

Uta Scheer: Gendered (Cy)Borgs: Body Technologies and Sexual Politics in Star Trek

1 Introduction

In the genre of science fiction that is marked by a diversity of body productions cyborgs are often playing an ordaining role. These beings that are part machine, part organic body, can show us in their popular manifestations how the asymmetrical dichotomies of culture/nature and man/woman, that are basic for Western societies, function. But by blurring the borders of these dichotomies cyborgs also offer the possibility to reveal the fractures of this socio-cultural matrix.

The focus of my presentation consists in the televisual construction of a female cyborg called *Seven of Nine* who holds an important part in the fourth *Star Trek* tv series *Voyager* (1995-2001). By means of the development of this character throughout the series I want to demonstrate how the gendered borders between technology and biology are drawn on a sexed body and which options and restrictions are given for this figure based on this process.

2 Theories

With regard to the works of Judith Butler I look for the modes of the ongoing symbolic reproduction of sex and gender through the performed embodiment of *Seven of Nine*. According to Butler's theory sex, like gender, is a social construct that is stabilized and reproduced in everyday life via various strategies, performative acts and regulating mechanisms. By analyzing *Seven of Nine* I want to dismantle exactly these strategies, acts and mechanisms. My special interest hereby comprises further dichotomies like technology/biology, mind/body, subject/object, and active/passive that are intrinsically linked with the basic gendered difference and contain the same asymmetry of superiority and inferiority as the primary dichotomy man/woman. (Butler 1990 and 1993). To say it in the words of Vicky Kirby these binary oppositions mean "mind over matter, male over female, culture over nature, the West over the rest" (Kirby 1997: 137). Another reference is the body theory of Elizabeth Grosz that points out the symbolic linkage between body and woman in Western culture:

Relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynist thought confines women to the biological requirements of reproduction on the assumption that because of particular biological, physiological, and endocrinological transformations, women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men (emphasizes in original, Grosz 1994: 14).

Further I am referring to Donna Haraway's 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' that in form of an ironical counter-myth challenges the dominating image of the hypermasculine cybernetic hybrid by showing the border blurring potentials of the Cyborg. Due to the cyborgian mergence of technology and body other linked hierarchized dichotomies like culture/nature and man/woman are under attack and thereby deformable.

3 Method

Given that television is centrally concerned with the representation of humans (Fiske 1987: 149), and for science fiction television should be added: with the coded representation of humans in the form of aliens, androids and other 'Others', it is obvious for a research about a tv series to pick one outstanding character as an object of further examination. From a gender perspective *Seven of Nine* offers the best preconditions for such a project, because on, in and through this figure the interfaces between technology/biology and man/woman are medially negotiated and embodied.

According to the work of John Fiske a fictive person can be 'read' and analysed basically from two perspectives: Firstly from a so-called 'realistic' perspective that understands the tv character as a unique individual. From this position his/her actions and relations, traits and potentials can be traced

back to a psychological 'self', whereby the social and political dimensions of the presented character are neglected: "This self is unique and different from other selves: its origins are rarely examined but are assumed to be natural, or biological, rather than social" (Fiske 1987: 152). This reading is especially labelled by its fading out of questions of gender-, race-, and class-inequality (Fiske 1987: 154). The second mode to analyze and 'read' protagonists of televisual texts is the 'discursive' reading. From this perspective the tv character is seen as a textual means that is constructed of discourses¹ and ideology. As a result a tv character cannot be seen as an individual "in his or her own right, but only as series of textual (and intertextual) relations" (Fiske 1987: 153). This approach comprises a socio-political dimension: It shows that tv characters should not be interpreted as psychologically constructed and motivated individuals, but as metonymic representations of social positions and norms. My analysis of the cyborg *Seven of Nine* is based on the discursive reading, that reveals the cultural gender codes that are interwoven in seemingly neutral topics like technology or biology and that demonstrates how public discourses are influencing the gendered construction of *Seven of Nine*.

4 *Seven of Nine*: From Borg to Individual?

4.1 *Star Trek*

Star Trek - Behind these words a media product is hidden that over the past three decades has developed into a far-reaching socio-cultural phenomenon - not just in the West, but all over the world. Figurehead of this media phenomenon are five television series and ten feature films. *Star Trek* promises a better future without complex socio-political problems eg. racism, sexism, as well as homophobia: A universe in which current dominating discriminations on the foundation of race/ethnicity, sex/gender and/or sexual orientation pass for bettered or, if still existing, are successfully fought. And it is just this attitude that is deemed crucial for the global fandom of *Star Trek*. But does *Star Trek* keep its promise of peaceful diversity concerning the science-fictionalized representation of gender and sexuality? This question I want to answer in the following with the examination of the figure *Seven of Nine*.

4.2 The Starting Point

Voyager was the first *Star Trek* series with a female lead, *Captain Kathryn Janeway* (Kate Mulgrew), and *Voyager* was also the first *Star Trek* series that was not produced in syndication: It had from the beginning the difficult task to be the figurehead of a new network (UPNⁱⁱ). But the series performed not as well as necessary to cope with this task. Confronted with permanently declining Nielsen ratings and an until then unknown degree of disapproval of a *Star Trek* captain by the fans the producers seen themselves forced to introduce a new and completely different character to the show. After the third season the rather 'unspectacular' and 'old', measured by Hollywood standards, *Captain Janeway* preserved as sidekick *Seven of Nine*, played by Jeri Ryan, an actress of thirty who looks like the perfect merger of Barbie and Silicon Valley. Ryan was decisively apt to play the latest addition to the *Voyager* family in the light of the barely concealed primary function of her role: *Seven of Nine's* first and foremost task was to allure a highly desired demographic group back to the show: male, aged 18 to 34. The producers' intentions are literally visible in an advertisement of UPN that points out how successful *Seven's* addition had been for the show's ratings (in particular the increase of young male viewers).ⁱⁱⁱ However, the producers' obvious incitement does not substitute the precise textual analysis of *Seven's* performance in the show, because the gendered encoding of this cyborg occurs in a much more complex manner than the mere visual exhibition of a 'beautiful' and 'sexy' female body. And due to the cyborg status of *Seven* audience's reactions and interpretations are not always congruent with the producers' expectations and hopes.

4.3 The *Borg*: Species as Metaphor for Gender

Seven of Nine is a deputy of the *Borg*, *Star Trek's* (in)famous machine-organism hybrids that tyrannise the universe with their flying cubes and by 'assimilating' other species. 'Assimilation' means the transformation of the victim's biological body into *Borg* by an infusion with 'nanoprobes'. This act happens via penetration of the victim's throat with tubes emerging from the *Borg's* hand and is nearly almost accompanied by the *Borg's* comment 'Resistance is futile'. Due to this nanotechnological assault the victims develop *Borg*-specific prostheses and implants and they also lose their hair and healthy tan. Equally important as the bodily changes is the loss of individuality that takes place in the course of the assimilation. Members of the *Borg* are only able to think and to act in a hive mind: Every *Borg* is permanently connected with the other *Borg* in the so-called 'collective'. Victims' names are replaced by hierarchized numbers that correspond with their functions in the collective. Single *Borg* call themselves 'drones' and are only speaking in the first person plural ("we") or in a depersonalized third person singular ("this drone"). The *Borg's* imperative is to achieve perfection via assimilation of other species, to add their knowledge and biological advantages to the collective. By doing this the *Borg* are destroying uncountable civilizations.

The *Borg* typify as a species thereby on several levels attributes and traits that are coded masculine in Western culture. Outstanding characteristics of the *Borg* are their semi-technological bodies and their advanced use of technology, especially weapon technology. As can be seen in figure 1, technology is in the same column as culture and therefore belongs to the 'masculine' side of the dichotomy. Accordingly technological competence is regarded as a specific male trait that is rated higher than any 'female competence' (like empathy for instance) (Klaus 1998: 60). Not to mention the *Borg's* preference for conquest and war which is also predominantly marked as masculine. One can also hardly fail to notice their black body armour that probably has inspired fan fiction writers first and foremost to think of the *Borg* as one big gay S/M collective, a phenomenon that Mark Dery describes in 'Slashing the *Borg*: Resistance is Fertile':

They are sealed in sculpted black body armor, their bleached flesh penetrated by fetishistic high-tech prostheses (...) Like sailors, bikers, cops, and other staples of homoerotic fantasy, the *Borg* are an all-male society living in close quarters. They are in constant physical communion with one another, literally bonded by electronic interconnection -- "borgasm" (emphasizes mine, electronic document: 1999).

Due to the (nano-)technological procreation the *Borg* also epitomise the ultimate male fantasy of "creation without the mother" (Huysen 1986: 70). Mary Ann Doane argues that the primary aim of technological reproduction is to control our culture's *angst* of femaleness that is (of course) equated with motherhood (Doane 2000: 116). The 'personal' traits of the *Borg* also mark them as masculine: Rationality and efficiency are hallmarks of their behavior. Since the civil division of labour these traits are delegated to the bourgeois male who works in the public sphere. On the bodily level the *Borg* also represent 'masculine' attributes: They possess a paramount physical strength and are almost invulnerable. Correspondingly the *Borg* have exclusively been played by male actors^{iv} since their first emergence in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

What consequences occur when a woman becomes chief deputy of these masculinely coded cyborgs?

4.4 A Close Encounter with *Seven of Nine*

In the following I will analyse several episodes of *Voyager's* fourth season to demonstrate the gendered construction of *Seven of Nine*. However, in this frame I have to focus on a selection of episodes and therefore can only show a fraction of the gendering mechanisms and strategies at work.

The cyborg *Seven of Nine* enters the televisual universe in 1997 in the fourth season's first episode *Scorpion, Part II*. In this episode *Captain Janeway* decides, confronted with an unbelievably aggressive species called *8472*, to cooperate with the *Borg*. In the course of the negotiations, *Starfleet* officers, for the first time in *Star Trek's* history, are voluntarily beamed into a *Borg* cube: In the cube *Captain Janeway* and officer *Tuvok* are welcomed by several *Borg* (all male) who are instantly trying to connect them to the collective's hive mind, but *Janeway* and *Tuvok* energetically resist as the *Borg* aim to penetrate their throats with outcoming tubes. The *Starfleet* members comment that they are working more effectively with 'intact' individuality. Instead of being connected they claim a single *Borg* as interlocutor like *Captain Jean-Luc Picard* who, several years ago, had been assimilated by the *Borg* and had later worked as their sole speaker. *Janeway* and *Tuvok* must have been convincing, because the next moment a door opens and amidst of fog and accompanied by dramatic music a female *Borg* appears: Like her male counterparts she has greyish skin, a bald head, lots of cybernetic implants and prostheses. Her behaviour is on first sight the same as would be expected from every other member of the *Borg*: She talks in a self confident manner, mostly in *Borg-plural*, is technologically competent and presents on a computer terminal a very devastating strategy to defeat the common enemy, *Species 8472*. But as soon as in the first shots one can easily recognize the difference that marks her as 'Other' even in this collective of aliens: Her upper body armour exhibits two enormous bulges that visually promise an attractive 'underneath'. Watching closer one can discover several other indicators of difference: As prelude of the following individualization she introduces herself in the first person singular, "I am *Seven of Nine*". While talking to *Janeway* and *Tuvok* she sneaks around them like a cat of prey - a performance that evokes *Seven's* proximity to nature and therefore delegates her to the realm of femaleness.^v For a 'normal' (= male) *Borg* such a kind of movement would be unthinkable - *Borg* are famous for their robot-like walk. At the end of this episode *Seven* is already living on starship *Voyager*, because her *Borg* cube has been destroyed during a fight with *Species 8472*. From that time on *Seven* lives in a cargo bay that has been transformed into an alcove in which she regenerates and refuels her *Borg* systems with energy.^{vi} As a result of a blighted attempt to assimilate *Voyager's* computer systems *Seven* has been painfully disconnected from the collective. Due to this she stays a short time in sick bay and *Scorpion, Part II* ends with a meaningful tracking shot of an unconscious *Seven* lying in sickbed (before her *Captain Janeway* has lain there too, also unconscious, but that is another story). Like the many other times that *Seven* will spend lying in sickbed over the course of the series a 'special' tracking shot is engaged that starts besides her legs, moves along her body and ends with a medium close up of her breasts and face. For those viewers who have not recognised the importance of *Seven's* body yet this shot makes ultimately clear what this cyborg's special quality is. But as important as this 'classic' sexist camera work are the textual transformations *Seven* is subjected to: *Seven's* role as an unconscious patient corresponds with the coding of women as passive and as object, as well as with the popular imagination of women being ill and contagious *per se*, as Elizabeth Grosz remarks (1994: 206).

For a further examination of *Seven's* development I now skip to the episode following *Scorpion, Part II*, *The Gift*. In *The Gift's* opening sequence *Seven* stands, recovered from her injuries, in the alcove and regenerates - an image well known from other *Borg* episodes. One important point in the presentation of the *Borg* is that they are exclusively shown in upright positions, standing or going, even when they are regenerating which is the *Borg's* equivalent for sleeping. By this the *Borg* are further masculinized, as Chris Straayer's argumentation with regard to the function of standing male bodies in film shows:

Male sex is (mis)represented by the phallus. Instead of a body with a penis, the male character's entire body, through its phallic position and action, becomes a giant (substitute) penis - a confusion of standing erect with erection (Straayer 1996: 79).

But *Seven's* 'masculine' standing position is perturbed by a camera movement that favours long shots of her upper body's profile, thus her secondary sexual characteristics are (again) intensely underscored and thereby the inherent conflict between being *Borg* and having a female body is evoked. Next *Seven* is visited by Janeway, *Tuvok* and the holographic Doctor of the *Voyager*. They wake her and in this situation we participate in *Seven's* point of view via a subjective camera: This kind of gazing position that is also called first person sequence or I-camera is, in Hollywood productions, usually reserved for male protagonists, above all in genres that are coded as 'masculine' like horror or science fiction (Clover 1997: 192). The gazing person is the subject and is in control of the situation. Like other *Borg Seven* has a special eye implant that enables her to see more precisely than any organic eye. We as spectators realize that 'we are looking' with *Borg* eyes due to several aesthetic means like the use of a color filter, overexposure and optical distortions that alienate *Seven's* point of view. That in this sequence a woman's point of view is presented can be assessed as evidence for the cyborg's potential to destroy gendered borders in a Harawayan sense. *Seven's* gender bending is furthermore underscored by a low angle camera position (bottom view) that optically heightens her. Her behavior is also very forceful, she claims to return to the *Borg* and in a strong voice rejects recommended medical help: "We need nothing from you. We are *Borg!*". But for how long is *Seven* allowed to partake in this filmic demonstration of agency? Not very long, so to say. In the very same sequence *Seven* suffers from a strong headache and a new attachment figure comes to the force: the *Doctor*. He ascribes her pains to the disconnection from the *Borg* which has caused a loss of *Borg* implants and has triggered her immune system to recapture its old terrain - her body tries to regress into its original state and due to this an altercation between *Borg* technology and *Seven's* biological organism breaks out. The *Doctor* orders *Seven* to sick bay, but she refuses violently and for the first time we catch a glimpse of her enormous physical strength. Due to better handling *Seven* is anesthetized by the Doctor and once again she lies unconscious in sickbed as living antithesis to her former *Borg* existence.

Into *what* and into *who* *Seven* is 're-developing' is clarified in the meantime in *Janeway's* office: The captain explains to her first officer *Chakotay* that *Seven*, the daughter of human explorers, had been assimilated nearly twenty years ago. In doing so she shows him a log book entry that displays the picture of a six year old smiling blonde girl - *Seven* as a child. That smiling blonde girls are the prototype of girls in Western culture has been convincingly traced by Sarah Projansky in her article 'Girls Who Act Like Women Who Fly' whereby she points out that these 'ideal' girls are white, decent, friendly, passive, fair-haired and of course good looking, an attribute which already connotes sexual attractiveness, often with fatal consequences (Projansky 1998: 777-78, 803) - this is an important clue considering *Seven of Nine's* engendering in general and for understanding the sexual politics in the later analysed episode *Retrospect* in particular. *Janeway* remarks that *Seven's* 'true' name is *Annika Hansen* and thereby, following Judith Butler, the first step in the process of gendering has been implemented, the 'naming': "in that naming the girl is 'girled,' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (Butler 1993: 7).

Now I skip back to the unconscious *Seven* in sick bay: The *Doctor* has already begun to remove parts of her *Borg* armour, he dismantles her technological shell commenting: "It's like peeling an onion." More skin becomes visible and her status as *Borg* is literally emasculated. Looking at *Seven*, *Janeway* notes: "[U]nderneath all that technology she is a human being. Whether she is ready to accept that or not. And until she is ready someone has to make the decisions for her. Proceed with the surgery." Now we know the final destination *Janeway* has in mind for *Seven*, even without the cyborg's approval. This sequence demonstrates that *Seven's* 'true essence' is located in her body, not in *Borg* technology - an allocation

that is in perfect accordance with the gender dichotomy in which the body is delegated to femininity. The 're-transformation' of the *Borg* Locutus into the human man *Jean-Luc Picard* in *The Next Generation* took place in almost the opposite way: *Picard's* 'true essence' did not appear by removing the *Borg* prostheses and the deliverance of his body, but by the liberation of his mind which was proved by the fact that he articulated his own will. The bodily changes played only a minor role, whereas *Seven's* announcer is her body - it defines her being human, or more precisely: her being female.

However, after her second visit in sick bay *Seven* is obviously not happy with her new life as an individual and tries to contact the *Borg*. She starts her attempt in a sequence in which she works on a system console together with the Asian American ensign *Harry Kim*. Her appearance in this degree of transformation is a little bit grotesque and to use the Doctor's metaphor: the onion is nearly half peeled. Her arms and delicate parts of her thighs are already fleshy, thus *Harry Kim* feels at once attracted to her. Distracted by her looks and awed by her brusque behaviour the regularly emasculated *Kim*^{vii} does not recognize that *Seven* uses her superior *Borg* gaze (subjective camera), this time extended by zoom effects, to discover in a muddle of cables a diminutive numerical series that appears to be the communication code of the *Voyager's* systems. Next she calls on *Harry* who immediately follows her call, but has to make the painful experience that his attempts to flirt do not result in what he expected: *Seven* knocks out the surprised ensign with an enormous bash on his chin, another demonstration of her still available *Borg* strength. Her attempt to contact the *Borg* is foiled by a female crewmember who through telepathic contact with *Species 8472* has developed extraordinary telekinetic skills that send *Seven* to unconsciousness for the third time.

Her desire to return to her former identity as *Borg* and her fear of being a female individual is rewarded with an attendance of one of the *Voyager's* prison cells. *Janeway* visits the fractious ex-*Borg* several times and tries to persuade her of her human identity. Her last visit is triggered by an aggressive *Seven* who, like an imprisoned animal, rampantly throws herself against the invisible security shields of the cell. Here again she shows a femininely coded erratic behaviour that is not in accordance with the rational and unemotional *Borg*. To perform her task *Janeway* shows *Seven* the log book entry that contains the picture of young *Annika*, tells the cyborg that this girl is her 'true self' and asks, for eliciting old memories, what *Annika's* favourite colour was. This conversation is accompanied by the already established splitting headache *Seven* suffers from since her disconnection whereby again the battle of technology against biology inside her body is evoked. Finally, *Seven* collapses once more and gives in: She tells *Janeway* *Annika's* favourite colour. In the last sequence of *The Gift* we see the 'new' *Seven*, an attractive blonde woman in a clinging silver catsuit which almost preposterously accents her bosom. Only implants over her left eye brow, beside her right ear and on her left hand are reminding of her former existence as *Borg*. *Seven* is, as the *Doctor* is eager to announce, a product of his skills as sculptor of female beauty and he especially boasts about the stimulation of *Seven's* hair follicles (imagine such a comment in the context of *Picard's* re-humanisation). Her body now consists of circa 20 per cent *Borg* material and 80 per cent human tissue. What is more, she now wears stiletto-heeled shoes that are a great convenience on a starship with a lot of military action. In *The Gift*, *Seven's* visual development into a 'typical' female, especially as the sexual object *par excellence*, comes to an end - but her development into an individual, resp. a woman, is continued until the series' end and is being influenced crucially by her cyborgian hybridity.

The next episode I want to examine is the fourth season's sixth episode *The Raven*. Due to the fact that *Borg* technology does not play the ordaining role in her body anymore, *Seven* needs, besides her regeneration cycles, conventional food. In a sequence with the ship's cook *Neelix* she re-learns how to eat and the first time since her assimilation she has to sit on a chair. *Neelix* explains to *Seven*, as if she

was a child how to induct food into her mouth, chew and swallow. Thus *Seven* is infantilised and the stereotype of a woman who is not able to care for herself is associated. While eating, *Seven* experiences disturbing memories of *Borg* and next an implant breaks through the skin of her right hand. She stands up (!), tells *Neelix* that he is going to be assimilated and beats him down with *Borg* power. In the following sequences she is able to bear down the ship's security systems and to walk through the ship checklessly - even phaser shots cannot stop her thanks to *Borg* shields that cover her body whenever she is hit. *Borg* represent by this means a corporal integrity that is exclusively assigned to men: "In Western industrial cultures, notions of masculinity have been historically associated with the denial of men's physical vulnerabilities and the projection of these characteristics onto the maternal [resp. female, U. S.] body" (Daniels 1997: 582). *Seven*, sure of being contacted by the *Borg*, captures a shuttle and flies to the planet where the alluring signal comes from and where she assumes to meet other *Borg*. But instead of fellow *Borg* *Seven* discovers the wreck of a starship that turns out to be her parents'. Inside the ship *Seven* finds the source of the *Borg* signal, a transmitter forgotten by the *Borg*, and deactivates it. In that very moment her confident *Borg* manner vanishes, she speaks in a broken voice and recalls her family's assimilation. *Seven* whispers "Papa... help me" and fearfully hides under a desk. She re-goes through her assimilation, we watch her memories, a crying and helpless girl that is cowering under a desk while *Borg* are grabbing for her. The *Borg* in this sequence are (of course) exclusively played by male actors and thereby the popular imagination of sexual violence against girls by cancered male strangers is provoked. The scared *Seven* has to be rescued by a male officer who has followed her. Without the *Borg* signal *Seven* has transformed into a typical female victim that is both afraid of and dependent on men. Additionally, we are being reminded that her human psyche has stopped to develop at the age of six - *Seven* has a little girl's psyche in the body of a grown-up woman.

The next and final episode I am going to analyse is fourth season's *Retrospect*. In *Retrospect*, *Seven* knocks out an arms dealer named *Kovin* who has approached her in a very close manner. Shortly after that incident she suffers from symptoms that are identified as indicators of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and she also experiences the emergence of 'repressed memories'. Because of this the Doctor helps her via hypnotic techniques to enter her sphere of the unconscious: We 'see' her memories in which *Kovin* extracts fluids out of a lying and tied up *Seven*. In this sequence we look at *Seven* and at first sight it seems to be an objective camera that does not embody a person's point of view. But, because the bearer of the gaze is the memorising *Seven*, it is in fact a first-person sequence, the cyborg's perspective as 'off screen persona'. Following Geoff King and Tanya Krywinka, point of view-sequences have a very important function in the genre of science fiction: "We might consider what is implied by a first-person perspective. It usually suggests that some kind of identification is being encouraged between character and viewer." (King/Krywinka 2000: 104). Thus, watching *Seven*'s memories from her point of view implies that the spectators should develop empathy for the traumatised cyborg and identify with her. Technically, these memory sequences resemble the infallible *Borg*-gaze, in other words, *Seven*'s memories are recognisable as her own memories for the audience by the use of different filmic devices like colour filter and overexposure. Participating in this point of view and supported by the normally unbetrayable *Borg*-gaze, we, the spectators, are lead to the assumption that everything we see in *Seven*'s memories is true and that the assault did really happen. But in the course of the episode we are taught that *Seven*'s memories are 'false' and that because of her 'unjustified' accusation an innocent man (*Kovin*), who alleges *Seven* to be a liar, has to die. Throughout the episode *Seven* defends her memories as true and authentic, but after a dubious examination of the site of the crime whose results are interpreted as support of *Kovin*'s testimony no one is listening to her anymore.^{viii} And last, we come to know that there is only one person to blame: *Seven*.

For understanding the fundamental meaning of this episode from a gender-political perspective I want to look at the discursive context of *Retrospect*. Since the early 1990s the topos of 'recovered' or 'repressed' memories has functioned as an indicator of sexual abuse in childhood in popular and scientific discourses as Celia Lury and Janet Walker remark (Lury 1998: 112; Walker 2001: 211). Reacting to the inclining cases of 'recovered memories' of sexual abuse and the following accusations of former victims against their parents the public discourse about 'false memories' emerged which since the mid 1990s has been playing a significant role in North American and European media representations of victims of sexual abuse. The grown-up *Seven* with the child's psyche seems to be the perfect candidate for this topic, resembling the themes of gender, childhood and especially sexual abuse, which has already been indicated in *The Raven*. The plot and the end of *Retrospect* to a high degree correspond with the logic, strategies and rhetorics of the 'False Memory discourse' in which the validity of adults' 'recovered memories' of sexual abuse in the childhood is being attacked, frequently in a very polemic manner. In this discourse recovered memories of sexual abuse in the childhood that re-emerge during therapeutic intervention, often decades after the assaults happened, are declared per se as 'false' and 'implanted' by the therapist (Curtois 1997; Zerbe Enns 1996). The spokesperson of this position in the *Star Trek* text is the *Vulcan* officer *Tuvok*, *Voyager's* voice of rationality, logic and science; in contradiction to the results of most of today's studies concerning memory and trauma, he explains: "Historically recovered memories have often proven unreliable." Further on, the accusers are blamed for destroying 'honourable' families, and 'honourable' men especially, thus *Seven* is accused of being responsible for *Kovin's* death. The false memory discourse provides the same gender dichotomy as this *Star Trek*-Episode: The victims/accusers of sexual abuse are (for the most part) female, the perpetrators/culprits (for the most part) male and the original victims become the 'real' perpetrators and vice versa. One important consequence of this victim-perpetrator-conversion is that authority over truth is adjudicated exclusively to individuals that are coded masculine (Lury 1998: 132). *Seven's* testimony, obviously feminised by the described discursive context, is declared to be false and deadly, whereas the evidence of the accused man is revealed to be 'true' in the end. And this happens although we have seen *Kovin's* assault against *Seven* 'with our own eyes'! As soon as the woman *Seven*, not the *Borg*, takes the point of view in *Retrospect*, this perspective loses the objectivity and authenticity that the *Borg-gaze* resp. the male gaze normally provides. Used to identify with the I-camera and to classify everything we have seen through the protagonist's eyes as 'true' and 'authentic' has a perfidious effect: We, the spectators, also feel or should feel betrayed by *Seven*. Therefore *Retrospect* has, not coming as a surprise, evoked indignation in the *Trek* BBS, *Star Trek's* biggest internet-messageboard community, as two examples show: A poster called *TRH* complains the usage of the filmed memories and the misdirection of the spectators: "The problem with this episode (...) is, that the viewers saw *Seven's* memories and thus know these are true images" (*TRH* 2002: electronic document). A probably female user called *Janette110* criticises the sexual politics concerning the topic of sexual abuse and memory in *Retrospect*: "I thought it was going to be a really good one with *Seven's* memories being accurate, but was pretty appalled when they turned out not to be. I thought it was a lousy message to give young girls or women in general who may have been attacked/assaulted and struggling to get the courage to speak up" (*Janette110* 2002: electronic document).

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to outline several strategies of feminisation the cyborg *Seven of Nine* is subjected to - strategies that are continued throughout the series but cannot be worked through wholly here. Nevertheless, until *Voyager's* last episode *Seven* retains several *Borg* attributes like rationality and effectivity and thus a tension arises that is triggered by the 'contemporaneity of the unequal' in the

figure of *Seven*. Hence the extreme accentuation of *Seven's* 'natural' femininity can be assessed as a reaction to her cyborgian ambiguity and allude to the Harawayan potential of cyborgs to perturb the gendered dichotomy. This potential can be read off messageboards that provide a multitude of reactions and interpretations of *Seven* by the fans that are partly not intended by the producers. Though the vast majority of *Seven's* fans actually consists of young male heterosexuals who perceive *Seven* for the most part as sex object, there are also women who adore the female cyborg because of her 'male' attributes like rationality, strength and independence. These female fans ignore the textual message that *Seven's* positive attributes are solely *Borg* heritage and 'read' her as a successful and powerful woman, as can be seen in two examples taken from messageboards: "Seven was added to reel in the drooling walking hormone crowd, but I as an estrogen powered gyno-American I have to say, I LOVE THIS CHICK. Though I am heterosexual, I am totally in love with Seven. (...) I think she is: a. hilarious. b. fantastic looking in a valkyrie sort of way c. forceful d. independent e. accomplished f. fascinating" (RickeElaine 1999: electronic document) and "I have two woman friends who watch *Voyager*, and they both think Seven of Nine is pretty cool. One of them even dressed up as Seven for Halloween last year" (Bionic Zombie 2001: electronic document).

However, on the basis of the analysis of the televisual texts it is clear that the traced strategies of feminisation in *Seven's* case are everything but harmless. Following Judith Mayne's critical remark that "an active viewer is still one positioned to be so by textual constructs" (Mayne 1997: 159) and with regard to Jenny Kitzinger's sobering results concerning 'resisting readings' (Kitzinger 1998: 210) a too euphemistic approach to 'active spectators' and 'oppositional readings' appears to be questionable. Above all, because the relation between dominant ideology and oppositional reception or empowerment by adoption is determined from the very beginning by an undeniable imbalance: There is a significant difference, for example, between presenting a woman's memories of sexual abuse in the childhood as unreliable and false in a tv series that is broadcasted worldwide or a young woman dressing up as *Seven* for Halloween. The destructive effects of the former are probably not equated with the latter.

ⁱ For this work I rely on Fiske's definition of 'discourse': "Discourse (...) is language in social use; language accented with its history of domination, subordination, and resistance; language marked by the social conditions of its use and its users: it is politicized, power-bearing language employed to extend or defend the interests of its discursive community" (Fiske 1996: 3).

ⁱⁱ United Paramount Network.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nevertheless, *Voyager* was not able to keep the new won young male viewers and critics blame *Seven* for the loss of large parts of the female audience. However, there never was an ad about the (not unlikely) increase of lesbian viewers as a result of *Seven's* allure.

^{iv} The *Borg Queen* who primarily appeared in the feature film *First Contact* and who had several prominent performances in *Voyager* is of course an important exception. Here is not the place to give an extended analysis of this character, but her functions and performances in tv as in film correspond in a high degree with traditional and stereotyped narratives in mainstream science fiction about strong female protagonists whose purpose is to show that "women cannot handle power, ought not to have it, and cannot keep it" as Joanna Russ writes (p. 2). Russ also points out that "[w]omen lose because they abuse (...) power or are immoral" (p. 2). Anne Cranny-Francis provides an excellent analysis of the *Borg Queen* in *First Contact* that underscores Russ's argumentation and shows the sexual coding of female immorality: "She is the polluting temptress who turns men away from their authoritative roles as mind/authority/power by offering them (the pleasures of) flesh. So, although she does articulate a few good lines, the *Borg Queen* is constituted within some very conservative narratives (in which the role of the powerful feminine is unequivocally evil)" (2000: 157-58).

^v Of course *Seven's* cat-like behaviour also comprises a sexual dimension by evoking the image of the sexually aggressive woman.

^{vi} The other *Borg* of her unit that had also been rescued died in the meantime: Opening the cargo bay's doors and puffing the cyborgs out into the universe was the only way to stop their attempt to assimilate *Voyager* (*Seven* has survived because she had been working in a Jeffrey's tube at that time).

^{vii} In several episodes *Harry Kim* is constructed in accordance with stereotypical Hollywood representations of male Asians as effeminated and sexually inferior (Scheer 2002: 107).

viii The results of the scientific examination of *Kovin's* laboratory are interpreted by Janeway and *Tuvok* as proof for *Kovin's* innocence, but as reviewers Julia Houston, Michelle Erica Green and Jim Wright correctly remark the examination's results are *not* contradictory to *Severn's* testimony and do not provide stridency.

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