What happens to the discourse of philosophy when it is produced by embodied, sexuate, reproductive subjects? This is one of the questions posed in Robyn Ferrell’s wide-ranging book while engaging with theorists such as Marx, Beauvoir, Heidegger, Irigaray, Butler, and Lévi-Strauss on topics including reproductive technology, the labor of parenting, the temporality of feminist politics, phallic signification, kinship patterns, and masochist pleasure. Rather than building a single argument in linear fashion from chapter to chapter, the book explores the myriad relations between reproduction, technology, and feminism in different ways, drawing on a range of disciplinary resources. Common themes, such as the significance of embodiment for feminist theory and politics, and basic philosophical concepts, such as genre and copula, are developed in different ways throughout the book. One of my aims in this review will be to gather these themes and concepts together, exploring their multifaceted significance in Ferrell’s work.

Ferrell’s analysis of the copula first arises in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan, the phallus is the copula which joins subject to object, producing both linguistic relation and sexual relation. Since the same signifier distinguishes those who have the phallus from those who lack it, there is only one libido and one logic of distinction/connection for Lacan. Accordingly, “The sexual relation is one the male subject has with himself, via the object of woman, and it never touches the other” (95). What would it take to imagine the copula of sexual, logical, and ontological connection/distinction in a way that does not always already belong to the masculine? Ferrell addresses this question in what I take to be the conceptual heart of this book, “The Figure of the Copula” (Chapter 7). In its most general sense, a copula “expresses the making of identity in relation” (109). For example, in the sentence “The cat is grey,” the copula “is” connects cat to grey, subject to predicate. This connection does not collapse the distinction between two terms but maintains them in relation to one another. Etymologically and conceptually, the term copula is related to copulation (sexual union) and copulative (which can refer to either grammatical connection or sexual union). But while Lacan’s phallic copula already belongs (if only in phantasy) to one of the terms it is meant to join together, there is no sense in our grammatical example that the “is” belongs more properly to the cat or to grey. The verb “to be” is not something, and it cannot be annexed to one side or the other of the sentence. Rather, it marks the hinge, or what I would call the point of indifference, between distinction...
and connection. The copula makes two potentially unrelated terms into a couple without suppressing one or the other.

The interrelation between logical, ontological, and sexual aspects of the copula open up fascinating possibilities for feminist theoretical inquiry, although the implications are not confined to theory. Ferrell traces the logic of the copula through her analysis of technology, including reproductive technology. Beginning with the claim that “[t]he copula is kin to technology” (159), she follows through the possibilities, but also the dangers, of technological thinking. For Ferrell, technology is “not merely a name for machine-based action, but any arrangement of resources that allows for the production of a desired end” (38). In this sense, even feminism could be understood as a technology for producing gender equity, for “reproducing (feminist) subjects” (43), or even for producing “gender” as a concept and area of inquiry. Drawing on Heidegger’s philosophical etymology of the word, we could say that a technology is the art or skill (techne) of bringing something forth (tiktein, to give birth). Technology reproduces something that would not otherwise come into being automatically or “naturally.” The process of reproduction, however, would not function without a certain degree of automatism. Whether we consider technological, literary, political, or physical reproduction, there is both an element of willed intervention (an “arrangement of resources”) and an element of unwilled contingency, a proliferation or spawning by which that which is made also makes and remakes itself: the fetus grows in its mother, the political movement takes on a life of its own, a new genre of feminist sci-fi emerges, mobile phones become a basic necessity, and so forth. This self-proliferation is both the strength and danger of technology, and Ferrell suggests that the technology of feminism is no different from other technologies in its ambivalence.

But what is the danger of feminism? What is its product or “desired end”? Ferrell calls feminism a technology in the sense that its “conceptions—equality for women, for example—have become material events” (159), becoming “real” in the form of universal suffrage, equal opportunity legislation, laws against domestic and sexual abuse, and so forth. But the very language of equal rights with which feminism has by and large developed its technological apparatus can take on a life of its own, working sometimes for and sometimes against feminist interests. Fetal rights and fathers’ rights compete with women’s rights like commodities in the marketplace; women’s rights are pitted against black rights, religious rights, or the right to traditional cultural values, leaving some women torn between seemingly incompatible aspects of themselves. In relation to reproductive technology in particular, the same techniques that give women greater control over their own reproductive
power, such as IVF technology, can also be used to commodify or diminish this power. Part of Ferrell’s lesson in this book is that every technology, including feminist political technologies, have both their danger and their saving power. If we join this claim to Ferrell’s analysis of capitalism throughout the book, then the implication is that many small-scale, locally based feminist techniques could work better for women than a single transnational feminist monopoly. The organization of the book itself, with its numerous approaches to specific but related issues, already gives us a concrete example of how this technique could take shape.

In addition to the logic of the copula and the ambivalence of reproductive technologies, Ferrell explores the concept of genre for feminist philosophy. Genre is both generative and generic; as such, it refers to the “reproduction of order” (160). In literature, genre refers to a group of texts that are “the same, but different” (160), sharing for example a common pattern, structure, or theme but telling a different story. Each new text reproduced within a genre brings forth “a future recognizable to the past and continuous with the present, while novel enough not to seem to be mere repetition, as a ‘clone’” (160). Likewise, sexuate genre (or gender) brings forth women who are the same but different from other women, and men who are the same but different from other men. But what precisely is “the same” that makes a woman identifiable as such without reducing her to merely a particular instance of her more general and generic gender? Does gender make the woman, or do women (in particular, feminist women) make gender, i.e., as a concept with which to analyze and dismantle patriarchal power? Furthermore, what is the relation between discourse and subjectivity, such that it makes sense to speak of both texts and embodied subjects in relation to genre?

While I cannot respond to these questions at length here, I will draw on Ferrell’s final chapter, “The Technology of Gender,” for my closing remarks. A literary genre does not exist apart from the texts that constitute it; and even if a key feature of genre is its capacity to reproduce texts which recognizably belong to itself, its other key feature (that the texts not be exact duplicates, that they tell their stories differently) opens the genre to transformations from within. For example, Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time belongs to the genre of science fiction and plays with the boundaries of this genre, transforming it from within. Does the feminist do something similar with the feminine gender? This sort of transformation from within—women changing the meaning of “woman”—is central to feminist labor, and it is most effective when reproduced across the generations, both the same and different, in as many different contexts as possible.
But the reproducibility of genre is not innocent, and it does not always generate positive changes which expand and diversify possibilities for women. Part of the ambivalence of genre—and perhaps also of gender—is its exposure to commodification. If you liked *The Matrix* you will love (or you will at least pay money to see) *Matrix 2*, *Matrix 3*, etc. If your mother was a feminist, why not try *Girl Power*? It comes with three collectable stickers and a do-it-yourself jewellery kit! Precisely because genre reproduces the same differently, it is capable of generating a sense of novelty while reinforcing or even restricting conventional generic boundaries. Linked with the replicative power of modern technology and the voracious appetite of contemporary capitalism, the power of genre poses formidable challenges for anyone who desires radical social change. Ferrell’s development of this concept in relation to feminist issues helps to clarify the task of contemporary feminism, which both inherits a legacy from first- and second-wave feminists and also faces different challenges—but also new possibilities—in an increasingly technological age.

LISA GUENTHER, *University of Auckland*

*Experiencing the Postmetaphysical Self: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*
FIONOLA MEREDITH

In this stimulating and well written book, Meredith proposes an antifoundational and hermeneutic/deconstructive approach which she believes escapes the pitfalls of deconstruction while assuming the best of hermeneutics. Following the poststructural erasure of the subject, the consequences for notions of experience, selfhood, and self-presence have been sizeable and, she argues, largely misappropriated. In response, Meredith reappraises the experiential in such a way that while she acknowledges there may no longer be a sovereign subject, she believes we may still meaningfully engage a notion of partial self-presence. To that end, she examines Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Althusser, Ricoeur, Gadamer, and others, so as first to diagnose what she views as “the ultra-negativity of post-structuralist thought” (2), and then to reposition what she determines to be salvageable from both sides of this less than clear philosophical divide.

Meredith argues that post-Saussurean/structuralist thinking, which she identifies chiefly with Derrida’s deconstruction, has reduced the