

The cyborg mother

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31 January 2003. *The birth of my daughter, Aleah Quinn Smith-Windsor.*

A few days after Quinn was born this quotation appeared, written beside her incubator: 'Every blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers: grow, grow.' It was a near-fatal birth. Quinn was born at 24½ weeks' gestation, 3½ months before her due date. Her birth weight was 700 grams, about a pound and a half.

1 February 2003. *It is difficult to imagine such a tiny, perfect human being. Her feet are no larger than two fingernails. Her legs are about the same size as adult fingers, femurs measuring 4.5 centimetres. Her eyebrows curve like fallen eyelashes above her eyes, waiting to be wished upon.*

Immediately after Quinn's lungs were cleared she was intubated, stabilized and flown, with the Neonate Team, by helicopter ambulance, to the Special Care Nursery at the BC's Children Hospital in Vancouver. We got to see her for a minute, tangled beneath the cords of her life-support machines.

2 February 2003. *A pump pushes breast milk down her throat, through a tube that goes into her belly. Sixty-five breaths per minute are administered by a Drager 2000 ventilator. She receives extra nutrition through an artificial umbilical line, blood products and medications through an intravenous. Electrodes cover her body, measuring her breaths and heart beats, her temperature, oxygen saturation and blood pressure.*

My daughter's birth was a post-human, cyborg moment. She became cyborg, 'the illegitimate child of the twentieth-century technological dynamo – part human, part machine, never completely either'.¹ In this moment it becomes possible to grapple with the concept and the implications of cyborg culture, raising some important questions about the amalgamation of the technological and the biological, and 'not just in the banal meat-meets-metal sense'.² Breaching the bio-techno boundary forces an engagement with 'new and complex understandings of "life", consciousness, and the dis-

inction (or lack of distinction) between the biological and the technological'.³ Becoming cyborg is about the simultaneous externalization of the nervous system and internalization of the machine. Thus symbiosis of human and machine makes possible the genesis of the cyborg consciousness. Ultimately, the breached boundary of the human body is a diasporic phenomenon: the dispersion of an originally homogeneous entity (the body), 'the diasporas of the human condition into several mutually incomprehensible languages'.⁴

Becoming cyborg is a consciousness that is embedded within the notion of diasporas. To confront the interface between human and machine is to confront cyborg consciousness as it fragments the human experience into a lexicon of incomprehensibility. As the corporeal body is rendered incomprehensible, the genesis of the cyborg catalyses the simultaneous genesis of technic consciousness and a new episteme of the body itself. The cyborg body assumes 'a unified role: as a means of communication and reproduction; carrier and weaver; machine assemblage in the service of the species; and general purpose system of simulation'. In the moment of cyborg genesis, technology displaces motherhood, with a 'relentless aptitude for mimicry'. Technology appropriates the womb, becoming 'the living foundation for the whole staging of the world'.⁵ To redefine the human experience as the diasporas of the body means that it is possible to imagine infancy without motherhood, genesis beyond the womb. But before the displacement of the maternal body by technology can be understood it is first necessary to explore the relationship between mother and child in its original context.

Within the dual relationship transference between mother and child, according to Julia Kristeva, it is possible to render as 'object' of analysis, not 'childhood language', but rather an 'infantile language'.⁶ Before literate language begins to encode the identity of the infant, and prior to the moment where the mirror introduces the paradoxical representation of reality, the infant and the mother exist within a symbiotic relationship defined by two basic principles: the need to nurture and the nurture of need. The relationship

functions as the womb functions between the maternal body and the fetal body. The relationship functions within a paradigm of symbiosis and mutual comprehensibility. The mother–child symbiosis provides the necessary relationship for the infantile language to be communicated. The infant is *incapable* of distinguishing between ‘sameness’ and ‘otherness’, between ‘subject’ and ‘object’.⁷ Ultimately, the infant is not capable of imagining itself autonomous of the Mother. Where the infantile language is overshadowed by the diasporas of mutual incomprehensibility, this is where a critical questioning of cyborg culture begins.

For what if this symbiotic relationship between mother and child is interrupted? What happens when technology begins to work itself into the infantile discourse, severing the symbiosis between mother and child? What happens when the infant becomes incapable of distinguishing between itself and the *machine*? What does it mean for the human condition that the maternal space has been appropriated as a technological fulcrum? These are the questions posed by the biological mother of a cyborg. This is the genesis of a cyborg. It begins in pre-literacy, when the child engages in an infantile language with the machine, and not the Mother.

According to Julia Kristeva, ‘love replaces narcissism in a third person that is external to the act of discursive communication’.⁸ Love between humans, that is, becomes invested in a third party. What happens, then, in cyborg culture when that ‘third party’ is not a person at all, but a machine – a ventilator, an incubator, a monitor? Technology separates the dialectical relationship between mother and child, mediating the relations between them, appropriating bodily space for technological colonization. In the production of artificial means to life, is the machine capable of simulating love? Is the cyborg capable of love? Or is it merely a distribution of biopower or the redistribution of life as biopolitics broken down to its most simplistic simulation – the performance of living and the ritual of dying?

30 March 2003. *Quinn has been fighting with her ventilator. She tries to tug it out of her throat, but it's glued to her skin. To stop her from wrestling, the doctor drugged her with addictive sedatives and paralysed her so she can't move, so the ventilator can fully take over her body. How can such violence give life? So, I read her a story by Dr Seuss about really small people called Whos... At the sound of my voice, she opened her eyes for a minute. That's not supposed to happen. I was asked to leave. I was disrupting the machine.*

Living within a mediated body means that rituals of living are written by technology. Technology is mimesis, the capability of imitating the human condition with such exactitude that it has become synonymous with the skin, the flesh, the vital organs of human bodies. In the absence of a moment of differentiation between machinic and organic functioning, technology begins to appropriate the spatial body. Human relations have always been subject to invasive social mediation. The social construction of gender, race and ethnicity are all part of the historically mediated body. Mediation *is* what shapes the political imaginary. However, the skin is no longer the boundary between the political and the corporeal. The skin does not enclose the human body but becomes itself a medium of communication, a means for mediation. Thus the intimate functioning of the human body has been appropriated as a political nexus, a space to be managed, a complex system that functions for the hyper-realization of an otherwise virtual political imaginary. This is the ultimate moment in the realization of biopolitics. Mediation by technology means the appropriation of bodily experience as a new theatre for the performance of power relations. Artificial life becomes the performance of real life. Distinguishing skin from machine becomes difficult.

8 February 2003. *There is a scab on her chest where the nurse pulled the electrode off her skin, and with it came most of the right nipple.*

Where technology becomes synonymous with the organic, the cyborg emerges. What are the implications of this violent symbiosis? Becoming cyborg implicates the human condition with a specific mediation of the human experience, the eternal return of the machine within the intimate realm of bodily function. Autonomous function is rendered obsolete. Essentially, the genesis of the cyborg redefines the body. The body becomes the medium itself. The skin of the cyborg, like the clear glass of the incubator, is rendered an invisible interface through which all knowledge is mediated – the environment, the experience of living, the means to communicate, the way of ‘knowing’. The skin is to the cyborg selectively permeable: osmotic. Meaning is no longer reciprocally diffused between what is interior and what is anterior to the body; it can only be absorbed. An analysis of the maternal body in relation to the Cyborg Mother reveals a fundamental shift in how the body is constructed as a political space.

As cyborg culture begins to redefine the body, the skin itself becomes a highly symbolic and political

organ. The skin no longer functions within biological conditions of possibility, but assumes technological and political functioning as well. The skin is what distinguishes the Mother from the Cyborg Mother, bios from techno.

To the maternal body hovering in the realm of the symbolic meaning, the skin completes the function of 'Mother' as *enceinte*: her skin encloses and secures the maternal space and the language of mutual exchange which circulates beneath it, between her 'self' and the 'other'. The skin of the Cyborg Mother, in contrast, is invisible, osmotic, selectively permeated by the technologies of the paternal state: sonograph, probe, monitor. Her body is transcended by technology, traversed and mapped for the colonization of what it contains: the fetal body, already subject-citizen. The 'Mother' is no longer perceived as *enceinte*. Her skin, as boundary, has been breached. She is supplanted by the Cyborg Mother, the matriarch of the paternal state, who redefines what it is to be 'Mother'.

For the Cyborg Mother, there is no longer birth, there is only the genesis of 'life': 'life' to be managed, 'life' as social construct, 'life' as a linguistic moment where social meaning is transferred from anterior to interior. There is no procreation, there is only *re-creation* of 'life' as the parody of technology. The maternal body is supplanted from the symbolic event of procreation as the driving evolutionary force for humanity. In her stead stands the Cyborg Mother, who invests the body with biopolitical functions of preordained living, creation and dying. Through the symbolic death of the Mother, the evolution of the human species into something 'other' than a reification of technology becomes impossible. The womb, as the symbolic spatialization of evolution becomes a non-space, representing the impossibility of procreation as miracle, or evolution as mutation. In cyborg culture, the womb, as a disembodied organ, functions as the *re-creation* of 'life' as *involution*.⁹ The disembodiment of the Mother from the maternal function implicates the human species with a singular way of being human that is necessarily mediated and dependent on technology. 'The resulting entity is no longer a recombinant copy of either one that engendered it; rather, it is a new and singular combination.'¹⁰ Here we encounter the hidden violence in the eternal mediation of the maternal space: *involution*, evolutionary atrophy, the reification of the human body as both an anatomy and a politics of sovereign power relations.

Biopower is a sovereign power. It takes from the human experience the autonomy of the body and renders it politically and technologically subordinate.

Every intimacy of the body becomes marked as a microphysics of power. As body and techno are fused, so too do human relations come to be likewise shaped. The mother/child relationship itself is appropriated by technology, for the state. Technology interrupts this relation, intercepts the exchange of nurturing and needing of the infantile language, and encodes the body within an economy of 'living'. With the supplementation of the maternal space by the Cyborg Mother, power relations likewise shift their objectification and scale. Sovereignty is no longer an abstraction that is external to the body. Sovereignty has become a seemingly natural relation of power, a bodily function. It circulates, as foreign blood through artificial veins, invisibly, the silent violence.

1 March 2003. *Quinn has an infection and no immunity against it. She can't produce enough blood to replace the blood that they take for tests. Three more blood transfusions and no more veins in her head. So they attach a plastic vein to an artery near her heart. Blood pumps through her from both the heart and the machine...*

The most transparent moment in subjection is when knowing the body becomes anterior to the body itself; when knowing the body becomes osmotic. The exchange of blood, through an artificial vein, is a symbolic moment where the body is invested with an economy of productivity that originates external to the *corps*. Essentially, bodily space becomes mediated by sovereigntist technologies, rendered docile within the boundaries of economic utility. The productive body is an economically viable medium. It is an efficient expenditure of sovereign power that functions to reify the sovereign itself. Here we begin to understand the cyborg body within the context of efficient expenditure.

30 February 2003. *The average cost of sustaining life is about \$20,000 per day for an intensive care neonate. Ceadra's dad, from bed #5 has done the maths. Ceadra costs 0.5 million dollars today. Quinn, slightly higher and two months to go. How silly the concept of currency seems when life itself hangs by some invisible thread ...*

Has the body been redefined as currency? To what end? How does the body become a micro-physics of economy? To understand the body within the context of economic use, it is useful to apply an economic grammar to the body. It is useful to 'weird' the body into an economic episteme. Suddenly there is no cost attributed to sustaining human life in its most critical

vulnerability. Instead, within the economic episteme, there is only the cost incurred by the sovereign in exercising power over life and death. There is only the excess expenditure of \$20,000 per day that essentially circulates rituals of sovereign power relations. Foucault claims that within the spectacular performance of power on the body (i.e. the exertion of pain on the body of the condemned) every expenditure of power is justified within the context of economic use. He claims that the economy of power relations is defined by its efficiency. Here we reach the limit of Foucault's analysis and must ask: have excessive spectacles of sovereign expenditure really been rendered obsolete?

Georges Bataille, in his theory of general economics, draws attention to an entire space within the political imagination that is ignored by Foucault. Specifically, he identifies the excess expenditures of the social body and claims them as the essence of society. If we shift the object and change the scale of Bataille's general economics to the corporeal, it becomes apparent that the laws of general economics implicate the biomedical body as an excessive expenditure. The language of sovereign economics undercuts the notion of the body itself. Here we must ask: have we really exited the age of corporeal punishment as a means of subjugating the body into productivity? Or has corporeal punishment merely been adopted into a more subtle grammar of anatomical economics?

5 March 2003. *I call Statistics Canada today. No 'Live Birth' form has been issued for Quinn and we are unable to get health insurance for her. The province has quit sending me invoices for her hospital care and now threatens to 'terminate all medical care'. There is no record of her life, except as an expense. She does not exist beyond the cost-benefit balancing act of the state...*

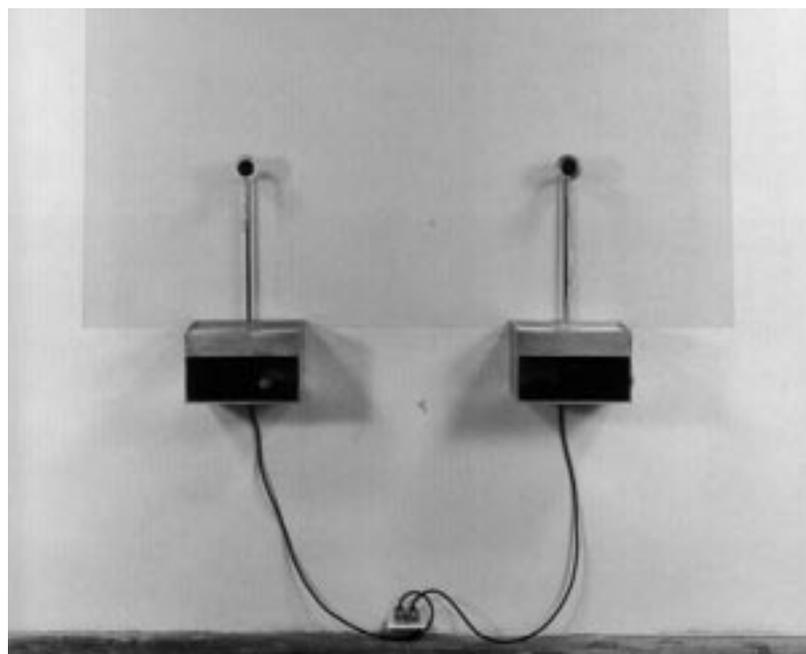
If society is best defined by the expenditure of surplus wealth, as Bataille claims, what does the excessive expenditure of surplus on the biomedical body say? Simply this: that the domination of the right of living and dying is less about a human miracle and more about performing a ritual economy for the sovereign. The disposal of surplus into my daughter's body is part of this economy. Her body, dangled by biomedical odds, ensures the eternal recurrence of

sovereignty as the biopolitical norm and a future that is dominated by the cyborg. Sovereignty becomes the message of the biomedical medium. It circulates through cyborg veins. And it is here, where economics and the body collide, that we begin to understand how biopower works to subject citizens. The ultimate form of biopower is the appropriation of the womb. The Mother becomes redundant: technology becomes the external womb. As the Mother is disembodied from the womb, the state assumes embodiment in fetal form. Ultimately, then, the fetal form becomes increasingly shaped into cyborg.

The investment of excess expenditure on the fetal body is not only an efficient expenditure of resources by the state. The extraordinary expenditure of surplus into the Western fetal body also identifies a geopolitical power that is deeply ingrained and exercised in the biomedical management of human life by the state. Here we encounter the geopolitical divide, where one fetal body is privileged over another, according to where that body falls in the arbitrary distribution of bodies across longitudes and latitudes. According to a recent solicitation I received in the mail, it costs only a dollar a day to save the life of a child living in substandard living conditions in a refugee camp in southern Uganda.

Questions abound. How does one child's life become equivalent to the price of a cup of coffee per day while my daughter's life becomes a million-dollar expenditure of surplus currency? Where does the value of human life end, and the value-as-currency of bodies begin?

The geopolitical divide is strengthened by the specific economic investment of the Western biomedical



subject and the fetal citizen of the developed world. Just as value has been redistributed along the geopolitical divide, the viability of human life has succumbed to political management as well. Viability of human life is no longer set by biological competence or human potential ('survival' of the fittest). Nor is viability determined by biomedical capacity alone. It is, like all power politics, first subject to the mercy of the map, to the distribution of bodies amongst border lines, between sovereign states and subordinate states. 'Viability' for a Western foetus, born into the outstretched hands of recent biomedical technology, is now set at 24 weeks' gestation. In contrast, the 'viability' of the Ugandan refugee might not be determined until late childhood.

'Viability' in the Western world is the stuff of legislation and public discourse. The geopolitical and biopolitical negotiation of 'viability' has recently arisen in the UK in the context of the abortion debate. 'Viability' is being appropriated and prostituted in both pro-choice and pro-life discourses. Behind these debates, however, is another issue. Viability is no longer a definitive moment where living either continues or is discontinued. It has become a discursive weapon, a political levy point, a technologically administered condition. According to David Steel, the Member of Parliament who first introduced the abortion bill to the British parliament in 1966, advances in medical technology are not being reflected by abortion law. The Infant Life Preservation Act of 1929 revolved around the '28-week assumption of "viability" of a foetus';¹¹ the 1967 Abortion Act set the upper time limit on legal abortion accordingly. But as medical technologies advance, the assumed gestational age of fetal 'viability' also lowers. Since technology has become intimately involved in the maternal experience, medical science has begun to boast of the 'viability' of infants born at less than 22 weeks of pregnancy. The gap between ethics and praxis is evident. Legislation and literature about fetal 'viability' draws a definitive line between miscarriage and birth at 24 weeks' gestation. What then, of those born on the borderline? Are they foetus, infant or neither? Perhaps it is in this grey area that the cyborg is born.

6 February 2003. *Another mother comes to tour the SCN, pushed around in a wheelchair by a nurse. She looks the way I must have looked when they told me they could not stop my labour. We talk for a while. She is 23.5 weeks along and will deliver within 24 hours. She tells me that the whole way to the hospital she thought she was miscarrying.*

She was shocked to hear that her baby could live. I admit to her that I had assumed the same...

It seems strange that a mother should have to consult legislation to know whether or not her child is 'viable' in the eyes of the state. Essentially, the discourse surrounding the 'viability' of human life has been relocated from the womb to techno-politics. The ongoing debate surrounding 'viability' is only a fraction of the issue. At stake is the role of the maternal body in human genesis. The womb itself is no longer a private space. Every intimacy of its function has become both social and political fodder.

Within the discourse of cyber-feminism, the externalized, technological womb begins to make sense: 'in Latin, it is *matrix*, or matter, both the mother and the material'.¹² Technology, as the manifestation of the paternal state, has become both the mother and the matter of the consciousness, the medium through which the need to nurture and the nurture of need are fulfilled. The cyborg is thus born through this virtual non-space, this womb of machinic consciousness, this techne of state paternalism. Within the technological womb, human bodies and human consciousness become 'cy-dough-plasma' – malleable matter, without fixed form.¹³

27 February 2003. *I'm a little confused about her ears. They're pliable. Lacking cartilage at this stage of development often finds them in crumples of folded-over flesh. They require frequent repositioning and remoulding so they don't get all folded up like fortune cookies. I try not to play with them too much, but, it's not like you can rationalize with her yet: 'Don't crumple up your ears dear...'*

Externalizing the womb subjects the unformed body to manipulation. The cyborg body, by definition, is partly a virtualization, a chimera, an unformed body. The relocation of genesis beyond the maternal womb is a vital moment in the creation of the cyborg. Once the womb is exposed, appropriated and externalized by technology, the body emerges as a form to be fixed into an ideal shape for citizenship, a perfected system of productive functioning. The cyborg body is the visible body, the virtual body. The politics of the cyborg body are ultimately fixed through the perfected simulation of 'living'. The cyborg consciousness, like the fetal body, becomes the art of the machine. Bodies and consciousness are remixed. And what we perceive to be the body often becomes distorted in the engineering of cyborg.

3 February 2003. *It was as if her delicate features had been rearranged to make room for equipment. Somehow, her perfect nose was in the way of the ventilator, so they moved it off to the side. The machines rearrange the perfection of her body.*

Just as in Julia Kristeva's infantile language, there is no easy way to distinguish between the child and the simulated techno-Mother. The machine and the baby become symbiotic. 'Sameness' governs the relationship between the baby and the machine. Their sameness means that they are mutually dependent on each other in order for 'life' to continue. This moment, where differentiation becomes impossible, witnesses the ultimate realization of biopower: the virtual birth of the cyborg.

Technology is capable of simulating vital signs, of supporting life, of becoming Mother. The child of the techno-Mother is essentially a virtual body, a simulation of vital signs that becomes internalized. The ventilator simulates Quinn's breathing, supporting her life through mimicry. Through the perfect simulation of breathing, the ritual of life goes forward. In cyborg culture, the lines between simulation and reality are blurred into irrelevancy. The cyborg is the interface between simulation and reality, where the simulacrum becomes capable of living. Her body is 'redesigned by means of life-support machines and prosthetic organs'.¹⁴ Thus the body is breached in becoming cyborg, a recombinant fusion of technological and biological traffic. What is internal and external to the virtually dead body becomes confused. Indeed, what is internal and what is external is confused.

Infancy disembodied from the biological Mother goes forward unmanned, like the Predator Drone – moving forward into a machinic realm of infinite possibility.¹⁵ What happens when the conditions of infinite possibility are governed by an inherent nihilism? The externalization of the nervous system makes possible the continuation of life, yet it is a life that is fundamentally nihilistic, eternally bound to a mediated consciousness.

1 March 2003. *I want to love and hate the machine that breathes for her. Ventilation is a Catch-22. Ventilation turns the fragile tissues and muscles that are used for breathing and exchanging oxygen into scars. 'As long as her lungs develop faster than the ventilator damages them, we win', says Dr T. She is getting chest X-rays almost daily now. In her X-rays, her lungs are clouded over with white. Her little lungs fill with fluid that has to be suctioned out almost every two hours in order for her to get the*

proper amount of oxygen into her blood. We've had a serious heart to heart, recently. I used the 'stern mother voice' for the first time to tell her that she is not allowed to take her ventilator to kindergarten with her.

The relationship between machine and body cannot sustain life endlessly. One must eventually overtake the other in order for life to continue. Through the body, the machine performs the dichotomy of living and killing, life and death. It gives life only to overtake it. The technology that sustains life is ultimately nihilistic. What happens faster is vital – the ability to outgrow the machine, or the damage inflicted by the machine itself. This is a profound statement about the morphology of humans and machines. To become cyborg is to commit a slow suicide. Ultimately, it is the annihilation of the human body, of autonomous human consciousness. This is the paradox of the cyborg body: nihilism is embedded in the rituals of living.

Just as technology is capable of simulating rituals of living, becoming cyborg affects the rituals of dying. Technology has intervened and institutionalized the right/rite of death. Even after the body expires, the machines keep going. It is not until they are turned off that the body is pronounced 'dead'. Being cyborg means that death is experienced in a new way. Is it possible to be absent in death – a redundant body in the machinic performance of dying?

14 February 2003. *I hold my child for the first time. She is naked, against my chest. Her ventilator curls around my neck, is taped to my shoulder, and disappears inside her. There are other tubes, too, taped to my other limbs by peach-coloured surgical tape. Beside me, another mother's baby dies. Another baby dies. The respiratory technician yells: 'No CPR' from across the nursery. He crosses the room, switches off the machines – ventilator, incubator, monitor, eight intravenous pumps of miscellaneous medical poisons. The life inside the machine, refuses to go on without them. And I am taped to a rubberized rocking chair, taped to my baby, taped to the machine. I cannot leave when another baby's mother comes in.*

The nihilism of becoming cyborg is inescapable. We are taped down to our own inherent nihilism. In cyborg culture, nihilism becomes synonymous with death. When a cyborg dies, the announcement of death waits for the machine to be switched off. The simulation of life continues even in the absence of living being. When a cyborg dies, it is only because the human



body has failed the perfect simulation of life by the machine. Death is ambivalent in relation to physical being, the body becomes almost irrelevant. The machinic simulation of 'being human' can continue to exist in the absence of a body, but the body cannot continue in the absence of the machine. In death, the human body seemingly fails the machine. The real fails the virtualization: this is what Jacques Derrida calls the logocentric moment where one technology of knowing is privileged over the other and infinite other historicities of being are forgotten. What happens if someone fails to turn off the machine? Is it possible that the cyborg can forget to die? Can machinic consciousness simply be switched off? It is in the moment that we forget to be merely human that the machine takes over the mother, technology takes over consciousness. Thus becoming cyborg becomes a metanarrative, totalizing and privileging only one point of view – the technological gaze. The internalization of the technological gaze is the most important political moment in becoming cyborg. It is the moment when the human condition becomes invisibly mediated by technology. It is the moment where technology and knowing become bound within perception. Thus, becoming cyborg is not merely a physical reconditioning of the body. It is a condition of being appropriated by and for technology.

26 February 2003. *I look to the machines and they tell me how my daughter is doing today. How easy it is to look at the monitor that tells me 'she has the hiccups, she's sleeping, she's not breathing – not yet'. The machines talk to me and I understand what Quinn cannot yet tell me. The machines tell me what she cannot communicate. Quinn is having a 'terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day'...*¹⁶

Through the morphology of my daughter's body, her journey from the maternal *enceinte* to becoming cyborg, I experienced the displacement of my own motherhood by the machine. I could understand my daughter in and through the machinic interface. In this moment, I too was written into the metanarrative of the cyborg consciousness, my perception of the human condition filtered through the technological gaze. Becoming cyborg goes beyond the physical symbiosis between the corporeal and the technological. Rather, becoming cyborg witnesses the becoming of technological consciousness. Ultimately, cyborg culture witnesses the reification of Mother as technology, denying the possibility of ways of being that are beyond the cyborg experience.

Exposing the womb, digesting machinic consciousness, monitoring the human body, locating motherhood outside of the mother/child symbiosis: these are technologies of becoming cyborg that go beyond the physical imagery of meat-meets-metal. These are technologies of sovereignty that are internalized, that operate in and through the cyborg. When the machine is shut off, cyborg life continues to occupy the human condition through consciousness, subconsciousness, perception.

10 April 2003. *After sixty-nine days on a ventilator, the tube was finally pulled. My little Quinnapotamus now breathes her own breaths. I guess our little talk about 'no ventilators in kindergarten' made sense to her and she has decided to hold her own. It was amazing to watch her take her first breaths after they pulled the tube, to hear the resigned sigh of the ventilator when it was shut off. The monitor flatlining. The sound of her hoarse crying, her voice rising through bruised vocal chords for the first time, met my ears and was strangely comforting.*

The cyborg does not die because it is unplugged. The cyborg continues to exist beyond all locations of space and time, consciousness irreversibly fused with technology. Becoming cyborg necessitates the sublimation of the mind. Becoming cyborg allows for the

cultivation of human life in and for state sovereignty. Ultimately, to become cyborg is to be harvested by the state and for the state. Like my daughter, paralysed for wrestling with her machines, internalizing the technologies of state sovereignty is likewise paralysing. It becomes impossible for the body to perform outside of technology. Ultimately, cyborg culture is written within the context of state sovereignty. The making of cyborg bodies is simply that – the epistemic branding of the state on the bodies and the minds of the subordinate citizenry. The cyborg body is the ultimate embodiment of the state: the ideal currency, the most efficient expenditure, the most malleable subject, the virtual subordinate.

The body in cyborg culture is incorporated into a centralizing episteme. Anatomy becomes a homogenizing structure, a collective social anatomy of ‘sameness’ in which there is a marked absence of differentiation between ‘self’ and ‘state’, political anatomy and human anatomy, *bio* and *technic* sameness. Suddenly, a story about a neonate baby is less about medicine and miracles and more about what remains hidden and unarticulated – the nihilism of being bound to cyborg consciousness. To become cyborg is to commit to a slow suicide of the once autonomous body and the eternal reification of a bounded human identity.¹⁷ The cyborg becomes a venue for confinement, the confinement of the human condition within a symbiosis of machine and body. Symbiosis with machine (whether machinic consciousness or machinic matter) becomes the precondition to living itself. To locate ‘being’ outside of technology becomes an impossibility. Ultimately it reduces the human body to a specific mechanics, a site of micro-physics, a docile and useful being. Becoming cyborg is ultimately about the sublimation of the human identity and the political imaginary.

The aim of this critical examination of cyborg culture is by no means to discredit the technologies that taught my daughter the art of living. It does, however, highlight the implications of becoming cyborg. The entire history of the cyborg is written in and through my daughter’s body. Upon her body, history is written. It is the history of the body as it becomes disembodied from the womb. The day I gave birth to a cyborg, I began to understand how every human has become a collaboration of machinic and biological matter. The human condition is mediated by technology. The metanarrative of being cyborg ignores ethical questions. The machine can’t ask, What would the world look like without mothers? Or, for that matter, fathers? Technology is quite literally beginning to rewire the

way we do family, the way we know humanity. The ultimate violence of technology is its ability to generate its own invisibility, to circulate undetected in and through the physical body, to become manifest in human consciousness as epistemic reality. Conditions of possibility other than becoming cyborg are thus hidden from the human condition. The maternal body, once autonomous *enceinte*, is condemned to redundancy. Once technology has been internalized and invisibly operates within the body, it becomes the only way of being human. Engaging in a relationship with technology is merely one means of engaging with new conditions of possibility for the human condition, but the human–machine symbiosis simultaneously negates the possibility of a metanarrative of ‘being in the world’ and forgets all of the moments of differentiation and deferral that work to inform the human essence.¹⁸ Ways of being ‘other’ than an agent of sovereignty become impossible when identity is bound to this logocentric privileging of the dominant discourse.¹⁹

Notes

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1. Barbara Kennedy, ‘The “Virtual Machine” and New Becomings in the Pre-Millennial Culture’, in D. Bell and B. Kennedy, eds, *The Cybercultures Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000.
2. David Bell, ‘Cybercultures Reader: A User’s Guide’, in Bell and Kennedy, eds, *The Cybercultures Reader*.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
4. Anon.
5. Sadie Plant, ‘On the Matrix: Cyberfeminist Simulations’, in Bell and Kennedy, eds, *The Cybercultures Reader*.
6. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Language*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980, p. 278.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
9. Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
11. David Steel, ‘We Need to Rethink My Abortion Law’, *Guardian*, 6 July 2004.
12. Plant, ‘On the Matrix’, p. 333.
13. Bell, ‘Cybercultures Reader’, p. 8.
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