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Re-Visioning Feminist Futures: Literature as Social Theory

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I'd like to thank my parents for having me in the first place, and for continuing to be interested in my successes. Many members of my family, some no longer with us, have given me my passion for social transformation.

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved partner, Gary Fleming, who has been my Sanity Clause for the duration (with apologies to Groucho Marx!).

Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university. The thesis has been prepared in accordance with the University of Warwick's guidelines on the presentation of a research thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationships between science fiction, social theory and social transformation through an in-depth analysis of three feminist science fiction novels. It develops innovative reading practices that bring together narrative theories and methodologies from a range of disciplines, including Sociology, Cultural Studies and Literary Studies. With reference to feminist psychoanalytic theory, the thesis also develops an original theorisation of the 'utopian impulse' and the workings of passionate identification in the formation of interpretive communities, with particular reference to feminist, social theoretical, and science fiction (fan) communities.

The three novels focused on – *The Gate to Women's Country*, *Body of Glass* and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* – were selected because they crystallise an extensive range of debates conducted in a period of productive crisis for feminist theory and praxis from the mid 1980s through the mid 1990s. The thesis conducts an in-depth analysis of the transformations in social relations, including intimate social relations, that the novels theorise are necessary for the re-visioning of feminist futures. These include issues surrounding Sex, Gender and Sexuality; Mothering and Fatherhood; the relationship between investments in Spirituality, Technology and Hope for the Future. These debates are all set in the larger context of the historical (and epistemological) rupture between Modern and Post-Modern thought caused by the traumatic events of the Holocaust.

The thesis argues that the heteroglossic genre possibilities of science fiction enable the novel texts to embody diverse strands of contestatory feminist theorising. They can thus hold open debates that might be foreclosed in more academic genres of theory that prefer texts to embody a single coherent authorial voice. Throughout the thesis I argue that this is a particularly timely moment to examine such questions, when feminist theory in the academy is apparently dominated by post-structuralist theory, and other feminist theories, namely those clustered around radical feminism, have been and continue to be abjected.

I argue that feminist hope for the future requires that no feminist theories should simply be rejected, but that they require conscientious re-readings. Feminists, I argue, must take account of their passionate longings for inclusion in feminist interpretive communities as well as the pain caused when feminist theories exclude their subjective experience and / or alternative theories. The reading practices that can be developed when reading feminist science fiction can facilitate such a process.

Introduction

Re-Visioning Feminist Futures: Literature as Social Theory

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival (Rich 1979: 35).

> "Theory" is a highly contested term within feminist discourse. The number of questions raised about it indicated the importance of the debate: what qualifies as "theory"? Who is the author of "theory"? Is it singular? Is it defined in opposition to something which is atheoretical, pretheoretical, or posttheoretical? What are the political implications of using "theory" for feminist analysis, considering that some of what appears under the sign of "theory" has marked masculinist and Eurocentric roots? Is "theory" distinct from politics? Is "theory" an insidious form of politics? Can any politics be derived from "theory," or is "theory" itself a form of political nihilism? (Butler and Scott 1992).

Introduction: Setting the Context

In the 1980s and 1990s, in response to social and economic retrenchment as well as to the epistemological challenges presented by postmodern and poststructuralist theory, a significant proportion of Anglo-American feminist academics recast their academic and political identities as poststructuralist or postmodern feminists, in the process disavowing the claims to knowledge of radical feminists, ecofeminists and spiritual feminists. These theoretical and political realignments were structured around some particularly salient oppositions, including Nature / Culture, Natural / Technological, Essentialism / Anti-Essentialism, and were empirically validated by the growth and global

reach of new reproductive technologies, developments in the medical technologies associated with gender reassignment surgery and the apparent ubiquity of information and communication technologies.

However, the epistemological and theoretical formations emergent from this period have presented dilemmas for feminist academics who wish to remain invested in collective political identity and for those feminists who wish to theorise about agency and the possibility of social transformation. A political and theoretical crisis about the possibility for and characteristics of both female and feminist subjectivity has therefore ensued. I argue that this crisis was particularly fruitful for feminist theory production, both in the academy and in the field of popular culture. However, it also made it very difficult for feminists to make some knowledge claims, particularly those that invested in particular aspects of or versions of sexual difference, or those that were to do with 'the body'. This thesis investigates distinctive ways in which this theoretical crisis and its component debates were played out in three emblematic feminist science fictions of the period, as well as in some of the feminist social theory produced by activists and academics. Key themes include the likelihood of a dystopian future; the utopian possibilities of socially transforming (to avoid) that future, and the prior necessity for radically transforming intersubjective relations. More specifically, I aim to demonstrate that the genre of feminist science fiction[1] provides a particularly fruitful site for working through this crisis in feminist social theory, because of its heteroglossic capacity to embody multiple and contestatory soccial theories.

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[1] From now on I will use the abbreviation sf to refer to science fiction as this is customary amongst sf fans and writers.

My interest in the period from the mid-1980s through to the mid-1990s is influenced by my own academic history. I graduated in 1986 having studied for my first degree within a cultural studies paradigm which was still heavily influenced by Marxism, but which was making the transition to post-structuralism via the post-Marxism of Althusser. At that historical moment, I had no investment in feminism, structuring my political identity in relationship to socialism, and seeing class as the key axis of inequality. However, when I returned to part-time postgraduate study in 1992, I had spent six years outside the academy, during which time gendered inequalities in the workplace were something that I experienced as deeply disempowering and materially damaging. Further, the political climate to which I have already alluded was extremely hostile to my own political identity formation. Beginning a postgraduate degree in Gender Studies, therefore, I was keen to develop theoretical insights that would illuminate my experience, particularly as it seemed to me that pervasive media messages about 'post-feminism' missed the point that the feminist project as I understood it, somewhat inchoately, was incomplete. A sense of belatedness however, assailed me as I began to engage with feminist debates as presented on my course. The political identity which felt most congenial to me in my readings of feminist history and theory, that of socialist feminism, was a position that no longer seemed tenable. Indeed such was the claim of some of its erstwhile proponents (Barrett 1988; Haraway 1989). In the course of my postgraduate studies since I registered for my PhD, and in the period between my postgraduate degrees when I continued to work in commerce full-time, that sense of arriving too late at the debating table continued to increase. Of late, however, it has begun to subside, as it seems that the process of struggling to bring theory and

politics together which has informed my own research has also informed the work of many other feminists, in several generations (Bar On and Ferguson 1998; Bronfen and Kavka 2001; Stacey 2001; Walker 1995). It is also crucial to recognise that the turn to culture in feminism which was both cause and result of much of the agonising theoretical debate in the period to which I refer has in itself provided the space and the tools to pursue the kind of investigation which this thesis represents.

The project I chose for my Master's thesis was provoked by reading Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* and being piqued by her claim that feminism did not have its own utopian literature. My own impulse when faced with uncongenial social, economic and political circumstances was to search for resources on which to found a personal project of hope, so her remark initiated an ongoing research project that seeks to examine the relationship between reading for pleasure and hoping for / working for social change. Initially, my research centred on the potential for liberation Firestone suggested was offered by reproductive technology, so I sought out sf that focused on this issue. Like many others before me, I discovered Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* to be a compelling realisation of a potential feminist future, a utopia, albeit a critical one[2]. It was my entry point into a genre which has sustained my interest ever since.

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[2] Tom Moylan coined the term critical utopia to encompass science-fictional utopias produced out of US counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s. He differentiates critical utopias from their literary predecessors by claiming that their producers recognise the limits of the utopian tradtion and "reject utopia as blueprint whilst preserving it as a dream" (Moylan 1986: 10).

When I decided to pursue further research, I chose to continue investigating feminist sf as my case study for tracing shifts in feminist thinking, because I surmised that in a period of massive technological transformation, a genre that takes as its task "the cognitive mapping and poetic figuration of social relations as they are constituted and changed by new technological modes of 'being-in-the-world'" (Vivian Sobchack, quoted in Bonner 1992: 94) would be ripe with potential. There was also a personal historical reason for the choice as, like many alienated teenagers, I had read sf avidly and invested heavily in the visions of 'better'[3] societies I found in the pages of those novels. However, there was a gap of some years between my reading of 'canonical'[4] sf and my turn to feminist sf – a counter-canon to a counter-canon. In a self-reflective account of her own relationship with the sf genre, Hilary Rose reports that having become alienated with what she perceived as the macho enthusiasm of sf she was initially reluctant to like feminist sf. However, she reveals:

> I caved in over Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Moved by her meticulous account of Connie's all too painful existence at home and in the psychiatric hospital, Connie's time travelling in which she could even 'fly back into the past and make it all come out right' read initially as a cop-out. But the book drew me back and I began to read it differently, as *a hope-giving construction of an alternative reality* which took off in a positive way from the everyday life in which Connie was trapped (Rose 1994: 213) (emphasis added).

I would concur with Rose's second reading of Piercy's novel and, indeed, it was in pursuit of such hope-giving constructions that I chose to research feminist sf and its relationship to the broader feminist project of social transformation and its theorisation.

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[3] I think it is unlikely that from my current vantage point that I would view some of those visions of the future in quite such a rosy light. That former self seems horribly rationalist and lacking in compassion from the point of view of my current self.

The overarching research question this thesis addresses then, is what are the relationships between feminist sf, social theory and social transformation? This question contains an implicit commitment to the potential for cultural products, such as feminist sf, to provide resources for subjective projects of social agency. Methodologically, this question is approached through a multi-layered analysis of three emblematic feminist sf novels, chosen because they crystallise many of the key themes common to the genre and particularly to the period of feminist transformations in the 1980s and 1990s, to explore the possibilities offered by claiming feminist sf as a genre of social theory.

This thesis aims therefore to problematise commonsense genre boundaries between social theory and 'literature', by examining the distinctive ways in which debates in social theory are deployed through fiction. Although in some ways it seemed self-evident to me that social theory could be and is deployed in feminist sf, it is important to question whether there are epistemological implications in the use of particular genre conventions. I will argue that there are, indeed, profound constraints on (as well as profound possibilities for) the type of theory that can be produced by working within particular genre forms.

I also aim to demonstrate how the use of semiotic and psychoanalytic perspectives in textual analysis can illuminate the textures of the social theoretical debates and the utopian impulse that I argue drives them. These strategies of textual analysis will be contextualised within a sociological

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[4] "canonical" is in inverted commas as the sf canon is of course distinct from the canon produced by literature scholars – a canon, nonetheless can be said to exist.

appropriation of narrative theory and methodology. The specific debates that I will examine will include the impact of new material technologies on subjective understandings of gender, sexuality, reproduction and motherhood, as well as the impact of epistemological contestation on the production of feminist knowledge more generally.

Although many of the arguments I develop can be applied to a substantial proportion of narrative fiction, some of them are particular to the genre chosen; feminist sf. For example, within the genre of sf there is, as my personal reading had led me to believe, a tradition of utopian speculation that conceptualises utopia as a goal for the future to be reached through human agency (Clute and Nicholls 1995: 1260). The complementary tradition of feminist utopian fiction has also usually been produced within the genre of sf, dating back at least to the publication of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* in 1915 (Andermahr, et al. 2000: 285)[5].

Before proceeding with my argument I will say a little more about the sociohistorical context from which the novels emerge. I will then provide very brief plot summaries that focus on the subjective experiences of focal characters and point to the centrality of revisioning sex, gender, sexuality and mothering. I then move on to outline my project in more detail. I tease out some of the meanings of the key concepts in my thesis title: 'Re-visioning Feminist Futures'. I provide a brief overview of the distinctive generic features of feminist science

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[5] Some would argue that Margaret Cavendish's 1666 publication *The Description of the New World Called the Blazing-World* also falls into this category. Hilary Rose indeed suggests that it would be appropriate to substitute Margaret Cavendish for Mary Shelley as the founding foremother of science fiction (Rose 1994: 209-210).

fiction. I introduce some of the key contestations in feminist theory which inform my project. I gesture towards the interdisciplinary methodologies I have developed in this project, and which are elaborated in greater detail in Chapters 1 and 2. Finally I outline the structure of the thesis, and point towards anticipated conclusions.

Novel Selection

The three novels that I have chosen to focus on, Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, and Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, were published in the USA between 1989 and 1993. They were published in a period of intense contestation about the successes and failures of feminism as a social movement and a body of theory and in a political climate of increased conservatism. Although each of the statements above refers to the USA, markedly similar trends were in process in the UK. The respective elections of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in the UK in 1979 and of Ronald Reagan as President in the USA marked the beginnings of an extended period in which social and political gains achieved by a range of social and political movements were under threat from conservative hegemony. As Ruth Rosen points out with regard to the 1980 USA elections: "(f)or the first time, the Republican platform no longer support(ed) the Equal Rights Amendment Act (ERA) and (went) on record as being against abortion" (Rosen 2001: xxxi). In her 1988 introduction to *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, sf editor and critic, Sarah Lefanu remarked:

> I also believe that the anti-feminism of the present day is a powerful force
> in both Britain and America. The Thatcher-Reagan alliance seems to
> encourage imitative moves between the two countries. The growth of the

New Right in Britain (who like to see themselves as having intellectual respectability) is not unrelated, I believe, to the growing power of the 'moral majority' in the USA, although I suspect they might not like the connection. Both promulgate an ethos of authoritarianism under the guise of 'responsibility'. Both governments seem determined to crush movements of organised labour, to attack civil rights and, in Britain at least, to undermine a socialised system of health care and education. Women are not the only victims of right-wing governments, but they are amongst the first. This, then, is common ground, and is likely to be reflected in contemporary science fiction (Lefanu 1988: 7-8).

I am in sympathy with Lefanu, to a degree, when she claims that:

the particular circumstances of reading and marketing within science fiction override any clear distinction [between British and American writers]. The feminist texts, too, of the 1970s sped back and forth across the Atlantic (Lefanu 1988: 7).

It seems to me that the boundaries between UK or USA produced feminist sf and feminist categorical and indexical social theory *are* blurred because of the various networks of circulation of texts and interpretive communities (which I address more fully in Chapter 1), but it is also crucial to note that the differences between key social institutions and discourses like the legal and political systems do affect the social theory that is produced and the ways in which resistance to or subversion of hegemony is organised. In this thesis, I will remain mindful of the differences between the social relations of production of the texts (as artefacts) and my own situated location from which I produce readings of those texts.

Creating massive tensions with the attempts of dominant politicians, in the 1980s and 1990s, to reconstruct the centrality of the heterosexual nuclear family to a privatised (social) order – a nuclear family, moreover with a male head of household who earns a family wage and a stay-at-home wife and mother – were widely-disseminated technological developments which were extremely

disruptive of attempts to reinstate a firm divide between the public and the private. The proliferation of new reproductive technologies, and the appropriation of some of their possibilities by anti-abortion activists, put sexuality and reproduction even more firmly into the public gaze than was already the case, and in a manner which forced confrontation with individual and social understandings of the issues that might be at stake, such as definitions of gender and kinship. Similarly, the exponential growth in the penetration of information technologies (see for example Castells 1996; McLaughlin, et al. 1999), along with a decline in mass market consumption, shifted the focus of capitalism from mass production on an industrial model to the commodification and exchange of information (cf. McLoughlin and Clark 1994; Scarbrough and Corbett 1992). The implications of this shift include what has been called the feminisation of labour (cf. Cockburn 1983; Game and Pringle 1983; Wajcman 1991), a related 'crisis' in masculinity (Massey 1996), and a decline in the importance of the nation-state as multinational organisations reap the benefits of cheap labour wherever state protection of workers is weak.

The novels that I am critiquing in detail overlap the period in which the feminist sf genre had its most visible presence in the UK. This visibility was due to the Women's Press short-lived sf list. Launched in 1985, the imprint ceased to exist in 1991, and in the early 1990s it was relatively easy to pick up most of the titles remaindered in discount bookshops. The list was probably a casualty of mainstream publishing's increasing conglomeration and incorporation of feminist publishing in the 1980s and 1990s. Although *The Women's Press* proudly boasts its contemporary independence on its website, it is unlikely that it

would have been unscathed by the feminist in-fighting in publishing that was widely reported in the national press, and probably had to consolidate its backlist to remain viable in a highly competitive marketplace.

Sarah Lefanu, author of *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* was a part-time editor at The Women's Press and was involved in the launch of the press's sf list. Her experience of giving classes on the subject of feminism and sf inspired her to write a book on the topic and probably contributed to the vibrant and eclectic nature of the list while it lasted. The imprint's mission statement in the front matter of its publications read as follows:

> The list will feature new titles by contemporary writers and reprints of classic works by well known authors. Our aim is 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 male domination of the science fiction tradition itself.
>
> We hope that the series will encourage more women both to read and write science fiction, and give the traditional science fiction readership a new and stimulating perspective (Russ 1985 (1975):unnumbered).

For most established feminist academics in the UK, the feminist sf genre is understood to be the titles published by The Women's Press sf imprint in that six-year span. As Helen Merrick notes, this visible coding of novels as both feminist and sf remains singular: "the nebulous identity of 'feminist sf texts' is not usually signalled by labels, a shelf in a shop, or even by the cover blurbs" (Merrick 1998: 254). Even though The Women's Press has continued to publish feminist sf intermittently, it no longer labels it as such. As Merrick elaborates, it is the various groups of readers who collectively name works as feminist sf. Indeed, each of the titles I have chosen is cited as feminist sf or feminist utopia in

a number of reader-produced arenas, such as critical journals, edited book collections or fan websites. I do not necessarily agree with the criteria and / or terminology used in these arenas but it is interesting to note that a consensus does emerge over whether or not an sf text is of interest to feminists even if the texts cannot be labelled unproblematically as feminist.

Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989) is published as a mass market novel by an sf genre publisher, while Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1992) is recognised as an sf novel by genre readers but was not labelled as such by its publisher (Penguin, in the UK). Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) is often referred to as an 'ecotopia'– a subgenre of utopian fiction following Ernest Callenbach's fairly dreadful 'novel' of that title (Callenbach 1990), and sf boundary defenders might insist that it is fantasy. However, as much of the 'science' in sf is more properly fantasy, and as I am including the social sciences under the banner 'science' in my genre definition of sf I will include it without shame. Another striking factor about each of my three key novels is that they have been almost continuously in print since first publication in both the USA and the UK. This is very unusual in sf, as short print runs and short 'shelf lives' mean that individual titles have only a fleeting presence in even specialist bookstores. Both *Body of Glass* and *The Gate to Women's Country* have already received a reasonable degree of critical attention in academic sf journals and in feminist monographs, although never in comparison. *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, perhaps because of its generic marginality has received much less attention. By reading the three novels alongside and against each other, I argue that my approach produces a much more nuanced account of their shared and contested

theoretical preoccupations. In order to provide a basic framework for my detailed readings, I will now provide brief synopses of the three key novels.

The Gate to Women's Country

The plot trajectory in *The Gate to Women's Country* is the disciplining of Stavia, the novel's key protagonist and focal character, to become a compliant citizen of Women's Country, and particularly of Marthatown, the town of her birth. Stavia, the second daughter of Morgot – one of the effective rulers of Marthatown – is courted by Chernon, who is the brother of Stavia's best friend, Beneda. This is significant because the power in Women's Country is held by Councilwomen, while most of the males aged over five live in a garrison outside the walled towns. The leading warriors in the garrisons are continually plotting to uncover the secrets of the women's rule as they wish to take power. Hence their attempts to have first Myra (Morgot's first daughter) and then Stavia seduced by warriors-in-training as they believe these young women are most likely to have access to the secrets.

Stavia leaves Marthatown for eight years to train as a medic and to be removed from Chernon's influence. However, on her return she still feels guilty about having been unable to satisfy Chernon's curiosity when they were adolescents, and she allows herself to be seduced into an illicit meeting with him outside the protective walls around Women's Country's towns. This leads to her becoming pregnant after something very like rape is perpetrated on her by Chernon. Stavia and Chernon are then captured by Holylanders, an atavistic patriarchal community, and Stavia is seriously injured trying to escape. She is eventually

rescued by servitors – men who have chosen not to remain warriors and so are allowed to return to live in Women's Country – and when she returns with them to Marthatown she finally learns Women's Country's key secret. The Councilwomen who govern Women's Country do not allow warriors to father children and all pregnancies (with the possible exception of those of Councilwomen who live with servitors) are conceived using artificial insemination, without the knowledge or consent of the women. At twice annual carnivals women are allowed to have sex with warriors. During 'medical' check-ups before and after the pre-arranged assignations women are inseminated with semen provided by Servitors. This is because the Councilwomen believe they can breed out masculine aggression. Stavia learns that because her first child was conceived outside this breeding program it is virtually inevitable that her son will choose to repudiate her and Women's Country and become a warrior. The novel opens with this repudiation and closes with Stavia's performance as Iphigenia in *Iphigenia at Ilium*, the play that dramatises Women's Country's philosophy. Throughout the novel, the text of the play has been interspersed with 'contemporary' and flashback narratives that rehearse Stavia's biography and her coming to terms with the loss of her son.

Body of Glass

Body of Glass also follows the story of a young woman and her son. However, Shira returns home to her birthplace, Tikva, following her voluntary exile pursuing educational and professional advancement and fleeing the aftermath of infidelity by her first lover, Gadi. Shira's son, Ari, was conceived while she was married to Josh, and following their divorce, Josh won sole custody. When Josh

takes Ari off-world to ensure that Shira cannot have physical contact with her child, Shira returns home to work for Gadi's father, Avram and to "lick her wounds" living in her childhood home with her grandmother.

The work she has returned home for turns out to be the socialisation of a cyborg, created illegally by Avram. Her grandmother, Malkah, had initially been responsible for this work, but Avram had banned her from its continuation because of her subversive approach. It eventually becomes clear that Shira's employer had manipulated her personal situation in order to obtain inside information on the creation of the cyborg. Her employer, Yakamura-Stichen (Y-S), is also implicated in a number of real and virtual terrorist assaults on Tikva and its Base, its projection in the Net. As one of the chief overseers of the base, Malkah is under particular threat.

Taking time out from protecting Tikva, Shira and Yod, the cyborg, enter Y-S covertly to snatch Ari back when they learn that he and his father have returned from off-world and realise that Ari is being used as a bargaining tool. In the process, Yod kills Josh and Shira accepts responsibility for his death because she did not caution Yod to protect him, but conceals the circumstances from Ari.

Eventually, Tikva joins forces with New Gangs in the Glop and with the assistance of Nili, a visitor from an all-female society, Safed, built on the ruins of Israel-Palestine, they mount counter-attacks on Y-S that are temporarily liberatory. There is every expectation that in time the other multis will compete to fill the gaps left behind by Y-S; however, the successful coalition between

Tikva, the Glop and Nili as representative of Safed has provided a model for resistance. In the course of these incursions, Yod self-destructs, simultaneously destroying Avram's lab and the records of his work, so that no further cyborgs can be manufactured. Yod's destruction parallels the close of the tale of the golem that Malkah has told to Yod via the Net in a parallel narrative throughout the novel. However, unlike Joseph, Yod will not rise again as he has destroyed the means of his making.

The novel closes with Shira taking on her grandmother's role as base overseer. Her character development is evidenced by her choosing to destroy the means to create another Yod when she learns that (inadvertently) he had not completely destroyed that capability. Malkah has gone overseas to the Black Zone[6] with Nili to take advantage of technology that will restore her sight and to forge links with this distinctive alternative community.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

The Fifth Sacred Thing has significant elements in common with both of the other novels, however in this story, the exile who returns is a grandson, not a daughter or granddaughter. Bird has been imprisoned in the Southlands for ten years for an act of sabotage, the decommissioning of a nuclear power plant, that ended in the death of his comrade and with him killing one of their assailants. Bird escapes from prison when he finally regains his memory. Throughout his imprisonment, apparently, he has been dissociative to the point that each day his bedmate had to tell him who and where he was. Although, like the rest of the

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[6] On maps of the world, the zone in which Safed resides is marked in black as the multis believe it is uninhabitable.

prison inmates, Bird eats food that is drugged to keep him passive, the memory loss is explained, later in the novel, as a desperate measure that Bird took to avoid betraying the City (San Fransciso) to the representatives of the Southlands regime who tortured him. On regaining his memory, Bird is also able to access telepathic and telekinetic skills – witchcraft – which he learned as a child growing up in San Francisco and which enable him both to heal a third inmate who is being tortured and to circumvent the technology that holds the three of them prisoner.

Bird returns home to a City (San Francisco) that has been plagued by epidemics; probably viruses engineered by the Stewards who rule the rest of the former USA (although the struggle tends to be figured as taking place between the two Cities; San Francisco and Los Angeles, anglicised as Angel City). His former lover, Madrone is a healer and midwife who has been battling the viruses. As Bird returns she is recovering from a collapse following her over-extension of her healing powers. Bird brings news of the warlike intentions of the Southlanders as well as information on other resisters who require the service of a healer. Madrone leaves the City to educate the Monsters and the Hillboys in healing, while Bird remains to work with San Franciscos's inhabitants on its defences against incursions from the south.

Maya, Bird's grandmother and Madrone's almost-grandmother, initially devises the non-violent strategy that is developed to resist the Steward's armies. The tactics that are employed are ultimately successful, although this is in part due to the violent mutiny of some of the invading soldiers. The tactics have not

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prevented the torture, rape and murder of many of the City's inhabitants, but their partially pragmatic and partially philosophical commitment to non-violence, as well as the evidence that their daily life is preferable to that in the Southlands eventually convinces most of the invading troops to join them. The novel closes with Madrone, Bird and Katy – a refugee from LA – all considering returning to the Southlands to continue / renew resistance there.

By providing these synopses I have outlined the key events which are linked temporally and causally in the narratives of the novels. However, these brief overviews barely hint at the social theories that are narrativised in the texts. Each of the texts articulates social theories about: the need to revision sex, gender, sexuality and kinship relations in pursuit of more equitable communities and societies. They theorise about the (re)establishment of societies in the aftermath of disaster, and the importance of incorporating the lessons learnt from catastrophe. Emergent from this topic are theories about the most appropriate ways to narrate social history in order to make sense both of and from the present, and in order to enable less toxic social relations in the future. Modes of activism in the pursuit of social transformation are theorised and can be compared both intra- and intertextually. In particular, vanguardism is compared with coalition, demonstrating comprehensively the ways that feminists have theorised from the experience of feminist movement. Related to this insight is further social theorising about the ways in which feminists bound their identification with the idea(s) of feminism, and the losses that can accrue when this identification is secured through strategies that disparage other feminists. I will trace the details of each of these interlocking theories through the key texts.

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I will also touch upon other theoretical debates about, for example, modes of governance, division of labour and the management of conflict, which provide the theoretical contexts for questions of subjectivity, social action and social transformation.

Distinctive Reading Practices

The distinctive set of reading practices that I articulate and apply in this thesis draw attention to the character of feminist sf's generic possibilities, to the feminist interlocutors or interpretive communities required to realise such possibilities, and by extension to the complex web of social relations which produce the sf field.

Feminist sf, like sf in general, has attracted significant critical and academic attention in North America[7] where sf is an established field of enquiry in higher education. The study of sf in the academy in the UK is underdeveloped by comparison. Although monographs focusing on feminist sf by UK authors are significantly fewer in number than those produced in the US[8], the genre has historically provided a resource for British as well as North American feminists, particularly although not exclusively for those engaged in critiques of science and technology[9].

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[7] Barr 1981, Barr 1993, Barr 2000, Russ 1984 and Russ 1995.
[8] Armitt 1991, Lefanu 1988 and Wolmark 1993.
[9] In her bibliography for *Love, Power and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences*, Hilary Rose includes references to twentieth century feminist science fiction by Gerd Brantenberg, Octavia Butler, Sally Gearhart, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ursula Le Guin, Doris Lessing, Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ. She also references Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing-World* (Rose 1994).

However, although many academic critics have discussed the feminist ideas circulating within feminist sf, no single study has been able to give such sustained and detailed attention as I do to the complexity and ambiguity in the interventions the novels make into much broader feminist conversations about social theory (King 1994a).

By revisiting the same three novels in four different chapters which examine different clusters of debates engaged in by feminism: sex, gender and sexuality; reproduction and mothering; the political and epistemological implications and consequences of representational practices and the destabilisation or reinvocation of gendered dualisms in feminist theory and praxis, I have been able to map much more fully the range and scope of social theoretical debates forwarded via character development and emplotment. Moreover, because of my own involvement in both fan and academic communities, and my variously central or marginal location in particular configurations of those communities, I am excruciatingly conscious of the social location and production of the various texts-in-use (Carr 1989; Haraway 1991a). My study is further inflected by the insights offered by the field of feminist science and technology studies, so that I would argue that I take much greater account of the science component in the term sf than is general in feminist readings of the genre. I will draw on textual practices originally developed within literary studies, and more recently taken up in the 'narrative turn' in cultural studies and the social sciences. I am interested in feminist science fiction, and indeed feminist social theory as bodies of knowledge produced and consumed, or rather co-produced by individual subjects

variously located in social relations that are negotiated, at least in part, with recourse to narrative.

Re-Visioning Feminist Futures

In the remainder of this chapter I intend to outline my project in more detail. The title of this thesis – 'Re-Visioning Feminist Futures: Literature as Social Theory' – condenses a number of complex and contested concepts into a very short space. It will be necessary to expand substantially on each concept - 're-visioning', 'feminist' and 'futures' - before proceeding to give some account of the fields of knowledge to which this thesis is intended to contribute: feminist cultural studies, of science fiction, in this instance, and feminist social theory.

Although I seized on the concept of 'Re-Visioning' because it seemed to resonate with my sense of the space opened for feminism by sf, I was initially unaware of its coining by Adrienne Rich, in her essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (Rich 1979). It is salient to note this gap in my knowledge, as I would argue that it is testament to the ways in which certain aspects of second wave feminism were actively forgotten in the course of the 1980s and 1990s. Although Rich's remarks were originally made in the context of a feminist challenge within literary studies, her characterisation of re-vision as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (1979: 35) can be read as a much more overarching description of the critical project of second-wave feminism if we read 'text' metaphorically rather than just literally. It also prefigures, I would argue, much of the methodology that is now represented as poststructuralist or deconstructionist.

Re-visioning, however, is not simply a practice that feminists have applied to non-feminist or anti-feminist institutions or bodies of knowledge. It is also, I would argue, a continual and on-going process in which feminists critique feminist theory and praxis – their own and that of others. For example Kavka suggests that:

> Sometime between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, then, an important shift happened, a shift from explaining women's subordination in terms of a single constraining system ... to focusing on the discursive, material, and cultural differences that make up the being or becoming of women (Kavka 2001: xiii).

Kavka attributes this shift to critiques by feminists of colour and poststructuralists, but other feminists might also point to the important interventions by lesbian feminists in shifting the focus of feminism away from white middle class heterosexual women. In fact, many feminists who attempt to construct histories or genealogies of feminism or feminist theory now explicitly state their partiality to signal the plurality of histories / genealogies that might be constructed and the contestation thus implied.

I view this fluidity of boundaries as something to be treasured. The facility to continually re-vision history leaves open the possibility of continually re-visioning futures as it does not pin feminism down to one fixed time-line. In some ways this seems a generically science-fictional approach to knowledge as the possibility of alternate histories and alternate futures is recognised – sometimes celebratorily and sometimes with great anxiety. The three novels on which my study focuses have certainly re-visioned history, constructing versions of the modern West that are at odds with conventional historiography. This re-

visioning, I argue, is crucial in enabling the future to be re-visioned in ways that might be conceptualised as 'feminist'.

Feminism as a social movement has challenged the social order while feminists within the academy have challenged the traditional boundaries of the academic disciplines, their epistemological underpinnings and their substantive content. Feminists have effected enormous changes both within and without the walls of the academy. However, recognition of the plurality of feminisms, ongoing political and theoretical self-reflexivity and exchange between feminists with a range of agendas plus shifting social, economic and political settlements in late modernity have led to greater caution in both the hopes expressed by feminists and the language in which they are couched. This is particularly the case for feminists working within the academy and news media, who are constrained by particular institutional and generic conventions. However, I would argue that radical re-visions of 'the social order' are still possible in genres which are not compelled to locate themselves in the same contemporary orthodoxies or consensuses. Feminist sf, a genre which was widely discussed by feminists in the 1980s, has also developed and changed in the 1980s and 1990s, but its particular location in a market sustained by a fan culture which is prepared to exchange cash for a genre that expresses their political hopes and dreams means that its practitioners have not been bound by the same constraints facing feminists working in the academy or those pursuing feminist activism in other social arenas.

In this section I provide a brief outline of some of the key debates in feminism that provide the context for my reading of the feminist science fictions I will

critique in this thesis. Published in 1988, the revised edition of *Women's Oppression Today* is useful for benchmarking the shifts that were taking place in feminism in the mid-1980s (Barrett 1988). It is of particular interest to me, as it was one of the earliest books of feminist social theory that I read, coming belatedly to feminism via the academy in the early 1990s, especially as it is a book firmly located in the UK rather than the US. In the new introduction, Barrett suggests that, in the eight years since the publication of the first edition, there has been both a philosophical questioning of the category 'women', informed in part by psychoanalysis, and "a political recognition of differences of power and resources between women – exemplified by the racism of white feminists" (Barrett 1988: vi). Like Donna Haraway[10] in the US, Michèle Barrett is working out of a tradition that had attempted to integrate socialism and feminism as elements of a political subjectivity, but that went on to relinquish hopes of anything other than a "comradely friendship" (Barrett 1988: xxii). In 1988, Barrett suggested that "feminism as such is publicly identified with writers such as Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin and Dale Spender rather than with socialist feminism" (Barrett 1988: xxiii). Barrett does not specify to which 'public' she refers which makes her claim less than useful for establishing a contemporary notion of feminist theoretical hegemony, although it does hint at some kind of ongoing struggle for primacy, as does Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'. In distinguishing those writers publicly identified with feminism from socialist-feminism Barrett refers to the ascendancy of questions of difference between women and men in their work. Barrett does not explicitly

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[10] In Chapter 6, 'I'd Rather Be a Cyborg Than a Goddess', I discuss in some detail the political and epistemological shifts that Donna Haraway signals in the move from socialist feminism to postmodern feminism, as well as the ways this shift, and the debates from which it emerged are theorised in the feminist sf texts.

label these publicly identified feminists as essentialist or even name their feminism explicitly as 'radical' or 'cultural' feminism. She does however refer to both radical and cultural feminism as being problematic, explicitly in terms of essentialism and suggests that Rich *et al* may be identified with these positions. Barrett herself claims that essentialism may come in biologically determinist or culturalist varieties, although she also acknowledges that work dismissed as essentialist speaks powerfully to other readers who recognise truths therein (Barrett 1988: xxxiii). While Barrett points to a steady decline in the influence of 'socialist-feminism', I would venture to suggest that many activists and academics espousing this identity repositioned themselves within the emergent postmodern or poststructuralist feminism in opposition to a perceived 'Other' of what is typically characterised as less theoretically sophisticated feminism. Indeed, Barrett herself suggests that the "arguments of postmodernism already represent ... a key position around which feminist theoretical work in the future is likely to revolve" and suggests that that is the position from which the book would begin were she writing rather than revising it, in 1988.

Many feminist anthologies published in the late 1980s and early 1990s were explicitly structured around the trope of problematic encounters in theory, politics and epistemology and feminists' differential alignments as participants or combatants in the encounters (Barrett and Phillips 1992; Bock and James 1992; Brennan 1989; Butler and Scott 1992; Hirsch and Keller 1990; Nicholson 1990; Weed 1989)[11]. Monographs were also implicitly and explicitly structured around

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[11] Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this project to explore the extent to which the object "feminist theory" was constructed by the material relations of production of the Routledge publishing house. This would be an interesting and important project in its own right.

this problematic; one particularly pointed and polemical example is Lynne Segal's *Is the Future Female?* (Segal 1987).

For example, in the introduction to *Coming to Terms*, Elizabeth Weed constructs US academic feminism as a field of contradiction and tension that is in a constant state of contestation. Central to her discussion of "constitutive tensions even within mainstream feminism" is her claim that *second wave feminism in the US was* principally inscribed within liberalism, while she acknowledges that "feminism can never be completely at home within the structure of individual rights" (Weed 1989: xii). It is important to note the difference in national context between Barrett and Weed's work, when comparing the different feminisms they construct as hegemonic. Strikingly, however, three of the four "public face(s) of feminism" to whom Barrett refers are from the USA. It is also important to note the importance in both contexts of Haraway's work. In the Weed collection Haraway's *Manifesto* and three commentaries on it provide four out of the nineteen contributions, while Barrett refers to it as a path-breaking article, the implications of which for feminism are only just beginning to be debated (Barrett 1988: xxvi; Crosby 1989; Doane 1989; Haraway 1989; Scott 1989).

The historical co-incidence of theories of postmodernity, poststructuralist epistemologies and the critique of white middle-class heterosexual feminists by feminists not encompassed by this constituency seems to massively over-determine the so-called 'turn to culture' in feminism. In fact, white feminists in the USA and the UK engaged with each of these critiques somewhat patchily. In the introduction to *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Butler and Scott encapsulate

the state of debate as I understood it to stand in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in

a series of questions posed to the anthology's contributors:

> There appears to be a belief that without an ontologically grounded
> feminist subject there can be no politics. Here, politics is understood as a
> representational discourse that presumes a fixed or ready-made subject,
> usually conceived through the category of "women." As a result, analysis
> of the political construction and regulation of this category is summarily
> foreclosed. What are the political consequences of such foreclosure?
> And what political possibilities does a critique of identity categories make
> possible? (Butler and Scott 1992: xiv).

Butler and Scott acknowledge that poststructuralism constitutes just one site of a

certain crisis in feminism, and they cite a range of other critical and theoretical

practices which have or should cause feminists to examine the ways that

discourses shape categories in a process of exclusion. However, from my point

of view the two key issues they raised were those of 'ontology' and

'representation'. In common with feminists throughout the academy (and

elsewhere) in the USA and the UK (and, again, elsewhere) I was profoundly

exercised by the issue of the appropriate subject of feminism. Was there an

essential subject of feminism? Was she a woman? What is a woman? In the

course of these debates, however, some of these questions seemed to be

answered in a fashion that was at odds with the deconstructive spirit of

poststructuralism, so that the accusation of 'essentialism' levelled at any feminist

work was tantamount to labelling it both theoretically and politically incorrect.

The other aspect of representation that these debates foregrounded was the

relationship between 'reality' and 'representation'. Poststructuralism prompted

feminists to inquire as to whether representational practices mediated reality or,

in effect, created it. The play with language encouraged by poststructuralism so

that different meanings of the subject (of politics, of psychoanalysis, of a sentence) and of representation (political, textual) enlivened or confused these debates (or both), depending on your point of view. However, the effect seemed to be a focus on cultural practices, rather than social relations, and a disdain for the material, which appeared to culminate in rendering it impossible to speak about women as a social category, or women's bodies as having any foundational ontology. Of course, this crisis provoked another rich vein of theoretical work, that of corporeal feminism, which attempted both to retain the theoretical insights and valorisation of difference emergent from poststructuralism (and black and lesbian feminist critiques) and to rescue the lived body as a site from which agency could be practiced and as a discursive space or territory that could be theorised legitimately. Materiality in all its plural forms needed to be reclaimed.

I would argue that the period spanning the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s sees the peak of the post-structuralist crisis for feminist theory and leaves it poised on the brink of a new theoretical trend which aims to bring the body and the material back into contention in feminist theory. The feminist sf novels I have chosen to examine embody that extended moment of crisis as well as extending a Janus-faced gaze over the history and future of feminism(s).

The future(s) in which I am interested are imagined futures, rather than the rapid unfolding that makes our present the past and tomorrow's future, today's present. This may seem a redundant claim, as the future is only the future *per se* whilst it remains within the realms of the imagination. However, I want to differentiate between what is *likely to happen* as the intended and unintended consequence of

already-existing structures and actions, and what we might *wish to happen* as a result of social transformation on a grand scale. That wished-for future, the future towards which 'we' yearn, then is what interests me, whether it is imagined by feminist social critics and theorists who would replace actually-existing patriarchal and / or capitalist social organisation with an anti-oppressive model or by feminist novelists who re-vision social organisation in utopian or dystopian fashion to provide ethnographies of imaginary societies that we might inhabit in 'the future'. In the introduction to *Feminist Consequences*, Misha Kavka suggests that feminism lives at the intersection of history and manifesto (Kavka 2001: xxiv). This interesting formulation certainly rings true for the texts that I examine, as it does for feminist sf in general. Sf has often been referred to as 'future history' and in feminist sf; that particular aspect of sf's generic toolkit has been drawn upon assiduously.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan remarks that the preposition 'towards', which marked many studies proposing a transition from classical to post-classical narratology (Rimmon-Kenan's discipline) carries a sense of movement with it. Rimmon-Kenan adds that she now views herself as being "in a state of an exciting perpetual 'towards', never quite making it to a destination" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 144). So this is another sense of 'the future' that I would like to preserve in this thesis: a state of an exciting perpetual 'towards'. This move would figure yearning, that desire for radical change that bell hooks sees as intimately linked with other desires and passions, or the 'utopian impulse' as the state(s) of feeling that motivate that perpetual moving 'towards' (note, **not** forward) an imagined (provisional) goal of a more just society (hooks 1990: 12). As Kavka points out:

"though social justice remains a universal ideal and a driving force of feminism, the content of this ideal cannot be specified in advance" (Kavka 2001: xii). Kavka's remark resonates with the definition of utopia voiced by a character in an sf novel by Kim Stanley Robinson:

> "Must redefine utopia. It isn't the perfect end-product of our wishes, define it so and it deserves the scorn of those who sneer when they hear the word. No. Utopia is the process of making a better world, the name for one path history can take, a dynamic, tumultuous, agonizing process, with no end. Struggle forever" (Robinson 1995: 81).

I will return to a detailed discusision of the 'utopian impulse' in Chapter 2.

Feminist Science Fiction as a Genre (of Social Theory)

I read sf avidly as a child and young adult, but having acquired – or so I thought – a thin veneer of sophistication while studying for my first degree, I disavowed that particular 'literary' genre until, in the course of studying for an MA, I realised (or rather remembered) that there were some things that sf was particularly well disposed to do; for example, to speculate about the future in a general sense, and more specifically to imagine how scientific and technological innovations could impact on society and the self-understanding of its inhabitants.

It was the field of new reproductive technologies which first inspired me to turn to feminist sf for a "cognitive mapping and poetic figuration of [their] social relations", but the reading and interpretation process this opened up made it clear that the "technological modes of 'being-in-the-world'" which sf mapped and figured were not simply technologies in the common sense mode of 'the appliance of science', but technologies in the Foucauldian sense of articulating:

power relations, systems of communication, and productive activities or practices; 'articulate' here is used both in the sense of 'expressing' that which is already given or operative and in the sense of conjoining or connecting. So, following Foucault's logic, the notion of 'technology' describes the workings of a collection of practices that produce specific cultural effects (Balsamo 1996: 21).

One of my key research questions asks whether it is possible to claim sf texts as a genre of social theory. It is the narrative mode in which the authors imagine and describe entire social worlds, and the ways in which these imagined social circumstances motivate their fictional subjects that I am arguing constitutes social theorising in sf. Feminist sf gives attention to the effects of material and discursive technologies on the embodied experience of being in the world. Narrative fiction in general, and feminist sf in particular, is distinct from the conventionally philosophical genre of social theorising which is predicated on generic conventions of abstraction and impersonality, owing to its focus on the interaction of 'fully-realised' individuals and the societies they inhabit. To address my research question in the context of a 'narrative turn' in the social sciences, it is necessary to develop an understanding of two key concepts; narrative, and genre. I will discuss narrative, and its take-up in the social sciences in detail in the following chapter. As the 'genre' status of sf is so central to its appeal, as well as to its dismissal by those who are not interpellated by that appeal, I will discuss genre now.

If we interpret genres, as Helen Carr has done, as texts that involve an implied contract between reader and writer (Carr 1989: 7), we can certainly claim that categorical and indexical social theory is also a genre. Carr cites Jonathan Culler's definition of genre as "groups of norms and expectations that help

readers assign functions to the various elements in the work" (Carr 1989: 6). This suggests that it is possible to have genred writing that is not also narrative in the sense of story with a plot. I would acknowledge also that narrative fragments are embedded in academic social theory *and* that such social theory is embedded in shared cultural narratives; however, narrative is not its primary rhetorical mode. When I refer to narrative in this thesis, I refer to narrative fiction and its distinctive tropes and textual strategies.

This thesis is primarily preoccupied with a sub-set of the narrative genre, sf, although corollary observations on the generic tropes of social theory have also emerged from the research. Many sf fans would argue that the characteristic which sets genre sf apart from contemporary literature is its emphasis on story, rather than on character and subjectivity; preoccupations they consider to be more properly the domain of (despised) contemporary fiction. However, even if this were indisputably the case (and I would dispute it), *feminist* sf is distinctive for the ways in which credible characters forward its stories. As Dorrit Cohn points out:

> the special life-likeness of narrative fiction – as compared to dramatic and cinematic fictions – depends on what writers and readers know least in life: how another mind thinks, another body feels (Cohn 1978: 5).

In this thesis I will argue that it is precisely the life-likeness of narrative fiction which makes feminist sf a superb vehicle for social theory. Imaginative identification with the thought processes and bodily experiences of characters embedded in social relations that both are and are not our own enables us to 'grasp', to 'own' social theory, particularly transformative versions thereof, in a way that is rarely experienced with social theory produced within the academy.

Through close readings of my key feminist sf novels, as well as references to other examples from the genre that share common thematic preoccupations, I will illustrate that the contract between readers and writers of feminist sf is based on an expectation that serious attempts will be made to imagine and elaborate future societies which invite the reader to invest in particular visions of social transformation.

Helen Carr says of genres, that they:

> represent a set of conventions whose parameters are redrawn with each new book and each new reading. The concept involves a contract between reader and writer. Once we think of a text as an example of a genre, we can no longer approach it only as an artefact to be analysed in some contextless critical purity. We need to ask who reads such books, why and in what way, seeing them as what Helen Taylor describes as texts-in-use (Carr 1989: 8).

The contract between writers and readers of sf is one that is continually being rewritten, and with the influx of feminist writers into the genre in the late 1960s and 1970s this process became even more marked. Writing of the late 1960s, Donna Haraway comments:

> In the late 1960s science fiction anthologist and critic Judith Merril idiosyncratically began using the signifier SF to designate a complex emerging narrative field in which boundaries between science fiction (conventionally, sf) and fantasy became highly permeable in confusing ways, commercially and linguistically. Her designation, SF, came to be widely adopted as critics, readers, writers, fans, and publishers struggled to comprehend an increasingly heterodox array of writing, reading, and marketing practices indicated by a proliferation of "sf" phrases: speculative fiction, science fiction, science fantasy, speculative futures, speculative fabulation (Haraway 1992: 5).

This complex emerging narrative field was constituted in part by the emergence of feminist sf as a significant sub-genre. The genre contract that was constituted with readers of feminist sf as it emerged from the late 1960s on included an

expectation that its writers would rework its genre tropes to provide texts which focused on key debates in feminist theory and politics. This thesis argues that in order to do so feminist sf enacts social theory through its plotting and its facility to argue multiple points of view on multiple debates simultaneously.

Sarah Lefanu claims that feminist sf is "informed by the feminist, socialist and radical politics that developed during the 1960s and 1970s" (Lefanu 1988: 3) so clearly she considers the genre, or sub-genre to have been established relatively recently. Certainly there were women writing sf much earlier than this but the body of work labelled feminist sf burgeoned hand-in-hand with second-wave feminism. Lefanu points out that this intervention was not easy: "writers have had to struggle not only against the weight of the male bias of the form, but also against the weight of a cultural and political male hegemony that underpins the form itself." (Lefanu 1988: 4), but she feels that "the stock conventions of science fiction...can be used metaphorically and metonymically as powerful ways of exploring the construction of 'woman'" (Lefanu 1988). I would agree, and they can also be used to examine many other themes that coincide with ongoing debates within feminism.

Jenny Wolmark adds that "in recent years science fiction as a whole has been increasingly identified with such postmodernist concerns as the instability of social and cultural categories, the erosion of confidence in historical narratives and a seemingly concomitant inability to imagine the future." (Wolmark 1993: 1). Wolmark is critical of the lack of attention given to gender and feminism by postmodern theorists such as Jameson and Baudrillard, and notes that feminism

cannot come to any easy accommodation with postmodernism because of its (feminism's) continued commitment to political intervention. However her characterisation of their "'shared theoretical moment', in which more open-ended and provisional accounts of the subject and of social relations generally have emerged" (Wolmark 1993: 20) resonates with my own approach to feminism and postmodernism in this thesis. Wolmark turns to feminist sf as a space within which genre, gender and identity can be redefined through the productive contradictions at the various intersections between the discourses of science fiction, feminism and postmodernism. My own interest in the three novels on which my thesis focuses, as well as the broader field in which they are situated, is in the redefinition of feminist sf as both a genre of social theory and of popular fiction, as well as in the variously open-ended social theories the novels articulate.

Wolmark identifies a "significant convergence between feminism and science fiction since the 1970s (which) has resulted in the production of texts in which gender and identity are central, as is the depiction of new and different sets of social and sexual relations" (Wolmark 1993). Those are precisely the types of texts that I propose to examine in this project. Wolmark also claims that "Feminist science fiction has brought the politics of feminism into a genre with a solid tradition of ignoring or excluding women writers, and is so doing it has politicised our understanding of the fantasies of science fiction" (Wolmark 1993: 2). I believe that this is an extremely significant point and that is why I want to consider my chosen texts in the context of the genre of sf, rather than attempting to recuperate them to some kind of enlarged postmodern canon in the way that

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Marleen Barr attempts. An extended quotation from *Aliens and Other* captures

Barr's move appositely:

> In an extraordinary about-face, Barr has turned from being a vociferous advocate of the significance of the writing practices of feminist SF, to becoming an ardent supporter of a postmodern literary canon which has expanded to accommodate what she calls "feminist fabulation". Since this term includes what used to be known as feminist SF, it is clear that generic specificity has been abandoned in favour of "an umbrella term for describing overlapping genres"; quite how knowledge of the way in which genres overlap is to be gained, when the genres themselves have been conceptually dissolved, is not clear (Wolmark 1993: 25).

Barr's shift from feminist sf to feminist fabulation does indeed seem to be both a

strategic and methodological mis-step, in my opinion, because of its elision of

specificity. Perhaps Barr should take heed of Joanna Russ's remark, originally

provoked, in 1984, by a feminist graduate student who critiqued a Russ short

story by finding acceptable feminist theory from three white men:

> This kind of conciliatory behavior – see, we'll prove to them that feminists fit into the existing disciplines – isn't heard and doesn't get preserved in the discipline; it will simply be ignored and lost. Since the conflict feminists have with the patriarchal establishment and its theory isn't about what's right or wrong but about who's boss (like Humpty Dumpty), the only tactics that work are open confrontation and active non-cooperation. Play by the rules and you may get an immediate pat on the head but ten minutes later (sometimes it takes longer but as we know, seldom) you'll try to enter the conversation and you know what? Nobody will hear you (Russ 1995: 174).

I believe that the choice of genre is a political choice, as feminist writers choose,

in the words of Donna Haraway "theory and practice addressed to the social

relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myths and

meanings structuring our imaginations" (Haraway 1991a: 163). In *Science as*

Power, Stanley Aronowitz has argued that science is regarded as the only

legitimate form of knowledge in contemporary culture (Aronowitz 1988). If this

is the case, writers who wish to take issue with society as it is currently

structured must necessarily engage with science. By choosing to do so using science fiction, feminists must also, of necessity engage with the sf tradition. As Wolmark recognises, feminist sf writers work both within and against the sf genre to extremely fruitful ends (Wolmark 1993).

Feminist Social Theory

In her discussion of the production and reception of theory in U.S. feminism, Katie King claims that she has referred to these exchanges as "conversations" in order to challenge taxonomies of feminist theory or history (King 1994a: ix)[12]. However, King is acutely sensitive to the power-inscribed effects on theory production of feminists' locations in the nexus of social and disciplinary regimes of publication and distribution. King's use of conversation resonates with my own intuitive use of the term to refer to feminist knowledge created in a range of locations and institutional spaces. Conversation seems to me to be a much more meaningful metaphor than debate, with its connotations of informality, people talking across each other, joining in and leaving at different times, and of a general open-endedness. It is crucial to be aware, however, that this is not a completely benevolent metaphor, because, as King herself notes, conversations are power-inscribed, and some voices are more likely to receive a hearing than another. In arguing that social theory is produced in feminist sf, I do not intend

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[12] I met the friend who introduced me to the book at a Women's Studies Network conference when we were put together on a panel because we were both speaking about feminist science fiction. This was a happy coincidence, because she (Helen Merrick) lives and works in Australia, and the introduction to Katie King came about during our extended email correspondence. I introduce this aside just to note that I am indebted to many people for the way that my thinking on my research topic has developed, and having appeared in the acknowledgements sections of a couple of PhDs already, the conversations seem to be mutually beneficial. And those are just some of the people for whom I am writing my PhD. I am alternately motivated and hamstrung by the thought of the multiple allegiances that inform my attempts to write this thesis.

to set up a hierarchy of theory production that would rank certain conversations above others, simply to note that the production of feminist theory is the outcome of myriad conversations. I do want to insist, however, that feminist theory is *produced* in and indeed as sf texts; the texts do not simply reflect the zeitgeist like secular parables. They offer a way of reading and tools for the imagination that "categorical and indexical feminist social theory"[13] *qua* Stanley and Wise (Stanley and Wise 2000), lacks because of the mode of its disciplinary production.

Anne Balsamo claims that the project of recuperating a notion of the body without implying essentialism occupied many feminists in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She notes that this project evoked mixed responses with some feminists fearing it would "set the stage for the recontainment of women to the body" while "others claimed that the body was, and would continue to be, the premier battleground for women's rights in the late twentieth century" (Balsamo 1996: 157). As a feminist who believes that political activism should circulate around the latter response to the project, but who feels that the fears of the former group must be taken seriously, it seemed to me that narrative fiction, particularly sf, offered the potential to pursue this project in a complex and compelling fashion that could not be easily collapsed into the abjecting dualisms encouraged by the generic conventions of categorical and indexical social theory. I draw the

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[13] Stanley and Wise suggest that 'a specialist and elite group of "feminist theorists" has come into existence, producing a "professional and indexical category" of feminst theory [which is] perceived by its "consumers", those who read and teach and use it, rather than necessarily by its producers, to be at the apex of feminist knowledge production; and it is higly similar in its constitution to "social theory", which remains a masculinist preserve largely untouched by feminist thinking' (Stanley and Wise 2000 : 262).

notions of abjection and of abjecting, as an active process, from Butler's

appropriations of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva. According to Butler:

> Kristeva's discussion of abjection in *The Powers of Horror* begins to
> suggest the uses of this structuralist notion of a boundary-constituting
> taboo for the purposes of constructing a discrete subject through
> exclusion. The "abject" designates that which has been expelled from the
> body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered "Other." This appears
> as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established
> through this expulsion. The construction of the "not-me" as the abject
> establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of
> the subject (Butler 1990: 133).

The boundary-constituting process that Kristeva describes is an impassioned one.

Bodily processes are inscribed with meanings that are crucial to a subject's sense

of self-integrity. In this thesis, I will argue that abjection is a characteristic of

theory production as theorists secure their theoretical and political boundaries by

abjecting theories, theorists and modes of writing which threaten those

boundaries. I use the notion of abjection to make two key points about theory

production. The first point is that despite the relatively dispassionate

presentation of some feminist academic social theory the processes of its

production are extremely impassioned, and this passion can be uncovered by

close attention to the interlocutors with whom theoretical texts are in dialogue. I

will elaborate on this point in chapter 1. The second point is that this process is

facilitated / exacerbated by the choice of particular genres, the formal

characteristics of which virtually demand that knowledge is produced /

represented in this abjecting manner. I will make this case through my readings

of the feminist science fictions and with reference to contemporaneous feminist

social theory produced within the academy.

This thesis will produce close readings of feminist sf that are informed by my

membership of a number of interpretive communities. However, this does not

mean that my reading will be identical to those that others with those multiple

memberships would produce. As Lynne Pearce notes:

> an interpretive community does not represent a set of fixed, and shared,
> values with which the reader mindlessly agrees, or to whom s/he defers.
> Rather, it should be thought of as its own site of struggle: a group whose
> 'position' is constantly being renegotiated and re-legitimated even while
> its consensus is publicly upheld (Pearce 1997: 212).

As a reader of feminist sf, and over the course of this project an increasingly

active participant in the feminist sf fan sub-culture, I am also in the position of

being one of its representatives[14]. I would not wish to overstate this case as it is a

heterogeneous interpretive community, but the fact remains that with other

members of this community I share a vast literature base. If it is reasonable to

assert, and I would argue that it is, "that it is the social and intellectual milieu in

which a text is consumed rather than its author or reader *per se* that makes and

guarantees its meaning" (Pearce 1997: 211) then the readings I produce of my

selected texts can be assumed to have some consonance with those which would

be produced by other keen readers of the genre, both feminist academics and

feminist sf fans. However, my central reason for choosing to foreground my

own interpretation of the texts is that, like Pearce, I consider there to be a

dialogic relationship between readers and texts. Despite the fact that the

meaning of a text can only be completed with the co-operation of a reader, which

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[14] In 1998, 1999, 2001 and 2003 I attended 'WisCon', a feminist science fiction convention held annually in Madison, Wisconsin for the past 25 years. At each of these conventions I presented a sole-authored academic paper on an sf text as well as participating in a number of multi-speaker panels discussing texts, pedagogy and science and technology. In 2001, I was the Chair of Judges for the Tiptree Award, an award presented annually since 1990 for the science fiction or fantasy novel or short story that best explores or expands notions of gender. I also belong to a closed listserve (admission by seconded nomination), which has been described as 'a virtual WisCon'; other listmembers include writers, readers, critics and teachers of sf.

has led Barthes, amongst others, to proclaim the death of the author, it seems

clear to me that texts do work to privilege certain readings (and readers) and to

foreclose others[15].

So although, as already discussed, I will use some of the conventional tools of

literary criticism, drawing on structuralism and semiotics, poststructuralism and

psychoanalysis, new historicism and hermeneutics, with Terry Eagleton and the

ancient rhetoricists he harks back to, I see these novels:

> not merely as textual objects, to be aesthetically contemplated or
> endlessly deconstructed, but as forms of *activity* inseparable from the
> wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences,
> and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in
> which they were embedded (Eagleton 1983: 206).

My project, therefore, is one of cultural studies, not of literary criticism *per se*,

and I stress the sociological dimensions of cultural studies in my approach. My

particular focus on the issue of genre and its relation to social theory and social

action draws on work by feminists who have been preoccupied with the links

between gender and genre in literary studies, on work done in cultural studies on

the text / reader relationship and particularly textual manifestations of ideology

and the process of interpellation, and in work produced under the rubrics of both

cultural studies and sociology about the uses of narrative in subject formation

and social interaction. Graeme Turner has referred to the:

> dogged and perhaps slightly curious resistance to the establishment of a
> theoretical orthodoxy in cultural studies [that] is a product of two of its
> defining characteristics: the complexity and comprehensiveness of the
> theoretical issues it has confronted in order to deal with the problem of
> culture, and its commitment to critical, political objectives (Turner 1990:
> 5).

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[15] See Chapter 2 " 'I' the Reader: Text, Context and the Balance of Power" in Pearce 1997.

If this is the case for cultural studies, and I would agree with Turner that it is despite the countervailing pressures within the academy to discipline cultural studies, then it is even more strongly the case for feminist cultural studies. I have therefore drawn upon the tools appropriate to my investigation without seeking a precedent for the particular synthesis I have produced.

I have chosen to analyse texts published between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, a period that I have already identified as being productive of a crisis in academic feminism, as well as in 'the Left' more generally on both sides of the Atlantic. The shift in political culture and sociocultural imaginaries brought about by the Reagan and Thatcher governments had profound effects on movements of social transformation and those individuals with significant investments in their goals, leading to a concerted effort to re-vision anti-hegemonic projects in a bid to counter a pervasive sense of hopelessness and political inertia[16]. It is also a period when academic feminism in the UK looked to the US where different institutional locations for feminist academics and different publishing practices meant that the bulk of the 'feminist theory' being disseminated was being produced in the US. It almost seemed as if the women's movement was defunct and that it had been replaced by a niche market in publishing. A feminist cultural studies approach therefore seems particularly apt to deal with the complexity and comprehensiveness of the social and theoretical issues I will have to confront. Andrews et al provide a vivid potted history of the study of narrative as "a point of intersection, even cross-over, between the social sciences and the humanities"

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[16] That in the UK the parliamentary labour party transformed itself in the image of Thatcherism is both a striking example of the material effects of discursive practices and a further source of feelings of political impotence for those who would seek a more radical redistribution of social justice than the return to 19th century meritocracy offered by New Labour.

since the 1970s (Andrews, et al. 2000a: 1). In a sense my own intellectual subjectivity as I began this thesis could be characterised in a similar way, drawing on both the humanities and social sciences with Cultural Studies as a field, rather than a point of intersection. This thesis is submitted for a PhD in Sociology and engages explicitly with social theory in the implicit framework of the sociology of culture, but it also draws on my interdisciplinary training. This resource of interdisciplinarity echoes that of feminist knowledge production more generally in its exhibition of both an awareness of and a healthy (dis)respect for the exclusionary operation of disciplinary boundaries.

Anticipating Conclusions

Each of the science fictions analysed in this thesis has in common the narrative feature of shifting points of view, and modes of address to the reader, so that the impossibility, and indeed undesirability of achieving one fixed meaning is foregrounded in their forms. Although they all have in common plots which could be imagined visually as 'action films', that action is only one level of the narrative. Complex characterizations involving emotions, motivations, ambivalence and ambiguity are a further level. A mapping of social forces is a third level, with each novel dealing with the interrelating structures of paid labour, unpaid labour, laws and customs, hegemonic and resistant 'world views', sexual practices, social and biological reproduction, and so on. Each of the novels under analysis is strong, and innovative, in each of these levels, in contrast to a large proportion of published genre sf which relies heavily on the first level with only sketchy reference to the second, and drawing on a common storehouse of shorthand techniques of context setting – sometimes known as

'shared worlds' or 'shared universes' for the third. The particular feature of sf literature that is to apply the techniques of mimetic realism to a situation that does not (yet) exist, commonly known as 'world-building', means that the selected texts may be read as a sociology of the (imagined) future. And, bearing in mind Darko Suvin's suggestion that the task of sf is to produce cognitive estrangement (Suvin 1979: 7), that is, to make its readers reflect on the gap between the world portrayed and their understanding of the world they inhabit, we can also read them as social theories that critique the flaws in their contemporary societies and hypothesise potential solutions.

The novels examined embody what might be conceived of as a range of feminist theoretical perspectives; radical feminism, liberal feminism, socialist feminism, post-structuralist feminism, ecofeminism and indeed queer feminism. However, they demonstrate with great force that these perspectives are neither neatly categorised nor categorisable. Sandra Harding makes a similar point with regard to the feminist epistemologies of science for which she devises discrete categories while recognising that feminist scientists and feminist science projects will draw upon one or more pragmatically to best achieve their objectives (Harding 1991). These perspectives are employed strategically and draw on a complex feminist dialogic and discursive field. They are also employed in the novels in ways that enable the interested reader to grasp their congruencies and contradictions when such nuances may be erased in the more abjecting genre of categorical and indexical social theory.

Structure of the Thesis

In the first two chapters of this thesis, 'Science Fiction and Social Theory' and 'A Passion for Social Transformation' I' will set out the critical resources on which I drew in my reading and theorising – in brief, literary and sociological work on narrative, and psychoanalytic theory – and appropriated strategically to illuminate the textures of the debates, and the utopian impulse which I argue drives them. In chapter 1, 'Science Fiction and Social Theory: Narrative, Interlocutors and Interpretive Communities' I will outline the ways in which feminists, social and cultural theorists have drawn upon the concept of narrative, and the location of my own project in this developing field. I will set out the project of this thesis: to examine the ways in which it can be argued that sf is a site where social theory is narrativised; embodied in the characters, points of view, and emplotted action of popular fictions in a pedagogical address to a particular interpretive community. In Chapter 2, 'A Passion for Social Transformation', I explain my rationale for drawing on particular theoretical and methodological concepts to enable my analysis. I will draw on feminist psychoanalysis both to theorise the 'utopian impulse' that I argue underpins feminist social theory and to develop a further aspect of my deconstructive[17] reading practices.

In the second part of the thesis, I will tease out the social theories narrativised in each of the novels, focussing on technologies of gendered embodiment in

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[17] I am not using "deconstructive" to signify complete alignment with the work of Derrida, simply to suggest that my reading practices will endeavour to open up contradictions within the text, particularly where these accrue to explicit or implicit hierarchical oppositions within the text.

Chapters 3 and 4; issues of narrative, representation and the particular futures enabled by particular historiographies in Chapter 5; the deconstruction and / or reinvocation of the hierarchical oppositions of Nature / Culture, Organicism / Technology and Materialism / Spirituality in feminist theory in Chapter 6. In these substantive chapters I will examine the contributions made by the sf texts under analysis to the range of feminist social theoretical debates already outlined. In my conclusion I will summarise the distinctive contribution that I argue feminist sf makes to the larger field of social theory, and the ways that it illuminates the generic practices of academic social theory.

In the following chapter, I will set the context for this thesis by describing the 'turn to narrative' in cultural studies and the social sciences.

Chapter 1

Science Fiction and Social Theory: Narrative, Interlocutors, and Interpretive Communities

> We live in narrative's moment (Maines 1993: 17). The narrative turn in the social sciences has been taken. The linguistic and textual basis of knowledge about society is now privileged. Culture is seen as a performance. Everything we study is contained within a storied, or narrative, representation. Indeed, as scholars we are storytellers, telling stories about other people's stories. We call our stories theories (Denzin 2000: 1).

In the 'Introduction' to this thesis, I explained that I am interested in the relationships between feminist science fiction, social theory and social transformation, and I indicated that I was going to explore these relationships through a project of textual analysis. I also made frequent references both to self-naming as 'a feminist' and to my pleasure – guilty and otherwise – in reading science fiction, and I implicitly linked those observations to my use of the term 'feminist interpretive communities'. My conviction that all textual interpretation – reading – is produced in the context of identifications with interpretive communities is significant for the theories and methodologies that I brought to bear on the texts I examine, so it is appropriate initially to trace my appropriation and inflection of this term, via literary and cultural studies. In the following chapter I will indicate how my understanding and application of this concept is further inflected by a particular take-up of psychoanalytic theories on emotion and intersubjectivity. In this chapter, however, my focus is on interpretive strategies which explicitly link texts with the social contexts of their

production and reception (although reception can more properly be conceptualised as another process of production). I will go on to explain why I chose to draw particularly on dialogics as well as other reading strategies or technologies, and then describe the key concepts that I will apply. Although my experience of reading the texts could at times seem to be either a witting or unwitting oscillation between pleasure and critique, my academic training and my political conviction lead me to believe that the process is rather more complex and is socially produced, although not determined. It was therefore important to me that I develop a conceptual framework for my textual interpretation. At times I use this framework as an explicit and self-conscious methodology, and at other times it simply becomes the implicit, although never fully unself-conscious, context for my reading.

I begin this chapter with a brief contextual discussion of feminist sf followed by a critical elaboration of the concept of interpretive communities. I then move on to provide a fuller account of the 'turn to narrative' in the social sciences, already touched upon in the introduction, and situate my own project within that movement. Finally I elaborate the combined conceptual framework / methodology which underpins my analysis throughout this thesis.

Feminist Science Fiction

In the UK at least, feminist sf appears to have been dislodged from its central position as a popular feminist genre by feminist crime fiction. In Silver Moon, until recently "Europe's Largest Women's Bookshop", it was the only popular fiction genre to command its own – large – dedicated shelf space from the mid-

1990s until the store's demise in 2001[18]. It would be interesting to hypothesise whether this ousting is in any part due to the shift from grand structuralist theories of oppression to situated post-structuralist theories of difference, but this is outside the scope of the present project[19]. However, it is indisputable that in the UK, the Women's Press sf list was a disappointingly short-lived publishing phenomenon. It is possible that its demise indicates the lack of an organised fan culture within the UK on the scale that exists in the US, but this explanation seems questionable bearing in mind the large number of UK-based feminist fans of sf that I have encountered during the course of conducting this research. It seems more likely that the list was a casualty of the wrangling and restructuring in UK book publishing that seemed to be a constantly recurring feature of the industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but again this topic is outside the scope of this thesis[20]. However, it is important to note that in the course of my research I have also encountered a large number of people, including feminists, who profess a deep antipathy to sf, often based on very little (if any) actual experience of the genre, with the possible exception of sf film and TV.

I also find much of both print and media sf trivial and frustrating but for different reasons than non-fans I suspect. From my point of view, it is in the extent to which individual texts fail to profit from their generic capacity to critique the status quo and imagine sweeping transformation that my disappointment lies.

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[18] Although Silver Moon no longer exists as an independent bookstore, the 'Silver Moon' name has been purchased by Foyles which has now opened a Silver Moon section in its bookstore on the Tottenham Court Road in London.
[19] However, Joke Hermes' work with Dutch readers of crime fiction seems to suggest that the popularity of even overtly feminist crime fiction is because they embody the contradiction of discourses of already achieved emancipation with representations of "everyday" experience which reveal the struggles for equality that women still face (Hermes and Stello 2000).

The novels on which this thesis focuses, however, do make optimum use of their generic distinction, and they do so in a way which holds in productive tension a sophisticated critique of contemporary social relations and a complexly elaborated imagined future. This generic potential to maintain productive tensions is a textual strategy that is much less available to producers of categorical and indexical social theory. In selecting my key novels, I deliberately focused on sf set on Earth rather than texts which perform similar critiques by using the more dramatically estranging devices of using 'aliens' as protagonists (or antagonists) or setting the 'action' in space or on other planets. The texts that I have chosen are enabled to make their critiques much more pointedly because they situate themselves in relation to a 'known' history and geography and therefore work the difference between contemporary critique and imagined future with a disruptive conjuncture of mimetic and fantastic realism.

It is interesting to speculate whether it is the perceived dissonance between the subject matter – the far future, alternate universes, speculative technologies – and its generic presentation in "old-fashioned narrative" that its detractors find hard to engage with. Cristopher Nash defines "'old-fashioned narrative'" as:

> a kind of narrative that has a subject. 'Subject' in two important senses of the word: a 'subject-matter' that demands to be 'told', to be 'borne witness to'; the narrative is about something – something stable, clear, and readily identifiable. And the narrative has in it or behind it a 'subjectivity' – a person, a 'subject' who experiences this truth to which he or she must bear witness; a being, a mind that is in some vital respect stable, clear, and readily identifiable (Nash 1990: 200).

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[20] Nicci Gerrard claimed that: "in the last years of the 1980s the radicalism and independence of women's presses have been threatened by the takeover boom in the publishing world" (Gerrard 1989: 9).

I have already indicated that 'cognitive estrangement' is Darko Suvin's

approving characterisation of science fiction's generic specificity, but perhaps

this is experienced negatively as cognitive dissonance by readers who expect

mimetic realism in a narrative to be put at the service of the mundane rather than

the fantastic – even when the fantasy is couched as scientific extrapolation or

speculation. Conversely, perhaps some readers expect formal experimentation

to accompany radical critique and therefore dismiss sf as a conservative genre.

However, as Nash provocatively asserts:

> (T)he movement for dismantling of the subject (in both its senses) and all
> that we come to associate with it that it is customary to call 'radical' in
> narrative writing is now, by all standards, middle-aged. Far from
> promoting the permanent revolution it had proclaimed in the 1960s, it's
> an established tradition (Nash 1990: 213).

If that is the case, then perhaps feminist sf might provide a site for theorising the

"better conception of agency and identity than has been available in either (anti-

humanist) post-structuralist thought or its (humanist) modernist predecessors"

that Barrett called for in her essay 'Words and Things' (Barrett 1992: 216). In

fact, some feminists and other cultural commentators have turned explicitly to sf

for its portrayal of the 'posthuman' and its attendant liberatory potential (Hayles

1999). The content of the sub-genre most quoted in these explorations –

cyberpunk – may be (have been) innovative – but formally, such fictions are the

subject-centred narratives that Nash calls "old-fashioned". In the chapters that

follow, I hope to demonstrate that it is possible to combine some of the features

of 'old-fashioned narrative' with a somewhat more sceptical attitude towards

subjects on the part of writer, text and reader. I will suggest that the

identificatory pleasures of the science-fictional text are an important generic

strategy for inciting their readers to engage in speculation and debate about a

plurality of futures. Because I want to disaggregate the notion of identificatory

pleasures from that of 'identity', or other such concepts suggesting singularity or

authenticity, before I turn to the question of psychoanalysis in the next chapter, I

want to clarify that feminist sf texts, and feminist categorical and indexical social

theory are produced and consumed within communities, even if the material

reading experience appears to consist of a lone reader and a single text.

Interpretive Communities

One of the most vexed questions in the analysis of literature has been over

whether to accord primacy to the text or to the reader in the making of meaning.

In *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, for example, Lynne Pearce remarks

that:

> this question of the textual 'balance of power' was a preoccupation of my
> own early work, and ... the struggle for authority between text (and
> context) and reader (and addressee) continues to be central to much of my
> analysis ... (Pearce 1997: 2)[21].

I am also exercised by this textual balance of power, particularly as I have been

influenced by sociological accounts of the ways that everyday narratives – virtual

texts, if you will – circulate in social interaction (Plummer 1995; Redman 1999;

Riessman 1993). Whilst Ricoeur's claim that in narrative "the process of

composition, of configuration, is not completed in the text but in the reader"

(Ricoeur 1991: 26), seems logically indisputable, I would be unhappy pushing

this statement to the conclusion that the meaning of a text is radically unfixed.

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[21] Of course this quotation is the tip of a metaphorical iceberg of literary theory. For one provocative overview of the study of literature which also provides a historicised survey of a range of literary theories see Eagleton 1983. Rice and Waugh 1992 provides a selection of key theoretical texts which have influenced both Literary Studies and Cultural Studies since, they suggest, the mid 1960s, from when they date an "unprecedented attack on the grounding assumptions of the Anglo-American critical tradition" (Rice and Waugh 1992:1).

Stanley Fish famously claimed that interpretive strategies, that is, the way in which readings of texts are performed, are developed within interpretive communities (Fish 1980). He suggests that there is "a core of agreement (although one subject to change) concerning the ways of *producing* the text" (Fish 1980: 342). That is, that texts are produced by readers within a certain set of rules and conventions. However, Fish pushes this claim to the limit that I have already ruled out in my reference to Ricoeur by insisting that:

> while there are always mechanisms for ruling out readings, their source is not the text but the presently recognized interpretive strategies for producing the text. It follows, then, that no reading, however outlandish it might appear, is an impossible one (Fish 1980: 347).

Whilst at face value, his argument seems compelling, particularly as I am persuaded that competence to produce meaning from a text is a skill acquired in a social context and not an innate gift, it is difficult to sustain when applied to the genre of feminist sf (and indeed to any genre fiction) because of the rule-boundedness implied by genre – the fact that texts are authored to meet specific contractual expectations by the reader – and because of the political and theoretical engagement that the adjective feminist implies. I will anticipate my discussion of dialogics by turning to Bakhtin to investigate the ways in which recourse to the dialogic principle can situate and discipline Fish's over-expansive definition of the power of the interpretive community to produce textual meaning. David Shepherd has laid the groundwork for this turn. As he points out Bakhtin, like Fish, acknowledges that textual interpretations will shift over time and that texts will be read (produced) differently in different social and historical contexts. But, as Shepherd points out, Bakhtin was more reluctant than Fish: "to abandon notions of textual meaning not wholly dependent on the shared predispositions of readers. If the text has a determining role in the way it is read,

this is because the socially and historically inscribed meanings of its constitutive utterances are never forgotten" (Shepherd 1989: 97). This does not mean, Shepherd clarifies, that for Bakhtin all possible future meanings are "always already inscribed in a text from the very moment of its production" (Shepherd 1989: 98). What it does mean, however, is that because a text always bears the traces of its past contexts, there is a limit to the way it can be recontextualised. I would extrapolate this discussion to argue that just as contemporary readers of a text are constrained in their interpretations by the interpretive communities to which they offer allegiance, so the text's author was also constrained by the interpretive communities in which they were situated. When those interpretive communities are further constrained by the operations of tightly bounded generic expectations I argue that it is possible to infer with a degree of accuracy the material interlocutors with whom a text is in dialogue, and potentially a preferred reading.

To clarify: I argue that, in the case of the genre of feminist sf, both 'authors' – the persons identified on the spine of a novel as responsible for its content – and 'readers' (who may adopt the identity of fan or who may insist on a level of distinction[22] in their reading of popular fiction, or both) – explicitly and / or implicitly identify with a number of interpretive communities that probably include amongst them: 'people who recognise the analytic purchase of feminist critique' and 'people who understand the generic conventions of sf *and* the ways in which feminists have expanded those conventions'. So, drawing upon the dialogic principle, which I will elaborate at greater length below, feminist sf

authors will write their stories with particular readers (interlocutors) in mind and feminist sf readers will approximate to those particular readers because they (authors and readers) share similar understandings of what particular utterances mean. This is not simply a synchronic relationship; it is also diachronic, because 'good' feminist sf authors and 'good' feminist sf readers will have an understanding of the history out of which these utterances proceed.

However, like Kim Worthington, I understand interpretive communities pragmatically, rather than idealistically, as acting "under a plurality of historically specific social conditions, [and] existing as the complex manifestations of multiple communal determinants and interpersonal affiliations" (Worthington 1996: 32). So, for example, as a feminist academic who is broadly sympathetic to the genre of feminist sf, or as a feminist who has immersed herself in the (feminist) sf genre, I could produce somewhat different readings of, for example, *Body of Glass* (Piercy 1992). In the former case, I might read the novel against Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and various film Frankensteins; it would be hard to avoid this, as Piercy writes the comparison into the text. I would probably also read the text in dialogue with Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (Haraway 1991a), particularly if I am in the habit of reading 'Acknowledgements' as Piercy claims Haraway's essay was "suggestive" (Piercy 1992: 584), although as the Penguin edition of the novel has this section at the back, I might have to read the dialogue backwards into the text, if this (somewhat obvious) intertextuality had escaped me. I would probably appreciate the way

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[22] In interviews with readers of crime fiction – another genre of popular fiction – Hermes notes their insistence on "'being a reader'" (Hermes and Stello 2000: 223) – n.b. not fans – and on "categorizing the popular books they liked as Literature" (Hermes 2000: 355).

that Piercy has placed her cyborg narrative in a near future in terms of the possibility this offers for utopian / dystopian speculation. However, in the latter case, I might have a much larger store of relevant associations to situate my reading. I might refer Piercy's work on the cyborg to the mainstream sf tradition of Asimov and his robots, and in particular to *The Positronic Man*. I might refer Piercy's treatment of human / computer interaction to the cyberpunk sub-genre or to other feminist sf writers' treatments of similar themes such as Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (Scott 1994). I would probably still think about Haraway, but I might be more inclined to draw on the work of Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, than just on feminists who are preoccupied with categorical and indexical social theory. In each case I have just referred to a tiny sample of the possible texts that would form the intertextual context of my interpretation which I will broadly share with many other readers. The interpersonal and personal historical dimensions of interpretive community formation are also influential. Feminist academics and feminist sf fans (and I identify with both 'communities' as they overlap and intersect) also participate in material interpretive communities – university departments, academic conferences, fan conventions, reading groups as well as in the virtual community that is produced by a body of genre texts.

But I have suggested that in the two cases I have cited the readings would only be 'somewhat' different. This is because both material texts and discursive practices circulate in ways that are neither predictable nor fully accessible to (self)consciousness. When I suggested that I might read *Body of Glass* against 'A Cyborg Manifesto', for example, I might mean that I would perform a close

reading of the two texts side-by-side on my desk. Or I might mean that reading one text or the other I would call to mind a prior reading of the alternate text when dissonance between the two conceptualisations of cyborgs caused me intellectual discomfort. Or it might simply be that Haraway's 'Manifesto' has acquired escape velocity such that the essay's key concepts seem to float free in a contemporary feminist imaginary, always already available for comparison with a whole range of texts or situations. However, each of these possibilities is constrained (as well as enabled) by the location of text and reader in a web of dialogic relationships which work to limit the play of meaning. The preoccupation with narrative and meaning-making in cultural studies and the social sciences forms one of the many dialogic networks within which I produce my readings of the feminist sf texts, and is the broader context in which this entire project is situated.

Multiple Turns to Narrative/Culture

The exact periodicity of the 'turn to culture' and the related 'turn to narrative' in the social sciences is difficult to outline as the 'turn' in both cases could more properly be characterised as multiple turns which have occurred throughout the humanities and social sciences in North America and Western Europe in the decades following the second world war, and from which the interdiscipline of cultural studies in Britain emerged. Within each discipline, and in each nation-state, the turns have occurred slightly differently and in each individual location the turn has been a matter of intradisciplinary contestation as well as of inter- and

cross-disciplinary borrowing. As Susan Bordo notes when discussing the related

phenomenon of gender-scepticism in feminist theory[23]:

> Like all cultural formations...[it] is complexly constructed out of diverse elements – intellectual, psychological, institutional, and sociological. Arising not from monolithic design but from an interplay of factors and forces, it is best understood not as a discrete, definable position which can be adopted or rejected, but as an emerging coherency which is being fed by a variety of currents, sometimes overlapping, sometimes quite distinct (Bordo 1990: 135).

However, in common with the gender-scepticism which Bordo critiques in the

context of feminism and postmodernism, the turns to both culture and narrative

seem to be complexly bound up with the influence of postmodernism and

poststructuralism, even when the epistemological and ontological implications of

these anti-foundationalist critiques are not fully embraced. New social

movements, of course, including the women's liberation movement have also

had their part to play. Before I discuss the influences from within the academy, I

will provide a brief overview of the relationship between women's liberation, or

feminism, and narrative.

Feminism and Narrative

In this section, I use 'narrative' in two key senses: the first refers to the stories

that people (women, in the movement) tell about their lives, whether those stories

are spoken or written, and the second refers to narrative fictions. Involvement in

the feminist movement has profoundly influenced many academics who treat

narrative as a resource. Catherine Riessman, for example remarks that she, like

many other women, came to see their common oppression through the narrating

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[23] Bordo is discussing the critique of second wave feminism posed both by poststructuralists and "indigenous feminist concerns" that led to "a new drift within feminism, a new scepticism about the use of gender as an analytic category" (Bordo 1990: 135).

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of personal experiences in consciousness-raising groups, which she later realised could be read as "data, texts about lives that could be interpreted to reveal intersections of the social, cultural, personal, and political" (Riessman 1993: vi). The editors of *Feminist Sociology* also refer to the significance of consciousness-raising groups for generating insights "into the importance of personal life for understanding social action" and they argue that life histories and biographies – narratives – "provide an especially insightful route to observe social actors over time, life course time and historical time, and to theorize human agency as it intersects with social structure" (Laslett and Thorne 1997: 6-8). Ruth Rosen claims that the slogan "the personal is political" was coined in 1968 by Carol Hanisch "to convey the then-shocking idea that there were political dimensions to private life, that power relations shaped life in marriage, in the kitchen, the bedroom, the nursery, and at work" and links this to the term "consciousness raising" coined by Kathie Sarachild which described the process by which women in small groups could share their life stories in order to explore the political aspects of personal life. According to Rosen:

> When enough women had told their stories, enough such meetings had taken place, the "personal" no longer seemed a purely individual problem, but the result of deep cultural, social and economic forces and assumptions. Having learned to see the world through men's eyes, one suddenly began to view life through the eyes of a woman, and that woman was you (Rosen 2001: 196-197).

So, the production of personal narratives, initially orally, but eventually in more lasting textual forms has been an intrinsic feature of feminist political praxis since the late 1960s. In the 'Introduction', I have already referred to Adrienne Rich's concept of re-visioning which was originally developed as a feminist challenge to the contemporary masculinist orthodoxy in literary studies. Rich was, in effect, arguing for the insights developed from consciousness-raising to

be applied to the reading of canonical literature, and she claimed this practice as "an act of survival" (Rich 1979: 35). Feminists have taken textual politics very seriously. Gayle Greene, for example, claims that:

> (t)he feminist fiction that flourished in the late sixties and early seventies came out of a liberation movement, the so-called second wave of feminism in this century, and focused on women's efforts to liberate themselves from the structures of the past (Greene 1991: 292).

Conversely, in recent interviews with readers of crime fiction, Joke Hermes explicitly contrasts their avoidance of overpoliticising the genre, in their pursuit of "(h)igh cultural appreciation of literary merit" with the reception of "the feminist confessional autobiography and the consciousness-raising novel of the 1970s, read as urgent texts that demanded immediate reaction" (Hermes and Stello 2000: 229). So, in fact, the two senses of narrative that I define above were absolutely intertwined in the cultural practices of early second-wave feminism[24].

Postmodernism

Feminism can, therefore, be seen as one as the key influences on the turn to narrative in the social sciences, particularly as the insight that 'the personal is the political' continued to inform the kind of scholarship that feminists undertook. However, other academic and cultural threads were also influential, not least postmodernism. Andreas Huyssen suggests that postmodernism emerged in the US as an avant-garde in the 1960s, although the term was first used in literary criticism in the late 1950s, but only gained wider currency in the 1970s (Huyssen 1990). Huyssen figures the direction of travel of postmodernism from the USA

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[24] I do not mean to suggest that similar insights eluded earlier feminists. See, for example, Showalter 1978 on nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist novelists, but also the critique of Showalter in Moi 1985.

towards continental Europe, whereas other versions of this genealogy see it as moving in the opposite direction from France to the USA (Bordo 1990). This travelling theory – or orientation – certainly took in the UK as well; feminists in particular have been extremely flexible in their appropriation of theoretical and methodological tools from both North America and continental Europe (Barrett 1988; Barrett 1992; Barrett and Phillips 1992). Linda Nicholson refers to postmodernism's critique of modernity as encompassing "such diverse elements as the modern sense of the self and subjectivity, the idea of history as linear and evolutionary, (and) the modernist separation of art and mass culture ... [and] the critique of the idea of a transcendent reason" (Nicholson 1990: 3). However, it has also been taken to mark shifts in the organisation of production. These include the globalisation of capital and the consequent transcendence of national boundaries, the recognition of information as a key commodity, and the feminisation of labour (Haraway 1991a). This rupture between modernity and postmodernity is evident in the topic matter of each of the novels under investigation as well as in my own epistemological and methodological approach to reading them. For example, as I will discuss in some detail in Chapter 3, each of the key novels is set in a post-holocaust future and theorises both about the causes of holocaust and the appropriate societal response. Zygmunt Bauman argues that Modernity was the necessary, if not sufficient cause for the Holocaust (Bauman 2000/1989), while Dominick LaCapra argues that in theoretical and historical texts, the Holocaust "often functions as a more or less covert point of rupture between the modern and the postmodern" (LaCapra 1994: ix); the feminist sf texts articulate their own distinctive contributions to this debate. The issue of narrative and its relationship to history, as discussed in the following

paragraph, is also a key preoccupation of the texts, as is "gender-scepticism", in Bordo's terms; each text theoretically deconstructs and reconstructs the relationships between sex, gender and sexuality, in distinctive ways, as well as the putative links between mothering and gendered subjectivity.

With specific regard to the topic of narrative, one of the most salient insights of postmodernism is a refusal of 'metanarratives' or 'master narratives', i.e. overarching accounts of, for example, the forward march of history or the betterment of humanity. As Michele Barrett notes, many who do not completely agree with the arguments of Jean-Francois Lyotard are nonetheless extremely taken with the use of the term 'metanarrative' to describe large-scale political and intellectual projects. She remarks that this is because many have found it helpful "to use a metaphorical fictionalising as a critical tool for unlocking the objectivist pretension of things like rationality, the Enlightenment or even feminism" (Barrett 1992: 205). Although this insight has been taken by some politically invested scholars to be politically dis(en)abling, as it has seemed to do away with the capacity to organise social or political movements around clear, future-oriented goals or to seek a fundamental cause of inequality, others have viewed it as liberating because of the account that is taken of those who were not encompassed, or indeed were excluded by the liberatory narratives of the Enlightenment and liberal humanism (Haraway suggests that "(T)he political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once" (Haraway 1991a: 154)). Andermahr et al suggest that the alternative offered by postmodernism is "'little narratives' which do not necessarily add up, but which may be woven together as a succession of short threads in a blanket" (Andermahr, et al. 2000: 208). So,

although this use of the term 'narrative' may be regarded as a metaphor for a more modest approach to the pursuit of knowledge, it does also slip into the notion of 'narrative' as a genre of literature, or of speech. Much contemporary social science may be thought of as operating with a condensed use of the term that incorporates both these senses albeit with varying degrees of relative emphasis.

Poststructuralism

Linked to the notion of postmodernism, with its epochal associations, is that arena of academic enquiry bracketed under the term poststructuralism. There has been much debate, not to say confusion, as to whether these terms may be considered distinct. Indeed, in their *Glossary of Feminist Theory*, Andermahr et al have separate entries for the two terms, but are compelled to discuss poststructuralism within the entry on postmodernism, as well as discretely, because of the ways in which the terms have been taken up (Andermahr, et al. 2000: 207-211). However, we can think of poststructuralism as a loose association of theories and associated methodologies developed within the academy in response to the historical trends and structural changes in society that have been conceptualised under the rubric of postmodernity. That is, whether we think of postmodernity as the historical epoch of late capitalism or see it as modernity's latent content[25], a certain scepticism towards the foundational presuppositions and grand narratives of the Enlightenment is its basic orientation.

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[25] Of course, most versions of postmodernism do suggest some sense that the epistemological shift is linked with historical changes in social organisation. According to Bauman: "Postmodernity is modernity that has admitted the non-feasibility of its original project. Postmodernity is modernity reconciled to its own impossibility – and determined, for better or worse, to live with it. Modern practice continues – now, however, devoid of the objective that once triggered it off" (Bauman 1991: 98).

Poststructuralist scholars typically assume that orientation and work through its consequences for the (inter)disciplines within which they operate. So, for example, Foucault's genealogical explorations of power / knowledge and Derrida's deconstruction are both poststructuralist in the methodologies they adopt to map and deconstruct the textual production of knowledge. Andermahr et al suggest that Derrida has been taken up chiefly in literary and textual studies whereas Foucault has been more influential in social and historical studies. They also note that cultural studies divides the honours more evenly as indeed, I would suggest, seems appropriate for an interdiscipline that works self-consciously at the interface of literary and textual studies with social and historical studies (Andermahr, et al. 2000: 210-211). Both the Foucauldian notion that knowledge is produced in the discourse that claims to reveal it, and the Derridean notion that there is nothing outside the text have been extremely influential in the turns to culture and narrative.

Subjectivity and Agency in the Social Sciences

Postmodernism and poststructuralism therefore provide the backdrop for what the editors of *Lines of Narrative* (Andrews, et al. 2000b) claim has been the point of intersection, or more strongly, cross-over between the humanities and social sciences offered by the study of narrative since the 1970s. Although they do not refer to postmodernism or poststructuralism per se – except to note in passing that narratives are "at once modern and postmodern" – they refer to "a broader cultural and linguistic 'turn' [in the social sciences] through which recognition has been given both to the shaping effects of cultural environments, and to subjective experience" (Andrews, et al. 2000a:1). Thus, they refer to a growing

importance in subjectivity in the social sciences that coincided with "the application of formal concepts and methods to cultural artefacts of all kinds" in the humanities, which they suggest was also, in turn, taken up by the social sciences. In their suggestion that "(O)ne can see this process as a kind of reintegration of the sciences and the humanities, after a long post-Enlightenment period in which they were sharply counterposed" there is a gesture to awareness of more far-reaching epistemological disruption.

Robert Franzosi's rationale for sociological interest in narrative can be read as a more elaborated version of Andrews et al's account. Pragmatically, he notes that "(N)arrative texts are packed with sociological information, and a great deal of our empirical evidence is in narrative form" (Franzosi 1998: 517.) However, he expands on this somewhat circular rationalization with the rather more persuasive suggestion that the turn to narrative by sociologists indicates a shift not just in methodology, but also in epistemology:

> No doubt, a view of social reality fundamentally based on narrative data shifts sociologists' concerns away from variables to actors, away from regression-based statistical models to networks, and away from a variable-based conception of causality to narrative sequences. That view promises to bring sociology closer to history and to sociology's own original concerns with issues of human agency (Franzosi 1998: 526-7).

Franzosi's overview is instructive, because he clarifies what the study of narrative offers to both those persuaded by postmodernism or post-structuralism (those, that is, who insist on retaining the possibility of some political and social transformation) and those still working within liberal humanist paradigms; that is a focus on human agency. This focus is of particular interest to me because, persuasive as I find postmodern / poststructuralist critiques, as a feminist, I am

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invested in a project of social transformation that fundamentally requires human agency. The reason I became interested in feminist sf to begin with was because it seemed instinctive to me to look to narrative fiction for models of and incitements to agentic intervention in social transformation. I say 'instinctive', but as a reader of narrative fiction since the age of five, this is of course a learned competence. Cristopher Nash asserts his own preference for a narrative form of subjectivity – as experienced both in fiction and the life-world:

> with any forthright and consistent obliteration of the idea of the experiencing, acting subject – of discrete persons as agents of discrete events and intentions – or with any description of the subject as simply a manifestation of impersonal collective forces, we can't hope either to account intelligibly for change, explain to ourselves how we feel ourselves to be in disagreement with someone else, or hold anyone responsible for his or her acts ... social interaction and political action become incomprehensible (Nash 1990: 216).

The exact nature of the relationship between narrative and subjectivity is clearly a matter for much debate. Andrews et al's sweeping tentativeness is characteristic: "If we are constructed by stories, or are storytellers by nature, or perhaps both, then narrative must, surely, be a prime concern of social science" (Andrews, et al. 2000a: 1). However, in spite of, or perhaps because of, this flexibility of definition, research organised around narrative has been extremely fruitful in both Sociology and its close relative Cultural Studies. As Andrews et al note: "(C)ontemporary social-scientific definitions of narrative are extremely variable" (Andrews, et al. 2000a: 3). Like many others, they suggest that the basic definition of narrative is taken to be a sequence of events in time. However, they go on to expand this definition to encompass spoken and written 'narrative', image sequences and single images which imply sequences, and even

sequences of action that demonstrate the "living out of story structures". Indeed

they argue that their aim is:

> to disestablish conventions that make stories of human lives, or – in the
> psychological, literary and cultural-studies tradition – narratives with
> idealised linguistic, fiction or filmic forms, the canonical centre of
> narrative analysis (Andrews, et al. 2000a: 3).

I am somewhat uneasy with such an all-encompassing notion of narrative as I

think it is important to take full account of the specificity of forms in which

meaning is encoded, and to recognise that all encoding is not necessarily

narrative.

Peter Redman suggests that it is useful to conceptualise the study of narrative as

taking one of three broad approaches:

> The first of these involves a primary focus on narrative as *textual*
> *structure* or *signifying system* and has a concomitant emphasis (though
> not exclusively) on the study of narrative fiction (for example, novels,
> films and folk-tales) ...the second of these broad approaches involves a
> primary focus on narratives as *social interaction* or orientation to the
> other, with a concomitant emphasis on how narratives circulate and are
> deployed in everyday life ...(a) final broad approach, sometimes
> overlapping with the two previous approaches, focuses on narrative as a
> socially available grammar or 'map of meaning' (Redman 1999: 50-52).

As Redman points out, the first of these approaches is typically found in literary

studies and semiotic versions of cultural and media studies (Barthes 1973;

Barthes 1977; Cohan and Shires 1988; Rimmon-Kenan 2002), while the second

is also taken up in both sociology and those versions of cultural studies which

self-consciously locate themselves in a historicised and sociological framework

(Dawson 1994; Plummer 1995). The final approach, Redman notes has been

taken up in psychology and philosophy, and imported into qualitative sociology,

to explore the use of narrative as a cognitive device through which individuals

construct and manage self-coherence and additionally in studies of the

construction of knowledge (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Ricoeur 1991). This last observation resonates with Andermahr's account of postmodernism as preoccupied with "'little narratives' that do not necessarily add up, but which may be woven together as a succession of short threads in a blanket" (Andermahr, et al. 2000: 208), as well as the approach taken by Andrews et al and the contributors to their collection (Andrews, et al. 2000b).

What I hope this account has emphasised is that the boundaries of sociology's preoccupation with narrative are extremely fluid and by definition interdisciplinary. My thesis draws on all three of the approaches that Redman outlines because of my own (inter)disciplinary allegiances as outlined in the 'Introduction'. I am interested in the study of feminist science fictions as "*textual structures* or *signifying systems*" to the degree that each novel is available to be read as one specific textual encapsulation of a set of discourses organised using conventional narrative techniques, and is thus amenable to formalist criticism, on which more later (of course, this 'encapsulation' is only partial; it cannot help but gesture to discourses outside the text). However, my interest in the various interpretive communities that are the condition of production of each of these narratives means that I have a related interest in the way that these narrative fictions (and indeed scholarly social theories) circulate and are deployed in everyday life. For the most part however, this social interaction will be largely theorised or inferred from the modes of address embodied by the sf texts. This theorisation will be facilitated through the use of Bakhtinian dialogics which I will go on to discuss below, and amplified by my own situation in the multiple overlapping interpretive communities addressed by

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feminist sf and 'categorical and indexical' feminist social theory. Finally, the focus on "narrative as a socially available grammar or 'map of meaning'" will be deployed as I intend to map the ways in which the fictions self-consciously work with this notion, particularly in Chapter 3 'Projects of Memory and Hope for the Future'. As I have already indicated, in Chapter 3, the implications of narrative practices for social organisation and transformation form part of the topic matter of the feminist sf novels.

Although Peter Redman's overview of academic approaches to narrative includes reference to the study of narrative fiction, within the social sciences, I would (argue that references to the narratives produced in interviews, life histories and biographical texts have primacy (Atkinson 1999). However, narrative practices in the social sciences also extend to the creative presentation of research data in narrative form, such as tends to occur in anthropology, particularly in critical ethnography and much feminist research (Behar 1999; Berger 2001; Geertz 1993; Riessman 1993). Michael Holquist's comparison of histories and novels could also be applied to ethnographies; the only significant difference being the temporal spacing of the series of moments to which he refers:

> Histories are like novels in that they set out to provide more or less comprehensive accounts of social systems. Histories occupy themselves with relationships between the strata of legal codes, religious beliefs, economic organization, family structure and so forth, in order to create a series of moments in which the interaction of these forces can be seen in their simultaneity as well as their continuity. And novels, too, concern themselves more or less with such interrelationships, the particular assemblage of discourses that define specific cultures (Bakhtin and Holquist 1981: xxviii).

So although it is certainly instructive to read feminist sf as future history, it is also possible and potentially more fruitful to read the novels as ethnographies of

future societies because, as Dominick LaCapra points out, "(a)n atheoretical or even antitheoretical approach has often characterized conventional historiography, and it has engendered the idea of history as a craft" (LaCapra 1994: 2). Conversely, Donna Haraway notes:

> An 'ethnographic attitude' can be adopted within any kind of inquiry, including textual analysis. Not limited to a specific discipline, an ethnographic attitude is a mode of *practical and theoretical* attention, a way of remaining mindful and accountable (Haraway 1997a: 191) (emphasis added).

It is indubitably my attention to remain mindful and accountable when reading the sf texts, but I would argue that they are particularly available to an ethnographic mode of reading, because the ethnographic attitude Haraway defines also characterised their mode of writing. As such, they embody social theory in a similar fashion to the life histories in *Feminist Sociology* which the editors say "can broaden the literary conventions of sociology by helping to construct a 'blurred genre' of sociological writing, one in which personal narratives and social theory come together" (Laslett and Thorne 1997: 4). The blurred genre of feminist sf narrativises social theory through ethnographies of the future. Anthropologist Ruth Behar who conceptualises ethnography as a "second-fiddle genre" remarks:

> Although it has been difficult for me to part with my youthful prestige hierarchy about creative writing being superior to ethnographic writing, I no longer see such a wide gulf between them. Fiction and poetry, at their best, continue to inspire in me a kind of awe that I do not feel even for the most laudable ethnographies. But I also find that fiction and poetry, at their worst, can be more offensive to my sensibility than a boring ethnography (Behar 1999: 475).

Behar goes on to suggest that fiction is painful to read "when its imaginative web is spun from threads of sloppy and disrespectful ethnography" (ibid). She

describes how she has begun her own novel that mixes memoir, ethnography and imaginary stories (a blurred genre indeed) to test out this claim:

> My hope is that my ethnographic research on Santeria and Jewish cultures in Cuba, as well as my own personal experience of these realities, will give depth and passion to my fiction. I am betting on my theory that fiction is as good as the ethnography it is based on (just as, I suppose, ethnography is as good as the fiction it is based on) (Behar 1999: 476).

As the novels under discussion are set in the future, in some sense Behar's criteria might seem difficult to apply. However, as they both extrapolate from, and cognitively estrange the present (of their moment of composition), remaining mindful and accountable, in Haraway's terms, requires that we read them with the same intellectual rigour that we would apply to 'categorical and indexical' social theory. In order, to do so, it is important to set out both the defining characteristics of the genre, and the tools with which it can be systematically interrogated. I do this in the following sections.

Narrative Fiction

Feminist sf is a genre of narrative fiction. Narrative fiction – that is, what we generally call 'the novel', or less frequently, 'the short story', has formal characteristics with which most adults educated in the west are familiar, as learning to read literary fiction forms part of conventional schooling. Indeed, most school children learn the basic formal characteristics of narrative fiction from being taught to 'write stories'. Those formal characteristics at their most basic are first the use of focal characters; fictional actors who possibly, but not necessarily, narrate the story, but who certainly provide us with subjective access to the 'feel' of it. Secondly, the strategy of emplotment, that is the relation of a

sequence of events linked causally and temporally, distinguishes effective fiction from a bare story synopis, through the creative use of structure and language. Even this brief characterisation of the novel is arguable because the plot is furthered through the traiting of characters just as much as it is, for example, through structural devices that indicate temporality. I have chosen this division between character and plot because of the ways in which it might be mapped on to a distinction between 'the subject' and society, and because in my readings of feminist sf I will argue that readers are asked to imaginatively identify with 'characters' and to use this process of identification to write themselves into the imagined social world of the text.

Fictional Subjects

Bakhtin suggests that "(T)he speaking person and his *(sic)* discourse is ... what makes a novel a novel, the thing responsible for the uniqueness of the genre" (Bakhtin 1981: 333). He goes on to note that of course the speaking person in the novel can act, but he insists:

> The activity of a character in a novel is always ideologically demarcated: he lives and acts in an ideological world of his own (and not in the unitary world of the epic), he has his own perception of the world that is incarnated in his action and in his discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 335).

The distinction that Bakhtin draws between the epic, a classical genre that predates modern conceptions of subjectivity, and "the ideological world of his own" suggests that we can infer social theory from both explicit speech within a fictive text and from the action that takes place therein. Dorrit Cohn makes a related point when he claims that "the special life-likeness of narrative fiction – as compared to dramatic and cinematic fictions – depends on what writers and readers know least in life: how another mind thinks, another body feels" (Cohn

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1978: 5). By implication, then, writers – and readers – (co)fabricate fictional

subject(ivitie)s by drawing on their own thinking and feeling as well as upon

shared discourses of how other minds think and other bodies feel.   The

passionate investments that readers make in these fictional subject(ivitie)s

suggests that we are prepared to, and indeed desire to, work at identifying with

the fictional other, embodying his or her passions and experiences, in a way that,

I argue, we are also (sometimes) prepared to work at intersubjective

identification and recognition with 'real' others. It is this evocation of

'breathing, passionate' subjectivity with which we yearn to engage that I argue is

the generic feature of narrative fiction that enables social theory to be

narrativised in a way that solicits readers' investments[26]. Contra Plummer who

distinguishes literary texts from "*sexual stories ... socially produced in social

contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feeling of

everyday life*" (Plummer 1995: 16) (original emphasis), I argue that the sf texts,

and indeed scholarly social theory, also embody the passions of their producers

and the interlocutors (interpretive communities) to whom they are addressed.

Peter Redman suggests that it is the "promise of an 'authentic', 'deep' and

unified knowing subject [that] lies at the heart of narrative's power to seduce and

interpellate" (Redman 1999: 48). Althusser's notion of interpellation, which

explains how subjects assent to their subjection by / to ideology by drawing on

Lacan's theory of the symbolic, has been very influential within cultural studies

of literature. Whilst I agree with Redman that narrative interpellates or 'hails' its

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[26] N.B. I am not using "social theory" to stand in for ideology, however, as I argue that the social theorising is an explicit project of the text and the reader, not simply an unexamined textual embodiment of the authors' worldviews.

readers by eliciting their investment in its unfolding, this understanding must be tempered by, or textured by the recognition that the possibility of multiple, shifting or plural identifications can also suture the reader into the text. As Cohan and Shires demonstrate in their reading of Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*: "a narrative places its reader in a field of desire which gives reading its sense of urgency" (Cohan and Shires 1988: 153). Calvino's postmodern text directly addresses the reader making him (I use the pronoun advisedly) a character in the novel, and seducing the reader to continue reading by playing with plot and readerly expectations of narrative sequencing and closure. The pleasure available to the reader in this textual encounter demonstrates that identification can be experienced as plural and fragmented and still interpellate the reader in the sense – and to the extent – that he or she remains committed to completing the text. Calvino's text foregrounds readerly agency (as well as its constraint), by rendering explicit the work that readers implicitly engage in with "old-fashioned narrative". However, in the case of Calvino's text, as Cohan and Shires point out, the process of identification is intended to be experienced simultaneously as alienating because the textual "self-consciousness" "dispels the illusion that 'you have entered the novel' as a fully autonomous individual and exposes instead what such imaginary habitation requires of you" (Cohan and Shires 1988: 153).

I would argue that the narrative genre of feminist sf and its readers are far less preoccupied with an authentic and unified subject than the young male users of the romance genre which Redman investigates, for several reasons: formally, because cognitive estrangement draws attention to the work that narrative does,

and politically, because the fiction of the authentic, unified, knowing subject has not served 'women' well, according to feminist critiques. In chapter 2, I will draw on psychoanalysis for a "powerful explanation of the relation between narrative and subjectivity" that Cohan and Shires begin tracing through Calvino's novel (Cohan and Shires 1988: 154), and the operation of desire in the processes of identification which incite a reader to invest in a narrative. Before I do so, however, I will explain why I have chosen to draw on particular facets of narrative theory / methodology, and give a brief summary of those tools that are most pertinent to my project.

Theoretical and Methodological Choices

My own academic training as a critical reader of texts is marked by the various institutional locations and historical moments at which I acquired key competences[27]. My readings will therefore bear the traces of my encounters with structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxist and feminist (and socialist-feminist) ideological criticism, new historicism and postmodernism. I will draw on these resources with varying degrees of self-consciousness throughout this thesis. I will, however, privilege a strategic appropriation of dialogics linked with the concept of interpretive communities and some key narratological categories, formalist in origin, which will enable me to articulate (in the sense of joining

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[27] I recognise that this is a gross oversimplification. Just as the context of reading of any text shapes the interpretation, so does it shape the choice of interpretive tools and the self-consciousness of their application. When I was first introduced to feminist literary criticism (sometimes called "gynocriticism") in the final year of my undergraduate degree (1985-6) for example, I dismissed it as irrelevant because I thought Marxist critiques (of literary and historiographical production) the most politically urgent and apposite. The institutional context of the introduction may be part of the reason why this disavowal was possible or likely, but as I suggested in the introduction it may also be owing to the fact that I did not recognise that I was being discriminated against as a woman until I entered full-time paid employment, and therefore did not feel the need for a feminist critique.

together) my conceptual resources. Feminist psychoanalysis, to be discussed in the following chapter, will also be drawn upon to make comparisons between the work that is required to take pleasure from reading and the work that is required to invest in social transformation.

As I hope I have made clear, the argument of this thesis is that feminist sf is a genre of social theory. In the substantive chapters of this thesis (3, 4, 5 and 6) I will illustrate this argument through a series of case studies about theoretical debates produced intratextually and intertextually. It is the substance of those debates, and the distinctive ways that they are treated within feminist sf that is my key preoccupation. This is not a work of literary criticism. However, as I argue that feminist social theory is produced distinctively in narrative fiction, it is necessary to give some attention to key generic features such as characterisation, focalisation and emplotment. Like any exercise in categorisation, this conceptual separation is an oversimplification of categories that in narrative are difficult to divide. However, I believe that the examples I will set out below will demonstrate how the use of these tools will enable me to unpack the social theories narrativised in the text, as well as revealing the textual strategies which enable this social theory, metaphorically, to get under its readers' skins.

The Dialogic Principle

In her review of feminist appropriations of Bakhtin, Lynne Pearce suggests that the concept of 'dialogism' itself makes his work most appealing to feminists, because:

> Dialogue is a concept which touches the heart of what it means to be a feminist: a concept evocative of sisterhood, of the perpetual negotiation of sameness and difference, of our dealings with men and patriarchal institutions, of our relationship to a language which simultaneously is, and is not, our own (Pearce 1994: 100).

Although I might take issue with Pearce's account of "what it means to be a feminist", her argument is persuasive. In this thesis, I will also point to the ways in which feminists have evaded some much needed dialogues, but as I suggested in the introduction, in the late 1980s and early 1990s feminists seemed constantly to be in dialogue about political and theoretical presuppositions. Dialogics offers tools to tease out the complexities of these dialogues, even when there has been an attempt to evade them, as I will suggest below by reference to the concept of doubly-voiced discourse. However, with Glazener, to whom Pearce also refers, I would emphasise that "it is the *social situatedness* of Baktin's theories of discourse and utterance that signal their fundamental relevance for feminist criticism" (Pearce 1994: 101).

The dialogic principle at its most basic is the notion that no utterance is possible without the enabling 'presence' of an addressee, even when we are unaware of that presence (Pearce 1994: 3). This principle is elaborated somewhat in the following quote, taken from Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

> Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'. I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view of the community to which I belong (Quoted in (Pearce 1994: 43).

This dialogic principle underpins all communication according to the Bakhtin School. It also facilitates the expansion of the concept of genre to encompass spoken as well as written discourse, as in this quotation from Bakhtin's essay on 'Speech Genres':

> Speech genres organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do. We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length (that is, the approximate length of the speech whole) and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole, which is only later differentiated during the speech process. If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible (Quoted in (Pearce 1994: 73).

This insight could be articulated productively with the current sociological interest in narratives that are produced in social interaction, to nuance the degree to which particular social interactions can enable speakers to modify a genre, but I introduce it simply to give some sense of the extensive network of genres and communities within which the apparently discrete genres of 'feminist sf' and 'categorical and indexical feminist social theory' are produced. I will refine the insight however, by drawing on some additional dialogic concepts that will enable me to identify with some specificity the particular interlocutors to whom the feminist sf novels and other feminist social theory texts address their utterances. Lynne Pearce has found this approach particularly helpful in her own work on women's and / or feminist writing:

> rather than search for the elusive "difference" of women's writing in either the sex of the author (i.e. who a text is by) or in its content (i.e. what it is about) we concentrate instead, on *who a text is for*. Women's writing is best understood not as writing *by* women but as writing for them: what genders a text is not its authorship but its *potential readership* – the way in which interlocutors *within* the text (i.e. the textual addressees) and its actual readers are positioned as female or, indeed feminist (Pearce 1994: 106).

Although I believe that there is ample textual and intertextual evidence to support

my claim that the authors of the science fictions I examine are feminists, a

dialogic approach to reading the texts they produce enables me to examine the

ways in which their readers are positioned as feminists or indeed female – that

being the order that makes more sense for my project. Significantly, some of this

positioning is done at the level of content, which demands that readers are

familiar with a range of feminist debates. It is also done through the use of

intonation; I will elaborate on this dialogic concept shortly. Before I do, I will

refer to the dialogic term that best encapsulates one of the key advantages

narrative fiction has over categorical and indexical social theory for holding

contradictions or paradox in tension: heteroglossia.

Heteroglossia

'Heteroglossia' is the key enabling generic feature for the embedding of a range

of contestatory feminist social theories in a single feminist sf text in a way that

need not – although it may still – construct a hierarchy of preferred and

antagonistic interlocutors. According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia, "a diversity of

social speech types", is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.

Amongst the 'social speech types' that he identifies are:

> professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age
> groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various
> circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific
> sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own
> slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) (Bakhtin 1981: 262-3)

So heteroglossia is not simply about the use of multiple points of view within a

novel, although point of view may be one of the "fundamental compositional

unities" which enables heteroglossia to enter the novel. Bakhtin suggests it

might enter via authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres (that is, for example the use of reproduced correspondence or, as in the case of *The Gate to Women's Country,* through the reproduction of the script of a play) or the speech of characters. Within the feminist sf novels I examine, some of the social speech types that interest me are the languages of different cohorts of feminists (stratified by, for example, age, nationality, race, 'variety': i.e. radical, socialist, ecofeminist); the languages of hegemonic science and / or epistemology, the languages of US liberalism, and so on.

Intonation and Doubly-Voiced Discourse

Lynne Pearce points out that the dialogic interdependence of speaker and addressee in Bakhtin group writings is always implicitly power-inscribed and that the most explicit recognition of this power is in the use of intonation in dialogic exchange:

> in everyday speech, the *tone of voice* we use in our address always supplements *its semantic communication in some way. Intonation may* reinforce the apparent sincerity of a statement or, as in the case of irony, reveal a sentiment entirely at odds with it. It will also reveal much about the relationship between the speaker and addressee: whether it is professional or intimate, for example; whether it is friendly or adversarial; and which of the interlocutors, in this particular exchange holds the balance of power (Pearce 1994: 4).

Of course, this explanation begs the observation that the eavesdropper on this communication must needs be within the same speech community as interlocutor and addressee to register intonation accurately. And I would suggest that even in such cases there is always the risk of misrecognition of tone. However, the point is taken that the mode of utterance is as important as the content of the utterance for arriving at an understanding of its values and the power dynamics in operation.

I want to stress that this notion of intonation is important for written discourse as well, because close readings of texts which are sensitive to their 'situatedness'[28] can trace the ways that particular interlocutors are included or excluded. This is likely to take place at the level of style in the tone of address which assumes that interlocutors will take up particular positions in relation to textual utterances. This extrapolation of the concept of intonation resonates with Bakhtin's discussions of doubly-voiced discourse in the novel, but I suggest that it can productively be applied to readings of categorical and indexical social theory texts which may not be as self-consciously crafted but which nonetheless interpellate or alienate their readers by their mode of address. Bakhtin defines a variety of types of doubly-voiced discourse, but the two which are of particular relevance to this project are 'hidden dialogue' and 'hidden polemic'. In each of these cases, the interlocutor is not named in the text, but their presence can be inferred from the utterances within the text. In each case the utterances carry the trace of the responses the unnamed interlocutor might be expected to make. As Bakhtin remarks "(R)esponsive understanding is a fundamental force, one that participates in the formulation of discourse, and it is moreover an active understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the discourse" (Bakhtin 1981: 280-281). The main difference between 'hidden dialogue' and 'hidden polemic' is that in the latter case, the inferred interlocutor is assumed to be hostile. In the case of feminist (categorical and indexical) social theory, for example, I would argue that the tone of some texts emerges through hidden dialogue with like-minded feminists, and hidden polemic against feminists who are assumed to hold antagonistic opinions. In this thesis, I argue

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[28] cf Haraway on situated knowledges (Haraway 1991b).

that 'hidden polemic' is a genre characteristic of categorical and indexical social theory at least as much as it is evidence of actually-existing antagonism between different 'varieties' of feminists. In fact, I will argue that it emerges from genre requirements of logical coherence; the effort to produce a consistent argument in an authoritative voice. Therefore, although, like all communications, this genre of social theory is intrinsically dialogic, dependent on interlocutors for its condition of speech, intratextually, the (never-to-be-achieved) objective is to achieve a single-voiced discourse, in marked contrast to the 'heteroglossia' that is characteristic of novelistic discourse. In the following close reading of a passage from *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, I demonstrate how appropriation of the concepts of heteroglossia, hidden dialogue and hidden polemic enable me to deconstruct the textual operations which embed social theory in narrative fiction. The dialogue reproduced below is extracted from a longer discussion about sexual abuse of children (in this imagined future, children are bred specifically for the sexual use of powerful men). Madrone has been sharing her bed with Poppy, a fragile looking blonde child of about five who has been terrified by Madrone's gentle refusal of a sexual overture:

> "She'll be okay, " Katy said. "These ones get the nightmares."
> "It wasn't that," Madrone said. "She — she started to — to feel me. Sexually. And when I stopped her, she panicked."
> "Ah, well, of course she would, wouldn't she now?" Katy said.
> "What do you mean?"
> "Her life has taught her only one way to secure affection or care. To survive. You blocked that for her."
> "Damn right. And I would again."
> "Well she'll learn, maybe, that there's other roads to love. And then again, maybe she won't. Maybe none of us has the time or the energy or the optimism left to teach her that. She's so very young, it seems like there should be some hope for her still. Some choice. But maybe she's already marked for the Angels"(Starhawk 1993: 303).

At a very commonsensical level this passage is heteroglossic in that it contains two distinct intratextual voices. At a more sophisticated level, the intratextual dialogue that ensues articulates two potential social theories about sexual intercourse with children, each of which emerge from the characters' social situatedness. Madrone articulates a position which views sexual intercourse between adults and children as an aberration that can be eradicated by eliminating hierarchy from social relations and by ensuring that no relations between children and adults are completely privatised (I am drawing on other passages in which this theme is treated). Katy, on the other hand, articulates a much more pragmatic and localised social theory which recognises that social relations, as organised in Los Angeles, mean that some children will be sexually abused, and that the task for those who oppose this abuse is to work with the abused children to help them overcome this trauma. Taken together, these two theories can articulate a more complex theory about subjective and social transformation in relation to sexual abuse than Madrone's utopian or Katy's dystopian vision alone.

It is my contention that the extract I have reproduced and the longer discussion from which it is taken is in hidden dialogue with feminists who agree that the sexual abuse of children by powerful men is harmful. I cannot imagine any feminists would dispute this proposition. However, as the discussion develops, the text begins to engage in hidden polemic with feminists who argue that it is possible for consenting adults to take pleasure from domination in sexuality:

> "I wasn't raised to believe in evil, Katy. But I can't think of another word for this," she said finally.
> "There isn't any other word for it. Where you come from – they don't have sex shops and torture clubs?" (Starhawk 1993: 304).

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I suggest that this juxtaposition of textual voices is suggesting that the same social relations that facilitate child abuse make dominance sexy, and is thus in hidden polemic with feminists whose insistence on the importance of sexual pleasure, and thus recuperation of the eroticisation of dominance[29], might foreclose on a nuanced articulation of the complexities of this arena of social relations. Thus, it is entirely probable that feminists with a range of theoretical analyses could find themselves alternately interpellated and alienated by the different textual voices. It is also plausible that this oscillation between identification with and repudiation of theories or the characters who voice them could open up a more productive dialogue between text and reader than the presentation of similar arguments in categorical and indexical social theory which require a more 'coherent' textual identification to take place. I have argued that the articulation of theories through 'characters' is one of the ways in which social theory is narrativised. But how are 'characters' narrated?

Characterisation

In feminist sf, as in other forms of narrative fiction, characters are the actors in a story who make things happen, or who experience the events that are sequenced to form the action of a story. We understand intellectually that characters are not 'real people', but nonetheless, when characterisation is successfully narrated, as readers we may identify with or even desire characters, although, as Pearce points out, the latter possibility is rarely acknowledged. According to Rimmon-Kennan and Cohan and Shires, characters are produced in narrative through the

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[29] See these collections for some examples of the relevant discussions: Segal and McIntosh 1992, Vance 1992.

use of character traiting (Cohan and Shires 1988; Rimmon-Kenan 2002). Cohan

and Shires suggest it is appropriate to understand traits as:

> semantic features (or *semes*), which refer, not to an essentialized and universal human nature, but "to a stock of physical, behavioural, psychological and verbal attributes out of which fictional characters may be put together" (Fowler 1977: 35) in (Cohan and Shires 1988: 73).

Revisiting Cohn's insight that "the special life-likeness of narrative fiction ...

depends on what writers and readers know least in life: how another mind thinks,

another body feels" (1978: 5); we can articulate it with the post-structuralist

notion that the subject is an effect of discourse. Thus, the recognition that

fictional characters are nothing more than a network of directly defined and

indirectly presented traits (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 59) can be compared with

'real' subjectivity as a node in a network of constitutive discourses, so that the

non-existence of characters as whole beings does not seem like a significant

obstacle to the circulation of identificatory processes. For the purposes of this

thesis, I argue that it is the availability of convincingly realised characters with

which readers can identify or disidentify in their (fictive) embodied subjectivity

that is responsible in large part for creating the field of desire which Cohan and

Shires claim gives reading its sense of urgency. This point is taken up in the next

chapter. By remaining alert to the use of traiting and the ways in which it

enables us to 'piece together' our sense of embodied characters, I will argue that

it is thus possible to read their bodies as produced by the social relations in which

they are fictively embedded. This fictive embedding is also an effect of the

formal characteristic of focalization.

Focalization

Cohan and Shires suggest that "*Focalization* consists of a triadic relation formed by the *narrating agent* (who narrates), the *focalizer* (who sees), and the *focalized* (what is being seen and, thus, narrated – in the case of mental life: emotion, cognition, or perception" (Cohan and Shires 1988: 95). I will illustrate this with reference to two scenes from one of the key novels to demonstrate just some of the potential configurations of focalisation. In *The Gate to Women's Country* narration is anonymous; that is, there is a third-person narrator. However, the majority of what is seen, felt or understood is focalised through Stavia, as the following short extract indicates:

> Stavia saw herself as in a picture, from the outside, a darkly cloaked figure moving along a cobbled street, the stones sheened with a soft, early spring rain ... As usually happened on occasions like this one, Stavia felt herself become an actor in an unfamiliar play, uncertain of the lines or the plot, apprehensive of the ending (Tepper 1989: 1).

So in this extract, that which is focalised is the physical characteristics of the town, the prevailing weather, and Stavia's mental life. By reference to her mental life through this process of focalisation, Stavia is also traited as somebody who experiences her subjectivity as unstable, or doubled.

In contrast, in the following scene, the narrating agent continues to be anonymous but events and perceptions are focalised first through Chernon, the warrior-to-be who entices Stavia away from Women's Country, and, in the course of the "ravishment" through Stavia once more:

> Though he kept himself well concealed in forest as she had instructed, he watched for her from the high edge of a ridge, growing more impatient and heated with each passing moment. When she arrived he had no words to greet her with. Imaginings had kept him awake for most of the night; his restless body had done the rest. *He took hold of her as she approached the camp, pulling her away from the donkey, dragging her*

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> *toward his spread blankets, covering her mouth with his own so that she
> had no time to speak.* He gave her no time, no word, nothing but a
> frenzied and almost forcible ravishment which, while it did not totally
> surprise her, left her, when he rolled away, completely unfulfilled and
> trembling in a state of pain and half-aroused anger. He was tangled in his
> blankets, eyes closed, breathing like surf in deep, liquid heavings. If it
> had not been precisely rape, it had been close to it (Tepper 1989: 237)
> (emphasis added).

I would argue that the section of the passage preceding the italicised section is clearly focalised through Chernon, whilst the section following the italics is clearly focalised through Stavia. The section in italics can be seen as the moment of transition. Shifting focalisation is one of the techniques an author can employ narratively to represent the different social speech types that make up the heteroglossic character of novelistic discourse as outlined by Bakhtin. In tracing through these textual operations, I hope I have begun to demonstrate the tools that dialogics and formalist narratology offer for a project that is concerned with the social theories produced in narrative fiction. Each of these tools however is simply a lens through which to focus aspects of an analysis of an extremely complex textual product. The concept of emplotment refers to the many levels of codes and structures which make up this complexity.

Emplotment

Many narrative theorists make a distinction between story and plot along the following lines. The fictional story could be understood in a commonsensical fashion as a synopsis of the action of a novel, ordered as it would be 'in real life'. So the story of *The Gate to Women's Country* very briefly rendered is as follows. Stavia, the daughter of Morgot, grows up on the women's side of the wall in Women's Country. Whilst growing up, she forms an illicit friendship with Chernon, a boy who lives with the warriors on the other side of the wall. On an

ill-advised and secretive trip away from her home town she meets up with Chernon and becomes pregnant with his child. On returning home, she learns that the Councilwomen, the effective rulers of Women's Country, are attempting to breed out aggression by ensuring that warriors never inseminate the women of Women's Country. Because Stavia becomes privy to this knowledge, she understands that her son by Chernon will become a warrior and that she will therefore lose him. The story ends shortly after Stavia's son joins the warriors when Stavia performs as Iphigenia in the play performed annually in Women's Country. However, the plot of Women's Country is much more complex with heightened suspense, dramatic revelations, revealed through a complexly plotted series of flashbacks, and thematic counterpoints provided through the interleaving of the text of the play in which Stavia performs with the narrated account of her life. Extremely sophisticated analytic categories have been developed within literary criticism to deconstruct narrative fictions, but they are not essential to my project. However, I will be sensitive to the use of plot devices in the fictions examined, because they are another means by which heteroglossia can be organised in the novel. To take a famous example from feminist science fiction, the story of Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* is that four different versions of the same person inhabit alternate versions of history. The novel's plot however, is postmodern in the extreme with unexplained shifts in point of view, sections of apparently 'old-fashioned narrative' interspersed with aphorisms, jokes, and direct addresses to the reader. The science-fictional language of alternate universes circulates in the text, as does the ironic language of self-conscious fictionalising, through this postmodern plotting. So heteroglossia is not confined to the content of utterances, I would argue, it is also

embodied in plot devices. However, in order to recognise the diversity of social speech types put into play through plotting and other narrative strategies, it is necessary that the reader, the text's material extra-textual interlocutor, as opposed to intratextual or implied interlocutors, belongs to the particular interpretive community or plurality of interpretive communities to which the text as an entire utterance is addressed.

Interpretive Communities and Intersubjectivity

In this chapter, I situated my examination of feminist sf in the context of the narrative turn within the social sciences, drawing on traditions crossing boundaries amongst feminist, sociological and cultural studies. I argued that Bakhtinian dialogics as it has been taken up by feminists and other cultural theorists provides some particularly powerful concepts that can be deployed to map the social embeddedness of both feminist sf and categorical and indexical feminist social theory. I added that the focus on speech and text as social interaction by Bakhtinian scholars is usefully complemented by a 'sociology of stories' approach, which examines the ways in which narratives are "socially embedded in the daily practices and strategies of everyday life" (Plummer 1995: 15).

In doing so, I suggested that the readers of texts in both of the genres with which this thesis is preoccupied are interpellated or hailed as members of a plurality of interpretive communities. As a corollary, I noted that the difference between feminist sf and categorical and indexical feminist social theory is that the former can simultaneously hail multiple interpretive communities which would be

impossible – or at least extremely unlikely – with the latter because of its (over)valuation of a single, authoritative voice and singular coherent theory. Finally, I explained how I would draw on some of the tools of formalist narratology in order to relate the narrative techniques employed by authors to the kind of social theory that it is possible to produce in differently genred texts.

In the following chapter I will link the functioning of interpretive communities to both textual and extra-textual processes of identification as theorised in relational psychoanalysis. By drawing on psychoanalysis I will be able to elucidate the emotional investments that readers make in texts and subjects make in the possibility of social transformation, thus clarifying the role that embodied passions play in interpellating readers into texts and suturing subjects into the discursive production of social reality. For just as Bakhtin stresses the necessity of the interlocutor to the production of any utterance, so Jessica Benjamin stresses the necessity of the recognizing other to the production of subjectivity.

Chapter 2

A Passion for Social Transformation

Introduction

In this chapter, I want to extend the argument about the social embeddedness of texts and their readers by giving attention to the importance of passion in the formation and processes of interpretive communities. The centrality of passion to interpretive community formation and functioning emerges repeatedly in the critical rhetoric inscribing sf readership. For example, in the entry 'SF in the Classroom' in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction,* Peter Nicholls claims that "A common catchphrase among sf fans was 'Kick sf out of the classroom and back to the gutter where it belongs'" (Clute and Nicholls 1995: 1065). Much has been made of the power-inscription of dialogues or discourses, but I argue that such power takes much of its charge from the powerful emotions accruing to notions of belonging and not-belonging, or, more actively, inclusion and exclusion. In the introduction I made reference to the process of abjecting in the securing of theoretical boundaries. In this chapter, I will provide alternative accounts of subjective exclusionary practices as well as of processes which take their emotional charge from inclusion. A model of subjectivity, therefore, that focuses on intersubjectivity, that is relationships between selves and others, rather than on singular identity, is necessary for thinking through the workings of these powerful emotions.

In this chapter I begin by outlining my conceptualisation of the 'utopian impulse' as it manifests in feminist sf and, indeed, underpins any social theorising that critiques the status quo. Having thus set the context for this chapter, I proceed to explain why I argue that it is unworkable to draw on notions of community and of investments in social transformation without giving due account to the empassioned (and embodied) character of subjectivity. I then outline my rationale for the use of psychoanalysis in dealing with questions of passion, placing particular emphasis on the perspectives developed by feminist psychoanalyst and theorist, Jessica Benjamin. I link my discussion of the passions that infuse interpretive communities with what I call the 'utopian impulse'; a passionate investment in social transformation. I explain how my use of psychoanalysis in this chapter helps to conceptualise the 'utopian impulse' as an open-ended process, specifically as a key dimension of the social, cultural and theoretical power of sf.

Utopian Pleasures of the Science Fiction Text

I have already mentioned, in the 'Introduction', that I began reading sf again, and feminist sf in particular, following my reading of Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (Firestone 1979). Academic texts that discuss feminist sf have, on occasion, elided the distinction between the genres of sf and utopia, often to the disgruntlement of sf fans and indeed other academics who take different methodological approaches to the study of sf. In my opinion, however, this elision is understandable, if not necessarily desirable when examining *feminist* science fiction, because the preferred interpretive communities with which these texts interact are already invested in utopian longing, and invest that hopeful

orientation to the future in their reading of even dystopic feminist sf. However,

the binary opposition between utopias and dystopias – like any other categorical

dualism – can foreclose more productive and complex readings of the texts, as

occurs when critics attempt to produce a homogenised reading of a single text in

an attempt to assign it definitively to one category or another. Of course, the

notion of heteroglossia as a generic characteristic of narrative fiction, as

discussed in the previous chapter mitigates against such homogenisation. Here I

sketch out some brief definitions.

In formulating my theory of the 'utopian impulse'[30] I am more concerned with

utopian longing or 'utopianism' than 'utopia' *per se*. Lyman Tower Sargent

defines 'utopianism' as social dreaming:

> The dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of
> people arrange their lives and which usually envisions a radically
> different society than the one in which the dreamers live. But not all are
> radical, for some people at any time dream of something basically
> familiar (Sargent 1994: 3).

He goes on to point out: "While we often simply fantasize, at times we reason

about our dreams, and sometimes we even act on them" (Sargent 1994:4). My

own interest in utopian longing certainly depends on reasoning and fantasising

being bound up together and with, at the very least, the imagined possibility of

activism. Commonsense definitions of utopia as 'wishful thinking' are

somewhat similar to Sargent's elaboration of the aspects of social dreaming, but

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[30] N.B. I did not coin the term "utopian impulse" although I suspect that I was using it in a
commonsense fashion before I encountered it in a number of texts including the following:
Bammer 1991, Bartkowski 1989, Levitas 1990, Sargent 1994 and Sargisson 1996. Most of these
authors use the term approvingly, but Levitas argues that: "The idea of a utopian impulse is...
both unnecessary and unverifiable ... intimately bound up with essentialist definitions of human
needs and human nature, which are themselves deeply problematic" (Levitas 1990: 181). I
disagree that "impulse" necessarily has essentialist connotations.

they do not generally focus on the 'social' aspect. I want to put a slight twist on Sargent's definition; he seems to conceptualise 'social dreaming' as individuals dreaming about different social changes, whereas my focus would be on the dream being common to certain societies, communities, or groups, so that utopianism is an imaginative investment in a collectively wished-for society.

These speculations draw on the original meaning of 'utopia' – a term coined by Thomas More to connote both 'no place' (Greek *ou topos*) and 'good place' (Greek *eu topos*) (Kumar 1991:1; Levitas 1990:3; Sargent 1994:5). The literary utopia, in the tradition originated by More describes the organisation and functioning of an imagined state or society in some detail. The diffuse field of utopian studies has spawned a host of related terms, including 'dystopia' which can be thought of as an extrapolation of our worst dreams or the most negative tendencies in society (the judgement, of course, is open to contestation) and the 'critical utopia', which, according to Moylan, "reject[s] utopia as blueprint while preserving it as a dream" (Moylan 1986). Moylan is referring to texts that self-consciously intervene in the generic strategies of utopia at the same time as they critique its goals.

The understanding of 'utopian impulse' that I want to develop is a transitive one, such that impulse actually refers to a continual impelling: "to urge forward; to excite to action; to instigate" (Schwartz 1993: 838). So taken together with my above definitions of utopia and utopianism, I conceptualise the 'utopian impulse' as 'that which urges collective envisioning of a radically different society'. However, utopian longing is to a large extent unthinkable without a critique of

the dystopian trends and tendencies in the contemporary society of the social dreamer. The three novels which this thesis examines in depth foreground both critique and a social theoretical response to that critique, and draw their hope for the future from the ability to hold those two narrative processes in tension. For example, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* embodies both a swingeing critique of patriarchal militarism and a revisioning of masculinity that represents the possibility that men can be as invested in caring labour as women are currently expected to be and in anti-oppressive social relations as feminists aspire to be. However, the text does not represent this as a stark either / or choice between militaristic domination and 'new men' as the syntax of my preceding sentence might suggest. Militarism is inflected by capitalism and religious fundamentalism, for example, although these 'isms' are not represented as homologous apparatus of repression but rather as the circulating effects of institutional practices *and* individual choices. Similarly, masculinity is not reified as the Other to femininity; the effects of 'race', class, education, economic opportunity and affective relations (the list is not exhaustive) are all traced through the embodiment of key and peripheral male and female protagonists.

The slippage between utopia and sf that I have already suggested is defensible in the case of feminist sf is also understandable if it is recognised that the imaginative project of world-building is one of the key generic tropes of science fiction. Sf tends either to extrapolate or to cognitively estrange from our contemporary narrative understanding of the world. It does this by narrating imagined worlds in our future or in alternative presents that are both similar to

and different from the world we 'know'. So in that sense – the sense of *ou topos* – science fictions are always utopian (as indeed are all narrative fictions, but sf foregrounds this understanding). Feminist science fiction, as the genre crystallised from the 1970s on, also mobilised the *eu topos* sense as they imagined worlds with radically different gender relations from those of the texts' own socio-historical context of production (Charnas 1989; Gearhart 1985 (1979); Piercy 1979; Russ 1985 (1975)). It must be noted that most of these texts[31] additionally satisfy Moylan's definition of 'critical utopia', that is they play with the generic conventions of utopia, and they critique the possibility and / or the desirability of achieving the utopian future. They also embodied dystopian critiques as part of their narrative strategies, but they did not maintain such a taut balance between the utopian and the dystopian as the three novels on which I focus. I argue that they embody a particularly anxious period for feminists, subject as they were to both internal and external critique and that the balancing act between utopian and dystopia embodies a feminist response of revisioning past, present *and* future.

In my argument that the feminist science fictions under discussion in this thesis embody utopian longing, it is not my intention to produce homogenised readings. On the contrary I am particularly interested in how a close reading of the texts will illuminate their productive contradictions. Rosi Braidotti claims that: "Feminism is not a dogmatic countertruth, but the wilful choice of non-closure as an intellectual and ethical style" (Braidotti 1994: 201). This is certainly the intellectual and ethical style I would aspire to embody. However, I would argue

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[31] I would exclude the Gearhart text from the designation "critical utopia".

that even feminists run the constant risk of foreclosing debate, as we seek to secure the boundaries of our identifications with the 'right kind' of feminism, at the expense of those we consider to be theoretically less sophisticated or politically less astute through overt debate or through abjection and silencing. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Bakhtinian concepts of hidden dialogue and hidden polemic will be extremely useful in teasing these foreclosures out of the texts under examination. As I repeatedly argue in this thesis, this risk is exacerbated by some of the generic and epistemological choices we make. I am concerned therefore to trace where the "wilful choice of non-closure" – utopian longing as "struggle forever" – manifests in the texts, and where dogma – utopian longing as the "perfect end product of our wishes" manifests (Robinson 1995: 81). The concepts of 'struggle forever' and 'perfect end product of all our wishes' are extracted from a longer quotation reproduced in the introduction to this thesis. The quotation is an attempt by a character in a Kim Stanley Robinson sf novel to redefine 'utopia'. In the introduction I juxtaposed the quote with Kavka's insight that social justice remains the universal ideal and driving force of feminism but that *its content cannot be specified in advance*, which also resonates productively with Braidotti's utopian definition of feminism. It is important to remain mindful that 'wilful non-closure' takes effort. As Sandra Harding points out:

> (feminism) contains both progressive and regressive tendencies. It is not usefully conceptualized without qualification as inherently good ... Those of its tendencies that focus on male supremacy and gender relations without giving equal weight to other important aspects of social relations can provide resources for Eurocentrism, racism, imperialism, compulsory heterosexism, and class exploitative beliefs and practices – whether or not such a result is overtly or consciously intended. But it also contains tendencies that can contribute sturdy resources to the elimination of these forms of oppression, exploitation, and domination (Harding 1991: 10-11).

It would certainly be possible to examine *The Gate to Women's Country*, or even *The Fifth Sacred Thing* within the terms applied to 'literary utopias' – *Body of Glass* would be more problematic. Kumar suggests that the literary utopia is:

> first and foremost a work of imaginative fiction in which, unlike other such works, the central subject is the good society. This distinguishes it at the same time from other treatments of the good society, whether in myths of a Golden Age, beliefs in a coming millennium, or philosophical speculation on the ideal city. Fictive elements no doubt have their part to play in these modes but in none of them is narrative fiction, as in the utopia, the defining form (Kumar 1991: 27).

Kumar suggests that the Utopian form enables the treatment of discursive and theoretical issues in all their density and concrete particularity, much as I suggest is the case with the feminist sf I examine (Kumar 1991: 24). However, the fictions that I focus on are much more dynamic representations of 'good societies', particularly because they are plotted to include transformation within the text and because they are focalized through protagonists who inhabit and invest in the maintenance of those societies.

However, my own reading of the feminist sf texts is concerned with process rather than product; with the encounter between text and reader that is prefigured in the textual modes of address. The texts could each be described as utopian in the very basic sense that they represent places that do not exist (although some have chosen to coin the term euchronia for this kind of text to capture the sense that they are displaced in time rather than or as well as in geography). The 'utopian impulse' is manifested in each of the texts under scrutiny in two key ways: in the way that key protagonists conceive of themselves as capable of social action that is informed by collectively held principles and that has the potential to transform the social order, as well as in the potential that the texts

have to interpellate their readers as members of interpretive communities with shared investments in utopian longing for social transformation.

The texts differ in whether the protagonists inhabit communities that are dominant or subordinate in the social order, and in the degree to which the action engaged in by protagonists affects the social order. They also differ in the degree to which the discourses of social transformation are explicitly articulated or implicitly embodied by protagonists. However, they all draw from a shared social imaginary that includes: the ideal of the USA as the liberal democratic state incarnate; an understanding of the unsustainability in ecological terms of western consumer society; an ambivalent investment in the liberatory possibilities of technology; a dissatisfaction with the patriarchal organisation of kinship and sexual relationships and a multi-stranded investment in the feminist theoretical conversations about each of these facets of society that have taken place in the Anglo-American West in each of the 'waves' of feminism. They also draw on and subvert the genre conventions of utopia, sf and fantasy as a cluster of tropes for exploring the problematic intersections of these systems for organising social knowledge. The 'lens' of feminism plays a crucial part in focusing the priority of concerns.

Theorising Passionate Investments

It seems to me to be impossible to theorise utopian longing, yearning, an investment in social transformation – in short, hoping that seeks to have an effect on the social world – without due attention being given to feelings. However

convincing a discourse of social transformation might be at a material-rational level, the individuals who align themselves with – feel affinity[32] with – such a politics must be passionately convinced that it makes sense, particularly if they envision radical changes that would require them to forego some of their own privileges in order for the situation to be ameliorated for others. I certainly do not want to suggest that this passionate conviction is essential, in the sense that it captures an authentic and unmediated experience of reality, but I do want to insist that emotions are not reducible to social constructions or discursive effects. There is a physical, embodied component to them and therefore to our sense of self. bell hooks puts it well in *Yearning*:

> All too often our political desire for change is seen as separate from longings and passions that consume lots of time and energy in daily life. Particularly the realm of fantasy is often seen as completely separate from politics. Yet I think of all the time black folks (especially the underclass) spend just fantasizing about what our lives would be like if there were no racism, no white supremacy. Surely our desire for radical social change is intimately linked with the desire to experience pleasure, erotic fulfillment, and a host of other passions. Then, on the flip side, there are many individuals with race, gender and class privilege who are longing to see the kind of revolutionary change that will end domination and oppression even though their lives would be completely and utterly transformed (hooks 1990: 12-13).

The feeling of 'yearning' that hooks thus identifies resonates strongly with my definition of the utopian impulse, in the way that it firmly situates embodied passions in a social and intersubjective context.

In order to theorise the ways in which these passions circulate, I draw on the work of Jessica Benjamin, which is a critical, feminist reformulation of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a complexly elaborated and continually and

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[32] Donna Haraway defines affinity thus: "related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity" (Haraway 1991a: 155).

profoundly contested (both internally and externally) discursive field that takes

the operation of emotional states and their foundation in the human condition as

its objects of enquiry. Many feminists and sociologists have been uneasy about

the potential for psychoanalysis to lapse into biological determinism[33]. I would

insist, however, that it is possible to accept an understanding of deep feelings that

are experienced carnally, and in excess of rational calculation, without accepting

essentialist or biologically determinist accounts of subjectivity.

Orientation to the Other

By drawing on Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity in my examination of

feminist sf texts, I argue that the desire for social transformation is linked with a

particular orientation to the other. I argue that an intersubjective mode of

relating to 'the other' can be identified with 'progressive' investments in social

transformation such as those of anti-oppressive feminists, and that a mode of

relating to the other which relegates them to the status of object and, in extreme

cases, to the realm of the abject can be identified with 'reactionary' investments

in social transformation, such as those who espouse exclusionary versions of

nationalism / ethnic cleansing. I argue that complex oscillations between both

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[33] Teresa Brennan provides an interesting genealogy of the linked problematics of "essentialism" and "biological determinism" in the introduction to *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*:

> Initially in Britain, essentialist theories were criticized from a Marxist theoretical standpoint. Essentialist theories are those that believe in some essential aspect of "human nature"; in something pre-given, innate, natural, biological; in something which cannot be changed ... Where Marxism was allied with feminism, the critique of essentialism carried over. Its focus became sharper; essentialist theories are those which appeal to sexual biology. The early condemnations of essentialism, in feminist literature in the late 1970s, usually have the question of change as their context. As much as it was an argument against natural rather than historical, materialist explanation, this was an argument for a logical principle. If it was allowed in any context that there was something fixed in sexual identity, then that argument was open to abuse: if women were naturally more nurturant, then by the same logic, women could be naturally incompetent. To admit even a positive argument from nature was to foreclose (too soon?) on the belief in an ultimately social account of sexual difference; to rule out strategies for change directed against the social order as it stands (Brennan 1989: 7).

of these modalities are in play even when individuals and social groupings are striving to behave ethically. Vitally, however, there is a crucial difference between the 'destruction' of others in fantasy, that I suggest forms part of the process of much theorising, and the destruction of concrete others that followed on, for example, the abjection or scapegoating of Jews in Nazi Germany. I will discuss this further in the section 'The Problem of Aggression'. I trace this oscillation through the psychoanalytic theories that map these modes of relating and my readings of the feminist sf texts. It is crucial to acknowledge the competing emotional states and investments that inform political analyses in order that we can reflect on those states which might lead our utopian longings to become the dystopian nightmares of others if we secure our wishes at the cost of excluding or abjecting theirs.

Although this thesis is concerned with projects of social transformation, implicit in my argument is the proposition that social determinism is as epistemologically unsatisfactory as biological determinism. It seems to me self-evident that a particular social location does not inevitably lead to accommodation or resistance just as "(M)ost standpoint feminists ... reject the notion of an automatic correlation between social location and standpoint" (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002: 317). I consider that it is necessary to give due account to the material individuals who comprise social movements or develop disciplinary literatures; those that is who make particular sets of meanings from particular social circumstances. With this in mind, I concur with Rosi Braidotti that "the embodiment of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a

sociological category, but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical,

the symbolic and the sociological" (Braidotti 1994: 4):

> The "body" in question is the threshold of subjectivity; it is to be thought
> of as the point of intersection, as the interface between the biological and
> the social – that is to say, between the sociopolitical field of the
> microphysics of power and the subjective dimension. This vision implies
> that the subject is subjected to her / his unconscious; the driving notion of
> "desire" is precisely that which relays the self to the many "others" that
> constitute her / his "external" reality (Braidotti 1994: 182).

For this reason, although psychoanalysis must be used with due caution in a

sociologically-oriented thesis, its mapping of subjectivity as "the interface

between the biological and the social" adds a dimension to the consideration of

social and cultural theory that is lost if we abstract it from its production by

embodied men and women. With LaCapra, I suggest that "psychoanalysis is

misconstrued as a psychology of the individual" and that:

> its basic concepts should be understood as undercutting the binary
> opposition between the individual and society because these concepts
> apply to social individuals whose relative individuation or collective
> status is a problem for investigation and argument (LaCapra 1994: 173).

It is important, therefore, to note that although I am drawing upon psychoanalytic

terminology which tends to theorise around dyads abstracted from their social

context – psychoanalysts and analysands, mothers and infants, and so on – I am

using it more generously to apprehend relationships with, for example

communities, theoretical concepts, and texts, rather than just singular 'others'. I

suggest that we think of psychoanalysis as a discursive field that theorises,

documents (and, in clinical practice, refashions) technologies of the self (in

relation).

Psychoanalysis And (Gendered) Subjectivity

It is in the sense of theorising and documenting technologies of the self that one of the most widely discussed recent feminist appropriations of psychoanalysis has functioned. Judith Butler has drawn on the work of Lacan to account for the hegemony of "a regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality" (Butler 1993: 12) that secures the subjectivity of some bodies, i.e. those of conventional masculine and feminine heterosexual men and women at the cost of abjecting others; the "feminised fag" and the "phallicised dyke" (Butler 1993: 96). I elaborate the implications of Butler's thesis for feminist debates on sex, gender and sexuality in chapter 4, but here I draw on her explanation for using psychoanalysis to elaborate social critique.

Following Foucault, Butler is interested in the (potentially revisable) regulatory practices that produce intelligible subjects, and in the operation of regulatory ideals such as 'sex' which, she suggests, compel the materialization of embodied subjects. Although Butler's overriding preoccupation is with the effects of discourse, such that she appears to find it impossible to locate any agency within individuals, she does acknowledge that bodily egos – 'I's – do emerge, and turns to psychoanalysis for an account of "identification [which] is the assimilating passion by which an ego first emerges" (Butler 1993:13). She asks:

> If the formulation of a bodily ego, a sense of stable contour, and the fixing of spatial boundary is achieved through identificatory practices, and if psychoanalysis documents the hegemonic workings of those identifications, can we then read psychoanalysis for the inculcation of the heterosexual matrix at the level of bodily morphogenesis?

In her essay 'Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex'(Butler 1993:93 – 119), she proceeds to reread Freud and Lacan for just such a purpose.

Butler's interrogation of psychoanalysis as a discursive field documents ways in which individuals are interpellated by culturally and historically specific normative discourses of gender and sexuality, and provides an interesting model for using psychoanalytic theory in the context of a poststructuralist project. Butler's deconstructive critique of the ways in which purportedly liberatory identity politics function via exclusionary operations has been influential on the ways in which I have theorised the functioning of interpretive communities and the circulation of the utopian impulse. I have chosen not to work entirely within the parameters of Butler's appropriation, however, because of its apparently overwhelming focus on 'lack' and exclusion. I will explain later that I think this emphasis is political rather than theoretical. However, I find it both theoretically and politically problematic, because it seems implausible to me that the sustained effort required to achieve social transformation could emerge *only* from feelings of lack.

Lack and Longing

Levitas, for example, claims that the idea of a utopian impulse is unnecessary and unverifiable and claims instead that:

> Utopia is a social construct which arises not from a 'natural' impulse subject to social mediation, but as a socially constructed response to an *equally* socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it. *All* aspects of the scarcity gap are social constructs, including the propensity to imagine it away by some means or other (Levitas 1990:181-2).

However, this conceptualisation of utopia is inadequate to explain why individuals might respond passionately to 'the scarcity gap' through political identification or activism. Nor can it account for how and why individuals with

distinctly similar locations in particular societies perceive 'the scarcity gap' and their relationship to it completely differently. I am unhappy with definitions of utopia that see it simply as a negative, reactive process rather than an active transformatory process. This focus on 'lack' is a potential drawback when appropriating psychoanalytic theory.

For example, Butler herself suggests that she is appropriating Lacan's theory as a documentation of the hegemonic workings of identificatory practices, in effect as a discourse that maps the operation of normative constraints and *not* as a metanarrative that uncovers the truth about subjectivity. Despite her concerted efforts to the contrary, however her argument does carry over some of the problems that feminists have already grappled with regarding Lacan's work. The centrality of the phallus – or its lack – to Lacan's schema inevitably instates sexual difference as 'the difference that makes a difference'[34]. Even Butler's critical reworking of the terms of this power / knowledge nexus makes it difficult to imagine how utopian longing, figured as operating through identificatory practices, might emerge as an investment in a collective project and not simply desire to remedy individual loss accruing to the acquisition of gendered subjectivity. This is particularly the case when she follows the logic of Lacan's sequential trajectory of the emergence of a bodily ego in the mirror stage followed by the assumption of sexed subjectivity as the condition for entry into the Symbolic. This logic conflates the assumption of gender, sexuality and the entry into language and emergence as a speaking subject into one seminal

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[34] I inserted this remark in quotations because of my sense that it was a phrase that circulated as a shorthand for feminists and feminisms that privilege sexual difference as the primary and / or most fundamental axis of difference or oppression. However, I do not recall the first time I heard or read the phrase being used.

moment of overdetermination. Despite Butler's qualification that "Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability" (Butler 1993: 105), suggesting a potential fluidity that exceeds Lacan's formulation, she does not seem to take sufficient account of the processes of inclusion that operate coincidently with the processes of exclusion. By focusing so squarely on the negative pole of the workings of identificatory practices, I argue that she forecloses the possibility of the coalition politics she would wish to enable.

Revaluing Mothers

However, despite the misgivings thus provoked by according primary explanatory power to Lacanian psychoanalysis, there is certainly a good case for regarding it as a pervasive cultural narrative that is used to organise commonsenses about gender and subjectivity. Feminist object relations has been one strand within contemporary psychoanalysis which has attempted to contest the centrality of the castration complex in order to refigure understandings of gender and subjectivity through its re-orientation on the pre-oedipal attachment between mother and child. Benjamin characterises the debate that has played out in feminist psychoanalytic thought over the past two decades as follows:

> Put somewhat simply, while the Lacanian view takes the phallus or father as starting point, the object relations view takes the mother. For the adherents of Freud [and Lacan], masculinity is presumed and femininity defined as its other; for the revisionists, maternal objectification is primary and masculinity comes into being as not-mother (Benjamin 1998: xvi)

Whilst acknowledging the critiques that have been made by feminists on either side of the debate, Benjamin prefers to hold the two accounts of subject

formation and gender identification in tension, because she believes that in doing

so the ambiguity of gender is thrown into relief. As she remarks:

> masculinity and femininity can each be construed as the negation of the
> other – its opposite, its complementary other. This confirms the view
> shared by myself and other relational thinkers that gender as we now
> know it works through a mutual and symmetrical determination of
> opposing terms, which can shift in tandem, rather than through *essential,
> fixed qualities* (Benjamin 1998: xvi) [emphasis added; references
> omitted].

In fact, Benjamin is convinced that feminists' revaluation of motherhood was

absolutely necessary for enabling psychoanalysis to move out of its objectivist

paradigm into an intersubjective one: "(t)he idea that self-other dialogue is the

fundamental basis for the development of mind has evolved in tandem with our

revaluing of the early maternal dyad, its affective and communicative

possibilities" (Benjamin 1998: xv) [references omitted]. So, relational

psychoanalysis has moved beyond Freud's original critique of the self-present

subject of modernity to a more powerfully deconstructive position that

recognises *subjective multiplicity* that is organised through *plural identificatory

moves*.

Psychoanalysis and Social Theory

Jessica Benjamin's self-professed tendency to hold oppositional moves in tension

is very productive for my thesis, which is concerned with the processes of

identification and disidentification, inclusion and exclusion, that constitute the

speech and text genres of feminist sf and categorical and indexical feminist social

theory, and their interpretive or interlocutory communities. The insights that she

has developed through practicing clinically as well as engaging with feminist

social and political thought and both critical and deconstructive variants of social

theory enable her to describe and theorise the complexity of subjectivity and

agency. She sets her objectives thus:

> My effort has been to address underlying issues that I consider
> fundamental to the intersubjective perspective as a whole ... This effort is
> inspired by the belief that the clinical experiences opened up by the
> discussion of intersubjectivity deserve to be raised to the level of theory
> where they will have an impact on other kinds of theorizing, which, too
> often, have relied on Freud alone for their psychoanalytic perspective
> (Benjamin 1998: xii).

In *The Bonds of Love* (1990), *Like Subjects, Love Objects* (1995) and *In the*

Shadow of the Other (1998), Jessica Benjamin[35] has brought feminism and

psychoanalysis into a productive conversation with each other. Her alignment

with feminism and her clinical and academic work as a psychoanalyst, plus an

ongoing engagement with critical social theory has provided her with the

material to develop psychoanalytic theory that deals with individuals as social

beings and not as monads whose interaction with the 'external' world is for the

sole purpose of securing their subject status in opposition to its object status.

This focus on intersubjectivity is of enormous value to social theorists who seek

to elucidate an ethical component to subjectivity, which is not subsumed to the

means-end calculus of rational choice theory. If 'identity politics' is

conventionally organised around a discourse of rights, then a move towards

social theory and politics formulated with an intersubjective perspective could be

organised around a discourse of (mutual) responsibility and (mutual) investment.

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[35] Thanks must go to Stephen Frosh for introducing me to the work of Jessica Benjamin on the
MA in Gender, Society and Culture at Birkbeck College, University of London.

The Double Task of Recognition

Benjamin's work on what she calls "the double task of recognition" posits that "*any subject's primary responsibility to the other subject is to be her intervening or surviving other*"(Benjamin 1998: 99) [original emphasis]. In other words, just as we seek recognition from another subject so we can provide that subject with recognition by surviving their destructive wishes and by demonstrating that we are not subjected to their will. As she makes clear, the heart of the matter is "how we use our marvelous capacity for identification with the other to either further or impede our recognition of others, to bridge or obfuscate difference between us. Or rather ... how we do both at once" (Benjamin 1998: pxiii). But, as she goes on to elaborate, in an intersubjective relationship we go beyond identification to appreciate the other as a being outside the self, a subject in its own right; a concrete other and not the Other of fantasy. For Benjamin, it is only this recognition of the other as "an outside center of experience" (Benjamin 1995: 90) that makes the demand to respect difference a genuine ethical question rather than "a projection of one's own injured narcissism on to the other" (Benjamin 1998: 98).

The psychoanalytic 'tradition' that Benjamin is developing sees the role of the mother[36] as the paradigmatic outside other who enables the child "to form the somatic sense of self and to perceive and think about the me and not-me environment" (Benjamin 1998: 27). By this Benjamin refers to the way in which

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[36] N.B. Within Benjamin's schema, it is not crucial that the "mother" is female, nor even indeed that she is singular (although I surmise that relative stability / continuity of care would be theorised as necessary for the child's toleration of its own destructive urges). However, to a certain degree, it is necessary that the terminology of mother is retained because of the centrality of particular discourses of the family to contemporary North American and Western European social theory and commonsense, and the ways that individuals invest emotionally in these discourses / fantasies, despite their failure to capture the complexity and plurality of contemporary social life.

the child is able to own their own 'affects' or passions, rather than being overwhelmed by them. This relationship between the child and outside other is crucial, Benjamin claims, in evolving from a concrete experience of an outside other who stimulates or soothes the child as appropriate to help regulate its internal tensions to a metaphorical experience of self-containment. The child is enabled to achieve bodily regulation through an intersubjective relationship with another body which enables it to conceive of its body as a metaphorical container for its mental states, taking its mother's body as "the cultural / theoretical template" (Benjamin 1998: 27). So rather than the experience of the mother's body being an imaginary relationship of pre-Symbolic oneness and non-differentiation as Lacanian theory suggests, and as some feminist theory fears, relational analysis suggests rather an emerging dialogic relationship which plays out in bodily communication – holding, stroking, breathing together, for example – and which forms "a substrate of affective life that is more or less in awareness" throughout our lives as embodied (inter)subjects (Benjamin 1998: 27). This formulation enables us to think about the embodied ways in which we experience emotional states and takes into account the complex interplay between the social world and our existence as material creatures, without the anxiety about essentialism that has haunted feminist attempts to theorise embodiment. It also leads us to a qualitatively different understanding of language than that characteristic of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Rather than understanding the individual as subjected to the symbolic structure, we see that the Symbolic, or language, forms the medium of the subject's "acting on and interacting with the world". Or as Benjamin frames it:

> speech is conditioned by the recognition between two subjects, rather than a property of the subject. Because communicative speech

establishes a space of dialogue potentially outside the mental control of either or both participants, it is a site of mediation, the "third term." Significantly, this understanding of subjectivity has grown from our attention to the analytic and maternal dyads (Benjamin 1998: 28).

This shift of perspective enables us to see communicative speech – and by extension other discourses – as a space for agency rather than a determining space. However, Benjamin's observation that dialogue is "potentially outside the mental control of either or both participants" emphasises that mediation and communication are always open to (mis)interpretation.

As already indicated, for Benjamin, one of the crucial factors in enabling the developing child to recognize the other in their independent existence is the presence of a mother[37] who is herself a subject of desire, who can survive the destruction of her own fantasy that she can provide a perfect world for her child as well as the child's attempts to shape the mother's actions to her will. Benjamin posits that revaluing the role of the mother thus, in relational psychoanalysis, has been enabled by the women's movement and paralleled by "psychoanalytic efforts to deconstruct the dominance of an objectively knowing subject in favor of a personal subjectivity" (Benjamin 1998: 25). She traces the development of these trends in psychoanalysis by way of the work of Bion and Winnicott who recognised the role of the (m)other in (respectively) providing a container or delineating an intermediate space in which the child can move towards the symbolic expression of feelings rather than simply acting them out or evacuating the painful ones into the other.

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[37] As I have already indicated, for Benjamin, it is not crucial that the "mother" is female. Indeed, as I understand her theory, it is even possible that plural caretakers can provide the "mothering" that she theorises as necessary to provide recognition to and elicit recognition from the child, providing the appropriate work of destruction / survival takes place.

This enables a restating of the problem so that:

> (T)he person who remains unable to process bodily tension except through motoric discharge or somatic symptoms could be described not as lacking speech or symbolic capacity, but as lacking a *relationship* that is a condition of that capacity (Benjamin 1998: 26-27).

So, the interlocutor is not simply the condition of our utterance *qua* Bakhtin. By recognising our embodied subjectivity and our existence as his / her concrete other s/he enables us to work through our bodily tensions and the affects to which they attach, to communicate these passions symbolically and thus to act responsibly in the world instead of remaining locked in a fantasy of omnipotence.

The Importance of Tolerable Paradox

Like Butler's appropriation of Lacan, Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity stresses the importance both of identification, and the psychic tendency towards 'splitting' which Butler terms 'abjection' because of her focus on the negative pole of the splitting. However, Benjamin explains that the concept of splitting works very differently in Lacanian and object relations theories. According to Benjamin, Lacan locates the inevitable split in the subject that arises through subjection to language. There is no access to a self prior to language. However, in object relations theory, rather than focusing on a once-and-for-all split within the subject, the notion of splitting refers to an "active ongoing process of psychic defence performed by the self" whereby parts of the self and the other are split off with 'good' parts from the other introjected or incorporated into the self and 'bad' parts of the self projected onto the other. As Benjamin points out, this notion of splitting which has its roots in Kleinian object relations seems to be

"the origin of Kristeva's (1982) idea of abjection, in which the self actively creates the abject within the dichotomy 'part-of-self' and 'repudiated not-part-of-self'"(Benjamin 1998: 88-9). Butler has famously drawn on this notion of abjection in her theorising of the workings of the heterosexual matrix, within her commitment to understanding subjectivity as an effect of discourse. Benjamin's commitment to splitting as an active process, sees creativity in both its accepting and repudiating facets. She argues that: "(t)his negating moment is decisive for the problem of accepting difference and otherness" (Benjamin 1998: xviii), and locates that possibility in the holding in tension of these intrapsychic processes with intersubjective recognition of the different concrete other. In fact, she states that the principle underlying her understanding of symbolic representation and of the analytic situation (taken as a privileged space for the raising of these issues of identification and recognition to consciousness) is "the idea of transforming complementarities into dialectical tension, into tolerable paradox, instead of into antinomies that compel binary choices" (Benjamin 1998: 24). Although some conscientious anti-essentialists might balk at Benjamin's suggestion that there is an "inherent psychic tendency to split", it is undeniable that binary logic pervades Western thinking. With this acknowledged, it seems imperative to agree with Benjamin's judgement that:

> It is the capacity to hold them [opposites] in tension and overcome splitting that is at stake. This inevitable movement through opposites is what we need to hold in mind both in our theory and the clinical situation (Benjamin 1998: 24)

In the case of identification, Benjamin suggests that "mediated by symbolic expression" – i.e. a third space where that tension can be held – it can become the means through which we understand the position of the other, to recognise and respect their difference, rather than a moment in which differentiation collapses

(Benjamin 1998: 28). So relational analysis departs from the subject-object paradigm that infuses Western philosophy and scientific thinking and conceives of a possibility for the co-creation of "a mutuality that allows for and presumes separateness" through a dialogue in which two active subjects "alternate in expressing and receiving" (Benjamin 1998: 29). According to Benjamin: "(T)he core experience of intersubjectivity, as Daniel Stern (1985) has analyzed it in his work on the development of infant consciousness, is that separate minds can share common states, feelings, or experiences" (Benjamin 1995: 183).

The Problem of Aggression

It is important to note that Benjamin's theorisation of intersubjectivity is utopian in the mode of 'struggle forever' and not the 'perfect end-product of our wishes' (Robinson 1995: 81). Some versions of social theory are so invested in notions of competitiveness and aggression – of subject-object relating in an omnipotent mode, in short – as motors for social organisation that any discussion of intersubjectivity tends to be dismissed as infused with utopian ideals (in the sense of impossible wishes). In the feminist sf texts from which I am teasing out social theory, debates are staged between intersubjective social relations and subject-object social relations of dominance. These debates play out differently in each of the texts. In *The Gate to Women's Country* the distinction between intersubjectivity and objectification is undercut by the duplicitous handling of conflict or dissent by the Councilwomen. In *Body of Glass*, objectification by the multis is critiqued and contrasted with the tolerance of difference in Tikva, but again objectification within Tikva's boundaries disrupts any simple reading of this contrast. In *The Fifth Sacred Thing* the subjective struggle that is required

to move from objectification to intersubjectivity, and to maintain the commitment to intersubjectivity is foregrounded through the strategy and tactics of non-violent resistance that the inhabitants of anti-oppressive San Francisco adopt towards their invaders. In each of these instances the debate is played through at the level of intratextual dialogue as well as in plot development. Benjamin's psychoanalytic theory of intersubjectivity engages explicitly with the problems of aggression and destructiveness. However, in doing so she cautions that:

> It is necessary, (therefore), to protect the distinction between the symbolic and the concrete on two fronts – to sustain simultaneously the respect for unconscious fantasy life and for outer reality, a tension that threatens to break down both in the psychoanalytic movement and in intellectual life as a whole. This tension corresponds to the two main difficulties in dealing with destructiveness: recognizing real danger "out there" and accepting the presence of internal destructiveness (Benjamin 1995: 180).

Benjamin explores the issues of external and internal destructiveness in her discussion of pornography in 'Sympathy for the Devil' which builds on her work on erotic domination in *The Bonds of Love*. Drawing on Chasseguèt-Smirgel and Stoller she characterises sadistic erotic fantasies as an attempt by the adult to both separate from and to control (differentiate and de-differentiate) the omnipotent mother of the dependent child they once were. Benjamin sees this as a fantasy fuelled by aggression that can be experienced by both men and women, although it is particularly charged for men in a culture where masculinity is secured at the cost of repudiating femininity with its associations with passivity. This type of fantasy amply demonstrates that intersubjectivity – as conceived by Benjamin – is not a benign state, but an ongoing process; a struggle. As she remarks:

The paradoxical doing and undoing of differentiation can be seen as a reaction to the primary condition of intersubjectivity, the predicament of needing an other who is outside our control – to the imaginary threat of assimilating or being assimilated by the other (Benjamin 1995: 188).

The Predicament of Needing an Other

The choice of terminology – "predicament" – makes it clear that intersubjectivity is a condition of vulnerability, not one of plenitude. Benjamin suggests that:

> Aggression and its derivative, mastery, represent the effort to turn outward the invading stimuli, the unbearable tension. In the face of an original intolerable helplessness, the ego defends itself through the well-known switch from passive to active (Christiansen 1993) (Benjamin 1995: 193).

However, Benjamin suggests that a sustaining tension between self and other, that is, a relationship of mutuality between two subjects, rather than the dominating model of a subject-object relationship makes this kind of internal tension bearable. This kind of sustaining tension, however, is an achievement, not an inevitability. For the developing child, this achievement is realised, retroactively, following the transition which occurs when the child realises that her destructive wishes do not annihilate the (m)other, that she survives to engage in a dialogic relationship with the child. (N.B. Benjamin cautions against understanding this as a once-and-for-all achievement) This survival is also not inevitable. If the (m)other fails to survive, not only is the distinction between the symbolic and the concrete threatened, but so is the ongoing possibility of recognising the other. However:

> When the other survives confrontation over assertion and difference, when aggression is "caught" by the other, then there is a space of symbolic communication between subjects in which disappointment or excitement can be contained. With the emergence of this space between the person and the action, between action and reaction, it becomes possible to symbolize feeling in fantasy and words (Benjamin 1995: 202)

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Benjamin also suggests that failures in recognition, in distinguishing between fantasy and reality can be worked through, by way of fantasy, and that this process of working through can "contribute positively to the metabolizing of aggression" (Benjamin 1995: 196). We could read *The Gate to Women's Country* as a dramatisation of that process wherein the breakdown in mutuality that is evidenced by the Women's domination of the Warriors is understood as a feminist (feminine? female? women's?) fantasy of destruction of patriarchy at the same time that the covert, but mutually respectful relationship between the Councilwomen and the servitors serves as a model for a more desirable and ethical mode of relating. The book also serves the purpose of bringing to consciousness the rage and fantasies of revenge which may have impelled some feminists to fight their own subordination while at the same time demonstrating the danger of assuming that the condition of having been subordinated leads automatically to better behaviour or better politics.

Intersubjectivity, Interpretive Communities and Feminism

Benjamin herself suggests that the key question for intersubjectivity "how is it possible to recognize an other?" is analogous to the questions dominant in feminist theory of the 1980s and 1990s about whether the imperative to respect difference can be reconciled with feminist politics. It seemed to some feminist social theorists in this period that if the logic of poststructuralist and postmodernist theory played out to its apparent conclusions that feminism would be left without the capacity to make any ethical or moral claims in the pursuit of social justice because the call to 'respect difference' seemed to negate the possibilities of organising around the collective identity of feminism. Those

feminists who resisted the seductions of this pessimism developed a number of code phrases for insisting on their continued political agency, including 'strategic essentialism' and 'differences that make a difference'. I want to argue that what these resistant feminists have in common is an emotional and imaginative commitment to a future in which we all recognize each other as subjects with equal claim on the goods of society. However, the sociopolitical project called feminism, with which they identify, has implicitly recognized the 'utopian impulse' that is the will to strive for intersubjective recognition, and therefore has been deeply influenced by those aspects of poststructuralism and postmodernism which value non-closure and undecidability. This recognition and subsequent influence, in large part, emerges from the crises in the movement and in the feminist academy which have resulted in serious and ethical reformulations of the feminist project in such a way that, to those who define feminism 'purely and simply' as a women's liberation movement, feminism seems to have disappeared. However, to those who accept that a feminist critique of gendered oppression must also be a feminist critique of all other forms of social oppression and their interimplication, feminism is still a vibrant project. It is arguable that many feminists always already implicitly recognised this insight and that the fierce debates amongst activists raised this insight to collective consciousness so that feminists were particularly receptive to the postmodern and poststructuralist critiques.

As Beatrice Hanssen notes:

> It is no small feat that the critique of feminism's exclusionary practices, its denial of radical difference among women, slowly but surely brought about a sea change in its theoretical foundations ... In taking on "essentialism" through "constructivism" and "antifoundationalism,"

feminists engaged in multiple alliances and in coalition-building with postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonial theory (Hanssen 2001: 72)

Although it is impossible (and undesirable) to construct a unitary history of feminism or feminist theory, it is possible to define its (imagined) origins minimally as a project pursuing social recognition for women. However, the critique of feminism's exclusionary practices to which Hanssen refers, has resulted in the deconstruction of the category women (via poststructuralist theory), a recognition of the differences amongst women (via black and lesbian feminists), and a realisation that, to quote Sandra Harding, "the subject of liberatory feminist knowledge must also be the subject of every other liberatory knowledge project"(Harding 1991: 285). The call that has been made for coalition politics therefore, from Harding, Haraway and Butler – to name but three – shifts the focus from a politics of identity (although this was always already a misnomer for as plural a movement as feminism) to a politics of identification.

However, this call has occasioned a great anxiety because of the debilitating effects of a preoccupation with the 'linguistic turn' (Barrett 1992) which have led to a loss of confidence in the possibility of any agency at all, let alone political agency. Benjamin's approach suggests that this loss of confidence is the result in large part of a category error in thinking, and she distinguishes the subject "as a position in discourse" from a "psychological notion of the self" which she insists must be retained in order to be able to investigate questions of motivation, need and desire. As she acknowledges "the psychological notion of the self has its limits just as the idea of the subject of discourse has: Either notion will, if used to

displace the other, become falsely totalizing" (Benjamin 1998: 86). Benjamin is

also careful to distinguish 'self' from 'identity'; they are emphatically not the

same in her analysis:

> We can say that a self can be nonidentical, and yet contain a state, express
> a feeling, identify with or assume a position. The critique of identity does
> not prevent us from postulating a psychic subjectivity that takes us
> various positions through identification, a kind of "identifier behind the
> identification" (Benjamin 1998: 87).

As already mentioned, Judith Butler has suggested that the 'fact' that subject

positions (identifications) are produced through the logic of repudiation and

abjection makes the connection that is required for coalitional politics difficult to

achieve. Benjamin's reading of Butler's claim is that Butler seems to "posit an

exclusion that has no opposing term, no *inclusion*, no formation of the subject

through recognition" (Benjamin 1998: 101). My reading, conversely, suggests

that Butler does recognise the opposing term, but that her circumlocutory

language disguises this recognition, perhaps because she tends to split the

operations of exclusion and inclusion between hegemonic subjects and abjected

(not really) subjects. However, as Benjamin rightly notes, the "contesting and

rifting" that Butler calls for requires both identification and repudiation to take

place; perhaps the main difference between their approaches is that Benjamin

focuses her hope for ethical subjectivity – and political agency – on the

possibility of holding identification and repudiation in tension through the

processes of intersubjective recognition while Butler's focus is on new forms of

political practice that dramatise the operations of repudiation by those with

discursive hegemony so that those abjected by their exclusionary moves can use

this deconstructive moment to argue for a more inclusive social accommodation.

My distinction suggests therefore that the main difference between their account

of the processes of identification and repudiation that constitute subjects and communities, is that Benjamin focuses on the struggle to hold opposites in tolerable paradox while Butler focuses on the deconstructive possibilities in the inevitable 'moments' where the tense paradox collapses into the binary antimonies that Benjamin also anticipates.

In the introduction to *Like Subjects, Love Objects* Benjamin distinguishes between the psychoanalytic register and the philosophical register to clarify that her notion of intersubjectivity is the description of a material possibility rather than a normative ideal (*qua* Habermas) but she also acknowledges that she has argued "from the standpoint of social and political theory that we need mutual recognition in order to live in some degree free of domination and nonviolently" (Benjamin 1995: 21). Whilst insisting on the modesty of her goals and her desire to remain within the theoretical space defined by psychoanalysis rather than the broader one defined by philosophy (or social theory, in my terms), she continues to make explicit links between psychoanalysis and a broader socio-political project when she states that:

> mutual recognition is meaningful as an ideal only when it is understood as the basis for struggle and negotiation of conflict (see Pizer 1992), when its impossibility and the striving to attain it are adequately included in the concept (see Butler 1994) (Benjamin 1995: 23)

As the version of feminist social theory which I find has the most effective epistemological purchase is that developed from an "anti-oppressive postmodernist feminist standpoint" (Steinberg 1994)[38] and the version of utopian

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[38] Steinberg developed her account of an "anti-oppressive feminist standpoint" in the context of feminist science studies, by articulating the work of Sandra Harding on feminist epistemologies of science with feminist postmodernism and the focus on issues of oppression and power relations by black feminists. From her account I draw the following requirements of such a

longing which I find most hopeful is what Kim Stanley Robinson calls 'Struggle forever' (see discussions on pages 36 and 104), the desire for and striving for *mutual* recognition seems to resonate with what I call the utopian impulse, *as it is manifested in projects of social transformation which have maximal justice and equality as their idealised ends.* When there is a collapse into the desire to dominate, to transform a society in one's one image – as with National Socialism, or the new ethnic nationalisms – the utopian (dystopian) impulse appears to demonstrate the collapse of recognition and the desire to assimilate (repudiate) difference that Benjamin identifies as a cultural psychopathology in her work from *The Bonds of Love* onwards. This seems to share key characteristics with Judith Butler's account of the workings of abjection.

Dialogics and Psychoanalysis

In my readings of the science fiction novels I suggest that there is an ongoing exchange of dialogues between authors and the characters they create, between characters, between characters and readers, between readers and imaginary interlocutors. Authors depict protagonists who represent identifications they have made and identifications they have repudiated, readers recognise some aspects of characters, repudiate others and – if a writer is particularly skilled in representing and therefore eliciting ambivalence – shift those identifications over the course of a novel. I further suggest that the imaginative flexibility that this develops, and the capacity for recognising repudiated identifications that it thus

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standpoint: a commitment to social transformation; a recognition that strategic decisions must be taken regarding the axis or axes of power relations need to be critiqued in any particular area of enquiry – gendered power relations, racialised power relations etc and an awareness that positionality is not sufficient grounds for analysis. I do not have privileged access to knowledge simply because I am a woman. I need to take account of my own implication in power relations.

enables and raises to consciousness can provide readers with a model for thinking about and recognising 'concrete others'. Benjamin notes that: "every psychoanalytic relationship has to work through oscillations between action and activity, split complementarity and mutuality, and so we are always rededicating ourselves to finding a path toward intersubjective speech" (Benjamin 1998: 34) and I would suggest that this process of working through is necessary in any relationship or desired relationship between equals, such as those idealised in movements for social justice like feminism.

I use Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity at three distinct (if not necessarily discrete) levels of reading the feminist science fictions. The three levels are: first, the articulation of feminist social theory at the levels of speech and argument within the text; secondly, the development of protagonists' 'characters' through their interaction with other characters and events within the story, thirdly, the level of plot. However, it will not always be possible – or even desirable – to tackle these levels separately. As I have already stated, the distinctive feature of feminist science fictions is the way in which they enable us to grasp the implications of social theory by imaginatively embodying the socially embedded experiences of their key protagonists, by recognising them in Benjamin's terms. So, character development, plot development and feminist social theory are three registers of the text which, as readers, we may grasp in many different ways depending on the identifications and disidentifications within each register which the text hails us with.

However, as one of the sets of discourses with which I identify – the interpretive community of feminists using psychoanalysis as a strategy of textual deconstruction – provides me with tools for reflecting upon this process, I will be alert to textual manifestations of key psychological processes that Benjamin highlights; identification, repudiation, aggression, destruction, splitting, abjection. I will also be alert to the register(s) in which these processes occur in order to account for the difference it makes to our reading(s): whether these processes are self-consciously delineated for the purposes of narrative form or are (apparently) unconscious ruptures in the narrative which demonstrate unacknowledged conflicts or contradictions within the various discourses circulating in the texts. In addition to tracing out the operations of these basic processes of intersubjective relating, I will also refer to specific psychoanalytic debates, where appropriate.

For example, in Chapter 3 which deals with post-Holocaust themes in the fictions, LaCapra's use of the concept of 'working-through' which he develops from Freud's work on 'Mourning and Melancholia' will be used to explore the possibility of living well and hoping for the future after trauma. Benjamin's characterisation of intersubjectivity as a working through of oscillations "between action and activity, split complementarity and mutuality" (Benjamin 1998: 34) will be used to identify the common themes LaCapra's project shares with the versions of feminism elaborated in the fictions and theory under examination. In Chapter 4, Butler's appropriation of the Freudian tradition via Lacan to discuss the hegemony of heterosexuality will be discussed with regard to treatments of the themes of sex, gender and sexuality in the feminist sf texts.

In Chapter 5, which deals with reproduction, the contributions of the object relations tradition and their sedimentation (or repudiation) in feminist common senses with regards to mothering will inflect readings of the texts, as will the contributions of feminist philosophers on maternal thinking.   Chapter 6 will return again to the oscillating terms of identification and repudiation to discuss the ways in which inclusion and exclusion, through abjection, operate to authorise certain feminisms and certain forms of agency at the cost of others and to suggest that those feminisms which, in effect, embody intersubjectivity most successfully offer the most hope for the future and for meaningful social action.

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Conclusion

It is the argument of this thesis that although material circumstances and social construction may be sufficient to explain the particular contents of projects of social transformation, they are not sufficient to explain the 'impulse' to pursue such a project, as not all people in similar circumstances and social locations will do so. It is therefore hypothesised that although this 'impulse' is not essential, in the sense of an intrinsic biological drive, there is something about the human condition of embodied being-in-the world, in excess of a facility for rational calculation, which motivates the desire for social change.

Whether we call this supplement 'emotions' or 'psychic processes', it seems that there are 'states of thinking-feeling' which are not reducible to cognitive states that may be abstracted from embodiment. However, it is also apparent that these 'states of thinking-feeling' are not experienced identically by all human beings so that embodiment, correspondingly, cannot be abstracted from 'being-in-the-

world'. Human beings, to paraphrase Rosi Braidotti, are *interfaces* between the biological and the social, and this must be taken into account in theorising a 'utopian impulse'. Benjamin's relational analysis seems to provide a way of theorising this 'threshold' quality that escapes the putative essentialism of feminist object relations theory and the linguistic determinism of Lacanian theory. She does this by taking seriously the communicative possibilities of dialogic interaction between bodies that forms an ongoing substrate to dialogic interaction at the level of the Symbolic. The importance of 'feeling for the other' is fundamental to the intersubjectivity that is the open-ended project of relational analysis.

Feminist social theory and feminist epistemology share as their primary object of critique the 'man of reason'; the abstracted knower (who just happens to be white male and middle class) whose mastery of knowledge and over nature also extends to the domination of women and other others. In this respect, feminism has always already been postmodern, modernity without illusions, *qua* Bauman. Benjamin's feminist version of relational analysis enables us to theorise the psychic processes that provide us with the longing not simply to subvert this opposition by making women the valued term in this complementary scheme, but to envisage a journey towards women's liberation that is also men's liberation and perhaps even a liberation from gender complementarity.

The sense of a somatic self who pre-exists and co-exists with a linguistic and political subject that is delineated in this version of psychoanalysis succeeds in holding in tension those aspects of being which may be mediated through

language and those which are in excess of its symbolic framework, but which still have material effects. Although this understanding of the self does not obviate the mediating effects of language, it does assume that there is a boundary between self and other, whether that other is a concrete other in the sense of another human being, or the 'real world' that the self inhabits. It is not necessary to assume that the 'real world' is transparently accessible to being known, simply to acknowledge that there is a difference between 'objects' as we imagine (or fantasise) them to be, and as they 'really' are; that is, that we are not omnipotent. It is still possible to suspend epistemological judgement about the explanatory capacities of the natural or the human sciences, and to stress the ways in which language structures perception, but we must take seriously the intrapsychic as well as the intersubjective aspects of the self. We must assume that there is an identifier before the identification (contra Judith Butler) as there needs to be some distinction made between fantasy and reality, however contestable the contents of those categories may be.

Jessica Benjamin asserts: "The intersubjective analyst's idea of freedom – the analyst's freedom – is to make use of one's emotional responses, one's subjectivity, in a knowing way" (Benjamin 1998: 23). In my reading of the feminist science fictions I want to make use of my own emotional responses to the texts in just such a knowing way. My own identifications with aspects of feminism and of sf and repudiation of other aspects will help to illuminate where there are significant points of splitting in the texts. I cannot hope to be completely exhaustive in uncovering and holding in tension all the polysemy embedded in the texts, because, as Benjamin notes:

> Once subjectivity is embraced, we have entered into a realm of knowledge based on identifications, hence knowing that is intrapsychically filtered. In short, we must tolerate the inevitable misrecognition that accompanies our efforts at recognition. To react to this inevitability by relinquishing the effort to know or recognize would simply reinstall the principle of objective knowledge as the only one worth having (Benjamin 1998: 25).

Although Benjamin is referring to the communication between analyst and analysand in the above quotation, I think it may be usefully applied to the dialogue between text and reader in which the reader constructs an imaginary dialogic partner via the communicative space of the text. So although I cannot read off the intentions of an author from her or his text in an unproblematic fashion, in the process of reading a text – particularly a feminist sf which assumes a reading community – I do attempt to recognise her intentions through a conscientious reading of the various levels of character, plot, and story. Indeed, a similar process goes on when reading feminist social theory, as I attempt to recognise the communication the author intends to make through oscillating between identifying with and repudiating the claims and arguments that she constructs and the alignments she makes with other theorists. What I am calling a 'conscientious' reading refers to this notion of making use of one's emotional responses in a knowing way; resisting the lure of easy assumptions, of assimilating others' points of view to my own, or of repudiating the possibility of the validity of the points of view of other others. In some ways, and as I hope to demonstrate, this conscientious reading is (counter-intuitively) more feasible in a feminist sf than in feminist social theory, per se, because its generic features encourage the reader to piece together a story's meaning or meanings from a range of contesting or ambivalent story fragments (plot-lines, narrative voices).

Chapter 3

After the Holocaust[39]: Projects of Memory and Hope

for the Future

> From my vantage point, the project of ecofeminism is understanding,
> interpreting, describing and envisioning a past, a present, and a future, all
> with an intentional consciousness of the ways in which the oppression of
> women and the exploitation of nature are intertwined (Vance 1993:126).

Introduction

In the previous two chapters I set out some of the tools that will enable me to

provide conscientious readings of the feminist science fictions. In this chapter, I

provide readings of the fictions using those tools. In the process I highlight

ways in which the plotting of each of the novels overtly and, in some cases,

explicitly (within intratextual discourse) draws on concepts of narrative fiction or

other representational genres – such as drama and historiography – to make

social theoretical points. I also examine how such plotting techniques put into

question the ideological (discursive) workings of narrative. In this chapter I

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[39] When writing about or discussing utopianism or social transformation in an academic context it
is easy to become defensive in a climate where these concepts are associated with uncritical and
under-theorised analyses of the social world and of power distribution. However, in the current
state of world politics a commitment to social transformation in the pursuit of social justice seems
ever more urgent. (N.B. This statement was originally drafted prior to the events of September
11, 2001, and ongoing military responses). Despite extensive academic and political wrangling
over whether it is appropriate or justifiable to reify the Nazi Holocaust as the paradigm of human
evil, the historical events and the challenge that they pose to comprehension and representation
suggest to many that hope for the future can only be characterised as blind optimism. It was with
the desire to resist this pessimistic – if not, indeed, cynical – world view that I chose to examine
feminist science fiction which represents "the Holocaust" not as the end to hope, but as a rupture
in the timeline that makes hope, as well as effective social and political agency, possible.

explore some of the ways in which feminist science fiction constitutes a body of theory which engages with the problem of the holocaustal. Feminist science fiction set in the future of our planet typically takes the occurrence of holocausts for granted; however, the fictions that I discuss do rather more than that. They take the occurrence of a specific holocaust, or a holocaustal series of events as being foundational to those societies deemed preferable in the texts as well as those deemed threatening to the future of the 'utopian' societies. I am using 'utopian' to describe those societies whose social relations differ markedly from those which obtained at the time of the holocaust or holocausts. The connotation of 'no place' (now) is appropriate for each of these societies; the connotation of 'good place' is debatable. However, I have explained that I am interested in process rather than product, and each of these societies is represented as having (re)organised its social relations in a bid to ensure that the holocaust will remain a historical event and not a future possibility. I want to examine the ways that representations of process and struggle inflect the re-visioned social theories produced by the texts. In the fictions discussed: *The Gate to Women's Country* (Tepper 1989), *Body of Glass* (Piercy 1992), and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (Starhawk 1993), the 'utopian' societies coexist with societies whose response to the same historical occurrences has been to intensify the social relations that are theorised as being productive of the foundational holocausts. These societies are therefore appropriately termed dystopian.

The action in each of the novels to be discussed in this chapter takes place in a post-holocaust North America on damaged land that formerly constituted part of the nation-state, the United States of America. It is important to note that action,

indeed conflict, is the narrative driver in each of these texts; they are not simply didactic presentations of an ideal(ised) future. Each text's imagined future America has in common extreme weather conditions; land with severely damaged fertility, population loss to war and disease, and fragile health and reproductive capacity for both humans and animals. *The Gate to Women's Country* and *Body of Glass* novels refer specifically to monumental catastrophes involving the detonation of nuclear weapons; *The Fifth Sacred Thing* locates the cataclysm in the overthrow of representative democracy, following economic collapse, by armed forces in the service of capitalists and fundamentalist religious leaders. Each novel also develops a sophisticated theoretical analysis of the interconnectedness of causal factors such as gendered, classed and racialised hierarchy and domination, each of which exhibit an investment in 'power-over'[40].

In these futures, extreme climate change and shortages of the key resources – food, water and energy – demonstrate graphically[41] that the consequence of 'man's inhumanity to man' is catastrophic damage to the planet such that there can be no assumption that it will continue to sustain life. However, the protagonists of these novels, with whom we are invited to identify, each inhabit societies that have invested considerable mental, emotional and physical energy in learning the lessons offered by the holocausts and taking steps to ensure that history does not repeat itself. The idea of 'history' itself is problematised in each

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[40] Starhawk suggests there are three types of power; power-over, power-from-within, and power-with. She argues that:

> Power-over comes from the consciousness I have termed estrangement: the view of the world as made up of atomized, nonliving parts, mechanically interacting, valued not for what they inherently are but only in relation to some outside standard (Starhawk 1990: 9).

of the texts and associated with the need for individual and collective activity in

(re)making both history and society. This chapter focuses on representations of

the holocaustal as symbolic of the rupture between past and future. I have

already alluded to the notion of sf as future history. The temporality of the

novels is such that we can read their past as 'our' present and their present as

'our' future; what is known in sf terms as 'extrapolation'. There is also a sense

in which some of the alternative societies in the future can be read as cognitively

estranged representations of our present. I examine this disruption of simple

oppositions between past and present or present and future to determine whether

the novels cross-fertilisation of 'cognitive estrangement' and 'extrapolation' is

effective in the deconstruction of single vision.[42]

The texts use similar plotting strategies with regard to space. In each case the

'utopian' society – Women's Country; Tikva; San Francisco[43] – is compared

with both 'dystopian' others and with 'interzones'[44]: places which occupy an

intermediate geographical as well as sociological space[45]. In some cases it is

difficult to decide whether to assign the designation 'interzone' or 'dystopia' to

the other spaces; for example, the Glop in *Body of Glass* or "the dancing ground

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[41] The adverb is used advisedly. It is very easy to imagine these novels as screenplays and to run the film in your head, drawing on over seventy years of cinematic and televisual science fiction.
[42] In "A Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway claims: "Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters" (Haraway 1991a: 154).
[43] The future inhabitants of San Francisco simply refer to it as "the City", but their dystopian counterpart is called "the City of Angels"; to avoid confusion, I refer to the cities as San Francisco and Los Angeles – the anachronism may serve to reinforce the specific intersection of extrapolation and cognitive estrangement achieved in this text (Starhawk 1993).
[44] N.B. *Interzone* is the name of an extant British monthly magazine of science fiction, first published in 1982.
[45] Ildney Cavalcanti has also given attention to the links between spatial organisation and utopia in *Body of Glass* in a chapter of her PhD thesis entitled "Explorig the Utopian Space/time. Her mapping has different emphases and is conducted within a much more "literary" treatment of the novel than my own. She is much less concerned with the temporal dimension of space/time than I am in this chapter (Cavalcanti 1999).

of the Monsters" (Starhawk 1993: 92) in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. Again, by

constantly shifting the grounds of comparison, the texts mitigate against

reductive readings. Although I will refer to these interzones, and their textual

presence influences my analysis, I will give more attention to those societies

which are used to figure the dystopian past / present and the utopian present /

future. In this chapter I will provide an overview of social organisation and social

relations. In chapters 4 and 5 I will elaborate on the subjective experience of

these organisations and relations by key protagonists, focusing particularly on

sexuality and reproduction.

The main thesis of this chapter is that each of the novels develops its social

theories in response to 'the Holocaust'[46] as well as to the restagings of its

dynamics in the novels' more recent histories; the "convulsion" in *The Gate to*

Women's Country, the "Two Week War" in *Body of Glass* and the "Collapse of

'27"* followed by the Stewards taking power in 2028 in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

However, although each of the novels figures these historical ruptures as

significant, they also set them in the context of a much more extensive time

frame. I argue that this is due to the texts' production in dialogue with feminist

social theories that draw links between the domination of 'Nature' and of women

in post-Enlightenment thinking and social relations. These perspectives have

been developed by feminists who have become associated retrospectively with

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[46] Mike Brennan provides an interesting genealogy of this term. He argues that it was not until the 1960s that historians fixed upon the term "Holocaust" in an attempt to comprehend "the seemingly incomprehensible" atrocities of the "Nazi genocide of 6 million Jews (and an estimated 5 million gypsies, homosexuals, political opponents, mentally and physically disabled people, and others considere by the Nazis as morally degenerate". He argues that Jewish-identified academics have tended to favour the Hebrew term "Churban" which links the Nazi genocide with the destruction of the Jewish temple, and that since the mid-1980s, the term "Shoah", also from the Hebrew "avoids the debasement that the term Holocaust has, in recent years, suffered by its ubiquitous use to refer to all thngs catastrophic" (Brennan 2001).

feminist science studies or ecofeminism; some theorists are claimed by both traditions (Griffin 1994; Keller 1985; Merchant 1980; Plaskow 1993). These theoretical strands in feminism share with radical environmentalists a critical analysis of the post-Enlightenment devaluation and objectification of nature in 'the West'. Distinctively, however, they articulate this critical analysis with a recognition that this devaluation and objectification was instituted by privileged white men: "Women barely took part in the conceptualization of those [scientific, intellectual, and industrial] revolutions, or until recently, in the culture that emerged from them. Neither did the poor, or non-Europeans" (Vance 1993: 124). In order to theorise social transformation, the science fiction texts under examination have had to theorise the possibility of survival in and / or the repair of an inhospitable environment. The science fictions therefore nuance Bauman's theory that modernity was the necessary if not sufficient cause of the Holocaust (Bauman 2000 (1989)) by their attention to gendered, racialised and classed power relations and their complex articulations with the domination of Nature by Culture / Science.

The chapter is organised as follows: first I provide a rationale for using the concept of 'holocaust' rather than that of 'apocalypse' to enable me to discuss the relationship of (feminist) social theory to 'holocaust studies'. Secondly, I provide a detailed reading of the social theory developed in the sf texts in response to the Holocaust, under the following thematic headings: 'The "Nature" of the Holocaust', 'The Response to the Catastrophe', 'The Threat(s) from Outside' and 'Utopian versus Dystopian Societies'. Thirdly, through a comparison of the work of Laurence Langer and Dominick LaCapra, I draw on

additional critical resources for exploring the uses of narrative for coming to terms with history and imagining the possibility of social transformation. The fourth major section of the chapter returns to a close reading of the novels to provide a detailed account of the ways in which memory, history and narrative practices are implicated in both the toxic social theories which enabled the holocaust and those underpinning the social relations and practices of the re-visioned societies. In the conclusion to this chapter I sum up the distinctive social theories embodied in these texts.

Why 'Holocaust' and not 'Apocalypse'?

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, it would have been possible to use the term 'Apocalypse' rather than that of 'Holocaust' to describe the textual representations of the complex sociological and ecological disasters that predated the re-visioning of the utopian societies under examination. None of the texts use either term to describe the disasters from which they are recovering and the repetition of which they are working to prevent. However both *Body of Glass* and *The Fifth Sacred Thing* make specific textual references to the Holocaust, and in each of the novels death through plague, famine and war has distinctly eschatological overtones. In the sf genre, post-disaster texts use both terms, although the *Encyclopedia (sic) of Science Fiction* suggests that the aftermath of holocaust may be the most major theme in sf (Clute and Nicholls 1995: 581-584). However, the entry for 'HOLOCAUST AND AFTER' (upper case is used for the entirety of section headings) dates the first example of the distinctive modern form of the post-holocaust story to 1885, so it was clearly not produced in response to 'the Holocaust'. It is interesting, nonetheless, that generic

treatments of the themes also suggest an extended historical timeframe for anxiety about future disaster. Although both of the terms 'Holocaust' and 'Apocalypse' have religious connotations, the eschatological associations of the latter are particularly at odds with the notion of utopia of process[47] that I emphasise throughout this thesis. Associated as it is with the Book of Revelations, the term Apocalypse is suffused with a sense of inevitability, as the moment towards which human history is progressing, only to be obliterated with the total destruction of the earth and all that is in it. This inevitability in a sense absolves humanity of responsibility and thus removes the obligation of human beings to work for social justice.

In 'Talk about the Weather: The Greening of Eschatology', Catherine Keller suggests that a biblical understanding of history leads to investing all hope for the future in supernatural intervention leading to the creation of a new heaven on earth, rendering working to change the natural world both unnecessary and demonstrative of a lack of faith (Keller 1993). She suggests that a set of subliminal apocalyptic codes are deeply embedded in the subtext of western culture and function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Keller traces an unholy alliance between Christian theology, gendered oppression and free market capitalism that she believes results in: "an ultra-modernist technological utopianism ... [that is] willing to accept apocalyptic consequences for the earth while transferring traditional American optimism about progress into the heavens" (Keller 1993: 39). The dystopian geographies of the texts I am examining reveal their authors' disinvestment in such utopian fantasies of escape

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[47] See discussions of utopia as "struggle forever" on pages 36, 104 and 130, for example.

from the damage caused to the planet by the interlocking influences Keller cites. They also locate their foundational holocausts as specific located phenomena set in a extended temporal context of linked historical catastrophes including 'the Holocaust'. Instead of seeking to escape their consequences, however, they develop social theories and represent potential activism that counter "the array of doctrinal symbolics which have drawn interest *away from* the earth, from natural conditions, from finitude and flesh" (Keller 1993: 36). Of course, doctrinal symbolics are not limited to Christian theology; they are also the effect of the damaging dualisms that, as feminists have argued, underpin the Western modern project as well as Classical philosophy.

Although 'Holocaust' is also associated with large-scale destruction, there is at least a hint that the destruction is not total – it is not the end of things. There is also a sense of human responsibility embedded within the concept which is absent from the apocalyptic. Responsibility and agency cannot be so neatly side-stepped. And, of course, most importantly, since the second world war, the phrase Holocaust has been associated with massive destruction of life and of the environment, through its use to describe the Nazi's attempted annihilation of the Jews as well as the possibility of nuclear destruction evidenced in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In a project that is concerned with projects of social transformation, therefore, Holocaust seems a far more appropriate – if heavily weighted – term to use in discussions of the way societies obliterate themselves and then rebuild from the ashes.

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I have noted that post-holocaust fiction predated the Holocaust, but I believe that

the specificity of the Holocaust is salient in conscientious readings of the three

chosen sf texts, because two of them make specific reference to it as a historical

reference point while the third is so similar in the themes treated that it bears

examination through the same lens. Although the term 'holocaust'

(uncapitalised) is also used in the phrase 'nuclear holocaust' following the

devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the academic field of 'Holocaust

Studies', principally a USA-based phenomenon, has largely been preoccupied

with the Holocaust as the acts perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews.

However, some recent anthologies have tried to redress the balance by referring

to the other peoples targeted for extermination by the Nazis, and one even

includes an essay on Japanese perpetrators of atrocities against other Asian

peoples, during the second world war (Tokudome 2001). In *Is the Holocaust*

Unique, first published in 1996, Alan Rosenbaum asserts that:

> The time has come to fix the place of the Nazi-engineered Holocaust
> against the Jews, Gypsies, and millions of others so that it may be
> accurately integrated into the mainstream of recorded history. For
> it remains disturbingly obvious, even to those with merely a passing
> exposure to this area of scholarship, that the variety of radically different
> opinions on this matter may contribute unwittingly to the nihilistic
> impression that any one view is as valid or invalid as any other view
> (Rosenbaum 2001: 1)

However, Rosenbaum then goes on to cite a number of abstractions, which he

claims undermine philosophical reflections and theoretical discussions of

historically significant events like the Holocausts. They include: the tendency to

attribute the occurrence of the Holocaust or any act of violence to 'Man's

inhumanity to Man' or a presumed 'evil or bestial human instinct'; a

mystification that ensues from treating the Holocaust as essentially unthinkable owing to its extrahistorical and profoundly idiosyncratic, evil nature and a trivialization of its unprecedented character that accrues to the notion that the Holocaust, like *all* other sociohistorical events, is unique. The enduring character of these abstractions may be attributable in part to the disciplines which have been most preoccupied with representing the Holocaust: history, literature and religious studies, and with their epistemological and methodological frameworks.

Although Fine and Turner suggest that Zygmunt Bauman was in error when he claimed, in 1989, that there had been no social theory produced in response to the Holocaust, and that Hannah Arendt's work was just such a theoretical response (Fine and Turner 2000: 4), Bauman undoubtedly made an enormous contribution to the "long-overdue task of a formidable cultural and political importance; the task of bringing the sociological, psychological and political lessons of the Holocaust episode to bear on the self-awareness and practice of the institution and the members of contemporary society" (Bauman 2000/1989: xii). That in 2001, Rosenbaum can refer to the

> essential but unfortunate academic, cultural and institutional battles being waged over securing the controlling or authoritative interpretation of the Holocaust and its fitting place in history, politics, ethics, religion and in the popular imagination (Rosenbaum 2001: 11)

points to the magnitude of this task and the passion it continues to inspire. LaCapra's work *Representing the Holocaust* argues for a self-reflective, overtly theorised approach to historiography that would not in itself defuse the passions

inherent in working in such an emotionally charged area of knowledge
production, but that would give them their due in the process (LaCapra 1994).

Two central binary oppositions appear to be in conflict in much of this
contestation. The first constructs the Holocaust as either unique or else just
another genocide; the second operates between those who would argue that the
Holocaust can be worked through for resources which can inform an ethical
social theory and those who would counter that its occurrence demonstrates the
pointlessness of such an endeavour. John K Roth intervenes to argue that:

> As the 21st Century develops, the challenge we face in thinking about
> uniqueness debates in particular and the direction of Holocaust and
> genocide studies in general is the following: *We should avoid the ultimate
> irony that would result if Holocaust and genocide studies – including
> debates about uniqueness – become a kind of useless knowledge* (Roth
> 2001: 31).

This remark is particularly pertinent, because it goes to the crux of the matter; do
we seek knowledge 'about' or knowledge 'for'? If the Enlightenment project has
been irrevocably stained by the occurrence of the Holocaust, can we still hope to
produce knowledge that is liberatory or productive of social transformation?
And should that be our aim, anyway?

In a discussion of Holocaust survivors, Aaron Hass notes that while they

> provide evidence of the debilitating effects of trauma, they also reflect the
> tremendous resilience inherent in a human being. Some commentators
> emphasize the former, while others insist upon the latter. But both must
> be recognized. On a certain level, survivors find themselves in an ironic
> predicament. Acknowledging their fulminating wounds implies the
> further, successful reach of the oppressor. Denying those hurts might
> imply that the onslaught was benign (Hass 1996: 192).

The tendency of commentators to polarise their representations of survivors points to the political and emotional investments that scholars have in this arena, and the ways in which empathy and identification can work to obscure and illuminate. In a recent reference to Hannah Arendt's distinction "between survivors who, traumatized by the horror, can only react and those who, engaging the traumatic events vicariously, can afford to contemplate its historical and cultural significance" (Kahane 2001: 183), Claire Kahane notes that Holocaust texts by survivor-writers "are more than a mere reaction; on the contrary they are a move to recuperate a self and a world, to move out of the paralysis of trauma that has been the fate of many an eye-witness" (Kahane 2001: 184). Conversely, I would argue that some commentators who have engaged the traumatic events vicariously have become encapsulated in the trauma to the extent that they are significantly handicapped in the quest to produce useful knowledge.

Feminism as Absent Presence in Holocaust Studies

When asking the question; "Could – and should – the Holocaust even be considered within the context of gender?" (Kahane 2001: 162), Kahane references a recent "flurry of attention to the different experience of women in the Holocaust" (Kahane 2001: 184n). However, this is a very belated development in the field, and much of the work is about recovering history, rather than bringing the feminist critical gaze to bear on the field as a whole. The magnitude of the tragedy seems to have pushed discourses about it in either universalist directions about the 'problem of humanity' or in particularistic directions about the German apotheosis of anti-semitism. These simplistic

polarisations are now being complicated as the field of 'Holocaust Studies' develops and as the passage of time enables a more balanced weighing of arguments.

Nonetheless, there is an apparent dearth of feminist theoretical work produced in response to the Holocaust. This may be due in part to the hostility exhibited by those already occupying the field to questions of gender, as well as to the sensitivity and respect with which feminist critics wish to treat the survivors of this tragedy, as well as those who did not survive. I would argue that the science fiction novels I examine, as well as other feminist sf texts in fact constitute a feminist theoretical response to the Holocaust.

The 'Nature' of the Holocausts

The Gate to Women's Country

The re-visioned societies cannot be taken as microcosms of this future whole earth[48]; a major result of the holocausts has been to effect an enormous restructuring of the way that space is used. For example, in *The Gate to Women's Country*, the inhabitants of the North American continent gather in small enclaves where radiation damage is minimal and where it is still possible to raise crops and rear animals. Marthatown, the founding city of Women's Country is the birthplace of the novel's central characters, Morgot and Stavia. The rational social organisation of Marthatown is contrasted with the violent and

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[48] According to Donna Haraway:
> NASA photographs of the blue, cloud-swathed whole Earth are icons for the emergence of global, national, and local struggles over a recent natural-technical object of knowledge called the environment (Haraway 1997a: 174).

solipsistic patriarchal (dis)organisation of the Holylanders who occupy more marginal territory. Communication between societies in this future is patchy and low-tech; councilwomen from various Women's Country cities exchange messengers and meet face-to-face to plan for the future, but other communication depends on news carried by itinerants.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, in contrast, despite the massive environmental harm caused by the Two Week War and the ensuing loss of life, global communications via the Net remain intact although physical geographical mobility is possible only for the educated elite. Geographic location in terms of residence is inextricably linked with economics. The unemployed and the mass of workers live in the 'Glop', slang for megalopolis, with insufficient protection from the extremes of weather, daily exposure to violence, and poor environmental and quality control of food and water. The highly skilled workers and the managerial classes inhabit Multi domes, climate controlled cities, which are enclosed within domes, and have access to the more complex and extensive technological mediation which makes comfortable living possible, albeit extremely restricted and regulated. The remainder of the inhabitants of the globe live in Free Towns or Rural Zones, which are textually defined as exceptional. Very little overt reference is made to the Rural Zones, but we can infer that they comprise limited zones of land which can still be farmed. How this might be possible when the worldwide climate has polarised to the extent that it is necessary either to wear extensive protective clothing if not protected from the environment (the 'Raw') by a Multi dome, or a Free Town wrap is not clear. In addition to the damage caused in the Two Week

War that obliterated Jerusalem, there is reference to the death by starvation of two billion people in the Famine because of the drowning or drying up of agricultural land. Plague is also mentioned. The focal characters, Malkah and Shirah respectively inhabit, or have inhabited, one of the exceptional free towns, Tikva. Tikva is Hebrew for Hope.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the action revolves around the cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles – called City of the Angels by its inhabitants – and their hinterlands. Madrone, Maya and Bird are all inhabitants of San Francisco although Bird has spent many years imprisoned in the Southlands. San Francisco has been reorganised to ensure that all of its inhabitants have enough to eat and drink as well as free healthcare and a roof over their heads. Roads have been torn up to provide more space for planting crops; private cars are no longer used because they are environmentally unsustainable; bicycles, electric carts and the occasional horse have taken their place. Cable cars networked high above the city provide public transport. The reconstructed city is not simply practical, it is beautiful. However the occupants of the city are not just preoccupied with survival and redistribution; they are also invested in repair. For example, some of the inhabitants in the collective household that is also home to Madrone, Maya and Bird are members of the Toxics collective and are attempting to counteract the harmful effects of industrial pollution in the Bay Area. The business of surviving with a severely damaged climate seems to have had the effect of rendering geographical mobility unlikely, although a historical moment of polarisation is referred to when people chose to reside in Southern or

Northern California depending on the way they intended to respond to the catastrophe. It is also made clear towards the end of the novel that San Francisco's extreme isolation has been due in part to the blocking of radio transmissions in and out of the Bay Area.

In the City of the Angels, and its suburbs, living conditions are polarised between the slum-dwellers of the city and the privileged few living in mansions in the surrounding hills. The roads have been destroyed there too, but not through human agency. The destruction is due to earthquakes; neither the damaged roads nor the collapsed buildings have been repaired since the "Collapse" of 2027, a massive earthquake whose epicentre was near the centre of Los Angeles, with tremors felt as far north as San Francisco. Shanty towns have been scavenged from the ruins. Water is available to the city dwellers on ration; just enough for bare survival in the drought conditions. Food is also scarce and any access to food and water is available to the bulk of the population only by submitting to labour in prison-like factories. The city is fragmented into zones; industrial, gang territory and the liberated zone controlled by "the Web", the movement resisting control by the Stewards. Within the liberated zone there is an unnamed compound, presided over by Katy, which can be read as a microcosmic model of San Francisco – plants are grown, water and food are shared fairly and a haven is provided for fugitives from the Stewards' oppression.

Response to the Catastrophes

The Gate to Women's Country

Although the reader of *Gate* only learns the full extent of Women's Country's response to the catastrophe towards the end of the novel, the plot is structured to reveal a highly theorised organisational response to the problems posed by the holocaustal losses. These losses are not just material; they are also cultural, as much of the knowledge of the past has been lost with the destruction of educational institutions and cultural artefacts like books and films.

Women's Country's social organisation has been devised and implemented by women. An unelected Council, which renews itself through cooption, governs each city; the majority of the Councilwomen are medically trained. Women's Country's project of reparation is based on a fair allocation of resources relating to household sizes in exchange for a requirement that all citizens contribute labour, and pursue life-long learning in three key categories; Arts, Crafts and Sciences. Different women may prioritise the categories differently, but there is a minimum service requirement in each. Households are mainly female; the only male residents are 'servitors', who are relatively few in number, and boy children under the age of five. Servitors apparently function as domestic servants, but towards the close of the novel readers learn that at least some of them have influential voices on the Council, although that fact is concealed from the women in Women's Country who are not privy to the Council's secrets. Reproduction and Sexuality are also highly regulated, as heterosexual intercourse can take place only during twice-yearly fortnight-long carnivals where assignations must

be pre-booked. Homosexuality has been eliminated through prenatal hormonal regulation. I will discuss these issues in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

There is a marked sexual division of labour in Women's Country, although 'men', as a category, do not figure in the text, as they are divided into 'Warriors' the high-profile, macho defenders of Women's Country garrisoned outside the city walls, and 'Servitors', low profile, apparently insignificant men who have chosen to return through the gate to Women's Country. Warriors do not have access to the same education as the women, and the only labour they are required to perform is that associated with maintaining a standing army such as drilling and maintaining weapons. They have plenty of spare time, therefore, in which to indulge in intrigue. Servitors may resume their education on their return to Women's Country.

The sexual division of labour and organisation of adult residences is mirrored by the children of Women's Country. At the age of five, all male children are given over to the garrison for rearing by their warrior fathers, despite the emotional pain this poses to all family members: mothers, sisters and resident servitors. They are then drilled in martial arts and warrior mythologies, until at the age of fifteen they are allowed to choose whether to remain with the warriors or to return to Women's Country as a servitor. Although it appears that this division is reinforcing the 'sex war' mentality that Women's Country's leaders see as underpinning the causes of the 'Convulsion', in fact they are attempting to ensure that all the men will choose to return by ensuring that warriors do not father

children. The projected end product of this breeding programme is "no more wars".

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, however, the inhabitants of Tikva have a very different strategy for self-governance. In Tikva, citizens are also required to contribute labour to the town, but it is only a portion of their labour. Once the requirement for contribution to security and other communal projects such as reforestation is fulfilled, inhabitants are free to sell their labour within the town or to the multis in whatever is their particular area of strength. They can also choose to 'sell themselves directly' to a multi; to live and work within a corporate dome and to abide by the rules and regulations of the multinational company that owns it. Children in Tikva are educated so that they may choose to become a part of this technocratic elite, in exchange for curtailment of liberty, if they so prefer, and indeed it appears as if the educational system encourages this indentured labour. However, the ethos of the town is more collective than individualistic, with participatory democracy being the mode of governance as well as common areas for preparing and eating food. Shira's take on council meetings is somewhat cynical:

> There was nothing people liked so much as a good political fight
> about principles or ecological correctness or the constant
> nurturing of true equality. Partners and siblings could scream at
> each other. Everybody could take sides, persuade, entreat,
> scheme, manipulate, all in the name of some higher goal.
> Eventually some dim consensus would be patted together and the
> peace of utter fatigue would descend. It was one of the major
> sports of the free town (Piercy 1992: 547).

The kind of dialogue represented is hardly utopian. Although everybody is granted the same minimum rights to speech – three minutes on any topic – they

cannot expect to be listened to respectfully. Derision, hissing, booing and procedural manipulation are just some of the responses they might expect. Although the town has been constructed in opposition to the hegemonic power structures of the multis, those power structures also claim to be invested in peace keeping, albeit in the service of the profit motive, rather than in the pursuit of social justice. There is therefore a tense coexistence in operation between multis and free towns, although the very terminology suggests that Tikvans view the Multis as oppressive – unfree in fact.

Less attention is given to the daily practice of food production and resource allocation in *Body of Glass* than in *The Gate to Women's Country*, but this is because the borders of this society are portrayed as more permeable. There is reference to the "meekro" of the town (unexplained, but from context 'micro-ecology') which includes "fish farming, growing cukes, tomatoes, peppers, all part of the same self-contained system under the wrap". This is in marked contrast to the diet of most people who eat "vat food made of algae and yeasts" (Piercy 1992: 56-57).

Tikvans do exchange goods and services with other societies, even as they protect a way of life that is more tolerant of difference than that possible in the multis, or economically feasible in the Glop. Life in Tikva is much less prescribed than in Marthatown, and decisions that affect its inhabitants are supposed to be made transparently through a town meeting that enables every citizen to have his or her say. This does not preclude individuals acting autocratically or unilaterally, but that behaviour is subject to sanction in a way

not possible in Women's Country, where many of the rules are unwritten and the sanctions applied covertly.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In the San Francisco of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* governance is also by means of a Town Meeting. However a more fully theorised system of representation of the different interests in the City – by profession, by occupation, by lifestyle choice – is portrayed in this novel. The Town Council is open to everyone, but spokespersons are selected to represent work collectives and neighbourhoods to the council one day each week as gift labour. Of the three, this novel is the one which gives most attention to the processes and labour involved in participatory democracy and social transformation. Depending on the type of work collective or guild, representatives to the council may serve fixed terms to provide continuity or rotate the responsibility with their work colleagues to ensure nobody is overly burdened (Starhawk 1993: 45-54). The official language for Council Meetings is "English augmented with Sign" (Starhawk 1993: 48) although every neighborhood in the city cultivates its own mother tongue, including Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, Cantonese and Tagalog (Starhawk 1993: 47).

A further difference is the way in which the sacred is entwined with the political in this society:

> "The Four Sacred Things are earth, air, fire, and water. Nobody can own them or profit from them, and it's our responsibility to heal them and take care of them. That's the basis of our politics and economy." (Starhawk 1993: 272)

For the five years preceding the events which form the plot of this narrative, the "Four Sacred Things", Earth, Air, Fire and Water, have been represented in the town meeting by masked representatives who sit "in trance ... channelling the Voices of wind, fire, water, and earth" (Starhawk 1993: 47). There is also a "Speaker for the Voices, who was always either a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man" (Starhawk 1993: 45). This particular arrangement was brainstormed in a Council meeting to reflect that fact that "many people felt that nothing could truly be decided when the Four Sacred Things were not present" (Starhawk 1993: 46).

Everybody who lives San Francisco and the surrounding region is obligated to provide a certain number of gift hours each year. They can generally choose whether to provide those hours in their own speciality, particularly if they have a vital skill such as healing or in alternative labour. Importantly, everybody's labour is valued at the same worth, because their economic system would break down otherwise. The key unit of value in San Francisco is the calorie, which takes into account the amount of energy that is used in production as well as the amount required to replace a resource that is used. (Starhawk 1993: 273-4). This high degree of reconceptualisation, organisation and participation has enabled a highly effective response to catastrophe. The city's roads and pavements have been torn up to enable as much planting for food as possible. The city is also irrigated so that people can derive aesthetic pleasure as well as material benefit from water. Cleaning up toxic waste and tree planting, for example, are tasks that people expend their gift work on, either as volunteers, or when necessary, chosen by lottery. The City Council does not control the economy although it

encourages co-ordination. Work groups set their own goals and barter in an open

market, but wealth is accounted for in a new way:

> "Marx said that wealth came from labor, but we say there are three
> different sources, and labor is only one, the most variable. There is also
> the stored labor of the past: for example a house that was built a
> generation ago, or my grandmother's bone china. That sort of wealth
> should also be shared fairly, not hoarded up in a few families. And
> finally there's wealth that is based on the resources of the earth, on the
> Four Sacred Things, and that wealth no one can profit from individually"
> (Starhawk 1993: 274)

The city has developed new technologies so that it is self-sufficient and has also

developed ways of passing on skills, such as medical training. Hierarchies have

been eliminated, but university-equivalent education is still available within the

city although its parameters have been somewhat expanded (Starhawk 1993:

267). For example, Madrone – who was just eight years old during the uprising

– has received the equivalent of an M.D. in terms of education, but she has also

received training in herbs and Chinese medicine. When new and difficult

situations arrive, a pattern of collective problem-solving and sharing of

responsibility for each other is in place to ensure that solutions are reached. For

example, when a new bio-engineered virus places the members of the Healer's

collective under excessive strain, the Council puts in place a system whereby

volunteers will perform some of their other responsibilities such as gardening

and household maintenance (Starhawk 1993: 49).

Sexuality and family forms are unregulated in the City. Both the female and the

one male focal characters have had sexual relationships with partners of both

sexes, serially and concurrently. Marriage is no longer the societal norm,

although some still marry if they belong to a religion that has such regulation.

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However, marriage as an economic institution is defunct. People who do caring labour, whatever their sex, collect work credits within the city economy.

The Threat(s) from Outside

The Gate to Women's Country

In *The Gate to Women's Country* there are twinned threats from outside. The first threat – albeit one that is kept within bounds – is from the warrior garrison stationed outside the walls of each of Women's Country's cities. This threat is kept under control through spies within the garrison who report any dissent to the Councilwomen. The second threat comes from the Holylanders who inhabit the "badlands" (Tepper 1989: 247) to the south of the part of Women's Country in which the novel is set. They do not threaten Marthatown directly, but one of its sister towns within Women's Country, Emmaburg. They spy on them, poach their sheep, and when the opportunity arises capture lone women to provide sexual services and bear their children. They are inclined to (literally) hamstring captives who attempt to escape. They practice a fundamentalist monotheism which is patriarchal in the extreme. The elders (all men) take multiple wives and 'father' as many children as possible, although female children seem to disappear – to infanticide, we infer. If any boy child disappears, it is likely that he will have been sold by one elder to another who doesn't have any. The marriage ceremony includes shaving the woman's head so she won't inspire lust and beating her with willow twigs (existing wives do this) to ensure she knows what punishment she will face if she provokes her husband. Sexual intercourse is referred to as "duty" although it is clear that there is some desire involved, on the part of the men, at least, however much as it is disallowed. Susannah, one of the

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Holylander women names this desire "lust", indicating a biblical economy of sin, but also suggesting that it is an objectifying practice, not a shared emotion. Once a Holylander woman has borne children, she may not remarry if widowed, despite enormous age gaps between husbands and wives.

Men and women live apart in this society, as well, in "family manors" divided into "bachelor houses", "wive houses", "granny houses" and "Father-houses". Women and girls seem to do all the domestic labour in addition to bearing children as frequently as they can be impregnated. The 'domestic labour' is heavy work, including drawing water from wells and churning cheese by hand. When boys reach age six they are taught to read and write by their father in order to be able to read scripture; they also learn basic calculating skills to help them in their shepherding. The Holylander's existence is far more marginal than that in Women's Country; their breeding practices – both animal and human – seem to be producing fewer and fewer healthy offspring. This is represented both as a 'natural' moral judgement on their practices and also a sign of their ignorance about the environmental consequences of the devastation; they live too close to land that is compromised by nuclear fallout.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, the threat from outside comes from the multis, in general, and Yakamura-Stichen (Y-S), in particular; the multi to which Shira had sold herself when she graduated from university and which she leaves when she loses custody of her son, Ari. Free Towns need to sell something unique to a number of rival multis in order to retain independence. Although the twenty-three

different multis, which divide the world between them, have different corporate cultures, Y-S is the one about which we learn most. Corporate culture is all-encompassing; controlling where employees live, the style of the residence, bodily appearance and comportment, sexual practices and so on. In Y-S, marriage contracts are for limited terms, with men of 'low-level talent' or above frequently contracting with younger partners whenever terms expire. Although technically the same practice is open to women of similar status, 'male dominance' (Piercy 1992: 5) within Y-S means this option is unequally exercised. Y-S has patriarchal laws and "rigid sex roles – not at work, of course, for no one could afford such nonsense, but in every other sector of living" (Piercy 1992: 135). Although the multis have kept the world war-free for forty-two years this does not mean that they are entirely peaceful. There are "raids, assassinations, skirmishes" (Piercy 1992: 3) and industrial espionage is part of the system (Piercy 1992: 103) up to and including deadly force; "(P)rofessional assassins work in the security corps of multis (Piercy 1992: 67). There are no longer any functioning governments (of nation-states) but corporate covenants function with more than the force of law. Apart from the 'eco-police' – the remnants of the old UN – only corporate security have legal weapons although other groups can obtain them from the black market (Piercy 1992: 63). There is some sense, then, that the interests of capital may be more conducive to peace than the interests of nation-states.

Social relations within the multis are hierarchical in operation and rigidly stratified by the economic value of individuals to the corporation. Y-S decorum also requires exchanges of ritual gestures of courtesy, differentiated by rank; for

example, bowing to a superior, nodding to an equal. Only those employees desired for their 'talent' (and their term spouses) are offered the protection (and constraint) of the multi dome and lifestyle. The talent most in demand is skill with information technology: . Support and maintenance staff inhabit the "Glop" and travel into the dome daily for work. They are instantly recognisable as they wear uniforms colour coded to their jobs.

Y-S presents a threat in the virtual world as in the real world. The "Network" (Piercy 1992: 1) (henceforth the Net) is an enhanced internet which allows users to access it in projection; 'virtual reality'. Each corporate entity or community also maintains its own "Base", private domains which provide their users with relatively secure information storage as well as access to the Net. Chimeras, computer programs designed to defend and conceal the Bases, are Tikva's chief export and also its means of protecting itself from the industrial espionage of the multis. However, the multis also own assassins who can operate in projection, killing Net-users on-line, rendering their material bodies brain-dead.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In The Fifth Sacred Thing, Los Angeles, or City of the Angels, is the iconic city representing the threat to San Francisco. Although we infer that a large part of what was formerly the United States is under the control of the Stewards, the immediate threat to San Francisco appears to come from the "Southlands" in general, and "the Stewards' armies that may be gathering, for all we know, just over the border" (Starhawk 1993: 3); i.e. to the south of the Bay Area. The Stewards are the military wing of the Millennialists who preach that Jesus Christ

returned to Earth in the year 2000 but repudiated the world for its sins (Starhawk 1993: 29). They oversee a society that is oppressive and hierarchical. Difference is used as a form of power-laden boundary demarcation in the Southlands, rather than as a source of play and pleasure as in San Francisco. Not only are rich divided from poor, and captors from their captives, rigid demarcation takes place within oppressed categories. For example, in the prisons, the men group themselves into Blacks, Latins and Asians, although it is noted that these terms seem only loosely related to colour or culture. This is in part due to the fact that punishment is meted out to anyone speaking in a language other than English. All the city names that were formerly Spanish have been changed to English equivalents.

The Stewards see people who depart from their narrowly defined norm of affluent, white, Millennialists as less than human. Even female members of this privileged class are regarded as subordinate to the men. They can no longer work outside the home. Non-white, non-English speakers and those who are deemed to have departed in any way from the four purities, dark mirror to the four sacred things. Moral Purity, Family Purity, Racial Purity and Spiritual Purity are all easily transgressed categories, open to exploitation in any way the Stewards see fit. The inhabitants of San Francisco transgress on every count, and in particular due to the practice of "witchcraft" or Wicca. The stewards themselves seem to be above these laws, as they breed people – who are considered sub-human – to carry out certain tasks, including androgynous beauties – "Angels" – who are sexually abused from a very young age, and

athletes – "Runners" – whose metabolisms have been engineered to ensure that they excel physically, although their lifespans are shortened correspondingly.

The Stewards are attracted by the natural resources of San Francisco and its environs: the Hillboys, hill-dwelling members of the Web of resistance, explain to Bird that when the Stewards seized power they also expelled all foreign investors and seized their assets. The Steward-run areas of the former USA have been under trade embargo for twenty years and in order to rejoin international trade relations they need the timber that grows in Northern California, as well as its harbours to ship it from.

Utopian versus Dystopian Societies

The Gate to Women's Country

The way that Women's Country responds to, or rather pre-empts the threats posed by the garrisons and by the Holylanders demonstrates those elements in both these societies which are deemed responsible for the holocaust and the failure of Women's Country, so far, to reorder its own social relations to avoid a repeat catastrophe. In her encounter with the Holylanders, Stavia recognises in their social organisation those blameworthy characteristics that she has learnt led to the Convulsion:

> The father, his older sons. There seemed to be eight of them, counting the three who had captured them. And only one adolescent girl! She read it all in that, inferred it all. They had learned about it in history class. Female infanticide or female sacrifice, one or both. But not polyandry, which could have solved the situation (Tepper 1989: 254).

On her return to Women's Country she suggests to her mother that the Holyland is an atavistic microcosm of preconvulsion society. Morgot's response is confused, and confusing, to say the least. At first she demurs, saying:

> "No, no. Not that bad as a general rule, I don't think. Love existed, after all. Some men and women have always loved one another. Not all cultures oppressed women ..." (Tepper 1989: 292).

However she follows this measured appraisal with a litany of historical abuses of women including "domestic violence ... when a women's husband beat her, sometimes to death" and infibulation and contradicts her earlier assessment of the Holyland: "Compared to ancient times you got away virtually unscathed. Your hair will grow back. Your back will heal" (Tepper 1989: 292). In the following chapter I will discuss in some detail how this text struggles to unpack 'love' from '(hetero)sexuality' in order to try and extricate some men from the category of violent women-abusers. The text is not wholly successful at this extrication.

The way in which Women's Country deals with the 'threat' from the garrisons is invidious. When the Councilwomen learn of the planned mutiny by the leaders of the Marthatown garrison and of Chernon's knowledge of Women's Country's "secrets" they take decisive action. They lure the ringleaders to a meeting away from the garrison and kill them. They then hang their dead bodies in the parade ground of the Marthatown garrison and put about a false story about a planned assault from Tabithatown. Similar action is taken by the Councilwomen of three other cities whose garrisons have been plotting together with that of Marthatown. The twelve hundred men from the garrison then march out to battle with Tabithatown, but the Councilwomen have organised that the full garrisons from

four other cities will be there to join Tabithatown's forces. This is in part to weaken the garrisons so they cannot attack the cities, but also to ensure that there is ample food for those left behind, the women and children within the city walls of Women's Country, and those boys and men too young or old to fight who remain in the garrison. The Councilwomen have agreed that the entire fighting force of Marthatown garrison is to be wiped out. No weapons of mass destruction are used; the warriors have been educated to kill their opponents only when they face equal risk from them, i.e. arms-length fighting. They do not have the materials to make sophisticated weapons, as Women's Country has withheld the technology for making steel; the warriors' weapons are made of bronze. However, the servitors and Councilwomen do have access to more sophisticated, more deadly weapons, which they use to eliminate this threat.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, again the 'utopian'[49] space — Tikva — is apparently assuming only a defensive posture, protecting its freedoms and its precious technology from the predacious multis. However, it seems that the attention of the multis was drawn to Tikva in particular among the free towns, by Avram's illegal experimentation with the cyborgs being built — allegedly — to defend this "fragile modern ghetto". So, in fact, the threat from without is provoked by a threat from within, in the shape of Avram, a scientist who is represented as a product of the legacy of the patriarchal Enlightenment. His self-identity as pure scientist and autonomous individual predisposes him to moves of mastery and ownership

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[49] For the purposes of comparisons, I am calling Tikva (Hebrew for 'Hope') utopian, although this is only in the sense that it is a no-place; a place that does not (yet) exist. However, it is clear that the utopian future of the text lies with Safed, and perhaps even the Glop and the potential for coalition these other places offer. Tikva is really a precursor — a staging post.

with insufficient consideration of the mores of the society in which he voluntarily participates. This includes the creation of the cyborg Yod to "protect" the free town, without consulting the town council, despite the fact that Tikva has signed a treaty with the other free towns and multis not to pursue such research. Gadi's revelation to Shira that Avram had been in trouble for illegal robotic experiments long before he came to Tikva, emphasises that his rationale is self-serving.

However, the links made textually between the golem of the Prague ghetto, to the memorial of the Holocaust that Malkah visited as a student in Prague at the turn of the twentieth century, and Yod as guardian of Tikva do demonstrate an investment in militancy in the preservation of a community:

> the foundation of Tikva was libertarian socialism with a strong admixture of anarcho-feminism, reconstructionist Judaism (although there were six temples, each representing a different Jewishness) and greeners. They would almost always choose the option that seemed to offer the largest degree of freedom (Piercy 1992: 548)

Unlike Jerusalem, Tikva is located on marginal land; territorial claims are not disputed. However, its inhabitants choose to pursue a lifestyle that is resolutely different from that of the multis who wish to extend their control over what is economically profitable and to instil a homogeneity of social practices to ensure the efficient functioning of their capitalist enterprises. Tikvans therefore seek to preserve their own independence by trading with the multis to a limited degree, but do not seem to have any strong desire to dismantle the oppressive system, pursuing a course of separatism rather than coalition with other anti-hegemonic groupings.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

The inhabitants of San Francisco in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* seem to embody the most fully theorised response to the threat of force of the three novels under discussion. The heart of their philosophy is that "means become ends" so they do not meet force with force, but instead with peaceful disobedience and an attitude of neighbourliness that is encompassed in the phrase: "There is a place set for you at our table, if you will choose to join us" (Starhawk 1993: 310). This society is the one that is the most preoccupied with the ethics of its response:

> "Is it nonviolence or psychological warfare?" Bird asked Lily ... "It's a question that's come up in the training. Is our goal to convert the enemy, turn them loving and peaceful and kind, or just to keep them continuously off balance?"
>
> "Our strategy," Lily said, "is to refuse to participate in the patterns that perpetuate violence. If we succeed, it is likely that we will do both – knock our opponents off balance and convert some of them" (Starhawk 1993: 285).

Of the three "utopian" cities under examination, San Francisco is the one whose revision was most intimately bound up with initiatory activism. The Uprising that is commemorated at the novel's opening was a popular one which included property damage and non-violent resistance, but which led to many deaths among the insurgents before the Stewards and their supporters withdrew from the city. So most of the inhabitants who are older than their mid-twenties know exactly the character of the threat they face. However, despite this awareness, the city was re-visioned with an explicit commitment to expending resources on food not weapons. There is a Defense *(sic)* Council, but it comprises "nine old women [who] guard the city with their magic" (Starhawk 1993: 148). The women listen and dream because they believe that the terrain on which they can defend the city is the "landscape of consciousness" (Starhawk 1993: 152). As

one Defense Councillor explains, war can be thought of as a massing of arms and troops but it can also be seen as: "a delicate web of interwoven choices made by human beings, made out of a certain consciousness" (loc.cit.). As she goes on to explain, that consciousness depends on convincing people that all the decisions are already made and there are no choices.

The narrative of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* demonstrates a comprehensive acknowledgement of the dangers of any investment in rationalism and science, and a recognition of how these were implicated in the holocaust. Thus the commitment to, for example, using resources to produce food rather than weapons, coupled with an invitation to the invading army to sit at their table, points to a fundamental commitment to sustainability, and a rejection of any escalationary logic which it is understood would produces further holocausts.

Langer and LaCapra on Representing the Holocaust

Laurence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies* analyses the oral testimonies of survivors to suggest that the Holocaust did irreparable damage to the memories and thus the subjectivity of its survivors, as well as fatally undermining any investment in human nature being oriented towards the good:

> This is the contradiction we still wrestle with nearly half a century after the event. The foundations of moral behavior remain in place, as the goal if not the reality of decent societies, while victims of the Nazi attempt to annihilate European Jewry tell tales of survival that reduce such moral systems to an irrelevant luxury. (Langer 1991: 121)

Langer wants to refute what he sees as a pernicious tendency in treatments of the Holocaust to undervalue the extremity of the horror perpetrated. This he pursues

through discussion of the ways in which memory and therefore the self has been damaged by the Holocaust experience. However, in order to sustain his argument, it is necessary to accept some fundamental presuppositions which are contested in this postmodern epoch, the most crucial of which is that there is such a thing as an undamaged memory, a 'whole' self, which could be subjected to burial, division, beseigement, taint and diminishment paradigmatically by the Holocaust.

If one takes the insights of psychoanalysis seriously, particularly those versions influenced by poststructuralism or postmodernism, then there is no such thing as a 'Real Self' which is unmediated by language and intersubjective experience. As individuals we are subjects-in-process, constantly working over our memories, re-narrating our subjectivities[50]. It would be invidious to suggest that the life experiences of holocaust survivors were not extreme and horrific, but perhaps their experiences of irreconcilable aspects of their memories might be taken as limit cases rather than exceptions. As LaCapra points out:

> The Holocaust has been both repressed and "canonized" in the recent past, and it often functions as a more or less covert point of rupture between the modern and the postmodern. Careful inquiry into it may reveal often concealed aspects of the genealogy of various postmodernisms and poststructuralisms, and it may also help to provide a different way of seeing and raising questions about certain pronounced tendencies in contemporary thought, such as the near fixation on the sublime or the almost obsessive preoccupation with loss, aporia, dispossession, and deferred meaning (LaCapra 1994: xi).

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[50] According to Anthony Elliott: "the split subject speaks a plurality of heterogeneous fantasies, symptoms and identifications, as Melanie Klein, S.W. Winnicott, Wilfred Bion, Heinz Kohut, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and many others have impressively shown" (Elliott 1996: 1).

It would do Langer's thoughtful work a disservice to categorise him with the canonizers of the Holocaust, but he does seem to assign it an overly privileged role in the composition of our contemporary psyches:

> "damaged personhood" is one of the inevitable prices we pay for having lived in the time of the Holocaust, provided we acknowledge our active role as audience to the content of these testimonies (Langer 1991: 201)

There is certainly a sense in which the Holocaust marks a point of rupture for what LaCapra calls 'contemporary thought', but damaged personhood in Langer's account might be recognised as being the normal condition of the modern Western subject whose fantasies of unity and plenitude are just that; fantasies which are unfulfillable. This is not to dispute the pain and the ongoing struggle of Holocaust survivors to achieve any degree of narrative composure of self, simply to suggest that this work is at the extreme end of what is required of any 'normal' subject of society in the modern West. Langer's focus on amassing individual survivor testimonies which constitute grim catalogues of traumatic facts, rather than setting them in the context of all the other social actors implicated in the historical events seems to mire him in hopelessness. With the turn to social theory, called for by Bauman in 1989 in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, particularly if it is informed by psychoanalysis as a study of the social subject, it is possible to find some grounds for hope. The feminist sf texts that I examine also embody this hope in the way they attempt to work through their responses to the founding catastrophes of their re-visioned futures.

According to Langer:

> For the former victims, the Holocaust is a communal wound that cannot heal. This is the ailing subtext of their testimonies, wailing beneath the convalescent murmur of their surface lives. We have little trouble

listening to that surface murmur. When the subtext of their story echoes
for us too as a communal wound, then we will have begun to hear their
legacy of unheroic memory and grasp the meaning for our time of a
diminished self (Langer 1991: 205)

The challenge that Langer poses might be deemed more or less fruitful

depending on which community Langer is inviting to share this wound. This is a

very serious question, because unless Langer intends this wound to be shared by

all inhabitants of the earth, he runs the risk of participating in what Bauman

identifies as the potential posthumous triumph of the Endlösung designers:

> They did not manage to turn the world against the Jews, but in their
> graves they can still dream of turning the Jews against the world, and thus
> – one way or another – to make the Jewish reconciliation with the world,
> their peaceful cohabitation with the world, all the more difficult, if not
> downright impossible. The prophecies of the Holocaust are not quite
> self-fulfilling, but they do fulfil – render plausible – the prospect of a
> world in which the Holocaust may never stop being prophesied, with all
> the deleterious and disastrous psychic, cultural and political consequences
> which such prophecy is bound to bring forth and propagate (Bauman
> 2000: 14-15).

One of the key risks that Bauman identifies is that: "the ethics of hereditary

victimhood reverse the logic of the law: the accused remain criminals until they

have proved their innocence..." (Bauman 2000: 12). As Bauman astutely notes:

> Memory of suffering does not assure the life-long dedication to the fight
> against inhumanity, cruelty and pain as such, wherever they happen and
> whoever are the sufferers. An equally probable outcome of the
> martyrdom is the tendency to draw an opposite lesson: that humankind is
> divided into victims and victimisers, and so if you are (or expect to be) a
> victim, your task is to reverse the tables ('the stronger lives'). It is this
> lesson that the spectre of the Holocaust whispers into many ears.
> (Bauman 2000: 12)

It is to counter this lesson that it is instructive to trace the 'performativity of

hope' where it appears in feminist sf. The attitude of neighbourliness that the

inhabitants of San Francisco adopt when threatened by the Southlanders, in *The*

Fifth Sacred Thing is an ethical response to this spectre and a corrective to what

Bauman calls the "*Schindler's List* version of the Holocaust" in which he claims:

> the sole stake of that most inhuman among human tragedies was to
> remain alive – while the humanity of life, and particularly its dignity and
> ethical value, was at best of secondary importance and above all of no
> consequence and was never allowed to interfere with the principal goal.
> The goal of staying alive took care of all moral concerns. (Bauman 2000:
> 8)

In *Representing the Holocaust* Dominick LaCapra elaborates the psychoanalytic

concept of 'working-through' which he believes has been "underemphasized and

relatively undeveloped in post-Freudian psychoanalysis" (LaCapra 1994: 205)

and even in Freud's own work. LaCapra argues that "psychoanalysis is

misconstrued as a psychology of the individual" and suggests rather that:

> its basic concepts should be understood as undercutting the binary
> opposition between the individual and society because these concepts
> apply to social individuals whose relative individuation or collective
> status is a problem for investigation and argument (LaCapra 1994: 173).

LaCapra wants to encourage historians and other critical intellectuals to put the

process of 'working-through' into operation in representing the Holocaust which

he suggests "is an extreme instance of a traumatic series of events that pose the

problem of denial or disavowal, acting-out, and working-through" (LaCapra

1994: 187). Trauma in these discussions carries both the sense of a grievous

injury, and the additional layer of meaning provided by Freud, who suggested

that: "the absence of appropriate affect – anxiety – is what leads to

traumatization rather than loss per se" (Santner, quoted byLaCapra 1994: 214).

LaCapra suggests that:

> Working through trauma brings the possibility of counteracting
> compulsive "acting-out" through a controlled, explicit, critically
> controlled process of repetition that significantly changes a life by

making possible the selective retrieval and modified enactment of unactualized past possibilities (LaCapra 1994: 174)

but LaCapra does not want to limit this process to the individual clinical situation. He wants to apply it to the academic endeavour and by extension to interventions in the social world outside the walls of the academy. Countering Langer's insistence on the importance of open wounds, LaCapra's use of working-through seems to provide a much more useful tool for making political interventions in a process of social transformation which would work to ensure that what he calls: "the scapegoating and victimization, in the treatment of certain oppressed others as impure elements or contaminants in the body politic" (LaCapra 1994: 171) should never happen again.

Holocaust as End of History or Radical Break

In the late twentieth century, even those intellectuals who did not subscribe to postmodern theses about the death of grand narratives or the end of history had had their faith in the enlightenment project of liberal rationality shaken. The Holocaust can be seen as the historical event (more properly series of events, or process) which did most to undermine this faith. Zygmunt Bauman suggests that "Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its necessary condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable (Bauman 2000/1989: 13). Bauman sums up his argument:

> (T)he most shattering of lessons deriving from the analysis of the 'twisted road to Auschwitz is that – in the last resort – the *choice of physical extermination as the right means to the task of* Entfernumg *was a product of routine bureaucratic procedures:* means-end calculus, budget balancing, universal rule of application (Bauman 2000/1989: 17).

The shattering effects of the Holocaust continue to reverberate in the humanities

and social sciences, and may indeed have prompted much of the epistemological

re-visioning which has been so deconstructive of modern certainties. Lawrence

Langer suggests that the Holocaust fatally undermined any investment in human

nature being oriented towards the good. Dominic LaCapra prefaces

Representing the Holocaust with a quotation from Geoffrey H. Hartman: "The

Holocaust threatens a secular as well as a religious gospel, faith in reason and

progress as well as Christianity ... It challenges the credibility of redemptive

thinking..." (LaCapra 1994: vii) and goes on to suggest that the Holocaust "often

functions as a more or less covert point of rupture between the modern and the

postmodern" (LaCapra 1994: xi). However, in 1989, Bauman could still

legitimately claim that as a profession sociologists had "succeeded in all but

forgetting it [the Holocaust], or shelving it away into the 'specialist interests'

area from where it stands no chance of reaching the mainstream of the

discipline" (Bauman 2000/1989: 11). He instanced a number of strategies which

one way or other defused the bomb of this shattering event so that:

> no major revision of our social theory is really necessary; our visions of
> modernity, of its unrevealed yet all-too-present potential, its historical
> tendency to not require another look, as the methods and concepts
> accumulated by sociology are fully adequate to handle this challenge – to
> 'explain it', to 'make sense of it', to understand. The overall result is
> theoretical complacency. Nothing, really, happened to justify another
> critique of the model of modern society that has served so well as the
> theoretical framework and the pragmatic legitimation of sociological
> practice.

> Thus far, significant dissent with this complacent, self-congratulating
> attitude has been voiced mostly by historians and theologians. Little
> attention has been paid to these voices by the sociologists (Bauman
> 2000/1989: 3)

Only limited, progress has been made by the turn of the twenty-first century to "treat the Holocaust as a resource, as an event which challenges existing categories of social and political analysis" (Fine and Turner 2000: 3). This belatedness may be explained in part by what LaCapra calls the mutually reinforcing relation between canonization and the repression of significant dimensions of the canonized object. Taking the Holocaust as an exemplar he suggests:

> In the case of traumatic events, canonization involves the mitigation or covering over of wounds and creating the impression that nothing really disruptive has occurred. Thus one forecloses the possibility of mourning, renders impossible a critical engagement with the past, and impedes the recognition of problems (including the return of the repressed) (LaCapra 1994: 23).

Narrative as Praxis

The Gate to Women's Country

The Gate to Women's Country is structured around a flash-back narrative, which maps the origins, events and consequences of Stavia's relationship with Chernon, a warrior-to-be. Because of her preoccupation with Chernon, Stavia breaks the ordinances of Women's Country, first as a child by loaning Chernon books forbidden to those in the garrison, and then as an adult meeting him outside the walls around Women's Country. Stavia thus comes prematurely to knowledge about her society to which only a select few are privy.

Referred to frequently in the narrative, although never exhaustively expressed, the ordinances are an assembly of explicit rules as well as customs, which regulate everything about Women's Country's social organisation, including sexuality, reproduction, child-rearing, education, labour and resource allocation.

Other than the script of the play, which is reproduced in the novel, the textuality of the ordinances is obscured. They form part of the schooling – a life-long project – of all inhabitants of Women's Country, but it seems probable they are largely communicated orally; books remaining from pre-convulsion times are scarce and resources do not seem to permit the production of new ones. As readers, we learn of the ordinances fragmentarily through character's speech, but they seem to carry the force of ingrained custom, of ritualisation rather than being open to debate. The ordinances comprise the way that history is embodied in Women's Country, and the emphasis on obedience to the extensive ordinances without any understanding of the larger plan being prosecuted by the Councilwomen seems to invite at least discontent if not rebellion. As Stavia learns from her mother:

> "We all have to do things we don't want to do," Morgot had said. "All of us here in Women's Country. Sometimes they are things that hurt us to do. We accept the hurt because the alternative would be worse. We have many reminders to keep us aware of that. The Council ceremonies. The play before summer carnival. The desolations are there to remind us of pain, and the well is there to remind us that the pain will pàss..." (Tepper 1989: 12).

The convulsion and its alleged causes are part of the common knowledge of the female inhabitants of Women's Country, and the servitors who co-habit with them, via the ordinances. The warriors who live in the garrisons outside the walls of Women's Country's cities are not normally party to this knowledge. Their education is limited to

> 'Romances, Stavia. Tales of battle. Saga. Designs for armor. Hygiene. Maintenance of garrison property. You know! Nothing about real things. Nothing about medicine, or engineering or management." (Tepper 1989: 78)

Medicine, engineering and management are 'women's studies' and keeping the warriors in ignorance of them is a key part of the ordinances. It is discussing this forbidden knowledge with Chernon and, most seriously, loaning him one of Women's Country's books that is the trespass which leads to Stavia's breaking of the ordinances, and in turn to her rape by Chernon and imprisonment by the Holylanders. By structuring the narrative around a very traditional plot sequence of equilibrium, conflict, disruption and recuperation, and focalising it largely through Stavia's particular implication in the narrative events *The Gate to Women's Country* articulates its argument that the social relations of Women's Country are superior to those of the garrison and the Holyland. If we identify with Stavia and her mistreatment by Chernon and subsequently by the Holylanders, it is hard not to have sympathy with the rigours of Women's Country's ordinances although our lingering doubts about their wisdom might be strongly reinforced when Stavia's rescue is followed by the revelation of the full extent of the Council Women's power and their breeding plan.

The Council Women's governance lies in ensuring that Women's Country's ordinances – the rules by which it operates – are adhered to by all of its citizens, whether or not they are party to Martha Evesdaughter's long-range vision. The ordinance that receives most prominence in the novel is the requirement that every schoolgirl learn the play *Iphigenia at Ilium*. The text of the play, performed annually by the Councilwomen, is reproduced in full in the novel and is interspersed with the chapters which pursue Stavia's story. Regular performance of the play is apparently one of the ways that the Councilwomen co-opt others to the rightness of their cause, and despite the tragedy that it recounts,

it is supposed to be staged as satire because, as Stavia's elder sister points out to

her, it is "'A commentary on particular attitudes of preconvulsion society'"

(Tepper 1989: 37). The first reference to the play is in the novel's second

chapter and the concluding line of the play immediately precedes the novel's

closing paragraph (Tepper 1989: 315). The centrality of the play to the social

theory that underpins the functioning of Women's Country is manifested in this

strong textual presence. Based on a Greek anti-war drama, *Iphigenia at Ilium*

dramatises two key points: that all women are sisters, and that war, always and

everywhere, is perpetrated by men. Women face an eternal double bind

according to the text of the play:

> "Dead or damned, that's the choice we make. Either you men kill us and
> are honoured for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it. Women
> don't have to make choices like that in Hades. There's no love there,
> nothing to betray" (Tepper 1989: 15).

In 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Donna Haraway affirms that: "Innocence, and the

corollary insistence on victimhood as the only ground for insight, has done

enough damage" (Haraway 1991a: 157) and goes on to suggest that perhaps

(even socialist) feminists have been:

> substantially guilty of producing essentialist theory that suppressed
> women's particularity and contradictory interests ... through unreflective
> participation in the logics, languages, and practices of white humanism
> and through searching for a single ground of domination to secure our
> revolutionary voice (Haraway 1991a: 160).

The projects of memory in *The Gate to Women's Country*, unfortunately seem to

embody this type of essentialist theory, and despite the reflection that is opened

up temporarily by Stavia's transgression of the ordinances, Women's Country

seems set fair to invert this single ground of domination through the furtherance

of their project of social transformation (or reformation). The innocence of the

women and hence the justice of their programme is what the "reminders" are designed to construct and reinforce, despite the fatal flaw in their logic; the garrisons were originally populated largely by women because of the dearth of male survivors of the convulsion, 'and it was they who instituted the rituals around which the warriors' social organisation revolves.

Morgot's speech to Michael, Stephon and Patras, when the Marthatown Council acts to quell the garrison uprising, has the force of ritual despite her opening gambit: "'Let me tell you some history, Michael'" (Tepper 1989: 301). The "history" that she relates has been simplified to its 'essence' which is that "'almost everyone in the world had died in a great devastation brought about by men'" (loc.cit.). Class, race, sexuality and any other particularity has been suppressed and occluded in this account. Women and children are only victims in this account; not bystanders or perpetrators. Fighting by men is represented as a biological flaw which must 'be bred out of our race' (Tepper 1989: 302) and the warriors are castigated as cowards for attempting to take over the city, yet fighting back by women is represented as something to which they are driven; self-defense.

This is the same message that is driven home by the Councilwomen every time they perform the play *Iphigenia at Ilium* which represents men as obsessed with killing and conquest, and women and children as their eternal victims. The gendered polarities of power and agency are represented as biologically founded and immutable in the ordinances, including the play, despite the inherent

contradiction that these projects of memory are as much constructions as reconstructions, instituting what they claim to critique.

The Gate to Women's Country therefore develops some compelling social theories but the commitment of Women's Country to dwelling on past wounds and fixing on a single coherent explanation for them which invites a totalizing plan of social and biological engineering undercuts confidence in the theorising. The text links the oppression of women firmly with the devastation of their environment and places responsibility for both in the hands of men. There is some recognition that it was men in positions of institutional power who were most to blame, but because the novel avoids any treatment of 'race' or class and because an analysis of difference other than gendered difference is absent from anything we learn of the ordinances, this recognitions seems to have become essentialised so that all men are destroyers and all women victims. That is the message of *Iphigenia at Ilium*.

So although *Gate to Women's Country* theorises that in order to transform society it is necessary both to eliminate men's domination of women, and to eliminate the waste of lives and resources caused by war, its theories do not take seriously enough the risk posed by simply transferring power to a different privileged few. The Council Women's self-naming as "the Damned Few" seems to be a somewhat perverse vanguardism and any guilt expressed about the ruthlessness of their actions does not extend to any suggestion that they will reconsider them.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, chapters alternate between two point of view characters, Shira, an unsuccessful corporate technician and Malkah, her grandmother, who is a world-renowned expert in the creation of "misinformation, pseudo-programs, falsified data ... the structures that protected Bases by misdirection ... called as a class chimera (a term Malkah herself had invented...)" (Piercy 1992: 61). The Shira chapters produce a fairly straightforward linear narrative, which begins with the hearing at which she loses custody of her son and ends with her son restored to her and her reinvention as a citizen of a Free Town. Shira's ex-husband, Josh, to whom custody was initially awarded, is represented as an emotionally damaged adult, whose childhood trauma of being orphaned is directly linked to the conflagration. His parents were:

> an Israeli couple, survivors of the Two Week War a terrorist had launched with a nuclear device that had burned Jerusalem off the map, a conflagration of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons that had set the oilfields aflame and destroyed the entire region. He had been orphaned at ten, wandering without a country in the periòd Jews called the Troubles, when the whole world blamed them for the disasters that put an end to oil dependence in a maelstrom of economic chaos. Nothing had come easy to him in his life (Piercy 1992: 3-4)

The trauma which is wreaked on Shira by her failed marriage and her husband's winning custody of her child has been prefigured by the trauma of the failure of her first romantic and sexual relationship with Gadi. Both Josh and Gadi have suffered because of the conflagration - Josh through the total loss of his home and family, and Gadi through the loss of his mother to a mutated virus, so they repeat that trauma in their relationships with Shira.

The Malkah chapters begin with a retelling of the legend of the Golem of Prague

– which Malkah claims is a family story – to Yod, the cyborg whose creation

Malkah was involved in and with whom Shira has a sexual relationship. The

Malkah sections of the novel take the form of a first person narrative mediated by

the Net; her interlocutor, initially, is Yod, but as the book draws to a close she

addresses posterity. Malkah presents a genealogy of anti-semitism and Jewish

scapegoating, which she links to her contemporary existence in "this fragile

modern ghetto" (Piercy 1992: 24) but also a genealogy of resistance in her tales

of the Prague ghetto, and through reference to the death camps (Piercy 1992: 25)

whose victims are memorialized in a synagogue in Prague. Malkah's story

telling is underpinned by a firm belief in the power of the word, and she suggests

that that has led to her becoming more of a mystic as she ages:

> "When I was young, sex and psychology obsessed me, fashion and flair;
> now that I come towards the end of my braided rope, I am fascinated by
> the holy and the powerful light that shines through history, the powers
> that enact their dramas through us, *the good and the evil, the damage and
> the repair* our wanderings and our choices commit. (Piercy 1992: 33-4).

So *Body of Glass* is not a simple story of eternal victimhood; there is an

acknowledgement of responsibility and of the need and capacity to make good,

as well as of the special perils faced by the Jewish Diaspora from hostile states or

militant Christianity. However, the trauma of the Nazi Holocaust is not reified as

the exemplar of anti-semitism at its most vile because of this longer historical

perspective. Piercy also makes much of economic reasons for anti-Semitism.

By juxtaposing the different narrative strategies which present these two focal

characters to the reader, *Body of Glass* enables us to identify with a range of

reasons for resistance or compliance to oppressive social relations. It also shows

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how individuals are not inherently resistant or compliant but are socially constructed as such and that as situations change, so can the subject-positions that individuals take up. The congruences between the historical and the futuristic narrative also demonstrate the way that social relations have a history that becomes deeply embedded in culture.

In *Body of Glass*, the projects of memory construct a community of resistance; a community that engages with the rest of the social world in a complex process of negotiation in which difference is simultaneously prized and threatened and which enables trade and communication to be conducted within the rules of the larger society, while providing a geographically bounded space in which norms are constructed in terms of non-hegemonic cultural and political identifications. The projects of memory include the playful and ironic, as well as the serious business of remembering trauma; for example, the chapter (Piercy 1992: 202-212) in which Yod the cyborg immerses himself in a multimedia feast of *Frankenstein* stories in a "magnificent adolescent funk" emphasises the constructed nature of 'histories' as he searches for an alternative origin story to the myth of the Golem offered to him by Malkah. Malkah herself acknowledges that:

> I cannot always distinguish between myth and reality, because myth forms reality and we act out of what we think we are; we know on many levels truths that are irrational as well as reasoned or experimental. Our minds help create the world we inhabit. I am myself a magician who last fall seduced a machine, so I can project myself back into the Maharal and say that he, too, may have created the being that folk memory records as his. (Piercy 1992: 34)

In telling the story of the Golem, Malkah acknowledges that she is constructing a single narrative from many different variations on the same story, with priority

given to the version handed down through her own family. She also points out that she herself has told the story with different levels of detail and nuance to her daughter and granddaughter. This telling is different because the moment of its telling has important resonances with the historical period in which the earlier myth is based, and because of the relationship between tale teller and listener of maker and made; the same relationship as existed between the Maharal and the golem. Taken together with the 'contemporary' narrative of Yod's creation and eventual (self) destruction, this project of memory is in fact a cautionary tale, a deconstruction of layers of meaning to find the reasons for intervening in history in a particular way and the risks that these interventions run. The stories stress the irreconcilability of 'goodness' and necessity and therefore eschew innocence and victimhood in favour of responsibility and agency. In 'Telling Stories About Stories', Piercy herself asserts: "Basically I believe history to be mythology, and thus a collection of stories we tell each other" (Piercy 1994: 2).

By focusing the narrative through two women who take their self-identity as members of a subordinate social and cultural group seriously, *Body of Glass* almost inevitably produces a more nuanced take on power relations than occurs in *Gate* which seems to have white, middle-class as its default assumption. But this nuance is at times undercut by the investments that these women have in discourses of modernity – of, for example 'talent' – which were not originally intended to have Jewish women as their privilege subjects. Unlike *Gate*, then, *Body of Glass* provides a rationale for women's investment in social relations that are ultimately understood to be oppressive. The two key institutions through which this investment is theorised are work and romance. Although it is

explicitly recognised that formal equality for women in the workplace rarely translates to genuinely equal opportunity or achievement, both Shira and Malkah see work (in the sense of paid labour) as a source of autonomous pleasure and pride, as well as desiring the status rewards it accrues. Shira is also heavily invested in discourses of romantic love as all-encompassing and self-defining, although this is hard to credit bearing in mind the pragmatic attitude to sexual relationships of Malkah, the woman who reared her. Perhaps Tikva is more embedded in the media culture of the 21st century than is entirely explicit.

Because *Body* situates itself explicitly in time – unlike *Gate* – and because it locates the worst effects of the conflagration in the Middle East, and not in North America, this text can theorise a much more explicitly historicised critique of domination that emphasises continuity over rupture. The use of extrapolation (and intertexuality with cyberpunk) means that the worst tendencies of current institutions can be extrapolated which simultaneously estranges readers from their current configurations. This means that the text can theorise the devastation of the environment – and gendered relations of domination – through a set of intersecting and overlapping power relations which consolidate wealth and privilege in the hands of a few and push the rest of the human population to a marginal and fragmented existence. The contradictions of capitalist production, which will secure expertise wherever it can, with patriarchal social relations means that male techies have access to privileges (such as term spouses) that are effectively unavailable, although permitted, for female techies. Such contradictions emphasise that even hegemonic power relations are not seamless and that relations of dominance are not simple analogies of each other. Shira's

character development over the course of the novel demonstrates a growing investment in such theories as she becomes more self-conscious about the privileges she has taken for granted and not simply the exclusions that have marked her. For example, she comes to realise that she has accepted the multis' definition of the Glop as an amorphous mass of disposable people, and recognises that they might have unexpected resources for resistance.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the conflagration is evoked as a progressive sequence of events that culminates in the military coup which provoked the San Francisco Uprising. The history of its eruption emerges from conversations protagonists have with interlocutors from the Southlands, and in fragments from interior monologues and descriptions of rituals. That the catastrophe is not reified by being encapsulated in a linear narrative seems key to the way in which this text is constructed with its focus on responsibility, reconstruction, repair and reconciliation (not necessarily in that order). It is the aftermath of the catastrophe that is evoked; the changes to San Francisco's geography, reference to a climate which we can infer has changed for the worse, and on page 3 a mention of "the bodies mummifying in mass graves over the East Bay hills" which may be a consequence of the "big epidemic" mentioned separately on the same page, or of some other trauma. There is also repeated reference to the loss of significant friends, lovers and family members of the novel's key protagonists; most of the losses seem to be linked with the "conflagration" in one way or another. However, the ritual which memorialises the Uprising also refers to 'five thousand years of postponed results' (Starhawk 1993: 17) setting the recent

losses in the context of thousands of years of "callousness toward the earth and toward other human beings" suggesting collective responsibility for and implication in disaster rather than innocence or victimhood.

The Southlands and its rulers, the Stewards, do seem to bear more responsibility for the catastrophe, in the sense that they are still perpetuating it, and have not learnt the lessons of "unwaste" that the San Franciscans have. In fact:

> "The Stewards control the water supplies; that's how they took control of the government in '28. The Millennialists backed them with funds and religious prophecies, and in return they put into law most everything the Millennialists believe. You've got to work for the Stewards and obey the Millennialist Purities, or you can't even buy water and you lose your right to eat" (Starhawk 1993: 72).

The projects of memory in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* seem specifically designed to celebrate a culture of difference and diversity. The novel opens with the preparations for and celebration of the "Day of the Reaper" and the twentieth anniversary of the Uprising. The scene is set for this ceremony which affirms and reaffirms the social philosophy of the San Franciscans with descriptions of the hill on which it takes place which is "dotted with shrines to Goddesses and Gods, ancestors and spirits ... [which] encompassed an eclectic mixture of traditions" (Starhawk 1993: 11). Maya's remembrances of her family which are evoked by the sound of a young woman chanting in Hebrew and contain references to priorities given to faith over politics or vice versa, and the playful way in which she and Sam discuss heresy and honoring ancestors suggest that these are memories which are worked through in order to serve the living and to bind them to common purposes, without suppressing particularity.

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The anniversary of the Uprising is used to remind people of what they have been able to achieve by working together and what is yet to be done, rather than dwelling on their status as injured parties. Like Piercy, the San Franciscans seem to recognise that: "It is an important task to situate ourselves in the time line so that we may be active in history" (Piercy 1994: 1) but they do not insist on open wounds, rather on healing; themselves and the earth.[51]

As with both *Gate* and *Body*, in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the most important thing to be produced through projects of memory is a sense of a community that is invested in a common purpose. In stark contrast to *Gate*, and in common with *Body* but in an even more nuanced fashion, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* envisions community as a diverse, contestable constituency that defines its own boundaries by a process of debate, rather than by patrolling them, as in Tikva, or by building walls, as in Women's Country (even if they do have gates in them). For example, the ritual to celebrate the Uprising draws participants from many smaller cultural, occupational or faith communities that make up the larger geographical communities; Miwok and Ohlone, the Teachers' Guild, Gardeners' Guild, Water Council, representatives of the four sacred things. These varied groups are characterised as "interlocking circles" (Starhawk 1993: 16-19). Maya has a key role in the ceremony; telling the story of the events of the day of the Uprising. Maya concludes her story of this act of resistance that precipitated the new social organisation in San Francisco with an exhortation:

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[51] In *Redemption and Utopia*, Michael Löwy refers to the Jewish (cabbalistic) idea of *Tikkun*, a "polysemic term for *redemption (Erlösung)*, restoration, reparation, reformation and the recovery of lost harmony" (Lowy 1992: 2). Although the version of spirituality most frequently referred to in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* is an eclectic earth-based spirituality incorporating Wicca, and many other female deities, the essence of the belief system seems remarkably close to this idea of *Tikkun*. It is interesting that in *Body of Glass* Malkah is a kabbalist.

"Remember this story. Remember that one act can change the world. When you turn the moist earth over and return your wastes to the cycles of decay, and place the seed in the furrow, remember that your are planting your freedom with your own hands ... " (Starhawk 1993: 18).

Madrone's colleague, Sam, responds to this sceptically:

"One act, and about a thousand hours of meetings," Sam whispered.
"Cynic," Madrone said. "Don't you know a good story when you hear one?"
"It's a great story. It's just that it bears so little resemblance to the actual history I remember" (Starhawk 1993: 18).

It seems that memories are open to reworking in this society, and that the reworking is transparent. The importance of memories is their capacity to build consensus and to be built through consensus. There is also the recognition that remembering is insufficient as a social intervention; that it must be harnessed to agency and responsibility and used to inform policy and action, if it is to be of value. This type of practice seems to be informed by the type of theory that LaCapra claims is related to Freud's notion of working through, which he says:

would prompt an attempt to combine criticism and self-criticism with a practice of articulation that would resist redemptive totalization. It would not deny the irreducibility of loss or the role of paradox and aporia. But instead of being compulsively fixated on or symptomatically reinforcing impasses, it would engage a process of mourning that would attempt, however self-questioningly or haltingly, to specify its haunting objects and (even if only symbolically) to give them a "proper" burial. It would also involve a tense interaction between seeming opposites such as stability and the risk of trauma – an interaction that would raise the question of desirable alternatives to one's object of criticism, notably in terms of the relationship between normative limits and transgression (LaCapra 1994: 192).

This tense interaction seems to inform the subjectivities of each of the key protagonists in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. For example, as Maya looks round the crowd celebrating the achievements since the Uprising she reflects:

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> This is good ... this is what I worked for all my life, and you too,
> Johanna, you too, Rio. But how many more must we lose, like Consuelo,
> like Sandy? Like Brigid and Marley and Jamie and, yes, maybe Bird?
> What is this worth if we can't preserve it, protect it? (Starhawk 1993: 16).

There is a genuine acknowledgement of loss, as well as the state of anxiety that is

necessary, qua Freud, to stave off future trauma, yet it does not undermine the

commitment to reparation. The ceremony has specified its haunting objects very

clearly:

> Those of us who are old have seen fire destroy our drought-baked cities
> and smoke eclipse the sun. We've seen rich croplands shrivel into glass-
> hard deserts, and the earth itself collapse on its emptied water table. We
> have seen diseases claim our children and our lovers and our neighbors.
> We know it can happen again.
>
> We hope for a harvest, we pray for rain, but nothing is certain ...
> (Starhawk 1993: 17).

In *Body of Glass,* the community which seems to have worked through its trauma

most effectively is that of Safed, which gets much less textual attention than

Tikva, the glop, or Y-S (the multi battling for control of Yod through Shira).

Nili, the messenger send out from Safed informs the Tikvans:

> "We are a joint community of the descendants of Israeli and Palestinian
> women who survive. We each keep our religion, observe each other's
> holidays and fast days. We have no men. We clone and engineer genes.
> After birth we undergo additional alteration. We have created ourselves
> to endure, to survive, to hold our land. Soon we will begin rebuilding
> Ycrushalaim" (Piercy 1992: 267).

Although the detail of the working-through has to be inferred from this passage,

that a joint community descended from Israelis and Palestinians is preparing to

rebuild Jerusalem suggests strongly that its haunting objects have been given a

proper burial. By keeping their own religions, yet observing each others' feast

and fast days, the residents of Safed's attitude to cultural memory demonstrates the kind of possibility that LaCapra identifies:

> of counteracting compulsive "acting-out" through a controlled, explicit, critically controlled process of repetition that significantly changes a life by making possible the selective retrieval and modified enactment of unactualized past possibilities (LaCapra 1994: 174).

By the end of *Body of Glass*, it appears that both Malkah, who has travelled to Safed for surgery to restore her eyesight, and Shira, who has taken over from her grandmother as Base Overseer, have also worked-through the traumas which caused them to participate in the creation of Yod. This working-through also appears to have been enacted at a social and cultural level as Tikva has begun to build alliances with the Glop and with Safed rather than turning its back on the world, as had been the case prior to the conflict with Y-S. The repetition-compulsion, which led to the creation of a weapon, supposedly to protect the community but which actually drew fire towards it has been forcibly worked-through because of Yod's self-consciousness and ability to demonstrate the wrongness of creating a sentient being purely as a weapon. Nili's example of reaching out to form alliances at the same time as protecting the security of her own community has also provided the Tikvans with a model for agency and responsibility that does not inhere in hereditary victimhood or what Bauman calls "a signed-in-advance and *in blanco* certificate of moral righteousness" (Bauman 2000: 12). Avram seems to be an example of what Bauman calls 'children manqués' who: "cannot be fulfilled unless the world they live in reveals its hostility, conspires against them – and, indeed, contains the possibility of another Holocaust", and who "draw a sense-giving reassurance from every sign of hostility towards them; and they are eager to interpret every move of those

around them as the overt or latent expression of such hostility". He is denied the opportunity to work-through his trauma (although in common with the children manqués, it seems that he has not "been, personally, the butt of anybody's wrath and wrongdoing"), because in a moment of sacrificial self-determination, Yod destroys himself and his maker to ensure that there will be no more of his kind (Piercy 1992: 13). Although Shira and Malkah are also implicated in the category of children manqués because of their participation in the creation of the cyborg, they are represented as deploring his / its use as a weapon – without self-definition – and in providing programming and socialisation to balance out his / its aggressive tendencies. They also work-through their fortress mentality by entering into coalition with Safed and the Glop in joint action that Avram is prepared to dismiss. In fact, Tikva itself seems to have provided Shira with the resources to work through her personal relationship-related traumas:

> she could stroll through the streets of her town while the storm beat on the wrap ... when she first arrived here, feeling broken. Simply being back here had begun to heal her at once: here on the shores of the ravaged poisoned sea slowly cleansing itself of human waste, here people tried to live with minimal damage, making their choices together (Piercy 1992: 484).

The Gate to Women's Country is the least hopeful of these three novels, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that the inhabitants of Women's Country seem to be <u>more</u> secure than either Tikva or San Francisco, and despite, or again, possibly because of the fact that of the three locales it has the most fully theorised programme of social amelioration based on its response to its holocaustal history. The final paragraph of the novel makes this hopelessness explicit, despite Morgot's claim that they are working towards "no more wars":

> Stavia leaned over Joshua, putting her cheek against his own, her eyes fixed on the half-empty garrison ground, seeing in her mind the thousands

who had marched away. Gone away, oh gone away. Wetness ran
between her face and his as he – servitor, warrior, citizen of Women's
Country, father – as he wept.
Wept for them all. (Tepper 1989: 315)

Conclusion

Each of the sf texts discussed develops its theories about social relations and the

possibility for social transformation in the context of the crisis posed to

Enlightenment investments in progress by the catastrophic events of the

twentieth century and in particular the Holocaust. This narrative praxis bears

more in common with Kahane's suggestion that narrative can provide a way out

of paralysis and trauma, than with Langer's insistence on unending lament. The

societies represented in the sf texts do not take the catastrophic ruptures in

history and social relations as an excuse to give up on the project of social

transformation, but instead reshape their approach to transformation by

addressing the causes of catastrophe.

The Gate to Women's Country reveals an attempt to work through the effects of

the holocaust and a commitment to a utopian project of ending wars. However,

despite the stated intention to end violence, the ethical and political project of

Women's Country involves a fundamental re-inscription of many of the

assumptions which appear to have led to both the Holocaust and the Convulsion.

One could suggest that the over-identification of the Council Women with their

lost ancestors, at the expense of their recognition of their own non-victimhood is

at the root of this re-inscription, as well as their inability to recognise that the

patriarchal investment of the modern project was 'essential' to it and not an

irrational abberation. Relating back to John K. Roth's question about knowledge

and the holocaust, Women's Country is ultimately revealed as a world where the knowledge which underpinned the holocaust and the strategies for avoiding future holocausts are confined to the elite few, rather than, for example, underpinning a democratic project in envisioning radical alternatives. This enables most of the inhabitants of Women's Country to exist in a state of apparent innocence, while the "Damned Few", with knowledge of their own implication in the perpetuation of violence and murder, are left to engage in the rational containment of the brutality and cruelty of their activities.

In *Body of Glass*, the preservationist ethos underlying the existence of Tikva represents a defensive response to the challenges posed by holocaust. Malkah and Shira's investments in romance and work point to self-interest above any intense commitment to revision the world, although there are hints that their association with the separatists of Safed and with the New Gangs in the Glop will encourage them to widen their notions of a community that they want to preserve. There is a central tension in *Body of Glass* between an investment in militant community protection and a critique of patriarchal and nationalist militarism. Malkah's creation of chimeras to protect Tikva's base, and Nili's ability to maintain a tight perimeter suggest that there is an important difference between feminist defensiveness and masculinist investments in the pleasures of aggression. However, the stress on the 'cautionary tale' aspect of the story of the Golem and of Yod's place in the narrative suggest a textual recognition of this central tension and the need to go on interrogating history in order to remake it for the better.

It is in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* where we see a move beyond a defensive, self-preservationist ethos, where the inhabitants of the City engage in discussion, and ultimately in very risky action, drawing on the knowledges that they have developed in working through the social, psychological and ecological traumas of the holocaust to open up their way of life to those from the South who would wish to perpetrate a further holocaust. Here there is an implicit recognition that future holocausts are inevitable unless there is a 'struggle forever' to resist such eventualities. The narrative of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* embodies a rejection of a hegemonic rationalism, militarism and any continuity of the oppressive aspects of the Enlightenment project, through its careful and thoughtful working through of the genealogy of the holocaust. This is embodied in post-modern collective rituals of story-telling that link mourning for the past with a recognition of its implication in the present, and a hopeful orientation to the future and a liberatory pedagogy which provides all citizens with access to this genealogy.

Chapter 4

Technologies of Gender I: Feminism and Sexuality

> Within the three years since I wrote "Compulsory Heterosexuality" –
> with this energy of hope and desire – the pressures to conform in a
> society increasingly conservative in mood have become more intense.
> The New Right's messages to women have been, precisely, that we are
> the emotional and sexual property of men, and that the autonomy and
> equality of women threaten family, religion and state. The institutions by
> which women have traditionally been controlled – patriarchal
> motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory
> heterosexuality – are being strengthened by legislation, religious fiat,
> media imagery, and efforts at censorship (Rich 1986: 24).

> Social movements, feminism included, move toward a vision; they cannot
> operate solely on fear. It is not enough to move women away from danger
> and oppression; it is necessary to move toward something: toward
> pleasure, agency, self-definition. Feminism must increase women's
> pleasure and joy, not just decrease our misery. It is difficult for political
> movements to speak for any extended time to the ambiguities,
> ambivalences and complexities that underscore human experience. Yet
> movements remain vital and vigorous to the extent that they are able to
> tap this wellspring of human experience. Without it, they become
> dogmatic, dry, compulsive, and ineffective. To persist amid frustrations
> and obstacles, feminism must reach deeply into women's pleasure and
> draw on this energy (Vance 1992 (1984): 24).

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that revisioning sex, gender and sexuality is key to the

utopian social transformations in process in the feminist science fictions. The

epigrams that head this chapter predate the first publication date of the earliest

novel by between approximately five and ten years. I have chosen them

deliberately to give some sense of the more extended and extensive feminist

conversations into which the novels are intervening, and the passion with which

they were and are infused. I also use them to gesture towards a period of recent

history in which feminists felt embattled from both without and within; from

conservative backlash in the wider social and political arenas and from painful

splits over the implications of theory for individual practice, and of individual

practice for collective politics. The novels emerge from that period of struggle

and each articulate different ways of coming to terms with it. I want therefore to

situate the discussion of the novels on the terrain of intimate relationships, and

their implication in / for feminist social theory and praxis. Together with the next

chapter which focuses on mothering, this chapter examines ways in which the

feminist science fictions have revisioned formative subjective experiences in

order to be able to imagine liberatory social transformation. In this chapter I give

particular attention, therefore, to the passionate experience of sexuality and the

impassioned debates about sexuality that feminists have had with each other. I

have called these chapters 'Technologies of Gender I' and 'Technologies of

Gender II' following Teresa de Lauretis's development of Foucault to

comprehend the recognition that:

> gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in
> human beings, but "the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and
> social relations," in Foucault's words, by the deployment of "a complex
> political technology" (de Lauretis 1987: 3).

I will draw my argument through a focus on the ways in which heterosexual

relations and their intersections with gendered power are theorised in each of the

three novels, focusing particularly on the links made between masculinity and

(sexual) domination. In the futures that each of these novels revision, the

connections between men, masculinity and domination are theorised with crucial

similarities and even more vital differences and, I argue, the only novel that

focalises a significant proportion of its narrative through a male character, *The*

Fifth Sacred Thing, is the one that most successfully theorises the possibility of

revisioning masculinity, and thereby gender and (heter)osexuality, in a socially

transformative manner. This narrative strategy enables epistemological and political manoeuvres to be effected that are not possible when men and masculinity are represented as problematic only for female protagonists, i.e. women. In fact, the social theories which are articulated in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* are most compatible with post-structuralist feminist theory (as developed within the academy), despite its explicit dialogue with ecofeminist interlocutors, which might lead some feminists to expect its theories to therefore be predicated on essentialism. Conversely, the novel which is most abjecting of the possibility of lesbian existence, *The Gate to Women's Country*, develops determinist theories of the type that have come to be known as 'essentialist' in a convenient, if reductive shorthand, and associated with radical feminism and/or cultural feminism[52]. I make this point because Teresa de Lauretis suggests that accusations of essentialism have served as a cover for attacking lesbian feminists, while Noel Sturgeon's list of "quintessentialists" *are all associated with lesbian feminism*. These observations suggest, therefore, that the discursive field of feminist theory is much more complexly articulated and interwoven than many accounts acknowledge, and that identification with particular theoretical critiques or political praxes does not map onto particular 'identities' or standpoints quite so neatly as labels like 'radical feminist' or 'Marxist feminist' seem(ed) to suggest[53]. Of course, in some senses the ability to accommodate that complexity accounts for the great attraction towards poststructuralism experienced by many feminist theorists, so that I may appear to be stating a banal truism. But I argue

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[52] N.B. Katie King suggests that Alice Echols produces her object of knowledge "radical feminism" by splitting it off from (abjecting) "cultural feminism", thus displacing onto cultural feminism those attributes that I argue poststructuralist feminism displaces onto radical feminism (King 1994b).

that poststructuralist feminist critiques of essentialising tendencies of aspects of, for example, 'radical feminism' have spilled over onto those aspects of 'radical feminism' which performed absolutely crucial groundbreaking theoretical analyses. I am concerned that this may diminish the theoretical resources on which feminists can draw as it may take many years of aspiring to membership of a feminist (social theoretical) interpretive community before individuals find the courage – or even feel the need – to read outside a very tightly bounded canon.

This observation links conveniently to consideration of the second purpose of this chapter, which is to discuss a number of the ways that certain standpoints within feminism have been abjected. In this chapter, I intend to use my readings of the fictions both to refer back to these feminist standpoints and to discuss how particular aspects of them became abjected. I have already suggested that a particular version of feminist social theory – poststructuralist in orientation – has become hegemonic in the academy to the exclusion – explicit or implicit – of other versions. Through my choice of epigrams I want to acknowledge that this claim centres one synchronic snapshot of myriad diachronic contested practices. By focusing on sexuality I also hope to draw out the way that theories are embodied in praxis – and vice versa – and thus to highlight my contention that interpretive communities are formed, disrupted, and reformed through passionate identification with and / or disavowal of prior interpretations or theories. The heteroglossic character of the fictions under examination is such that the traces of

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[53] In "A Cyborg Manifesto", Donna Haraway, famously argued: "It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective – or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun" (Haraway 1991a: 155).

many of the abjected or disavowed theories, and palpable reasons for identifying with them are embodied alongside perspectives which are generally considered to be more acceptable to a contemporary interlocutor, disciplined at a later moment in feminist history.

In what follows I will consider the complex intersections of sex, gender and sexuality one novel at a time, and in chronological order. This will enable me to tease out the different projects of revisioning heterosexuality that each text theorises is required for a more desirable future. First however, I will briefly discuss some of the conceptual distinctions between sex and gender that feminisms have deployed in their bid to dispel the myth that sex equals destiny. I will then introduce my discussion of the novels with an analysis of the way that the concepts of sex and gender were carried through discussions of intimate relations allied to the recognition that 'the personal is political'. In the examination of the novels that follows I will link my readings of the theories outlined in the novels to key feminist critiques of the intersections between sexuality and domination.

The Sex/Gender Distinction

Common-sense usages of the terms sex and gender would suggest that they have distinct meanings, as follows. Gender refers to the different cultural attributes which are expected/required of one or other of two biologically sexed classes of human beings — men or women. Biological sex is nowadays popularly considered to be a function of genetics, manifested externally through different sex organs and secondary sexual characteristics. That this neat distinction breaks

down as soon as it is subjected to any sustained analysis is a case that has been repeatedly made. Historically, English-speaking feminists have used the term, gender, to indicate that biology is not destiny; to suggest that so-called sex roles are historically and culturally contingent, and therefore available for reconstruction – or more recently, perhaps, deconstruction. Joan W Scott suggests that:

> In its most recent usage, 'gender' seems to have first appeared among American feminists who wanted to insist on the fundamentally social quality of distinctions based on sex. The word denoted a rejection of the biological determinism implicit in the uses of such terms as 'sex' or 'sexual difference'. 'Gender' also stressed the relational aspect of normative definitions of femininity (Scott 1988: 29).

So the distinction appears to be part of the 'utopian impulse' in feminism; by insisting on the plasticity of gender, feminists hoped to break free from conservative assumptions that social relations were simply the outcome of biological imperatives and to activate change. However, since the mid 1980s, there has also been growing doubt as to the conceptual utility of the term, and its problematic correspondence with sexual difference. This is in part due to the work of black and lesbian feminists, who have critiqued the equation of 'woman' with white, western, middle-class heterosexual women, and in part due to the work of theorists variously categorised as post-structuralist or post-modern who have reconceptualised the sexual difference binary as one of the cultural meta-narratives which structure the 'thinkability' of certain things. Judith Butler's work has been particularly influential; she published two key monographs concurrently with the period which the feminist science fictions span (Butler 1990; Butler 1993). As Butler states:

> gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is

produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts. (Butler 1993: 7).

Butler's thesis that these discursive / cultural means have material effects is dramatically borne out by feminist empirical research. For example, in *Feminism and Deconstruction*, Diane Elam refers to an essay by Susan Kessler, 'The Medical Construction of Gender' which suggests that doctors see their role as revealing the natural sex of newborn infants by completing their genitals if they are not unambiguously female or male. In discovering this 'natural' sex, Kessler observes that doctors tend to refer to an "underdeveloped phallus" rather than an "overdeveloped clitoris" which suggest that an infant is first of all male until proven otherwise. And more often than not, he is proven otherwise. "What is ambiguous," she notices, "is not whether this is a penis but whether it is 'good enough' to remain one" (Elam 1994: 13). So the discursive prioritisation of the male gender produces the female gender as fundamentally inferior or lacking. Despite the attention given by second-wave feminists to the socially constructed character of gender relations, the maintenance of the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender built an essentialist logic into feminist accounts of social construction, as Diana Fuss points out in *Essentially Speaking* (Fuss 1989). So a distinction that was theorised to provide strategic resources for women's agency in social and political transformation included a latent attachment to fixity and foundations. This theoretical sticking point made theorising a critical *and* transformative politics of sexuality an extremely fraught and painful business for feminists.

Theorising (Hetero)Sexuality and (Fe)Male Dominance

It is only possible to sketch in the outlines of twenty years of feminist theorising on the issues of sexuality in this section, however, this will serve to set the context of the problematics with which the novels grapple. Jackson and Scott claim that discussions of sexuality at the beginning of the second wave of feminism focused on women's struggles in relationships with men. They argue that many feminists, previously associated with the New Left, combined that movement's critique of marriage and monogamy, dissociation of sex from reproduction and emphasis on sexual pleasure and freedom with a feminist critique of the coercive and predatory aspects of male sexuality as well as with the priority given to male pleasure via penetrative sex (Jackson and Scott 1996: 5, 12)[54].

However, lesbian feminists urged heterosexual feminists to move towards a more expansive critique of heterosexuality as an institution; Jackson and Scott cite the Radicalesbians 1970 production of "a paper entitled 'Woman-identified woman'" as one of the first statements which "located lesbianism as a form of resistance to patriarchy" and suggested that heterosexual women's investment of energies in relationships with individual men held back their own liberation and that of all women (Jackson and Scott 1996: 13). Although lesbian separatism was only one expression of heterogeneous critiques of heterosexuality, Jackson and Scott suggest that: "the idea that heterosexual feminists were traitors to the cause" was

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[54] According to Ruth Rosen, for example, Anne Koedt's essay, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" which was originally published in 1968 became "an instant feminist classic" and "the faked orgasm" became a metaphor for sexual exploitation, although she also notes that: "Koedt's essay provoked countless debates, discussions, and disagreements among feminists" (Rosen 2001: 150).

in circulation from the early 1970s[55]. This formulation provoked defensiveness among heterosexual feminists; for example, much of Lynne Segal's work is constructed in dialogue with this notion; both through what Bakhtin would call hidden polemic, and through extremely overt polemic (Segal 1987; Segal 1990).

Adrienne Rich's essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' was one landmark text in the bid to articulate a critique of heterosexuality as an institution that disempowers women. Building on earlier work by lesbian feminists, she argued that heterosexual feminists needed to take more account of the theoretical resources developed by lesbian feminists in order to develop a more adequate account of social relations between the sexes. She suggested that psychoanalytic perspectives which cite men's 'fear' of women's sexuality as the reason they need to control it are improbable:

> It seems more probable that men really fear not that they will have women's sexual appetites forced on them or that women want to smother and devour them, but that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional – therefore economic – access to women *only* on women's terms, otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix (Rich 1986: 43).

As the selected quotation suggests, Rich's is a materialist analysis of male power, that draws on work by a range of feminists who have documented sexualised oppression. However, because her argument was in dialogue with psychoanalytically oriented feminists who seek rationales for 'disordered' social

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[55] In a footnote to "Sexual Skirmishes and Feminist Factions", Jackson and Scott pose this interesting distinction:

> The term "radical feminism" is now often used to include revolutionary feminism although the distinction between them is a politically important one. Both analyse patriarchy as a system of male domination and are critical of heterosexuality. Revolutionary feminists, however, give far greater causal priority to sexuality in explaining women's subordination. While radical feminists see lesbianism as a potential form of resistance to patriarchy, it is only revolutionary feminists who feel that political lesbianism is a *necessary* strategy for feminists. Hence it is the latter who are critical of those feminists who remain heterosexual (Jackson and Scott 1996: 29).

relations between the sexes in the mother-child relationship, she suggested that it would be more appropriate for feminists to ask why either sex would ever redirect their search for love and tenderness from the sex of their earliest caregiver. Rich was careful to assert that she was not arguing that mothering is a sufficient cause of lesbian existence; but her concerns with whether "in a different context or other things being equal, women would *choose* heterosexual coupling and marriage" (Rich 1986: 28) *can* be read as implying that women have an innate (lesbian) sexuality that is deformed by male power over women. However, in fact, Rich left open the question – and indeed invited others to investigate further – "why some women never, even temporarily, turn away from 'heretofore primary relationships' with other females" (Rich 1986: 47).

Through her references to the 'lesbian continuum' Rich argued that there are rich sources of resistance to male power to be drawn from women identifying with women, whether or not they have "consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" (Rich 1986: 51). Adrienne Rich's vision was absolutely joyous and inspiring, and captured early-second wave feminist perspectives that if women transform themselves they can transform the world – this woman-centredness was utopian. In developing the idea of lesbian continuum, I suggest that Rich was creating a political metaphor akin to Haraway's cyborg, rather than positing some mystical or essentialist link between women. Rich's essay is explicitly addressed to feminist interlocutors conceived as participants in a collective project, but also recognises that that collective project is fissured by difference. This tremendous passion for transforming women was thought to be sufficient to uncouple notions of sex and gender as destiny. However in linking

compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence, a socially transformative vision is coupled uneasily with a certain kind of essentialism. The underlying pessimism of radical/revolutionary feminism is that men and masculinity are fixed, immovable objects. Patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality benefit men, raising questions of why men would then work for social transformation. If possibilities for social transformation lie only with women, separatism is a logical response.

In early second-wave feminism, the term 'patriarchy' was mobilised to connote an overarching system of male dominance which seemed theoretically legitimate bearing in mind the extensive activism and empirical research conducted by feminists which revealed the pervasiveness of male power over women. The term has largely fallen out of favour in postmodern and poststructuralist feminist social theory, however, as it is taken to connote a reductive focus on sexual difference, without recognising that other differences are also implicated in inequality and oppression. Some feminists have, however, insisted on the continued utility of the term, notably Sylvia Walby who describes it as: "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1990: 214, quoted in (Andermahr, et al. 2000: 194).

In 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', for example, Rich refers to Kathleen Gough's anthropological essay, 'The Origin of the Family' which enumerates eight characteristics of male power including sexual domination, expropriation of women's labour and the control or removal of their children, amongst others. She also refers to Catherine MacKinnon's work on

sexual harassment in the workplace and the ways that because they are already

economically disadvantaged that:

> women – whether waitresses or professors – endure sexual harassment to
> keep their jobs and learn to behave in a complaisantly and ingratiatingly
> heterosexual manner because they discover this is their true qualification
> for employment, whatever the job description (Rich 1986: 41).

Andermahr et al also point out that:

> Radical feminist politics were responsible for uncovering the extent of
> violence against women, for the women's refuge movement, the setting
> up of Rape Crisis centres, and 'reclaim the night' marches (Andermahr, et
> al. 2000: 223)

Critiques of the concept of patriarchy and of the insistence on male oppression

having primacy over all other forms of oppression gave way to an insistence on

the ways in which classed and racialised hierarchies intercut sexed or gendered

hierarchies. With the prevalence of Foucauldian notions of power and their take-

up by poststructuralist feminists large-scale structural accounts of oppression

seemed to lose theoretical favour. However, this does not mean that women

ceased to experience being disadvantaged by the power that accrues to men or to

struggling in their intimate and other social relations between perceiving

gendered inequality as harmful to women and yet having personal and political

emotional allegiances with men. These struggles became particularly poignant in

the 1980s when conservative social relations were reasserted in the USA and the

UK via the political arena and when economic recessions deepened existing

inequalities and oppressions.

In the forthcoming discussions of the novels I will explore the ways in which the

texts revision intimate social relations in debate with three key feminist

perspectives on gender and sexuality. The first is the pessimism about sexuality

which assumes that erotic sexual relations are impossible without gender differentiation, even when sexual desire is taken to be socially constructed rather than the inevitable product of biological sexual difference. The second is one potential response to this pessimism, which led feminists who felt their sexuality abjected by the vanguardism of lesbian separatists to attempt to reconceptualise heterosexuality as egalitarian and therefore compatible with feminist politics. The third is the poststructuralist reformulation of the problematic that is associated particularly with Judith Butler, which sees much more potential for undermining the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality and gendered power relations.

The Gate to Women's Country

In *The Gate to Women's Country*, as already outlined, a discourse of separate spheres of masculinity and femininity is inscribed in the geography and architecture of both Women's Country and of the Holyland, whilst the equation of masculinity with patriarchy is figured both by the warriors who garrison each town in Women's Country and by the Holylander men whom Stavia encounters on her research trip outside Women's Country. The main difference between the two societies is that this radical separatism is simultaneously breached and strengthened in Women's Country by the return through the eponymous Gate of those men who have renounced the violent domination of women, suggesting that the potential for reintegration of the two genders in one society might one day be possible, albeit on women's terms.

Wendy Pearson, in her queer analysis of the novel suggests that the text completely erases sexuality because of the equation of Women's Country with Hades, in the text of *Iphigenia at Ilium*, and the repetition of the line from the play: "'There is no fucking in Hades'"(Pearson 1996; Tepper 1989:58 and 73). However, I would read the quotation differently. I suggest that what it means is that domination is not eroticised in Women's Country, at least amongst those who are responsible for furthering its utopian project, the Council Women and select servitors. The only sexual encounter represented in the entire novel, however, is Chernon's "not ... precisely rape" of Stavia (Tepper 1989: 237), although sexual infatuation with warriors is articulated as the normal condition of adolescent females; "the result of biological forces incident to racial survival" (Tepper 1989: 41). The sex between Chernon and Stavia is absolutely central to the plot of *The Gate to Women's Country* as her resultant unplanned pregnancy is the catalyst for Morgot's revelation of Women's Country's human breeding programme. Despite her training in both self-defense and sexual skills Stavia was apparently powerless to resist Chernon's sexual overtures:

> She was not terrified or greatly hurt, but she was angry.
> He had said nothing! Nothing loving, nothing sentimental. He had done no wooing. He had taken her as though she had been one of the Gypsies ...
> "You could have stopped him," the actor Stavia remarked from some dim and cavernous mental recess. "You could have laid him out, Stavia."
> "It wasn't stopping him that mattered. I wanted something else from him, not something else from me." That wasn't the real reason. It wasn't. She tried again. "I was so surprised, I couldn't figure out what to do, and then it was all over." And still again. "This wasn't what I thought he wanted" (Tepper 1989: 238).

Because human reproduction has not been dissociated from sexuality, the logic of Women's Country's plan requires that both men and women continue to desire each other. So despite the rational training that the women of Women's Country

receive they are still subjected to romantic discourses, as are the warriors, as well as to biologistic rationales for desiring men they don't necessarily admire or like. Further, because of the focus of Women's Country on eugenics and control of insemination, the sexual double standard is still in operation so that by removing herself from the protection of its walls Stavia can be regarded as a "Gypsy"; a woman who is no longer subject to Women's Country's sexual regulation or protection.

Many of the women living in Women's Country, as well as the warriors in the contiguous garrisons, are represented as languishing in a state of 'false consciousness' as they remain interpellated within romantic discourses of heterosexuality (as well as of maternity, to be discussed in the following chapter). Just as the text suggests that "'there are servitors and servitors'" in one of Stavia's brief flashes of insight before the entire plan of Women's Country is laid bare, so it also suggests that "there are women and women" in Joshua's paternalist reply (Tepper 1989: 133). Only those women who can transcend sentiment and emotion are deemed fit to order this utopia; so Morgot and Stavia who can make ruthless decisions and suppress their guilt are women of the first sort, while Myra, who is ruled by her passions, is a woman of the second sort. Stavia's 'getting of wisdom' and incorporation into the first category of women is directly traceable to her encounter with heterosexuality outside the protective confines of Women's Country. Subjected to rape by Chernon, and then battery by the Holylanders who are competing for the 'right' to sexual access to her, Stavia learns that the model of heterosexuality portrayed in romance is remarkably similar to the one favoured by dominating patriarchs. Small wonder

she swears off passion and invests in egalitarian gender relations with Corrig and a more rational sexuality.

Although some feminists, heterosexual and lesbian, may have reclaimed the term 'fucking', particularly those critical of the overemphasis on sexual danger in feminist discourses, I would suggest that other women who identify as feminists still view the disentanglement of inequality from erotic relations as central to transformed social relations. This appears to be key to the utopian project of Women's *Country*, although, *by containing domination, it does seem as if they* have also eliminated the erotic, which was the risk that many feminists believed accrued to an 'overemphasis' on rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Sexual relations are not yet completely benign in Women's Country, however, although it may be argued plausibly that this is due to the transitional nature of the society. Joshua, the servitor who is Morgot's partner, "had to" kill Michael, the rebellious garrison leader, because of sexual jealousy. Michael believes that he fathered Morgot's sons because of his sexual liaisons with her at the twice-annual Carnival; before Joshua executes him, he disabuses him of that notion. Morgot, herself, executes one of Michael's co-conspirators. Joshua expresses shame at his own residue of violence and possessiveness but claims to have been unable to overcome his feelings. He seems to take for granted, however, the Council Women's assessment that execution is the appropriate response to insurrection. This explicit acknowledgement of what has been textually implicit, that the servitors (and the women) of Women's Country still use violence in the pursuit of their utopia undermines any easy assumption that the Women's Country version of gender separatism is a transformation to be wished for.

The primacy of gender to the social theory articulated in this text can be inferred

from the absence of any explicit attention to class or 'race', although both disrupt

the text; in the effective sequestration of elite Councilwomen from the rest of the

females in Women's Country and in the use of the racialised epithet "Gypsies" to

label the sexual dissidents who absent themselves from their towns. The

servitors who return through the gates to Women's Country are men who can fit

within the transformed social order and live in women-headed households, but it

is unclear how (indeed if) their transformation has been effected. One of the

intratextual suggestions is that the Council Women are researching the basis of

the transformation with the men who have actively chosen to return to Women's

Country, while another is that it is an accidental byproduct of the eugenics

programme. A large proportion of the returners seem to have psychic powers; as

Jenny Wolmark remarks: "(t)hese abilities enable them to 'see' in a psychic

sense but also to 'see through' the self-deceptive masculine ideology of those

who remain in the garrison" (Wolmark 1993: 93) .

In *The Gate to Women's Country* sexual pleasure is absent from the text, and

male domination has been undermined. Inside the walls of Women's Country at

least, women have taken power. However, heterosexuality is not subjected to any

explicit critique and homosexuality is erased through textual reference to the

elimination of the hormonal disorder which was its underlying cause[56]. Although

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[56] The following passage is free indirect speech – that is, it is narrated (psycho-narrated in Dorrit Cohn's terms) from Stavia's point of view. Therefore, its reliability is questionable; Stavia like most other inhabitants of Women's Country has been educated in line with Martha's plan to eliminate war through social (and biological) engineering:

the revelation of Women's Country's founding deceptions in the final tenth of the book undermines any unambiguous reading of the text's gendered social theory, I strongly believe, nonetheless, that much of the textual ambiguity is an internal contradiction to its intended social theory, rather than an explicit problematisation. Although I agree with Jenny Wolmark that this text "confront(s) the structures of patriarchy which resist and exclude women and then subvert(s) those structures ... by reversing the process to exclude men" (Wolmark 1993: 89), because the text suggests that men would require psychic powers to see through this ruse, one could argue that this plot device embodies a foundational feminist pessimism about the potential for men to revision and transform masculinity. It seems that it is only women who can be depended upon to transform social relations, and only particular women at that. However readers choose to interpret the contradiction, once it becomes clear that the phallus-worshipping warriors who inhabit the space immediately outside the walls of Women's Country are perpetuating traditions reinstated after the destruction of the pre-holocaust society by women masquerading as men, it is hard to accept simple equations of masculinity with patriarchy despite the symbolic practices on both sides of the walls which function to equate femininity with sisterhood and nurturing and men with aggression and domination. The mutual contempt of the two sisters portrayed in the text also undermines such simple equations. The bitter humour of describing the garrison as including "an erection fit for a parade ground" can then be read as (doubly) ironic:

> "They call it a victory monument," objected Stavia, really looking at the pillar for the first time. It did look rather like a phallus.

Even in preconvulsion times it had been known that the so-called "gay syndrome" was caused by aberrant hormone levels during pregnancy. The women doctors now identified the condition as "hormonal reproductive maladaption," and corrected it before birth (Tepper 1989: 76).

"Oh for heaven's sake, Stavvy. It's even got a prepuce" (Tepper 1989: 59).

Nonetheless, even if the socially constructed contents of femininity and masculinity are thus undermined, the social construction of sexual difference / gender is left intact through the absolute equation of sexuality with heterosexuality. In the following chapter I will discuss the eugenic logic of Women's Country which reinstates the biological determinism that the textual focus on gendered ritual and other cultural practices undermines.

It is, in fact, the textual conflation of sexuality and reproduction, *pace* their uncoupling by cultural and material changes in the late twentieth century that produces a social theory that makes biological determinism the uneasy foundation of its social constructionism. This very apparent contradiction in the text is one which Diana Fuss suggests even the most resolutely anti-essentialist feminist theory finds it hard to evade as she argues that it is: "difficult to see how constructionism can *be* constructionism without a fundamental dependency upon essentialism" (Fuss 1989: 4). Judith Butler has tried to unpack this dependency with her suggestion that there are some: "constructions without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all, those which have acquired for us a kind of necessity" (Butler 1993: xi). Thus, in *The Gate to Women's Country*, we see the re-inscription of separate spheres of masculinity and femininity, coupled with social constructionist notions of gender which are revealed to rely on essentialist, and biologically deterministic, foundations. Whilst Women's Country enacts a project to separate sexual desire from domination, (heterosexual) discourses of romantic desire persist, at the same time

as eroticism has also been eliminated. The restoration of the concurrence of sexual relations and reproduction, through the twice annual carnivals, marks a troubling return to biological determinism, and the denial and / or containment of sexual pleasure / eroticism in this novel. This aligns Gate with the first position articulated above, that is a profound pessimism about the possibilities for radically transforming gender, sexual relations, (hetero)sexuality, and intimate relations between men and women.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, the holocaust has not resulted in the radical re-organisation of gender relations witnessed in Women's Country in either the multi zones or in Tikva, the societies about which we learn the most, nor indeed in the Glop where the New Gangs are headed by men. Certainly, in Tikva, gender relations are not homogenised to the degree that they are in the multi zones, and we are told that the free town "would almost always choose the option that seemed to offer the largest degree of freedom" (Piercy 1992: 548), but problematising gender relations seems to be a fairly privatised business. It is through Shira's encounters with the two cyborgs, Yod the inhuman male cyborg, and Nili the very human female cyborg ("Her dark skin glistened with sweat. Her exercise garb was soaked. In fact she reeked" (Piercy 1992: 262)) that she comes to question the conventional choices for which her mother scorns her: "'Pretty girl, got married, worked for a multi, had a baby'" (Piercy 1992: 263).

The one space in the novel which is represented as already transformed in a liberatory sense is the woman-only space of Safed, and significantly this space

only exists because it has been rendered a 'no-man's-land' by the detonation of a nuclear device. So gender relations have been transformed not through work, but through the literal elimination of men. According to Nili, who has been sent out from Safed to explore the world beyond, sexuality in her community is a pragmatic affair, with sexual relations conducted between women workmates; romance is not an issue. The women of Safed respect each others' difference – they are descendants of Israeli and Palestinian survivors of the nuclear devastation – and have utilised technology to adapt themselves to survive in the environment they inhabit rather than attempting to change the environment to suit them. Safed is not represented in comparable detail to either the hegemonic multi spaces or to the resistant free town of Tikva, but the reader is asked to invest in this community as being the best hope for the future. Although Nili has come out of her community to investigate the possibilities of coalition with other communities, and as part of this political / social / scientific exploration conducts a sexual affair with a man, the strong presumption of the text is that the advances that have been made in Safed are because of the absence of the distraction of heterosexual romance and the dominating logic of masculinity. Setting this against the emotional investments that both Malkah and Shira have made in both heterosexual romance and scientific mastery (although this is undercut by the focus on connection in their scientific practices) the text suggests that it is extremely difficult for heterosexual feminists to disinvest in struggles for dominance in intimate relationships. Lesbian separatism therefore offers a necessary space in which to experiment with social transformation and in which women can empower themselves without the personal and political distraction of compulsory heterosexuality, but it is unclear how these empowered women will

be able to export their transformed social relations to communities still heavily invested in masculine domination. They may provide yet another model of female autonomy for twenty-first century women who have been subjected to social and cultural amnesia about feminism, but Safed doesn't provide a model for egalitarian intersubjectivity through a transformation of compulsory heterosexuality.

Shira believes that she comes into her mature sexuality via the agency of the cyborg, Yod (Piercy 1992: 576), but Yod was programmed to be an ideal lover by her grandmother, Malkah:

> As far as Shira could figure out on the gross level she was following, Malkah had programmed Yod sexually on the principle that it was better to give than receive. Malkah had given him an overweening need to please and no particular attachment to any one way of giving pleasure (Piercy 1992: 476).

So Yod's approach to sexual intercourse reads like a wish-fulfilment fantasy of early second-wave heterosexual feminists (and probably many non-feminists). He puts his partner's pleasure before his own, he is not fixated on penetrative sex, and he is tireless. The first time Shira and Yod have sex, for example, is the first time she has an orgasm via cunnilingus and she has been heterosexually active since the age of thirteen (Piercy 1992: 60); she is now twenty-nine. However, despite finding out that Yod is not programmed to require penetration, she also tries sex with him "that way" and again has an orgasm. The sex is described in some detail and because Shira does not feel as compelled to assume conventional feminine roles in her interactions with the cyborg she is able to explore her own desire and to experience the physical pleasures of sex in a way she has only associated previously with her first love affair. Reflecting on the

encounter with Yod, she considers: "He felt to her at once like a person and a large fine toy" (Piercy 1992: 230). This theme continues through the novel with Shira oscillating between regarding Yod as the ideal partner a human man could never be, and recognising that this is in large part because she knows he is incapable of going against her wishes. Her final renunciation of the capacity to re-create Yod following his destruction suggests that she realises that the ability to control him is a morally and politically dubious ingredient in her feelings for him (Piercy 1992: 582).

However, undercutting those aspects of his programming which prompt Gadi to refer to him as a walking vibrator, despite Shira's protestations that Yod wasn't created as a sex toy (Piercy 1992: 336) Yod was also programmed by Avram, the father of Shira's first lover, Gadi, and he first expresses his desire for Shira as comparable to and in competition with Gadi's desire for her. Indeed he suggests to Shira that by coupling with him (in both senses of the word) she will feel protected from Gadi. Shira initially rejects Yod's advances despite her responsiveness to his (its) touch:

> "No, Yod. No. Can I trust you to listen to me?"
> "You can always trust me." He dropped his hand and retreated a step, clasping his hands behind his back. "I obey." He went up the steps to the door. He took hold of the doorknob and then, with a twitch, crushed it. Slowly he entered, stopping to glance back at her where she stood under the maple. She hoped he would not entirely demolish Gimel in their martial arts routine that night (Piercy 1992: 177)

This is one of the places in the novel where it seems to slip into the genre of pulp romance fiction, resonating with Judith Long Law's suggestion that romance is porn for heterosexual women[57]. The swift segue between masculine desire and

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[57] The suggestion is footnoted by Joanna Russ in an essay "On Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley". She notes: "According to Professor Judith Long Laws of Cornell University (in conversation, fall

aggression and Shira's titillated horror demonstrates once again the imperative of

domination in heterosexuality. However, Malkah later reassures Shira:

> "He has total inhibition blocks against sexual violence. You're safer with
> him than with any other male in Tikva. Or perhaps the world."
> "He isn't a male. He's a machine."
> "Avram made him male – entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal:
> pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. The world has barely survived the
> males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with
> emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and
> personal knowledge, a need for connections ..." (Piercy 1992: 192)

It is significant that there is no detailed representation of sexual intercourse

between women in the novel, as the text recognises the potential for resistance

offered to patriarchy by lesbian sexuality, but is ultimately unconvinced and

unconvincing about it as erotic passion. This was indeed one of the criticisms

levelled at Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'; that it

desexualised and de-eroticised lesbian existence. A great deal of work is

required of the reader to fill in these gaps in the text of *Body of Glass*; and

certainly the appropriate gaps exist, in a way that cannot be argued for *The Gate*

to Women's Country. But if we agree with bell hooks that our yearning for social

transformation is linked with other passions, the representation of Safed is

curiously dispassionate.

It seems likely that passionate sexuality is unthinkable and unrepresentable both

because of the cultural sedimentation of the romance genre and its symbiotic

relationship with compulsory heterosexuality. That is not to say that it is

impossible to experience sexuality as both passionate and mutual, but that

attempts to represent it tend to be recuperated either to the dominant model of

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1971), the intense emotionality of the Modern Gothics and the romance magazines is a form of
pornography for women who read them" (Russ 1995: n132).

sexuality or abjected with accusations of essentialism. It is as if, lacking any commonly shared theoretical account of the social construction of passionate mutuality, any narrative representations of such sexuality are unreadable.

In *Body of Glass*, masculinity in young adult males is represented as a condition of being wounded. Gadi is damaged by the relationship with his father, while Josh is an orphan, dispossessed of his homeland, and therefore even more bereft. Neither seem capable of self-transformation without the undivided service of a woman. Avram, conversely, is a controlling patriarch and his intervention to protect "his" community – the creation of Yod – actually places the community which has taken him in at risk. Yod, the cyborg, strives to emulate a masculinity that will enable him to create a family with Shira and Ari, but this is ultimately doomed because his programming as a weapon overrides any programming / socialisation Malkah and Shira have provided to balance out his aggression. So despite the text's investment in recuperating (hetero)sexual pleasure for women, it still seems at a loss to recuperate masculinity. However women reconstruct their relationships to the institution of heterosexuality, men do not seem capable in this account of transforming their own relationships with the institution and with its hierarchical imperative.

In *Body of Glass* there is rather more progress towards a critique of heterosexuality than is evident in *Gate*, but again it is women who seem to have to do the work of changing relations between the sexes. Malkah, joint creator of the cyborg, Yod, is a sexually active woman in her seventies who conducts sexual affairs and romances in both embodied and virtual reality. However, she

claims that work is central to her self-definition; relationships are important but relatively peripheral. Despite this explicit claim which is also repackaged as advice to her granddaughter, her sexuality and her power to attract lovers is also vital to her. She reflects: "My identity was fused with the notion of conquest, perhaps" (Piercy 1992: 219). In some senses, it is as if rather than revisioning masculinity, its privileges must simply be extended to women, so that it is femininity that is revisioned:

> "You love too hard. It occupies the centre and squeezes out your strength. If you work in the centre and love to the side, you will love better in the long run, Shira. You will give more gracefully, without counting, and what you get, you will enjoy" (Piercy 1992: 75).

The young Shira's response to this advice demonstrates that the discourse of romantic heterosexuality and its gendered division of labour still holds sway in the middle of the twenty-first century: Malkah did not know what love was. Shira refused to argue (Piercy 1992: 75).

As in *The Gate to Women's Country* the uneasy co-dependence of social constructionism and essentialism disrupts the possibility of producing convincing social theory about transformed heterosexual relations. There are resolutely materialist accounts of sexuality, in the sense of sexual practice, when Shira's sexual pleasure with Yod is represented phenomenologically as embodied response to skilful touch. However, the fact that Yod is a manufactured being, and not fully human consistently undermines the possibility of reading the relationship between Yod and Shira as anything more transformatory than an embodied fantasy. The masculinity of any of the born male characters on whom the narrative focuses: Josh; Gadi; Malcolm; Avram is represented as oscillating between an adolescent need to be adored and a patriarchal desire to control and

dominate. Avram represents the patriarchal extreme and Gadi the adolescent, while Josh and Malcolm combine both aspects. In *Body of Glass,* then, attempts to recuperate heterosexuality do not succeed because of the failure to reconceive masculinity. Women are left to do the work of transforming gender relations, reflecting the second feminist perspective on gender and sexuality elaborated above.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

The most striking utopian difference between *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and both *The Gate to Women's Country* and *Body of Glass* is the use of a male point-of-view character, in addition to two female focal characters, and the sustained attempt to revision masculinity as well as femininity. That this text is able to represent this convincingly is due to its refusal of any attempt to recuperate institutionalised heterosexuality; this is a post-structuralist utopia. In *The Fifth Sacred Thing,* masculinity is represented as being in the process of transformation, through its critical deconstruction. Bird, one of the novel's focal characters, is used to articulate the struggle that is involved in revisioning masculinity as well as the necessity for men as well as women to invest in that revisioning. Importantly, Bird is not white and therefore heir to the privileges of white western masculinity. Yet neither is pacifism Bird's essential nature; non-violence is an ongoing struggle for him. However, he recognises the need to work against his own desire for control and domination in the pursuit of a society which values all its members. It is interesting to note that he draws his resistance to co-optation to more violent forms of masculinity from his sensual memories of touch:

> He couldn't rape a woman. It would be a betrayal of every comforting
> touch he had ever felt, of every rising and spilling of pleasure, of
> something so deep in himself that it was still intact below all the levels of
> loss and betrayal. That surprised him and made him afraid again. So he
> still had something to lose (Starhawk 1993: 378).

Although this passage, taken in isolation, may suggest that comforting touches are associated with women, taken in the context of the entire novel which refers to multiple loving, sexual encounters that Bird has with both men and women, rather it points to a commitment to mutual intersubjectivity, and the importance of exchanges of bodily pleasure to that commitment. That the soldiers from the Southlands choose raping a woman as their test of Bird's masculinity demonstrates the inextricable entanglement of sexuality, domination and compulsory heterosexuality in their worldview.

In her 'Cyborg Manifesto', Donna Haraway claims that her "ironic political myth" is a contribution to "the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender" (Haraway 1991a: 150). As Stevi Jackson points out that need not mean a world without difference; without gendered hierarchies other differences and pleasures might emerge (Jackson 1999: 182). According to Jackson, heterosexuality is dependent on gender hierarchies, and indeed in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* with the elimination of such hierarchies, heterosexuality and its abjected other, homosexuality, are categories in the process of being evacuated of meaning. It is possible to imagine that should the San Francisco of Maya, Madrone and Bird continue to develop its resistance to hierarchies, then gender (sexual difference) will cease to be a category through which bodies are understood (or materialised in Judith Butler's terms). This radical deconstruction only seems thinkable, however, in a society where power has been redistributed

to the extent that all social institutions, schools, families, workplaces and so on, have been revisioned and transformed.

San Francisco is not yet a 'post-gender' society, but the logic of the text suggests that it is certainly moving in that direction as both gender and sexual hierarchies are constantly being undermined. Bird even recognises eventually that his desire to protect women renders him vulnerable to being co-opted to a more regressive version of masculinity and relinquishes the struggle for mastery of the situation in which he and those he loves are threatened. As already indicated, it is the dominatory logic of the Southlanders which results in them using female significant others, such as Maya and Rosa, in their attempts to undermine Bird's self-identity. They cannot conceive that Bird feel such passionate attachment to men as well, because this is an abjected possibility in the oppressive social relations of the Southlands. When Bird realises that he is being interpellated into their vision he is finally able to resist.

In the course of the novel, Bird has used violence (as revealed in a narrated memory), but he has subsequently renounced this option for social transformation. He is self-critical of his own lapses into "alpha male" behaviour, as when he insists on holding the floor in a Council Meeting against another male, Cress (Starhawk 1993: 241). At the novel's resolution, it is only when he realises the limits of his power to protect others that he is finally able to renounce his struggle with force and therefore to choose not to act in a way that he believes is wrong. A sexuality that is divorced from domination seems to be central to this revisioned masculinity. The only time Bird feels shame about his sexuality is

shortly after he recovers his consciousness in the Southland prison and has sex

with Littlejohn as an act that is purely about physicality and not about mutual

caring or love (Starhawk 1993:37). It is also his sexuality that enables Bird to

realise that there are acts he will not commit even to survive, and even to find

resources to resist his captors when he is once again a prisoner following the

invasion of San Francisco.

Members of the unit of soldiers that has "adopted" Bird have their masculinity

threatened when, in refusing to participate in their rape of a female prisoner, Bird

acknowledges that he also has sex with men and suggests that some of them must

do so too. He has not anticipated the depth of their homophobia. They then

insist that Bird redeem his own masculinity and therefore theirs by raping a

female prisoner:

> "Take her, man." They were stripping off his shirt and pulling his pants
> down, revealing his old scars. "Or we take her for you, one by one. You can
> watch. Then we carve our numbers in her ass and your prick" (Starhawk
> 1993: 379).

Although Bird still refuses to cooperate he is terrified that he might be pushed

eventually to a place where he might find it erotic to dominate somebody who is

fearful. However, the woman's own resistance to assault – "she was kicking out

viciously, intelligently, karate kicks that drew blood" (Starhawk 1993: 380) –

gives Bird the breathing space he needs to trick the soldiers into discontinuing

the assault by insinuating that she is a Witch and will therefore wreak terrible

revenge on them should they rape her:

> They dressed the girl and sent her home. Bird never learned her name. It
> didn't matter. She had escaped; that was victory, he supposed, if not by
> nonviolence then at least by trickery. He was amazed that he had won. They
> miscalculated, he thought. If this was part of their plan, to bring me along, to
> break me down, further and further, step by step, they made a mistake. No
> wonder. In their world, rape would be a small thing, not worth the pain to

resist. More than that – a pleasure, a reward. How could they know that for me it would be the worst thing, the step I will not come to until the last, the bitterest end? But he was still afraid, still falling. He would not escape (Starhawk 1993: 381).

The San Francisco of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* is the most plural of the revisioned societies in the three novels. Differences of 'race', religion, sexual practices and so on are all represented, although because hierarchical domination is no longer practiced in any of San Francisco's social institutions 'race' is beginning to make sense only as a historical category and not as a lived reality. Bird, Madrone and Maya are represented as and described as a man and as women, but because of the society's deconstruction of hierarchical privilege, sexual difference is not represented as key to sexuality. Both Bird and Madrone have male and female lovers in the course of the novel, and the opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality only makes sense historically or when the invaders from the South attempt to impose their untransformed and hierarchical understandings of sexuality on the inhabitants of San Francisco.

The importance of the episode when Bird refuses to rape the female prisoner is to demonstrate that this is *not* an easy or a painless transformation. In Council Meetings Bird struggles not to fall into historical patterns of masculine dominance, and in his relationships with his lovers, for example Madrone he has to remember that protection and nurturing are reciprocal practices. Bird and the rest of the inhabitants of San Francisco are still in the process of deconstructing gendered hierarchies and related categories of dominance. This deconstruction is agentic and intentional and for Bird to succumb to the force exerted by the regiment which has co-opted him and to rape the captive young woman would reinstate the categorisation. However, refusing to succumb is not an end to the

risk of capitulation; Bird and anyone who would transform society must continue to resist being interpellated by such normativising discourses until the repetition of that resistance undermines the categories. Of course, even then, vigilance will still be necessary to avoid being interpellated by new or re-formed power-inscribed discourses.

Maya, one of the novels other key protagonists, recognises this. When she is facing potential execution at Bird's hands, her fear is not about her own death, but for what killing her – in a drugged and disoriented state induced by his captors – might do to him:

> There was nothing she could do to help him. She couldn't even speak. What would she say? Bird, your failing is that you are simply mortal, susceptible to pressure and fear and capable of making great mistakes. I have failed you, Bird. Good feminist that I was, I always said yes, men should feel, should cry, should not be afraid to show their vulnerability. But in my secret heart, what I really wanted from you was the impermeable courage of the warrior. I wanted you to be invincible, larger than life. I did not raise you to accept anything less of yourself (Starhawk 1993: 470).

This psycho-narration reveals that even having decentred compulsory heterosexuality, some of its seductions still linger on, like the notion of the strong, self-contained heroic male; the positive flip-side of the male as dominator. Thus, the radical transformatory potentials of the City in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* rely extensively on an intensely revisioned masculinity (as well as femininity), and the concomitant radical under-mining of compulsory heterosexuality, which produces a society which strongly echoes Butler's post-structuralist reconceptualising of gender relations.

Conclusion

The Gate to Women's Country which can be read within a long tradition of 'sex wars' stories and novels in sf[58], can be seen to produce theory which risks reversing the hierarchy of dualism, without problematising the logic of categorical domination, but the same risk emerges in *Body of Glass* both from Yod's tragic destiny and insufficient problematisation of the utopian space of Safed and its representative Nili, of whom Malkah says: "'Yod was a mistake. You're the right path, Nili'" (Piercy 1992: 558).

In my own repeated readings of the texts, I continually glossed over Bird's contribution to *The Fifth Sacred Thing,* preferring to focus on the two central females, until I came to the conclusion that Starhawk's use of a male focal character was (re)visionary. In my own reading practice, then, as well as in the two earlier novels, a connection emerges between assuming that only women can be the agents of feminist transformation and a pessimism that men will impede this project by abdicating responsibility for the transformation of masculinity that is also required if a new social order is to be effected. This pessimism seems particular to heterosexual feminists, who have been profoundly influenced by the arguments of lesbian separatism, and therefore find it difficult to theorise the possibility that men will actively engage in the struggle to redistribute the power that accrues to them by 'virtue' of their gender. This is particularly painful when and if they also find it near-impossible to think the about sexual pleasure outside

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[58] Justine Larbalestier claims that battle of the sexes tests naturalise male rule and demonise female rule, many of them by representing a society in which gender roles are reversed. Larbalestier notes that in many instances of these texts the struggle to restore male rule and the natural order of things is paralleled by the incorporation of the female protagonist into a heterosexual economy by the male representative of the antagonists of matriarchy. (Larbalestier 1996: Chapter 3) .

the matrix of compulsory heterosexuality.

It is only in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* where men are actively engaged in the struggle (forever) to transform gender relations, and all interlocking relations of dominance / subordination, that a credible imagined future of radically transformed intimate relations appears. The relationships represented between inhabitants of the City represent an elaborated working-through of the undermining of compulsory heterosexuality through the recognition of all non-harmful intersubjective intimate social relations.

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Chapter 5

Technologies of Gender II: (Post)modern Mothering

> The [Baby M][59] case (was) about the reproductive rights of women and men; about biology, human bonding, parental rights and parental obligations; about surrogacy, legal contracts, indentured servitude and slavery; about mother-blaming among psychiatrists – particularly those involved in custody battles; about the increase in sterility in North America and the consequent increase in custody battles, adoptions, and new reproductive technologies; about the role of the media and legislation in our daily lives – the list is a long one indeed (Chesler 1988: 11).

> (M)odern approaches to reproductive bodies and processes were and remain centred on achieving and / or enhancing *control over* those bodies and processes. In contrast, postmodern approaches are centered on re/ de/ sign and *transformation* of reproductive bodies and processes to achieve a variety of goals (Clarke 1995: 140).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which sexuality and its implication in gendered social relations has been theorised in the feminist science fictions. I concluded that the text that was most deconstructive with regard to compulsory heterosexuality was also the one that most successfully re-visioned transformed and transformative gender relations. In this chapter, the focus on gender relations continues through an examination of the re-visioning of mothering and fatherhood, and the uncoupling of mothering from compulsory heterosexuality. I will argue that one of the key trajectories of feminist social

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[59] The "Baby M" Case was a feminist *cause célèbre* in the latter part of the 1980s. According to the jacket copy on *Sacred Bond*: "In 1985, Mary Beth Whitehead signed a contract agreeing to give birth to a baby for William and Elizabeth Stern in return for a payment of $10,000. After 'Baby M' was born, Mary Beth changed her mind. She wanted to keep the baby. Her decision led to a court battle which made headlines across the world." (Chesler 1988) Custody of "Baby M" was awarded to William Stern by the trial judge. In an appeal, Mary Beth Whitehead had her parental rights restored and was awarded visitation rights to the child, but William Stern retained custody.

transformation in the novels is the re-visioning of mothering[60]. Examining this issue in the contemporary sociohistorical context of the plethora of new reproductive technologies and their potential for providing material support for this re-visioning adds urgency to the debate. In this chapter I will again focus on the three fictional texts in their chronological order of first publication. This order, as in the previous chapter, also locates them on a continuum; in this case from most to least invested in rationality and least to most tolerant of difference and dissent. In turn the continuum can be traced through the relative centrality to key protagonists' subjectivity of their particular investments in biological reproduction, and through the re-visioning of both mothering and fathering both as biological and social relationships.

Feminist internal and external debates in the field of human reproduction have been hotly contested since the outset of second wave feminism[61], and feminists' theoretical analyses and political activity on the terrain of reproductive rights have taken place in the context of growing biomedical sophistication and anti-feminist resistance from conservative and patriarchal constituencies. A brief and necessarily sketchy overview of this contested terrain will provide the context for the exploration of social theories circulating around reproduction and mothering in the novels.

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[60] I have already explained my rationale for focusing on the three novels chosen. However, I could also have explored the issue of re-visioning mothering in, for example, the following science fictions: Charnas 1989, Piercy 1979, Russ 1985 (1975), Sargent 1987, Slonczewski 1987 and Vonarburg 1992. It is an ongoing preoccupation for Tepper. See, for example: Tepper 1990, Tepper 1992, Tepper 1994.

[61] And before, of course.

In early second wave feminism, according to Robyn Rowland (Rowland 1987: 68), some feminists rejected both motherhood and the nuclear family as traps for women[62] leading many women to choose to remain childfree[63]. However, Rowland argues that this perspective was soon re-evaluated by feminists who sought to disentangle those aspects of mothering that are positive for women, and which might provide the basis of a new political theory, from its institutionalisation within patriarchy; Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* and Mary O'Brien's *The Politics of Reproduction* are cited in this context. Rowland points to the irony that this re-evaluation coincided with: "a time when technopatriarchs within medical research must justify their continuing control of and experimentation with women's bodies, in the name of the power of mothering" (Rowland 1987: 79).

Rowland, of course, is referring to the burgeoning of the new reproductive technologies, which have become almost commonplace by the early twenty-first century. However, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, there was no feminist consensus on the liberatory or counter-liberatory potentials of these new technologies. Hilary Rose, for, example notes that in the early 1970s many feminists hoped they could pre-empt the application of IVF (in vitro fertilisation) to humans while most contributors to Michelle Stanworth's edited volume, *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*, cautiously

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[62] Elsewhere I have discussed Shulamith Firestone's distinctive take on this perspective (Firestone 1979), (Haran 2000).
[63] I internalised a skewed version of this message from an early age, believing that becoming pregnant would signal the effective end of my life as an autonomous individual. A peculiar confluence of feminist and Roman Catholic messages and a signal lack of imagination on my own part meant that I invested all of my hope for my personal future in intellectual endeavour - the choice seemed strictly binary; have a life or become a mother.

welcomed the technology and were more concerned with issues of access (Rose 1994; Stanworth 1987b). Hilary Rose, however, set her analysis in the wider context of the political economy of biotechnology and argued that IVF pioneers Steptoe and Edwards, the scientist and clinician who collaborated on the laboratory work that culminated in the conception of Louise Brown:

> had, with the aid of venture capital, demonstrated unprecedented and eugenicist power over the possibility of motherhood for Lesley and life for the embryo which was to become her daughter. The year 1978 was an important one for the Petri dish, patriarchal power and the private market (Rose 1994: 177).

Roughly co-incident with the speculation (financial and theoretical) around developing conceptive technologies was another reproductive issue that caused alarm on both sides of the Atlantic. Surrogate motherhood, and the high-profile examples of Baby 'M' in the USA and Baby Cotton in the UK meant that, as Zipper and Sevenhuijsen point out: "The legal rule *'mater semper certa est'* ('it is always certain who the mother is') cannot be held for an eternal truth anymore" (Zipper and Sevenhuijsen 1987: 129). Despite discussions of surrogacy that cited biblical precedent in the story of Sarah and her handmaid Hagar who bore a child for Abraham, surrogacy assumed a novel aspect in the early 1980s in the process of being considered by regulatory authorities alongside IVF and related technologies, as well as being mediated by brokers who attempted to put the practice on a business-like footing. As was the case with IVF, feminists were divided over whether the most appropriate response to the phenomenon was a liberal response which focused on issues of consent and widening access in a free market, one which viewed all the technologies as equally exploitative of women's bodies or some more pragmatic case-by-case approach.

The advent of the new reproductive technologies and surrogacy, frequently discussed together because feminists were amongst the first to realise the novel combinations of these social practices that would arise, posed a major challenge for feminist theory and politics. Feminist perspectives on reproductive rights which had been developed to fight for abortion and against sterilisation abuse were not designed for the task of theorising reproductive technologies which were represented as, and widely understood as, expanding choices for women[64]. However, each of these developing fields did overlap with other reproductive rights issues, such as the fights for safe, legal abortion and against sterilization abuse. For example, no sooner had the right to legal abortion been won in the USA than anti-abortion activists began to fight to chip away at it by, for example, removing public funding and thus limiting access for poorer women[65]. In a state of constant flux, then, the terrain of human reproduction posed enormous challenges for feminist social theory and an apparent imperative to engage continuously in contestations over the meanings of mothering and kinship, driven by shifts in technoscience and the resultant novel social relations. This imperative seems to risk undermining earlier attempts to decentre motherhood as the presumed destiny of all women. It also seemed to reinstate childbearing in the context of compulsory heterosexuality, and the nuclear family. So, just how

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[64] This chapter is not the place to rehearse the complexity of these debates. I have considered the range of arguments developed by feminists on the issue of In Vitro Fertilisation in Haran 1994. See the following texts for a range of perspectives on the debate: Corea 1988, McNeil, Varcoe and Yearley 1990, Sawicki 1991, Spallone 1989, Spallone and Steinberg 1987 and Stanworth 1987b.

[65] The field of feminist cultural studies has produced some extremely interesting theoretical and political responses to these moves which point to the ways in which links have been made between IVF technology and new visualisation technologies to disembody the foetus, and thus to undermine the subjective autonomy of pregnant women. Such strategies have been developed in a bid to recriminalise abortion as well as to increase medical and legal surveillance of pregnant women. See, for example, Haran 2001, Hartouni 1997, Hartouni 1999 and Haraway 1997a.

might feminists re-vision the roles of reproduction and motherhood in their imagined futures?

In the preceding section I have argued that a key issue for the transformed and transformative social theory developed in the feminist sf texts is the re-visioning of mothering. I have indicated that following early second wave feminist theorising that saw motherhood as a way to trap women within the patriarchal nuclear family, feminists developed alternative theories which saw the transformation of mothering as potentially liberating for both women and social relations in general. I have explained that this theoretical re-visioning, which is also conducted in the fictional texts that I analyse, occurred in a sociohistorical context which complicated the task for feminist theorising. New technologies developed in the capitalist marketplace as well as both individual and organised responses from conservative and patriarchal constituencies meant that the reproductive rights terrain was constantly shifting.

In what follows, I will examine the distinctive theoretical responses to this state of flux by the feminist sf novels. In the section 'Matrilineality and the Re-visioning of Fatherhood' I will consider the issue of re-visioning fatherhood because the interlocking quality of the institutions of compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood makes this complementary focus necessary. In 'Fleshy Subjects or Technologised Objects' I will examine the ways that pregnancy and birthgiving are located in the texual social relations. I will then examine the ways that 'The Practice of Mothering' is embodied in key protagonists in their intimate social relations. I will conclude the chapter by summarising the

implications for social transformation of the re-visioned identities and practices related to reproduction.

Matrilineality and the Re-visioning of Fatherhood

Each of the novels discussed re-visions mothering, and relatedly also re-visions fathering, but with dramatic differences amongst the texts. As already discussed, from the early 1980s, feminist critiques of the institution of motherhood had been joined and complicated by the technological disaggregation of mothering into "ovarian mothers...uterine mothers...and...social mothers" (Stanworth 1987a: 16). This technological deconstruction of motherhood caused enormous social anxiety and was the occasion of much public discourse which attempted to allay those anxieties by stressing the potential of technology to make good where nature had failed heterosexual nuclear families. The re-visioning of mothering – and fathering – and their relative centrality to the already re-ordered social relations or to the social relations requiring transformation in each feminist sf text was conducted within this wider social context.

The Gate to Women's Country

As noted earlier, in *The Gate to Women's Country* the society's entire long-term project of social transformation is dependent on eugenic pronatalism. All adult women in Women's Country are expected to bear several children. The women believe the children are fathered by warriors, at the twice-annual Carnivals when licensed sexual activity takes place; in fact, only sperm donated by servitors is used to inseminate women. This insemination takes place under the pretence of monitoring the women's sexual health pre- and post-Carnival. A conversation

between Morgot and the itinerant, Septemius Bird is revealing about the nature

of the consent involved:

> "We unraveled all your threads and from their substance rewove the truth.
> Our attention focused, for example, on the amount of medical attention
> given women before and after carnival. . . ."
>
> "To prevent disease," Morgot said quietly.
>
> "There was rather more to it than that. After all, we itinerants
> have had experience with what you do to prevent disease. We've been in
> the quarantine house, and it's no lengthy process. No, all this doctoring
> was to do something more, to prevent pregnancy during carnival, to
> assure pregnancy afterward. I assume the servitors chosen to father
> children provide the necessary ... ah ... wherewithal."
>
> "Yes. They do. Willingly." (Tepper 1989: 288)

So the fathers who are deemed to be fit by the Council Women have the

opportunity to make informed consent, even though the women who have sex

with warriors do not. This opportunity for men to consent to the re-visioned

social relations is contrasted with the lack of opportunity for women of Women's

County to consent to patriarchal relations, as in the Holyland or in pre-

convulsion times. It seems that in order to keep the secret from the warriors, it is

also necessary to conceal it from most women, who might otherwise follow their

hearts (their sexual desires) rather than their heads. Morgot reveals to Stavia that

some women do work out the secret on their own, but if they do not consent to

maintaining the secrecy they are executed, sacrificed like the sons and lovers

who have also been sacrificed in pursuit of Martha Evesdaughter's plans to

eliminate (sexual) violence.

Through controlling the (sexuality and) reproductive bodies of all of the

inhabitants of Women's Country, its leaders believe they will produce a peaceful

and compliant population. Although the project of biosocial engineering is not

public knowledge, childbearing and childrearing is taken for granted as the

normal and inevitable consequence of achieving sexual maturity for the women of the society, and female children are schooled in these responsibilities from an early age. The only textual reference to exceptions is to occasional celibates, not to sexually active women who chose not to bear children. So, despite the massive investment in population management, there is little sense in the novel that motherhood is a chosen identity; rather it appears that it is simply one facet of adulthood for the majority of women. Children are neither desperately wanted nor unwanted. Despite the problems of infertility and teratogenic defects that afflict the Holylanders in the novel, there is no suggestion that the inhabitants of Women's Country have any trouble conceiving. There is however the assumption that sexual intercourse and pregnancy are inseparable; contraception is never mentioned as an option for the women taking part in Carnival nor is the possibility of sex for pleasure alone, even though the women's schooling appears to include instruction in sexual technique. So although, in practice, child-bearing and mothering have been uncoupled from compulsory heterosexuality, it is assumed that the fiction of compulsory heterosexuality is necessary in order to secure women's consent to mother. Compulsory heterosexuality, nonethless, has become a marginal practice, while consensual heterosexuality is the long-term goal, currently secretly embodied in the relationships between select servitors and Council Women. In fact, the pursuit of (hetero)sexual pleasure for its own sake would be the source of great frustration for the citizens of Women's Country as they can only consort with the warriors during two fortnightly periods in each calendar year, and the possibility of same sex relationships has, as discussed in the previous chapter, been eliminated. The women are encouraged to redirect their efforts into reconstructing civilisation through reproducing

daughters to labour for Women's Country and sons to protect it, and simultaneously encouraged to long for the return of their sons through the gate to Women's Country. The sons who make this choice in turn become the feminised fathers the special servitors consent to be.

Although the majority of the women in Women's Country believe their children to have been 'fathered' by warriors, in that they believe conception to be the outcome of their Carnival assignations, they do not expect the warriors to share in the parenting of their children. Women are encouraged to have sex with multiple partners during Carnival, secure in the knowledge that between the records of the 'Assignation Mistress' and those of the medical centre any sons born will be presented to the appropriate warrior progenitor. Further, it is considered inappropriate for female children to speculate about their fathers; they are raised by their mothers alone. Male children are also parented exclusively by mothers, until they reach the age of five, at which point they are presented to their warrior 'fathers' who assume their responsibility thenceforwards. Thus male children leave Women's Country for the Warriors' Garrison outside the gate. The raising of children is therefore uncoupled from the oedipal family romance that some psychoanalytic feminists suspected resulted in the perpetuation of patriarchal relations. A geography of separate spheres is radically re-instated. 'Paternal' rights are also firmly circumscribed to ensure that women are responsible for the primary inculcation of values in male children, and solely responsible for female children. This social arrangement has the additional benefit that custody battles are not an issue in this society[66].

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[66] One wonders if it is the issue of men caring for small children without the civilising influence of women that has led to Tepper's insistence that homosexuality as desire has been biologically

Stavia, the key protagonist in *The Gate to Women's Country* is a 37 year old

woman with three children: Dawid who is 15, Susannah who is 13 and Spring

who is 11. At the novel's opening, Dawid who has lived with the warriors since

he was 5 – as is the custom in Women's Country – publicly repudiates his

mother and commits to remaining in the garrison rather than choosing to return

through the eponymous gate to Women's Country. In the first chapter, Stavia's

family confirm that this outcome was inevitable, based on his unfamilial

behaviour on his brief visits home at the two annual carnival periods. However,

as the logic of Women's Country's plan is unfolded, the reader learns that

Chernon, a warrior, fathered Dawid while Stavia's daughters were fathered by

Corrig; a servitor. Readers are encouraged to infer that it was the difference in

paternity that led to a difference in behaviour; Dawid never cared for his family,

while Susannah and Spring are dutiful and caring.

Myra, Stavia's sister, bears three sons in the course of the novel. They are also

destined to be warriors, although in the case of Myra's offspring it is her own

genetic heritage that is suspect; she was sired *(sic)* by the same warrior who

fathered Chernon, unlike Morgot's other children. Stavia and her three brothers;

Habby, Byram and Jerby were all fathered by Joshua, the servitor who co-habits

with Morgot and her children. Joshua has also fathered many more children to

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eliminated. Female children are protected from the sexual danger posed by predatory males by
remaining within the walls of Women's Country, but in order to protect boy children,
homosexual desire must be eliminated. So unlike Wendy Pearson who suggests that Tepper
requires "the tropes of the sadistic homosexual and the pederast as her primary signifiers of evil"
(Pearson 1996: 214) I would suggest that Tepper's primary signifier of evil is the male sex drive
in its imperative and insatiable sociobiological guise. Women's Country's social arrangements
make girls and women sexual agents and not victims, so long as they remain within the protective
walls, so a biological solution has to be found to protect prepubescent males. I suspect my
reading differs only in emphasis from Pearson's but I believe the difference is crucial.

serve Women's Country, although it is unclear whether he simply "provides the wherewithal" or whether intercourse is involved. Certainly, Morgot has to work to discipline her emotions:

> "(S)ince there is only about one fertile servitor to every three fertile women, and since there's only one of Joshua's quality for every twenty, he's also fathered children for other women here in Marthatown and in other cities. I am at considerable pains to make myself take pride in that fact. It does not come naturally." (Tepper 1989: 293)

However, Morgot gave birth to Myra before she was privy to Women's Country's breeding mission:

> "That pregnancy was by artificial insemination, of course[67]. Later, after I was on the Council and had been told, I took the trouble to find out who he was. Not anyone I'd ever met, and, as it later turned out, not a satisfactory sire. Almost none of his boy children return. We've stopped using him" (Tepper 1989: 293).

This sense that Myra is the unfit daughter of an unfit father seems to be at the root of Morgot's uneasy relationship with her.

Body of Glass

A custody battle over Shira's son, Ari is the apparent catalyst for the plot of *Body of Glass*. Shira conceived Ari "the ancient way", that is, through heterosexual intercourse and carried him to term in her body. Shira represents her choice of 'natural' childbirth, however, not as a resistance to technology per se, but as owing to suspicion of the interventions practiced by Y-S, the multi-national

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[67] Although there are no textual representations of sexual exchanges between women and servitors, I take this phrase to signal that some pregnancies are *not* by artificial insemination. As it is explicitly stated that none of the warriors father children, the only option left is for Morgot's pregnancies to have come about following sexual intercourse with Joshua. As discussed in the previous chapter, Joshua tells Michael that he is the father of Morgot's sons. Morgot's revelation to Stavia that Joshua has fathered children for women in other towns in Women's Country also suggests that she feels related sexual jealousy.

corporation to which she had sold herself. It is standard practice in this corporate enclave to induce labour in the eighth month to avoid stretch marks and the premature babies are "conditioned" as they are brought to term outside the womb. The technological processes involved and the content of the conditioning are not elaborated further, but the implication is that the babies are tailored to some degree to fit the prevailing social as well as phenotypical norms.

The reader also learns that Ari was conceived to heal a breach between Shira and her husband, Joshua; the attempt proved unsuccessful. When Shira loses custody of Ari, she realises that she should have taken her grandmother's advice not to marry. According to her grandmother, Malkah, Shira is the first in her family to marry for four generations, thus subjecting herself to the patriarchal laws and male dominance of the multi that employs her. Shira also regrets not giving her son to her mother to raise in accord with the genealogy her grandmother passed on to her as a child. The genealogy's mythical status and the true version that it masks is revealed as the plot unfolds.

Malkah has one child of her body, Riva, who was conceived when Malkah was a young student having an affair with her professor. Malkah represents this conception as a "caprice"; a souvenir of a happy period in her life (Piercy 1992: 308). There is no suggestion that she considered the 'father' to have any rights with regard to her daughter, Riva. Riva in her turn conceived Shira through artificial insemination (with the sperm of a physicist 'the Yosef Golinken') (Piercy 1992: 258) and used all the available technology possible to minimise the term of her pregnancy because she "'(c)ouldn't afford to hang around swollen up

like a bilious elephant'" (Piercy 1992: 259). Riva tells Shira: "'I'm a warrior, not

a mother. Frankly, you were sort of my gift to Malkah, to make up for who I

am'" (Piercy 1992: 260). When Riva goads Shira about her presumed negative

reaction to the news that she is "'a product of artificial insemination'", Shira

responds sharply:

> 'Oh, come on. Half the kids in this town (Tikva) are born from petri
> dishes or test tubes. At Y-S they used to say every baby has three parents
> nowadays – the mother, the father and the doctor who does all the
> chemistry. And there Y-S is the fourth parent' (Piercy 1992: 259)

However, the fact that Shira insisted on conceiving 'naturally' despite taking this

use of technology for granted, together with the negative consequences of

conceiving her child to heal a rift in heterosexual relations, suggests that her

aversion to using technology reveals a problematic investment in the nuclear

family at the same time as it reveals a critique of the capitalist eugenics practiced

by the multi.

The other significant mother in *Body of Glass* is Nili, the "amazon" from Safed.

Although cloning is used to produce the embryos which are implanted in the

women of Safed and genetic engineering is practiced, it is strongly implied that

the babies are 'of woman born'[68] as are Nili (Piercy 1992: 258) and her daughter

(Piercy 1992: 489). The organisation of Safed, where all key decisions are made

collectively, and where mothering of each child is shared by several mothers,

also suggests that the context of the use of technology is markedly different from

either Tikva or Y-S.

So in *Body of Glass*, it is recognised that mothering can be biological or social, and that the use of technology does not degrade motherhood, but mother rights are absolutely privileged over father rights. The conception of a child under the ageis of compulsory heterosexuality is recognised as threat to women's subjective autonomy. In fact, as I will go on to outline later, despite the benign fathering represented by Yod, fatherhood – biological or social – is ultimately represented as irrecuperable to social transformation.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In *The Fifth Sacred Thing* there is a much more thorough-going critique of the nexus of capitalism, patriarchal social relations and reproductive technologies. In the course of taking her healing skills to the resistance fighters in the Southlands, the dystopian space in the novel, Madrone encounters a white woman, Sara, who is married to a key Millennialist. Sara is passing off her niece, Angela, as the daughter of her black maid, Mary Ellen.

> "My sister, who was never very wise, had a little dalliance with Mary Ellen's son. They were discreet but not careful, and she got pregnant. Oh, we tried to get her an abortion but it was too dangerous – the Millennialists were on a campaign and nobody would do it. So we sent her off to our country house, and when the child came, Mary Ellen passed it off as hers. They might have gotten away with it if they'd had sense enough to break off the affair, but they didn't. And so eventually, of course, one of the other servants denounced them. Charles ran off to the hills, and Lisa – well, we no longer speak of her" (Starhawk 1993: 268).

This short passage condenses a great deal of information about the social organisation of the Southlands. The reason the pregnancy was dangerous was that it contravened the racist eugenic logic informing the Four Purities of the

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[68] Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* was a landmark feminist text on the vexed issue of mothering in a patriarchal society (Rich 1977).

Millennialists: Moral Purity, Family Purity, Racial Purity and Spiritual Purity

(Starhawk 1993: 272). However, obtaining an abortion was also problematic,

because the Millennialists had outlawed the practice. That Mary Ellen could

successfully pass the child off as her own reveals that different standards are

applied to the sexuality and reproduction of black women than of white.

However, these standards are applied inconsistently. Sara explains to Madrone

why she cannot get medical help for her chronically ill niece:

> "we can't afford to call any attention to her existence. What if my
> husband found out? Mary Ellen could go to the pens for having an
> illegitimate child. They don't usually enforce it with the blacks, but if we
> rub their noses in it, trying to doctor her, they'd have to" (Starhawk 1993:
> 269).

The pens to which Sara refers are breeding pens. The Stewards – the governing

arm of the Millennialists – use the pens to reproduce at least two sets of

commodified children, Runners and Angels. The mothers of runners receive

contracts from the Stewards for their offspring to be bioengineered for speed and

strength. The children are, in effect, born into, that is, produced for, slavery.

The labour they are bred for, however, is running races and providing sexual

services to those who spend most gambling on the outcomes of the races. In the

course of the novel only one runner is encountered, Isis is a young black woman

who has escaped slavery, but it is not clear whether the runners are bred

particularly from black mothers. However, as the social organisation of the

Southlands is a fairly credible extrapolation from contemporary racist attitudes,

this seems likely. This assumption could be inferred from the logic of the

Millennialist Creed, which claims that non-white people are non-human and

therefore legitimately subject to any form of oppression that the Stewards and

their allies impose. The Angels, on the other hand, are bred solely to be sexual

slaves to rich men who indulge in sadistic sexual abuse, particularly of children. The specifics of this breeding programme are not discussed in the novel, but the descriptions of the Angels as physically similar to each other in their beauty and androgyny might imply that cloning techniques are being used. Transgressing the racial othering in which the Stewards indulge, the majority of the Angels are blond(e) and white-skinned, although a small proportion have other hair or skin colours, although they share the androgynous physique. Madrone thinks they resemble "a breed of showdogs – greyhounds or Afghans" (Starhawk 1993: 260). The Stewards would therefore have to call on one of the other purities to rule this group of people as being non-human. This absolutely dystopian representation of reproduction under the rule of the Millennialists/Stewards reveals patriarchal relations to be bound up with classed and raced relations of oppression. Although there is little focus on fatherhood in the City (San Francisco), we can infer that it is in the process of being re-visioned as a relationship that is not about domination, particularly as children are represented as agents in their own right within the City.

There is no privileging of any particular family form or hegemonic sexuality in "the City"; the conception of children seems to take place within the context of loving and / or consensual, sexual relationships. Abortion is no longer a major issue as people in the City have learnt to control their fertility. Although maternal connections – 'motherlines' – seem to be privileged, fathers are acknowledged as significant even if they seem to be absent from the day-to-day rearing of their children. This absence seems to a large degree to be through force of circumstances, and recognises that men are not all equally privileged in

terms of patriarchal relations. For example, Madrone's father was a teenage freedom fighter killed in a revolutionary struggle in Guadalupe. The father of the child that Madrone midwives at the start of the novel has been dead for six months[69], and we can reasonably infer that he, like the child's mother, fell victim to the manufactured viruses released by the Millennialists. Despite this technoscientific plague, there is no reference to infertility posing a problem in the City. As Madrone, one of the novel's trio of key protagonists is a very overworked healer who specialises in "catching" babies as they are born, we can infer that birth is still very much a part of the daily life of the City.

There is one particular liminal pregnancy in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* that is particularly symbolic of the hope that the City represents when compared to the Southlands, and which simultaneously complicates any simplistic binary opposition between the two spaces. Katy, the daughter of a Methodist minister who was burned out of his church for resisting the Millennialists, coordinates resistance and maintains a garden in the centre of Los Angeles, and is Madrone's contact when she takes her healing skills to the city dwellers. Katy is already pregnant when Madrone meets her, but the baby is actually born as the two women escape north. Had Katy and her baby not escaped with Madrone, they would have been experimented on by the same scientists who have manufactured the epidemics that are decimating the population of San Francisco. Although, initially, Hijohn is an absent father, like Madrone's father, it is due to his involvement in a guerilla war, in Hijohn's case, contesting the oppressive social

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[69] Although it is not explicitly stated that Rosa's father was Consuelo's partner and the new baby's father, we can infer it from the lack of reference to any alternative in the relevant passages.

relations of the Southlands. It would seem that women's embodied connection to the children that they bear requires that mothering is re-visioned more urgently than fathering whilst the social relations that require of men that they go away to war (like most of the men in Women's Country) must be re-visioned.

Fleshy Subjects or Technologised Objects

In the previous section I began to discuss some of the plot devices and theoretical rationales for re-visioning motherhood and fatherhood. In the section that follows I will explore some of the tensions around the re-visioning of mothering and its implication in social relations that have arisen in feminism because of the inescapably embodied character of birthgiving. In 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Donna Haraway suggests that: "American radical feminists ... have profoundly affected our political imaginations – and perhaps restricted too much what we allow as a friendly body and political language. They insist on the organic, opposing it to the technological" (Haraway 1991a: 174). In what follows I explore the risks and benefits of being: "recalled ... to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance" (Haraway 1991a: 154) and of reproducing the somatophobia foundational to the thinking of Western modernity.

The Gate to Women's Country

In *The Gate to Women's Country* discussion of the embodied experience of childbearing is curiously absent despite the centrality of reproduction to this society. Stavia bears three children, her sister Myra bears three and their mother, Morgot, bore five, including the two sisters. Of these three key mothers in the text, the reader is only given detailed information about Myra's childbearing, and

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this is to highlight her inadequacies as a rational subject. When Myra discusses her pregnancy with Stavia, she expresses her desire that the child look like Barten, her warrior lover, as she hates her own red hair and freckles. The reader is given no information about Myra's experience of pregnancy or giving birth, but does learn of the way she is treated at the medical centre following the first carnival at which she has sexual intercourse:

> "they're so rude. Always the same questions. When was my last period? She knew. It was just before carnival, and she gave me an exam then. Was I taking my supplements? Did I have any sexual problems?"
> [Stavia] "That doesn't sound too rude."
> "It was something else. She had me up on the table all spread out like a split fish with that metal gadget in me, squirting me with syringes and stuff, and then they called her out for an emergency and she left me there!"
> "There are emergencies, My. There really are."
> "Well, somebody could have come and let me loose. I was there for half an hour, flat on my back" (Tepper 1989: 82)

So despite the importance of motherhood to social transformation, there is no sense of a supportive community of women sharing knowledge in *Gate*. Rather, if Myra can be taken as exemplary, pregnant women are completely disempowered by the investment of reproductive knowledge in the medics. When Stavia asks Myra, following this examination, whether she is pregnant, Myra replies that the medic will be able to tell her in about six weeks, rather than referring to her own knowledge of her body's cycles. In contrast, knowledge about the practice of mothering – as opposed to childbearing – is shared as part of the formal system of education in Women's Country, not in the context of mother-daughter or other intimate social relations. When Stavia counsels Myra not to communicate her disappointment with her baby if it is born with hair and freckles like hers, she is reproducing the knowledge she learns in school, not sharing her experience. Myra retorts:

> "Oh, for heaven's sake, Stavia, you are not the only person in this family ever to have taken childrearing courses!"(Tepper 1989: 83)

So the radical separatism in *Gate* between women and men, is carried through into separatism between expert women who regulate the practice of birthgiving and mothering, and non-expert, or irrational women who must be schooled in the social relations of mothering. It would seem that their bodies, whilst material to the programme of social transformation, are radically disavowed because of their putative connection to 'Nature' which has to be civilised.

As already discussed, neither infertility nor congenital illnesses appear to afflict the inhabitants of Women's Country whose reproduction is scientifically managed. The reader can infer that the residual scientific infrastructures in Women's Country are partially responsible for this state of affairs, as the towns of Women's Country are built away from "devastations"; land damaged by radiation. However, a markedly different situation obtains in the Holyland where reproduction comes under the aegis of patriarchal fundamentalists. Women in this society are married off virtually as soon as they begin to menstruate to provide the men with sexual services – "duty" – and to produce children. Female infanticide has depleted the pool of available females so the majority of the men in the Holyland are without wives. Should one of the older polygamous men die, however, their widows may not remarry if they have borne children. As contraception is unheard of in this society, it is highly unlikely that any widows will be childless. Chernon grasps the implications of this rapidly, as does Stavia:

> "Ownership," she said with heavy irony. "Whoever impregnates me, owns me, is that it?"

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"That's it!" he blurted, his face angry. "Yes. That's it. And no cheating. No saying yes then no. You have my child and you belong to me, and that's it." (Tepper 1989: 260).

In the Holyland, therefore, pregnancy seems to be inseparable from men's oppression and exploitation of women. However, the unintended consequence of the patriarchal control of women's reproduction twinned with female infanticide is functional infertility, while the insularity of the society means that, as Susannah points out to Stavia:

> "It's comin' to an end, can't you see? More'n more babies born dead or put out to die because there's somethin' wrong with 'em. It's all comin' to an end, and I'm glad. It's just ... you know, you get to love your girl children ..." (Tepper 1989: 258).

When Stavia is captured by the Holylanders she convinces them that the contraceptive implant in her arm that Chernon has viciously removed is in fact a device to ensure that she carries her pregnancies to term. (Stavia has the implant because of the risk of rape from Holylanders or other predatory men she might meet on her research trip outside Women's Country). On hearing this one of the elder male Holylanders orders her to implant it in his wife:

> "She's had babies afore their time. There was two dropped early afore this last one. You put this thing in Susannah" (Tepper 1989: 256).

The elder's language makes his wife sound like breeding stock, however there is no scientific management of this livestock prior to Stavia's arrival. Susannah becomes extremely distressed when she hears his command that is intended to enable her to be a more effective breeder:

> "I can't have another one. I get so sick. I can't have another one. I'm so tired."
> "How old are you?" Stavia asked.
> "Twenty-nine," she replied. "I'm too old. Oh I can't. I can't". (Tepper 1989: 256).

Stavia therefore takes the risk of revealing to her that rather than promoting pregnancy the device will ensure that its user will not become pregnant, for at least four or five years. The Holyland can be read as the 'natural' or 'essential' state of reproduction versus Women's Country as a socially constructed and by implication liberatory organisation of reproduction, because of the absence of controlling patriarchs who 'own' their women and their offspring. The availability of contraceptive technology to enable a woman to control her own fertility could support such a 'progressive' reading. Of course, this reading is only sustainable if the reader ignores that Women's Country's medics negate women's subjectivity in a remarkably similar way to medical professionals in patriarchal societies, contracepting and inseminating them without their knowledge, let alone their consent.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass* being 'of woman born' is a key marker of humanity and one of the few ways of distinguishing human cyborgs – Nili is a limit case – from lab-created cyborgs. However, this key marker is being pushed to its own limits by technological intervention in the gestation and birthing process in the multi zones as Shira explains in relation to Y-S:

> "One of the standard subjects for gossip among corporate women my age is exactly how you are trying to make a baby – comparing technologies" (Piercy 1992: 259).

In contrast however, Shira, as already discussed, conceived through sexual intercourse and bore her child to term. Early in the novel Shira contrasts travel by virtual reality adversely with real, i.e. embodied, travel:

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Shira was stubborn: what she hadn't done in her own body didn't really count. She was old-fashioned that way, as Malkah had raised her (Piercy 1992: 53).

So it is possible for the reader to infer that Shira's commitment to embodied experience is philosophical and/or socially constructed rather than an expression of investment in some foundational or essentialist ontology. Indeed, even though she refers to her relationship with her biological mother, Riva, as follows: "I'm flesh of her flesh", her subsequent query, "How can my own mother be so alien?" (Piercy 1992: 421) emphasises that biological relationships are not necessarily those that are most deeply felt and that intimate connection is produced through daily practices. The absolute commitment of the text, however, to its critique of patriarchal relations of reproduction, and the corollary investment in women only (if not all women) as being fit to mother lays the text open to an essentialised /essentialisng reading. The reader might speculate, for example, as to whether the markedly different relationship of the gestational mother to the child-to-be in Shira and Riva's cases (Shira bore her child in the context of a heterosexual nuclear family while Riva produced hers as a gift to her own mother) led the latter to disinvest in embodied connection, using technology to distance herself from the child. As noted earlier, Riva availed herself of "every bit of technology" possible to produce Shira (Piercy 1992: 259-60). Whichever reading is preferred, the text certainly reproduces the split apparent in *Gate* between the 'biology' (albeit augmented with technology) of childbearing, from the sociality of mothering. Malkah refers to her own pregnancy with Riva as "a lump in my womb like a souvenir of delight" (Piercy 1992: 26) but acknowledges that this did not mean that she knew how to mother her child once she was born.

So, although there are more references to the embodied experience of bearing children than in *The Gate to Women's Country*, many of them are in fact rhetorical or metaphorical. For example, when Shira loses custody of her son she feels torn open (Piercy 1992: 41). Further, when she tells Gadi that she would sacrifice anything to her son, Gadi senses the depth of her feelings and says:

> "You say that like a lioness yourself ... This is a new side of you, Ugi. Who would have expected maternity to give you fangs and claws?" (Piercy 1992: 482).

There is therefore an interesting slippage between the 'biological' and 'social' constructionist' readings of mothering in *Body* that recognises women's commitment to children as both 'natural' – it is an animal instinct – and socially constructed, it is the outcome of the work of making connection. Of course, in a sense this slippage is unavoidable if the social theory produced by the text continues to insist that the agency for feminist social transformation lies only with women.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In *The Fifth Sacred Thing* one of the first incidents in the novel is the 'delivery' of a baby. The reader is introduced to Madrone's character through a dramatic scene in which she is attempting to save a birthing mother's life. The first thing we learn about Madrone's world view is that, despite the risk of infection, she does not wear a surgical mask as she believes that a woman in labour needs to see another human face. The woman's cervix is barely dilated, making a vaginal birth impossible, although her high fever suggests that waiting to deliver the baby will endanger its life. When another medical worker, Aviva, suggests a

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caesarean section, Madrone rejects the option because she believes the woman

would die:

> "She's dying anyway," Aviva said, reading the monitor. "Her blood
> pressure's sky high. None of the drugs have touched it."
> "We can't lose her," Madrone said. "She's my neighbour, and she's
> Rosa's mother. I refuse to believe we're going to lose her. I won't lose
> her" (Starhawk 1993: 3).

Although this passage could be read as following a familiar heroic plot, where

the valiant doctor battles for his patient's life (the masculine possessive is

significant), I would suggest a more transformative reading is also available.

Rather, Madrone is invested in the specificity of this one patient, who is her

neighbour and the mother of a girl that Madrone grew up baby-sitting. However

eager she is to assist in the entry of a living baby into the world, she does not

subordinate the survival of its mother to that eagerness. And although she does

refer to Consuelo as Rosa's mother, she also refers to her as her (Madrone's)

friend, suggesting that Consuelo's identity is constructed through a web of

intersubjective relationships, not simply via a biological relationship to her child.

Ultimately, the struggle to save Consuelo's life is unsuccessful, but her baby girl

is born alive; in fact a caesarean section is performed when it is obvious the

mother is not going to survive, despite Madrone's exceptional efforts. It is

important to recognise that modern technology is used when appropriate in this

transformed environment; but technology serves needs rather than creating new

demands. Despite her grief at the loss of her friend and neighbour, on her death

Madrone's attention is immediately transferred to the problem of ensuring the

child's survival, and following discussion with her colleagues they agree that the

child can be nursed – that is breast-fed – by a neighbour of Aviva's who has just

lost a baby. This solution is deemed to be beneficial to both parties and will

enable the healers to monitor the health of both patients. So organic embodiment is not fetishised, but is constituted pragmatically as a condition of certain possibilities.

The loss of Consuelo, to a fever that proves to be caused by biotechnological warfare, signals a change in the situation of the City when it moves from a condition of relative isolation to one of siege and invasion and is mirrored by the survival of another mother and baby later in the novel when the tide begins to turn against the invaders. In fact, this later birthing takes place on the water, in a boat returning to San Francisco from Los Angeles. When Katy gives birth on board she is surrounded by women who support her physically and emotionally. Madrone, as midwife, claims to 'catch' babies, not deliver them, returning the birth-giving woman to centre stage. Even though she has been trained in conventional Western medical training, and uses those skills as she deems appropriate, she also has expertise in other systems of healing, including magic. Katy is initially fearful of her capacity to survive the birthgiving process but Madrone is encouraging:

> "Trust your body, Katy. Your woman's body has given birth for millions of years. It knows what to do" (Starhawk 1993: 406).

Although Katy is initially dubious about this statement, and therefore grateful for Madrone's presence as an experienced midwife, during the actual birth her reactions change. When Madrone coaches her to push she retorts:

> "I know," Katy said. "Don't tell me what to do."
> "No, *querida*, I don't need to tell you. The wisdom is in your cells, in your womb, and they are here with us tonight, the mothers, all the mothers, every woman who has ever given birth, your mother, my mother too. Lean on them, let them support you, they will hold your back" (Starhawk 1993: 407)

It would be very easy to label this passage essentialist, but in my opinion that does not do justice to the notions of both historical and biological continuity that are being evoked. Although Madrone weaves ritual about the birthing process she also pays close attention to its embodied reality:

> The child cried and Katy lifted her to her breast to suck. With a last moan, she expelled the placenta, and Mary Ellen caught it in a basin while Madrone kneaded Katy's womb to help it contract. There was blood all over the bunk, but praise the Goddess she had hardly torn at all, and there was no hemorrhage (Starhawk 1993: 409).

It is not simply the embodied experience of the birthing mother that is attended to in the text. Madrone's is also implicated in the process both imaginatively and physically:

> Madrone sat down at last. Her body was trembling; she was as exhausted as if she herself had given birth. Which she had, in a way. For she had rescued Katy from the lab, and if she hadn't, this child would already be dead, a specimen useful for data and products that didn't bear thinking of. Oh, she had saved this tiny life five times already, and *qué milagro* that it lived and breathed, that Katy's own hands could comfort and stroke it and hold it to her breast" (Starhawk 1993: 409).

Again, I would stress a reading of this passage which takes account of embodiment and active subjectivity rather than one which might argue that women are unproblematically conflated with their reproductive capacity. One of the Spanish phrases for giving birth, cited by Madrone in the text is *'dar a luz'*, meaning 'to give to light' and Madrone's intervention which saved Katy from the lab can be read as part of this process, without minimising the crucial factor of Katy's gestation and giving birth to the child.

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The Practice of Mothering

In the previous sections I have begun to unpack the conceptual sticking points that occur within feminist theory when feminists re-vision the institution or identity of motherhood and assume that this re-visioning of women's gendered destiny will result in the transformation of patriarchal social relations. This assumption is associated to a large degree with the work of feminist object relations theorists such as Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, as well as with the work of feminist psychologists and philosophers such as Carol Gilligan and Sara Ruddick (Chodorow 1978; Dinnerstein 1987; Gilligan 1982; Ruddick 1990). At this point it is worth considering Evelyn Nakano Glenn's working definition of mothering as "a historically and culturally variable relationship 'in which one individual nurtures and cares for another'" (Glenn 1994: 3). She suggests that the ideology of mothering needs to be deconstructed at two levels; firstly, by disentangling actor and activity so that it is not just women or birth-mothers who are recognised as nurturers and caregivers, and secondly, through recognising that mother and child do not form a single entity with unitary interests (Glenn 1994: 13). In fact, her working definition challenges the primacy of both blood ties and generational difference, as well as the gendering of mothering. Glenn herself suggests that:

> Decomposing mothering would broaden our field of vision to encompass the variety of actors who mother, the multiple identities/roles of women who mother, and the separate personhood and agency of mothers and children (Glenn 1994: 13).

But the logic of her argument encompasses the possibility that some of the actors who mother might be men and that women do not necessarily know best, that is

better than men, when it comes to the transformative organisation of childbearing and childrearing.

The Gate to Women's Country

For example, in *The Gate to Women's* Country, despite being: "beaten down, worn down, worked down" by continual pregnancy as well as the other duties required of women in the Holyland, Susannah can still prioritise the needs of her own female child. She therefore asks Stavia to implant the contraceptive device in her daughter Chastity in a bid to ensure that she will not be subject to the same fate as her mother, being worn out by constant childbearing before the age of thirty. The assumed identity of interest between mother and daughter is located in their common vulnerability to male sexual predation and men's desire to reproduce masculinity in the bodies of male children. Susannah's remark that: "It's just ... you know, you get to love your girl children ..." (Tepper 1989: 258) is telling in that it reveals an interesting symmetry between Women's Country and the Holyland. In both societies, mothering is practiced differentially depending on the sex of the child.

In Women's Country, as soon as a male child is five he is sent to the warriors who are responsible for his upbringing from then on. Although some textual reference is made to the rituals which surround this transference of responsibility, the reader is not given access to the point of view of either a five-year old boy or of a warrior responsible for 'mothering' him, so it is difficult to infer whether this does take place, or whether the only mothering a male child receives ceases on his fifth birthday. In the Holyland, similarly, once (and if) male children

reach the age of six, they are schooled by their fathers every day in the Father-Houses:

> Boys had to be able to read and write so they could discuss the Scriptures. They had to be able to calculate some, as well, in order to be efficient shepherds for All Father, who wouldn't tolerate lack of discipline or diligence (Tepper 1989: 202).

In both societies, therefore, mothering sons is a problematic enterprise for women. According to Adrienne Rich, this is not just the case in fantastic fiction:

> under the realities of organized male territoriality and aggression, when women produce sons, they are literally working for the army (Rich 1977: 195)

In Women's Country, the women give their male children over to be trained as warriors and must wait, and hope, until they are fifteen to learn whether they will return through the gate to Women's Country, or choose to remain with the warriors. However, even should they choose to return at 15, they are unlikely to return to their birth families as the Council Women habitually place them in another town from the one in which they are born. So mothers do not invest the same caring labour in boys that they can with girls who will remain geographically close for their entire lives, even if they move to another household. Some women therefore choose to mourn their loss to patriarchy as soon as they reach the age of five. Morgot explains the process to Stavia when they learn that Chernon may resume visiting his mother at the twice-yearly carnival holidays, after a period of estrangement; Stavia is surprised to learn that his mother might not welcome this prospect:

> Morgot got a faraway look on her face, her eyes sad. "You bear a son. When he's still a baby, you think of losing him when he's five. You grieve. You get over it. Then the day comes that your son is five and goes to his warrior father. You grieve. You heal. Then, every time he comes home for carnival, it's like ripping the wound open again. Each time you heal. And then, when he's fifteen, maybe he chooses to stay in

the garrison, and you grieve again. You lie awake at night with your eyes burning and your pillow wet. You choke on tears and they burn. You worry about his going into battle, being wounded, dying. Every battle means ... every battle means someone dies. Maybe your son, or your friend's son. Some women can't go on doing it over and over. Some women try to forget; they never speak of their sons again after the boys turn fifteen. Other women 'go on watching them, waving to them from the wall, sending them gifts." Her voice broke and she turned away (Tepper 1989: 70).

Although Morgot's grief is hard to credit when she bears a major share of the responsibility for implementing the plan that perpetuates this state of relations, underpinning the grief is a forlorn hope that the sons will recognise that matriarchal relations are preferable to patriarchal ones and will return home at last. The gendered separation is necessary – this social theory suggests – to render absolutely explicit the difference between the shared labour that is necessary to transform social relations to the benefit of all and the harmful patriarchal logic which alienates from women both their labour and their children in a paradoxical trade for protection. This paradox leaves women and children vulnerable to the private use of gendered violence so they can be protected from its application on a grand scale in the territorial battles which men's investment in domination seems to render inevitable.

In *The Gate to Women's Country*, I have argued, an adult woman's propensity to procreate is simply assumed. The classes in sexual technique and childrearing that girls and women receive as part of the standard education in Women's Country, the reader can infer, work in much the same way as normative discourses do in our contemporary social reality. That is they work to make alternatives to becoming a mother unthinkable, so that there is no need to make childbearing an official obligation in Women's Country. A corollary mythology

drives the consent of the garrison specifically with regard to the bearing of sons. Within the garrison it is also considered to be women's primary duty and self-interest to bear sons:

> Women knew the warriors protected them only because women bore them sons, so it was in the women's interest to see that sons were produced and brought to the appropriate father. Though Chernon had serious doubts about this, it was true that almost every warrior had at least one son ... Sons were the single most important thing in life to a warrior, and the women knew that. "In bearing a son for a warrior, a woman earns her life." That's the way the indoctrination for boys went. "Your mother earned her life so." Another saying was, "There's no use or excuse for a childless woman." Though, of course, everyone realized there really were many excuses. Without all the old women doing the weaving and preserving fish and shearing sheep, food and fabric would both be scarce. Everyone really knew that (Tepper 1989: 143).

In Women's Country, however, daughters are trained from an early age to take on the same responsibilities shouldered by their mother before them. At the age of ten when cautioned by her mother not to cause her shame, Stavia reflects that:

> she hadn't had a tantrum for at least a year. Well, part of a year. She had been so guiltily miserable after the last one, she might never have one again, even though sometimes she desperately felt like screaming and rolling around and saying, no, she wouldn't do whatever it was they expected her to do because they were always expecting her to do something more or be something more until it didn't feel like there was enough of her left to go round (Tepper 1989: 13-14).

The reference to "they" is telling as it makes it clear that it is difficult to separate the practice of mothering from the training of children to abide by the ordinances of Women's Country. Stavia has a much more harmonious relationship with her mother than her elder sister, Myra, and it appear that this is because Stavia models herself so closely on her mother. As Myra remarks, exasperatedly:

> "I swear to God, some days you sound just like Morgot. You're only eleven and I wish to God you'd act like it!" (Tepper 1989: 83)

Myra on the other hand is constantly out of favour with her mother. It is claimed textually that the rift between them occurs when Stavia is eleven, because of

Myra's infatuation with a warrior (Tepper 1989: 37). However, there is also textual evidence to suggest that Morgot favoured Stavia over Myra even prior to the rift, as Myra's resistance to the ordinances and their imposition via her mother is more overt than Stavia's, although ultimately, far less significant. Morgot shifts the responsibility for conflict to Myra and her growing interest in one of the warriors (Tepper 1989: 23-4). This dishonesty about this attribution of blame reveals the work that goes into disciplining the women of Women's Country into a form of subjectivity which privileges rational (self-) management over desire, yet, at the same time, mobilises romance and narratives of heroism to enlist women's (and warriors') co-operation in the social settlement.

Body of Glass

Having suggested that it is difficult to disentangle the practice of mothering from the inculcation of a restrictive set of social norms in *The Gate to Women's Country*, the situation in *Body of Glass* is relatively anarchic. Even when focusing simply on the mothering practices of the two key point of view female characters, Malkah and Shira, there are considerable differences. Malkah has reared two children, her daughter and her granddaughter in very different ways. She herself represents the process of bringing up Riva as a constant battle of wills, whereas her approach to raising Shira was markedly more playful. Malkah and Shira both consider themselves to be much more like each other than either is like Riva, but Malkah suggests that only part of this resemblance is due to the way in which they were nurtured:

> "I used to wonder what I did wrong. But now I think that unless you grossly mistreat a child or spoil her or let her be injured, basically there's a given element in all of us, something from genes or the moment. From

birth on, a child follows her own path. She learns, but she also unfolds from within" (Piercy 1992: 327).

This approach to mothering seems much more tolerant of difference than the approach taken by Morgot in *Gate*, although it also hints at an essential foundation to social construction. The reference to spoiling a child suggests that Malkah sees moral training as part of the practice of mothering but her remarks about bringing up Shira suggests that she is also self-conscious about the possibility that her methods may be fallible;

> "I'd raised Riva, she was gone, and I felt a little at loose ends. I'd had enough time alone to think how much better a job I could do now that I was so much smarter and kinder." She laughed sharply (Piercy 1992: 328).

Indeed, Shira is angry with her grandmother when she learns that the family tradition of children being raised by their grandmothers "back to the tenth generation" was simply a myth invented by Malkah to explain why Riva was not raising her own daughter. Interestingly she relates her anger to the disjuncture between conventional stories about grandmothers and her grandmother's agency as a storyteller and disruptor of conventional social relations. Indeed, in spite of having been mothered by a woman who spun tales, had a rich and varied sex life, a responsible job and many friends, Shira's own approach to mothering seems extremely reactionary. As quoted earlier, Riva sums it up in a nutshell:

> "Pretty girl, got married, worked for a multi, had a baby. Conventional and timid choices. Don't see much of myself in you."(Piercy 1992: 263)

Shira was determined that if she had a child she would bring it up in a household that she shared with its father, despite the quality of mothering that she received from Malkah: "Malkah's love was strong but abrasive, scrubbing her clean" (Piercy 1992: 52). This suggests that individual women cannot transform the patriarchal social relations of reproduction simply by mothering in an

unconventional fashion; hegemonic discourses of motherhood and paternity are more pervasive and persuasive than individual behaviour.

It also reflects the text's recognition that hegemonic culture can continually reinstate conservative power relations despite the potentially disruptive or deconstructive effects of technological innovation, and that resistance to this diffuse power cannot be effected through simple binary oppositions. For example, the multi's personnel file on Shira calls her 'natural' conception and delivery of Ari an archaism: "the term used in personnel for people who were considered not quite civilized or prepped, not fully up on corporate culture" (Piercy 1992: 379). A nuclear heterosexual family of the kind that Shira attempted to create with Josh and Ari is also an archaism in the corporate culture, although it was, apparently, prevalent in the Tikva of her childhood, whilst not her own experience. The files also note her "pronounced sense of guilt surrounding son" and judge that Shira can be re-employed by Y-S simply by offering her partial custody of her son (Piercy 1992:380-2). Shira's pronounced sense of guilt seems, like Malkah's more worked-through guilt, to be associated with two factors; her reason for having a baby and the way she has chosen to raise it.

> Malkah told her that when a woman had a baby, it was of her line. Men came, men went, but she should remember that her first baby belonged to her mother and to her but never to the father. Malkah said love was mostly nonsense and self-hypnosis, and men were by and large fine to work with and fun in bed, but never expect much otherwise. Of her Malkah expected much. She was the daughter of the line (Piercy 1992: 52).

Even when the tradition of children being raised by their grandmothers is revealed as a myth woven by Malkah, her behaviour in terms of work, sexuality

and mothering all bear out the rest of her remarks to Shira. So kinship, as in *The Gate to Women's Country* is ideally organised around motherlines. The dysfunctional relationships between Avram and his 'real' son Gadi, and his manufactured 'son' Yod provide the counter-example of patriarchal kinship which ends in the death and destruction of Avram and Yod. Safed and the harmonious community of the descendants of Israeli and Palestinian women provide an example of women-centred kinship that is diffused through an entire community and which results in women who are secure in their subjectivity. Nili explains to Shira that she was able to undertake her mission to the outside world, leaving her six-year old daughter behind, because:

> "The little ones are raised by several mothers. I was chosen for this quest. I'm the best equipped. But I miss her. Every day three or four times I sit and meditate on her image, but I know it's out of date." Nili shrugged. "We all have to pay for our choices and our situation. Don't you?" (Piercy 1992: 489)

It is only following this conversation that Shira is prepared to believe that Nili is a mother, despite having already received the information from Gadi. And her immediate assumption is that Nili must find the separation from her daughter as painful as she does her separation from Ari, without any reflection that it is possible to be emotionally connected in a less consuming fashion than is her own practice. At the outset of *Body of Glass* Shira's emotional immaturity is equated with her overinvestment in romantic heterosexuality as well as with her nostalgic "overattachment" to her "mythical" grandmother rather than to the "real" fallible woman Malkah proves to be. However, during the course of the novel she begins to mature emotionally as she learns to value her sexual agency, rather than to seek completion in coupledom. Malkah's advice to Shira over her break-up

with Gadi when she was seventeen (already quoted) seems to hold good for her apparent overinvestment in mothering:

> "You love too hard. It occupies the centre and squeezes out your strength. If you work in the centre and love to the side, you will love better in the long run, Shira. You will give more gracefully, without counting, and what you get you will enjoy" (Piercy 1992: 75).

Although the quote refers to sexual love, it seems that a similar analysis can be applied to Shira's love for her child, as in remarks like: "A mother without her child is a cart trying to run on three wheels" (Piercy 1992: 101). Malkah's pragmatic response to this dramatic plaint is: "So a three-wheeled cart is a wheelbarrow, and it works perfectly well".

Interestingly, the three-cornered relationship between Malkah, Shira and Riva bears marked similarities to that between Morgot, Stavia and Myra; the most obvious difference being the level of tolerance exhibited. Malkah explains to Shira:

> "You and I are more suited, more harmonious. We're two sensuous hearth-loving cats with our notions of exactly how things ought to be around here. She charges in like a porcupine. We're the ones who have to make the communication and the affection happen – but she's our flesh and blood too" (Piercy 1992: 263).

Unlike Myra, in *The Gate to Women's Country*, who is expelled from her mother's house and forced to pursue work that does not suit her, Riva remains a welcome and much-loved guest in her mother's home who pursues the life of a warrior. However, when Malkah believes Riva to be dead she reflects:

> If I sometimes ask myself whether I did not commit some early error that made love unimportant to her no matter how freely offered, she was what she wanted to be (Piercy 1992: 310).

This suggests that no matter how proud Malkah is of her daughter's commitment to liberating information, and however tolerant she is of her difference, she does

privilege emotional connection and see the inculcation of this capacity as a primary responsibility of mothering, and one in which she failed with Riva, and was perhaps too successful with Shira. Malkah contrasts the unpredictable work of mothering with the work of an artist:

> Every mother shapes clay into Caesar or Madame Curie or Jack the Ripper, unknowing, in blind hope. But every artist creates with open eyes what she sees in her dream (Piercy 1992: 91).

The Fifth Sacred Thing

The Fifth Sacred Thing differs from both The Gate to Women's Country and Body of Glass in that one of its key point of view characters is male. Bird is Maya's grandson, and one of Madrone's lovers. Like the two other novels, Fifth features a pair of strong female protagonists. In this case, however they are not blood relatives, although Maya was one of the adults responsible for rearing (mothering) Madrone following her mother's death. Madrone is also distinctive from Stavia and Shira as although she has attended the birth of many children, she has not, herself, given birth. This does not mean, however, that mothering is not a central issue in the novel. The introduction of a male focal character, however, does lend complexity to the way we can read off emotional connection. In the utopian space of San Francisco, nurturing and caregiving – a concise summary of Nakano Glenn's definition of mothering – have been diffused across extended friendship and kinship networks. The two key female characters, Maya and Madrone have a relationship in which they care and nurture each other, but this is not a traditional mother-daughter relationship. Maya scolds Madrone playfully for calling her abuelita (little grandmother) and, when Madrone answers that she cannot think what else to call her, retorts:

> "You don't know a word that means 'the daughter of the child one of my lovers had by my other lover when my back was turned'?" Maya asked innocently. "There isn't something in Spanish for that?"
>
> "Better settle for *madrina*. It covers a multitude of sins. Are you really okay?" (Starhawk 1993: 11)

Madrina is a polysemic term that can mean godmother, matron of honour (bridegroom's mother), patroness, female president, woman who launches a ship; it does indeed cover a multitude of sins. In the case of Maya and Madrone it seems to signify a kin relationship, which is not based on blood ties but bonds of affinity. The women share a communal living space with each other and a group of friends (blood relatives are temporarily absent, or lost through bereavement) and share responsibility for tending to each other's physical and emotional needs. The absence of infants 'birthed' by key protagonists does not equal an absence of mothering as interdependence and intersubjective relatedness are clearly central to the social organisation that supports each of these individuals. Children are present in the text as individuals and agents, not simply as extensions of their mothers. For example, Rosa, the child who is introduced at the opening of the novel as the bereaved daughter of Consuelo becomes a vital participant in the City's resistance to the invading Stewards' armies.

But blood ties are also celebrated; when Bird returns from prison in the Southlands, his grandmother is elated:

> Maya shivered with happiness. She held herself still, as if the joy might dissolve away if she moved. He is not lost, she thought. My line, Brigid's line, is restored. For a moment, she thought she felt the presence of her daughter, brushing soft spirit lips against the nape of her neck (Starhawk 1993: 121).

Like both the other novels being examined *Fifth* organises its kinship around motherlines but these are incorporated within hybrid family forms that extend to a webbed network of friends and lovers of both women so that caring labour is distributed rather than concentrated in birth-mothers. As Bird explains: "Littlejohn, when I say my family, I mean all my lovers and all their lovers and kids and ex-lovers and everyone ..." (Starhawk 1993: 87). Although it is apparent from the text that the family form encompassing Maya, Madrone and Bird is not hegemonic in the City, neither is it considered exceptional. The flexibility it exhibits can therefore be taken as exemplary of the way this new society has re-visioned mothering and the family.

I have already mentioned Madrone's efforts to 'save' Consuelo and her pragmatic attention to the newborn's needs when her mother is lost:

> "Who has milk? Who could we get to nurse this kid?"
> "It'd be safer to get volunteers to pump some milk. We don't know how contagious this thing is," Lou said.
> "There is that," Madrone said wearily. "It's too bad. Nursing would help her."
> "You really think she'll live?" Aviva asked.
> "I don't know. We don't know enough about this fever yet."
> "I bet my neighbor would take her," Aviva said. "She just lost a baby and her breasts are still dripping. And I'd notice if she started showing signs of fever."
> "That'd be good," Lou said. "That's a good idea."(Starhawk 1993: 5)

There is a sense emerging in this passage of mothering children as a communal responsibility. Madrone's own internal reflection prior to the quoted conversation is all about the needs of the child: "It needed coolness and warmth at the same time, and comfort, and milk. *Diosa*, it needed so much!", while Aviva's response sees the needs and relationship as a two way process; nursing the child will benefit her neighbour. Sara Ruddick suggests that to do the work

of mothering is "to 'see' children as demanding protection, nurturance and training[70] and then to commit oneself to meeting these demands" (Ruddick 1994). Collectively, it is apparent that the inhabitants of this future community will meet these demands. Apart from the protection and nurturance exhibited towards this orphan child, Bird's memories of home while he is in exile in the Southlands all revolve around the 'training' he had as a child. He remembers the stories told to him at bedtime to help him sleep, he remembers the myths used to teach ethical behaviour, and his education by Joanna, Madrone's grandmother.

If Glenn's definition is taken seriously, however, mothering is not a relationship that is one way. When Madrone recovers from her near-death state, Maya's distress leads the younger woman to comfort the elder:

> "It's okay," she said again, to Maya. "It's really going to be all right."
> Now I have become the child, Maya thought. This is what it means to grow old. I play at nagging, nurturing, feeding. But in the end, the young must comfort me (Starhawk 1993: 116).

In her somewhat uncritical exploration of the utopian potential of assisted reproductive technologies (despite her avowed intention of "(R)ejecting a characterisation of reproductive technologies as particularly demonic or beneficent" (Farquhar 2000: 215)), Dion Farquhar argues that the cyborg families emerging via the use of such technologies challenge "the assumptions, practices, and identities that are usually taken for granted as self-evident. (My

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[70] In explaining what she means by training, Ruddick states: "The social group that children enter requires them to learn to behave in acceptable ways; children's moral development is integral to their psychological integrity" (Ruddick 1994: 33) It appears to me that Ruddick's wording is recuperable to a conservative understanding of mothering as fitting children to the demands of patriarchal acceptability, but I think her own understanding of this relation is as one that is potentially transformative. I would therefore open up "training" to a more deconstructive reading of its possibilities.

child is 'my flesh and blood,' 'fruit of my womb,' 'seed of the father,' etc.)"
(Farquhar 2000: 217). I would argue that the friendship / kinship networks
represented in the City of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* embody such a challenge
without recourse to high-tech interventions. They demonstrate that shifts in
social relations can be accomplished without the need to invest in the capitalist
logic of product innovation.

Barbara Katz Rothman claims that she shares a vision with Sara Ruddick of a
future when there will be no more fathers ("'people of either sex who have power
over their children's lives and moral authority in their children's world, though
they do not do the work of attentive love'" (Quoted in Rothman 1994: 157) and
mothers of both sexes. She describes the skill with which her husband provides
her with nursing care, now he has been co-responsible for the intimate physical
care of their children:

> Nursing me through my first labor, he was infinitely well-meaning.
> Nursing me through my second, he knew what he was doing. He had
> been nurturing for seven years of nursing earaches, bellyaches, changing
> diapers, calming night terrors, holding pans for vomit, taking out
> splinters, washing bloody wounds. He had grown accustomed to the
> sheer physicality of the body, the sights and sounds and smells. More
> essentially, what I showed him in my pain and my fear was not foreign –
> he saw the baby, the child in me, not the one I was birthing, but the one I
> myself am, and he nursed it (Rothman 1994: 156).

Although Madrone has not given birth herself, I would argue that the text
represents her as engaged in maternal thinking *qua* Ruddick and in physical
nurturance *qua* Katz Rothman as evidenced by the attention she gives to birthing
mothers, the children they birth, and other vulnerable humans in need of physical
nurturance in the sense of healing, as well as in the sense of intersubjective
recognition that distinguishes social relations in the City from those in

Marthatown and Tikva. I have already discussed the ways in which she brings a maternal aspect to science in her practice as a midwife. Unlike the frankly patriarchal obstetrics represented in *The Gate to Women's Country*, Madrone, as I noted earlier, refers to her role as "catching" the newborn. Rather than depersonalising birthing women, she focuses on them, supports them and encourages them to do what they are uniquely fit to do. Surgical intervention into childbirth is a last-ditch measure, and that only when the dying mother cannot support the child who could live. When Madrone tried to heal Consuelo, she did so by sharing her own life energy with Consuelo. Later in the novel, when she successfully heals a child – and subsequently many others – gravely ill with the virus, she does so by taking the disease into her own body and healing it there (Starhawk 1993: 79-85). The practice is risky and by undertaking it without the support of fellow healers Madrone needlessly courts her own death. However, it does undermine the separation between knower and known that exemplifies Enlightenment epistemologies, and is undertaken because Madrone cannot bear to countenance the deaths of the members of her community. Healing as Madrone practices it is about the connections between people, and between people and their environment. It is not about the kind of domination of nature that Carolyn Merchant dates from Bacon (Merchant 1980), but rather about working with mortal, embodied human animals in the way that Katz Rothman describes.

Maya also turns not only her maternal thinking, but also her age and historical overview to rethinking the ways to defeat the Stewards. She supports the women of the Defense Council who see the City as a successful experiment in anti-oppressive living:

> [Lily, spokesperson for the Defense Council:] "We have shown in this City — in this watershed — that even on this ruined and ravaged and poisoned earth, people can live well together, can care for one another, can heal and build in harmony with what is around us" (Starhawk 1993: 238).

Lily's description of "living well" is a near paraphrase of Ruddick's definition of maternal thinking. In the passage that follows, Maya argues in support of Lily's point of view by cataloguing the litany of war and destruction of the twentieth century. In doing so, she specifically refers to the murder of "our own children and everybody else's", as well as to the impoverished world into which her own child was born. This rhetorical ploy is founded on the biological fact that women reproduce society through their embodied labour, and demonstrates forcefully the reasons that mothers and other women might attempt to subvert militaristic technologies, without suggesting that this subversion is inevitable. Although *The Fifth Sacred Thing* makes no simplistic equation between mothers and anti-militarism, there is certainly an argument in the novel that the patriarchal logic of domination bodes ill for the continued existence of humanity and the 'natural' environment that supports it (us).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some of the different reasons for re-visioning mothering in isolation from fathering in the texts under discussion. I have also explored additional tensions around the re-visioning of motherhood. In the context of the innovative technological and social practices surrounding mothering emergent in the 1980s and legislative attempts to contain these practices in an increasingly conservative social and political framework, Barbara

Katz Rothman's argument about the extension to women of the central concept of patriarchy is provocative. She argues that this modified system bases the relationship between women and children on creating an equivalence between semen and ova, so that "women are said to own their babies, have 'rights' to them, just as men do: based on their seed" (Rothman 1994:142). In the context of the Human Genome Project, and what Hilary Rose calls "industrialised genetics" the essentialism of this premise is perhaps less shocking than it might have been in the late 1960s and 1970s. This argument, developed to maintain the *status quo* of social relations of reproduction, is paradoxically taken up by Sheri Tepper in her envisioning of radical social transformation.

The Gate to Women's Country

In *The Gate to Women's Country*, the two mothers whose points of view are privileged are Morgot and Stavia. Morgot spotted Stavia's potential as a physician by the time she was ten because of her aptitude for the biological sciences. Morgot, who is also a physician, contrasts Stavia's talent in biological sciences with Myra's talent for dance, to Myra's detriment. The invidious comparison is justified by Morgot because Myra's focus on dance means that she devotes less of her energies to those studies in the crafts and sciences which have a more practical application, in reconstructing post-convulsion society, unlike Stavia's focus on a useful talent which is prized very highly in Women's Country. However, I would argue that Myra's focus on dance, an expressive art is also part of the issue as it is yet another demonstration that she is not as invested in rationality as Morgot and Stavia.

Myra's expressions of emotions are deemed too extreme, and are repeatedly

contrasted with the restraint that both Morgot and (the older) Stavia display, for

example when the former hands her five-year-old son over to the warriors or

when the latter is repudiated by her fifteen-year-old son. However, once Stavia

learns of the biosocial engineering that is being undertaken in Women's Country,

she invests fully in maintaining the secret, because she is convinced that the plan

is the appropriate corrective to the patriarchal nightmare she experienced with

the Holylanders.

Myra's lack of investment in motherhood re-visioned as a rational practice,

conveniently divorced from both heterosexual passion and patriarchal

domination, can be linked with the fraught relationship she experiences with her

mother, and Morgot's revelation to Stavia that Myra's father (he also fathered

Chernon) was "not a satisfactory sire" (Tepper 1989:293). When she reveals this

information to Stavia:

> She might have been discussing the breeding of sheep or the crossing of
> grain. Her voice was as unemotional as a wind on a distant ridge, her
> light eyes fixed on something Stavia could not see (Tepper 1989: 293).

Although the reader might infer that there may be some disjuncture between

Morgot's expression and her 'real' emotions, it is certainly the case that

emotional management appears to be highly prized and associated with a

rational, scientific worldview. It is hard to imagine that without this

overvaluation of rationality that scientists who are also mothers, and busy with

the daily work of mothering both male and female children, would be able to

implement a eugenic programme of population management in which their own

children, as well as the children of their friends and lovers, are implicated.

Barbara Katz Rothman suggests that: "Mothering teaches us physical nurturance. Having nurtured the literally unselfconscious child, we are more competent, more confident providing other kinds of intimate, physical care" (Rothman 1994: 156). *The Gate to Women's Country,* however, suggests that this is an idealisation of motherhood, and that Glenn's recommendation that we recognise that the interests of mother and children are not identical is necessary for the anti-oppressive re-visioning of motherhood. The mechanistic treatment that Myra experiences at the medical centre, authorised by Council Women who are also mothers – including Morgot, and later Stavia – is bound up in the kind of rationalistic, technologistic ideology that Katz Rothman suggests is completed at odds with the embodied connectedness of mothering, as well as an investment in the deterministic potential of certain kinds of seed (Rothman 1994: 147).

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass,* however, Malkah and Shira are both able to reconcile their investments in emotional connection with their scientific talents, and in fact, the strong implication is that their emotional literacy makes them superior scientists to the remote and controlling Avram, as well as better judges about what is appropriate with regards to reproduction. Avram's patriarchal investment in domination is contrasted with the penitence that both Malkah and Shira express for their parts in creating Yod. Avram insists that Yod "self-destruct" rather than allowing Yod to make his own decisions about how to handle an encounter with the multi Y-S. His entire attitude is that of a master towards a slave, or indeed of an operator towards a machine, yet he claims:

> "If you were my flesh-and-blood son, I could do nothing else. Protecting
> Tikva is my goal – our goal. You fulfilled your mission. Now you'll

bring it to an extraordinary conclusion. And there will be more of you, I promise ... [*Including Shira and Malkah in his address*] I created Yod, and indeed, I seem to be the only one who remembers his purpose" (Piercy 1992: 556).

Gadi, Avram's "flesh-and-blood son", is certainly of the opinion that it was in large part his own intractability that inspired Avram to create a more biddable creature. However, Malkah repents of her part in Yod's creation, and before his climactic destruction she has become convinced that he is a "person, albeit not a human person" (Piercy 1992: 530). Therefore, she seeks Yod's forgiveness:

> I asked him to forgive me for having taken part in his formation; more than ever, I have been thinking what overweening ambition and pride are involved in our creating of conscious life we plan to use and control, when we cannot even fully use our own minds and we blunder and thrash about vainly in our own lives. No life is for us but for itself (Piercy 1992: 533).

This passage is an interesting complement to the distinction that Malkah earlier makes between the role of the mother and that of an artist, with the former acting in blind hope and the latter confident in the outcome of their intentions. It takes Shira until the end of the novel to understand the distinction but she finally does. When she considers building a second Yod, she believes that she will create happiness for herself:

> She would manufacture a being to love her as she wanted to be loved. She would create for herself a being who belonged to her alone, as she had dreamed since adolescence, as she had belonged body and soul to Gadi until he had ripped himself from her (Piercy 1992: 580).

However she remembers that Yod's final act of self-determination was to destroy his creator and the capacity to replicate him and realises that unlike Avram she cannot manufacture "a being to serve her, even in love". However, she can empathise with Avram's arrogance and obsession and realises that in order not to

succumb to temptation she must destroy the capability to manufacture Yod, as otherwise:

> Like Avram, I will feel empowered to make a living being who belongs to me as a child never does and never should (Piercy 1992: 581).

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the construction of children as products is entirely allied with the dystopian patriarchal *and* capitalist space of the Southlands. The logic of biotechnology which constructs human offspring from 'seeds' in the Katz Rothman sense is represented as wholly informed by a logic of domination which is not recuperable to transformed or transformative social relations. The Breeder Pens can be read therefore, not as due to men's desire to control women and / or children, but as due to the desire to accumulate power through the control of resources that is the key shared characteristic of patriarchy and capitalism. This distinction between men and patriarchy means that men do not need to be alienated from the City's transformed social relations, but that instead they can share in the work of mothering.

To sum up; this chapter has addressed the re-visioning of motherhood vital to any project of feminist social transformation. The chosen novels all engage in radically different ways with the transformation of mothering. The chapter has followed three related strands of argument around the re-visioning of mothering through my reading of the chosen texts. Firstly I addressed accounts of conception and the different ways in which motherhood and fatherhood are re-visioned. Then I moved on to explore how pregnancy and the process of birth-

giving were located in the novels. Finally I turned to examine how practices of mothering are embodied in key protagonists and their intimate social relations.

While feminists have sometimes relied on the assumption that re-visioning motherhood will produce transformed gender relations, I argue here that re-visioning fatherhood, and uncoupling both motherhood and fatherhood are also central to this project, otherwise essentialist and biologically determinist notions of gender and reproduction will remain in place, in uneasy co-existence. The ambivalence of textual re-visionings of motherhood and fatherhood in *The Gate to Women's Country* and *Body of Glass,* lie, I suggest, in their uncertainty about the possibility of transforming fatherhood, as well as their interpellation into patriarchal models of kinship along the lines that Katz Rothman discusses. In *The Fifth Sacred Thing,* however, the distribution of mothering practices across genders and generations suggests that this society has the potential to re-vision mothering in the way that Evelyn Nakano Glenn suggests, so that nurturing and caregiving are diffused throughout social relations and children are valued as agents and not property.

Chapter 6

"I'd Rather be a Cyborg than a Goddess":

Technology, Spirituality and Hope

I work in the area of feminist theory, which is not distinct from feminism as a social movement. Feminist theory would have no content were there no movement, and the movement, in its various directions and forms, has always been involved in the act of theory. Theory is an activity that does not remain restricted to the academy. It takes place every time a possibility is imagined, a collective self-reflection takes place, or a dispute over values, priorities, and language emerges. I believe that there is importance in overcoming the fear of immanent critique and in maintaining the democratic value of producing a *movement that can* contain, without domesticating, conflicting interpretations on fundamental issues. As a latecomer to the second wave, I approach feminism with the presumption that no undisputed premises are to be agreed upon in the global context. And so, for practical and political reasons, there is no value to be derived in silencing disputes. *The only question is how best to have them, how most productively to stage them, and how to act in ways that acknowledge the irreversible complexity of who we are* (Butler 2001: 416) (emphasis added).

Introduction

The quotation reproduced at the head of this chapter embodies my own utopian

impulse for the future of feminism. Like Butler, I believe that it is the way that

feminists work through conflicts and / or sustain them as tolerable paradoxes,

that is crucial. In this chapter I will therefore offer some conclusions about

generic possibilities for the textual embodiment of utopian impulses. In the first

section, in order to set the terms for my final close reading of the key fictional

texts around the themes of technology and spirituality, I critically examine some

of the rhetorical strategies in Haraway's generative essay, 'A Cyborg Manifesto'

(Haraway 1991a). In so doing, I will highlight some key issues concerning

feminist social theoretical investments in modern and postmodern

epistemologies[71]. The second section of the chapter explores the ways that technology and spirituality are crucially interlinked in the transformatory social theory the fictions revision, while the third section extends the exploration to the relationships between these linked preoccupations and feminist praxis. In the conclusion, I will relate these discussions back to the theorisations of feminist utopian impulses and the operation of abjection in the formation of interpretive communities outlined in chapters 1 and 2.

This chapter was conceived, in part, as a response to the concluding remark in Haraway's famous 'Cyborg Manifesto': "Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway 1991a: 181). Haraway's closing question poses a foundational dichotomy that seems at cross-purposes with the boundary transgressing impulse of her overall theoretical project. I will go on to suggest that this apparent contradiction is a risk inherent to the production of social theory in an academic mode which requires a consistent and authoritative single 'voice'. Haraway herself recognises this risk and the 'Manifesto' seems to be an attempt to embody the "powerful infidel heteroglossia" she suggests would enable feminists "to strike fear into the supersavers of the new right" as well as avoid the drive to produce totalizing theory (Haraway 1991a: 181). However, her essay does seem to be ruptured in this attempt by the ways that postmodern feminist theory is demarcated through its difference from modern feminist social theory. I argue that in narrative

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[71] Sandra Harding's work on feminist epistemologies of science is also particularly relevant to this discussion. My readings of the sf texts are much influenced by Harding's work on feminist epistemologies of science and the possibilities for feminist successor sciences. I have discussed Harding's approach to these questions in Haran 1994.

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fiction, however, with its characteristic heteroglossia, and particularly in utopian science fiction with its self-conscious generic play with time and space, the drive to eliminate ambiguity is not at issue in the same way; modern and postmodern theories can co-exist and interact within a single text.

The reasons for taking Haraway's essay as a jumping-off point for an exploration of the relationships between genre and epistemology are extremely overdetermined. Published in its first version, in 1985, the essay was taken up by academics across a wide spectrum of disciplines – not simply by those (former) socialist feminists who were its primary interlocutors – and worked with throughout the remainder of the twentieth century[72]. It may therefore be read as definitive of the historical period in which the novels I am surveying were published. It marks a transition between those versions of feminist theory that formed their critique of patriarchy in the model of modern epistemology, and those postmodern versions which could no longer tolerate the paradox between the liberatory impulses of the Enlightenment and its founding exclusions of women, non-white peoples and the working classes.

Further, Haraway's own interest in science fiction and the fictions of science is one of long standing. In the Manifesto itself, Haraway refers to the sf of Joanna Russ, Samuel R Delany, James Tiptree Jr, John Varley, Octavia Butler and Vonda McIntyre, while references to sf, including Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* pepper her other essays in the collection *Simians, Cyborgs and*

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[72] I have already discussed the frequent anthologisation of the essay, and of responses to it in the "Introduction". Haraway herself has returned to the theme of the cyborg in, for example, Haraway 1995. Other works of interest include; Balsamo 1996, Gray 1995, Kirkup, Janes, Woodward and Hovenden 2000, Lykke 1996 and Wolmark 1999.

Women as they did her earlier collection *Primate Visions*. Marge Piercy, in her turn references the 'Manifesto' in the 'Acknowledgements' for *Body of Glass.*[73]

But finally, it was the novels themselves which prompted me to consider Haraway's "ironic political myth" as the final lens through which to examine them, because of the ways in which they each complicate the oppositions of Natural / Technological and Material / Spiritual in the futures they envision and therefore invite consideration in relation to the rhetorical figures of the cyborg and the goddess. I will discuss briefly what I understand by these key dualisms before moving on to my reading of Haraway's 'Manifesto'.

Although Nature / Culture may be the more familiar dualism within feminism, with its historical connotations of the Sex / Gender distinction, the opposition Natural / Technological makes more sense in the context of this thesis and its focus on the particular cultural product of science fiction, as well as with regards to Haraway's remark that "taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics" (Haraway 1991a: 181). As already discussed, science fiction is preoccupied with "social relations as they are constituted and changed by new technological modes of 'being-in-the-world'" (Vivian Sobchack, quoted in Bonner 1992: 94). Within the terms of modern Western thought, both the constitution of and changes in social relations, including those effected / affected by technology have been understood as being constructed in relation to 'nature'. When I have used the signifier 'technology' in this thesis, it has resonated with two distinct but related meanings that could

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[73] Haraway continues the cultural circuit in
Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan(C)_Meets_OncoMouse(TM) by referencing
Body of Glass.

potentially be mapped onto the modern / postmodern distinction, and indeed any usage may weight one meaning more heavily than the other. It may be helpful, therefore, to envisage particular usages as drawing on a continuum or a constellation of connotations. The first – and more commonsensical usage of the term, 'the appliance of science'[74], refers to manufactured objects which apply the results of basic science to the production of commodities exchanged in the market-place. The second, less common, meaning, following Foucault, is that of a set of organised social practices, suggesting that culture itself is a technology, or an assemblage of technologies. In a sense we might also think of these technologies as the appliance of science, but taking science simply to mean systematic knowledge production rather than experiments conducted in a laboratory. So, the opposition of Nature with Technology bears much in common with the opposition Nature / Culture, although it does carry with it the stronger (more commonsensical) meaning of technology that is used in everyday parlance.

'Nature' has assumed an extremely vexed character in feminist social theory. To a large degree this is due to the imperative in Second Wave Feminisms' theorising to separate destiny from biology and to insist that sexual difference, i.e. gender, was socially constructed, and therefore malleable, as discussed in the chapters on sexuality and motherhood. Of course this very present absence – as

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[74] "Zanussi: the Appliance of Science" was the strapline for a memorable television advertising campaign for white goods (fridges, freezers, washing machines), in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which constructed a pun around the meaning of technology as applied science, and the use of the word "appliance" to signify such domestic technologies. As I recall, the television advertisements also used science fiction visual and auditory signifiers in that the appliances appeared to be beamed down (teleported) from a space ship or more technologically advanced society.

the devalued term to which women were relegated – is an ironic mirror of the absent presence of Nature in masculinist social theory. The paradoxical conflation of radical feminism with essentialism, when most radical feminists in fact espoused social constructionism, might be traced therefore to Fuss's recognition, already discussed, that social constructionism *depended on* essentialism. That is, social constructionism depends on biology or 'nature' which is prior to the construction of social reality. In postmodern and poststructuralist thought, however, much attention has been given to deconstructing such binary hierarchies, but the epistemological effects of such projects have played through unevenly. I am interested in the sticking points for such projects *when worked through within feminist social theory, and the* different rhetorical strategies employed to signal modern or postmodern understandings of paired terms like Nature / Culture, Woman / Man and Natural / Technological.

However, those versions of radical feminism that were associated with investments in spirituality, I would argue, have been othered, or abjected because of the opposition Spirit / Matter, where spirit was equated with transcendence and Marxian notions of religion as opium of the people and matter equated with human labour and the 'real' as opposed to the 'immaterial'. However, as I have begun to suggest, Haraway's 'Manifesto' is emblematic of a shift in feminist theory "from things to words" that seems to perform an interesting reversal of this opposition, so that the realm of information, of discourse becomes the 'real', and 'organicism' or an investment in matter is problematised. This is what Val Plumwood would call *a truncated reversal*, which others Spirit in relation to

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Matter, but then goes on to other Matter in relation to 'discourse' or 'culture'.

We could then wonder whether Technology has in this schema been mapped

onto the Spirit side of the hierarchical opposition between Spirit / Matter, so that

the opposition becomes Technology (Information or discourse) / Matter, with the

opposing poles being revalued.

From Modern to Postmodern Feminisms

Having briefly sketched in some salient dualisms, I will now move on to discuss

the ways in which Haraway's essay both problematises and at the same time

reinstates them. Haraway's stated objective was: "to build an ironic political

myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" (Haraway 1997b: 149).

She thus located herself very firmly in the political and theoretical terrain that I

would argue is the heritage of currently hegemonic 'feminist theory'; a

poststructuralist or postmodern orientation to modern social and political thought

as that canon was critiqued and appropriated by the women's liberation

movement. Although it is difficult to document this hegemony I am not the only

feminist to be concerned that an effectively hegemonic or 'professional and

indexical category' of feminist theory has emerged (Stanley and Wise 2000).

Stanley and Wise suggest that many current overviews of feminist theory are:

> based on a kind of Whig view of the onward progress of feminist
> theorizing. 'In the past', the implication is, there were the 'theory wars'
> between Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, liberal
> feminism and so on. But 'in the present', there is a body of developing
> 'feminist theory' – a feminist social theory that has shed these early
> naiveties – and, in spite of a few remaining internal fractures, all right-
> thinking (non-essentialist) feminists adhere to this new sophisticated
> form. And implicitly, but sometimes also explicitly, people who do not
> agree or who advance considerably different ideas and ways of working
> are implied to be deficient in their scholarly and/or political credentials
> (Stanley and Wise 2000: 265).

Implicit in Stanley and Wise's critique is a lament for those aspects of modern feminist social theory that seem to have been abjected by the new hegemony; in particular, radical feminism. I would argue that the currently hegemonic feminist social theory to which Stanley and Wise refer is broadly speaking that with a postmodern / poststructuralist orientation that, taken at face value has most in common with the liberal and socialist traditions within feminism; radical feminism has been reified as that version of feminism most likely to suffer from the putatively irredeemable flaw of essentialism, and is therefore to be avoided at all costs. However, I as I hope I have begun to indicate through my readings of the feminist science fictions, some of the theorists and texts which have been abjected in the production of academic social theory were attempting very similar theoretical and political moves to those now produced under the sign of poststructuralism.

Of course, individual feminists, inside and outside the academy, negotiate their own principled and often anguished accommodations around theoretical issues, in the process of squaring political convictions with epistemological presuppositions and professional requirements. This type of negotiation cannot simply be reduced to the kind of power moves or colonising impulses that the quote from Stanley and Wise might suggest. But the critiques of essentialism that were mobilised in academic feminist social theory from the early 1980s had effects that were more far-reaching than their initial objects. Even though many feminist theorists may now consider the debate to be dated, it has served to abject an entire swathe of feminist movement and theory, rather than simply opening it up to question. In a discussion of the ways in which postmodern intellectuals are

characterised, Judith Butler wonders why: "'calling into question' is assumed to mean 'debunk' (rather than, say, revitalize)" (Butler 2001: 418). The question is extremely apt. However, in the context of this key strand of feminist social theory, calling into question does seem to have been elided very swiftly with debunked. It appears to me that a potential reason for that elision lies in the gaps between the enormous passions with which feminists invested the theory they produced, the capacity of different genres to embody those passions textually, and the dissonance between interpretive communities and the interlocutors to whom these theoretical texts were addressed.

I would venture, however, that it is still possible to produce extremely rigorous empirical research if one is aligned with radical feminism, without exposing oneself to the charge of essentialism, because the material specificity of the particular research subjects can be read as grounding a situated and local theory that is consonant with postmodern epistemology. Conversely, as much of postmodern theory is utopian in its deconstruction and subversion of binary oppositions that are still convincing representations of lived social reality for many, empirical research that is informed by poststructuralist theory and which takes account of the meanings made by research subjects is also recuperable to a more realist epistemology. This convergence is particularly noticeable in work around narrative. I suspect that for feminists it may be less painful to read empirical work generously and / or to read it into one's own epistemological framework than is the case with social theory where the work of reading is to write oneself into the text. For many feminists, it appears, the production of social theory which erased or ignored their lived experience, and therefore made

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it difficult or impossible to write themselves into the texts has been experienced

as a much more egregious failure from those we hoped would be their (our)

allies; other feminists / women. Of course, as Butler suggests, this has

sometimes spurred on feminists to produce theory that recognises these

differences[75]. However, I believe that much has been lost – as well as gained –

in the process.

For example, it is somewhat ironic – although not, perhaps, the irony that

Haraway intended – that the Cyborg Manifesto calls for coalition politics while

risking alienating its 'natural' constituency. Haraway's ironic political myth

attempted to be faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism. However, the

theoretical shift of which the essay is emblematic might be characterised as post-

materialist because of its growing focus on 'culture' or 'discourse' and its

separation out from the empirical social reality it was originally designed to

explain or transform. The 'Manifesto' oscillates between materialist analyses of

social relations and the working-through of a much more linguistically-oriented

epistemology which intriguingly uses science fiction to read contemporary

culture. However, the multiple take-ups of Haraway within academic social

theory have almost overwhelmingly focused on the latter part of her project.

This post-materialism has manifested in a great distrust of biology and

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[75] It is impossible to document the potential theorists or theorising lost to feminism through the operations of such exclusions, although some of the debates which have been polarised to the extent that productive movement seems unlikely can be traced in the footnotes of some academic texts. See for example Jackson & Scott's edited collection on *Feminism and Sexuality*. In the body of their introduction they note: "we have endeavoured to reproduce material which is representative of the diversity of feminist theory and politics and illustrative of some of the shifts in perspective which have occurred over the last two-and-a-half decades". This claim immediately links to a footnote acknowledging that there are: "two serious omissions: the work of Gayle Rubin and Carole Vance, which we had hoped to include in the collection. Unfortunately, both of these influential theorists refused us permission to reproduce extracts from their work" (Jackson and Scott 1996).

disparagement of any feminist cultural production tainted with 'essentialism', yet simultaneously has become entangled in a Gordian knot of attempting to theorise the body without recourse to any foundational discourse. Haraway's essay may be seen as part of this trend.

In the *Opening Out* 'Series Preface', Teresa Brennan suggests that "Feminist theory is the most innovative and truly living theory in today's academies" (Brennan 1993: vii) but that disciplinary specialisation is responsible for a growing division within feminism between "theoretical skills on the one hand, and literary analysis and socio-economic empirical research on the other". She also posits that "Poststructuralist or postmodern feminism is identified with the theoretical avant-garde, while historical, cultural feminism is associated with the study of how women are culturally represented, or what women are meant really to have done" (Brennan 1993: viii). Brennan suggests that these divisions are unhelpful and that disciplinary boundaries must be crossed, and dialogical relationships created amongst theoretical, empirical and analytical work. Although it is evident from a survey of contemporary feminist publications that many feminist academics share her judgement, I would argue that both radical feminism and ecofeminism continue to be reproduced as categories which are not recuperable to such dialogues.

Donna Haraway argues that her 'Cyborg Manifesto' is "an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (Haraway 1991a: 150). My readings of the sf texts will suggest however, that *some boundary constructions by feminisms* have not been fully responsible.

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Haraway's claim that: "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway 1991a: 181) could be implicated in such a critique. Although the statement may simply have been intended as a call for feminist theorists to transgress boundaries using the deconstructive methodology she is beginning to develop using the figure of the cyborg, by opposing it to the figure of the goddess judgemental dichotomies slip back into the text. While Haraway explicitly names her essay a 'Manifesto', and therefore signals her 'interestedness' in a political sense, and although her text is not monologic in any simple sense, it has typically been read as 'social theory'. So when she uses 'goddess' to connote *what her theory is not*, her material interlocutors[76] can be excused for reading this as a condensed critique of those versions of feminism which might be tainted by association with Goddess rhetoric such as radical feminism, ecofeminism and feminist theology. Her call for feminists to invest their hope in technology and not in spirituality suggests that the investments are necessarily mutually exclusive, and in effect sets a kind of theoretical litmus test that feminists must pass. This seems to contradict her claim that: "(t)here is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory" (Haraway 1991a: 181) and to disavow the possibility that feminists might wish to be both a cyborg and a goddess.

For example, Haraway's own work draws on many of the same theories as the work of ecofeminists, but there are a number of references in the Manifesto which I would argue produce radical feminism, ecofeminism and feminist theology as feminism's abject others despite her recognition, following Katie King, that: "Taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation

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[76] Those material interlocutors will more than likely be academics because her text is scarcely readable outside an entire nexus of political and social theory.

from official women's experience" (Haraway 1991a: 156). For example, the 'Manifesto' suggests that:

> American radical feminists like Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich have profoundly affected our political imaginations – and perhaps restricted too much what we allow as a friendly body and political language. They insist on the organic, opposing it to the technological (Haraway 1991a: 174).

Haraway argues that within feminism, "consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute" (Haraway 1991a: 155), yet by labelling Griffin, Lorde and Rich as radical feminists, seems to exclude them from her own more "contradictory, partial, and strategic" (*loc.cit*) understanding of identities. The potentially essentialist connotations of terms such as "friendly body" and "organic" are emphasised by referring to their opposition to the technological which suggests that radical feminists' theory / politics lie on the biology or nature side of the nature / culture divide. Her caveat: "But all these poets are very complex, not least in their treatment of themes of lying and erotic, decentred collective and personal identities" (Haraway 1991a: n247) is relegated to a footnote. It is also significant that she privileges the identity "poet" for these women, each of whom utilise a wide range of discursive forms. She extends the critique:

> But their symbolic systems and the related positions of ecofeminism and feminist paganism, replete with organicisms, can only be understood in Sandoval's terms as oppositional ideologies fitting the late twentieth century. They would simply bewilder anyone not preoccupied with the machines and consciousness of late capitalism. In that sense they are part of the cyborg world (Haraway 1991a: 174).

In this paragraph Haraway simultaneously positions them as opposing hegemonic ideologies (good), but doing so in a way that is "replete with organicisms" (probably essentialist – bad). This potentially offers interlocutors sympathetic to radical feminism the opportunity to embrace the breakdown of

clean distinctions that Haraway is suggesting would enable them to be more effective politically, but only, I argue, at the cost of splitting off the investment in "organicism". For readers who have been interpellated by (i.e. taken up the subject position offered by) Haraway's potent myth-making about the cyborg, I argue that this abjection of a vast and diverse swathe of feminist work simply slips below the radar to become a taken-for-granted exclusion. I would argue that, for the most part, it is with similarly discreet asides, and subsequently through absence, that other poststructuralist feminists have undermined the reputation of non-hegemonic feminisms.

However, preceding this discussion, Haraway has performed a much more overt critique of Catharine MacKinnon's "version of radical feminism" which she characterises as reductionist and totalizing. Although Haraway again acknowledges that her own taxonomy, like any other is a "re-inscription of history", her reading of MacKinnon as reductionist is effected through writing out MacKinnon's explicit focus on the gap between women's self-understanding and discursive constructions of their experience[77]. Having thus set out, through this (mis)reading of MacKinnon, an analysis of radical feminism as: "a caricature of the appropriating, incorporating, totalizing tendencies of Western theories of identity grounding action" (Haraway 1991a: 158), the move from questioning to debunking a complex and polyvocal spectrum of (non-postmodern) feminisms is not a large one for the reader to make. What is even more ironic, is that

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[77] See MacKinnon 1987. Although MacKinnon performs her own exclusionary moves, and despite critiques that suggest her account of male domination leaves no possibility for women's agency, MacKinnon explicitly refers to the paradox that feminism is a powerful politics despite the masculinist accounts of subjectivity which suggest the impossibility of women's agency. Haraway elides this deconstructive potential in MacKinnon's text.

Haraway's final critique of MacKinnon refers to her "intentional erasure of all difference through the device of the 'essential' non-existence of women"(Haraway 1991a: 159)[78]. So radical feminists are constructed as being problematic, both through risking essentialism, and through refusing it.

It can be argued that this practice of othering – abjecting – certain feminisms is at least in part a defensive strategy, possibly emerging from the three divisions that Teresa Brennan identifies: between feminist theory and feminist popular culture and politics; between feminism and other social movements and, "within feminism, between theoretical skills on the one hand, and literary analysis and socio-economic empirical research on the other" (Brennan 1993: vii-viii). However Stanley and Wise suggest that those academics occupying the professional category of "feminist theorists" have, in their "networks, working practices and theoretical outputs", more in common with social theorists than with either what they call, "feminism in general" or "academic feminism" (Stanley and Wise 2000: 263). Their argument is – probably intentionally – provocative, as they state that the mode of theorising in feminist theory:

> deploys categorical reification – for example, 'sexual difference', 'agency', 'identity', '(non-essentialist) embodiment', 'subjectivity', 'the psyche', 'desire' – of 'real world' phenomena but stripped of their specific, located and grounded content and replaced by a preoccupation with how these categories have been developed in prior theoretical work (Stanley and Wise 2000: 269).

In my opinion, they are overstating the case to stimulate debate, but their concern that feminist theory has become overly self-referential in the manner of non-feminist social theory calls to mind Audre Lorde's warning that we can't

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[78] Haraway does not give precise references for this "device", but from my own reading of MacKinnon it seems as if Haraway is misreading MacKinnon's theory of patriarchal ideology as an account of female subjectivity.

dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. Haraway's 'Manifesto' was developed to suggest that in fact this might be possible. With her suggestion that cyborgs, as "the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not mention state socialism" might be "exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (Haraway 1991a: 151), she attempted to undermine the sense of "the master" as all-powerful and in full control of his creations. Many arguments have been waged around the question of whether a post-modern feminism is an oxymoron because of feminism's investment in the Enlightenment project, and this chapter will revisit some of that terrain. I will argue that the science fiction novels produce feminist theory which – while prey to the same pitfalls as theory as such – because of its character-driven nature has a focus on embodiment and emotion that 'theory as such' lacks. Because of this focus, the theory embodied in the plot-lines and imaginary societies is more readily undercut or amplified by the subjective register so that the process of abjection conducted by theory cannot be prosecuted quite so rigorously.

Technology and Spirituality

In this section I will explore the ways that technology and spirituality – or the divine – function in the revisioned futures, and use this exploration both to tease out the epistemological / social theoretical commitments explicitly voiced in the text as well as to point up the contradictions that erupt. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the opposition between the cyborg and the goddess that closes Haraway's 'Manifesto' was what originally prompted me to think about technology and spirituality as mutually implicated. However, the novels under examination absolutely invite considerations of technology and spirituality, and

of problematic interzones such as 'magic' or 'paranormal' phenomena, that I suggest could be figured as 'cyborgs' in Haraway's sense of the term; that is boundary confusing phenomena. Latour suggests that one of the key factors in his hypothetical sketch of the Modern Constitution is the "strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines" (Latour 1993: 13). He suggests that Hobbes and Boyle, as founding fathers of the Enlightenment, successfully rid Nature of any divine presence at the same time as they rid Society of any divine origin, although the notion of God was left available for people to draw on individually, as long as it was understood that 'he' would not intervene: "No one is truly modern who does not agree to keep God from interfering with Natural Law as well as with the laws of the Republic" (Latour 1993: 32-35). It is arguable that Haraway's opposition of her postmodern cyborg to a goddess, replicates this modern move.

The Gate to Women's Country

Although it seems ironic that the most deeply rationalist of the imagined future societies I discuss refers to a deity, the female God (I think this is more apt than Goddess) stands outside the laws of 'Nature' and 'Society' in much the way Latour suggests. In *The Gate to Women's Country* it certainly appears that this is a future in which God (or the Goddess) does not interfere with Natural Law. As a child, Stavia is taught that the "Great Mother" is immutable and not to be bargained with, yet there is no real sense that this deity is interventionist, more an implication that she is the symbolic overseer of a rationally ordered cosmos:

> As the temple servers said, "No sentimentality, no romance, no false hopes, no self-petting lies, merely that which is!" (Tepper 1989: 9).

This deity seems to offer neither consolation nor any personal relationship to her adherents. In fact, she seems to be a paradoxical figure in such a deeply rationalist society. Neither does She interfere with the laws of Women's Country, although it appears that "the Lady" is drawn on symbolically and indeed, in a sense, literally, as the opium of the people when water from the "Well of Surcease" is doctored to deliver anaesthesia and euthanasia to gravely-injured warriors or at funeral services which counsel acceptance of loss. This apparently logical counsel seems much more sinister and manipulative once the reader realises that many of the losses are caused by the Councilwomen's fomenting of wars and skirmishes for their own ends. Despite these references to the Lady and the Great Mother, therefore, there is little sense that any notion of the sacred or the holy is integrated into everyday social interaction, or that the women have any genuine sense of a personal relationship with deity.

However, the gender of deities and of their worshippers is represented as a key issue in *Gate*. Both the warriors and the Holylander patriarchs use patriarchal deities to justify their superordinacy (perceived only in the case of the warriors) over women. Patriarchal religion is portrayed as deeply oppressive of women and children; a father-deity is a symbolic self-justification of the desires of patriarchal men. The play *Iphigenia at Ilium*, which the inhabitants of Women's Country perform every year at summer carnival, drives home the message about the relationship between men and their god forcefully:

> Iphigenia: Oh shhh, shhh, don't curse the Gods, old woman. It's man who puts the blood-stink in their noses and clotted gore upon their divine lips. (Tepper 1989:35)

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So Gods are represented as being created to justify and symbolise the will to power of their worshippers. In fact, in this revisioned society which has disturbingly regendered patriarchal values, the Goddess seems to function similarly. In her "Great Mother" aspect she creates order ruthlessly, whilst in the aspect of "the Lady" she dispenses consolation to both warriors and the more sentimental (aspects of) women. This split mirrors the split between reproduction and sexuality that Women's Country has effected, as well as the sense that she is a deity for special occasions only.

Although, in many ways, the warriors and the Holylanders in their dysfunctional pastoral setting could be read as atavistic reversions to premodern societies, the insistent link that the text makes between the post-convulsion (post-Holocaust) present and the violent domination of the Holylanders and the Warriors suggests rather that male moderns were irrationally invested in a God that they had eliminated from their cosmology. By naming the Holylanders as the logical descendants of the men in power when the novel was written, that is, those who would go on to cause the 'Holocaust', the text theorises the co-existence of irrationalism, liberal democracy and science in masculine modernity. Irrationalism − Latour's crossed-out God (most certainly a patriarch) − was always present at the margins of the modern project, co-existing with the rational practices of liberal democracy and the natural sciences. The text is absolutely clear, however, that this 'irrationalism' was a gendered flaw. It is about the male will to power. The social transformation worked for in *Gate* is aligned with those adherents of modernity who understand deism as irrational and anathema to the scientific worldview which is portrayed as providing the resources to

transform society so that Women's Country is reinscribing itself into a re-gendered modernity. Tragically, for its future, it appears as if the logic of the master subject[79] of the modern constitution has not been deconstructed. The woman of reason has been substituted for the man of reason.

Intriguingly, in respect of the up-ending of the gender hierarchy of modernity, the men who return through the gate to Women's Country are endowed with supernatural traits of telepathy and precognition. The text, in common with much science fiction, hints at a 'scientific' explanation: the traits apparently arose spontaneously in the course of Women's Country's breeding programme, but active selection is now being conducted. I want to suggest, however, that these traits represent an undercurrent of recognition that the interconnection and intersubjectivity, which the text is clearly aware is necessary for peaceful co-existence, cannot be achieved within the modern project. The pseudo-scientific character of these traits also suggests a latent textual recognition that a transcendent deity may function to both displace and stand in for immanent 'spirituality'. However, the investment in rationalism means that the traits must be scientised. These traits are not confined to the servitors who return – although the implication is that men could not develop these traits and remain warriors – but they are so rare amongst women that when Morgot learns that the female twins Kostia and Tonia share them she is greatly relieved that it is not a sex-linked characteristic (Tepper 1989: 289). Yet this tiny fragment of hope in the text that Women's Country may eventually move beyond role-reversal is

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[79] Val Plumwood argues that the master subject: "is not a masculine identity pure and simple, but the multiple, complex cultural identity of the master [is] formed in the context of class, race species and gender domination" (Plumwood 1993: 5) I will return to a discussion of the "master subject" or "master identity" in the conclusion to this chapter.

ironically carried and heralded by the one non-rationalist explanation in the text; the telepathy and precognition arose spontaneously and are beyond the control of the Council Women and the medics.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass* the references to deity and technological transcendence are much more intertwined, and indeed explicitly linked through the reflections of the character Malkah. Although a scientist, Malkah refers to herself as a mystic; she is a student of *kabbalah*. In fact she is explicitly introduced as a hybrid in the first chapter in which she is the focal character:

> Once upon a time is how stories begin. Half artist, half scientist, I know that much (Piercy 1992:23).

The text goes on to make explicit links between religious and scientific thinking via the material effects of symbolisation. As Malkah notes when describing the creation of the golem, the cyborg's monstrous predecessor:

> I believe in the truth of what is perhaps figurative, although Moshe Idel has found recipe after recipe, precise as the instructions for building a yurt or baking French bread, for making golems. I cannot always distinguish between myth and reality, because myth forms reality and we act out of what we think we are; we know on many levels truths that are irrational as well as reasoned or experimental (Piercy 1992: 34).

The text therefore refers explicitly to boundary confusion, as well as to the existence of knowledge that is not achieved using rational epistemologies. The fact that the rabbi who creates the golem is represented as a man of reason as well as a *kabbalist*, and that his creation – according to Piercy's revisioning of the tale – coincides with the beginning of the Scientific Revolution in Europe dramatises succinctly the work of purification that has taken place during the

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modern epoch in an attempt to create an absolute divorce between the material

and the spiritual:

> The Maharal is a bright fierce man, a hotheaded kabbalist, steeped in ancient tradition so that Torah haunts and informs and sculpts the world for him, but curious, open to the science and the speculation of his time ... He is almost alone in his time in believing that any opinion has the right to be uttered – he believes anachronistically in free speech, not because he is a relativist. No, he believes in the truth of his religion. But he believes too strongly in the sacredness of the intellect to cripple it by forbidding any ideas whatsoever (Piercy 1992: 28).

Malkah's part in the creation of a cyborg and her productive play with

(computer) language which results in the development of chimeras (insert

explanation) further emphasises the disavowed work of hybrid production that

Latour suggests has always characterised the modern era, but which we in 'the

West' have only recently acknowledged.

Unlike *Gate*, *Body of Glass* draws explicit analogies between the symbolisation

practices that are religious / spiritual, and those which are embedded in

technology such as the virtual world in which much of the 'action' of *Body of*

Glass takes place. Descriptions of the interactions that take place in the virtual

world that is a product of information technology are suspiciously similar to

telepathic and telekinetic experiences, but they have the gloss of scientific

possibility in a way that 'tele' experiences unmediated by technology do not.

They, nonetheless, rely on a perceptual experience of technological interaction

which cannot yet be satisfactorily modelled and which depends on some kind of

quantum leap that we cannot yet code. This leap, I would argue, corresponds to a

hope that technology – or in the case of *Gate* (assisted) human evolution – will

offer the transcendence that we no longer hope for from "the crossed-out God".

The links made in *Body of Glass* between information technology and Jewish mysticism are particularly pertinent in this light because of the Jewish traditional self-identity as people of the book, which is specifically referenced in *Body of Glass* and because *kabbalah* is so bound up with the power of language to create. For example, in the legend, the golem of Prague is animated because the rabbi places parchment in its mouth on which is written the secret names of G-d. The analogies between the discursive mechanism to which I referred earlier, which disavows the fleshiness and vulnerability of mortal bodies, and to metaphysical transcendence via religion or else technology are productively and provocatively in play in *Body of Glass*.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

Judaism also figures in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, although it is earth-based spirituality that most informs the daily practice of the key protagonists. However, it is the creative integration of these spiritual practices and their embeddedness in traditions of activism which gives the San Franciscans their resistance strategies. It is following a Seder celebration that Maya dreams about Elijah who advises her:

> "Tell your enemies this: 'There is a place set for you at our table, if you will choose to join us'" (Starhawk 1993: 218).

The Seder celebration is a ritual meal that celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the Jewish collective which hosts the Seder has incorporated Pagan elements into the Passover ritual including references to the Goddess. The ritual has also incorporated anti-racist and anti-oppressive elements so that it commemorates the specific histories of other collective groupings in addition to that of Jews

collective activism. Sam and Maya argue when he wants to open the door for the prophet Elijah, despite his secularism. Maya argues that Elijah was a racist, imperialist bigot. A discussion held at the meal illustrates the way that spirituality is integrated into the life of this future, where for some it refers to an interventionist deity, for some it is about the practice of hope and for some the strength offered by collective action:

> Sam was reading from the Haggadah, the book of prayers and songs and stories. " 'And the Source of All brought us out of Egypt, with a strong arm and an outstretched hand.' " He paused, looking up at them over his thick reading glasses. "What does that mean to us? Personally, after the Millennialists, I'm wary of any sort of divine intervention. I come from the fine old leftist Jewish secularist tradition, where we were taught to use the strength of our own arms and hands. If there's a God or Goddess offering deliverance, it had better be us."
> "I read it as hope," Aviva said. "Hope is the source of strength. We can depend on our arms and hands, but we can't do anything without hope."
> "But it's not just individual hope," a woman Maya didn't recognize said. "The strong arm is what we can lean on when all of our arms are working together."
> "God is our united support," Ari said.
> "But what about when you're all alone?" asked the woman with the sweet voice.
> "You still have the strength of the group to draw on." (Starhawk 1993: 214)

Starhawk, herself, encapsulates this discussion in *Truth or Dare* (Starhawk 1990):

> What is sacred – whether we name it Goddess, God, spirit, or something else – is not outside the world, but manifests in nature, in human beings in the community and culture we create ... Earth-based spirituality values diversity, imposes no dogma, no single name for the sacred, no one path to the centre (Starhawk 1990: 21).

The way that participants at the meal negotiate the ritual, and the meaning of the ritual, on the spot also demonstrates a society which places importance on the processes of negotiation and compromise as well as taking the symbolic

dimension seriously. For some key protagonists in this novel, the investment in

spirituality and intentionality extends to a belief in the power of magic.

However, the debate which Maya has with the prophet Elijah in her dream has

important resonances with the take on patriarchal religion embodied in *Gate*.

This text's critique extends to the atrocities conducted by religious purists, as

well as to those versions of religion which discourage personal activism. It also

critiques the sexism of the Jewish religion, and argues against its logocentrism:

> "I'll tell you something else – those foods are the real carriers of the tradition, the sacred mysteries. Not what comes out of your men's mouths, the words and the stories and the endless arguments and explanations, but what we women provide to put into your mouth, the taste of pain, the taste of spring, the taste of hope and new beginnings" (Starhawk 1993: 217).

The spirituality that is being invested in here is one of immanence rather than

transcendence, and it is striking that it seems to go hand-in-hand with a much

more pragmatic and limited investment in the transformative power of

technology. Bruno Latour suggests that it may be more emancipatory to adopt a

non-modern attitude that recognises the critical repertoire that modern thinking

offers, as well as the postmodern recognition of the complexities these critical

practices obscure.[80] This attitude is manifested, for example, in *The Fifth Sacred*

Thing which holds in tension the radical feminist critique of the gendered aspects

of domination as a historical phenomenon that had catastrophic effects, a

recognition that class and 'race' (for example) co-constitute gender, and a

poststructuralist or postmodern recognition that nobody holds the power to

dominate. Power is co-produced in the actions and choices of multiple

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[80] I am reinscribing Latour's suggestive and metaphorical narrativity within my own epistemological project, but despite the pleasure in and complexity of his text that this move excludes, I believe that my representation conveys the sense of his argument.

overlapping and ongoing intersubjective relations so that domination can be disrupted and interrupted by subjective agency. However, in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, it is also recognised that a shift in consciousness is required to enable the recognition that choice, that is agency, is a possibility. Magic, and in particular magical healing are used to symbolise this shift in consciousness. This is made explicit by the textual definition of magic as the art of changing consciousness at will.

So, although it is entirely possible to read the novel as a fantasy because of the inclusion of magical possibilities, it is also possible to continue to focus on its realist aspects, and its astute social theory, and to read the magic as a metaphor for the ongoing work of (inter)subjective agency, that draws on passion as much as it does on cognition.

For example, although the novel graphically represents gendered violence and includes intratextual dialogues about historical instances of domination on the grand scale, like the institution of slavery and the Holocaust, it also recognises that nobody is just a victim. When Lily asks Madrone to heal one of the Stewards' soldiers who killed almost an entire family before he balked at killing a five-year old child, Madrone initially suggests that the task is impossible:

> "That's why I tell you it's hopeless. I know these guys. They're not like us, Lily. They're lacking something. It's a different breed of human being, and I mean that literally" (Starhawk 1993:444)[81].

However, Lily encourages Madrone to recognise that the soldier was "acting out of what his life and training had taught him to believe and defend" (loc.cit) and

to find some compassion that he was able not to kill the child. She also suggests

that by healing in the present it is possible to heal the past in some measure[82],

because both soldier and healer are descended from both dominators and

dominated. Madrone is finally able to heal the soldier when she recognises that

despite her continued commitment to non-violence, her own rage at those who

have killed or wounded her loved ones makes her want to kill, even as she knows

she will continue to choose not to. It is her rage against domination, just as much

as her love for her own community that fuels her commitment to remaking the

world.

Crucially, it is when she touches the soldier – initially intending to scorch him

with the power she has summoned – that Madrone realises that he has also been

victimised:

> His flesh was cold, but it felt familiar, like touching a part of herself, like
> remembering something she had always known. We are alike, she
> thought, in some way, flesh of one flesh. How can that be? (Starhawk
> 1993:446).

This focus on what Madrone and the soldier share in common, their

embodiedness, recalls Jessica Benjamin's discussion of the somatic self who pre-

exists and co-exists with a linguistic and political subject, forming "a substrate of

affective life that is more or less in awareness" throughout our lives as embodied

(inter)subjects (Benjamin 1998: p.27). In this way, the text holds in tension both

the importance of symbolic communication through the verbal dialogues that are

necessary to revision history and the future through the medium of the present,

and the importance of the passions that impel and forestall that revisioning.

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[81] A proportion of the soldiers in the invading armies come out of the Southlands breeding pens
where the eugenic reproduction of Runners, Angels and Soldiers is conducted.
[82] This resonates with LaCapra's use of the psychoanalytic concept of working through the
trauma of the Holocaust, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Madrone is represented as passionately working through the process of abjecting the soldier, and denying any possibility of commonality with him towards intersubjective recognition of his difference through identification with what they do have in common. She also recognises that the soldier has no real sense of himself as a subject because of his interpellation into the Stewards' ideology of domination that abjects him as not fully human. By offering him a name that he can own, River instead of Ohnine (a contraction of his army registration number), Madrone offers him the possibility of interpellating himself into intersubjective relatedness.

The working-through process that Madrone embodies can be read as an analogy for the processes of rupture and transformation that have occurred in feminist theory, as well as an indication of a methodology / epistemology for holding the ruptures and transformations in tension in a feminist theory that takes account of the pain and the pleasure, the abstraction and the connection that that a fully dialogical and intersubjective feminist theory require.

Technology, Praxis and Social Transformation

Returning to my preoccupation with theorising the conditions of possibility for social transformation, one of the key arguments that each of the sf texts debates is the appropriate mode of leadership and / or collective activism in the pursuit of social transformation. This preoccupation with activism is entwined with textual explorations of subjectivity and individual agency through the actions and self-reflections of the central characters in the novels. In each of the texts, the

investment of key protagonists with the most appropriate skills to effect social transformation is a vital trope, as well as being extremely revealing of the relationship between utopian hopes and technology.

For example, in *The Gate to Women's Country*, reproductive technology is the key to social transformation, and Morgot and Stavia as medics are in the vanguard of transformation through their intimate involvement with the dissemination of this technology. In *Body of Glass*, access to and control of information – as the key commodity in the global economic system – is central, and Shira and Malkah are both expert users and creators of information technology. In *The Fifth Sacred Thing* matters are somewhat more complex, as social transformation is much more explicitly theorised as a collective process that requires the participation of all members of society. However Maya and Madrone as strategist and healer are represented as particularly energetic and innovative, while Bird's experiences of both perpetrating and suffering violence give him the intimate knowledge of its dynamics that is required to undermine its power.

The Gate to Women's Country

In *The Gate to Women's Country*, Morgot and Stavia take it upon themselves to transform their society without consultation with most of their co-inhabitants. In a sense perhaps they see themselves as messiahs on the Christian model – self-sacrificial figures who take on the sins of the world – or at least, their limited corner of it – in order to redeem it, although they themselves are damned. Their sacrifice is to bear the knowledge of Martha Evesdaughter's plan, along with the

other women who have been co-opted onto the Council and those few who work out the secret for themselves.

When Morgot refers to the councilwomen's nickname for themselves, "the Damned Few", there is a recognition that despite their devout belief that the means justify the ends, they privately acknowledge that the means are reprehensible. However, they are prepared to bear that burden in the cause of social transformation. This assumption of the role of arbiters of the future, acting as a vanguard for a 'class' (of women) that is not conscious of the full extent of the programme, is profoundly anti-democratic. It suggests that an elite class or oligarchy of decision-makers exists that has the necessary skills and vision to shape the future for all members of society without engaging those members in any discussion. This elite class can also take any action required to impose this revisioned social order and to surveil and regulate the interim social order, again without seeking any collective authorisation for these actions. The text's relentless focus on sexual difference as the problem that needs to be solved, with no explicit attention given to the fact that the male founders of modernity were also white and privileged, results in the production of totalising feminist social theory. All the women in Women's Country are white, and the Council Women constitute a privileged sector of experts. Sandra Harding's caution that the subject of feminist liberatory knowledge should also be the subject of every other liberatory knowledge project is well worth considering with regard to Women's Country's rationalist epistemology and social theory:

> Since lesbian, poor, and black women are all women, feminism will have to grasp how gender, race, class, and sexuality are used to construct one another. It will have to do so if feminism is to be emancipatory for marginalized women but also if it is to be maximally scientific for

dominant-group women about their own situation. There would otherwise be no way to distinguish between feminism and the narrow self-interest of dominant-group women – just as conventional androcentric thought permits no criterion for distinguishing between "best beliefs" and those that serve the self-interest of men as men (Harding 1991: 285).

The Council Women who rehearse the social theory underpinning Women's Country's social order clearly have some qualms that perhaps their plan is not in everybody's interest. The resistance displayed by the garrisons as well as by those women who prefer the degrading treatment they receive as "Gypsies" outside the city walls dramatises the text's latent recognition that Martha's utopia is an exclusive one; a society that will not appeal to those who resist its authoritarian structures and that focuses on suffering in the present in the hope of pleasure in the future. Yet neither the Council Women, nor the text's overall ethos suggest that it would be appropriate for the councilwomen to engage these 'others' in a debate about a future that could encompass them all. There is no other solution. Rather they are graphically abjected, either through the degrading treatment of the gypsies which calls to mind the way the British Government[83] policed prostitution using the Contagious Diseases Act, or through being sent off to war.

This social authoritarianism is interestingly juxtaposed with a laissez-faire attitude towards the brutally oppressed women of the Holyland. Apart from some limited acts of retribution against the male Holylanders by the servitors

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[83] The Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs) of 1866 and 1869 regulated the forcible inspection of prostitutes suspected of carrying venereal diseases. This was a particular issue in garrison towns. As in Women's Country, the prostitutes' clients were not subject to inspection. Josephine Butler led middle class feminists in a denunciation of the sexual and class discrimination of the CDAs (Nead 1988), (Walkowitz 1980), (Walkowitz 1984).

who rescue Stavia when she is imprisoned there, these women are left to their fate. This is 'justified' with the gloss that the society is so decadent that it will soon cease to exist. This callous disregard for the fate of other women seems to suggest that it is only those women who are already enlightened, or those who seek liberation out for themselves, who deserve to be redeemed from patriarchal oppression. These criticisms bear much in common with those levelled at radical feminists who were deemed to exclude too much difference in their preoccupation with the harm women suffer(ed) at men's hands.

Body of Glass

In *Body of Glass*, although the society of Tikva prizes education very highly, it is education within the context of the global capitalist social order. Although Malkah and Shira do embody different attitudes towards science than does Avram, the difference can be largely attributed to a gendered division of labour in which, stereotypically, women take more seriously the imbrication of knowing *and* feeling, whilst men overvalue abstract reasoning and disavow the emotional investments implicit in their ways of knowing. There does not appear to have been any serious attempt made in Tikva to revision the social relations of science and technology in any radical fashion; rather there is a liberal commitment to access. It could be inferred, therefore, that it is this lack of attention to radically liberatory modes of knowledge production which lead both Malkah and Shira to be interpellated, even if only temporarily, into the same logic of domination and instrumentality that informs Avram's decision to create cyborgs. This is a particular risk, because despite the distribution of scientific literary throughout the Tikva community, people like Malkah, Avram and Shira are respected and

even revered for their superior skills with information technology. This professionalisation is encouraged in an economic order in which product innovation, and therefore ever-increasing specialisation of a creative elite is the driver for economic dominance (in the case of the multis) or survival (in the case of the Free Towns).

Although Malkah is firmly embedded in service towards her community in her role as a Base Overseer, she nevertheless acts contrary to the town's express commitment not to contravene the Multi's ordinance against the creation of cyborgs, simply to gratify her own intellectual curiosity and creativity. Shira is even more of an individualist in her behaviour, as she sells her labour to the highest bidder, returning to the community that nurtured her only when the loss of custody of her child coincides with failure in both her romantic and work lives. Both women do eventually both rise above pure self-interestedness to work collectively for the protection of Tikva and the liberation of the Glop, so it is possible to infer that the text's argument is that it is necessary to make both personal and imaginative connections with those less privileged, if those who are more privileged are to be encouraged to act against oppression. However, that these connections are made through force of circumstance, and not through an ongoing and expansive commitment to transformation of the social order – not for nothing is Tikva nicknamed a modern ghetto by Malkah – renders the possibility of any lasting coalition fragile. This fragility is particularly exacerbated by the textual contrast between the liberatory and transcendent experience of virtual reality in the Net and the nasty and brutish conditions of life outside the fragile modern ghetto of Tikva. It is difficult for the reader to

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imagine utopian possibilities beyond the ending of *Body of Glass* as it is only too easy to imagine Malkah and Shira retreating into their sequestered pleasures in the information realm.

The Fifth Sacred Thing

In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the collective identification that facilitates activism is as much geographical as political, and the collectives are much more diverse in the range of subjectivities they encompass. Each of these collectives, however, although rooted in place, owes their origins to the resistance of the oppression perpetrated by the dominant Millennialists and their activist front, the Stewards. So although the novel singles out key protagonists through which to story its theories of social transformation, they are not represented as the only motors for action. In fact, using mechanistic metaphors to describe the social theories propounded in this text is somewhat counterintuitive as the text refuses a mechanistic conception of the Natural or Social orders. To rephrase, more aptly, therefore, the focal characters are represented as nodes in a network of resistance rather than members of an elite vanguard. The text explicitly refutes a hierarchical conception of leadership and focuses on the importance of consensus building in any project of resistance or social transformation. That said, it does recognise that people do possess particular skills and strengths as the result of their experience and that it makes sense to work to peoples' strengths. For example, Madrone's work as a healer makes her a suitable choice to undertake a mission to the Southlands in the attempt to discover if the viruses killing the inhabitants of San Francisco are weapons. Maya's experience as a veteran of many political campaigns means that her opinions and strategies are given a

careful hearing by the City Council. Individuals are still represented as overvaluing their own opinions and their own contributions to the collective good, but that kind of thinking is understood to be flawed and ultimately counter-productive, or at the very least personally costly. Although it is recognised that some "jobs don't lend themselves to counting hours" (Starhawk 1993: 274) such as those of healers, artists or musicians, and they receive a fixed stipend of credits, the basic principle in the City is that everyone's time, and therefore labour, is of equal value. This includes the value of gift labour which citizens are obliged to donate, as well as those tasks required for the daily maintenance of households, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare. Combined with the participatory democracy which shapes the City's social policy, this principle is intended to mitigate against individuals understanding themselves or being understood by others to be exceptional in their possession / wielding of expertise or power in their contribution to an activist collective.

This participatory democracy and commitment to radical equality is facilitated by an approach to education which does not divide knowledge up into disciplines with their exclusionary boundaries:

> That was the way Johanna ran the schools; she believed children should be taught about things from beginning to end. So they learned to make fire from sticks, and how to put out fires, and then studied all the chemistry and physics involved as they built steam engines and solar panels and tracked the course of the sun (Starhawk 1993: 71).

The text embodies the theory that particular epistemologies shape not only what can be known, but the action that can be taken. That is, if we shape our social theory and political philosophy within the categorising and dominating logic of modernity, we render impossible any social transformation which is not simply a

redistribution of domination. The theory is also explicitly expressed in intratextual dialogue. When Madrone encounters a group of privileged women in the hierarchical South, who are beginning to question their own social order and therefore ask for details of the society which she inhabits, she explains that their revisioned social relations arise from the recognition that other attempts at social transformation foundered because of: "'the mechanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, which saw nature as a great machine, something we could ultimately know and completely control'" (Starhawk 1993: 273).

Conclusion: Feminism, the Utopian Impulse and Abjection

This reference to intratextual dialogue returns me to the starting point of this thesis. In my introduction I explained that I was keen to explore the relationships between feminist science fiction, social theory and social transformation and to trace the utopian impulse that I suspected underpinned those relationships. In Chapter 1 I suggested that the turn to narrative offered social theorists a way of exploring social reality through the embeddedness of subjects in their social relations rather than through a focus on impersonal structures. I then discussed the ways that both narrative fiction and social theory were addressed to particular interlocutors in particular ways and noted that these interlocutors could usefully be conceptualised by drawing on Fish's concept of interpretive communities. However, I also argued that it was necessary to take into account the importance of passion in the formation of interpretive communities; their formation is not simply a cognitive or deterministic process. I linked this focus on passion through my theorisation of the utopian impulse which I suggested could be understood as an intersubjective mode of relating to (theoretical and concrete)

others, that is more liberatory than the subject / object mode of relating which is typically understood to underlie modern epistemology. This chapter has brought all these threads together by using Haraway's opposition between cyborgs and goddesses to unpack the epistemological oscillation between separation and connection (objectivity and intersubjectivity) that occurs in feminist social theory which is interpellated, although never fully, into modern and postmodern intellectual paradigms.

Through the complexity of plotting and characterisation that the three novels embody, narrative fiction has the generic capacity to embody the feminist epistemological ideals of interdisciplinarity as well as feminists' passionate investments in the possibility of social transformation. Academic social theory can rarely achieve this within a single text, despite the commitment to dialogue, and indeed to transformation, that the publication of 'categorical and indexical' social theory evidences. Even Donna Haraway's 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' cannot sustain a commitment to a heteroglossic theorising throughout, and as I pointed out, the text slides into abjecting certain feminist voices, notably those associated with radical feminisms, spiritual feminisms and ecofeminisms. These novels hold in tension questions of technology and spirituality in a way that remains profoundly difficult in the context of 'categorical and indexical' social theory. It is the capacity of feminist science fiction to narrate multiple trajectories of social theory within a single text, and to reflect upon the potentials and foreclosures that particular trajectories enable and constrain that makes the genre so inviting to feminist interlocutors who want to hold onto, and put into operation, the

transformative impulse of feminist critiques without creating new forms of domination or exclusion.

This chapter has been specifically concerned with questions of technology and spirituality, and has explored the different ways in which each novel theorises this relationship. The novels thus demonstrate that 'spirituality' is not necessarily the answer to the 'problems' of a technophilic / dualistic world – clearly such a stance simply re-instates another dualism. As Plumwood notes, "spirituality, far from being in some generalised and indiscriminate sense, 'the answer' to our difficulties in coming to terms with nature, has many of the same ambiguities and potentials to foster better or worse relationships with nature as other kinds of theories/practices" (Plumwood 2002: 219). Spirituality and technology can both invest in modern dichotomising, valorising rationality, transcendence and immateriality– as evidenced in *The Gate to Women's Country* and also *Body of Glass*. As Plumwood further notes, "Most ecofeminists have acknowledged this in calling for specifically ecological kinds of spirituality that are nondualist and immanent in orientation rather than transcendent and rationalist" (Plumwood 2002: 219-220). At the heart of *The Fifth Sacred Thing* then is a revisioned science and technology which is not opposed to spirituality. Spirituality is not contrasted with modernity, rather spirituality and science are mutually implicated in a 'materialist' (rather than transcendent) spirituality, a spirituality which informs the work of re-visioning a future which is fundamentally about transformed relationships, and webs of interconnectedness, intersubjectivity with other material, embodied beings – friends, lovers, animals, plants and 'Nature'.

Conclusion: Thinking Towards the Future

> I am not sure that the millennium is a significant way to mark time or, indeed, to mark the time of feminism. But it is always important to take stock of where feminism is, even as that effort at reflection is necessarily marred. No one stands in the perspective that might afford a global view of feminism. No one stands within a definition of feminism that would remain uncontested. I think it is fair to say that feminists everywhere seek a more substantial equality for women, and that they seek a more just arrangement of social and political institutions (Butler 2001).

In this Conclusion, I wish to draw attention to the key arguments I have made in this thesis. In my Introduction, I suggested that I began the thinking for this thesis in relation to my personal experience that the closing decades of the twentieth century were a time when radical optimism seemed very hard to maintain. I also suggested that I was particularly interested in theory that provided subjective resources for investing in hope for the future. Drawing again on my personal experience, I hypothesised that such resources might be found in feminist science fiction.

Reading widely in the field of feminist science fiction, I selected three novels that seemed to offer such resources because of the ways in which they embodied utopian longing. A commitment to social renewal and ongoing transformation is represented, in the novels, in the context of a dystopian future that graphically represents some of our worst fears for the future. Further, the feminist science fiction texts seemed to provide a magnificent source for tracing through the multivarious social theories developed by feminists who have sought, and continue to seek not simply to explain society, but to change it.

The contemporary preoccupation with narrative in the social sciences seems to recognise that there are aspects of subjective experience and subjective meaning-making that cannot be captured in other forms of social theorising, particularly those versions which focus on structure to the exclusion of agency. My own focus on narrative fiction, then, resonates with this recognition.

I wanted to investigate further how these ambivalent texts managed to call forth and invest in a 'utopian impulse' or impulses, at the same time as they avoided – or so it seemed to me – being examples of wish-fulfilment fantasies. I wished, therefore, to resist theories of utopian longing which insisted *only* on the social construction of hope, particularly when this focus seemed to overvalue the desire to remedy lack rather than the joy that might be involved. I therefore turned to psychoanalytic theory as a way to engage with the passionate aspects of yearning.

I argued that a 'utopian impulse' that was invested in inclusive versions of social transformation was characterised by an intersubjective mode of relating to 'the other'. The lower case 'o' is apposite, as intersubjectivity depends on the recognition of concrete others rather than identification with or disavowal of (or in extreme cases abjection of) the fascinating or threatening 'Others' of fantasy. I linked my discussion of the 'utopian impulse' to the processes of identification, recognition, repudiation and abjection that I argue are at work in the formation of interpretive communities. Interpretive communities authorise the theoretical 'speech' of social theorists by providing ideal interlocutors. I argued that passionate feelings of exclusion within or exclusion without particular feminist

interpretive communities have resulted in the inability of some feminists to recognise the theoretical productions of some other feminists.

As one potential remedy to this inability, I argue that the heteroglossic character of feminist science fiction enables it to embody a range of contestatory feminist social theories as well as holding in suspension any single overarching interpretation which would require its interlocutors to make a fixed identification with one or another apparently exclusive feminist interpretive community. What the science fictions make clear, in fact, is that these identifications rely on an unexamined abjection of other possible identifications. In doing so, they reveal that radical feminists, and poststructuralist feminists, for example, may have more in common than they are prepared to acknowledge, and in particular that radical feminists, along with other second-wave feminists were part of the massive challenge to modern thinking that post-structuralist and post-modernist feminists have benefited from.

Again, I return to the issue of passion, as it seems to me that many of the ruptures within and between feminist communities have circulated around the issue of passion, and whether social transformation can be achieved through the channelling or suppressing of passion. This theme is prevalent in all three of the feminist science fiction texts that I examined in detail. With reference to Misha Kavka's remark about the inseparability of history and manifesto in feminist work, I suggest that this Janus-faced aspect of feminism may have been temporarily suspended whilst feminists struggled to develop a theoretical praxis that enabled them / us to live in the interface of the present.

For some this negotiation has seemed to require splitting off the passionate rage of radical feminists at injustice. In doing so, perhaps recognition of radical feminists' joyous investment in women's agency for change has been forgotten. I do not mean to suggest that postmodern or poststructuralist feminists did not make valid critiques of radical feminism (as well as of liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and so on). But like Judith Butler, I think it important that critiques revitalise what they criticise, not simply debunk them. Feminist science fiction has revitalised the science fiction genre as a whole by opening up its categories to question. I believe that it can perform a similar task for feminist social theory.

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