

The Cyborg, a possible future between nature and culture

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Science fiction is a literary device that enables us to explore reconfigured and future identities. Could it be the place for writing of a radical feminist nature ? Indeed, new relationships between nature and culture, natural and artificial are treated in science fiction under the guise of exploring the future of humanity. A host of solutions or alternative writing depicting completely reviewed male and female bodies, societies where the roles of men and women are revised. It must be believed, as has been said by Yannick Rumpala (2009)¹ “ science fiction literature does not only have a narrative dimension. With its successive montages, it can support and be a vector for collective reflexivity. It can also contribute to prepare minds by participating to the construction and diffusion of images of the future. This contribution starts from the hypothesis that science fiction represents a way to recapture the vast issue of social change, et behind it that of its consequences and their eventual control.”. Certainly, the hybrid or cyborg themes have been explored by many authors of science fiction since 1940, unless you count Mary Shelley² 's *Frankenstein* published in 1818. Recently, they've acquired a new magnitude in the exploration of identity themes, and especially of reconfigured male and female identities . At that point, it is no longer about the cyborg as a man/machine construction but the « cyborg » in Donna Harraway's sense ; for her, all beings are built, chimeras, a mix of flesh and words, in short, a cyborg. The author wrote one of the founding texts about hybrids : « A cyborg Manifesto : Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century » in the *Socialist Review* published in 1985. She uses the « cyborg » metaphor to illustrate the danger of naturalism and essentialism associating woman (and man) to a given biology. Women, no more than men, says the author, belong to a category that would maintain them as they are despite conventions that tie them together. These remarks are not intended to summarize the recent feminist debates that D Harraway herself inspired, nor indeed to take over the term “cyborg” as is, but to set the terms of a debate that relates specifically to new nature/culture associations as a reformation of the real issue. Beyond the cyborg, it's about the possibilities of re-associating the female body to symbolic-concrete issues that manifest its novelty. The cyborg (or artefact) represents in this a possible alternative and a thought experiment translating new relationships between nature and culture and a re-composition of sexual and gender identities.

Corpus study

In this article, we are attempting to initiate a reading of female figures in science fiction from work that initially was done with the intent of an prospective exploration of future lifestyles going

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- 1 Yannick Rumpala « Entre anticipation et problématisation : la science fiction comme avant-garde » contribution for the symposium « How to dream today's science fiction » Cerisy-la-salle, 25 juillet – 3 août 2009 »
 - 2 A few rather old short stories are cobined in : Thomas N. Scortia and George Zebrowski (eds) *Human – Machines : an Anthology of Stories about Cyborgs*, New York, Vintage, 1975. It can be considered as a precursor of, the now very frequent and widely covered by the cyberpunks of cyberspace or « matrix » which men or women access by connecting themselves, via « neuronal » plugs to computers connected in a network. It also appears as precursor to the movement called « cybersex » within which sexual encounters happen with computer connections as intermediary.

through literary imagination of this particular genre. Indeed, science fiction is a genre that invents itself in the view of a social anticipation, with exploration of what a society, with yet to be fully realised social sciences in the 19th century, can become. It is then a progressive future. It is not only about, for the authors, painting a picture of a future society, indeed it is more about finding, with a coherent narration, a historical development, what a society would become if a few variables of our world were modified ; a integral part of science fiction as a genre answers this following question : “ What would happen if ... ? ” Many science fiction authors build, in this manner, social hypotheses. To construct these scenarios, they play on the variables, in a very rigorous manner thanks to the coherent narration, and put to the test the reader's credulity and the credibility of the story. It is not necessarily about predicting the future : Ballard explains that he did not predict certain characteristics of consumer society ; he simply described what was happening around hi. Science fiction authors, like different artists, bring to the surface realities that everyone has in front of them but cannot see. For this process of science fiction authors, beyond the pursuit of a hypothesis, is often the exacerbation, even the “gigantisation”, of a particular trait. The planet, nature, and its destruction, its possible environments theme plays a crucial role in a science fiction that never ceases to invent new ways to experience characters and readers. This is an exceptionally vivid narrative genre (the number of films, fanzines, etc. is constantly increasing) that continues to spill over into popular representations. It accompanies the multiplication of technical innovations and scientific discoveries often incomprehensible for the larger public: since the 1950s, science fiction branches out into many sub-genres: uchronies ; hard science fiction (including bio), the most scientific; cyberpunk since the 1980s, steampunk³ (few in numbers, very post carbon) space opera; robot and artificial intelligence, cyborg, parallel universes; temporal paradoxes; planet opera, otherness, etc. According to Véronica Hollinger (2005-2008)⁴, the modernity crisis and the criss-crossing of contemporary categories induce a proliferation of sub-genres in science fiction, all of which are of particular forms of development under conditions of contemporary existence. This proliferation of sub-genres make any strict definition impossible. However, it would be unwise to consider the images of science fiction as strictly metaphorical. This literary genre does not only propose to analyse our usual worlds with other images. They are effectively other worlds with their power of evocation, their possibilities in terms of experience that are described and explored ; so, the “sub-humans” of Cordwainer Smith, animals that have been humanised with biotechnology, are not simply metaphors of the feminine condition, or of slavery: they are human-animal hybrids, to be taken as such. The same goes for the invaded exterior planet, it is not only anti-colonialism. Let us not use science fiction as a prospective or imaginative manner with which new modes of writing will be found.

Our corpus of around a hundred texts deals with English and French science fiction, but does not claim to tour all of the identified publications in this genre. Today, 50 000 books in English are referenced on Amazon under this designation and there are 7000 of them in French. We have also conducted a systematic search of all the deliveries of the Grande anthologie de la science fiction (The great anthology of science fiction) (French collection in paperback initiated by Jacques Goimard, Gerard Klein and Demetri Iokamidis in 1966⁵) with, in mind, these following themes and

3 Steampunk is about imagining to what extent the past would have been different if the future had happened earlier. This is how *steampunk* is defined in the “anterior futures”. The project was realised with contributions from the Cosmic Club of Cockroach Gentlemen: Cyril Steampulp Boy, Doctor Arkady and Mr Knight. “After the Lightning” Daylon and PAT the menace. Add to the whole the reticent indications of Lady Sandrine [all in good faith since we are gentlemen after all!]. Our thanks to R.C. Wagner for having answer a few of our questions)
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4 Veronica Hollinger “Science fiction and post-modernism” in: David Seed (ED), 2005-2008. *A companion to science-fiction*, Oxford, Blakwell Publishing, pp 23-247

5 This monumental anthology groups all the great themes of science fiction in 36 volumes, plus 5 additional volumes for an analysis of French science fiction. These themes are illustrated by nearly 600 short stories from the 1930s to today (at least until 1989!) chosen from among a few thousand texts written by over 300 authors. Among them, we find the very famous (Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Dick, Brunner, Farmer, Heinlein, Leiber, Sheckley, Silverberg...)

key words: life-styles; ecology... as well as the following journals “Future Worlds”, Universe (whose editor-in-chief is Yves Fremion, today affiliated with the Green Party). Furthermore, science fiction dictionaries, the website Quarante-deux, as well as the Gerard Klein preface and Philippe Curval critiques were used. Our work was consequently not analysing the place and role of women in science fiction, work that has already been done in part by other authors⁶ but an analysis of the evolution of the lifestyles going through a transformation in the rapport of humans to nature. This work of bibliographical exploration has however brought to our attentions that dealing with ecology, of a possible future beyond the predictable disasters, is often the same as staging modified male/female relations. Woman occupies a specific place in the nature/culture rapport, since she is strongly polarised, according to authors, towards her own nature, and from that, all interrogation about the future that mixes questions of nature forces one to rethink woman's place.

The place of women in science fiction

If the major currents of science fiction make them epic tales of masculinity – even macho, quite often – where women play a foil, science fiction has nevertheless produced an important feminine fiction corpus. To the point of thinking that the relations between science fiction and feminism are some of the most important development of science fiction since the 70s ; what women do to their body⁷ by using imagination, to their place in society, to their eventual future, is often central in texts. Let's take it further : the cultural construction and reconstruction of identities forces us to reconsider the question of history as a problematic allying transmission, fixation or crystallisation and movement(s). Or, science fiction, from its pretension to explore possibilities and multiply the thought experiments of future to the present, are favourable to this tendency. Certainly, the readership remains mainly male whatever the reason (the themes, selective community phenomena), but the female writers of science fiction are many and develop quite a specific corpus : included are, in no particular order, Catherine Dufour, Noëlle Roger, Nathalie Henneberg, Christine Renard, Julia Verlanger, Élisabeth Vonarburg in French, and Leigh Brackett, Catherine L. Moore, Zenna Henderson, Judith Merrill, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Miriam Allen de Ford, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ⁸, Alice Sheldon (alias James Tiptree Jr), Vonda McIntyre, Suzy McKee Charnas, C.J. Cherryh, Kate Wilhelm, Lois McMaster Bujold, Joan D. Vinge, Nancy Kress, Octavia Butler and Connie Willis in English (without omitting in German Thea von Harbou, the author of *Metropolis* and *Women on the Moon*). To stress, among the first, the gothic novels of Ann Radcliff and the publication, in 1918, of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1797-1851). Since the 50s and 60s, a wave of political and social concern is taking over science fiction and the feminist anthology are many. Ursula Le Guin⁹ and Joanna Russ¹⁰ started, from this time, publishing in science-fiction magazines.

and more than 40 French authors (Curval, Jeury, Klein, Andrevon, Brussolo...) for the francophone part of the anthology.

- 6 *From My Guy to Sci-Fi : Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World* (ed. Helen Carr), Pandora Press, 1989 with : Carolyn Brown, Helen Carr, Merle Collins, Rosalind Coward, Leslie Dick, Cora Kaplan, Naseem Khan, Alison Light, Sar Maitland, Linda Semple, Carolun Steedman, Helen Taylor.
- 7 Jenny Wolmark, Time and identity in feministe science-fiction, in : David Seed (ED), 2005-008, *A companion to science-fiction*, Oxford, Blakwell Publishing, pp.156-171
- 8 Thanks to the editors in chief of magazines like Michael Moorcock (*New Worlds*) and of anthology like Harian Ellison (*Dangerous Visions*) or Damon Knight (*Orbit*), many women appear as science-fiction authors : all are not feminists (as Joanna Russ, Suzy McKee Charnas or Vonda Mac Intyre). Let us cite : *Encore des femmes et des merveilles*, Le livre d'or de la science-fiction (The golden book of science-fiction), anthology assembled by Pamela Sargent, Presses Pocket 1979 (1st edition 1976) : C.L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, Joanna Russ, Josephine Saxton, Kate Whilhem, Joan D. Vinge ; *Aurora: beyond equality* (1976) by Vonda Mc Intyre and Susan Janice Anderson, *Millenil Women* by Virginia Kidd, *Cassandra Rising* (1978) by Alice Laurence *Amazons* (1979) by Jessica Amanda Salmonson and *La Femme infinie* (1983) by Pierre Rey. Recently, *Daughters of Earth : Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* by Justine Larbalestier (2006)
- 9 Ursula le Guin, born in 1929, daughter of the anthropologist Alfred Kroeaber, rehabilitated the utopia at a time when science fiction seemed haunted by the ecological cataclysm or the proximity of the totalitarian nightmare. Her first publication is “April in Paris” in *Amazing Stories* in 1962. She publishes her first novel, *Rocannon's World* [first volume of a trilogy, in which follow *Planet of Exile* and *City of Illusion* in 1966. Her novels (especially *The Left*

Female figures thus emerge as well social partitions. Some texts relate to the implementation of exclusively feminine culture. After a societal or ecological catastrophe (that societies led by men are often accused of being responsible), women live among themselves. Reproduction uses genetic methods and/or cloning or artificial insemination. Only the distancing of sexes guarantees, it would seem, a return to where the drift to a dominant patriarchy began. Joanna Russ in *The female man*, 1975 or in the short story “*When it changes*” in: Jacque Goimard, Demetre Ioakimidis and Gerard Klein, (eds) 1985 *Stories of sex-fiction, The Great Anthology of Science-fiction*, Elisabeth Vonaburg in *Chroniques du pays des mères* (1997) and Pamela Sargent in *The Shore of Women* deal with the theme of segregation. In the first, “Whileaway” is Earth, our world, one of the possibles of the future. It's a parallel world where women, the female man, have become the whole of humanity. In the second, women have taken power and practice strict separation between men and women, raising the children in collective childcare. In the book, society evolves towards less rigorous opposition between the Mothers to the men's old world: men are more and more accepted in certain social activities and a relative reconciliation emerges. Women's societies have more consensual rapport to power, collectively accepted, and from that, less conflictual. Relations with men, fewer and considered a minority in all aspects, are controversial. For the last, the start up point of the novel is the following: nuclear war has ravaged Earth. Women, equipped with sensibilities, pacifists and givers of life, regrouped in the cities, have driven out the men. The mothers of the city, responsible for the societies, chose among the men those who present favourable to reproduction and the amelioration of the human species genetic behaviour and heritage, in the end the survival of this society is due to the sacrifice of certain women who accept to give birth to men, raise them during the first few years, and then, once they are driven out, to monitor and punish them when they dare leave the barbaric stage of neolithic society to organise themselves into a village and revive agriculture. It's the description of societies that assimilate women to shepherds and/or keepers of the herd. Other women figures emerge ; these artefacts, when they are female, have specificities.

Female figures

These artefacts, as said by Vonaburg¹¹, can be varied. Other than the fact they are the product of chimeric constructions, they are also monstrous, genetic mutants, vampires. Three distinct types. The “witch” has magical abilities, a mysterious and fluid nature that gives her power on the external world. The “monstress” has (internal or external) organs that makes her dangerous. She is repulsive or socially speaking marginal. The “technologically equipped” woman shows the possibilities of an extension for bodies. The artefactual figure, chimeras, cyborgs, negatively interpreted between the 1940s and 1990s, eventually take on traits of a “new feminine-feminism contract”. In masculine texts, from the 1980s onwards, with the explosion of cyberspace, the cyborg embodies the tearing from possible materiality and is lived as a triumph ; the cyborg or artefact represents discontent in feminine texts (Pat Cadigan, *Mindplayers* (1987), *Synners* (1989), *Fools* (1992)). Women don't necessarily have the same agenda as men, and do not de-construct the same worlds as them ; feminine texts charge themselves to de-construct the sexual artefact (the alienating image of woman (Joanna Russ, 1975, *The female man*) and Suzy MacKee Charnas (*The furies*, 1994 and *The Conqueror's child*, 1999)). In the texts concerning the artefact, the questions to ask are evidently crucial as regards to the status of women: who creates the artefact, has it the power to reproduce itself, what about its revolt against the creator (God, male or female)? ‘*In the Judeo-Christian culture, the artefact motif, fabricated, but more importantly dominated, always refers to*

Hand of Darkness, the Hugo prize in 1969, *Rocannon's World*, *City of Illusions*, *Planet of Exile*, *Earthsea*) explore the otherness, on planets which their characteristics make them characters in their own rights.

10 Born in 1937, Joanna Russ published her first science fiction short story in 1959. She is the creator of a heroine named Alyx who appears first as a *Heroic fantasy* warrior then as a protagonist in science-fiction stories. *The Female Man* (1975) is the confrontation of a woman with the other “me” from parallel universes.

11 Elisabeth Vonaburg, « Women as artefacts in modern science fiction » pages 153-166, in Francis Berthelot and Philippe Clermont (Eds), *Colloque de Cerisy, Science Fiction and modern imaginary*, Bragelonne, coll. Essais, 2007.

the feminine, even through sex and masculine gender artefacts (page 162). Let us resume: What are these artefactual figures? Firstly, the “witch” woman disposes of dangerous powers. Movements of witchcraft (*Wicca*) born in the UK then implanted in the US and in anglophone countries during the 20th century were first used as political goals, expressing in the American counter-culture in the 1960s the refusal of masculine authority and patriarchal power. The “feminist witches” searched for, at first, a pre-Christian theology, based on the adoration of nature and of matriarchal inspiration. Today the “feminist witches” less politicised, express more a personal quest of well-being. In Europe, the philosopher Isabelle Stengers took interest in this movement. Starhawk, left-wing figure, was the correspondent in San Francisco of the *Chimère* and *Multitude* magazines : “*To define one's self as a witch, it is to affirm the right of women to be powerful and dangerous by making them the heiresses of healers, and wise women and all the forms of not approved by the authorities knowledge. It's cultivating a spirituality rooted in nature, eroticism and the earth. How to transform our internalised powerlessness into power and collective creativity capable of changing an unfair social system?*” she said to the magazine *Ethnopsy* (N°4, February 2002)

Among the witches, counting the women in *Dune*, written by Franck Herbert, and in particular, *Jessica* from the “Bene Gesserit”. The “Bene Gesserit” is a female organisation, spiritual and matriarchal that prefers to act in the shadows. The opposite of the more masculine figures, the women from this sorority act in the shadow of the autocratic power practised by the descendants of the Atreid line. Vonda Mac Intyre's female healer in the *Dreamsnake* (Pocket editions 7170, December 1994) is an example of a woman, Serpent, who, as a healer, a kind of witch, heals the poorest of her planet desolate after a catastrophe we know nothing about. The heroine has three serpents, genetically modified: Sand, a desert-coloured rattlesnake, Mist, a female cobra of alabaster scales, and Grass, a dreamsnake, a precious reptile that comes from another planet, and its venom can give sleep, as well as taking away pain. Other types of witches exist, this time imagined by men. “Gregory of Gladys” (West John Anthony 1963, “Gregory of Gladys” *The Great Anthology of Science Fiction : Histoire à Rebours*, 1963, pp. 21-31) is a man fattened with the help of “little treats” who is going to be devoured by his wife (among other women). Evelyn Smith in a “*Journée en banlieue*” (1960, *The Great Anthology of Science Fiction: Stories of the year 2000*, 1985, p. 98-109) depicts a war between the “flat roofs” (inhabitants of apartment buildings) and the “pointy roofs” (inhabitants of housing estates). This war only concerns the women, who stay in their neighbourhoods all day and kill one another in the supermarket (a place of “meeting” between different social classes!) or when they are in their car, on the streets. The men, who only come back home in the evening, do not realise any of this is happening, all is calm on the weekends. When the novel's heroine realises that she soon will be able to access to a more chic neighbourhood because of her husband's social success, she knows then that more powerful weapons will be at her disposal...

Secondly, the woman can be a “monstresse” a monstrous woman. Catherine Moore (who created Jirel de Joiry, the first heroine in *Sword and Sorcery*) in *Shambleau*, novel published in 1933, stages a monstresse, a Medusa, with an approach to sensuality and emotion that is rare at that time. It is, effectively, an intimate connection between monster, sexuality, order, and the foundation of the world¹². The sexual metaphor accompanies the capacity for capture, for penetration and envelopment of monsters: the octopus suck the hero, vampirise him. The triumph against the monster by an essentially masculine hero symbolises the victory of the latter upon an uncontrollable savageness that he can domesticate and socialise in the couple's sexuality. The socialised and domesticated princess is the prize of the “monstricidal” hero. The mythological monsters defy the separation of the elements operated by the act of demiurgic of the creation of the cosmos (water/earth/air ; female-male, etc.) : they crawl, steal and suck (chimera, sphinx, etc.). Science-

12 *Stories of sex-fiction, La grande anthologie de la science-fiction*, Le livre de poche, 1985 ; *Cybersex, Aliens, neurosex and cyborgams*, Foreword by Will Self, including texts by Martin Amis, Jeff Noon, Kathe Koja, Harlan Ellison, Lisa Tuttle, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Raven books, London 1996.

fiction or fantasy are only revisited and re-motivated by science forms of ancient religious myths principles, and in the first row we find the principle of non-confusion evoked by, among others, Roger Caillois in *La pieuvre. Essai sur la logique de l'imaginaire* (1973).

Thirdly, the great reference of the technological woman is *The Ship who sang* by Anne McCaffrey (1961)¹³. A woman's brain is grafted onto a spaceship. Inside, a man works with her to pilot the ship. In one of the short stories, the ship's task is to save the embryos (the ship then appears as a matrix metaphor). Rebecca Ore¹⁴ in *Gaia's toys* (1995) describes a close future in which the nano-technology and bioengineering makes the distinction between nature and technology hard to make. The novel is structure with points of view. The first narrator is Allison, an eco-terrorist whose intention it is to blow up a refinery : she is captured by the FBI and, in exchange for life lived in jail, accepts that her body be entirely rebuilt using technology. Another narrator, Willie, earns his bread by renting his brain to be used as digital interface so as to process information. Dorcas is a genetic product, a scientific woman who manipulates genes in the view of a subversion to the society that made her : she generates insects. These three characters have in common that they all accepted this role in exchange of financial emolument. This society finds normal to equip human beings. The main interest of the story is to concentrate on the subjective difficulties of the characters to remake themselves, to rethink themselves as authentic subjects in an ambiguous, unpredictable, and infinitely different, context. Certainly, the body has to get used to the fact that it is becoming a cyborg to maintain the social status of the subject to which it belongs to ; what this means is quite uncertain. The masculine and feminine representations of these transformed bodies can differ profoundly, according to Janet Abbate (a specialist on technical networks) who comments¹⁵ a text by Catherine L. Moore dating from 1944 "*No Women Born*" published in *Histoire de médecins La Grande anthology de la Science-fiction*¹⁶. The main character, Deirdre, is a dancer whose body was destroyed by a fire and who saw her body recreated because of the work done by a team of scientists and artists (the model of the creative team). The dancer adapts well to her new body, and meditates on the links between the machine and man in a positive way. However, the men around the dancer express their fears ; the loss of her feminine body is synonymous to a loss of humanity to Malzer, the scientist.

This man's fear before the evanescence of the female body (its autonomy) is also identifiable in the work of David J. Skal, *Scavengers* (1980). Kelly, a sought after artist, decides to dissolve her personality in a drug circulating in the street. This substance, extracted from the brain, permits you to relive the personality of its deceased proprietor. Other than Kelly, the absentee, this novel crystallises Brian's madness, the madness of the conservator who wishes to freeze art, of the lover who wants to imprison the one he loves. Brian persists in trying to bring Kelly back through Tracy, druggie picked up in the street. Another artefactual capture, the work *The Stepford Wives* d'Ira Levin (1976, 159 p.) is about housewives, living in suburbia, who seem to be (or really are) robots invented by their husbands and who look exactly like their murdered ex-wives. In these novels, the bodies of women are manipulated and seem malleable to any desire. The aim of their transformation are visible: the reproduction or production of new human beings or beings at the service of the man of the future. Let's take for the last example, *Darwin* by Greg Bear (2005). Kaye Lang, geneticist, discovers that the silent part of our genes conceals old viruses ; a surprising biologic machinery has just engaged itself. The SHEVA syndrome starts attacking women and transforms the babies not yet

13 Anne McCaffrey, 1996, Pocket, Science-Fiction 5620 (1st edition, 1961)

14 Our analysis is taken from Jenny Wolmark's article "Time and identity in Feminist science-fiction", in : David Seed (ed), 2005-2008, A companion to science-fiction, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, pp. 156-171.

15 <http://www.inform.umd.edu/hist/Faculty/JAbbate/cyborg/human-machines.html#No>

16 <http://www.quarante-deux.org/exliibris/00/0f/a6/exliibris/00/02/3e/bc.html>> Jacques Goimard, Demètre Ioakimidis, Gérard

Klein

<http://www.quarante-deux.org/exliibris/00/0f/a6/exliibris/00/18/b1/4d.html>> Librairie Générale Française/le Livre de poche,

3781, 1983.

born. Women's bodies become a political social issue ; thousands are massacred for the fear of the bred monsters. Kaye herself has to give birth to, and in the greatest secrecy, in the company of Indians, who have also been marginalised, a child of the second type, maybe even a new humanity. The latter accomplishes a new leap on Darwin's Ladder, the way of evolution. It is not difficult to see to what point women's bodies, phantasmagorical theme, is reduced to objectivity ; the stories of science fiction written by women themselves often evade about the possibility of thinking of oneself as an individual confronted to stories and not just a sexual or gendered body.

A possible subject

Female figures in science-fiction are often considered as figures opposed to the masculine and patriarchal dominance. They are less often subjects who build themselves a story retold in terms of life experience, a journey to recount and a time-space sensitive that would define its own experience , prior of any male or female experience. In this, we turn to the genre theorists to approach the one or many ways this issue is being built. Elsa Dorlin¹⁷ in recent work, shows the different versions of the work on gender in feminist theory and, in particular, the *Queer* theories. If it's true that gender itself is a social elaboration – many of us are not born categorically male or female – the social construction of gender that will mix with this sexual elaboration finds it a reason to exist. What appears to be missing from this reasoning, and Judith Butler in her last work features, is the body's reason, this nature that we have been given, and that cannot be seen as passive matter upon which the imprint of our reason to exist would be grafted. The body speaks, but if it does, what does it say? Judith Butler in the work *Bodies That Matter ; On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (2009), extends her works aiming at the deconstruction of gender (and/or the genesis of its production). Beyond undoing the hold of forms of violent normalisation of which it is the vector, the author tries to put into evidence the imaginary fiction of a “natural” gender that would be the product of a series of performative acts. Also, fiction on the subject must not let the series of links that make it social and eminently cultural be forgotten.

From there, let's remark that science fiction authors do not seem to know the individual whose body is a socio-cultural construction, a rich life experience. Cultural and biological familial resources feed this construction. These words are not *a priori* political (but can be *a posteriori*), as much as they have been worked by the social and political, all individuals are a part of a given culture. Composed of interior monologues, of difficult reaction, disillusioned observations when faced with what has been put in motion, and thanks to taste, the “speaking body” experiences real moments of wonder in the pleasure of present time. Even if it does not anticipate the chains of causality unformed by cultural schemes, overhanging myths, and refrains, the body becomes power of acting and producing, by speech especially, all the while a story. Certainly, a big part of feminine or masculine science fiction is first of all militant. It does not build the psychology of the characters and really just emanations of a political demand. This is even truer for feminist science-fiction. This translates, however, a real difficulty to proven manifestation of body through history a real political question; that of manifesting yourself as a political subject independently from the categories that are used to secure it. A certain truth, in the pragmatic sense of the term¹⁸, can be argued from what has happened to the body, and how has the person arrived to be how he is, a body marked by life left behind, events that make up his story and sometimes, History. It's about a mark, and the

17 Elsa Dorlin, 2008, *Sexes, genres et sexualités*, Paris, Philosophies, PUF.

18 Quid pragmatism in feminist theories ? This major turn in American philosophical thought, born of the hinges of the 19th and 20th centuries, takes on the practical value as a truth criteria and considers that there is no absolute truth and all that is true is all that is successful. William James (1842-1910) in his work *Pragmatism* (James, 1907) gave a summary of its typical basic principles. He develops, in particular, a theory on truth, which stayed famous, that links it to the implementation of is “verification” process: “Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, it is made true by events.”

testimony of a lived life, and the experiences a person had to go through.

On the side of life experience, Catherine Dufour, presents in *Le goût de l'immortalité* (2007) an original and eloquent heroine: en 2304, an old lady returns to her youth through a letter. She recalls the events that marked her existence, that made her who she is: *My dear Marc, here it is completed, this work that dared think it could resist me! And since yesterday, I have nothing to add to it. I only have to deliver it to my client, and wish him a good read : (...) This letter, that promises to be long, is a response to the query in two words : you want to see me in real life. That expression makes me laugh. We spend so much time in virtual settings, piloting our avatars, that material reality is only a narrow bridge between two 3d. (...) There is, in what you ask, an appetite for the other that goes beyond what two centennials could draw from their made and remade bodies, and that all our virtual exchanges have visibly not satisfied. You require the whole Being, in a way. It is brave. I have decided to be brave also, and to confess...*” Cmatic, C. Dufour's heroine is an observer of the evolutions of her world. Lisber, by Elisabeth Vonaburg¹⁹, is also a heroine who has a personal story to tell. The action of *Chroniques du Pays des Mères* is situated in the distant future, at a time when it's being discovered that a whole technology has been lost through the ages. Due to a mysterious plague, more than ninety per cent of the population is female. Lisber, the protagonist, attempts to demystify the past all the while reconciling with her own destiny, and her own identity. The form of the story itself, with its triple temporality and its multiple voices, attempts to recreate the dialogue that establishes itself between the character and itself. This fictitious social system where women reign is also supported by an innovative writing style in a grammar point of view : in this novel, unlike in the use of French, the feminine takes over the masculine²⁰.

The saviour, a sort of Jeanne d'Arc, or pastor's daughter, represents a woman whose story is the ascension to *leadership*. This figure is destined to represent the humble: black or monsters, hybrids, any type of marginals. These compassionate and empathic heroines are new heroines. Octavia Butler in *La parabole du semeur* (1995),) presents Lauren, daughter of a black pastor, hyper-empathic, who transforms her genetic monstrosity into acting power. In 2025, the young woman, who comes from middle class gated communities, tries to save the world, in a devastated California, especially by the climate change. She leads crowds of poor people who are on the street (or maybe on the run) into a new religion and pleads for a humanity based on comprehension of God considered as synonymous to *Permanent Change*. Cordwainer Smith, in *The Instrumentality of Mankind* (2004), describes a real Jeanne d'Arc who leads her sub-beings comrades in a small revolution, founded on love, revolution that will quickly be repressed but will open the way to much later recognition in the time of the sub-beings. This dog-woman, D'Jeanne, finishes burnt at the stake. This feminine figure introduces women as leaders of men.

5. Conclusion

The woman is at the centre of a debate combining authenticity, real, nature by confronting them with sham, artifice, and loss of meaning. The woman as matrix, source and foundation has to maintain its authenticity ; as a feminine figure, she duplicitous, a monstresse disturbing the established order. To guaranty one, is to kill the other. In this sense, it is not surprising that the passage from a reign of nature to one of culture, from an agricultural world to an urban one, from a

19 Elisabeth Vonaburg, Dialogues on utopia, feminism and other annexed subjects ; Elisabeth Vonaburg interviewed by Sylvie Berard., Tessera, <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/tessera/article/viewFile/25907/2399> consulted the 5th of April 2011.

20 To note that a similar process is used by Catherine Dufour, who only gives capital letters to - endangered - plants and not to humans.

reality lived as authentic with pockets of civilisation, towns, to a reality lived as a sham²¹, is accompanied by a transformation of the perception of women. The latter has never been as in danger of a regression or another than now. The woman is confused with the question of nature, which has been proven as a social construct, pure grammar, and opposite as a given, a matter that would govern all powerful social organisations. The ecological crisis, but also the changes of scale and time associated with globalisation, lead to endangering a nature that should be re-authenticated, a uterus that should be fought for, to use for the well-being of humanity! In short, let us ask ourselves if saving nature is not saving the Sublimated woman. The possible future of the world would, in this case, be feminine! What place can science-fiction give, in this context, to woman? In any case, as a literary genre, specific tools.

21 Jean Baudrillard, 1981, *Simulacre et simulation*, Paris, Galilée coll. Débats.