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BACHELOR'S THESIS

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ÚSTAV JAZYKŮ

CYBERFEMINISM: WOMEN AND CYBERSPACE

KYBERFEMINISMUS: ŽENY A KYBERPROSTOR

BACHELOR'S THESIS
BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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TITLE OF THESIS:

Cyberfeminism: Women and Cyberspace

INSTRUCTION:

The goal is to point at the most important features of cyberfeminism as far as the question of the relationship between a human and computer/machine is concerned. The thesis should be able to point at the relevant historical context and analyse the complex phenomenon of cyberfeminism

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE:

Donna Harraway

Date of project specification:	3.2.2020	**Deadline for submission:**	12.6.2020

Supervisor: Mgr. Miroslav Kotásek, Ph.D.

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Subject Council chairman

Abstract

This bachelor thesis aims to introduce a reader to the ideas of cyberfeminism. Following chapters of this work will describe the history of feminism as a whole and cyberfeminism in particular. It gives the reader some basic understanding of sex and gender from the feministic point of view and introduces the concept of so-called „cyberspace" and the meaning of this term in the modern world, as well as the concept of "cyborgs" and how, according to cyberfeminist theories, they can influence gender-inequality. This thesis also describes the way new technologies influenced women and caused the emerging of cyberfeminism, explains to the reader Donna Haraway's idea of a cyborg entity, and studies how the Internet, with its anonymity, challenges existing gender norms. The last chapter of this thesis focuses on the practical manifestation of cyberfeminism.

Keywords

Cyberfeminism, feminism, cyberspace, cyborg, internet, gender.

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je seznámit čtenáře s myšlenkami kyberfeminismu. Následující kapitoly této práce popisují historii feminismu a zejména cyberfeminismu. Poskytuje čtenáři základní pochopení pojmů sex a genderu z feministického hlediska a představuje pojem tzv. „kyberprostoru" a význam tohoto pojmu v moderním světě, jakož i pojem „kyborgové" a jak podle kyberfeministických teorií mohou ovlivnit genderovou nerovnost. Tato práce také popisuje, jak nové technologie ovlivňovaly ženy a způsobovaly vznik kyberfeminismu, vysvětluje čtenáři Donna Harawayovou myšlenku cyborgské entity a studuje, jak internet svou anonymitou zpochybňuje stávající genderové normy. Poslední kapitola této práce je zaměřena na praktický projev cyberfeminismu.

Klíčová slova

Kyberfeminismus, feminismus, kyberprostor, kyborg, internet, gender

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Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Miroslav Kotásek , Ph.D.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že bakalářskou práci na téma *Cyberfeminism: Women and Cyberspace* jsem vypracovala samostatně pod vedením vedoucí semestrální práce a s použitím odborné literatury a dalších informačních zdrojů, které jsou všechny citovány v práci a uvedeny v seznamu literatury na konci práce.

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V Brně dne ....

Levdonskaya Alisa

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Introduction

Rapid development and the worldwide spread of new information and communication technologies, especially such as the computer and the Internet, lead to numerous changes in work and everyday life of thousands of people. It provided a great opportunity for people of different ideologies to find and to connect with like-minded individuals, to gain authority and political power and to influence views of other people; the further development showed that new technologies can also provide a source of entertainment and give new opportunities for business development, personal education and social life, as well as new ways of creative self-expression. So, it is not surprising that, despite some pre-existing stereotypes of technologies as a part of predominantly masculine culture, a lot of women saw it as an important to master tool and sought to use it for pursuing their goals and pushing forward their own, — quite often feministic — ideas.

One of such ideas was cyberfeminism that had appeared in the second half of the 20th century. The aim of this bachelor thesis is to explore the ideas of cyberfeminists, such as Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant and to understand how cyberfeminists see the relationships between women and technology, why they are important for feminism, and how technology can help us deal with gender-inequality that exists in the world.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter gives a brief outline of the history of feminism, showing how feministic ideas had developed and expanded over the years and, eventually, lead to an emergence of cyberfeminism. The second chapter introduces the problem of sex and gender, explaining why feminists think that it is important to distinguish them; it also touches on the changing nature of gender stereotypes and gender socialisation, as well as the effects it has on males and females. The third chapter deals with cyberfeminism as a movement, its "undefiable" nature, the reasons for its development and indicates how cyberfeminism differs from traditional feminism. The fourth chapter introduces the concept of cyborgs, building on Donna Haraway's work "A Cyborg Manifesto". It also gives a comparison of the views that cyberculture and cyberfeminism have on the cyborg, exploring the differences between male-oriented ideas of cyberpunk and female-oriented ones of the cyberfeminism. The fifth chapter of the thesis studies the relationships between genders and cyberspace. It covers the topic of women's use of the Internet in particular and, additionally, explains how anonymity on the Internet helps with gender- and sexuality-related self-exploration and which negative effects said the anonymity may have on gender representation and the safety of the Internet, especially for women. The last chapter introduces the practical manifestation of cyberfeminism: the works and projects of VNS Matrix and Old Boys Network. It inspects the differences between Haraway's

rather utopian theoretical ideas and cyberfeminist reality that, in case of VNS Matrix, prefers to emphasise the female body. This chapter also briefly touches on the fact that cyberfeminism, in its original form, no longer exists, and describes how it changed and evolved, creating new ideas and movements, such as xenofeminism.

1 The History of Feminism

Before delving into cyberfeminism and its ideas, it would be beneficial to learn about the history of the feminism first, as well as the connection between feminism and the idea that there is a clear distinction between sex and gender. It will help the reader to understand how and why cyberfeminism had emerged, and what distinguishes it from other ideologies and social or political movements that comprise feminism.

Modern-day feminism emerged in the form of 'first-wave feminism,' as it was coined in 1968 by Martha Lear in *The New York Times Magazine*. It occurred during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Their main focus was on gaining political power which they saw as the only way to bring about any changes. This period is often associated with the suffrage movement, as one of the most board and encompassing ones. During that time, the feminist movement, that had been almost exclusively concerned with the white middle class started to be more diverse, begins to understand a variety of problems faced by women of different backgrounds.

Nevertheless, for a long time, there was virtually no progress in most countries; suffragists faced condemnation and ridicule from the press. Only after the First World War some notable changes started to appear. European countries started to grand women increasingly more rights, including suffrage. For instance, in Britain, women over 30 got the right to vote in 1918 as an acknowledgement of their contribution during the war; 10 years later, in 1928, women got equal suffrage with men (Osborne, 2001: 19-22).

After the attainment of full suffrage, feminists' agenda expanded to the welfare and economic matters, but The Great Depression and the subsequent Second World War temporarily put a halt on any advances in women's rights. Just as in WWI before, during WWII, women stepped into traditionally men's jobs, working on assembly lines in factories and defence plants, producing munition, ships, aeroplanes. This work earned them of Rosie the Riveter in the United States. The image of Rosie, meant to inspire patriotism, remains one of the best-known icons of World War II; it was a new and different way of portraying a woman, and many cite this image as an inspiration for female liberation (McDermott, 2018).

With the sixties began the period known as 'second-wave' feminism. The debates about equal pay were renewed, and the issues concerning feminists were broadened, now including sexuality, reproductive rights, and de facto inequality. Additionally, women started to bring attention to domestic violence and marital rape and brought changes in divorce and custody laws.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is often credited as the first push that started second-wave feminism. This book, which dispelled the myth of a woman happy to be a housewife while a man is at work, and showed the reality of frustration and discontent, resonated with educated women on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1966 Friedan, helped the foundation of the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.). The aim of this organisation, as was said in the *Statement of Purpose* was to "break through the silken curtain of prejudice and discrimination against women in government, industry, and professions, the churches, the political parties, the judiciary, the labour unions, in education, science, medicine, law, religion and every other field of importance in American society," and to give women "equal professional and economic participation and advance (Friedan, 1966).

Unlike previously, second-wave feminists were not focused on one common goal; instead, they developed different branches that dealt with different problems and often had vastly different outlooks on them. The most prominent ones were liberal and radical feminist movements. Osborne (2001: 30) defies liberal feminists as those, who see the need to change society from within, by reinforcing positive outlook on women and women's rights by putting forward positive role models, establishing equality in personal relationships and lobbying parliament on legislation for equal rights, whereas radical feminists are those, who see the problem in widespread patriarchy that established male dominance in all areas of life and thus led to oppression of women. Many radical feminists spoke of being forced to remain silent and obedient by both patriarchal society, and individuals in their lives.

However, despite the differences in opinions, both groups saw the need to solve such problems as unequal payments, sexual harassment and the reproductive freedom of women, i.e. their right to use birth control and get abortions. Those problems remained to be important later, during third-wave feminism and still widely discussed even today.

In 1989 Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw introduced the term *intersectionality* which described the idea that women could experience different "levels of oppression" based on their gender identity, race and class. When third-wave feminism had emerged in the early 1990s, this concept began spreading, resonating with those new feminists, who embraced individualism and diversity. Around that time, new technologies, namely the Internet, came to play which allowed feminists to reach a global audience using blogs and online magazines. Consequently, it helped to expand the feminism movement even further, attracting more people with extremely diverse cultural backgrounds and bringing to light new ideas and new issues.

Third-wave feminism, which began in the early 1990s, and ever-growing use of new technologies became a catalyst for cyberfeminism. Third-wave feminism embraced individuality and diversity while continuing to be grounded in the civil rights advancements.

Later, in the 2010s, it transformed into yet another phase: fourth-wave. The main characteristics of this iteration are the empowerment of women and the extensive use of the Internet and various other technologies. Kira Cochrane believes fourth-wave feminism to be "defined by technologies", especially various social media, such as Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook, which allow women to "to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online" (Cochrane, 2013).

Notably, while cyberfeminism was the product of third-wave, its ideas, based around the use of new technologies and the relationships between these technologies and women seem to be more aligned with fourth-wave feminism.

2 Sex and Gender

2.1 The distinction between sex and gender

For a long time "sex" was used to describe the differences between men and women in both biological and socio-cultural aspects, while the term "gender" was used mostly to refer to grammatical categories of different words. However, in 1955 sexologist John Money introduced the word "gender" and subsequent "gender role" as a means to describe the social differences of men and women roles in society. Still, while the term "gender" was slowly gaining popularity, it was, and quite often still is, used in used interchangeably with the term "sex", and to this day they both are widely perceived as inextricably entwined; however, feminists and a subsequent field of gender studies, that were initially developed as means to question assumption existing regarding men and women, say that there is a distinction between one's sex and gender.

"Sex" is a diverse and complex category. It describes the biological differences between people, determined by the genetic features of the structure of cells, reproductive functions, anatomical and physiological characteristics; it primarily reflects the physiological, physical, biological differences between men and women. At the same time, it is worth to note that some of the differences, connected with biological sex, can be mutually exclusive and contrasting, while others allow numerous individual variations.

"Gender", on the other hand, refers to cultural, social, and psychological distinctions. It often determines areas of activity which are perceived by members of any given culture or society as suitable for males and females of this society; it also determines their roles in society in general. It considers a man and a woman not as a biological entity, whose fate, i.e role, place in the hierarchical structure, occupation, etc., is predetermined by its physiological characteristics, but rather as a person, as a social being with its own special status, special social interests, requests, needs and social behaviour strategy.

Most cultures associate one sex with one gender, creating a binary system of two pairs (i.e male-man and female-woman) (Nadal, 2017: 14). It is automatically assumed that for every person their sex, gender identity and sexuality will align and that they will fulfil a traditional role in society, appropriate for them. However, this system falls short for individuals with biological characteristics of both sexes (intersex people) and for people whose gender identity does not align with their biological sex or exists outside the feminine-masculine dichotomy (i.e. transgender, gender-queer, nonbinary, etc.), because they are seen as pathologies and violations, rather than variations of the norm. The inclusion of nonbinary or transgender identities into the "norm" may

be debatable, but depending on the rigidity of the system, it may also see relatively nonessential things, such as "butch" behaviour as violations, thus alienating them. Additionally, such contemporary system takes genders and gender roles as polar opposites of each other, whereas, in reality, most individual, regardless of their sex and gender are capable and often naturally inclined to display certain characteristics and fulfil roles that are not seen as culturally traditional for them.

It is worth mentioning that various ideology groups within the feminist movement have different views on issues related to sex and gender, such as gender socialisation, sexuality, and the phenomenon of transgender people. For example, more liberal feminists consider transgender persons, meaning usually trans women, as "real women", who belong in feminism movement and whose rights are part of all women rights, whereas so-called trans-exclusionary radical feminists, as the name suggests, reject the notion that trans women can be considered as women, seek to exclude them from women's spaces and oppose transgender rights legislation. Another acute problem that feminists may argue about is so-called adaptive behaviour and what can be considered as such: a lot of radical feminists believe that such things as the use of make-up, shaving, wearing high heels, etc., is not natural for women and is nothing more than a result of gender socialisation and the pressure of societal expectation; they also think that even the idea that some women may enjoy them and choose them willingly is also the result of socialisation. In terms of sexuality, there is a phenomenon of "political lesbianism" which presents the theory that sexual orientation can be a political choice, and presents homosexual, i.e. lesbian, relationships as an alternative to heterosexual ones; additionally, this theory suggests that feminists should limit, if not completely avoid, any interactions with males, seeing it as a way to oppose patriarchy.

2.2 Gender stereotypes and socialisation

2.2.1 Stereotypes

When we see a person for the first time, we notice their hair, their clothes and their manners, and, most importantly, we "register" their gender. It is an automatic process, connected with the way we perceive others around us (Glick & Fiske, 1999: 366). Then, having determined the gender, among other variable aspects of the appearance, such as age and race, we, however unconsciously, begin not only to interpret their behaviour, but also predict it, according to the preexisting ideas of behaviour typical for each gender, based on previous interactions, but also on the expectations dictated by the society which are often so deeply embedded into culture that they seem completely natural to us. These ideas, a certain set of beliefs of what is considered as "wrong" and as "right" behaviour for every individual based on their perceived gender, is what we call "gender

stereotypes". They include a wide variety of aspects, from the way we are supposed to look, the occupation, social relations and even hobbies.

However, gender stereotypes are directly connected with gender roles in society, and they are prone to change over time. Things which were once seen as masculine can turn into feminine or gender-neutral traits relatively easy and quickly.

One of the notable examples of such change is the way we perceive pink and blue colours and clothing. Nowadays, many people see pink as a feminine "girl" colour, whereas blue is masculine and more suitable for boys. Yet, it was the exact opposite only a hundred years ago. According to the book *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* by Jo B. Paoletti (2012: 19-41), when pink, blue, and other pastel colours first appeared in baby clothing in the nineteenth century, none of them was prominent as specifically girls' or boys' colour. Changes happened during and after World War I. An article from the trade publication *Earnshaw's Infants' Department* claimed, "generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger colour, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl" (1918). The shift towards the modern opposite perception of blue and pink is credited to manufacturers, who started to push this idea and advertise colours as gender-specific to increase sales.

2.2.2 Gender socialisation

There is a famous claim by Simone de Beauvoir that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, and that "social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature." (Beauvoir 1972 [original 1949]: 18) One of the interpretations for this claim is through the view of gender as a social construct and gender socialisation, or, in other words, the process where males become men and females become women by acquiring gender-specific traits and learning behaviour which is culturally perceived as masculine and feminine respectively (Mikkola, 2008).

Gender socialisation is a life-long process that often starts even before birth. As soon as parents learn the sex of their child, they may start buying clothes or decorate the room using specific colours (aforementioned blue/pink stereotype), they choose toys based on the suitability for a boy or a girl, most often than not choose a gender-specific name. From birth, and sometimes even before that, the child lives in a world divided by genders, because the parents can have certain expectations about its trait, habits, tastes and behaviour.

Gender socialisation manifests in a lot of ways; some examples include phrases like "boys will be boys" which is used as a way to emphasise that it is not surprising for a boy or a man to act rough, noisy or improper because it's a part of masculine, or "man's" behaviour (Cambridge dictionary), and the negative connotation that the phrase "[to do something] like a girl" has.

Additionally, gender socialisation can be considered as a self-policing process, because, even at a relatively young age, boys and girls search for clues on the "right" behaviour not only from authority figures, like parents and teachers but also from peers of the same age (Martin and Ruble, 2004: 67-70). Many feminists believe that such socialisation is harmful, as it puts an individual into strict limitations of "right behaviour" and set gender roles which may often come into conflict with their personal characteristics and features, leading to psychological problems in the future, such as low self-esteem and self-harm. It is worth to note that negative effects of certain gender norms and gender socialisation are true for both males and females, even if their socialisation is different and leads to different problems. For example, according to Christopher Liang, associate professor of counselling psychology, "if you are born a biological male, you might be taught a certain way of dealing with your emotions. Don't show your sadness, don't show that you're hurt, don't show that you're weak. Be strong. Be tough." whereas women, according to Nicole L. Johnson, assistant professor of counselling psychology, "have this invisible burden of caretaking that's often ignored or devalued" and are expected to be "appeasing or attractive to men" (Alu, 2019). And while gender socialisation in itself is not necessarily negative, "problems can develop or persist when men and women are rigid in their conformity to those expectations, resulting in health issues for individuals or fueling violence against women" which contributes to so-called "rape culture" (Alu, 2019). " Additionally, gender socialisation may lead to potential medical problems, such as masking of depression symptoms by men (Wide, Mok, et al., 2011)

When talking about gender socialisation and research data, the most difficult question is what has the most influence: one's biology or the influence of society. In a way, it is a classical question of "nature vs nurture". Some researches show that there is some role that biological aspects play in our behaviour and gender roles that we assume, however, it is notably difficult to determine the extent to which this is true (Lindsey, 2015: 28-30). Pierre Bourdieu suggested the idea of a "habitus" which represents "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu, 1977: 72). According to Bourdieu "[t]he "unconscious" is never anything other than the forgetting of history" and any behaviour or belief that we see as "natural"

is just an old necessity, ingrained into the culture so deeply that we forget its original purpose, and it becomes a part of socialisation. (Bourdieu, 1977: 78-79).

Many feminists believe that gender socialisation is at the root of the problem of gender inequality, due to the connotations that it puts on certain traits and behavioural patterns which are quite often negative for what is perceived as "girly" and positive for "manly" ones. Feminists, therefore, seek to abolish the rigid behavioural framework which society creates for men and women and to minimize, if not completely negate, the negative effects of gender socialisation.

In the context of cyberfeminism, at least in its first appearance in Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, still exists the want to abolish the negative connotation of "girly" traits and minimize negative results of gender socialisation that is characteristic for feminism; however, it also strives to make the notions of both sex and gender less, if not completely, meaningful and more fluid which differs it from other feminism movements. Cyberfeminism, in its original form, presents a utopian view of the post-gender future in cyberspace, where, instead of man and woman, male and female, exist cyborgs lacking biological sex and completely free from social constructs such as gender and class.

However, this is different for some of the later and more radical branches of cyberfeminism, as they strive not to abolish any sex- and gender-based discrimination, but rather focus on the empowerment of women via technology and the use of the female body in art. They also have a goal of creating "safe" spaces for women in cyberspace and, quite often, said safe spaces are restricted for men or for other people, who may be deemed as a "threat" or as "unsuitable", usually it includes transgender and non-binary persons.

3 Cyberfeminism

3.1 Cyberspace

To talk about cyberfeminism, first, we need to understand the term cyberspace and the culture that is inextricably linked with it. The term itself first appeared in the late 1960s; it was used by the Danish artist Susanne Using and the architect Carsten Hoff. At the time, as Hoff said, "'cyberspace' was simply about managing spaces. There was nothing esoteric about it. Nothing digital, either. It was just a tool. The space was concrete, physical." (Lillemose and Kryger, 2015). Later the term was popularized as a part of science fiction by an American cyberpunk writer William Gibson; in the 2000 documentary *No Maps for These Territories*: Gibson calls it an essentially meaningless "buzzword"; however, in the minds of science many fiction writers and, subsequently, the general public, cyberspace became "an electronically-mediated world where the metal is no longer limited by the physical" (Hall, 1996: 149). Nowadays, the term 'cyberspace' is mostly associated with online computer networks and often used as a de facto synonym for the Internet (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Gibson's works were the first step in the appearance of the new sci-fi subgenre, known as cyberpunk. This literary movement, which gained a lot of popularity and fans in the eighties, was the key to the spread of cyberculture. The subgenre saw the relationships between humans and technology as leading to the dystopian hyper-technological future. Yet, cyberculture sees the future connected with technology in a more positive light, influenced by the Internet and its specifics which give a certain degree of freedom, impossible in real life, due to the lack of censorship, anonymity and complete disregard of distances when having a real-time conversation. Cyberculture sees the transfer of the mind into the cyberspace as a way to liberate humans of the corporeal, therefore abolishing the discrimination based on skin colour, gender, nationality or class.

3.2 Cyberfeminism

For feminists, this new culture, with its ideas, and a new virtual environment raised the question of using it to realize their goals and promote the feminist agenda.

The term "cyberfeminism" was created as a combination of "cyber" and "feminism", thus indicating that this movement, in particular, deals with and operates within cyberspace and strives to influence and use it in a way which will be beneficial to gender equalization. However, despite the apparent simplicity of this term, cyberfeminism in itself is rather hard to define.

The history of cyberfeminism, which was yet to be called that, had started when Donna Haraway wrote an essay, named "A Cyborg Manifesto", published in 1985. In this essay, Haraway criticises traditional feminism for its focus on identity politics", i.e sex and gender of each individual, instead of emphasising affinity, and for assumptions that all men are one way, while all women are the other, and notes how traditional feminist ideology "does not so much marginalise as obliterate the authority of any other women's political speech and action. It is a totalization producing what Western patriarchy itself never succeeded in doing—feminists' consciousness of the nonexistence of women, except as products of men's desire." (Haraway, 1985: 25).

The concept of cyberfeminism as a movement, however, appeared sometime later, in the early nineties, in two different parts of the world almost simultaneously and independently of each other with an artist movement VNS Matrix in Australia and Sadie Plant in the United Kingdom.

Cyberfeminism is a part of third-wave feminism, heavily influenced by postmodernism and posthumanism. According to Jesse Daniels (2009: 102), "cyberfeminism is neither a single theory nor a feminist movement with a clearly articulated political agenda," instead it contains a range of theories, ideas and political stances on the relationships between women and technologies. Furthermore, sometimes, there is a distinction between "old" and "new" cyberfeminism, with its transition from the utopian view of a cyborg corrupting patriarchy to "confronting the top-down from the bottom-up" (Fernandez, Wilding and Wright, 2003: 22-23). Moreover, it is difficult to strictly define what cyberfeminism is as a movement, because it actively refuses definition, instead choosing to state what it is not, as is shown with a "100 anti-theses", written by the members of the Old Boys Network (OBN), regarded as the first international Cyberfeminist alliance. Some of the point state that "cyberfeminism is not ideology, not complete and not anti-male". The aim with this refusal of the definition is to keep the term as open, as possible, as stated on the OBN's webpage. At the same time, Sadie Plant (1997: 28) described cyberfeminism as a movement for women, who are "interested in theorizing, critiquing, exploring and re-making the Internet, cyberspace and new-media technologies in general".

In the broadest sense of the term, any feminist activity on the Internet that aims to spread feminist ideas and agendas can be considered cyberfeminism, even if the person or people who perform it do not consider themselves cyberfeminists, simply because they use cyberspace to promote feminist agenda.

As with traditional feminism before, feminism in cyberspace developed, among other theories and ideologies, two distinct branches of, what can be called, liberal and radical cyberfeminism. They were evolving alongside each other, but are virtually incompatible in ideas and methods, reflecting

the differences between theory and practice-based feminisms in the real world. Liberal cyberfeminism embraces Haraway's ideas; they see the Internet as a tool to advance sexual liberation and explore one's gender and sexuality. Radical cyberfeminists, on the other hand, strive to create "safe" women-only spaces on the Internet, such as chat-groups and e-mail lists, as an answer to online misogyny that women often face (Hall, 1996: 158-159); they are heavily criticized for using the same "identity policies" as traditional feminists which cyberfeminism was originally supposed to defy.

4 Cyborgs

4.1 The blend of organic and cybernetic

The idea of a cybernetic organism, or just *cyborg* for short, is not the creation of cyberfeminism. The concept of a mix between human and machine existed long before the appearance of cyberfeminist ideas. One of the first examples of the idea can be found in the short story *The Man That Was Used Up* (1843) by Edgar Allan Poe which describes a man whose body is fully composed of complex prosthetics. The first actual cyborg can be arguably found in the 1911 novel *Le Mystère des XV* [The Mystery Of The XV]*,* by French writer Jean de La Hire. This novel describes a character with an artificial heart and some superhuman powers.

The term "cyborg" was created in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, to describe their concept of a being with both organic and mechanic body parts. Unlike robots and androids, a cyborg is not a creation of an artificial being from metal and electronics, but rather the enhancement of already existing living organism, using various technologies. This concept erases the boundaries between biological and artificial, creating a perfect blend of nature and science which makes humanity better, more durable and more capable.

Of course, this view of complete cyberisation is rather utopian; but we are already blurring the lines between organic and cybernetic, natural and artificial, using science and technologies to solve numerous issues with our bodies; some of the examples include the use of prosthetics in case of limb loss, artificial pacemakers, hearing aids and other devices. One of the, possibly, most famous real-life examples is the late Stephen Hawking. While he may not be what we usually understand as "cyborg", the use of technologies, such as the "Equalizer" computer program for speech communication, to some extend qualifies him as a cyborg. Additionally, it shows us how much technologies can help people. But those are rather practical examples, ways to improve the quality of people's lives and compensate for their disabilities, and they are purely functional; however, there are also examples which are purely aesthetical, such as plastic surgeries which allow us to create an idealized "perfect" image of the body. With the rate at which those technologies continue to develop, there is no reason to believe that this process will ever stop. On the contrary, there is a possibility that future advances in technology will allow the artificial limb to over-perform the real ones (Herr, 2015 via WIRED), making them less of a disadvantage and more of an improvement for a human body, thus speeding up the process of "blurring of the lines".

Depending on a degree, to which people of the future will be able to change their bodies and actually willing to do so, it may also help with solving some of the problems based of sex-, class-

and race-based segregation, but for now, cyberspace can only give some outlet for experimentation with self-presentation of people of various sexes, genders, races and classes, allowing a glimpse into the world where an individual can have any gender or no gender at all and can further change it at a moment's notice, experimenting with it in order to better understand one's gender identity and sexuality. Nevertheless, cyberisation of a body creates another danger: instead of dealing with the existing problems of segregation and discrimination, it may create a new one, where people will be judged and discriminated on the basis of owning or not owning any cybernetic body-modifications and their extend.

4.2 Views on cyborgs

Many differences in cyberpunk and cyberfeminist views stem from one fundamental distinction: the fact that cyberpunk generally sees high-tech cybernetic future as a dystopian one, whereas cyberfeminism imagines a utopia. Other factors that influence them are the traditionally patriarchal basis of cyberpunk world and ideas of feminism and gender equality that serve as a foundation for cyberfeminism. Those views are quite apparently reflected in the ways how cyberpunk and cyberfeminism imagine cyborgs.

4.2.1 Cyborgs in cyberpunk

While the idea of cyborgs in cyberfeminism probably would not be possible without the ideas that were created by science fiction and cyberpunk culture, the views that cyberfeminism and cyberpunk subculture have on the way cyborgs will develop and change humans are vastly different. It may not be surprising considering that cyberpunk was generally written almost exclusively by men, thus expressing only a male viewpoint, which is influenced by male gender socialisation and expresses male fantasy, both in regards to imagining males as extremely masculine and "strong" and imagining females as extremely feminine and "desirable". Whereas cyberfeminism is mostly influenced by females and feminist desire for equality or abolishing of patriarchal norms.

Anne Balsamo, in her book "Technologies of the Gendered Body" points out how actual cyberspace in fiction, despite the disembodiment that it is supposed to provide, focus quite heavily on body representation and differentiation.

While in theory the transfer to cyberspace should be liberating, the reality is different: in cyberculture "heroes are usually men, whose racial identity, although rarely described explicitly, is contextually white. Cyberspace playmates are usually beautiful, sexualized, albeit violently

powerful women" (Balsamo, 1996). That shows a tendency of cyberpunk to fetishise and hyper-sexualised, creating highly idealized images of "perfect bodies" which correspond with male erotic fantasies.

In fairness, cyberpunk manages to escape some previous gender norms, such as female passivity and victimisation of other narratives, by allowing and even encouraging to weaponize female bodies on a par with male ones, however, Balsamo notes that even this weaponisation " [literarizes] the characteristically threatening nature of [a] female body". Moreover, the relationships between entities with cybernetic bodies still recreate and support "traditional heterosexual gender identities".

While some genderless or gender-neutral entities may also exist within cyberpunk narrative and in virtual cyberculture, they are relatively rare and often overlooked or ridiculed. Although, this tendency is seemingly starting to change, even if this process is still rather reluctant. This process can be seen, for example, in an upcoming game *Cyberpunk 2077* and a life simulation game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*.

In the Cyberpunk 2077, a player is given a protagonist with gender-neutral name and is, allegedly, able to customise the body, including its sexual characteristics, the voice and the face, freely combining feminine and masculine features which allows to create a character that can present its, and therefore player's, gender identity as anything on a scale from traditionally male to traditionally female and everything in between (within the boundaries set by the game).

As for Animal Crossing, players do not have to choose any gender at all, when creating their in-game representation of themselves or *avatars.* Instead, the game is allowing them to combine feminine, masculine and androgynous clothing, hairstyles and makeup and change them at any given moment. But even then, this lack of gender-related restrictions is true only for the western version of the game, as western culture is generally more accepting of such ideas.

It shows the spread of the idea that physical cybernetic or cyber-augmented bodies and virtual representations of said bodies, do not necessarily have to reinforce masculine and feminine stereotypes or follow them in any way, but can, instead, defy them or disregard them entirely. This creates an opportunity for self-exploration by trying to understand what is it like to have mixed or neutral gender features and inspecting the ways our outward gender presentation may influence our inward feeling and self-awareness and relationships with others.

Nevertheless, even this slight departure from the conservative politics of the AAA video game industry and the strict gender norms had caused a great deal of backlash on the Internet, thus showing that general public, especially in male-dominated cyber and gaming culture, is still not as susceptible to the changes in traditional gender norms, as it could have been.

By and large, cyberculture still mostly supports traditional views on genders and bodies, often producing characters whose sex and gender characteristics are more pronounced and lean towards either hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity.

4.2.2 Cyborgs in cyberfeminism

In contrast, for cyberfeminists, as can be seen in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, cyborg works as a mean to disrupt sexual and gender dualism and helps to destroy some other barriers, created by society. The first barrier is the old separation of cultural and natural. This dichotomy was already challenged by the evolution theory which created a direct connection between humans and apes. Before that humans thought themselves separate from animals, instead of "related" to them. The cyborg here becomes a symbol of the connection between nature – the body, and culture – artificially created parts. And, if we take into account the traditional dualism of men – culture versus woman – nature, then it can be said that cyborg also blurs the line between male and female worlds.

The second barrier is the dichotomy of a living organism and a machine. Technologies allow us to connect machinery with flesh, expanding its limits. Same technologies also disrupt the barrier between material and immaterial. The belief that mind and body are inextricably linked is challenged by digital technologies with their artificial intelligence which is narrow at the moment but has a potential to be developed into a strong AI, thus creating a mind without a body, a mind that exists in cybernetic space, instead of physical and material.

Haraway defines cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." That is where cyberfeminism shows the influence of posthumanist ideas. In Haraway's viewpoint, future society is meant to change from its physical form into an information system; a creature unbound by organics will be a natural resident of such future world. However, it is still bound by its code which may be seen as giving cyborg the same limitations that organics and DNA code give to humans. Nevertheless, cyborg's post-gender state, where it can change its gender at will or have no gender at all, will also mean that the world of cyborgs will be the world without patriarchy or, indeed, matriarchy, as there will be no sex segregation that serves as a base for oppression.

Another reason why, according to Haraway, patriarchy will be abolished in the cybernetic world is the fact that, "unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden—that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos" (Haraway, 1985: 9); in other words, the cyborg does not have to be male and does not need a female counterpart to fulfil a masculine task of producing offsprings and "carrying on the family name" which is strongly tied with patriarchal culture. Instead, it is capable of self-creation and reproduction by simply building other cyborgs.

In her essay, published in 1985, Haraway says that our natural society is gradually changing into an information system and creates a "chart of transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks" (Haraway, 1985: 28) which threaten to change the existing order based on patriarchy creating "informatics of domination" instead:

Representation	Simulation
Physiology	Communications engineering
Small group	Subsystem
Perfection	Optimization
Organism	Biotic component
Physiology	Communications engineering
Hygiene	Stress management
Sex	Genetic engineering
Labor	Robotics
Mind	Artificial Intelligence

This idea of a cyberfeminist cyborg, unlike the one in cyberpunk, is not prone to sexualisation and fetishization, because it does not have the need for sex as a mean to reproduce and have a desire to fulfil any sort of erotic fantasy that may be based on masculine or feminine ideals of a body. It "it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (Haraway, 1985: 8).

Unlike humans, the cyborg does not have to build itself around its body with its biological sex. Instead, the cyborg has a free choice of self-identification. Consequentially, the cyborg can escape gender socialisation, as, without a sexual or gendered body, there is no basis for separation from

"birth" or for creating negative and positive stereotypes that can be tied to clear binary system of outward features of two sexes. But it also suggests liberation from other limiting constructions as well. Cyborg does not have race or skin colour, there is also no class. It exists in a utopian world without social categories.

5 Women, Gender and Cyberspace

5.1 Women and the Internet

Prior to cyberfeminism, feminists tended to see technologies as part of an inherently masculine culture, despite women's contribution to the development of new technologies. However, Haraway and other feminists believed that, instead of rejecting technologies as masculine creation, women should become more technologically proficient. Sadie Plant, for example, argued that women are naturally suited to work using the Internet, as both are similar in nature as "non-linear, self-replicating systems concerned with making connections" (Consalvo, 2012: 109–110). The Internet largely became to be seen as an important to master tool which can be used not only to gain power and authority, but also to purchase goods, to educate oneself, to build a business and enhance social life, even by women who do not label or do not wish to be associated with feminists (Consalvo, 2002: 109-110), instead of seeing it as something that can be disregarded as "masculine" and, therefore, unsuitable for women. The results of this change in perspective are clearly noticeable in a decline of the gender-gap of the Internet usage: according to the First Wolrd Wide Web Survey (GVU, 1994), 94% of the Internet users were men, and only 6% - women, by the time of the Tenth WWW Survey the percentage of women had increased to almost 34% (GVU, 1999). More recent studies show a further decrease in the gap, with a proportion of women being 12% lower worldwide than men (3% in developed and 16% in developing countries) (ITU, 2017). However, 2019 statistics show that while in developed countries the gap continues to decrease (from 2.8 in 2017 to 2.3% in 2019), in developing and least developed countries the situation is the opposite (from 16 and 33 in 2017 to 23 and 43% respectively); because of that worldwide gap is also increasing, despite the previous tendencies (ITU, 2019).

According to Daniels (2009: 108), the Internet is seen as a "safe space" where women can hide from the problems that they face in their everyday lives offline. The same is true for men of various age groups. Nevertheless, recent studies show that women are more likely than men to face harassment, hate speech, verbal violence, direct threats and use of private information for defamation (Web Foundation, 2015). Aforementioned creation of women-only spaces is an attempt to evade or, at least, to partly lessen this problem. Unfortunately, it does nothing to deal with the problem which grows from misogyny and is fueled by anonymity and, therefore, impunity of any Internet activity. Arguably, it may even worsen the situation, because it gives an offender a sense of victory. After all, it seems as if their actions reached the goal of making women uncomfortable, sending them to "hiding", therefore, essentially segregating women from men on the Internet.

The other downside of the inherent patriarchy of the Internet culture is the fact that a lot of women choose to present themselves as men, or, in other words, they try to pretend to be men using typically masculine usernames, male pronouns and stereotypical behaviour, not as a form of self-exploration or roleplaying, but rather as a form of self-defence and self-empowerment, as it helps them to be seen and to be taken more seriously not only by men but by other women as well. Additionally, it drastically reduces the risk of harassment (Poland, 2016: 118) This creates a sort of a vicious circle. The use of male names and nicknames makes female presence online less visible, consequentially leading to underrepresentation of women which is reinforced even further by more aggressive and loud behaviour which men often tend to display both off and online, because they are taught to do so during male gender socialisation. That makes men more noticeable than women, who, on the other hand, are quite often taught to be quiet and compliant. This, in combination with the already pre-existing imbalance between the number of male and female users, makes certain parts of the Internet, such as forums and boards, more "male-leaning", or, in other words, it once again returns to the old stereotype of being an inherently masculine place, with a male target audience, leading to hostility towards women, as they become, in a sense, "intruders". And that, once again, prompts women to present as men. As an example, we can consider the existence of an Internet meme (an idea, a style, a symbol, etc. that is spread via the Internet) which states that "there are no girls on the Internet". While used mainly for irony, it still holds some truth about the way genders are perceived on the internet: statistics show that the gap between genders is much less noticeable than before, yet the idea that most, if not all, Internet users are men and, therefore, a tendency to assume that another person in a conversation is male, even if the user-name is gender-neutral or, in some cases, feminine, still prevails (Poland, 2016: 119).

Of course, the situation is a bit different on certain social media sites, such as Instagram: here trying to present as male does not give the same benefits as elsewhere, due to the nature of the site which is based mainly on the outward appearance of a person; that makes the pretence of being someone of different gender exceedingly more difficult, although not completely impossible. Besides, emphasizing one's femininity or masculinity may be a benefit in this case, as it may help to attract more followers, both female and male ones, which is essentially the main goal of Instagram.

However, not all gender-bending and role-play practices have a negative impact on gender equality online and not always it is used as a self-defence method. It can also be a way of self-exploration and self-expression.

5.2 Expressing gender in cyberspace and role-playing

The difference in the number of men and women using the Internet had already been discussed, but the problem of gender in relation to cyberspace is more complex than this imbalance. While cyberspace still appears to be mostly organised by the patriarchal forms (Boudourides and Drakou, 2000), it can also be rather gender-nonconforming in some circumstances. In real life, when meeting a new person, we use gender stereotypes, we tend to make an immediate conclusion about their gender, based on the physical attributes that they have, such as body type, hairstyle and clothing; that first assumption is later either reinforced or dissipated by their behaviour in comparison to our knowledge of culturally and socially constructed norms for each gender. In cyberspace, there is no physical presence to search for gender-specific clues, and any assumption made in regard to gender in a lot of cases can be based only on their textual representation and an avatar. Yet, an avatar can be ambiguous in gender; and, in many cases, a person has the ability to switch between male and female-presenting avatars in a matter of seconds; moreover, an avatar can give no relevant information about gender whatsoever if the person behind it decides to use a picture of an animal, imaginary character or inanimate object to represent them online.

Nowadays, in order to avoid confusion and misgendering, due to inability to determine gender from avatar or text, a lot of people choose to list their preferred pronoun or pronouns in their profiles, especially on big social media platforms, such as Twitter and Tumblr. Common courtesy there dictates that any person should refer to any other person by their listed pronouns, regardless of any other clues that may indicate gender, such as photographs. In cases, where profile does not contain any information about pronouns, it is common to use "they" as a neutral singular pronoun, or to simply ask about preferences, as the number of pronouns that people use is not limited by a standard set of third-person pronouns: "he", "she" and "they", but also includes some other variants, such as "ze" and "zir" which can be gender-neutral or refer to a gender that does not fall into binary male/female category. Of course, not everyone follows those courtesy rules, as that would require a certain degree of acceptance of ideas that deviate from traditional hetero and gender normative ones. Often, it leads to conflicts and debates, both among feminists and with people outside of the feminist movement.

The ability to pretend to be an individual of any gender, or, in some cases, of any class or even species with no strict limitations combined with the anonymity of the Internet makes cyberspace an ideal place to explore one's gender nonconformity and to freely experiment with self-expression and sexuality. According to Hall (1996: 151), there is a "growing number of women who dabble in so-called *cross-expressing* which refers to the practice of "verbal" gender-shifting to "exploit

the potentially anonymous nature of the technology in order to perform other personas." Shannon McRae's work *Coming Apart at the Seams: Sex, Text and the Virtual Body* talks of men, in many cases straight, masquerading as women online in order to seduce other men; motivation for such gender-bending ranges from doing it on a dare, to a self-exploration and desire to experience sex from the other point of view. Of course, it is purely a pretence of assuming the role of a woman and imagining what she may feel emotionally or physically during sexual intercourse. Furthermore, one of the McRae's respondents said that anonymity and experimentations with gender and sexuality provide him with a way to "explore personal issues around power and emotional safety" and to deal with "complex and sometimes problematic associations with masculinity and power".

It is worth to note, however, that cross-expressing in particular or role-playing in general, are not inherently sexual in nature. The role-playing community is exceedingly vast and diverse; it includes members of all age groups, including minors. For this reason, depending on a platform where the play takes plays and specific sets of rules of any given role-playing group, it can be either strictly non-sexual play, or it can allow sexual interaction between consenting player but only in "save" and age-restricted spaces, such as channels and chat-rooms designated specifically for this purpose, or players' own private messages. Additionally, for the protection and comfort of all players, some groups may implement age limit for membership. It is also common practice to moderate publicly accessible role-play for any inappropriate content.

6 Cyberfeminism in practice

6.1 VNS Matrix

VNS Matrix (read Venus Matrix) was a cyberfeminist art collective, formed in Australia in 1991. On the VNS' webpage, it is said they "forged an unholy alliance with technology and its machines, and spewed forth a blasphemous text which was the birth of cyberfeminism". In their works, VNS Matrix uses rather sexualized and often extremely explicit language, with numerous pornographic imaginaries to create radical feminist acts.

This collective, along with Sadie Plant, were among the first who used the term "cyberfeminism" to describe their ideas. VNS Matrix was mainly active from 1991 till 1997 and presented various artwork installations, events and interactive works in Australia and overseas. They worked with new technological media, used photography, audio and video for their imaginary and propaganda and distributed it both in real life and through the Internet.

They were known for an ironic appropriation of feminist theory and futurist cyberpunk imaginary of their works. For VNS cyberfeminism was based around the ideas of cyberpunk and fiction, video games and game culture, it was a matter of creative expression using various art forms in the new media.

Among the works, produced by the Matrix, is *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st century* heavily inspired by Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, proclaims that:

"We are the modern cunt

positive anti reason

unbounded unleashed unforgiving

we see art with our cunt we make art with our cunt

we believe in jouissance madness holiness and poetry

we are the virus of the new world disorder

rupturing the symbolic from within

saboteurs of big daddy mainframe

the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix

VNS MATRIX

terminators of the moral code

mercenaries of slime

go down on the altar of abjection

probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues

infiltrating disrupting disseminating

corrupting the discourse

we are the future cunt"

This manifesto was displayed on posters and billboard across Australia and then published on the Internet, thus attracting international attention. The language used by VNS Matrix was intentionally explicit, scandalous and as provocative to attract as much attention as possible, even if it was mostly negative. It also does not use any punctuation marks and mostly omits the use of correct capital letters, as it was "corrupting the discourse" and thus did not need to respect any uniform language standard. Sadie Plant described it as "the most dramatic of the earlier manifestations" of cyberfeminism (Plant, 2000: 325).

One of the ideas of the manifesto is to defend the art created by women as well as their right to create it and be recognised for it. For a long time, due to historical reasons, the art community was an elitist one and largely white Western male at that. As a consequence, women were often belittled and ridiculed for their desire to create art and their produced artworks. Even in the 20th and 21st centuries, we see quite a lot of examples when female writers have to resort to male or neutral pseudonyms, as it gives them more chances for their work to be recognized. There is still some deeply rooted in the patriarchy belief that men are inherently better at certain things, including creating art and writing, than women. VNS Matrix Manifesto, on the other hand, proclaims that women can create and understand art ("we see art", "we make art"), *because* they are women and not despite it ("with our cunt"). This shows that unlike Haraway, who wanted to disengage from the gender-based separation, VNS stresses gender and female body as their creative source.

Other ideas, which can be found in the Manifesto, are the acceptance of women in the cyberspace and on the Internet, their inclusion into the online culture, and the elimination of previously existing norm of the patriarchal discourse.

Another notable, if notorious, work by VNS Matrix is their *Bitch Mutant manifesto* created in 1996. This manifesto is more traditional in terms of grammar, partly adhering to the correct punctuation use and capitalization, but still choosing to omit both in some lines. It also includes

the extensive use of the inverted word-order, metaphors, irony and other rhetorical figures which makes it read somewhat like a poetic free verse, rather than a manifesto. This manifesto, while still talking about women and their relationships with technologies, also raises some other topics. For example, it proclaims how hacktivism (the act of hacking or otherwise gaining unauthorised access to a computer-based system or network in order to promote social or political agenda) is important for cyberfeminism as a tool to fight inequality. It also criticises technological development for being elitist, as well as mostly unavailable and worthless for the underdeveloped Third World counties:

> So what's the new millenium got to offer the dirty modemless masses?

> Ubiquitous fresh water? Simulation has its limits. Are the artists of oppressed nations on a parallel agenda? Perhaps it is just natural selection?

Both manifests use *big daddy mainframe* as a personification of the patriarchy and talk about destroying it. Bitch Mutant Manifesto additionally states that "the net", or the cyberspace and the resulting cyberculture, including cyberfeminism itself, is the natural result of patriarchy, as it is a "feral child of big daddy mainframe"(VNS Matrix, 1996) which may be an allusion to Haraway's cyborg, as it is also born "parthenogenetically". It suggests that computer coda, just as the genetic one, can be manipulated, but also can mutate on its own.

Another reference to Haraways's manifesto is the mention of how cyberspace can assist in escaping binary gender norms into a virtual world of code, as it does not have the same boundaries as XY-determined biology and allows people to be virtually genderless, or change their gender representation at will:

> Trying to flee the binary I enter the chromozone which is not one

> XXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXXYXX

> genderfuck me baby

Additionally, this manifest celebrates female pleasure and female identity, but also talks about the lack of sexuality or sexual desire, due to the abandonment of the body when the mind transiting into cyberspace: "The pleasure's in the dematerialisation. The devolution of desire".

Among other projects of VNS Matrix are the graphics of a video game *All New Gen* introduced in 1992 and its CD-ROM prototype, with some additional new images, animations, video sequences, and zones, called *Bad Code* introduced in 1997. The game, quite characteristically for VNS, criticises patriarchy and capitalism, offering the player to actually "fight" both; additionally, it condemns gender-based violence, using satirical and provocative visuals. In this fight, the player

is guided by a group of "DNA Sluts" through the various "contested zone, a terrain of propaganda, subversion and transgression". The player is a "cyber renegade" with the aim of destroying the databanks of "Big Daddy Mainframe" which is meant to represent sexist white rich men, who abuse their power. The game includes sexual act, meant to represent new sexualities and to show the subjectivity of heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual norms (Paniagua, 2012: 254). When logging on to All New Gen, the player is asked to choose their gender between "male", "female" and "neither". Naturally, showing its gender nonconformity, the game accepts only "neither" as the correct answer, while variant "male" and "female" lead to the inevitable and instant game over.

VNS mostly stopped their activity after 1997, but, occasionally, they still take part in some shows, like the 2019 *Producing Futures: An Exhibition on Post-Cyberfeminism* at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich, Switzerland, and produce essays, like *A Tender Hex* and *@go #91010* of 2018 by Melinda Rackham. Although, those seemed to be primarily reminiscences and reflections on previous works and activities, with some commentary on the changes that happened in cyberspace during this time and how they influenced cyberfeminist ideas.

6.2 Old Boys Network

Old Boys Networks was active from between 1997 and 2001. It was founded in Berlin by Cornelia Sollfrank, Ellen Nonnenmacher, Vali Djordjevic, and Julianne Pierce and is widely regarded as the first international cyberfeminist alliance.

 "Old boy network" in itself is an idiom which is normally meant to describe "an informal system through which men are thought to use their positions of influence to help others who went to the same school or university as they did, or who share a similar social background." (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). In other words, it is a network created by "white men" and dedicated to the empowerment of other "white men". It is largely class-based, as it is seen to exist mainly among the former pupils of prestigious schools, and members of such network are usually of a wealthy background. Therefore, the fact that cyberfeminists used OBN as their name can be seen as an ironic play on the meaning of the idiom. Instead of a class-based "white men" network, they created one meant for everyone who "calls herself women".

One of the OBN's activities, among forums, chats and mailing lists, were real-life meetings, called Cyberfeminist Internationals. The first meeting, which happened in 1997, was concerned with defining what cyberfeminism is and what it means for feminism to exist in and to use cyberspace. In the end, it resulted in the creation of the aforementioned 100 anti-thesis which defines what cyberfeminism is not, rather than what it is. Consequently, the members had agreed that each one

of them can define cyberfeminism by themselves based on their own worldview and scientific or artistic works.

The anti-thesis is written in a mixture of several different languages which would be considered inappropriate in any academic setting. The last sentence of the thesis explains it in a phrase stating that "cyberfeminism has not only one language". It reflects Haraway's idea that the cyborg should stand up against the code and an old patriarchal language (Paniagua, 2012: 256): "Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (Haraway, 1985: 57). Some statements of the anti-thesis may be rather nonsensical ("not a picnic", "not a coldfish"), while others are more relevant in terms of trying to give an "anti-definition" to a movement ("not ideology", "keine theorie", "keine praxis").

The First International included 37 women from 12 different countries, yet it still seemed to be largely Europe-centrist with some North American members which supports certain criticism of cyberfeminism as a movement which states that it is too western, white and middle-class focused. That criticism is valid, as women in developing and least developed countries more often than not have minimal or no access to the Internet at all, and therefore cannot contribute to the discussion of the online problems of women and, more importantly, cannot use it to attract attention to the inequality and problems that they face in real life.

In 1999, the second meeting, – Next Cyberfeminist International, – took place in Rotterdam. This time, the meeting discussed certain topics that seemed crucial for the further development of cyberfeminism, which included hacktivism and female hackers, the potential of new information technologies and their use in feminist activism and the problems of globalism. The topics also included new strategies of cyberfeminism and "new" cyberfeminism in itself, as the members on OBN felt the need to "distinguish ourselves from the first generation of cyberfeminists who coined the term in a way we found too narrow" and to "free Cyberfeminism from its old attributes in order to make it a useful and operational tool for all kinds of new utopias." (Volkart, Sollfrank, 1999).

OBN wanted "to build real and virtual spaces in which cyberfeminists can research, experiment, communicate and act" (Volkart, Sollfrank, 1999: 5), their activities were centred around creative practices, they included different art projects, manifestos, performances and various publications. They explored the relationships between women and technologies and wanted to use "the new technologies to improve women and men interconnections and the disruption of feminists on the established system to transmit pro-equality messages, create new moral "codes" by "coding", this is, writing computer programs" (Paniagua, 2012: 256).

One of the aspects of OBN which is worth to note is the fact that one of the requirements to become a member of OBN for an individual was to "calls herself woman" which may indicate it as one of the more radical branches of cyberfeminism, because it contradicts to the notion of an ideal world, where no sex- and/or gender-based segregation exists, even if OBN's idea of a "woman" was not based on one's biological sex or actual gender. Additionally, it can be argued that nowadays such request would be seen as rather transphobic and insensitive to the people of various genders and sexes who do not wish for whatever reason, to identify as "women" specifically.

6.3 Cyberfeminism now

It seems that cyberfeminist presence nowadays is barely noticeable. New relevant publications and artworks are relatively few and far between. Moreover, when new relevant works are created, they gain far less attention, partly due to their less provocative nature than the ones created in the nineties, but also due to the general overabundance of information on the Internet which makes it difficult for new ideas to be noticed, especially if they do not already have a large number of supporters. It seems that the movement had somewhat lost its momentum and appeal. The term itself is used mostly in an academic setting, as a theoretic idea, rather than an active and practically developing one.s

However, it cannot be said that cyberfeminism does not exist anymore. Mainly, it is due to the fact that, in the broad sense of the term, any feminist activity in cyberspace can be considered as cyberfeminism. Viewed from this angle, cyberfeminism is actually at the peak of activity at the moment, because feminism actions and activism are prevalent online. Those feminist activities, that are not classified as explicitly cyberfeminist, can be considered as a part of networked feminism.

Moreover, there are other, more contemporary groups, who have different names, but yet, at the core, still value cyberfeminist idea. Such is, for example, xenofeminism. Additionally, cyberfeminism is connected with the emergence of the feminist technoscience which is described as a "transdisciplinary field of research which has emerged out of decades of feminist critiques of the ways in which gender in its intersections with other sociocultural power differentials and identity markers is entangled in natural, medical and technical sciences as well as in sociotechnical networks and practices of a globalized world" (Åsberg and Lykke, 2010: 299).

6.3.1 Xenofeminism

Xenofeminism is an offshoot of cyberfeminism. The term was coined in 2015 by a collective, known as Laboria Cubonics. As the name suggests, it is a feminist movement that is explicitly

inclusive of all and everything "alien" or "other", like, for example, transgender persons, who are often excluded from the more radical branches of feminism. Their manifesto, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation,* states that it is "a feminism of unprecedented cunning, scale, and vision; a future in which the realization of gender justice and feminist emancipation contribute to a universalist politics assembled from the needs of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing, and geographical position" (Laboria Cubonics*,* 2015). It uses the same founding idea of a utopian world where any discrimination, based on "otherness", i.e race, gender, class, etc., is abolished.

In the manifesto, xenofeminists note how, despite the efforts of cyberfeminists to change anything, the cyberspace still follows the same patriarchal ground rules that exist in real life and how "in today's online interfaces has reinstated familiar modes of identity policing, power relations and gender norms in self-representation". However, they still believe that cyberfeminist ideas were ultimately right, and therefore do not "belong to the past".

The difference here is that, unlike cyberfeminism, xenofeminism believes that there is no point in trying to argue about mind over matter or, rather, about "the primacy of the virtual over the material" and, instead, it would be more beneficial to perceive and use them both as inseparable ends of the same scale, allowing to "grasps points of power and powerlessness in both, to unfold this knowledge as effective interventions in our jointly composed reality". Another difference is that while cyberfeminists, such as most notably VNS Matrix, largely used female bodies and body parts as their instrument to imagine and create new visualisation of a world, thus often involuntarily returning to the politics of sexual difference, xenofeminism claims that "that the 'rationalism' (reason) posited by the feminisms of difference as a projection of disembodied masculinity can be refashioned as the gender neutral tool of choice for a feminism aiming to generate new worlds through the active production of differences and novelty in this one" (Angel and Gibbs, 2017: 9).

6.3.2 Networked feminism

Networked feminism is seen as a successor of cyberfeminism. It is online coordination and cooperation of feminists, designed to respond to and to prevent online discriminatory acts against various minority groups.

Like with cyberfeminism, it is not a single movement or ideology, but a collection of various branches of feminism and their online activities that have a clear feminist, anti-sexists, anti-racist, etc. agenda. This includes the use of viral videos, hashtags, online groups and other tools to push for gender equality, to call attention to certain problems or to promote new ideas and projects and

showcase new viewpoints. The most notable for networked feminism is the use of various social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, due to the fact that many of them have search and recommendation algorithms that can be used to virally spread feminist content, making it more noticeable even for people who had no previous interest in it.

One of the examples of how networked feminism manifests itself on the Internet is Me Too (also spelt as #MeToo) movement. This movement was started in 2006 by Tarana Burke (Ohlheiser, 2017). The idea behind the movement is that it encourages victims of sexual assaults and abuse to share their experience on the Internet, mainly on social media, using hashtag "#metoo" (or variations thereof). This is meant to raise public awareness of the seriousness and the real extent of the problem of sexual harassment and abuse, especially in workplaces. This encourages victims to report sex offenders which is important because many victims are too afraid or too ashamed to do so; this makes it difficult to determine the real crime rate and to prosecute the offenders. The movement works to show victims that they are not alone and that there are people who can assist them in finding the necessary psychological help, support and empathy. Of course, there are certain downsides to the movement: it is often criticized for leading to the spread of false accusations. However, researches show that the number of false allegations is relatively small: they constitute between 2 to 10% of all allegations (Lisak et al., 2010: 1330), whereas the number of assaults that stays unreported is around 70-80% (Morgan, Kena, 2018: 7).

Downsides of networked feminism include the limited impact that it has, mainly due to the fact that many people, especially in Third World countries do not have access to the Internet and the general tendency to forget or disregard this fact. Another problem with networked feminism is the lack of clear hierarchy, policy or ideology. In instances, when there is no single defined common goal that can unite all the various feminism branches that co-exist online, it leads to internecine disputes between feminists. This is especially true for the more radical and the more liberal ends of the feminist spectrum. The argument includes such topics as, for example, the inclusion of transgender persons, representation of different sexualities and the phenomenon of adaptive behavioural traits, i.e. traits and habits, that are not natural for women but rather created by societal pressure, such as the use of make-up or preference for certain styles or colours in clothing.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on the topic of cyberfeminism. This work aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of this movement, its goals, ideology and its ideas. It also shows some ways, in which they were put into practice, like the way our use of protheses echoes Haraway's idea of part-metal, part-flesh creatures, cyborgs, and how gender-nonconformity of certain parts of the Internet reflects the goal of a world where gender and sex mean virtually nothing. To better understand cyberfeminism, it is beneficial to have a general idea of feminism; this is the reason why a part of this work was focused on its history from first-wave feminism up to the emergence of cyberfeminism, showing its development through the years.

The way a lot of cyberfeminists saw the future was rather utopian, sometimes irrational, and some of their ideas were way ahead of their time. It is true for the innovative idea of the post-gender world of the future. This may be some of the reasons, why cyberfeminism felt out of fashion and no longer exists to the same extent, as it did in the 90s. However, cybernetic feminist activity still exists, except it has taken on different terms, such as networked feminism. It is very prominent on the Internet, especially across various social media, such a Twitter, and there are still a great number of various movements with many ideologies, theories and political stances. Moreover, cyberfeminism gave way to some offshoots, like, for example, xenofeminism.

And, despite the decline, there is still a possibility of a resurrection of a sort, of the emergence of second-wave cyberfeminism, similar to how it was with its traditional counterpart in the past, because the rate of technological development does not show the signs of slowing down in the near future; quite the contrary it seems to bring us closer to the cybernetic future, even if it is not as extreme and utopian, as cyberfeminists could have imagined. Besides, the question of the relationships between women and technologies are still present, and there are still a great number of issues connected with the Internet and genders which is exactly the area of interest for cyberfeminists.

Rozšířený český abstrakt

Rychlý rozvoj komunikačních technologií a šíření internetu výrazně ovlivnily život a práci obrovského počtu lidí, není proto divu, že určité skupiny lidí viděly příležitost využít je k propagaci a rozvoji svých nápadů. Jednou z těchto skupin byly feministky, zejména jejich odnož zvaná kyberfeminismus.

Historie feminismu začíná v 19. století. Byla to takzvaná první vlna feminismu, a zpočátku hlavním cílem feministického hnutí bylo získat politický vliv, který by jim umožnil provést nezbytné změny, jako je udělení ženám práva hlasovat na stejné úrovni jako muži. Později se jejich cíle rozšířily o ekonomické problémy, jako jsou nerovnoměrné platy mužů a žen.

Druhá světová válka a velká hospodářská krize v Americe dočasně pozastavily hnutí za práva žen, ale v šedesátých letech se hnutí obnovilo a změnilo se na druhou vlnu feminismu. Byly obnoveny diskuse o problému stejné odměny a byly přidány nové diskuse týkající se sexuální orientace a reprodukčních práv. Feministky navíc začaly upozorňovat veřejnost na problém domácího násilí a obhajovaly změny zákonů o rozvodu a péče o děti.

V devadesátých letech se objevilo to, čemu říkáme třetí vlna feminismu. Nyní feminismus přivítal individualitu a rozmanitost a postupně přestal být zaměřen pouze na bílé ženy střední třídy. S příchodem nových technologií se cíle feminismu ještě rozšířily. Myšlenka, že ženy mohou a dokonce by měly používat počítače a komunikační technologie na stejném základě jako muži, vyvolala kyberfeminismus.

Jedním z problémů, o které se feministky zajímaly, bylo oddělení pohlaví a genderu, jakož i tzv. „genderová socializace“, její možné negativní důsledky a způsoby, jak se vyhnout nebo alespoň omezit její vliv. Myšlenky kyberfeminismu naznačily, že v budoucnu budeme žít ve světě "bez pohlaví", což znamená ve světě, kde nedochází k diskriminaci nebo genderové segregaci. To by bylo možné díky vzniku tzv. „kyborgů". Kromě toho, hrály při studiu vztahu biologického pohlaví a sociálního genderu člověka roli i nové technologie.

Jedním ze základů kyberfeminismu, který v té době ještě nedostal své jméno, je "Manifest Kyborgů", který v roce 1985 napsala Donna Haraway. Tento manifest kritizuje tradiční feminismus za to, že klade důraz na "politiku identity", tj. na pohlaví a gender každé osoby, čímž rozděluje muže a ženy do dvou samostatných skupin, než aby zdůrazňovala podobnosti. Kyberfeminismus se však jako samostatné hnutí objevil o něco později. Stalo se tak na počátku devadesátých let, ve dvou různých částech světa zhruba ve stejnou dobu, díky VNS Matrix v Austrálii a Sadie Plant ve Velké Británii.

Název, vytvořený spojením dvou slov - "kybernetický" a "feminismus", naznačuje, že toto hnutí vykonává svou činnost především v kyberprostoru, tj. na internetu, a chce jej použít k propagaci svých myšlenek a teorie. Nicméně, i přes zjevnou jednoduchost tohoto pojmu, je však kyberfeminismus obtížné jasně definovat. Důvodem jsou samotné kyberfeministky: odmítají jakékoli definice, a místo toho upřednostňují mluvit o tom, co kyberfeminismus není, jak lze vidět na příkladu "100 anti-tezí" napsaných členy Old Boys Network. Jesse Daniels říkala o kyberfeminismu, že "není ani jedinou teorií, ani feministickým hnutím s jasným politickým účelem", a místo toho je spousta různých teorií a myšlenek, které se týkají vztahu mezi ženami a technologiemi.

V širším smyslu kyberfeminismus je hnutím pro ženy, které mají zájem o zkoumání kyberprostoru a jeho využití k rozvoji svých myšlenek. Jakákoli činnost feministek na internetu zaměřená na propagaci feministických nápadů a boj proti nerovnosti tedy může být považována za kyberfeminismus.

Jedním z důležitých symbolů kyberfeminismu je kybernetický organismus, nebo stručně "kyborg". Myšlenka kombinující živý organismus s mechanickými částmi není myšlenkou kyberfeminismu, – ta se objevila mnohem dříve v různých beletristických pracích, zejména ve sci-fi a kyberpunkové literatuře. Svou existencí kyborg vymazává hranice mezi člověkem a strojem, ale také, podle feministek, je symbolem utopického světa budoucnosti, světa "bez genderu", což znamená bez diskriminace na základě pohlaví, rasy, sociální třídy atd. Tento symbolismus je spojen s faktem, že v teorii kyberfeminismu dá kyberizace lidem příležitost uniknout zavedeným genderovým stereotypům a vyhnout se další genderové socializaci. Nicméně v kyberpunku a související kyberkultuře se obraz kyborgů nejeví jako "androgynní" a "asexuální", ale spíše jako důrazně mužský nebo důrazně ženský, zobrazující obraz "ideálního těla", které splňuje mužské erotické fantazie. Tento rozdíl lze vysvětlit skutečností, že kyberpunk a kyberfeminismus mají diametrálně opačné názory na budoucnost: anti-utopický a utopický; kromě toho se kyberpunk jako žánr vyvíjel téměř výhradně pod vlivem autorů-mužů, což znamená, že odráží mužské hledisko a genderovou socializaci, zatímco kyberfeminismus odráží ženské, především feministické hledisko, s touhou zbavit se patriarchálních norem.

Před nástupem kyberfeminismu feministky měly tendenci vnímat technologii jako součást mužské kultury, a to i přes přínos žen k vývoji nových technologií. Haraway a další však věřili, že místo toho, aby odmítaly technologie jako čistě mužského stvoření, měly by se ženy snažit ji pochopit a poznat. Například, Sadie Plant tvrdila, že ženy jsou nejvhodnější pro používání internetu, protože ony i internet jsou svou povahou podobní, jelikož jsou "nelineární, samoreprodukující systémy zabývající se navazováním spojení". Internet se stal vnímán jako nástroj, který poskytuje velké

množství příležitostí nejen pro získání politického vlivu, ale také pro seberozvoj, vzdělávání a podnikání. Výsledkem této změny bylo postupné snižování tzv. genderové mezery na internetu, což vedlo ke skutečnosti, že počet mužských i ženských uživatelů se stal v mnoha vyspělých zemích stejný nebo blízký.

Pro mnoho žen se internet stal "bezpečným prostorem", kde se mohou skrývat před mnoha problémy, jimž v každodenním životě čelí. V mnoha ohledech to propagovaly kyberfeministky, zejména jejich radikálnější větve, které si daly za cíl vytvořit bezpečné prostory bez mužů. Internetová kultura však zůstává především patriarchální kulturou, která odráží situaci ve skutečném světě. Studie ukazují, že i na internetu se ženy častěji než muži setkávají s nenávistnými výroky, verbálním násilím, včetně sexuálního, a s přímými hrozbami. Navíc, mnoho žen cítí potřebu vydávat se za muže pomocí mužských nebo genderově neutrálních uživatelských jmen a napodobovat mužské chování, čímž se snaží snížit riziko sexuálního obtěžování a získat vážnější vnímání od ostatních uživatelů internetu. Druhou stránkou této strategie je, že přítomnost žen na internetu je stále méně znatelná, čímž podporuje stereotyp, že internet je určen především pro muže.

Nicméně, problém genderu na internetu je poněkud rozsáhlejší než jen nerovnováha v počtu uživatelů. Na rozdíl od skutečného života, kde při setkání s novou osobou můžeme podvědomě učinit závěr o jejím pohlaví a genderu na základě vzhledu, hlasu, chování atd., kyberprostor nám neumožňuje si tyto naše předsudky utvářet. Děje se tak kvůli výrazně menšímu počtu informací, které máme k dispozici. Jsou nám často známy pouze uživatelská jména, avatary, či styl řeči, což nám neumožňuje utvořit si přesný obraz o osobě, skryté za pouhým zlomkem informací, které nám poskytuje. Díky tomu se i přes patriarchální povahu internetu za určitých okolností mnoho uživatelů odchýlí od zavedených genderových norem. Anonymita, kterou internet dává, umožňuje mnoha lidem, mužům i ženám, používat internet pro rolové hry, ve kterých mohou převzít roli jednotlivců různého genderu nebo pohlaví, třídy nebo dokonce i druhu. Na rozdíl od předchozího odstavce, kde se jednalo o převzetí role jako prostředku sebeobrany, rolové hry se častěji používají pro sebepoznání, protože umožňují volně experimentovat se sebevyjádřením, pohlavím a sexualitou.

Kromě změn ve vnímání technologií a experimentů se kyberfeminismus projevil na internetu prostřednictvím různých skupin, jaké jsou VNS Matrix a Old Boys Network. Tyto skupiny se projevily prostřednictvím různých manifestů, uměleckých projektů, publikací a dokonce i her, které byly vytvořeny pomocí nových médií a distribuovány především prostřednictvím internetu. Poměrně často, především v případě VNS Matrix, byla jejich práce záměrně provokativní, k upoutání pozornosti použily vzdorovitý jazyk a pornografické obrázky. Mnohé z těchto děl byly

zaměřeny na kritiku patriarchátu a kapitalismu řízeného "bohatými bílými muži", jakož i na podporu myšlenek rovnosti mezi pohlavími.

V současné době již není kyberfeminismus natolik nápadný jako v minulosti. Nelze však říci, že přestal úplně existovat. Stále existují modernější jevy, které I přestože si změnily název, I nadále si cení mnoha myšlenek kyberfeminismu; jedním je xenofeminismus. Kromě toho, existuje tzv. "síťový feminismus", který je mnohými považován za příjemce kyberfeminismu, protože také používá internet a nové technologie, zejména sociální sítě, jako jsou Twitter a Facebook, pro online koordinaci a spolupráci feministek různých hnutí, která se snaží reagovat a zabránit online diskriminaci nejen vůči ženám, ale také vůči různým menšinovým skupinám.

Je zřejmé, že mnoho z myšlenek kyberfeminismu bylo utopických a občas iracionálních, nicméně stále existuje možnost vzniku nové vlny kyberfeminismu, stejně tak, jak se stalo s tradičním feminismem v minulosti. Kromě toho, stále existuje otázka vztahu žen a technologií, jakož i problémy související s internetem a genderem, což představuje příležitost pro další rozvoj teorií a myšlenek kyberfeminismu.

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