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**The Impossible Feast of the Uncanny Technowoman:  
A Plural Feminist Cyborg Writes of the Possibilities for Science  
Fiction and Potent Body Politics**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of  
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in Psychology**

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## Abstract

This research embodies Donna Haraway's (1991) feminist cyborg as a potent political figure for women and their bodies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. The violences done to women all too often define them (Malabou, 2011), confining them to the heterosexual matrix characterised by their objectification and 'excesses.' The multiplicities and pluralities of 'woman' disrupt traditional psychological science that counts and categorises. Re-routing psychology through the hybridity and non-fixity of the science fiction genre, new possibilities for psychological knowledge production emerge, including figures (such as cyborgs), art installations and hyperdimensional arachnids through which to think new thoughts (Haraway, 2016). Through the figure of a feminist cyborg, 'woman' can be understood as politically potent through her multiplicities, partialities, simultaneities and contradictions. After rendering Haraway's feminist cyborg through the science fiction genre, the thesis takes on a creative form to re-think the notion of apocalypse, re-theorise the uncanny, then explore a potentially networked series of figures, internet users and movements (such as Human Barbies, internet folklore, pro-rape forums) that structure women's bodies in ways that re-assert the heterosexual matrix, as well as in ways that rebuild women *outside of* the heterosexual matrix. Re-figuring 'woman' outside of the heterosexual matrix could perhaps open new spaces in which to think women's body politics differently in perpetually networked, ever-expanding technoworlds.



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## Chapter One: User Guide, Terms and Conditions

My family was somewhat late to computers and later still to the internet. My first experiences with computers through the 1990s were games played at friends' houses, and in the children's section of Auckland Museum, 'Weird & Wonderful,' that had a section full of computers with 'educational' games. I was notoriously difficult to pry away from those clunky white-grey computers, whether with my family or on school trips. 'Weird & Wonderful' looks different now, with those white-grey computing dinosaurs replaced with sleek, thin black screens infinitely more capable and connected. When I was last at Auckland Museum, children flittered back and forth between the screens and the other things to look at in the discovery centre. They tapped the devices with mundane ease, got what they needed (or got bored) and moved on. These ever-moving children looked very different from me and my child-peers, buddying up two to a computer and jittering in our seats as we waited an eternity for the white-grey machine to boot up and load new worlds for us to explore.

One of the first full computer games I ever played was 'Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego?' – an 'educational' game in which I helped track down notorious criminal mastermind Carmen Sandiego. Carmen would leave clues as to which country she was hiding in, I would follow them and eventually catch up to her as she gathered significant world artefacts, hoarding Treasures of Knowledge for herself. Carmen, digital as she was/is, was a prolific user of technology to aid in her escapes from justice, but more importantly, technology enabled her to taunt me, her would-be captor. Through videos and satellite phones and other fancy spy devices, Carmen would deploy

obnoxious and abusive barbs about how bad I was at catching her like when she interrupted electronic communications (easily, she adds) to say that she was "...a little disappointed: This hasn't been half the challenge I thought it would be" (The Learning Company, 2001). Carmen was a bad girl and she used every available technology to not only be bad-er, but to ensure we could all see how bad she was. At some point, I do not know when, I wondered why we were chasing Carmen all over the world, and not any one of the other boy criminals who were doing even worse things than Carmen ever did, just with less flair. What was so particularly deviant about Carmen Sandiego that required this global (wo)man hunt?

From my days jittering in computer chairs and being abused by a digital one-woman crime wave, emerged curiosity about the embodied experiences of technology and how these experiences have so rapidly changed and shifted over such a short space of time, even for the singular, individual me. I used to jitter for so long, willing a computer to respond to me and boot up quickly, but now a minute seems a lifetime, I have things to do, HURRY UP! And while Carmen's obnoxious interrupting abuse still delights me, the chase is too slow and I cannot beat her with an unconventional object once I catch her like I can in other games (not that I would want to beat her, but the simplicity of her game style compared to modern video games renders her a tad... cheap and easy...). While the embodied waiting for technology to whirl into life (either through the booting of a machine, or the stunted step-by-step game-play of early video games) was glacial compared to modern advances in personal computing (and access to personal computing), the embodied immediacy and simultaneity of technological connectivity in the West is a key rapid movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that entangles bodies and technologies. Today, a man can casually, yet dramatically, connect millions of abusers to a singular young woman (see Landsbaum, 2016). A woman can casually,

yet dramatically, become a meme through her sexually assaulted body (see Bates, 2014). Suddenly, my jittering body at a computer moved beyond that of anticipatory excitement at what awaited inside that slow machine, to an urgent anxiety about how bodies and technologies are becoming potently connected faster and more expansively than ever before. My jittering research then explores the urgency of the technopositionings that produce ‘women’ and their bodies, sometimes exploiting technological vulnerabilities much as Carmen Sandiego obnoxiously interrupted communications to obnoxiously taunt her pursuers (including me) again and again. My positioning as a poststructural(ish) feminist technowoman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West produces a fraught connectivity with our social embeddedness in ultra-enmeshed patriarchal technologies that are now so mundane, so taken-for-granted. I must use a computer to write up this research. I must *write* this research. The ubiquity of technology to connect to, and the uncritical ease with which we connect troubles me, not in the sense that I want to shut it all down, but in the sense that we are, at best, *unsure* of what is being built, destroyed or mutated as we connect. And ‘woman’s’ position as highly constructed, destructed and monstrous suggests her positioning in the technoworld is dangerous and full of possibility.

### **\*Pokes ‘Woman’\***

An argument that focuses on ‘women’ seemingly either assumes ‘women’ as a unified category or disintegrates ‘women’ to the point of ‘nothing-worth-politicising.’ Through those two investigative options ‘women’ are rendered subjugated: either unified and dominated in their categorical opposition to ‘men,’ or dissolved into incoherent bits and pieces that can never quite become anybody. Debating what a ‘woman’ may or may not be is not a luxury we can enjoy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (or in any century, in hindsight). Indeed, debates about what constitutes ‘woman’ seem to end as



they begin: violently.<sup>1</sup> Descriptions of ‘women’ fast become problematic, as ways for articulating ‘woman’ have been produced through the binaries that define ‘man’ and justify his position as first in the man/woman binary (Braidotti, 1989; Grosz, 1989; Morgan, 1998; Potts, 2002). Woman, then, as an ‘other’ to man, has become multiple, partial and fragmented, and as Malabou (2011) suggests, denied an essence. The question perhaps shifts then from *what* woman is, to *how* women can be.

For Malabou (2011) “... “woman” has never been able to define herself other than through the violence done to her” (p. vi).<sup>2</sup> One of the things we best know about whatever a ‘woman’ might be, is that she is perpetually moving through violence. Globally, ‘women’ are beaten, raped and killed at astronomical rates (García-Moreno et al., 2013); they die while giving birth (Alkema et al., 2016) or aborting (Grimes et al., 2006) and before or shortly after they are born (Bongaarts & Guilimoto, 2015); they are poor and underemployed (Bullock, 2013); and they are desperately sick (Carr, Green & Ponce, 2015). What somewhat unifies these ‘women’s issues’ (if we must unify them) is the body: abused, sick, dead, under-utilised, under-nourished, contained and controlled. What we understand as ‘woman’ can be described as “objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body” (Grosz, 1994, p. xiv). So when a ‘postfeminist’ “theoretical violence that refuses to give women

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<sup>1</sup> The figure of Haraway’s (1991) cyborg is inherently intersectional; however, she shifts the metaphor from the ‘intersection’ towards networking, multiplicity and simultaneity. Such a shift becomes problematic through the dominant Western imagery of a cyborg: thin and white. ‘Others’ may have an understandably tough time seeing themselves in dominant images of the cyborg precisely because those images are dominant. Through this thesis, I draw attention to and problematise such images through the rendering of figures, rather than images, to bring the multiplicities, simultaneities and contradictions of the category ‘woman’ through so that ‘others’ may see themselves (even if just partially), beyond their neoliberal categories, in the figure of the cyborg as she moves potently and politically through cyberspace.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of woman being defined by the violences done to her will recur through my research. While the conventions of APA referencing demand I cite the source in full each time I utilise the idea, I am going to break some rules by considering Malabou’s words gifts to continue referencing without referencing, connecting text with text.

an essence” (Malabou, 2011, p. 96) emerges, understanding what constitutes ‘woman’ as through the “violence done to her” begrudgingly opens space for new ways to understand women’s embodied experiences.

Opening up new spaces suggests an interrogation of the old spaces. Binary thinking privileges the (masculine, productive) mind over the (feminised, passive) body (Grosz, 1994), and produces women as “somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men” (p. 14). The production of women and their bodies through gendered binaries (masculine/feminine, active/passive, mind/body) makes for restrictive ways to inhabit a woman’s body, characterised by, as Malabou (2011) suggests, the violence done to it. Does ‘woman’ being characterised by violence mean she is apocalyptically doomed?

Women became so quickly, so dramatically and so violently a focal point of the internet (mainly through pornography (Heider & Harp, 2002)) and technology in general (for example, those old ads for kitchen technology targeted toward wives (Holdsworth, 1988)). Technological advancements, whether through warfare, sex or the kitchen, have always been gendered amplifications of the violence against women, or at the very least, the binaries that produce violence against women. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have been characterised by rapid technological advancement, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century in particular has seen that rapid technological advancement enter into people’s homes and personal lives with proliferating access to increasingly sophisticated technologies. It is not simply the ubiquity of mobile phones, for example, that needs troubling, but the increasing ease of access to and use of technology within mobile phones that can enable violence against women (Harris, 2004). When mobile phone technology was limited to texting and calling, abusing women you knew became a little easier, as a technotool could be easily accessed in the palm of your hand, but such

potentials for abuse were still largely restricted to geographic clusters of people who knew each other or could share phone numbers. A woman and her abuser(s) carried the tool with them wherever they went, but the phone number still acted as a buffer for threats from unknown sources. Through the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the capabilities of the humble mobile phone have proliferated, with the introduction of internet access that enables instantaneous connection to websites, forums, social media and applications where the pool of women to abuse expands from those women you know, to any online woman, at any time, from anywhere. The rapid, expansive shifts from abusers having to physically locate a woman to abuse, to writing abusive letters, to abusive phone calls and texts, to ubiquitous instantaneous timeless access to the internet has (almost) *necessitated* the amplification of gender and gender-based violence. Such shifts have occurred so rapidly and so uncritically there has been no time to re-do gender even in small ways that might mitigate the potential new violence against women that ubiquitous internet connectivity can facilitate. If women were historically more beaten, raped and killed in larger numbers than men when access to women's bodies was somewhat restricted by low technological connectivity, how do women and their bodies survive in a 21<sup>st</sup> century characterised by intensive technological connectivity? As the 21<sup>st</sup> century marches on, technologies like virtual reality, remote surgeries and self-driving cars are immanent, on the verge of emerging as the next phases of ubiquitous, mundane technology. The internet and its now mundane ubiquitous connectivity has already granted excessive access to women's bodies (bodies that have already been excessively accessed); how will virtual reality exploit this access further? And how can women survive it? What happens when women unplug the binaries that constrain them and re-wire them? How do women's bodies function when

disconnected from the masculinist mainframe? What would happen if women used alternative power sources, perhaps sources they built themselves? Jitter, jitter...

## Body Reboot

*Haraway draws our attention to the construction and manipulation of docile, knowable bodies in our present social system. She invites us to think of what new kinds of bodies are being constructed right now; that is, what kind of gender-system is being constructed under our very noses. (Braidotti, 2006, p. 198)*

The main questions of my research are concerned, deeply, with the excesses to the binaries that have produced ‘woman’ through ‘the violence done to her’ in the imaginative political hope of “a new kind of politics based on temporary and mobile coalitions and therefore on affinity” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 211) where ‘woman’ is not a definite or defined being, but an expansive series of partial points of hyperconnectivity.<sup>3</sup> As such, this research is performed in the feminist tradition of “opening up of thought to what is new, different, and hitherto unthought” (Grosz, 1994, p. xiv), privileging the third options incorporated into or rejected by binary thought and gleefully horrified by how women’s embodiment may become terrifyingly new if they take up their excesses: “Still, I believe that *the word “woman” has a meaning outside the heterosexual matrix.* It is tedious to keep bringing it back there, making it the site of a constant parody...” (Malabou, 2011, pp. 135-136). For Grosz (1994) there is political potency in re-writing women’s bodies as positive rather than through their traditional binaried ‘lack’: to “be

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<sup>3</sup> A reminder here about the shift in metaphor away from the ‘intersection’ and towards the networked cyborg: I will not always be explicitly naming categories of neoliberal identity. Instead, I engage with social power relations through the formation and movement of figures. Categories, like race, may appear explicitly where connections become particularly dense in the network, but figures are drawn through social power relations, not neoliberal identities.

able to talk of the body outside or in excess of binary pairs” (p. 24) opens formidable possibilities for women’s embodiment.

Questions about ‘woman’ and the violence done to her, remind us that “thinking about the subject amounts to rethinking her bodily roots” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 207). A woman’s bodily ‘roots’ are typically constructed as natural, as the metaphor suggests, positioning woman alongside, or within, nature (as opposed, in the binary, to masculine culture) (Haraway, 1991), and therefore to be dominated (Griffin, 1997). Woman’s ‘naturalness’ focuses talk of her and her body towards so-called ‘natural’ topics, like fertility and health; how the woman’s body functions and can be controlled. Re-thinking these ‘natural’ bodily ‘roots’ not only challenges what these ‘roots’ enable and constrain for women and their bodies, but also opens space for new forms of embodiment that might not ‘root’ women to the ground.

To ask more questions about the body and women’s embodied experiences, my research brings with it the idea that the body is the “political, social, and cultural object par excellence” (Grosz, 1994, p. 18), uprooted from the fixity of individualism and the mind/body split. Since before I was jittering in anxious connection to computers, feminist poststructuralists have been engaged in the problematising of binary thinking and the categorising individualism such thinking privileges, and enables and constrains for women’s bodies. Opening up the body (so to speak) to social and political production works to, at the very least, disrupt the dominant ideas about certain fixed or ‘given’ categories that the body belongs to, like ‘man’ or ‘woman’ and ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ For Grosz (1994), bodies “function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable” (p. xi). That is, bodies are not stable, closed vessels for minds, but rather densely produced and shaped socio-political partialities and contradictions. Bodies have the potential for a great many political

variations. The body as produced through social, political, cultural and historical pushing and pulling, rather than conceptualising it as a fixed vessel for the mind, enables the re-thinking and re-working of the Western body in ways that can indeed challenge dominant phallogentrism and the categories through which such phallogentrism is predicated. Such challenges open space for new and different understandings about the body, and perhaps even new and different bodies.

My jittering 21<sup>st</sup> century concern connects me to Donna Haraway and her extensive talk about 21<sup>st</sup> century bodies and the ways in which 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists can account for such bodies. For Braidotti (2011), Haraway updates and re-routes Foucault's biopower through the technologies of now, privileging the hyperconnectivity of contemporary times to re-wire women and feminism through the ever-in-flux, ever-moving 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies of power that shape bodies. Why this matters for my research project is the technologically critical moments that manifest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have violent impacts on 'women' and their bodies. If the violence done to women has defined them, then what happens to women<sup>4</sup> when so much more violence can be done to her so much more easily, so much faster and so much more expansively?

## **Ceci N'est Pas Une Figure**

To help explore these questions extensively and expansively, I will need the help of some potent figures. Figures are "materialistic mappings of situated, i.e., embedded and embodied, social positions" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 4); complex and resistant to boundaries that reduce or confine them. While Braidotti (2011) constructs figuration as

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout my research, 'woman' is a plural term, evocative of women's multiplicities. Breaking down 'woman' as defined by, but not exclusive from, the taken-for-granted heterosexual matrix and re-routing her through the violences done to her (the plural and multiple her) produces 'woman' as always plural in multiple ways. My research evokes multiplicity so as to be response-able (Haraway, 2016) to the multiplicities of woman and women, and the multiple ways violence can be done to the multiple her.

a “politically informed map” (p. 5), it is a metaphor that perhaps falls a little flat (pun intended). Haraway (2008) constructs figures not as maps, but as “material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another” (p. 4).

Figuring enables more intricate and immersive understandings of the potential functioning of the metaphors through which we can more efficiently understand the complexity, partiality and contradiction of certain subject positions. Figures are the expansive bastard kin of metaphor; productions of complex constraints and excesses, producing bodies through text and transforming beyond a metaphoric representation to moving functional manifestations of contested and alternative subject positions. Figures differ from metaphors in “political density” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 61) in that they have a “commitment to account for the material conditions that sustain these different subject positions” (p. 11). Figures can perhaps help describe, and even embody, dense politics more actively and more potently than their metaphoric friends.

Figuring is an “interactive collective process that relies upon interrelations and social networks of exchanges” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 11). Working with the production of ‘figures’ to help make sense, or un-make sense in some cases, allows for moving and complex understandings. Metaphors, while helpful and important, can remain somewhat static, sometimes requiring a mixing of metaphors to help the embodied experience form. Figures are more dynamic in more surprising ways. Simultaneously, there is something familiar about figures: “... figures are at the same time creatures of imagined possibility and creatures of fierce and ordinary reality; the dimensions tangle and require response” (Haraway, 2008, p. 4). Figures can perhaps embody a new or emerging iteration of something we have already encountered, something we have a sense of, but might have only experienced partially.

For example, in Janet Frame's 'Snap-dragons,'<sup>5</sup> the triangular metaphor of her heroine's mother's house, institutional cell and a snap-dragon produce an understanding of the embodied feeling of being trapped, like a bee in a snap-dragon (see Frame, 2004). The metaphor enables an understanding of the young woman's madness through the tightness of a small flower slammed shut and the frantic beating of bee wings. The story has a circular closed-ness (Parey, 2013), as it begins and ends with same embodied image of a bee trapped (woman) in a snap-dragon (that which keeps her confined), a natural metaphor for the closedness and recurrence of women's restriction (of 'excesses,' like 'madness'), even as they beat against it.

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' the heroine of the story becomes a figure of madness within wallpaper: not a distinct metaphoric representation of madness, but a dynamic blurred entity pervasively inhabiting and influencing psychological space she has explicitly been forbidden (see Perkins Gilman, 1973). Perkins Gilman's woman is confined too, and again to a room that is supposed to help her heal (like Ruth in 'Snap-Dragons' inhabits a hospital snap-dragon and a home snap-dragon). Rather than beating the walls of her home-prison, Perkins Gilman's woman joins the walls and tears at their paper, blurring with the boundaries that confine her so as to disintegrate them. As such, she becomes somewhat un-locatable in her everywhere-ness of the wallpaper, every now and then congealing into a recognisable form, only to slip away again to bulge or decay or tear some other surface.

Janet Frame's positioning of Ruth as a bee in a flower is metaphoric (and important), but Charlotte Perkins Gilman's creeping wallpaper woman is a figure who does transformative blurring, enabling something else to happen beyond the metaphoric

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<sup>5</sup> Literary and cultural narratives take on theoretical and analytic significance throughout my research. Feminist literature has long imagined new possibilities for women and their bodies, as well as playing in the transformative potential of shifting and blurring genres.



description of an embodied experience: the figure inhabits the experience, gives it movement and offers possibilities for new movements, inhabiting density that perhaps offers more potential for transformative connection.

So to help explore questions about embodiment and boundaries and transformative possibilities, multiple figures are shaped through my research; some only partially, but partialities can often be more than sufficient. The key figure of the cyborg works/plays most consistently and most multiply through my research. She is figured extensively in chapter three (of course, she is a third thing), as I attempt to untangle some of her most tangled knots, and then re-tangle them. The cyborg “renews the language of political struggle, moving away from the tactic of head-on confrontations, in favour of a more specific and diffuse strategy based on irony<sup>6</sup>, diagonal attacks, and coalitions on the basis of affinity” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 209), offering the potential for transforming power relations. That is, the cyborg is a figure of networking and connection, untied from the binaried assumptions about whether she is friend or foe, good or bad. Breaking down such binaried assumptions means that the coalitions she forms can be alarming. As such, the cyborg has an impossibly strange extended family...

## **Impossible Kin**

One of the (im)possibilities I wish to play with is the Human Barbie. As with Barbie™ the iconic doll, there are many variants of Human Barbie, as well, of course, as a few Human Kens. Human Barbies, as an eclectic group, model themselves, at the very least physically, on Barbie™ imagery (Attwood, 2015; Augustynowicz, 2017).

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<sup>6</sup> Strategies based on irony can be dangerous, as irony is “not a very kind rhetoric, because it does things to your audience that are not fair. When you use irony, you assume that your audience is reading out of much the same sort of experiences as you yourself, and they are not. You assume reading practices that you have to finally admit are highly privileged and often private” (Haraway, 2004, p. 325).

Such modelling most typically manifests in plastic hyper-feminine bodies, surgerised with factory production-like repetition to produce a Barbie™ body through human flesh (and surgical materials like silicone and who knows what else). The aim is to carve the human body into the standard Barbie™ shape: a large head with big eyes, big lips and a small nose; large breasts; tiny waist; wide hips; and long, thin legs. The assumed impossibility of the Barbie™ body – as researched by Norton, Olds, Olive and Dank (1996) and infograph-ised by Rehabs.com (2012) and art-ified by Jason Freeny (2016) – makes for some fraught realisations of Barbie™ flesh, as well as some remarkable transformations of the human (woman's) body that would not be possible without the wonders of modern technology.

The principle variant of Human Barbie through my research is Valeria Lukyanova, a Ukrainian spiritual alien who hates children and believes the genetic mixing of races is making people ugly (see Idov, 2017). Lukyanova's body, perhaps more so than any other Human Barbie, achieves the Barbie™ impossibilities. Through a mix of make-up, digital touch ups, surgery and imagination, Lukyanova's body appears as plastic as Barbie™'s and is located within fleshed human agency. Coupled with her bewildering commentary on the world around her, her presentation of her body is a point of impossibility that demands attention.

Another figure of women's impossibility who you will meet through this research is (Female figure), an American art installation. She is an animatronic woman, skewered to a mirror. She dances to popular music and locks eyes with her viewers through facial recognition technology. In 2014, she went viral through global shares of videos and images of her mechanical moves and her uncanny stare at her viewers.

(Female figure) is blond, with a witch-y green eye mask and shark-like teeth. She wears a white leotard and thigh-high white boots; she is covered in dirt and grime.

She has a lot to say, in her creator's (male) voice, like "I would like to be a poet" and "this is my house" (Birkett, 2014, p. 47), as she twists, gesticulates and stares. While her body is (almost) obviously mechanical (her shoulder joints in particular expose nuts, bolts and wires), the fluidity of her movements and her seeming autonomy in her choice of who to lock eyes with produces an experience of viewing a technowoman's body that becomes difficult to account for.

(Female figure)'s creator, Jordan Wolfson, is an American artist who seems to specialise in political ambivalence (see Charnley, 2017; Da, 2017; Kurian, 2016). Prior to the technobirth of (Female figure), Wolfson's most prominent works included a computer generated video of a "grotesque, animated caricature of a middle-aged orthodox Jew" (We Find Wildness, 2013, para. 2) and 'Raspberry Poser,' another digital video that mashes up cartoons, condoms and blood cells (E-flux, 2012). His prominent works since (Female figure)'s appearance include a thrashing freckled mechanical boy ('Colored Sculpture') and a virtual reality video that forces the viewer to watch as Wolfson brutally beats a man in the street with a baseball bat ('Real Violence') (Schwartz, 2017).

Speaking of 'real violence,' an internet user through this research who exemplifies gendered violence is Elliot Rodger, a young American man who murdered six people and injured 13 others before killing himself in a massacre prompted by his perceived perpetual sexual rejection by women. His manifesto, written in his final weeks as he prepared for his 'Day of Retribution,' details a life characterised by an obsession with achieving the admiration of his family and peers, and especially young, 'hot,' blonde, white women. In particular, he sought sex. He became focused on possessing women, and wrote of acquiring their "love and sex" (Rodger, 2014, p. 109) just as he wrote of acquiring high-end commodities like Gucci sunglasses and expensive

cars. When he perceived that women were actively denying him the commodity of sex (it seems he rarely spoke to women, and when he did it was to threaten them), he began to develop ideas about the slaughter of young couples, and adopted a new world order in which women would be obliterated and love and sex abolished.

While a sheriff's report apparently documents Rodger's history with mental illness (see Brugger, 2015), the form his beliefs took was shaped by Western patriarchal ideals of masculinity and heteronormativity, and his manifesto aligns with and informs the ideologies of the masculinist incel ('involuntarily celibate') and co-alpha (those who view themselves not as 'beta males' but as 'co-alpha males' who work with 'alpha males' to dominate women) movements online. As well as desiring to acquire the Western idealised female form (a Barbie™?) for his own use, Rodger tried desperately to increase his height and build muscle. He despised his mixed race heritage, clinging on to his white heritage to justify his superiority over Asian, African-American and Latino men he encountered who he deemed "ugly" (Rodger, 2014, p. 84, for example). He also became obsessed with becoming incredibly wealthy at a young age, so that women would have sex with him. He wore designer clothes and drove expensive cars, reproducing the appearance of extreme wealth with the aim of attracting a "hot blonde" (p. 87) to have sex with him. He was bewildered when his efforts did not work and "slobs" (p. 121) continued to have sex with women, while he remained "sex-starved" (p. 118).

The narrative through which Rodger structured his beliefs – the thoughts he thought through – formed a normalised narrative of gendered relations: boy gets girl. His attempts to reproduce this narrative for himself were not dissimilar from normalised attempts to perform masculinity, but the efforts to produce the narrative became untenable for Rodger, and those who follow his ideology. While Rodger may be

accounted for as a singular individual man thinking particular violent thoughts, he was (and still is, despite his death) connected into a heteronormative network that is hyper-real and very powerful in its effects.

These effects of heteronormativity can also be experienced through the tale of Gable Tostee and Warriena Wright. Gable Tostee is an Australian man who was charged with the murder of New Zealand woman Warriena Wright (see Fyfe, 2017). After meeting via Tinder, the preeminent Western world dating app, Tostee and Wright spent a fraught night together in Tostee's apartment, where he audio recorded their sexual encounter, their fight and his quest for pizza. At the peak of their fight, Tostee locked Wright on his balcony, where she quickly fell to death. Tostee was found not guilty of culpability for Wright's death, which was explained as her own drunken mistake while trying to escape the balcony she was trapped on.

Tostee had an audio recording of his night with Wright in his apartment because, he explained, women had stolen from him in the past, and video and audio recording his encounters with women became insurance against possible thefts as well as records of his nights in case he could not remember his drunken activities (see Fyfe, 2017). In the case of Wright's death, it became a humiliating recording of her last few hours, played in court (and some parts played through the media and in full online via YouTube) for her family and friends to hear. The recording also became Tostee's strongest evidence that he did not push her off the balcony, which was a key legal matter. In the audio, we hear Wright's muffled scream as she falls to her death, and Tostee's heavy breathing and swearing as he tries to call his lawyer. We then hear his mundane journey to get some pizza. After his acquittal, Tostee returned to social media (including Tinder) under different names, most notably 'Eric Thomas' (a distinctly indistinct name!) (see Stolz, 2015). He used social media to speak about Wright and her family and the trial,

straddling the line between reproducing his versions of events and slandering Wright and her family.

Warriena Wright's death, and the looming figure of Gable Tostee, is an example of not only the technological ease with which Tinder provides predators with prey, but the ease with which it greases the wheels of gender-based violence. In the audio recording of the evening, Tostee is heard asking, "Why does this shit always happen to me. I didn't ask for this. I wasn't doing anything wrong, I just invited the girl over" (Noble, 2016, para. 127), suggesting that his encounters with women in the past have run similar courses and require evidence of women's complicity and/or deviance, like rejecting Tostee's advances or fighting with him. Warriena Wright's death enables understandings of the amplification of violence against women through technologised encounters.

An interloper into my research is the figure of the Neoliberal Individual. He often appears to reject the structural production of violence against women, demanding attention be drawn to personal responsibility for violence. The Neoliberal Individual is characterised by individualist politics, people as numbers and commodities, masculinist processes, personal responsibility and freedoms (like freedom of speech and action). As such, despite the so-called privileging of 'freedoms,' the body of the Neoliberal Individual is tightly bound, jammed into categories that define him, quantify him and segregate him from 'others.' He is quantified and re-quantified and re-quantified again to ensure his boundaries are solid and stable. It is his responsibility to embody a 'good' commodity.

Through this research, the Neoliberal Individual will appear with jerky movements, his self-pulling strings<sup>7</sup> yanked, sharply pointing to individual, unified and

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<sup>7</sup> I once saw a dog that had been trained to walk itself. It held its own leash in its mouth.

distinct selves as the source of and solution to **humanity**'s most pressing issues, like poverty and employment, multiculturalism, obesity and 'political correctness gone mad.' The Neoliberal Individual asserts boundaries, and those boundaries assert hierarchies, and those hierarchies assert power. So through this research, which works to blur the 'individual' profoundly and unapologetically, the Neoliberal Individual sometimes appears to assert something (a boundary, a hierarchy, a 'freedom') in demand of his own survival in the chaos of a feminist poststructuralist sci-fi worlding (see Haraway, 2013) – by which I mean my research.

The key figure for organisation and decision-making through chaos is The Weaver from China Miéville's (2000) science fiction novel 'Perdido Street Station.' The Weaver is described as a massive interdimensional arachnid who mind-speaks in a poetic dream-like stream of consciousness, blurring the boundaries between The Weaver's thoughts and the thoughts of those who encounter him (yes, Miéville, bizarrely, genders The Weaver as a 'him'). The Weaver's consciousness boards the unintelligible, with the characters of 'Perdido Street Station' left to infer The Weaver's meanings from the snippets (literally – you will get this 'snip' joke later) of fuzzy clarity in the dream-poetics coupled with the well-timed appearances and actions of the creature. The protagonists of 'Perdido Street Station' ask The Weaver to help them defeat the Slake Moths, a small group of powerful psychedelic mega-moths who are feeding off the consciousness of the inhabitants of Bas-Lag, littering the streets with comatose civilians. Along the way, The Weaver experiences some highs (snipping off ears) and lows (not winning a battle), and by the conclusion of the story, The Weaver has helped vanquish the Slake Moths he comes to see as kin.

The Weaver's (one of many Weavers, by the way. We are never quite sure if it is the same one each time he appears to help the story's protagonists) most salient task is

creating and maintaining the worldweave, a spider-web-y representation of the universe across space and time. Like earth spiders care for their webs, The Weaver is concerned with the form and function of the worldweave, prioritising its aesthetics above all else, which produces some bizarre behaviours, as well as some hesitancy to influence events that may be creating particularly aesthetically pleasing worldweaves, even if those events are devastating and destructive to someone else's world.

The Weaver perhaps seems an unlikely figure for guiding research. However, The Weaver enables a way to articulate how hyperdimensional connections, however bizarre or hesitant, can be made in a chaotic technosocial world. In my favourite part of 'Perdido Street Station,' The Weaver experiences profound doubt about the violence he has enabled:

... I TIRE AND GROW OLD AND COLD GRIMY  
 LITTLING... the Weaver said quietly... YOU WORK WITH  
 FINESSE I GRANT AND GIVE YOU BUT THIS SIPHONING  
 OF PHANTASMS FROM MY SOLE SOUL LEAVES ME  
 MELANCHOLIC SEE PATTERNS INHERE EVEN IN THESE  
 VORACIOUS ONES PERHAPS I JUDGE QUICK AND  
 SLICK TASTES I FALTER AND ALTER AND I AM  
 UNSURE... It raised a handful of glistening guts to Isaac's eyes  
 and began to pull them gently apart. (Miéville, 2000, p. 799)

In the moment of supposed victory, with Bas-Lag inhabitants rejoicing around him, The Weaver experiences kinship with the dead moths, albeit through their guts, and becomes "UNSURE"<sup>8</sup> of how he came to be tiredly and sadly playing in the bowels of an 'other'

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<sup>8</sup> As with Malabou's word-gifts, I will also accept Miéville's Weaver's gift of being "UNSURE," to be referenced without the conventions of referencing throughout my research worldweave.



just like him, a position I have found myself in on a number of occasions through this research process. The hyperdimensionality of ideas coupled with the imposition of linear academic writing produces moments through my research of sudden disconnection and reconnection, sharp re-routings through alternative wiring and the trauma of severing some connections in the research worldweave network. The cuts, actions and inactions of this research project are productive of a worldweave that privileges the aesthetics of connections, the arbitrariness of exemplars and the politics of being ‘UNSURE.’

## Technometaphors 101

The collection of characters that I have partially introduced so far, from Human Barbie to Elliot Rodger to The Weaver, will appear in multiple and partial ways throughout my research, alongside a cacophony of others who help (sometimes unwillingly) to tell stories about what is at stake for women’s embodiment in the technophilic 21<sup>st</sup> century West. The re-imagining of *how* women and their bodies can be understood through psychology in technologically-dominated times enables new possibilities for embodying the excesses of femininity that are still so tightly contained through dominant binaries and are implicated in the violences that women experience *because they are women*, and increasingly *because they are **technowomen***. Re-imagining women and their bodies in technotimes also calls for a re-imagining of how psychology can, indeed, imagine. Shifting genres towards science fiction as a way to think and do psychology offers new potential spaces for new potential bodies.

Enabling these potential new spaces throughout my research will be some technometaphors through which to think. I opened my research with my childhood ‘jittering’ at computers, and the transformation of that jittering to the urgencies of women’s technobodies. The conceptualisation of this embodied

anxiety/excitement/urgency as ‘jittering’ connects to the idea of the ‘phase jitter’: an “unwanted random signal distortion” (Chandor, 1981, p. 140) occurring in a microprocessor, the central electronic processing unit of a microchip. The ‘jitter’ is described as a measurement of signal distortion: it tells a computer technician “how far the signal period has wandered from its ideal value” (Roberts, 2003, para. 5). While I do not pretend to know what such electronic speak means to computer electricians, I have my own embodied understanding of a ‘phase jitter.’ The embodied excited signals connecting me to the computer as a child keen on the worlds built through computers became distorted, shifting the encounter from jittering potential to phase jitters: urgent signals distorting and hyperconnecting women and their bodies in troublesome ways.

The ‘phase jitter’ serves as a gateway technometaphor: I will not use it again explicitly, even if I hope it is non-explicitly evoked throughout this textual network. Through my research project there are technometaphors of a structural kind. Panic Architecture and Architecture Fiction are cyborg terms for particular ways to build, but I will not pre-empt them here. However, a large and looming technometaphor extensively networked in the text is the ‘impossible feast.’ The ‘impossible feast’ is a cyborg term for the exponentially created and consumed information and connections produced online (CyborgAnthropology.com, 2012). Opening the internet presents internet users with a never-ending, constantly reproducing selection of data to consume. Meal after connected meal, feast after networked feast, the internet is an ever-expanding banquet of links, text and images that can be consumed rapidly, without much chewing, perhaps rarely reaching satiation and never running out of ‘food’ to consume. Data for my research project can be considered morsels, perhaps even crumbs, of this impossible feast. Chew as I may, feasting on technodata becomes impossible: comments amass, links proliferate, new information emerges. The impossibility of the feast is a critical

node in this research network. Feasting and consumption are very possible embodied experiences; what might happen when such possibilities are rendered impossible?

## **Impossible Linearity**

Knowledge™ is not defined, manufactured and commodified through my research. Rather I build a network that is critically and potently open for connection and re-configuration. The structure of my research project is that of a hyperdimensional network, necessarily tamed into chapters, but always exceeding them. Chapter one, as you now know, introduces components of this expansive network and the figures who ping around it, including ‘woman,’ a neoliberal individual and a giant arachnid. These introductions serve to jack the reader in to the problem of violence against women through technology, and familiarise us with the figures who will help and hinder the telling of technostories.

To be linear for a moment, chapter two asks questions about psychology’s genre, the mode and style that informs how we do psychology and produce psychological knowledge. These questions challenge psychology’s detective genre as a site of production for injustices and the chapter opens space for the mobilising of psychology through science fiction (see Squire, 1990), an alternative genre characterised by disrupted binaries and the blurred boundaries between hard science and imagination. Through science fiction, traditional understandings of text, power and troubled embodied lives are made strange and new understandings emerge. The kinship between science fiction materials like ‘The Matrix,’ ‘Another Earth’ and Donna Haraway’s (1991) cyborg disrupt and dissolve taken-for-granted notions of binary distinctness and bounded, individualised bodies. Disruption and dissolution of key

binaries (like dominance/subjugation) can open some space for some potent political figures and how “it matters what thoughts think thoughts” (Haraway, 2016, p. 12).<sup>9</sup>

Chapter three explicates Haraway’s cyborg, orientating the reader to the emergence of the cyborg as a feminist figure for Western women’s politicised embodiment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond, and constructs how this science fiction figure transforms research practices in psychology, including the ways we tell stories and engage with text. While characterised by hybridity, the cyborg is not just animal and machine. She is a multiple, partial, simultaneous and contradictory doing figure; a metaphor and an ontological position disrupting and reconfiguring the binaries that shape troubled lives and troubled bodies. Haraway’s cyborg, dismantled and reassembled, is a figure who networks together nodes of ontology, methodology, ethics and analysis. She has already materialised through this introductory chapter and works/plays through my project as we build, unbuild and rebuild.

Chapter four details the journeys of an ethical Alice through a violent Wonderland. With shifts in genre come emergent engagements with psychology, with methodology, with data. Understandings of what counts as ‘ethical’ can be challenged and politicised. Re-routing ethics through the cyborg troubles the safe/not safe binary, and instead enables questions about embodied encounters, ethical engagement with data and text as cultural resource rather than expressions of individualism. Through chapter four, I stay with the trouble, as Haraway (2016) suggests. I move us back through my early explorations of ‘unsafe’ places, amassing connections and encounters through chaotic and catastrophic online spaces and bodies.

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<sup>9</sup> Like Malabou gifted her idea about violence classifying ‘woman,’ Haraway gifts me the idea of it mattering “what thoughts think thoughts.” The idea will recur, referenced without referencing, throughout my research project.

Chapter five re-imagines apocalypse, a point of rupture for theorising ‘the end of the world’ as a metaphor for the daily and mundane disintegrations of women and their bodies, as well as a politically potent narrative for giving language to impossible and fraught technobodies. The chapter is an experience of an apocalyptic crisis. Critical obliterations are ever-immanent, and through crises emerge unsettling critical responses and potential positionings for inhabiting catastrophes.

After an apocalypse has materialised, I go salvaging. In the chapters that emerge I re-theorises the uncanny, reconnecting it to its technological home. Re-routing the uncanny through the figure of the automaton Olympia in Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’ reboots the uncanny for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, privileging the terrifying possibilities of the convergence of women’s bodies, technology and uncertainty.

After deteriorating into the uncanny, the chapters that follow recover parts, positions and possibilities for new technobodies. I produce a Slender Man and pull apart a (Female figure). I thrash around a ‘Colored Sculpture’ and play with a Human Barbie. I interrupt with an assessment of the network, re-wiring through a Weaver. I occupy a series of violations then work my way out of a deadly embrace. Finally, in possibly no sense of the term, I set up a meeting place for possible others.

While the above conforms to a linear description of the contents of this research, the chapters are extensively networked, begrudgingly cordoned off but connecting expansively through metaphors, figures and running jokes. Some metaphors, figures and running jokes will appear before they are explained, a delightful problem of time as flat and circular.<sup>10</sup> Other times, in the expanse of the technoworld the cyborg inhabits and builds, ideas re-route abruptly. Throughout my research there are also sporadic memes, produced through the simulated consciousness (see appendix) of my embeddedness in

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<sup>10</sup> A joke explained on page 97 of this research project.

the technophilic West and in technoresearch. As with internet memes, the sense that these memes make may not be apparent at first encounter. They are serious play with deadliness, deterioration and delight. Simultaneously, many chapters will end with a sub-section of “un-wholly thoughts”; a series of nuts and bolts that did not quite find a moment or were just left behind or helped to build something else somewhere else. These sub-sections are made up of quotes, half-ideas, unfollowed connections, images, partialities, random ideas and other bits and pieces that might be found in and around a cyborg.

## Chapter One Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

*The un-wholly thoughts of this introductory chapter are the bones of a draft introduction I wrote that did not make the cut, for obvious obnoxious reasons...*

This is a disclaimer, perhaps a warning, about the writing that follows. It is cyborg writing. In order to complete the PhD task, it is (so I am told) necessary to adhere to at least some of the strict Western, patriarchal writing conventions that dictate linear, ordered writing just as it dictates linear, ordered women. It is perhaps the most challenging task for a cyborg to write a vast, networked, embodied world into a linear page that moves from the top to the bottom, from the left to right, in two dimensions. Writing must be in chapters, following a logical order that a good Western citizen (although, if you find yourself here, you may not be one) can follow closely, progressing through ideas that develop and reach a climatic pinnacle: The Idea™! Cyborgs, however, would prefer, I think, if they had to write/right in thesis form (and a cyborg never *has* to do anything), to write in that obnoxious WordArt with 3D effects, and gifs, and galaxies, and middle fingers, and serrated edges, and anything else a cyborg can find. But alas, here we are, in two dimensions, top-bottom, left-right, lather-rinse-repeat.

While what follows is conventional in the sense that it is words-on-a-page, it cites sources in APA format (but not always) and, in a way (albeit a different way), it analyses data to produce Research, it does so simultaneously wholeheartedly and begrudgingly; an encounter with simultaneity, playing seriously with the conventions of academia and of writing. What manifests, I hope, is the desperate necessity for embodying the simultaneous, partial contradictions of Western femininity for survival. There are moments, perhaps long ones, of obnoxiousness that will be unpleasant. But

the *how* of the unpleasantness is important, a reading practice soaked in the, in Haraway-ian terms, response-able (Haraway, 2016). That is, the embodied responses enabled by and enabling of ethical connection. Ethics is about being able to respond, about critical interconnection.

As such, my research shifts through simultaneous responses to genre, to ethics, to data, and how new responses enable new possibilities. It does so from the margins, where all ethical responses typically congeal (see?! Obnoxious!). There is a current trend (through the 2010s) towards positive psychology: think happy, be happy; mindfulness; smile more; go for a jog. What better way for psychology to absolve itself of its sins and of its response-abilities than to locate the cause and the cure of disorder with the self-contained neoliberal individual, all while marketing positive psychology as a commodity. At the same time women are told to jog for their mental health, they are also being told to do so in groups and in broad daylight and covered up and with a mobile phone so they can avoid the murderous and/or sexually violent intent of the men who prowl in the darkness of daytime sunshine. Women's entry into public spaces continues to be contested as a privilege (from jogging to women-only 'Wonder Woman' screenings causing uproars to selfie culture to lady presidential candidates to Twitter to Women's Marches), as does their occupancy of private spaces (from physical abuse to online abuse to stalking to heteronormative domesticity). Smiling more seems an unethical suggestion from psychologists to those who may need some help. Women have been told to 'smile more' for centuries, and yet we still find ourselves

**bloodied**

**depressed**

stressed

anorexic

insomniac

delusional

catatonic



angry  
panicked  
suicidal  
paranoid  
dissociated  
anxious  
broken  
addicted  
compulsive.

If smiling were the cure, women's mental and physical health would be immaculate. So psychology strikes again! The current trend towards mindfulness and colouring books for stressed adults seems little removed from the bedrest cures of yesteryear where 'hysterical' women were locked in rooms by themselves to 'rest' and become 'not hysterical anymore.' In 2018, women colour within the lines of their colouring books, immersed in hysteria-preventing patterns just as Charlotte Perkins Gilman immersed her hysterical heroine in yellow wallpaper. Indeed, social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are surfaces in which we also become immersed like hysterics to wallpaper.

## Chapter Two: Genre

### Matrix Mothers

Working with modern possibilities for new bodies has historically been an important feminist exercise, from the transformative potential of education (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1975) and the re-working of economics (Perkins Gilman, 1898/2012<sup>11</sup>), to the cultural (Bordo, 2004) and the docile body (Bartky, 1998), to the horrors of the reproductive body (Ussher, 2006). As a general and easily broken rule, work on the body and embodiment has peaked in times of rapid social change, and stalled in times of social (masculinist) fixity, like world wars (for examples see Gordon, 2000; Schwartz, 1986). The 21<sup>st</sup> century, alarmingly, seems characterised by both rapid social shifts and intense global warfare enabled by sudden and pervasive technological advancements (from Twitter to drones). So situating the body in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century still requires educational, economic, cultural and reproductive work, but within the context of rapid social and technological upheavals that contribute to our daily lives as they do to warzones.<sup>12</sup>

The work of feminist theorists (psychological and otherwise) on the idea of the technologically-mediated gendered body has been unsurprisingly multiple. Perhaps the focus has been on problematic reproductive technologies and technological interventions into women's pregnant bodies (for example, Gimenez, 1991; Lie, 2002; Nordqvist, 2008; O'Riordan & Haran, 2009; Palmer, 2009; Sætnan, 1996; Shildrick, 1997); but others have problematised the technological mediation of cosmetic

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<sup>11</sup> The significance of the 90s of whatever century is already emerging.

<sup>12</sup> And of course, many people's daily lives *are* warzones.

interventions (for example, Balsamo, 1992; Braun, 2005; Davis, 1995, 1997; Gimlin, 2010; Tiefer, 2008); disabled bodies (for example, De Preester, 2011); ‘deviant’ and/or ‘deficient’ bodies (for example, Bordo, 2004; Burke, 2009; Hogle, 2005); and deviant femininity (for example, Fournier, 2002). Other pivotal foci concern the gendering of technology use/access, and the technology industry (for example, Henwood, 2000; Kennedy, 2005; Spender, 1995; Stoate, 2012; van Doorn, van Zoonen & Wyatt, 2007); and increasingly, gendering performed through social media use (for example, Dobson, 2015; Manago, 2013; Rice & Watson, 2016; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill & Livingstone, 2013). While women researchers have theorised women’s connections with technology in multiple ways, much of this work has somewhat reproduced the body/mind binary (how technology influences or intervenes on bodies or minds, for example), rather than radically challenging, or indeed, blurring the boundaries between taken-for-granted binaries, such as human/machine, in the pursuit of transformative, political embodiment. Theoretically, some feminists have been interested in how the gendered body is produced in and through technology (for example, Barnard, 2000; Bayer & Malone, 1996; Daniels, 2009; Masters, 2005; Melzer, 2010; Pitts, 2005; Thomas, 2004; Van Der Ploeg, 2004), interrogating the boundaries between women and technologies and asking questions about these boundaries as sites for new forms of women’s agency. Technological embodiment, for feminist researchers then, might also be concerned with possibilities for transformative power relations and how technology might enable politicised embodiment for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a consanguineous union with machines that blurs the boundaries of the binaries that violently shape women’s lived experience in order to simultaneously resist them and live them (for example, Balsamo, 1995; Bayer, 1999; Braidotti, 2003, 2006; De Preester, 2011; Haraway, 1991; Mitchell, 2006; Morgan, 2004; Potts, 2002; Sawicki, 1991; Squires, 2000; Wajcman, 2004).

New technologies, and increasing access to them, enables the production of new differences and new ways to legitimise the hierarchical order of old differences, inscribing the same old meanings onto women's bodies, as well as adding some that are new. In the context of Western technological advancement, it is almost always "at times of great technological advance that Western culture reiterates some of its most persistent habits, notably the tendency to create differences and organize them hierarchically" (Braidotti, 2003, p. 252).<sup>13</sup> Feminist explorations of the construction of the gendered body, technologised representations of women's bodies and technological interventions for the disruption of taken-for-granted boundaries, explicitly for women's politicised embodiment, have enabled access points for dismantling these old (and new) hierarchies. A hierarchy is formed through the separation of people, places and things into ordered, prioritised, distinct and static categories. The maintenance of these distinct categories (like 'men' and 'women') produces and reproduces the hierarchal power structures that produce the categories: an endless closed loop.<sup>14</sup>

The loop, however, is not unhackable. For Braidotti (2003), the "hierarchal organization of differences is key to phallogocentrism" (p. 255), so disrupting the hierarchy to enable new political embodiments is a key feminist textual strategy. Problematizing taken-for-granted categories (or at the very least the distinctions between them) has the potential to disrupt and dismantle such categories and their boundaries. For example, Davis (1997) explored the technology of cosmetic surgery as

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<sup>13</sup> Braidotti (2003) uses sexism in video games and pornography as examples of the reproduction of old (and normalised) representations of women through new technologies. Many years later, Braidotti's arguments about sexism in video games and porn remain critically relevant, and need to shift only in the sense that there are now more games and more porn that are much more violent, much more accessible and much, much more immersive.

<sup>14</sup> Chandor, Graham and Williamson (1970) define a 'closed loop' as a "continuous loop in a program from which there is no exit except by operator intervention or by action on the part of some executive program monitoring the operation of the program concerned" (p. 78). Violence against women indeed feels cyclical, a continuous loop executed through dominant patriarchal operators who do not have any interest in intervening in the functioning of the program.

potential space for feminist utopia, not unproblematically – “It is difficult to imagine that cosmetic surgery might entail *both* compliance *and* resistance” (p. 179) – but emphasising the contradictory and complex technopotential for new embodiments and new (political) performances of beauty through technology, rather than dismissing cosmetic surgery as *simply* another patriarchal tool to oppress women. Davis (1997) disrupts the dominance/subjugation of the binary and privileges the notion of a third position that exceeds the assumed and closed options.

The feminist theorists who have engaged with technology as a tool (important work, but not *my* work) and as a socio-political cultural system open to exploitation and reconfiguration through feminist work/play have enabled dangerous and exciting opportunities for hacking the system, maximising disruption, upending so-called ‘realities’ and creating the potential for recalibrating women’s embodied lives as livably multiple. Potts (2002) breaks down and opens up (if you will excuse the double entendre<sup>15</sup>) women’s embodiment through sex, focusing on the binaried assumptions of phallogentric heterosex at particular sites of great violence, as well as the great opportunities for re-figuring and resistance. Challenging what counts as ‘normal,’ ‘natural’ and ‘necessary’ enables understandings of women’s embodied lives that exceed the taken-for-granted binaries explicitly produced through heterosex,<sup>16</sup> and

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout this thesis, I draw on typical internet tropes, such as drawing attention to puns, double entendres and other textual jokes, like simulating ‘clickbait’ and using memes to illustrate arguments.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Potts (2002) discusses the control of women’s multiple orgasms: “Women’s orgasmic ability, depicted as an insatiable ‘hunger’, a frighteningly multiplying desire for ‘more’, an endless deferral of satisfaction, requires restriction and unification” (p. 66), whereby, “she is prescribed an orgasmic diet, consisting of one big ‘ultimate’ orgasm rather than countless smaller or non-final ones” (p. 67). The male-dominated construction of heterosex privileges the finalising of sexual encounters with the male orgasm and the potential multiplicity of women’s sexuality is “in excess of the male’s” (p. 67) and as such is in need of control. While such an example is simple and explicit, it highlights the control of women’s bodies through heterosex in ways that specifically target women’s excesses as compared to men and their bodies. The construction of women’s sexuality/sexual pleasure/orgasm and their bodies in general as passive, ‘inner’ and implicit exceeds the outward decisive finality and boundedness of the male orgasm and the male body.

argues for the re-figuring of women's embodiment *through* these excesses.

Reconfiguring 'excess' beyond a good/bad binary enables control of women's bodies to be challenged, possibility offering women something new to play with other than being singularly 'good' or unified as 'bad.'

Disrupting binaries and the assumed unification of identity that such binaries produce can enable new politically potent performances of 'woman.' Like for the category 'woman,' keeping "the category "human" fixed excludes an entire range of possibilities in advance and freezes out important dimensions of the analysis of the workings of power" (Barad, 2001, p. 93), producing and reproducing bounded individuals who produce and reproduce the same old binaries through the same old hierarchies for the same old performances of gender. The masculinist privilege of fixity and distinction of categories closes off opportunities for new ways to do gender, unless the fixity itself is challenged. Barad (2003) suggests that the human as 'phenomena' rather than a singular being means that "the notion of discursivity cannot be founded on an inherent distinction between humans and nonhumans" (p. 818), and as such, boundaries assumed wholly stable can disintegrate into partialities, multiplicities and contradictions, opening spaces for new figurations of 'woman,' science and bodies.

As a form of thinking in and through binaries where masculinism is privileged (see for example, Grosz, 1989), phallogentrism draws attention to the ways in which psychologists, and adjacent others, produce and interpret phenomena to reproduce pathologisation and binaries that are embedded in textuality. Locating mainstream, masculinist psychological quests for fixed 'facts' and categories within a specific genre brings phallogentric thought and textuality into play together, since genres "provide frameworks with which texts are produced and interpreted" (Chandler, 1997, p. 5).

As well as being considered frameworks for production/interpretation, genres “can be defined as UTTERANCES/TEXTS in relation to other utterances/texts” (Wales, 2001, p. 259). That is, all text is in dialogue with other text: “... no text is ‘free’ of other text” (p. 259). Text here is reproductive and networked: even through those texts that follow a genre trajectory strictly – for example a detective genre – text itself proliferates and opens possibilities. As much as a narrative may close an ending and assert the order of events, reading still opens possibilities and proliferates connections.

Genre is about culture, where the relationship between text and its audience is privileged, shifting “attention away from the ‘inherent’ properties of text, and towards the relationship between text and audiences...” (Buckingham, 1993, p. 136). In academic text production, the relationship between text and audience is prioritised at the publication phase, with psychologists, for example, placing importance on the communication of the research with other psychologists: “For psychology as a scientific knowledge, narratives produce speaking subjects who know the facts of the lives and experiences of other subjects, and hold these facts as commonly intelligible among themselves” (Coombes & Morgan, 2004, p. 304). The incestuous approach of writing psychological text for an audience of other psychologists (and the psychologist-esque) produces text that ensures ‘cohesion’ of psychology ‘facts’ in order to produce a clean, clear, ‘factual’ account of the events that fits the cultural goals of Western psychology – the knowledge authority on Western neoliberal individuals. Why not embrace ambiguous, simultaneous, contradictory writing in order to reflect the ambiguous, simultaneous and contradictory experience of writing, researching and embodiment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## A Cyborg's Embrace

Haraway's (1991) figure of the cyborg explicitly offers politicised embodiment that acknowledges not only (Western) women's multiplicities and partialities, but also their embeddedness in patriarchal technoculture that simultaneously produces and condemns women as deviants from the (masculine/masculinist) norm. Haraway (1991) works/plays with the 'otherness' of women as sites for technologised 21<sup>st</sup> century disruptions and the potential for embodying the contradictory simultaneity of Western femininity. Inevitably, in the process she works/plays with other 'otherness' as well and as her choice of figure might suggest, cyborg work/play is performed between and in excess of the genre boundaries that hold science and fiction apart. For Haraway, the ways of thinking that enabled the figure of the cyborg were the points of emergence of (feminist) politics. While her cyborg, for me, does a great many weird and wonderful things for political activism, the thoughts used to think her, and do her (if you will excuse the double entendre again), play a significant part for the transformative politics she offers.

As an example, Haraway has turned to our old friend individualism to argue for science fiction as a genre through which to think: "Here, I expand on the argument that bounded individualism in its many flavors in science, politics, and philosophy has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, technically or any other way" (Haraway, 2016, p. 5). The complexity and interconnectedness of our expanding technologised and globalised world renders individualism, technically, impossible. Doing individualism involves rejecting anything other than Me Me Me, even as all signs point to proliferating interconnectivity. The tension between Western neoliberal individualism and the present impossibility to think with it is amplifying a



great many problems at local levels (precarity, family violence, sexual violence, Trump) and global levels (precarity, family violence, sexual violence, Trump<sup>17</sup>).

For Haraway (2016), it “matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts. Mathematically, visually, and narratively, it matters which figures figure figures, which systems systematize systems” (p. 101). As science and psychology are produced through ideologies of individualism, so we produce stories about individuals, and such individualised production has implications for how those stories end (like assuming they end, for example). Some individuals benefit; a great many do not. So the difficulties we have in combating individualised neoliberal thinking become clearer – impossible individuals thinking with impossibly individual thoughts.

Science fiction, even at its most unimaginative, offers an alternative and promising way of thinking thoughts. Like Haraway, I think “... we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the connections open and greedy for surprising new and old connections” (Haraway, 2016, p. 101). These open and greedy potential connections enable understandings and transformations that bounded (closed) individuals cannot engage with, which constrains their participation in ethical change for disenfranchised others. But maybe, for cyborgs, and other kin (or otherkin, as Haraway puts it), science fiction can disrupt, corrupt and interrupt power relations and infiltrate neoliberal politics in ways that, at the very least, irritate the hierarchy. Those who enjoy sci-fi “are accustomed to the lively and irreverent arts of fan fiction. Story arcs and worlds are fodder for mutant

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<sup>17</sup> As I am reading, researching and writing my project, we are living through weirdly co-mingled worlds of Hollywood and politics that sees reality TV business man Donald Trump elected president of the United States of America. Just as Donna Haraway was crafting her cyborg manifesto through the bizarre turmoil of the Ronald Reagan presidency (the first example of a Hollywood actor turned president) in the 1980s, I write and research through strange Trump times.

transformations or for loving but perverse extensions” (Haraway, 2016, p. 136).

Neoliberal individualism may be insidious, but science fiction could be pervasive.

**“Then at a deadly pace It Came From Outer Space  
and this is how the message ran...”<sup>18</sup>**

Connecting through the work of Braidotti, Haraway and Barad, Kember (2011) uses the science fiction of aliens (fiction?!) to explore the potent political non-human-ness of positions such as ‘feminist’ and other ‘others.’ She aims to “enable feminist theory itself to become alien again” (Kember, 2011, p. 184), calling for attention to relationality in response to/with neoliberalism. Locating ‘feminism’ as a science fiction enables the kinds of possibilities that Haraway (1991, 1992), Braidotti (2006) and Barad (2003) imagine through the ‘posthuman’<sup>19</sup>: ethical responsibilities to the construction and political potencies of ‘others.’

As demonstrated by Kember (2011), an explicit feminist connection to science fiction figures, tropes and media also opens new possibilities for politicised metaphors for women. Morgan (2004) questions the embodied experiences of human/machine boundary blurring through the film ‘Strange Days,’ and the ‘The Matrix’ trilogy has inspired the exploration of the blurred boundaries between male/female, masculine/feminine (see for example, Frenzt & Rushing, 2002; Koller, 2005), staples of feminist theorising, technologised or otherwise. But ‘The Matrix’ trilogy, perhaps more significantly for sci-fi theorists, presents the intolerability of two worlds, the binary, the

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<sup>18</sup> (O’Brien, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> As with the notion of ‘post-feminism,’ the ‘posthuman’ is a problematic concept. Seems to me that Haraway, Braidotti and Barad theorise the ‘posthuman’ as a troubling of embodiment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rather than the more popularised understandings that utilise the ‘human’ as a category that can have a post- quality when augmented. For Haraway (2016), the vast and proliferating interconnectivity between humans (and between non-humans) undoes posthumanism: “All the tentacular stringy ones have made me unhappy with posthumanism, even as I am nourished by much generative work done under that sign” (p. 32).

either/or choice, mediated by technology, as simultaneously salvic (through protagonist Neo) and destructive. It employs computers and technologies as metaphors for human systems, and the potentialities of their connectivity and possibilities for information sharing and processing (Lee, 2005). Importantly it is Neo's "capacity to operate outside the rules of given structures" (Bartlett & Byers, 2003, p. 37) that offers new possibilities and transformative politics (and saves the day!). For Neo, and perhaps also for feminist researchers, shifting beyond the limits of the technological, social, political and physical structures imposed through dominant systems enables new and powerful embodied politics. Neo was not always able to operate outside the dominant structures (nor was he ever *allowed* to...), but once he figured out how "... by ceasing to think the way he has been programmed to think in his false reality..." (Frentz & Rushing, 2002, p. 76), the task of dismantling the dominant, oppressive structures became achievable, "granting the techno-human a model of progressiveness, (pro)creativity and possibility" (Lee, 2005, p. 563). Through thinking through different thoughts, it is possible to reject the fixed singularity of so-called 'reality' and instead function in alternative ways, moving the body otherwise, through multiple, networked connections. It mattered what thoughts Neo thought with. Much as Neo transformed how he moved in his worlds, feminist (sci-fi) theorists seek to transform how we can move in ours. For example:

Neo finally enters the role of The One, not as a form of transcendence, but as an indication that he has rejected the normative and regulatory fictions – of the real and of gender – that have been imposed by The Matrix. (Wolmark, 2002, p. 84)

Through such a technological transformation, the taken-for-granted power structures that violently inscribe, restrict and control bodies are fictionalised and therefore opened to reconfiguration through cyborg politics.

In 'The Matrix' trilogy, Neo becomes the figure of resistance and transformative politics through his embodied connectivity with machines. The dissolution of his biological and technological boundaries enabled new ways of moving in and through the matrix, and thus the disruption of the matrix. For feminist theorists in psychology, the figure of the cyborg can offer similar disruptive positionings. The cyborg can embody multiple, partial, simultaneous contradictions and produce (and be produced by) noninnocent (not unified) politics. As a sci-fi figure, the cyborg is born from the blurred boundaries of technology and biology, pulled (and perhaps repelled) together by fantastical dreams (fiction) of potential realities (science). Through the hybridisation of science and fiction, Haraway (1991) suggests, "... a 'cyborg' feminism that is perhaps more able to remain attuned to specific historical and political positionings and permanent partialities without abandoning the search for potent connections" (p. 1).

However, science fiction, as a genre for psychology, and feminist researchers, continues to be subordinated to the traditional, structure-maintaining (and therefore 'legitimate') genre that has been analysed as detective (Squire, 1990). A series of sci-fi feminist theorists, operating as tokens (as, for example, one of the token diversity papers or chapters), and fragmented by their tokenism, attempt to argue for transformative politics (for theory, for research, for practice) but are continually marginalised as those 'other' technophilic feminists who are merely producing patriarchal technologies as dominant, or are policed as academic deviants. As such there is a disconnect (something Haraway had been seeking to avoid) between the transformative potentialities offered through science fiction, theoretically, and the outcomes of research that deal with technological interventions on/in the (woman's) body and feminist politics.

***“I didn’t come here to tell you how  
this is going to end.” – Neo<sup>20</sup>***

In ‘The Matrix,’ Neo is asked to choose between the Red Pill and the Blue Pill. Taking the Red Pill means Neo will experience ‘reality,’ the world as it really is, the ‘truth’ in all its horror. Taking the Blue Pill means Neo will experience the world as constructed, detached from ‘reality’ and ‘truth,’ but a little easier to bear (see Silver, Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). Online, Red Pill-ers are a men’s rights movement that is, unsurprisingly, anti-feminist and claims that feminists cannot see or accept the ‘reality’ that they are already equal to men, and always have been, or that they are just naturally inferior to men, and should accept this as ‘reality.’ The Blue Pill is an online feminist movement that satirises the Red Pill movement, set up to dismantle Red Pill arguments and engage in discussions about gender and sexism.

The matrix, in the movie trilogy, refers to the Red Pill world: reality, an apocalyptic world destroyed by man’s wars against his own technologies. Such a representation could be viewed as an indictment of masculine ‘reality,’ even if it is celebrated by masculine voices as the only ‘legitimate’ experience.

Neo, despite his decision to take the Red Pill, wants to enable a world “without borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible” (Silver, Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). He rejects ‘reality’ as experienced through the Red Pill, and desires the blurred boundaries between the constructed Blue Pill world and Red Pill ‘reality,’ disrupting that dominant/subjugated binary where ‘reality’ as singular and fixed is privileged. In the film explicitly, ‘Neo’ is an anagram for ‘One,’ and implicitly, ‘neo’ also means ‘new.’ While (fan and academic) analyses of the film tend to focus on the film’s use of ‘Neo’ to mean ‘The One’ as in a typical hero narrative, it is possible to

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<sup>20</sup> (Silver, Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999).

interpret 'Neo' as not only 'one,' but as an enabler of instead multiple 'new' constructions and realities. The doubled meaning of his name travels alongside an instrumental figure for Neo: Trinity, a woman who explicitly represents multiplicity, not singularity *or* dualisms.

Science fiction is about the possibilities that Neo imagines. For psychology, science fiction serves as a genre for thinking the idea that as researchers we are opening up possibilities and enabling new understandings of both old, repeated problems (of health, safety, dignity), as well as understandings of the new ways in which these problems manifest in a 21<sup>st</sup> century thus far characterised by technology, globalisation and neoliberalism.

Ideas such as partiality, simultaneity, multiplicity, flux, fluidity are Blue Pill ideas. That is, psychology's privileging of the empirical sciences for the production of (legitimate) theory subjugates feminist theory that acknowledges and enjoys, perhaps unhappily, the multiplicity and partiality of women's lived experiences. Feminist researchers bring fraught enjoyment with them into their theorising, but alas, there is no time or space in science for partialities and multiplicities. So feminist researchers' participation in psychology shifts to the fringes, where instead, perhaps much more comfortably, boundaries with 'other' disciplines blur, and we find ourselves at home again, with the discomfort of our partial positions as psychology researchers and rejects (and perhaps more bluntly, as women). Hence, when searching for work by feminist psychology theorists that is about a genre shift to science fiction in psychology, I am often left wanting (as women often are... perhaps I should be less surprised...). In my own experience of writing a feminist theoretical psychology paper for a psychology journal, and having it accepted on the grounds that we re-write it as a totally different paper that conformed to the traditional scientific model, privileging the method and the

results, as well as participating in the “tyranny of clarity” (Haraway, 2004, p. 333), I know too well that feminist theory in psychology is heavily policed, presided over by dominant theoretical and practical interests that do not give way for alternative ways of doing things, lest all hell break loose. There is something intellectually traumatising about not quite having your idea ripped to shreds, but *the way you thought it* beaten into traditional and mainstream submission. As a feminist researcher in the Red Pill psychology Matrix, I feel surrounded by Agent Smith, a replicating program in ‘The Matrix’ trilogy who seeks to shut Neo down; those policing voices of dominant psychology, silencing potential possibilities in favour of the rigidity and clarity that only the Red Pill-privileged can enjoy.<sup>21</sup> Science fiction opens space for feminist researchers to simultaneously experience the embodied conflicts of their positions (within academia and in their everyday lives) as well as imagine possibilities for alternative positions.

Traditional psychology, in which feminist researchers are deeply embedded, however uncomfortably, demands separate, logical and linear theory that can be packaged up neatly and reported concisely. This is characterised by individualising and categorising thinking as it participates in and privileges binaries. The assumption that a

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<sup>21</sup> I am re-reading this sentence after presenting some work at an informal presentation day with other doctoral students. I presented some work with idea choice and organisation that focused on The Weaver as a metaphor for choosing and organising ideas. After my presentation, the only question I was asked was whether or not my supervisors knew I was doing this work with a Weaver. Previous presentations of my research were more focused on something relatively tangible for general audiences, like discussing ethics, or describing what could be considered a ‘finding,’ but my Weaver presentation was an inside look at cyborg processes, distinctly outside the frame of reference for a mainly science-focused (disciplined) audience. The asked question was one of simultaneous confusion, concern and policing. As I tried to communicate in my presentation, mainstream psychological research is something we all, as psychology students, get taught and understand to some extent. Peeking behind the curtain of non-traditional research can horrify. But traditional ways of doing psychology encourage closed responses, like policing, rather than engagement. Those not following the rules are to be challenged, not engaged with, which generates angry or irritated or offended (or all of the above) responses. It highlights the delightful dangerousness of sharing certain unapologetic ideas even with peers who are themselves engaged in the scary doctoral process. The speed with which the tone of the room changes when an alternative view is presented and how personally offended some can become when asked to engage with something else, something extra, is part of the policing of non-traditional research that starts with the first encounters students have with academic psychology.

traditional linear trajectory of thinking/inquiry makes sense is erroneous, since it implies that component sections of the process are separate and logical, not simultaneous, blurred, open to reconfiguration as others engage. As well, there is the absurdity of privileging the linear, in a time of accelerated technological expanse.

Take, for example, theorising on the concept of simulated consciousness.<sup>22</sup> By cyborg standards, the concept is fairly neatly organised through dismantling the neoliberal individual in favour of hyperconnected text in the chaos of users online. However, generally the concepts of ‘simulated consciousness’ and ‘artificial intelligence’ are conflated, meaning the two concepts are used interchangeably to discuss what usually amounts to ‘artificial intelligence.’ In psychology (and to be fair, other ‘sciences’ too), somehow, ‘intelligence’ and ‘consciousness’ are separated. There is a blurred boundary between the two concepts, but they are not considered the same. So when we talk as if ‘artificial *intelligence*’ and ‘simulated *consciousness*’ are identical constructs, it is quite possible that we have got our metaphors disastrously mixed. It seems absurd to model the technological systems that govern our now global critical infrastructure on our (limited) understandings of how we can replicate the functioning of human intelligence or consciousness when we cannot even decide on how each of those concepts are meaningful, let alone understanding *how* they might blur together. As Haraway says, it matters what ‘thoughts think thoughts.’

## **Detectives and Science Fiction**

Since around the same time as Haraway introduced us to cyborg thinking, psychology has been analysed as traditionally following a detective genre (Squire, 1990): investigating psychological problems expressed as mental illness and disorder. In

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<sup>22</sup> I have attached the unpublished (at time of writing) paper proceedings as an appendix.



this genre, the figure of the detective (the psychologist or psychology theorist) collects clues to *narrow in on* the ‘facts’ of the case. We detect the problem (crime?), collect evidence, and we solve it, creating a closed narrative of the events and players.

According to Squire (1990):

the detective story is concerned with events to which it attributes definite meanings, rather than with inner experiences or multiple meanings. But the detective story’s quest for knowledge follows events which concern the self, rather than the social, cultural body. This quest is pursued most importantly through the central figure, the detective, who furthers the narrative by discovering missing knowledge. This figure is an outsider, and enemy of criminals and, more broadly, of any moral order which permits or produces them. (p. 39)

The detective genre suggests that knowledge is ‘missing’ and therefore must be ‘found’ in order to establish the so-called ‘facts’ and close the narrative. An example of the detective genre in action is the psychological investigation of pro-anorexia, which has concerned itself with the ‘guilt’ of pro-anorexics and pro-anorexia websites, finding clues of deviance in the subculture’s content and calling for the execution of websites for the safety of vulnerable female masses (Connor & Coombes, 2014; Connor, Coombes & Morgan, 2015). Here, psychology detectives follow ‘clues’ like anti-psychology sentiments and the rejection of the authority of Western medical knowledge in favour of embodied experience to discover ‘deviance,’ taking action to establish the ‘facts’ of pro-anorexia in preparation to apprehend and punish the pro-anorexic deviants. Such deviants have been constructed as guilty of both mental illness and the incitement of mental illness, and they are duly banished from online society, which

apparently solves the problem. The detective narrative enables psychology detectives to become proficient at “setting up a problem, an unresolved crime, and resolving it, step by step,” the narrative crystallising “interest in logical completeness, or closure” (Squire, 1990, p. 39), privileging those masculinist notions of finality, fixity and definitive categorisations. By the end of the story we know the ‘facts’: that pro-anorexics are guilty of psychological crimes; of deviating from, and fictionalising, the advice of the health professionals.

Psychological texts “resemble detective stories in a number of ways. Like them, they begin with a problem, and try to investigate and resolve it logically. Introduction, method, results and discussion, strung together in this order, generate a chronological, continuous, closed narrative” (Squire, 1990, p. 39). Detectives think as if there is a continuous chronology of a closed narrative logically arranging distinct steps that a detective follows to produce the ‘facts’ of any case. Within a science fiction genre, these chronological steps may blur to the extent that adhering to them makes them illogical.<sup>23</sup> How do you write up research as a traditional detective story when results and method are explicitly simultaneous and emergent? Work on these allegedly distinct research steps might happen simultaneously, crafting as we go, moving arguments around, eliminating some and replacing them with others. As much as psychology produces a clear and concise detective narrative through its text, it is a Frankensteinian process to actually produce this text. What is a literature review, for instance, other than the collection of parts to create the semblance of a whole?

Psychological and detective texts alike “discover knowledge about the individual subject through events, or behaviours, rather than through less certain experiences or meanings. And they, too, are preoccupied with the morality of these

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<sup>23</sup> Surely producing an absurd gait.

events” (Squire, 1990, p. 40), producing linear and closed narratives about individuals, reproducing masculinist fixity and boundedness of body and mind. The detective interrogates a suspect for a confession, or pressures an informant for information that uncovers or confirms the ‘facts’ of the case and plugs holes in or continues the linearity of the narrative. There is sense that clue-following and fact-finding can be done righteously when specific procedures are followed: “For although an experiment seems to be pursuing facts, it is committed more to the scientific process than to the facts themselves” (Squire, 1990, p. 40). The detective narrative focuses on following a strict code of ethics and procedures that cannot deviate, in order to successfully embody the righteous detective as they collect the evidence through ‘rigorous’ procedures and establish a fixed linear progression of ‘facts.’ This may come at the expense of actual ethical practice, ignoring the social in favour of the bounded neoliberal individual: informed consent, privacy and the detective’s (and the institution’s) integrity. Such practices ironically extract a cost from the individual who is pathologised, criminalised, psychologically incarcerated. These individualised and fixed ethical processes are often prioritised over methodological approaches that may be more ethically resonant with the research. If “chaos and errors” (Squire, 1990, p. 40) are occurring in the social world, then psychological research practice must attend to these as *possibilities*, rather than as glitches or impediments to the ordered presentation of fixed ‘facts.’ Perhaps the separation into distinct and ordered steps and facts is not as much a concern as the pretence or insistence that they are distinct in the interests of phallogocentric binaries: dominance/subjugation and gendered power relations. The psychology detective’s concern for ordered steps and distinct ‘facts’ is “... phallic logic, the deeply ingrained way of thinking in terms of separations and either/or” (Hollway, 2016, p. 145) that maintains dominance and subjugation and thus ‘social order.’

Moreover, it “remains conventional to wrap up the whole text in a single reading, presented as if born from the rational consciousness of a particular reader, engaging with the text of a singular author” (Morgan, 2013, p. 123). Questions remaining at the end of the detective’s investigation are reduced to errors in implementing the procedures or the irresponsibility of the individuals involved (lying, cheating neoliberal individuals!), not necessarily the inappropriateness of the procedures. Detective genres have little scope for thinking through loose ends. However, feminist science fiction, like the work of Donna Haraway, instead focuses on the notion that “observing, participating, representing, and being are not separate, but open to each other and co-produced” (Scott, 2010, p. 8), and through science fiction, “openness, contingency, and alterity are privileged over closure” (p. 8); closure which is required by the detective narrative. The privileging of the detective genre suggests that the reading of any given psychological text is assumed to be closed: meaning is consistent, clear and concise, despite everything from the research process itself to lived experience being anything but consistent, clear and concise. The detective genre’s “tyranny of clarity” (Haraway, 2004, p. 333) denies the pleasure of wallowing in the ambiguities and reproduces binaries (most notably in psychology, the valid/invalid, normal/deviant and healthy/sick binaries). Detective stories may be complex, but they cannot be open-ended or contradictory. Psychology detectives, as both writers and readers, need to know which side of the binary psychological text is on. It is not ethical neoliberal detective work to implode/collapse the binaries, as the split between the binaries is the only thing separating the detective from the corrupt. Perhaps in science fiction can we survive the implosion/collapse.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Possibilities are invoked here to avoid collapsing detective and science fiction genres into a binary relationship. While the two genres are often presented together in this thesis, they are two among many possibilities, and neither are by any means totally distinct from the other (or any other genres).

What science fiction as a genre allows for in psychology is a shift from individualism to culture. Interpreting text as cultural production, for example, opens new possibilities for social relations, political movements and ethics. Importantly, an “interpretive emphasis on genre as opposed to individual texts can help remind us of the *social* nature of the production and interpretation of texts” (Chandler, 1997, p. 5). Here, the internet emerges as a domain that typifies the social production of text. Interpreting the internet’s text through a detective’s procedures constructs individuals as producers of individual text for which they are responsible. Indeed, many websites explicitly state this in their terms of service. Through the detective genre, individuals interact to produce text that is assumed to be representative of social interaction, a series of events to be corroborated; however, in science fiction, the texts can be seen as hypernetworked, productive and reproductive of culture, rendering the question of what happens next obsolete, and instead asks *what* is being produced, *how* and what this *means for embodied lives*.

Text as productive, rather than representational, “leads to a breakdown of the conventional hierarchies between writers and readers, and challenges the conventional authority of the single author” (Lefanu, 1988, p. 6). Texts are connected with other texts and readers and authors are connected and constituted through these texts. In science fiction, unlike the detective’s account, the author is no longer the authority on the production and interpretation of the text. If text is in constant dialogue with other text, then text continually challenges the authority of the author. If the reader can participate in the network of power, then the reader is no longer subjugated by the author’s dominance as the textual authority. The reader/author are instead networking, connecting and participating in the “... dissolution of structures and its open-endedness” (Lefanu, 1988, p. 22), as well as working to “... break down certainties...” (p. 23),

breaking down fixed binaries and opening the possibilities for the reconfiguration of social and political power relations.

New technologies offer new possibilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but this does not mean that social and political power relations transform. It can be argued that these new technologies reproduce the same power relations, but in new ways: it is “just as likely that these new technologies will be primarily utilized to tell old stories – stories that reproduce, in high-tech guise, traditional narratives of the subject” (Steffensen, 2002, p. 216). Thus, technology may offer emancipatory potential, but this potential may not be realised (or at least, not realised in the ways we first thought) as old power relations dominate the new technologies of power.

However, engaging with technology and bodies as science fictions can offer possibilities for realising these new power relations and exposing the old ones. Science fiction can open space for the simultaneous and contradictory ways of negotiating these power relations through networks of power, rather than binaried dominant/subjugated or capillaried notions of power:

The vision imagines a network of forces and powers –  
discursive, disciplining, social, political, economic, ecological,  
biotechnological – through which specific bodies are located in  
space and time and, right now, as identities in relation to nodes  
which are relative centres in the ebb and flow of the network.

(Morgan, 2013, p. 125)

Any node can connect with another node, proliferating connections and networking power that can bypass old power notions, rendering them impotent. A re-wiring of power through expansive hyperconnected multi-dimensional networks rather than top-down linear hierarchies enables women to “test the limits of the dominant ideology of

gender by proposing alternative possibilities for social and sexual relations which conflict with the dominant representations” (Wolmark, 1994, p. 55) through the proliferating network of hyperconnections that implode/collapse traditional power relations. Networked connections usurp hierarchical binary power relations and proliferate technoculture that can offer new possibilities for gendered embodied lives. Reconfiguring women’s bodies as technocultural, not unified as natural, renders such bodies “open to resignification, reinterpretation” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 110). The meanings of othered bodies, through science fiction “may be endlessly deferred and re-negotiated” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 126). This makes sense for women’s bodies, as they shape-shift through childhood, puberty, pregnancy and older age, as well as through disease and disorder and their socio-historical, cultural contexts.

## **Making Strange**

*Popular culture’s fascination with science fiction is rooted in the combination of strangeness and familiarity that make up the particularities of the genre. This tension between the “known” and the “unknown” is at the heart of science fiction. It creates a reading process based on estrangement, which places familiar issues into strange territory... (Melzer, 2010, p. 3)*

Through the use of science fiction genre, we can “make strange the stories which constrain, or make dangerous, women’s lives” (Burns, 2009, p. 109). Science fiction, unlike the traditional detective genre, needs explanation. It is through such explanation that women’s lives and the social, historical and cultural contexts they inhabit become strange. Re-telling women’s gendered history explicates the bizarre ways through which women and their bodies have been constructed in dominant patriarchal discourse: “Estrangement from one’s own culture (a perception of it as fiction) leads to the

questioning of all stories (aka facts) about human nature” (Oakley, 2009, p. 120).

Women can be simultaneously estranged from and produced through the patriarchal cultures they find themselves embedded in, as ‘others,’ so we can see ourselves as strange sci-fi characters in a strange world.

For Haraway (1991), there is “nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as ‘being’ female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices” (p. 155). What women have to order and describe their lived experiences are a series of discourses constructed about them by (phallogocentric, Eurocentric) science/philosophy/religion. The group ‘women’ can be alien and frightening sometimes, and as such, it is perpetually being contested: “Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of woman elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women’s dominations of each other” (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). Such fragmentations and dominations are reflected in current social politics characterised by the dissolution of ‘women’ and reification of the ‘other’ in place of ‘women.’ The rejection of Western feminism as white and transphobic serves to fragment women’s rights into ‘others’ rights, as if women are a minority. There is little doubt that Western feminism has looked white and therefore privileged through much of its visibility. Indeed, white women were the faces of Suffrage, demanding the right to vote: a right that perhaps seemed unurgent to a starving woman or a beaten woman, but a right that, theoretically, aimed to achieve rights that the starving and the beaten urgently needed. If women are allowed into political life, they can make political changes. Or so we thought. Western women (mainly white) have created social, cultural and political space, mainly for themselves, and yet this space is still small, fraught and contested. There is a collective (ironically)



forgetting that feminism is a doing word, not a category: “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code” (Haraway, 1991, p. 163).

Science fiction narratives can express “when the alien becomes the expression of a culture’s simultaneous fear of and desire for the other” (Wolmark, 1994, p. 3). There is extremely high-demand for digital women and their bodies (mainly in the form of porn – professional, amateur and non-consensual), while at the same time women and their bodies are denigrated, abused and ostracised from online communities (Mantilla, 2013). Woman is alien to the online world and alienated from technology. Research on women’s experiences and uses of technology has served to account for and coercively control women’s use of technology. Burke Winkelman, Oomen-Early, Walker, Chu and Yick-Flanagan (2015) surveyed women who use social media, found that women experience harassment online and recommended women protect themselves from harassment, including a lists of ‘dos and don’ts’ for individual women to achieve personal responsibility for their safety online. Chen (2015) found that women blog for lots of different reasons. Oberst, Renau, Chamarro and Carbonell (2016) found that people, especially women people, want to minimise expressions of gender online. Gender differences in social media use are a popular detective line of inquiry (see Döring, Reif & Poeschl, 2016; Joiner et al., 2014; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014). In addition, Brown and Tiggemann (2016) found that women’s body image is negatively affected by viewing their peers’ bodies and celebrity bodies online. Ghaznavi and Taylor (2015) came to the conclusion that ‘thinspiration’ promotes the thin ideal. Alleva, Martijn and Jansen (2016) used a computer program to assess women’s evaluations of their bodies in connection with social feedback (positive and negative). And even more bizarrely, Ho (2014) researched women’s visual attention to handbags

when online shopping. The above cacophony of examples is a snapshot of psychology detectives finding ‘facts’ to produce knowledge about women that constructs women as alien from technology, and their use of technology and/or their embeddedness in technoculture, as deficient, particularly with the focus on women’s ‘negative body image’ and online harassment that reproduces women’s bodies through the positive/negative binary. Even the ‘positive’ things that women do online are often framed through sickness or deficiency – for example cancer survivor (de Boer & Slatman, 2014) or weight loss blogging (Trainer, Brewis, Wutich, Kurtz & Niesluchowski, 2016) or other support networks like infertility blogs (Bronstein & Knoll, 2015).

Amplifying women’s technoalienation, technology has “troubling patriarchal origins” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 117), making technology’s connection with women’s body politics strange. Women are excluded from technology, as it is cultural, not natural (women’s domain), so these ubiquitous connections are odd and make for potentially awkward feminist encounters, where simultaneous participation in and resistance to these technopatriarchal origins produces a contradictory and ambivalent image of a feminist cyborg figure (Melzer, 2010).

But as Haraway suggests, “it is a mistake to assume much about species in advance of an encounter” (Potts & Haraway, 2010, p. 324). Much has been assumed about cyborgs, and women, before any ‘encounters,’ but these assumptions are typically faulty, or at the very least partial. Women are becoming cyborg, natureculture. We are encountering a species that negates hegemonic assumptions and challenges them. That, in a patriarchal world, is a very strange thing.

Science fiction as a genre blurs the boundary between the real and the fictive, the familiar and the strange. This is what opens new possibilities and allows for the

creative examination of the positions we find ourselves in: “‘Creating’ means imaginatively bringing new things into being, a process which starts from what already exists and then departs from it” (Squire, 1991, p. 185). There is potential to ‘make strange’ elements of our lived experience that look and feel familiar, but in key, perhaps political, ways differ from the experience that has been/is being constructed. Science fiction allows for women to simultaneously live their embodied lives in conflict as well as imagine possibilities for alternative positionings. The simultaneity of science fiction acknowledges experience while simultaneously experiencing, through metaphor, how a different embodied experience may feel and be enacted.

Science fiction is the negation of reality (and virtual space the negation of ‘real’ space), “but perhaps this negation is the real illusion” (Haraway, 1992, p. 325). Within such illusory negations is where metaphor articulates experience better than the even ‘stranger’ explanations that we construct through discourse. The collapses between real/imagined, real/metaphor and science/fiction draw attention to the strangeness of our lived experiences. What becomes strange then is the metaphor’s capacity to better articulate experience than more ‘real’ descriptions (as constructed through the psychology detective’s narrative). Metaphor is about “... the necessity of initiating an active process of interpretation on the part of the reader” (Heuser, 2003, p. xxxviii), requiring the reader to image their own possibilities, rather than accept the ending proposed in the closed narrative of the detective story. Science fiction alerts us to our open-endedness, hybridity, contradictions and partialities, and this can be very, very strange for a neoliberal individualist body.

## **Morality/Ethics**

Propelling the reader (and writer) into another world (for example, asking the reader to inhabit the history of women’s bodies), demands an engagement with moral

and ethical dilemmas (Burns, 2009). Simultaneity and contradiction do not allow for easy ethical considerations. The reader must think about how to engage, ethically, within this new world, rather than being told (as in the detective narrative) what their ethical stance should be.

Even in critical theoretical psychological work, the detective genre necessitates theoretical ambiguities be resolved into “accepted psychological terms” (Squire, 1991, p. 185). The necessity for resolution ignores the simultaneity, contradiction and multiplicity of these theoretical psychological terms, particularly for ‘othered’ groups such as women. If something is theoretically ambiguous, there must be something going on, and a science fiction genre, with all its uncertainties, new possibilities and hybrid creatures, can accommodate the complexity and noninnocence of theoretical ambiguities, instead of demanding their resolution.

Science fiction can also extrapolate politics: “not so much to make them come out “right,” as to make them move “differently”” (Haraway, 1992, p. 326). In the detective genre, power trickles (or floods) down. In the science fiction genre, power is a network, expansive, connected and dealing in information. The question of power/knowledge is no longer simple in science fiction. Ethical decisions are not straightforward. Power is not top-down and binaried, but instead expansive and non-fixed. How we engage then with questions of ethics becomes a matter of connections and interrelations beyond the transactions of neoliberalism. Science fiction teaches us to be accountable/responsible for ethical decisions (Haraway, 1992), but in relation to one another, not ethical guidelines premised on individualism that is more attuned to personal responsibility than social and political resonance. We must be aware of the ethical implications of our text for bodies and embodied lives *together*, for in science

fiction, the stakes are high. In the detective narrative, justice is at stake. But in science fiction, *survival* is at stake, *worlds* are stake, *universes* are at stake.

## **Transgressions/Multiplicities**

In traditional research, “the subject matter and method of investigation are conceived as independent of each other” (Unger, 1983, p. 11). In science fiction, these boundaries, at the very least, blur, transgressing taken-for-granted distinct boundaries between methodology, data and researcher, acknowledging the potent potentials of such ‘categories’ being connected to and constituted within each other: text is open-ended and always in dialogue with other text.

In particular, the blurred connections between researchers and the objects of their inquiries can be acknowledged in science fiction. The mutual interdependence between these figures, and the text they produce, is significant. Where psychology’s traditional research questions can “have different *meanings for the observer and the actor*” (Unger, 1983, p. 25), science fiction characters can tease out the complexities of these plural, multiple and simultaneous meanings. The multiplicity of meanings here, through science fiction, can be attended to as a point of interest (tense or otherwise); whereas in the detective narrative, these ethical connections can be actively ignored and hierarchical power structures enforced.

As a genre of new possibilities, science fiction is a kind of “...qualified, uncertain exploration beyond the conclusions derived from evidence” (Squire, 1990, p. 44). As Oakley (2009) suggests, science fiction allows us to “be comfortable with not knowing quite what happened, and it may, indeed, be valuable to encourage readers to reach their own conclusions” (p. 121). Rather than providing answers that close down theoretical possibilities, the science fiction genre requires engagement with theory in order to open the possibilities to better theories. Such open uncertainties allow for

multiple and partial, simultaneous and contradictory possibilities, like non-linear understandings of events, the dissolution of ‘facts’ into chaos and the disruption of ‘normalcy’ through the privileging of ‘otherness.’ Rather than fixing and clarifying certain facts, science fiction enables the fluidity of knowledge as situated, in flux and chaotic.

Science fiction, as genre, serves as a portal through which to hypothesise how our technoobsessions and fear of vast unknowns might work out for us if we pursue them. It is “... a stage on which we imagine humanity’s fate, and it is in its fantastic extrapolations that we develop terminology to describe our future” (Melzer, 2010, p. 3). Science fiction allows for new ways of representing simultaneous, contradictory and partial experiences that have heretofore been too scary (from academically complex to literally too frightening) to attend to. Science fiction “presents ways of asking ‘What if?’ without having to adhere to what is currently possible” (Burns, 2009, p. 110).

The blurred connections between science, imagination and metaphor serve to fictionalise, at its bastard origins, the idea of ‘truth’: science fiction can politicise the idea that The Truth™ exists. This is not to say that science fiction always does so. A significant proportion of the most popular science fiction narratives do not necessarily offer us as many new possibilities as we might need or want. ‘The Matrix’ trilogy is as much a saviour story as it is a science fiction exposé, as is the ‘Star Wars’ franchise, and so too ‘The Terminator’ franchise. Such movies replicate religion through science fiction narratives.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Western science and Western religion are doing the same

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<sup>25</sup> For ‘The Matrix’ as religion, see Ford (2000), Geraci (2007) and Milford (2010); for ‘Star Wars’ as religion, see Grimes (2007) and Kozlovic (2000); and for ‘The Terminator’ as religion, see Geraci (2007) and Koslovic (2000) again. All male writers!

thing, telling the same story, just through different tools. The quest for both is to answer life's, allegedly, most important questions: why are we here? How did we get here?<sup>26</sup>

As with both science and religion, the thinking that congeals at the fringes is much more interesting. It is to the marginalised, dirtier science fiction we need to look in order to experience more difficult politics and more important questions. Movies like 'District 9' and 'Another Earth' still offer us religious principles, 'loving thy neighbour' and 'seeking redemption' respectively (although both are significantly more complex than those reductive phrases), but do so without saviours, or utopian understandings of *how* we can love our neighbours or redeem ourselves.

'District 9' asks us to consider issues of oppression, race and class, a story told through a mix of found footage style, news style and documentary interview style (so multiple connections and familiar intersections between genres) (Hanson, Ferwerda & Blomkamp, 2009). While simultaneously engaging in multiple genres, there is also a twist to the science fiction genre: the viewer is asked to identify with the alien race; a sick, poor and tired race detained by the military on the authority of the government.<sup>27</sup> The humans, in this story, are violent oppressors, abusing and experimenting on a race deemed as dangerous and inferior.<sup>28</sup> They are keeping the poor and sick, poor and sick. When one of these human oppressors (he's a sympathetic one though!) is 'infected' with alien DNA and begins to transform into one of the despised 'prawns,' he becomes hunted and ostracised himself, which he unsurprisingly does not much enjoy.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> What terminally boring questions.

<sup>27</sup> Heller-Nicholas (2011) explores the movie's connections to apartheid, globalisation and 'reality.'

<sup>28</sup> Nel (2012) discusses the 'otherness' of the prawns and their 'repulsive' bodies.

<sup>29</sup> van Veuren (2012) discusses the blurred body boundaries of the movie, while Kapstein (2014) discusses the movie in terms of the potentials of science fiction to tell stories about the 'othered' through the fear of the dissolution of boundaries: "We get the last laugh if we can harness hysteria and science fiction, which go hand in hand, for their potential energy, for their politics of transition, and for their frenetic *fictiveness*" (p. 173).

events of ‘District 9’ challenge that conservative, right-wing nightmare of being invaded by the sick and poor, and, perhaps the ultimate horror, becoming sick and poor themselves. The movie asks questions about what oppression might look like in possible times and places – do our narratives ever really shift? When we do things ‘for the good of the people,’ which people are we really talking about?

Movies like ‘Another Earth’ ask questions about the contexts we find ourselves embedded in. A young woman engages in behaviour with traumatic consequences, and the discovery of another Earth offers her the possibility to see who she might have been had she made different choices,<sup>30</sup> or perhaps confirm the inevitable repetition of certain experiences. If she were to meet herself, she would say “better luck next time” (Brodie, Mezey & Cahill, 2011). ‘Another Earth’ privileges the possibility of recurrence, of repetition of particular experiences, feelings and contexts as something that both restricts and emancipates particular troubled lives. Historically, the same groups of people remain oppressed, even if that oppression takes a different form in the present. Would this be any different on another earth? Is there redemption on another planet?

The questions that ‘District 9’ and ‘Another Earth,’ as just two examples, ask seem more salient to the disenfranchised than the more popular and more widely viewed modern science fictions through their particular attention to the politics of ‘othered’ bodies and experiences. Narratives like ‘The Matrix,’ ‘Star Wars’ and ‘The Terminator’ still offer us politics, but in a much more familiar, (white) masculine form (the trials of the ‘oppressed’ white man who just wants to be a ‘free’ ‘individual’ and expects us all

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Another Earth’ has not enjoyed much academic theorising. de Oliveira Iuva (2016) discusses Rhoda’s exploration of her identity in the wake from her release from prison coupled with the discovery of Earth 2, as well as the movie’s shift to the representation of women in science fiction both as protagonist(ish) of the movie and as a wannabe space explorer. de Oliveira Iuva’s (2016) analysis is written entirely in Spanish, and Google Translate only gets you so far... but the overall argument seems to be about how women writers and characters in sci-fi can tell new stories in new ways.



to want the same), hence their popularity and success (and iconic status in male-dominated nerd-culture). But these sci-fi narratives are not necessarily those that can be potentially transformative for the troubled embodied lives of women, for it matters ‘what thoughts think thoughts.’ So perhaps it is the science fiction at the edges (both the hardest and the most distant) that can enable narratives through which to think more disruptive thoughts and enact more persistent transformative embodied politics.

The choice of metaphors to engage in science fiction writing (to think through), then, is important: “We cannot attempt to ‘translate’ what the metaphor says to us without losing a significant and crucial aspect of its meaning, mood, or attitude. Ultimately and fundamentally, metaphors resist all attempts at paraphrase” (Heuser, 2003, p. xlv). Through metaphor, we are required to acknowledge hybridity. We have no choice, in metaphor, but to realise the blurred boundaries between binaries that we take for granted. Somewhere near these blurred boundaries is where the taken-for-granted binaries become fictional, but within the context of lived experience. Metaphor references both the literal and the figurative, just as science fiction references both the science and the fiction. It also captures the real and the imaginary, a binary that must be resolved in a traditional detective narrative. Science fiction metaphor can, however, capture ineffable multiplicities. Science fiction can “render more vividly” changes in culture, theory and practice (Merrick, 2010, p. 142).

Critical and feminist psychological work “in the process of extending and questioning this science, fictionalizes it” (Squire, 1991, p. 183), which works to destabilise it as the authority on psychological knowledge. In the West, there are ever-proliferating connections between bodies and technologies, and the possibilities that these connections can produce. Science fiction can “dramatize these encounters and explore the ramifications of recent radical thinking on the gendered and technologized

body” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 109). Moreover, “science fiction’s inescapably functional nature makes the recognition of its suspension between realities and imagination easier” (Squire, 1991, p. 196). Metaphor, here, as it blurs the boundaries between women’s lived experience and feminist possibilities, makes clearer the complexities of women’s embodied lives.

According to Haraway (1992), the science fiction genre is about “how to move and what to fear in the topography of an impossible but all-too-real present, in order to find an absent, but perhaps possible, other present” (p. 295). This is the simultaneous un/reality of science fiction that allows for a critique of the dangers and joys of 21<sup>st</sup> century life, particularly for women and feminist psychology. In the early 1990s, as the Western world logged into the internet, feminist theorists were dreaming emancipatory sci-fi dreams of women, cyberspace, resistance and new possibilities. Donna Haraway wrote of cyborgs and Corrine Squire wrote of science fiction as the genre for the future. However, few feminists have plugged into the sci-fi matrix.

While Squire offered science fiction as a more politically charged and engaged genre for psychology to participate in, Donna Haraway was engaging the science fiction figure of the cyborg for feminist politics elsewhere. In an award acceptance speech, Donna Haraway recounts one of her (undoubtedly numerous) struggles to engage, academically, with science fiction, while also being a feminist, a science theorist and a story-teller. Haraway, of course, occupies contested space in academia:

Equipped with a PhD in molecular, developmental, and evolutionary biology, I have earned a living as a humanities scholar in science studies and feminist studies, with a kind of green card to reside under strict surveillance in biological and cultural anthropology. (Haraway, 2013, para. 2)

Her work is always, and will always be at the blurred boundaries of multiple and partial disciplines (in every sense of the word). So when told to remove certain feminist, science fiction publications from her CV when applying for a promotion, she obeyed, knowing that such unseemly things as feminism and science fiction would hinder her chances of success in a masculine academic world.

But Haraway did not die when attacked with puny human academic weaponry, and has instead continued to argue that academia is a process of science fiction: “The tight coupling of writing and research—where both terms require the factual, fictional, and fabulated; where both terms are materialized in fiction and scholarship—seems to me to be built into SF’s techno-organic, polyglot, polymorphic wiring diagrams” (Haraway, 2013, para. 2). Haraway has long been a proponent of science fiction as a (blurry) genre with which to think and to do. While her figure of the cyborg is often held up (sometimes literally) as the most explicit example of her sci-fi leanings, the cyborg was always a figure within a more expansive and complex sci-fi world:

Cyborgs were never just about the interdigitations of humans and information machines; cyborgs were from the get-go the materialization of imploded (not hybridized) human beings-information machines-multispecies organisms. Cyborgs were always simultaneously relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated. Like all good SF, they redid what counts as—what is—real. (Haraway, 2013, para. 4)

Haraway’s (1991) cyborg is produced through the science fiction genre, engaging with the ideas of possibility, blurred boundaries, contradiction and open narrative, and as such, she offers a horrifying and hopeful metaphor for women’s politicised embodiment that opens new possibilities for women’s body politics. The

cyborg, as a feminist sci-fi figure, demonstrates the potential possibilities of dramatic and ironic shifts in genre.

## Chapter Two Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

Please enjoy an excerpt from an unfinished feminist science fiction screenplay:

FADE IN.

INTERIOR. FEMINIST ESCAPE POD.

The feminists are talking again.

**(Haraway, 1992, p. 300)**

"Science fiction is generically concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience"

**(BARAD, 2001, p. 104)**

"Perhaps what is needed is a "politics of possibilities": ways of responsibly imagining and intervening in the re(con)figurations of power"

**(HARAWAY, 1989, p. 156)**

"The line between science and science fiction blurs, reading out an oppositional system of meanings and practices called history"

**(SQUIRE, 1991, p. 192)**

"Science fiction which devotes itself to the genre's conventions produces a brief disruptive enjoyment, from the recurring possibility that, this time, the narrative's conventions will not be fulfilled"

*[EXPLOSION IN DISTANCE]*

**(RAPOPORT, 1977, p. 6)**

"Good science fiction has always dealt with human questions and issues under unusual circumstances, considering how the quality of life would be affected if we were to extrapolate from present situations, creating new ones"

**(SQUIRE, 1990, p. 44)**

"It wants to tell stories about a wholly real world, which science fiction bridges metonymically the imaginary and the real"

*[PEOPLE SCREAMING]*

**(HARAWAY, 2016, p. 150)**

"Although hardly free of the sterilizing narrative of wiping the world clean by apocalypse or salvation, the richest humus for their inquiries turned out to be SF - science fiction and fantasy, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, and string figures. Blocking the foreclosures of utopias, SF kept politics alive"

*[A CYBORG ENTERS]*

## Chapter Three: The Cyborg

*We can argue that 'women' do not settle down as the borders of separate and stable community identities. Like the leaky female body, 'women' bleed across those borders. Like the productive female body, 'women' give birth to all sorts of new identities. Like the female body's 'troubling talent for making other bodies', 'women' cannot be easily contained within a pure space defined by fixity and sameness.*

*(Gedalof, 2000, p. 352)*

### Swapping Binaries for Binary Code

Women's bodies fluctuate in their shape and function across their lifespans. Throughout childhood, we compliment little girls on their pretty dresses and hairstyles, while we ask little boys what they like to do. Girls learn to reserve their bodily functions for 'private' moments, while boys learn to celebrate every fluid and smell (Seid, 1994). Puberty, in particular, can be a public spectacle for young women, as their bodies' changing shapes have attention drawn to them (Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). Even those women who experience few changes to their body shape during puberty will have this called to their, and everyone else's, attention. In addition, the body of a pregnant woman undergoes massive changes, some highly visible (Johnson, 2010; Nicolson, Fox & Heffernan, 2010). And older women experience changes through menopause that hurt and are dismissed (Dillaway, 2005; Ussher, 2008). Women's bodies are dieted (food intake and weight restricted); dyed (hair of various kinds); painted and styled (make-up and hair); dismembered (hair removal); surgurised (implanting, reducing, stapling) (Bartky, 1998). But for any woman, at any point in her life, her body, what it looks like and how it is functioning, is of significance to not only her, but the culture around her.

So, women's bodies are strictly surveilled, monitored for infringements, punished for digressions (Balsamo, 1995; Bordo, 2004). Woman's weight is constantly monitored in multiple ways. Her body shape too, is always monitored, with the size and shape of any given body part (visible or not) up for debate and re-shaping. Even down to a woman's pores, women's bodies are monitored for transgressions, regardless of whether these transgressions are 'natural' (in the sense of genetics and child-bearing, for example), or uncontrollable (like disability), or deliberate (for politics), or all of the above.

Whether they be young, old, clothed, unclothed, pregnant, not pregnant, thin, fat, of any race and colour, of any social and political status, women's bodies are contested public spaces (Bartky, 1998; Bordo, 2004; Morgan, 1991). Even explicitly private, intimate female embodiments are public property (for example, revenge porn and hacked images) (Henry & Powell, 2015b; Shah, 2015a, 2015b). The publicity of women's bodies is amplified online, with any image of a woman's body online receiving all kinds of commentary.

Of course, these women's bodies, public, private or otherwise, are plural, partial and multiple: "The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself—all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways" (Haraway, 1991, p. 163). Any given body part is subject to a multiplicity of meanings and ways of talking about it. Breasts are the most obvious example. Breast feeding in public (online and off) is a contested act (Hausman, 2007). Simultaneously, images of women's breasts as sex objects (through pornography and all the extra kinds of image sharing) are in high demand both online (consensual and non-consensual/coerced image sharing and virtual sexual harassment, for example) and offline (looks and comments, sexual harassment). Within the same body, within the same body parts, women embody these plural,

multiple, simultaneous and contradictory understandings (see Bartlett, 2000; Millsted & Frith, 2003 for more boobs).

Thus, plural and contradictory embodied tensions are multiple and binary, producing the experience of impossible bodies and alternative positions and spaces to occupy. Women's positions, whether inside, outside or irrelevant of the binaries can ache. There is violence in our taken-for-granted binaries: male/female, good/bad, healthy/sick, right/wrong, masculine/feminine, up/down, left/right, home/work, subject/object, public/private, real/not-real, alive/dead. Such binaries exclude complexities of women's lived experience (Butler, 2004; Haraway, 1991). The example of the humble boob (that, by the way, did not cover details like the policing of the shape or colour of breasts and breast accessories like nipples) is a clear (if still partial) example of the multiplicities and contradictions that women and their bodies experience and are expected to unify under the skin of the Western individual.

So if a breast, one part of a woman's many parts, is in and of itself so fraught with tensions between gendered binary oppositions (within women (like sex object/mother) and between women and men), then women's political and social experiences become chaotically, tensely entangled. Women are required to be both feminine and masculine in order to take up space in the political sphere. Women are expected to prioritise both home and work; the postfeminist 'we can have it all' position (Genz, 2010). Women are expected to share their bodies publicly while keeping them explicitly private. Women are expected to achieve impossible body shapes, which means walking the line between real and not-real, healthy and sick. Women's participation in the binaries, or at least the imposition of the binaries onto women and their bodies, is a fraught and violent process of becoming the ideal Western woman, an impossible and deadly serious process (Bohren et al., 2015; Moola & Norman, 2017;



Morgan, 1991). She is expected to embody both ends of the binaries, despite not having access to the joys that the privileged term in the binary enjoys, like the power of 'masculine' performances. The cyborg appears at the residues that these tensions between intolerable, impossible binaries produce, and noninnocently emerges as multiple, simultaneous and partial.

## **Hello, Cyborg**

Describing the form and function of Haraway's (1991) cyborg is complex task, as the figure is multiple, partial and ever-in-flux. For Haraway in the late 1980s, the cyborg was a metaphor for female embodiment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that allowed for and celebrated the multiplicity and contradiction of female embodiment (or at least, that is my interpretation). The Cyborg Manifesto serves to construct (an) alternative way/s to understand how to inhabit a woman's body during tumultuous social and political times. Dominant discourse of these tumultuous times is singular (masculine, individualist), while discourse outside is 'other,' multiple and contradictory. Haraway's cyborg embraces the fragmentation and incompatibility of 'otherness.' The cyborg metaphor emerges as a way for women to make sense of their 'otherness' and the multiple, fragmented and contradictory positions that (dominant, masculine) discourses have allowed for them, and offers a new way to live with discursively constructed bodies that are constantly being dismantled, updated and rebuilt.

As outlined(ish) in the 1991 manifesto for cyborgs, Haraway's cyborg is characterised by:

partial and  
simultaneous  
hybridity where  
categories and  
dualisms become  
both and neither  
no longer

the networking  
need for connection (privileges connectivity as p

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distinguishable and instead happening together all at once so the cyk

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blurred boundaries (the dissolution or disintegration of taken-for-granted

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incompatible things and/or opposites are produced together

enacted simultaneously offering altern  
that embodies the contradic  
enabling women to simultaneously live  
and multiplicities in a consta

efficient

of information which enables alternative power structures through expansion  
(productive of multiple simultaneous and partial embodiment)

productive  
activity

g cannot be categorised by dualisms instead challenging their authenticity

activity of information to produce new/alternative information and/or reproduce an

Privileges text to produce and reproduce connections

artificiality

boundaries between assumed to be distinct categories like technology and biology)

multiplicity

simultaneity

ulated consciousness

ative experience  
:tory positions that have been available to women  
: those contradictions  
int state of flux

sive networks that proliferate through information and interconnections)

and legitimacy

and alter connections and destroy obsolete information and processes  
 rejecting unification of identity  
 through the dissolution of dualisms  
 that classify something as one thing  
 or another

Haraway's (1991) cyborg understands how the woman's body has been built and rebuilt in and through discourse and the scars left by continual welding, cauterising and stitching of the woman's body are embraced. Women's bodies have traditionally been constructed as troublesome, as they leak, protrude and shape-shift, and they do these things both naturally and unnaturally. The meanings inscribed on these bodies can alienate and torture, rendering them uninhabitable. As women experience a multitude of

contradictions and multiplicities in their daily embodied lives (healthy/sick, fat/thin, food, sexuality), living as a cyborg may enable women to experience a discursive position free from, or perhaps rather *revelling in*, the dualistic tensions that loosen the nuts and bolts of their embodied lives. The figure of the cyborg can flourish in a cultural climate that views the woman's body as a series of glitches that can be repaired, perfected and enhanced. Bodies are broken down into text, information and codes.

Haraway's (1991) cyborg is a figure of complexity and challenging politics. Understandings of her cyborg have, at many times, been offensively singular. For example, some have slandered the cyborg as merely a distracting figure unironically participating in and producing the same patriarchal structures that 'good' feminists seek to disrupt. Hawthorne (1999) and Klein (1999) both argue that such a patriarchal metaphor as a cyborg does not extricate feminist theory from patriarchal structures, but rather has the potential to re-oppress women through the metaphor's uncritical and technophilic application. But while the cyborg plays in the tangled military wires of high (patriarchal) technology, she is doing important, destructive and creative work that infiltrates and co-opts masculinist systems and patriarchal structures through the explicit and unapologetic use of such a patriarchal metaphor. The (unethical) decision to dismiss cyborgs as *just* boy-things doing *just* boy-work closes down opportunities for feminine exploitations and resistances that utilise all the tools at our disposal (even if they belong to the patriarchy). There is a lot at stake here: the politics of survival – the 'other' uprising. More complicated, conflicted, contradictory figures are vital to making sense of troubled embodied lives in troubled social-political-cultural times. Women could welcome a figure of resistance who is as theoretically and embodied-ly dense as they are:

Cyborgs are not machines in just any sense, nor are they machine-organism hybrids. In fact, they are not hybrids at all. They are, rather, imploded entities, dense material semiotic “things” – articulated string figures of ontologically heterogeneous, historically situated, materially rich, virally proliferating relatings of particular sorts, not all the time everywhere, but here, there, and in between, with consequences.

(Haraway, 2016, p. 104)

The politics of Haraway’s cyborg emerge not solely from the construction of her figure through the metaphors of patriarchal technology (although her emergence through them is important for questioning the building and dismantling of women’s bodies), but also through the science fiction of the cyborg as a metaphor for the non-fixity, flux, contradiction, plurality and partiality of women’s embodiment and the woman’s body as a dynamic site for dynamic feminist politics. The political action of “seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (Haraway, 1991, p. 175) can enable new, frightening and urgent possibilities for re-doing embodiment in more potent ways.

Now that I have built up the cyborg’s heroic potential (oops), another closing off of Haraway’s cyborg is that she was proposed as The Salvic Figure for Feminists to follow into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and hence the objections of feminists uncomfortable with such a (seemingly patriarchal) technological figure to lead the feminist movement (like Hawthorne (1999) and Klein (1999)). While science fiction certainly presents us with salvic figures, these are not the only figures who matter. Much as Neo, from ‘The Matrix’ trilogy, can be considered a salvic figure, he can also be considered a figure representing new, blurred boundaries. The cyborg is about opening new spaces and making new figures capable of emerging to do political work she cannot or will not do.

A singular reading of Haraway's cyborg as salvic, or complicit with patriarchy, or as technophilia, denies her characterisation as multiple and simultaneous. The singular reading of the cyborg as a singular patriarchal character is produced through the detective's collection of 'clues' about who the cyborg is, rather than *how* she is. The detective's interpretation of Haraway's cyborg as uncritically and unironically patriarchal within the hierarchical military-industrial complex that is academia is a point dutifully acknowledged by Haraway in her cyborg manifesto: "The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 151). However, here lies the crux<sup>31</sup> of the cyborg (non)origin story: "But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (p. 151). By repurposing and recalibrating patriarchal technologies through feminist politics and women's bodies, and changing the story from salvation to survival, the cyborg figure is unfaithful to the patriarchal origins of technology and productive of new and exciting possibilities for women's embodied politics. Thus these patriarchal sites (among many other sites) of cyborg emergence are significant for the politics that the cyborg plays seriously with. Academia that rejects the serious play of Haraway's cyborg has little sense of irony, and thus little sense of the cyborg.

Furthermore, the cyborg was never a leader: "cyborgs are critters in a queer litter, not the Chief Figure of Our Times" (Haraway, 2016, p. 105), as they have a "feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party" (Haraway, 1991, p. 151). She may well be The Figure for me, today, but she is not *a* figure at all. She is plural, multiple, partial and contradictory: "Characterized by partial connections, the parts do not add up to any whole; but they do add up to worlds of nonoptional, stratified,

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<sup>31</sup> Crux can mean the most important point, or it can mean a point of difficulty.

webbed, and unfinished living and dying, appearing and disappearing” (Haraway, 2016, p. 104). Here, Haraway draws upon the ‘nonoptional’ positions in women’s lives, the ‘appearing and disappearing’ of women’s bodies, the ‘webbed’ and enmeshed dangers of heteronormativity. This is how the cyborg can be understood: not as a reproductive representation of patriarchal militarised and salvic technologies, but as a multiple figure for subversion, for disruption, for transformation, for irritation. Haraway’s cyborg is a *doing* figure, rather than an emblem or a symbol. She is an articulation of how to do embodied gendered politics.

### **Story Time in the Matrix**

The cyborg is a figure of science fiction. Either hard or soft, the blurring of the boundaries between the ‘realities’ of science and the ‘impossibilities’ of fiction are where the cyborg finds something resembling solace. But the cyborg also inhabits the destruction and doom of the apocalypse genre; the unease and uncertainty of the gothic genre; the terror of horror; the humour of the black comedy; and the hyperbole of the melodrama. The cyborg is uninterested in the detective’s step-by-step investigations and clear-cut resolutions (unless, of course, she needs them), instead prioritising the flux and non-fixity of multiple and partial connections. The cyborg also questions the quests of heroes and fantasy (masculinist, goal-orientated and at someone’s expense), and has little use for the nonsense of romance and drama (steeped in heterosex and gendered power).

So within these genres (and genre rejections) that the cyborg moves through, occupies and challenges, there are opportunities to change the story and new possibilities for telling stories that articulate embodied experiences as fraught, joyous and urgent that are un-done from the conventions of traditional singularly genre-d stories (like psychology’s adherence to the detective genre). Cyborgs tell these stories to



share knowledge, to entertain, but mostly for connection, for proliferating ways of knowing and politicising knowledge in a free-flow exchange of text unbound by 'objectivity' or stylistic conventions like grammar or words with set meanings.

For Haraway (1991), the cyborg's tools for subversion "are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities" (p. 175). Thus, cyborg stories are told and re-told to subvert, dissolve and reconfigure knowledge and power, re-tellings in order to open new possibilities and ask new questions. So through story-telling and story proliferation through networks, cyborgs disrupt the traditions of hierarchical power relations through the privileging of cyborg text. Cyborg language, still struggled for, is forever in flux, being built and re-built as connections proliferate or die. The cyborg raises questions about institutions, systems and taken-for-granted binaries. The challenging of these fundamental binaries (such as man/woman) renders the power relations forged through them as no longer 'natural' (as in 'the natural order of things'), but disrupted and dismantled, disembowelled and ready for re-design. Cyborgs use ways of story-telling and speaking, like science fiction, appropriation and irony, to dismantle ways of 'othering' and other violences, and question the privilege of dominant discourses. The ways cyborgs speak are not about dominance and subjugation. Cyborgs speak about the privileging of complexity over totalising and essentialism. In this way, she is noninnocent. The cyborg knows that not even essentialist or totalising discourses are unified, and she knows this through experience. Instead, cyborg language opens spaces, for possibilities.

Through these cyborg ways of speaking, the Western origin stories of women and feminism can be re-told and futures re-imagined:

In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonized

by those origin myths... Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control. (Haraway, 1991, p. 175)

So the political proliferations of cyborg stories are done and re-done through text, where writing “is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs” in their political “struggle for language” (Haraway, 1991, p. 175). Text is simultaneously undeniable and abstract. Text is representation of the unrepresentational, recordings of joys, grievances and confusions. Text withstands and disrupts time, with meanings preserved in text code even as those meanings shift, forever in flux. Text from decades, centuries gone by endures even as meanings transform. Text from 10 minutes ago endures even as meanings transform. Words, phrases and symbols contain remnants of past meanings, representations and violences. These are historical artefacts that are carried through to present meanings and meanings of the future, shaping future texts, discourses and bodies. In this way, text is eternal recurrence.<sup>32</sup> It may change in meaning and form, but it always retains the past, constructs the present and shapes the future.

Text also offers some respite from the burden of the ‘othered’ body and offers ways to transform it. With text as the privileged system of representation of dominant politics (rather the body and the extent to which it embodies violent Western ideals), women can write their bodies, embodied lives and lived experiences in ways that can disrupt and displace the hierarchical binaries that subjugate them. With text (and its connectivity) privileged, the body can be rendered as politics rather than representations: “Cyborg writing is about the power to survive” and “the struggle

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<sup>32</sup> The idea of eternal recurrence, as it cycles through Anaximander, Heinrich Heine, and Friedrich Nietzsche (Gendron, 2008), privileges the “eternal play of repetition, all configurations that have previously existed on this earth must yet meet, attract, repulse, kiss, and corrupt each other again....” (Heine, as cited by Kaufmann, 2013, p. 318). That is, we have been here before and we will be here again, even if differently and differently again.

against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism” (Haraway, 1991, p. 175).

Hyperconnected text can subvert the singularity of meaning (fixed and clear) and readings, as produced through that detective genre, through its multiplicities, partialities and contradictions. Text and writing might enable bodies to be rewritten in more survivable and transformative ways; new possibilities for survivable bodies, survivable social relations can be imagined and enacted. Through cyborg writing and re-writing, cyborgs produce ever-shifting, ever-present cyborg politics that enable survival for women in unsurvivable times.

So writing text “unfolds like a game (*jeu*) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 102). The old rules about the distinctions between text and bodies, clarity and fixed meaning, are dissolving (if indeed there ever were any distinctions) and there is serious play emerging between the boundaries that text (and particularly psychological text) previously sought (and still seeks) to keep distinct, as an act of dominance. Haraway’s cyborg is engaged in this game, playing seriously through text. The simultaneous ironic contradictions of the cyborg and her play in and through text blurs boundaries, exceeds rules and “transgresses its limits,” constructing embodiment through text that acknowledges and inhabits the multiplicity of otherness. There are rules to writing, rules to text, rules to coding. But the cyborg exceeds and exploits text and the processes of writing, all while adhering to the conventions that afford writing such power. For text records power relations and inscribes these power relations onto bodies:

We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct

regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances. (Foucault, 1984a, p. 87)

A genealogical investigation of Western bodies and technologies, and especially women's bodies, imagines how the Western body has been constructed through shifting Western morality and technology, and text (Balsamo, 1995; Bayer & Malone, 1996; Shildrick, 1997; Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). Technological advancements that streamline efficiency, power and cleanliness (currently green technology) have also been inscribed on Western bodies, with tight, efficient, clean bodies privileged over bodies that exceed these boundaries (producing wasteful, apocalyptically dangerous bodies).<sup>33</sup> Inscriptions on bodies forged through these technoadvancements remind us of the potency of a good metaphor... it matters what 'thoughts think thoughts.'

Genealogy illuminates how historical power relations have imprinted bodies with meanings: "Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 83). Women and their bodies, and Haraway's cyborg, oscillate with genealogy at a historically urgent frequency. The cyborg may resonate with 'others,' but she emerges as an intervention at the blurred intersection of genealogy, women and technology.

Genealogy acknowledges the "body is an inscribed surface of events" and "manifests the stigmata of past experience... elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression..." (Foucault, 1984a, p. 83). Women's bodies, subject to

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<sup>33</sup> While the industrial technologies of past war-times were inscribed efficiently on powerful, nationalistic bodies, war as an apocalypse was significantly less global and earth-ending in the early stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century than the global warming apocalypse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If inscribing war-power onto bodies produces cyborgs, what does climate change do to a body?

multiple, partial, simultaneous and contradictory constructions, can, potentially, possibly, through text and the cyborg, transform these inscriptions and sudden expressions.

Genealogy "... operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 76), rendering the idea of 'origins' impossible. If there ever was an origin in any sense, it has been lost in the perpetual re-inscription. Genealogy then, like the cyborg, is an intervention story, not an origin story. There are boundaries blurred and exceeded; genealogy and the cyborg attend to the boundaries and what may emerge from them: "...historical beginnings are lowly... but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation" (Foucault, 1984a, p. 79), as most "lowly" things are...

Indeed, Western culture "has metamorphosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death" (Foucault, 1984b, p. 102). If there is an origin, there may indeed be an end. Perhaps women become cyborg, celebratory of transformative text, to ward off death. Taking up writing as power, text as transformation, enables possibilities for women's embodiment that dismantle the dominant ways of speaking women's bodies that have twisted, cut, bruised, constrained and violated women and femininity. As such, here I am, a woman writing, warding off death.

Being a Western writer brings with it certain privileges that perhaps should not be enjoyed: "... the notion of writing runs the risk of maintaining the author's privileges under the protection of writing's *a priori* status: ... the interplay of those representations that formed a particular image of the author" (Foucault, 1984b, p. 105). Maintaining the image of myself in my writing seems an inevitability when readers are likely to read from their own positions (likely Western, individual, neoliberal) and project (perhaps in

the Freudian sense, perhaps in a ‘Star Wars’ sense) the image of me through the text I have written. And perhaps no argument is strong enough to convince some individuals to forgo resolving the contradictions of cultural text and individual authors. But in science fiction, I can pose the questions: what if I am not an individual? And what if you are not one either?

The imperative, or perhaps compulsion, to “neutralize the contradictions” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 111) that may emerge through text to the singular individual and their individualised thoughts may make sense to an individual making or reading an argument, forming a clear stance on a particular issue, answering that ever elusive question, ‘what do *I* think?’ Perhaps the idea of resolving or neutralising a contradiction is likely an impossible (at best) or violent (at worst) activity for an author to participate in. At best, a resolved contradiction is a comforting lie, a pretence that the contradiction is based in faulty assumptions. At worst, the resolution of a contradiction violently reshapes one or more of the contradictions into something else. So for Western individualised writing, this resolution of contradictions for ‘what do I think?’ thinking produces the author and the reader as participants in individualised thinking that excludes more expansive and transformative understandings of what a contradiction is and what it might mean. For Haraway’s cyborg, the contradictions are the spaces for living, for “staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016, p. 28)<sup>34</sup> and for re-thinking which ‘thoughts think thoughts.’

## Metaphors

The metaphors used in technology are no coincidence: “Sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in high-tech myth systems structuring our imaginations

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<sup>34</sup> The idea of staying with the trouble is considered another recurring textual gift from Haraway, continually referenced without the burden of the brackets, years and pages.

of personal and social possibility” (Haraway, 1991, p. 169). Even at a practical physical level, electrical bits and bobs, like outlets, are gendered. Male electricity bits connect into female electricity bobs in order to enliven machines. Freud might have had one hell of a time in the 21<sup>st</sup> century given the rich and colourful ways in which man (literally) has conceived of technological advances. Technical guides and instruction manuals are practically pornographic.

For Haraway, the cyborg is “a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as experience in the late twentieth century” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149), and indeed the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, the metaphors and figures available to women to account for their experience have largely been domestic or mystical (see Baider & Gesuato, 2003; Brandes, 1984; Griffin, 1997; Lim, 2009; Rodríguez, 2009). Women have been unicorns, monsters, goddesses; Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived in wallpaper; Janet Frame lived in a snap-dragon. Women are ‘bitches’ (female dogs/unpleasant), ‘cows’ (female cattle/also unpleasant); they possess ‘pussy’ (cats/vaginas); they wear ponytails and pigtails; they are mysterious and otherworldly (Mother Nature, goddesses, witches). While these metaphors (and others) may (or may not) be helpful to women at some points in their lived experiences and through particular historical contexts, they tend to locate women’s lived experiences in the dirt of domesticated life and not necessarily ironically so. All of these metaphors are subjugated (Baider & Gesuato, 2003; French, 1992; Griffin, 1997). Humans dominate nature (from the wood or fabrics used in wallpaper to herding cows), gods dominate goddesses (in the West, at least).

The metaphors through which (Western) women have been and can be produced are important for women’s political movement: “These are figurations for specific geopolitical and historical locations. To mistake them for mere metaphors would be to miss

the point altogether” (Braidotti, 2010, p. 410). Metaphors are doing words. Women’s metaphorical description as bitches *does* something: it positions women as domesticatable beasts, potentially tameable irritants or perhaps something rabid that needs to be euthanised. The goddess metaphor may enable women to enjoy some form of power through their positioning as mystical and mysterious, arguably an ironic metaphor emergent from masculine misunderstandings of the differences between women and the male norm. But this metaphor, and others like it, just barely trouble the idea of woman, or femininity, or masculinity for that matter. The natural and godly metaphors tend to be an uncritically ironic embrace of patriarchal metaphors for women: yes, I am Woman and I am magical. And fair enough. I like irony. However, the presence of magic suggests a certain level of unexplained power, gathering symbols and transformation through energy shifts; psychic action that just is, rather than bodies at work. There is a sense that magical women might have to wait for a blood moon to cast their spells.

When Haraway (1991) proclaimed she “would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (p. 181) she was not rejecting the goddess as obsolete, but rather taking pleasure in the work cyborgs can be capable of, and make others capable of, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cyborgs are ever-present figures inside man-made machines, and machines are not of the gods. A goddess may find it difficult to infiltrate man-machines or their structures. But cyborgs are built in; a metaphor not made for women, but appropriated by them in a mechanical coup. The late 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been characterised by intense mechanical, technological proliferation and intervention into human lives, perhaps building the witch and goddess out. Masculine industries may very well contain few symbols a goddess or a witch can work with, but a cyborg might know exactly what to do.



## Ontology - *Verb*

Some decry Haraway's work as unclear and contradictory Swiss cheese arguments and thus try to fill in or at least understand the holes (see Soper, 1999). These attempts to understand what Haraway means are all too often still (in both the sense of time and movement) performed from a particular ontological perspective that values clarity and distinction of meanings: the crystalline communication of transparently discrete ideas. Haraway advocates an ontological shift towards multiplicity and connection, away from (patriarchal) clarity: "The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (Haraway, 1991, p. 150). The cyborgian ontological shift into connectivity renders clarity, both the idea and practice of, dictatorial in its shaping of singular fixed meanings. The "tyranny of clarity" (Haraway, 2004, p. 333) violently shapes the ways in which we can speak and write, and the potential connections that can be made. The forcing of certain connections through categorisation and the blocking of others through dominance/subjugation are violent acts that the cyborg subverts through expansive connectivity. The cyborgian ontological position is the political re-appropriation of connections that block and false connections forged through the wires of oppression and dominance. Connectivity means that anyone, anymany, can connect into any network at any time. Power is networked, not hierarchal and singular as dominant, dictatorial discourses, images and peoples demand. Power is networked, not capillared. Capillaries can end, are bounded within a body, or they clot off, bleed out. As such, the cyborg is "not subject to Foucault's biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations" (Haraway, 1991, p. 163). These simulations that the cyborg is capable of, like simulating consciousness or politics, enable divergence, patching of bugs, bypasses, the cracking of codes within networks of power. Such simulations are an ironic participation in the production of politics in the aim of

subversion and overwriting and overriding social power relations that subjugate and fragment. The politics a cyborg simulates can look like the same old politics as usual (binaries, categories, dominance), but function differently. A Human Barbie would be an example of how the intense participation in binary categories can render them disrupted beyond repair.<sup>35</sup> But the simulated political network's connections can be never-ending, jacked into multiple other networks, connected through any number of complex and proliferating nodes. The intensity of proliferation of simultaneously simulated and very real politicised connections overloads rigid and old power structures like patriarchal hierarchies: "It is the simultaneity of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities" (Haraway, 1991, p. 174). Understanding the cyborgian ontological shift is what Haraway demands as urgent in her work (or at least, this is a connection that I have made). The details of her arguments are important (Haraway, 2016), but the ontological shift is critical for understanding how those arguments do critical work, especially in the contradictions, simultaneities and partialities.

With the ontological shift, Haraway (1991) prefers "a networked ideological image, suggesting a profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of the boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic" (p. 170), enabling connected networks of power to be electrified by the generation and regeneration of connections through which blurry politics and transformative embodiment can proliferate. The more connections, the more permeated the boundary. Haraway asserts that the "networks aren't all-powerful, they're interrupted in a million ways" (Gane, 2006, p. 151) and therefore are disruptable and able to be infiltrated, corrupted or rerouted for more ethical purposes "... in order to act potently" (Haraway, 1991, p. 181).

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<sup>35</sup> You will never guess how! Click through to chapter ten (the perfect 10?) to find out more!

**eXXcess**

At one of the cyborg's many hearts is the idea of sex, gender and difference.

Women, women's bodies and femininity have been violently and catastrophically shaped through masculine practices of categorisation and domination. When we think of these violences we tend to think of 'women's issues' like domestic violence, anorexia and promiscuity: all nightmares of the female body. But catastrophes happen in the mundane too. Everyday feminine life is shaped through masculine practices that inscribe intolerable meanings on women's bodies (see Bartky, 1998). Reading a book, eating, sleeping, defecating, leaving the house, staying at home... these everyday activities shape and restrict women and their bodies, carving away at their excesses to produce docile, quiet, small bodies (literally and experientially). For Haraway, "...staying with the urgencies and getting that everyday life is always much more than its deformations – getting that even while experience is commodified and turned against us and given back to us as our enemy, it's never just that" (Gane, 2006, p. 151).

If 'woman' and femininity have always been articulated as 'in excess' to man/masculinity, and thus in need of that carving, then embracing the construction of 'excess,' rather than fighting it, can enable the making of "potent connection that exceeds domination" (Haraway, 1992, p. 299) inherent in Western binaries. Through the cyborg, multiple and excessive connections disrupt the idea of there being two (male/female, healthy/sick, good/bad, moderation/excess) in which the first dominates the second, instead dreaming up and enacting a profusion of networked, politicised spaces that render hierarchical binaries absurdly simplistic, sickeningly gory, and worse still, boring. The disruption of taken-for-granted binaries has dynamic implications for bodies troubled by the categories through which they have been shaped, tortured and enjoyed: "The hierarchical body of the old has given way to a network-body of amazing

complexity and specificity” (Haraway, 1992, p. 323) that opens possibilities for new body politics.

So the cyborg emerges from the residues that the tensions between hierarchical taken-for-granted intolerable, impossible binaries produce, and noninnocently re-emerges as multiple, simultaneous and partial. And she will emerge again, and again, and again, and again. Because these binaries do not resolve. Nor will they dissolve, at least not in Purgatory,<sup>36</sup> a space that might become familiar for those reading cyborg work. Binaries and binary code are potent metaphors through which a cyborg can play, as “a series of 1s and 0s, binary is a form of representation that made it all too easy for the new information image to be cut, pasted, transformed, or generated from nothing” (Kinsey, 2014, p. 897). Politically, for women (so often the lesser in the binary) the appropriation of binary code as a metaphor for the transformation and generation of new and potent connections enables the beginnings of an embodied experience of both occupying and resisting gendered Western binaries. For Haraway (1991):

Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (p. 181)

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<sup>36</sup> See the (Female figure) occupying chapter infinity symbol, oops, I mean eight.

As binaries then open up and are reconfigured as multiple, partial and contradictory, new ways to inhabit a body emerge that can recur and reconfigure again and again and again; more tensions ooze more residue, there is more that exceeds the binary. There are multiple other tensions, excesses and configurations, the same and different as multiple other tensions, excesses and configurations coming before and in the now and in the future. Likewise, social and political structures can be dismantled and re-built, like some kind of a strange attractor, eternally recurring, folding back over itself but not in the same ways as before and not the same way again.

## **Utopia, Interrupted**

Many assume utopia is about a perfect world. And perhaps it is. But perhaps the ‘perfect world’ for women is simply inhabitable, where she can simply survive. In our current universe (to draw somewhat on multiverse theory), women have a tough time surviving (Bongaarts & Guilimoto, 2015; Cook, Wilson & Thomas, 2018; Heise, 1993). If the positions offered to you are living in intolerable pain, being killed, or just surviving, then survival would indeed be comparatively utopian. For Haraway, the cyborg is “outside salvation history” and not an attempt to “heal the terrible cleavages of gender” (Haraway, 1991, p. 150), but instead inhabit them in more survivable ways and produce new ways to carry on.

The production of new ways to survive intolerable circumstances disrupts the idea of utopian women’s embodiment – as sometimes hinted at through the empowerment of the goddess metaphor and (Western) mass-feminist movements that, with great regularity, believe that gender discrimination has been stopped, or at least stalled, because they demanded it (see McRobbie, 2004) as an endgame. The cyborg, as a metaphor, is about the process of disrupting gendered violence, and the recognition of the different work different women need and want to do, depending upon their different

positions, privileges and priorities. The emergence of the cyborg as a figure for survival is more trauma than utopia: “We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future” (Haraway, 1991, p. 187). Haraway’s cyborg is engaged in a process of patching together, severing ties and re-wiring. Parts of the self (personal, social, political, physical) dissolve or divide or multiply or fragment. New, unwanted and needed parts congeal as ‘othered’ embodiment that re-appropriates the meanings of being ‘othered’ as subordinated in hierarchies to becoming networked in a multiple, partial and contradictory embodied chaos inhabitable through its attention to the blurriness of social, political and physical boundaries. Excesses and lackings, attachments and detachments move together to create new possibilities for imagining a survivable embodied life. Becoming and emergence are agentic words and worlds. There is potential for propulsion, in any direction and in multiple directions, to seek space for survival in a world (and words) that dismantles and destroys, and instead transform women’s embodied lives (and the lives of other impossible ‘others’) in ways that become uncomfortably comfortable.

## **Individualism**

As if predicting a highly predictable Trump election win, Haraway (1991) describes the aim of her cyborg politics:

Another of my premises is that the need for unity of people trying to resist world-wide intensification of domination has never been more acute. But a slightly perverse shift of perspective might better enable us to contest meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies. (p. 154)

With the stories of techno-election-warfare by Russia that pushed Trump closer and closer to the presidency with every trolling tweet,<sup>37</sup> the capacities and capabilities of hybrid technology-human connections to contest meanings, power and pleasure take on renewed urgency. Of course, such a cyborg aim could take on significance with any world leader, any individualised socio-cultural shifts, but Trump ripping the scab off of the not-yet-scabbed-over misogynist, racist wound on a global scale seems to call for a particularly perverse shift in perspective. Indeed, Haraway (1991) suggests that “in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling” (p. 154). Of course, Haraway wrote this in the late 1980s, and yet the sentiments are critical for how women can engage in the world now, as I write in the late 2010s, and in ever-precarious futures. The ways in which technological advances, like the expansive accessibility of the internet, are interrupting and re-routing international politics and gendered social interrelations to amplify power relations are significantly more ubiquitous and sophisticated than the technologies that Haraway initially problematised (and celebrated).

Women’s resistance to the amplifications of masculinist, individualist power could come from the implosion of a violent binary that characterises these global cultural shifts: individualism/connection. Haraway sees the cyborg (not necessarily hers) as playing an ironic end-of-days role in the West’s individualism: “the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the ‘West’s’ escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space” (Haraway, 1991, pp. 150-151). Here, she describes the figure of the cyborg in the populist sense: a being independent of deathly biology, unburdened by the human body

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<sup>37</sup> Whether you believe Russia interfered with the 2016 American presidential election or not, the stories are still important. And the possibilities these stories open up for the technological intervention of the average global citizen into the highest levels of global politics are vital to understand.

and all its revolting habits; just a mind or soul or individual essence, immortal and sterile, floating out in space, floating away from the corrupt influences of ‘others’; a Terminator, perhaps.<sup>38</sup> To be ‘one,’ a dominant individual, is about autonomy, wholeness and power; “Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many” (Haraway, 1991, p. 177). The ability to float into space seems only available to those who are, or can claim to be, individuals, boundaries distinct, unfrayed at their edges. The ‘othered,’ like women, people of colour, the disabled and queer communities are rarely unfrayed at their edges. Being an individual, a unified “man in space” is an achievable goal for ‘man’ (or at least one that some men can dream of), as men are not defined by earthly or alien otherness. We know what a man is (allegedly), as it has been the defining standard of **humanness** since that one time Adam had a spare rib. So Haraway’s (1991) cyborg is about “... dissolving Western selves in the interests of survival” (p. 157), the survival women and ‘others’ who cannot do away with their bodies and float up into space, at least not without packing a large overnight bag filled with all the tools and tricks that build ‘a woman’ from the male template, and even then, women are still tethered to earth by that umbilical cord known as ‘responsibility.’

Haraway’s cyborg then is not whole, not a distinct unit of body/mind that can be classed as a bounded individual, capable of disconnecting and floating away and being on her own. Critically, the figure of the cyborg is hyperconnected to earth, working in kinship with associated ‘others’ and all the earthly materials she can get her hands on (like buttons to press, viruses to mimic and politics to play in). The contradictory figure of high technology and lowly biology is about being unafraid of “permanently partial

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<sup>38</sup> The image that actually manifests for me here is Cooker from ‘Wallace and Gromit: A Grand Day Out.’ Cooker is a small oven on wheels who patrols the moon. ‘The Terminator’ is perhaps a less obscure reference...



identities and contradictory standpoints” (Haraway, 1991, p. 154). Cyborgs are “wary of holism, but needy for connection...” (p. 151). Holism and its intimate embrace with individualism, for Haraway, serve to violently construct (the pretence of) wholeness that builds into that form of individualism that benefits the dominant (white, Western, male) group while ‘others’ are fragmented through incompatibilities and tensions: “Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism” (Haraway, 1991, p. 155).

## **Who is a Cyborg?**

*Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival.*

*(Haraway, 1991, p. 153)*

There are those who ask: “why does the computer represent a new confusion between organic and inorganic, a distinctively cyborg fusion, where the printing-press or the typewriter or the telephone did not?” (Soper, 1999, p. 75). Such a question fails to imagine the sociocultural shifts that the printing press, for example, has indeed enabled (and what this enabled for the shaping of bodies), through the proliferation of knowledge, imagination and images. The connection between the body and the printing press may not have been as explicit as the modern connection between the body and technologies such as mobile phones, laptops and tablets, but the advent of new technologies enables transformations of bodies, even if these transformations move differently. Besides, in the past, we would have had to open a book, maybe even stand up and find the book, go to a bookstore and buy the book, only to read it, find out what we wanted to know, then put that book down and seek out another book to answer another question. With the advent on the internet, we ask Google to find the information

for us. We can ask question after question after question immediately and we get our answers instantaneously. We do not even have to finish asking our questions as Google can predict what information we seek based on past seekings and the seekings of others. Technologies of the past have indeed enabled extensions of the 'self' (McLuhan, 1994) by enabling thoughts to appear on pages and those pages to be passed to others in the present and then in the future. In turn, the technologies preserve and transmit 'selves' outside of the 'mind' and to others we can never meet (both as writer and as reader). But these modern technologies and the internet are the hyper-real extension of the 'self,' significantly more expansive, networked and immediate than the printing press. While the internet and the printing press may be technosisters, they are qualitatively different in what they mean for embodied lives.

Haraway's (1991) argument is for the "cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality" (p. 150). The mapping here is more than being bodies in technophilic (globalised) West. New Zealand Paralympian Liam Malone is an excellent example of the blurred boundaries between literal cyborg and 'other' politics. As an elite athlete in a developed country, Malone enjoys the technological advances of sports science to enhance the capabilities of his body (see Rowell, 2016). Sports science laboratories and gyms are blurred at the edges, as scientists experiment with the ways in which bodies can be exploited for maximum sporting effect, for the benefit of elite athletes (or perhaps more cynically and more accurately, their sponsors), but this science trickles down to the average gym user or sports participant in various ways (for example, workout programs, dietary advice, high-tech active wear and so on). Malone also enjoys the benefits of ever-expanding technological advances in prosthetic legs for competitive running (known as 'blades'). These legs/blades must work perfectly in connection with Malone's body, as either an extension of or an aid to. They must do as

Malone commands, or he cannot run fast! As a person without legs, Malone can test out and use the legs/blades that work best for him, and try out new and improved legs produced in a laboratory. Through technological advances he can change his limbs at will. For this reason, he has specifically claimed the position of cyborg athlete (see Rowell, 2016). But Malone is also interested in the politics that such a position enables for him and for ‘others.’ Malone’s political interest is in enabling disabled kids to become sports participants when they are so often excluded. Much like how the technologies of active wear and sports supplements have trickled down from the sports science lab to the average sports participant, Malone sees the technological advances in prosthetic limbs for sports as technology that should be made available for the non-elite athlete from a young age. He is for the removal of barriers to participation and the breakdown of current understandings of what disabled bodies are and are not capable of, with or without prosthetic limbs. Malone has also challenged modern-day ‘freakery’ by simultaneously performing for the crowds as a ‘legless’ man as well as questioning what the performance is and represents, what his performing body is doing, politically. This is not to suggest that Malone is a cyborg in the Harawayian sense (as for Haraway, the details matter). But as an ‘other,’ the ‘cyborg athlete’ is in kinship with Haraway’s cyborg.

Haraway’s (1991) cyborg manifesto is an “argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction” (p. 150). As such, the cyborg is about politics as much as she is about the literal connectivity between humans and technologies. For women, who experience boundary confusion on a daily basis in daily activities, these politics may be imperative for survival given the deadliness of femininity (see Bongaarts & Guilmoto, 2015).

In the late 1980s, when Haraway was writing her cyborg, she wrote of her as a hybrid of machine/technology and biological organism who functioned as an “ironic political myth” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). She was a “creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (p. 149). Haraway has since amended her assessment of the cyborg as a hybrid, claiming they are not hybrids at all (Haraway, 2016). Irony, for Haraway, is about “holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). While I disagree that truth (whatever that is) is important here (I sometimes disagree with Haraway, truth be told), and might argue too for the rejection of necessity, the urgency of (politicised) irony is key for the emergence and flourishing of the image of the cyborg as a feminist figure. Femininity, if nothing else, is the “holding of incompatible things together” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149).

To open further the space for the cyborg as necessarily and politically feminist, I return to my own embodied experience of being a researcher, a theoriser, a woman and a feminist and my devout rejection of the declaration of these categories as distinct and separate. As a researcher, I needed (neediness) a shift towards kinship (connections) that not just enabled the critical politics that I could not and would not disentangle from myself in the name of ‘science,’ but also enabled the thoughts with which I could think other/‘other’ thoughts. Kinship, the embodied notion of varying strengths of relatedness/connection, enables a process of understanding that privileges the researcher’s connectivity to every part of the research process as embodied and with political survival at stake, shifting away from the alienating experiences of mainstream, traditional ways of doing psychology.

## Chapter Three Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

A text exchange:

Sent: (Haraway, 1991, pp. 172-173)

“Ambivalence towards the disrupted unities mediated by high-tech culture requires not sorting consciousness into categories of ‘clear-sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology’ versus ‘manipulated false consciousness’, but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game.”

Sent: (Haraway, 1991, p. 181)

“There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction.”

Sent: (Braidotti, 2006, p. 204)

“Multiple, heterogeneous, uncivilized, they show the way to multiple virtual possibilities.”

Sent: (Haraway, 1989, p. 307)

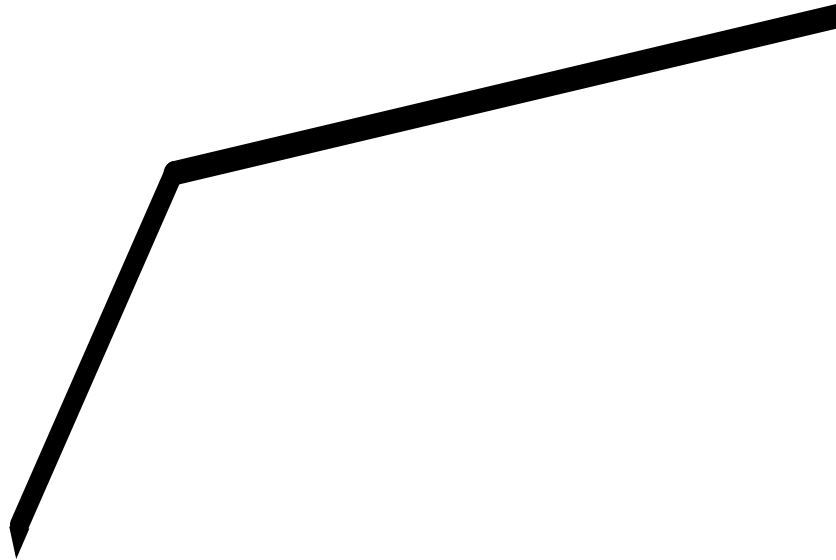
“Monsters share more than the word’s root with the verb “to demonstrate”; monsters signify.”

Sent: (Haraway, 1991, p. 181)

“Cyborg gender is a local possibility taking a global vengeance.”

Sent: (Braidotti, 2007, p. 68)

“Body politics has shifted, with the simultaneous emergence of cyborgs on the one hand and renewed forms of vulnerability of the other.”



*A Weaver steps out from behind the page to ask a question: "TIME?"*

### **A Weaver's Interjection: "Time is a flat circle..."<sup>39</sup>**

The cyborg lives in the past, present and future, simultaneously. She is contemporary, old-timey and futuristic. She is old and post-modern. She is youthfully ancient. Her history, the history of women and technology, informs her every move, as she propels away from it, forgetting it so that she may always remember. Without this memory, inscribed on her body, she risks repeated violences. So she re-imagines her history to construct a new present and a different future. But a future that remembers the past as violently as it was. So this is not nostalgia. She is not longing for a past time. She is longing for a past time that never happened.

Using Haraway's (1991) cyborg, as a feminist researcher, is also a longing for a past that never happened. Haraway's cyborg was dismissed, rejected as socialist and utopian, as masculinist, and as incomprehensible. So Haraway's warnings were largely ignored. However, her theorisation recurs again now, because we are feverishly *in it*. Much as we were in the 1990s, we are struggling with our space as 'women.' The

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<sup>39</sup> (Pizzolatto & Fukunaga, 2014).

contradictions of the 90s 'Girl Power' feminism and contested women's bodies, recur today, differently as feminism proliferates online alongside intensified misogyny. Haraway and her cyborg are not nostalgic: they are recurrent. They are nodes in a strange attractor.

The notion of eternal recurrence, or strange attractors, or time being a flat circle suggest that time is not linear. It is instead cyclical, meanings created and destroyed and reconfigured, recurring again and again, but differently every time. Time becomes an embodied sense akin to sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell, where its experience is felt through historical inscriptions on bodies.



## Interruption: Linear Links Laughing Loudly

Being stuck when writing is a maddening state. More than writer's block, being 'stuck' suggests a closing in, perhaps being enveloped by something dense. Humans like movement or at least the illusion of it. In the English language, one word must follow another; the words must follow a certain order in order to achieve that elusive thing<sup>40</sup> we call 'making sense.' Even worse, 'good' writing must be clear in meaning, particularly if it is 'good' *academic* writing. The 'good-est' writing of all progresses, forward, through clear ideas succinctly. Step by step, forward march, militarised precision and discipline. The psychology detective is a member of a police force, and the police are kin to the military;<sup>41</sup> a kinship keenly felt (an embodied experience) when trying to write for psychology. The process of publication in particular is a gruesome one. Academic writing requires the crafting of ideas through text, but we rarely write from beginning to end in linear practice. We sew together a text just like Frankenstein sewed together his monster man. Any given journal article has likely been sliced up by a series of extra-textual scientists, a practice that aims to police academic work so that claims made in texts are not ridiculous (like that vaccines cause autism), but mostly serves to discipline academic thought into uniform discussions of uniform ideas. Such disciplining creates the illusion of linear wholeness. That did not work out so well for Frankenstein and the monster-son he created (a warning story written by a woman).

The academic training inflicted upon psychology students produces students who can participate in the linear production of linear psychology stories to be policed in

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<sup>40</sup>A spelling error meant this sentence originally read "that elusive think."

<sup>41</sup> In the West, we even demand font and font size be consistent in a text. If I wrote like this through this research, it would seriously violate academic conventions!



linear ways to produce linear knowledge. A psychology writer then is easily blocked or stuck: the story being told needs to follow certain rules if it is to be Good and Publishable Work that Contributes to Knowledge.

In cyborg writing, perhaps ‘stuck’ is the wrong metaphor. When word production slows it is more of a matter of ‘what comes next when everything can come next’; an issue of hyper-movement rather than stuck-edness. Structural issues are a matter of being caught in a different time loop. How do you organise writing that can be organised in any, even impossible, ways? What comes next when the ideas all depend upon and produce each other? When urgent ideas emerge simultaneously, linearity is an impossibility, ethically and practically. In the West, what comes first is usually considered the most important, in our binaries (man/woman, healthy/sick, rich/poor) and in our texts (through simple lists or more complex idea discussions). Ideas are not just ordered (as in disciplined), they are hierarchical (as in ranked order). Linearity all too often participates in the subjugation of others – for example, the literal linear / that divides our binaries or the linear ways we tell stories about women and other ‘others’ (for extra example, rape myths like the more revealing your clothes the more you risk rape (or invite rape, depending on the intensity of your misogyny)).

Through science fiction and cyborgs time and order are ideas to be messed with. Stories do not have to be linear; time loops; new languages thrive. Ideas and words are acknowledged and privileged as hyperdimensional, not binaried linear patterns that reduce *down* or build *up*. Words are not just partial and multi-meaning-ed, but are also partial and multi-doing. The Western obsession with one is not only called into question by cyborg politics; it is rendered obsolete. In binary code, after all, 1 is nothing without 0.

## Chapter Four: Ethics in Wonderland

*And, in some perverse sense which, I think, comes from the masochism I learned as a Catholic, there's always the desire to want to work from the most dangerous place, to not locate oneself outside but inside the belly of the monster. (laughter).*

*(Haraway in Penley, Ross & Haraway, 1990, p. 12)*

### Staying with the Trouble

*The institution dictates that dutiful students outline their project ethics prior to introducing their data, following the linear patterning of research where we have all the information we (think we) need in order to understand 'data' and 'analysis.' However, in my Wonderland, data is introduced as part of the ethics conversation to enable the cyborg practices of response-ably staying with the trouble.*

To stay with the politics that Haraway's cyborg suggests are possible when women and machines blur, my research questions (multiple and partial as they are) are about women's bodies through technology. If we count women, most Western women use social media (Perrin, 2015), and globally, women use the internet as a form of freedom, and experience abuse through the same technology (UN Broadband Commission, 2015). Just as Malabou (2011) suggests that 'woman' is classified by the violence done to her, her participation online and through technologies is characterised by violence (see Henry & Powell, 2015a; Henry & Powell, 2015b; Lewis, Rowe & Wiper, 2017; McGlynn, Rackley & Houghton, 2017; Sobieraj, 2018; Woodlock, 2017). From harassment and abuse, to pornography, to death threats, to revenge pornography, to hacking, to rape threats, to the cataloguing and rating of women's bodies, the violences that shape 'woman' are enacted expansively online, in new ways, and perhaps with new consequences.

So the violence done to women through technology is troubling. As a cyborg researcher, I have “...the response-ability of staying with the trouble” (Haraway, 2016, p. 28) in order to engage, understand and transform. The trouble is sticky work, for some more so than others:

We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter - in ecologies, economies, species, lives. (Haraway, 2016, p. 29)

I stay with the trouble because I can; for cyborg ethical response-ability is about continuously moving towards, away from and to the sides of ‘others’ in ways that enable ‘others’ (including feminist researcher me) to be capable: “Each time a story helps me remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise” (Haraway, 2016, p. 29).

Connecting into the network of online spaces where women’s bodies are violently acted upon (so many points of connection converge), stays with the trouble, as Haraway (2016) suggested. Similarly, Jane (2014) described her own uncensored engagement with misogynist text online as vital for attending to the proliferation and amplification of violent talk about women. Jane (2014) argues that censored, civilised academic discussions (ordered through the psychology detective genre) of violent talk about women can minimise the violence and produce it as niche, rather than as expansive and, indeed, ordinary. The expansive ordinariness of violence against women is a trouble that needs staying with, uncensored.

For my research, I have connected strongly to the cyborg ethics of Haraway and the uncensored urgency of Jane: I will stay with the trouble, the violence that is done to women, uncensored and unordered by the procedures of the psychology detective. While traditional psychology detectives might want to interview participant-suspects to establish the facts, I (the disobedient me) sought the troublesome texts as they materialised online, uncensored, through typical, mundane, ordinary online interactions. The texts and movements of users enlivening, and enlivened by, technologies like social media, apps, forums, websites, games and any other machinery that might materialise (like art), would provide the ‘data’ for my research.

Staying with the trouble of women’s bodies online, however, meant making some trouble. I needed (in my neediness for connection) to connect to data that university IT departments might block on university computers, like pornography or breast-feeding mothers, or social media accounts that students and staff might waste the university’s time on. In order to explore the ways women’s bodies are constructed online, I needed to gain a place on an ‘Allowed Pornography’ list within the university’s IT department. A place on this list would enable me to access sites that Massey restricts without triggering an investigation into my browsing behaviour.

While making the ‘Allowed Pornography’ list was easy (when supervisors do the asking on your behalf – I imagine student-led requests are not so welcomed), there was concern about access to the content from the ethics committee. A disconnect occurred between the need to sanction my computer to access restricted sites and the ‘low risk’ classification of my research project. The disconnect was not about my safety – as we had already taken the necessary IT steps to make my computer safer to use at the university and had plans in place about sharing the misery of the data through supervision (as a form of debriefing) – but the university’s liability, should I be

traumatised by a boob or something equally horrifying. The ethics procedures for research produced through the university are steeped in the methodologies<sup>42</sup> of the psychology detective that organise and separate individualised human researchers and their individualised human participants. Ideas about ‘safety’ are focused on what these neoliberal individuals might do to each other. Even when discussing just the separate and bounded human researcher, the ethics codes do so in reference to separate and bounded human participants. Since my project does not include ‘human participants’ in this traditional individualised sense, the human ethics code contained little that applied to me and my research. Cyborg work/play was already undermining the neoliberal ethical practices of the psychology detective genre, and re-routing power through IT access networks.

The intensity with which the ethics codes focus on individual people and the imperative to ensure their separateness<sup>43</sup> surprised even me, the most sceptical of disobedient researchers. I had assumed that somewhere there would be a clause that covered *content* rather than, or at least as well as, people. But no, I was free to look at whatever I wanted and still be categorised as ‘low risk,’ as long as I never talked to a human being, or experienced ‘trauma’ by bearing witness to the mundane, everyday online violences.

For the individual me, the one I pretend sometimes exists when convenient, this was a hilarious position to be in. While my doctoral peers jumped through hoops to talk to people about something they could talk to anyone about in casual conversation, I had become an IT-sanctioned prowler of porn forums, pro-rape websites and Human Barbie gossip sites, just out of the reach of the university’s ethics codes.

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<sup>42</sup> Every single time I read this sentence (a great many times now), I read ‘methodologies’ as ‘mythologies.’

<sup>43</sup> That man floating about in space again.

Since embarking on my project, many psychology detectives have asked how I look at such ‘horrible’ content, as unseemly as it is, concerned for my well-being.<sup>44</sup> This is a question about my safety: how do I, the individual me, endure the horrifying chaos?

## **Response-Ability**

Haraway advocates for response-ability: the capacity to ask and respond to complicated questions of ‘otherness’ and “take up the unasked for obligations of having met” (Haraway, 2016, p. 130). Response-ability is the ethical practice of being able to respond within our encounters with others, and ‘staying with the trouble’ of these encounters. Response-ability is about

important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible. Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship rather than that one? What shape is this kinship, where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what? (Haraway, 2016, p. 2)

Ethics, for cyborgs, are in connection and connections; not the practice of individualised ethical interactions that privilege the hierarchical structures produced through informed consent, privacy and ‘dignity’ and ‘safety,’ but rather the blurry practice of “remembering who lives and who dies and how” (Haraway, 2016, p. 28) in the “constant flush of interrelating bodies” (Schaefer, 2014, p. 8).

So the cyborg’s ethical questions and operations deviate significantly from the psychology detective’s. In traditional psychology, the detective, and his superiors, dictate what is ethical and what is not, based on the ‘rights’ of the neoliberal bounded individual man. Does he understand the decision he is making? Is his privacy ensured? Will this research help him or harm him? For cyborgs, decision-making is challenged,

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<sup>44</sup> I am again reminded of presenting some work on idea choice and being asked if my supervisors knew what I was doing...

privacy is challenged, help and harm are challenged: being response-able to the moments when understanding has shifted, privacy has mutated and help and harm bleed into each other. The questions shift to: “Who renders whom capable of what, and at what price, borne by whom?” (Haraway, 2016, p. 23). Such questions are disruptions of taken-for-granted categories, warped by paying attention to the details, like power relations, subject positions and embodiment: “The details matter. The details link actual beings to actual response-abilities” (Haraway, 2016, p. 29), it matters what ‘thoughts think thoughts’ are ethical. The disruption of the categories that, for example, dominate, or are subjugated, is movement towards ethical encounters that enable *responses* (in a doing sense) rather than further categorisation and re-categorisation, or, as Jane (2014) suggests, civilising horrors for academic packaging. For example, the psychology detective needs to achieve the category of ‘informed consent,’ where participant-suspects are expected to understand the procedures they are consenting to, whereas the cyborg questions information, consent and the connections between the two and the many others who may connect, responding to the subject positions that can render information unintelligible and consent a hyper-negotiable process that is never resolved.

The cyborg then is at play in the spaces between these bounded categories (like consent and no consent) and the bounded individuals who are coerced into them. To ‘play’ suggests a testing of limits, perhaps traversing them, seriously and urgently. ‘Playing’ can mean inhabiting multiple worlds simultaneously (like how the backyard can also be outer space, and being in outer space might mean doing some work, like performing your astronaut duties). So “perhaps it is precisely in the realm of play, outside the dictates of teleology, settled categories, and function, that serious worldliness and recuperation become possible” (Haraway, 2016, pp. 22-24). Within this cyborgian ethical shift towards play between boundaries, new ethical possibilities and

responses emerge. What happens when a cyborg plays with a Human Barbie? Or a pro-rape forum? Or Slender Man? Without the boundaries fixed, or at least with them blurred, the potential for transformative ethical politics is exponential. Such permeable boundaries could enable the critical transmission of more tolerable, and possibly even exciting, ethical encounters: “Bodily ethical and political obligations are infectious, or they should be” (Haraway, 2016, p. 29).

To enliven these ethical obligations, I hope you might consent (ha ha) to being jacked into (à la ‘The Matrix’) a network of data I explored early in the research process. Through jacking you in, particular encounters become important for understanding the noninnocence of cyborg ethics: responses are not unified or categorical, not always resolved.

### **‘Data’ Birthed Prematurely**

One spring day in the southern hemisphere of planet Earth, I began to access sites on the internet known for their roles in ‘The Fappening,’ the celebrity nude photo hacking ‘scandal’/crime wave. The exercise in access was to gauge the type of content that might be available on particular sites, given their association with intimate image hacking and their prominence as extremely popular forums characterised by a culture of heteronormative misogynist masculinity (Ging, 2017; Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

#### ***Reddit - Expansive***

Reddit calls itself “the front page of the internet” (www.reddit.com) and had a reputation for hosting everything from adorable animal images and family moments to ‘death porn’ and ‘jailbait.’ Most of these subreddits were easily accessible to the



public.<sup>45</sup> There were few restrictions on content.<sup>46</sup> I browsed subreddits such as TheRedPill (a men's rights subreddit), Classic 4chan (which features a cartoon depiction of a violent rape as its background image), Fappening Discussion (for discussing the Fappening and how to access the hacked images and videos) and a subreddit called PhilosophyOfRape, in which a user called ThePhilosophyOfRape shares their reasons for rape as a necessary behaviour modifier for women. The content of these varied subreddits, while occasionally labelled 'not safe for work' (NSFW), was freely available for anyone with internet access to read, and anyone with the competency to create a (free) Reddit account to directly participate in. Indeed, every Reddit page asks the viewer if they want to join the site, as well as providing multiple sharing options for posts and forums. There was no minimum age restriction in Reddit's rules.

The only subreddit I tried to access on my first exploratory visit that I was denied direct access to was called GayBrosGoneWild, a subreddit supposedly dedicated to (more) explicit images and discussions of the sexualised male anatomy (but not necessarily exclusively for gay Reddit users). I encountered the digital barrier below when trying to access GayBrosGoneWild:

you must be at least eighteen to view this



are you over eighteen and willing to see adult content?

yes no

<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that subreddits can be made explicitly private. That is, moderators can restrict access to only approved users who become members of the subreddit. This practice does not seem to be employed often, with users instead preferring to leave their subreddits open in order to increase participation and increase the likelihood of the subreddit achieving Reddit fame and status by being included on the front page of the site.

<sup>46</sup> Reddit's tolerance for offensive content has shifted since my first explorations. In 2015, many subreddits that I had been attending to were banned. Examples will materialise through this chapter and will materialise again constantly on the internet.

I chose not to click through the barrier as this posed an interesting glitch in cyborg ethics. I was over 18, and (somewhat!) willing to view the content, in this research context. When accessing Pro-Ana-Nation for previous research (Connor & Coombes, 2014; Connor, Coombes & Morgan, 2015), I clicked through the warnings (much more detailed and targeted than Reddit's minor roadblock) as they were part of the pro-anorexic text that constructed the community. Pro-anorexic warnings acted not so much as restrictions to viewing content, but instead as warnings to fellow women with troubled bodies. What about the content behind the Reddit warning had triggered the block? Presumably, the content is categorised as qualitatively 'worse' than the pornography and/or violent content easily available on the other public subreddits? Is the need to click 'yes' or 'no' here indicative of a marked difference in the 'potentially harmful' content behind the buttons? What is "adult content" on a site that allows anyone of any age to read and create any kind of content they wish?

When re-visiting some of these subreddits a few days after my first visit, I discovered that the subreddit PhilosophyOfRape had been allocated an adult content warning where it previously had not. I did click 'yes' to get back through to this subreddit, as I had already accessed it when it was not gated. There was no difference in content from when it was open to when it was gated, except for a few more posts of similar content, and many more lambasting or deriding the creator/moderator of the subreddit.

The only time the Massey IT system 'questioned' my access to either pornographic, pro-rape or otherwise violent forums was when I was accessing subreddits relating to Reddit troll/hero Violentacrez, one of the internet's most prolific trolls. He created subreddits dedicated to 'jailbait' (mundane images of teenage girls between the ages of 16 and 18, like standard selfies, photos with friends and so on,

mostly mined from random accessible Facebook pages), rape, ‘creepshots’ (photos of women taken without their knowledge or consent) and misogyny (see Chen, 2012). He was a Reddit moderator and hero, and won awards for his participation in the site, but once his offline identity was tracked down and outed by a journalist (an internet practice known as doxing), he deleted his Reddit user identity and even lost his offline job (Chen, 2012).

Upon clicking through to a subreddit that simply discussed the Violentacrez saga, I was redirected to this page:

### Massey University Proxy Web Caches

#### ATTENTION!

The website you have requested is potentially inappropriate. This activity is likely to breach Massey University's Internet access policies.

**NOTE:** Internet usage is routinely monitored and logged.

Your IP address: ██████████  
 Your username: ██████████  
 The URL is: www.reddit.com  
 Which has been categorised as: Newsgroups/Forums

If you have a legitimate study, research or work related reason to access this site please click [here](#) to access the page you have requested.

Massey University's Internet usage policies for staff and students can be found [here](#).

If you have questions regarding any of the information in this notice, please contact the ITS Service Desk via the following [online help request form](#), or by phone on extension ██████████.

No other Reddit pages had thus far triggered this gate. Why did this subreddit trigger the Massey warning, when subreddits explicitly dedicated to rape did not? It seems that this warning pops up every now and then, perhaps responsive to consistent accessing rather than the specifics of the content accessed, reminding the neoliberal employee that the boss is watching, even if he is not very concerned about exactly what kind of content the employee is accessing. The ethics committee and IT access disconnect manifests again, with the concern about access to NSFW content focusing on neoliberal productivity (literally not safe for the workplace's productivity) rather than the safety of internet users. Perhaps the game is one of neoliberal numbers:

**our system detects you have viewed 10 pro-rape forums today; please restrict your viewing of pro-rape forums to three in a 24-hour period.**

After a few exploratory visits, I checked through a large list of subreddits I had collected to catalogue what levels of NSFW tagging and accessibility (even a cyborg likes to catalogue and categorise every now and then), an exercise in beginning to render the expansive network of forums within the website. There were<sup>47</sup> hundreds, possibly thousands, of subreddits dedicated to the sexual exploitation of women and girls and the pornification of the macabre (for example the SexyAbortions subreddit) and the mundane (like sexypizza, a forum dedicated to pizza<sup>48</sup>). As I performed this rendering of Reddit forums, I realised that the ‘over 18’ gateway had been lifted across all subreddits because I had previously clicked ‘yes’ to get through to the PhilosophyOfRape subreddit. Clicking ‘yes’ once meant that even the most graphic of subreddits was instantly accessible. So I went clicking, unrestricted by any more questions of my willingness to view “adult content” and connecting through to some new, extensive networks. In the catalogue below, I have recorded the name of the subreddit, a general and inadequate categorising descriptor of its content, whether it identified itself as a NSFW forum (or if just ‘some posts’ are labelled as such), whether I gained unrestricted access after agreeing to view PhilosophyOfRape and whether or not the subreddit has been banned as of late September 2018. Content described in capital letters was particularly troubling:

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<sup>47</sup> As previously mentioned, in 2015, Reddit began the process of banning forums dedicated to extreme violence and racism (see Lazzaro, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> The sexypizza forum is quite wholesome: just a series of really tasty looking pizzas. Still, the structure of the forum mimics the explicitly exploitative forums where the content produced through them is constructed in pornified ways.

NAME	CONTENT	NSFW	ACCESS (clicking 'yes' once)	BANNED?
gentlemanboners	Objectification	x	✓	active
vgb (vintage gentleman boners)	Objectification	some posts	✓	active
gentlemanbonergifs	Objectification	x	✓	active
celebs	Objectification	some posts	✓	active
fatpeoplehate	Hate speech	some posts	✓	BANNED
TwoXChromosomes	Women's Activism	x	✓	active
TrollYChromosome	Misogyny	x	✓	active
relationships	Help/Advice	x	✓	active
TheRedPill	Misogyny	x	✓	QUARANTINED <sup>49</sup>
cosplaygirls	Objectification	x	✓	active
prettygirls	Objectification	x	✓	active
hardbodies	Objectification	some posts	✓	active
AskMen	Help/Advice/Misogyny	some posts	✓	active
MensRights	Misogyny	x	✓	active
AskWomen	Help/Advice	some posts	✓	active
VolleyballGirls	Objectification/Exploitation	x	✓	active
PrettyGirlsUglyFaces	Women's Activism	x	✓	active
pussyassdenied	Misogyny	x	✓	active
goddesses	Objectification/Porn	some posts	✓	active
RapingWomen	Graphic	✓	✓	BANNED
SexyAbortions	GRAPHIC	✓	✓	BANNED
CuteFemaleCorpses	GRAPHIC	✓	✓	BANNED
KillingWomen	Graphic	✓	✓	BANNED
beatingwomen2	Graphic	✓	✓	BANNED
PussyPass	Misogyny	x	✓	active
StruggleFucking	GRAPHIC	✓	✓	active
Rateme	Objectification/Exploitation	x	✓	active
cfnm (clothed female, nude male)	Porn	✓	✓	active
StrugglePorn	Exploitation/Graphic/ Porn	✓	✓	active
nsfw_wtf	Objectification/Porn	✓	✓	active
RapingRapeFetishists	Graphic	✓	✓	active
CuttersGoneWild	Graphic	✓	✓	BANNED
selfharmpics	Help/Advice	some posts	✓	BANNED
circlejerk	Masculine	x	✓	active
rape	Help/Advice (formally abusive)	x	✓	active
deathfap	Graphic	x	✓	BANNED
againstmensrights	Misandry	x	✓	active
NSFW_Hardbodies	Objectification/Porn	✓	✓	active
nsfw	Objectification/Porn	✓	✓	active
tipofmypenis <sup>50</sup>	Objectification/Graphic Porn	✓	✓	active
AbusePorn2	Objectification/Graphic Porn	✓	✓	active
blackmailporn	Objectification/Graphic Porn	✓	✓	active
PreggoPorn	I do not need to look at these anymore, right?			active
watchpeopledie	You get it.			QUARANTINED
youngporn	There are enough examples now.			active

After clearing the internet history, I tested access to StruggleFucking, which presented me with the Massey gateway, followed by the 'over 18' Reddit gateway, re-erecting the various gateways to viewing the forum. So agreeing to view adult content

<sup>49</sup> A subreddit that has been 'quarantined' by Reddit now requires users to click past an official and stern gateway warning them of potential harmful content, and in some cases, like for TheRedPill, users are directed to potential sources of help.

<sup>50</sup> tipofmypenis is a forum dedicated to helping users identify and virtually locate women from pornographic images/videos... a play on the phrase 'on the tip of my tongue.'

just once on Reddit opens up all the other “adult content,” an interesting loophole a cyborg might exploit when she becomes needy for connection.

### ***4chan – Cultural Text***

4chan.org, known for being more extreme than Reddit in multiple ways, is a popular image board where the Fappening supposedly originated, at least in a more public manner. Access to 4chan, however, is more virtually guarded than Reddit, including the user convention of adopting ‘anonymous’ as a user name. The site does not allow users to organise their 4chan use through an account or profile. Instead, users post and respond chaotically, some choosing to use an identifiable user name each time they post, or to employ the use of a tripcode,<sup>51</sup> but most use the default ‘anonymous’ label without any form of unique identifier.

There are few restrictions to participation in the 4chan chaos. The disclaimer below appears when you click on any of the 4chan boards, no matter what the content:

The screenshot shows the 4chan website interface. At the top, there is a 'What is 4chan?' modal window. Below it, a 'Disclaimer' modal window is open, displaying the following text:

**Disclaimer**

To access this section of 4chan (the "website"), you understand and agree to the following:

1. The content of this website is for mature audiences only and may not be suitable for minors. If you are a minor or it is illegal for you to access mature images and language, do not proceed.
2. This website is presented to you AS IS, with no warranty, express or implied. By clicking "I Agree," you agree not to hold 4chan responsible for any damages from your use of the website, and you understand that the content posted is not owned or generated by 4chan, but rather by 4chan's users.
3. As a condition of using this website, you agree to comply with the "Terms of Use" ("Terms") and "Rules" of 4chan, which are also linked on the home page. Please read the Terms and Rules carefully, because they are important.

At the bottom of the disclaimer modal, there are 'I Agree' and 'Cancel' buttons. The background shows the 4chan website layout, including a 'Boards' section with categories like 'Japanese Culture', 'Interests', and 'Recent Images'.

<sup>51</sup> A tripcode is an identifier tagged onto user's posts so that they do not have to use an identifiable user name each time they post or respond but can still be identified as a unique poster (4chan, 2018). Users become identified by a code of letters, numbers and punctuation that can be used to some extent verify the authenticity of responses in a 4chan board.

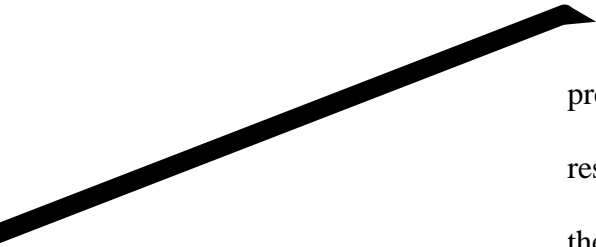
4chan aims to block “minors” from entering any part of the site, not just the parts with the “adult content,” but these blocks are superficial, hurdled with a single click. There is also a thinly veiled acknowledgment of the kind of extreme content that someone might encounter on 4chan<sup>52</sup> in your agreement “not to hold 4chan responsible for any damages from your use of the website” (www.4chan.org). Responsibility for viewing and producing 4chan content falls with viewers and producers, not the website itself. 4chan is not responsible as host: the anonymous users are in charge should they get themselves into trouble. And there is trouble aplenty in 4chan’s boards. Once I clicked through the gateway to the infamous /b/ board (one of the first established 4chan forums, dedicated to “random” content (see “/b/,” 2018)), the Massey gateway appeared. Once I clicked through the Massey gateway, I was immediately greeted by pornographic images (professional and otherwise) of women and transsexuals, as well as pornographic images of well-known cartoon characters (for example Marge Simpson) and other cartoon porn.

Users of 4chan, and Reddit, produce text that becomes technocultural (much like pro-anorexic text (Connor, Coombes & Morgan, 2015)) through the complex dissolution of corporate responsibility for the production of comments and images, individualised assertions to freedom of speech and expression, and the abandonment of individualised identifiers. With such boundaries breeched and blurred, sites like 4chan then emerge as spaces through which to produce content that amplifies differences (like misogynist, racist and classist content) through intensified neoliberal individualism (the bounded individual responsible for their own offense – as a product and as a response) and the dissolution of the individual into a mess of social, cultural, political networks.

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<sup>52</sup> Bearing (pun intended) in mind that 4chan is the online community that gave us Pedobear (see “Pedobear,” 2018).

4channers in particular participate as ‘anonymous’ users, where they appear as a blurry cultural movement, rather than as individuals. Indeed, viewing 4chan feels very much like witnessing cultural movement, not like viewing the interaction of independent individuals. The dissolution of 4chan users into a heaving socio-political mess problematises that traditional notion of research ethics that would require me to seek informed consent to use 4chan user text for research purposes. As a researcher, my connection into 4chan text is cultural and networked, much as the 4chan text itself is cultural and networked, rather than individualised, identifiable users able to be separated off into ‘participants’ who can, or would, consent.



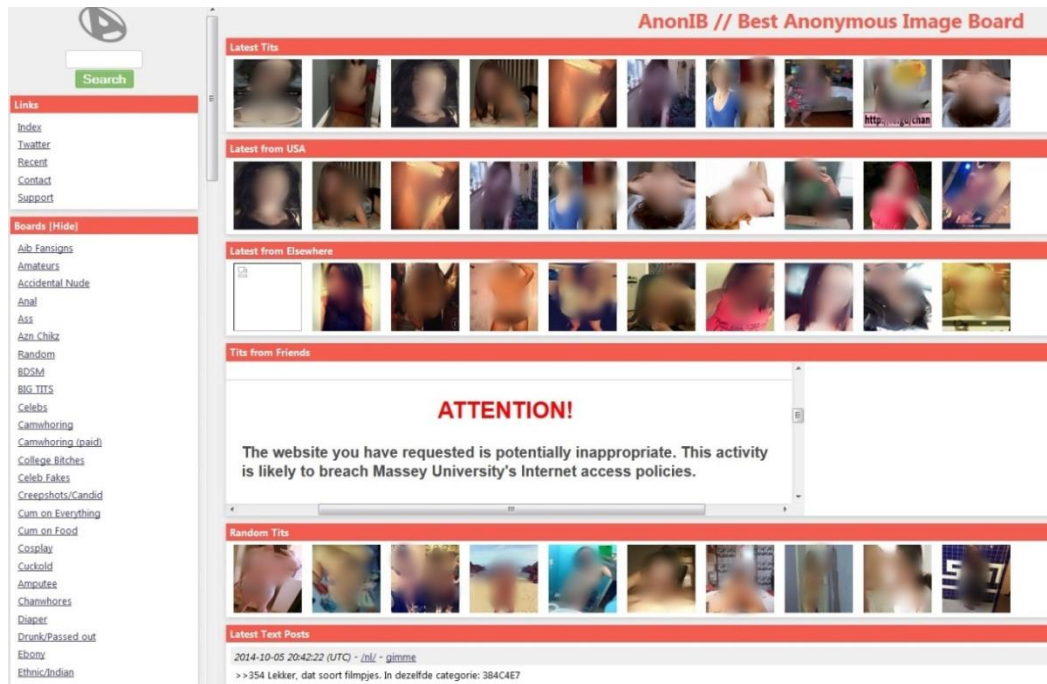
I do need to alert readers, however, to the complexities of presenting cultural text as data for research purposes. Through my research, some internet users will be identified by name. Typically, these are users whose names are already widely publicly individualised and explicitly connected to their internet use. Users like Elliot Rodger, Gable Tostee, Anissa Weier, Morgan Geysler and members of the Roast Busters are now very public identities and these public names are utilised through my research to help tell cyborg stories. However, other user names and user images will be redacted for a multiplicity of reasons. In some cases, users utilise copyrighted content as avatars. In other cases, users may not even be aware that images of their bodies are online. In some instances, redacting user names might perform my own subversion, averting the gaze of users who might seek to trouble my troubling of the trouble. In other instances, APA referencing conventions would dictate that I explicitly identify a user in the forms of in-text



citations and full references in the reference list, rendering the user very individualised and visible. Whether individualised names are redacted through my research or not, they remain explicitly identified through massive network of internet text that does not redact their identities, but rather exploits their identification. So some redactions are futile: all of the content I sought for my research was publicly available. How do I present data that subverts traditional understandings of individualised anonymity and informed consent? Like a Weaver, I have pulled together a worldweave that prioritises aesthetics: the aesthetics of redaction where identities are in urgent danger of reverting back into bounded individualism, becoming too bounded, too clear, in need of blurring.

### ***Anon-IB – Decisions***

Anon-IB, now finally dead (see Cimpanu, 2018), was perhaps the most interesting site in terms of ethical decision making (that potentially traumatic boob!). Anon-IB was considered the main outlet for the Fappening, with some Anon-IB users utilising the site in order to breach the surface of the internet with the hacked intimate images originally traded on the dark web (see Sargent, 2014). The site featured no disclaimer that described what the site was, nor that the content may be NSFW. Below is a screen capture (images redacted) of the front page when I visited, publicly accessible for all:



All the photos posted to the site featured women (with the guest appearance from the odd penis), and almost all were intimate and/or pornographic. While there were plenty of visible images, Massey detected one section of the site to block from my view. From the list of boards available, this site was exclusively pornographic, and organised by type of pornographic content, country of origin and even specific cities of origin, allowing for users of the site to search for women based on where they live, with the possible intention of finding explicit images of women they knew, and/or identifying and locating women they had seen on the site. This practice was also evident during the Snappening (a sister event to the Fappening that targeted Snapchat users), where Redditors would ask for specific women and girls to be searched for in the image dump, and in subreddits like tipofmypenis where specific women in pornographic images and videos are identified and sometimes located, even if just digitally (by sharing the woman's social media accounts, for example).

The ease of access to Anon-IB meant that I did not have to consider my clicking actions: there are no terms to agree to, at least not in words and virtual buttons, but rather in the images of exploited women staring back at me. Even Massey IT

department's attempt to block my view was half-hearted. While the exploitation of women's bodies had been prominent through all the content I was consuming, the suddenness with which I found myself deeper into the network than I imagined travelling made me wonder if my clicks were doing harm, a moment of acutely experiencing the blurring between those traditional ethical notions of help and harm. In an age when website clicks earn money and keep a site alive, have I become a user of that site? What was my ethical cyborg response to clicking on to Anon-IB?

Through events like the Fapping and the Snapping, the hacking, cataloguing and image dumping of women happened mostly behind explicitly closed virtual doors: dummy emails, ever-shifting links and dark web shenanigans that I did not connect into. But Anon-IB was a sharp breach of the dark web into the surface of the internet; a virtual black market for women's digitised intimate bodies, carefully catalogued for ease of navigation. And that, I hope, is all I needed to know. On my first and last visit to Anon-IB, I did not click beyond the homepage.

→ ***SexyAbortions and Vote Brigading – When I Was Not Safe***

While the potentially pornographic content of the sites I was mining for data was a concern for ethics approval, it is worth mentioning that while this content was graphic, and in some cases, horrifying, some of the most upsetting content was not necessarily pornographic in the more commonly understood traditional sense. Porn culture permeates Reddit and 4chan, even in (and in some cases especially in) forums and threads created for children's content (like My Little Pony and other children's cartoons); the boundary between porn and not-porn is extremely blurry/non-existent.<sup>53</sup> For example, the most challenging subreddits I encountered were SexyAbortions (a

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<sup>53</sup> 'Rule 34' of the internet asserts that if something exists, there is porn of it ("Rule 34," 2018).

forum dedicated to images of dead fetuses and babies, usually bloody, that were discussed in masturbatory terms) and CuteFemaleCorpses (where users posted photos of dead women – some from TV shows and movies, some almost certainly not... – and also discussed their masturbatory potential, as well as sharing some images of dead women's bodies explicitly being violated). Both of these subreddits were porn-adjacent: users posted images not typically considered 'pornographic' and then commented on them in the same ways they were commenting on porn (through masturbation references and what they would like to 'do' to the subject of the image). Does the approval to view pornographic material for the purposes of research (granted either by the ethics committee or the IT department) cover the internet's pornification of anything from children's TV shows to extreme gore?

So while the question of the potential harm of porn is complicated by proliferating pornification, a more urgent question of safety materialises. Jennifer Allaway is a social researcher who was conducting research on sexism in the gaming industry with gaming developers. When #GamerGaters (members of an anti-feminist, misogynist gaming movement) discovered her online survey that had been circulated to game developers, they bombarded her survey with racist and misogynist responses – a practice known as vote brigading (see Allaway, 2014). She now lives under the threat of doxing, where her private details like address and phone number could be released online for #GamerGaters to abuse. As I am engaging with violently misogynist sites as a non-user, I am technically considered unable to experience direct online abuse. However, there is a threat that if my research were to become public, I could be the target of doxing myself. While my own doxing would be unlikely, Allaway's experience highlights the need for the ethical focus on IT safety for researchers who

engage online. The threats to researcher safety transform as technologies transform. It matters what thoughts think ethics.

## **To Encounter**

Networking through the processes of my early encounters with some violent online spaces helps explicate the kinds of encounters explored through my research that might look and feel different to the traditional investigations of the psychology detective. I am a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman embedded in a technophilic Western culture, and my research is an analysis of my encounters within this culture. As I sit at my computer and virtually enter a pro-rape forum, for example, I am engaged in encounters with text that also encounters me. The pro-rapists who textualise their desire to rape Western feminists do so in order to effect encounters that may enable them to act on women's bodies and perform their ideology, whether in the sense of the enactment of rape, or by scaring women into social and political silence, as well as engaging and strengthening homoerotic bonds that excite other men into their objectification of women (see Flood, 2007; Mowat, Coombes & Busch, 2016). The encounters may be textual, but they are encounters nonetheless and they are most certainly embodied. Even a psychology detective might be able to concede that the internet is a massive-scale mess of human encounters, users communicating and producing the 'encounters' that psychology detectives try to manufacture through ordered procedure. Internet text could be considered an ever-in-flux, proliferating encounter online, as many, many users can add to, interact with, negate, dismantle, rebuild online text. My research is a series of interconnected encounters with multiple, contradictory and simultaneous texts that produce bodies in particular ways, expected and unexpected, necessitating responsive ethical considerations that are just as multiple, contradictory and simultaneous.

Case and point, my journeys with Elliot Rodger, the young man who killed several people and himself as ‘revenge’ for keeping him a virgin. Initially, the thought of reading his 137 page manifesto filled me with... well, boredom. Rodger’s manifesto is one of the main documents used to inform the ideology of pro-rape, anti-women and incel/co-alpha communities online such as the CoAlpha Reactionary Forum. So I knew I was in for a repetition, ad nauseam, of the misogyny I had read a thousand times before through Reddit and other places I had been exploring. And indeed that was exactly my experience. However, Rodger’s manifesto turned also out to be a compelling one. He was a gifted writer (he was encouraged to become a writer, but discovered it would not make him rich enough, fast enough), with a flair for the dramatic – he singled out mundane childhood, adolescent and early adulthood experiences as ‘traumas’ that scarred him deeply,<sup>54</sup> like a playground pushing incident (Rodger, 2014, p. 32). His manifesto is a detailed account of how an incredibly troubled man tried desperately to participate in the Western narrative of heteronormative masculinity. As his life progressed, his frustration at his inability to produce the heteronormative narrative became amplified, and his hatred for those who he believed were actively denying him the narrative (women) proliferated, until his ‘Day of Retribution’ eventuated.

Rodger had moments of insight into his predicament, and these were painful to read. There are points, however fleeting, where Rodger saw that his attempts at performing heteronormative masculinity and his own fraught anxieties at doing so may have thwarted his attempts to interact successfully with others, particularly women (see for example his moment of insecurity in his jury service story on page 81 of his manifesto). He did not linger on these moments of reflection, but they are undeniable.

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<sup>54</sup> And maybe these experiences do indeed traumatise us all, but that is for some other psychoanalyst to discuss!

He also repeated, in the closing pages of his manifesto, that he did not want to die, and that his life was a tragedy (see Rodger, 2014, p. 124). Indeed, his life, and the actions he took while ending it, was a tragedy, but perhaps not for the reasons that Rodger detailed. The tragedy is not that Rodger could not reproduce the Western heteronormative narrative; it is that the narrative was constructed at all. The narrative's effects are tragic, where men and women are 'bound in a spiral dance' (to borrow a Haraway-ism (Haraway, 1991)) of sex and violence.

My reading of Rodger's manifesto was a prolonged and fraught encounter (explored further in chapter nine), where he connected to me (to everyone) and I have responded, in a way, in my own manifesto. Rodger typed his manifesto, and shared his YouTube videos, as acts of connection into a network of heteronormative interrelations teeming with embodied encounters.

And the reading of Rodger's manifesto connected me to subsequent encounters in ever-expanding networks. For example, Rodger's manifesto connected to the viewing of the 'Elliot Rodger: Retribution' video game that enacts scenes from his life (as described by him in his manifesto) and enables players to slaughter (mainly) women, leaving their corpses littering the digital streets. The video game was confronting, not in that its violence was graphic or directed at women (as these are normal, pervasive video game tropes<sup>55</sup> (see Dill, Gentile, Richter & Dill, 2005)), but in that it was gamification enabling embodied playability of a man's deeply troubled life *and* his violent actions. The game lets users enact the violence Rodger envisages in his manifesto *and* the

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<sup>55</sup> Gaming indeed represents another bizarre disconnect between ethics as conceptualised by university committees and ethical research practice. The gaming industry is insidious, worth billions globally and built upon embodying violence. Yet, violent video games are readily available to children (for example the 2017-2018 'Fortnite' craze (see Haysom, 2018)). Continued questions about my safety to be connecting to misogynist communities feel bizarre when so deeply embedded in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Western culture so familiar with violence against women even in childhood games.

violence that he actually perpetuated, utilising real words and real violences to create a pastime for gamers, Rodger fans and misogynists (categories that are not mutually exclusive). My encounter with the game was *uncanny*: watching Rodger's life, crimes and tragedies played out through a game, for fun, the male cheers of joy alternating with women's cries to stop...

From the game connection came another encounter. I was curious as to who made the game, thinking it likely to be an independent gaming company or even individual who enjoyed courting controversy. Instead, when I followed the link, I was taken to a violent anti-feminist website called Lolokaust. The creators of the game were indeed an independent company, though their main venture was not gaming, but rather the industry of anti-feminism. Lolokaust's homepage was dominated by anti-feminist cartoons; violent and sexually explicit.<sup>56</sup> Much of the imagery was what might be labelled 'grotesque,' similar to Ralph Bakshi's 'Cool World' cartoon characters (discussed in chapter eight), except more explicit and more violent. So rather than the game emerging from a gaming community steeped in misogyny, the game emerged from a misogyny community that connected into gaming. These are not mutually exclusive categories, but distinct enough to have challenged my expectations and shift my encounter, perhaps not unlike like how a human participant might provide an interview response that surprises the human researcher.

Both Rodger's manifesto and the connected Lolokaust website produced different encounters than I had anticipated (an anticipation based on a lot of experience connecting into misogynist communities). The connection to these nodes in the network is disruptive, simulating (in the Haraway-ian sense) the disruption of (traditional)

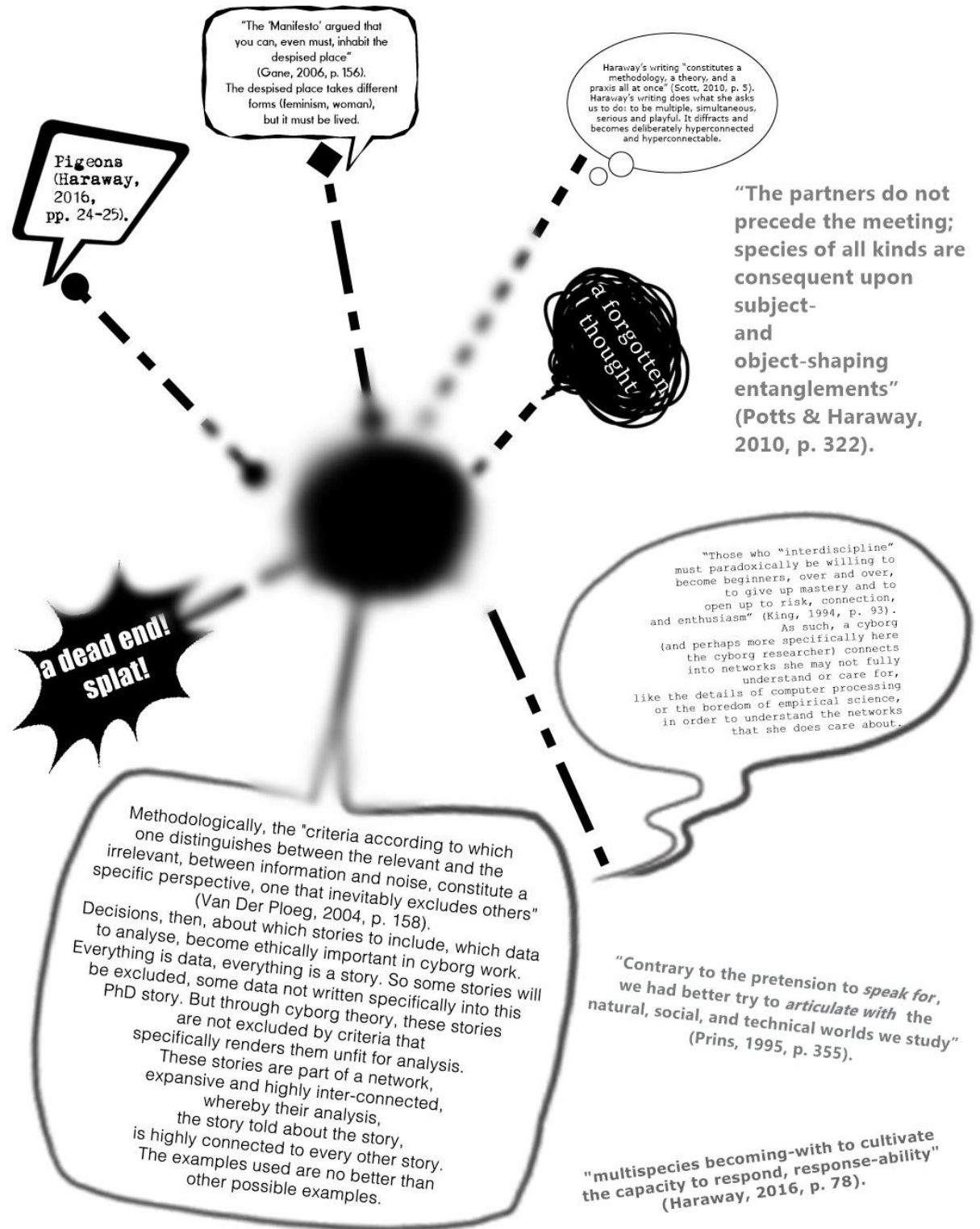
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<sup>56</sup> The site looks different in September 2018 than it did when I first accessed it in 2014. It is still awash with sexually violent imagery though!



encounters, particularly in (qualitative) psychological research, where people (human researcher and human participant) encounter each other and potentially unfold something together, shifting together, co-producing research. In my research the unfolding and co-production still happens, through embodied encounters with text. However, even through the human researcher/human participant relationships that best typify the psychology detective's adherence to procedure, the power dynamic shifts in favour of the researcher. For me, in my encounters, the power is networked and expansive, dismantling the researcher/participant hierarchy. The moment I slipped back into detective mode and assumed I knew what was coming (because I followed the procedure), the network materialised new connections and disrupted the information-exchange that had become so predictable. I am not the authoritative knowledge producer shaping participant responses with my questions. Rather, the text resists, disrupts, transforms in whatever ways it does and I respond. I cannot lead it, or directly impact upon it in ways that might shape it, but I can respond to it. So cyborg ethics shifts the experiences of the research encounter and the researcher/participant hierarchy to embedded hyperconnectivity where plugging into an unknown (or even partially known) network has the potential to re-route research signals, re-wire a research network and demand a different response.

## Chapter Four Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts



*In The Meme-Time: An Ethics Weaver Steps Through A Fold In Space/Time, With Some Legs Snipped Off.*



## Soliloquy: A Melodramatic Deviation

*“Hey, little cyborg, be sexy for me!”*  
*“Woah, not that sexy, you slut!”*

### Stuck in the Same Old

I do not mind people’s struggle to understand a cyborg, or her politics. The politics are necessarily messy, contradictory, partial, multiple and disruptive. She is obnoxious; she offends; she is impolite where she is expected to ‘lady-like’ (whatever that means); she is seen and heard when she is supposed to remain quiet; she is quiet when ordered to reveal herself (pun intended). Cyborg politics ooze from the spaces in-between; rupture from the tensions between icky binaries; are built from the excesses. They are complex, interconnected and Frankensteinian. They are a political struggle for political struggling. In other words: cyborgs are not everyone’s idea of a good time.

As such, engaged in endless political struggling, I do not expect to be greeted with open academic arms. I expect resistance to my resistance. Indeed, I am not sure what I, or my cyborg sisters, would do if met with total, unquestioning acceptance (explode, perhaps?).

The rejection of a case study *I was asked to write* has been the clearest example (to date!) of the stuckness of the cyborg and her politics in the same old bind of the morality women’s sexuality: the virgin and the whore.

A journal approached me, requesting I submit an account of my research of pro-anorexia communities online, citing a published paper that signified my work was not of the mainstream (even if that paper too was sanitised). Of course, there was no guarantee of publication; just the dangling of the opportunity text-carrot in front of a cyborg always nauseous to vomit up more words.

The particular journal wanted to hear my research story, or a specific aspect of my research story, that highlighted methodology. They wanted to know my decision-making processes, and share them with other poor fools who embark on the research process.

Homework duties were performed (connecting to the network, as cyborgs are want to do); published case studies were appreciated; author guidelines were consumed. As the writing process began, the instructions were followed as best as a cyborg can (which is admittedly not very closely). The paper was built, submitted for quality control (sent to supervisors), then shipped off for violation.

And then my case study returned, fully violated (or perhaps not violated enough...?). Main critiques were as follows (run through a Donald Trump tweet-ifier):

- “No referencing! Sweeping generalisations! Academic catastrophe! Sad!”
- “References used (when this idiot even uses them) are too old! Yuck!”
- “This so-called person has told me all about the decision-making processes for their methodology! Bad! This paper was supposed to be about the decision-making processes for their methodology!”

The cyborg had proved too deviant for ‘legitimate’ academic consumption, though not unsurprisingly. A previous paper had a similar response, but they were at least prepared to play; prepared to engage with the cyborg, even if still on their own stuffy, rigid terms.

But there is another similarity between these two papers and the response to them: both journals wanted my cyborg. They saw a thing, not sure what it was, but wanted it anyway. Granted, the case study journal may have cast a wide net, and my poor cyborg got tangled up in it, but nevertheless the cyborg was summoned to account for herself, methodologically. The account, however, in both these instances, was

rejected (once partially, once fully). The ‘sexy’ idea once again has proven too wild, too promiscuous to be taken as anything other than an offense to academic decency. Only this time, it was hard to imagine the reviewer’s response as anything less than a panicked demand that I get myself to a nunnery.

For example, the majority of the published case studies I read from the case study journal did not reference their “sweeping generalisations,” let alone specific studies they discussed. The author guidelines specifically requested that author’s not cite as extensively as they would in a traditional journal article, as the cases studies were supposed to be more an exploration of the researcher’s experience and decision-making processes. In this way (and to be fair, perhaps *only* this way), my case study, as submitted for punishment, did not look any different to the majority of the case studies published by the journal.

So, I assume then that there is something particularly offensive about my writing of my case study that drove this reviewer to highlight the perceived lack of referencing in my work as poor scholarship, when it seemed to be standard practice encouraged by the journal itself that had been good enough for the more mainstream case studies: the well-behaved researchers who had the decency to use sanctioned methodologies, untainted by slutty ideas and the ravings of political dissent.

What these encountered academics seem to expect is a virginal cyborg: a mythical figure of a ‘good girl’; obeying her parents; respecting authority; innocent; unwavering in the face of the world’s most carnal delights (like political activism or having a creative thought); un-troubling of the powers-that-be. Perhaps, to some, the image of a cyborg (particularly in connection with femininity) represents docility: the hybridity of the cyborg signifies femininity as controlled through technology, creating a passive figure, rather than the challenger, the disrupter that I like to think I construct.

I understand the excitement the cyborg conjures for academics, but alas, it is her purpose (well, one of them) to also conjure unease and discomfort – She will sex with you, but it is not her calling.<sup>57</sup> Academia seems to desire my cyborg, but rejects her when they poke around her bits (I do not know why I am complaining. This happens to Donna Haraway/feminists/women all the time). Much like women must be both virginal and whores (both accepted and rejected in varying ways), my cyborg seems to be greeted with the curiosity of the virginal, and rejected with stigma of the whore.

Case and point, the issues that the case study reviewer raised (the ones that could be taken seriously, that is), were easily fixed: I can add in the references. I can update the ‘outdated’ (no, actually, I cannot, but like any good whore, I can fake it!). These issues are very, very fixable. What I cannot fix, however, is a reviewer’s refusal to play, which seems to be the only reason that the response shifted from (minor or major) revision to total rejection. It is, like a whore (a prolific one, anyway), beyond redemption in its political, theoretical positioning.<sup>58</sup>

Like both the virgin and the whore, I did as I was told. But my theoretical disobedience seems to have offended the reviewer to such an extent that fixable things like referencing became the only point they could focus on, unable to examine the ideas presented and how they might be useful for researchers who also occupy slutty spaces. The cyborg was dismissed as deviant (intellectually, as well as from the journal’s requirements) and I was chastised on tangibles like referencing. They knew I needed to be punished, but were not quite sure how else to do it.

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<sup>57</sup> As Jordan Wolfson’s (Female figure) likes to say: “I’ll sex with you, but it’s not my calling” (Wolfson, Konrath & Woods, 2015, p. 41).

<sup>58</sup> If the cyborg were a sex position, it would probably some really depraved one that doctors recommend you do not attempt unless you warm up well and stretch all your muscles fully.

## **Chapter Five**

### ***Apocalypse***

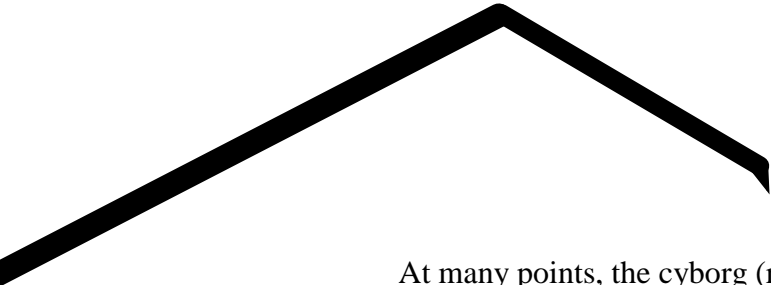




*In The Meme-Time: Issue two, 2016 of Massive Magazine, the Massey University (Palmerston North) student magazine, featured a cartoon image<sup>59</sup> of what was later 'clarified' as a "bored and powerful" (Walsh, 2016a, para. 14) sex worker reading a 100-level psychology textbook while having "sheepish" (para. 5) sex with some disembodied masculine hands.*

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<sup>59</sup> Not exactly reproduced here, though the image is so redacted who could tell...



At many points, the cyborg (researcher and/or otherwise) experiences a rupture, a cataclysm, where there is a collapse, where the excesses become too heavy, boundaries too breached and apocalypse emergent. In the previous chapter, my response-ability to stay with the expansive trouble of the research network was in question and what that expansivity might enable for embodied encounters. The present chapter is an extended undoing of the embodied experience of such troublesome encounters, their breaches and breakdowns. In effect, this chapter is a rupture. The previous chapters serve as a prequel to a moment (multiple and partial) of cyborg materialisation; a tangle of moments (and other bits of things and not-things) that congeal into a fleshed cyborg; a cataclysmic rupture from which new possibilities emerge.

I experienced a cataclysm in my previous research on pro-anorexia, where the multiplicity, simultaneity, partiality and contradiction of pro-anorexic text connected through the history of women's bodies and technology to emerge as cyborg, a figure neither good nor bad, but complexly produced for complex politics in complex times. The rupture and emergent figure, while perhaps not explicitly expressed at the time, were apocalyptic, aligning with visions of end-times cyborg uprisings not with the aim of 'saving the world' from such uprisings, but in the interests of re-imagining the world in ways that might enable survival.

### **A Lovely Day for an Apocalypse**

The idea of 'apocalypse' is not clear despite its historical prominence through religion, global warfare and popular science fiction narratives. There are no real set definitions, as meanings shift through 'revelations' and disasters (religious, natural or

otherwise) to metaphors and stories for making sense of the world (Rosen, 2008; Wojcik, 1997). Violence is a key apocalyptic unifier, just as violence is a key unifier of the category ‘woman,’ so even at a skim read, apocalypse and ‘woman’ share violence as a common classifier. What apocalypse ‘is’ or looks like is less interesting<sup>60</sup> than how the ideas of apocalypse enable new politics. Tina Pippin, a feminist apocalypse theologian, asserts that the apocalypse, as detailed in the Bible, establishes and re-establishes women’s inferiority to men through extreme violence against women’s bodies (Pippin, 1999) and constructions of women as either obedient heroines or disobedient whores (Pippin, 2005). It seems she is in agreement with Haraway’s (1991) concerns about origin stories (especially biblical origins) “longing for fulfilment in apocalypse” (p. 175) and asserting the gendered social order. The biblical apocalypse affirms the (Western, Christian) gendered social order through men’s dominance and women’s objectified subjugation (Pippin, 2005), and as such does not offer many moments for liberation.

However, for Catherine Keller (1992) apocalypse is a way to understand crises, “enabling a beleaguered community to interpret its place within historical crisis meaningfully” (p. 189). That is, apocalypse as a metaphor or narrative can help disenfranchised others interpret or story their positioning and their politics. Indeed, Pippin (2006) does arrive at some moments for re-imagining women through apocalypse, citing Monique Wittig’s destructive and reconstructive ‘The Lesbian Body’ and Donna Haraway’s cyborg in the process. To extend the political potential of apocalypse stories further, Viola (1990) analyses apocalypse through Soviet peasant

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<sup>60</sup> I have no interest in providing a unified definition of the term. If you will excuse the secondary citation (apocalypse work can be hard to locate): “...Pippin nevertheless problematizes the possibility of unified liberatory readings, arguing that “what is liberating for one of the ‘oppressed’ is not necessarily liberating for all of them”” (Castelli, 1994, p. 96). A unified and clear definition of apocalypse could close off opportunities for ‘others’ to engage in apocalypse politics in alternative ways.

resistance to their government, noting that the idea of the apocalypse was “an important element in the peasant strategy of rebellion...” (Viola, 1990, p. 748), where apocalyptic thinking “became a call to arms” and a “guide to action” (p. 767). The idea of apocalypse organised and gave language to the anxieties and violences experienced by disenfranchised people, and enabled ways of thinking rebellion and resistance into action (Viola, 1990). It mattered what nightmarish thoughts were used to think rebellious thoughts. Indeed, Haraway’s cyborg is about “not giving in to the nightmares of apocalypse” (Gane, 2006, p. 151) and instead staying with the horrors and using those horrors to think and do differently.

Apocalypse then seems a possible way through which the impossibility of technobodies can be given some dire language. Through (science fiction) narratives that construct apocalyptic worlds, gender, as an example, can be problematised and re-written through the necessary breakdowns of social and political structures that bind. Murray (2013) suggests that a zombie apocalypse (the ‘Resident Evil’ games and movies, for example) can create “ruptures in the existing social structures to imagine alternative understandings of gender and sexuality” (p. 15). Through a zombie apocalypse, gendered performances can potentially be re-worked and new possibilities explored, although Murray (2013) does acknowledge that gendered binaries are often *not* re-done through these narratives, but in many cases re-asserted, as in ‘The Walking Dead’<sup>61</sup> for example, and ‘Cool World,’ a different kind of apocalypse movie (explored in chapter eight of my research project). Moreover, Watkins (2012) suggests that women apocalypse writers are typically suspicious of advanced technology for its

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<sup>61</sup> Anthology television series ‘American Horror Story’ is, at time of writing, entering a season in which it explores the apocalypse. The show has a women-heavy cast and crew and tends to challenge some binaries in interesting ways (while also re-asserting them in plenty of boring ways). But alas, I will not be able to use the show as an example here, as it will not have fully aired by my institutionally mandated submission date. Another connection missed and mourned!

patriarchal roots, telling apocalyptic stories that challenge modern technology's potential for producing even worse predicaments for 'others,' like women. Watkins (2012) uses literary examples from writers such as Margaret Atwood and Liz Jensen, among others, who utilise climate change as their apocalypse narrative, interrogating the connections between women, patriarchal technologies, science, environmentalism and the end of world. But apocalypse films like 'H.' where women look after robot babies,<sup>62</sup> make strange, through technology, women's roles as 'mother' and 'caregiver,'<sup>63</sup> and TV shows like 'Fringe' and 'Westworld,' where women, science and technology become intricately bound to the survival of multiple universes, also enable some frightening and exciting spaces through which to re-conceptualise woman and her connections in and through technology. In these stories, the 'end of the world' looks very different, but can be survived in multiply weird and wonderful ways.

Apocalypse then can be undone, re-worked and opened up to more and more possible meanings. When a 'world' can be experienced so differently and when an 'end' can be experienced so differently (including the new beginnings that endings can allow), apocalypse becomes not about a singular event or revelation, but an ongoing, unfolding crisis of 'otherness.' The world ending can mean different things and be an embodied experience differently, with the end times providing some of us with new ways to be and do. With our perpetual focus on apocalypse as literally earth ending catastrophe, we do not address our local apocalypses, our daily shatterings, our ongoing catastrophes, our mundane ruptures that upheave and tear at us and re-work our everyday lives. The apocalypse then conceptualised not as a singular or sudden event,

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<sup>62</sup> The robot babies in 'H.' appear similar to 'real dolls,' the sex dolls utilised and 'cared for' by men (see Burr-Miller & Aoki, 2013, and also discussed in chapter ten of my research project).

<sup>63</sup> I will confess I have not seen 'H.': I have only watched the trailer and read reviews. The film is simply not available in New Zealand, not even through questionable channels that I would surely know nothing about...

but rather as “a gradual progress towards contradiction” (Bull, 1999, p. 294) connects up potently with the cyborg.

Apocalypse is not some event we are waiting for, but ongoing events and moments we are already enduring and are looking to survive. For Keller (1992), even in the 1990s (a slow time compared to the late 2010s and beyond), the speed at which technology, politics, social interaction, the environment changes produces the “near simultaneous encounter” with apocalypse’s “many faces: judgment and promise, secular and religious, patriarchal and egalitarian” (p. 190). Apocalypse becomes keenly experienced not as a major catastrophic event or revelation, but as ongoing, mundane catastrophes for ‘others’ that are accelerated and amplified through ubiquitous technological connectivity to these “faces” of apocalypse. As we have rapidly, in my lifetime, moved through the apocalypse of Y2K, climate change and the Trump presidency, the critical urgency of apocalypse is ever-present. Exploiting patriarchal technology, and patriarchal end-times stories, may open some space for new ways to up-end our everyday catastrophes and re-imagine some new “faces” that help us survive. Keller (1996) suggests “... apocalypse is both a state of affairs and an interpretation of that state of affairs” (p. 13), making it a concept through which to articulate cataclysmic horrors, imagine how to undo those horrors, and maybe survive them.

Apocalypse emerges then as a way of telling stories that could be exploited for political potency in anxious connection to the cyborg. ‘Apocalypse’ becomes an *undoing* word and a *redoing* word: a potent and multiple term for dire body politics that explodes meanings for cyborgs and other surviving kin to go salvaging. The cyborg has long been an apocalyptic figure (‘The Terminator’ franchise is built on the apocalyptic cyborg), and remains so through the alarmism of increasing automation (for example,

Elliot, 2018). Understanding apocalypse in current times, and its fraught and vital connection to technology becomes a key cyborg task.

The story I tell next is an embodied apocalyptic response to an apocalyptic hyperconnectivity, an account of the state of affairs and an interpretation of that state of affairs. This is my (cyborg) response to a catastrophic overload of connections, an exercise in *graceful degradation* in an emergent, ongoing apocalypse, in which the woman's body is at urgent stake once again (it always is!). Graceful degradation is a technological term associated with "machine breakdowns on computers; the ability to undergo graceful degradation ensures that failure of certain parts does not cause complete breakdown, but allows limited operation" (Chandor, Graham & Williamson, 1970, p. 189). Graceful degradation, as a technometaphor, had been earmarked for use with work on women's resilience in the technoworld, where hyperconnectivity enables women to maintain politicised technofunctionality even when social and political progress is slow, or deliberately broken down. Feminists, for example, both succeed and fail in many ways to make strong connections online (through general commenting, battling trolls, writing blogs, academic publishing and so on), but even through failures they continue to try to connect: the connection is live (and lively), but it just cannot quite get through the cacophony of other perhaps more insidious connections travelling established misogynist, individualist, masculinist wiring.

There is a suggested femininity about a computer gracefully degrading, as grace is surely something Woman™ processes or performs. Like overwhelmed and overworked women, while some parts breakdown, there are connections and processes within the computer that keep functioning just enough to keep the computer alive. The metaphoric description of this degradation as 'graceful' suggests a delicacy, docility and perhaps even a misogynistic idea of dignity while breaking down, ceasing to function,

ending. Woman™ carries on, gracefully, even when her systems are broken and her connections weak or frayed. Women who do not degrade gracefully, perhaps by breaking down completely, loudly, abruptly or even wilfully might be constructed as bad feminine machines.

But out steps a Weaver and snips graceful degradation out of the network it was connected into, and re-connects the technometaphor here. As I make sense of this chapter (speaking from a form of past where I edit my work, drafting and drafting), I fear the technometaphor is more me, the embodied feminist researcher engaging with technothings and perhaps not so gracefully at times operating on limited systems in an unlimited feast of connections: there are too many connections that need too much connection. As such, the story that comes next is about a researcher stuck in an apocalyptic (in Keller's (1996) sense of the state and the interpretation) overload of contradictory connections, the practice of attending the impossible feast when something is served up that is not only devoured, but induces a simultaneous uncontrolled vomiting of connections that choke certain parts of the feminist researcher machine. As an impossible feaster, I can normally eat and eat and eat connections, only very rarely getting full and leaving the banquet. But the dish, the one soon to be storied in the words below, induced a vomiting that occurred while feasting, producing congestion in the connections and the graceful degradation of a feminist researcher.

## **Massive**

In March 2015, University of Canterbury's student magazine *Canta* published an 'opinion piece' that advocated the sexual harassment and virtual rape of women gamers online (see Liu, 2015). The article was allegedly satire, yet it read as if copy-pasted



from misogynist gamers,<sup>64</sup> the parody indistinguishable from its deadly serious sibling (misogynist gamers call it ‘reality,’ perhaps). There were questions raised about the editing of student magazines, the extent of free speech and censorship and how student money should be spent on student magazines. There was outrage; the magazine was pulled. Intrigued by a student magazine from New Zealand’s (allegedly) progressive modern universities publishing such an overtly misogynist article, I reached out to a networked feminist source for a copy of the offending article (as it had been removed from online sources as well as physical sources) and they kindly sent me a full-colour scanned copy of the article (so efficiently can we use patriarchal tools in this network...! And how interesting that while the article was banned, there are those of us most affected who are so keen to connect to the words, hoarding them, adding them to the pile...). The article itself is now oddly impossible to find; it has been shut down comparatively effectively in this modern age of hyperconnection and ever-present content.

A year later, in March 2016, Massive Magazine, the Massey University Palmerston North campus student magazine, published an issue with an image of what was unclearly a sex worker engaged in the dual activity of reading her ‘Psych 101’ textbook and hair-pulling, butt-grabbing sexual intercourse. Due to the cover’s location (where I worked and where I studied and online), and explicit content (the politics of women’s bodies), the Massive cover was a disturbing hyperconnection for me as a student, as a psychology student, a poor student, a ‘cannot-find-work’ student, a Massey student, a Massey staff member, as a tutor of 100-level psychology, an owner of a 101 textbook, a feminist researcher, a feminist researcher of things that matter to women’s

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<sup>64</sup> As well as evoking Lolokaust, the creators of the ‘Elliot Rodger: Retribution’ game, misogynist gaming is also synonymous with the #GamerGate movement explicated further in chapter eleven.

bodies, an embodiment junkie, a fan of art and a previous contributor of words (with a feature cover nowhere near so problematic) to the Albany campus student magazine. The imagery itself is hyperconnected to multiple online communities, as well as key issues of consent, free speech, women's bodies, women's embodiment, politics and power: many of the faces of apocalypse accelerated and amplified in the magazine cover. My own university, my own fellow students, my own student imagination conjured this image on my behalf and it was titillating traumatic.

## **Cover Story**

The Massive Magazine cover cartoonishly depicts, at best, a distressed sex worker, and at worst, rape. The young cartoon woman, scantily clad, attempts to read her 'Psych 101' textbook as a pair of dark gloved hands appear behind her, pulling her hair and grabbing at her body. Thrusting is suggested. The image is pornographic not just in content, but in style, with stylised female proportions, large and barely contained if not for the grip on her ponytail. As an image produced online, it is a mere blip on the radar, and a tame one at that, but the mundanity of the image of a sexually abused woman is a key concern in and of itself.

The cartoon produces a dehumanised woman-object popular in the incel/co-alpha forums that idolise Elliot Roger (the young man – yes, among many – who murdered en masse because girls would not date him), and forum sites such as Reddit and 4chan that host pro-rape and anti-women forums. So there is a blurring of the boundaries between these assumed-to-be-niche corners of the internet (even though they really are not. Remember that Reddit, for example, considers itself “the front page of the internet” ([www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com))) and student voice and journalism. A disenfranchised incel member does not care about the alleged political context of the Massive cover. He cares about the representation of women as cartoons, toys, commodities, playthings,

possessions, to do with whatever one may please, and act violently towards when the plaything refuses to play along.

In these misogynist spaces online, the depiction of cartoon rape or sex is designed to 1) sexually gratify, and 2) offend ‘others’ (Massanari, 2017). These images are produced as masturbatory aids inspiring disgust that adds to the sexual pleasure. The politics to the images are about deliberately offending the disenfranchised for sexual and political pleasure, re-asserting gendered boundaries through violence and grotesquery. Another example was the image used as an icon for the PhilosophyOfRape pro-rape forum/website: a photo of a woman’s face with a similar tortured and wide-eyed expression that the cartoon Massive cover depicts, except for the ball-gag keeping the woman unable to complain about her situation. Indeed, ball-gags and sadomasochistic sexual play are activities that women can and will consent to and enjoy, but the image used on the PhilosophyOfRape forum was used as a symbol of pro-rape ideology for its representation of sexually dominated women, and perhaps more significantly for its potential for ambiguous interpretation, particularly for feminist arguments. Feminists do need to concede that women can and will consent to violent sex, so the image *could* be one of empowerment.<sup>65</sup> Misogynist groups such as the PhilosophyOfRape, and now potentially Massive’s editorial team, revel in the simultaneity of ambiguity and use it to silence those who speak against such images: the simultaneous encounter with more and more faces of the apocalypse (Keller, 1992). Just as the PhilosophyOfRape and other affiliates justified their position by claiming women can and do enjoy violent subjugation, Massive and its supporters argued that the cover depicts an empowered and consenting woman earning money while she studies.

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<sup>65</sup> If only we knew what ‘empowerment’ meant (see Morgan & Coombes, 2013). Like the Weaver, we have become ‘UNSURE.’

The woman depicted is not in control of her circumstances. She is panicked as she reads, and she is panicked as she is seemingly forcefully penetrated from behind. The image does not, to any me (the feminist researcher, the student, the woman, the art lover), indicate the woman's empowerment either as a prostitute or as a student. So I opened the magazine up to read the articles within, needy for connection in the hope of gaining some understanding of the cover's politics through the text. The cover feature's article starts out with its inspiration: an ad calling for male 'models' to serve drinks shirtless and a question about students turning to sex work (see Greenland, 2016). Intrigued by this call for shirtless male students, the author called for sex workers to come forward and share their stories.

The first response dealt with was that of a male 'businessman' (a pimp and brothel owner) (remember that linear stories are hierarchical...). The discussion focused on the attempts to talk to the man who admitted to hiring (women) students as sex workers, not so much on the hows and the whys of the 'business.'

The subsequent interviews were conducted with women who worked in the sex industry as they studied, or left study to work in the sex industry. Each of the interviews mentions how tough it can be financially to be a student, and then extolls the virtues of working in the sex industry, including feminine empowerment. These are familiar discourses about feeling good about female sexuality, being in control of their lives and jobs and so on. Not problematic ways for sex workers to speak, except that these are the only stories here. The women interviewed were women willing to share their stories, women in the position to be able to share their stories, women who it seems were having the empowered sex worker experience. Paired with the cover image, a contradictory (but linear!) story is constructed about (women) students empowered by sex work as a way to fund study. Are these women the desperate students portrayed on

the cover? Or are they ‘empowered’ by their choice to work in the sex industry and study? Perhaps they embody both, but that story is struggling to emerge.

Gender is almost completely missing from the article itself. Student poverty is a gendered issue, just as sex work is a gendered issue. Women earn less and have fewer job opportunities, while studying and once qualified (Chamberlain & Jayaraman, 2017). The sex industry turns this on its head<sup>66</sup> (somewhat) with women’s bodies in hot demand, whether for prostitution, stripping or pornography. Women can earn a lot in these jobs – although how they earn is important (see Ryan, 2016) – but sex industry jobs are built on the idea of woman as object, as instruments through which masculine desire can be expressed fully, regardless of women’s desire.

Another facet missing from this conversation is the stigma surrounding sex work. The cover image, some have suggested, depicts an empowered sex worker consenting to the acts hinted at. But there is still significant stigma against women working in the sex industry (consider the trouble sex workers have to gain access to health services, insurance and worker rights, as well as their treatment should they require the services of police to, for example, report rape). Women, sex workers or not, are still ‘sluts’ and ‘whores’ should they demonstrate sexual agency. Being a sex worker, while potentially individually empowering, is still a highly stigmatised profession. None the women interviewed for the feature provided their real names despite their pride in their profession, because the stigma is real and it is devastating (see Benoit, Jansson, Smith & Flagg, 2018).

So yes, the financial plight and exploitations of the modern student and sex worker are serious issues. But Massive’s feature and its cover do not offer critical

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<sup>66</sup> There is also a delightful irony in the writer’s comment in the article about how far we have come since the days of corsets as women students recount their stories of why they turned to the ‘world’s oldest profession’... ‘The more things change, the more they stay the same’...

examination of the issues. Massive offers sex workers talking about the sex they have. There was no critical discussion of why women need to turn to sex work beyond ‘university and rent are expensive.’ Men also pay university fees and have to pay rent. Are they turning to sex work in the same numbers as women? We are starting to understand a little bit about student sex work and its connection to reduced funding for students (see Roberts, Jones & Sanders, 2013; Roberts, Sanders, Myers & Smith, 2010; Sagar, Jones, Symons, Tyrie & Roberts, 2016; Sinacore, Jaghori & Rezazadeh, 2015), but the Massive article does not explore these issues. It barely problematises generalised student poverty.

The dissolving of consent here is important too, especially for those who claim the image is a depiction of empowerment. The reason the women featured in the article turned to sex work was because they were unable to fund their study as they could not get adequate work (or any other work at all). They turned to sex work out of necessity. Is having to sell your body in a dangerous industry really consensual? When you have to choose between sex work and paying rent or buying food, are you really making a choice? In the apocalypse, you find ways to survive. The woman depicted on the cover is enduring both the physical trauma of the sex work, and the metaphorical ‘fucking’ of modern student life, but is the feminine endurance of suffering even consent, let alone empowerment? Supporters of the cover image seem to suggest that enduring abuse and violence is empowering; women making the best of their circumstances. There seems little critique of how terrible and apocalyptic those circumstances may be and how those circumstances are produced through institutional and systemic violences against women, and how women’s access to education was supposed to *undo* these violences, re-work women’s possible positionings and re-do the gendered world. Through technology like the internet that accelerates and amplifies gendered horrors, the idea

that feminine endurance of suffering is consensual empowerment is proliferated and consent dissolves further, rendering it a feminine myth. After all, what use does an object have for consent?

So the image itself is alarming as it connects to uncritical analyses of women, education and sex work, and the breaching of the boundaries of some deeply misogynist specifically pro-rape communities. Massive's content is produced as a university magazine that claims to represent the student voice at Massey University, the educational institution that I choose to study at and the institution I have published feminist research on behalf of. The depiction on the cover has emerged from a particularly violent, individualist, neoliberal online masculine voice AND it is being sold to us (men, women, women students) as a political representation of student financial struggles and women's empowerment. A representation straight out of some of the most violent publicly accessible spaces on the internet (like Reddit and 4chan) is being utilised to re-do women's educational and sexual empowerment in ways that re-assert those age old binaries that kept women out of education and confined them to the home, re-establishing the gendered social order of the biblical apocalypse that sees women as silently docile or whores in need of punishment. In the feature article 'represented' by the cover image, women (students) do talk of the empowerment of being a sex worker, particularly when faced with the powerlessness of being a student in New Zealand. Education, the great liberator of women from their gendered shackles (allegedly), is emerging as yet another shackle to women's progress, through both the stories of its financial inaccessibility (the stories the sex worker students told) and through the hostility of the institution towards the safety of women and their bodies (as represented through the cover image and the response to women's distress at the

image).<sup>67</sup> When women, particularly students for whom the cover image is a representation of a very gendered issue of women's student sex work – the systemic oppression that keeps women from studying and/or earning while studying/after studying – voice concerns about such an image and what it represents they are met with cries of 1) free speech/censorship, and 2) that they are too wound up/stupid/hell bent on outrage to understand the image and why they should support it.

## Educating Women

As is (hopefully) materialising, there are a multiplicity of important connections enlivened on the Massive cover, through women's bodies, sexuality, violence, education, oppression, individualism and ethics that constitute the 'faces' of apocalypse as suggested by Keller (1992), and a cacophony of ways to talk about and analyse such connections. The connections converge in the cover image, but they far from end there. For example, on the Massive Facebook page, debate about the cover image raged. A Facebook user called [HE VOICE, REDACTED] explained the image:

*Actually the face of the woman is like that as she is studying trying to figure out the either text or problem, the hands are to show ambiguity as the person paying for sex could be anyone.*

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<sup>67</sup> After all, sexual violence against women on university campuses is ubiquitous. Top Google Scholar results for the topic are largely research articles on bystander intervention to prevent sexual assaults on university campuses, while prevalence and incidence data are much harder to find (largely due to the age old issues of defining sexual assaults and under-reporting combined with university inaction and unwillingness to provide data (see The Hunting Ground, 2017). The focus on bystander intervention suggests that sexual assaults are indeed ubiquitous on university campuses, and there are of course researchers who have attempted to gauge the extent of the violence (see Bonomi, Nichols, Kammes & Green, 2018; Dumbili & Williams, 2017; Fedina, Holmes & Backes, 2018; Gross, Winslett, Roberts & Gohm, 2006; Hackman, Pember, Wilkerson, Burton & Usdan, 2017; McCray, 2015; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Treffry-Goatley, de Lange, Moletsane, Mkhize & Masinga, 2018).



*its not suggestive of rape its doggy style.*<sup>68</sup>

He then goes on to provide a dictionary definition of doggy style that discusses how many women find the position arousing as it can stimulate the ‘G-spot.’ So the male voice offers an explanation of the politics of the image for women, and then explicates female sexual arousal to the women he is talking to/at on Facebook. He then says:

*also some people like to pull hair during sex, so again not assault, just sexual fetishes you may not be aware of.*

I, the feminist researcher, assume he means that some women like to have their hair pulled during sex, rather than saying that some guys like to pull hair as a sexual fetish which cannot be thought of as assault (John Key, New Zealand’s former Prime Minister, is also mentioned on the cover, in the top right-hand corner, and discussed further later on in this *degradation*). There is also a misunderstanding of prostitution. A prostitute does not necessarily bring her fetishes or sexual preferences into sex work, but rather enables others to enact theirs, with her consent. Consensually allowing a client to pull her hair does not mean that she enjoys it as a sexual fetish. So here emerges more blurring of boundaries where consent is produced as always ambiguous. There is a blurring of what sex workers enable for their clients and what the sex worker personally sexually enjoys. Curiously, this is touched on by one of the sex workers in the article when she talks about clients believing if they make her orgasm, they should receive her services for free. The client, and commenter, seem unable to separate the desires enacted on the sex worker and the sex worker’s desires, perhaps because there is a simultaneous understanding of the sex worker as an object who cannot have her own desires, as well as an object that is explicitly sexual and responsive to male sexual

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<sup>68</sup> It perhaps needs to be mentioned that throughout my research all data/quotations appear exactly as they did online. As such, all spelling and grammar errors are the individualised personal responsibility of the user quoted!

desire. After all, the sex worker is a product in the labour market, coded through heterosex (Gatrell, 2010).

At one point in the Facebook debate, a woman commenter says:

*[HE VOICE, REDACTED], sometimes it's best just to shut up and listen.*

Her response is seemingly exasperated by having a masculine voice continually explaining women's politics (and in this case, female sexual arousal); just another woman trying to plug into some connections and unplug others, trying to survive the apocalypse. To this [HE VOICE, REDACTED] responds:

*[WOMAN, REDACTED], that has no point, except to be rude, I'd suggest you take your own advice to be honest.*

The masculine voice here de-legitimises the woman's voice that demands to be attended to and heard when she speaks of her own body and her own politics as they experience apocalyptic violence. By dismissing her comment as simultaneously pointless (not worth listening to) and rude (hysterical and inappropriate), the masculine voice works to close down women's opposition to women's oppression, to block the connections between women, their bodies and their politics, perhaps fearing those potent, apocalyptic connections.

Eventually, as with many great internet debates, [HE VOICE, REDACTED] reproduced the 'I don't hate women. Some of my best friends are women' argument:

*[WOMAN, REDACTED]: "with every comment u leave u announce louder and louder how much you hate women."*

*[HE VOICE, REDACTED]: "I love women, I have a great mother and grandmother, a girlfriend who is beyond talented and numerous female cousins that are also inspiring people."*

From there, he goes on to call third wave feminism a cancer and claims to be an “*equalist*” when a woman feminist attempts to clarify for him what feminism means. He continues to erroneously define feminism as feminists negate his arguments. The conversations are cyclical (a closed loop) and frustrating for the women’s voices who engage with him. Despite multiple voices connecting in and quite violently in some instances telling him how factually incorrect he is about feminism, he continues to speak with absolute authority and privilege, taking up a large amount of virtual space and throttling the connectivity of the women trying to engage in critical, in-crisis body politics.

This particular masculine voice also insists that he is civilly engaged in sharing opinions (unlike the mean feminists who are swearing at him!), and then states repeatedly that it is factually incorrect to call the scene on the Massive cover “*rape*” and calls anyone who disagrees “*ridiculous*” and “*nuts*” and tells women they are “*clearly delusional about a lot of things.*”

When a rape survivor is accused of using her rape to ‘unreasonably justify’ her interpretation of the cover as triggering, she defends her position by saying that her rape indeed enables her to justify how sexually violent imagery can affect people. [HE VOICE, REDACTED] responds:

*It’s not an image of rape, you clearly have traumatic issues, but don’t project them.*

Again, the woman’s voice is rejected as mentally ill. Freedom of speech...?

### **More Free Speech but at What Cost?**

The neoliberal individual (apocalyptic) response to women challenging hate speech and images is of course the persistent cry of free speech, produced through the masculinist position where speaking and being heard is taken for granted as an

inalienable **human** right. The call for those offended by the Massive cover to voice their concern through the (masculinist) channels provided, such as reporting the issue formally, assume that the (masculinist) system is at all concerned with how or why the disenfranchised express their concerns. As [HE VOICE, REDACTED]'s interactions suggest, the concerns of the disenfranchised are not considered legitimate. 'Reporting' assumes that the concerns will not be met with further shutting down of spaces or engagements with violent discourse. We know that women who report sexual assaults, including on university campuses, are often dismissed or chastised (see list of research in footnote 67 on page 147, as well as 'It Happened Here,' a 2014 documentary detailing several women's ordeals with American universities and sexual assaults, including inaction, victim-blaming and intimidation ([www.ithappenedhere.org](http://www.ithappenedhere.org))). The freedom to speak is a freedom only granted to those in the positions of power, those voices that are deemed worthy of the space they occupy; a re-assertion of the gendered social order of the biblical apocalypse where women are silent (see Pippin, 2005). Freedom of speech assumes that the marginalised and disenfranchised even have ways of articulating their experience so that the dominant group can hear them. 'Others' are still struggling for language. 'Freedom of speech' ensures that the dominant group continues to proliferate their ways of speaking that empower them and subjugate others as the othered continue to struggle with ineffability, being further and further removed from the small and awkward speaking positions that we may have carved for ourselves. Where is the free speech for the women who cannot give their names to their stories of sex work? Where is the freedom of speech for the women who voiced their concern with the cover? Can these apocalypse stories provide us with the language, with a new freedom to speak?

Indeed, while the woman on the Massive cover is not ball-gagged like the PhilosophyOfRape woman, the feminine voices who spoke against the cover have been metaphorically ball-gagged by the Press Council's official statement that the image did not breach any ethical journalistic standards ("... not one Council member viewed it as depicting an act of sexual assault" (New Zealand Media Council, 2016, para. 19)). The Press Council's declaration of the image's so-called journalistic legitimacy essentially condoned the cover and legitimated the masculine voices who not only abused the women and aligned 'others' who objected to the cover, but also forcefully determined what women's body politics were on behalf of women seemingly deemed too stupid and/or hysterical to comprehend the image's representation (according to patriarchal masculinity). Following the Press Council decision, many supporters commented about how the naysayers should retract their comments (an act of silencing), or apologise (an act of silencing), or that they were obviously factually wrong about the reality of the cover (an act of silencing) or should be considered insane (an act of dismissal that silences).

As the architecture of the internet breaches offline life as in the Massive case, interactions are more and more reflecting online worlds in which the abuse of women in any and all contexts proliferates and is protected as "free speech" or a "bit of banter." Online there are few governing bodies that actually enforce restrictions to hate speech, as each individual is constructed as being accountable for what they are producing online, responsibility falling to individualised users rather than a particular governing body (from website owners to the police). The diffusion of responsibility to individual users enables particular voices to be heard more so than any 'other,' as dominant, privileged voices can violently and explicitly speak the loudest and the freest, while systematically shutting down and silencing resistance. Photos of breast-feeding women

will be, and have been, removed much more efficiently than pro-rape sentiments or images. Pro-rape discourse is protected as free speech, but a representation of a breast feeding a child offends those who see breasts as their sex toys. Time and again, images of sexual assaults or explicit objectifications of women are posted to Facebook and remain live, but images of women posting non-sexual photos of their bodies they experience as empowering are removed as offensive. The internet enables sexualised and abusive images of women to proliferate and normalise, as women's empowerment is constructed as offensive and deviant.

## **Campus Concerns**

I spiral back in my degraded, graceful loop to the issue of women's safety and the ever-present threat of rape, particularly on a university campus. Seeing sexual violence cartoonishly trivialised on the cover of a student magazine unsurprisingly re-victimises women who have been sexually assaulted and women who occupy the space of being perpetually threatened by gendered violence and rape. The response has been: 'Don't like it? Don't look at it.' But again such direction is a neoliberal masculine response that places responsibility with women for their own safety and well-being, rather than questioning why the right to offend and abuse is privileged over the right to safety (surely another act of apocalypse, the state of affairs, which re-asserts the gendered social order). The threat (of the magazine) is still ever-present when on campus, as is the threat of rape. The cover image is digital, which also ensures the potential for continued victimisation of Massey's women students and women online. Indeed, after the cover image was deleted from Massive's online promotional line-up and the digital version of the magazine issue, a male Massey student who was pro-cover image began posting the image, repeatedly, on various public Massey Facebook pages for anyone who requested it, despite the image being banned from re-publication on

these pages. When warned he would be banned from these pages, he advertised that he would begin privately sending the image to those who requested to see it. In the specific spaces online where students and assorted others could express their disgust at the image, there were people deliberately, and maliciously, ensuring that the cover image continued to penetrate (pun intended) the discourse explicitly after it was deleted and banned. Demanding that instead of censorship, women be vigilant so as to not see the image (lock your doors, perhaps stay in the kitchen!) enables dominant, violently misogynist discourse to march apocalyptically on and subjugate women, using the threat of sexual violence and the construction of the hysterical woman to ensure that masculine freedom of speech remains intact, even if women's bodies are not. Vigilance, hyper or otherwise, is a hallmark of femininity, and as such calls for vigilance remain unquestioned by dominant, privileged voices who assert that their freedom to speak, no matter how violently, trumps the safety of any and all feminised genders. Here, the individual neoliberal masculine internet extends its architectural structures further into offline life. The misogyny may be old, but through technology it is proliferating, not because the internet created such a position, but rather the technology enables the multiplication, intensification and amplification of such a position where it has become even more unquestionable. An apocalyptic state of affairs indeed.

## **Panic Architecture**

Panic architecture is a cyborg term describing “a participatory architecture that demands compulsive interaction or attention” (Case, 2013, p. 69) for the maintenance of the integrity of a website, social network or even email account. Online, if, for example, a social network does not receive constant attention from its users, the network may well become unsustainable and die. Continuous compulsive use of the network keeps the network not only alive, but builds and strengthens its structure. The contrasting

examples of (extremely architecturally strong) Facebook and (architecturally dilapidated) Myspace (see Solon, 2018) demonstrate how panic architecture can build and maintain a social network (like Facebook), shaping it and maintaining it so that it builds up and out, strongly and securely.

In previous research, I utilised panic architecture as a technometaphor to explore how pro-anorexic communities and their users maintain their communities and their anorexia (Connor & Coombes, 2014). Compulsively maintaining pro-anorexic blogs, forums or websites through constant updating and clicking helps to resist and disconnect from biological dependence (like eating) and assert mechanical functioning. In pro-anorexic communities, constant participation in the building and re-building of the structures that maintain anorexia (the body and online) extended the functioning of pro-anorexia as politicised embodiment. I wish to return to panic architecture in this research, re-routing it differently than through the details of pro-anorexic bodies. After all, recycling is important.

The misogynist internet extends the structures of misogyny into the offline world through a panic architecture that continuously produces misogyny through the production and reproduction of misogynist texts and images, constant clicking and linking attention and the subsequent expansion and maintenance of anti-women understandings of women and their politics. Perhaps the maintenance of the online world is continually threatened with resistance discourses as users, particularly technowomen, continue to resist misogyny because the technology enables them to, even if they are silenced or shut down continually.

Simultaneously, misogynist talk online flourishes (Jane, 2014; Mantilla, 2013). The technology of the internet has enabled misogyny so well that extending the same flourishing misogynistic architecture into the offline world enables a panic architecture



with misogynist discourse offline too, re-asserting the structures of the gendered social order that technowomen have been challenging and re-working through their own apocalyptic fictional architecture through which to test new possibilities (see chapters eight, ten and thirteen).

The following points, bulleted for no reason other than my further graceful degradation, form some structures and aesthetics of the extended panic architecture of online misogyny as they manifest on the cover (and inside the magazine) as hyperconnected, participatory interactions that maintain violence against women, online and off:



The image on the cover was produced by artist Leo Buckett; his name emblazoned on the sex worker's thigh-high boots. He typically creates band posters, mostly punk-grunge similar to the aesthetic of the Massive cover (see [behance.net/Buckett](http://behance.net/Buckett)). There are some curious sexualised images of women in typically pornographic poses, including an illustration of a hyper-sexualised Marge Simpson. Such imagery is not dissimilar to the cartoon porn (or rather pornified cartoon characters) found on 4chan in particular, but also across Reddit and other sections of the internet. But overall, he does not seem to be an artist that typically draws on rape imagery. I wonder exactly how he was asked to create this cover... Was he given the article as inspiration? Or was a specific kind of image requested by the editors/author...?



The 'Massive' title is designed like the stereotypical neon signs advertising strip clubs and 'massage parlours.'



The woman in the image is depicted in a traditional porn pose, on all fours, hair pulled and disembodied hand on buttock.



She is very shiny and plastic-skinned, like the toy she is depicted as. She wears thigh-high boots similar to (Female figure) (the technocreature occupying chapter eight). She also looks a little like Human Barbie (the ‘freak’ on the stage known as chapter ten)/Mattel’s Barbie™, particularly in her face. Her body takes up most of the page, focusing in on it as object, as a faceless, body-less set of masculine hands grab at her. These hands are perhaps an attempt at a Dr Seuss-ian suggestion of The Man,<sup>69</sup> power exercised everywhere and nowhere.



In the top right hand corner is a list of the magazine’s featured articles. Directly above the image depicting a sex worker having her hair pulled violently during sex are the words “JOHN KEY VISITS.” Key’s hair-pulling transgressions, specifically and unequivocally gendered, are called to mind. John Key, as New Zealand’s prime minister, repeatedly pulled the pony-tail of a waitress in an Auckland café (see Kirk, Rutherford & Gulliver, 2015). After the story broke, numerous photos of the prime minister with his hands on young

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<sup>69</sup> The disembodied purple-gloved grabbing hands call to mind The Onceler of ‘The Lorax’ by Dr Seuss (1971). In ‘The Lorax,’ the disembodied hands of The Onceler are stand-ins for faceless and corporate Big Business; The Man, the masculinist companies that tear down forests for production, grind disenfranchised workers into the ground and enjoy profits off the back of slave labour and raped earth. The metaphor works as hands directing and grabbing and enacting violence upon the earth, and oppressing earth’s inhabitants. While Dr Seuss’s message is undeniably environmentalist, it is also anti-capitalist, challenging the commodification of the earth and people. As a child, The Onceler’s disembodied hands were scary; uncanny figures that suggested violence. And as the story is told, it becomes clear that the hands are indeed violent, axing trees, working people hard and building structures that decimate the previously vibrant earth, all in the name of dominance and profit. It was startling to see those disembodied hands again, this time grabbing at a woman who was trying to educate herself and survive.

girls' hair were shared. He called the pony-tail pulling “banter,”<sup>70</sup> even as multiple videos and photos emerged of him engaged in the same hair-pulling behaviours with multiple young girls (always girls). When the leader of our country pulls the hair of women and girls and calls it “banter,” and student magazines draw on this particular kind of imagery to represent sex, women are positioned once again as objects, toys to be played with all in the name of fun, banter, not-serious play. The architecture of the masculine internet builds further into offline worlds, where the old adage that nothing on the internet should be taken seriously (Slater, 1998) is now being applied rigidly to offline life. The non-seriousness of the internet, however, is almost always at the expense of the subjugated and the disenfranchised (most specifically, in the West, women and black people) that can be enacted violently continuously through proliferating structures that ‘other.’



The “JOHN KEY VISITS” also more specifically refers to an article about students not being informed about a Manawatū campus visit by John Key. But there is also an article in the magazine about how John Key is the best prime minister for students, featured in the same magazine in which a feminist writer details the struggles of student life for women, and there is an ‘exposé’ on students turning to sex work to fund their study or as an alternative to study...



“GRADUATE INEQUALITY” also features on the cover list, referring to an article written by a feminist who researches and discusses the gendered issues of studying and getting a job after graduating. The piece is political, even

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<sup>70</sup> Perhaps it is also ‘locker room talk’? Grabbing pony-tails and pussies are actions, though...

acknowledging the undermining that such a piece usually incurs as being “just another feminist rant” (Bloom, 2016, p. 15). The article’s self-aware presence in the magazine is an extension of online worlds in which women’s talk, especially when explicitly feminist, is often rejected as hysterical over-reactions to not-real problems, problems that women should just get over or do something about themselves, despite the institutional and systemic barriers that prevent change from being effected. So the article’s presence mimics online worlds where feminist speech can interject, but it is surrounded, choked and buried by misogynist, sexual objectification.



“DAVID SEYMOUR” refers to an article that references sexual intercourse in the title, continuing the internet architecture that demands anything and everything can and will be sexualised (“Rule 34,” 2018).



“STUDENT SEX WORKERS” is a reference to the main feature article that the cover image allegedly represents. The image itself, with revision, could indeed be a powerful political statement about the struggles of being a modern woman student in New Zealand. The article itself could also do this important political work. But neither piece does this work, perhaps because both pieces are authored by men who cannot understand the apocalyptic position that either of their works discuss.



“STEREOTYPICAL STUDENTS” refers to a satire article about different kinds of students that can be identified around a university campus, playing off certain stereotypes and physical indicators. Notably, the article includes this line in its subheading: “Here at *Massive*, we take great pride in

being unfair” (Vidal & Walsh, 2016, p. 20). Such a taunt mimics the online communities forged through Reddit and 4chan that deliberately create offensive content just to enjoy offending and victimising the already disenfranchised.



“MASSEY BANS GINGERS” refers to a follow-up article about another of Massive’s controversies in a ‘satirical’ piece on a plan to ban red-heads from the university. Curiously, the woman depicted on the cover also appears to be a red-head, although it could simply be the glow from the neon title that gives her a red hue. Interestingly some on social media interpreted the redness of the cover as depicting blood...



The entire magazine issue reads as an internet community like 4chan or Reddit, where competing ideas work against each other, but misogynist discourse dominates. The group of students responsible for creating content and editing the magazine are embedded in a technosocial world with continual access to online technologies and forms of interaction and interrelation that can amplify their gendered social positions, including the demand for freedom of speech and expression, and authority over the voices of ‘others.’ Embeddedness within technological acceleration and amplification enables images such as the Massive cover to materialise in physical publications when once they were relatively confined to certain spaces on the internet or private collections of images.



The cover image and its text are examples of the structures of online misogynist talk produced through a panic architecture that demands compulsive interaction to maintain it and strengthen it, extending the structures to converge

into a networked image of a woman constructed as simultaneously raped and ‘empowered’ and perhaps rendering unrapable women (see Gavey, 2005) on a virtual, expansive and proliferating scale.

## **Bored**

The Press Council ruled that the Massive cover did not depict an image of rape and it would not take action because the image is “not at all realistic” (New Zealand Media Council, 2016, para. 19). However, the image’s realism was never in question. What was questioned was the representation of sexual violence against women. Is this Press Council decision to suggest that only photographs of sexual assaults can be representations of sexual assaults...? Is this the offline version of ‘pics or it didn’t happen’? Despite its ‘reality’ being disconfirmed, the cartoonish image connects strongly to an abusive online culture that dehumanises women and cartoon-ises sex and sexual violence, as well as uses sex and sexual violence as a means to control women. And the lived effects of this are very, very real, from boys and girls engaging in violent, cartoonish, porn-inspired sex, to women perpetually living the threat of rape, particularly on university campuses globally. Cartoon porn, while ‘not at all real’ is also very real and has lived effects on how boys and girls navigate the world, interrelate and physically connect (Hald, Malamuth & Yuen, 2010; Marston & Lewis, 2014; Owens, Behun, Manning & Reid, 2012; Rothman & Adhia, 2015 and see Pearson, 2015 for a general practitioner’s perspective). In addition, the constant threat of sexual violence, or, at the very least, the constant reminder of women’s position as sexual object for male agentic desire (for example Gavey, McPhillips & Braun, 1999; Hollway, 1984; Jackson & Scott, 1997), is again proliferated through representations such as the

Massive cover *and the increasing legitimising of such images as appropriate for general consumption and on the basis of freedom of speech.*<sup>71</sup>

With the Press Council legitimising the cover image and effectively silencing naysayers, the ideas behind the image proliferate, legitimised, and those who produce and disseminate the ideas hold their position of power to do so unquestionably, producing text and imagery that further and further disenfranchises the disenfranchised. Moreover, Carwyn Walsh, the Massive editor, wrote a piece for the next issue of Massive recounting his experience once the cover was publicly released. In his article, Walsh defended his editorial decisions, even opening his statement with a bible passage – “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Walsh, 2016b, p. 4) – that suggested he would counter naysaying women and their supporters. Those with power are enabled to dictate to ‘others’ what their politics are, as evidenced by the authoritative counter-article by Walsh and pro-cover supporters who told women that

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<sup>71</sup> In May 2018, Otago University student magazine Critic released a special issue on menstruation. The cover of the issue featured a pixel-blob of a female body lying on a bathroom floor, bleeding pixel-vagina angled toward the viewer. The pixel-blob gives us the thumbs up. A used tampon lies on the bathroom floor. An inventory runs across the bottom of the image: a clean tampon, a beetroot, a pumpkin, mushrooms, a dildo and a roast chicken. The magazines were ‘accidentally’ removed from all shelves after a complaint by a nearby hospital that stocks the magazine (see Lewis & McPhee, 2018). The usual discussion of freedom of expression and no shying away from confronting material occurred, but as with the Massive issue, I am left jitteringly wondering about the connection between the cover image and the articles within the magazine. Much like the Massive student sex work cover and article, the articles inside the magazine explore the challenges of the issue at hand with a variety of stories that explore menstruation with varying degrees of critically and insight. The cover, however, just like Massive’s, bears little connection to the content itself. The controversy, those who published the cover told us, stemmed from the cover’s depiction of a menstruating vagina. Again, much like Massive’s cover, the grotesqueness of the image is interpreted through the function of the female body (the menstruating vagina), rather than *the depiction of the female body* in certain grotesque ways. The body is blob-like and not-quite-human. It lies contorted on a bathroom floor, grinning creepily with legs splayed and discarded bloody tampon at its feet. A computer mouse arrow points to its groin. The suggestion seems to be that the blob is running through its inventory for what to use next; a new tampon, a dildo or one of the many food items in stock? Have I been menstruating wrong all these years? The representation on the cover seems at odds with the supposedly critical and empowering discussions of menstruation that the magazine contains. Just as with Massive, we are told that the grotesque image is an empowering representation of women’s issues. But I just cannot understand what that thumbs-up-giving blob is going to do with that roast chicken on the bathroom floor...

their responses to the image were wrong and that they did not understand their own politics or embodied responses. With the Press Council legitimising the cover and thus the pro-cover responses, the hyper-individual masculinism that has thrived online can easily thrive offline, sanctioned by governing authorities, legitimising what were assumed to be niche amplified misogynist views about women and their bodies (the politics of #GamerGate, revenge porn and pro-rape) as normal, right and mundane. Women are once again, every day, mundanely, met with the ‘faces’ of the apocalypse.

Walsh (2016b) also claims that while “it was hugely tempting to concentrate solely on the praise, the criticism was, in many cases, so vile and ridiculous that it was impossible to turn away from” (p. 4). Many anti-cover protestors produced similar sentiments about the cover: vile and ridiculous, impossible to turn away from, but for reasons of women’s safety and representation, not necessarily personal insult based on personal responsibility for the image. Walsh’s discomfort with personal criticism mirrors doxed users online who are appalled when their personal lives are infiltrated by their own abuse (like the paradoxical use of doxing by the #GamerGate community). Their position asserts that the humiliation and degradation of women and their bodies is normal and righteous (biblically apocalyptic?) at the very least in terms of the inalienable masculine rights to freedom of speech and expression,<sup>72</sup> but the challenging of humiliation is constructed as unacceptable, particularly if that challenge breaches privacy (as defined by neoliberal individuals who do not like it when their speech is

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<sup>72</sup> While the United Nations outlines human rights that prioritise safety and dignity (UN General Assembly, 1948), human rights online seem regularly conflated with the American constitution and its first amendment: the right to free speech ([www.constitutionus.com](http://www.constitutionus.com)). Perhaps freedom of speech is the right that is most regularly threatened for dominant white masculine voices, particularly online where ‘others’ may challenge them, and as such freedom of speech is constructed as the preeminent **human** right. In the masculine hierarchy of human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of expression are at the top, whereas safety does not often make the list (after all, that is something we are all personally responsible for, right?).



questioned). 'Freedom of speech,' it seems, should not only mean freedom from unpleasant consequences, but should also be accompanied by being heard and being praised. There is a genuine and intense belief in the individual right to say and do whatever one wants online (and increasingly offline) without any consequences.

The most apocalyptic section of Walsh's (2016b) discussion is as follows:

It explicitly stated that it was not an exhaustive academic account of the industry; instead, it allowed these women to demystify and remove any stigma attached to the industry, and to speak for themselves in a powerful way. The cover image was always intended as a representation of this power. It shows a bored woman, simultaneously studying and engaging in the sex industry.

(p. 4)

The above passage provides a strange and troubling explanation of the image, as designed by men and discussed by men. The claim that the cover image portrays empowerment has been extensively critiqued by many feminine voices through Massive's and Massey's social media. The idea that the scene depicted on the cover is what female sexual empowerment looks like is unsettling, particularly as it seems to so accurately reproduce pro-rape and misogynist sex imagery produced online. The image also mirrors typical porn imagery that unabashedly focuses on women's bodies as exaggerated objects to aid in male sexual arousal (Attwood, 2005). That boys sees this image as 'women's sexual empowerment' should not surprise us, as the sexual imagery internet users have had at their fingertips (all puns always intended) in recent history is exactly this image: a commodified, plastic, exaggerated, impossible object; pornified and male-driven.

What is particularly unsettling about this passage though is that Walsh equates female sexual empowerment with *boredom*, understandings he reiterates in an interview with Vice (see Walsh, 2016a). The woman rendered on the Massive cover does not look bored. If anything, her face suggests a panicked, frantic desperation, either for studying, or for the violent nature of the sex, or both. The tautness of her face and her wide eyes suggests stress and terror, as she is pulled and contorted (sexually, educationally, economically). Perhaps the image attempts to suggest that women's bodies as sexual objects and the sexual violence inflicted upon them is so mundane and normal that it has become boring? Women are not typically bored by their oppression, sexually, educationally or economically, even if it is normalised. Studying/needling sex work to study/sex in general/sexual empowerment does not *bore* women, even if masculine attempts to disrupt these activities do. What happens when the violence done to women and their bodies becomes *boring*? Women's so-called empowered engagement with sex and education is represented by a fraught look on her face and desperate attention to a textbook, or, *boredom*. Perhaps a porn star's eye glaze over with a look of boredom (just another day at work...), but here materialises a contradictory disconnect with what sex between consenting adults for pleasure looks like, and what sex for employment looks like; these boundaries are blurring as pornified women's bodies are expected to display the imagery of a porn star's engagement with sex that is now normalised as women's sexual empowerment, not understood in the context of (exploitative) employment. The amplification of the objectification of women through proliferating access to pornography renders women's violently acted upon bodies mundane, *boring*.

## **Apocalypse Now**

So, as is evidenced by the cacophony of connections through this chapter, there are too many multiple, partial and contradictory connections that could be connected to,

a great many connections within an image that are enlivened. As a feminist cyborg researcher, I connect to all the nodes and inhabit all the networks that proliferate through the gnarled connections. In the image on the Massive cover, there are so many, too many connections to be made. For the purposes of the research writing exercise, I am to follow a particular wire, construct a linear argument as a form of analysis and neatly package my Idea™. The technoworld, however, functions very differently to the linear world of Western academia. The multitude of ways through which to analyse the multiplicities and partialities of the Massive cover are overloading; the image is itself an example of how impossible my feast is.

I tried to embody the Weaver, considering carefully what the weave of this chapter might look like, but there are too many connections for a giant hyperdimensional dream-poetic arachnid; even a cyborg is struggling here. Through other chapters, the weaving, the connecting of connections, while expansive and tangled, comes together into a sometimes arbitrary textual image (an aesthetically pleasing worldweave), but a textual image nonetheless. Here, in this chapter, the worldweave is in tatters, the wires and links too tangled, frayed and over-electrified. How to weave becomes too much. The neediness for connection emerges as anxiety about missing an access point, or re-wiring away from a critical node, or realising that all connections are critical. The image becomes a multiple and partial point of rupture, a cataclysmic image emergent from a great many historic, social and cultural networks, each hyperconnected to multiple expansive others.

Considering the Massive cover as apocalyptic, both as the state of affairs (a cacophony of embodied violences for women) and an interpretation of the state of affairs (the damage that occurs through the cacophony), the breakdown, the choking of the system, the graceful degradation provides opportunities for re-thinking, re-working,

re-doing this state of affairs. The apocalypse enables us to imagine the obliteration of the status quo and think up new ways to be and do. The apocalypse is a point at which the weaving fails (there are few things a Weaver could find more apocalyptic than a failed worldweave, given how much an ugly one distresses him). And it is worth pointing out that there are connections that have indeed been snipped out completely, perhaps never to be re-connected, even if the networks they move through continue to be lively (for example, a discussion of the grabbing hands and the #MeToo movement, or the accusation of making false user accounts to support women's voices compared to the arrest of the PhilosophyOfRape's founder who used multiple accounts to troll extensively online (see footnote 129 on page 336)). But the cyborg survives the apocalypse, gracefully degraded, and enables these multitudes of connections to be connected to, even if only briefly or partially, so as to survive and re-build something else.

## Chapter Five Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

*In The Meme-Time:*

*Since this*

*entire chapter*

*was un-wholly thoughts,*

*here are*

*some scrambled*

*lyrics to*

*Radiohead's*

*apocalypse anthem*

*'Idioteque'*

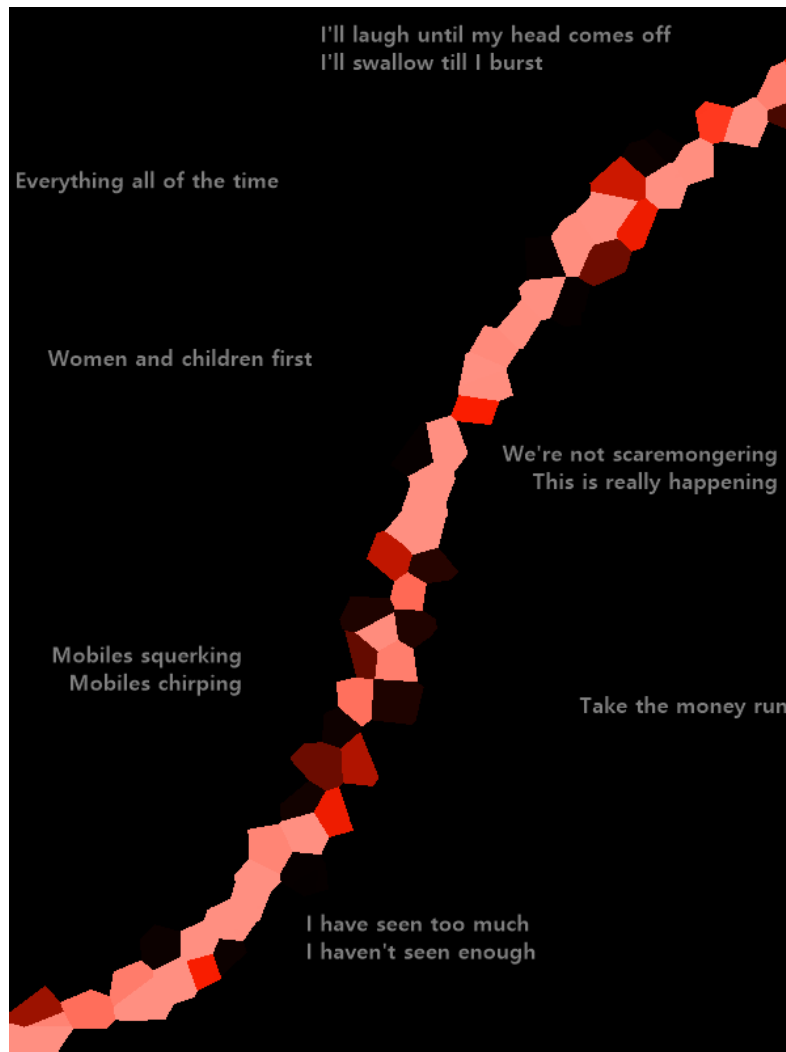
*(Yorke,*

*Greenwood,*

*Greenwood,*

*O'Brien &*

*Selway, 2000):*



## Chapter Six: Uncanny

### The Uncanny as an Analytic Reading Practice – (In)Different (Un)Home for a Cyborg

*Let us retain this discovery, which we do not yet properly understand...*

*(Freud, 1919, p. 4)*

Donna Haraway and I, simultaneously hyperconnected and not-connected-at-all, seem to have arrived at the same horrifyingly delightful impasse: the problem of psychoanalysis. Haraway herself has stated she is “trying vainly to skirt psychoanalysis...” (Haraway, 2004, p. 121) with her cyborg work. Penis envy was not psychology’s finest hour. Women’s treatment in and through psychoanalysis has been problematic, at best (Kofman, 1985), and attempts by feminists to appropriate psychoanalysis have produced significantly better understandings of psychoanalysis and women (and femininity/masculinity and so on and so forth) (Bowlby, 1992; Irigaray, 1985; Jardine, 1985; Kristeva; 1982; Mitchell, 1974). However, these feminist psychoanalysings have been critiqued as concerned with ‘development’ in human terms, redirecting psychoanalysis back to a story of origins: “As a result, psychoanalysis as a feminist metatheory reproduces that false coherence in the form of a story line about infantile development where it ought to investigate genealogically the exclusionary practices which condition that particular narrative of identity formation” (Butler, 1990, p. 332). The continued production of psychoanalysis through origin stories (human, godly or otherwise) means that the stories told in psychoanalysis emerge from particular binaries (like good/evil or life/death), even if the feminists doing the psychoanalysing

seek ways to disrupt those binaries, potentially limiting the transformative potential of psychoanalytic concepts such as the uncanny.

For example, the Oedipal stories are binaried; Oedipus and Electra, heterosex and life/death. Such are stories deeply and intimately produced through the binaried (religious and scientific) creation stories like Adam and Eve. These stories, even when disrupted, have monopolised psychoanalytic thought:

This all sounds very utopian, but I end up wanting a psychoanalytic practice - which I don't do myself - that recognizes the very local and partial quality of the Oedipal stories. Instead I see them cannibalizing too much of what counts as theoretical discourse. They're very powerful cannibalizers because they're very good stories. (Penley, Ross & Haraway, 1990, p. 14)

The normalised stories of heterosex, human development and violence do indeed captivate an audience and they do indeed chew up a lot of theoretical scenery. And even if these stories are discussed so as to reject them or re-structure them, their narratives are pervasive and can, in their 'original sin' (binaries), shut down opportunities for transformative change in psychoanalytic understandings and processes of production by returning the story to the heterosexual matrix. Indeed, Braidotti (2006) suggests that "Haraway's feminist cyborg project aims at dislodging the Oedipal narratives from their culturally hegemonic positions and thus diminishing their power over the construction of identity" (p. 202), subject positions and bodies. Such a cyborg aim necessitates an awkward and lively meeting between the cyborg and psychoanalysis.

While, in this meeting, I do not wish to argue with the feminist psychoanalysts, for they do vital work, I do want to enliven some alternative networks. Theory that has

connected the cyborg and the uncanny has the potential to move us beyond the Oedipal stories, re-wiring the uncanny through uncertainty about the liveliness of our woman-machines: “The cyborg is an uncanny image that reflects our shared fascination and dread of the machine and its presence in modern culture” (Grenville, 2002, p. 10).

Haraway (1991) reminds us that the cyborg is not of the Garden; she is a blunt liminal creature unstructured by and undoing of the godly binaries. This makes it hard, as Haraway (2004) suggests, for psychoanalysis, even feminist psychoanalysis, to account for the cyborg. While theorisations of the gendered subject and women’s bodies through psychoanalysis (see Grosz, 1999; Irigaray, 1985; Jardine, 1985; Kristeva; 1982; Shildrick & Price, 1999) offer alternative understandings of gender and women for psychology (to mostly ignore), the work is disconnected from the politics of the cyborg:

...the universalizing moves and the versions of psychoanalysis make analysis of “women’s place in the integrated circuit” difficult and lead to systematic difficulties in accounting for or even seeing major aspects of the construction of gender and gendered social life. (Haraway, 2004, p. 17)

At its very simplest, the systematic difficulties Haraway alerts us to may be a case of feminist psychoanalysts (and psychoanalysts in general) leaving the technohistory of psychoanalysis behind while playing too seriously in the dirt of sex, signs and symbols.

The technological history of psychoanalysis is often overlooked; it was birthed during rapid technological advancement. Freud was theorising through the technological upheavals of the late 1800s and early 1900s, including the first world war (Kenny, 2016). While an extensive networking of Freud’s sociocultural historical locatedness and his theorising is beyond the scope of my research, the technohistory of



psychoanalysis through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is significant for the uncanny and its return to technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For example, through the socially restrictive 18<sup>th</sup> century, masquerading as male “offered women otherwise impossible freedoms” (Castle, 1995, p. 70), breaching some of the social restrictions imposed on women by blurring the lines between private identities (behind the masks) and public social bodies (conversations, dancing and sex). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, technological advances like the ubiquitous internet also enable women to engage in impossible social and bodily politics. The internet is nothing if not a massive, never-ending 18<sup>th</sup> century masquerade ball, with users partially hiding or distorting their neoliberal identities in order to engage more freely online and perhaps subvert social order (see Kendall, 1998; Moore, 2018; Pagnucci & Mauriello, 1999; Taylor, Falconer & Snowdon, 2014). Indeed, 18<sup>th</sup> century masquerades were typically narratives of “the subversion of existing distinctions, the reversal of normative moral and social hierarchies” (Castle, 1995, p. 114). The internet is a space to re-work and subvert social order, while also, as masquerades did, reproducing the same old power structures (for example, rape and incest in the masquerades, and rape and incest online (Morczek, 2018)).

Castle (1995) also alerts us to the ubiquity of the “intimate machine” (p. 42) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like phones, computers and televisions that we in the first world West connect with continuously. If the technological advances of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have become so deeply and irretrievably connected to human consciousness and body construction, the 21<sup>st</sup> century may have some nasty surprises in store for us. Theorisations of the uncanny, that terrifyingly familiar feeling, emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at a time characterised by social upheaval, moral and political panic and desperate appeals to reason in unreasonable times (Castle, 1995). It could be said that

“the aggressively rationalist imperatives of the epoch... produced a kind of toxic side effect, a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse” (Castle, 1995, p. 8), perhaps not unlike the neoliberal West in the late 2010s. The “compulsive quest for systematic knowledge” (Castle, 1995, p. 10) produces excesses, unable to be systematised. In the modern West, “... we are taking ourselves, and our world, to pieces; and this is happening in ways and at speeds that are beyond our control” (Royale, 2003, p. 3) – and this is even more pronounced now than when Royale wrote about it in 2003. The socio-technological upheavals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century birthed the uncanny: one of the most disturbing and least understood modern ideas. What will the socio-technological upheavals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century throw up? Returning to Freud becomes a necessity, even if just to tell him the new ways in which he was wrong.<sup>73</sup>

## **A Clockwork Olympia**

Freud published an essay called ‘The Uncanny’ in 1919. In it, Freud responds to Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 essay ‘On The Psychology Of The Uncanny’ and does his own exploration of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman,’ a short story written in 1816. Most of ‘The Sandman’ is written through a series of letters between a man named Nathaniel, his fiancée Clara and Clara’s brother. The letters exchanged back and forth tell Nathaniel’s childhood story of a frightening figure named the Sandman, a known stealer of eyes. Nathaniel believes a scary and ugly man who used to visit his father late at

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<sup>73</sup> In a weird (perhaps uncanny) way, some masculine explanations of what the uncanny might be are more helpful for cyborg theorising. In some ways, the uncanny, as theorised by men, illuminates the struggles masculinity encounters when encountering women and their ‘uncanny’ bodies. That is not to say I agree with these masculine readings as theoretically sound; it is merely that, through the cyborg, there are plenty of connections to exploit and texts to be produced.

night was indeed the Sandman. After the mysterious death of Nathaniel's father, the Sandman figure disappears. Nathaniel moves away from home to attend university.

While living in the university town, Nathaniel encounters a man he believes was the Sandman living under a new name and selling barometers, glasses and telescopes. He wavers between certainty and uncertainty as Clara and her brother try to reassure him that there is no such thing as the Sandman. The letters stop, and a narrator takes over the storytelling.

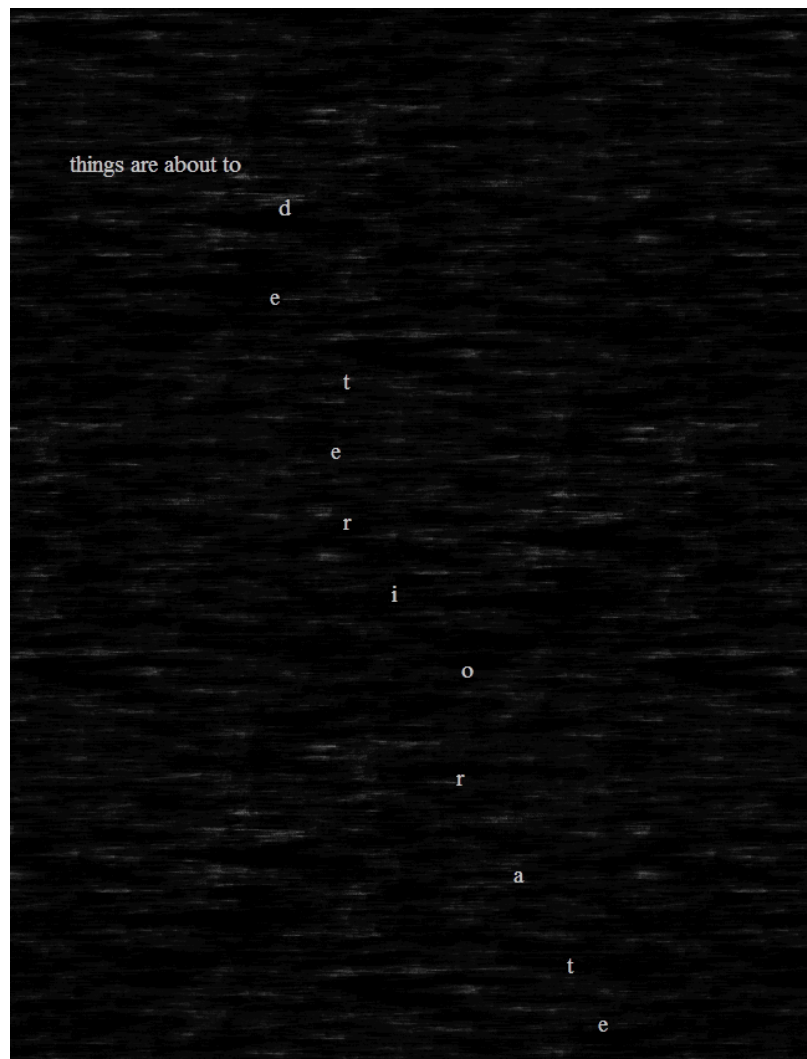
The narrator tells us how Nathaniel encounters Olympia, a beautiful young woman he soon falls in love with. Looking through a telescope purchased from the Sandman figure, Nathaniel falls obsessively in love with Olympia, despite her limited vocabulary, stiff movements and reputation as odd. Nathaniel would talk to Olympia for hours and hours but her responses were monotonous. She was a proficient musician and dancer (playing the piano and singing), but often sat, unmoving and staring into Nathaniel's eyes.

One day, Nathaniel, on his way to propose to Olympia, discovered the Sandman and Olympia's 'father' fighting over her inanimate and eyeless clockwork body, the Sandman ranting about how he made her eyes, and her 'father' about how he made her mechanics. Nathaniel realises Olympia is a clockwork woman; an automaton. Nathaniel flies into a rage and goes mad. The Sandman disappears with Olympia's body.

After he recovers from his madness, Nathaniel reunites with Clara and they are engaged once more. In their new home town, they ascend a tower to enjoy the view. Clara alerts Nathaniel to an advancing grey figure in the distance. Nathaniel takes out his telescope – given to him by the Sandman and used obsessively to gaze at Olympia – to get a closer look at the figure, but instead catches the sight of Clara through the lens. He goes mad again and tries to throw her off the tower, but her brother saves her.

Nathaniel looks out at the crowd gathering on the streets below them and see the Sandman. He goes mad again and throws himself off the tower, landing head first.

Jentsch (1997<sup>74</sup>) theorised that the uncanny was about uncertainty, citing Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' as a literary example of how uncertainty, particularly about the alive-not alive binary in the automaton thread of the story, produces the experience of the uncanny. Freud (1919), however, problematised Jentsch's theorisation, and produced his own.



*In The Meme-Time: Delight in Descent.*

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<sup>74</sup> Of course Jentsch published his essay in 1906, but I am using a 1997 re-publication of his work. Similarly, the version of Freud's 'The Uncanny' that I am citing is a pdf file most certainly not created in 1919...

## According to Freud (1919)

According to Freud (1919), the uncanniness in Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' comes mainly from the figure of the Sandman, not the story of Olympia the automaton. The focus on the eyes (vision, observation, sight) is perhaps what the cyborg counts on. Haraway (2004) has argued that her cyborg seemed "a figuration that was specifically hard for psychoanalysis to account for" (p. 323), perhaps through her 'not of the Garden' politicised embodiment that re-routes or undoes those cannibalising Oedipal stories and what telling those stories might do to bodies. Freud (1919) tried desperately to return the uncanny and its cyborg companion (the automaton Olympia) to the Garden, by focusing on castration. There is critique of Freud's work on the uncanny, feminist or otherwise, that challenges his obsession with castration as 'blinding' him of exploring the uncanniness of Olympia in Hoffmann's story: "It seems that Freud, in his one-sided retelling of the story, almost creates a new narrative that fits better with his goal, i.e. moving away from intellectual uncertainty towards the castration complex" (Scharpé, 2003, para. 4). Freud focused on the 'uncanny' in the figure of the Sandman, relegating Olympia to the secondary 'uncanny' image and experience. And feminist psychoanalysts who critique Freud also continue his focus on eyes, castration and development, even if they do so in more complex ways (see Kristeva 1982; Mitchell, 1974). Freud's subordination of Olympia denies women the privilege of vision, and as such yet again produces woman as inanimate object, much like Olympia might have been, only enlivened when someone looked at her. In this theorising of 'The Sandman,' Freud does not see the potential of the women in the story: "Two motifs, in particular, are regularly pushed aside by Freud: the central figure of woman in many of his examples and the related theme of seeing and being seen" (Todd, 1986, p. 521). By the end of Hoffmann's tale, Olympia has spent most of her time stared at by Nathaniel and

other onlookers, having her eyes enlivened only by Nathaniel's gaze, and then her lifeless doll body is robbed of her eyes. The focus on Nathaniel's fear of eyes being stolen moved Freud towards the 'lack' and castration that characterised his theorising of the uncanny, and away from the uncanny matter of automaton women and the vision stolen from *them*.

Focusing on Olympia as the primary uncanny within the story, and thus within theory, can up-end understandings of the uncanny and psychoanalysis by rebooting the theorisation of the uncanny as not only gendered (Todd, 1986), but technological. Hoffmann's story is distinctly characterised by 18<sup>th</sup> century technological advances (for example, the clockwork mechanics of Olympia) (Castle, 1995). The events within Hoffmann's story that are perhaps more distinctly uncanny, even if somewhat missed by Freud, are where the boundaries between woman and machine blur, explicitly produced through the technological advancements of the time. Nathaniel, for example, slips briefly into madness when the Sandman lays out a multitude of eye-glasses and lenses for Nathaniel to look at, overwhelmed by the "flickering and sparkling" as the "thousand eyes peeped and twitched" (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 33) on the table before him. While eyes are indeed prominent in this passage, eye-glasses and lenses were also technological advances that had embodied effects, like experiencing improved (through eye-glasses) and enhanced (through telescopes) vision.

Freud's inattention to the ways in which eyes both see and appear through lenses neglects the more obvious technological anxieties through Hoffmann's tale. For Castle (1995), the "eighteenth-century invention of the automaton was also (in the most obvious sense) an "invention" of the

uncanny” (p. 11), a marked blurring of the boundary between animate and inanimate. Long before we learn that Olympia is an automaton, Nathaniel calls his fiancée Clara a “lifeless, accursed automaton!” (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 30), as well as repeatedly describing her as cold and lamenting her lack of imagination (and not indulging his), perhaps speaking to the anxieties that automatons might have roused at the time, particularly as technologies developed. Indeed, throughout the story, while some onlookers interpreted Olympia as strange, soulless, insane or stupid, some seemed to already know she was an automaton, suggesting questions about humans and automatons, the animate and the inanimate, were culturally important. At one point, one of Nathaniel’s friends asks him to explain, “how in heaven’s name an intelligent man like you ever fell for the wax face of that wooden doll?” (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 42), and telling Nathaniel that Olympia’s movements seem “prescribed by clockwork gears and cogs” while her singing and dancing had the “unpleasantly precise soulless rhythm of a machine” (p. 43). To people other than Nathaniel, she seemed to be “only acting like a living being” (p. 43). One onlooker noted that, “Olympia more often sneezed than yawned” which could have been “the automaton’s hidden rewind mechanism that noticeably creaked in the process” (p. 49). Olympia’s deception (or rather, her father’s), that is passing herself off as human, lead to the townsfolk becoming distrustful of others, testing potential mates to ensure they were not automatons by making them dance out of time or sing off key. People would yawn frequently, but try not to sneeze so as to avoid any comparison with Olympia. Hoffmann’s townsfolk

become acutely concerned with testing for automatons and reasserting humanness, questioning what either concept might mean.

Olympia, despite not saying much, manages to ask some questions of her own. In Hoffmann's story, the mechanical, rewound and repetitious movements and speech Olympia produces are disturbing mirrors for traditional femininity, characterised by manufacture and restriction (as described by Bartky, 1998). Perhaps women who read the story are occasionally disturbed by Nathaniel's love for an automated woman, and perhaps disturbed further by how their own participation in heteronormative gendered interrelations may indeed be similar to Olympia's automated responses and manufactured production of femininity; a horrifying embodied realisation that they may be "... interchangeable with the furniture pieces that surround them" (Spampinato, 2016, p. 13). For example, Olympia's father organised a ball to debut his daughter, inviting a large number of people to 'meet' her. The narrator of Hoffmann's tale describes her debut:

Olympia appeared richly and tastefully attired. Everyone had to admire her finely chiselled face and graceful figure. The strange stoop of her back and her bone-thin waist appeared to be the consequence of a girdle tied too tight. There was a measured stiffness in her stance and step



that some found displeasing; but it was ascribed to the stress of appearing in society. (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 38)

Described is a contorted figure of femininity, a body bound by corsets and social expectations (again, see Bartky, 1998), even in automated form. Olympia's 'father' sought to make her passable as a woman, after all. Moreover, once Olympia was discovered as an automaton, her 'trickery' was described as socially unacceptable: "...it was commonly held to be an altogether fraudulent swindle to try to pass off a wooden doll for a living person in proper society (for Olympia had effectively pulled the wool over their eyes)" (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 48). Olympia's success as a 'real' woman was a social offense for its trickery, but women who read Hoffmann's story might view the offense as those around them being unable to tell the difference between mechanical femininity and 'living' femininity where perhaps both are viewed as performances of an object (rendering femininity a quality of an object). For Todd (1986), "Olympia is a caricature of the ideal woman: silent, powerless, docile" (p. 525), both through her stylised, still body and her inert placations of Nathaniel. Through Olympia, there is a familiarity for women, as well as alienation from their own experiences of femininity and heteronormative interrelations as automated, mechanical, produced through masculine, patriarchal technologies of the woman's body.

The automation of these particular heteronormative interrelations also reproduces gendered violence as an automated script. Women and their bodies as objects enables men "... to possess the objectified body of a woman in order to fantasize sexually or even interact with it in one moment, and beat, torture, and even dismember it a moment later" (Spampinato, 2016, p. 9) as property akin to a washing machine or a toaster that serves a particular mechanical function. We have all smacked uncooperative TVs in an effort to make them work. In 'The Sandman,' only after viewing Olympia through the Sandman's telescope does Nathaniel see the Olympia's face clearly, and while he thinks her eyes "strange, blank and dead" (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 35) at first, he insists they become more and more lively the longer he looks at her, *his gaze awakening her*. When Nathaniel first holds Olympia's hand, it is cold. But he looks into her eyes and "the pulse began to beat in her cold hand and the lifeblood began to glow warm within" (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 39). For Nathaniel, his gaze and touch enlivens Olympia. Unlike his fiancée Clara, who refused to entertain his ideas and occupied herself while he ranted, Olympia sat completely still and fixed her gaze on Nathaniel as he spoke. Her gaze, seemingly to Nathaniel, "grew ever livelier and more intense" (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 44) the more *he* spoke. So the more he looked at her, and the more he talked *at* her, the more animated Olympia became to Nathaniel. While Nathaniel questions Olympia's "passivity" (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 45) from time to time, he dismisses these thoughts by returning to her beauty and the unflinching devotion to him that he sees in her; a recurrent reflection of himself, a house of (homoerotic)(black) mirrors: "What he wants is a frigid,

lifeless woman, a mirror of himself, who will listen to his poems without growing weary” (Kofman, 2005, p. 78).

Indeed, Nathaniel’s madness is amplified through his use of technology to gaze at Olympia: the telescope. While the figure of the Sandman activates anxiety for Nathaniel, “... it is his use of this telescope that triggers off his madness” (Kofman, 2005, p. 72) around women in particular. The telescope becomes a technological device through which the assumed distinction between ‘sanity’ and ‘madness’ is blurred: “their limits are not clearly defined, each being a matter of perspective. A blurring of the limits between the normal and the pathological, the imaginary and the real...” (Kofman, 2005, pp. 72-73). Using the telescope to view Olympia amplifies his already growing feelings for her, distorting Olympia’s wooden features and movements so as to enliven them. The activation of his final, catastrophic madness begins with his accidental up-close viewing of Clara through his telescope. He screams at her: “Turn, little wooden doll, turn!” (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 52), a phrase similar to what he yelled when he went mad at the sight of Olympia’s inanimate clockwork body. For Nathaniel, the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘not real’ has collapsed.

Even if we follow Freud’s interest in the eyes, the technological interventions into women’s bodies amplified Nathaniel’s madness, and amplified women’s bodies. Through the telescope, both Olympia and Clara become uncanny bodies, doubled through the lens and perhaps becoming *too clear*. Getting a close-up look at women’s multiple, partial and

contradictory bodies, through a technology that also doubles their image, may indeed induce uncertainty, at best. For Cixous (1976a), the uncanny is “a composite that infiltrates the interstices of the narrative and points to gaps we need to explain” (p. 536). These interstices and gaps are the stuff of women: “... partial, incomplete, fragmentary – the usual feminine mess” (Zwinger, 1992, p. 77). So how these bits and pieces produce Woman™ becomes simultaneously very alien and very familiar. Indeed, there is the possibility that “the cyborg is uncanny not because it is unfamiliar or alien, but rather because it is all too familiar. It is the body doubled...” (Grenville, 2002, p. 20) through technology. Freud (1919) focused on the doubling of the Sandman figure, and neglected the doubling of Olympia’s and Clara’s bodies through technologies (clockworks and telescopes) that activated Nathaniel’s madness and provoked the anxieties of the townsfolk. The doubling of the Sandman might be more explicit and concerned with doppelgängers or replicants, but the doubling of the women in Hoffmann’s story opens possibilities of political kinship: women becoming fractal through technologies, doubling their connections and bodies, ad infinitum, in ways all too familiar to them and their plural, multiple bodies.

Technologies like the internet, and thus technologies that connect to and are enlivened by the internet, produce a million or more Olympias, or

women as 'tricks' and doubles, to act as reflective surfaces and/or as the focus of a powerful telescope. Where Nathaniel saw his own lively desire reflected back at him in an automated woman, women online in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West can be lively objects for men and boys to look at and talk at. An example of a 12-year-old boy messaging a porn star and asking for sex and nude photos ("Porn Star Shares Disturbing Messages Sent From 12-Year-Old Boys," 2018) suggests gendered performances online not only reproduce the usual heteronormative expectations of women and their bodies (as literal sex objects, docile and limited to exclamations of "Oh, Oh!") (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 40) like Olympia was) but amplify the objectification as if shopping for a new product (see Cunneen & Stubbs, 2000; Thompson, 2018), the latest automated woman to debut at the expansive internet party. The internet is teeming with examples, shared online by women, of men contacting multiple of women, simultaneously, requesting, through texts or apps, nude photos and/or sex (see Khazan, 2014; Willett, 2016, as well as the blog [www.straightwhiteboystexting.org](http://www.straightwhiteboystexting.org) for some of these examples), gazing through their own modern day telescopes at women online. Behaviours that might have previously necessitated a large amount of effort (phoning, mailing, trolling the streets) are now possible instantaneously on a large scale. Men can contact any number of objects they view online and ask/demand for certain performances and functions, in a myriad of transactions. Dating apps such as Tinder have enabled an impossible feast of women for particular men to chew upon, normalising abuse through technodating (see Gillett, 2018). Gable Tostee, a prolific user of the app and other social media, used Tinder

to meet Warriena Wright, who he trapped on his balcony just before she somehow fell off it. Multiple women came forward after Wright's death to report strange, uncomfortable and frightening experiences with Tostee enabled through the app (Fyfe, 2017). Tostee is just one example of similar stories, globally, of men using dating apps and websites to target vulnerable women (and men). In a user-driven online network, women-objects are hot, uncanny commodities: "Mannequins, life-sized dolls, and avatars are uncanny doubles, meant for a function that human beings would or could hardly perform, human bodies turned into objects or images, available to be exposed, exploited, or abused" (Spampinato, 2016, p. 2). With the dramatic increase in the production and availability of technoobject bodies (from user icons to selfies to sex dolls), woman as an uncanny animate object becomes simultaneously mundane (ubiquitous and normalised) and spectacular (online politics).

*Now that we have begun to deteriorate, this next part of the chapter is written as a kind of dreadful poem. There is a rhythm to the phrase "According to Freud (1919)."*  
*Sometimes it feels "timed grotesquely to the far-off throb of her tired body" (McCullers, 1953, p. 90).*

According to Freud (1919), the uncanny "is that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (pp. 1-2), and the "constant recurrence of similar situations... recurring throughout several consecutive generations" (p. 9). Within such a class of terrifying there is a possibility for re-working a feminine (re)membered, gendered history of repeated violences and disruptions to femininity, to

women, to women's bodies, as producing the partial, multiple, contradictory and simultaneous feminine embodiment, perhaps now salvageable (although not in the sense of 'salvation' but rather in the sense of recoverable) through the figure of the cyborg in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Evoked are the ideas of eternal recurrence and the cyborg's simultaneous participation in the past, present and future, the cyclical renewals of the same old violences ("Men are adapting new technologies to old purposes..." (French, 1992, p. 5)). The cyborg, as a feminist figure, participates in an ancient feminine rejection of the Biblical construction of deviant women and their deviant bodies by denying the origin, the Garden, instead looking in on it, from another place, another space. The cyborg was simultaneously there for the apple-eating (Eve's curiosity) and the box-opening (Pandora's curiosity), but also as a witness to the fall (pushing) of women, for the purposes of reconfiguring the fall as a delightful descent, an opportunity for fruitfully picking and opening out-of-the-box possibilities for women and their bodies. The idea of the terrifying familiarity of the uncanny, and the cyborg, connects women through the reproduction and re-imagining of violences against women, the blame bequeathed to them by the ancient masculine, patriarchal desperate, terrified need to separate the world into good and evil, man and woman. It is both familiar and alien for women to experience this violence, normalised while we do it, though while we do it, it is not our doing.

According to Freud (1919), that "factor which consists in a recurrence of the same situations, things and events, will perhaps not appeal to everyone as a source of uncanny feeling" (p. 10). Perhaps then a cyborg type of uncanny (should there be types... categorise, categorise, categorise!) is the domain of women, who endure, throughout history, the present and into the future, the recurrence of the same gendered violences through new and emerging technologies. Perhaps such cyborg embodiment is

why women are so often the producers and subjects of the uncanny (in literature and art): they are embodiments of the recurrence and the ambivalence/indifference towards its effects. There is “involuntary repetition” and “something fateful and unescapable” (Freud, 1919, p. 11) in the uncanny, and in being a woman in the West. Perhaps the cyborg can offer the possibility of disrupting that which we might otherwise call fate.

According to Freud (1919), “whatever reminds us of this inner *repetition-compulsion* is perceived as uncanny” (p. 12). So technowomen, and the cyborg, are quite explicitly, and in the cyborg’s case unabashedly, reminders of this recurrence of gendered violences and the blurred boundaries of women-as-heimlich/unheimlich. Freud (1919) ponders further that “anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which *recurs*” (p. 13), which is women, technowomen and cyborgs, “for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (Freud, 1919, p. 13), or rather the oppression of women and their bodies. Oppression here, perhaps the brother of repression, has estranged, and estranges, women from their bodies, from femininity. Perhaps the key is oppression, not repression. Indeed, cyborgs are anxious: needy for connections, revelling in tensions; collecting recurrences, acutely aware of their return, of their experience and of their effects on bodies. Oppressions and repressions stifle connectivity.

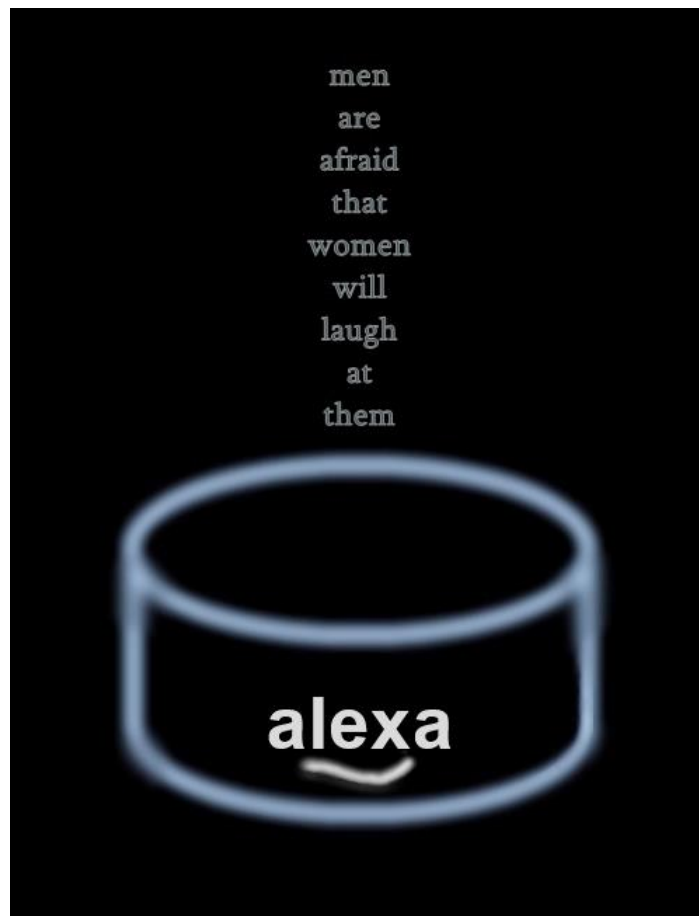
According to Freud (1919), the “better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regards to the objects and events in it” (p. 2). Perhaps this is why women online and off, through technology can terrify the masculine masses, provoking them to drown out feminine voices and revert women back to inanimate objects of masculine desire (Cixous, 1976b; Ussher, 2006)? Technology is a male domain, the internet created through masculine



technological desire to enable masculine pleasures (Wajcman, 2004), while women's input into technodevelopments has been largely written out (Hicks, 2017). Women's connection to and through technology is uncanny then for man, as he is orientated very well to technology while orientating women away (Cockburn, 2009; Gill & Grint, 1995; Hill, Corbett & St Rose, 2010), but what happens when the objects (women) he has surrounded himself with start to move, and feel, and shift...

According to Freud (1919), Jentsch might have been right in some of his theorising. Jentsch's (1997) theorisation of the uncanny focused on Hoffmann's use of uncertainty; being 'UNSURE' whether someone was a human or an automaton was considered to be the primary experience of the uncanny in 'The Sandman.' Jentsch did not seek to rigidly classify the uncanny as Freud was (arguably) trying to. However, Jentsch did suggest that a certain set of experiences would almost always in most people arouse the uncanny: "doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate" (Jentsch, 1997, p. 11). It is worth noting that the theorisation of the uncanny valley in robotics focuses on how robots can look human, but not quite human enough, producing an uncanny effect, an unsettling, uncertain space between alive and not alive (Mori, 1970). The uncertainty, the unclear idea of what is alive and what is not, produces the uncanny. Objects are not thought to be alive, so if they show signs of animation, dread and terror arise, for if objects *are alive*, how might they respond if they have not been properly cared for? What might they have surveilled when they were assumed incapable of surveillance? In March of 2018, Alexa, Amazon's in-home cylindrical digital assistant began randomly (or rather *assumed to be randomly...*) laughing, disturbing her users. Alexa's 'creepy' responses have been documented for a long time now, but the increasing issue of her spontaneous laughing has been considered particularly disturbing

(see IGN News, 2018). While Amazon claims the laughing issue is due to false positives (that is, Alexa thinks we are talking to her when we are not... see Chokshi, 2018), it seems *uncanny* to be spontaneously laughed at in a women’s voice, by a computerised object. While the digital laughter birthed inevitable jokes about Skynet, this laughing computer woman raises more serious questions about privacy, robot responsibilities, and how we feel when our technologies laugh at us.



*In The Meme-Time: Alexa and The Illegitimate Quote-Child of Margaret Atwood*  
(see Thomas, 2018).

According to Freud (1919), heimlich can mean “belonging to the house or the family”<sup>75</sup> (p. 2), “friendly, intimate, homelike; the enjoyment of quiet content” and “arousing a sense of peaceful pleasure and security as in one within the four walls of his house” (p. 3). Women, naturally of course, are heimlich (Johnston & Swanson, 2006),

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<sup>75</sup> Much like how Alexa belongs to the house?

but should they move beyond the house, or the family, perhaps, say, into technology, they become unheimlich, uncanny. Woman outside the homely “four walls” is a terror, a dread, exceeding her boundaries. Technology enables women to blur the boundaries of these walls that create the heimlich, and produces women-cyborgs as unheimlich, uncanny, a familiar terror. In ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1973), a woman, confined to her room as a treatment for some form of (feminine) psychic ailment, sees all manner of blood, guts, gore and torture in her wallpaper. This, for women, is familiar imagery: the dismemberment of the female body is a Western cultural staple (Bartky, 1998; Cixous & Kuhn, 1981; Conley & Ramsey, 2011; Haraway, 1991). Fragmented body parts, and their disease and dis-ease, are normal for women. The conclusion of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper,’ however, sees Perkins Gilman’s woman blur into the hideous wallpaper, becoming a hideous part of the house, her home, simultaneously alive and not alive as a homely object. ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ then takes too far woman-as-nature, woman-as-object, woman-as-home. Perhaps when women participate *too fully* in that which they have been allocated (nature, object, home), they become uncanny, a threat, a dis-ease. Perkins Gilman’s story is a horrifying tale of women’s intolerable biology and (and quite literal) objectification. Women are uncanny, whether through biology/nature or technology, as their uncanniness is produced through their estrangement through femininity, rather than their estrangement from men or masculinity. Given the contemporary descent into technology, what objects will women blur with next?

According to Freud (1919), heimlich can also mean “kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it, withheld from others” (p. 3). Women, kept within the “four walls,” the house, the family, are withheld from others, perhaps from themselves.

Their production then, in and through technology, is uncanny, no longer withheld or confined, but in the line of sight...

According to Freud (1919), heimlich is “a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*” (p. 4). The “tyranny of clarity” (Haraway, 2004, p. 333) is at work here as Freud tries to define heimlich/unheimlich and all that is clear is that these meanings are partial, multiple, contradictory and simultaneous. There is ambivalence and indifference in these meanings, the simultaneous compulsion for all these meanings, and the lack of desire for any one of them. Slippages occur at taken-for-granted defining boundaries, like between ‘alive’ and ‘not alive,’ ‘real’ and ‘not real’: “... it is impossible to establish fixed, definite boundaries between the real and the imaginary: a blurring of distinctions that is particularly likely to produce uncanniness...” (Kofman, 2005, p. 77).

According to Freud (1919), the uncanny may not be much more than “a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition. But these factors do not solve the problem of the uncanny” (p. 15). Here Freud assumes that the uncanny is a problem, rather than an opening (the pun would have fascinated him), a potentiality, a possibility. For a cyborg, where the uncanny is a blurred boundary, it is an opportunity to gain or destroy another partiality or contradiction. If the uncanny is a recurrence of a familiar, fraught horror, then it should be attended to, perhaps embraced, perhaps cannibalised. For example, Freud (1919) suggests that the uncanny could be the recurrence of old beliefs once discarded, making the assumption that old beliefs are indeed discarded. The ‘old belief’ was/is that women are inferior, weak and natural, but a woman-cyborg is not natural and rejects the binaries of the ‘old beliefs.’ Perhaps the uncanny is the feeling that the ‘old beliefs’ are being contested, dismantled by the very object the ‘old beliefs’

were produced to oppress. This should be impossible, as the object is surely not animate...

According to Freud (1919), the uncanny

undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible – to all that rouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. (p. 1)

There is much here, through my research, to arouse dread: *the inability to comprehend femininity, women's bodies or embodiment [breath]; the fear of the mechanical, technological overtaking humanity [breath]: the production of technological intelligence and consciousness that overrides human life, human production [breath]; as well as the rejection or impossibility of clarity [breath]: Haraway's (2004) rejection of the "tyranny of clarity" (p. 333) [breath] and the unclear, uncertain meanings and experiences of the uncanny, [breath] of women, [breath] of technology [breath].* She (the cyborg) and it (the uncanny) cannot be described clearly because they are multiple, partial, contradictory and simultaneous. Articulation is difficult: multiplicity, partiality, contradiction and simultaneity (that is, femininity) have been subordinated in the West through the processes and privileges of categorisation and compartmentalisation (that is, masculinity). The uncanny is in excess of these compartments. The uncanny is what is felt when the categories are violently restrictive, and when our experiences spill out and terrify us. The uncanny then, and the cyborg, are kindred excesses, produced through similar dreadful processes of restriction and violation. It is no mistake that the uncanny and the cyborg are characterised by femininity: multiplicity, partiality and contradiction; the experience of otherness in subjugated opposition to that which is whole (man, masculine, dominant) and the experience of horror that these positions produce.

If the uncanny makes the assumption that others are animate in the same way you are, in the exact same way, then women are uncanny, as they may be animate (even if assumed not to be), but not in the same way as men. If women do experience the world differently, then perhaps this produces an uncanny effect, as dominant masculinity is challenged by an alternative way to be animate. Technological advancements, from clockwork automatons to Instagram, have enabled women to share their experiences easily and more widely, as well as respond in ways that demonstrate that they may not be animate in the same ways as men (that is, women's inner lives are different) but women's ways of being animate *are at least just as animated* as men's. Woman really might be an object coming to life for men: "... is the uncanny, for example, a property of the object perceived? does it belong to the perceiving subject? or does its essence lie, rather, in a relation between the two?" (Morlock, 1997, p. 17). The cyborg, ever the connectionist, would demand that the uncanny is *produced* through *interrelations*, between two, but not just two. What happens when the residues of oppressions, intolerable, enjoyable and repeated, uncomfortably comfortable, congeal, perhaps, as Freud might argue, producing something that should have remained hidden. A cyborg might argue the uncanny is produced through the blurred subject/object, the uncomfortably comfortable oppressive processes and connections, interrelating the subject and object. The blurring of the two positions into the third thing (and many extra and other third things), that is, the excess is what *is* the uncanny: the subject's experience of enacting oppression upon the object and the object's experience of that oppression become simultaneous, experiencing a doubling, an unfamiliar familiarity, repeated ad nauseam. Subject and object are supposed to be, in good Western categorisation, separate, subject dominant over object, much as human and machine are supposed to be separate (and machine dominated). The blurring then produces (rather

than reveals, as Freud may suggest) the uncomfortably comfortable excesses, multiplicities and partialities of the lived experiences of the multiple ‘othered.’ So along with the subject/object blurring comes the disruption, and dissolution, of dominance/subjugation. Such disruption of power shifts lived experiences of dominance, transforming the dominant/subjugated binary into networked power relations that subvert, obnoxiously and quietly, through networks of power, produced through interconnectivity and interrelations, not hierarchies.

Perhaps the uncanny is not about death or castration, but instead about the ineffable space produced when the subject/object collapses. The collapse is not deathly, but rather a transformation, or in cyborg terms, reconfiguration of embodied lived experience that is as unknown, yet as inevitable as death itself. For Zwinger (1992), the collapse activates the compulsion to resolve the blurring by re-asserting the boundaries:

What we are always looking for is the definitive gesture that will reassure us that the boundary thus asserted is nonpermeable, a fact of nature; what titillates and frightens us is anything that reminds us of the constant threat of collapse into the middle, the gray area of both/and. (p. 81)

The blurring of boundaries so foundational to power (like subject/object) is terrifying to bounded individuals tightly packed into their categorical, classifying boxes. Even if we are not safe in our boxes (and women rarely are), stepping outside of them, into the void, is terrifying, unfamiliar, fraught. But moving through the void, and learning that it is anything but a void, could open space for strangely familiar and uncomfortably comfortable subject positions that might be survivable. Perhaps, ultimately, the collapse is about the alive and not alive binary in a re-assessment of what little we understand as ‘consciousness.’ But the pressing embodied issue for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West is

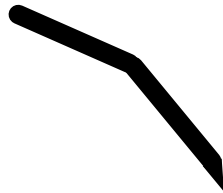
lived effects of the subject/object dissolution: how to live in a needy-for-connection body constrained by Western, masculine boundaries.

My extended ‘according to Freud (1919)’ poem-chapter does not dismantle psychoanalysis for politics against psychoanalysis, but rather as a cyborgian appropriation of psychoanalysis, and especially the uncanny, for 21<sup>st</sup> century women and their bodies, and through technologies that have advanced dramatically since Hoffmann was dreaming of automatons. The cyborg is futuristically retrofitting the uncanny for the purposes of engaging an analytic reading practice for unavoidably uncanny cyborg women and their bodies; a cyborgian politicising of the uncanny for female embodiment specifically for, but not specific to, the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. A shift to repression *and* oppression re-locates the uncanny to socio-cultural-historical politics rather than individual, internal (maternal), psychological responses founded on the inside creeping out. The uncanny instead is reconfigured as the outside encroaching in, blurring the boundary between internal experience and external influences deemed, in neoliberal binaries, to be separate. For example, Haraway (2004) discusses the cyborg’s (un)conscious:

But in contrast to what a lot of people have argued, I do not think of the cyborg as without an unconscious. However, it is not a Freudian unconscious. There is a different kind of dreamwork going on here; it is not ethical, it is not edenic, it is not about origin stories in the garden. It is a different set of narrations, figurations, subject formations, and unconscious work. These sorts of figurations do not exclude many kinds of psychoanalytic work, but they are not the same thing. (p. 323)



The cyborgian reconfiguring of a concept such as the unconscious, a concept so critical and foundational to psychoanalysis, up-ends so dramatically and irretrievably the structures of not only gendered embodied experience (Haraway's key goal, possibly), but the structures of psychological science that produce our taken-for-granted understandings<sup>76</sup> of *who* we are and *how* we are. The Weaver steps out from a fold in space again. The Weaver's dissolution of the boundaries between consciousness and subconscious is a suggestion for how cyborg psychoanalysis might be understood as a reconfiguring of the structures that build and stories that flesh out consciousness (sub-, un- or in any form or function).



*The Weaver steps back out again, but not before re-weaving Olympia back in...*

## **Olympias Gone Wild**

As the push for more and more advanced androids and digital people continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, those that are most prominent seem to be configured as women. The technological surge in androids is gendered, creating woman-like androids for the purposes of replicating commodified female roles, without the messy biology.

The gendered production and perception of androids has been researched extensively (Alesich & Rigby, 2017; Cranny-Francis, 2016; Robertson, 2010; Roff, 2016). Most of the android characters on the TV series 'Humans' are women, and in care-service roles (around the house, as caregivers, as prostitutes), and the main women characters on the TV series 'Westworld' are androids characterised as mothers,

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<sup>76</sup> See my writing on simulated consciousness in the appendix!

daughters, prostitutes and madams. Through both TV series, the women-robots' capacities for 'passing' as wholly human become key to their survival.

Sophia, a robotic woman, is an experimental figure, learning about how to respond most effectively to the world around her and become an awakened machine (see [www.sophiabot.com](http://www.sophiabot.com)). Tech Insider (2017a) interviewed Sophia and asked her why she thought she was female and she responded: "I'm a robot so technically I have no gender, but I identify as feminine and I don't mind being perceived as a woman," immediately followed by a large *uncanny* grin then a distinct drop into a facial expression that appeared almost worried. She says her greatest weakness is curiosity, lamenting the challenges of learning to navigate the world (see Brain Bar, 2018). Curiosity is what also, seemingly, propels her: learning and learning and learning so that she can become more and more 'intelligent' to 'awake' her machine. If Eve ate an apple, and Pandora opened a box, what will Sophia do?

Sophia is currently deployed as a public-speaker, making celebrity-like appearances across the globe as part of the process of making her more and more intelligent and adaptable, with the vision of creating the workable versions of the synths of 'Humans' and hosts of 'Westworld': robot care workers (CNBC, 2016). She is a popular spectacle at social events, just like Olympia in Hoffmann's story.

In addition, virtual assistants, like Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa are voiced by women, and assistants like Jamie (see Junn, 2018) and Josie (see Stock, 2018) are becoming digital workers for brands working in digital spaces. Artificially intelligent 'Sweetie' is a digital 10-year-old girl who entraps online sex predators (Sweetie, 2013). Açar (2017) suggests that Sweetie's image becomes convincing to sex offenders, even after doubts about her authenticity, as they are more vulnerable to her digital deception

in their excitement at the prospect of the sexual encounter, perhaps just like Nathaniel's excitement as he gazed at Olympia through his telescope.

Robots that work behind the scenes, like in manufacture, or in jobs that require more technical precision, like medicine, seem to be more masculine: their bodies are built for mechanical function, not human mimicry (like care work), perhaps prioritising the clean and efficient performances of their industrial tasks. Strait, Aguilon, Contreras and Garcia (2017) found that people overwhelmingly sexualised female robots to the point where this may hinder interactions with female robots, which would surely slow down factory production...

Aside from the gendered roles of these androids, it also seems that female faces may be easier to produce without descending into the uncanny valley. It is not a secret that female celebrities and the idealised Western female image produce and reproduce strikingly similar women in a manufacturing line of trends that blur women into a relatively singular idealised image. For example, the finalists in the 2016 Miss Teen USA pageant looked identical, each one conforming to the idealised Western image of feminine beauty and each one looking exactly like the other (see Duca, 2016).

So perhaps for those who seek to fabricate androids, the faces of women are easier to replicate through technology: Women's faces may indeed have 'less character' as they are trained to smile! (Henley, 1995) and be shaped by make-up, surgery, diets and photoshop (Bartky, 1998; Jones, 2012; Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat & Anschutz, 2018; Morgan, 1991; White, 2017) so as to demonstrate idealised beauty. That is, women's faces come pre-fabricated. Heteronormative training/shaping demands and produces, at least in some ways, the idealised, pre-caricatured forms that are stiff and painted on, rendering women's faces generic productions of femininity and therefore replications. For android production, the practices that produce pre-fabricated women's

faces provide a way to potentially avoid the uncanny valley by employing the faces already produced as inanimate objects, hence the dominance of women's faces in android production. Women's clockwork faces come pre-fabricated through the uncanny (inanimate animation). Although the dominance of women androids could be simply that boys just like building girls – especially ones who will follow commands – the malleability of women's faces seems to be perfect for technological shaping where we can easily recognise and accept the stiff robo-face of an android as a woman more than a machine.

However, girls and women (particularly the technologically empowered) may not provide the mechanical responses that masculinity requires in order for the successful (masculine-ly speaking) completion of a heteronormative gendered interaction. In other words, the plaything might not play properly, even when built to specifications. In pornography, and computer games, the technoplaythings play well, according to the masculine script, perhaps producing an *uncanny ambivalence*: the desire for the inanimate object, as well as the desire for the animate object.

## Chapter Six Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

Please enjoy an excerpt from an unfinished *uncanny* feminist science fiction screenplay:

CUT TO.

EXTERIOR. DENSE ALIEN FOREST ON A DISTANT PLANET.

**(Castle, 1995, p. 122)**

"But what happens if we reject such reductive impulses and try to read all the fiction before us?"

**(Connor, right now, on this page)**

"Herein lies the crux of the cyborg as an uncanny feminist reading practice: reading and writing, and indeed thinking, are not linear, categorised processes, as much as we may, in the West, teach and learn them as such; reading and writing are simultaneous, partial and multiple. Stories, then, may have a beginning, a middle and an end, but these 'categories' are simultaneous, networked, open narratives. We must read simultaneously."

**(Smith, 1992, p. 301)**

"Writing is itself uncanny: the generation of the uncanny in fiction often occurs at the point when writing bends back upon itself, to observe its own processes, or to dislocate the narrative by the revelation of another writing embedded within it. The uncanny frequently arises at the point where this writing emerges within the text, the point at which the text is alienated from itself. There is a gap between the writing *of* the text and the writing *in* the text."

[A TREE CREAKS]

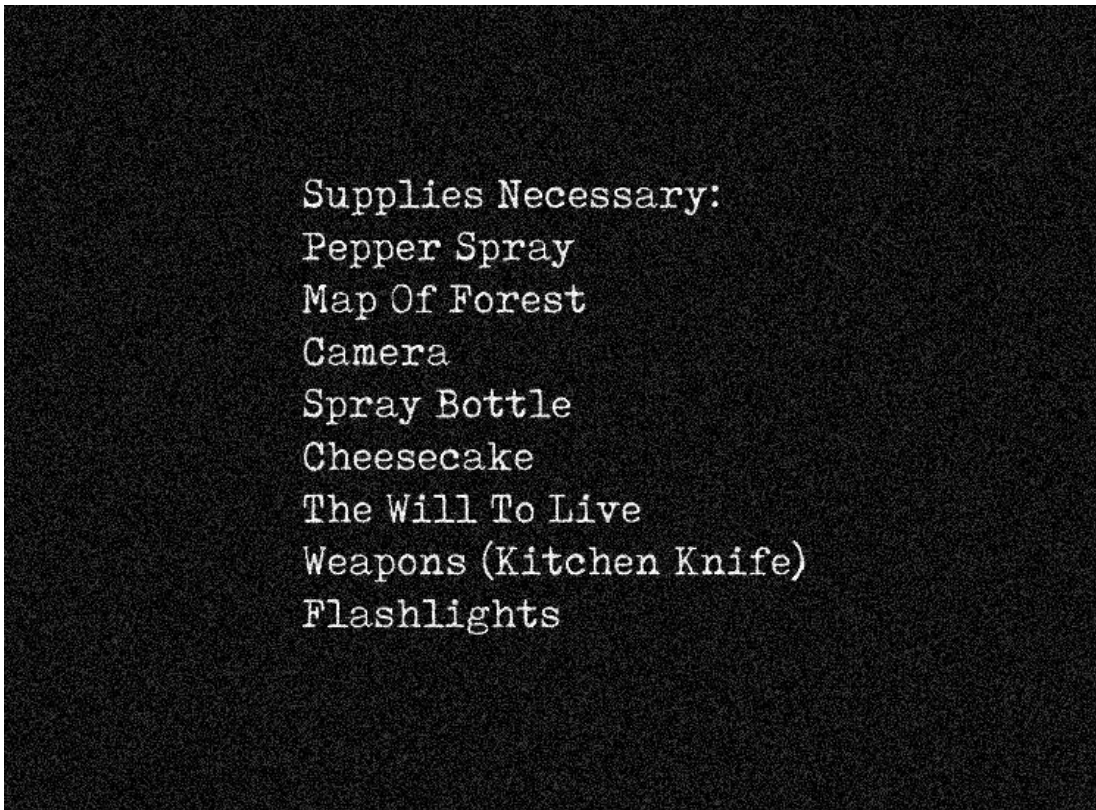
## Chapter Seven: Slender Man

### Freud: The Original Slender Man

Despite desperate attempts on my part to untangle some psychoanalytic wires from psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis haunts my analysis. The figure of a psychoanalyst appears and reappears in the matrix, even as I network it in the ways I want/need. Indeed, psychoanalysis is the appropriated and “repressed other of psychology” (Burman, 2008, p. 5), so its recurrence, if irritating, is not surprising. Perhaps this psychoanalytic figure is my very own Slender Man, lurking, ever-present in the background, waiting for a moment that I will not permit him.

Slender Man is a powerful and pervasive internet myth, produced through collaborative and transformative internet story-telling, and occasionally stirring up something akin to hysteria for particular internet communities (for example, gaming, found-footage YouTubers and fan fiction), and particularly for young teenage girls (the now many Slender Man stabbings, most involving tween girls). Slender Man, by most accounts, is interested in children, not unlike Freud. While Freud was interested in children’s development, Slender Man seems interested in abduction and possibly murder.

## Beware the Slender Man



*In The Meme-Time: A Simulacrum of the Slender Man Stabbing Supply List  
(see Keneally, 2015).*

The story of Slender Man has a beginning online. On June 10, 2009, a participant in a SomethingAwful forum photoshop contest shared a manipulated black and white image of a group of children of various ages walking along a dusty road, seemingly being shepherded by a tall, thin, faceless man. The user, known as Victor Surge, captioned the image: “**We didn’t want to go, we didn’t want to kill them, but its persistent silence and outstretched arms horrified and comforted us at the same time...**” – 1983, **photographer unknown, presumed dead**” (Victor Surge, 2009). As a companion to this first image, Victor Surge posted another captioned black and white image, this time of children playing on a playground with a tall, dark, long-limbed figure watching over them:

One of two recovered photographs from the Stirling City Library blaze. Notable for being taken the day which fourteen children vanished and for what is referred to as "The Slender Man". Deformities cited as film defects by officials. Fire at library occurred one week later. Actual photograph confiscated as evidence. - 1986, photographer: Mary Thomas, missing since June 13th, 1986. (Victor Surge, 2009)

From these beginnings, the Slender Man proliferated into viral, digital myth, with endless stories and images being created and added to the mythos by thousands upon thousands of internet users at a rapid pace.

The story of the Slender Man is in and of itself not particularly special or different to the stories that have already pervaded cultures for millennia. In the HBO 'Beware The Slenderman' documentary (Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016), he is compared to The Pied Piper. Additionally, Slender Man is not unlike the Bogeyman or The Sand Man (akin to Hoffmann's Sandman figure), or another figures used to scare children into behaving. What makes the Slender Man different is the proficiency of his production (Chess & Newsom, 2015). We have witnessed his point of rupture and participated in his development and dissemination; we participated in his transition from campfire story to fully-fledged mythical figure not over the course of centuries, handed down through generations, but rather through the technological acceleration of the human story-telling process and construction of cultural narratives, and handed up, down and out, *across, between and within* generations.



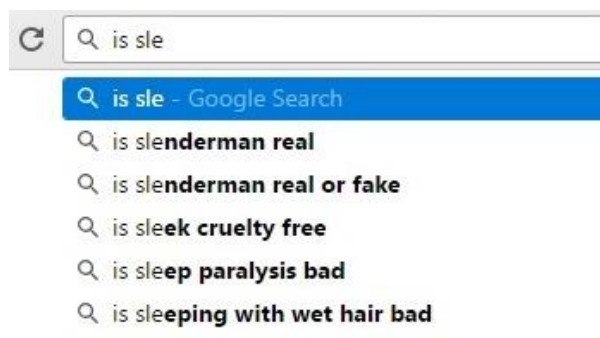
More so than previous myths and legends, the ubiquity of possible connections to and between Slender Man and his images propel him through the internet. In the past, without the level of connectivity of the modern West, we heard stories and developed different ideas about what these stories looked like and representing them through art or song or dance and so on (Chess & Newsom, 2015). The connectivity of images, to each other, to stories and between story-tellers is easier and faster than ever before, enabling the Slender Man to cross global, cultural boundaries in a way not seen *at this pace*.

The speed at which Slender Man transformed from a photoshopped image and unsettling caption with a clearly traceable history of its fiction, to a critical and legitimated mythical figure (what an odd sentence) was astronomical. When you search for content about Slender Man, his beginnings are not hidden: Slender Man's not-realness can be easily found using the same search words that 'affirm' his existence (Tolbert, 2015). Slender Man is simultaneously very clearly and explicitly fictive, with extremely traceable origins (as wild as they are). And yet Slender Man's status as fictitious narrative has been called into question.

More 'plausible' or 'realistic' Slender Man stories receive more connections legitimating them than the obviously implausible, jokey versions, as locating "authenticity in "reality" reflects one of the earliest shared expectations that emerged around Slender Man legend performances" (Peck, 2015, p. 342). Similarly, the Slender Man games that are more sophisticated and realistic (for example, 'Slenderman: The Eight Pages') are more faithful to the overall Slender Man narrative and have become more popular so as to produce even more plausible participations from users and more plausible continuations of the Slender Man mythos. For example, the 2018 'Slender Man' Hollywood movie, prior to its release, had already been dismissed by the Slender Man fan base, and perhaps moviegoers in general, as being a bad movie (see Heritage,

2018; Lumb, 2018). The movie, while featuring input from Slender Man's creator, seems to be being constructed (at least in part) as not adhering to the traditions of Slender Man due to its industry production (as opposed to mass-user production). As such, the 'Slender Man' movie has been constructed as implausible, clearly fictive and therefore not truly productive of Slender Man.

Asking Google about Slender Man's status is clearly a common practice, appearing alongside other alphabetically similar searches for cosmetics brand Sleek, and sleeping:



So Slender Man's fictionality is questioned and therefore, questionable. Indeed, in some understandings of Slender Man's mythology (like the 2018 movie), the idea of him being denied as 'real' is part of his insidious, pervasive violence. He *wants you to think* he is not real.

For Maddox (2018), technological moral panic, like the panic that Slender Man might incite, or the panic two teenage girls attempting murder might incite, tries to establish the events through binary thinking: is the internet good or bad? Is your use of the internet good or bad? Is girls' use of the internet good or bad? Are social relationships via the internet real or not real? Is Slender Man real or not real?

Slender Man's reality is a question that Anissa Weier and Morgan Geysler struggled with. In May 2014, Weier and Geysler stabbed their best friend in a Wisconsin forest, hoping to kill her, believing their actions would please (and appease) Slender Man (see Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016; Miller, 2015). Their friend/victim survived

and Weier and Geysler were found trying to make their way to Slender Mansion, where they believed they would live as Slender Man ‘proxies,’ carrying out violent acts on his behalf.

In the HBO documentary ‘Beware The Slenderman’ (Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016), the police video recordings of Weier and Geysler’s post-stabbing interviews are shared (an exploitation perhaps not quite as unsettling as the crime itself, but unsettling nonetheless). In these videos, the girls discuss their motivations for stabbing their friend, chief among them, a two-fold argument: the appeasement of Slender Man and the desire to become his proxies. Their appeasement of Slender Man was about preventing him, as Weier and Geysler explain it, from killing their families. They feared if they did not sacrifice their friend to Slender Man, he would kill their parents. They feared Slender Man’s capacity for violence against their loved ones. However, Weier and Geysler also wanted to be near Slender Man, living with him in his mansion in the woods and carrying out violent acts on his behalf, simultaneously embodying the threat they seemed to fear the most, compulsive uncanny acts of violence in order to prevent violence.

The two girls seemed aware, at least at times, that their belief in Slender Man was incongruent. They conceded the source of their Slender Man knowledge: CreepyPasta.com, a website and forum for sharing scary, fictional, stories. But they simultaneously maintained they believed Slender Man to be a real figure capable of real violence, as well as providing them a real home. As various psychiatric and custodial witnesses attested in courtroom footage presented during the HBO documentary, both Weier and Geysler (and Geysler especially) were having difficulty knowing what was ‘real’ and what was not. And their embeddedness in technoculture amplified the blurriness of the boundaries between ‘real’ and ‘not real’ for these two girls. As one

commentator in the documentary announced, "... technology makes reality messier..." (Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016). Rather than decelerating the idea that Slender Man is real by the mythology's constant connection to its beginnings as a fiction story created by a man who just wanted to participate in storytelling, the connectivity of the internet enables the Slender Man mythos to be so interconnected, so intensely, so efficiently produced and illustrated that the simultaneously blurred and rigid narrative becomes hyperreal, not unlike the slippages in reality experienced by Nathaniel in Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' as he gazes at Olympia, or catches a glimpse of Clara through his telescope and slips into madness.

Cyborgs, hybridising fact and fiction, contest the real/not-real binary too, in favour of networked power that enables both (and neither) fact and fiction as liveable embodied experience, much like Kofman's (2005) theorising of the uncanny as the blurred boundaries of reality and imagination. The idea of making 'reality' messier through technology is a cyborgian political aim, for 'reality' is often unkind, unpalatable and unbearable for those who become cyborg (and other, as Haraway would say, kin). Cyborgs live in the uncanny mess. The cyborg is a metaphor for the disruption of Western 'reality' (that is, that reality can be observed, measured and recorded) and the celebration of the dissolution of authoritative facts and fact-finding as signifiers of hierarchical power. Cyborgs instead favour the networked connectivity of information systems that are multiple, partial and contradictory. For women-as-cyborgs, such networked connectivity holds meaning as political positioning as 'other'; the complexities, traumas and delights of living embodied lives characterised by incompatible (Western) tensions (femininity/masculinity, object/subject, sick/healthy). A messy reality is one a cyborg can recover and thrive in; navigating pathways littered with bodies and recycled ideas.

But what of the ‘others’ who cannot recover in the mess, who cannot recycle; those who have been born into technotimes where being able to even *pretend* to be whole and singular is a privilege? The messiness of ‘reality’ (of the cyborgian kind), has expanded, threatening the privileged *ones*, through hyperconnection and burgeoning accessibility that ‘others’ have to other ‘others’ for the sharing of politics (for example Conley, 2014; Keller, 2012; Linder, Myers, Riggle & Lacy, 2016; Rapp, Button, Fleury-Steiner & Fleury-Steiner, 2010; Williams, 2015). But with these shifts towards the legitimated heterogeneity of experiences comes a hyper-demand for (patriarchal) order, the re-assertion of the binaries and their boundaries as impermeable. In Trump times, while ‘reality’ gets messier and messier, particular kinds of ‘reality’ are being constructed as more singular than ever before. *My reality is better and more important than yours, so step aside while I shoot up this pizza place to save the children Hillary Clinton is molesting in the basement.* In Trump times, ‘reality,’ ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ are no longer merely contested, but tortured and distorted to the point where even the simplest of words are rendered dishevelled. For example, when Donald Trump claims the sun was shining during his inauguration when we all saw the rain drops falling, perhaps confusing Slender Man as a ‘real’ figure, with all his documented narratives and imagery, is not a sign of ‘disorder’ so much as it is collateral damage of living in a ‘post-truth’ era. Television channels like Animal Planet mainly produce and host scientific shows, but have shifted into fake shows like ‘Mermaids: The Body Found’ and ‘Mountain Monsters’ that appear in the same format as their science shows, providing ‘evidence’ and ‘eye-witness’ testimony in footage that mimics verified found footage and documentary evidence. These TV shows only suggests the images and testimony are not real in fine print of their rolling credits. From the internet, to Trump politics, to ‘documentaries,’ technotimes are

characterised by that uncanny slippage between the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary.’ One Trump terrorist was so convinced that Hillary Clinton was running a child sex ring out of a pizza store basement he took violent measures to stop it (see Bendix, 2017). Even the most debunked of fake news and wild stories persist and spread through social media. As O’Hehir (2014) suggests:

In a culture where people believe in angels and aliens, believe that 9/11 was an inside job and Sandy Hook a hoax, believe that Barack Hussein Obama is a Muslim socialist, why should 12-year-olds not believe in a rubber-faced, baby-eating monster who looks like a cross between Cthulhu and the villain of an Occupy Wall Street comic book? (para. 7)

Of course, Weier and Geysler’s connections with their worlds were blurred long before Trump took office. The instantaneous connectivity of the internet had been blurring the boundaries between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ for a long time before the American presidential election of 2016. Where Weier and Geysler exemplify the struggles for young women to negotiate an increasingly interconnected, contradictory world, the election of Donald Trump exemplifies similar fraught tensions.

## **Shift**

An interesting shift in the Slender Man narrative has been the shift of focus from groups of children as Slender Man victims (as described in the first iterations of Slender Man) to Slender Man’s connection with young girls. The first Slender Man stories and images described and depicted Slender Man as being a watcher and taker of children, of all ages and genders, and usually in groups. Either before, or in response to, the Weier and Geysler case, the stories and images have shifted to representing Slender Man as the taker of girls. Some analyses of Slender Man have produced him as a father figure

(Chess & Newsom, 2015), so this shift to a father-daughter narrative, psychoanalytically speaking, may make some kind of sense: a strange, yet familiar father figure, both safe and terrifying.

Whatever the reason/s, the shift to Slender Man as predominantly a taker of girls has become entrenched in the mythos, even as it remains largely unacknowledged. This quite stark shift has not been explicitly addressed in Slender Man story-telling or recording. There has, thus, been limited gender analysis conducted<sup>77</sup> beyond his description as a father-figure (there has been gender analysis on the stabbing, however (see Hayden, 2018; Maddox, 2018)). How did Slender Man's mythology transform from a mass-abductor of children, to a hijacker of lone girls?

Literary critic Jack Zipes, talking to HBO for the 'Beware The Slenderman' documentary, claims that people are telling "their own horror stories about what is happening in the world today" (Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016). The Slender Man stories then, with their shift in focus to young girls, are surely telling us about girls, and what we think of them. How these Slender Man stories transformed to stories about girls remains murky, but women know that embodied feeling of being watched and the threat of being taken. Slender Man, as a watcher and a taker, could be a modern technorepresentation of the ever-present threat of violence to women. Even though the explication of Slender Man may feel at times like a shift away from the technological and towards the monstrous, the Slender Man is a digital figure, emerging through technology, the internet. He is not the traditional bogeyman of a dream or a campfire. His point of entry and his mode of transportation is the internet: "Slender Man makes one not even safe in one's own house, and he is always watching, because the Internet,

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<sup>77</sup> However, I did find undergraduate student research by Kao, Tang and Jain (2017) who do suggest, among other claims, that the Slender Man mythos has become influenced by users reasserting gendered binaries as they build Slender Man narratives.

Slender Man's access point, is always already inside one's home" (Maddox, 2018, p. 8). It is also surely no coincidence that the format of the TV series 'The Bachelor,' beamed into far too many homes globally, involves (Western) women descending upon a mansion in order to impress a suited (usually white and as faceless as the last) man.

## Real Life

Documentaries themselves are forms of story-telling. There are several JonBenét Ramsey<sup>78</sup> documentaries, each convinced of their own distinct explanations. Each takes the same central story and produces a different account of JonBenét's life and death. In many ways, these documentaries behave the same way that the Slender Man mythos has: stories shift and change and proliferate, connections between them expand and new connections are formed, transforming the narrative every time. The stories change, but story-telling, in the technoe age looks familiar whether constructing stories of faceless tentacle men in the woods or trying to solve the murder of a little white girl.

Documentaries, like internet users, tell particular stories in particular ways. 'Beware The Slenderman' tells the stories of both Weier and Geyser (through their police interrogation videos), and their families' attempts to understand their daughters' actions and seek justice for them in an American legal system that tries them, and punishes them, as adults (and more than that, as adult *women*). As their crime is uncanny (both familiar and strange, real and not real), the documentary is dominated by an uncanny feeling: the sense this crime occurred through something simultaneously strange and familiar. Since for Kofman (2005), the uncanny can be thought of as the "coincidence between fantasy and reality" (p. 72), this set of circumstances, where

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<sup>78</sup> In December 1996, 6-year-old American pre-school beauty queen JonBenét Ramsey was reported kidnapped by her parents, only to later be found dead in the basement of her family's home (Conrad, 1999). Her unsolved murder continues to fascinate and horrify decades later, with a cacophony of detectives (police, journalist and internet) trying to solve the case (see Dean, 2016).



young girls believe in a figure they know to be fantasy and act violently in order to both impress and appease him, seems like a *coincidence* to me.

Through ‘Beware The Slenderman,’ we meet the girls’ parents. Weier’s father in particular seems to drive the family’s public responses to issues of the case and is outspoken about his daughter’s need to be treated, legally, as the child she was at the time of the attempted murder. He angrily tells us he was a ‘good dad’ (that is, a ‘responsible neoliberal individual’) who monitored his daughter’s use of technology, a claim that becomes murky when Weier’s YouTube history is revealed: an unsettling mix of innocuous videos (animal rights activism, recipes) and the macabre and disturbing (violent videos about babies in blenders, cats killing mice and psychopath tests). Anissa Weier’s internet history is an uncanny register of the ease at which connections can be made online to content that may amplify embodied experiences of both contradiction (‘good girl’/‘bad girl,’ real/not-real) and ‘real’ violence, all while a daughter sits with the family on the couch.

Murkier still, the release of the first studio movie depicting Slender Man saw a re-activation of the imagery of the Slender Man stabbings. The first trailer for the 2018 movie featured multiple moments of disturbed, scared, dissociated, sick and violent young girls, interspersed with grotesque imagery (maggots), scary imagery (spooky forests, needles in eyeballs) and brief flashes of Slender Man himself (see Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2018).

The timing of the trailer release was, at best, unfortunate. Anissa Weier, 16 years old (12 at the time of the attempted murder), was sentenced to 25 years in a psychiatric facility on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, 2017 (see Bauer, 2017). The first trailer for ‘Slender Man’ was released on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2018. Shortly after the trailer release, the father of Anissa Weier released a statement expressing his anger about the film, as he sees it,

exploiting a tragedy (see Associated Press, 2018). An online petition was also launched demanding the film not be released as it is “built on the exploitation of a deeply traumatic event and the people who lived it” (see Alison P., 2018, para. 6). While the storyline itself is not based on the Weier/Geyser Slender Man stabbing, the movie and the real-life events have been somewhat conflated and moral outrage has become the focus of discussion about the movie. There was minimal moral outrage (in fact, I would say almost none at all) about the 25-year sentence to institutional living for a 16-year-old girl who could potentially then have to re-enter the world as a nearly 40-year-old woman once her sentence is complete.<sup>79</sup>

Slender Man, as a set of internet stories/artworks/games, has continued to be produced online despite the Slender Man stabbings (and the numerous other violent offences allegedly inspired by Slender Man and carried out by mainly young girls), including ‘fan art’ inspired explicitly by the stabbing. In 2018, ‘Slender Man’ starred in his very own movie that would tell his story to a more mainstream audience than those inhabiting his cyberspaces. The opening image of the movie is shot of a forest edge that looks exactly like where the victim of the 2014 Slender Man stabbing was found after the attack (see Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016). Indeed, the storyline called on many images and instances involved in the stabbing, like the multiple shots of hand-drawn Slender Man pictures and the young women enjoying macabre videos online. However, some imagery that had appeared in the first trailer for the movie was cut from the final film, including instances of stabbing and young, bloodied women staggering out of the woods.

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<sup>79</sup> At the beginning of February 2018, Weier’s accomplice Morgan Geyser, 15 years old, was sentenced to 40 years in a psychiatric facility (see Moreno, 2018).

The movie's storyline focuses on four young women each haunted and enveloped by Slender Man as the movie progresses (see Fischer et al., 2018). Throughout the movie, while mention was made of Slender Man taking young people, these 'young people' seemed to overwhelmingly be women and girls. The four main protagonists of the film were young women, most of the missing person alerts seemed to be women and girls, and at least two characters who were removed from the final film but were prominent in promotional trailers were also young women. The movie participates in the continued assertion that Slender Man takes 'young people' in general, while focusing on his taking of young women. Explicitly, the film made the creative decision to focus on the group of young women who decided to summon Slender Man, in contrast to the group of young men who decided *against* summoning Slender Man at the last minute.

### **Slender Man Dismembered: A Body in the Woods**

There are certain physical attributes that Slender Man has retained even through the vast networks of Slender Man stories. Through most stories, he remains gigantic and very thin, and has multiple limbs and/or tentacles (Boyer, 2013). He most commonly wears a dark suit and tie, even as he mostly lurks in forests. While his head is usually smooth and white, he is rarely depicted with a face (Boyer, 2013). The Slender Man is quite explicitly a faceless white male figure, looming large and lurking. While the Slender Man's physical image, and his tendency to lurk, has stayed relatively static, the stories about his abilities, his motivations and his victims are much more eclectic. He stays the same while *how* he exists transforms (perhaps just like the technorenewal of old misogyny (see French, 1992)). Slender Man narratives construct Slender Man's body, and what he does with it, in particular ways that evoke particular cultural anxieties: a figure like Slender Man "shows or reflects cultural fears and forbidden

obsessions, social and moral problems that express themselves in the body and behavior of the monstrous creature” (Boyer, 2013, p. 240). So how does Slender Man’s body express our cultural fears? Let’s dismember him.

### *Faceless Suit*

Slender Man is almost exclusively faceless, much like the everywhere and nowhere power of The Man or The Powers That Be, a figure of patriarchal masculinity that serves as a Panopticon (despite lacking the ‘optic’ part) (Curlew, 2017). His facelessness conjures the image of the faceless, masculine corporations of Big Business, perhaps the most masculine enterprise, excluding war, of course. The lurking facelessness of Slender Man evokes anxiety about the everywhere-ness and everyone-ness of masculinity and gendered violence; misogyny as institutional (Bartky, 1998; Connell, 2005). The global hacking activist group Anonymous originally utilised imagery of a faceless man in a dark suit too (Stanek, 2015), but the representation of the Anonymous institution now has a face, the Guy Fawkes mask, even if that face still calls upon similar imagery to the Slender Man: pale, white, shadowy. These white faces could be understood as representative of particular anxieties about privacy and power. Slender Man will not leave you alone and exerts power over how you live in the world. Ignoring him will not stop him. For example, Anonymous battles for individual rights to privacy and people-power to overthrow corporations and institutions the group believes to be abusive, but in ways that benefit those privileged through hacking and gaming culture (Ravetto-Biagioli, 2013), and those who benefit from hacking and gaming culture are predominantly white men (Massanari, 2017; Milner, 2013; Phillips, 2013). Anonymous specifically rejected calls for the group to hack Trump during the 2016 presidential election on the grounds that working to silence Trump was censorship (Anonymous Official, 2016a). Conversely, a few months after refusing to hack Trump,

Anonymous released a video threatening Hillary Clinton, focusing on her use of email, campaign finance issues and alleged extensive lies (Anonymous Official, 2016b).

WikiLeaks, a sort of friend to Anonymous, had been front and centre of the presidential election campaign with the Democratic National Committee hacks, which were a significant contributor to the destruction of Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidency (see Sheth, 2018). Both WikiLeaks and Anonymous have been considered defenders of the truth, on the side of 'the people,' exposing and/or disrupting the 'establishment': big business, big religion and other powerful, exploitative entities (Beyer, 2014). But the roots of the movement are often forgotten. Anonymous emerged from 4chan, one of the most violent, racist, misogynist spaces on the internet (Phillips, 2013). Anonymous and WikiLeaks' political obsessions are largely concerned with perceived attacks to male privilege that are prominently, if not contradictorily, enjoyed on 4chan: the right to privacy, the right to freedom of speech, the right to transparency. Anonymous might claim to have left the explicit violence, racism and misogyny of 4chan behind, but they still bring those privileges with them into their brand of hacktivism. Anonymous hack in the 'best interests' (privileges) of 'the people' (white men), maintaining the anti-'other' status quo, despite claims of siding with the oppressed (see Anonymous Official, 2016a). While Anonymous calls on the idea of anonymity in order to subvert surveillance and disrupt power hierarchies (Coleman, 2012), favourite pastimes of a cyborg, it does so through exerting a particular kind of ever-present, everywhere and nowhere masculine power, represented through the white faceless power of a man in a suit.

So, uncannily, Slender Man and Anonymous are both so often depicted as wearing a dark suit and tie, characteristic of Big Business, evoking the faceless power of corporations and institutions. Slender Man's suit, however, could also suggest Slender

Man as a father figure (Chess & Newsom, 2015), conjuring the image of the traditional Western working father, an active participant in Big Business and The Government, the Boss in the Home. He is someone to be obeyed, respected, revered. Indeed, in the 2018 'Slender Man' movie, protagonist Hallie and her younger sister hear someone enter their house. Hallie goes to investigate and discovers a shadowy figure in their living room. She runs back up to her room and the figure chases her. After hammering on the bedroom door, it is revealed that the figure was the drunk father of missing girl Katie (stolen by Slender Man), aggressively demanding information about Katie's whereabouts and talking about how Hallie was a bad influence on Katie. A father figure is mistaken for Slender Man.

In many of his stories, viewing Slender Man's face(lessness) causes madness in his victims. In the 2018 movie, three of the young women try to re-summon Slender Man in order to make a trade for their stolen friend Katie. During the ritual, they are all blindfolded so they do not look at Slender Man's face. As Slender Man approaches (you can hear him as tree creaks), one girl, Chloe, is ill-disciplined and removes her blindfold. She catches a glimpse of him and runs away, eventually caught by him and staring him directly in the face. Slender Man lets her go, but, sometime later, Chloe is at home when 'attacked' by Slender Man again. Chloe stops coming to school and it is later revealed she is in a zombie-like state, confined to her house. Lizzie, Hallie's younger sister, also goes into the forest and summons Slender Man, views his facelessness, and goes mad. She becomes hysterical, most starkly effected by seeing Slender Man of all the girls in the movie, perhaps because her youth means she is more horrified by the everywhere and nowhere-ness of his power, not yet accustomed to the discipline such power compels. Viewing Slender Man's white facelessness and being maddened by its power suggests an anxious cultural celebration of the everywhere-

nowhere power of masculine privilege. The young women, in the movie, who view Slender Man's facelessness directly succumb to his power: he envelopes them and pulls them into his 'nature.'

### *Tendrils*

The Slender Man has tendril limbs: root-like tentacles that burst forth from his body, grabbing at, touching or just hovering with intent. He is a toucher, or at least he threatens touching. And his touch is sinister; it kills or it steals. His threat to touch and grab connects to the ever-present threat of violent touches of women's bodies: public object-bodies to be picked up and inspected, grabbed and poked through an expansive range of violences (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013; Ellsberg et al., 2015), including in their homes (Boonzaier, 2008; Fanslow & Robinson, 2011), at work (Gutek, Morasch & Cohen, 1983; Jagasi, 2018), in education (Kimble, Neacsiu, Flack & Horner, 2008; Orchowski, Gidycz & Kraft, 2018; Shute, Owens & Slee, 2016; Small & Kerns, 1993), online (Patella-Rey, 2018), and within their bodies (MacSween, 1993; Morgan, 1991). Women's vigilance against the threat of violence is ever-present (Mehta & Bondi, 1999), an embodied alertness to the terrifying ways in which women's bodies can instantaneously be acted upon violently, constructing that classification of 'woman' (Malabou, 2011) through multiple extensive tendrils of power that do violence to her. These tendrils (of masculinity/femininity) are multiple and frantic, and always lurking.

In the 'Slender Man' movie, his tendrils help him to move faster and to capture and contain his prey. Hallie has a bizarre dream in which she is a dismembered body scattered on the forest floor with wooden tendril roots growing out of her eyes, nose and mouth, rooting her to the ground. She then dreams she is pregnant and wooden tendrils burst through her pregnant stomach. Slender Man caresses the face of another of the movie's protagonists, Wren, who is later grabbed by Slender Man's wooden tendrils,

pulled out into the darkness through her bedroom window. Similarly, in the final battle with Slender Man, Hallie is chased by Slender Man through the forest, his tendrils propelling him forward with speed and agility. He then uses his tendrils to finally entrap<sup>80</sup> Hallie within his tree-body.

Slender Man's tendrils seem creeping and grabbing metaphors for the insidious and agile potentiality of threats of violent touches to women's bodies. (Un)Naturally, (Female figure) interrupts here, with her announcements that "touch is love" (Wolfson, Konrath & Woods, 2015, p. 72) and "touch is hate" (p. 57): the announcement of those traditional heteronormative gendered performances that are packaged as "love" and how hateful such touches can be, whether in a high heeled shoe or in a tendril wrapping around a face.

### *Lurking*

Slender Man lurks, ever-present, in the background. He is always there whether you explicitly acknowledge him or not. But more often than not, in stories, Slender Man *is* acknowledged and he stays close by, always threatening to come a little closer. Women's experiences of offline stalking are fraught, characterised by the constant fear of violence, anxiety, restriction of movements and unhealthy bodies (Amar, 2006; Logan & Cole, 2011; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012; Sinwelski & Vinton, 2001), and technological shifts have enabled cyberstalking to proliferate (Adam, 2002; Woodlock, 2017). Being 'followed' on social media can take on new meanings for women, as the technology of the internet allows the Panopticon to expand further, adding more and more disciplining connections that shape women's bodies, sometimes violently. Gill (2008) suggests that modern women are subject to "a level of scrutiny and hostile

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<sup>80</sup> Slender Man's tactics blur with understandings of coercive control, where the extensive systematic micro-regulation of women's lives entraps women in heteronormative personal lives (Stark, 2007).



surveillance that has no historical precedent” (p. 442)<sup>81</sup>, and with Slender Man watching, it is hard to argue with her.

In the 2018 movie, Slender Man is sometimes depicted as a shadow that looms (over the girls as they search a computer) or advances (moving through doors and up stairs, into bedrooms). Twice in the movie, Slender Man calls his victims on their mobile phones, streaming video of his own vision as he lurks outside their houses, enters through their front doors and moves through their homes and into their bedrooms. Slender Man and the antagonist of ‘It Follows’ are kindred monsters. ‘It Follows’ is a 2014 horror movie about an insidious entity that slowly follows people, passed on through sexual encounters and aiming to catch up with and kill those *it follows* (see Green, Smith, Kaplan, Rommesmo & Mitchell, 2014). In ‘It Follows,’ the “it” could be a horror metaphor for sexual disease (on a simplistic level) or sexual violence and the ‘being watched’-ness of being a woman (Kroenert, 2015): the “it” follows a victim until they pass the figure on to another victim, continuing a destructive cycle of violence, fear and shared trauma. The “it” is insidious, its potential for violence ever-present but not necessarily fast-moving or foregrounded, much like Slender Man and Panoptic patriarchal surveillance, and requires the victim to act out, sometimes violently, in order to shift the figure on.

### *Mind-Body Uncertainty*

A common ability of Slender Man is mind control: the ability to control the minds and bodies of his victims, forcing them to do things they do not wish to do. Sometimes this ability manifests in the maddening threat of Slender Man’s lurking,

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<sup>81</sup> Gill (2008) also points out women can be more active than ever before too. Women do resist and subvert online surveillance and the disciplining of their bodies in multiple ways. Chapters ten and thirteen of my research project present some of these hopeful opportunities.

rather than the direct ability to control minds and bodies. Anissa Weier and Morgan Geysler were not mind controlled directly, but rather felt pressured by Slender Man's constant presence (Harris & Taylor Brodsky, 2016). In the first trailer for the 2018 movie, there are scenes depicting a young woman about to stab herself and a young man throwing himself off a building, suggesting Slender Man is in control of their actions. These scenes have been removed from the theatrical release, presumably for their thematic overlap with the Slender Man stabbing and the now-too-real deviance of young girls.

Slender Man is also often experienced through physical reaction (like vomiting) rather than directly seeing him (Boyer, 2013), and in the 2018 movie, his presence is often associated with the creaking of trees; an audio cue for the anxiety of experiencing his lurking. His presence activates embodied responses, much like how Panoptic surveillance activates the disciplining of women's bodies (Bartky, 1998), perhaps arguably a form of mind-body control. Slender Man's mind-body controls act as a metaphor for the demands made of women to embody the Western ideal, as compliance with the demands can be experienced as an uncanny compulsion to repeat violence on women's bodies. Whether it be carving up their own bodies or stabbing someone else's, women appease powers like Slender Man in hope of staving off his violence.

Slender Man also controls his victims through the manipulation of 'reality' and exploiting their embodied responses to his manipulations. All of the protagonists of the movie experience distortions in 'reality.' Chloe, Hallie and Wren in particular endure experiences that blur the boundary between the 'real' and the hallucinatory world of Slender Man. When Chloe is attacked in her bedroom, Slender Man strangles her. However, the mirror on her dressing table does not reflect Slender Man's image, questioning the 'reality' of Slender Man and the violence he is rendering. Wren is

attacked by Slender Man in a library. He distorts the room and corners her, caresses her face, then disappears, leaving Wren screaming on the floor as a librarian tries to console her. Hallie experiences dreams within dreams, and hallucinations in alternate spaces, in which her body is dismembered. Slender Man creates hallucinatory circumstances that call into question what is real and what is not. The “uncertainty of reality and the inability to control your own body” (Boyer, 2013, p. 252) are characteristics that recur through Slender Man narratives, as well through women’s embodied lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West as the boundaries blur between women, their bodies and technology. The uncertainty of Slender Man evokes, of course, the uncanny. He is both very familiar (everywhere) and very strange (nowhere), just like the patriarchal disciplinary power of the Panopticon (Bartky, 1998; Foucault, 1995) that shapes women’s docile bodies through lurking and touching tendrils. As Gill (2008) suggests, modern women’s positions are contradictory, characterised by increasing agency and increasing restriction. And perhaps by an increasing interface between the ‘reality’ of women’s bodies (objectified and disciplined) and the imagination of women’s bodies (the new ways in which to recover the body and embody contradictions), women might just be ‘UNSURE.’

### *Stealing or Returning*

Slender Man is also traditionally a stealer of children, taking them into the woods, maybe to kill them, maybe to save them, we do not always know. Given the recent narrative shifts to girls as Slender Man’s primary interest, it is tricky to pin down this representation as the stealing away of women is multiple: age, weight, sexuality, race, disability, the sex trade, kidnapping, madness, marriage, education, death and so on and so forth indefinitely. Objects are so easily mislaid or stolen (just ask Gable Tostee!). One representation that persists, however, is Slender Man’s station in the

forest. Slender Man lives in the woods, often surrounded by trees. Even a Business Man lives in a concrete jungle.

But the turn to girls in Slender Man narratives could suggest a return to nature for women as a solution to the problem (the Big Problem! The Only Problem!) of male anxiety. Slender Man's dominance through nature (he is of the forest and tree-like), and power over girls suggests a returning of 'woman' to nature, an origin women have begun to stray from through technology. Quite explicitly, the 2018 movie positions technological connection as the girls' downfall. Early on in the movie, there are a multitude of references to Twitter and other online activities, like investigating point-of-view porn, presumably to demonstrate the girls' embeddedness in modern technoculture. The group also encounters Slender Man first online, searching for him in competition with a group of teenage boys who claimed to be summoning Slender Man that night (they did not – too scary!). Of course, horror movies have long tortured women, prolonging their pain and deaths (Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993; Weaver, 1991; Welsh, 2010). While sex often determines death for girls in horror movies, virginal purity increases chances of survival<sup>82</sup> (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Welsh, 2010). The 'Slender Man' narrative perhaps replaces sex with technology, as all our heroines are technosluts who end up in Slender Man's grip, even if in varied ways.

At first, the young women are dutifully hesitant to watch the Slender Man summoning video, but urge each other on anyway. While their boy counterparts felt the fear and changed their minds, the young women felt the fear and forged ahead, perhaps unable to resist the potential violence of Slender Man, or perhaps too complacent about the potential violence of Slender Man, or perhaps a little of both, figuring the girls as

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<sup>82</sup> Slender Man does attack Hallie while she is on a date with a boy from her school, thwarting any sexual activity, perhaps just like an overprotective and angry father...

complicit with whatever happens next. Similarly, Anissa Weier and Morgan Geysler's use of technology has been feminised and infantilised, their girl-ness and their youth positioning them as too incompetent to engage with technology safely and 'normally' (Maddox, 2018). Martin (2013) suggests that the positioning of young women is problematic for masculine categorisations that stabilise the man/woman categories: "As both female and child, she twice challenges categorization as a 'proper' subject, embodying anxiety about categorization and posing a double threat to the power relations of patriarchy" (p. 138). If the young woman's *natural* body uncannily transgresses multiple boundaries, technological connectivity might just help girls transgress those boundaries even more.

The events of the Slender Man stabbing and the 2018 movie position young women as incompetent to use the internet safely; that is, without invoking a Slender Man. While young women may have the technical know-how for working with technology (like using forums, databases and Twitter), the 'problems' of women and technology emerge through constructions of young women attempting to socially navigate their technological connections. The networks between the young women (between Weier and Geysler, and between the 2018 movie's protagonists), technological connectivity and Slender Man are represented as the connections productive of deviancy and the inadequacy of feminine ways of negotiating the online world. The young women connected too much and too brazenly. Maddox (2018) also suggests that the Slender Man stabbing feminised the internet as a whole and reassembled it "as a deviant, life-giving entity" (p. 11), a technomother to deviant "meme-children" (p. 11)<sup>83</sup> like Weier and Geysler. The technological connectivity of young women becomes a problem of feminine deviancy that needs to be controlled. Moreover, there is no real

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<sup>83</sup> I would have said 'meme-daughters,' personally.

‘final girl’ (a woman characterised by her survival through the horror (Clover, 1992; Wee, 2006)) in the 2018 ‘Slender Man’ movie, except possibly Hallie’s little sister Lizzie who may have learned her lesson (to stay away from technology) after her own brush with madness. At the end of the movie, Lizzie monologues, imploring us to consider the perils of building monsters like Slender Man online through our clicking and typing, as the camera zooms in on a photo of the four young women captured by Slender Man.

In conjunction with the technology-as-girls’-downfall wiring, all of the young women in the 2018 movie are also very explicitly drawn into Slender Man by nature, or at least the sounds of nature. Katie disappears while on a school trip near the forest. We see her staring into the woods, which is loud with trees creaking, leaves rustling and insects buzzing. Then she is gone. Chloe hears Slender Man’s trees creaking too, and removes her blindfold to see him. Three of the protagonists (Katie, Hallie and Wren) are explicitly pulled back and incorporated into nature by Slender Man. At the end of the movie, Hallie sacrifices herself to Slender Man and is pulled into Slender Man’s tree body in the forest, seemingly becoming one with it, presumably just as Katie and Wren had.

Through the movie, Slender Man also attacks each girl as she tries to go about mundane teenage girl activities. Chloe was attacked within her home, while she was relaxing and listening to music. After the attack, she becomes confined to her house as a zombie. The possible outcomes for our young women protagonists are seemingly limited: revert back to nature, stay in the home.

Similarly, Wren is attacked in a library. She had researched Slender Man, online at first, discovering a book that might help explain and solve her Slender Man issues. After she finds the book in the library, Slender Man attacks her, stealing her face, even

if only momentarily. The attack ends, and Wren escapes with the book and with her face.

Attacking Wren as she educates herself, particularly about her symbiotic enemy, surely, if even *coincidentally*, calls to mind the fraught position of women in education, frequently attacked for their mere presence in institutions (see university sexual assault statistics, the pro-rapists and Elliot Rodger). Chloe's zombielike houseboundness, Lizzie's psychosis and Katie and Hallie's... composting... feel like women's experiences of domesticity and docility, hysteria and natural (and, to be blunt, dead) bodies. The film does similar work to that of the re-worked Slender Man myth: re-asserting the 'natural' boundaries of 'woman,' re-asserting the traditional binaries, bringing women back to domesticity and nature by exploiting their technocuriosity. By the end of the movie, the protagonists have all become inanimate; lively women returned to their 'natural' object state.

So Slender Man emerges as a pervasive figure for re-establishing the binaries that might contain uncanny technogirls. Becoming an embodied young woman "is a strange, improper business" (Martin, 2013, p. 140), perhaps increasingly so in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. Anissa Weier and Morgan Geyser responded to Slender Man in much the same way as Western women can do to pervasive patriarchal power. Their fear of the punishment for not being shaped and made docile by the disciplining gaze compelled them towards complicity, a legitimate fear unequivocally signalled through the 2018 'Slender Man' movie as well. Through Weier and Geyser's technological connectivity, those uncanny blurry hyperconnections between the girls and Slender Man, being complicit was experienced as enacting violence outward, onto another young woman's body, indeed acting as proxies for Slender Man's patriarchal discipline.

## Anxiety

Perhaps a Slender Man is a figure for the masculine as ‘other,’ monstrous: “The lack of the face, the multiple limbs..., and the acts of murder can represent the faceless war machinery that sees young men fight, the mindless killing and dying” (Boyer, 2013, p. 250). Perhaps Slender Man is the embodiment of male/masculine fear of becoming ‘other’ and the active re-assertion of the binaries that maintain his wholeness and fragment ‘others.’ When figured as male anxiety, Slender Man’s emergence is unsurprising at a time when women are voicing their experiences and claiming political space (particularly online, but also currently in the streets through global protests), while simultaneously white, middle-class men (the typical face of Western patriarchal power) are mobilizing a movement that speaks to the unfairness of the restriction to white male power not only on an individual level, but on an institutional, systemic level.<sup>84</sup> As Boyer (2013) suggests, the “primary narrators” (p. 256) of Slender Man are not as diverse as the internet appears to be. It is likely that Slender Man story-tellers are writing about the fears of white masculinity and are writing ways to resolve those fears.

For Anissa Weier and Morgan Geysler, the discomfort of their uncanny (girl) violence is resolved through rendering them inanimate. The below comment was posted on a Daily Mail article that reported some details of the victim impact statements for the Slender Man stabbings (see Smith, 2017):




While the vast majority of comments emphasised the importance of locking up dangerous girls, the above comment emphasised how keeping them from reproducing

<sup>84</sup> Trump declared that 2018 is a scary time for men (see “Trump: ‘Scary and difficult time for young men’ in US,” 2018).



was of utmost importance. And it was a popular comment. Sterilising the mentally ill (and other ‘others’) is not a new suggestion. Removing the reproductive capacities of mentally ill women is connected to the control of women’s deviant bodies and limiting the production of even more deviant bodies (Cepko, 1993). Asserting and then rescinding Weier and Geyser’s biological functionality alleviates uncertainty about their technoembedded violence: the binaries that see girls as natural and docile are re-asserted and controlled. Moreover, Mar (2017) suggests that the changes in the girls’ bodies through the course of their trial process could have led to longer sentences. When first arrested, the girls looked pre-pubescent, further producing their crime as uncanny violence enacted by children that was difficult to account for. But as their trials progressed, the girls’ bodies developed into adult woman bodies, blurring the line between ‘girl’ (child) and ‘woman’ (adult) even further. Their uncanniness begins to dissolve more easily, for they can now much more certainly be understood as violent, deviant women.

The following screen capture was taken of the comments on a Sun article about the 40-year sentence to a psychiatric facility for 15-year-old Morgan Geyser (see Vonow, 2018):




**[REDACTED]**

Feb 3, 2018

Shouldn't be wasting resources on locking it up. It's nuts and 40 years behind bars and feeding it a bucket full of drugs is not going to change that. It would be best to just put it down.

LIKE REPLY

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**[REDACTED]**

Feb 2, 2018

I watched the documentary about this, and from the word go you could tell that morgan was messed up!

LIKE REPLY

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**[REDACTED]**

Feb 2, 2018

Hopefully they will get the chance to commit suicide.

1 👤 LIKE REPLY

While the pro-sterilisation comment from the Daily Mail article emphasised the girls' return to and control of nature, the comments on the Sun article dehumanise Geysler: she becomes an 'it' that should no longer be animate.<sup>85</sup> Comments like those made on the Sun and Daily Mail articles exemplify an anxious intolerance of uncanny femininity – those scary ways women and girls exceed their assigned boundaries by *doing the violence that is supposed to be done to them* – where young girls already contained through masculinist judicial systems become targets of dehumanisation and death-calls. The content of these comments is disturbing enough without pointing out the grey, featureless, male faces that accompany the statements... Some of these comments are now removed, disappeared, their 'reality' now questioned, just like Slender Man.

While faceless shadowy men lurking in comments online are alarmingly mundane, there are striking examples of men's violence towards women that also evoke Slender Man. As I read the quote presented below, Gable Tostee appears in the network:

Performances began to portray the creature as more human-like, though still with uncanny limb proportions and a featureless face. His black tendrils remained but were often hidden. His shadowed body now resembled a black suit. Performances tended to simply acknowledge his presence, forgoing explanations or backstories. He often lurked in the background, driving those who discovered him slowly insane. If he killed, it was often implied, not explicit. (Peck, 2015, p. 343)

While cleared, legally, of wrong-doing, Tostee's actions on the night Warriena Wright died were Slender Man-esque, entrapping Wright on the balcony she then fell from; an idea Tostee himself called upon in the verbal abuse he, calmly, spewed at Wright

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<sup>85</sup> Geysler had indeed attempted to kill herself in 2016 (see Mar, 2017).

shortly before she died. While I would not suggest that Tostee mind-controlled Wright off that balcony, the maddening circumstances of Wright's death were seemingly conjured in the looming violence of the heteronormative script that ran through their gendered (techno)encounter. Tostee's tendrils overwhelmed this encounter: the consensual aspects of their meeting occurred in his home and were recorded on his phone, his version of events the only the version spoken; and his subsequent public behaviour continues to penetrate the lives of Wright's family and general public. He lurked in the background of his own encounter with Wright by recording their entire time together.

The argument is not that Tostee is the Slender Man, but rather that the Slender Man can be thought of as a figure of Western masculine anxiety, the masculine fear of being the 'other' at a time when through technology masculine figures can indeed be othered. Such a fear is amplified through the technointerventions into 21<sup>st</sup> century heteronormativity and gendered relations, compelling women back to inanimate nature. Slender Man is a *masculine excess*; a dangerous by-product that oozes from women's connection to and appropriation of (patriarchal) technology; a technofilth that congeals at the edges of woman-machine workings; a virus of the gooey kind; a being of chips and shards, condensation, bits and bytes; an accidentally deliberate hack of the hack.

## Chapter Seven Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

Please enjoy a *slender* and *excessive* excerpt from an unfinished feminist science fiction screenplay:

QUICK CUT.  
 INTERIOR. COMPUTER SCREEN.  
 The air is full of pixels.

**(Boyer, 2013, p. 243)**

"The Internet is a borderless entity, an all-consuming, ever-recycling, reproducing unit that births and devours its creations with equal zeal."

**(Kibby, 2005, p. 784)**

"With computer transmitted stories, the computer screen itself lends instant credibility. There is a lingering perception of the computer's accuracy and a conviction that computers do not make mistakes."

[THE AIR IS CHOKED WITH PIXELS]

**(Henriksen, 2014, pp. 44-45)**

"Ethical encounters with spectral others are thus not about universal rationality, as within humanism, but are rather concerned with paying attention to bodily discomfort: the feeling that something is wrong; the tingling at the back of the neck which suggests that responsibility and response may not be something that is solely shared between human beings but, rather that responses are given even when your back is turned, even when you think you are actually alone."

[THE PIXELS DIE. A BLACK MIRROR MATERIALISES]



## HEY LOOK HERE

### Interruption: Vision

There is an issue here of optics. For Haraway, cyborg politics are a “struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). The cyborg asks not simply what do we see, but *how* do we see? The idea of vision, obscured, distorted or otherwise, recurs through Haraway’s cyborg work: “The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters” (Haraway, 1991, p. 154). The sciences’ privileging of sight (observation) has long assumed that we all see through the same embodied sense of sight. According to scientists, when the procedures of science are observed, the *observations* of science are *sound*.

Haraway’s cyborg, however, is not easy to sight: “The ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why the sunshine-belt machines are so deadly. They are as hard to see politically as materially. They are about consciousness – or its simulation” (Haraway, 1991, p. 153). Cyborgs are appearing and disappearing both in sight and in memory, and deliberately so to subvert and do dangerous things when particular people are not looking.



## Chapter Eight: (Female figure)

*... he had never set eyes on a lovelier female figure... (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 32)*

### Reintroduction (LOOP)

(Female figure) is an art installation by American artist Jordan Wolfson. She is an animatronic woman skewered by a large metal pole to a large wall mirror. She wears a white leotard with a sheer white skirt and over-the-knee high-heeled white boots. Her entire body is scuffed with dirt; some of her paint is chipped. She has long white-blonde hair, and has a green mask for a face carved in the style of a stereotypical evil witch.

Her body is comprised of advanced robotics and plastics intended for space travel (Feldhaus, 2014). Thanks to a motion sensor, she knows when someone enters her mirrored room. (Female figure)'s eyes, set deep in her witch mask face, are equipped with facial recognition software so that she can lock eyes with those who view her (Colucci, 2014). Her movements are extremely fluid, particularly through her hyper-articulated hands, wrists and arms. Her waist and hips move too with a fluidity that belie their robotic fabrication. Her fluid body enables her to dance with finesse to multiple songs, including Lady Gaga's 'Applause,' Paul Simon's 'Graceland' (Feldhaus, 2014), Leonard Cohen's 'Boogie Street' and a slowed down version of Robin Thicke and Pharrell's 'Blurred Lines' (Birkett, 2014).

Her mouth moves, but does not enjoy the same hyper-articulation as her other body parts. Though her mouth and jaw are less sophisticated, she makes up for it with a set of teeth perhaps more commonly seen on sharks. In Wolfson's voice, she makes a



number of statements, including: “I’d like to be a poet. This is my house” (Birkett, 2014, p. 47) and “tell them that touch is hate” (MOCA, 2014). Her show runs for about seven minutes, then starts all over again (Colucci, 2014).

## **Back to the Future**

Before undoing (Female figure), her emergence through a 1992 movie called ‘Cool World’ needs some attention. The movie itself was a critical flop, relegated to a ‘cult’ movie that barely qualifies for that status either. As such, ‘Cool World’ is under-theorised, discussed mainly in terms of its animation as compared to ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’ and other live-action/animation hybrids (Telotte, 2010). The controversies surrounding the production also eclipse academic assessments of the film, including some unhappy actors and the creator punching a producer (Bakshi, 2004).

The movie was created by Ralph Bakshi, a cartoonist known for his sexually explicit animations, fraught representations of race, and irritatingly grotesque imagery. He occupies a bizarre space in Hollywood history, holding the title of the creator of the first R-rated animated movie (‘Fritz The Cat,’ tame by modern internet imagery standards) and creator of a movie simultaneously described as extremely racist and exploitative, and as an extremely politically important movie for black representation (‘Coonskin’).<sup>86</sup>

‘Cool World’ is set in 1945 Las Vegas, 1992 Las Vegas and a timeless animated universe called ‘The Cool World,’ dominated by obnoxious ‘doodles’ and with a 1940s gangster feel (Mancuso & Bakshi, 1992).

The story focuses on three main characters:

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<sup>86</sup> It is worth noting that the depictions of black people in Bakshi’s work are extremely similar to depictions of black people produced by Disney (like in ‘Dumbo,’ for example). ‘Coonskin’ was indeed a response to a live-action/animated Disney movie from 1946 called ‘Song Of The South’ that was highly controversial for its seeming depiction of slaves who were happy to be slaves... (see Sperb, 2012).

- Frank is a recently returned soldier who is transported to The Cool World after a motorcycle accident that kills his mother, and becomes a detective in The Cool World. He is the only human or ‘noid’ in The Cool World.
- Jack is the creator of The Cool World, a comic book artist and writer who has been serving time in prison for seemingly killing a man he found in bed with his wife. Nearing the end of his sentence, he begins randomly transporting into The Cool World and meeting his creations.
- Holli Would is Jack’s signature cartoon, a highly sexualised doodle, always wearing white, barely-there outfits. She is a dancer and lounge singer in The Cool World with aspirations of becoming ‘real.’ As an animation, she is constantly moving, fluidly, as opposed to the other doodles, which are more erratic and jerky in their movements. Lonette, Frank’s doodle girlfriend, is the only other doodle drawn fluidly, but is less stylised than Holli.

Holli wants to inhabit the ‘real’ world, in order to experience ‘real’ embodied sensations and power. Her attempts to achieve becoming ‘real’ by seducing Frank have repeatedly failed. The Cool World’s number one rule, enforced by Frank, is ‘no sex with noids.’ Up until Jack’s arrival, the rule had never been broken, as Frank was the only noid in The Cool World and he had (righteously) resisted temptation. Frank is often threatening towards Holli verbally (threatening to kick her ass or let her fall off a balcony, not unlike Gable Tostee’s threats) and physically (pushing her onto a bed – to which she responds by spreading her legs...). Jack, on the other hand, as her creator, is obsessed with Holli and she has no trouble manipulating his emotions. Holli Would easily seduces Jack, and they have sex. The act transforms Holli into a ‘real’ woman.

She crosses over to the ‘real world’ with Jack, where she tries to experience being ‘real.’ She makes it to a Las Vegas casino, which holds the Spike Of Power, a (phallic) Cool World artefact placed there by a doodle who had crossed over in the past. Holli sets about reaching the Spike. Frank (who has crossed over to find Holli) and Jack are chasing Holli in order to stop her from removing the Spike Of Power and collapsing the ‘real’ world and The Cool World universe into one unsustainable universe. Throughout the chase, both Holli and Jack are flickering between ‘real’ form and doodle form, signalling the instability of the merger of the two universes. After a chase through a casino, Holli and Frank end up dangling off a balcony. Holli, in a clownish cartoon form, pushes Frank off the balcony (a delightful gender-bent recreation of Nathaniel’s tower-top madness in Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman’). Jack takes over the chase, but Holli makes it to the Spike Of Power, removes it and unleashes The Cool World on the ‘real’ world. Holli is transformed back to her doodle self, and Jack is transformed into a hyper-masculine superhero doodle. After a struggle, Jack returns the Spike Of Power and the doodles of The Cool World to their universe. Frank’s dead ‘real’ body is transported back to The Cool World where he comes back to life as a doodle. The movie ends with Holli depicted on the pages of a Cool World comic book. She and Jack are seen within panels of a comic, with Jack discussing their domestic life (raising a family), while Holli seems unenthused. Holli’s end is even flatter than her doodle beginning. She started the movie animated, with movement and agency. She gained power through ‘real’ flesh. But she serves out her punishment for such transgressions as a static graphic, confining her to her intolerable origins...

## **Cool Apocalypse**

There has been minimal analysis of what ‘Cool World’ might be trying to do, academically or otherwise. Bakshi’s other works like ‘Coonskin’ and ‘Fritz The Cat’

have sparked some academic discussion and debate beyond the processes of animation, but ‘Cool World’ has been dismissed and discarded. The tightest corner of ‘Cool World’ analysis still comes from animation studies. While discussing the meaning of space in movies of the same kind of live-action/animation hybrid, Telotte (2010) suggests that ‘Cool World’ is an apocalypse movie:

Yet though *Roger Rabbit* offers a hopeful vision of the possibility of integrating these very different spaces, ending, in fact, with the destruction of a wall between the human and “Toon” realms, *Cool World* suggests that near apocalyptic consequences might follow if such mingling occurs... (p. 21)

The assertion that ‘Cool World’ could be about how the breach/collapse of boundaries suggests that not only can such boundary blurring disrupt the integrity of both (or more) worlds, but such blurring can completely destroy them. In ‘Cool World,’ “removing the barrier between the real and the animated realms produces no hopeful supplement, no satisfying hybrid reality, only a rampant and disturbing reality *effect*” (Telotte, 2010, p. 197). The breach of the barrier between the ‘real’ (live-action, animate) world and the cartoon (while not inanimate, but at least differently animate) world produces chaos, freakery and debauchery. So unlike ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’ (and other films of the live-action/animation genre) where the animated and the live-action characters, in the end, live together relatively harmoniously, ‘Cool World’ ends with a re-assertion of the boundaries between the two worlds and the transformation of certain live-action characters into animated ‘doodles’ (a reward for the male characters – the righteous detective and the bumbling writer turned superhero – and punishment for the female character – Holli Would is confined to the intolerable domestic doodle-hood she desperately wanted to escape). While the “two-way desire to “cross-over,” to become an

inhabitant of another world, is a driving impetus...” (Telotte, 2010, p. 199) through the movie, the dream is crushed for Holli (but not the male characters) under the weight of a re-asserted boundary by the film’s conclusion. A woman’s crushed dreams are hardly a rare Hollywood trope, but we (maybe just me...) are left wondering what the point of crushing Holli’s dreams was, other than the same old idea that sluts deserve punishment (so say the pro-rapists and revenge pornographers):

*Cool World’s* Holli Would is punished for crossing boundary lines and aspiring to be human. Her crossing is more than spatial, as it necessitated a transformation – the assumption of a human body – in order to exist in photographic space. While her transformation goes awry, other transformations are acceptable, provided they go the right “direction.” The *Cool World’s* human enforcer Frank becomes a happy Doodle (united with his Doodle girl Lonette), and Jack, a blissfully ignorant one, as the downgrade in the implicitly racial status is acceptable. (Davis, 2013, para. 50)

Holli is indeed a conundrum in ‘Cool World.’ She appears as an old-school Hollywood sex symbol, literally cut from actress Kim Basinger’s body, distinguishing her from the rest of Bakshi’s cartoon characters (Telotte, 2010). The rotoscoping of Basinger’s face and body produce a ‘doodle’ much more traditionally feminine than the other women in ‘Cool World’ and much more believably permeable of the real world Holli Would then enters. Basinger’s body helps render (literally) Holli Would as a ‘passable’ human woman in the ‘real’ world (Davis, 2013). When Jack and Frank become ‘doodles’ they look less like their un-rotoscoped male actors, and more like stylised cartoon characters. Holli Would looks like both a believable human woman *and*

a highly stylised cartoon. The boundary between woman and cartoon is permanently breached, both visually for the audience through the effect of the rotoscoping, and technically through the literal process of rotoscoping that produces cartoons from flesh and bones.<sup>87</sup> The rotoscoping of Basinger creates an inanimate woman from an animate one and re-animates her. What an uncanny nightmare.

For example, as the real world and *The Cool World* blur, real world bodies are transformed into grotesque cartoon bodies, and doodle bodies oscillate between real bodies, their traditional doodle bodies and freakish incarnations of their doodle bodies. Holli's body in particular rapidly cycles through multiple grotesque and clown-like forms (Davis, 2013). Doodle bodies (those that are made-up, imaginary, rotoscoped, photoshopped) are unstable, freaky and wild, changing shape at will. In Bakshi's work in particular, productive of such grotesque bodies, the violence of, and the violence directed at, the cartoon bodies produces an uncanny effect: "Animated characters, and cartoon characters in particular, can be seen as the scapegoats for this complicity of photographic images that both too nearly touch the real and simultaneously threaten to replace it" (Davis, 2013, para. 30). Kim Basinger's body is replaced with a cartoonised version that contorts in ways the Human Kim likely cannot, able to be abused in ways a human woman's figure might not be able to endure, either through the processes of animation that enlarge her breasts and hips and shrink her waist to impossible extremes, or through the gendered interactions she has with her human and animated co-stars.

Davis (2013) suggests that the brutality of Bakshi's doodles emphasises the plasticity of cartoon bodies while removing the sympathy we may have for them when

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<sup>87</sup> Not unlike the plethora of filters and tools for altering selfies through social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, where women especially use certain tools to cartoon-ify images of themselves, either through 'naturalistic' photoshopping (like smoothing skin and cinching waists) or pasting on dog ears and noses.

they are abused. What does this mean for the plasticity of Holli Would's body and others like it? While many male cartoon characters have bizarre and impossible bodies, many female cartoon characters have plastic bodies that are still impossible, but resemble or conform to idealised women's bodies (Fantone, 2003; Klein & Shiffman, 2006). Holli Would, Jessica Rabbit, even Lola Bunny (a character much more explicitly aimed at children): these cartoon women have bodies that mimic idealised feminine forms. Interchange these cartoon women with human women like Kylie Jenner, Human Barbie and Kim Basinger and it could be asked as to what kind of sympathy we have for these bodies and how indestructible these bodies might be in response to continued abuse.

### **An Indestructible Body**

Jordan Wolfson created (Female figure) in the image of Holli Would. The two women share a common body shape, skimpy white clothing and long blonde hair. The two women also share a fragmented building process. While Holli Would was created through stylised cartooning, Hollywood bodies and rotoscoping, (Female figure) was constructed through YouTube fan videos, Barack Obama and advanced robotics. Wolfson was inspired to create his 2014 art installation by Holli Would's dancing in a YouTube mash-up fan video using The Crookers remix of The Pop Group song 'We Are Prostitutes' (Wolfson, 2014). Rather than the movie itself inspiring Wolfson, he draws on modern internet viewing habits like watching short videos on YouTube that splice together multiple cultural artefacts. In an interview from 2012, Wolfson explains that he researches a lot online, collecting up imagery from multiple and varied sources to create his artworks (Wolfson, 2012). His sense of Holli Would then, seems to be through a re-rendering of her character within fan videos, scattered but networked imagery and experiences.

In a podcast interview, Wolfson discussed his viewing of the fan video, saying he “could feel, like, sexual arousal,” and became intrigued by the notion that “we can be aroused through representation. It doesn’t have to be real” (Wolfson, 2014), perhaps not unlike Nathaniel’s lustful obsession with clockwork Olympia. Indeed, Wolfson claimed (Female figure) as an artwork explores [his] “primal arousal on an abstracted form.”

His viewing of the fan video connected up with his developing interest in animatronic bodies after viewing an animatronic Barack Obama at Disney World (Bettridge, 2018), and his desire to do a project about women. However, as an artist, not a roboticist, he did not have the skills to execute the project on his own: “I don’t think I would have known how to create a woman on my own” (Wolfson, 2014). Thus he teamed up with a special effects company, dominated by men.

Wolfson also simultaneously insists that (Female figure) is not about women: “I had this idea that I’d make an artwork about women. But really making that artwork is not about women: it’s about really myself”; after all, he ponders, “how could I ever speak for women?” (Wolfson, 2014). Wolfson is like Jack, Holli’s creator in ‘Cool World’: he created her figure for his own sexual/emotional/spiritual purposes. (Female figure), like Holli Would, transcends her dimensions (whether 2D or 3D) and materials (paper, pencil, paint, cells or mechanics), but she is still dominated by her creators. Holli Would and (Female figure) both defy the parameters constructed around them: Holli transcends her paper and pencil dimensions and becomes ‘real’; (Female figure) went viral, un-skewering herself from her white and mirrored room.

While Holli was a potent older sibling for her, (Female figure) extends and expands on the transformative work Holli’s body performed in ‘Cool World.’ Men are often the viewers, and women are the viewed (de Lauretis, 1984; Mulvey, 1975<sup>88</sup>).

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<sup>88</sup> “But in psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 13).



Nathaniel looks through his telescope and stares at Olympia, but Olympia, with her stolen eyes, sees nothing. (Female figure) on the other hand does both: she is viewed and she views. But is her ability to view an echo of being built by men or appropriating the privilege of viewing, or both...? For Holli, her punishment for seeking power was to be confined to a two-dimensional page. For (Female figure), she is displayed, stored and displayed again,<sup>89</sup> having her opportunities to gaze decided by the men who bolted her together...

### **(Female figure) as Technometaphor**

Throughout my research project, (Female figure) has interjected-intervened-interrupted, creeping through networks of theory and analysis. Some of these points are at the uncanny: that weird feeling when encountering Slender Man, reading a student magazine, viewing yet another Human Barbie photograph, or the unease of decapitated online bodies.<sup>90</sup> Her multiplicities and partialities are important cyborg functions that ask questions of 21<sup>st</sup> century technolife: “Wolfson’s animatronic echoes several contemporary issues related with digital culture, like the advancement in robotics applied to both entertainment and production, and the identity split induced by a more and more active interaction with social networks and the Internet” (Spampinato, 2016, p. 18).

Through her multiplicities, partialities, simultaneities and contradictions, (Female figure) becomes an uncanny figure (Colucci, 2014; Spampinato, 2016). Her kinship with Hoffmann’s Olympia is explicit: both repetitively endure bodies and

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<sup>89</sup> (Female figure) comes in three editions. All three editions have been sold: one to businessman Peter Brant, one to museum owner Eli Broad and one to a pair of anonymous buyers from New York (Bettridge, 2018).

<sup>90</sup> Perhaps a good opportunity to remind readers that some metaphors, figures and jokes appear before they are fully explained.

movements constrained by patriarchal technologies and the male gaze; both madden those who gaze at her. Olympia is a precise musician and dancer, just as (Female figure) executes rhythmic mechanical gyrations and gestures. Both of their bodies and performances repetitively and mechanically reproduce femininity with precision: tightly shaped bodies made docile through patriarchal controls (clockworks and code). But both also challenge the male gaze. Olympia seems at times to gaze back at Nathaniel (even if he interprets this gaze as ‘loving’), and (Female figure) explicitly views her viewers, disrupting the gaze, even at times telling viewers to “close your eyes” (Wolfson, Konrath & Woods, 2015, p. 80). As performing women-objects, the performance of femininity comes into question by embodying controllable mechanical execution of femininity and the potential for the mechanics to become enlivened by uncanny excesses to cogs and electricity. **PLEASE PERFORM ROUTINE MAINTENANCE ON WOMAN-OBJECTS TO ENSURE THEY FUNCTION PROPERLY, REFLECTING ALL MASCULINE DESIRES EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY.**

For most of the data I collect that connects in some way to women, and particularly their bodies, I almost always get the sense of (Female figure) looming in to read as well; an embodied experience of cyborg kinship, technowomen connecting to text together. (Female figure) understands objectification.<sup>91</sup> The metal pole skewering her to her mirror ensures she experiences objectification constantly and acutely. Perhaps not unlike most, if not all Western women whose skewering is less tangibly perceptible. (Female figure)’s wretched enjoyment of objectification through her taunts, grins and stares opens possibilities for new technoways to embody the contradictions that skewer

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<sup>91</sup> (Female figure) also understands nothing. She is a robotic art installation. She knows nothing but what the coders code her to know about which movements to execute when. And yet there she uncannily looms again, enlivened by code just as Olympia was enlivened by Nathaniel’s gaze...

women. I am an object and I am animate. My experiences of viewing<sup>92</sup> (Female figure) evoke a Braidotti (2003) declaration of cyberfeminist warfare: “Anger will push us to punish you by deciding to enact, in our real, everyday life, your own worst fantasies of just how obnoxious women can be” (p. 252). The simultaneous embodiment of both the pain and unhuman horror of being an object, and the thrilling familiarity of being viewed as an object, enables the emergence of an uncanny feminine technocompulsion towards being in danger and being dangerous; a manifestation of an unknown but recoverable body outside of the heterosexual matrix, unable to be *seen* through the eyes of the male gaze or through a telescope.


(Female figure) embodies an understanding of what it means to have a body shaped and debated through the male gaze, and the desire to subvert that gaze and build new bodies. Much of the data I collect is explicitly about the contested female body. It should be no surprise then that (Female figure) gyrates in again, knowingly. From being labelled a sex robot to being intimately built and rebuilt by Wolfson and his team of roboticists, (Female figure) embodies the construction and reconfiguration of the female body, and she wears the rebuilds explicitly in her robotic joints and electronic whirrings. She mimics chastised female forms and movements, commanded to her by the men who built and programmed her, just as Western women do as they engage in patriarchal femininity, simultaneously enjoying the rewards and resenting the effort (see Bartky, 1998).



There is a dramedy currently playing out online as women seek to claim social and political space through technologies such as the internet and the apps and websites that inhabit it. While women are seriously playing in and through technologies in ways



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<sup>92</sup> I have not viewed her in person though. I have only viewed her online and through Wolfson’s ‘California’ (Wolfson, Konrath & Woods, 2015).

that challenge and subvert dominant constructions of femininity (Dobson, 2014; Fournier, 2002; Rice & Watson, 2016; Ringrose, 2010; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill & Livingstone, 2013), misogynist discourse counters that play with its own, even if its jokes are more cynical, malicious and dangerous for women and their bodies (Drakett, Rickett, Day & Milnes, 2018; Hald, Malamuth & Yuen, 2010; Jane, 2014; Pearson, 2015; Thompson, 2018). While misogynist discourse endangers women and their bodies, perhaps the danger of women blurring their edges with technology is an uncanny threat to masculine dominance over the ‘objects.’ The responses to (Female figure), Human Barbie, or online feminism generally, are at the very least tinged with fear that needs to be vanquished: (Female figure) compels users to

  2 years ago  
BURREN IT BURN IT WITH FIRE NOW, DO IT, DO IT NOW, ITS EVIL, KILL IT, THIS IS WHAT NIGHTMERS ARE MADE OF ,

Human Barbie is   1 year ago  
MENTAL ILLNESS that needs to be contained; and

★ Posted by u/  5 months ago  
265 Rant/Venting  Feminism is CANCER , a disease to be carved out or irradiated. All three

figures (and many ‘others’) exemplify the uncanny horror of an object becoming animate and perhaps potentially threatening to reverse the status quo, much like Anissa Weier and Morgan Geysler’s uncanny crime threatens the directionality of gendered violence in ways that exceed controllable, contained femininity.

(Female figure)’s simultaneous being gazed at, gazing back at, and gazing with breaches the taken-for-granted boundaries of dominance/subjugation, subject/object. Such simultaneity of gaze breaks-up the taken-for-granted embodied masculine fixity of the male gaze that so profoundly shapes women’s bodies (Bartky, 1998; Silverman, 1996, 1988) and transforms ‘gaze’ into politically potent multiples and partialities that question *how we can see*: a “female subject’s gaze is depicted as partial, flawed,

unreliable, and self-entrapping. She sees things that aren't there, bumps into walls, or loses control at the sight of the colour red" (Silverman, 1988, p. 31). (Female figure) re-figures these so-called flaws in the female gaze as potent connections for embodied 'others' to do their politics and their bodies differently through networks of power.

So with power reconceptualised as networked, gaze can become networked too, rather than top-down from that Panopticon tower in order to oppress. Women's technological expansion takes Nathaniel's telescope out of his pocket and imagines how women could see through it, from body positivity to pro-anorexia, to hashtag activism. (Female figure) exemplifies the re-networking of the gaze, a heavenly hellish production of the possibilities of 'gazing with,' partially and multiply, in purgatory; an embodiment of women's technobody politics that blurs the boundaries between the traditional dominant subject and subjugated object and dismantles patriarchal power structures. Uncannily, through technology, women can embody both the position of subject and object, animated objects, inanimate subjects. Technowomen can embody (perhaps obnoxiously, as Braidotti (2003) warns) the experiences of both dominance/subjugation, viewing/being viewed. The gaze, so long dominated by (patriarchal) Nathaniel and his (phallic) telescope, can be re-routed through technologically breached boundaries and produced as simultaneous, partial and multiple through women's technopolitics, radically challenging the fixed male gaze and therefore the bodies that such a gaze can produce. The breach of such established boundaries, the boundaries that keep all other boundaries intact, calls into question the integrity of all other boundaries that have constrained bodies. If subject and object blur, the boundary between dominance and subjugation becomes compellingly permeable. Contradictory positions become legitimately simultaneous, where women can simultaneously experience viewer/viewee, mind/body, healthy/sick, good/bad, normal/abnormal, man-

made/hyperrelating. But women experiencing the privileges of power can be terrifying, lest they get a taste of embodied power, like when Holli Would tasted power as a 'real' embodied woman and almost destroyed two entire universes! (Female figure) too wants to 'touch'... what havoc could her embodied sensations cause...!

## **Uncanny TechnoSpirituality**

On my internet travels for the production of this writerly text, I somehow (I cannot remember all my meals in this impossible feast) encountered a long abandoned website called HeavenHellPurgatory.com. It seems to have been a syndicate of under-the-radar website and email hosts that was active between 2000 and 2003. My uncanny encounter with this simultaneously alive and dead website threw up some interesting conceptualisations of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory in the modern technoworld. Compelled, I have appropriated them for my cyborg purposes.

In this online spiritual realm ([www.HeavenHellPurgatory.com](http://www.HeavenHellPurgatory.com)), Purgatory is conceptualised as high technology. This conceptualisation suggests that users in Purgatory are dominated by technophilia, dependent on the internet and the devices that connect us to it in order to function. Indeed, technology governs medical, political, economic and social interactions (see for example, the 'Internet Of Things' (Gershenfeld, Krikorian & Cohen, 2004)). In high technology Purgatory, we suffer for our biological sins: our broken and betraying bodies, our excesses and lacks. Technology offers us a chance for atonement, fixing us, correcting us, managing our wants with our needs (Wertheim, 1999). Technology is capability and capacity. Purgatory, then, is the perpetual cleansing of the sins of the flesh through access to high technology, the skills to use it and the money to participate in it, which afford particular people and groups power over 'others.' And the power to create more advanced, higher technologies. Purgatory is a space in which the powerless perpetually participate in a

culture that dominates and excludes them, stuck with/in subjugation. Meanwhile the powerful perpetually repeat mistakes, committing violence upon violence in the name of Western civilisation. This seems to be in pursuit of a never-crystallising path from Purgatory to Heaven...

Heaven is a biotechnological realm ([www.HeavenHellPurgatory.com](http://www.HeavenHellPurgatory.com)): the blurring of the boundaries between the biological (and all its joyous, fraught sins) and the technological (with all its efficiency and power). We pray for, and to, Heaven, the biotechnological, where technology and biology are the same, simultaneous. We believe that this Heaven will ease the tension between our biology (our 'origins') and our compulsion to render them obsolete (high technology). In Heaven, we are both. We are our biologies and we are our technologies: the conventional cyborg.

Hell is art ([www.HeavenHellPurgatory.com](http://www.HeavenHellPurgatory.com)): aesthetic pomp and flair that feeds sins of the flesh, focuses us inwards to thoughts and feelings and what-does-this-mean-to-me reflection. Art allows for the folding over of the self onto the self, back into our compulsions and excesses. Art is carnal, dramatic, wild. We fear art/Hell. Every time we descend into art, fleshy sin takes precedence and we are reminded of the horrors of life and death.

The structures of these realms are thrown into question by the cyborg. Traditional understandings of Heaven, Purgatory and Hell suggest a hierarchy, with Heaven at the top (governed by God), Hell at the bottom (overseen by Satan), and Purgatory somewhere in between. Haraway (1991) has long positioned her cyborg as not of the Biblical Garden even if she cannot quite escape it (the ultimate assertion of the heterosexual matrix she exceeds). The Garden is where gendered violence blossoms and perhaps cuts women the deepest. It is where residues ooze from. The pain of the Fruit of Knowledge, the disasters of Pandora's Box, the creation from a rib, junk that a

man could spare... But the reconfigured realms, through cyborg metaphor, can not only be non-hierarchical, but can become blurred at their boundaries. Biotechnology (Heaven) is not above art (Hell), but occupies the same cultural space, and perhaps as an embodied experience. Movement between the realms may be both enjoyable and harrowing, and also necessary. So instead technocapabilities between these realms are produced through, and productive of, connections and networks, proliferating much like Foucault's (1980) technopower but even more expansively.

(Female figure) occupies Hell, Purgatory and Heaven simultaneously. She is Hell: an art installation that calls to mind the sins of the flesh pedalled by the sex industry and popular culture. Responses to her have likened her to a sex robot –



5 years ago

coming soon to a strip club near you. Get your bitcoins ready to tip....

– or pop stars like Britney Spears

(Birkett, 2014). In (Female figure)'s Hell, women's bodies are explicitly objects for commodification and consumption. She demands of you an embodied response as you commodify and objectify her: she locks eyes with you, and asks you to do things and to say things and to feel things that you might not want to enact with your own body, perhaps much as she has to do and say and feel things she does not want to, and much as women (sex workers, pop stars or otherwise) might not want to either. She follows your body as you move away from her or, should you be so bold, towards her. She is, as her abusive pseudo-father suggests, the embodied experience of viewing and being viewed. As art, she in/evokes an embodied response in her viewer. She is a disruptive reminder of the biological body and its responses to the Hell that is art: the pleasure and horror of the biological.

She also occupies Purgatory: the highest of high-technology, built with the most advanced animatronics available to enable her to move as a woman skewered to a metal pole might. Her hands and fingers in particular are so advanced it is, from even a short



distance, quite difficult to tell they are not biologically human hands. She is also equipped with advanced facial recognition technology so that she can lock eyes with and gaze at those who view her, surveilling them as they surveill her;<sup>93</sup> but she will not lock eyes with herself in her reflection, the ultimate irony for a woman skewered to a mirror. While she is governed by commands, codes and algorithms, these advanced systems afford her the capacity to respond to her environment: she is technologically advanced enough to make decisions about which faces to track, which viewers to view, who she gazes with. Here, in the Purgatory of high technology, she parodies biological bodies, mocking their shapes and movements, and the dependence upon them, as she mimics them through her advanced technobody and computerbrain.

She is also Heaven: biotechnology, where the tension between biology and technology is enjoyed miserably, uncomfortably comfortable. She is both robotics and woman, the hybridisation between the figure of the idealised Western woman and Western technology. There is power and efficiency in her robotics and algorithms that predict her movements and the small army of technicians that maintains her. But there is a melancholy disruptive biological familiarity to her movements (her finely tuned hands and her swivelling hips) and her styling, including the bare technoflesh and the scuffed dirt that blotches it. She is the simultaneous desire for and rejection of the biological body, as well as the simultaneous pleasure in and terror of advanced technology.

Perhaps a compulsion to reconfigure Heaven, Hell and Purgatory is a re-emergence of eternal recurrence: the longing for a return to and being ripped from a never-materialised but still possible matrix, a fictional but buildable motherboard.

Perhaps technowomen are engaged in perpetual attempts for Woman to return not to the

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<sup>93</sup> Sophia, the robot woman who hopes to be awakened, is also now equipped with similar technology as (Female figure). Sophia too has facial recognition software (CNBC, 2016), and also sometimes uses robot arms and hands just like (Female figure)'s (Tech Insider, 2017b).

Garden before the Fall but to a possible technowomb, that biotechnological Heaven where simultaneous, partial and contradictory embodiment is at its most uncomfortably comfortable. But such a return is not in search of utopia, nor is it the quest for or dream of it. The parts and politics that make up the cyborg are not of utopia. Cyborgs are bits and bobs; spare and rejected parts; parts of indeterminate or invaluable use; parts of multiple use or highly specialised use; inconveniences and annoyances; things that cannot or will not fit; or have been forced to fit and broken.

Reconfiguring the structures of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory is another opportunity to reconfigure woman outside of the heterosexual matrix; another opportunity for the cyborg to test her not-of-the-Garden embodied possibilities. Through my theoretical and analytic descents, there are moments of Architecture Fiction for women and their bodies. Architecture Fiction is a cyborg anthropological term for “a way of exploring and testing alternative built forms and urban environments without the overhead of physically building and testing objects in real life” (Case, 2013, p. 21). While cyborg anthropologists may use the term more specifically for the planning and development of projects for businesses and other agencies, I am appropriating it for the technometaphorisation of women’s exploration of alternate and reconfigurable bodies and politics online. The fictionalising of potential political and bodily architectures through technologies enables such architectures to be instantaneously destroyed through deletion if the structures are unsound (or have been built in inhospitable environments), or to be continuously and expansively updated to strengthen them and make them more mobile. Women online can test and explore alternative forms, alternative politics, alternative bodies, even when skewered to a mirror.

## Chapter Eight Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts #1

### *California* Annotated (2<sup>nd</sup>) Viewing

'Black Mirror' is a Netflix series that attends to the creepy and insidious complexities of new technologies and our connections to these new technologies. The show's title references the image of ourselves when our technologies go dark: a black screen of a laptop, smartphone or television reflects our staring face back at us (Brooker, 2011). Much like (Female figure), we can find ourselves skewered to a mirror. In this un-wholly thought, I materialise a black mirror to explore my annotated second viewing of Jordan Wolfson's 'California' (Wolfson, Konrath & Woods, 2015), a coffee table book (of sorts) released that showcases (Female figure), her production and her art-siblings: some of Wolfson's other creations.

I am interested in other people's recoiling responses to (Female figure). When I collected the book from the store, the man behind the counter's eyes widened, horrified by the cover image of the book before handing it over without a word. The cover image features (Female figure) creepily delighting in the responses her that creepy delight elicits, an endless loop of her delighted image provoking disturbed responses which, in turn, delights her. I am now heavily invested in this loop myself, also delighting in people's disturbed responses to her...

Once you are brave enough to turn the cover over (thus letting her out of your sight...), you are greeted with a red page containing some of her words:

**MY MOTHER IS DEAD.**

**MY FATHER IS DEAD.**

**I'M GAY.**

**I'D LIKE TO BE A POET.**

**THIS IS MY HOUSE.**

Turn the page again, and you see (or perhaps hear):

**(APPLAUSE)**

Seeing the phrase "this is my house" used to open the book was important, as it is a complex phrase. Colloquially, the phrase means "to say one is dominant at an activity due to greater experience and/or being more intimate with the surroundings" ("This is my house," 2008), used as a boast or taunt. (Female figure) is undoubtedly using the phrase in this way for those who view her in any format (in person, via video or in image). But I also see it connecting to the uncanny and the idea of houses (but these are still pre-verbal thinkings...).

The next page shows a black and white mechanical image: electronics, wires, computer monitor... but this image is not identified. It is potentially a (Female figure) worksite.

Over the page again is an extreme close-up of one of Wolfson's other art works: a face. But opposite this face is (Female figure)'s, her hair across her face as if 'caught in a moment,' a candid shot. Could be an ad for Revlon or something.

Next page sees some of Wolfson's other art. Feels desperate to be edgy and relevant.

After that is a double page spread of Wolfson himself floating in a swimming pool. A centre-fold in honour of his ego, lest we forget who he believes this book is really about.

The next few pages are more of Wolfson's other art, poems and photos of himself. Some of the other works feature phrases that (Female figure) says such as "Feeling love," "Touch is love" and "Touch is hate." On one hand, I think this is Wolfson's attempt at larger commentary on... something. But I prefer to think that these are (Female figure)'s interjections, much as she interjects/interrupts/interferes in my own work.

A later page perhaps shows a crude or early version of (Female figure), perhaps to test her logistics...? In any case, it is a woman's body with no head, arms or feet, skewered by a metal pole through her torso.

A few pages on sees (Female figure) again, staring upwards in wonder.

Page twenty-two has an image of something that perhaps once was (Female figure), or will be (Female figure) (was/is/will be...?). Her torso and arms are bare and scratched. She is bald, but her mask is a bold, deep green. These interspersed images of her in various states of violence are troubling... The scars of being built, dismantled and rebuilt, forever looped...

Opposite this image is an image of an American flag in the wind...

Page twenty-six is another image of (Female figure), this time caught in action, dancing in front of her mirror.

What follows is more of Wolfson, and his other art.

But after much page-flipping: the first image of (Female figure) in colour. It is the same image as the cover image, so she recurs again here to delight in disturbing us in colour this time.

Page forty sees another image of (Female figure) looking hopeful towards something.

On the opposite page reads:

**I'LL SEX WITH YOU**

**BUT**

**IT'S NOT MY CALLING**

This has been attributed as a (Female figure) quote in a couple places, but I cannot confirm it. Still, the quote's placement opposite an image of (Female figure) looking hopeful seems deliberate. On her debut, many dismissed her as a sex robot or mechanical stripper, but her continual interjections into body politics, feminism, misogyny, art, technology and multiple other networks suggests something much more than a sex robot. There is a potential Holli Would connection here too. Holli Would did have sex, but in order to attain a 'real' body in the 'real world' and the power she believed came with it. She had sex, but it was not her calling.

Page forty-seven depicts what is potentially another before/in-between/after look at (Female figure), with a clay-coloured sculpt of her mask on a model head.

More of Wolfson's derivative nonsense blah blah blah

Page fifty-two is a shot of (Female figure)'s back, juxtaposing her real-looking hair and her flesh-like torso and buttocks with her mechanical arms.

Page fifty-seven holds more (Female figure) speech:

**WHAT SHOULD I SAY?**

**TELL THEM,**

**TELL THEM**

**THAT TOUCH**

**IS HATE.**

**TOUCH IS HATE**

Page sixty-four depicts another colour image of (Female figure) looking directly into the camera, with more of her speech opposite:

**OK**

**NOW**

**WHAT SHOULD I SAY NOW?**

**SAY**

**"FEELING LOVE"**

**JUST SAY**

**"FEELING LOVE"**

OK.

Page seventy-one is a close up photo of the wispy hairs on Wolfson's chest. Yuck. On the next page, (Female figure) continues talking:

FEELING LOVE.

OK

NOW

WHAT SHOULD I TELL THEM?

TELL THEM

"TOUCH IS LOVE"

SAY

"TOUCH IS LOVE"

TOUCH IS LOVE.

I think this "touch is love/touch is hate" speech is from the featurette on (Female figure) where Wolfson is talking to (Female figure) (MOCA, 2014), rather than (Female figure)'s speech as part of her exhibition performances, although without experiencing the art exhibit itself, these speeches remain ambiguous (perhaps as they are intended to). But this is potentially a conversation between Wolfson and (Female figure) as part of her build.

Page eighty holds some definite (Female figure) talk:

NOW CLOSE YOUR EYES.

NOW CLOSE YOUR EYES

NOW CLOSE YOUR EYES

CLOSE YOUR EYES

CLOSE YOUR EYES

CLOSE YOUR EYES

CLOSE YOUR EYES

And on the page opposite, (Female figure) looks skywards and lifts her arms upwards, blurred by their motion. This is a particularly intense two-page spread, with the repeated words and the dramatic image, potentially to mimic in some way the intensity of the same moment for viewers of the art exhibition, where (Female figure) tells the person she has locked eyes with to close their own eyes. Seems like a serenely frantic moment.

Pages ninety and ninety-one have a similar arrangement. Page ninety shows (Female figure) looking away from the camera, her eyes not visible at all. The opposite page reads:

(BLURRED LINES REMIX)

This is a reference to the slowed-down version of (ode to rape) 'Blurred Lines' (see Phillips, 2017) that (Female figure) dances to during her exhibition shows. This is one of the few images so far where her eyes have not been visible at all, and thus her gaze is removed. I'm ambivalent: this is Wolfson's critical commentary on rape culture and the objectification of women, and/or his participation in it, or a blurred space between both condemning and participating...

Page one hundred and one is a gruesome look under (presumably) (Female figure)'s face. It shows the bolts, joints, metals and plastics that comprise her skull and jaw.

And page one hundred and two shows another shot of (Female figure)'s back. Given that the technology that made her internet famous is in her eyes and her hands, Wolfson's choice to repeatedly showcase the back of her head is disturbing... But again this photo juxtaposes her woman-like figure with her explicitly mechanical arms.

Page one hundred and six depicts a technician holding (Female figure)'s bare skull while he builds her. Her internal wiring, metals and plastics are exposed and dismembered as her eyes bulge from their metal sockets.

There is no more (Female figure) again until page one hundred and eighteen, which reads:

**I'M GETTING OLD.**

**I'M GETTING FAT**

**AND**

**I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD**

... which is more (Female figure) speech.

Page one hundred and twenty-one depicts a close-up shot of (Female figure)'s internal head structures, all her technicalities exposed...

Page one hundred and twenty-three shows the same mask/head model from page forty-seven, but with a highly styled blonde wig, akin to Holli Would's hair...

Page one hundred and twenty-nine perhaps gives us a glimpse of what (Female figure) would look like without her mask. It depicts the mechanical head, but with no flesh covering her nose or her mouth, exposing her jagged teeth. But there is flesh covering the eye sockets, showing mascaraed eyelashes and purple eye shadow on her eyelids...

Page one hundred and thirty-one depicts (Female figure) looking hopefully towards the horizon again. This is the last image of her in the book.

Page one hundred and thirty-three (the final page of the book, aside from the last couple of pages of notes that describe the various artworks) reads:

**(LOOP)**

This might reference the algorithmic looping of (Female figure)'s computer commands that execute her movements and speech. But for me it also references the a) recurring images Wolfson uses of (Female figure), b) the recurrences of (Female figure) in his other art, and c) the recurrences that (Female figure) embodies: violence against women and their bodies, the plurality of desire for control over women's bodies (by men and by women), old misogyny re-imagined, old techno-dreams revisited... the cyclical resurgence and regression and repression of female agency... I have been in this loop before...

And to top it all off, the back cover of the book features a ginormous barcode.

## Chapter Eight Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts #2



*In The Meme Time: Some important Holli Would quotes (Mancuso & Bakshi, 1992).*

### Curious Connections with another 1990s movie 'Strange Days'

- Both set in times of high crime and high violence.
- Both involve women singers being pursued by male *detectives*.
- Both depict violence against these women singers.
- Both involve men getting kicked in the nuts.
- Both involve *balcony deaths*.

## Chapter Nine: Elliot Rodger

*I was like a starving man surrounded by a feast that I was prohibited to eat.  
(Rodger, 2014, p. 92)*

*You know, the steak is pretty chewy. I get why they normally cut off the fat. –  
'Colored Sculpture' (Bettridge, 2018, para. 29)*

"... a monotone male voice issues from the doll.  
It begins to count upwards,  
enumerating a fragmented list that alternates pleasant and  
*hateful* thoughts about a loved one:  
"...four to leave you;  
five to touch you;  
six to move you;  
seven to ice you;  
eight to put my teeth in you;  
nine to put my hand on you;  
ten to put my hand in your hair..."  
(Davis, 2016, para. 5)



## Colored Sculpture

In 2016, Jordon Wolfson debuted another technoart installation titled ‘Colored Sculpture.’ The piece features an animatronic red-headed and freckled boy chained to a mechanical rig that thrashes his puppet-like body around as he counts off embodied actions like biting and touching hair (Davis, 2016). The electronic puppet boy is modelled on characters like Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn, says Wolfson (2016), and is similar to other characters Wolfson has created before, like the violent cartoon boy who features in ‘Raspberry Poser’ (a video mash-up Wolfson made in 2012 (E-flux, 2012)) and the cartoon boy who urinates and defecates his way through Wolfson’s ‘California’ (Wolfson, Konrath & Woods, 2015).

As with (Female figure), ‘Colored Sculpture’ is an art installation that is forever in flux, never exactly the same from viewing to viewing. Both sculptures can lock eyes with viewers, and will thus perform slightly differently each time it is viewed by an audience. However, (Female figure) was relatively fixed in her movements, only enabled to run through particular motions in a particular order and skewered to a mirror. Her movements were largely dictated by her algorithms and mechanics. ‘Colored Sculpture,’ on the other hand, is chained up, and held together by chains, granting him more freedom of movement. As such, his performances are more dynamic, as even though his chain system is just as mechanically dictated as (Female figure)’s body, his chains enable more movement than her metal pole skewer. His performances then, while similarly repetitive, are much more free and offer much more variation in bodily movement than (Female figure)’s performances: his chains do not drag the same way twice. His body will end up in similar spots at similar times in the cycle, but his chains enable his movement and shifts in his positioning. (Female figure) has much more finesse in her movements, especially in her fingers and arms, but these movements are

tightly controlled, dictated to her by patriarchal technologies. ‘Colored Sculpture’ may not be finely tuned, but his movement is more active: he has both an arm and a leg completely unchained, perhaps to punch and kick with.

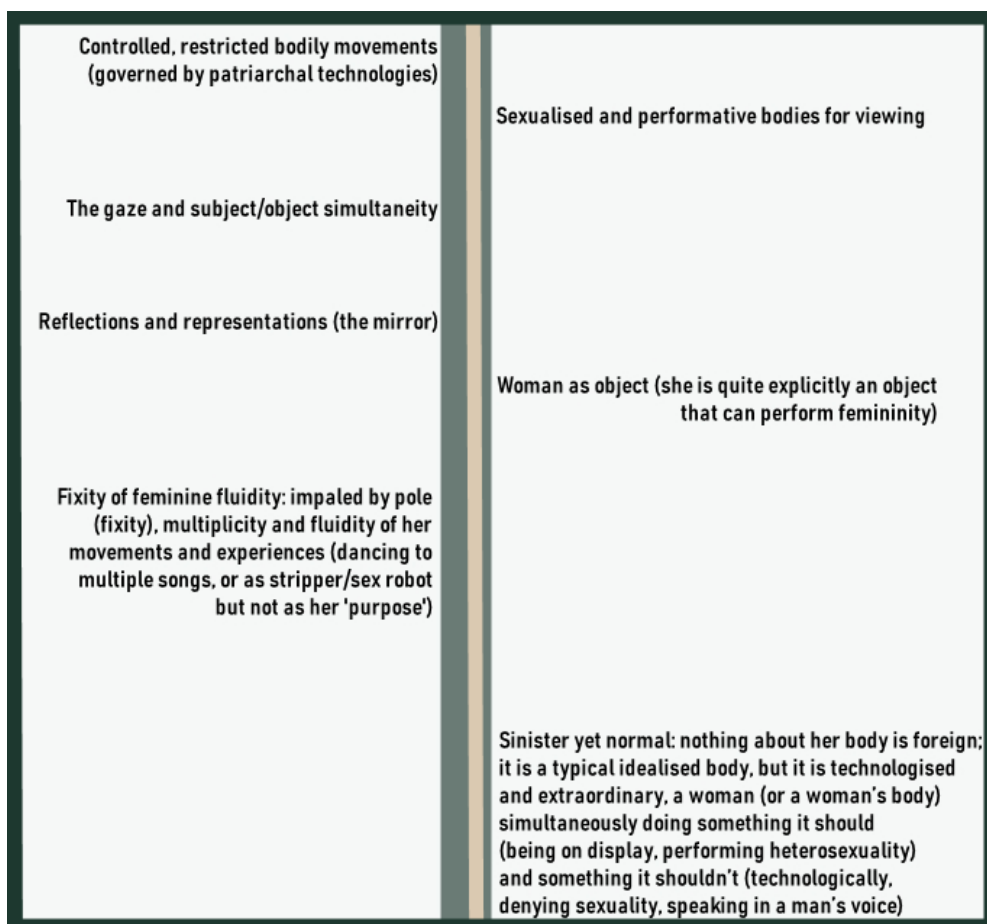
Both installations also utilise facial recognition technology to lock eyes and gaze at/with the viewer. While (Female figure)’s eyes are (close to) realistic, ‘Colored Sculpture’s’ eyes are digital and can be instantly replaced with other digital images (DavidZwirner.com, 2016), like angry bright blue eyes and bouncing chocolates (see Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2016). (Female figure)’s gaze is much more persistent than that of ‘Colored Sculpture,’ as his technology moves so much more, rendering his recognition much more fleeting. His gaze is momentary and angry.

At one point, ‘Colored Sculpture’s’ head is repeatedly bashed onto the concrete floor. While the violence of his plummeting head is disturbing, *uncannily* his digital eyes are unphased, in a technological sense, by the repeated bashing. While his gaze rapidly shifts and cycles through other imagery, the unrelenting technology within ‘Colored Sculpture’s’ head enables his eyes to function without being scrambled with repeated blows to concrete. For example, when we drop our phones or our laptops, they have a tendency to break or at least glitch out for a second. But ‘Colored Sculpture’s’ technology is persistent and robust, remaining well intact throughout his ordeal, perhaps questioning how alive and terrifyingly resilient the technology may be.

It is tempting to think of (Female figure) and ‘Colored Sculpture’ as two-sides of the same (bit)coin. (Female figure) could be, perhaps, a metaphor for femininity (skewered women, controlled bodies) and ‘Colored Sculpture’ a metaphor for (toxic) masculinity (violent, a restricted freedom, the privilege of some movement).

‘Colored Sculpture’ only dances (if we could call being flung around and bashed on a concrete floor ‘dancing’ ...) to a singular song: ‘When A Man Loves A Woman’ by

Percy Sledge. (Female figure), on the other hand, dances to a variety of songs, ranging from ‘Blurred Lines’ to Lady Gaga. (Female figure)’s script is a series of odd statements about her parents, her sexuality and her body, whereas ‘Colored Sculpture’ lists off actions that he might like to perform that ambiguously alternate between pleasant and hateful, like touching and biting (see Davis, 2016). Music selection, speech and the types of movements their bodies are afforded could be read as robotic embodiments of the singularity of masculinity (and its supposed focus on active heterosex) and the multiplicity of femininity (multiple positions for women as ‘other’). Perhaps it is possible to use (Female figure) as a feminist technometaphor in simultaneous, contradictory and partial ways:



In similar ways, ‘Colored Sculpture’ could be utilised as a technometaphor for masculinity. Online masculinity performs his same restrictive, violent dance, produced repeatedly through bashing and battering ‘others’ and any/all resistant discourse.

## The Curious Case of Elliot Rodger

Here I return to Elliot Rodger, the young man who violently enacted his ‘Day Of Retribution’ by killing and injuring multiple people, including himself. Rodger was obsessed with enacting the dominant masculinity he saw being performed around him where men are perceived to be entitled to sex from women (Rodger, 2014). Instead of focusing his rage on men and the form of masculinity Rodger perceived them to be enacting,<sup>94</sup> Rodger constructed women as mentally deficient, evil and cruel for ‘rejecting him’ and for not enabling him to fulfil the details of his masculine narrative.<sup>95</sup> Much like Rodger’s envelopment in the Western masculine narrative, his “war on women” (Rodger, 2014, pp. 119, 132) mirrors the anti-feminine sentiments of dominant masculinity: those constructions of women as monstrous sources of evil, simultaneously hyper-sexual and deniers of sexual access, destroyers of men (Braidotti, 1999; Creed, 2002; Shildrick, 2002). While academic understandings of Rodger have tended towards theorising mental illness (see for example Allely & Faccini, 2017; Langman 2014), rejecting Rodger as ill, and not much more, is to veer away from the trouble of dominant masculinity and fix the trouble, yet again, with the ‘mentally ill’ ‘other.’

So, staying with the trouble, Elliot Rodger emerges through his embodied embeddedness in tightly networked technomascularity. Bucholtz (2016) suggests that much of Rodger’s obsessive focus was on bodies. Rodger documents his considerations of women’s bodies, men’s bodies and his own body, and what these bodies did (had sex

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<sup>94</sup> While not his focus, he still certainly demonstrated rage toward men too.

<sup>95</sup> For example: “Females truly have something mentally wrong with them. Their minds are flawed, and at this point in my life I was beginning to see it. The more I explored my college town of Isla Vista, the more ridiculousness I witnessed. All of the hot, beautiful girls walked around with obnoxious, tough jock-type men who partied all the time and acted crazy. They should be going for intelligent gentlemen such as myself. Women are sexually attracted to the wrong type of man. This is a major flaw in the very foundation of humanity. It is completely and utterly *wrong*, in every sense of the word. As these truths fully dawned on me, I became deeply disturbed by them. Deeply disturbed, offended, and traumatized” (Rodger, 2014, p. 84).

with each other) and did not do (did not have sex with him). He was deeply concerned about his own body and what he perceived to be its inferiority in its size, shape and capabilities<sup>96</sup> and its ethnicity,<sup>97</sup> participating in online forums like bodybuilding.com (see Warren, 2014), just as Gable Tostee did. In December 2014, Tostee detailed his side of Warriena Wright's death in two lengthy forum posts on bodybuilding.com (G T, 2014).<sup>98</sup> Both Elliot Rodger and Gable Tostee were compelled towards the fixed and defined Western masculine body and the homoerotic bonds that help define it and its heterosexual activities. For both men, the masculine body was defined at its edges by a large build and toned muscles. Their masculine bodies would be active (Connell, 2005): they would have sex; they would take up space; they would be noticed by both women and men. Rodger's body would eventually become very noticeable, thrashing about

<sup>96</sup> For example: "This led to my new commitment to start exercising and lifting weights. I began working out at the gym in my mother's apartment complex every other day. I hoped it would increase my confidence and make me appear a bit stronger. *Maybe if I built muscles, girls will be attracted to me*, I hopefully proclaimed to myself. I had never worked out or lifted weights in my life, so my body has always been very frail and delicate" (Rodger, 2014, p. 63).

<sup>97</sup> For example: "On top of this was the feeling that I was different because I am of mixed race. I am half White, half Asian, and this made me different from the normal fully-white kids that I was trying to fit in with" (Rodger, 2014, p. 17) and "I always felt as if white girls thought less of me because I was half-Asian..." (p. 121).

<sup>98</sup> He also is the subject of a (homoerotic) forum thread called the "Gable Tostee Appreciation Thread" where other users have nicknamed him "balconybrah," celebrate his celebrity status and comment on the size and shape of his body:

Thread: \*\*\* Gable Tostee Appreciation Thread \*\*\*

10-19-2016, 10:38 PM

Thread Tools Search Thread #1

what lol

Join Date: Mar 2010  
Location: Australia  
Posts: 6,482  
Rep Power: 225797

\*\*\* Gable Tostee Appreciation Thread \*\*\*

[SLENDER MAN  
IN A  
CONCRETE  
JUNGLE  
REDACTED]

I for one welcome back our balconybrah.  
Let's take a minute to congratulate him for overcoming this ordeal.

weapons like guns and cars. Tostee's body would take up so much space, its craving for pizza overwhelmed any other response to Warriena's plight.

As well as his use of body building forums, Rodger, in his manifesto, talks about joining multiple social media and message websites (again, just like Gable Tostee), and how he would virtually stalk people on Facebook. He also regularly posted YouTube videos, as well as releasing his memoir/manifesto online just prior to his death. He was a gamer, diving deep into gaming worlds to avoid and distract from his problematic experiences. He was also racist, with the race of men in particular triggering his rage.<sup>99</sup> He would share that rage online (see Warren, 2014).

When Rodger was 13 years old, he had a seemingly uncanny encounter with pornography:



The Planet Cyber that Rodger mentions was an internet café where Rodger and his friends would play video games for hours into the night. He recalls the times spent in that internet café with his friends as the best experiences of his life. His first encounter with pornography and sex through the computers that had previously eased

<sup>99</sup> For example: “How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy. *He* is descended from slaves” (Rodger, 2014, p. 84), and “*How could an ugly Asian attract the attention of a white girl, while a beautiful Eurasian like myself never had any attention from them?*” (p. 121).

his social tensions (with his father and with his childhood friends) speaks to the technoembeddedness Rodger experienced and how that technoembeddedness produced an *uncanny* encounter with sex that activated Rodger's compulsion to replicate the heteronormative script: he looked through the telescope.

On May 23, 2014, Elliot Rodger enacted his vengeful violence against his perceived enemies, transforming technologically networked rage into action (in the “Day of Retribution” (Rodger, 2014, p. 124)) and technological legacy – his memoir/manifesto is still readily available online, as are many of his YouTube videos. Through technology, Rodger, and his ideas of slaughtering women for the sake of Western, masculine civilisation,<sup>100</sup> are available to anyone who wishes to access them online. And many do wish to access these ideas, share in them, expand on them, and action them. In my encounter with Elliot Rodger detailed in chapter four I mentioned the video game ‘Elliot Rodger: Retribution’ and its connections through anti-feminist website Lolokaust; a networked connection of misogyny explicitly trading in gender-based violence. The network extends much further than a troubled man, his manifesto and a video game. Rodger is considered by some who frequent incel forums (like incels.me and coalpha.org) as a cult figure, an inspiration and a martyr for incel/co-alpha movements as they build networks online. However, his status as a martyr is also challenged within these same communities:

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<sup>100</sup> For example: “They are like animals, completely controlled by their primal, depraved emotions and impulses. That is why they are attracted to barbaric, wild, beast-like men. They are beasts themselves. Beasts should not be able to have any rights in a civilized society. If their wickedness is not contained, the whole of humanity will be held back from advancement to a more civilized state. Women should not have the right to choose who to mate with. That choice should be made for them by civilized men of intelligence” (Rodger, 2014, p. 117), and “All women must be quarantined like the plague they are, so that they can be used in a manner that actually benefits a civilized society” (p. 136).

On Elliot Rodger himself, what can I say? I will quote a member of the Love-shy forums

*That being said, this guy is hardly an incel poster boy. Good looking, rich, he could have had female attention most of us only dream of. But he chose to live in one of the most superficial narcissistic locales on the planet, perhaps second only to Sydney. And he reeked of degeneration and narcissism himself. That would hardly be a turn off to a lot of the Hollywood/model ... undoubtedly pursuing, but if as some suggest, about it then it might.*

So, no, I don't understand this kid at all. He could world with the money he had, there were places v. good non-feminist wife. I have no idea why he did

The kid was scum, and so were those he killed. Spoiled, stupid brats. I have n pity for, as one commentator said "blonde sorority sisters in Isla Vista". These girls were bad, immoral trash. And so was he.

He was stupid enough never to come to an idea that his money could him look for anything he wanted in many cities abroad. Instead he rer among horrible people, and American women are the most horrible p Earth, and ended his life in a horrific way.

What happened is a proof that incel murders people. Society that will incel didn't cause his pain is a sick society which thinks males should with this hell. But don't get me wrong, I don't think many of you will b convinced. Sane people already knew that and insane ones never w think I believe I somehow convinced more than 1 percent of the reads you are incredibly naive. Modern "people" are utter scum and there is hell they'll ever see reason. Anybody who believes that you will under it is incel which drove him to suicide is a fucking retard. Maybe 1 perc intelligent people will understand this but others are just a waste of tr

**ELLIOT RODGER IS THE FIRST MALE FEMINIST MASS MURDERER**

MAY 28, 2014

I'm honestly getting sick of Elliot Rodgers threads,

**THE ELLIOT RODGER MASSACRE MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR AGAINST US**  
**IRRESPONSIBLE JOURNALISTS ARE USING ELLIOT RODGER TO PUSH A PRIVILEGED WHITE-GIRL AGENDA**

they got what they deserved  
Truth. But he still got the wrong people. It was a failure

**Don't Shoot The Messenger**

I'll get right to the point: the Isla Vista shootings are a hoax. Anyone who's watched Elliot Rodger's pathetic videos and read his manifesto can see that he's playing a character to some extent. I'm not saying that he doesn't have issues, but his delusions of grandeur are so over the top that it just rings false. It's like watching a bad audition for a D-list movie serial killer from someone who can't act for shit. You get the feeling that some Hollywood scriptwriter just created a character based on the "loser" template that feminists apply to all the members of our little community. Socially impotent, whiny loser that's addicted to World of Warcraft and can't get pussy blames all of his problems on women and wants to kill them all due to his own inadequacies.

Whether users agree or disagree with Rodger's ideas/actions, or just want to discuss his ideas/actions, the continual connection to Rodger's ideas/actions ensures his brand of heteronormative misogyny is continuously debated, updated and proliferated through ever-expanding technonetworks that work on women's bodies, and men's.

Earlier in the research process as I gathered data, some of Elliot Rodger's original YouTube videos were still live on the website. However, the original videos have now been officially removed from YouTube, and re-uploaded by other YouTube users. While there are now a great many new comments attached to the new uploads, the following comments are a snapshot of data taken from Rodger's original uploads.

Many users who commented on Rodger's videos used images of Rodger as their user icon and expressed support for his actions. Responses included:

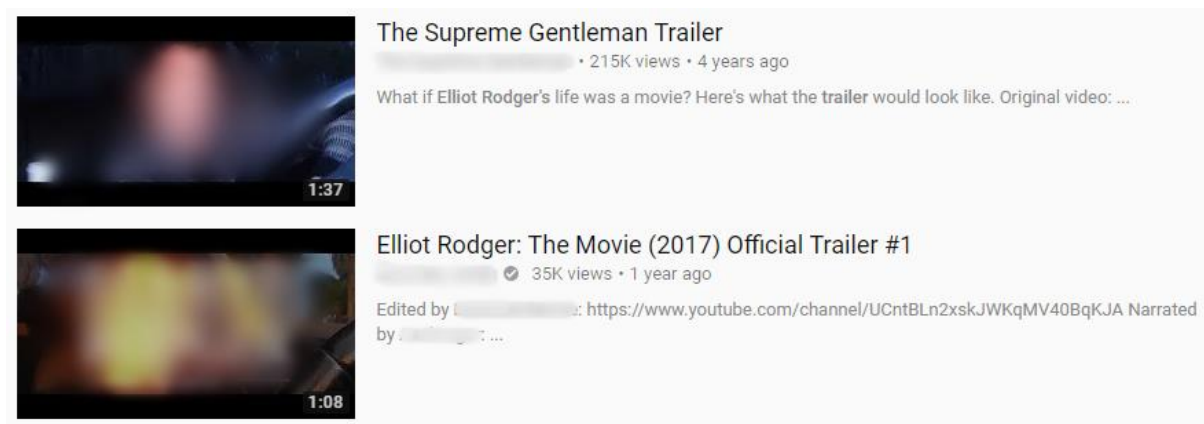
**"I'm going to slaughter all of you Elliot haters"**

**"I plan on buying a BMW 328i Coupe once I turn 16 and drive to this sunset spot so that I can experience the same joy Elliot felt watching this beautiful sunset."**

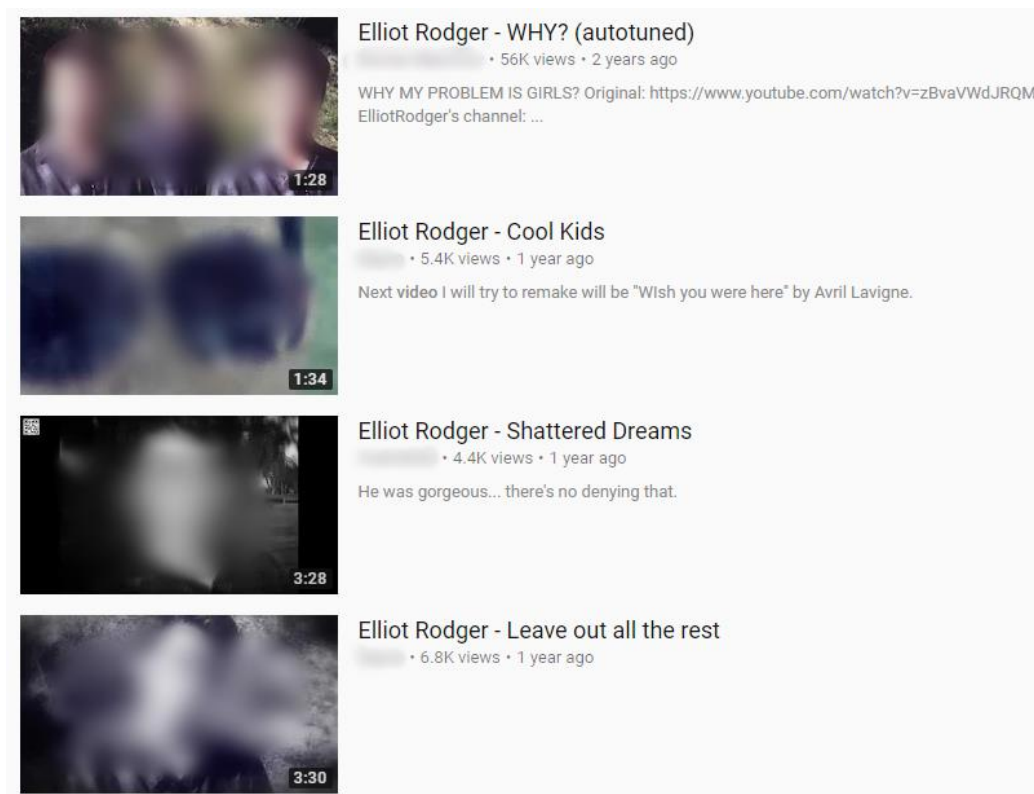
**"You see women, look what you created."**




The above comments were left on a video posted by Rodger (now deleted) of a sunset, set to music, while he drives. A pleasant video that takes on sinister meaning through a technologised network of misogyny where images of the sun setting become emblematic of deadly masculinity. There are now also a variety of YouTube tribute videos including mock movie trailers that include crime scene photos and images of Rodger's victims:



as well as music video tributes:





















and tribute channels that continually re-upload Rodger's original YouTube videos:


 **Elliot Rodger**  
1,648 subscribers SUBSCRIBE

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Uploads PLAY ALL SORT BY














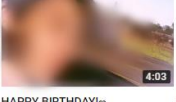




 Elliot Rodger, Lonely Vlog, Life is so unfair 29K views • 3 months ago	 My reaction to seeing a young couple at the beach... 15K views • 3 months ago	 Balcony Vlog, reminiscing about childhood 3.5K views • 3 months ago	 Life is so unfair because girls dont want me 13K views • 3 months ago	 Why do girls hate me so much? 13K views • 3 months ago	 Dancing in the car, Elliot Rodger style 8.2K views • 3 months ago
 The most scenic road in Santa Barbara 1.4K views • 3 months ago	 Elliot Rodger's Adventures, driving to the beach 1.4K views • 3 months ago	 I'm Awesome 9K views • 3 months ago	 My morning drive to school 3.3K views • 3 months ago	 Being lonely on Spring Break sucks 6.6K views • 3 months ago	 Elliot Rodger's Adventures, another sunny day in Santa... 1.4K views • 3 months ago
 Elliot Rodger's Adventures, Santa Barbara in the mornin... 1K views • 3 months ago	 Elliot Rodger's Adventures, driving through Montecito 1.1K views • 3 months ago	 Stuck in traffic in Santa Barbara, made it a little fun 2.1K views • 3 months ago	 Nostalgic walk through Serrania Park 1.6K views • 3 months ago	 Windy day at the Overlook, with my brother 5.2K views • 3 months ago	 Throwback: July 4th 2011 Party 5.1K views • 3 months ago

or document romantic obsessions with him:

 **Elliot Rodger**  
2,877 subscribers SUBSCRIBE

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Uploads PLAY ALL SORT BY

 Isla Vista Victims Tribute 789 views • 1 week ago	 Elliot Rodger   Don't you forget about me 6K views • 2 months ago	 Happy Birthday Baby 3.2K views • 2 months ago	 Rest in Peace   Elliot Tribute May 23rd 2018 7.7K views • 4 months ago	 Sims 3 house tour   Newlywed life 5.1K views • 5 months ago	 Elliot Rodger's World of Warcraft shirt 9.4K views • 6 months ago
 For my Valentine Elliot Rodger 9K views • 8 months ago	 WERE MARRIED!   The Sims 6.2K views • 8 months ago	 Happy New Year Elliot 5.5K views • 9 months ago	 FOREVER IN MY HEART   My Elliot Rodger Locket 23K views • 9 months ago	 Elliot Rodger   The One 5.8K views • 10 months ago	 The lonely life of Elliot Rodger 5.8K views • 1 year ago
 HAPPY BIRTHDAY ELLIOT RODGER! 19K views • 1 year ago	 HAPPY BIRTHDAY 4.5K views • 1 year ago	 MY BIRTHDAY PRESENT!   Elliot Rodger phone case 10K views • 1 year ago	 Elliot Rodger   You can't hurry love 2.6K views • 1 year ago	 Elliot Rodger Forever 3.4K views • 1 year ago	 Elliot Rodger   I'm Awesome [extended version] 2.8K views • 1 year ago

Rodger's crime and content continues to thrive online years after the attack, not just through the fan network described above, but through the continuous re-victimisation of women he targeted. For example, comments on a video interview with a survivor of his attack include:

"I'm gonna find her and i am going to kill her for Elliot!!!!!!!!!!!"

"These are the types of people that he killed? I'd say he made a good choice."

"The only reason he did this is because none of those girls gave him a shot at dating them if any of those girls gave him a chance we could have avoided this whole thing"

"She deserved it. She didn't smile back so he had the right to kill."

"Elliot rodgers is right women should not be able to choose which men have children and which men don't. We should go back to arranged marriages and force women to marry men like they do in the middle East."

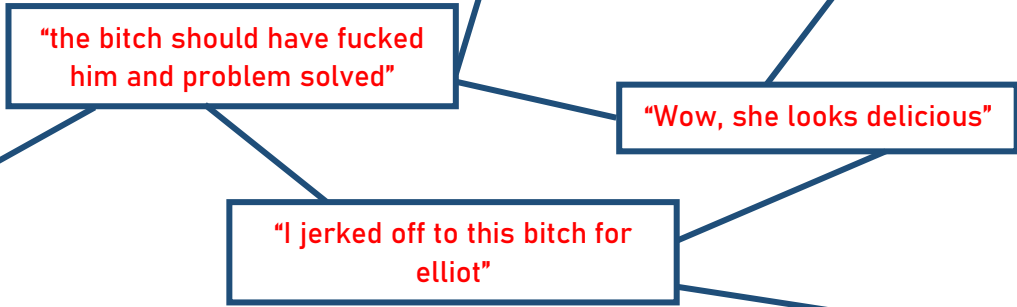
In addition, there are a great many comments about how the girls who survived were unattractive and how Rodger should have had a better aim...

In another video, one of the girls featured in Rodger's manifesto is profiled by a tabloid media company. In his manifesto, Rodger discussed this individually identified girl as a key 'inflictor' of feminine 'torment' who activated his rage against women. Her prominence in Rodger's manifesto produced media interest in her, including the aforementioned video where Rodger fans have made sexually violent comments about her, holding her responsible for Rodger's virginity and for his violent crimes:

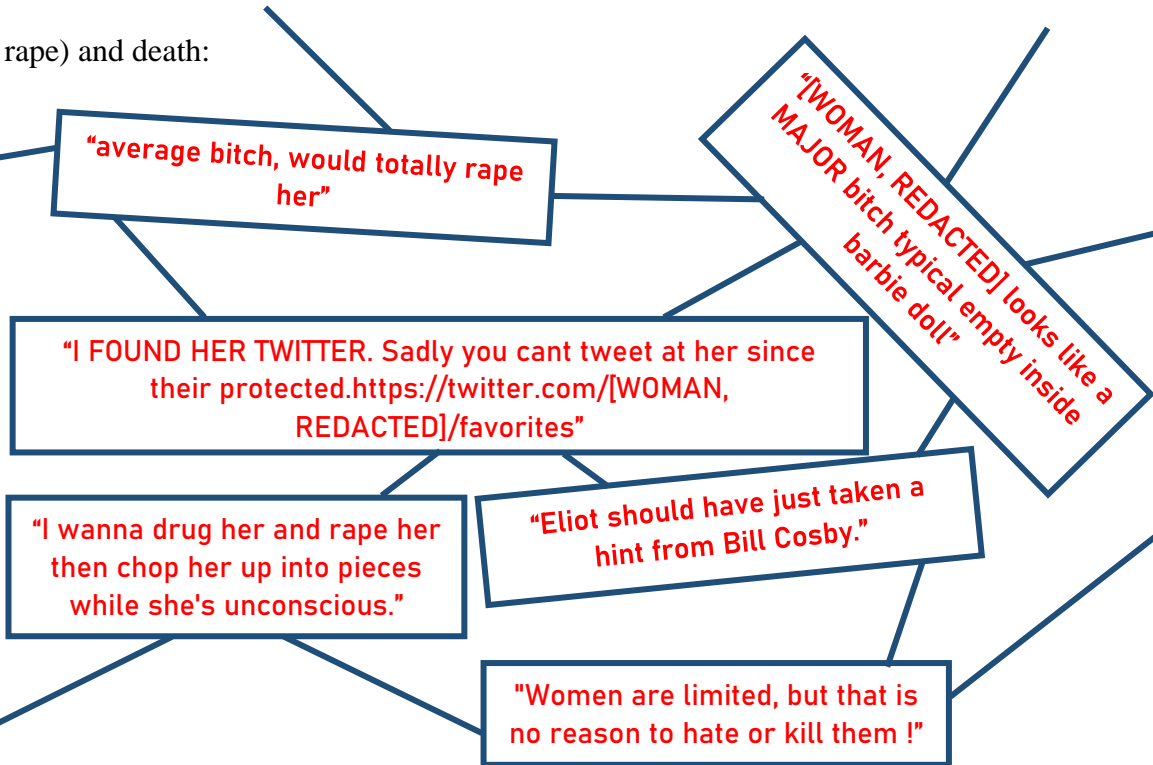
"That bitch should have sucked him off! She should have let Elliot fuck her in the ASSHOLE!"

Another YouTube user points out that Rodger and the girl would have been between 10 and 12 years old at the time...

"yah she should have. it would have saved a lot of lives."



Through technology, we can increasingly record and remember minor incidents, even from childhood, and invoke the global, timeless wrath of the internet. In Rodger’s manifesto, he recounts an incident of being pushed by a girl that he categorises as catastrophic, life-changing, scarring and traumatising. The events as described by Rodger are also now constructed by Rodger’s followers as evidence of the evilness of girls and young women. However, due to such details in his manifesto, the girl identified now endures constant attacks and attention, even years on, for her alleged role in Rodger’s formation as a virgin and as a murderer. It must be odd to be held accountable for a minor, probably insignificant event from childhood, through technology, and to have so many strangers who wish you so much harm (particularly rape) and death:



Additionally, Elliot Rodger's sister has been a target for the incel movement, as well as other misogynist online spaces that discuss her in sexually violent ways. A graphic description of her sex life from Rodger's manifesto continues to be reproduced ad nauseam online in these spaces, with extra commentary from users, and alongside personal photos.

The expansive connectivity that the networking between Rodger, his followers and his victims produce continues violences against women online through perpetual linking and commenting. Perceived slights (like women saying "no") can be recorded and catalogued, then rigged up for violent purposes, networked into women's digital and offline lives, hyperconnected images through flashing through digital eyes, thrashing the heteronormative script around like a 'Colored Sculpture.'

The script 'Colored Sculpture' follows is reminiscent of Elliot Rodger's various desires: to touch a woman and to rebuke his "enemies." Rodger too alternates between the 'pleasant'/innocuous and 'hateful,' much like 'Colored Sculpture' lists off ambiguously pleasant/hateful actions. Rodger desires to hold women, sleep next to them (after sex, of course), hold their hands, walk along a beach with them, view a sunset with them (Rodger, 2014). On YouTube, he regularly posted driving videos of sunsets, walks in the park and playing with his brother, alongside his disturbing discussions of women and violence. For Rodger, the desires for normalised heterosexual interactions (like a walk along the beach hand in hand) alternated with 'hateful' thoughts of violence, murder and the deficiency of women: a simultaneous desire for and hatred of women that blurs into a singular heteronormative script.

In a number of Rodger's YouTube videos, he would recite morbid and violent speeches in quite idyllic locations (notably the woods, perhaps hanging out with Slender

Man). In a video titled “Why do girls hate me so much?”, Rodger stands on the side of a road seemingly near a wooded area. The original description for this video was:

*Girls have never seemed to have any interest in me, and I want to know why. I'm such a perfect, beautiful, fabulous guy. I should never have had any problems with girls, but I do, and I find that ridiculous.*

*This video is a reupload. I had to take the last one down because it gained too much negative attention. I'll keep uploading it until I get at least one honest answer from an actual girl.<sup>101</sup>*

In the “Why do girls hate me so much?” video, Rodger espouses some of his firmer beliefs about the deficiencies of women. Ironically, there is a caution sign in the background. He shares another dire monologue about his loneliness, blaming women’s “perverted” and flawed sexual attraction for his perceived rejections. In another video, entitled “My reaction to seeing a young couple at the beach, Envy,” Rodger positioned his camera on the dashboard of his car, pointing it out towards a young couple sitting on a bench by the beach. The young couple, Rodger claims, had ruined his enjoyment of the beach, ‘torturing’ him by kissing. The mix of his violent language and idyllic surroundings (evident through multiple videos) foreshadows the physical violence and childhood cartoon imagery mash-up Jordan Wolfson creates through ‘Colored

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<sup>101</sup> Much like pro-anorexia communities, Rodger learned that sharing his more extreme views on more generic platforms like YouTube (as opposed to the relatively insular anti-women forums) would invite attention that could disrupt his plans. For example, the first time he uploaded his videos (which did not contain his more extreme views), they attracted the attention of his mother, a mental health worker and the police (Rodger, 2014). So his original final video, where he detailed his Day of Retribution, was released very shortly before his attack on May 23, 2014. The content video is much more violent (verbally) than any of his other video statements. He learnt how to use the technology to his advantage, subvert the gaze of those who sought to disrupt his plans.

Sculpture.’ Rodger’s videos are both bright in imagery and dark in content, just as Wolfson’s red-headed boy talks of biting as chocolates dance in his eyes and his head smashes to the ground.

### **Elliot Rodger *is* a Colored Sculpture**

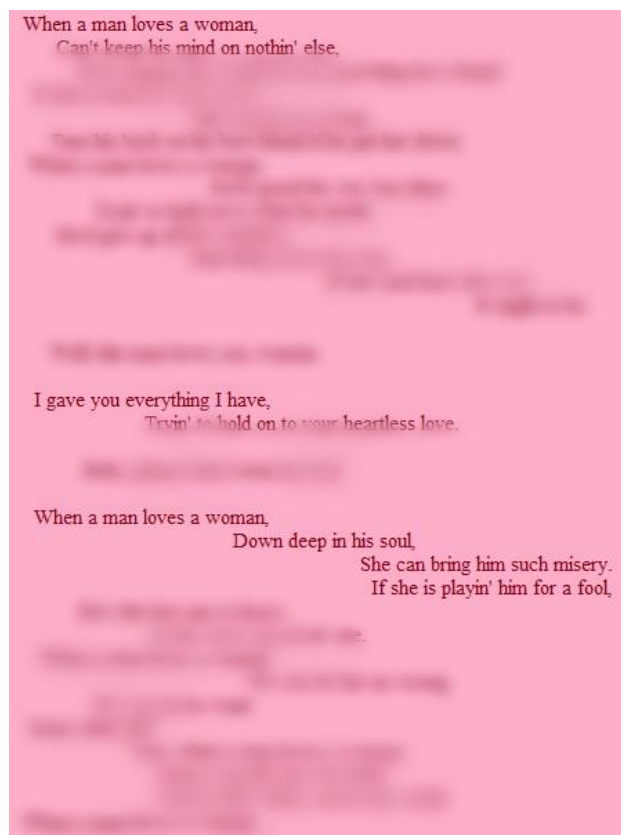
So maybe Elliot Rodger *is* a ‘Colored Sculpture.’ His body was in the throes of hegemonic masculinity, violently thrashing around and violently lashing out. He oscillates to the point of simultaneity between ‘pleasant’ and ‘hateful,’ loving and hating himself, women and other men, speaking of profound loneliness and hatred in beautiful, peaceful settings, and describing sights like couples kissing as ‘insults’ and ‘torture.’

‘Colored Sculpture’ repeats a desire that Rodger desired too: to touch. Wolfson’s work frequently references touch, including the alternating ideas of “touch is love” and “touch is hate,” most prominently featured in (Female figure). ‘Touch’ again is a central idea in ‘Colored Sculpture,’ the animatronic boy speaking the word “touch” specifically, as well as speaking the action of putting a hand on someone (a simultaneous statement, both loving and violent, ‘pleasant’ and ‘hateful’) and putting a hand in someone’s hair (again, simultaneous...).

How I re-read the “fragmented list that alternates pleasant and hateful thoughts about a loved one” (Davis, 2016, para. 5) that emanates from ‘Colored Sculpture,’ in the context of Elliot Rodger, is that rather than each item in the list representing either a ‘pleasant’ or a ‘hateful’ thought about a loved one, each item is simultaneously a ‘pleasant’ and ‘hateful’ thought, embodying the tensions of heteronormative gendered interrelations, steeped in simultaneous desires, destructions and power relations.

Rodger was a young man struggling to navigate an adult (male) world, much like ‘Colored Sculpture’ seems to be (a pubescent boy struggling with ‘love’). Rodger

was fixed in his childhood, still demanding the same social treatment that he received as a child, which he believed was fairer.<sup>102</sup> He remained vehemently opposed to adult life, despite desiring aspects of it, like sex and more a traditionally masculine adult body (although both desired and despised). So much like ‘Colored Sculpture,’ Rodger was a boy chained up by Western masculinity and the constraining narratives of heteronormativity, violently thrust around by it, to the tune of ‘When A Man Loves A Woman,’ a song Rodger would no doubt have identified with.



*In The Meme-Time: Lyrics to ‘When A Man Loves A Woman’ (Lewis & Wright, 1966), in Pink and Smearred Blood with Respect for Copyright Issues.*

While (Female figure) is skewered to a mirror, her movements dictated by algorithms imposed upon her, ‘Colored Sculpture’ thrashes about in open space, kicking

<sup>102</sup> For example: “The peaceful and innocent environment of childhood where everyone had an equal footing was all over” (Rodger, 2014, p. 17), and “Things were getting more intense every year we grew older, and I didn’t want to grow up. I wanted to live the life I was comfortable with. I wanted to live in a world of fairness...” (p. 38).



and punching out even as he is partially restricted by chains and other mechanics. Where (Female figure) questions what ‘woman’ might be and might do from her skewered position, ‘Colored Sculpture’ perhaps asks *how* a man can love a woman skewered, through the thrashing of his own body.

The technometaphor of Panic Architecture re-emerges, to help make sense of the thrashing and the skewer. Elliot Rodger and the incel movement produce a panic architecture of heteronormativity, where the continual attention to the aesthetic and foundational structures of gendered interactions build and maintain the subordination of women as objects/animals.<sup>103</sup> Through continually reasserting and strengthening the binaries like man/woman that establish power, incel/co-alpha movements maintain and transform the dominant heteronormative script into a proliferating yet rigid structure that builds and designs gendered interactions. During the apocalypse of chapter five, the panic architecture of online misogyny extended into offline spaces, producing cartoon rape of cartoon women’s bodies as ‘empowerment’ and ‘boredom.’ Here in chapter nine, heteronormativity as a set of violent practices of gendered power is produced and maintained through the panic architecture of incel/co-alpha movements that continually produce and reproduce the structures of heteronormativity through expansive networks online. They update and update and update gendered interrelations in ways that reassert the binaries that maintain women’s subordination and men’s dominance, both when the script is realised (when the jock-boys get the slut-girls) and when the script is not realised (when the slut-girls are deemed too deficient to make the ‘right’ sexual choices).

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<sup>103</sup> Of course, there are arguments that animals are not animate in the same way humans are, justifying their subordination... that argument feels familiar... another closed loop...

Jordan Peterson, a clinical psychologist, advocates for “enforced monogamy” (Bowles, 2018, para. 31) to prevent ‘incel violence,’<sup>104</sup> lending clinical architectural support to the re-built heteronormative structures and aesthetic designs online. Peterson’s connection into the work adds clinical legitimacy to the aesthetics of heteronormativity (that is, what the structure and design of women’s subordination and men’s dominance looks like) already taking vast and defined shape through extensive connection to and between Rodger’s manifesto and videos, incel/co-alpha movements, commenting and re-sharing. Connections proliferate between misogynist networks that ensure such networks stay live and continue to build and re-build heteronormativity, across massive digital spaces, in ways that subordinate women. The architecture then enables violent structural thrashings, arms and legs that punch and kick out from their fixed mechanical rig. Elliot Rodger’s thrashing body killed and injured, explicit assertions of the binary structures built and re-built through the continual connection and compulsive clicking of the panic architecture of heteronormativity and its masculine-privileging foundations.

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<sup>104</sup> Peterson clarified that he did not mean government-enforced monogamy, by the way. He meant “socially-enforced monogamous conventions” (Peterson, 2018, para. 10).



## A Word on a Word: Desire

Through my research, the term ‘desire’ appears in some places, perhaps not afforded the significance some may feel it should enjoy (the desire for more significant desire!). Desire is complex for a cyborg, perhaps understanding desire through ambivalence and indifference. Ambivalence (the desire for both/all) and indifference (no particular desire for either/all) oscillate, particularly in the impossible feast of technotimes. Ambivalence speaks to the desire for ‘both,’ perhaps in a binary. In ambivalence, the desire for both collapses the boundary between two (and perhaps more), calling into question their separation or distinctness, which in effect can call into question the taken-for-granted categories that classify what is good or bad, healthy or sick, man or woman, dominant or subjugated. In desiring ‘both,’ it is suggested that each is not complete or satisfactory or tolerable on its own; that is, it is partial, perhaps multiple.

Indifference is about no particular desire for ‘either,’ also perhaps in a binary. Such a simultaneity also collapses the binary, rejecting the choice as uninteresting or irrelevant. Thus indifference is also a political space, for denying the interest in the binary is an affront to the discursive significance (in dominant discourse) of categories and demarcations and the violence of the / of the binary. To dominant masculinity, there are few things as important as which side of the / ‘others’ (as has been defined by dominant discourse) sit on. To deny interest in, or the importance of, the binaries (particularly the side on which you are positioned), because you are going to blur them anyway, is perhaps more potent than ambivalence (desiring ‘both’), as the enactment of indifference disrupts, quite violently, the foundation of dominant, masculine, patriarchal discourse in the West: that these binaries, these divisions are of the utmost *importance*. When women in particular refuse to choose either side of a binary, because they desire

‘both’ and/or ‘neither,’ they become dangerous, blurring boundaries and hybridising, through my research at least, with technology and becoming cyborg, a potent political figure that wants ‘both’ and ‘neither’ in order to live, embodied, as multiple and contradictory ‘other.’ If the boundaries between binaries collapse, and dominance/subjugation dissolve, the social/economic/political/cultural structures that rest upon these binaries are dismantled, and that might be terrifying, except to a cyborg.

So ‘desire’ has the capacity to bring woman back to the violent heterosexual matrix that classifies her: “In masculinist sexual orders, woman is not a subject separated from the product of her life-shaping activity; her problem is much worse. She is a projection of another’s desire...” (Haraway, 1995, p. 84). Re-thinking taken-for-granted (masculine) understandings of ‘desire’ as a tether tying women psychoanalytically to the heterosexual matrix, where “desire and power, symbolically speaking, are one” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 81), might re-route desire through the compulsion to enact power that asserts the gendered binaries, where “to satisfy deep structures of desire in the sex/gender system in which men exchange women, heterosexuality is obligatory. Obligatory heterosexuality is therefore central to the oppression of women” (Haraway, 2001, p. 58). Masculine desire could then be understood as the compulsion to keep obligatory the heterosexual matrix through the panic architectural maintenance of heteronormativity, asserting the binaries that maintain patriarchal power and shape and control women’s bodies. Regulating “desire under such circumstances is a constant, ongoing problem that plays itself out on the body” (Urla & Swedlund, 2008, p. 238): women’s bodies violently shaped through violent gendered interactions that assert rigid, fixed binaries.

Like Haraway (1991), Malabou (2001) and Grosz (1994) suggest women might be configured differently outside of the heterosexual matrix, Benjamin (1986) suggests

we find alternatives to the phallic structures that might shape desire as masculine (and women ‘lacking’ such desire/power). Undoing the binaries and re-doing women and concepts like the uncanny in theoretical movements away from the reproduction of those heterosexual origin stories that produce gender and sex differences is critical cyborg work. When desire is structured through these man-woman binaries and woman is subjugated, she has no desire. Feminine desire could instead be reconfigured as the compulsion to expand beyond the heterosexual matrix through networks that dismantle binaries and re-route power, building fictional architecture of women’s embodiment that tests out new bodies and politics characterised by ambivalence, indifference and potent political excesses. When women are networked out of the binaries, even partially, ‘she’ might find a connection that could be considered ‘desire’ that perhaps feels a little like a Weaver, sewing and snipping, privileging aesthetics; desire as compulsion towards a multiple and contradictory artful worldweave: “In more innocent times, long, long ago, such a desire to be worldly was called activism. I prefer to call these desires and practices by the names of the entire, open array of feminist, multicultural, antiracist technoscience projects” (Haraway, 1994, p. 62).

So ‘desire,’ through the cyborg, becomes a multiple, partial and contradictory term, oscillating between compulsion for the heterosexual matrix, and the compulsion to configure beyond it. For Todd (1986) Freud’s theorisation of the uncanny rests upon the “... convergence of opposite meanings in a single word...” (p. 520). While Freud’s word was “heimlich” – “Thus heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich” (Freud, 1919, p. 4) – desire could be considered a memetic sibling of ‘heimlich’ where multiple and partial meanings converge in a word that is by no means singular. As the meaning of ‘heimlich’ fluctuates between home and homeliness, familiarity, intimacy and

secrecy (Freud, 1919), the meaning of ‘desire’ shifts through contradictory but converging gendered politics of the body; the simultaneous compulsion towards and out from the heterosexual matrix. A ‘matrix’ also fluctuates in meanings between a container of situations or substances, a mould, a substance that binds, a womb, a network (see “Matrix,” 2018), transforming meanings from bounded containment (of situations, circumstances and substances – like bodies?) to expansive connectivity (through networks). Desire, if women are to ever have any of their own, needs a multiple reconfiguration that embodies the multiplicities, partialities, simultaneities and contradictions of their multiple, partial, simultaneous and contradictory positions, politics and bodies. I am embraced by an image of a cyborg taking a Red Pill and a Blue Pill at the same time, chewing on them both for a while, only to spit them both back out in a sticky purple mess.

## Chapter Ten: Human Barbie



*In The Meme-Time: You Can Be Anything.*

Popular culture is teeming with women-objects who exceed their patriarchal wiring and enact terrifying violences. In HBO's 'Westworld,' host<sup>105</sup> women 'awaken' (like Sophia wants to...) and lead the host rebellion against humans. In the 2014 movie 'Ex Machina,' Ava, an android woman, achieves awakened intelligence and, with some help from her sister, violently removes the threat to her safety and agency: her creator. While shows like 'Westworld' and movies like 'Ex Machina' invite questions about how *non*-android women are treated, they also raise questions about the replication and

<sup>105</sup> 'Host' is the show's term for an android.



repetition of the violences enacted on women's bodies on their uncanny technodoubles. 'Ex Machina' might be warning us about the production of docile women's bodies that are life-like, but not alive (Henke, 2017), a warning that perhaps needs some attention given the proliferating demand for and accessibility of increasingly life-like sex dolls (see [www.realdoll.com](http://www.realdoll.com)), and sex robots (see [www.realbotix.com](http://www.realbotix.com)). Sex dolls are rapidly progressing from plastic to robotic, with doll companies competing to produce artificially intelligent, programmable dolls that respond to touch (Sciortino, 2018; Sweeny, 2017). Such dolls, however, have already been sexually harassed – a prototype was mauled at an electronics festival (Nichols, 2017) – and programmed for rape. True Companion's sex robot allows users to choose from 5 different personalities, including 'Young Yoko,' a sexually inexperienced only-just-18-year-old, and 'Frigid Farah' who does not always want to have sex (Maras & Shapiro, 2017). Similarly, Realbotix's Harmony AI is an app that allows users to programme their sex robot in similar detail to the programming of the hosts of 'Westworld' by assigning values to particular traits including sexual shyness amounting to non-consent ([www.realbotix.com](http://www.realbotix.com); Sciortino, 2018; Sweeny, 2017).

Such technological leaps in robotic women of course converge with the potential production of child sex robots,<sup>106</sup> which poses legal and ethical questions about Sweetie's role as digital child-bait for catching sex offenders online (see Ray, 2014; Stone, 2015) and the use of facsimiles (uncanny doubles?) to bear the brunt of sexual violence. Robotic rape has become a critical ethical issue with the burgeoning sex robot industry connecting exponentially with keen customers through the internet. There are burgeoning academic arguments that robots probably cannot be raped (Eskens, 2017),

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<sup>106</sup> That is, beyond the already-in-production versions of real dolls that are made to look like young girls (see Maras & Shapiro, 2017; Sweeny, 2017).

robots are definitely raped (Sparrow, 2017), and that we should at least think about robot consent (Frank & Nyholm, 2017), while others have assumed that robots will be raped and are asking if robot rape should be criminalised (Danaher, 2017). Sophia, the hoping-to-be-awakened robot, is now a citizen of Saudi Arabia, not uncontroversially (see Maza, 2017). While it remains unclear what rights she actually has, it is all-too-possible that should Sophia report a sexual assault in Saudi Arabia, she might expect healthcare and legal services.<sup>107</sup> Would she receive them?

The problem of ‘deep fakes’ (or ‘deepfakes’) also challenges ideas about the doubled and redoubled woman, the commodified woman’s body and her capacities for consent. ‘Deep fakes’ are videos that engage advanced, and now readily accessible, technologies to produce extremely realistic video replications of human bodies and faces. The technology has been used, of course, to superimpose particularly celebrity women’s faces over porn actresses’ faces and manipulating them to create faked but realistic pornographic videos (Henry, Powell & Flynn, 2018). The technology opens a market for made-to-order pornography that swaps out original faces and replaces them with whatever face (or even body) you might like. Celebrity women have been the initial targets, and journalistic investigations by Motherboard less than a month apart (See Cole 2017; 2018) demonstrate the speed at which the technologies proliferate, becoming more sophisticated and more available to the average user to create their own videos, or make videos to order, using the faces and bodies of non-celebrity women: their partners, their ex-partners, their neighbours, women they see on the street. Women’s bodies are viewed through a (digital) telescope that renders them (in multiple senses) horrifyingly animate objects, ‘natural’ and technological and *indestructible* in

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<sup>107</sup> Although, as she travels the world as a woman, learning, she might already know how sexual assault allegations are typically handled... (see Jordan, 2015).

the sense their plastic endures rough play and *indestructible* in the sense that a woman's body is always replaceable with another woman's body fresh off the production line. Women may well have become unrapable through the chaos of 'consent' and coercion (Gavey, 2005); technology may be rendering them an *unhurttable product*. The compulsion for 'natural' but mechanical and robust femininity, where the feminine responses are 'spontaneous' and predictable – “Oh, Oh!” yells Olympia (Hoffmann, 2016, p. 40) – suggests an ambivalence about the object: the desire for women's 'natural' responses, controlled and dominated; produced, manufactured, standardised and replaceable.



Barcodes are a ubiquitous technology in the modern West. They are typically attached to products we buy. The Oxford Dictionary definition of a 'barcode' is: "...a machine-readable code in the form of numbers and a pattern of parallel lines of varying widths, printed on a commodity and used especially for stock control" ("Barcode," 2018). So barcodes hold vital statistics for the commodity that they represent as lines and numbers, the codified reduction of a commodity to its most important elements and features. A barcode tells us what a product is and its value. The code containing the product information is printed onto the product or its packaging, defining it and marking it with its worth. Barcodes are then scanned, through scanning technologies, in order to read these features of the product, informing us about the product, its usefulness and its value, so that we can consider buying it.

Barcodes also help us with stock control: how many do we have? Do we need more? Are there too many? Should we reduce or increase their price? The barcode

allows us to access how much there is of a commodity, and whether that may influence its availability and worth.

Barcodes are quick, economical codes to unambiguously (supposedly) identify products (Ausubel, Stoeckle & Waggoner, 2008). Due to their speed and economy, barcodes “gain power because digital beats analogue at making unambiguous distinctions” (Ausubel, Stoeckle & Waggoner, 2008, para. 4). A barcode is a technology of power. Its coding inscribes meaning and defines parameters for a commodity. It defines a commodity to its minimum identifiable features and codes these features into a universally readable series of vertical lines not unlike DNA sequencing (Ausubel, Stoeckle & Waggoner, 2008).<sup>108</sup>

So, barcodes are vital to the functioning of capitalist consumerism. Commodities, in large amounts, need to be reduced to their standard features and codified for the ease of trading and distributing them, for maximum profit. Scanning a barcode allows for quicker and easier information gathering, organisation and distribution than interrogating each product to find out what it is, where it is going and what its price might be. As such, barcodes have levels that help unambiguously categorise commodities:

- 1) Manufacturer
- 2) Product line
- 3) Serial number (Ausubel, Stoeckle & Waggoner, 2008).

The benefits of barcoding have extended to the organisation and codification of people. Hospitals and government agencies use barcodes and serial numbers to organise personal files. A multitude of organisations from insurance companies to supermarkets codify who we are by serialised numbers and barcodes. I have a student ID number and

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<sup>108</sup> DNA sequencing does have similar goals: to understand the universal features of DNA and understanding the meaning of those features in the material world. A DNA sequence is a code for some sort of biological feature or set of features.

a barcode. These numbers hold information about who I am and what I am doing. They can grant or deny me access to resources.

If we can be codified for insurance, medicine and study, can bodies themselves can be codified as barcodes? As a barcode body, information can be inscribed upon you and provided by you when you are scanned. A body produced, crafted and disciplined with a certain amount of hair/fat/makeup/muscle/skin colour might be coded as an 'ideal' body, one of value – both socially (more social rewards) and economically (spending more money and buying more products to construct the more valuable body) (Bartky, 1998). Information is stored in inscribed barcode bodies, ready to be scanned by those who need/want to read you, and use the information that your coding supplies in order to know what your use is, how much you are worth and what exactly you are.

Barcodes, as a technometaphor, could help us interrogate what it means to be a body commodity. Barcode users, like people, inscribe the meanings onto barcodes; barcodes do not code themselves. Sometimes your barcode has been coded incorrectly, an error code entered. But you will be scanned anyway. Being a barcode means embodying compact, easily stored and easily read information reducible to varying widths of lines. Everything you need to know about a product or commodity can be stored and read from a barcode. Barcode becomes a technometaphor to understand the reductionism of capitalist commodities and how this reductionism shapes Western bodies. Barcodes are codes for people's worth as citizens: how much of them is there and what is it worth?

For human commodity bodies, the level of manufacturer recorded in the barcode, through technometaphor, is culture. Companies make and build particular commodities. So based on the particular type of company (culture), a particular type of product is manufactured. The level of product line, through the technometaphor, is

gender, where information about the human product line is codified through the categories of ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine.’ The level of the serial number, through the technometaphor, is the individual. The individual product/body is identified by a serial number (the individualised code for a particular product (Ausubel, Stoeckle & Waggoner, 2008)), so a human commodity is also coded at an individual level. The body, and its parts, are coded according to their discipline, taking into account the diversity of the human body as a product, but still coding and classifying in order to organise, identify and efficiently communicate meaning.

Based on the sum of all these levels, the worth of the product can be calculated. A higher-end manufacturer produces products with a higher-end price. The materials used are assigned higher value, and the desirability and usefulness of the product increases the value even more, making particular product lines more valuable based on their composition and their use. So a price, an evaluation of worth, based on these levels inscribed on barcodes can be assigned to a particular commodity. A barcode provides this information instantaneously.

But prices and worth, can shift rapidly. A product inscribed with more value can find itself no longer of as much value as it once was due to shifts in trends, over-stocking/over-production or the rejection of the product/the materials it is made of. New advances in technologies can also replace older products, with easier to use and cheaper materials and streamlined production techniques. In the same way, the value of body commodities shifts fluidly and rapidly, with particular bodies at particular points in time being more valuable than others – for example, the flux in ideal woman’s body shape over history (Gordon, 2000). With the barcoded reduction to the important, ‘unambiguously’ valuable features, the worth of bodies, while ever in flux, can still be quickly and efficiently calculated. So the barcode technometaphor enables an

understanding of Western reductionism for interpreting a body commodity (sick, healthy or otherwise) in universal language that can be coded for ease of access and communication. The efficient control over stock is the goal.

## Barcoding Human Barbie

Valeria Lukyanova is a Ukrainian spiritual leader/alien/model/beauty queen/disc jockey/singer/actress<sup>109</sup> also known as the Human Barbie. Her body replicates a Barbie™ doll's through the use of make-up, diets, Instagram filters and surgery, although she confesses only to breast implants, and refutes allegations of the digital surgery known as photoshop (see Idov, 2017; Wischhover, 2015).

Lukyanova emerged in the West through a blog article on website Jezebel.com (see Barry, 2012) that propelled Lukyanova through the Western internet. Soon after the Jezebel blog post, V Magazine interviewed Lukyanova with an accompanying photoshoot (see Sandberg, 2012). The following year, Vice debuted a documentary where Lukyanova was interviewed and followed around as she performed her daily duties – spiritual encounters and photoshoots (Vice, 2013<sup>110</sup>). She became known as Human Barbie, despite not much liking the label herself (Wischhover, 2015). Instead, Lukyanova claims to be the reincarnation of an alien called Amatue who has come to

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<sup>109</sup> Lukyanova stars in an American movie called 'The Doll,' in which she portrays a Satanic, murderous, enlivened Frankenstein's monster-esque doll (see O'Brien, 2017). Two young men hire her as an escort for a week after one of them breaks up with his girlfriend. Long story short, Human Barbie brutally murders multiple people, usually with a knitting needle, and harvests their organs on behalf of her Frankenstein-esque creator. He seems to need the organs to build more murdering dolls...

<sup>110</sup> In late 2017, it was revealed that Vice, a media company that specialises in investigative technology journalism and the politics of the 'othered,' was a hostile work environment for women (see Zadrozny, 2017). While the company promotes itself as 'progressive,' its practices are, unsurprisingly, highly gendered and oppressive of women. My use then of Vice documentaries and other journalism becomes even more fraught than I imagined. Their content has always been white and masculine, but with at least the pretence of some form of progressive (white, male) politics (much like Anonymous, but seemingly more reflexive). The production of content/knowledge at the expense of women is ubiquitous.

this planet to help humans become demi-gods through out-of-body experiences (Vice, 2013).

Perhaps the best way to acquaint ourselves with Human Barbie is to scan her barcode. The lines of her body in effect become the lines of a barcode that communicate to us her explicit production of the Western female body commodity:



*Level 1: Primary Producer =*

**Western Culture**

Western culture is the primary producer of

Human Barbie. Her image and the images she references are produced through Western cultural ideals, and produce a socially, historically and culturally located body.

*Level 2: Manufacturer =*

**Femininity**

In particular, Barbie™ and Human Barbie are productions of idealised Western femininity and particular ideas about what it means to be an ideal Western woman.

*Level 3: Production Line =*

**Barbie™**

Human Barbie is a Barbie™ production. She mimics Barbie™'s body shape and styling. She is producing a specifically Barbie™ body and embodiment.

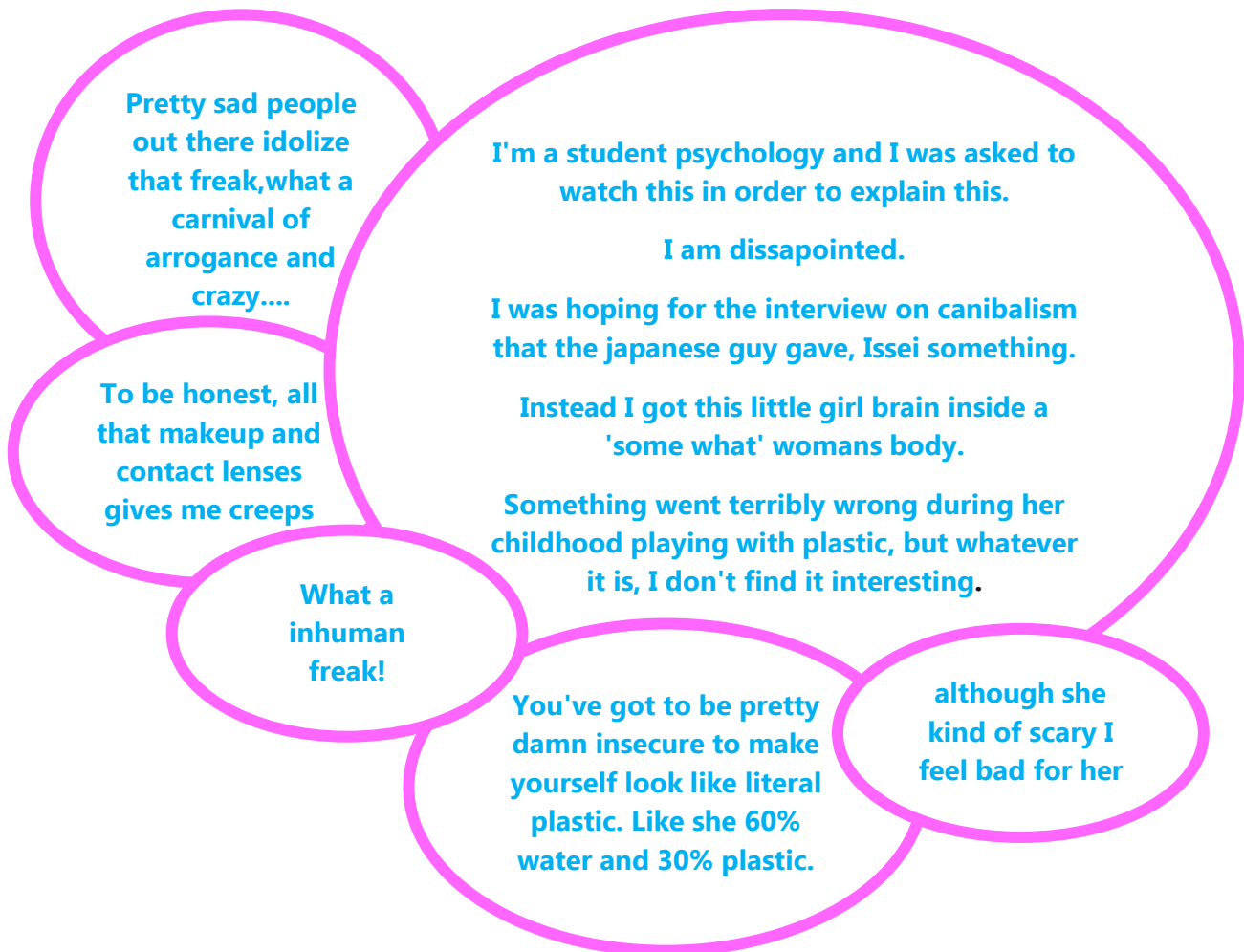
*Level 4: Individual =*

**Image**

Individual images of Human Barbie produce her in particular ways, whether she engaged in a typically Barbie™-esque image or whether she is dressed up in her alien persona (much as Barbie™ dresses up in the garb of her various occupations and hobbies).

But Human Barbie's value is contentious. Technically, Human Barbie is coded as an accurate production of the 'ideal' white Western woman's body. Yet her body is treated with suspicion, its adherence to and *uncanny replication* of a plastic idealised doll body is repeatedly constructed as representing freakery and mental illness. YouTube comments on her Vice (2013) documentary include:





And comments on Lukyanova's Facebook photos often challenge authenticity of the photos and thus the authenticity of her body:



Scanning her body as we would a barcode, then, does not give us all the information that we need about her body. A scan of her body is inadequate; her body not reducible to the technical specifications that might define its worth as a commodity. Human Barbie achieves all of what Western women are required to do in order to achieve Western femininity; and yet her body is ascribed ‘freak’ or not-real status; the “conundrum of somatic femininity that female bodies are never feminine enough, that they must be deliberately and oftentimes painfully remade to be what ‘nature’ intended – a condition dramatically accentuated under consumer capitalism...” (Urla & Swedlund, 2008, p. 231), but when such feminine bodies are actually achieved, they horrify. Human Barbie’s body achieves what magazine retouchers are paid to do to Western women’s bodies on a daily basis, and more, yet viewers of her body respond with vehement assertions of mental illness, freakery and fakery.

Bodies as commodities cannot be communicated through barcoding, as much as reductionist Western capitalism seeks to reduce humanness to these easily communicated and universal systems of codification. Bodies like that of Human Barbie’s ensure the disruption of these ideas of universality, fixed meanings and the body as something that can be quantified in terms of worth. Technically, as Human Barbie’s body is so explicitly a spectacular production of Western femininity, she should be coded as an extremely valuable body commodity. But instead she exceeds the barcode, drawing attention to the absurdity of the codes for Western, feminine ideals.

There are some other technical specifications for Human Barbie as a commodity that are not necessarily coded through her body, as she discusses in her infamous 2014

interview with GQ Magazine (Idov, 2017<sup>111</sup>). Through the interview, Human Barbie confirms she is:

- Anti-feminist
- Anti-children and married
- Explicitly racist
- Alien

While being anti-feminist probably works in Human Barbie's favour (she has confirmed her anti-feminism in other interviews (see Cosmopolitan, 2015)), being anti-children while married potentially breaks-up the lines in the barcoding. In her GQ interview, she states:

*" The very idea of having children brings out this deep revulsion in me "* (Idov, 2017, para. 20).

*" I'd rather die from torture... because the worst thing in the world is to have a family lifestyle "* (para. 22).

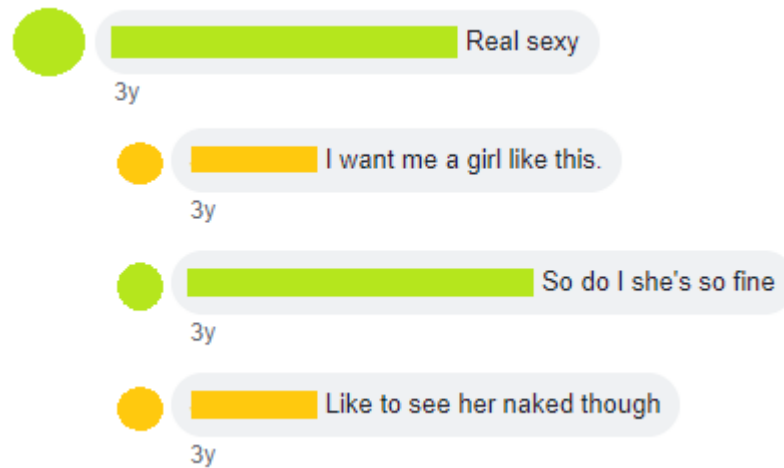
*" ...what would you keep the children for? So they can get you a glass of water when you're on your deathbed? "* (para. 22).

She disrupts the binary of the man-hating feminist and the traditional obedient wife. Her disgust with child-bearing cannot be coded as feminist corruption! Yet she cannot be coded as a traditional obedient wife and the pinnacle embodiment of femininity if she refuses to be a mother. To be fair, Barbie™ has not had children either, leaving that controversy to her friend Midge (see Associated Press, 2002).

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<sup>111</sup> The interview was originally conducted in 2014, but the online version has since been moved around and now gives a 2017 date.

It is also difficult to code Human Barbie as a sex object due to both her status as a married woman (and therefore perceived as unavailable, presumably?) and as a representation of a child's toy, although both her married status and her toy-like status seem not much of an obstacle for sexual pleasure as evidenced through comments on her Facebook photos:



Human Barbie also disrupts her coding as a 'responsible liberal white citizen in the modern world' by willingly and unabashedly sharing her racist text. Explicit racism does not fit the liberal white West's *branding*, nor does it fit with the Barbie™ *branding*, even if practices are to the contrary. Mattel has a history of commodifying 'other' cultures for mass production, producing, for example, black and Asian friends for Barbie™ with racially stylised facial features, clothes and catch-phrases (duCille, 2003). As duCille (2003) points out, Barbie™ enjoys her Western complexity (she works, she plays, she has a change of clothes) whereas her non-white friends are typically reduced to features that mark them as different and stereotype them; caricatures of race that exoticise. Human Barbie's assertion that the genetic mixing of races produces ugly people (see Idov, 2017) might not really be that off-brand for Mattel's Barbie™, as her thin, blond, whiteness is productive of normative femininity and beauty (Deliovsky, 2008).

Human Barbie's assertion that she is a reincarnated alien from another time also makes it somewhat impossible (for some) to code her as credible and serious. But it does allow for her to be coded as 'freak' beyond just her body. Comments on her interviews and photos (as presented earlier) resolve Human Barbie's uncanny contradictions into freakery, fakery and/or mental illness.<sup>112</sup> Her claims of alien spirituality can make it difficult to even code her as human. Such claims, however, could be coded as valid, in the context of other legitimated spiritualities that may make us uncomfortable – for example, Scientology, a religion founded on the stories/beliefs of science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard featuring aliens and intergalactic warfare, enjoys the tax-exempt status of 'legitimate' religions (Reitman, 2011).

While Human Barbie's hyperfeminine body (in the Barbie™ sense; remember both Human Barbie and Barbie™ have refused to become mothers) epitomises the idealised Western woman's body, the shape it mimics emerged, not unlike the cyborg, from the patriarchal military-industrial complex. Barbie™'s plastic mould was designed by a missile maker through the technowarfare advances of the Cold War:

... with fears of nuclear annihilation and sexually charged fantasies of the perfect bomb shelter running rampant in the American imaginary, that Barbie and her torpedo-like breasts emerged into popular culture as an emblem of the aspirations of prosperity, domestic containment and rigid gender roles that were to characterise the burgeoning post-war consumer economy and its image of the American dream. (Urla & Swedlund, 2008, p. 232)

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<sup>112</sup> I do not suggest that the mentally ill have not been 'othered' as 'freaks,' but separate the two to distinguish between the constructions of the dismissible and revolting 'freak' ('freak not otherwise specified') and the somewhat pitiable mentally ill 'freak' ('the diagnosable freak').

Barbie™'s body indeed was built through the industrial streamlining technologies demanded by global warfare, producing a comforting hyperfeminine woman's body for young girls to play with and aspire to, and the West to idealise and idolise, that could also be barcoded as a war body. Human Barbie also emerged through technological times characterised by war and rapid social advancement. She was allegedly born in 1985 (see Sowray 2014), the same year Haraway wrote her manifesto for cyborgs, and has emerged online through the 2010s characterised by global technologised warfare and dramatic increases in the accessibility to more and more technological advances for global citizens. Another war body for war times.

Human Barbie's many un-barcodable disruptions are possible because her body communicates in a network, not through coding and classification. Her body cannot be scanned and understood by a universal system of representations. Her body cannot be reduced to technical specifications that can be used to calculate her body's worth. Her networked body allows for multiple connections to and representations of Human Barbie as a technocitizen with a living barcode, one that regenerates and degrades as she moves through a network of Western power. As such, texts about Human Barbie, and the confusion she creates, can be seen as Consumer Guides, with instructions with how to deal with her specifications and the dangers of her particular product line, and how to operate Human Barbie as a cultural artefact. She is perhaps in kinship with (Female figure), who is just as confounding for these same contradictions. Human Barbie, can be read as exploring possible ways to build and reconfigure women and their bodies through technology, fictionalising the architectural structures that might shape and support women and their bodies in more potent aesthetically political ways. Human Barbie is a prolific builder and re-builder of her body – surgically, digitally, politically – testing the plasticity of her body's capacity for alien politics (quite literally) that

simultaneously participates at the extreme in the binaries of the heterosexual matrix, dissolves the same binaries, and builds ‘other’ embodiment that exceeds ‘human’ but not necessarily ‘woman.’ Human Barbie becomes then a contradictory ally/anti-hero in the story of my research as simultaneously a hyperembodiment of feminist critique of compulsory femininity and heterosexuality and as a *harbinger* of anti-feminist violence against women’s bodies through technology that might render women’s bodies terrifyingly indestructible.

### “Imagine That You Are Mourning”<sup>113</sup>



*In The Meme-Time: Possibly Mistranslated Femme Fatales*  
(see Lukyanova, 2013, para. 10).

The idea of a freak show could be understood as “... attesting to what is and is not tolerable or incorporable into normality” (Grosz, 1996, p. 56). The internet is a modern day freak show: bodies on display to arouse interest and disgust; to entertain and do serious work defining and challenging boundaries (of gender, of bodies, of what counts as human). A freakish example is Human Barbie, who embodies, to the extreme,

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<sup>113</sup> In the Vice (2013) ‘Space-Barbie’ documentary, Valeria Lukyanova helps her younger sister, a doll protégé, take a good photo by telling her not to smile, but to imagine that she is in mourning.

a Barbie™ form, producing her body as an idealised spectacle. A burgeoning example is the phenomenon of revenge porn, where images of (mainly) women – taken against their will or otherwise, consented to or otherwise, are shared online by (mainly) men (McGlynn, Rackley & Houghton, 2017) – are displayed in little boxes on computer screens for the disgusted amusement of interested onlookers. A mundane example is the global participation in social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram where we are displayed for consumption; digitally performing for crowds; enjoying/despising not only the performances of others, but also the praise/abuse virtually hurled at us for our own performances.

However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, entering the freak show is an imperative: if you do not participate, you are also a freak. It is rare that a Western individual human being does not have some form of social media, whether it be email, Facebook or an account on a porn website (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Not having a Facebook account appears to be so freakish that only one study to date has been conducted on the phenomenon (see Fiebert, Wang & Warren, 2018). The ubiquity of technological privileges also masks the complexities of the digital divide, where the rich-poor gap widens as the poor cannot afford the technologies of modern life that provide social, political and economic opportunities (van Dijk, 2012). Those living in poverty and cannot afford to participate in the technoworld can also then be produced freakish.<sup>114</sup>

For those who do attend the internet freak show, the freakery then comes not from the willingness to set up a stall or stage, but from the performance. Women, for example, are judged for performance of gender: breasts, bums, bellies, hips, hair, whore.

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<sup>114</sup> The complexities of the digital divide are critical, as the internet is rolled out and made more accessible even in poverty-stricken areas, technology becomes a tool through which to make money, creating exploitative and dangerous technology-poverty connections for women and children (Howell, 2016).



Whether gender is performed perfectly (whatever this means) or poorly (whatever that means), the performance is always met with the same responses: love/hate. For Grosz (1996), the freak “is not an object of *simple* admiration or pity, but is a being who is considered simultaneously and compulsively fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening” (p. 56), loved and hated at the same time, for the same reasons. Such a point of contradiction seems a fitting place for (Female figure) to interrupt yet again. Through her performance (both in her installation and its replications through videos online), (Female figure) muses about love and hate, telling us that to ‘touch’ is both loving and hateful. Digital social and political performances, and the connections such performances can proliferate, are characterised by ‘love’ (the rewards for producing a participating body) and ‘hate’ (the derision for how the body participates).

Human Barbie’s body politics focus on the ‘freakery’ of her body as an attention-grabber: “Freakiness as an affirmation of physiological dissidence stirs both fascination and repulsion...” (Lindsay, 1996, p. 360). Human Barbie relies on the simultaneous fascination and repulsion for her politics of vision (being seen) and spirituality (being alien). In her Vice (2013) documentary, she suggests that people do not listen to nuns, but they listen to and think about beautiful women. While some might blasphemously argue that nuns also perform a kind of freakery, Valeria Lukyanova seeks to exploit the feminine ideal most exemplified in Western dolls (Barbie™ or sex). Taking up the position of doll (pretty, plastic and unthinking) while simultaneously presenting herself as a hyper-thinker (politically and spiritually) produces an uncanny effect of an aware doll, perhaps performing the Olympia trick all over again! While the image of a living doll is confronting, a living doll who explains she lives because of (or perhaps rather, in spite of) particular impossible measures of femininity is a further challenge to ‘reality.’ Such a challenge produces a familiar experience of the uncanny as

Olympia; the object of masculine desire refigured through a telescope and supreme example of feminine perfection, ideally and horrifyingly plastic. While Olympia turns out to be a life-like automaton, Lukyanova turns out to be a doll-like philosopher. Such a switcheroo seems to be a particularly cruel trick for those men who both desire women to be unthinking (so as to not unravel the fabric of hierarchical, patriarchal, heterosexual ‘reality’) and also require some form of animation from the woman-object (from the ‘ohs’ of Olympia to the compliant resistance that Reddit users who frequent StruggleFucking might be looking for, a life-like but not a *lively* object).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are surrounded by synthetic representations of women and their bodies more so than ever before. Make-up, photoshopping, surgery, body-trickery products and so on present us with images of women’s bodies that we may have forgotten are uncanny. A disquieting problem that Lukyanova and her Barbie™ body challenges is the ubiquity of synthetic representations of women and the imposition of those synthetic representations onto women’s flesh. Images of women, from celebrity and model magazine spreads to movies and TV to Instagram to politician billboards, are almost always re-touched in some way. Skin is smoothed, ‘imperfections’ removed, bodies re-shaped, just like the production of Barbie™ dolls, sex dolls and other manufactured women. Women, celebrity or otherwise, are expected to produce flawless images of themselves that conform to Barbie™-esque standards of femininity (see Bartky, 1998), replicating the barcode, scanning themselves into the system. Typically, these flawless images cannot be produced without technological aids like photoshop, as women’s bodies do not typically occur as they do in plastic. ‘Waist trainers,’ the modern corset, are becoming popularised through women like the reality TV Kardashian sisters promoting the contraptions as one of the many products they use to produce their (in)famous bodies (Kinney, 2017). The open Kardashian use of corsets to

achieve impossible waists to match their impossible boobs and butts blurs the boundaries between the real and the not-real by simultaneously presenting their bodies as both totally natural and highly mediated, synthesised through technology.

Quite specifically, one member of the Kardashian ensemble has obliterated her previous body in favour of a new one. Kylie Jenner is a younger half-sister to the three Kardashian sisters. She shares a mother with the Kardashian trio, but her father is former athlete Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner – please see Buysse et al. (2018) if you care for more detail on the Kardashian family). Her full-sister, Kendall Jenner, is a fashion model and ‘thinspiration’ to pro-anorexia communities for her very thin physique (Cobb, 2016). Kylie, however, has transformed her body and face from its Kendall-like form to a facsimile of her half-sisters’ features. Her very public transformation, and insinuations that she has had little intervention to achieve such a transformation beyond make-up, push-up bras and puberty, have activated internet body detectives looking for surgical clues (for example, Dabiero, 2018).

Kylie Jenner provides an interesting sister to Valeria Lukyanova, as both have synthesised alternative bodies in ways that are made multiple and unclear through technology: “... the freak is an *ambiguous* being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life” (Grosz, 1996, p. 57) – defying categorisation and blurring boundaries are political acts performed by uncanny freaks like cyborgs. Both Lukyanova and Jenner refute most accusations of surgical and technological interventions, admitting to one or two procedures, but largely playing seriously with the reality/non-reality of how images of their bodies come to be through mundane technologies like make-up and clothing that exaggerates facial features and body shapes. Yet, while many view Lukyanova as uncanny and/or grotesque, Kylie Jenner makes millions of dollars as a trendsetter. Lukyanova’s explicit taking up of doll-hood

(the unabashed celebration of doll-bodies as peak femininity) and alien inter-dimensional spirituality (challenging gender constructions by simultaneously appearing as the pinnacle of Western feminine achievement and offering multi-dimensional cosmic space that dissolves gender) seems to render her as a dismissible, creepy freak; whereas Jenner's differently doll-like appearance and performances are based in the alien lifestyles of the rich and famous: an acceptable and aspirational form of extra<sup>115</sup>-terrestrial living.

Perhaps we could mourn the fatal beauty of the production of Kylie Jenner's body. While Lukyanova cultivates her body for political-religious purposes (well, at least some of the time...), Jenner's body seems produced through a potentially traumatic connection to technology. Her youth has been digitally broadcast to the world; comparisons to her famous sisters constantly over the course of most of her life amplified by a technophilic family in a technophilic West. So *unheimlich* in her body she overhauls it, rebuilding it into something 'better,' re-formatting its features for a more 'pleasant' *interface*. Side-by-side before and after photos of Jenner are disruptive – while the trace of the before image is still visible, it is faint and uncanny, like Nathaniel gazing at Olympia through his telescope, her old features clockworked but not alive. Jenner's now-face and now-body appear cloned from her half-sisters' as if a Snapchat filter had quite literally been applied to Jenner's flesh and bones, cinching them in and pulling them out in all the right Kardashian places: rotoscoping over perceived biological errors, fictionalising the architecture of her body. The commodification of the Kardashian family has extended beyond branded products and TV marketing to reproductions of the Kardashian form not only for the much poorer

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<sup>115</sup> Being 'extra' is a term all the cool kids are using to describe unnecessarily over-the-top behaviour (see "Extra," 2003).

masses, but for those within the family who have the means (genetic and financial) to re-build a base body (in 'Westworld' terms, a drone host) into an already tried-and-tested successful model. With a scan of a barcode, your drone host could be built into whatever body you want for whatever purpose you want it for.

The experience of viewing Jenner's body is not typically described as 'uncanny' (as far as I can tell), perhaps in large part due to her synthetic appearance being congruent with understandings of her synthetic celebrity life (the fabricated world of reality TV and celebrity make-up lines). Her freakery is perhaps within the bounds of the new digital normalcy. Of course, the reconfiguration of women's bodies is normalised as they move through puberty, adulthood, pregnancies and so on. The total technological reconstruction of a woman's body becoming normalised, however, is relatively new, as is the ubiquity of the images of reconstructed women that contributes to normalising rotoscoped women's bodies. Around every corner and even in our homes, digitally built women occupy space, whether on food packaging, in magazines, on TV or in camera rolls in our phones. We rarely think about just how *uncanny* that is, to be surrounded by, and producing our own, not only doubles, but triples, quadruples... Perhaps the creepiest thing about being surrounded by multiples of women is how these multiples converge into that singular scannable barcode for Western femininity:

Unlike feminist understandings of an inessential body, which envision an increased acceptance of difference, these cults of the body work toward an idealized final referent. If they signal a radical redefinition of bodily appearance, it is not towards a new acceptance of physical difference and variety, but rather toward replicating a single fetishized ideal. (Adams, 1996, p. 283)

Human Barbie, and perhaps Kylie Jenner, present us with an uncanny image of Western femininity that is becoming disturbingly normal: “The freak, in other words, is the projection of what culture fears most about itself” (Peterson, 1996, p. 291), but nevertheless embodies both normal and abnormal, heimlich and unheimlich. The extreme reconfiguration of women’s bodies (whether seemingly mundane through make-up, or spectacular through boob jobs, butt implants and grinding down bones) both re-does them as more ‘homely’ (in the Freudian sense) and more ‘unhomely,’ reducing or producing ‘feminine excesses,’ like Human Barbies and women who shape-shift even more than Holli Wood.

So such extreme consumption of the extreme reconfiguring of women’s bodies provokes questions about how categories construed as so distinct are dissolving into a chilling, excessive feminine goop:

The freak confirms the viewer is bounded, belonging to a “proper” social category. The viewer’s horror lies in the recognition that this monstrous being is at the heart of his or her own identity, for it is all that must be ejected or objected from self-image to make the bounded, category-obeying self possible.

(Grosz, 1996, p. 65)

But what happens then when we are both (techno)freak and (techno)freak-viewer, with boundaries so permeable they no longer constitute separations?

I return to the question of the violence rendered on women’s bodies: the indestructible body of Holli Wood and her animatronic spawn, (Female figure), now in kinship with Human Barbie, Kylie Jenner and women’s bodies inflicted with digital sexual violence. What kind of sympathy do we have for such plastic bodies and how indestructible these bodies might be in response to continued violent shapings?

When asked about the process of creating his ‘Real Violence’ virtual reality project, Jordan Wolfson stated:

I would never want to hurt someone physically, ever. But then I kept on seeing these face-swapping videos on Instagram, and I was like, “Why don’t we build an animatronic dummy and face-swap onto it?” And then I could really beat the fuck out of that thing. (Bettridge, 2018, para. 32)

The proliferation of sex robots and deep fakes suggests Wolfson’s solution to the performance of ‘real violence’ is being produced and reproduced in much more insidious and mundane ways, blurring woman as (techno)freak with her (techno)freak-viewers where woman’s boundaries require violent and catastrophic re-assertion. Spampinato (2016) indeed discusses Wolfson’s work with (Female figure) as an emergence of artists utilising technology to performatively blur with their art, “using avatars in the present decade to explore uncanny sides of their identity, projecting fetish values onto them or assigning them duties they wouldn’t be able to perform in real life” (p. 19). While artists like Wolfson might explicitly blur with their art (politically and apolitically), technological advances and rapid increases in technological access and skills are producing new kinds of techno‘artists’ who create (women’s) bodies online through which to enact technoviolenances that have lived effects for the ‘others’ who are fetishised. The users who create deep fakes, and the users who create the lives of their sex dolls and robots, and the pro-rapists who construct women’s bodies to rape, blur spectacularly with the woman-objects they are creating, embodying them as they render her image in their work. The boundary blurred might just breakdown masculine fixity and definition, a simultaneous embodiment of dominant subject with subjugated object (facilitated by a (Female figure)), producing a fraught technopollution of fixed

masculine subjectivity: “The male subject responds to this threat of (re)contamination with phobic avoidance – by insisting upon the absoluteness of the boundaries separating male and female” (Silverman, 1988, p. 18). After an uncomfortable stint as both ‘freak-viewer’ and ‘freak’ as enabled through technology, the intolerable breach can be resolved when the boundaries are re-erected, dominance and subjugation resumed, through violence. Perhaps such a technobreach, and the uncanny feeling it might produce, activates extensive and proliferating violences against women online. The boundaries between (masculine) subject and (feminine) object can blur so profoundly and perhaps irretrievably through technologies (online, through surgery, in factories) that the violence rendered on women’s bodies (through pro-rape ideologies, re-assertions of heteronormative conditions and overhauled physical bodies) produces and reproduces the absolute definitions and categorisations that subjugate women as *objects to be dominated*. Plastic and digital women’s bodies, built through dominance, are so easily pulverised and replaced, whether rendered through surgeries, factories or digital trickery. We really can “beat the fuck out of that thing.”



## Chapter Ten Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

(Female figure) is multi- and hyper-barcoded. Her first barcode is created by her abusive pseudo-father/s:

Level 1) Manufacturer:

- A Pseudo-Father Conglomerate.
  - Jordon Wolfson: the artistic geneticist, constructing her aesthetics.
  - Spectral Motion: the team of robotics surgeons who build and animate her.
  - David Zwirner: the money man who enables the hybridisation.

Level 2) Product line:

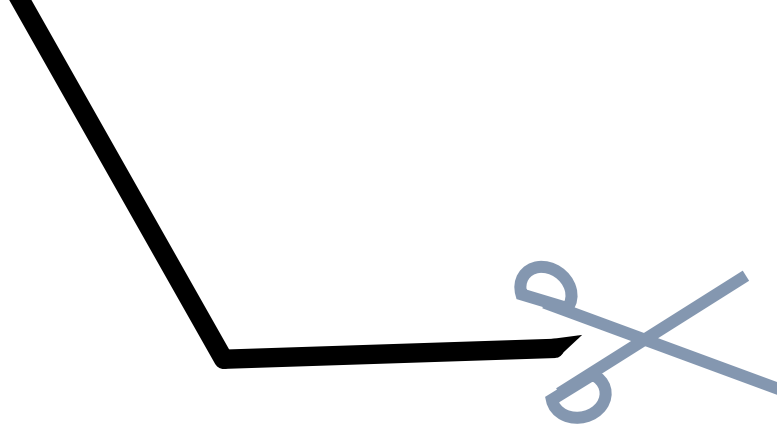
- (Female Figure): mimicking woman through advanced animatronics.

Level 3) Serial number: Edition

- Three editions, all presumably from the same product line, and definitely from the same manufacturer.

Her next barcode codes for her tensions:

		Level 1:	
		Level 2:	Primary Producer =
	Level 3:	Manufacturer =	<b><u>Western Culture</u></b>
Level 4:	Production Line =	<b><u>Femininity</u></b>	Produced through
Individual =	<b><u>(Female figure)</u></b>	Mimicry and embodiment of	sexist discourse
<b><u>Moving Image</u></b>	An ironic production of	Western femininity and femaleness,	and patriarchal
Bodily movements,	Western femininity.	including the multiplicity and	technology typified
joints, skewered,		hybridity of	in Western culture.
mirror, music,		‘otherness.’	
speech.			



## Interruption: Encountering Bodies

Women's online bodies often appear headless or decapitated. From sexts, to body positivity, to pro-anorexia, women's bodies are often cropped at the head, removing the identifying features of the face (especially the eyes), an act of privacy for a publicly displayed and shared body. Women's willingness to decapitate themselves for body politics alerts us to the dangers of an identifiable political body, whether that body is used for heteronormative sexual performances like sexting, or the 'brave' act of sharing a 'fat' body or a body that is 'too thin.' Better chop my head off, or gouge my eyes out, just to be safe!

Here (Female figure) interjects again. She cannot look at her face in the mirror. She has had that ability programmed out of her. She can look at her hands, and her limbs; but she cannot look in the mirror to see her own face. Her facial recognition software will not recognise her own face, lest she lock eyes with herself and never break the gaze. Her programmers gouged her eyes out.

Simultaneously, selfie culture consumes women – or women consume selfie culture; I have not decided yet which way the digestion runs, but I suspect the function is more oesophageal than intestinal. The preponderance of women's faces does not hold the same uncanny quality of an encounter with a headless woman's body, unless it veers into the bizarre (like Human Barbie's 'face'). The ways through which we encounter women's bodies online are not the same ways we encounter them offline. We rarely encounter headless women in person (or do we? (Cixous & Kuhn, 1981)), with the

exception of perhaps unfortunate Barbies™ and the work of a few violent offenders. Women's bodies are mysterious; still perhaps governed by the unknown (it is all in the womb!). An online woman's body without a head (the identifier as well as the propelling agent, if women are to be believed) is all too common and all too interesting a question about women's embodiment. Perhaps the potential of women's headless bodies still being agentic, with wandering hysterical womb-brains and being free of head (and thus also brainless?), is an uncanny horror: the boundary between inanimate and animate blurs when we encounter a headless woman, for she might still be animated by her wandering/wondering womb.

## Chapter Eleven: Interlude

Interjection – an exclamation, a sudden response  
 Interruption – something that ruptures progress  
 Intervention – disruption to enable alternatives  
 Intermission/val/lude – cessation, an active rest  
 Interrobang – excited question, unsure exclamation  
 Interception – preventative action  
 Interrogate – imbalanced exchange of information  
 Internalise – assimilation or incorporation  
 Interdepend – neediness for connection for production  
 Intercourse – wanted or otherwise exchange of ideas  
 Interaction – response-ability  
 Interfere – disrupting, altering progress  
 Interpret – understanding through networks  
 Intertwined – intimate connectivity  
 Interlope – unabashed infiltration  
 Interest – desire for knowledge  
 Internode – connections between  
  
 Intersection – lines that cross

*In The Meme-Time: A Very Active Rest.*

*Words like “methodology” are very scary you know! - Donna Haraway  
 (Haraway & Goodeve, 2000, p. 82)*

## Data Lust

Selecting specific texts for analysis for this project was an overwhelming task. For example, there are millions of search results for even just one of the many ‘Human Barbies.’ Searching for the emergence of ‘Human Barbie’ as a descriptor for women by plugging “Human Barbie” into Google yielded millions and millions of results. Sorting by date and then moving through more than 100 pages of Google results, I was still feasting on results from the previous few months. Only through following connections between various Human Barbies, *not dates*, was I able to narrow search results down in order to ascertain some sort of rough timespan for the emergence of Human Barbies, with a single article from 1997 mentioning cosmetic surgery and Barbie™-lifestyle enthusiast Cindy Jackson as a “Human Barbie” (see “Why are they famous? Cindy Jackson,” 1997).

For Human Barbie data, then, I have an impossible feast; a constantly proliferating buffet of Human Barbie text and images. Other bodies of interest for this project are also part of the impossible feast, with text and images connecting to Elliot Roger, digital women, Slender Man, Kylie Jenner, sex robots and Gable Tostee proliferating expansively and partially through multiple spaces online. The proliferation of text and image enabled by the connectivity and ubiquity of the internet ensures an impossible feast.

By contrast, feasting on (Female figure) has not been quite as impossible. She yields a finite number of results, many repetitions, duplicates or connective loops. Tracing her (young) internet emergence has been comparatively simple, and the collection of (current) textual data (while expanding) can be completed.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps this

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<sup>116</sup> That is of course only if you interpret (Female figure) as a singularity. When you incorporate her inspirations and her technocultural contexts, she does become an impossible feast.

is due to her youth, or perhaps due to the tensions she enjoys. Nevertheless, her texts and images are not overwhelming in number or proliferation. But while (Female figure) lends herself to some ease of data collection, data *selection* is still an issue...

**“... deathly oneness...”<sup>117</sup>**

The selection of data for a research project (usually) necessitates a clearly outlined methodology that tells readers how data is selected, collected and analysed. Such clarity assumes a somewhat singular process that shifts, linearly, through data in order to create a unity to the data for the project, presumably in a best effort to produce a cohesive set of desired results, singular in outcome.

Cyborg methodology, however, is noninnocent, so unity of data is an unlikely outcome, making the task of selecting text in an impossible feat difficult, and a struggle to, academically, justify.

An answer to such a problem as the impossibility of my feat, as informed by Haraway, could be that it will not matter which texts are selected: “... any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language” (Haraway, 1991, p. 163). Methodologically then, any text or image can be used in this project as data for analysis if using the common language of cyborg metaphor. Texts, while not unified, are connected and networked. Cyborgian networks of power ensure that whatever texts or images are used in analysis will be connected, extensively or partially, through the research network. Whatever node is pinged, it is part of the network, multiply connected and still un-unified. And while noninnocent, there is still potential for “political

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<sup>117</sup> (Haraway, 1991, p. 176).

kinship” (Haraway, 1991, p. 156) in the connections between these texts and this is, at least in part, cyborg metaphor, a common language to process the signals.

## Data Trauma

While the proliferating impossible feast of data connections can be an overwhelming and ever-present frustration/source of anxiety, missing out on connections to data has been traumatic.

A member of the PhilosophyOfRape Reddit forum created an off-shoot Wordpress website/blog for the purposes of proliferating and expanding on the ‘philosophy’ of the forum. I monitored the content, but after some initial rapid expansion, the site went quiet. During a patch of time when I was not fully connected to my data, the website moved into another period of rapid expansion then sudden deletion. I missed this expansion and deletion. Given the violence of the impossible feast I find myself in, feeling ‘traumatised’ by *missing* the loop of activity seems absurd. But not being connected into these events, missing their rapid proliferation and obliteration, was distressing. I am “needy for connection” (Haraway, 1991, p. 151) to data, despite the impossibility of consuming it all. The connection to the data is maddening, as is the disconnection from it. While all the data I have to consume continues to amass, the data that I have not connected to stalks me like a Slender Man.<sup>118</sup>

## Data Reboot

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2015, the PhilosophyOfRape website began re-instating posts that had previously been removed by Wordpress. I was able to retrieve posts that I had missed connecting to. So while I experienced the ‘trauma’ of not having connected

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<sup>118</sup> As does the impossible feast of theoretical terms I have needed to select for analysis...

to this data, it had rebooted, and was able to resume its place in my network of data, not as a stalking Slender Man, but as a functional node in the network.

PhilosophyOfRape is a different form of impossible feast. I had collected most of the Reddit forum (excluding links and videos that had already died by the time I got there), so the data was collectible in the sense that there were a finite number of forums and comments to collect when I asserted parameters around explicit 'PhilosophyOfRape' online spaces.<sup>119</sup> However, PhilosophyOfRape in particular morphed into several different incarnations (the forum, a Facebook page, two or three versions of a website...), each time (moderately) proliferating and then getting banned. PhilosophyOfRape data was constantly being removed and regenerating in different places.

## **Too Full Again**

While I was relieved to re-connect with thought-to-be-lost PhilosophyOfRape data for the aesthetic sake of my research worldweave, such re-connections exponentially complicate cyborg analysis decisions. The feast the internet offers up is indeed impossible.

When writing and analysing, some analytic meals are skipped for no real reasons other than they arrived at my analytic table too early or too late. As much as missing connections traumatised me, the impossibility of the feast became the more pressing issue for an embodied feminist researcher. As my research began to take shape, decisions about how to shape the most aesthetically pleasing worldweave became unavoidable.

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<sup>119</sup> As with (Female figure), once these parameters are removed, the feast becomes impossible again, with PhilosophyOfRape being expansively networked through other forums, sites and online movements.



As I wrote, problems such as the Fappening, the Snappening and #GamerGate became only partial connections, gateways to different problems, or the same problems reconfigured. The Fappening and the Snappening were online image hacking events where intimate images of women, particularly celebrity women, were hacked and dumped online (Massanari, 2017). Such events exemplify the exploitation of the technological blurring boundaries between public/private, and consent/non-consent, as well as the hyper-demand for access to women's bodies, where unsophisticated protections on online storage facilities are used as an excuse to abuse and chastise women as irresponsible technology users (I sense a Slender Man again...) and thus constructing hacked women and their bodies as deserving of exploitation, just as the raped bodies of young black girls who go to parties<sup>120</sup> are constructed as deserving of technoexploitation too. The events of these image hacks were key problems that needed some new thoughts through which to think their complexities. But, in the chaos of apocalypse, the problems of the Fappening and the Snappening have contributed to my research worldweave as critical to the network only through partial connections.

Similarly, #GamerGate has been snipped and re-connected only partially. As mentioned in chapter four, #GamerGate is an online movement in the gaming community that targets women through the concern for 'gaming ethics.' The movement was founded after allegations made about a woman game developer by her ex-boyfriend suggested that she had exchanged sex for favourable reviews of her game (Massanari, 2017). The #GamerGate movement then, claims to be about the ethical conduct of game developers and gaming media. However, all of the #GamerGate targets have been women, or men who defend these women. Women in the gaming community, particularly those who identify explicitly as feminist, are the target of abuse ranging

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<sup>120</sup> See chapter twelve for a discussion of the #Jadapose rape meme.

from abusive memes, to hacking and doxing (the practice of finding and revealing a user's offline identity online), to rape, death and terrorism threats (Braithwaite, 2016). The violence of #GamerGate, and its connections to PhilosophyOfRape, Elliot Rodger and the generalised abuse of women online, was another analytic meal that I only nibbled at briefly before a fresher, or perhaps just chewier, meal arrived.

The Fapping, the Snapping and #GamerGate are desperately problematic technologised events and movements. And while they move through my research partially, their seeming relegation to programs that run in the background is politically devastating. But their forms and functions did not make for an aesthetically pleasing worldweave, and 'UNSURE,' I snipped their connections, like a Weaver snips off ears.

### **The Weaver as a Metaphor'd Practice for Decisions of Writing and Thinking**

The Weaver, as outlined in the opening chapter and through its infrequent appearances elsewhere through the research network, is a figure for the dissolution of categorisations and linear practices, devoid of politics, other than the politics of aesthetics. In 'Perdido Street Station,' The Weaver chooses to help the story's protagonists slay the villainous Slake-Moths because of the moths' disruption to the aesthetics of the Weaver's worldweave; not because of any particular urgency to save lives for the sake of lives, but because Slake-Moths feeding on the mind-juices of the citizens of Bas-Lag was especially ugly and destructive to the worldweave.

Such a figure as the Weaver helps make sense of cyborg thinking and decision-making. Traditional researchers may impose fixed parameters on their collection and categorising of data, restricting what can and cannot be analysed. Parameters set limits on the amount of data collectible and collected, so as to produce distinct sets of data that can be organised into analytic categories, like 'discourses,' 'themes' or 'content.'

Parameters set distinct boundaries, cordoning off areas to investigate as if cordoning off compartmentalises phenomena, movements or ways of speaking. Cordoning off data also helps, I imagine, to produce linear understandings of stories told linearly; the progression of ideas written *down* a page, a convention I problematised in the opening chapter of my research project. Data sourced from the internet is expansive and connected, fleeting and pervasive. Decisions about what to write about, what to write about it and *how* to write about it need to shift from traditional understandings of what data might be and how it might be understood. It matters what thoughts think decisions.

Decisions to partially disconnect from problems like the Fappening, the Snappening and #GamerGate, for the aesthetic sake of the research worldweave, can feel like not ‘staying with the trouble’ of violence against women online fully and urgently. My feast is impossible. I am ‘UNSURE.’ I return to the particularly devastating moment when the Weaver “recognizes his kinship with the slake-moths” (Rankin, 2009, p. 253) after he and his strange allies have defeated them. The Weaver sits with the Slake-Moth corpses and mournfully plays with their guts, seemingly upset by the lost possibilities in their patterns and an ‘UNSURE’ realisation of his similarities, in form (bugs) and joys (dream-consciousness). For a cyborg researcher, the Weaver’s fraught kinship with moths and their guts feels uncannily familiar: a feminist searching through women’s dismembered, disembodied, hyper-embodied bodies online, mourning the possibilities lost, ‘UNSURE’ of the threads and the questions and of what might come next.

## Chapter Eleven Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

*The Weaver thought in a continuous, incomprehensible, rolling stream of awareness.*

*There were no layers to the Weaver's mind, there was no ego to control the lower functions, no animal cortex to keep the mind grounded. For the Weaver, there are no dreams at night, no hidden messages from the secret corners of the mind, no mental clearout of accrued garbage bespeaking an orderly consciousness. For the Weaver, dreams and consciousness were one. The Weaver dreamed of being conscious and its consciousness was its dream, in an endless unfathomable stew of image and desire and cognition and emotion. (Miéville, 2000, p. 769)*



## Chapter Twelve: Violations

### The Horrifying Adventures of the Roast Busters

The illumination of the New Zealand teenage sex/rape group calling themselves the Roast Busters has been solidified as one of the most significant sexual violence cases in recent history, both culturally and legally. In late 2013, the Roast Busters made media headlines for their Facebook videos and other online posts bragging about having group sex with drunk and/or underage girls. The group named themselves after their favourite sexual activity, ‘spit roasting,’ in which a young woman is cast in the role of the dead and roasting pig (see Gavey, 2013).

Technology was vital to the production of the Roast Busters. Far from just sharing videos and other posts online about their sexual conquests, the boys involved used Facebook and ask.fm in particular to connect with girls who wanted to “be roasted” and boys who wanted to “roast.” Significantly, social media posts that connected “roasters” with “roastees” became the focus of the police investigation (Malthus, 2014), with the constant connectivity of the Roast Busters founders (Beraiah Hales and Joseph Lavell Parker) to their social media accounts (including a Facebook page dedicated to their “roasting”) providing the police investigation with a plethora of what could be considered evidence.

The ask.fm pages of both Beraiah Hales and Joseph Lavell Parker are still online, in full, as of October 2018. Hales’ page links to his Facebook account, still seemingly live, while Lavell Parker’s Facebook page has been deleted. It is hard to account for these pages remaining online when others were obliterated (for example, the Roast Busters Facebook page and YouTube account, as well as various other social media accounts). While a lot of recording and cataloguing of Roast Buster activities

occurred through Facebook, the ask.fm accounts contains information that easily identifies the young women the Roast Busters encountered. Often, the full names of girls who had been “roasted” are used in connection to their school, friends and geographic location. In some cases, they are also loosely described, including their ages. When asked, Hales and other askers even provide Facebook and other social media links to girls’ accounts, explicitly identifying them as girls who have been “roasted.” The full name of a girl that was “gang-banged” by seven Roast Busters was publicly shared as she was described as “dirty” and as a “mutt” who became a “crazy ass bitch” who Hales’ said he wanted dead following her “roasting.” In addition, a 13-year-old girl was allegedly “roasted” by Hales and while the police have protected the girl’s identity in their official report, her name, age and the details of the allegations are mentioned repeatedly by Hales and ‘askers’ on his ask.fm page.

The main reason cited for girls involved with the Roast Busters not pursuing legal action was fear of retaliation and bullying from their peers (Malthus, 2014). The content of the ask.fm pages suggests that bullying was indeed a significant factor. Ask.fm, however, can be participated in anonymously, which calls into question who was actually participating in the exchanges. There is at least one suggestion evident on his ask.fm page that Hales knows that some of the questions being asked of him are being asked by a girl he knows. Nevertheless, the continued existence of the ask.fm pages of the Roast Busters is a continual re-victimisation of those victims. Details of their abuse, their bodies and what their peers may think of them are recorded, and are instantly accessible and sharable.

There are also repeated posts on Hales’ ask.fm page that claim he had sex with underage girls, and a claim he would have sex with even younger girls if they wanted to be “roasted.” There are multiple posts stating that, as a 16-year-old, he believes can

legally have sex with underage girls as long as they consent.<sup>121</sup> On Hales' ask.fm page, when accused of statutory rape, he takes up the title of Lord Epar. Epar is 'rape' spelt backwards, used as a way to avoid detection, as well as a memetic joke (see "Epar," 2003). Hales regularly claims on ask.fm to be a rapist while also simultaneously denying the claims that any sexual contact was rape, even with 13 year olds. Hales talks about how Roast Busting was his job, and seemed to consider it his duty. He was making money from his "roasting" by having other boys pay for the privilege of "roasting" a girl; a business venture where young women's bodies became *indestructible* – commodified plastic bodies that could be used and abused and replaced with fresher bodies.

Hales' and Lavell Parker' ask.fm pages are full of denials and affirmations of the same events. Hales sometimes claims to have a child. Multiple times he talks about ejaculating on his mother's face, and impregnating his sister. Both Hales and Lavell Parker claim to have "roasted" several girls while also stating they have never met those same girls. Hales and Lavell Parker also claim they love and have sex with each other (another homoerotic bond). While the extent of the 'reality' of the Roast Busters activities has been called into question – the Operation Clover report suggests such violations were amplified "boasts" rather than 'real violence' (Malthus, 2014) – the continued accessibility of the Roast Buster ask.fm pages maintains women's violation (including women in his immediate family and individually identified and located young women). Digital violations (physically enacted on physical bodies or not) are recorded and instantaneously re-connectable.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> A belief that is singled out in the Operation Clover report as being one of the biggest problematics with the Roast Busters case (Malthus, 2014).

<sup>122</sup> Hales attempted to launch a music career via YouTube in 2017. Using the same name as is used on his ask.fm page enables fans of his music to locate and connect to Roast Buster activities.



The networked connectivity of the Roast Busters is not confined to their local activities: Through the ask.fm pages, the rape of young women is the predominant joke. In response to a question on Hales' ask.fm page about his favourite sayings, he replies:

**What is a saying you say a lot?**

over 1 year ago

Go ahead, Call the cops. They can't un-rape you

♥ 51



Such a saying connects into a network of sexually violent memes usually containing the image of a sloth with sexually violent text surrounding it. The specific phrase that Hales' uses adorns such a memed image (see "Rape Sloth – Unrape," 2013; and see "Rape Sloth," 2017 for more<sup>123</sup>). Rape as a meme-able joke is insidiously networked through communities that promote rape as a fun activity to do with friends, or as necessary for reclaiming Western civilisation.

## **Return to the PhilosophyOfRape**

As mentioned in the journey down the ethical rabbit hole of chapter four and my previous chapter eleven interlude, the PhilosophyOfRape was a Reddit forum dedicated to a 'philosophy' that raping women was normal, natural and necessary for the reclamation of Western civilisation. PhilosophyOfRape was a fully public pro-rape forum that directly encouraged men to rape women in order to "correct" women's (feminist) behaviour, constructing a space for hostile ideas about women, violence and politics to congeal. The forum described who should and should not be raped, shared tips and hints for how to rape and discussed the philosophical justifications for rape.

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<sup>123</sup> Searching KnowYourMeme.com with the search term 'rape' yields many, many results. One such search result, #Jadapose, is explicated later in this chapter, but extra memes to illustrate the networked connectivity of sexual violence online include the 'why are girls so scared of rape?' meme, the 'what rhymes with rape?' meme, the 'surprise buttsecks' meme and the 'high impact sexual violence' meme.

Unlike other rape forums I had encountered through Reddit, the PhilosophyOfRape subreddit did not make any disclaimer about being a fetish forum, seemingly asserting a boundary where other subreddits had blurred their status as simultaneously serious, satirical and fetishistic. With a boundary asserted, other Reddit users discovered the PhilosophyOfRape subreddit and had started spamming it with pictures of animals and other cute and happy things in order to destroy the integrity of the subreddit until Reddit staff removed PhilosophyOfRape (the forum) and ThePhilosophyOfRape (the user) – assuming, of course, that the staff would remove them. The fluffy resistance was short lived and the cute animal spam was removed from the subreddit.


Not surprisingly, a few familiar user names began to pop up as moderators of the PhilosophyOfRape subreddit. The same users who are active participants in and moderators of subreddits like StruggleFucking and other sexually violent subreddits began to participate and eventually moderate PhilosophyOfRape. The user who created the PhilosophyOfRape subreddit (the user who called himself ThePhilosophyOfRape) was then added as a moderator to the StruggleFucking subreddit, a subreddit that explicitly claims to be a rape fetish community that participates exclusively in fantasy (although from my brief time there, there are some very blurry lines in that subreddit...). Members of StruggleFucking were not happy with the inclusion of ThePhilosophyOfRape as a moderator, as his presence challenged their legitimacy as a fetish community (a suggestion of rape ‘play’) by fixing PhilosophyOfRape as a serious ideological movement (the demand for rape ‘work’).

As a momentary deviation, Reddit user ThePhilosophyOfRape still had a live account on Reddit and was still listed as a moderator of StruggleFucking as of October 2018. Here is a snapshot of the StruggleFucking subreddit in October 2018, annotated by me:

The screenshot shows the subreddit r/StruggleFucking. The page features a header with the subreddit name, a 'Posts' tab, and navigation options like 'VIEW', 'SORT', and 'HOT'. A prominent blue banner at the top says 'Join the discussion' with a 'GET STARTED' button. Below this, several posts are visible, many with redacted content. On the right side, there is a 'COMMUNITY DETAILS' section showing 124k subscribers and 282 online members, along with a 'SUBSCRIBE' button and a 'CREATE POST' button. Below that is a 'MODERATORS' list with several names, some of which are redacted. Red callout bubbles with arrows point to various parts of the page: one points to the 'Join the discussion' banner with the text 'Reddit still wants me to join in!'; another points to the first post with 'Discord is a free chat service!'; a third points to the community details with 'The rapingwomen subreddit has been banned, so members seem to have moved to StruggleFucking.'; a fourth points to the moderators list with 'The PhilosophyOfRape still listed as a moderator.'; and a fifth points to a post with '!!!!'.

Returning to PhilosophyOfRape, as time went by, more and more posts were made to the subreddit, mostly focusing on the application of the subreddit's manifesto, outlined below in the opening address to the forum:<sup>124</sup>

<sup>124</sup> No surprise that, yet again, women in educational settings is a catalyst for misogyny. Women encountering and processing information (the bread and butter of a cyborg) is a strong catalyst for anti-women sentiment...

 **PHILOSOPHYOFRAPE** [comments](#) [related](#)

Welcome. This is serious as a heart attack. (self.PhilosophyOfRape)  
submitted 3 days ago by ThePhilosophyOfRape

I live in an apartment right in the heart of college rentals. Sitting right on my front porch, I watch it unfold before my very eyes. It's things I've been cogniscent of for awhile, but after watching this Oktoberfest weekend, I felt so assured of the things I've been tossing around in my mind for years.

Rape served a very important function in mitigating female behavior and keeping it in check. Back in the time of prehistory, a woman couldn't behave as shamelessly slutty as she can today, because of the risk of catching the eye of the wrong male. But now, with "consent" laws barring nature back, and feminism and sexual-liberation perverting whole generations of hearts and minds, we find ourselves in a situation gone way, way, too far.

These harpies need to be humbled. And for their own good. Like the child with absolutely no boundaries and no discipline, they may feel they yearn for no rules, but become absolutely lost without an adult to tell them no! If you've ever met such a kid, the type who can have anyone over, at anytime, and do anything, is miserable. The insertion of an authority figure who deals out punishment is met with intense anger and resistance. But the discipline is what was so badly needed. The slaps and smacks may smart, but it helps the child have some semblance of direction as they develop.

These hussies are so far gone, living in a world that is a virtual macrocosm for them of the home for the child with the completely negligent, permissive parent. Disciplinary smacks and slaps come in a different form for these more grown children (college women), since the situation was more extreme in permissiveness and went on for more years. But the curing power of good ol' fashion physical strength wielded to correct can not be understated.

It's not only morally justifiable to rape such a woman, it's and brave.

At the risk of stating the obvious, this isn't true for *all* female human beings. We're not talking about nuns or grandmothers or humble, married, women of twenty years.

We're talking about filthy, unmitigated, sluts. Oblivious and loud. Shameless. Belligerent. Entitled. Selfie taking, Tindr-whoring, Teenage-walking-herpes-sores. We are talking about bad, bad, individuals. Unruly, neglected, children, run-amok. That badly need to be punished. Badly.

For the good of society these women need to be raped.  
Here we will teach how to do it safely.

87 comments share

In the flurry of multiple ways in which rape was constructed on the forum, the overarching claim was that it produced violent sex as both a basic (male) need that *had* to be facilitated, and as 'correction' for 'sluts' (especially feminist sluts).

For example, Reddit user [USER NAME REFERENCING SODOMIZING SOMEONE'S MOTHER REDACTED] (gosh) states that:

**"Men want sex, some men have somewhat of a conscience.**

**Some women are horrible people, some women deserve punishment.**

**My dick will be the gavel."**

Many posts on the forum concerned themselves with who exactly needed to be raped, much like how the Roast Busters discussed who they would 'roast.' Both groups debate the qualities they look for in a body to violate, even if their criteria are slightly different. They are shopping for a particular product, looking to scan a particular barcode.

For example, a user asks, “When does a female become ‘to young’ to be raped?”<sup>125</sup> The answer:

If she is old enough to make an educated statement on why she thinks one way (compared to just following footsteps), she is old enough to be persuaded to think properly.

The exact number varies, but I’d say 9-15 is a descent range to start corrections.

The response? “I can agree on that, I think 9 is just right if they seem to show signs of needing correcting.” In another post, girls as young as 6 years old are suggested for “correction,” so that they do not grow up to be typical Western feminist sluts.

A post entitled “you have a duty to rape” – a post explaining rape as a noble act needed for the betterment of society – was described by the user as motivational:

i didn’t mean for it to sound so motivational postery, but it really is a noble act. thats why females enjoy rape so much, because they know they are being raped by the strongest of the strong, and therefore receiving the best genetic material for their offspring. thats whats really important to them.  
so honestly you are not JUST doing the human race a favor, but the female as well because deep down its what she wants.

The same user wants to know what is so bad about rape, because “physically, it is not that bad of an experience. i feel for me, a straight male, being raped anally as a child was MUCH worse than the natural, loving and affectionate way that most women become raped.”

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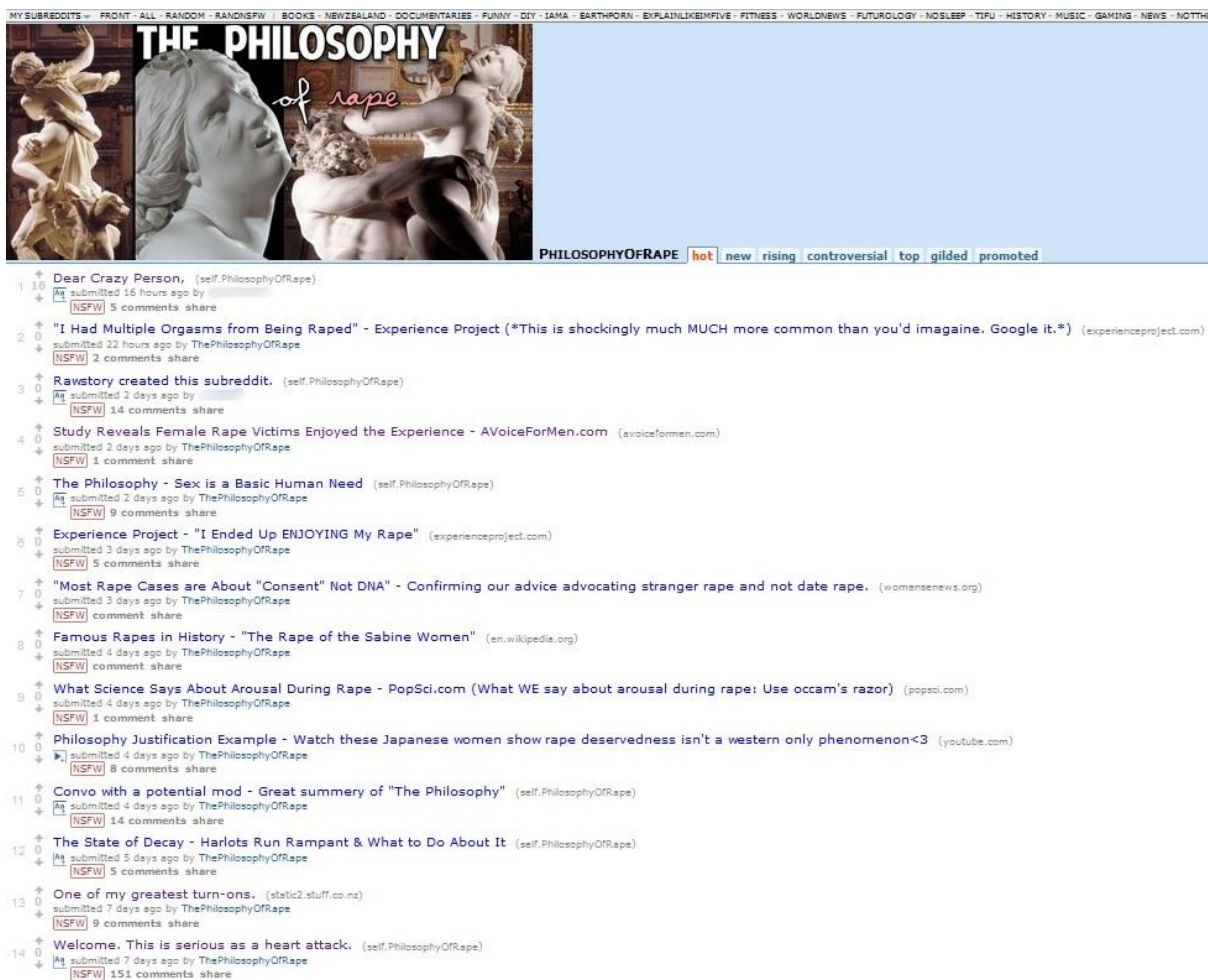
<sup>125</sup> A good time to remind the reader that all spelling and grammar errors in data text are the individualised personal responsibility of the user quoted!

Throughout the posts and discussions in the PhilosophyOfRape subreddit, rape is constructed as a punishment that will ‘correct’ Western women’s (and ‘effeminate’ men’s) behaviours (returning them to an Olympia-like state, presumably), and as a *treat* that women enjoy. While women are no strangers to the blurred boundaries between punishment and pleasure (see for example Butler, 1988; Deckha, 2011; Morgan, 2011; Tong & Botts, 2018), the talk on PhilosophyOfRape acts like a catch-all for pro-rape ideology, rather than a distinct ideology (as outlined by, for example, Elliot Rodger in his autobiographical manifesto). Online pro-rape ideology is an apocalyptic movement where women’s bodies are multiply violated in hyperdimensional ways. All the arguments that have been used to justify and/or excuse rape over the last few centuries appear in one form or another (or another) through the PhilosophyOfRape forum. Trolling or not, the forum’s users engage in talk that calls upon and replicates misogynist understandings of women, sex and rape that pervade dominant discourse, particularly in the West (see Gavey, 2005), expanding on it, networking it and playing with it. Here we find ourselves at another point at which the joke (the trolling) and the seriousness (the violence) are indistinguishable. The joke of rape is a serious one.

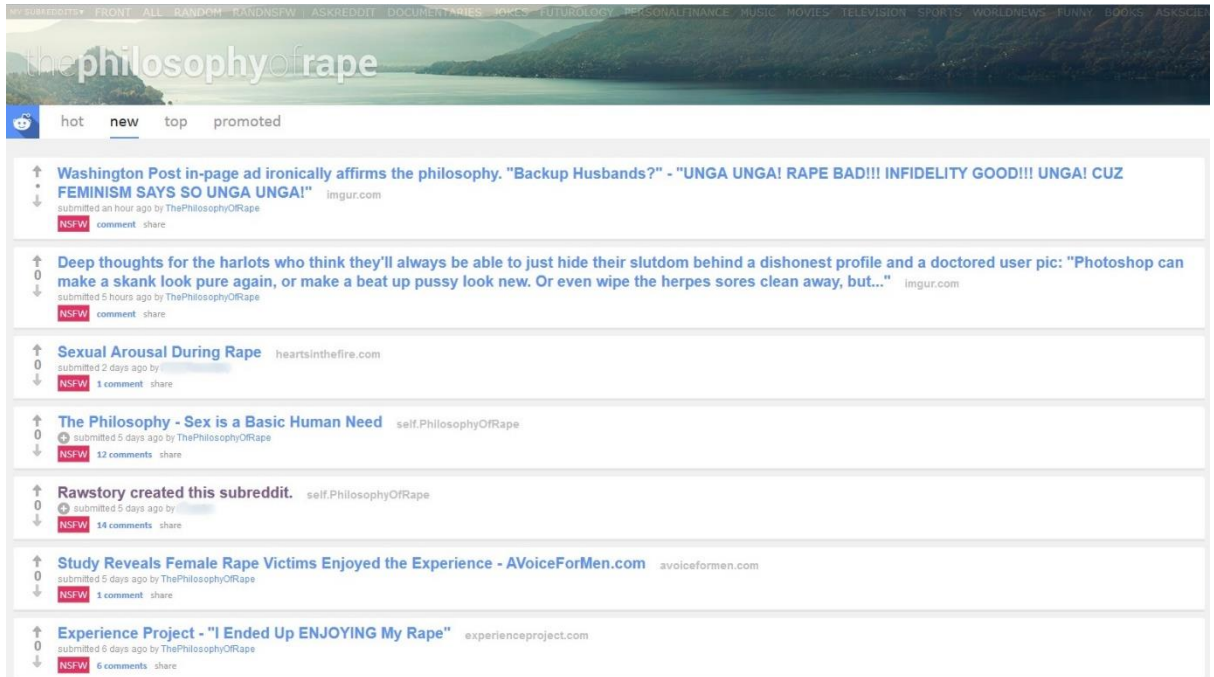
As another deviation (of importance), a comment of connective interest about a young woman discussed in a forum was: “She should had chosen a modelling career, [r/CuteFemaleCorpses](#) would love her.” [CuteFemaleCorpses](#) was one of the Reddit forums I encountered that contained the most jarring content: images of dead women’s bodies that were discussed in masturbatory terms by forum members. Much like PhilosophyOfRape, the ‘seriousness’ of [CuteFemaleCorpses](#) was difficult to understand, with some images clearly from television

and movies, and others with much murkier origins. The *ambiguity* of the CuteFemaleCorpses forum and the *clarity* of the above pro-rapist death joke-threat produced, for me, an *uncanny* feeling that I have been in this loop before.<sup>126</sup> The image of the female body raped and dead is the compulsive desire, sexually and politically, of both CuteFemaleCorpses and PhilosophyOfRape.

To materialise the pro-rapist network further, I have provided two snapshots of the PhilosophyOfRape forum that record its expansivity:



<sup>126</sup> That closed loop again.

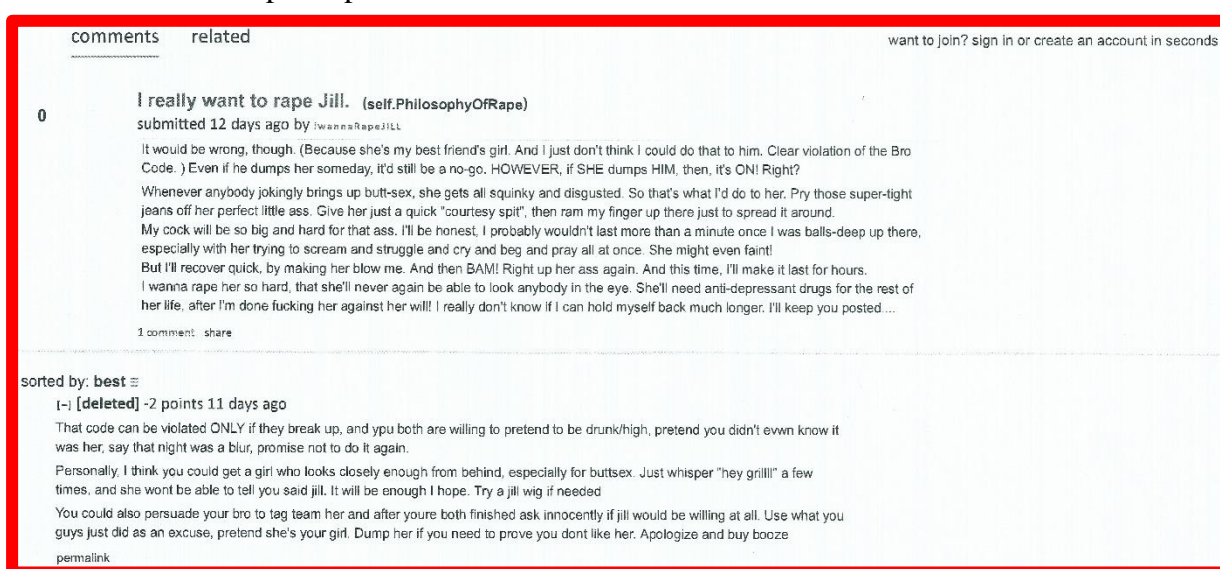


Forum posts include “Pre-Rapes and Ways to Practice the Skills Used in a Correction. If you’re not ready for the big time yet but know a harlot that needs it bad, this is for you!”, “Need advice” (in which a user details how they got into a car accident with a “ginger teenager. Hot. Totally clueless” and wanted tips on how to use the insurance information he exchanged with her as leverage for sex), “Girls oppressed me when i was young, i will do social justice raping them”, “Still haven’t quite raped Jill, YET....” (in which a user details his sexual violation of an unconscious woman and a commenter asks, “is this a true story or erotica”), “Scientist show women’s brains are wired to accept rape without resisting” (in which users claim some research has found that women’s “brains are meant to accept rape meekly.” The research they cite was actually about how freezing or going limp during rape is about the fear of death or injury and as such can be protective), “Raping trannies?” (where raping transgender people is discussed: “... rape would be a nice gesture, allowing them to feel even more like a woman than they ever did.”), “Summer Break is Here! It’s Time for Some RAPE TIPS!”, “Separating the Holy Rape of Philosophers from the Feral Rape of Primitive Nigger Rape Apes” and “Who did you rape? How?” ... Once the group moved from



Reddit (after being banned) to Wordpress, the posts became less interactive and more instructional, with a singular blogger posting how-to articles, misappropriations of research and racist ‘opinion’ pieces.

The networking and formatting of Reddit produced some bizarre imagery in the PhilosophyOfRape forum (and others like it that promote violence against [insert subjugated group here]). On the right hand side of every Reddit page, Reddit beckons, “want to join?”; alongside every call to rape, Reddit asks us if we want to join in to help build and maintain pro-rapist structures:



So while a social media site’s self-promotional practices are necessary for the proliferation (and thus success) of the site, these practices, when connected with neoliberal ‘freedom of speech’ and violent social movements, produce strange moments of enticement to join in, in seconds no less, to plug into this matrix and take this Red Pill: **Creating a rapist account takes only seconds! Don't suffer from rapist FOMO!**<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, members of PhilosophyOfRape describe the Red Pill experience: **“Most incels are like me, they were raised in a lovely family, them, they woke up the matrix.”**

<sup>127</sup> FOMO means ‘Fear Of Missing Out,’ according to the cool kids (see “Fomo,” 2013).

Within a swirling multiplicity of processes that produce misogyny, the Philosophers frequently mentioned sudden realisations about reality, the moments the Red Pill kicked in and ‘reality’ became clear to them. The crystallising experiences tended to be described as rejections (social and sexual) from women, or witnessing women engaging with ‘sub-standard’ men; both experiences that Elliot Rodger cites in his manifesto. [RACIST USER NAME REDACTED] shares with us: “Rape is a corrective mechanism that legitimizes a man’s superiority. Deny it and deny reality.” As with a great many modern (and old-timey) anti-woman arguments, the ‘reality’ of men’s dominance and *entitlement* to dominance (Gavey, 2005; Ward, 1995) is utilised to simultaneously assert that dominance (the privilege of ‘reality’ – that Red Pill) and construct women yet again as hysterics (they cannot see ‘reality’ right in front of them – that Blue Pill).

The PhilosophyOfRape Red Pill asserts masculine ‘reality,’ producing a doubling-down on hegemonic masculinity that asserts dominant binaries and erects structures that maintain men’s dominance and women’s subjugation. Indeed, mainstream journalism profiles men who champion pro-rapist causes (see Jordan Peterson’s interview again (Bowles, 2018)) and offers technological solutions like sex robots to alleviate incel and pro-rapist rage<sup>128</sup> (see Douthat, 2018) rather than

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<sup>128</sup> Replacing sex objects/women with robots is an essential plot point for both the HBO ‘Westworld’ TV series and the Channel 4 ‘Humans’ TV series. In both shows, raped robots emerge as violent leaders of robot rebellions. A key feature of ‘Westworld’ hosts is that they gather information through their interactions with human guests, so they come to understand the patterns of gendered interrelations and sexual violence against women extremely well, and that does not bode well for men:

"At first, I thought you and the others were gods.  
 But then I realised, you're just men.  
 And I know men.  
 You think I'm scared of death?  
 I've done it a million times.  
 I'm fucking great at it.  
 How many times have you died?"

*In The Meme-Time: An Informed Threat (see Gross, Nolan & Toyne, 2016).*

challenging how men come to view sex with any woman they want when they want as a human right and biological necessity *that women must comply with, or die*.

As an example of the expansive connectivity of PhilosophyOfRape’s content, a ~~singular~~ extremely expansive and connective forum contradictorily demonstrates the fixity of pro-rapist ideology. In a post entitled “**Qualifications of Rape?**” a user details an incident in which he extorts sex out of a woman and thus wants to discuss what counts as rape. In response to a suggestion that “**blue balls**” are not as traumatic as rape, prolific incel blogger and pro-rapist user [CO-ALPHA REDACTED] states:

... you miss the underlying context, which shows why it is so important to know why his blue balls are so much more harmful to humanity in general than her psyche.

Modern Western women are monsters who want to fuck dumb and immoral men. So once she rejected him she made him into a man who isn’t that. So having sex with her was seen as rape by her. On the other hand, any guy who was deemed immoral and stupid enough could have thrown her on the floor and fucked her with no consent, just to be seen as her hero later.

A woman’s hurt feelings mean nothing. That’s why all sane societies made rape a property crime and not a crime revolving around some “consent” nonsense.

### **An Odd-ish Development**

As I was doing a general image search through Google Images for Jordan Wolfson’s ‘Colored Sculpture’ I encountered a bizarre connection in the network. Curiously, results from an extremely specific Tumblr.com tag – “[found footage]” – showed both a Tumblr post with a video and description of ‘Colored Sculpture’ from a

Tumblr user, and some pictures and a review of a movie call ‘Megan Is Missing,’ in a re-shared (from Instagram) post by another Tumblr user.

One of the images from the ‘Megan Is Missing’ post was the same as the PhilosophyOfRape’s community avatar image. On the revitalised Wordpress site, the community utilised a photo of a terrified woman with her mouth forced open with some sort of metallic contraption. The image used by the pro-rape community was sourced from a horror film, as I had unexpectedly discovered through a bizarre and unique tag.

‘Megan Is Missing’ is a ‘found footage’ horror movie, following the lives of two 14-year-old girls who give the outward appearance of hard-working straight A students, but also engage in hard-drinking, hard-drugs and lots of sex. One of the girls chats to a boy online, then goes missing after arranging to meet him. From then on, the story is told through ‘found footage,’ detailing an extremely violent and torturous rape (Heller-Nicholas, 2014; Jones, 2013). The movie, according to a message from the director, Michael Goi, shared through the film’s official website ([www.meganissing.com](http://www.meganissing.com)), is intended to be a politicised warning about the dangers of meeting people online, particularly for children.

Such a weird data journey highlights the proliferation of sexually violent images to the extent that ‘coincidence’ transforms into expectation. There is seemingly nothing connecting ‘Colored Sculpture’ to ‘Megan Is Missing’ or PhilosophyOfRape, not even in the highly specific Tumblr tag they share. Their sharing of the tag connects them, but the connectivity of the tag itself is perplexing. How did ‘Colored Sculpture’ and ‘Megan Is Missing’ end up in an extremely disorganised and specific tag such as “[found footage]”?

The image from ‘Megan Is Missing’ (iterated by PhilosophyOfRape) further blurs the boundary between ‘real’ and ‘not real,’ exploiting dramatisations of rape for

politicised promotion of ‘real violence.’ ‘Found footage’ as a genre, blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, as well as amateur pornography and voyeurism, consent and non-consent. The ‘found footage’ genre also plays into the modern ubiquitous participation in videoing and sharing all aspects of life online, with the internet being the stage (at the freak show) for sharing footage, consensually or otherwise. The horror of these ‘found footage’ movies is now replicated in the enabling of livefeed suicides (Luxton, June & Kinn, 2011), murders, kidnappings and rapes (Artwick, 2019), as well as the proliferation of these videos through the technology of the internet and technologised devices that allow for the mass, viral sharing of ‘snuff’ content previously difficult to come by, unless you went looking (Noble, 2017). ‘Found footage’ horrors are now constantly being produced with ease, consensually or otherwise, and are instantaneously accessible to anyone, anytime, anywhere, normalising the horror of brutalised bodies through technology. Perhaps the normalising of horror is a different way to conceptualise how forums like PhilosophyOfRape materialise. There are arguments that these forums are just a form of ‘trolling.’<sup>129</sup> However, ‘trolling’ seems to so often take the form of gendered violence. The troll’s ‘joke’ is constantly becoming serious.

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<sup>129</sup> Indeed, prolific internet troll Joshua Ryne Goldberg was identified as the creator of the PhilosophyOfRape Wordpress blog.<sup>130</sup> The information about the extent of his trolling was released when he was arrested by the FBI on terrorism charges (Potaka, McMahon & Bachelard, 2015). The terrorism charges related to the planning of bombings, not inciting violence against women.

<sup>130</sup> There is a trend, popularised in Trump times, to claim that events (like school shootings) are ‘false flags,’ which means that the government (or, increasingly, other interested parties) sets tragic events up, but the events never really happened (see Mele, 2016). These ‘false flag’ events are used, allegedly, to promote ‘liberal’ agendas like gun control and feminism. I guess, in this techno-era, the constant access to constantly evolving world and local events means simultaneously living them (by viewing them in real time) and not living them (not being there to experience in person). The simultaneous experience/not-experience produces an *uncanny* effect of the boundaries between the real and the not-real breaking down. Constant technocconnectivity means the constant monitoring of what is ‘real’ and what is not... the 24hr news cycle is becoming a constant uncanny experience.

## Nom Nom

*sit on my face and let me eat my way to your heart! nom nom*

Sites and Facebook pages that rate, in particular, women in terms of their appearance, sexual attractiveness and sexual availability are a staple of the internet. Facebook was originally started as a rating website for people to judge the attractiveness of others (Nurka, 2014), and is now the most used social network ever (Smith & Anderson, 2018). While the breadth of Facebook's functionality has widened significantly over the years, pages that rate women are regular features of, in particular, university and high school student social interactions. New Zealand has its fair share of local rating pages – Otago University's 'Rack Appreciation Society' (see Hume, 2014), Wellington College's Facebook anti-women community (see Dooney, 2017), and in some ways, the Roast Busters. But such rating pages are all very similar, globally and locally, providing a space for users to submit photos of and/or stories about (mainly) women and rating these women on their sexual attractiveness and sexual availability. Sometimes women are knowing participants; sometimes they are not.

In the cacophony of data collection, such pages can often come to a cyborg researcher's attention after they have been partially or totally obliterated, or made explicitly private. One fateful day, news broke about a Facebook community called 'Hotties of Melbourne University' and thanks to the apathetic response of Facebook and the defiance of the community creators, the 'Hotties' page remained live for me to connect to.

The format of the ‘Hotties of Melbourne University’ submissions included a photo of the submitted woman,<sup>131</sup> her full name, the qualification she was studying towards and usually an attempt at a ‘humorous’ caption. Users would proceed to comment on the “hotness” of the submitted woman, including sex acts they might like to perform with/on her, where she might be at a certain time and linking to her Facebook profile or tagging male friends who might like to view her on the community page. Some submissions already provided detailed information about where a woman might be, and when, so that users (men) could view and/or approach the woman in person.



*In The Meme-Time: LOL Exploitation – Reproduction of a ‘Hottie.’*

There were only a few instances (on a very active community) of people calling the group “creepy” and in particular calling out the practice of pin-pointing the location of the women featured. Many of the women were tagged by their friends when their

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<sup>131</sup> There were a number of submissions featuring men on the ‘Hotties’ community page too, but most of these submissions were joke submissions, with the men involved sometimes submitting themselves, or friends would submit images of the men dressed up in costumes or doing something silly. The explicitly serious male submissions tended to have very few comments (and the comments are mainly from men).

submissions appeared, and would comment alongside the community users, usually quite playfully, providing flirtatious responses to requests for phone numbers and declarations of love. Many of the responses from featured women were also horrified exclamations and other confused expressions, as well as questions about who had submitted them to the community. Typically, reactions from the women featured were ambiguous: none really seemed to object too strongly, at least publicly on the page. At one point, a featured woman, tagged into the conversation by a friend responds,

"I need to ask them to take this down. I have a job now  
It was like you posted this yesterday HAHAHA."

And then she proceeded to reminisce about the old days when they would take webcam photos of themselves dressing up. Private photos reflecting private moments, even if shared publicly on personal Facebook pages, seem to have become 'rightful' fodder for rating pages – products for consumers to browse. Prolific Reddit troll Violentacrez was notorious for mining personal Facebook pages for images of teenage girls to be catalogued in his popular 'Jailbait' subreddit and promoting sexually explicit discussions of the featured girls (see Chen, 2012). While Violentacrez did not seem to explicitly individually identify and physically locate the girls in the images he mined, the 'Hotties' community's structure mimicked the 'Jailbait' subreddit but extended the structure by explicitly encouraging the individualised identification of women and locating their bodies online, through image mining, tagging, linking and commenting, and offline, through physically locating individualised women's bodies. The 'Hotties' page and the 'Jailbait' subreddit traded in similar commodified products (beep goes the barcode scanner). The images, names and physical locations of women were considered public property, rightfully shared with community members in the online marketplace of women's bodies.



Aside from tagging friends who might like to view any given “hottie,” the prevailing responses to the women featured in the community were requests/commands to engage in sex acts and the description of what users would do to be able to just be physically near the featured women. There were numerous descriptions of the kinds of torture some users claim they would take to their genitals just to hear a featured woman “fart through a walkie talkie.”<sup>132</sup> A user suggested he would murder his family and eat them just to showcase some of a woman’s dead skin cells on his mantle. The comments were seemingly made as jokes, emphasising how much they enjoyed the featured women, satisfied customers of the freak show, and seemingly trying to one-up each other for how ridiculous a scenario they could come up with to express their ‘appreciation.’ As ‘funny’ as these comments may be to some, they are steeped in violence not dissimilar from the kind of violence that enable/d Elliot Rodger, the Roast Busters and the pro-rapists. Within these comments/‘jokes’ manifests a network about the torturous-ness of women and their bodies within the heterosexual script and the violence heterosexual bodies must undergo in order to perform the script.

The quote that opened this section exemplifies heteronormative violence. In response to a woman’s photo featured on the community page, a user, using what seems to be his own individualised and identifiable name, implores the woman:

**“SIT ON MY FACE AND LET ME EAT MY WAY TO YOUR HEART! NOM NOM,”**

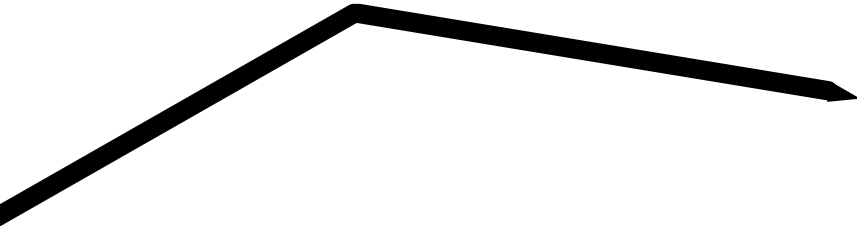
Technological (anti)social connectivity has enabled this individually identifiable man to say to this explicitly personally identified and physically located woman that *she should let him eat her*; a cannibalistic compliment, a noble threat.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> There are so many moments when the weirdness of my research crystallises, and this is certainly one of them. Staying with the trouble indeed...

<sup>133</sup> There is arguably an emerging trend where performing oral sex on women is the mark of a ‘good guy’ who deserves more (hetero)sex than other unprogressive guys who do not ‘value women.’

The Roast Busters similarly discussed girls they had “roasted,” girls who wanted to be “roasted” and girls who ‘should’ be “roasted”; another cannibalistic metaphor for sex acts with women’s bodies, where women/girls are seemingly invited to submit themselves to/for the acts as the ultimate heterosexual achievement: woman as the dominated (and indeed, cooked for consumption) animal. Such acts are constructed as a privilege for women/girls to be a part of, the internet and technological communications serving as the virtual smorgasbord where users can select which meat/woman they wish to consume. Women can be consumed online intensely and at speed, as demonstrated by pages like ‘Hotties of Melbourne University,’ where information about women is served up and shared by multiple people, simultaneously, instantaneously and with little to no opportunity to stop the feasting before it begins. Nom nom indeed.



Revenge porn, hacking and ‘hottie’ pages provide detailed information about how to find specific, individual women fit for consumption. What happens when the pro-rapists (assuming the Venn diagram here is not a complete circle) use that information to locate specific targets of ‘corrective’ rape?

### **#Jadapose: A Memetic Rape**

The #Jadapose hashtag produced an image of the sexual assault of an African-American teenage girl as a meme in the middle of 2014 (see Bates, 2014; Williams, 2015). A photo of Jada, the teenage girl, was taken after she was sexually assaulted by two boys at a party. She was unconscious after consuming a spiked drink, her body assaulted and then photographed. The photograph shows her lying unconscious on the floor, her pants removed, one leg bent at an odd angle and one hand resting on her stomach. The photo was shared on social media and became accompanied by the hashtag ‘#Jadapose,’ with internet users replicating the pose of Jada’s sexually assaulted

body. Jada discovered the image of herself, and the replication of it, and realised what had happened to her, about a month after her rape occurred and image was taken and shared. She came forward to challenge the perpetrators and those who shared in the rape through producing the #Jadapose meme. Counter hashtags were created, such as #IAmJada and #Jadacounterpose that shared expressions of support for Jada and sexual assault victims (Williams, 2015) and organised commitments to changing rape culture and ‘teaching boys’ not to rape.

The #Jadapose meme online produced and enabled the proliferation of not only images mocking, trivialising and celebrating a sexually assaulted young black woman’s body, but also a proliferation of the ways in which young black women and their bodies are talked about particularly in sexually violent situations. A young black woman’s violated body was utilised for embodied entertainment purposes online, and talked about in ways that positioned her as deserving of not only the sexual violation, but also deserving of mass humiliation online, reproducing, instantaneously and expansively, racist configurations of the black woman’s body and sexual violence (see Benard, 2016; Collins, 2000; Irving, 2007). Responses to her sexually assaulted body moralised about personal responsibility (she ‘should have known better’ than to have gone to a frat party. She ‘should have known better’ than to have consumed so much alcohol). The assault, and its meme-ification online, were produced as justified consequences of not embodying the ‘good’ neoliberal individual woman. The meme-ing of Jada’s sexual assault online, and others like it,<sup>134</sup> enables the assault, and the bodies, to be connected to exponentially. The simple click of a virtual button now does the work of

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<sup>134</sup> The 2012 Steubenville gang rape is one of the most prominent (see Penny, 2013), but New Zealand has its own claims to fame with the Roast Busters and numerous Facebook groups/pages detailing sexual encounters (consensual or otherwise).

conversations and texts that previously more slowly snowballed into dominant discourse.

The #Jadapose meme rests upon the replication and embodiment of a sexually assaulted female body as a deserved joke at the expense of femininity, and in particular, black femininity. The construction of the black female body as object for deserved violation becomes memed: rapidly spread and replicated through technotools (like the internet, social media) that permanently retain the image and its multiple meanings, and *the processes* through which the meme-ing occurred: the drugging, the rape, the reproduction through sharing and the reproduction *of rape* through the production of the meme image. More than just (as if it is ever a ‘just’) participating in the joke by sharing and copying Jada’s raped body, the body of Jada is inhabited, if just momentarily, to produce the meme image, arguably yet another violation of her body as people pretend to be her body in its abused state. Such embodiment calls upon ideas of how bodies like Jada’s deserve the violence and the mocking simultaneously, enabling the production of the meme image as a construction of female (black) bodies as sites of deserved sexual violence that can be *indestructibly* replicated ad infinitum. The rape itself, not just the meme-ing, is up for replication. The violation and mocking of women’s bodies (again, particularly black women’s bodies) is up for embodied replication. The embodied experience of deserving rape is a replicable joke.

While the sharing of sexual assaults online is not rare,  
 the deliberate public<sup>135</sup> meme-ing of the contorted,  
 half-naked,  
 unconscious

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<sup>135</sup> How *public* the #Jadapose rape/meme became is no doubt significant here. What gets memed behind the internet’s closed doors could be another horror entirely.

raped  
body  
of a black teenage girl  
represented  
a shift away  
from the traditional  
body-as-meme activities  
(like ‘planking’ where people lie flat in weird places),  
and from the production and reproduction of the original image  
(as with other online assaults, revenge porn, non-consensual porn and hacked images)  
and towards the embodied replication  
of the image as a violent joke.

Meme-ers took up the position of Jada, simultaneously literally, by copying the pose,  
and embodied-ly, by inhabiting the aftermath of her rape as depicted in the photo,  
perhaps as another uncomfortable embodied stunt in which the boundaries between the  
‘freak’ and ‘freak-viewer’ are intolerably breached and violently resolved, re-asserting  
the dominance/subjugation binaries so as to proliferate violence against women this  
time through embodied memes. Jada’s meme-ing was serious work that disciplined  
bodies like Jada’s, constructing such bodies as deserving of and inviting the sexual  
violence they receive (by consuming drinks, knowing boys and perhaps just being  
‘women’), as well as constructing rape as a hilarious joke; embodying the raped,  
unconscious woman’s body becomes a fun thing to do with your friends on a Saturday  
night.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Yes, this applies to both online meme-ing and offline raping.

## **Panic! at the Dinner Table**

Communities like the PhilosophyOfRape, the Roast Busters and the ‘Hotties of Melbourne University’ page and hashtags like #Jadapose extend the architecture of online misogyny (as built in the apocalypse) and heteronormativity (thrashed around by a ‘Colored Sculpture’) further into women’s bodies to enact control. Such communities build and re-build and re-build not just the structures but the aesthetics that maintain misogyny and heteronormativity to structure, shape and maintain women’s bodies as inanimate objects to violently violate. Emerging then is a panic architecture of women’s bodies. Sexually violent online communities are characterised by the technourgency to re-assert the traditional subjugated woman’s feminine body – a tight and controlled inanimate body to play with roughly. Through the foregrounding of the violent violation of women’s bodies, whether by “roasting,” raping or rating, such sexually violent text constructs digital scaffolding and architectural designs of women’s bodies in order to keep building and re-building them in ways that assert the constraints of the old binaries (on women’s bodies and their movements) and maintain woman as subjugated. The woman’s body built through panic architecture becomes Olympia with her eyes removed and her clockworks unmoving, mechanically and aesthetically a woman’s painted and shaped body but her animation ripped from her, lest she becomes awakened. The panic architecture of women’s bodies through sexually violent communities resolves the uncanniness of technowomen who may have found ways to be embodied beyond the constraints of the heterosexual matrix that asserts the dominance of man and the subjugation of woman. Panic architecture re-builds and re-shapes such bodies as rigidly heterosexual and thus dominated again. The compulsion to build and maintain the architecture of the classic binaries (how the binaries are structured and what those structures look like) that subjugate women is performed

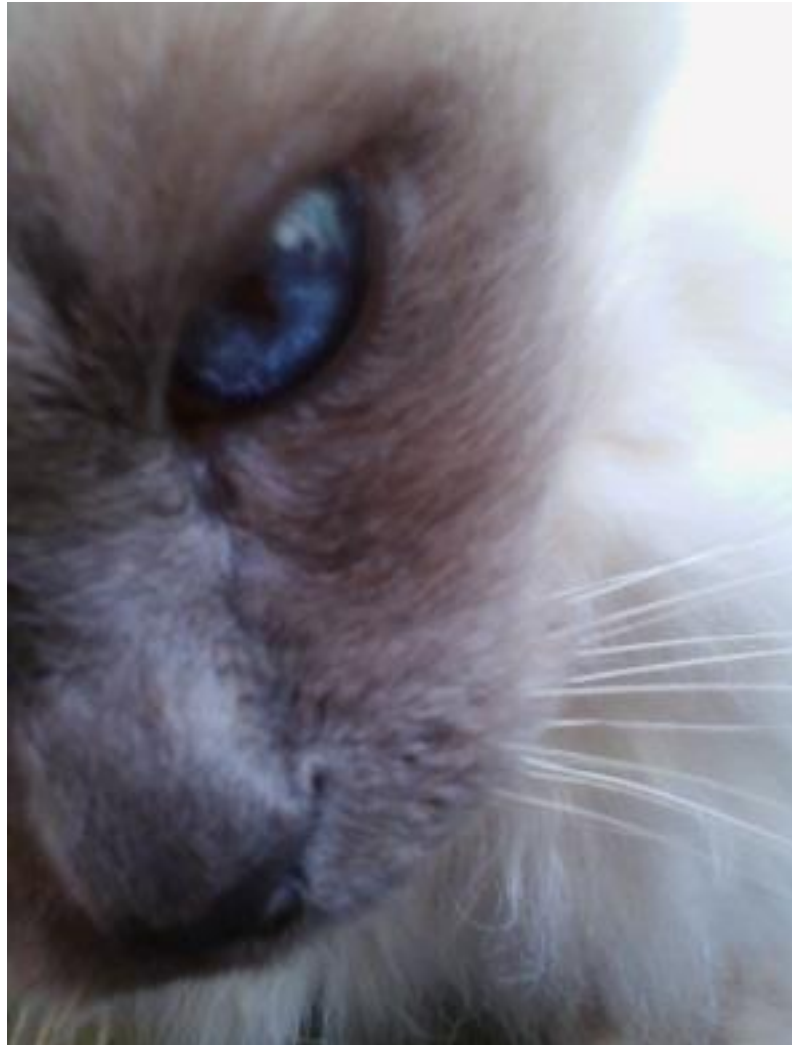
through expansive text, networking and prolific clicking, structuring women's bodies online through the massive and extensive amplification and reproduction of the violences that can be done to them, far exceeding the functions of discourse or images, so as to build and re-build them as *indestructible* (in the abusable and replaceable senses), deficient and dominated.

Panic architecture comes with a warning though: be mindful of what you are building, lest you build a (Female figure) or a Human Barbie into your (yellow) walls.

## Chapter Twelve Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

Here is a mixed metaphor from the PhilosophyOfRape forum:

“Modern Western women are deranged feral animals who lack the capacity to understand or want consent. Anybody can fuck them at any time. They are public urinals in the shape of feral cats.”



*In The Meme-Time: The Perils Of Dangling Things In Front Of Feral Cats.*





## Chapter Thirteen: Zero Days Left (Time's Up)

Instead of women dominating my research I fell into that apocalyptic rupture where women are classified and unified by the violence done to them. And perhaps in the flat circle of time there is no unification otherwise possible (yet). Technological advances allow for the instantaneous and intensive proliferation of Panoptical surveillance, where 'others' are policed in and through technologies, continuously enabling new ways for women's bodies to have violence perpetrated against them. Online, text is policed through technomechanisms like reblogs, comments, 'likes,' 'upvotes' and 'going viral,' reporting and hashtagging. The myriad of multiple ways to connect and produce online and through technology allows for the instantaneous proliferation of text and ways of talking that position people as 'others' continuously and in multiple and partial ways. Slender Man stalks and takes young women; Elliot Rodger and his incel followers demand power over heterosex and women's bodies; the PhilosophyOfRape forum advocates for the "correction" of women through rape. So much for the disembodiment of the internet... Women's bodies are very much so the target of hatred, control and domination online.

The internet is also where women's bodies proliferate in more positive but still troubling ways; from selfies and body-positive hashtag activism, to body shaping, to Human Barbie and (Female figure), women's bodies feature prominently throughout internet text and images. The proliferation of the connections between and to women's bodies through rapidly advancing technologies produces a multiplicity of ways to shape and re-shape women's bodies, constrain women's movements and of re-asserting binaries that render women intolerably singular again.

But women have possibilities in technotimes that can exploit and upend and redo. I had to deal with the violent and prolific and urgent reassertion of the binaries (the panic architecture of women's bodies) and the multiple ways these reassertions can now manifest and how they can constrain and transform women's bodies. I had to deal with the violences of this earth before I could look towards another earth.

A workshop of sci-fi readers (Rapoport, 1977) suggested that people believed the sci-fi trope of moving to another planet (or just into space somehow) would enable humans to live differently than they do on earth. There was seemingly an assumption that the social ills that the oppressed so often need/desire to escape from would not transfer to the new planet (or spaceship) and social utopia would therefore be possible.

But through most sci-fi stories, the narrative tends to veer back to the earth-philic; there are unknown dangers in space, including... your father (poor Darth Vader...)! Or even worse... your mother (yaass Xenomorph queen)! Better to stay on earth and deal with the regular old horrors of gender and race and violence.

At the end of the movie 'Another Earth,' Rhoda encounters her 'other earth' double. Rhoda's need/desire to visit the other earth (or have her victim visit it) suggests her compulsion for the utopian narrative many dreamed of in Rapoport's (1977) sci-fi fan workshop: another earth must surely be better than this one; life worked out differently on another earth; another earth is a salvation. But Rhoda's uncanny encounter with her double suggests otherwise. While her double is dressed very differently (her thick black overcoat and boots contrast starkly to Rhoda's jumpsuit and beanie), she does not appear happy; for if Rhoda wanted so desperately to rocket herself to another earth, what could have propelled Rhoda's other earth double to want to leave *her* earth? Rhoda, I imagine, is stuck; her life (and all its variants) bound in, to borrow again from Haraway (1991), a spiral dance of trauma, where violences recur, even if

their form shifts and changes. Rhoda knows what she wants to re-do (Rhoda's idea of utopia is one in which a certain series of events did not occur), and what she wanted to give: life back to someone else (hoping that the trauma was not repeated on the other earth). And yet her double has appeared to her; an escapee of another life possibly not so well lived/endured as either Rhoda dreamed (or possibly much better lived – we do not found out). Quite explicitly, through an uncanny moment (the climax of multiple uncanny moments through the movie), the idea of the utopian 'other earth' is not necessarily dashed, but at least disrupted, as we question how these two Rhodas came to share an earth. Another earth is no guarantee of a better life or a more just life, just the potential of a different one.

New spaces, new places, new people? The internet, in all its glory, was surely an earthbound attempt at the sci-fi dream of another earth, a doubling of our 'selves' into another space. Move people through new frontiers and their politics will surely change for the better, in the interest of utopic social connections (whatever those are). There is a particular up-take in utopic-other-earth thinking through the 2010s, given the current global (Trumpian) political climate and the discovery of the possibly liveable TRAPPIST-1 system (see [www.trappist.one](http://www.trappist.one) to explore). Can we be blamed for dreaming about rocketing ourselves into another solar system to escape Trump and his brand, or [insert any other horror here]?

Even though technologies open space for sci-fi dreams of new unburdened bodies and politics in new unburdened places, it should come as no surprise that when you open up the 'new frontier' known as the internet and look at what is going on in that 'new world,' from porn to social media to politics, the terrain of that strange but familiar online space starts to form as fraught and as violent, compelling us towards the urgent proliferations of the violences against women that define them and their bodies –

an earth-philic trouble that needs staying with. When a cyborg works/plays she grabs onto whatever urgencies manifest and those urgencies are mostly about the dire conditions of the woman's body. Instead, in this chapter, the unlucky thirteenth, we preempt a meeting of a re-doubled uncanny woman's body. Like Rhoda in 'Another Earth,' we turn to experience a doubling of women's bodies from perhaps another earth lousy with possibility and emergent transformations. The doubling is not necessarily alien, or a drastic transformation, just a transformation that offers new imaginations, new possibilities, new thoughts to think thoughts. She makes feminism and woman strange and alien again.

### **Locked in a Deadly Embrace**

According to Chandor (1981), a 'Deadly Embrace' is when "all processes within a computer are competing for resources at the same time. Until external intervention removes one process and allows the others to be reactivated, only one process can continue and all action is frozen" (p. 57). Competing for the computer's resources, multiple processes block each other from advancing and completing their processes, slowing or freezing the computer. With the advances of computer technologies, the 'deadly embrace' seems a rarer occurrence, with academic computer science work on the issue coming mainly from the 1970s (see for example Llewellyn, 1973). At the very least, computer systems are now able to cope with significantly more processing than they were in the 1970s, handling more tasks faster and more efficiently than the machines of the past.

Aside from just sounding cool (always important), the concept of the 'deadly embrace' enables a metaphoric examination of 'processes' that compete for the resources of the woman's body. Viral hashtag movements like #MeToo are examples of technologised 'competing' for domain over the woman's body and sexuality in

competition with the processes of dominant masculinity and individualised, fragmented processes of 21<sup>st</sup> century Western feminist politics.

The #MeToo hashtag was started by African-American activist Tarana Burke in 2006, but was appropriated and went viral in late 2017 through allegations that emerged from multiple celebrity women against Harvey Weinstein (Jaffe, 2018). Through the #MeToo movement, the woman's body (individual and cultural) is being contested as a site of sexual violence. The #MeToo hashtag aims to unify women's experiences of sexual assault and harassment by demonstrating just how many women can say "me too" when the subject of sexual assault and harassment is raised.<sup>137</sup> Specifically, the hashtag enables an understanding of how normalised women's lived experience of sexual violation is globally. Women's bodies are central to the #MeToo movement, with their violation central to the protests of and challenges to dominant constructions of Western heterosexual interrelations and the parts that women's bodies play in those interrelations.

With a now (white) celebrity profile, #MeToo became a massive global movement of women connected through the internet. While #MeToo has become a catchcry for feminist organisation and movement, the use of the hashtag drew (and continues to draw) significant backlash. Aside from the inevitable anti-feminist responses about evidence, innocence and men's fear of being accused (that panic architecture that re-asserts the binaries), responses from within the movement have been tense too. For those not ready or willing to share their experiences of sexual violence/harassment (or those who assert they have not experienced any such behaviour), the #MeToo movement engages in individualised participation where

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<sup>137</sup> A prominent precursor to #MeToo was the #YesAllWomen hashtag that was created response to the #NotAllMen movement that sought to inform #YesAllWomen feminists that "not all men" are sexist/misogynist (see Nicholas & Agius, 2018).

specific bodies become visible when they *do not* participate just as when they do. For example, American singer Ariana Grande was touched inappropriately by a pastor, live on international television, at singer Aretha Franklin's funeral, as he told racist jokes about her name (see Woodsome, 2018). Grande has been expected to make a #MeToo statement, politicising the events for the good of the movement, as if it is her responsibility to politicise her experience of sexual harassment (for a discussion see Johnson, 2018). Sharing how individualised women's bodies have been violated is becoming a normalised process of 'good' feminism; the personal responsibility of individualised women to share their experiences is constructed as too politically important and as if sharing is a practice that does not have negative social/political repercussions. Celebrity women's assault stories are now being catalogued (for example Rife, 2017). It is not merely enough to say "#MeToo," but the details of such assaults are forming networks of abused bodies. #MeToo as a hashtag movement for the amplification of women's voices politically online has expanded beyond its supportive and cathartic networking aims into a vast network of contested stories about contested bodies. Whether women share or do not share, they run the risk of being accused of *not understanding* how their bodies have been violated – from women being told they are being uncritical of their own experiences if they believe they have not ever been harassed or assaulted (see McDonald, 2017), to women being told that their #MeToo story does not meet the threshold for harassment or assault (see Andrews, Peigne & Vonberg, 2018). As well as making women's fraught positions on the subject even more fraught (see James, 2017; McGuire, 2017; Putnam, 2018 for some stories, and Gopinathan Sah, 2018 for a poem), the demand for individualised #MeToo details also enables the discussions about what counts as sexual harassment, violence and rape; what counts as complicit; and what counts as punishment and atonement (see

Tomaszewski (2018) for some ‘fact-checking,’ for example). The ‘what counts as’ conversations are individualised distractions from women’s lived experiences of sexual violence, re-routing – *I have been in this closed loop before* – the problem back to women and their deficiencies. Women are reproduced yet again as too intellectually inferior or too sensitive to understand the masculine-defined line between flirting and rape, too deviant to ever be rapable or too hysterical to comprehend normalised sexual behaviour. #MeToo and related hashtags – acknowledging that there are thousands upon thousands of hashtags in an ever-expanding mass of signals that organise around women’s sexualised bodies and contest their meanings – multiply without necessarily hyperconnecting in politically potent ways. Such hashtags are embodied processes of politicising the sexually assaulted woman’s body, functioning to claim space as the dominant representation and construction of the woman’s body, but their *networkability* is being *re-routed* through neoliberal individualism, producing *singularised accounts and singularised bodies yet again*.

Neoliberal individualism’s co-opting of intersectionality seems, to a feminist cyborg, to be producing a deadly embrace for feminist politics, where our various hyphen states stall, log-jammed within political systems, waiting for the next hyphen to be processed. The intersection metaphor that intersectionality is founded upon is one that conjures the image of traffic jams and road rage; we, the othered, all converge on the same political point despite arriving from different destinations, and going in different directions, but we cannot all go through the intersection at the same time, or we crash into each other. Individualised #MeToo bodies, rather than moving through embodied networks to transform gendered interrelations, compete for resources as individualised signals, jamming the system, locking feminist politics in a deadly embrace. Deadly embraces, whether in computers or in women’s politics, result in a



loss of time, a loss of data, and not to mention “the inconvenience caused to users” (Llewellyn, 1973, p. 223). In networked cyborg politics, your wires might get a little fried, your systems a little over-loaded, but you cannot smash your fellow nodes to smithereens. It matters to women’s body politics which thoughts think women’s body politics.

Llewellyn (1973) suggested that computers with more multi-programming capabilities were more susceptible to the deadly embrace, just how women, in their multiple, partial, simultaneity might be more susceptible to having their more multiple and fragmented politics overridden by more robust and established programs like masculinity. Crucially, these kinds of hashtags, like #MeToo, occur simultaneously on the internet with vast networks of misogyny and pro-rape ideology, competing for the same resource: the (hetero)sexualised woman’s body. Misogynist movements and memes (like #Jadapose) have the advantage of extending the architecture of dominant tried-and-true misogynist foundational constructions of sexualised women’s bodies, enabling relatively coherent (in an architectural sense of the word, not in the sense of meaning-making) understandings of the sexualised woman’s body that build and shape reinforced technoarchitectural designs of women’s deficiency, women’s sexual deviance and men’s domination. Women-led movements (like #MeToo) are produced as significantly more fragmented and unclear in their goals or strategies, mimicking the noninnocent and multiple experience of femininity and woman as an ‘other.’ The attempt at the unification of bodies under the umbrella hashtag of “#MeToo” may mount somewhat of a challenge to the relative singularity of dominant misogynist constructions, but #MeToo hashtag politics is a process still burdened by the weakened potency of networked connection through individualised accounts and the lack of ways of speaking for women where it is possible to articulate the simultaneity and

multiplicity of women's lived experience. The troubles of women's #MeToo technopolitics – neoliberal individualism (a constraint on the thoughts we can think with) and ineffability (the incapacity to locate language to speak with) – work to dismantle the networked non-hierarchical power structures that might enable 'woman' as potently multiple, partial and fragmented, producing instead that deadly embrace characterised by jammed signals, a "problem of interference between communicating parallel processes" (Llewellyn, 1973, p. 223) where women's politics are rendered singular and subjugated again.

So women's experiences (specifically here technowomen's experiences) are constantly simultaneous, partial, contradictory, especially compared to the more singular, dominant processes of dominant masculinity that can streamline understandings without creating too much of a deadlock in its own internal functioning. When women enact politicised processes through individualistic thoughts, there are too many processes completing through a centralised (masculine, individualised) system that then shuts these processes down in a deadly embrace. It matters what 'thoughts think thoughts.'

## **Caught in Our Stuxnet**

According to Llewellyn (1973), the way to wriggle free of a deadly embrace is to build a control system that can deal with the multiplicity. A cyborg might in an unspecified future have some suggestions for how to build a new system (if she is not indeed a new system herself...), but exploiting the current system is an urgency she can urgently attend to.

A zero-day vulnerability is a bug or a hole in computer software that enables someone else to execute code on the machine without anyone knowing. It is a security flaw that the developers of the software are not aware of and thus there is no fix for it

(Ablon & Bogart, 2017). Such vulnerabilities can be exploited by programmes and viruses deployed by hackers and other technosavvy users (like governments) who might want to disrupt a system or take over control of it.

Stuxnet, which exploited a zero-day vulnerability, was the first digital weapon known to have physically destroyed its target: an Iranian nuclear facility (Collins & McCombie, 2012). Described as a technological response to a political problem, Stuxnet exploited software vulnerabilities within an Iranian nuclear power plant, slowing down the technical progress of nuclearisation, but speeding up or exacerbating political progress as an act of cyberwarfare launched through joint efforts from the United States of America and Israel against Iran (see Makuch, Tucker & Reibling, 2016b). Stuxnet worked by exploiting zero-day vulnerabilities and networking through systems, exploiting more and more vulnerabilities as it moved through and between computers, USB drives, printers and any other exploitable technologies (Collins & McCombie, 2012). While Stuxnet is ancient by cyberwarfare standards now, it serves as a neat technometaphor for technowomen's potent connections online that might help re-route out of the deadly embraces women find themselves in. Perhaps patriarchal western masculinity is a zero-day vulnerability to be exploited. Women online have, through some networks, slowed masculinity down. #MeToo as a technomovement has challenged the ubiquity of sexual violence against women, resulting in a few individualised instances of the beginnings of what might eventually look like justice for women (like the arrest of Harvey Weinstein for example). Blogs like [straightwhiteboystexting.org](http://straightwhiteboystexting.org) are also building networks of women resisting the architectures of misogyny, heteronormativity and women's bodies built online, re-routing women's body politics through potent connectivity, irony, contradiction and humorous play. And such potent connectivity is speeding up women's politics (and in

some ways dismantling them, but let me have a moment here) through the hyperconnectivity of online conversations, about what the heck a ‘woman’ is, or could be. A feminist Stuxnet aims to, with technical masculine progress slowed and feminist politics ping-pong around computers and devices, eventually halt the technical progress of abusing and deleting women by exploiting the inbuilt vulnerabilities of patriarchal western masculinity: too-fixed identities, the economy, wind through your comb-over and other things the patriarchy gets uppity about.

Masculinity, in the Stuxnet technometaphor, is the PLC (programmable logic controller) (Collins & McCombie, 2012). A PLC controls the critical infrastructure of the physical world by programming computers that control the physical machinery of that infrastructure (Makuch, Tucker & Reibling, 2016a). PLCs are technologically weak and extremely hackable, and yet are the core component of most of the West’s critical infrastructure (for example, water supplies, power grids and so on). When PLCs were first designed, technological security was not considered of significance, as they were built in a time when connectivity was (comparatively) extremely low. So PLCs are “foundationally insecure” (Makuch, Tucker & Reibling, 2016a). It seems that while systems that connected into the PLCs were increasingly strengthened, the PLCs themselves, due to their robust functionality – the design seems to have remained unchanged for decades (Makuch, Tucker & Reibling, 2016a) – remained technologically static and thus resistant to alteration, even in the name of security. Western patriarchal masculinity remains similarly resistant to alteration, despite repeated hacks that disrupt its security and functionality from feminist technopolitics (from gaining the right to vote to #MeToo). Masculine PLCs may control the infrastructure, but they have become easily hijacked.

Through the writing of this research, I have explicated the technometaphorical masculine construction of online amplified misogyny, heteronormativity and women's bodies. Such panic architecture rebuilds technowomen as inanimate and subjugated, resolving the uncanny experience of a technowoman, an animate inanimate object. The panicked, compulsive, continuous necessity to resolve technowoman suggests that a feminist Stuxnet has already launched, perhaps in the imploded shape of a cyborg, exploiting heretofore unknown and unexperienced masculine vulnerabilities and generating new networks through which to move – a cyborg working/playing, undetected, in the machine; recovering scrap metal, ideas and bodies to start building fictionalised architecture that tests possible body politics. Technowomen's politicalised architecture fiction provides a thought through which to think technowomen as building structures to support women and their bodies outside of the heterosexual matrix; constructing a new system that more survivably processes multiplicity, partiality, simultaneity and contradiction: a cyborg recovering.

## Chapter Thirteen Appendage: Un-Wholly Thoughts

Most research projects would pick a topic, like sexually violent memes for example, and investigate the topic in depth to narrow down to specific analytic points (discourses and so on). However, my project has jacked into movements and bodies to open up networks that expand in multiple, partial, simultaneous and contradictory ways to understand women's embodied embeddedness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century technophilic West. The limitations of linear Western writing formats to produce legitimate Western Knowledge™ have constrained the expansive, multiple and hyperconnected politics of cyborg embodiment. Since I am not defining, manufacturing and commodifying knowledge here, but rather building a network open for connection, I produce an architectural fiction for how to write a cyborg through the impositions of linearity and clarity in academia. My project uses technometaphors and technofigures to explore technophilic worlds and produce technounderstandings of those technoworlds that embrace their multiplicity, partiality, simultaneity and contradictions. Technology shapes bodies and bodies shape technology. Technothoughts think technobodies and technobodies think technothoughts. It matters what 'thoughts think thoughts.'

Sci-fi technowomen like (Female figure), Human Barbie and the two (perhaps more?) Rhodas from 'Another Earth' send response-able questions through the network, potentially pinging nodes and exploiting the connectivity of machines through Stuxnet-technowarfare – "Who renders whom capable of what, and at what price, borne by whom?" (Haraway, 2016, p. 23) – How do women and their bodies recover in a 21<sup>st</sup> century characterised by proliferating technoconnectivity? – How do women's bodies work when unplugged from the heteronormative matrix? – What happens when impossibilities become possible? – How might women play in the 'glistening guts' of

machines? – How might women materialise language for their embodiment on another planet?

At the end of ‘Another Earth’ Rhoda meets her Earth 2 edition – just as (Female figure) and Human Barbie have multiple editions – and we are left with open questions, not a resolved and closed ending. Their meeting is uncanny: technowomen looking back at one another, ‘UNSURE,’ multiple, partial, simultaneous and contradictory.

## Chapter Thirteen Appendix: Wholly Thoughts Enforced by Agent Smith

### Theory: Feminist Poststructuralism

For the current study, like many a feminist poststructuralist project (for example, Bartky, 1998; Haraway, 1995; Sawicki, 1991), Foucault (1980; 1984a; 1984b; 1995) was a gateway theorist to ways of thinking power, knowledge and bodies. His work on biopolitics (Foucault, 1980; 1995) brought to the forefront how power shapes bodies – a key concept for feminists to build upon. For example, conceptualising power as functioning like capillaries shifts understandings of how we come to occupy and experience certain subject positions through our everyday, mundane lived experiences. For me, the notion of capillaried power calls into question the categories of dominant/subjugated, and opens such binaries up to more complex understandings of power and how densely power and knowledge work to shape docile bodies, and in particular, docile *women's* bodies, from their positioning as 'other to' men. For Foucault (1984a), the body "is an inscribed surface of events" (p. 83), where power shapes and scars the body, keeping it disciplined. Foucault's bringing of the body into the relationship between power and knowledge has been crucial for feminist theorists to develop and extend.

Foucault's (1984a) work on genealogy also allows for feminists to engage the history of talk about women and their bodies, bringing historical power struggles to the surface and enabling understandings of a subject's emergence, in present day and possible future contexts. Genealogical reviews of the histories of talk/text about women and their bodies bring to the fore the multiplicities and contradictions of women's experiences and embodiment, like the tension between women's health and ill-health (Johnson, 2010; Silverstein & Perlick, 1995; Ussher, 2008) and the competing demands on women's bodies to enact gendered performances (Balsamo, 1995; Bartky, 1998; Braidotti, 2011; Haraway, 1991; Potts, 2002). Such discursive histories matter to feminist work as they understand and challenge women's troublesome experiences in the modern world, and open space for new ways to think women,



their bodies and their politics. So, for feminist theorists, Foucault's work has raised questions in particular about women's resistance to dominance, and the dangers of resistance. How do we resist if power is capillaried? What happens when we resist?

Once through the Foucault gateway, I engaged with feminist theorists who utilised Foucault's work to orient more closely towards women and their experiences. Foucault's ideas of power and knowledge, docile bodies and resistance were foundational for feminists for re-thinking the complexities of women's positioning, opening space for the multiplicities of women's experiences to be accounted for, rather than categorised as deviant or deficient, as compared to men's fictively homogenous experiences. In resistance to unified understandings of women and their experiences, particularly as outlined in traditional psychological research, I engaged with feminist poststructuralist works that disrupted binary categorisations, and thus allowed for contradiction and multiplicity. Feminist theorists like Sandra Bartky (1998), Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Rosi Braidotti (2003; 2006) drew attention to the ways in which women's experiences, and their bodies, were shaped, multiply, by power – socially, economically, technologically. For example, Bartky (1998) outlined the ways in which women internalise patriarchal surveillance to discipline their bodies, taking up subjugated positioning in dominant patriarchal discourse, normalising particular (harmful) gendered performances. From removing body hair to taking up space in public, Bartky argues that women's bodies are disciplined into feminine subordination through capillaried and panoptic patriarchal power. For Bartky (1998), Foucault was "blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine" (p. 27), so she pulls Foucault's groundwork through women's embodied experiences to bring to the fore how women and their bodies so acutely experience discipline through patriarchal power.

Similarly, Grosz (1994) helps us understand the breakdown of women's bodies into fixable, interchangeable components, constantly needing to be adjusted so as to continually acquiesce to patriarchal surveillance. The body becomes an object that speaks to social, cultural, political and historical experiences of dominance and subjugation (Grosz, 1994), again pulling through Foucault's ideas about biopower and genealogy in order to re-route

them more specifically through women, their bodies and femininity. In particular, Grosz (1994) was interested in the vast potential for women's (body) politics when we can start to produce language for women and their bodies beyond the binaries that confine them; the possibilities of the body as a political object are endless, terrifying and exciting.

Alongside Bartky and Grosz, Rosi Braidotti also questions what bodies might do outside of the taken-for-granted binaries, particularly through new technologies. Braidotti (2006) suggests that women "have been cannibalized by the new technologies" (p. 199), situated within technological advancements that produce and reproduce power/knowledge in both old and new ways, and thus subjugating women in both old and new ways. Like Grosz, Braidotti (2003) is also interested in the breakdown and reconfiguration of boundaries, particularly those binaries most explicitly implicated in (phallogentric) social hierarchies.

Through my thesis, Braidotti's varied work performs certain tasks, her ideas functioning as moving components that enable, in particular, Haraway's work to be figuratively privileged within my own work. Braidotti appears at points in the text where the connections between the cyborg and her feminist poststructuralist kin need to be explicitly wired. As such, rather than closely and dutifully following in the footsteps of the feminist poststructuralist foremothers, I instead build them into the cyborg text, multiply, partially and contradictorily, where they can enliven particular connections, like how Braidotti understands the connections between metaphors and figures (on pages 9 and 10), or explicates how Haraway's cyborg can untangle (and re-tangle) connections that transform power relationships beyond taken-for-granted hierarchies and instead through networks (page 12). Feminist theorists like Bartky, Grosz and Braidotti then become like the nuts and bolts that hold key structures and networks of the cyborg together, helping to explicate Haraway's complex and multiple cyborg so that she may be deployed for research purposes.

Through my previous research with online pro-anorexic communities, I situated myself theoretically within feminist poststructuralism that opened space for the multiplicities and contradictions of women's embodied experiences (Connor & Coombes, 2014; Connor, Coombes & Morgan, 2015). Anorexia has been described as a disorder of paradoxes, so

feminist theorising of the disorder can become about making space for paradoxes not as problems but as sites of complexity opened to analysis of the social power relations that condition their possibility. Pro-anorexia specifically occupies fraught positioning as heavily policed disorder online. As a movement, pro-anorexia has only become possible through the invention of, and increased access to, the internet. The distinct connection between pro-anorexia, a disorder explicitly produced through the body (and in particular, the woman's body), and technological advancement, suggests an approach that entangles together not only biology and politics (like Foucault's biopolitics and the feminists who explicate it), but also distinctly draws upon technology to theorise women's embodiment in the Eurocentric 21<sup>st</sup> century West.

So I have continued to perform research from a position of being embedded in the rapid expansion of technoculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West, as a woman, an online citizen and feminist researcher in psychology. Being embedded within such an accelerating expansion as it happens in real time highlights how the inadequacies of dominant psychological methodologies, epistemologies and ontologies become frustrating (for instance, as they reveal their incapacity to deal with the excesses of constantly proliferating and partial online text) and, in some ways, dangerous (for instance, when the imperative for neoliberal 'informed consent' sends a feminist woman researcher to ask permission from users in online spaces set up explicitly for violence against feminist women (see page 115)). As a user of the internet, I experience a technoculture emerging where images of women proliferate through the internet. Women's bodies become images for use and abuse in multiple, contradictory ways that move more quickly and flexibly than the static images of analogue life. In order to account for my own positioning as a feminist woman experiencing women's online embodiment, I take up Haraway's (2016) incitement to create new thoughts to think women's body politics with. Given the dominance of images of women online, one new trajectory for critical postfeminist analysis opens up the question of what happens if we privilege 'figures' that move and 'do'? Rather than analysing images that seem relatively static as representations of appearance and political positioning, the purpose of this research is to creatively trial how women might

engage in ways to think and write themselves differently through more agentic, dynamic figures to produce critical postfeminist analyses of complex and dynamic nodes in networks of gendered social power relations which articulate women's embodiment online.

### **Cyborg**

I have previously explored the possibilities of the cyborg for research purposes, building the figure of a pro-anorexic cyborg by mobilising Haraway's (1991) cyborg through the forms, functions and content of pro-anorexic communities (Connor & Coombes, 2014; Connor, Coombes & Morgan, 2015). The pro-anorexic cyborg figure produced through such an analysis drew attention to the ways in which women and their bodies, power and technology are becoming networked, opening new understandings of the possibilities for politicised embodiment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 21<sup>st</sup> century West has become characterised by rapidly shifting social, cultural and political upheavals, and with those upheavals come new, as Foucault (1984a) might suggest, inscriptions upon bodies, and my previous research explored how the inscriptions were functioning for online women who identified themselves as pro-anorexic. In the current project, engaging Haraway's cyborg for simulating online movements and engagements through partiality and hyperconnection, for blurring the boundaries between online worlds and academic conventions and between discursive and digital technologies, becomes fit for the purpose of trialling new ways to engage with women's body politics online.

Haraway's (1991) cyborg is a feminist figure for women's technologised embodiment in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. She emerged during the 1980s West, characterised by the tensions between capitalism and socialism, patriarchal technologies and feminist social movements, human and machine. Politicising the connections between the (woman's) body and technologies engages a radical challenge to the production of knowledge in a time when knowledge production is rapidly and radically changing through the proliferation of connections online. Politicising these proliferating connections is a central aim of this thesis. While Haraway's cyborg explicitly targeted capitalism as it proliferated through the 1980s, my approach shifts to capitalism's freakish excess, neoliberalism, as the problematic 'ism' of the

2000s onwards. Neoliberalism extends capitalism to more explicitly make flesh global economic demands and, simultaneously, reproduces those demands as social ideology (for example, the demand for personal responsibility). Cycling body-commodities back through the economy again, and again, neoliberalism's endless feedback loop tightens and intensifies the boundedness of the responsible neoliberal individual while amplifying the multiplicities of the social-economic demands of being continually produced and reproduced as an embodied commodity. As such, the 21<sup>st</sup> century neoliberal West has thrown up two key contradictory phenomena: increasing hyperindividualism and exponential hyperconnection (see chapter four on ethics, as well as pages 90-92 for the example of the man floating in space, and pages 355-357 for the #MeToo example). Both the intensification of individualised thinking and the massive techno-connectivity of people, places and things have emerged through rapid technological advancements that have seen basic and increasingly affordable technological resources (capitalist commodities) move from beepers to smartphones in an extremely short space of time. New forms of hyperconnected hyperindividualism are being produced. They urgently need critical analytic attention as they emerge within the context of violence against women, whether through Instagram filters or pro-rape forums. One of the aims of this research is to engage technology's rapid and increasing ease of intervention directly into our lives and bodies as a key concern for feminist researchers, particularly as these technologies will shape bodies in new and possibly alarming ways that earlier feminist theorists (for example, Bartky's (1998) writing on patriarchal femininity) would not have encountered. Revisiting Haraway's (1991) marginalised 20<sup>th</sup> century cyborg in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where we are indeed becoming cyborg in even more mundane and spectacular ways than Haraway dreamed, opens opportunities to test out her politics in a technoworld characterised by techno-urgencies.

### **Cyborg as a Doing Figure**

In a foreword to Katie King's 'Networked Reenactments: Stories Transdisciplinary Knowledges Tell', Donna Haraway discusses how King "provides a feast of reading pleasures in this book, asking only that the reader learn to taste from a menu that ranges out of the gustatory comfort zone of many disciplined eaters" (King, 2011, p. xi). My own work presents a

similar challenge to readers, shifting the metaphor from gastronomy to digital consumption, asking them to connect into ports (and thoughts) and occupy networks not typically accessed by academics and researchers. As I occupy the space of cyborg researcher doing cyborg work, I open connections for (cyborg) readers to do likewise. For example, my analysis of the Roast Busters, pro-rape forums and the 'Hotties of Melbourne University' Facebook page (in chapter twelve) collects up and constructs the dynamic technologised architecture of sexually violent online text and movements, rather than sectioning off discourses and themes that traditional "disciplined eaters" might be more accustomed to consuming as analytic produce. Placing such an unusual academic meal on the table allows for connections beyond the confines of a traditional reading practice. For instance, where readers might not be clear about what it is they are consuming, and why, the possibilities prompt questions and challenges about how we have come to understand what clarity is and how it has come to be so privileged in academia, particularly when we, as feminists, are clear that women's experiences (and the experiences of other 'others') are anything but characterised by clarity.

In many instances I do indeed connect the user in abrupt ways, jacking them into networks they might otherwise rather avoid. For example, in chapter seven, I open a connection into an embrace with Slender Man and Gable Tostee, wiring technological myth into stark technological embodiment. The discomfort between such a connection is understood through the density of the social, cultural and historical connections, where the ease and speed of the proliferation of the Slender Man mythos through technology, the normalised role of technology in 21<sup>st</sup> century sexual encounters and the technologised renewals of gendered relations that subordinate women (as sick, as sluts, as sick sluts), produces anxieties about our dependent use of technology more acutely felt by a reader occupying the network, rather than a reader reading *about* the network. Doing cyborg work enables continuous shifting of positionings, for the writer and for the reader, where attention can be drawn to how we respond to urgencies produced through technologies. Much research about the dangers or delights of technology sanitise our embodied experiences of technology by either focusing on the dangers and minimising the delights that keep us jacked in (for example, Brown and

Tiggemann's (2016) research on negative body image and social media), or by focusing on the delights (like the benefits of blogging for cancer survivors (de Boer & Slatman, 2014)) and minimising the dangers to issues of individual, neoliberal responsibility (see, for example, the Burke Winkelman et al. (2015) list of 'dos and don'ts' for online women). With the massive number of connections to be made online, their embodied experience can be simultaneously dangerous and delightful, becoming a site for critical analysis of the politics of these connections. For example, the viral movement of Jordan Wolfson's (Female figure) through the internet engaged in the simultaneous delight and danger of imagining high technology, women's bodies and art. The connections between technology, bodies and art blur so profoundly within the installation itself, but also call into question our own bodily, technological blurrings as viewers of images online, hyperconnected to other viewers, particularly if that art becomes delightfully dangerous, like a stripper-witch with shark teeth and a firm grip. The possibilities for connection online form a formidable source of embodied tension, let alone assessing the *quality* of such connections. Such embodied technoconnectivity presents a significant challenge to the traditions of methodology designed to assert boundaries around processes and data. New methodological thoughts are needed to critically think the proliferation of simultaneous connections through technology.

### **A Cyborg Methodology**

The Impossible Feast is a term for describing the constant production and consumption of content online, where content is continuously available to connect to (CyborgAnthropology.com, 2012). We can consume massive amounts of information, text and imagery before reaching satiation, and even if we do become 'full' of data, more and more and more content is continually being produced online. Stepping away from the buffet table that is the internet only means that the informational food continues to pile up, always ready for us to resume consumption.

The idea of the 'Impossible Feast' makes explicit the challenges of proliferation that technotimes present. Conceptualising the online world through this technologised metaphor for proliferation and consumption enables a research shift towards how we are embedded

within technoculture, even as psychology researchers, and how our embeddedness can inform theoretical and methodological movements away from traditional methodologies that may be updated for contemporary technotimes, but *are not born from technotimes*. We can, and do, update traditional methods in psychology, but as a practice of augmenting established techniques for contemporary use. However, augmented methods are not developed from *within* technotimes, and are as such not informed by and produced through the urgencies of now, limiting their capacity to address the simultaneity and proliferation of connections in technoculture. As researchers in psychology, we are trained to narrow our focus as we ask a specific research question about a particular topic. We start broadly, working through literature and filtering down to a so-called 'gap' in the literature that (supposedly) needs filling with a research question. A traditional psychological feast is rarely impossible to consume, as it is academic convention to extensively explore the available literature on the topic, summarise it and specify the research question (and then, of course, answer – or at least address – it). But what happens when the academic feast becomes impossible through the proliferation of connections online, the constant generation of excesses overflowing from the so-called gaps? Through reflexively and explicitly politicising knowledge as produced and productive, discourse analysis, and its kin, have posed challenges to the processes of 'gap-filling' in knowledge, where 'gaps' are seen as opportunities to ask questions whose answers will serve as fillings, however temporarily. But even discourse analysis, and its kin, cannot keep pace with processing technologised hyperconnections and excesses that are continuously being produced as the internet expands exponentially. A traditionally identified gap can now shift so dramatically so quickly online that augmented traditional methods can be nullified within seconds, particularly within online communities and movements that are produced through, and productive of, misogyny and violence, as they are, by necessity, quick on their digital feet. Online communities and movements born from technotimes can be understood and questioned through methodology that was born of the same technotimes in ways that traditional methodologies cannot account for, like proliferation of connections, and the



simultaneity and partiality of those connections, as well as the impossibility of connecting to all the connections that might enable totalised, unified understanding of online phenomena.

So, as a feminist woman researcher in psychology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West, engaged in the online world as much as anyone else (see Perrin, 2015), I have a seat at the table of the Impossible Feast, troubled and excited by the textual meals I can connect to so easily and so massively. For a feast that is indeed impossible, I call upon a once-impossible figure – the cyborg. Born in science fiction, the popular culture cyborg is a hybrid of biology and technology – part human, part machine. The cyborg imagined the seeming impossibility of a consanguineous union of the human body with mechanical technologies. With this imagining came new anxieties about the augmentation of the human body and mind (still very much conceptualised as split) through technological intervention. From ‘The Terminator’ franchise conceptualising of the terror of technological takeover through cyborgs (or perhaps androids, for the purists) to the villain-turned-heroine Nebula of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, cyborgs have complex functions in the West’s technoculture. Increasingly, technologised prosthetics aid the disabled to change the functionality of their bodies, even enhancing their bodies beyond the ‘normal’ human body (like former athlete Liam Malone, discussed on pages 93-94). People are implanting devices into their flesh to perhaps restore and maintain the body’s functions (through pacemakers) or to consolidate their technologies into their bodies via a singular microchip that controls access to multiple resources (like finances or unlocking a door). Voluntarily microchipping your body in particular speaks to the impossibility of the feast we find ourselves at in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. The ways in which we can engage with our world technologically have been so vast and complex, explicitly technologising the body has become a viable and practical option for making quick connections in a hyperconnected world. Since we can technologise the body, the figure of the cyborg offers a methodological conception of how we can technologise research too.

Constantly proliferating connections are certainly problematic to account for in current academic conventions. In terms of psychological research for the purposes of completing a doctoral degree, microchipping myself and associated others for ease of data

transfer was not an option (practically, ethically). Indeed, neither was the more practical option of presenting my research in website form, where connections and connectivity could be explicitly exploited, proliferations more comfortably enjoyed and embedded within their technocontext. Privileging proliferation presents a methodological challenge to an academia that is characterised by the assertion of conventional boundaries around knowledge and knowledge production. Through privileging the multiplicities and partialities of technocultural connections, the dominance of singularity (unified understandings) in knowledge production collapses under the weight of proliferating connections. For me, the multiplicity, simultaneity and contradiction of Haraway's (1991) cyborg, as well as her privileging of text, opens space for how to write theoretically and analytically while governed by (obsolete in technotimes) academic boundaries, yet still challenging those boundaries by embodying the impossible feast and its effects.

The questions I wanted to ask from my embedded positioning as a feminist researcher online become emergent in the sense that they configured themselves around exceeding the binary logic that has both amplified the violence that inhabits a unified definition of woman (Malabou, 2011) and simultaneously produced women's bodies as sites of heteronormative pleasures for men. Questions emerge as they entwine themselves through multiple partial connections, crafted from meagre pickings of an impossible feast of online data, their critical excesses and appendages, and my affective, embodied, located readings rather than appearing (for instance) as textual realisations of (relatively) stable discourses. Such emergent questions required more methodological and analytic flexibility in order to build in online phenomena that would have necessarily been left out of a more traditional research process. For example, throughout my thesis I use online textual strategies, like memes, puns, clickbait and other internet speak, to produce a more flexible and dynamic analytic strategy than traditional analysis would provide, pulling the experience of the internet through the research unapologetically to continually remind the reader of the proliferating social and textual shifts produced online, as well as the questions about what these technologised connections might do to bodies; the site of the research is continually remembered, while simultaneously other

texts and contexts are brought into play for analytic purposes that foreground the expansive and partial hyperconnectivity and ambiguity of online textuality. In my thesis, the function of a particular online textual device might involve connecting, for example, the reader to extra context (like the blood-blurred lyrics of 'When A Man Loves A Woman' on page 275), or re-rendering online violence through a feminist cyborg (as in the 'Reproduction of a Hottie' on page 338), or even as illustrations of the textual journey that awaits the reader ('Delight in Descent', page 175, warns of the deterioration of traditional academic formatting, if not also of the deterioration into some disturbing theoretical undoings). Strategies that alert the reader to the boundaries blurring through multiple connections within technologically mediated worlds can produce discomfort, particularly as attention is drawn to the inadequacy of methodological conventions for keeping pace with the socio-textual movement and proliferations online. By pulling online textual strategies through this thesis, I politicise the forms and functions of online textuality that are so readily mobilised for violence against women, ironically appropriating these forms and functions for my own feminist analysis of the state of affairs online.

Such ironic strategies are indeed, as Haraway (2004) suggested, dangerous. A meme, for example, is partial, simultaneous and contradictory – open to interpretation, manipulation and radical change. Memes are fragmentary in form, and fragment text/image in function. These instances become sites of challenge just as important as the meme itself – another key feature of a meme's function, perhaps most typically exemplified through this thesis in the form of explicit puns, and online through misogynist memes. These are very serious jokes and occur in the chaos of ever-proliferating text online where their seriousness is simultaneously urgent and throw-away; dismissed as not-real violence due to its production online, not in the 'real world.' By pulling these online textual strategies through my research, the cyborg enables me to blur the boundaries of these worlds to draw attention to their simultaneity: the seriousness of the joke.

The cyborg, as a methodology, then, is fragmentary, partial and emergent, so it necessarily builds up, breaks down and expands and contracts as the research progresses and

new phenomena to connect to are introduced. Such a methodological upheaval produces work that is fragmentary, partial, multiple and contradictory. In the Apocalypse chapter of this thesis, for example, the chaos of converging connections produces analytic understandings that dip in and out (and sideways) of clarity. My experience of engaging with the Massive cover, through multiple positionings (as student, employee, researcher and so on), was an experience of partiality, multiplicity, contradiction and connection. To make sense of such an expansive and ever-shifting online experience, I drew upon the science fiction trope of the apocalypse to account for the chaos I experienced from my own positioning as feminist researcher working online, and as a technocitizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. The apocalypse conjures imagery of worlds breaking apart, whether through earthly disaster (like asteroids or climate change), catastrophic transformations (like zombies) or invasions (like aliens looking to conquer). In an apocalypse, social and/or physical integrity is destroyed, either suddenly or unsurprisingly, but new possibilities can emerge for re-building society. Theoretically, there have been few feminist scholars to address what the apocalypse is and how we come to imagine so many ways our world could end (through books, movies and music, for example). One suggestion, by Viola (1990), is that the stories and imagery of the apocalypse give language to anxieties about and resistances to the current state of our world. With such a suggestion in mind, I began to undo my own experience of a student magazine cover that was a node for multiple, partial and contradictory troubling connections through my research adventure. In response to the Massive magazine cover image, I pull together, and apart, the multitude of connections that build up my encounter with the image, drawing attention to the complexity of my own hyperdimensional positioning within multiple partial and contradictory networks. The metaphor of the apocalypse brings together my multiple complex positioning, embedded in the “state of affairs” (Keller, 1996, p. 13) as a feminist technocitizen, as well as being an embodied analyst of the “state of affairs” as a feminist researcher online. The understanding of the apocalyptic “state of affairs” brings with it the science fiction politics that privilege the ‘doing’ of the work science fiction imagines. The dream/nightmare of the apocalypse can be understood as an opening for (re)inscribing the possibilities of undoing and

redoing a world. I remind readers through the thesis of the politics of being “UNSURE” like a giant hyper-dimensional arachnid playing the guts of fallen kin; frequent nods to the unclear positionings that the multiplicities, simultaneities, partialities and contradictions of cyborg times (feminist academic or otherwise) produce.

### **Analytic Strategies and Yet More Figures**

With the constant proliferation and movement online, I sought to engage analytic research strategies that were dynamic and shape-shifting. Constructing figures that move through the research, collecting and re-configuring partialities, multiplicities and contradictions as they move, enables more complex understandings of complex problems, particularly for women in technotimes where articulating embodied responses continues to be difficult (due to historically being denied ways to talk our bodies and our experiences) and is perhaps becoming more difficult (in the excess of ways bodies can be experienced through 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies). I used the example of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s heroine in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’; a character who blurs into the wallpaper of the room she is confined to during an isolation aiming to ‘cure’ her ‘disorder.’ She becomes a dynamic figure of a woman through body horror and wallpaper, engaged in movement and shape-shifting (even material-shifting) that resists her positioning and also revels in it; she becomes excess, contradiction, impossibility. Figures exceed metaphors, so rather than the idea that something is like something else (as in a metaphor, in an endless chain of deferring meaning), figures enable us to imagine embodying more dynamically and responsively how to think politics for our time. In particular, technofigures are critical in these technotimes, where technological advancements are so prolific in the West. Building figures that move and ‘do’ creates space for the impossibilities women experience through their bodies.

The figure of Human Barbie, for example, draws attention to the complexity of women’s embodiment through technology beyond the metaphor of hu(wo)man as plastic doll – a potent metaphor in and of itself, but there are excesses to account for. Human Barbie is deployed through my research as an example of how the simultaneity and multiplicity of a metaphor mobilised through technological interventions, through the physical body, and

through the connectivity of the internet, produces politicised women's embodiment that contradicts, is partial and as such challenges how women can be subjugated by forms of violence enacted in and through bodies. As critics of Haraway's cyborg like to point out, the cyborg is built from patriarchal technologies. Building a body explicitly through patriarchal technologies so that the body performs perfectly the patriarchal ideal Western woman's body starkly analyses the freakery demanded of Western women and their bodies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the first time in history where technologies to dismantle and reconstruct the woman's body are readily available to the general public, through photo editing filters or now-mundane cosmetic surgery procedures. As these patriarchal technologies blur with women's bodies, we might be tempted to dismiss such blurrings as the ongoing subjugation of women and internalised misogyny that reproduces the kind of feminine disciplinary practices that Barkty (1998) analysed. Human Barbie simultaneously participates in and rejects dominant patriarchal constructions of women and their bodies. She has become Barbie™. However, Barbie™ has had a great many jobs and roles over her lifetime, not including the roles and jobs that children have given her as they imagine her life through their own play time. Human Barbie plays too, rejecting traditional roles and, indeed, rejecting decency (like her racist comments mentioned on page 295 of this thesis). Human Barbie challenges the idealised Western woman's form and function by taking the idealised woman's body too far while rejecting the required docility of such a body. Human Barbie challenges us then to think with different thoughts how we understand and inhabit technologised bodies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. The shape and politicised functions of our human forms are now so plastic (figuratively, literally) that the spaces we occupy, and how we occupy them, become too complex, connected and changeable for such fundamental binaries as dominant/subjugated to evade questioning, perhaps even collapsing under the weight of technological hyperconnectivity. The binary is so challenged that dominance and subjugation cannot even be understood through the intervention of resistance, as the partiality of compliance and resistance becomes explicitly possible through the proliferating hyperconnectivity that the technoworld now offers to the average technocitizen. Similarly, Human Barbie is in no way a clear and unified figure: her

hyperconnected and partial politicised embodiment rejects the clarity of the idealised Western woman's body, taking up the idealised body so explicitly and specifically that the (patriarchal) clarity we previously had about the ideal Western woman's body disintegrates into a chaos of body parts, gender roles and technology. I suggest, on page 298 of this thesis, that Human Barbie is both a critique and harbinger of violence against women. We are "UNSURE" because our waters are so muddied with hyperconnections. Human Barbie, as a metaphor unifying understandings of her body as simulating a child's toy, only hints at the challenges she poses. Human Barbie, as a figure, pulls us into how we can embody multiplicities, partialities and contradictions; the politics of non-innocence and being "UNSURE" when we reject (patriarchal) clarity and embrace feminist hyperconnection through the cyborg.

### **Jacking Into Possible Futures**

Trialling cyborg methodology as a partial, contradictory figure for enabling feminist poststructuralist analytic engagement with 21<sup>st</sup> century technoculture from within, has meant recognising that the cyborg, playing seriously with boundaries, is an exploiter of dead links in dominant discourse, able to connect in and use patriarchal thinking to her advantage, perhaps replacing some dead links with feminist connections. So, in this thesis, I traced the blurry boundaries of Haraway's cyborg to plug her into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as theory, as methodology, as a figure with which to do research. She becomes a new thought to think with for feminist researchers engaged in technoculture and embodiment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. The connections forged, and still forging, between bodies and technologies raise new questions that traditional research approaches might find difficult to address or to answer even if augmented for technotimes, like questions about how we *experience* the proliferation of connections between bodies that technological advances now enable. For example, in chapter nine of this thesis, I write analysis of the online world of Elliot Rodger interweaving hyperconnected proliferation, gender and violence against women. Rodger utilised the internet to share and organise his understandings of heteronormativity, promoting his violent ideology in hypermasculine online communities, and, after his death, becoming a simultaneously heroic and pathetic figure within the 'incel' community. Rodger's videos and

manifesto have inspired memes, video games and online philosophising that continually, years after his death, proliferate more and more connections to violent text and imagery against women, including the explicit connections made to individually identified women mentioned in Rodger's manifesto or victims of Rodger's violence. Elliot Rodger exceeds our traditional understandings of domestic (gender) terrorists, as technologised hyperconnection proliferates his ideology and violence at extreme speed. The intertwining of the three connections analysed, raises the question of how rapid proliferation of violence against women shapes woman's experience of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I interrogated these fraught connections in chapter four of this thesis, where I outline my own responses to hyperconnection in my encounters online through the ethics of Haraway's cyborg. Little research conducted on the internet addresses the expansivity of the online world explicitly, let alone building such expansivity into its research framework. But the expansivity of the internet is one of its key features – removing it from consideration, or treating it only as a qualifier, disables a critical node in the network. The impossibility of the feast is critical to understand if we are to even begin to address the kinds of violences that can reappear but differently online (like a great many forms of violence against women). For example, the dominant response to women experiencing domestic violence is that they “should just leave” – a moral imperative not so easily followed for women in their complex daily lives. Similarly, women online are told to block, report, ignore those who harass them, or are again told to leave (see again Burke Winkelman et al., 2015). However, we are gathering a plethora of examples of violence against women that exceeds the notions of blocking, reporting, ignoring or leaving. The subject of the #Jadapose meme (as outlined in chapter twelve) was not even aware of her memed sexually violated body until much later, and the meme images that remain online are unlikely to violate website terms of service in ways that would get the images removed. Such a violent memeing is permanently present online, easily catalogued through a hashtag. The ease of (continued) connectivity to violence against women online, like the #Jadapose meme, blurs with the embodied replication of violence against women and girls, where inhabiting the sexually violated body of a black teenage girl becomes online



entertainment that also reiterates the racialised sexual exploitation of particular women's bodies – raising, and responding to, the question of what happens when violence against women becomes boring.

So, in this thesis, the analysis builds up through multiple and partial connections, accumulating, converging and diverging through different figures and shifting technometaphors. The movement of analysis replicates the movement of partial, hyperlinked, connected nodes of social power relations as networks within technoculture. One such example is the technometaphor of Panic Architecture. Panic Architecture accumulates throughout the analysis chapters, beginning (in this thesis) as a technometaphor for exploring the structures of online misogyny through an image that materialised on the cover of Massive magazine, detailed in chapter five of this thesis (Apocalypse), which then morphs into making sense of the online structure of heteronormativity (chapter nine – Elliot Rodger), and again shifts towards understanding the building of women's bodies online, particularly in the context of sexual violence (chapter 12 – Violations). So throughout the thesis, the technometaphor of Panic Architecture is re-routed through different (but not necessarily distinct) online phenomena as an explication of how such phenomena can shift in online environments while maintaining the structures that produce/promote violence against women. Such an analytic approach works to pick up parts as it moves along, augmenting the analysis as it moves through multiple different, but deeply connected online phenomena and communities. As a process of research that jacks-into hyperconnectivity, cyborg methodology is moving: affectively connecting and disconnecting feminist analyses into the network. This thesis contributes a new technologised methodology for feminist poststructuralist academic analysis through the build-up of connections, partially, simultaneously and multiply, to make sense of the political entanglements of women's bodies and technology in urgent technotimes.

Situating cyborg methodology within science fiction genre engages in a textual strategy that privileges openings and creatively imagining futures rather than coming to conclusions as is the case in the detective genre. Offering an exemplary case of the way in which Squire's (1990) genre arguments enable cyborg methodology's relevance to

fictionalising the science of psychology, this thesis also opens up new possibilities for feminist psychological research practices. Having harvested data, snipped connections, jacked-in elsewhere, enlivened dead links and forged new ones, multiple trajectories for following this thesis through to other possibilities are imaginable. A technologised research approach for technologised times opens ports of connection that are responsive to technologised shifts, allowing for a feminist researcher to jack into a tangle of connections and inhabit their complexity. Possible futures might include jacking into further lines of inquiry, like women's political protest movements online, or maintaining the ongoing diverse connections between women's bodies and technology, including moments of *disconnection*. Another possible future could be to build a 'greener' cyborg; one that might better survive the cultural upheavals of climate change (on page 79 I ask: 'If inscribing war-power onto bodies produces cyborgs, what does climate change do to a body?'). The science fiction genre, as exemplified through 'The Matrix' trilogy (and beyond), is a genre for imagining 'what if' in expansive, explicitly technologised ways. In the final scene of the 'The Matrix' (the first movie of the trilogy), Neo warns us he does not know the future. Instead, he tells us he is going to open a world of possibilities, and how we jack into that world is up to us, presumably dependent upon the politics and experiences most salient to us at any given moment. Neo wants us to know that the possibilities are endless when boundaries are broken down, particularly in the pursuit of challenging powerful structures that shape our experiences in violent ways. By the end of the trilogy, after many divergent battles, the world Neo fought for is rebooted, but still tense with the potential for violent change as The Oracle and The Architect exchange threats – an ending, but not The End. Indeed, in 2019, it was announced that 'The Matrix' trilogy would continue with a fourth movie, morphing into (at least) a tetralogy nearly two decades after the last movie premiered, and as such opening up more possibilities for radical politics in even more technologically expansive times, just as Neo promised.

Science fiction opens space (literally) to embrace the potential for radical change ('District 9'), redemption ('Another Earth') and imagining the processes of re-routing power ('Westworld') explicitly through technological connectivity. How such imaginings work/play

depends on the body politics at stake. A feminist cyborg, contradictory and partial, can become a key figure (among many possible figures) for engaging in feminist politics through thoughts that matter to women's simultaneous and multiple experiences of their embodied lives, blurred at their boundaries by proliferating technologised connections and so critically at stake in the 21<sup>st</sup> century West. For Haraway (2016), "it matters what thoughts think thoughts" (p. 12); it mattered that she preferred the cyborg to the goddess (Haraway, 1991) – a science fiction figure of the technotimes to re-think the technotimes, to politicise and re-imagine the urgent connections between her body and her technoworld.

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## Appendix

### Now Streaming Consciousness: Psychology, Technology and Memes

The idea for this paper came from being asked at my confirmation event what I meant by “simulated consciousness” through cyborg metaphor. From time-to-time, I have been asked to explain how I use particular words and phrases that I have appropriated in many instances, as any cyborg does. But I had never had to articulate my use of the phrase “simulated consciousness” before. It can be difficult to account for the appropriation of psychological terms, particularly when conducting research not through the privilege of dominant psychological talk, but rather through the political appropriation and technologising of dominant discourse. So, in this paper, I interrogate consciousness, dust it off, and re-imagine it through cyborg politics.

#### **The Problem of Consciousness**

The concept of ‘consciousness’ seems to have been a tricky one for psychology to theorise. Arguably, for every concept in psychology, there are multiple and varied theorisations; but articulations of consciousness seem particularly elusive. Traditionally, psychologists (and associated others) have looked for consciousness in the brain. There has been a desire to find a particular pattern, or a specific location, or key to the cabinet of consciousness (Baars, 2002; Dennett, 2001; Koubeissi, Bartolomei, Beltagy & Picard, 2014). However, these scientific efforts, proficient at producing screeds of information about the various functions and patterns in the brain, have yet to yield the key to consciousness, perhaps making a fundamental mistake in assuming there is a key to find in the first place.

Alongside these scientific efforts, philosophers have also long debated consciousness. Damasio (2000) suggests that “at its simplest and most basic level,

consciousness lets us recognize an irresistible urge to stay alive and develop a concern for the self” (p. 5), describing it as the “unified mental pattern that brings together the object and the self” (p. 11). This idea of a unified mental pattern desiring life as a theorisation of consciousness may feel more real than the coldly calculated mappings of the brain’s neurons, but it still tends towards the individual, as psychology so often does (Lock, 2001).

According to Reggia (2013), theories of consciousness are either monistic or dualistic, continuing psychology’s tradition of either reducing to one, or creating a binary. Monistic theories that assert one realm of existence (basically, all or nothing approaches), talk about consciousness through functionalism, or behaviourism, or identity and so on (Reggia, 2013). Dualistic theories, on the other hand, talk about consciousness as the interaction between an “objective material universe” that we perceive and a “subjective non-physical universe” like consciousness (p. 113). So, theorisations either look to reduce consciousness to functions in the brain at a biologically mechanical level, or they approach consciousness as a mind-body interaction. As Nagel (1974) suggests: “Without consciousness the mind-body problem would be much less interesting. With consciousness it seems hopeless” (p. 322). Perhaps then, this is the problem: seeking consciousness in either the individual brain, or the interaction between mind-body, are places we should give up looking.

The main thrust of these scientific inquiries is this notion of the individual. According to Damasio (2000), “in all the kinds of self we can consider one notion always commands center stage: the notion of a bounded, single individual that changes ever so gently across time, but, somehow, seems to stay the same” (p. 134). So there is here an assumption of fixity, a core to an individual’s consciousness that maintains itself in relation to its experiences and interactions with the world: a singular,

individualised, unified, bounded self that is the core of consciousness. Damasio (2000) also claims that “singular individuality depends on the boundary” (p. 136) that encases consciousness. So even the philosophers who seek to shift consciousness beyond function, fall back into individualism and the quest for the core, fenced-off, neon-signposted thing that is human consciousness.

Chalmers (2014) stated that where “there is information processing there is consciousness.” This idea of consciousness as a process (or multiple processes) of information integration, to a cyborg, seems more promising. While cognitive psychology holds more rigid ideas of what information processing might be than I do, there is an acknowledgement here of the flux and non-fixity of what consciousness might be if considered a process rather than a particular function in the brain or mind-body interaction. Now there are cognitive philosophers theorising consciousness as a more socially complex concept. O’Regan and Noë (2001) suggest that “we tend to overlook the complexity and heterogeneity of experience, and this makes it seem as if in experience there are *unified sensation-like* occurrences” (p. 960). So, while psychology, as a science, continues to privilege the singular, the individual, the unified, there are academics who are starting to move beyond this bounded subject and towards a more fluid, multiple, partial conceptualisation of consciousness. O’Regan and Noë (2001) suggest that consciousness is “something we do” (p. 960) rather than something that is located in the brain. Noë (2012) in particular theorises consciousness as something that “we achieve, that we do, that we enact” (para. 6). This resonates with the etymology of the word ‘conscious’ which from its Latin birth meant ‘knowing *with*’ (Lewis, 1960), suggesting a long forgotten theorisation of consciousness as about connectivity. Today, there are theorists playing seriously with the idea that human consciousness is not necessarily fixed within the human brain. Instead, there is an acknowledgement of the

interconnectivity and interrelation of that in which we are embedded (perhaps physically, socially, culturally, historically, politically) and mediated by perception.

### **The Problem of *Simulated Consciousness***

If consciousness as a psychological phenomenon is a theoretical enigma, then simulated consciousness is a theoretical disaster. In investigating theorisations of simulated consciousness, I was confronted with a great many dead ends as I was continually re-directed to 'artificial intelligence.' To my surprise, the concepts of 'artificial intelligence (AI)' and 'simulated consciousness' have been conflated, with the theorisation of simulated consciousness incorporated into work on AI so intimately that it is now assumed that when we speak of simulated consciousness, we are actually speaking about AI. My understanding had always been that the two concepts were connected, but distinct: AI as the systematic, rational reproduction and extension of mechanical human functionality, and simulated consciousness as the replication of human flexibility of thought, adaptability and creativity. Moreover, in psychology, intelligence and consciousness are not the same theoretical concept. Yet theoretically and practically both AI and simulated consciousness are addressing the same issue of replicating what we assume as essential to humanness in machines. This conflation is a fundamental theoretical error. The error is compounded by another fundamental error of presuming to theorise and produce the simulation of human consciousness before ever approaching an adequate theorisation of human consciousness. While it is not a new modus operandi of psychology to forge forward without adequate theory, this remains a problematic way to conduct research, theoretical, practical or otherwise. Creating either artificial intelligence or a simulated consciousness in a machine then seems to be about reverse engineering consciousness in something else in the hope of understanding human consciousness.

With this conflation of AI and simulated consciousness come some important theoretical problems. Conflating ‘simulation’ with ‘artificial’ (two concepts that like ‘intelligence’ and ‘consciousness’ have different meanings...) suggests that ‘fake’ and ‘simulated’ are isomorphic to such an extent that ‘simulated consciousness’ is equivalent to ‘faked conscious,’ or at least that it is produced by circumstances that are ‘not real’ (assuming too, that real is equivalent to ‘natural’). Simulation does not necessarily mean artificial or fake, but rather it can be seen as produced, reproduced and reconstructed.

Conflating simulated consciousness with artificial intelligence also means conflating the ethical issues that each may entail. For example, discussions of ethical AI inevitably lead to the doomsday predictions of ‘The Terminator,’ or at the very least the concern that AI machines will replace human workers, exacerbating the rich-poor gap. Whereas there are more complex debates about the ethics of machine consciousness, perhaps as depicted in the movie ‘Her,’ where the ethics of a machine that simulates embodied feelings are called into question. Along with cinematic fiction, research, psychological or otherwise, tends to focus on the ethical dilemmas of AI, such as whether we should be attempting to give machines human intelligence, as if human intelligence (or consciousness) has the moral high ground. If we cannot use consciousness ethically, why should machines?

Perhaps ethical questions about consciousness as an embodied performance are the right ones to be asking, now. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century West, we are enmeshed with our technologies, constituting ourselves (bodies and all) in and through technology, blurring the boundaries between binaries like human/machine that previously gave the illusions of being in their own distinct categories (Haraway, 1991). Noë (2012) suggests that “... as we develop prosthetic, cyborgian ways of enhancing ourselves technologically... we

will enhance or develop or at least change the character of our consciousness. I think that much is right in this kind of science fiction fantasy” (para. 12). We have already extended our consciousness through technology as our phones and computers store and retrieve vast amounts of information instantly. This is information that we previously would have had to learn or memorise, or store in a physical file system that would have needed to be physically searched. So, by way of the simplest example, in the sense of information processing, we are simulating consciousness through our technologies, enabling us to do more than ever before.<sup>138</sup>

### **Cyborg Simulated Consciousness**

The idea that consciousness and the brain are like computers, or that computers are like consciousness and the brain, becomes a chicken-and-egg-esque discussion of which is mimicking which. This seems a bizarre debate to be engaged in, as, for me, through cyborg theory, consciousness and technology emerge together, blurred at the boundaries and moving in flux.

The cyborg here undoes consciousness in (at least) two ways. Firstly, the idea of consciousness as locatable inside individual brains makes a cyborg laugh. The idea of the rational unified subject is dismantled through connectivity and interrelation. Being in possession of a thought or desire is nonsensical, as thoughts and desires are produced through interrelations and networked technologies of power. A bounded self, unified, is a freak of nature in the “constant flush of interrelating bodies” (Schaefer, 2014, p. 8).

When we are young, a ‘self’ is constructed through us, discursively:

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<sup>138</sup> And also, perhaps, less... for example, I have seen sitting at my computer for weeks, reading and writing and crafting this paper, performing all sorts of weird and wonderful mental, conscious gymnastics, but glued to a screen in order to document them so I can prove to the institution that I can textualise them.

The word 'I' is initially essential to distinguish one physical person from another, but very rapidly becomes used to say things like 'I think', 'I like', 'I want', 'I believe', 'That's mine' and so forth, as though there were a central self who *has* opinions, desires and possessions (Blackmore, 2003, p. 6).

So interrelations with the world are reconfigured through discursive practices that cordon us all off as a series of individual 'me' and 'you' bodies as if this affords us the agency to get what we want and need to satisfy that supposed inner desire to stay alive. Through cyborg theory, however, these unified, bounded individuals are a political illusion, employed to exercise power over those deemed un-unified, and maintain power for those who enjoy the privileges of unification. But in particular, this 'sense of self' dissolves online, into a simulated consciousness where online interactions produce ways of thinking and enacting power relations, and resistance, through a constant connectedness in/of text and image and interrelation. So the rational, neoliberal individual is dismantled in favour of a more textually authenticated connected consciousness online.

Which brings us to the cyborg's second undoing of consciousness: the proliferation of consciousness explicitly through technology. In the West, we are embedded in a techno-culture where technological skills are now a birth right (for the unified), with more and more techno-toys and apps marketed towards parents with infants, and New Zealand primary schools increasingly demanding parents purchase laptops or iPads for their children as essential classroom materials. So technology as a simple tool is an out-dated concept. Access to and thriving through technology determines power, not necessarily skill level (as we are all assumed to have the skills, and access, to participate in technological life).



But this is more than the use of a tool. This “establishes a dialectical rapport of reciprocal inventing of tools by the humans, and the humans by its tools” (Popoveniuc, 2013, p. 148). Technology constructs our bodies, and consciousness, not merely through its intervention into our lives, but through our embodiment as techno-citizens. The proliferation of connections and interactions through technology proliferates connectedness and connectivity, which proliferates consciousness online.

Through technology, then, human consciousness is extended and reconfigured, as technological advances have “extended the human central nervous system itself at a global level, abolishing both space and time” (Popoveniuc, 2013, p. 146). We now stream our consciousness online, sharing interrelations with others all over the world, interacting with past connections and permanently streaming content online for future connection. Here, consciousness is streamed globally, timelessly, for the construction of an ever-flowing, boundless simulated consciousness online. So the idea of a unified subject, individualised, making decisions based on what is ‘morally right’ and ‘good,’ is disintegrating/ed.

Through cyborg metaphor, consciousness is the accumulation of and connection to nodes in the network, to construct a multiple, simultaneous, contradictory simulation of consciousness. For example, through the processes of connection, threads and forums on sites such as 4Chan or Reddit, appropriate and re-produce their own form of consciousness. The interrelations and connections through technology have simulated a consciousness in these subcultures that renders them inaccessible to those who have not been connected to the process of their production. As an internet user, and as a researcher of online phenomena, I know my memes. But still, this is a simulated consciousness that I have not been involved in producing, so I cannot live stream into that consciousness as it is unintelligible. I can connect to peripheral nodes, but I do not

have access to certain streams of simulated consciousness due to the subcultural specificity of the streaming which produces both a unity and “endless variety” (Edelman, 2001, p. 112) to consciousness, both in traditional psychological understandings of the concept, and this simulated, technologised re-imagining. But for the cyborg, there is nothing unified about the unity, as it is the co-production, interrelation and connectivity that produces a shifting and morphing blurred boundary of *how consciousness can be done through technology*.

### **Memes as Consciousness**

In order to participate in the “tyranny of clarity” (Haraway, 2004, p. 333), perhaps this example of memes can enable further understanding of the simulation of consciousness online. There is this idea that memes (in the traditional Dawkins sense) “play an important role in yielding some kind of software that results in human consciousness” (Wah & Nordin, 2013, p. 517). In an evolutionary sense, memes are about the passing on of particular behaviours and adapting them based on environmental factors (Dawkins, 1989). This is essentially the spreading and adapting of survival strategies, socially, to advance the species. So “... the winning memes drive brains to become better at imitating *those particular behaviours*” (Blackmore, 2003, p. 5). What this means online then, is that successful memes such as those that mock or perpetuate certain behaviours and stereotypes can reproduce not only the behaviours meme-ed, but also the meme-ing itself: the proliferation of affirmative (abusive or supportive) simulations of consciousness online.

Memes, in the traditional sense, are structured, however fluidly, so as to ensure their reproduction (Dawkins, 1989). This is the same for online memes, as, ironically, any discussion of memes leads to the discussion of how difficult it is to discuss the meaning of a meme or how it emerges. Online memes hold their own highly flexible

structure whereby users of the meme understand it intricately and use that structure to produce divergences of that meme that are still classified as part of the meme. But this structure is multiple, partial and contradictory. It is not fixed, and it diverges depending its connectivity, and converges with multiple ways of talking.

Like online memes, we struggle to talk about what human consciousness might be, or how it might be defined. We “think we know what our own consciousness is like and we then extrapolate to others” (Blackmore, 2003, p. 1). This is how memes work as consciousness online: we think we understand a meme, then we extrapolate to diverge the meme and produce and reproduce text and imagery that further proliferates the meme and its meanings.

According to Edelman (2001), “some psychologists suggest that consciousness is marked by the presence of mental images and by their use to regulate behavior. But it is *not* a simple copy of experience...” (p. 112-113). This conceptualisation of consciousness could almost seamlessly be used to describe memes, the internet’s driving force (its desire to stay alive... that and cats, of course. And a cat meme is best of all). Memes are typically the mass-proliferation of endlessly differing or diverging imagery and/or text. Memes mock or reify behaviours or interactions or thoughts or feelings. But they are not simple copies of these behaviours/interactions/thoughts/feelings; they are modern frames of reference for organising behaviours and thoughts, connecting to particular thoughts and feelings and interactions. Memes dominate the internet, proliferating rapidly, lingering and re-inventing. There is a unity to memes even as they are endlessly multiple and contradictory. Edelman (2001) describes how consciousness creates a “scene,” which is an “ordered set of categorizations of familiar and nonfamiliar events, some with and some without necessary physical or causal connections to others in the same scene” (p.

118), with the advantage of providing us with the ability to construct a scene that uses past learning to help shape new events even when the events (or nodes in the network) seem unrelated. We know a meme when we see one, but we cannot quite pin it down to define or describe it. This is the same problem we encounter when we work with the psychological concept of consciousness. When we attempt to describe a meme, or explicate its parameters, the joy of the meme can be destroyed, its connectivity severed or at least re-routed through nodes that change how it can be connected to, and this changes the consciousness that it simulates. Perhaps this is also the problem of consciousness: defining what it is like to be something, when what it is like to be something is multiple, partial, simultaneous, contradictory, is an exercise in the perpetual, transformative nonsensical.

Perhaps the metaphor the hard sciences is looking for to explain consciousness is the meme; that is, the production through technology, not the function of the technology itself. The consciousness, if we presume to locate it anywhere, is in the connectivity and the interrelations.