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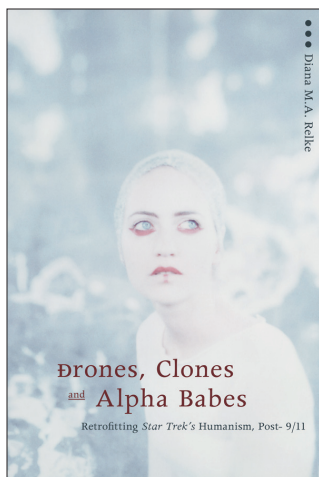
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DRONES, CLONES AND ALPHA BABES: RETROFITTING *STAR TREK'S* HUMANISM, POST- 9/11

by Diana M.A. Relke

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3: Phallic Mothers

The alternative to the female sex object is seemingly the active or “phallic mother.” But the mother is not regarded as a sexual subject even in psychoanalysis – her emblem of power is the borrowed phallus that she loses when she becomes the oedipal, castrated mother. – Jessica Benjamin, “The Alienation of Desire,” 456.

It may be that any sympathetic account of mothering is heard as “idealization”; if so that is an indirect testament to the mother-blaming widespread in our society. – Sara Ruddick, “Thinking about Mothering and Putting Maternal Thinking to Use,” 5–6.

IF FREUD WAS RIGHT, all of us are haunted by infantile memories of an omnipotent mother with the power to grant our every desire and deny our every need. This figure, who apparently dominated our lives before we were even aware of the existence of fathers, bears the signifier of patriarchal power – the phallus. Patriarchal gender arrangements ensure that we never entirely get over this pre-oedipal fantasy, which is thought to be more acute in men, thanks to the punishing demands of masculinity. But even if, as it turns out, Freud was only generalizing from his knowledge of industrialized Western culture, that still includes most creators and consumers of *Star Trek* whose involvement with it is bound to produce evidence of that infantile fantasy. Indeed, a psychoanalytic critic could probably make a pretty good case for *Voyager* as the pre-oedipal *Star Trek*. And if *Voyager* is the pre-oedipal *Trek*, then *The Next Generation* is definitely the post-oedipal. Unlike *TNG*, which favours relationships among fathers, sons, and brothers – biological, spiritual, or technological, and almost always oedipal in their dynamics – *Voyager* prefers explorations of relationships based on the mother-daughter model.

The dutiful daughters who constitute the nurturing “female matrix” of *TNG* submit to the Law of the Father – as when, for example, in *First Contact*, Dr. Crusher commands the crew to carry out Picard’s suicidal orders “because he’s the Captain.” Janeway, by contrast, operates far beyond the outermost reaches of the Federation and its Rule of Law. She is nevertheless constrained by it. Elizabeth Grosz’s take on the Freudian-Lacanian construction of the phallic mother is easily adapted to the construction of Janeway: she “carries the Law of the Father within her.... She invokes ‘his’ authority on loan whenever she threatens or punishes [her subordinates] for wrong-doing. She requires the authority of he who is absent” (71). Even Janeway’s violations of the Prime Directive constitute “submission through what appears to be resistance to the oedipal law, i.e., the so-called ‘masculinity complex’” (150). But regardless of how easily a psychoanalytic framework accounts for Janeway’s construction, it can never fully account for the way in which Janeway is apprehended by viewers – especially women viewers, who can be subversively wilful misreaders of patriarchal texts.

So, what might a wilful misreading of *Voyager* look like?

In an oedipal economy, the only power a woman has is sexual, and as we’ve seen in conjunction with the work of Wagner and Lundeen, that power has been ruled out as a possibility for Janeway. Phallic power is the only other option: it has worked for her predecessors, Kirk and Picard, but it can work for a female captain only within a pre-oedipal economy. Making it work requires investing Janeway with a certain amount of self-knowledge. In the pilot episode, she provides her crew – and herself – with a demonstration of the phallic mother’s power to deny their most immediate desire. She destroys the Caretaker’s array, the technology that stranded them in the Delta Quadrant and, so far as they know, the only technology that could have got them home within their lifetimes. Janeway spends the next seven seasons making up for that unilateral and unpopular decision by welding the unlikely assortment of Starfleet personnel, Maquis rebels, and Delta Quadrant tag-alongs into a functional crew: “family” is the only category that seems to her inclusive enough to accommodate the radical differences among them. Under that banner, she must now demonstrate the phallic mother’s other power – the power to provide the necessities of life, and to nurture the crew’s hope that they will find their way back to Earth. In short, Janeway instinctively relies on each member of her crew’s having introjected the pre-oedipal mother, for it makes them susceptible to her style of command, which incorporates Starfleet’s humanist principles

tempered by maternal compassion – a kind of “Law of the Phallic Mother.” This far from the Federation, such power is a female captain’s best defence against mutiny – or worse.

To arrive at this conclusion, one need only compare *Voyager*’s fate with that of the *Equinox*. Similarly stranded in the Delta Quadrant, the *Equinox* has fared poorly – and not just because the ship is technologically less well endowed than *Voyager*. The *Equinox* has suffered terrible losses, not the least of which is the moral compass of its Captain, Rudy Ransom. Ransom remembers what the Prime Directive is – indeed, it still weighs on his conscience, although it no longer informs his leadership. He exploits his crew’s disciplined respect for the chain of command: like Dr. Crusher, they obey him because he’s the Captain. Thus has he overridden their scruples and involved them in slaughtering aliens, whose corpses are then converted into a powerful fuel for enhancing the performance of their warp engines and speeding up their return to Earth. When Janeway discovers that Ransom has betrayed every Federation principle she has struggled to uphold, she is so furious that their argument degenerates into the polarized one of rigid moral absolutes versus complete moral relativism, the issue at the very heart of the American culture wars. In essence, theirs is a nasty conflict between humanism at its worst and postmodernism taken to its amoral extreme – an interesting departure from Picard’s ongoing debate with Q in *TNG*. Fortunately, thanks to five years under her command, Janeway’s crew carry within them her “Law of the Phallic Mother,” invoking it even in those moments of crisis when Janeway herself violates it. As a consequence, it’s her first officer who saves her from making a mistake as egregious as Ransom’s – namely, torturing information out of one of Ransom’s officers. By contrast, when Ransom’s conscience finally erupts in a change of heart, his first officer, now thoroughly corrupted, leads a mutiny against him, bringing about Ransom’s destruction as well as his own (“*Equinox*”).

As a character, Janeway is constructed as an authority figure with an unabashed belief in women’s maternal instincts (a point to which I shall return). If *Voyager* fan fiction is any indication, this is precisely what makes Janeway popular with many female fans, as she reconciles some of the internal conflict experienced by female inheritors of second-wave feminism’s achievements. It’s also what makes her an easy target for any psychoanalytic critic driven by a need to expose *Voyager* as a reproducer of the patriarchal status quo. The latter easily trumps the former. However,

as Stuart Hall famously told us more than twenty years ago, consumers of popular culture are not “cultural dupes” (232). As illustrated by the graffiti that serves as the epigraph to this essay, *Star Trek* viewers can be active and critical participants in the production and negotiation of meaning. But rarely do academic and other professional critics give themselves permission to read the *Star Trek* text as fans read it – perhaps because this would require our reading it on its own terms, and this is a skill that has been bred out of us (see Harrison 270). By proposing a “Law of the Phallic Mother,” I am attempting to reconcile the desire of female fans with a critique of the mother-blaming that is bound to creep into any text that constructs female authority within a heteronormative framework. Besides, such a law can account for the enormous challenge faced by the Borg Queen in her power struggle with Janeway. The phallic mother’s power is dependent upon sexual reproduction and the psychic blueprint laid down in the pre-oedipal period. But the Borg method of reproduction is asexual, and insofar as the Borg collective can be said to possess a psychic blueprint, it’s not laid down psychosexually but rather, technologically. This poses all kinds of difficulties for Janeway vis-à-vis Seven of Nine.

In *Voyager*, the Queen of the Borg appears to have risen from the ashes of her demise, suggesting that she cannot be permanently defeated by either the brawny masculinity or the power of reason possessed by Picard and Data, the combination of which gives them the advantage in *First Contact*. In her confrontations with the Borg, Janeway succeeds by beating them at their own game. Upon her liberation of Seven of Nine from the Borg collective, the Captain informs her that she will remain on *Voyager* and work at reclaiming her humanity, whether she wants to or not. Janeway might just as well have said *You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile*. “Then you are no different from the Borg,” Seven lashes out in anger and contempt. Even Janeway’s most impressive attempts at sympathy and understanding are made to echo the Borg:

JANEWAY: I want to help you, but I need to understand what you’re going through.

SEVEN: Do not engage us in superficial attempts at sympathy!

JANEWAY: It’s obvious that you’re in pain, that you’re frightened, that you feel isolated, alone.

SEVEN: You are an individual, you are small. You cannot understand what it is to be Borg!

- JANEWAY: No. But I can imagine. You were part of a vast consciousness; billions of minds working together. A harmony of purpose and thought; no indecisions, no doubts; the security and strength of a unified will. And you've lost that.
- SEVEN: This drone is small now, alone. One voice. One mind. The silence is unacceptable! We need the others!
- JANEWAY: I can't give you back to the Borg. But you're not alone; you're part of a human community now; a human collective! We may be individuals but we live and work together. You can have some of the unity you require right here on *Voyager*.
- SEVEN: Insufficient.
- JANEWAY: It'll have to do. And the fact is, this community needs you.... We need your expertise, your cooperation. *You must comply.* ("The Gift")

Janeway's mapping out of Seven's future for her in a language she can understand establishes the mirroring effect that structures all of *Voyager's* encounters with the Borg. It also plays to the theme of "It takes a village to raise a child." For all its postfeminist appeal, this theme, as Berlant's summary of American political debate points out, is a sentiment that does not always harmonize with patriarchal family politics – and, I would add, with a post-9/11 world in which families are encouraged to close ranks and report any suspicious behaviour on the part of the neighbours, especially those of Middle-Eastern origin. Viewed in this new American context, these *Voyager* episodes seem more subversive than they did when they first aired. More to the point, as the above passage suggests, it's not captivity alone that accounts for Seven's successful integration into the ship's company but, more importantly, the tough-love maternalism that infuses Janeway's authority. This quality in Janeway turns out to be even more dangerous to the Borg than the toxin of individuality introduced into the collective by Hugh.

If Janeway is Seven of Nine's mother in this emerging family romance, then the Doctor is surely her father. As a hologram whose body is given substance in a complex interaction of "photons and force fields," he is the realization of his creator's fantasy. He is the motherless offspring of Starfleet cyberneticist Dr. Lewis Zimmerman, many of whose personality traits and desires are replicated in the hologram. Seven of Nine is, in turn, the realization of the hologram's fantasy, "a cross between Barbie and Tomb Raider Games heroine Lara Croft" (Cranny-Francis 158). Her

highly sexualized appearance, combined with her complete lack of interest in sexuality and the regimes of femininity, transforms her into the ultimate fetish – the phallic woman. Because her body is also a biotechnological war zone, through his management of it the Doctor also gets to play midwife in the drama of the drone’s return to human female form:

The iconography of this has caused much comment, as the Doctor performs a mixture of necessary and cosmetic operations on her. Under his ministrations her hair is regrown, blond, and at this stage up in a neat french pleat. Her complexion is peaches and cream, her eyes (one prosthetic) matching blue; the remaining sections of Borg implant are refashioned as ornamental body jewellery. Her figure (she wears skintight clothes) heavily accentuates the hourglass. (Barrett and Barrett 113–14)

Like Pygmalion presenting Galatea to Venus, the Doctor introduces his masterpiece to the Captain: “Fashion, of course, is hardly my forte. Nevertheless, I’ve managed to balance functionality and aesthetics in a pleasing enough manner” (“The Gift”). He will continue to play an active role in her rebirth, giving her lessons in the social graces associated with patriarchal femininity. And in the process – again, like Pygmalion – he will gradually fall in love with her. But, for Seven, resistance is not entirely futile: he is, after all, her father, and Janeway is no Venus. Seven will resist the Doctor’s awkward advances, just as her body resists surrendering the last 18 percent of its Borg technology, and her ferocious will resists surrendering her Borg designation.

Like the Queen of *First Contact*, Janeway is not satisfied with merely assimilating Seven by force. She wants Seven’s cooperation and her loyalty, and the welfare of the entire *Voyager* family is dependent upon the Captain’s success in getting them. As one would with a difficult child, Janeway achieves this goal by assigning her duties and incrementally increasing her freedom of access to areas of the ship beyond the cargo bay that serves as Seven’s quarters. Over time, despite several setbacks and confrontations that echo those of a stormy relationship between a mother and a pubescent daughter, the two women establish a relationship of trust. Slowly, Seven learns what it means to be part of another kind of collective – one bound together, not by physical force but rather, by force of circumstance and by loyalties borne of their success in working together

to beat the odds against their survival in an often hostile environment. Eventually, Seven is able to claim that she *freely* chooses to remain on *Voyager* under the command of Captain Janeway, who she calls “a resourceful leader” – which, in Borgspeak, is high praise indeed. In short, through the power of maternalism, Janeway achieves with Seven what the Borg Queen, through the power of sexual seduction, failed to achieve with Picard or Data. It’s hardly surprising, therefore, that the Queen decides on a change of strategy. Following Janeway’s lead, she will try to beat the Captain at her own game.

In the power struggle between Janeway and the Borg Queen, a third element is introduced, which allows for a slightly more complex treatment of the family values theme. In order to reconstruct the ship’s company as a legitimate family, the biological nuclear family – specifically, Seven’s family of origin – has to undergo a deconstruction. Initially, there is only a single entry in the Starfleet database on Magnus and Erin Hansen and their daughter Anika: “Her parents were unconventional,” Janeway tells her first officer: “They fancied themselves explorers, but wanted nothing to do with Starfleet or the Federation. Their names were last recorded at a remote outpost in the Omega sector. They refused to file a flight plan. Apparently, they aimed their little ship towards the Delta Quadrant and were never heard from again” (“The Gift”).

Seven is able to furnish a bit more information after she experiences an eruption of repressed memories of her childhood assimilation. Some months after her arrival aboard *Voyager*, her cranial hardware picks up a mysterious signal, which she interprets as the collective commanding her return. With two crewmembers in hot pursuit, she hijacks a shuttle and follows the signal to its source. It turns out to be an automated beacon still emanating from the eighteen-year-old wreck of her parents’ ship. Aboard the wreckage, she recalls celebrating her sixth birthday there. Then, another memory fragment surfaces: “My father did experiments,” she says, “They were very important and we had to travel a long way.” *Voyager* is able to recover the Hansens’ field notes and personal logs from the wreckage (“Raven”). These data reveal that the Hansens’ had been exobiologists with a particular interest in pursuing highly suspect theories about the Borg.

Traumatized by the return of her memories, Seven begins to resent her parents and refuses to have anything to do with their journals and field notes. “My parents underestimated the collective,” she tells the Doctor, “Because of their arrogance, I was raised by Borg.” But in preparation for a

daring raid on a Borg vessel, Janeway puts pressure on Seven to study her parents' research: "Look for any data that might give us a tactical edge," she orders. "My parents were assimilated," Seven responds contemptuously, "obviously their tactics were flawed." Thus their journals, in her view, are "irrelevant." "You say they're irrelevant – and I say you've been avoiding them," Janeway accuses ("Dark Frontier"). There is something of the domineering mother in the Captain's handling of this, for the emotional and psychological demands she is making on her surrogate daughter are more exploitive than therapeutic. After all, if what she wants is merely useful information about the Borg, any one of her officers could easily carry out this research. But not only does Janeway require the Hansens' data. By pressuring Seven to get reacquainted with her human ancestry, she reveals her impatience and her ambition to make Seven over in her own image. "Perhaps I'm pushing you too hard," she says, manipulating Seven's pride in her Borg "efficiency" in dealing with matters she considers irrelevant. Clearly, Janeway is deeply invested in Seven's individuation, and this raises the question of the degree to which the Captain is abusing her power of command to satisfy her ego.

The action of "Dark Frontier" is intercut with flashbacks to Seven's childhood on the *Raven*, where we get to see how the Hansens handled their responsibility as parents and their careers as scientists. They are either preoccupied with the details of their work or debating their next course of action, but this work is made to seem self-centred, as little Anika, although loved – at least, by her father – copes with a certain amount of neglect. Represented in these scenes is what American politicians like to call "the working family," well-meaning parents who are nevertheless too focussed on work and professional ambition to spend adequate time with their children – a trend blamed for everything from armed street gangs of underclass Black and Latino kids to school shootings by neglected middle-class white boys. These scenes aboard the *Raven* give added substance to Seven's charge of parental irresponsibility. Only Janeway is unambiguous in her praise of the Hansens as brilliant scientists and "great explorers," and even finds herself defending them against disapproval by the Doctor, who leans toward Seven's view. What is being set up in this episode is a cruel testing of Seven's loyalties: the collective, the ship's company, and her family of origin represent three different takes on family values, and each purports to have a claim on "the best interests of the child." In this episode, Seven has to grapple with all three at once.

Having discovered Janeway's plan to raid a Borg vessel and make off with a transwarp coil – a propulsion device that will take several years off *Voyager's* trip home – the Borg Queen decides to take advantage of the opportunity this gives her to reclaim Seven of Nine. Accessing the communications array that Seven still carries in her skull, the Queen makes her an offer she can't refuse: rejoin the collective or the Borg will assimilate *Voyager*. Seven's devotion to the *Voyager* crew is now so complete that she is willing to sacrifice herself on behalf of the welfare of her crewmates. When the raiding party transports to the Borg vessel and completes their heist, Seven refuses to leave, telling Janeway she has decided to rejoin the collective. Janeway and the rest of the Away Team narrowly escape, the Borg vessel disappears into subspace, and *Voyager* loses all track of it. Chakotay, relieved to report, "No sign of Borg activity – we made a clean getaway," intimates that Seven's decision to return to the Borg was probably inevitable. Janeway is unconvinced. With a rescue operation in mind, she searches the ship's sensor logs for even the flimsiest of scientific excuses for it – which is exactly what she finds. But combined with her "maternal instincts," it's all she needs.

Aboard the Borg vessel, Seven is expecting to be brutally reassimilated. But the Queen has other plans. Gone is her sexual seductiveness, and in its place the Borg version of maternalism. She begins by trying to convince Seven that the Borg did not abandon her these past two years, that in fact the Queen had placed her on *Voyager* so she could acquire experience that would add to the Borg's perfection. "You are unique," the Queen says, almost gently: "You must be tired.... We've adapted an alcove just for you. Go. It will help order your thoughts.... *Comply*." The following day, when Seven asks why the Queen has expended such significant resources to capture her, the Queen replies:

Isn't it obvious? You're going to help us assimilate humanity. We failed in our first attempt to assimilate Earth. And we won't succeed the next time unless we understand the nature of their resistance. We want you to be our eyes. Let us see humanity.... We want to keep you exactly the way you are. Otherwise, you would lose your human perspective. We don't want another drone. We want you.

Thus does the Queen appeal to the value Seven places on her newly acquired individuality and even feigns a measure of selfless concern for

Seven's welfare. She weaves these sentiments into what Seven had valued most as a Borg drone: the collective's single purpose – to unite all species in pursuit of perfection. But besides uncannily echoing Janeway's tough but sympathetic exchange with Seven upon her liberation from the collective, the Queen's new spin on the old story is completely out of character with the Borg's brutality and rapaciousness, and Seven cannot be taken in by such transparent lies. The Queen *is* the collective, and the collective is the Queen; her selfishness is absolute.

While leaving Seven's individuality intact, the Queen attempts to rekindle Seven's allegiance to the collective by imitating Janeway's strategies. She reminds Seven of her origins – Borg origins, that is – and, like Janeway, orders her to carry out a task loathsome to her, namely, assisting in the assimilation of a culture the Borg have just conquered. The Queen senses Seven's resistance: "Maybe I've been pushing you too quickly," she says, echoing Janeway's words on the matter of the Hansens' journals. To entice Seven – or, more accurately, coerce her – to cooperate, the Queen summons into Seven's presence the drone who was once her father. Overwhelmed by memories of her affection for him, Seven's resolve begins to weaken, and the Queen leaps to exploit it: "Your family's here. You're here. Be one with us again." But this strategy backfires. Seven's trust in Janeway is rewarded when, at this moment, in an act that collapses the selfless/selfish dichotomy altogether, the Captain risks everything – her crew, her ship, her life – in a daring rescue operation. Janeway cleverly gains access to the Queen's chamber and completes the circle of competing family representatives surrounding Seven and demanding her loyalty. Heart on her sleeve, and armed with only a phaser rifle, Janeway faces down the Queen and all her superior technology – and wins.

Clearly, emotional blackmail is no substitute for trust. As Julia Houston notes, "[t]he Borg, after all, have no need to trust each other. Their thoughts are one. Trust only becomes necessary when there is the possibility of doubt. By trying to deal with Seven as an individual, the Queen puts herself in a situation she is ill-equipped to handle, for without trust the Queen's manipulations are all too obvious" (1999b). Thus, from Seven's perspective, there is no contest in this futile power struggle between her two formidable stepmothers. But the similarities between the two are as important as the differences. There is no foolproof way of distinguishing between selfish and selfless motives when it comes to parenting. The binary oppositions that furnish conservative family ideology with its moral certainty are every

bit as false as the Queen's performance of maternalism. However, Janeway may cross the line at times, confusing her personal ambitions with Seven's welfare, but unlike the Queen, she is capable of engaging the perpetual struggle to balance them out.

Because *Star Trek* is wedded to the heterosexual imperative, "Dark Frontier" tries to evoke terror through its obvious allusions to "Best of Both Worlds" and *First Contact*. Within that imperative, the reconstruction of the Borg as feminine means that the collective's threat is *ipso facto* sexual, and what it threatens is masculinity. However, in this particular episode, where the female characters occupy the whole of centre stage, most of the male sexual anxiety provoked by the Queen is behind the camera. Our only visual reminder of the extent of the sexual threat appears when the Queen presents Seven with an image of her castrated father. In this way, the Borg illustrate Anne Balsamo's disappointment in images of cyborgs that reproduce cultural gender stereotypes. In Balsamo's view, the best that can be said of female cyborg images is that they "do *more* to challenge the opposition between human and machine than do male cyborgs because femininity is culturally imagined as less compatible with technology than is masculinity."

This is to say that because our cultural imagination aligns masculinity and rationality with technology and science, male gendered cyborgs fail to radically challenge the distinction between human and machine. Female cyborgs, on the other hand, are culturally coded as emotional, sexual, and often, naturally maternal. It is these very characteristics which more radically challenge the notion of an organic-mechanical hybrid. Female cyborgs embody cultural contradictions which strain the technological imagination. Technology isn't feminine, and femininity isn't rational. (Balsamo 148–49)

Balsamo's observation is useful for locating where the threat really lies in "Dark Frontier." Technologically determined, it's the Queen's inability to reproduce a convincing simulation of the maternal that marks her as monstrous. She has none of those maternal instincts with which Janeway's character is invested, nor do her technologically reproduced "progeny" possess a psychology that would incline them to respond to such instincts. Indeed, it's their absence that constitutes her phallic power. She can provide (in Janeway's words) "the security and strength of a unified will," but

by definition she cannot nurture the soul, which humanism regards as a necessary defence against precisely the kind of all-consuming mechanical materialism she represents.

But there is more to the mirroring effect in “Dark Frontier” than a simple contest between phallic mothers. Casting Janeway’s *Voyager* in the role of the aggressor whose single-minded purpose is the appropriation of technology, and the Borg in the role of reclamer of one of their own for the sake of her human individuality, defamiliarizes both roles by levelling the moral landscape between them. The resulting illustration of how easily enlightened humanism slips across the “Dark Frontier” and into the ethical shadows offers us a glimpse into how the demonization of the Other can sometimes rebound onto the demonizer. “By my count, we’ve added at least two years to our journey by avoiding the Borg,” says Janeway: “I’m tired of turning tail every time we detect a cube.” This is all the justification she needs for ignoring her cautious first officer: “Better safe than assimilated,” he warns. Fans of Captain Kirk’s style of command would likely approve of Janeway in this episode, for she is confident to the point of cockiness, relishes the danger of the mission, and exhibits no qualms about violating the Prime Directive. “This is no time for protocol,” she says to her crew, as she orders them to get started on a plan for the heist. Her choice of target is a vulnerable scout ship, heavily damaged from an ion storm and “limping home” at low warp. Animated by the prospect of beating the Borg at the game they invented, Janeway likens her mission to the theft of gold from Fort Knox, and Tom Paris even makes a reference to a similar heist attempted by the greedy Ferengi, arch-capitalists of the galaxy whose acquisitiveness rivals that of the Borg.

The Borg’s unambiguous construction as the evil Other makes it easy to justify Janeway’s motives and methods in this episode. After all, she and her crew are the good guys; their desire for more resources is our desire. This makes their semi-crippled target fair game, just as the vulnerable and tempting targets of our own recent aggression – Afghanistan, with its strategic access to the Caspian Sea petroleum deposits, and Iraq, possessor of the second largest oil reserves in the world – are rendered fair game through the construction of them as terrorist-infested states that threaten the security of the “civilized” West. At this point in the *Voyager* saga, Janeway has not yet encountered Captain Ransom, whose slaughter of aliens as high-octane fuel to speed the *Equinox* back to the comforts of home is all too resonant with the atrocities and their political justification currently served up for us on

the six o'clock news. Janeway's reckless overreaction to Ransom's violation of the Prime Directive may be read as a psychological defence mechanism, a denial of her own questionable behaviour in "Dark Frontier," where shaving a few thousand light-years off her own journey home almost cost her the life of a valued crewmember and surrogate daughter. Indeed, when Ransom asks if she's ever broken the Prime Directive, her answer is something of a surprise: "Never," she insists, avoiding his gaze: "Bent it on occasion, and even then, it was a difficult choice." This lie signals a radical dislocation of her principles and her practise. While preaching rigid adherence to Starfleet protocol because "if we turn our backs on our principles, we stop being human," she prosecutes with evangelical zeal – and against the advice of her two co-parents, Chakotay and Tuvok – an appallingly inhumane punishment of Ransom and his crew. In this episode, as in "Dark Frontier," this behaviour almost costs her Seven of Nine. Clearly Janeway's "maternal instincts" are not so instinctual after all ("Equinox").

This theme of maternal instincts – or rather, the absence of them – is addressed again in "Unimatrix Zero." The episode is set in a *Star Trek* version of cyberspace – a virtual Garden of Eden constructed through the collective effort of several Borg drones who carry a genetic marker that protects their unconscious minds from annihilation by the assimilation process. Unlike the vast majority of drones, who experience nothing while they regenerate in their alcoves aboard various Borg vessels scattered throughout the galaxy, those who exhibit the genetic mutation slip into this shared dream, a virtual community where their individuality can flourish and their avatars enjoy interpersonal relationships. As they recall nothing of this dreamworld when they emerge from their regeneration cycle, it is impossible for the Queen to get the information she needs to correct this potentially destabilizing "imperfection" in the collective. Echoing the female monsters of myth who eat their young, she kills and dismembers drones in an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve the crucial information from their cortical implants. At one point in the narrative, the Queen devises a way to project a virtual version of herself into Unimatrix Zero, where she encounters the avatar of a small boy who the Borg have recently assimilated. In a conversation with him in which she performs a frigid imitation of Janeway's maternalist style, all her mystery as a personalized projection of the entire collective – a paradox that so intrigued us in *First Contact* – is stripped away. She reveals herself to be a drone like all the others in that she has a pre-assimilation

history as a humanoid individual who had been assimilated along with her parents and other inhabitants of her planet of origin. Within this new and mundane understanding of her being, she becomes not much more than an especially ambitious drone risen to the position of CEO in charge of corporate mergers, hostile takeovers, and ruthless quality control. The stage is now set for a conflict of Victorian proportions. Like a rapacious industrialist presiding over her dark satanic mills, this reconfigured Queen is an even more appropriate target for Janeway's maternal (post)feminism. Janeway triumphs by infiltrating the Queen's vast industrial complex, organizing the genetically marked vanguard of its oppressed working class, and liberating it to lead a revolution on behalf of its genetically less fortunate comrades.

Maternal feminism is not an unreasonable interpretation of Janeway's project in "Unimatrix Zero." The best that can be said of her act of piracy in "Dark Frontier" is that it is motivated by guilt for having stranded her crew in the Delta Quadrant; at worst, it's a case of self-interest masquerading as a justifiable act of aggression. But in "Unimatrix Zero," both Janeway and her officers are clear that their duty is to respond to the distress call from the drone resistance movement. Not even an offer from the Queen to speed *Voyager* home via Borg transwarp technology can tempt Janeway into abandoning her mission. Even the cautious Chakotay is on side. "The way I see it, risking the safety of *Voyager* is a small price to pay," he says: "If we help these people, this could be a turning point in our battle with the Borg." To put it another way, this mission is a matter of Janeway's extending her maternalism beyond the circle of the *Voyager* family. Given that she seeks to liberate drones who actually desire liberation, she makes amends for having forced it on Seven of Nine. Unlike the Queen, who destroys those drones over whom she cannot have absolute control, Janeway has no designs on those whose liberation she facilitates. Rather, she encourages them to embrace their liberty as they choose. In short, this is indeed "a turning point" in Janeway's competitive struggle with the Borg Queen. If this interpretation sounds like an "idealization" of Janeway's maternalism – or of maternal feminism – perhaps, to borrow Sara Ruddick's phrase in the epigraph to this chapter, it has something to do with "the mother-blaming widespread in our society."

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Despite the strain she puts on the technological imagination of patriarchy, the Queen in these *Voyager* episodes is a disappointment for which even the most wilful of misreadings cannot entirely compensate. In *First Contact*, the Queen's character had been consistent with her visual presentation, and Alice Krige, the South African actor who played her so superbly, understood the Queen's postmodernist possibilities. The femininity of Krige's Queen is at once hilariously exaggerated and chillingly evil. In the *Voyager* episodes, she is played by Susanna Thompson, who was handed scripts that in no way correspond with the sexy costume and makeup of the character. But this is the challenge posed by all cyborg characters, who are by design – and Donna Haraway's definition – a bundle of contradictions. The binary opposition around which Thompson was challenged to work is patriarchy's oldest and perhaps most stubborn: mother/temptress. The possibility of being both is largely up to the actor and her director to realize, but in Thompson's Queen, mother and temptress cancel each other out. Happily for *Voyager* fans, Krige was engaged to reprise her interpretation in *Voyager's* final episode – the ultimate battle for matriarchal domination of the no-man's-land between Delta and Alpha Quadrants, and Janeway's most daring exhibition of phallic power before returning to the oedipal stable for possible gelding.

Thompson's serviceable but less than inspired performance gave me a greater appreciation for Jeri Ryan's talent, even if the Seven of Nine character presented her with a different and perhaps easier binary around which to work: namely, sexual/rational. Ryan makes the dislocation between her character's highly sexualized visual image and her technological "efficiency" as conveyed through her dialogue the most engaging thing about the character. Her "phallic woman" image even provides an opportunity for a bit of postmodern fun. In "Night," Tom Paris takes Seven to the holodeck and coaxes her into playing the role of Constance Goodheart in a scene from his holonovel. A testosterone fuelled adolescent fantasy that draws on Tom's extensive knowledge of twentieth-century American popular culture, this cross between *Flash Gordon* and *Lost in Space* is a black-and-white simulation featuring all the requisite stereotypes: Dr. Chaotica, the dastardly villain; Chaotica's ungainly giant robot; Captain Proton, "Spaceman First Class, protector of Earth, scourge of intergalactic evil," played by Tom; and Captain Proton's "secretary," Constance Goodheart, who "tag[s] along on all the missions." She is the obligatory buxom blonde, vacant-eyed and programmed to emit an ear-splitting scream in all the appropriate places.

“Now, when we last saw our heroes they had just retaken their rocket ship,” Tom explains enthusiastically, cuing Seven to get into character: “Dr. Chaotica has escaped, but he’s left behind his trusty robot to foil Captain Proton.” Tom activates the scene, and the robot lumbers noisily in Seven’s direction: “Citizen of Earth, surrender!” it commands. The robot’s accordion-pleated arms rise from the elbow joints like twin phalluses and thrust out at her: “Do not resist!” “I am Borg,” says Seven superciliously. Clearly bored, she deftly opens a hatch in the robot’s chest, reaches in, and yanks out its electrical wiring. Exaggerating the castrating effect Seven has on all males who dare to approach her with amorous intent, the robot winds down and whirrs to a stop; its arms fall, unpleat, and droop flaccidly to the floor. “The robot has been neutralized,” says Seven flatly: “May I leave now?” “C’mon, Seven,” complains Tom, “give it a chance – the galaxy’s at stake!” This scene may well have been written as a cheeky response to all the critical flak about Seven of Nine as *Voyager’s* pandering to the puerile tastes of *Star Trek’s* male viewers. In addition, Tom’s “Captain Proton” holonovel manages to poke a little self-reflexive fun at the SciFi TV serial itself, and even takes a shot at its appropriation by academics. When the Doctor criticizes the simulation as “a waste of photonic energy” and tries to shut it down so that he can use the holodeck to rehearse a scene from the opera *Don Carlos*, the hi-culture/lo-culture insult puts Tom on the defensive: “Take a look around you,” he implores: “This is how the twentieth century saw the future. We’re studying sociology!” The Doctor is unimpressed: “Perhaps you can teach a course at Starfleet Academy: ‘Satan’s Robot: An Historical Overview.’” It’s unfortunate that a little of this ludic postmodernism doesn’t spill over into the family values theme – which is not to say that humour is absent from *Voyager’s* representation of maternalism. Some of Ryan’s most interesting work is apparent in those episodes where Seven, like the Borg Queen, is challenged to come up with a maternal style – which is where my narrative is headed now.