

# Rereading Cyborg(?) Women: The Visual Rhetoric of Images of Cyborg (and Cyber) Bodies on the World Wide Web\*

DÀNIELLE DEVOSS, M.A.

## ABSTRACT

Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" marked a turning point in theory analyzing the intersections of machine and body. In the manifesto, she defined a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." Haraway argued for finding pleasure in the border zone between social and body reality—a zone where post-genderedness is a possibility, a zone free of the boundaries of public and private. Although a variety of theorists have utilized Haraway's work in arguing for the allure of the cyborg or the pleasures of cyborg discourse, few theorists have approached the cyborg as physical reality. As González notes, where visual representations of the cyborg do exist, rarely are traditional, gendered Western roles (and bodies) challenged. The machinic, while offering liberation from gender, usually serves merely to reinforce the gender dynamics currently at play. In this article, I discuss images of "cyborg" men and women found on the World Wide Web and argue that most visual representations of cyborg bodies are actually representations of "cyber" bodies, which reinforce contemporary notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and power. I will also, however, discuss other images that represent the possibilities Haraway and other theorists envision cyborgs as providing. These departures from cyber bodies offer productive ruptures through which alternative constructions of cyborg bodies can be envisioned.

## INTRODUCTION

**H**ARAWAY'S "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" marked a turning point in theory analyzing the intersections of the machine and the body. In the manifesto, she defined a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."<sup>1</sup> Haraway de-

scribed how, in the late 20th century, the lines between animal and mechanical have been obliterated. In *The Cyborg Handbook*,<sup>2</sup> for example, the multiplicities of this boundary crossing are presented, using examples such as teleoperators, prostheses, reproductive technologies, etc. Our certainty about what counts as nature is challenged by such devices, and, Haraway suggested, probably fatally undermined. Haraway argued that cyborgs are mixtures of

---

Ph.D. candidate, Humanities Department, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI.

\*A version of this article was presented at the 2nd Annual Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, held October 7–9, 1999, Minneapolis, MN.

"imagination and material reality," and also argued for finding pleasure in the border zone between social and body reality—a zone where postgenderedness is a possibility, a zone free of the boundaries of public and private. A problematic, yet potentially liberating characteristic of cyborgs is that they are the offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, offspring that, as Haraway noted, may be "exceedingly unfaithful" to their fathers.<sup>1</sup>

Haraway's manifesto focused on the search for "a kind of politics [that] could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves" while still being "faithful, effective and . . . socialist feminist." Cyborg feminists must argue, she continued, that there can be no natural matrix of unity, no essentialism, no idea of a construction as a whole. Instead, possibilities should be sought in frayed identities, identities free of the disintegration of *woman* into *women*.<sup>1</sup>

Haraway<sup>1</sup> offered Monique Wittig's work as accessing the weaving she argued is key to cyborgism; Wittig knows how "to write the body, how to weave eroticism, cosmology, and politics from imagery of embodiment . . . of fragmentation and reconstitution of bodies."<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to *The Lesbian Body*, Wittig struggled with the rigidity of French pronouns and explained her adoption of a language that *je* does not allow, that distorts the submersion of feminine persons as complementary to masculine persons. Wittig wove an erotic tale:

You are m/y glory of cyprine m/y tawny lilac  
purple one, you pursue m/e throughout m/y  
tunnels, your wind bursts in, you blow in m/y  
ears, you bellow, your cheeks are flushed, you  
are m/yself you are m/yself<sup>4</sup>

with the liquid and material substance of the body.

THE ARTERIAL BLOOD THE AORTIC  
BLOOD THE VENULES THE ARTERIOLES  
THE CAPILLARY VESSELS THE AORTA  
THE CAROTID THE CEPHALIC THE JUGULAR  
THE CORONARY THE OESOPHAGEAL  
THE PULMONARY<sup>3</sup>

This poses a particularly challenging question to the visuality we expect and, in fact, reg-

ularly demand in a world saturated by media images: How to represent this pulse of erotics, the liquidity of the body, the turning inside out of the material body and the erotic flow of the language? Haraway noted that cyborg politics is the "struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the general dogma of phallogocentrism."<sup>1</sup> How much codification, then, does the visual perhaps entail? That is, is the visual dangerous to the notion of the cyborg? Can the cyborg be both essentialized and simplified in the visual?

## THE LITERATURE

A variety of theorists have utilized Haraway's work (especially "A Manifesto for Cyborgs") in arguing for the allure of the cyborg. Jamison,<sup>4</sup> for example, explained the seductive nature of the cyborg—the cyborg image tempting us as it "leads us away, entices, and fascinates . . . to win over, attract, entrap, charm, infatuate, and captivate." Jamison<sup>4</sup> noted the possibilities of cyborgism, particularly where women's bodies (certainly a social reality and a "living typeface") become fragmented parts, pieces woven together to form a metal, plastic, and flesh-based patchwork. McRae<sup>5</sup> similarly sexualized and made exotic the figure of the cyborg in her essay on virtual sex. Both arguments, however, read more like utopian theorizing, and both fall prey to Laughlin's<sup>6</sup> argument—in defending the significance of the actual cyborg—that "more of the papers written subsequent to her's [Haraway's] [are] undisciplined, metaphorical applications of the cyborg concept in the interests of so called post-modern criticism."

There are, however, spaces where the cyborg concept has been explored at the level of the physical body. Balsamo began her analysis of cyborg women by defining the body as a "social construction . . . conceptualized and articulated within different cultural discourses." Balsamo utilized Haraway's introduction to the cyborg body to explore a variety of facets that alter the "dimensions and markers" of what we think of as the natural body. Balsamo noted that not only do bodybuilding, cosmetic

surgery, imaging technologies, reproductive technologies and fetus surveillance, and virtual reality create cyborg bodies, they create cyborg *consciousness*. This consciousness is tangled in bodies in process of construction and reconstruction, bodies that subvert paradigmatic notions of the natural (or even unnatural) body, bodies that break down binaries and reside at organic and mechanical territorial boundaries. Cyborg bodies lead to cyborg identities, which foreground “the constructedness of otherness.”<sup>7</sup>

The cyborg body is not always a liberatory space, however. Balsamo noted the problems inherent in some new technologies. Instead of being used to enhance, resculpt, or rethink women’s bodies, they are used to further control and regulate women’s bodies. She noted that certain reproductive technologies turn women into potentially pregnant bodies, that technologies such as laparoscopes (medical devices used to pierce the abdomen and analyze the reproductive organs) serve to objectify the body, and thus the woman, turning her body into a window to the womb and a warming, nutrient-providing machine for the fetus.

Via inquiries into cyborg bodies, the project of Balsamo’s<sup>7</sup> text is “the investigation of the cultural apparatus that constructs gendered bodies.” Balsamo’s<sup>8</sup> interest is exploring social constructions that make the body gendered, as opposed to investigating representations of gendered bodies. We cannot, however, ignore the gendered nature of representations of cyborg bodies—especially when Haraway’s cyborg theories create a space for postgendered possibilities.

González<sup>8</sup> noted that the cyborg body is the site of possible being, a body existing in the “excess of the real.” However, she also noted that the cyborg body is woven within the real. González argued that:

Visual representations of cyborgs are thus not only utopian or dystopian prophesies, but are rather reflections of a contemporary state of being. The image of the cyborg body functions as a site of condensation and displacement. It contains on its surface and in its fundamental structure the multiple fears and desires of a culture caught in the process of transformation.<sup>2</sup>

She continued by analyzing images of the cyborg, which she defined as a “techno-human amalgamation.” González argued that *L’Horlogère* is a cyborg body. This work is paradigmatic of some of the technology-oriented art produced in the late sixteenth century in France, art that reflected the rapid change induced by the industrialization of production in the country. González<sup>8</sup> complicated the vision of *L’Horlogère*, however, in noting that she “is a clock, the clock is a woman—complex, mechanical, serviceable, decorative.” González<sup>2</sup> used the piece to argue that not only the existence of the organic-technico interface is to be analyzed, but the function of such must also be analyzed. González<sup>8</sup> noted that rarely are traditional, gendered Western roles (and bodies) challenged by visual representations of cyborgs. The machinic, while offering liberation from gender, usually serves merely to reinforce the gender dynamics currently at play.

González<sup>8</sup> illustrated her interest in the intersection of race with cyborg representation and takes “Kiddy” (a character in the Japanese anime book *Silent Möbius*) as emblematic of the representation of minority bodies as cyborgs. Kiddy is the only character of color in the entire text—a green-eyed, chocolate-brown woman with Euro-American features. Kiddy eventually decides to expose her secret to her love interest, and begins melting off her brown flesh, explaining that she is “seventy-percent bionic, covered with synth flesh” (from *Silent Möbius*, quoted in González). Her brown coating gives way to gray, almost white flesh. González<sup>8</sup> argued that she is “typical of contemporary (mostly male-produced) cyborg fantasies: a powerful, yet vulnerable, combination of sex toy and techno-sophisticate.” After her brown skin has disappeared, she declares that she thinks she can finally live with what she has become. The Kiddy character provides us with an interesting question to ask in regards to both race and cyborgism—was Kiddy passing as a woman of color, or passing as human? How does cyborgism complicate our notions of race and of flesh?

Oehlert<sup>9</sup> provided a brief overview of the cyborg in comic books, which in turn, provides an interesting point of analysis when analyzing images of cyborgs found on the World

Wide Web.\* Many of the same young men involved in the comic book subculture were active on the Internet and are now active on the Web, participating in synchronous environments such as multiobject-oriented domains (MUDs) and other synchronous and asynchronous areas of the Internet. It is no wonder, then, that we see so many images of cyborgs on the web that reproduce the stereotypically masculine, often violent (or violence prone), heterosexist, and misogynist images viewed in comic books.

Oehlert<sup>9</sup> noted that comic book cyborgs evoke a range of feelings and attitudes in us, from “a deep ambivalence towards violence and killing to issues of lost humanity and, finally, to new conceptions of the nature of evil.” The focus of Oehlert’s<sup>10</sup> essay is categorizing comic book cyborgs based on three groups: simple controllers, biotech integrators, and genetic cyborgs. Important to the focus of this article, however, is how cyborgs are characterized in the essay—they are violent creatures, almost incapable of controlling their rage and physical/technical power. As Oehlert<sup>9</sup> noted, “if you attract the attention of a cyborg hero, you can probably expect to be killed or maimed.”† Oehlert continued by noting that the cyborg hero can quickly and easily become the cyborg villain and these slippages reflect our unease with cyborgs themselves.

However, the popularity of cyborg figures in comic books also reflects the comic book subculture’s (and perhaps the larger culture’s?) acceptance of such figures. We certainly see this

positive portrayal in images of comic book-modeled cyborgs on the web.\*

### CYBORG OR CYBER?

Springer<sup>10</sup> argued that the dispute over gender and gender representation is intensified by the growing cyborg phenomena in popular culture. Representations of cyborgs highlight our anxieties of the future of human beings. However, in order to introduce a practical feminist technological politics, we must reconcile the gap between theoretical constructions of cyborg possibilities and actual visual representations of the cyborg.

The bulk of images we view—whether on the World Wide Web, in comic books, or in popular science fiction film—are not cyborg images in the way that Haraway and other theorists imagine the political and possibly liberating cyborg. Instead, these images are *cyber* images, drawing upon and reinforcing contemporary notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and power. They mesh hegemonic constructions with mechanical possibilities.

The distinction between cyber and cyborg is important. The term “cyber” refers to a term coined much earlier, but popularized by William Gibson, a popular science fiction writer, in his 1984 book, *Neuromancer*.<sup>11</sup> Cyberbodies are “high-tech” bodies that, instead of problematizing representations of bodies and the heterosexual imperative in much visual representation, reproduce norms of sexuality and the sexualization of certain women’s bodies, and validate the male gaze. The cyberbody does not politicize the potential of the techno/synthetic/mechanical body in the

---

\*Video games, although not often analyzed for their visually induced effects on sex and social relations, are also influential in how we conceive of cyborg bodies and cyborg consciousness. As Haraway<sup>1</sup> noted, “the culture of video games is heavily oriented to individual competition and extraterrestrial warfare. High-tech, gendered imaginations are produced here, imaginations that can contemplate destruction and a sci-fi escape from its consequences” (p. 88).

†It is particularly interesting here to compare this point to the work of González—I would argue that Oehlert is specifically referencing male cyborgs when he noted the danger of attracting the attention of a cyborg hero. When Kiddy, a female cyborg, attracts the attention of a human male, she maims *herself*.

---

\*The images we see in comic books are similar to the images of cyborgs we see in film (see, for example, *Robocop* and *Robocop 2*). *Terminator* and *Terminator 2* provide an interesting lens through which to view the abstract masculinity of the male cyborg. In *Terminator*, Arnold Schwarzenegger is a killing machine carefully disguised by synthetic flesh. He is emotionless and seemingly unstoppable. We see the Terminator’s predecessor in *Terminator 2* as much less muscular, but more advanced synthetically—technology seemingly replacing the good old humanoid features. But, again, the Terminator is an emotionless, mechanical monster.



FIG. 1. "Femachine," female cyborg.

ways that theorized notions of cyborg bodies can.

Braidotti<sup>12</sup> challenged the often upheld belief that cyberspaces can seemingly replace solidified and universal notions of the self with "multiple and polymorphous reembodiments." Cyberspaces provide no automatic advancement of such freedom. Braidotti<sup>12</sup> also noted the staleness of representation of femininity and masculinity in media culture, where Pamela Anderson Lee presents the ideal of femininity, and the muscled Arnold Schwarzenegger presents an abstract masculinity in a hyper-real body. Cyberbodies reproduce this, painting the staleness over with a fresh coat of metal for flesh, enhancing but not challenging the norms of femininity and masculinity.

I will focus here on images of so-called "cyborgs" found on the World Wide Web\* to illustrate the argument that instead of viewing cyborg bodies, we are viewing cyber bodies. It

---

\*The images shown here were collected by using the keyword "cyborg" on the search engine AltaVista (<http://www.altavista.com>). This was not necessarily a precise methodology, but one that provided a wide variety of images and contexts.

will soon become clear that Haraway's written tease about the possibilities of the cyborg has yet to become visually represented.

## THE GAZE

Figure 1<sup>13</sup> provides a typical representation of the female cyberbody. She is clearly in a sexualized pose and sexualized construction—her breasts are revealed, her feet are sculpted into what almost look like high heels, although incredibly sharp. She looks straight at us, with blank, empty eyes, mouth slightly open. However, there is some danger apparent here: her sharp heels, possibly weaponry strapped to her back. Much female cyborg imagery plays along the margin of sexuality and violence, although sexuality seems always to dominate potential violence.

The norms of femininity and female sexuality are asserted in Figure 2,<sup>14</sup> where the only facial features of the robot-woman are sensuous lips. She kneels, holding the front of her thong bodysuit open, her breasts almost revealed. She is sexualized, nearly undressed (in the process of undressing herself for us, in fact).



FIG. 2. "Robot," female cyborg.

She exists for pleasuring, not with any autonomy. This image does not bring us to the post-gendered space Haraway described where partiality and ambiguity reside. The message is clear—this cyborg body is a techno sexpot, an available and docile sexualized machine.

This image is found on a website offering an analysis of “Legacy Systems and Functional Cyborgization of Humans” and future directions for the replacement of “old” systems—technological and biological. The author provides a comparison of illustrations, offering a naked woman sitting in a tree as an example of a natural human, unaugmented and “devoid of clothing or any other form of physical enhancement.”<sup>14</sup>

We again see norms of femininity reflected in Figure 3 (web page no longer available), where three robot models are on display for us. They are clearly sexualized cyberbodies, their poses inviting and demure. The breasts of the figure to the far right are showing, with chains across the nipples. All three figures are wearing heavy makeup, are slender, and are revealing a good deal of skin—a gendered performance, but also a human performance, as if to show “under all this metal, there’s still flesh, and it’s available to you.”

One doesn’t need to surmise such a promise in Figures 4 and 5,<sup>15</sup> where the promise is apparent. The *Android Sexual Mechanics Lab* provides images of “artificial girls” designed for sexual pleasure. A variety of images are presented, and all include women partially or completely nude, some of their body parts replaced or removed, their metal subsurface showing through. Although the images them-



FIG. 4. Artificial girl designed for sexual pleasure, female cyborg.

selves are disturbing, the text that accompanies the images are equally as disturbing. For example, the text that appears with Figure 4 notes that “Andrea comes with removable limbs for better storage.” The text that appears with Figure 5 informs viewers that “Extra body parts always available arms, legs, waist, and head units.” These are sexually appropriated images of women, robbing the actual women they represent of their subjectivity and even of their potential subjectivity.

Some interesting cyborg imagery comes from a website providing a “cyborg personality index”<sup>16</sup>—a way to find out just how cyborg one is. The results of previous tests are available, along with a picture constructed based on

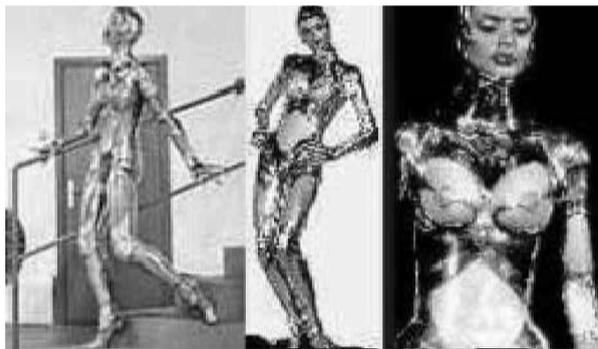


FIG. 3. Robot models, female cyborgs.



FIG. 5. Artificial girl designed for sexual pleasure, female cyborg.



FIG. 6. "Lobo," male cyborg.

how "cyborg" the test-taker was. The more cyborg the test-taker is, the more masculine the test-taker becomes. In fact, the "least cyborg" image is that of a young woman with blonde hair. She is wearing jeans and a simple shirt—no metal gear, no weaponry, seemingly no synthetic flesh. She poses demurely, her knees together, one foot arched upward so that her toes can shyly touch the ground.\* The next stage reveals a woman wearing black sunglasses and a tight black skirt, clinging to her legs and hips. At next stage of cyborgism, the test-taker becomes a muscular woman, t-shirt strained across bulging chest muscles, a holster slung over one shoulder. She has a threatening

\*The use of the female body (often naked) appears again and again in cyborg-related imagery as an example of the body "least" cyborg—the body offering few (or no) technological possibilities. This illustrates the double bind women find themselves in: cultural narratives typically align women with nature and men with science, thus allowing men more access to technology and trapping technology within hegemonic masculinity.

stance—her hands on her hips and her legs spread apart. If the test-taker scores high enough, s/he becomes Robocop, the cyborg police officer, equipped with a massive robotic body, large metal muscles, and a variety of built-in weaponry. In the film *Robocop*, however, the robotic police officer is somewhat of a "good guy." If test-takers surpass Robocop in the results of their answers, they become the "evil" robot seen in the same film—industry's creation, wired for utter obedience and destruction and equipped with super weaponry. In the film, however, the mega-robot fizzles and engages in a destructive rampage. The cyborg test seemingly sets up a criteria for us: feminine → masculine → cyborg → monster.

Typical images of male cyborgs reflecting both abstract masculinity and cyberesque notions of the male body are seen in Figures 6 and 7. Figure 6<sup>17</sup> is particularly interesting because it is, in some ways, not typical of the male cyborg body—the figure is slender and not particularly the muscle-bound cyborg we see in other images. The figure, however, has broad shoulders, a big enough gun to dwarf the lack of obvious musculature, and a large phallus. The cyborg has an aggressive pose—his chest

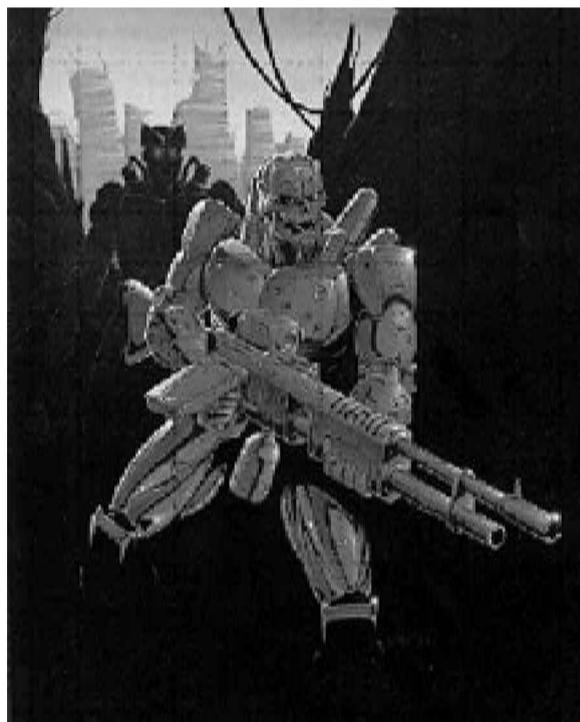


FIG. 7. "Rifts," male cyborg.

jutting out, his head lowered like a bull's before charging, his gun held upward in one hand, the fingers on his other hand curled as if waiting to grip the gun and fire. "Lobo" was originally created as a combat cyborg for a fantasy game, but he was lost in battle and eventually reprogrammed to exercise free thought. As the web page that houses the image explains, after being granted access to free thought, Lobo became a "pirate," the very being he was originally created to battle. Although the choice employed by this cyborg reflects on Haraway's argument that cyborgs are potentially unfaithful to their fathers, this cyborg image still reflects the violent prowess typical of representations of male cyborgs.

Figure 7<sup>18</sup> provides a more typical male cyborg image. The cyborg has incredibly large metal muscles, gigantic chest, and shoulders. He holds an almost impossibly big weapon and it is clear that he has some sort of backpack slung behind him with ammunition or missiles attached. Not surprisingly, the canister of his gun hangs directly between his legs. His pose is that of a hunter and is aggressive and menacing. His face looks stern and dangerous, but the metal mouth almost seems curled up in a smile—he is enjoying the hunt, enjoying stalking, and, inevitably, bloodshed (or synthetic flesh shed) will occur when he finds his quarry.

A final interesting version of the cyborg is that of "skins." On a variety of websites, players of multiplayer, often violent video games like *Doom* and *Quake* can trade "skins" for their players. These skins are virtual and can be put onto a character. This provides an interesting option where gender-bending and identity shifting can occur—individuals can sculpt their players, their online personas, can try on different skins (usually male). Most of the skins, however, reproduce norms of power and violence. The few female skins were graced with hypersexuality and hyperweaponry. Most skins came with built-in extensive weaponry, huge muscles, and other typical markers of violent cyborgs.

### RETHINKING CYBORG WOMEN

With these *cyber* images—and the thousands of others like them available on the World Wide

Web and seen in popular science fiction film—in mind, is it then possible to conceive of a visual representation of the cyborg Haraway and other theorists have envisioned?

The textual representations of female cyborgs by feminist theorists are difficult to come by in visual representation. One such possibility (albeit not available on the World Wide Web) is found in Tamblyn's<sup>19</sup> "She Loves It, She Loves It Not: Women and technology." Tamblyn's article consists of images from a CD-ROM project focused on the tensions of women's interactions with technology. One such image (see Fig. 8<sup>19</sup>) presents a picture of a woman in the center of a daisy, the background of which is an astrological chart. In the upper-left hand corner, we read "she loves it" and in the upper-right hand corner, we read "she loves it not." "Women and Technology" appears at bottom center. The author has digitized herself, placed herself within and upon the technology she seemingly has a shifting relationship with. The use of the visual metaphor of the daisy—along with the text that calls upon the children's game of plucking the petals, hoping for "he (or, in this case, it) loves me"—complicates and questions the relationship of women, nature, and technology in ways that the earlier images do not.

What this CD-ROM project seemingly attempts to achieve is what Albright<sup>20</sup> argues is



FIG. 8. She loves it, she loves it not: Women and technology.

the transcendence of women from their bodies, achieved by removing boundary markers, by “creating a space for the digital emancipation of the feminine sphere in hypertextual cyberspace.” These technologically savvy women artists are bringing the body back to the center “via electronic representation.” They are re-coding the cyborg body “as the body electronic.”

Another such possibility of a feminist-identified (or at least Haraway-identified) cyborg can be found in the images of Ju Gosling (see Fig. 9<sup>21</sup>), provided on her website. The images she provided are in direct response to the absence of the disabled in society and in cyberspace, “either in images or in positions of power.” She noted that the disabled are not only seen as nongendered, they are also seen as sexless and asexual. She asked: “Is it any wonder, then, if we take to replicating digitally in our own mirrors?”

Gosling was diagnosed with Scheuermann’s disease when she was 28 and was soon recognized by the British government as a “state-certified cripp.” After a variety of treatments were tested, Gosling was prescribed an awkward plastic brace that fastened with nylon straps and covered the length of her spine. She described her panic the first time she tried on the brace:

The feeling of being confined made me panic and hyperventilate, and the brace’s appearance filled me with horror. Its white nylon



FIG. 10. Ju Gosling’s transformation of the brace.

straps were made of the same material as the fastenings on my racing dinghy. Its surgical pink surface took no account of ethnic difference: if you were “white,” you were pink. Its shape exaggerated my waist and hips while my breasts were the only part of my torso left exposed, creating a feminised, almost Edwardian silhouette.

Initially, she felt claimed by the brace—her identity became submerged in the awkward piece of equipment designed to straighten her spine. Although the brace was intended to help her reclaim herself, her autonomy, she found herself submerged in the brace, by the brace—it became her personality, her identity.

To accept the plastic extension she was forced to wear everyday, with the help of an artist friend, Gosling transformed the brace (see Fig. 10<sup>21</sup>). Gosling noted that reclaiming the brace was a move against “medical images . . . of surveillance and social regulation, used to classify, discipline and manage the body. I wanted to control my own image, to mark my body in a way which was meaningful to me,



FIG. 9. Ju Gosling, self-defined cyborg.

and to reject my body's classification by its impairment." One of their priorities as they resculpted the brace was to turn Gosling's body from an asexualized, disabled body into a different body of desire.

Gosling described the transformation process:

Jo began by spraying the brace a metallic silver with a blue tinge. Metal is inorganic: disabled people are regarded as less than organic and/or inseparable from their inorganic aids. Metal is associated with hardness, power: pink with softness, weakness. Metal is androgynous: pink femme. And unlike the surgical pink plastic, metal does not pretend to be flesh; perceived as artificial, the brace/borg separated itself from me.

The reclamation of the brace, then, provided a space in which Gosling could reclaim her identity, her sexuality, and her life.\*

## CONCLUSION

There are places on the Internet where gender is performed and represented much differently than in the visual space of the World Wide Web. Kendall<sup>22</sup> and McRae,<sup>5</sup> for example, discuss gender performance in MUDs. These Internet spaces are purely textual, and users create characters that can either realistically represent the person at the keyboard (e.g., a person with the handle "Kathy" and the description "Kathy is a student at Michigan Technological University. She is a tall blonde who likes country music") or can represent an entirely different perspective of the user (e.g., a person with the handle "Kat" and the description "Kat is a sinewy lioness, with a tawny hide and muscular legs. She sits slightly back on her haunches and bares her solid, sharp white teeth"). Manipulations abound in these realms

and there are generally few restrictions on how individuals choose to enact their online selves. Most users are asked to assign a gender to their character when they first enter a MUD, but many MUDs offer the option of an "other" gender and corresponding other pronouns. For example, on GammaMOO, users have the following gender options: neuter, male, female, either, Spivak, plural, etc.

Even in a textual realm offering radically different possibilities, however, the same representations are found. Kendall<sup>22</sup> noted that "almost every female character is wielding a gun, sword or similar weapon. This juxtaposition of large breasts and pointed weapons gives them a hypersexual 'phallic female' appearance." The adoption and enactment of different genders by users also often results in mere caricature of that other gender. For example, Kendall<sup>22</sup> noted that "choosing a gender, even a neutral gender, doesn't free people from standard gender expectations." Men who choose female characters often grace them with a 38-24-34 figure, a long mane of hair, high heels, seemingly demure mannerisms, etc. It is an interesting deviation that they often then grace such stereotypically feminine characters with a variety of imposing weapons.

McRae<sup>5</sup> has argued that enacting another gender online might allow a user to explore what it "feels like" to be something other. But, as Kendall noted, adopting a different gender does little to change the actual gendered representations and realities of everyday life.

This deconstruction of seemingly "cyborg" images leaves much to be challenged and questioned. Obviously, I have not analyzed all of the images on the World Wide Web, nor have I done much categorization. It is important at this point in time, especially where the constantly evolving landscape of the web is concerned, to document representations—textual and visual. Although many of the web pages that initially hosted the images discussed here no longer exist or have dramatically changed, traces of the images—and their implications—linger on the web. It is crucial that we address the visual marking of the web and interrogate the images that appear throughout its electronic ecology.

Future research could offer much to our un-

---

\*Some theorists would probably push this analysis further, arguing that for Gosling to really have done so, she would have had a synth-metal spinal implant. I would argue, however, that to truly visualize the possibilities of the cyborg, we do have to negotiate between what is technologically possible and what will become technologically probable.

derstanding of the complicated traces and marks left behind, and the results of such markings on visual and virtual spaces. In a realm where radical new possibilities for publication exist, differentiating between the contexts in which certain traces appear (or do not appear) will help future researchers sort through the vast amount of visual content found online. Some theorists—Wall,<sup>23</sup> for example—have also argued that the World Wide Web itself is a cyborg, thus complicating the notion of the medium in which the images appear.

What this article offers, then, is a way to begin thinking about cyborg images in a way that allows us to differentiate them and the bodies they represent—theoretically and practically—from cyber bodies. This differentiation is crucial if we are to ever visually and virtually realize cyborgs as Haraway envisions them to be.

## REFERENCES

1. Haraway, D. (1985). A manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. *Socialist Review*, 80:65–107.
2. Gray, C.H., Mentor, S., & Figueroa-Sarriera, H. (1995). *The cyborg handbook*. London: Routledge, pp. 276–280.
3. Wittig, M. (1975). *The lesbian body*. Trans. David LeVay. New York: Morrow.
4. Jamison, P.K. (1998). Contradictory spaces: Pleasure and the seduction of the cyborg discourse. *Arachnet Electronic Journal of Virtual Culture*, 2. Online document: [http://lydia.bradley.edu:80/las/soc/syl/391/papers/contra\\_spaces.html](http://lydia.bradley.edu:80/las/soc/syl/391/papers/contra_spaces.html)
5. McRae, S. (1996). Coming apart at the seams: Sex, text, and the virtual body. In Cherny L., Weise E.R. (eds.), *wired\_women: Gender and new realities in cyberspace*. Seattle: Seal Press, pp. 242–264.
6. Laughlin, C. (1996). Tangent: Cyborg consciousness. Online document: <http://www.carleton.ca/~claughli/tutcybor.htm>
7. Balsamo, A. (1996). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
8. González, J. (1995). Envisioning cyborg bodies: Notes from current research. In Gray C.H., Mentor S., Figueroa-Sarriera H., (eds.) *The cyborg handbook*. London: Routledge.
9. Oehlert, M. (1995). From Captain America to Wolverine: Cyborgs in comic books, alternative images of cybernetic heroes and villains. In Gray C.H., Mentor S., Figueroa-Sarriera H. (eds.). *The cyborg handbook* London: Routledge, (pp. 219–233).
10. Springer, C. (1996). *Electronic eros: Bodies and desire in the postindustrial age*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
11. Gibson, W. (1984). *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books.
12. Braidotti, R. (1998). Cyberfeminism with a difference. Online document: [http://www.let.ruu.nl/womens\\_studies/rosi/cyberfem.htm#bfn16](http://www.let.ruu.nl/womens_studies/rosi/cyberfem.htm#bfn16)
13. Shaylor, C. (2000). Femachine. Online document: <http://www.blumoonrising.com>
14. Chislenko, A. (1998). Legacy systems and functional cyborgization of humans. Online document: <http://www.lucifer.com/~sasha/articles/Cyborgs.html>
15. Android Sexual Mechanics Lab. (1998). Online document: <http://members.xoom.com/androidlab/main.htm>
16. Bush, Z., Chadwick, B., Gill, S., Pollack, C., Protell, P., & Ullah, K. (1998). The cyborg personality index. Online document: <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~bbc5e/cyborgs/cyborgs.html>
17. Septerra Core. (1999). Lobo. Online document: <http://www.septerracore.com/lobo.html>
18. Welcome to the Megaverse. (1999). Online document: <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Chamber/7626/rifts.htm>
19. Tamblyn, C. (1997). She loves it, she loves it not: Women and technology. In Terry J., Calvert M. (eds.) *Processed lives: Gender and technology in everyday life* New York: Routledge, pp. 47–50.
20. Albright, J.M. (1998). Of mind, body and machine: Cyborg cultural politics in the age of hypertext. Online document: <http://www-scf.usc.edu/~albright/cyborg3.txt>
21. Gosling, J. (1998). My not-so-secret life as a cyborg. Online document: <http://users.netmatters.co.uk/ju90/cylife.htm>
22. Kendall, L. (1996). MUDder? I hardly know 'er! Adventures of a feminist MUDder. In: Cherny L., Weise E.R. (eds.) *wired\_women: Gender and new realities in cyberspace*. Seattle: Seal Press, pp. 207–223.
23. Wall, D. (1994). The World-Wide Web as a cyborg author in the postmodern world. Online document: [http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/courses/encr481/wall\\_paper.html](http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/courses/encr481/wall_paper.html)

Address reprint requests to:

Danielle DeVoss, M.A.  
Humanities Department  
Michigan Technological University  
1400 Townsend Drive  
Houghton, MI 49931

E-mail: [dndevoss@mtu.edu](mailto:dndevoss@mtu.edu)

Copyright of CyberPsychology & Behavior is the property of Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Copyright of CyberPsychology & Behavior is the property of Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.