FCJ-016 The Online Body Breaks Out? Asence, Ghosts, Cyborgs, Gender, Polarity and Politics

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2 [1] Representations of the online body seem constantly involved with issues of imprecise, crossed or broken boundaries. Online boundaries, both personal and group, appear especially fluid when contrasted with moves towards establishing impermeable boundaries offline. This contributes to perceptions of disembodiment or potential unity with machines. Online bodies are thus described in terms reminiscent of other constructs such as ghosts – partly because experiences of materiality can be described in terms of boundary issues, and partly because it is difficult to bring offline bodies to bear. From another angle, gender, when constructed as a polarity, also serves to "ghost" experience. However, online bodies are also connected to constructions and feelings of offline bodies to reduce ambiguities and to establish authenticity online. For example, mood, as sustained by the offline body, acts as a framing for communication in netsex, mourning and flame.

3 Another popular body metaphor in this context involves the description of people as cyborgs. It is sometimes claimed that cyborgs form radical "hybrid" entities. Yet cyborgs also get caught in boundary issues. The cyborg is, for example, caught in narratives that further capitalist technopower, whatever our intentions.

4 The situation becomes even more complex when we consider that both the ghostly body and the cyborg body are often contrasted with a virile and active offline body. This provides a further set of paradoxes if we consider the possibility of online action affecting the offline world. There are no easy answers.

1.1 Boundaries and Offline Bodies

5 As online and offline blur, and are intimately involved, it is useful to begin by looking at some offline issues around bodies, in particular those around boundaries. [2]

6 A common offline narrative indicating boundary anxiety holds that Western [3] bodies are precariously porous and under attack from outside by "germs". These germs or viruses are ubiquitous evils associated with matter out of place, or untoward contact. They come from other people and overpower us when our personal or social boundaries are not maintained (Douglas, 1969). This narrative has expanded to include other boundary violators, such as carcinogens, radiation, chemical food additives, and genetic modification.

7 One of the best descriptions of this anxiety complex is given by Martin in her study of ideas about the immune system. However her thesis of change, from the maintenance of external barriers to the maintenance of personal immune systems, over the last 40 years, seems exaggerated. She gives plenty of contemporary examples of boundary anxiety towards foreign substances (1994: 37-9, 53-4, 67, 230ff.), reflected also in recent advertising campaigns promoting wars on bacteria in the household. The latter focus on children ingesting germs if bacteria are not "wiped out". This indicates that barrier models of defence are still strong, despite reports of such anti-bacterial agents helping the evolution of resistant bacteria and impeding the development of the immune system.

8 Similarly in the "Western" world, boundaries between groups and methods of maintaining boundaries seem insecure and focuses of anxiety. People often feel unable to control either their own, or their group's, destiny or security. Forces around them (political, economic, cultural, criminal, ecological etc.), seem beyond control and likely to overwhelm at any moment, often fortifying conspiracy theories and what Timothy Melly calls 'agency panic' (2000: 7-16).

9 Boundaries between work and home are threatened as portable electronics bring us forever in range of work. In politics the global is said to threaten the local and so on. States attempt to deal with anxieties around vagueness and disruption in their boundaries brought by technology, migration and corporate motility (Everard, 2000). In response, some try to construct boundaries which are impermeable to the outside. In Australia our government successfully appealed to an electorate through panic about being overwhelmed by refugees. The "fortress" enclave, equipped with private security guards, is widely represented as a response by the wealthier middle class to disorder around them (Hills, 1998). Evan McKenzie, writing in 1993, claimed that over 30 million

Americans (one eighth of the population) lived in these enclaves (q. Boyer, 1996: 151). There is no reason to suppose this number has diminished.

10 As Cecil Helman points out, the terms of sickness (and hence boundary violation) are commonly used in describing society and its boundary problems – we live in a "sick society" suffering "epidemics", or "plagues" of social problems (1992: 53-4, 67, 230ff.).

1.2 Online Boundaries

11 Such pressures and panics can intensify online as online groups rarely have formal boundaries, and almost never have boundaries observable by all members. People wander in and out, and the majority of members don't participate, or participate so infrequently they are invisible. Fear of disruption from viruses, from spam, from outsiders, or trolls, who might wish to disturb the group is large (Marshall, 2000: Chp 5, Herring et al, 2003).

12 This vagueness of group boundaries extends to the personal in a blurring between presence and absence. In offline societies, it is generally possible to tell whether a person is present or not. Presence and status are acknowledged by others making, at the least, eye contact or grunts in a person's direction, or by their pointedly ignoring that person. Identity is reinforced by reaction. People are generally aware of who is listening to the conversation and of their reactions to each other. Online this is usually not the case. It is possible for a person to be present without others being aware of them: there is no marker of existence beyond the act of communication itself. "Asence" is the term I have coined to express this almost ontological uncertainty, or suspension of being between presence and absence.

13 Even in email "conversation", this suspension of being occurs in the lack of closure of exchange. In offline conversation, reception of a message and the ending of communication is marked by a negotiation of grunts and/or formal phrases – however, email conversation usually ends abruptly in suspension. There is no certainty whether you have been received, or read, or of the nature of your reader's reaction. The only way to know that you exist to others is by their response, and yet only a relatively few mails to Lists receive acknowledgment, even if people liked the post. The writer receives little reinforcement or feedback to most of their communication presences. Their presence is always drifting away. Status has to be continually re-earned before a shifting audience. People might be able to express themselves without inhibition, thus giving a feel of intimacy, but there may be no response, thus giving the feel of absence and isolation. Attempting to resolve this asence is important for many online behaviours (Marshall, 2000; 2004).

2. Online Bodies

14 Initial explorations of what people report about online bodies focuses on the Mailing List Cybermind, the group with which I have most ethnographic experience. Cybermind was founded by Alan Sondheim and Michael Current in mid 1994 to discuss the 'philosophical and psychological implications of subjectivity in cyberspace'. It has always been a List that has combined this discussion with a large amount of reportage, art, social activity and politics. I have been on List since December 1994. [4]

15 In May 1997 Alan Sondheim wrote questions to Cybermind which were relevant to these issues. The first question was: 'When you are on-line, do you feel that your body has a specific beginning and ending? Are you aware of your body?'

16 Several people left the first part of this question unanswered, which may imply body beginning and ending are not normally within the awareness of "Western" people, or are taken for granted. However some implied they felt their bodies extend on line. For example Enok wrote: 'I am a secret tiger, walking restless along the fence, stretching my paws out between the bars, – to touch and scratch the freedom'. Alan added: 'it's as if I'm extended into another space, boundariless'. Rose wrote that her body 'flows into the space created for it. Always!'. Jerry: 'my fingers reach out into the wires…'. These statements carry the implication that online life is free from restriction or the "resistance of the Real", and hence from "materiality".

17 Other people implied that they lost awareness of their body. Kerry wrote:

> 18 [After logging in], body awareness subsides against the intense linguisticity, the concentration on/of what is being *said* even as the digits and the pixels conceal and obscure.
>
> 19

FOP2 wrote: 'If there is ever a time when my body is simply carrying my eyes, this is it'. KNS suggested that body awareness varies with activity:

> Different activities involve different physical sensations: reading on the web, my body is relaxed and I sprawl in the chair; posting I am more attentive, all my awareness focused on my fingers and I "feel" my mind more; with my online lover, I am aware of intense erotic sensations very different from RL sex

Paula wrote of disruption to this lack of awareness:

> As in RL I am most often unaware of my body. But on occasion, as when the smell of the breeze (or person) causes a physical response in me, online I may suddenly become aware of the silky keys under my fingers.

Rose alone suggested that 'Body awareness *increases*….. ('Course, it might depend on the identity of the sender…. ;)', implying this is related to sexual attraction. She answered the question about lack of boundaries with: 'Only when a particular name appears. Love'.

Extension, and loss of body awareness was not my experience. This may be related to discomfort. I first proposed this when faced with increasing hand pain and in discussing downloading consciousness:

> Pain inhibits typing, so there is less presence of me.[…] Would i exchange this body for a life in wires?
>
> such a being would no longer be me, but i suspect there would be a lack in the wires- even more marked than the lack in life, and maybe- though pain free- I'd have even less to say.

Orlando, who did not mention extension, was also aware of physical discomfort: 'Perpetual bloody headaches. I'm aware of my fingers and my head and my cramped legs, crossed and uncomfortable'. Similarly G mentioned their awareness of boundaries, and wrote: 'Yes, the small muscles in my eyelids flutter like VoltaFrogsLegs. My butt aches, I need Coffee'.

Another question Alan phrased in terms of boundaries was: 'Do you have immersion-feelings when on-line, lack of boundaries? If so, to what do you ascribe these?'

Immersion seems to have been interpreted by respondents to refer to their level of involvement in online activities, and was frequently linked with lack of awareness of time passing. For example zoogirl writes:

> On-line (or whilst at the pc reading and writing) I feel immersed in what I'm doing to the extent that time telescopes and dissappears. I forget to eat (useful when dieting) and can usually carry on regardless of how tired I feel. This is unlike other activities. Sometimes, the tiredness evaporates when on-line in a way which worries me. It seems that the body is producing some chemical to override normal patterns in response to the CMC. I can't work out why it should do this.

Rose comments 'I'll grant you this: the awareness of "time elapsed" is suspended in this medium. Remarkably so'. Kerry discussing the decline of his body awareness when online writes: 'For evidence, it's enough to look at the clock and see that 2 or 3 hours have evaporated'.

Perhaps this lack of time-awareness renders the experience of online life as occurring in a different type of time to "normal" time, and helps reinforce historical vagueness (lack of group history) or "mythic" time in which succession is not fixed.

Alan suggests "immersion feelings" are modality dependent:

> I ascribe them to an identification with the site or domain I'm reading/writing. It happens more often when working on, say, javascript or exploring sendmail, than when reading/writing email. It happens totally with Netsex, the strongest often in cuseeme.

KNS thought immersion was compensatory for life problems, suggesting some moral ambiguities:

> At times I do get completely immersed in being online and have difficulty focusing on my "real" life. I ascribe it to my fascination with the medium, but even more to difficulties in my real life.

Jerry locates the degree of immersion in intimacy and boundary fluidity:

> yes there are always immersion feelings – same as when I write or read – the boundaries get fluid. I ascribe these to the question of the locus of subjectivitiy – how close one is to the Other – personal space is always variable depending on who one is talking to.

FOP2 agrees to the lack of boundaries:

> Yes, have immersion-feelings when on-line, lack of boundaries?... Writing to a list is like being in Shaw's heaven, where people are coming and going in a mist, meeting, fading away, so yes, no boundaries.

Which implies that to be conceived of as "boundaries" by "Western" people such boundaries have to be sharp or observable.

These responses imply that people's experience of personal boundaries online are more fluid, weak or indefinite than in offline life (perhaps leading to a larger sense of self), unless inhibited by pain or discomfort. To become present online, the body becomes asent, which may be its condition in much offline involvement as well, but it seems more noticeable online. Vagueness of group and personal boundaries may reinforce each other.

One method of dealing with these boundary problems is to rigidly enforce the boundaries, or polarities, between the net persona and the person themselves. This argument usually proposes that all behavioural rules can be discarded because no behaviour on the net (which does not interfere with a user's computer) can actually hurt another person. In this view only the "body," as separated from the "mind", can actually suffer pain. Two List members took this position at the Cybermind Conference but nearly all List members who commented disagreed, which might be expected given the positive valuation of empathy in the group (Marshall 2000, Chapters 10-12). Perhaps this rigid separation is also held by those who propose that netsex is safe sex with no ill consequences or that it is easy to separate public and private spaces on the net, with those who cannot being declared weak or naïve.

3. Sustaining Mood: Emotion, Framing and Intimacy

What people say about their online bodies does not exhaust the way they use their bodies online.

On an email List, a variety of moods is common, as many threads and responses appear simultaneously to the reader. Sustained mood (often construed as a bodily response), which can then become a stable framing for the interpretation of messages, is rare and most commonly occurs in flame wars, although it also occurs with death and netsex.

3.1 Flame War

It only takes a few people to create a flame war. Although many people may comment indirectly on a dispute the number of people directly involved can be small. In one memorable war, most mail came from five people, and not more than twelve commented directly, yet perceptions were that the dispute overwhelmed the List. Mail of one consistent mood (in this case hostile) dominated over the more fragmented moods of other mails. This derives from asence; only the visible or the responding exist to affect others. [5]

In an environment where it is next to impossible to exclude people (particularly in newsgroups), public condemnation and humiliation is the only obvious way to exert social control. Thus flames are often used to establish boundaries, to point out those unfamiliar with group conventions and get them to learn or leave. However, the List may become almost unreadably voluminous in a flame war, which drives away those with less commitment to it. So the way of establishing boundaries can also disrupt them. Further, if the body is the ultimate locus of power, then the frustration involved in trying to bring the body directly into acts of social control renders that body "immaterial" or at least asent; it cannot act directly upon the bodies of others.

3.2 Death

Sustained mood may partly explain people's surprise at their intense emotional responses to Michael Current's death in the first month of Cybermind's existence. For example, Debra writes two years later:

> The most powerful event of my online life (so far) was the death of Michael Current [...] I still don't understand why, as right now when I think of him I find tears in my eyes.

Argyle, lurking at the time, reports in an article that she wondered:

> What was going on with me? Why was I so upset? Why did I have to read all these messages. Why do I still think about it now? (1996: 136).

At the time of death, many other List members wrote as if surprised at the extent of their grief, and found they had to justify their ties to Michael – usually by describing offlist contact – thus establishing the personal ties necessary to legitimate grief.

53 Reiteration of grief from a relatively large number of people produced a radically different experience from the normal mode of reading, and for some this crossed Lists. Fido wrote:

54 > For me the ritual has already begun in the cycling of messages repeated and repeated from list to list as I leaf through five, six seven copies of the same awkward anguish, one copy for each place we haunted together.

55 In these messages of grief, not only was the mood sustained, but the mood was known by everyone, and possessed a momentum of its own. We all have griefs, and these can all resonate (even if they were not initially griefs for Michael). [6] There was also no feeling that the surviving family needed to be protected from the grief of those distant from the deceased.

56 However there were few ritual usages to maintain mood, and no markers to remind people of the appropriate mood. Ritual gestures such as silence and quiet, common at "Western" funerals, would have simply implied the List was not present or was uninterested. Thus even with the intensity of feeling involved, the List could only maintain the mood for several days, and soon returned to normal.

3.3 Netsex and Framing

57 Netsex on Cybermind is covered in Marshall (2003) so the arguments are only briefly recapped here. Demands for authenticity and the conflation of gender relations with intimacy make gender exceedingly important in offlist or personal communication. Netsex is part of the hidden life of Cybermind, and occurs between members in other online environments. Following Foucault (1979: 6-7), discourse about sex in "Western" society tends to be considered a revelation of "truth", and hence a form of declaring authenticity. This links with signs of the body acting as signs of authenticity, and suggests that sex is used to establish the "truth" needed to make intimacy.

58 Without normal persevering presence, sex and bonding become more marked, especially on MOOs, to reduce asence and give a sense of physical presence, anchored in a sustained, mutually referenced and common, offline body response.

59 On MOOs boundary problems and forms of asence are emphasised. On a MOO a person can be excluded; or an intimate conversation can have participants which another participant is not aware of; or a person can give attention to multiple subjects at the same time. [7] I have heard of people leaving the computer to smoke or go to the toilet without informing the person they were supposedly being intimate with. Any kind of special relationship in this circumstance needs something which renders a claim possible, yet conventions of authenticity clash with uses of ritual to maintain, or mark, these states or claims. Commonly people use sex to sustain the mutuality of mood.

60 Within this high asence environment with weak boundaries and little elaborated ritual code, people might need to "fall in love" to prove a relationship actually exists. Love is the prime justification in "Western" society for closeness and intimacy, particularly between the sexes. A person can then maintain the presence of the other before them via narration and body feeling. Netsex can also, as one person wrote to me, restore contact if the dialogue slides out of areas of mutual interest.

61 Concerns with asence and authenticity can clash and lead to deletion – especially given widespread fears of gender appropriateness around intimacy which translate into fears about the identity of the offline body. Even if the gender of the person online may not match their gender offline, the gender they choose usually exaggerates the conventions of gender construction. On MOOs, most women and men are adorned with an excess of the symbolisms of the gender and sexual discourse they participate within. As Springer writes, when discussing cyberpunk novels and films 'cyberbodies, in fact, tend to appear masculine or feminine to an exaggerated degree' (1996: 64).

62 This use of gender symbols to enable the performance may appear to simultaneously delete the presence of "real gender", or a real self, which might be expressed in uncertainties and hesitations. As a consequence most people I have discussed online romance with fear they could fall for

fantasy (inauthentic) images, and hence need to bring the relationship into the offline "real" to check it or render it "true".

63 Thus, although online romance may be perceived as intense, it may also be perceived as "unreal" (the offline body being real). The person becomes caught in a contradiction between an intimacy which can only be confirmed offline, and an equally supposed ability to only be "who they are" while online.

64 In this context, one List member asked:

> 65 on the net we can (start to) efface the connections between the body and the signs of discipline or the inhabitor of the body and the enactor of discipline. Once that happens then what is the body, or the person, that *isn't* those things?

66 Perhaps we can suggest that they become spectral or even more elusive.

4. The Haunted Computer

67 "Western" cultures already have a set of "virtual body" constructions, which are complementary to our constructions of the "physical body"; those of the "soul", the "mind", and the "ghost", all of which blend together due to their status of being "not-physical" bodies. The polarity between mind/body, generates the parallel of "virtual" or online for "spiritual", and offline for physical.

68 Such a material/immaterial split is not essential, and many Western traditions have proposed more elaborate divisions of the mind, including the sources of mainstream religion. The Hebrew Scriptures distinguish nephesh from ruach, and the Greek Testament distinguishes psyche from pneuma. Both of these divisions are often translated as "soul" and "spirit". Lullian alchemy makes the distinction between spirit and matter one of degree; matter could be etherealised and spirit concentrated. Mid Seventeenth Century philosophers such as Joseph Glanville and Henry More used examples of ghosts and witches to make arguments about the complexity of the multi-part soul's interaction with the world. Such arguments seem to have become incomprehensible in the Eighteenth Century and later. [8]

69 Other cultures can become more elaborate. The people of Zinancantan in Mexico have a 13 part soul (Helman, 1992: 109). According to Ruel (1970) the Banyang claimed that humans are individually connected to animals or other natural phenomenon (babu) into which they can transform, or send out as an extension of themselves. The babu moves in a parallel 'shadow' world, the 'forest of babu', with effects in this world – making humans sick or destroying crops for example.

70 The point of this reference is not just exoticism but to illustrate a schema which could easily be applied to online experience, but which seems unavailable to Westerners. There are separate but parallel worlds, one is a 'shadow' of the other, part of oneself goes into the other world and behaves differently (perhaps more socially "irresponsibly"), yet we are connected to this other self. Tensions in one world spill into the other.

71 Despite such traditions, we tend to polarise body and mind, often while criticising other people for doing so.

72 A recent tendency is to represent minds as software, with the result that the distinction between computers and minds blurs. Computers become host to the realm of spirits. There are "true stories" of ghosts of 17th Century Englishmen typing messages onto computers (Wester, 1989), and there was, at one time, 'a clearing house for information about possessed PCs' (Watson, 1990: 208). Research shows that many people approach computers as if the computers were conscious social actors (Weizenbaum,1993: 6-7; Frude, 1982: 62, 75, 77, 83; and Reeves and Nass, 1996). There are many science fiction novels in which computers become intelligent, in which human minds wander through computer networks, or in which Artificial Intelligences assume an independent and powerful net life of their own. [9]

73 Software can be seen as analogous to independent mind and hardware to body, even though software would be meaningless without the hardware it can run on. One result is that people can be reduced to nodes in networks of information, without thought of the metaphor's implications.

74 In his book Mind Children (1988), Hans Moravec, director of the Mobile Robot Lab at Carnegie-Mellon University, describes four imagined procedures for transferring a person's mind to a

machine to gain spiritual immortality – most of which assume that replication is equivalent to identity. [10] Ed Regis quotes Moravec as saying:

> The idea that your essence is software seems a very small step from the view that your essence is spirit... This is not some way of tricking you into being less than you are; you're going to be more than you are... It really is a sort of Christian fantasy: this is how to become pure spirit (Regis, 1990: 6, 176).

Academic Iain Chambers casually invokes a similar complex of ideas:

> in the zone of "bodiless exultation" in cyberspace, we also confront the alchemy of anthropological mutation... Here in the infinity of the memory chips the body of homo telematicus is finally superseded, dematerialized. Projected into the fourth and eternal dimension of cyberspace, anatomy is replaced by the electric impulses of "pure" intelligence (Chambers, 1994: 54, 60).

4.2: Online Bodies as Ghosts

"Disembodied" is a term frequently used in academic analysis of online life. For example Dery writes of 'disembodied... combatants' (1993: 559), Marcus of a 'disembodied medium' (1996a: 23), McLagan of 'disembodied communication' (1996: 161), Danet et al of 'disembodied "virtual play"' (1998: 41), while Wertheim ambiguously oscillates between arguing that people perceive Cyberspace as immaterial or that it is an 'immaterial space of mind' (1999: 41, 228-9, 231-2).

Email is also sometimes stated to be like "disembodied" or, "mind to mind communication". This model, and attacks on this model, were moderately common on Cybermind. For example John writes:

> It took a while, but I learned to type and Zen-program in my sleep and suddenly I wasn't in my chair in a computer lab, I had left it and was in an astral plane. Programs were spells, and I was a magi of unlimited mana.

In reply to KK, who wrote 'a soul is nothing but a neuro chemical process', Paula wrote:

> Oh PLEEEEEEASEE. Always and forever the soul is an electric force that shivers and shimmers and reflects the essence of a human being. Don't you know that's why we take so natually to cyberspace? It's a lovely marriage of electrons, human and machine.

Another List member argued the Internet confirmed the mind/body split, paving the way for a new Cartesianism. T-Bone, being critical, remarked: 'It particularly irks me when people with online access [...] imagine they have somehow now purchased an astral body for "moving through" cyberspace'. Another writer, more positively, wrote 'cybersex does not need a body', Kara claimed that in 'virtual relationships [...] there is no physical reality and no desire for it', and Bernadette wrote of her and her netlover that 'We desire to merge but our body gets in the way'. Perhaps the "lack" of a body feeds into Western visions of the perfect love as loss of self, where 'united *souls* represent the purest form of romance' (Springer, 1996: 61 emphasis added). [11]

As argued previously boundaries on MOOs are particularly uncertain. People on MOOs resemble modern ghosts and are treated that way. They merge with the spiritual realm of the program. Unknown in a person's normal life, they contrast with this normality as an independent force which touches it. They can appear out of nowhere and be exorcised by formulae. Actions of figures in a MOO are symbolic actions. Most of their external life actions are deleted, only those redolent with meaning remain and they are repeated, just as a ghost's actions have some specific meaning and are repeated. The number of bodies that may be squeezed into a room is not influenced by the described size of the room and it is also usually impossible to interact with most of the features of a location or room, another reminder of immateriality. People in electronic communication also resemble ghosts in that they function on one sense band only; for modern Western ghosts this can vary being visual, auditory or kinetic, but MOO, or List, ghosts are texts.

There is also a marked class/power division on MOOs. If Wizards are like ghosts, they are like the holy ghost. They can cross most barriers, they can observe whatever happens in a room without being present to the occupiers, they can disconnect less powerful characters, and some are reputed to record the conversations of others for their own use. A MOO is a society under surveillance by invisible spirits. This problem, though frequently resented, is usually ignored.

Given the emphasis on gender in net behaviour, uses of etherealisation and the ghostly nature of net presences might also connect with the gendered history of the net. A common point made in

feminist critiques of Western philosophy and ideologies (e.g. Goldenberg, 1990: 78ff.) has been the tendency of male theorists to denigrate the body and to either praise some etheric transcendence or to derive the world from some disembodied set of categories or processes, while simultaneously constructing the female as an inferior, passive, and physical, body.

87 A fairly common narrative is that this opposition developed in the 17th century through a successful strategy employed by an "intellectual" administrative class to distinguish realms controlled by the church from realms which were open to its own investigation, theorisation and control. This became institutionalised in divisions between the governors, or managers, who undertook mind work, and the governed who performed body work and who, ideally, do not question.

88 The ghost becomes more ethereal as this process becomes more pronounced. The upheavals of the last century loosened this boundary and the ghost became more solid. [12] Nowadays some constructions of the "mind" appear to be etherealising again online. This might be linked in mutual feedback with the constant attempts to characterise the new elites supposedly dealing with immaterial information, as "knowledge" or "creative" workers opposed to "physical" service workers, or the valueless unemployed.

89 If some such position is accepted, then, as the Internet has primarily been colonised by Western males who seek dominance via the supposed excellence of their mental, administrative, or creative abilities, it might be expected that they have used the Internet to emphasise etherealisation as part of the construction of their male identity. Taylor and Saarinen write that their female students using email were:

> 90 much more uneasy about the "out-of-body" experience they are having than the men. Cynthia and Kaisu are obsessed with email and yet are deeply disturbed by the evaporation of the material and the absence of face-to-face. The men in the class are much less bothered by all of this (1994: "Body Snatching 7").

91 Hall likewise argues that:

> 92 Bodyless communication, then, for many men at least is characterised not by a genderless exchange but rather by an exaggeration of cultural conceptions of masculinity – one realised through the textual construction of conversational dominance, sexual harassment, heterosexism, and physical hierarchies (1996: 158).

93 However, this simple division does not seem dominant on Cybermind, as might be expected if gender no longer marks "knowledge workers".

94 Boundaries seem important to materiality. Judith Butler proposes that we 'return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface but as a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary fixity and surface we call matter' (1993: 9). If so, then we can suggest that materiality is linked with a rigid boundary, and that non rigid boundaries constitute the immaterial. Materiality becomes related to the process of making categories firm and exclusive. The lack of boundary fixity in people's experience online, particularly when not interrupted by pain, creates a sense of personal immateriality, which is perhaps furthered by the loss of time sense as an organiser of experience, and the apparent diminishment of restraint or resistance. [13] This leads not only to boundary vagueness but to problems of polarity deletion.

4.3 Polarity, Gender and Spectres

95 All polarity categories, such as male and female, may delete "the other pole". Suppose, for instance, there are two groups A and B, and members of A define a polarity such that A is positive and B is negative. By default B becomes defined as not-A. However as "events/things" are rarely logical opposites (i.e. women are not logical opposites of men, or vice versa), B becomes "illusory" or "spectral" to A. [14] But as A becomes set off, or defined, by being not-B (ie not-not-A) A becomes a negation of an illusion. The situation is further confused if B refuses to accept completely the attributions of what is considered by A as not-A, and then constructs A as not-B. Thus although Luce Irigaray argues that Plato, in the Timaeus, makes the masculine occupy both halves of a binary opposition and, as a result, deletes the feminine (Butler, 1993: 35ff), it might seem that by occupying both halves of the binary the "masculine" is distorted or spectralised as well, even if representationally dominant.

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Further, if, as Germaine Greer argues (1997), in modern society women are deleted and primarily conceived of as voids, without power or potency, endlessly available (almost as prostheses) to be penetrated, then such a construct might be unsatisfactory not just for women but for men as well, as it puts a vacuum at the heart of all relationships. “Existential emptiness”, opens its void in the midst of the only intimacy allowed “Western” men. This boundless void can never be filled, and there can be no co-operation. The penetrator can never surrender, never be “soft” without risking becoming the void. These might only be metaphors, but that is the point.

97 Within this complex of polarity and absence of boundary, the “two bodies” become one body, and its lack. Qualities of the male and female body which limit or influence gendered experience are deleted, or turned into the default image of the ideal male or female; which is itself a deletion.

98 The resultant tendency is to magnify the possibility of asencing and spectralising the body – which can only be grounded by an excess of symbolic gender, belonging to either sex, effectively asencing the body even further. There is no pause in which to explore the “underlying” “feelings” or kinaesthetics which might be held to render us present.

99 The asent body, the asent self, as neither present nor absent becomes a virtual body like a ghost. Sometimes the virtuality is taken as real (as in the narrative of how the virtual world allows true expression of authentic being), and sometimes it is the offline world which is taken as real (as in the narrative of how computer use is an escape from, or abandonment of, real life). However, the overwhelming of one category pole by “the other” might not tend to solidify the dominant pole but unsettle it. The Ghost becomes not pure spirit or matter but an uneasy oscillation.

100 As Alan writes (20 Oct.97), the Ghost is a ‘disturbance of material and semiotic processes, something peripheral – on the (dis)order of the uncanny’. Likewise Derrida suggests that what happens between “twos” (polarities) ‘Can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost’, even if this spectral ‘is never present as such’ (1994: xviii). He later suggests that ‘[O]ne must perhaps ask oneself whether the spectrality effect does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic between actual, effective presence and its other’ (ibid: 40). The answer is perhaps not so clear.

5.Cyborgs

101 One body model which is supposed to undo oppositions is the cyborg, a melding of human and machine. However, it may not escape the problems of another haunting – that of power.

102 Many visions of the net were shaped by a literary movement – cyberpunk [15] – in particular by William Gibson’s Neuromancer (1984), in which the hero plugs directly from his brain into the machine. For these cyborgs, wires and weapons course through their bodies and they run the risk that the burden of their hardware will destroy their humanity – a much reiterated theme in the narratives of science fiction. Somehow, in narrative, becoming machines leaves humans with no option but conquest. Long before the overwhelming presence of computers the Cybermen in Dr. Who (1966+) replaced all their body parts with prostheses and became “rational” killing machines. [16]

103 In a well known and oft quoted section of Neuromancer, written before the Internet became popular, the hero, Case, has his connection to cyberspace destroyed and Gibson writes; ‘For Case who’d lived in the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall… The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh’ (1994: 6). In this case the cyborg is Christian Cartesian.

104 Unlike many societies where the landscape is seen as a human body, in cyberspace it is common for the human to be perceived as permeated with wires and becoming cyborg. The machinic is transferred to life and becomes alive itself. In this invasion the screen flashes, circuits or programmes move imaged electrons. We give “input”, not participation. The body is immobile and the imagined movement of the machine becomes our movement – ‘our machines are disturbingly lively and we ourselves frighteningly inert’ (Haraway, 1989: 152).

105 Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr writes

> 106 Historically, the cyborg has stood for the radical anxiety of human consciousness about its own embodiment at the moment that embodiment appears almost fully contingent. Cyborg anxiety has stood for a panic oscillation between the “human” element (associated with affections, eros, error, innovation, projects begun in the face of mortality) and the “machine” element (the desire for long life, health, physical impermeability, self-contained control processes, dependability).
>
> 107

Use of the term cyborg is often phased in reassuring terms of us already being cyborgs (because we use tools or even language) and in terms of alarm that if we do not become cyborg we will be superseded and computers or robots will take over the world.

108 There also seems a mythic relationship between the machinisation of the human and the loss of human emotions, suggesting, in "Western" terms, that cyborgisation exaggerates of ideas of masculinity and its transcendence of the (gendered) flesh.

109 In this theory, it can be alleged that disruptions to ego development are sheltered behind ideas of armour, and people attempt to attain invulnerability by allying with the "hard" machine. Springer argues that the filmic image of the Cyborg makes use of the overt power and strength of the "passing" industrial technology, while powered by the diffuse, concealed power of computers; it is a "hypermasculine" resistance (1996: 111-2). Or as Bukatman phrases it: 'The techno-organic fusion of these cinematic cyborgs thus represents only an exaggerated defensive formation, another panic subject frantically hiding its obsolescence behind a suit of armour' (1993: 310). Whatever their intent, these motifs of "obsolescence" imply another triumphal narrative of machine over human, this time of "soft-tech".

110 Under a dominant system of technological control where boundaries and command are drawn and imposed from outside people can identify with the machine, and release their fear of dissolution in aggression against outsiders. Reference is made here (by Bukatman, Springer, Foder and Dery) to Theweleit's study of the Freikcorps who particularly feared the "bloody mass" of the feminine (reminiscent of Reynolds' claims that females are associated, in the 'technical world view', with the unformed or the protoplasmic (1991: chapter 3)). In this case the flow of the unformed threatens the hyper-form of the male machinic ego (Bukatman, 1993: 303-4, Robins & Levidow, 1995).

111 Despite his claims about cyborgs and defense mechanisms Bukatman will eventually conclude:

> 112 The body must become a cyborg to retain its presence in the world, resituated in technological space and reconfigured in technological terms. Whether this represents a continuation, a sacrifice, a transcendence, or a surrender of "the subject" is not certain (1993: 247).

113 This not only assumes some kind of triumphal narrative, even if one not desired, but assumes only cyborgs have a future, perhaps because Bukatman sees all human interaction with and production of technology under the rubric of the cyborg, which has its own narrative direction. Whereas it is perhaps the ambiguities and uncertainties which are important.

114 Such theories suggest cyborgisation acts as avoidance of the "tender", or fleshly feminine. This leads to the question of whether more aggressive net users see themselves as cyborgs with greater ease than less aggressive, or whether Cyborgisation primarily functions in net discourse to indicate one is an insider and deeply implicated in cyberspace usually in relation to, or with, others.

115 Cyborg references seemed rare on Cybermind, and more self conscious despite the opening line of the List Manifesto which proclaims 'We are all dwelling in cyberspace, coursing through the wires, becoming cyborg and becoming human'. Remarks about cyborgs tended to be in reference to books, academic papers, conferences, performance art, occasional discussions whether human use of technology has rendered us always already cyborg, and to events in the Cybermind Novel (2004). It might be suggested that the prominent reference to cyborgs in the Manifesto was largely influenced by Donna Haraway, who is a prime source for the conception of cyborgs as a radical form of body metaphor.

5.1: Haraway – Cyborg Politics and Borders

116 Haraway famously argues that Cyborgs are post-gendered, but if gender is vital to "Western" self regulation and framing online as argued previously, then this seems improbable, and thus dubious as a libratory tool. Furthermore, portrayals of cyborgs on the Internet tend to be thoroughly gendered (DeVoss, 2000). Silvio (1999) demonstrates that an apparently radical cyborg anime, also portrays control of female body by male spirit, so the myth is easily gendered by spirit and dominance. Wilkerson goes so far as to write that 'from the standpoint of feminist bisexual identity... I contend that this [cyborg] myth evades the very issues of race and sexuality which it seems to be addressing', and suggests that 'it is vitally important to keep tensions of race and sexuality present rather than to blur the boundaries' (1997: 164, 172). There is nothing necessarily

radical in hybridity, especially if one side subsumes the other. Terms like asence draw more attention to the complexities.

Cyborgs, according to Haraway, are not haunted, yet statements such as:

> Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile … Cyborgs are ether, quintessence (1989: 153)

suggest that, even for her, cybermachines are already homes for some kind of disembodiment and etherealisation. As others have demonstrated, cyborg theology and transcendence are easily possible (Kull 2001, 2002).

However, if Bartsch and Dipalma (2001) are correct, Haraway's use of the cyborg body is one in a series of politically motivated rhetorical tropes, and not an attempt at analysing contemporary bodies and their situatedness. It is part of a series of 'secular technoscientific salvation stories full of promise' (2001: 131). It is intended as a device for crossing or confounding boundaries and categories; and for linking temporary coalitions.

An exuberant conference announcement posted to Cybermind declares that Haraway's Manifesto:

> interrogates and/or collapses the differences between the sentient and the non-sentient, the human and the non-human; it engages and undoes a wide range of binary oppositions from Cartesian dualism to culturally coded distinctions of gender, class, and race; and it exemplifies the breaching of boundaries and frontiers in social, ethical, legal and technological issues from disability to genetic engineering to computer privacy.

However, it is doubtful whether it quite fulfils these welcome aims. 'Cyborg' is not a value neutral term, it already has its ties and complexes, as implied above. Myths, even 'ironic' ones, have their own directions. [17] In addition, it is often the case that those oppositions that the cyborg was to overcome re-emerge in the attempt to find a third term combining both or acting as a bridge.

In other words, the "cyborg" ignores what we might call the sandpile problem. One grain of sand is not a 'heap' but 100,000 grains might be, and the boundary is never going to be clear. To use a cyborg cliché: imagine you have a human, you keep adding machinery and subtracting flesh, at what point does it stop being human? How many fragmented cells makes a human? This is the nature of many categories. Putting in a hybrid third merely allows the poles to separate while pretending to overcome them. Categories usually have some kind of bounding, and such boundaries become a way of conception. They will always appear somewhere.

Exploring the way these category borders are used (as done in the more ethnographic section of this paper) would seem more interesting than transcending them as hybrids, or by describing the current by models of a posited future. I hope a more modest word like asence which draws attention to the process of boundary uncertainty, of suspension and oscillation; that does not act as a bridging third; and which leaves the categories with the force that they have, is more useful than a hybrid like cyborg which already has its own drives, elisions and politics in place.

It is the way of categories that a category that seems a disrupter of other categories sometimes becomes subservient to them, apparently privileging one side. We might even suggest that such disposals of the body suggest, not that the old forms of authority are disposed of, but that they are intensified.

6 Online back to Offline

If the cyborg, then, sometimes subverts itself as a radical option, what kind of move is the online to the offline often conceived as?

6.1 Virile Bodies

If "physical" body is the ultimate locus, or victim, of power then the frustration involved in social control and action renders that body "immaterial" if online, or, if offline, "ineffective" or "unvirile". So the offline can be contrasted with the online, as Real, as is indicated by the common use of RL (Real Life), for offline life.

Phil wrote:

> As much as the virtual world here enchants me, I still have the feeling of the morning run to keep things in perspective– no email is going to match the feeling of crisp cold air burning my nostrils

Robert muses on the pallid interaction between the embedding world and the net:

> Does a major in the Jonathanas Savimbi army shudder at the thought that Cybermind disapproves of their attack on a major import/export center [...] Double Bah, tripple humbug and a loud Hah!

Dorrie feared that without an engagement with "Real Life" people on the List might become, 'Intellectuals with no muscles in our backs'.

This kind of analysis can be found elaborated by the Krokers (1996) as 'bunkering in.... being sick of others and trying to shelter the beleaguered self in a techno-bubble'. They also use terms like 'fantasy' and 'infantilization' to imply the online body is unable to participate in the public realm.

Thus the offline body could be feminine if compared to online "spirit", but masculine if virile and active when compared to online ineffective. The poles destabilise, but still exist.

6.2: Asence and Sensation

The more speedily and well the body functions, the more it can be ignored. As we have seen, pain interrupts the transfer and sense of presence online. Without this pain, deletion is perhaps possible as computing is pre-dominantly a visual medium. We do not see the body while computing, so we don't 'see' its removal (if we don't feel its pain). Yet while using this computer, we are restricted in movement: almost immobile, hunched over, eyes flicking between hands and screen (but with little focal change and a lowered blink rate), perhaps fearing that hand pain resulting from repetition may cast us out from this world (which is our only source of decent income). [18]

The sensations of computer usage are basically unpleasant. There is little in the way of tactile, kinaesthetic or olfactory pleasure, and little in the way of aesthetic or visual pleasure other than on the web. It is possible there might be a sensory pleasure gained from the mere presence of other (non-hostile) humans or plants and animals which is missed as well.

Computer use is thus a competition between sensation and interest. While the person is engaged, sexually evoked or intellectually interested then sensual discomfort is overpowered. When topics recycle, the threshold of engagement lowers, and discomfort is more noticeable. The effort to increase the engagement might explain some of the attractions of flaming or netsex, as these diminish registering of background sensory distress. People do not approach the net erotically or angrily, but become erotic or angry to maintain an approach.

6.3 Asence and Politics

"Information" is an ambiguous category often used to terminate narrative myths explaining changes in the economy, as in the expressions "information economy", "information companies" and so on (e.g Drucker, 1993: 181ff.). As such a category, it has tenuous boundaries, and thus risks becoming ghostly itself – people can insist information is immaterial. Information can even claimed to be a directly productive force, as if it was self-animate or a never-ending alchemy of self-productive signs. Furthermore, information can be abstracted from its specific carriers. Computers allow the reduction of all data (whether mathematical formulae or films) to digital representation, blurring any differences. As Hayles argues this can influence the projected design of machines designed to access data, so that the data becomes even more isolated from its environment (1996: 34-5). Research or policy can be based upon interaction with simulations rather than interaction with "realities". This may promote the deletion of reference to the social and technological bases which allows the information to exist, which controls its distribution, though leaving "the market" as an abstract determiner of "success" (Grusin, 1996: 46, Henwod, 1995, Castells, 1996: 371ff.).

However, humans cannot live by abstract information alone, it always needs to be legitimated, or converted into something else, usually through some organisation. Only certain kinds of information can be sold. As a result, the nature of the work of "knowledge workers", and of their place in the world, becomes representationally problematic.

The computer is often supposed to free people from body work, liberating them for this ethereal, intellectual, creative or "knowledge" work. However, for most workers, it renders "creative" skills even less important. Those with superseded skills, or injury, join those without computers, vanishing from the computerised world; becoming represented as unable to "keep up". We too become ghosts with no impact, or cyborgs striving to remain embedded in the system.

The confined, neglected body haunts us, and this is reinforced by political alienation, in the sense that people cannot act on the world politically, so they tend to experience themselves as "immaterial". It is possible to allege that an otherwise disempowered person through writing on the net, could produce political change or, at least, reach the numbers of readers previously reserved for mass media. However, such power does not seem currently common, and may never be a common experience.

143 Further, the web of postmodern power appears nomadic, elusive and always elsewhere – in some ways more alive than ourselves. It too has no obvious boundaries and thus becomes represented as spirit-like, a magic life haunting the net. We cannot act upon it, and the traditional modes of protest available to all, such as occupying the streets or a building are no longer effective (Critical Art Ensemble, 1994). We might return here to where we began with the uncertain boundaries of the offline world, and the attempts to close them. Yet again, the boundaries are open to the corporate world. Little separates them from your work, your home, your computers, your food, your genes, your geography, your being. As Yaakov Garb asks:

144 Why is etherealism so popular in a world were matter isn't? More eerily, how do the fantasies of disengagement from body and nature emerge from the same military/industrial complex which manufactures the technologies for the actual destruction of both (q. Springer,1996: 25).

145 Yet at the same time people's action in online society is often an attempt not only to act in the world, but to create a new world, or at least to create a safe place in the world. So here again, in the heart of the absence is presence – we have asence.

7. Conclusions

146 This paper has discussed some of the complex factors involved in the way that people construct and use bodies, and experience boundaries on the net, from within "Western" Internet cultures. Some of these factors may depend on a history which has valorised a polarity between mind and body as a factor in a male identity, polarised with female identity, and based in administrative competence. The "mind" is single, occasionally hidden, and associated with control over an inferior opposite – the "body". Before the 18th Century, mainstream philosophers and poets could elaborate a complex set of interactions between several variables, but by the 19th Century, and certainly presently, despite monotonous recognitions of the "falsity" of these distinctions, they have polarised and separated.

147 This polarisation may be linked to a "Western" tendency to try to construct sharp either/or categories and group boundaries, and impose these on more magical vague categories. With the advent of the computer and the Internet this polarisation has in places increased, while boundary definition of the self appears to have weakened, and conceptual dominance has shifted from categories of "matter" to categories of the "immaterial". The textual body of net culture becomes associated with the spiritual pole, perhaps reinforced by the feeling that the immaterial is that without precise boundaries or inhibitors, enabling expression of boundary anxieties produced offline.

148 As with online groups, the sense of online self has asent boundaries unless restricted by pain. This lack of boundaries leads to the cyberbody being categorised as immaterial, in the same way as ghosts and spirits are classified as immaterial in the "Western" world. The cyberghost is validated by comparison with a construction of an offline active and virile body. Construction of the body as cyborg seems far rarer in actual online life, although common in theory, and even so, still has ambiguities that arise from connecting persisting polarities – even though those polarities are supposedly overcome by it.

149 Cyborgisation and etherealisation are counterpositional narrative myths of body subjectivity that function in different spheres. Cyborgs have undergone their development primarily in action film, comic and theory, whereas etherealisation has flourished more in novel, science and online life. Like ghosts, it has been suggested that the narrative and drives of the image of the cyborg do not make it particularly consequence, or value, free for analysing the interdependence and interinvolvement of the prior categories of culture, nature, biology and technology, with all of their uncertain and changing ambiguities and the ways they both enable and restrict and are permeated by power. These category boundaries cannot be dissolved by fiat, and it is more

productive to look how people deal with them, rather than hypothesise a yet to arrive future in which they are gone.

150 Category matching and framing can be maintained by mood. The mood produced by reiteration reinforces the content of the messages, and usually refers to easily accessed offline moods, as with flames, grief, sex and so on.

151 It has been argued that the online use of the body occurs in areas of tension that arise because of the lack of formal roles (other than gender), and social unease with permeable boundaries. Some "Western" online relationships tend to become sexual, as a means of maintaining mood and contact – particularly when the polarity of gender (which is associated with intimacy and sex, and with the polarity of body and mind) is able to diminish asence, and the symbolic burden of the lack of roles and prescribed behaviours.

152 Finally, it was suggested that asencing of the body allows the experience of "immersion" in online worlds. This asencing is caught in a further dialectic between political presence (or the ability to act upon an individual's social problems through the use of the net), and the narrative myth that Internet users are abandoning both the "real world" and those persons who have been effectively made invisible by their lack of access to either computers, or to the powerful parts of the online world. The appearance of immateriality is further increased by frustrations at the inability to use physical force to control life online – those we try and influence may simply ignore us. The cyberbody is caught between conceptions of impotence and omnipotence.

Author's Biography

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Notes

[1] This paper has grown out of my fieldwork on the Cybermind Mailing List between 1994 and 1998. Thanks is given to the List for their encouragement, support and comments.

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[2] Boundaries are not simple and can be of many types. They can blend into one another or be distinct, they can radiate in density from a central point. Boundaries can allow one way or two way flow, can have different thresholds of permeability, they can be abrupt or gradual, or can be in states of extension or exclusion.

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[3] I am using the term "Western", as a short cut for Western Mainstream Middle Class, English Speaking People. But even here there is less homogeneity than is implied.

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[4] For a more detailed history see Marshall (2000, Chp 1), and a summary of more recent history in Marshall (2004).

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[5] I have discussed the relationship between flaming, asence and structure in Marshall (2004).

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[6] Argyle writes: 'The pain of the other's touched the pain held within myself. Personal experiences of loss, memories of funerals and the sorrow of those left behind all flooded me.... I grieved with them, for myself and my losses, and for theirs' (1996: 140).

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[7] Turkle instances a person acting on four different MOOs at once (1995: 12). See also Odzer (1997: 43), Dudfield (1999: np).

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[8] I am submitting an article on this subject to the Journal for the Academic Study of Magic. For the change in ghosts between the medieval and contemporary periods see Finucane (1982).

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[9] A question to a group of four friends about such stories immediately produced 15 different titles written by 12 different authors.

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[10] To be clearer: the process of replication destroys the original, so essentially you die so that copies of you can "live". The appeal of this idea is probably connected with the magical mechanisms of "similarity" and "transfer".

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[11] For example Milton in his description of angels making love; (Paradise Lost, book 8). Note the contrast with the "animal" which is "bodily" and the supposed superiority of the "virtual" angelic.

But if the sense of touch whereby mankind
Is propagated seem such dear delight
Beyond all other, think the same voutsaf't
To Cattel and each Beast.....
Bear with me then, if lawful what I ask;
Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and how thir Love
Express they, by looks onely, or do they mix
Irradiance, virtual or immediate touch?
To whom the Angel with a smile that glow'd
Celestial rosie red, Loves proper hue,
Answer'd. Let it suffice thee that thou know'st
Us happie, and without Love no happiness.
Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
In eminence, and obstacle find none
Of membrane, joynt, or limb, exclusive barrs:
Easier then Air with Air, if Spirits embrace,
Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure
Desiring; nor restrain'd conveyance need
As Flesh to mix with Flesh, or Soul with Soul.

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[12] It might be worth drawing attention to the contrast between the apparent increase in preoccupation with both body and State boundaries over this period, (as described by Elias 1972), and the growing etherealisation, and detachment, of the ghost.

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[13] It is not necessary to accept any other parts of Butler's argument for this to be an interesting proposition, and it is not necessary to assume that it works for all kinds of matter – we are only discussing online experience. For a good critique of Butler's position on matter in general see Kerin (1999).

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[14] For example, the categories A and B may share properties in common. Defining B as not-A, apparently removes those common properties from B. Further, the set of not-A may include B, but it also includes things which are not-B. So the category B may have properties added and subtracted from it, by this operation.

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[15] Lewis Shiner, one of the earliest writers in the genre, writes (1992: 25) that he first heard the term "cyberpunk" in 1983. The first of Gibson's "sprawl" series came out in 1981.

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[16] By all postmodern uses of the term, the still earlier Daleks are also cyborg, and yet again technically ingenious, with a hard line on their own superiority, driven to conquest, murder and autocracy. Daleks were once humanoid as well.

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[17] My understanding is that Haraway wrote the article as a polemic against mid-80s back to nature goddess feminism, for which it is entirely adequate and to the point. However it has been transported out of that limited context and considered to have far wider, almost universal, implications. It is this that I am objecting to.

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[18] Hayes claims the rate of RSI among the workforce increased by 1,246% between 1982 and 1992. The estimated cost of dealing with this problem in 1992, was US$25 billion per year (1995: 176). In 1999 the cost to UK industry was estimated at between £5 billion and £20 billion annually (RSIA 2000).

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