

Confirmative Praxis Report

The Corporeal is Simulated

Tessa Holly Salt

0952334

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
MA Contemporary Dialogues – Photography**

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea

CONFIRMATIVE PRAXIS (ADAA7002)

WORD COUNT: 5464

Table of Contents

Pages

List of illustrations	3
Introduction	4
Mind vs. Body	7
Virtual vs. Real	13
Male vs. Female	18
Woman vs. Machine	23
Conclusion	29
Bibliography	31

List of Illustrations

Pages

Figure 1: Salt, T H. (2023) <i>Mind vs. Body</i> . [Photographic mordançaçe]. In possession of: the author.	7
Figure 2: Salt, T H. (2024) <i>Virtual vs. Real</i> . [Photographic mordançaçe]. In possession of: the author.	13
Figure 3: Salt, T H. (2024) <i>Male vs. Female</i> . [Photographic mordançaçe]. In possession of: the author.	18
Figure 4: Salt, T H. (2024) <i>Woman vs. Machine</i> . [Photographic mordançaçe]. In possession of: the author.	23

Introduction

“Usurp the body. Become your avatar. Be the glitch. Let the whole goddamn thing short circuit”
(Russell, 2020, p.153).

In *Glitch Feminism*, Legacy Russell advocates for the subversion of traditional bodily constraints and encourages the embracing of digital personas as a way to challenge conventional notions of identity, authenticity, and representation. It encourages individuals to inhabit the liminal spaces between binaries, embracing the complexity and multiplicity of identity. Glitches are not just errors, but disruptions within systems that can challenge and change procedures and expose underlying structures. Russell’s text serves as a catalyst for unravelling societal structures, questioning established hierarchies, and inviting individuals to (re)consider their perceptions of the world.

The intention behind this project is to find alternate ways of using male-dominated technologies, such as photographic and computational processes, to highlight inequalities and start to dismantle the historical hierarchies and structures that society is built on and still influenced by. By acknowledging the biases in the world, we can look to oppose them and explore the grey areas between binaries. This facilitates a shift in societal thinking and action, leading the way for systemic change.

Whilst exploring the broad and unlimited area of ‘in-between binaries’, this work specifically uses the nude female body as a tool to focus on disrupting the male gaze and emphasises the

ways patriarchal structures have shaped perceptions. By creating glitches in the body to abstract the imagery either digitally or physically, the aim is to reimagine the possibilities of identity and embodiment within both digital and physical spaces.

The boundaries and limitations of photography have been explored through various alternative processes, including anthotypes, cyanotypes and liquid emulsion. This exploration led to the process of mordantage. Mordantage is a photographic bleaching process that uses a solution of hydrogen peroxide, acetic acid and copper chloride that reacts with the silver present in a traditional darkroom print to lift the black emulsion from the surface of the print. It was originally used as a reversal process for black and white film negatives to turn them into positive films throughout the 1800s. Jean-Pierre Sudre later started using the process on prints instead of film to create distressed and abstracted artworks and named it mordantage. Elizabeth Opalenik created the draping effect that is now a popular technique within the process. This is how I have used the process, draping and shifting the veils of emulsion into other areas of the image to cause abstraction.

Deleuze and Guattari propose the theory of smooth space in *A Thousand Plateaus* as an alternative to conventional notions of space as a homogeneous and rigid construct such as the Cartesian logic of binary opposition. “‘smooth space’ haunts and can disrupt the striations of conventional space, and it unfolds through ‘an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction’” (Parr, 2005, p.257). This concept challenges the fixed and compartmentalised nature of striated space, instead embracing multiplicity and variability.

In the same way that smooth space disrupts the striations of conventional space, the chapters of this report aim to disrupt typical binary oppositions by examining the interconnectedness and fluidity between seemingly dichotomous concepts. I aim to highlight the impacts that our technologically mediated world has on gender identity, emphasising that whilst technology has the potential to empower women, it also poses significant challenges and risks.

Mind vs. Body

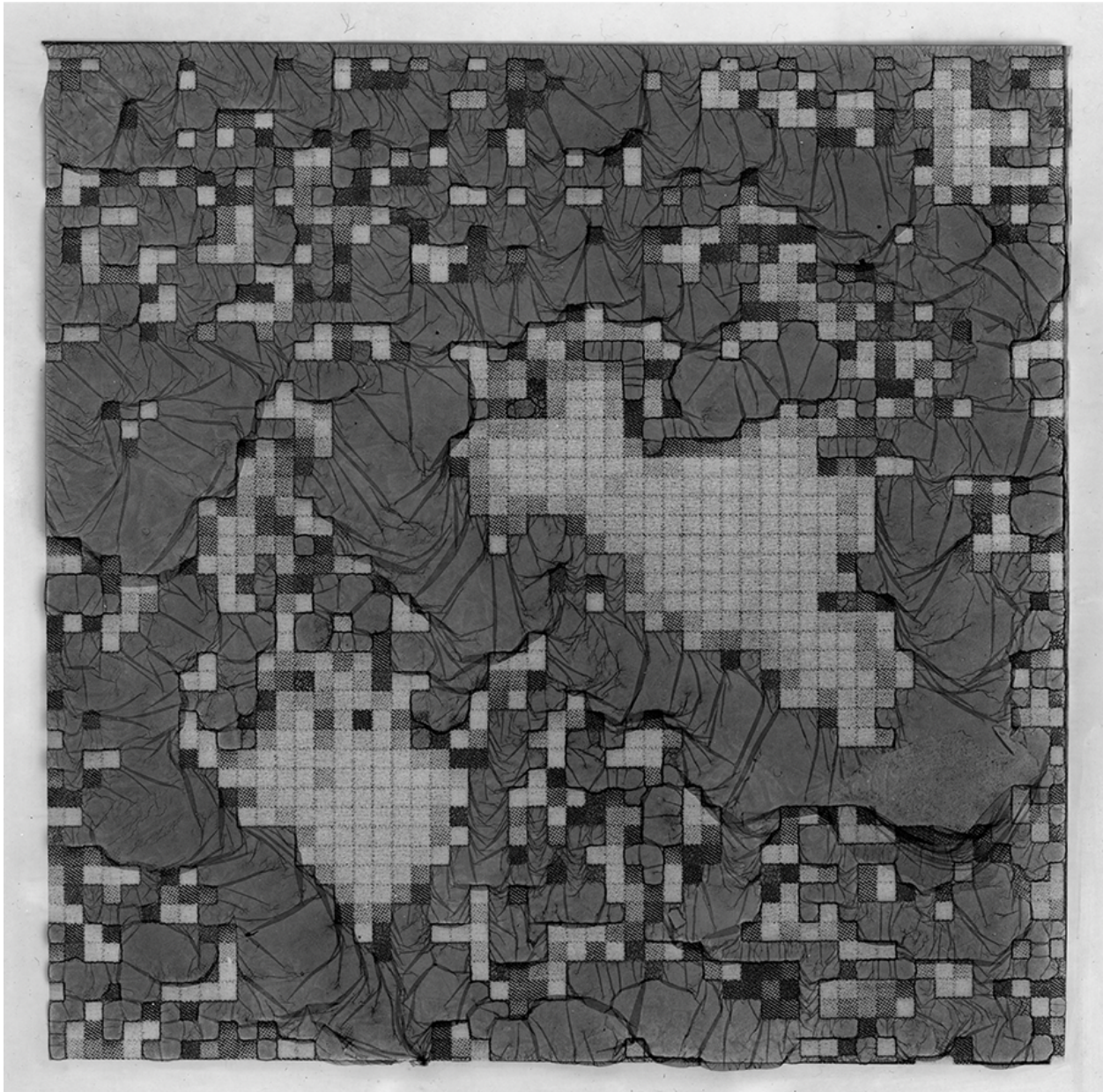


Figure 1

an atomic particle can effectively be in two places at one time. This suggests that particles can be separated in space but so intimately entangled that they can only be considered together (Plant, 1994, p.258).

In *Zeros + Ones*, Sadie Plant presents the idea of separate entities being intrinsically linked. This could be applied to various dualities, such as the relationship between the body and the mind

or the body and the soul. Are these entities truly separate? Can they be disentangled, and should they be? It is often thought that the mind and body are completely separate, individual entities, but their interdependence is undeniable.

The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically (Patrizio, 2019, p.153).

For instance, physical exercise affects mental well-being by triggering the release of endorphins resulting in improved mood. This illustrates the intricate connection between physical and mental aspects of the human experience.

Historically, philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, Husserl and Sartre have spoken about the difference between the mind/consciousness and the body, generally favouring that the mind is more powerful than the body and also suggesting the idea of the mind escaping the body altogether (Butler, 1990). However, associations are frequently made between the mind and masculinity, and the body with femininity, which can reinforce gender hierarchies and perpetuate inequality.

Simone de Beauvoir also discussed the mind/body distinction, stating that society often marks the female body in a way that puts it below the male body. This was countered by Luce Irigaray who believes that both male and female bodies are marked by society, but in different ways. Irigaray argued that women are often seen as other or different, while men are considered the norm (Butler, 1990). This is certainly true that men are 'marked' or stereotyped in certain ways, e.g. being expected to be tough and not show emotion, which can have adverse effects in the

form of toxic masculinity. Whilst this is very problematic, as Irigaray states, it is a different type of marking and one that also has a negative impact on women. The stereotype perpetuates prejudice against women which can lead to domestic abuse or gender-based violence.

On the topic of the body Russell states in *Glitch Feminism* that “the body conceived of as a machinic assemblage becomes a body that is multiple”; machine bodies are multiplicities, glitched bodies are “becoming every-body and no-body simultaneously” (2020, p.137). This implies that when taking a digital photograph of a person, they become part machine by proximity, **the digital form is a new version of that person**. The pixels that make up digital content could be compared to atoms, everything in the physical realm is made of atoms, everything in the digital realm is made of pixels. Tiny elements that we can't see unless intensely magnified.

Photography is both atoms and pixels, an interplay of digital technology and analogue processes. The link between photography and memory, photography and the mind, is intrinsic.

Teodora Cosman points out that the conceptualization of photography in terms of making impressions on a light-sensitive surface established a parallel with the way memory was understood to work: as a process of making imprints on the tissue of the brain (Zylinska, 2023, p.56).

Memory itself operates as a form of internalised photography and thus photography operates as an externalised form of memory. This relationship blurs the boundaries between physical and mental states. They work together in tandem rather than being separate entities. Memory is not fixed, and whilst photographs are often seen as a frozen moment in time, they too are not necessarily fixed. They can deteriorate, they can show things out of context, they can be

staged. The interplay of memory and photography highlights the questionability and unfixability of both.

“bodies are not fixed points they are not destinations. Bodies are journeys. Bodies move. Body is an abstract. We recognise that we begin in obstruction and then journey toward becoming” (Russell, 2020, p.146). Russell refers to people as "cyborg subjects" (2020, p.121), previously stating that “bodies navigating digital space are as much computational as they are flesh” (2020, p.67). The way that smartphones and devices are so integrated in daily lives is a demonstration of this. They become an extension of the body. As a capitalist society, we are so reliant on digital spaces and computational technology that we are essentially already cyborgs. It has been less than 20 years since the smartphones of today (and less than 10 years since they became the norm), and yet it seems impossible to navigate life without them today. Technology is so ingrained in our lives that it would be impossible to separate from it. With the convenience it provides, it’s easy to see how this has happened. But corporations and marketing teams take advantage of this convenience and reliance to sell us products, and if it’s free, you are the product (Serra, 1980). This manipulation of the human mind has been well documented for decades, with Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, credited as the father of public relations since the publication of *Propaganda* in 1928.

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, and our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of.... It is they who pull the wires that control the public mind (Bernays, 1928, p.37).

Simulated bodies are often commodified and subjected to exploitation, even more so with deepfake technology becoming more and more accessible. The creation of deepfake porn is now a criminal offence in the UK. When the law was put in place in April 2024, Laura Farris, Minister for Victims and Safeguarding, stated “This new offence sends a crystal clear message that making this material is immoral, often misogynistic, and a crime” (Ministry of Justice, 2024). Acts of resistance against this commodification are increasing, with artists and activists reclaiming autonomy and authority. Platforms like OnlyFans serve as examples of individuals asserting control over their online personas with creators charging audiences for their content and choosing what people are able to view. Artist Leah Schrager demonstrates this with her project *Ona*, an Instagram cam-girl persona of herself which has amassed over 5 million followers. After being unable to find support for the project in the art world, Schrager launched a gallery of the work on OnlyFans, taking back power and showing that women can reclaim control over their own representation (Schrager, 2020).

The use of simulated bodies blurs the boundaries between physical reality and digital representation, challenging our understanding of embodiment and consciousness. Alison Adam discusses the idea that “the desires [of men] are to make the body obsolete, to play god in artificial worlds and to download minds into robots” (2000, p.282). These desires assume that inserting a human mind into a robot turns that machine into a person, it is not the body that is essential to being human, it is only a vessel for carrying the mind. “the body does not matter, it can be left behind” (Adam, 2000, p.282). Whether these are cyborg mutations of ourselves or for our robot 'children' as discussed by Sue Jansen in her account of male AI scientists wishing

to create their own robots; they wish to play at being god and "become father to oneself" (Adam, 2000, p.491). This implies that they believe themselves to be the most superior beings.

Fernández indicates a shift towards the prioritisation of digital existence over embodied existence:

As with other live entities, humans are viewed primarily as patterns of information transferable to various media, such as computers. In this scheme of things, embodiment is secondary; the organism has been replaced by its code (Fernández, 2003, p.520).

Humans are patterns of information that can be replicated and transferred to different forms of media, into computational input. Human identity can be reduced to code, to information, which reflects the influence of digital technologies and the prevalence of information as currency in contemporary society (Hayles, 2003). This implies the devaluation of embodiment or physicality in favour of digital representations. The physical body is merely a vessel for the underlying information, rather than an integral aspect of human experience and identity. But should we prioritise that information and digital existence over embodied existence?

Virtual vs. Real

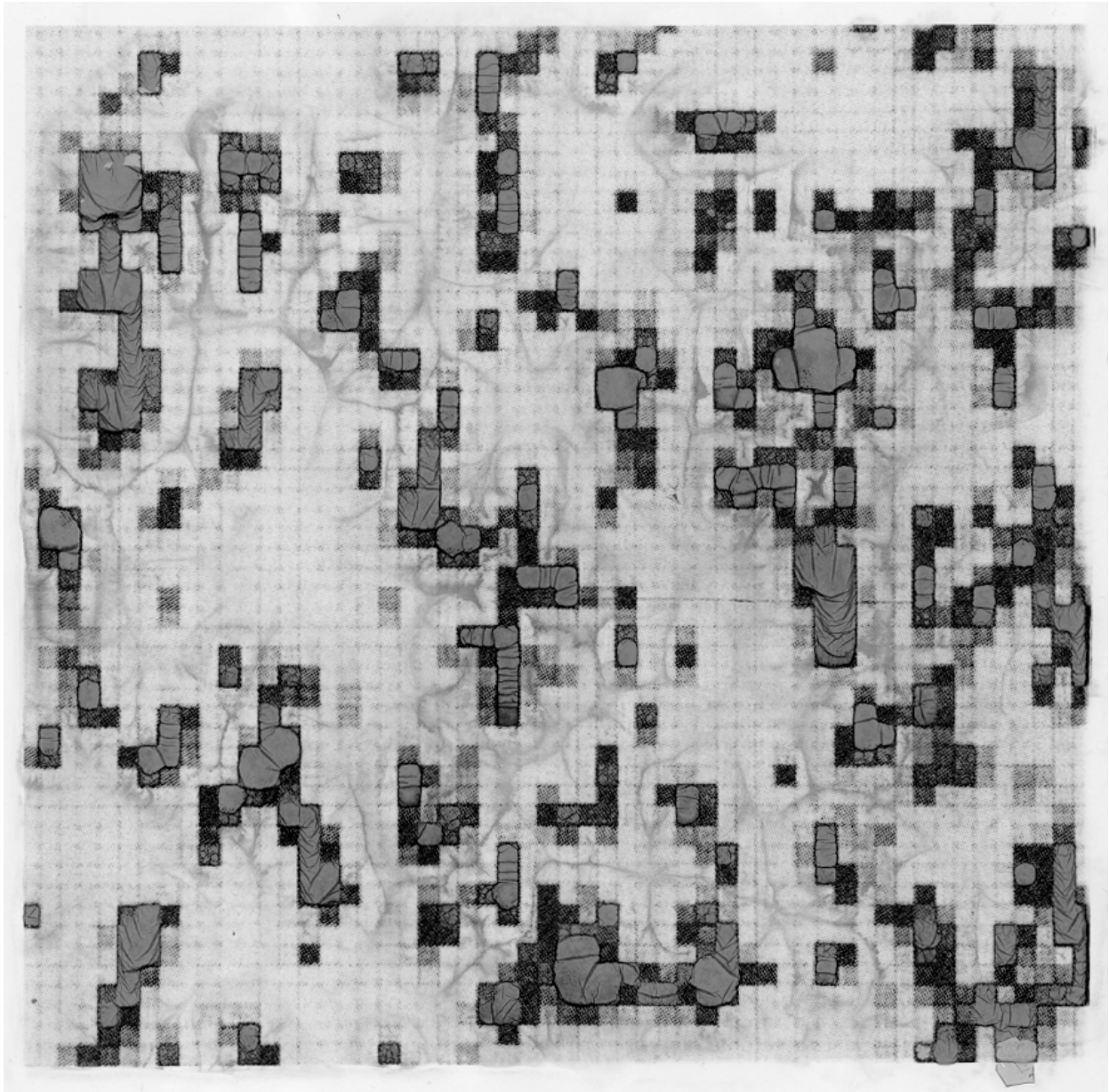


Figure 2

“the replicants are not supposed to know they were made, not born” (Plant, 1997, p.97).

The humanoid replicants depicted in *Blade Runner* are indistinguishable from humans except when undergoing a Turing test to detect emotional responses to prove the presence of

humanity. But humans are made up of social constructs; we are all made despite being born. Is anything innate? How can we truly know ourselves if that is true? We are constantly changing and transitioning, adapting; constantly in a state of flux, shaped by the world around us. If we, like replicants, aren't supposed to know that we're made not born, what happens when we do discover this? We realise we can change the social constructs; we can tear down patriarchal and capitalist structures.

The humanoids in science fiction films straddle the line between virtual and real worlds, not human but not devoid of intelligence. To make the distinction, they are often depicted as emotionless beings that have a desire to take over the world from humans. However, "computing machines can only carry out the purposes that they are instructed to do" which would include not harming humans as specified in Asimov's laws of robotics (Plant, 1997, p.99). This distinction between programmed behaviour and human unpredictability emphasises the limitations of both human and artificial intelligence.

Humans have various limitations in their thinking processes, and therefore so do computers. They lack the capacity for true randomness, as highlighted by Bridle; "You can't programme a computer to produce true randomness"; computers need some basis and rules on which to produce 'randomness' which, by definition, makes it not random (2022, p.326). This lack of randomness highlights a fundamental difference between the two realms of virtual and real. In virtual environments, randomness is often simulated rather than genuine and so even though it may feel authentic to users, it lacks the true unpredictability of real-world randomness.

The term hyperobject was originally coined by Timothy Morton to mean something that surrounds us but is too big to see in its entirety from one perspective. As it touches and influences so many different areas, we only truly perceive the impact it has on other areas, such as the outcome of AI-generated art and its effects on practising artists. A virtual world entity impacting the real world.

Telepresence, video calling, live streams and virtual reality have changed the landscape of digital embodiment. Even live streams of different locations provide an element of virtually travelling to and viewing places that you may not otherwise see. These visuals along with features like haptic feedback on controllers add another sense to the experience making it more life-like. These digital technologies can facilitate and manipulate bodily experiences and bridge the gap between virtual and real. Deconstructing the binaries of virtual worlds and the real world helps to challenge the binaries and hierarchies of gender; “cyber feminism does not express itself in single, individual approaches but in the differences in between” (Russell, 2020, p.36).

If you’ve ever made a user profile online, you’ve likely been asked to upload an image of yourself to the profile or make a digital avatar of yourself. Before it was common practice to have lifelike ‘simulations’ of yourself as a representative online, it was popular to recreate yourself, your family, your home, etc. in games like *The Sims*. A game that literally simulates real life. Legacy Russell points out that the term bodied essentially means to give material form

to something abstract (2020). Digital 'lives' are formed in games and online spaces, grounding the virtual by adding in elements of 'real' life, making it less abstract.

There are many contradictions with computation, glitches being one of them. James Bridle explores the relationship between glitches, computation and the representation of reality in *New Dark Age*. He argues that "the network is the best representation of reality we have built, precisely because it too is so difficult to think" (2019, p.76). It is a hyperobject. The network has become completely ingrained in our daily lives, seamlessly integrated into our routines, and carried around in our pockets through smartphones. But paradoxically, it remains fundamentally inconceivable, contradicting the accessibility of it.

Bridle suggests that these contradictions are inherent to the nature of computation and its manifestation in the network. While it offers unparalleled connectivity and access to vast amounts of information, it is also prone to glitches and errors that challenge our understanding of reality. These glitches are not just technical malfunctions but serve as reminders of the complexities and uncertainties that underlie our digitally mediated existence (2019).

In the film *Ex Machina*, one of the main characters states:

They thought that search engines were a map of what people were thinking. But actually, they were a map of *how* people were thinking. **Impulse. Response. Fluid. Imperfect. Patterned. Chaotic** (Ex Machina, 2014).

This highlights the relationship between humans and technology and emphasises the unpredictability of humans as a species. Independent thinking is a factor in differentiating

humans from machines. Can it 'think' for itself? But what is it to think independently and how often do humans actually exercise this ability? Russell states that “we are complicit in the theft of our data”; we frequently fill out online forms and pass on information without thinking about where the data is going or what it might be used for (2020, p.73). This complacency contributes to a loss of control over personal information and privacy and thus heightened vulnerability to exploitation, manipulation, and surveillance by commercial corporations and governmental bodies.

Male vs. Female

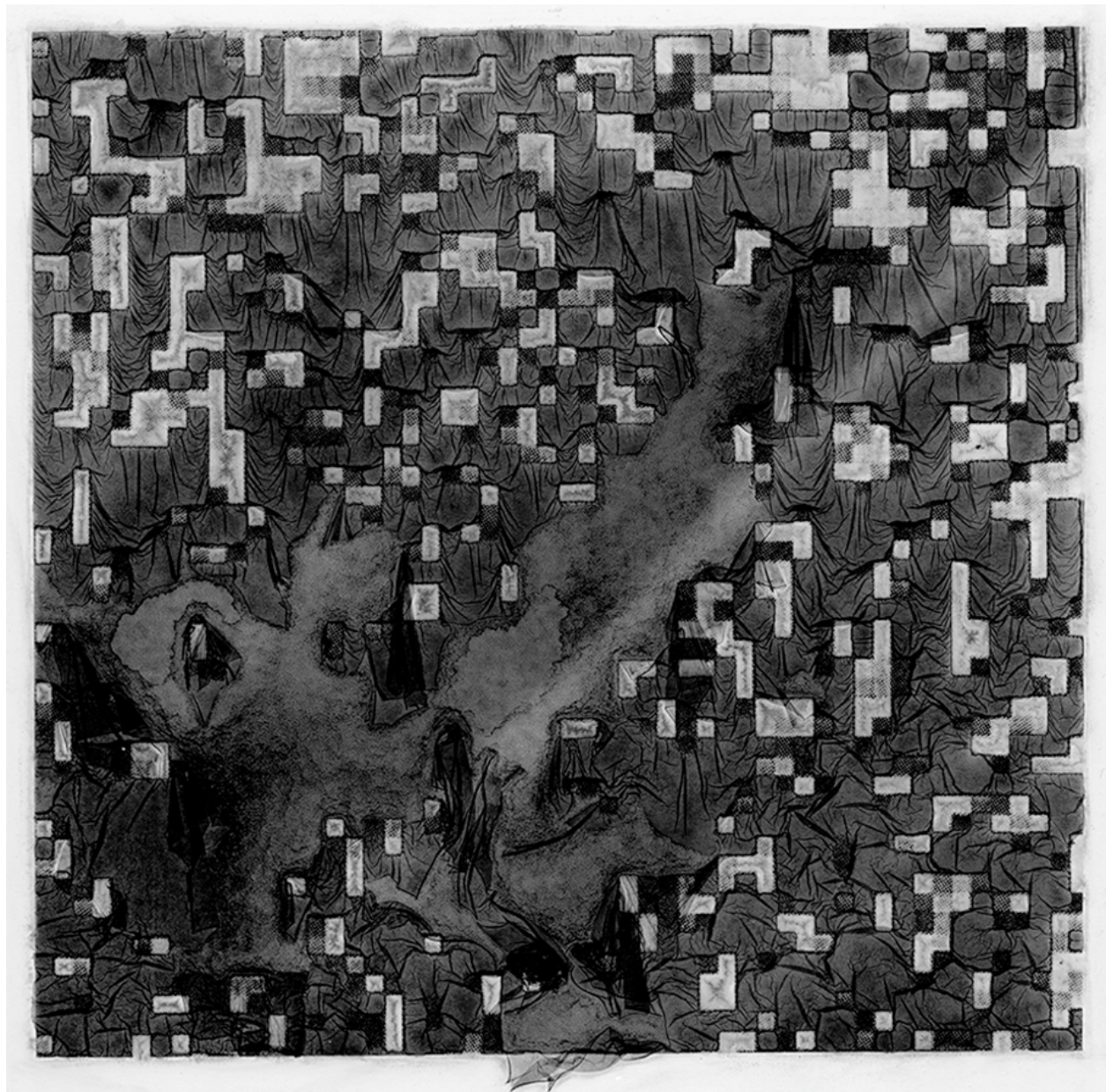


Figure 3

gender is not man OR woman, but a spectrum of ands; discipline is not hard OR soft, but flexible and plural. If something is not one or the other, its potential increases. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari caution against being—that it is inert, unproductive (Wolfgang, 2013, p.54).

By acknowledging gender as a spectrum, we can recognise the diversity of gender experiences, expressions, and identities and make room for greater inclusivity and acceptance. As Wolfgang

states, applying this spectrum to discipline is an easier explanation; a flexible approach to discipline rather than being strictly hard, rigid and unwavering, or soft and lenient. It recognises that different situations require different responses. It adapts to context, rather than following a fixed set of rules. A plural discipline acknowledges that there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. Different people may need varying approaches to achieve their best potential. When something defies binary categorisation, its potential increases. Ambiguity leaves room for creativity, interpretation and adaptability. Deleuze and Guattari's warning against the state of *being* rather than *becoming* further highlights that clinging to fixed categories limits potential and causes stagnation.

Sadie Plant rejects sexual binary categorisation and suggests that this should be replicated in digital technology with the use of the terminology 'holes' and 'not-holes' to replace phrasing around zero and one, on and off, something and nothing (Brodsky, 2022). The term sliding implies movement and transition rather than the abrupt switches of on/off. Acknowledging that digital processes can exist in states of in-between opens possibilities for nuance and adaptability, as stated in relation to gender and discipline. Using the phrases 'holes' and 'not-holes' switches the meanings of the typical binary code of zeroes and ones. 'Holes' evoke openings, tunnels, throughways; passages for journey, exploration, and expansion. 'Not-holes' represents absence, closure, or exclusion. This terminology shift challenges the binary norms and emphasises the interplay between presence and absence.

Toril Moi proposes the lived body as a replacement for gender terminology;

Although our biology is fundamental to the way we live in the world, biological facts alone give us no grounds for concluding anything at all about the *meaning* and *value* they will have for the individual and for society (2010, p.69).

Different bodies have different experiences; those with disabled bodies or Black bodies, non-athletic bodies, etc. will have different lived experiences to their opposites but it does not determine their worth.

It does more because it helps avoid a problem generated by use of ascriptive general categories such as 'gender', 'race', 'nationality', 'sexual orientation', to describe the constructed identities of individuals, namely the additive character that identities appear to have under this description (Young, 2005, p.20).

Everyone has their own distinct body with specific traits, abilities, and desires. Upbringing, family, and cultural background also shape who we are. Categories like gender and race can have certain stereotypes attached to them and all this does is describe how society positions us, rather than who we are as individuals. Lived experience is a much more nuanced and individualised category. It highlights that even people of the same gender, race or class background can have very different experiences of life.

However, larger categorisations, such as 'women' or 'marginalised genders' are useful when discussing experiences or traits that are almost universal to people within those categories.

"Even though there is no eternal feminine essence, there is 'a common basis which underlies every individual female existence in the present state of education and custom'" (Young, 2005, p.29). There are societal structures and expectations that influence the lives of individuals within these categories in similar ways. For example, women may experience the gender pay

gap at work, and those who identify with marginalised genders may share experiences of exclusion or prejudice due to societal norms that prioritise cisgender identities.

Being a woman, is in itself a contradiction. It is being multiples simultaneously; it is spanning the spectrum between binaries. As Young states; “the modalities of feminine bodily transcendence, motility, and spatiality exhibit this same tension between transcendence and immanence, between subjectivity and being a mere object” (Young, 2005, p.32). The discussion around violence against women is often countered with the fact that men experience and are victims of violence too, but even in these instances, overwhelmingly it is men causing this violence. It is in fact not a counterpoint but adds validity to the claim that it’s not all men, but it is (almost) always a man (Bates, 2022). “Men are committing between 85-90% of all violent offences and 98% of sexual offences” according to 2019 data from the UK Ministry of Justice (Martin, 2024, p.20). Only 2% of sexual offences are not committed by men.

Simone De Beauvoir presented the issue of women being ‘Other’ to men in 1949, stating “humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. [...] He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Perez, 2020, p.xii). Whilst the theory isn’t new, the context in which women are still seen as ‘Other’ has been added to with the increase and reliance on technology; “a world increasingly reliant on and in thrall to data. Big Data. Which in turn is panned for Big Truths by Big Algorithms, using Big Computers” (Perez, 2020, p.xii). Alas, this data that starts the process is biased; it does not offer the full story as it is largely generated by one gender. This creates

unreliable outputs “as computer scientists themselves say: ‘Garbage in, garbage out’” (Perez, 2020, p.xii). As technology increasingly shapes our societal landscape, the reliance on biased data perpetuates this narrative and cycle, making it imperative for critical engagement to counteract the skewed outputs that arise from predominantly male-generated data.

Woman vs. Machine



Figure 4

The ambivalence of fear and desire towards technology is re-cast in the mode of an ancestral patriarchal suspicion towards powerful women and women in positions of power (Shingler, 2019, p.2).

There are countless films that feature women as machines, from comedies such as *Austin Powers* to sci-fi classics like *Blade Runner*. In the film *Ex Machina*, one of the central characters

is a female android named Ava. She is presented as fully intelligent which forces viewers to consider the intelligence or perceived intelligence of machines.

Can technology think for itself or is it just an expert in recalling information and presenting it in ways that are 'learned' through pattern recognition? Even in the case of the latter, this can be perceived as a type of intelligence. As believed by Ada Lovelace, computers can only do what they are 'taught' (programmed) to do, but this can include acts that appear as though they are independent thoughts. This was Alan Turing's belief; "that intelligence might be multiple and relational: that it might take many different forms, and that **it exists between, rather than within**, beings of all and diverse kinds" (Bridle, 2022, p.59).

In *Ex Machina*, all AI robots are portrayed as female. This choice suggests the belief that making AI subservient and gentle, like women, reduces threat levels. However, Ava challenges this notion and uses it to her advantage. Initially, she appears as an innocent damsel in distress, catering to her creator Nathan's desires, but she ultimately asserts her dominance by escaping and leaving the men stranded, challenging traditional gender roles and subverting the male gaze.

Women in roles of servitude is a stereotype that is still perpetuated in society today. As demonstrated by the smart assistants that are built into commonly used devices such as Google Home, Alexa and Siri on iPhones. The primary purpose of these devices is to assist, to serve, and these devices all have female voices by default. The creators of the technology deny any

malicious intent behind this, or any specific intent at all, but this just demonstrates how deeply ingrained the association of women as subservient is within the unconscious of the majority of society (Strengers and Kennedy, 2020).

Donna Haraway stated in *A Cyborg Manifesto* that she “would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (Haraway, 2003, p.491). Whilst this can simply be taken to mean it is preferred to be a hybrid of machine and organism rather than a mythic deity, it is also an instruction that the only way to dismantle the structures of society (patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism) is through them. Being a goddess carries the connotations of purity, perfection, and innate femininity. This is the past; cyborgs are the future. The smart devices mentioned previously could be seen as cyborgs, embodying the fusion of woman and machine. When *A Cyborg Manifesto* was written in 1985, smart assistants didn’t exist but if this is an iteration of cyborg living, we still have a long way to go before reaching Haraway’s suggestion of a future.

Marcel L’Herbier’s silent film *L’Inhumaine* (1924) and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) also feature female leads who are representative of technology, i.e. technology is compared to the female body. Rosi Braidotti has analysed both of these films, stating that the characters of Claire (*L’Inhumaine*) and Maria (*Metropolis*) highlight the fears that we have about technology by drawing a parallel between the way we fear (certain) women; both are seen as powerful and uncontrollable (Shingler, 2019). This fear is most notably demonstrated by the way that women were tortured and sentenced to death in the 15th to 18th centuries for possessing what was seen as witchcraft. They were considered to be powerful beyond the realm of this world (i.e.

more powerful than men) and so were outlawed. This supernatural power is comparable to that of technology. Prominent men in the technology industry have expressed their concerns over the potential of AI; “Elon Musk...believes that AI is the ‘biggest existential threat’ to humanity. Bill Gates...has said he doesn’t understand why people are not more concerned about its development” (Bridle, 2022, pp.27-28). This reiterates the point that if it cannot be harnessed and controlled by men then it is 'unnatural' and seen as a threat.

The subRosa project *Biopower Unlimited* was set up at a university campus technology fair with computers that tested participants' “bio-power” which subsequently told them “they were spending all of their waking hours working for someone else and had virtually no ‘free’ time” (subRosa, 2011). The project emphasised how physical labourers and service providers in patriarchal structures are pushed into subordinate positions within a capitalist hierarchy. This system is upheld by an upper class comprising corporate executives, knowledge producers, and government officials, who reap disproportionate rewards for their contributions (Brodsky, 2022, p.59).

Gender bias and stereotypes can determine the design, development and marketing of technology. For example, products and services may be designed with a male-centred perspective, leading to gender-specific biases or exclusion of women's needs and experiences. Based on a 2016 study, Google’s speech recognition software was 70% more likely to accurately recognise a male voice than a female voice (Perez, 2020). Voice command software is supposed to decrease distractions when used whilst driving, so you can be hands-free. However, the

opposite is true if it doesn't work, meaning that women experiencing issues with hands-free calling are more likely to be distracted which could lead to a car crash.

Despite technology and computing being a largely male-dominated field, the names given to certain parts of computers are gendered as female; motherboard, and daughterboard, whilst none are gendered as male other than male connectors or ports which also have female counterparts. Terms such as motherboard, mothership and mother nature reinforce gender stereotypes as mothers are associated with nurturing and caregiving which places women as caregivers and providers, as 'servers'. This perpetuates the notion that certain roles or fields, such as leadership roles, are more suited to men.

Technology is thoroughly interwoven with gender and identity. Women have always been involved in technological advances but haven't always been recognised for it. Through societal perceptions, the notion of woman vs machine becomes woman as machine which in turn becomes woman *is* machine. Embodiment for women is a very different idea to embodiment for men, whether in the digital or the physical world. "The body is an idea that is cosmic, which is to say 'inconceivably vast'" (Russell, 2020, p.48). Women experience the numerous and nuanced ways in which technology shapes and is shaped by gendered narratives, looking for a future where the machine ceases to define the woman and instead empowers agency and autonomy in both the physical and virtual realms.

Conclusion

The corporeal is simulated.

Society is a construct.

The human experience is not real.

Through exploring various aspects such as embodiment, virtual spaces, masculinity, femininity, and the impact of technology on gender identity, it is evident that technology can be both a tool for empowerment and a point of friction for gender equality. While digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for women to connect, organise, and express themselves, they also perpetuate gender stereotypes, inequality, and violence.

This body of work highlights the increasing integration of digital technologies into our understanding and experience of physical reality, raising questions about the nature of reality and the relationship between the physical and the simulated. It suggests that simulated experiences offer only approximations of embodied existence, and whilst close, do not fully replicate the same complexity and richness. The boundaries between physical reality and its simulated representations are becoming less and less distinct in contemporary society.

The images in this work were originally photographic nude self-portraits taken on medium format film. The film was fogged prior to shooting and thus the images did not come out with any clarity. The representations of these images shown in this document are digital scans of the negatives that have been zoomed into 3200%, the ISO of the film, then printed and

mordançaged. This absence of the nude female form in the images highlights the erasure from society that women experience. The unintentional omission adds another form of abstraction to the process, replicating the layers of exclusion and marginalisation experienced by women.

The transformation that happens during the mordançage process is a visual representation of the liminal space between the physical and the virtual. The emulsion is lifted out of the physical and into the virtual – quite literally when the final print is scanned or photographed to create a digital copy of it. The final step of the mordançage process is to leave the print to wash in water. Whilst the emulsion veils are floating in water, the print is straddling binaries; between 2D and 3D, smooth and striated, feminine and masculine, physical and virtual, real and not real. The print itself becomes a body, an idea, a concept. The mordançaged pixel images are the embodiment of merging binaries. They encompass everything mentioned above in a physical and material form. They are a visual metaphor for the deconstruction of binary constructs.

Without the mordançage alteration of the pixel images, the work could be viewed as having the opposite outcome to my intention; reinforcing patriarchal ideals by reducing the female body to a few pixels. However, I believe the integration of the final step shows the connection between gender and technology and that the only way out of rigid constructs is to go through them, causing glitches and alterations along the way. To reiterate the words of Donna Haraway, it is better to be a cyborg than a goddess.

Bibliography

- Adam, A. (2000) *Feminist AI Projects and Cyberfutures*, in Kirkup, J. Janes, L. Woodward, and K. Hovenden, F. (Eds.) *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*. London: Routledge, p.276-290.
- Bates, L. (2022) *Fix the System Not the Women*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Bernays, E. (1928) *Propaganda*. New York: Ig Publishing, 2005.
- Blade Runner (1982) Directed by R. Scott. Available at: Amazon Prime (Accessed: 05 May 2024).
- Braidotti, R. (2013) *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bridle, J. (2019) *New Dark Age*. London: Verso.
- Bridle, J. (2022) *Ways of Being*. London: Verso
- Brodsky, J. (2022) *Dismantling the Patriarchy, Bit by Bit*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
- Broude, N. and Garrard, M. (Eds.). (1996) *The Power of Feminist Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble*. Oxon: Routledge, 2007.
- Connor, S. (2009) *Michel Serres: The Hard and the Soft*. Available at: <https://www.stevenconnor.com/hardsoft> (Accessed: 05 May 2024).
- Copeland, J. (1994) *Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford. Blackwell Publishers.
- Criado-Perez, C. (2020) *Invisible women: exposing data bias in a world designed for men*. New York: Vintage Publishing.
- D'Souza, A. (Ed.). (2001) *Self & History: A Tribute to Linda Nochlin*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Ex Machina (2014) Directed by A. Garland. Available at: Amazon Prime (Accessed: 05 May 2024).
- Fernández, M. (2003) *Postcolonial Media Theory*, in Jones, A. (Ed.) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. Oxon: Routledge, pp.475-497.
- Freud, S. (1999) *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gombrich, E.H. (1989) *The Story of Art*. London: Phaidon.
- Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians: Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books.

- Haraway, D. (2003) *A Cyborg Manifesto*, in Jones, A. (Ed.) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. Oxon: Routledge, pp.520-528.
- Hayles, N. (2003) *Virtual bodies and Flickering Signifiers*, in Jones, A. (Ed.) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. Oxon: Routledge, pp.497-506.
- Hewitt, B. (1995) *Blueprints on fabric: innovative uses for cyanotype*. Colorado: Interweave Press.
- Jones, A. (Ed.). (2003) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Kirkup, J. Janes, L. Woodward, and K. Hovenden, F. (Eds.). (2000) *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- L'Herbier, M. (1924) *L'Inhumaine*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnZHqANmpvQ&t=1s&ab_channel=ARGONOTA-PRESENTFROMTHEPAST (Accessed: 05 May 2024).
- Lovejoy, M. (2008) *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Martin, G. (2024) *To Hate and Love Men*. Birmingham: The Pound Project.
- Ministry of Justice and Farris, L. (2024) *Government cracks down on 'deepfakes' creation*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-cracks-down-on-deepfakes-creation> (Accessed: 05 May 2024).
- Moi, T. (2010) *Sex, Gender, and the Body: The student edition of What is a Woman?*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Monteiro, S. (2017) *The Fabric of Interface*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Parr, A. (2010) *The Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Perez, C. C. (2020) *Invisible Women*. London: Vintage.
- Patrizio, A. (2019) *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Eco-critical Art History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Plant, S. (1994) *Zeroes + Ones*. 4th edn. New York: 4th Estate.
- Popper, F. (1997) *art.of.the.electronic.age*. London: Thames and Hudson..
- Russell, L. (2020) *Glitch Feminism*. London: Verso.
- Sanderson, A. (2002) *Hand colouring and alternative darkroom processes*. London: RotoVision.
- Schrager, L. (2020) *Ona*. Available at: <https://leahschrager.com/ona> (Accessed: 15 May 2024).

- Segal, J. (2000) *Ideas In Psychoanalysis Phantasy*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- Serra, R. (1980) *Interviews, Etc. 1970-1980*. New York: Library of Congress
- Shingler, K. (2019) *Technology and femininity in Marcel L'Herbier's L'Inhumaine*. *Modernist Cultures*, 14 (2), pp.236-259. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2019.0252>
- Somers-Hall, H. Bell, J. Williams, J. (Eds.) (2018) *A Thousand Plateaus and Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- subRosa. (2011) *Bodies Unlimited A decade of subRosa's art practice*, *n.paradoxa*, 28, pp.16-25. Available at: https://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/vol28_npara_16-25_subRosa.pdf
- Wolfgang, C. (2013) *Productive Uncertainties: Deleuze/Guattari, Feminist Theory, and Disciplinary Boundary Crossings*, 39(1), pp.52-69. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5406/visuartsrese.39.1.0052>•
- Wooldridge, M. (2020) *The Road to Conscious Machines: The Story of AI*. Dublin: Pelican Books.
- Young, I. (2005) *On Female Body Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zylinska, J. (2017) *Nonhuman Photography*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Zylinska, J. (2023) *The Perception Machine*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.