

The cyborg no longer works. Some remarks about the future of the “gender” category

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Introduction

The ability to predict the future is a dream as old as humanity itself. It is no coincidence that long before the spread of such elementary inventions as the wheel or the plough, humans developed complex systems of augury, magic and beliefs, devoting more energy to attempts to gain control over the future than their most immediate environment.

As human civilisation developed, it turned out inevitably that there were no shortcuts and that a more effective way to defend people against floods was to build embankments rather than make sacrificial offerings. Thus, the degree of investing humanity's resources was reversed and today their main beneficiary is technology and science and not the traditional pairing of religion and magic. Of course, the effectiveness of science has not diminished the need to predict the future, so now it is up to science to face questions about the future. The initial enthusiasm died out when confronted with reality and the hopes people had for futurology, which flourished fifty years ago, vanished as quickly as they emerged. While the shortcomings of the scientific predictions for the future can be eliminated in areas requiring only an increase in computing power (weather forecasting or simulations of chemical processes), in the case of forecasts concerning the human world science has had to admit its impotence. It has been demonstrated both by practice (none of the expensive analytical centres in the world was able to predict such an important event as the collapse of the USSR) and, perhaps more importantly, by theory. The reason is very simple – leaving aside the (un)predictability of the behaviour of people and societies, the existence and functioning of our civilisation is inextricably linked to science and technology. However, it is

impossible to predict scientific discoveries and inventions resulting from them – *ergo* it is impossible to predict the future shape of the world. So since it is generally impossible to predict the future of natural sciences, it seems all the more impossible to predict human motivation and actions. Assuming, therefore, that the notion of impossibility can be graded, the hope for a sensible reflection on the future of culture should be abandoned straight after it has emerged.

However, first – predicting the future is invariably tempting and desirable, second – as scientists we should not be discouraged even by the biggest obstacles. Although history teaches us that the development of society and culture is never a linear process, but one full of unexpected turns or stoppages, the only relatively scientific possibility of establishing at least a general direction is to extrapolate the existing phenomena and trends. In this paper I will try to use such an approach to *gender studies* or the concept and category of gender in culture.

My starting point will be a short recapitulation of the traditional understanding of gender, followed by a description of landmark concepts, i.e. Virginia Woolf's *androgyny* from the early 20th century and Donna Haraway's cyborg from the end of that century. These points will be sufficient to establish a line of development – so the article will end with a reflection on its possible extension into the future. Will the category of gender play any role in the future of culture?

From the historical point of view it cannot be overestimated, because usually – in most societies until today – gender has been the strongest determinant of human fate. Gender-associated social norms regulate all elements of life: from clothing and behaviour, through shaping of people's personality and education possibilities (or lack thereof), to achievable position in society. In fact, already in this basic issue a preliminary observation makes it possible to note that the role of this determinant diminishes with the development of civilisation and societies. Despite undoubted burdens relating to child upbringing, social transformations are creating a more balanced division of these duties between parents, thanks to which women are more and more confident in entering spheres of life hitherto inaccessible to them and achieve goals impossible in any of the historical societies we know (it would be difficult to talk responsibly about matriarchal societies in this context given the scarcity of documentary evidence). Today women are in prominent social and professional positions, are increasingly bold in entering fields hitherto traditionally accorded only to men, and all seems to be suggesting that this deconstruction of traditional roles will grow stronger and stronger, for these are also official objectives of policies of many countries.

However, even such far-reaching changes concern only social norms relating to gender. They do not touch its very essence and it is in this sphere that possible transformations seem to be the most exciting. In order to take a closer look at them, we need to start with a definition.

Gender

It is difficult to say unequivocally who and when for the first time used the concept of “gender” with reference to the social and cultural aspects of male-female differences. Although expressions like *gender role* or *gender identity* are fairly new, the notion of gender itself has existed in English for a long time. For a long time, too, this word has been associated with some ambiguity; according to the sixth edition of Doctor Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* from 1785, it could refer either to the grammatical classification of nouns and to human gender as such. What is more, as can be seen in Shakespeare’s use (in *Othello*) of the verb *to gender* in the sense of “to multiply” or “to copulate”, the word must have clearly carried a sexual connotation. This was often consciously used – for example, in an introduction to a book co-written with Cora Kaplan, David Glover cites a rumour marking the beginning of a twilight of a career and published in the society pages of the *Morning Herald* of 29 November 1784, which mentioned a “grammatical error” committed by a member of parliament with regard to a nephew of another aristocrat – it suggested unambiguously a seduction of the young man¹.

The entry “gender” in Maggie Humm’s *Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, reads as follows:

Culturally-shaped group of attributes and behaviours given to the female or to the male. Contemporary feminist theory [...] takes the view that sex is biological and that gender behaviour is a social construction².

The idea was briefly and precisely formulated by the German scholar Ferdinand Merz:

Nature determines whether we are male or female; culture decides what it means that we are male or female³.

Kazimierz Ślęczka, on the other hand, notes that gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon:

it develops in individuals under a huge pressure revealing its presence in the case of failures to meet the expectations. Once internalised, models dictated in a culture become in mature individuals an imperative component of their gender make-up⁴.

The distinction between *sex* and *gender* has become important,

because it makes it possible to carry out a critical analysis of the relations between the sexes. It is associated with an anti-reductionist conviction that being a woman or a man cannot be reduced

¹ D. Glover, *Introduction*, [in:] D. Glover, C. Kaplan, *Genders*, London-New York 2000, pp. X, XI.

² M. Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, Columbus, Ohio State UP, 1999, p. 84.

³ F. Merz, *quoted after K. Ślęczka, Feminizm. Ideologie i koncepcje społeczne współczesnego feminizmu*, Katowice 1999, p. 30.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

only to the shape or functions of the body. The features and functions of the body cannot be simply translated into social behaviour⁵.

The interest in the category of *gender* as an analytical tool grew in opposition to male domination. Works of feminist theorists from the 1960s and 1970s revealed cultural constructs superimposed on sex. Yet the description was made within the framework of a patriarchal culture and in accordance with its rules, and, therefore, the newly established category paradoxically only confirmed that against which it had emerged; it fitted in perfectly with male discourse. Making the distinction between *sex* and *gender* created new possibilities for description and interpretation, but was still within the old system. That is why it became necessary to discover new possibilities in the category of *gender*. There came a crisis in the essentialist understanding of femininity, which ceased to be timeless and unchanging; in addition, defining the woman as the Other (than the man) was no longer sufficient, instead a new difference was introduced: after all, women differ also among themselves and there is no femininity that can be captured and defined once and for all. These transformations were followed by a necessity to go beyond the generic category now treated as both a place where masculinity and femininity clashed and as something which they had in common.

Two clear trends emerged in the approach to the category of *gender*: in addition to affirmation of being a woman and stressing the female otherness, there also emerged a sense of isolation, of being locked in a ghetto, of female thinking being marked by its gender (masculinity and male reflection do not have to resort to such categorising, because they claim to be universal). In the case of literature it was only the launch of studies into the male legacy also in terms of the category of *gender* that provided a way-out of the impasse and the “theory of a broadly defined ‘gender’, covering the entire literature, aroused the interest of scholars of both sexes”⁶.

A universalist view aspiring to objectivity was replaced by a view from a specific place, through a strictly defined perspective. As twentieth-century philosophy of science has demonstrated, universal or “objective” view is, in fact, always a view from a specific place for which – add the feminists – the sexual difference is one of its constitutive elements. According to Susan Bordo:

The imperial categories [...] – Reason, Truth, Human Nature, History, Tradition – now were replaced by the (historical, social) questions: Whose truth? Whose nature? Whose version of reason? Whose history? Whose tradition?⁷

⁵ S. Walczewska, *Feminizm jako odkrywanie kultury kobiecej*, [in:] *Różnica i różnorodność. O kulturze ponowoczesnej — szkice krytyczne*, ed. A. Jawlowska, Poznań 1996, pp. 73-74.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

⁷ S. Bordo, *Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism*, [in:] *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. L.J. Nicholson, New York-London 1990, p. 137.

The traditional division of roles

There are no equal opportunities for men and women. Men can get to know the fullness of life, because they are both men and human beings. For women only a fraction of life remains – they must be either human beings or women⁸.

For many years being a woman signified social alienation, living on the margins of the male world, only in the private sphere. While men’s world was identical with the world as such – men in caravels investigated its boundaries, tried to conquer it with fire and sword, tried to fathom its metaphysical foundations in their studies – women’s world was limited to hard work, children, kitchen and washing.

To a large extent this is still the case today. In spite of the increasing revisions mentioned earlier, we are still living in largely patriarchal societies, in which men are the most important, serving socially responsible functions – rulers, warriors, politicians, decision-makers, those who have the biggest number of “obligations” and the greatest responsibility. In most cultures people still wait for a son, who can be the only lawful heir of the name and should be the woman’s ultimate fulfilment in her motherly duty; women are from the very beginning raised to be carers. They play with dolls, take care of their siblings, help with housework. And it does not matter whether they are made for it or not, whether they are persuaded to assume such a role by society, whether they really identify with it – this is the woman’s social construct and this is what is expected of her. In their adult life women constantly take care of somebody: their beloved men, children, elderly parents or sick in the hospital. Above all, they accompany their men, they create them a home, support them in all their activities for better and for worse⁹. Since traditionally even those women who were lucky to be born in places, times and families not requiring them to work could not have careers in the public sphere or in science, it is not surprising that the main field in which conscious emancipating reflection emerged was literature. It was in this seemingly not dangerous – and as such not regulated by male domination – area of writing private letters and memoirs that the first, initially just as private, literary works appeared, becoming public as time went by, however¹⁰. This inevitably led to a theoretical reflection – which is why

⁸ Z. Nałkowska, *Dzienniki I. 1899-1905*, edition, introduction and comments by H. Kirchner, Warszawa 1975, p. 24.

⁹ See H. Jaxa-Rożen, *Kontestacja i banal: feminizm w kulturze współczesnej*, Wrocław 2005, especially the chapter: “Druga połowa — towarzysząca życia — bohaterka drugiego planu”, pp. 32-53.

¹⁰ E. Showalter, who invented the term gynocriticism (the study of women aesthetics in literature), has distinguished three phases in the development of women writing. The first, feminine, was in a way based on the copying of male writing. The only model of culture and, consequently, writing was male, so women in order to make themselves noticed had to write “like men”, because only then could they be published. In the English-language literature this phase lasted more or less between 1840 and 1880; a characteristic feature of this period was the assumption of male pseudonyms by

we should not be surprised that it was from the reflection on women's literature that modern concepts of gender emerged¹¹. Let us take a closer look at this process, especially given the fact that literature acts like lens in focusing on important problems of the world that surrounds it.

Literature

Elaine Showalter¹², in an article opening a collection of studies entitled *Speaking of Gender*, includes this reflection on *gender* in literary analysis. In practice this means that all the existing categories used to describe a literary work, categories like narrative, character, plot, theme, stylistic tropes, topoi, style etc. now can be (and should be) additionally filtered through the category of gender. Thus we could say that in this way poetics supports the gender theory trying to create new tools to study literature.

Each discussion concerning the relations between the gender category and literature must necessarily take into account the specific attitude of women to the novel as a genre. As Virginia Woolf presented it¹³, for a long time being a woman-writer meant alienation, working outside the major canons, styles, groups and artistic manifestos of the period; next to or on the margins of the phenomenon we call literary life. Men-writers could gather experience when travelling, educate themselves and improve their writing skills at universities, meet in salons or cafes, engage in discussions and create literary groups. Women, on the other hand, were cut off from education, were isolated, locked in their houses, painfully limited in nearly all spheres of life. In their specific isolation and loneliness they could only read books by other women. This literary isolation of women writers was broken usually by their rich correspondence, often with their fellow women writers. Clearly, there was a component of women's literature that could better be discussed with other women, even one living many kilometres away than with a man of letters, even one who was right next door. Rightly or wrongly, many

female writers. The second phase, emancipating or militant (feminist), was a protest against the existing standards and obligations, i.e. against patriarchal culture. It is placed in 1880-1920 and is closely linked to the fight for women's political rights, including suffrage, freedom and autonomy. Finally, the third, biologicistic phase, which began in 1920 and which lasts to this day, is a phase of discovering and manifesting of the female, a search for the fullness of humanity manifesting itself in purely female experiences of puberty, menstruation, sexual initiation, pregnancy, childbirth or menopause (see E. Showalter, *Towards Feminist Poetics*, [in:] *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. E. Showalter, London 1986).

¹¹ See I. Iwasiów, *Gatunki i konfesje w badaniach "gender"*, *Teksty Drugie* 1999, no. 6.

¹² See E. Showalter, *Introduction: The Rise of Gender*, [in:] *Speaking of Gender*, ed. E. Showalter, New York- London 1989.

¹³ V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Wordsworth Classics 2012.

female scholars, especially English and American, e.g. Ellen Moers¹⁴, claim that women’s literature is an international movement, as it were, dating back to more or less the 18th century, a movement that encompasses the greatest works of female writers of various nationalities. This opinion is shared by many critics, noticing in works by women a continuity and repeatability of some themes, problems and generational characters.

Many works dealing with women’s writing draw on the sociology of literature and history of culture, which study the social structure, position of women and leisure time, including time devoted to reading. According to Moers¹⁵, writing novels played a huge role in women’s life in creating earning opportunities. Women writers could work in the privacy of their homes, though typical images show a woman writing in a drawing-room, at a small table, amid the tumult of family life.

Indeed, since freedom and fullness of expression are of the essence of the art, such a lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools must have told enormously upon the writing of women. [...] There is no reason to think that the form of the epic or of the poetic play suit a woman any more than the sentence [made by men] suits her. But all the older forms of literature were hardened and set by the time she became a writer. The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands – another reason, perhaps, why she wrote novels¹⁶.

In addition, unlike theatre or journalism, writing novels did not require direct involvement in public life, which was seen as improper for women. All negotiations and arrangements with publishers could be made by letter or through a brother or husband, and this did not require direct participation and risk of public embarrassment.

Owing to its lack of established tradition and form, and owing to a conviction that it required less intellectual contribution than the classical literary genres, the novel created possibilities of development for women and by women. We have here two aspects of such an explanation of women’s interest in the novel. The first – dismissive and close the patriarchal point of view – tells us that whereas men study and create classical works requiring considerable intellectual engagement, women play and write trivial novels. The second – feminist – points out that the novel was a young genre not tainted by male domination, so women could shape and develop it in their own way. After all, the novel has its origins in forms very close to women’s writing, such as memoirs, journals or letters; it is, therefore, not surprising that women preferred the novel to the classical poetry genres originating in the Greek and Roman tradition.

The novel is a genre often chosen by women writers not only because of its form (poetics). Just as important, perhaps even more important, is the plot itself

¹⁴ See E. Moers, *Literary Women*, [in:] *Feminist Literary Theory. A Reader*, ed. M. Eagleton, Cambridge-Oxford 1986, pp. 96-98.

¹⁵ See *ibidem*, pp. 8-11.

¹⁶ V. Woolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

characteristic of this type of writing¹⁷. This choice was all the more valuable from the point of view of women's writing and the gender category, given the fact that male values predominated in the patriarchal world and are transferred to literature. As Virginia Woolf wrote,

This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book, because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room¹⁸.

The author of *A Room of One's Own* also believed that the creative power of women was no different to that of men; a description of a shop full of ribbons was just as important and interesting as a traveller's account of a trek across passes in the Andes, and a biography of a female shop assistant could even be much more interesting than yet another description of Napoleon's life.

That is why Woolf wrote elsewhere that

all the literary training that a woman had in the early nineteenth century was training in the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion¹⁹.

As we know, the ability to analyse emotion was for a very long time interpreted by critics as "true femininity" and regarded by them as a natural female ability. However, Woolf pointed to something more: she stressed the need for a description of men from the female point of view. A description hitherto non-existent in literature, because it required, first of all, full awareness of one's own gender. This is not easy; Inga Iwasiów formulates two conclusions in this respect. The first concerns the impossibility of defining gender in an unequivocal manner – we can only provide an approximate description of it:

While it is possible to define the context in which gender functions, to recreate its character constructed by a variety of factors, it is impossible to "catch itself in the act"²⁰.

The same goes for literature: there is no ready-made set of qualities characterising women's literature. We can only talk of female motifs, themes, threads or issues. The second conclusion is that despite the existence in the so-called feminist literature of a strong female subject (the main protagonist and/or narrator), the text nevertheless is close to the ideal of androgyny:

The literary text, like the gender theory, is [...] androgynous. And this androgyny has its source in the undefinability, inexpressibility and the actual unimaginability of gender. The impossibility of draining off all the contexts from it²¹.

¹⁷ See E. Kraskowska, *O modelach pisarstwa kobiecego i o kilku toposach feministycznych*, [in:] *eadem, Piórem niewieściem. Z problemów prozy kobiecej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Poznań 1999.

¹⁸ V. Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

²⁰ I. Iwasiów, *Płeć jako niewyraźne, niewypowiedane, niedefiniowalne*, [in:] *Literatura wobec niewyraźnego*, ed. W. Bolecki, E. Kuźma, Warszawa 1997, p. 167.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

Once again we are faced with the thesis that full humanity is expressed in androgyny. However, this fullness is by nature dual. According to Greek etymology, *androgynē* is a combination of two words: *andrós* [genitive of *aner*] — man and *gynē* — woman. This does not mean that we are dealing here with a sexless creature or one with two sexes. It is seen as “linking, in a psychological and spiritual sense, features traditionally considered feminine and masculine”²².

Such a combination can be seen in two ways: on the one hand as an ideal and fullness of human possibility, on the other – as a fatal neutrality, emptiness and death. However, regardless of the interpretation, androgyny carries with it a deconstruction of one of the basic oppositions of the patriarchal society – the feminine and the masculine. It is, therefore, not surprising that this category became a subject of feminist discussion.

Androgyny as fullness in which we can look for possibilities of development and the future of humanity is advocated by Elizabeth Badinter:

The modern androgynē results from neither a conjunction of the two sexes nor a fusion that eliminates them. [...] The androgynous human being alternates the expression of its two components according to the exigencies of the moment. [The androgynous identity allows] a coming and going of feminine and masculine qualities. [...] The androgynē is a creature with its own sex, different from the other. It can allow itself to be changeable only when it has found itself. Undoubtedly, never have the man and the woman been more similar, never have the genders been less different than they are today²³.

A specific spiritual androgyny, understood as a merger of the feminine and the masculine in the mind, was also explored by Woolf. In her view, it is a prerequisite for artistic work:

in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man’s brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman’s brain the woman predominates over the man.

The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties. [...] [Coleridge] meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided²⁴.

Thus androgyny makes it possible to leave behind gender polarisation and to overcome division of humanity, which in turn gives us full freedom of choosing social roles and modes of behaviour. Such an approach talks in the end not so much about androgyny, but about being outside gender. In today’s world the possibility of such existence can probably best be seen in the so-called new media art, which uses means of expression like performance or multimedia installation. Exclusion of gender/sex is often characteristic of this art; it is used to achieve in

²² M. Humm, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²³ E. Badinter, *YX: On Masculine Identity*, transl. L. Davis, New York 1995, pp. 164-165.

²⁴ V. Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

it full artistic freedom, which after the elimination of the gender category is no longer determined by anything.

This concept is fairly fresh, however; older literature, whether it wanted it or not, drew on well-known tropes. Thus it began to experiment with androgyny, the most prominent example of which is probably Woolf's *Orlando*. This novel, published in 1928, was so much ahead of its time that it had to wait for attempts at more profound reading until the humanities developed the right tools making it possible to notice and analyse the links between gender and identity, and, first of all, to show the unequivocality of these categories in culture.

I am coming, I am coming, here I am,
neither a woman, nor a man,
we are joined, we are one,
With a human face²⁵.

Orlando is a pseudo-biography of a young English nobleman. His life would not be worth describing and becoming of interest more than the vicissitudes of any other representative of Elizabethan aristocracy, if it were not for the fact that it lasts over four-hundred years (the story ends in 1928) and, in addition to other events in his life, includes one that is completely unique – sex change. One day Orlando, still a man, simply falls asleep and wakes up being already a woman.

Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory [...] went back through all the events of his past life without encountering any obstacle²⁶.

Orlando's face remains the same; the only thing that changes without his will is the sex, which the protagonist accepts rather indifferently and without surprise. In Sally Potter's film version Tilda Swinton, who plays the eponymous hero, looks into the mirror, then in the spectator's eyes and shrugs her shoulders: "Same person. No difference at all. Just a different sex"²⁷. Interestingly, although the main protagonist does not care much about her/his new corporeality, people around him/her are very moved and disoriented. The issue of Orlando's sex becomes so important that a special trial is held to settle whether we are dealing with a woman or a man. Once again, this shows how important and fundamental the category of sex is; paradoxically, it is much more important to the organisation of society and culture than to the description of the person (subject).

The very name places the main protagonist between the male and the female form (which, unfortunately, cannot be conveyed in the Polish translation because

²⁵ Fragment of the final song *Coming* (S. Potter, D. Motion, J. Somerville) from the film *Orlando*, written and directed by S. Potter, 1992.

²⁶ V. Woolf, *Orlando*, Wordsworth Editions 1995, p. 67.

²⁷ It must be noted that these words are not used in Woolf's book.

of grammatical gender-related inflection); Orlando has one face and undetermined sex, is a kind of androgyne. In any case, androgyny is very important for Woolf and keeps recurring in her oeuvre. For example, in her novel *Mrs Dalloway*²⁸ two protagonists – Clarissa and Septimus – are kindred spirits; each has a separate life, away from the other, but they are like the two halves of a split Platonic whole. Both in *Mrs Dalloway* and in *A Room of One's Own* androgyny becomes a symbol of fullness as unification (or the original unity and indivisibility), freedom and unlimited potential of the human being. This is what we find also in *Orlando*. Orlando's androgynous indeterminacy undermines the perception of sex and identity as indivisible, determined within the framework of a binary model in which the female and the male are separate kingdoms on two opposite extremes, ruled by biology. Woolf also questions the norms concerning sexuality, imposing a structure on relations between humans, a structure that specifies admissible arrangements, permitted spheres (*human* and *normal*) as well as those which people cannot enter on pain of exclusion. We can find in *Orlando* a foretaste of the complications dealt with today by the *queer theory*²⁹. The story touches upon the spheres in which identity eludes the social obligatoriness of gender and sex related to it. The protagonist of Woolf's novel tries to adapt to the social identity imposed on him by sex. However, this turns out – every time! – impossible, because there is always a particle, a fragment, a detail that stands out and does not fit in with the social model of being a man or a woman. Orlando transcends sex and transforms gender into a performative spectacle, masquerade, ironic game exposing the artificiality and inadequacy of social expectations concerning sex.

Yet sexuality is usually too strongly rooted in human languages and, consequently, in cultures, to make it easy to abandon it. This is probably most emphatically seen in Jeannette Winterson's novel *Written on the Body*, which uses a generically undetermined language to tell a story of a relationship of two people, without ever mentioning their sex/gender. Reading this book is a fantastic experience and let it be a measure of our helplessness that, first of all, it cannot be repeated in many languages³⁰, secondly – even in those that do make similar experiments possible, such works are rare experiments, in fact, not a cultural norm.

Although the figure of *androgyne* had a huge impact on the theory of *gender* and feminism, it could not become popular in the real world outside the niche-like and by definition spectacle-like *queer* subculture. It has been rejected even by the feminists; Showalter, for example, questions not so much the idea of androgyny

²⁸ See V. Woolf, *Pani Dalloway*, transl. K. Tarnowska, Kraków 2003.

²⁹ Literally, *queer* is a vulgar English word denoting a homosexual; its use by gay activists was to break that spell. Today *queer* means abandoning definition of identity in favour of a concept of the subject undergoing permanent change (see I. Iwasiów, *Gender dla średnio zaawansowanych. Wykłady szczecińskie*, Warszawa 2004, p. 87).

³⁰ The Polish translator opted for a version with two women, because the presence of inflectional suffixes determining gender in Polish meant that the author's idea was unfeasible in our culture.

itself, but its usefulness in the building of women's identity. Woolf said that artists should be sexless, because artistic creation was outside this category (there can be only good or bad artists), while Showalter sees in such a perception of androgyny a risk that the woman will disappear. Woolf's idealising position comes down to a vision of absolute artistic spirit, while Showalter warns against an escape from reality and a loss of the women's gender awareness, won, after all, with such great difficulty.

However, even despite the ultimate impossibility of liberation from the corset of sex, Woolf and her *Orlando* paved the way for the next stage of the liberation of the subject – not only from sex/gender, but also from the body.

Haraway and the cyborg

An interesting concept of subjectivity, associated with the postmodern death of the human being or a crisis of the existentially defined subject, is a proposal put forward by the American scholar Donna Haraway³¹. She introduces the cyborg or, in fact, a cybernetic organism, which is a hybrid of a machine and a living organism, a mixture of future potentialities and today's reality. Yet we cannot speak of a peaceful co-existence or of one emerging from the other, but, rather, of a mortal combat, because we do not know where the human being begins and the machine ends or the other way round. Haraway points out that although a combination of a human being and a machine is not an entirely new idea, in modern medicine the human body is as never before constantly penetrated by more or less complex machines. Like with modern warfare – after all, this confrontation increasingly becomes a fight between machines (computers) rather than humans in direct contact on the battlefield. Haraway's thesis is, therefore, as follows: we are all cyborgs and the existential subject (human being) is inextricably linked to machines and depends on them. As the digitalisation of the world increases, the machines surrounding us undoubtedly become more than tools; they condition and co-create us, becoming an important part of our identity, their mechanical failure can cause hysteria comparable with one caused by a loss of a part of oneself. However, according to the American scholar, this is not a tragedy of humanity. Although in the history of capitalism the relation between man and the machine has been a constant battle (the subjugation of nature and mastery over the earth is done thanks to the power of technology), the goal of new culture and feminism is not so much to give up machines or fight them, but, rather, to demonstrate that there is a still undiscovered pleasure in blurring the boundaries between the human being and the machine. It is also about reminding ourselves of the responsibility for shaping

³¹ See D. Haraway, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*, [in:] *Feminism/Postmodernism...*, pp. 190-233.

reality, and, as a consequence, for maintaining a perceptible difference between reality (for example, people dying during a war) and its representation (death inflicted in Pakistan remotely from America). The world of genderless cyborgs – apart from being unquestionably linked to postmodernism (*simulacrum*) – is also characterised by the fact that the history of salvation does not apply to them. Since there is no problem with the Oedipus complex, there is a chance that sexist illnesses will be cured. The cyborg is also a post-gender creature – it is sexless and such categories as bisexuality or androgynism do not apply to it, because it lacks the founding myth, characteristic of Western culture, of the original unity and separation. The cyborg is outside the myth. By definition it is not innocent; it embodies the end of the division into the public and the private. For dust it is not and does not dream of returning to dust; unlike Frankenstein, it does not expect to be saved.

Haraway points to three main breaks in the borderline areas which have hitherto constituted the anthropological subject. First, the boundary between the human being and the animal has ceased to be obvious. Research conducted on monkeys, especially chimpanzees, shows that things that seemed fundamental in distinguishing humans from animals one by one are questioned and collapse. What is more, people cease to need such a distinction at all. An opposite tendency comes to the fore, demanding equal treatment for human rights and animal rights. The cyborg, appearing at a time when the boundary between the human and the animal world becomes blurred, embodies the idea of unification of (also those) two worlds.

Secondly, the difference between a living organism and a machine is eliminated. Hitherto only humans have been constructors or creators of machines. However, technology has developed so much that the machine once invented by humans today designs other machines itself, for example, integrated circuits, and in the future may even design the living. As Haraway puts it, “our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert”³².

Thirdly, the boundary between the physical and non-physical has been blurred and is unclear to us today. Miniaturisation has changed the experience of mechanisms – one-hundred years ago mechanisms were large and tangible, today machines are microelements, they are everywhere and sometimes are even invisible (their size is very small or their structural components include light, waves or biological structures). Today people are material, opaque and heavy. The anguish of humans, too strongly bound to earth to be able to soar among the clouds, still exists in the technology culture, but its source has changed. People are reminded of their inherent biological deficiencies no longer by ethereal spirits and angels, but by their own machines, free from bodily imperfections.

Since borderline areas of the modern world have collapsed or are collapsing, *gender*, too, has ceased to be obvious and needs to be constantly made more

³² *Ibidem*, p. 194.

specific. The sense of unity of the female subject, of being a woman is supplanted by the experience of class, sexual orientation and skin colour. Given the growing fragmentation of the world, Haraway proposes, instead of the female subject, the introduction of kinship of choice. This “kin” can be the subjectivity of the cyborg, which, like the cyborg itself, is built of fragments. Elements can be dismantled and changed at will, which is why the dichotomous division is questioned. Everyone, including the female subject, can shape themselves as they wish, can replace and move its building blocks, depending on the needs of the surrounding world. On the other hand, our world is increasingly dependent on electronics, with micro-electronics being the technical foundation of the postmodern world of simulacra.

Conclusion

Do the phases examined here make up a trend, a direction? I believe they do, for we can clearly see a growing awareness of one's own gender combined with a growing desire and, primarily, possibilities of becoming free of it. In fact, Haraway has told us a gender-related end of history – a future in which humans combined with machines will be able to incorporate animal elements, biological by nature, or even elements artificially designed and grown; a future in which human sexuality will be a matter of free choice. Since thanks to modern medicine people can change their sex, a future providing for shaping of the body at will opens up a possibility of multiple sex changes in the course of one's life, a possibility of getting rid of one's sex or even creating new, hitherto non-existent sexes. Science fiction has long explored such worlds of unlimited possibilities, androgynous societies (for instance *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula Le Guin), multi-sexual societies (*Cluster* by Anthony Piers) or societies shaping sexuality and corporeality as they wish (*Endymion* by Dan Simmons, as well as works by Stanisław Lem). Moreover, although the imperfection of our technology still allows for the existence of only two biological sexes, human culture has been experimenting with sexuality for a long time. In many traditional cultures there exist various forms of the third gender, to name just the South Asian *hijra*, Samoan *Fa'afafine* or Albanian *burrnesha*. And there have been even more complicated cases, for instance in ancient Israel, the literary heritage of which (Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash) contain fragments referring to four more genders, in addition to the male and the female³³.

In several countries in the world these cultural traditions have been introduced into their legal systems, for example, on 27 December 2007 the Supreme Court decided that Nepal would become the first state in the world in which people would

³³ See G. Drinkwater, J. Lesser, D. Shneer, *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*, New York 2009.

officially be able to define themselves as women, men or the Other, and receive IDs with such a gender³⁴. A similar solution has been adopted in India, while in Australia and New Zealand people applying for passports can define their gender as M, F or X. This is obviously not the end – there are more and more people in the world placing their gender identity on a palette of possibilities stretching from asexual, through demi- and semi- to polysexual³⁵.

This wealth of perspectives allows us to assume, with a high degree of probability, that as medical technology develops, gender experiments indeed will become a free formation of the subject – in accordance with Woolf’s and Haraway’s postulates – completely free from the dictate of sex. At the same time future liberation from biological limitations means that we need to acknowledge our helplessness and admit that, as intuited at the beginning, we are not able to say anything about the future character of culture in this respect. Future sexuality will depend almost exclusively on free will so much so that it is impossible to make any binding predictions.

³⁴ See M. Bochenek, K. Knight, *Nepal’s Third Gender and the Recognition of Gender Identity*, JURIST-Hotline, Apr. 23, 2012, <http://jurist.org/hotline/2012/04/bochenek-knight-gender.php> (access: 26 December 2012).

³⁵ See M. Miller, *Pozytywni*, Kraków 2005.