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# GLITCH FEMINISM

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# GLITCH FEMINISM

A Manifesto

LEGACY RUSSELL



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Cover design by Elizabeth Karp-Evans (Pacific)  
Typeset in Sabon by Biblchor Ltd, Edinburgh  
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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First published by Verso 2020

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

**Verso**

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG

US: 20 Jay Street, Suite 1010, Brooklyn, NY 11201

[versobooks.com](http://versobooks.com)

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books ISBN-13: 978-1-78663-266-1

ISBN-13: 978-1-78663-268-5 (UK EBK)

ISBN-13: 978-1-78663-269-2 (US EBK)

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

For DIGITALMAN, who:

- 001—Loved me and my avatar.
- 002—Championed journeying along this gorgeous loop.
- 003—Died before this was born[e],  
but who birthed me, and for that, birthed this, too.

Still processing, you live here, in these pages, with us all.

*O, dear one we've lost, but who lives on, online.  
For you, we write your name here, and occupy this space.*

---

*Say their name.*

*Say their name.*

*Say their name.*

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fuck  
the whole muthafucking thing  
Etheridge Knight, "Feeling Fucked Up," 1986

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Mark Aguilar, *These Are the Axes*, 2012

**THESE ARE THE AXES:**

**1  
BODIES ARE INHERENTLY VALID**

**2  
REMEMBER DEATH**

**3  
BE UGLY**

**4  
KNOW BEAUTY**

**5  
IT IS COMPLICATED**

**6  
EMPATHY**

**7  
CHOICE**

**8  
RECONSTRUCT, REIFY**

**9  
RESPECT, NEGOTIATE**

## 00 – INTRODUCTION

As a tweenager I logged on as LuvPunk12 and spent the following years wandering the highways of haunted machinery, occupying chat rooms and building GeoCities GIF fantasies. Growing up on Saint Mark's Place in the center of the East Village I learned how to construct and perform my gendered self from the punk kids I met on my stoop, from the drag queens who took the stage at Stingy Lulu's and dominated yearly at Wigstock in Tompkins Square Park, as well as from the Boricua culture, all of which was, at the time, part of the bedrock of the East Village and Lower East Side.

LuvPunk12 became a symbolic amalgam of all this flow. I chose the name when I spotted *LUV PUNK!* on a candy-apple-red heart-shaped sticker adhered to a phone booth outside of my apartment building. I was twelve. I peeled it off and stuck it to my Trapper Keeper, wearing it as a badge of pride. It became a rooted reminder of home as I transitioned in and out of spaces beyond the East Village that often felt alienating to me.

LuvPunk12 as a chatroom handle was a nascent performance, an exploration of a future self. I was a young body: Black, female-identifying, femme, queer.<sup>1</sup> There was no pressing pause, no reprieve; the world around me never let me forget these identifiers. Yet online I could be whatever I wanted. And so my twelve-year-old self became sixteen, became twenty, became seventy. I aged. I died. Through this storytelling and shapeshifting, I was resurrected. I claimed my range. Online I found my first connection to the gendered swagger of ascendancy, the thirsty drag of aspiration. My “female” transmogrified, I set out to explore “man,” to expand “woman.” I toyed with power dynamics, exchanging with other faceless strangers, empowered via creating new selves, slipping in and out of digital skins, celebrating in the new rituals of cybersex. In chatrooms I donned different corpo-realities while the rainbow wheel of death buffered in the ecstatic, dawdling jam of AOL dial-up.

Those dulcet tones of dial-up were Pavlovian: they made me salivate in anticipation of the worlds that lay just beyond the bells. I was a digital native pushing through those cybernated landscapes with a dawning awareness, a shyly exercised power. I was not yet privileged enough to be fully formed as cyborg but, in reaching, surely on my way.

And I was not alone.

Away from the keyboard (or “AFK”), immersed in a rapidly gentrifying East Village, faces, skin, identities like my

own and like the mixed communities I had been brought up in were slowly disappearing. I was becoming a stranger in my own territory, a remnant of a past chapter of New York. Creative families of color like mine who had built the vibrant landscape of downtown New York were being priced out of the neighborhoods. Suddenly those living next door were increasingly white, upwardly mobile, and made visibly uncomfortable by my presence and the presence of my family. The “old guard” were coming up against a generation of trust-fund children. These new arrivals were intrigued by the mythology of the East Village as a cultural bastion yet displayed little interest in investing in the necessary fight to protect its legacy.

Beyond my doorstep, my queer femininity found itself, too, in a vulnerable passage through channels of middle school heteronormativity. My prepubescent body was exhausted by social mores, tired of being told to take up less space, being seen and not heard, systematically erased, edited out, ignored. All I wanted to do was move. But in the light of daytime, I felt trapped, always shifting uneasily under the weight of incessant white heteronormative observation.

Under this sort of surveillance, real innocence and childhood play seems suddenly unviable. Instead I searched for opportunities to immerse myself in the potential of refusal. I commenced to push back against the violence of this unconsented visibility, to take control of the eyes on me and how

they interpreted my body. It was clear to me, as I stood at a volatile intersection, that the binary was some kind of fiction. Even for a fledgling queer Black body, a DuBoisian double-consciousness splinters further, “double” becoming “triple,” consciousness amplified and expanded by the “third eye” of gender.

Looking through these veils of race and gender but never being fully seen myself, with limited reference points in the world beyond, I was distanced from any accurate mirror. For my body, then, subversion came via digital remix, searching for those sites of experimentation where I could explore my true self, open and ready to be read by those who spoke my language. Online, I sought to become a fugitive from the mainstream, unwilling to accept its limited definition of bodies like my own. What the world AFK offered was not enough. I wanted—demanded—more.

The construct of gender binary is, and has always been, precarious. Aggressively contingent, it is an immaterial invention that in its toxic virality has infected our social and cultural narratives. To exist within a binary system one must assume that our selves are unchangeable, that how we are read in the world must be chosen for us, rather than for us to define—and choose—for ourselves. To be at the intersection of female-identifying, queer, and Black is to find oneself at an integral apex. Each of these components is a key technology in and of itself. Alone and together, “female,” “queer,”

“Black” as a survival strategy demand the creation of their individual machinery, that innovates, builds, resists. With physical movement often restricted, female-identifying people, queer people, Black people invent ways to create space through rupture. Here, in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired crossroad of gender, race, and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch.

A glitch is an error, a mistake, a failure to function. Within technoculture, a glitch is part of machinic anxiety, an indicator of something having gone wrong. This built-in technological anxiety of *something gone wrong* spills over naturally when we encounter glitches in AFK scenarios: a car engine calling it quits; getting stuck in an elevator; a city-wide blackout.

Yet these are rather micro examples in the broader scheme of things. If we step back further, considering the larger and more complicated systems that have been used to shape the machine of society and culture, gender is immediately identifiable as a core cog within this wheel. Gender has been used as a weapon against its own populace. The idea of “body” carries this weapon: gender circumscribes the body, “protects” it from becoming limitless, from claiming the infinite vast, from realizing its true potential.

We use “body” to give material form to an idea that has no form, an assemblage that is abstract. The concept of a body houses within it social, political, and cultural discourses,

which change based on where the body is situated and how it is read. When we gender a body, we are making assumptions about the body's function, its sociopolitical condition, its fixity. When the body is determined as a male or female individual, the body performs gender as its score, guided by a set of rules and requirements that validate and verify the humanity of that individual. A body that pushes back at the application of pronouns, or remains indecipherable within binary assignment, is a body that refuses to perform the score. This nonperformance is a glitch. This glitch is a form of refusal.

Within glitch feminism, glitch is celebrated as a vehicle of refusal, a strategy of nonperformance. This glitch aims to make abstract again that which has been forced into an uncomfortable and ill-defined material: the body. In glitch feminism, we look at the notion of *glitch-as-error* with its genesis in the realm of the machinic and the digital and consider how it can be reapplied to inform the way we see the AFK world, shaping how we might participate in it toward greater agency for and by ourselves. Deploying the Internet as a creative material, glitch feminism looks first through the lens of artists who, in their work and research, offer solutions to this troubled material of the body. The process of becoming material surfaces tensions, prompting us to inquire: *Who defines the material of the body? Who gives it value—and why?*

These questions are challenging and uncomfortable, requiring us to confront the body as a strategic framework and one that is often applied toward particular ends. Yet, along this line of inquiry, glitch feminism remains a mediation of desire for all those bodies like mine who continue to come of age at night on the Internet. The glitch acknowledges that gendered bodies are far from absolute but rather an imaginary, manufactured and commodified for capital. The glitch is an activist prayer, a call to action, as we work toward fantastic failure, breaking free of an understanding of gender as something stationary.

While we continue to navigate toward a more vast and abstract concept of gender, it must be said that at times it really does feel, paradoxically, as if all we have are the bodies we are housed in, gendered or otherwise. Under the sun of capitalism, we truly own little else, and even so, we are often subject to a complicated choreography dictated by the complicated, bureaucratic, and rhizomatic systems of institutions. The brutality of this precarious state is particularly evident via the constant expectation that we as bodies reassert a gender performance that fits within a binary in order to comply with the prescriptions of the everyday. As political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott writes, “Legibility [becomes] a condition of manipulation.”<sup>2</sup> These aggressions, marked as neutral in their banality, are indeed violent. Quotidian in nature, we find ourselves fending off the advances of binary

gender as it winds its way through the basics of modern life: opening a bank account; applying for a passport; going to the bathroom.

So, what does it mean to dismantle gender? Such a program is a project of disarmament; it demands the end of our relationship with the social practice of the body as we know it. In his 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room*, writer and activist James Baldwin's protagonist David darkly muses, "It doesn't matter, it is only the body, [and] it will soon be over." Through the application of the glitch, we ghost on the gendered body and accelerate toward its end. The infinite possibilities presented as a consequence of this allows for our exploration: we can dis-identify and by dis-identifying, we can make up our own rules in wrestling with the problem of the body.

Glitch feminism asks us to look at the deeply flawed society we are currently implicated by and participating in, a society that relentlessly demands we make choices based on a conceptual gender binary that limits us as individuals. Glitch feminism urges us to consider the *in-between* as a core component of survival—neither masculine nor feminine, neither male nor female, but a spectrum across which we may be empowered to choose and define ourselves for ourselves. Thus, the glitch creates a fissure within which new possibilities of being and becoming manifest. This failure to function within the confines of a society that fails us is a pointed and

necessary refusal. Glitch feminism dissents, pushes back against capitalism.

As glitch feminists, this is our politic: we refuse to be hewn to the hegemonic line of a binary body. This calculated failure prompts the violent socio-cultural machine to hiccup, sigh, shudder, buffer. We want a new framework and for this framework, we want new skin. The digital world provides a potential space where this can play out. Through the digital, we make new worlds and dare to modify our own. Through the digital, the body "in glitch" finds its genesis. Embracing the glitch is therefore a participatory action that challenges the status quo. It creates a homeland for those traversing the complex channels of gender's diaspora. The glitch is for those selves joyfully immersed in the in-between, those who have traveled away from their assigned site of gendered origin. The ongoing presence of the glitch generates a welcome and protected space in which to innovate and experiment. Glitch feminism demands an occupation of the digital as a means of world-building. It allows us to seize the opportunity to generate new ideas and resources for the ongoing (r)evolution of bodies that can inevitably move and shift faster than AFK mores or the societies that produce them under which we are forced to operate offline.

With the early avatar of LuvPunk12, I cloaked myself in the skin of the digital, politicking via my baby gender play, traveling without a passport, taking up space, amplifying my

queer blackness. This experience of machinic mutiny was foundational to me, and gave me the courage to let go of the ambivalence that comes with fear of fossilizing in formation inherent to the upheavals of adolescence. I found family and faith in the future with these interventions, shaping my personal visions of a self that could be truly empowered in being self-defined, a futurity that social decorum regularly discouraged for a queer Black body.

Feminist writer and activist Simone de Beauvoir is famous for positing “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” The glitch posits: One is not born, but rather becomes, a body. Though the artifice of a simple digital Shangri-La—a world online where we could all finally be “freed” from the mores of gender, as dreamt of by early cyberfeminists—is now punctured, the Internet still remains a vessel through which a “becoming” can realize itself. The glitch is a passage through which the body traverses toward liberation, a tear in the fabric of the digital.

This book is for those who are en route to becoming their avatars, those who continue to play, experiment, and build via the Internet as a means of strengthening the loop between online and AFK. This book will call on and celebrate artists who make critique of the body central to their practice, and share the hard fought-for rooms created on this journey as we seek shelter, safety, futurity. To quote poet, critic, and theorist

Fred Moten, “The normative is the after-effect, it is a response to the irregular.”

As glitch feminists, we inject our positive irregularities into these systems as errata, activating new architecture through these malfunctions, seeking out and celebrating the slipperiness of gender in our weird and wild wander. Toward this purpose, this book is structured in twelve sections, each section intended to pose an alternative after-effect, allowing us to peer through the lens of new practices and politics to discover new ways that life not only imitates, but begins with, art. Each of the twelve sections begins with a declaration, a white wall against which to cast glitch feminism in its slip, side, and manifesto. This text will travel from an exploration of *glitch* as a word to its reapplication within the context of (cyber)feminism, to a history of cybefeminism itself, challenging who has been made most visible in these narratives. Each section will apply the concept of the glitch in an investigation, and celebration, of artists and their artwork that help us imagine new possibilities of what the body can do, and how this can work against the normative. Beginning online, we will journey the online-to-AFK loop, seeing how glitch feminism can be used out in the world at large, inspired by practitioners who, in their rebellion against the binary body, guide us through wayward worlds toward new frameworks and new visions of fantastic futures.

Consider artist E. Jane's 2016 piece *NOPE (a manifesto)*. I begin here, with the words of *NOPE*, because bound up within them is the foundational refusal required "to glitch." *To glitch* is to embrace malfunction, and to embrace malfunction is in and of itself an expression that starts with "no." Thus E. Jane's *NOPE* helps us take these first steps.

E. Jane writes:

I am not an identity artist just because I am a Black artist with multiple selves.

I am not grappling with notions of identity and representation in my art. I'm grappling with safety and futurity. We are beyond asking should we be in the room. We are in the room. We are also dying at a rapid pace and need a sustainable future.

We need more people, we need better environments, we need places to hide, we need Utopian demands, we need culture that loves us.

I am not asking who I am. I'm a Black woman and expansive in my Blackness and my queerness as Blackness and queerness are always already expansive. None of this is as simple as "identity and representation" outside of the colonial gaze. I reject the colonial gaze as the primary gaze. I am outside of it in the land of NOPE.

Before talking about what glitch is or what it can do, let's meditate on the idea of a "[self] with multiple selves" and acknowledge that the construction of a self, creative or otherwise, is complex. E. Jane's naming and claiming of "multiple selves" pushes back against a flattened reading of historically othered bodies—intersectional bodies who have traveled restlessly, gloriously, through narrow spaces. These are the selves that, as writer and activist Audre Lorde wrote in her 1978 poem "A Litany for Survival," "live at the shoreline" and "were never meant to survive."

To seize "multiple selves" is, therefore, an inherently feminist act: multiplicity is a liberty. Within their creative practice, E. Jane explores the freedom found in multiplicity, stretching their range across two selves: E. Jane and their "alter-ego" avatar Mhysa. Mhysa is a self-proclaimed "popstar 4 the underground cyber resistance" who crossed into some of E. Jane's early artworks presented via the now-defunct "multimedia cultural hub" and "creation engine" NewHive.<sup>1</sup>

E. Jane's NewHive piece "MhysaxEmbaci-Freakinme" (2016) featured Mhysa in a pulsing field of lavender peonies, glittering lips, and moving bodies ever-so-slightly out of sync in the digital drag of a syncopated collage of sound and imagery. These two selves began as relatively distinct entities, with Mhysa "allowing [E. Jane] to be a part of [themselves that] white institutions tried to smother," serving as an alter-ego that self-recorded and shared snippets of their own blooming becoming on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.<sup>2</sup> Then, in 2017, Mhysa released an LP with eleven tracks aptly titled *Fantasii*, marking the moment when "the slippage between IRL and URL" deepened as Mhysa performed songs and sets AFK, stepping out into E. Jane's world and perforating the carefully constructed divide between on- and offline selfdom.<sup>3</sup>

E. Jane's journey toward Mhysa, first as an avatar and then as an AFK extension of themselves, is one marked by finding room to roam, and finding their range. I think of the poet Walt Whitman's 1892 poem "Song of Myself":

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself,  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Whitman, a white man, was considered radically queer for his time. Within these lines of his, he captures a perfect snap-

shot of the problem of patriarchy, and of whiteness. Whitman is an agent bound up within a social and cultural status quo, yet that he "contain[s] multitudes" is his exercise of his right to be "large," his capacity to "contradict" himself is his exercise of the right to be blurry, unfixed, abstract. Patriarchy exercises its social dominance by taking up space as its birthright; when patriarchy comes into contact with whiteness, it leaves little room for anything else. Space is not just claimed by those exercising the "primary gaze" E. Jane speaks of, but is also made for them: space for becoming an unencumbered, range-full self and the agential complexity this provides is granted and protected for normative selves and the bodies they occupy.

What E. Jane fiercely protects—that expansive self—Whitman dons fearlessly, wholly unconcerned with the threat of having privilege taken from him. More than one hundred twenty years apart, they speak to each other through a void, yet look toward two very different worlds. When considering identity and the language often used to speak of it (e.g., "the mainstream" and those "at the margins"), it comes as little surprise that under white patriarchy, bodies—*selves*—that cannot be defined with clarity by the "primary gaze," are pushed from the center. There, a Black queer femme body is flattened, essentialized as singular in dimension, given little room to occupy and even less territory to explore. As flat

shadowy figures standing at the margins, we are stripped of the right to feel, to transform, to express a range of self.

The history of this sort of flattening or “othering” is one that has deep roots within a painful narrative of race, gender and sexuality in America, but also remains consistent across a world history of war. Where imperialism has touched, where neocolonialism continues, the force of flattening can be found. If one can render another body faceless and unrecognizable, if one can pin another as subhuman, it becomes easier for one group to establish a position of supremacy over another.

Violence is a key component of supremacy and, as such, a core agent of patriarchy. Where we see the limitation of a body’s “right to range,” be it at an individual or state level, we see domination.

E. Jane is not being hyperbolic when they write that we are “dying at a rapid pace.” Pushed to the margins, we find ourselves as queer people, as people of color, as femme-identifying people most vulnerable in weathering world conditions, ranging from climate change to plantation capitalism. Thus, envisioning what shape a sustainable future might take, finding safe “places to hide” in addition to techniques that provide space for ourselves, is urgent.

Glitch is all about traversing along edges and stepping to the limits, those we occupy and push through, on our journey to defining ourselves. Glitch is also about claiming our right to complexity, to range, within and beyond the proverbial

margins. E. Jane is correct: we *do* “need places to hide, we need Utopian demands, we need culture that loves us.”

The imaginative architecture of utopia remains ever present in glitch feminism. It gives us home and hope. In 2009, academic and queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz wrote in his *Cruising Utopia*, “Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.”<sup>4</sup> In this “something missing” is desire, a wanting of a better world, a rejection of the here and now. Muñoz observes, “We have been cast out of straight time’s rhythm, and we have made worlds in our temporal and spatial configurations.”<sup>5</sup> A refusal of “straight time” and, via extension, of a Eurocentric model of time and space, E. Jane posits a NOPE that does not settle for a world or a social system that fails us.

The oblique romance of Internet-as-utopia, against this backdrop reality, should not be dismissed as naïve. Imbuing digital material with fantasy today is not a retro act of mythologizing; it continues as a survival mechanism. Using the Internet to play, perform, explore still has potential. Giving ourselves this space to experiment perhaps brings us closer to a projection of a “sustainable future.”

The same is true online as AFK. All technology reflects the society that produces it, including its power structures and prejudices. This is true all the way down to the level of the algorithm. The outmoded myth, however, that equates the digital and the radical continues to prove counterfeit. Norma-

tive cultural institutions and the social construct of taxonomical norms—gender, race, class—with them are quick to marginalize difference. Paradoxically, the very nature of these differences titillate, are labeled as “wild.” Nevertheless, this wildness is permitted just as long as it is properly maintained, growing only within its prescribed space. Just as physical institutions lack intelligence and awareness, so do institutions of the digital—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik-Tok. These are the institutions (re)defining the future of visual culture; they are also, without question, deeply flawed.

In the spring of 2018, in the midst of #MeToo, a Snapchat ad surfaced asking viewers if they would prefer to “slap Rihanna” or “punch Chris Brown,” which resulted in a backlash of outrage about its making light of singer Rihanna’s 2009 domestic abuse at the hands of her then-partner, singer Chris Brown. High-profile individuals such as former rapper Joe Budden and media figure Chelsea Clinton voiced their support of Rihanna, and their general horror regarding the distasteful ad on Twitter. Rihanna herself went to Instagram, a rival to the Snapchat platform, to “talk back” to Snapchat, writing: “You spent money to animate something that would intentionally bring shame to DV victims and made a joke of it.”<sup>6</sup> In the days that followed, Snapchat stock lost \$800 million.<sup>7</sup> Rihanna exercised her own refusal, her nonperformance by stepping back from a Snapchat “public,” an intervention in

which she raised a fist in solidarity with survivors of domestic abuse.

The paradox of using platforms that grossly co-opt, sensationalize, and capitalize on POC, female-identifying, and queer bodies (and our pain) as a means of advancing urgent political or cultural dialogue about our struggle (in addition to our joys and our journeys) is one that remains impossible to ignore. At these fault lines surface questions of consent—yours, mine, ours—as we continue to “opt-in,” feeding our “selves” (e.g., our bodies as represented or performed online) into these channels. To quote poet Nikki Giovanni: “Isn’t this counter-revolutionary[?]”<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps, yes. However if we assume that Audre Lorde’s 1984 declaration that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” still holds true, then perhaps what these institutions—both online and off—require is not dismantling but rather mutiny in the form of strategic occupation. The glitch challenges us to consider how we can “penetrate … break … puncture … tear” the material of the institution, and, by extension, the institution of the body.<sup>9</sup> Thus, hacking the “code” of gender, making binaries blurry, becomes our core objective, a revolutionary catalyst. Glitched bodies—those that do not align with the canon of white cisgender heteronormativity—pose a threat to social order. Range-full and vast, they cannot be programmed.

Glitched bodies are not considered in the process of programming new creative technologies. In 2015, Google's image-recognition algorithm confused Black users with gorillas. The company's "immediate action" in response to this was "to prevent Google Photos from ever labelling any image as a gorilla, chimpanzee, or monkey—even pictures of the primates themselves."<sup>10</sup> Several years later, Google's 2018 Arts & Culture app with its museum doppelgänger feature allowed users to find artwork containing figures and faces that look like them, prompting problematic pairings as the algorithm identified look-alikes based on essentializing ethnic or racialized attributes.<sup>11</sup> For many of us, these "tools" have done little more than gamify racial bias. These technologies underscore the dominant arc of whiteness within art historical image-making and the dissemination of those images in a marketplace that presents deep biases of its own. They also highlight the structural inequality inherent to the creation of these tools themselves, with such algorithms created for and by whiteness, and so echo the exclusionary and violent art historical canon.

Online, we grapple with multiplying questions of use, participation, and visibility. Never before in history has there been such an opportunity to produce, and access, so many different types of publics. In 1995, poet and activist Essex Hemphill mused, "I stand at the threshold of cyberspace and wonder, is it possible that I am unwelcome here, too? Will I

be allowed to construct a virtual reality that empowers me? Can invisible men see their own reflections?"<sup>12</sup>

Today Hemphill's questions endure, made even more complicated by the fact that the "public" of the Internet is not singular or cohesive but divergent and fractal. What's more, the "space" of cyberspace that Hemphill calls upon has shown itself not to be a universally shared utopia. Instead, it is a space with many worlds, and within these worlds, vastly different understandings of what utopia might look like or become—and for whom. The Internet is an immersive institutional edifice, one that reflects and surrounds. There is no fixed entry-point: it is everywhere, all around us. Thus, the notion of Hemphill's "threshold" has since timed out.

This search for our "own reflections"—recognizing oneself within digital material and the electric black mirror that carries it—is bound up inextricably with a search for self-recognition away from the screen as well. Othered bodies are rendered invisible because they cannot be read by a normative mainstream and therefore cannot be categorized. As such, they are erased or misclassified within and outside of an algorithmic designation. Perhaps, then, this "land of NOPE" that E. Jane speaks of in their manifesto is the exact utopia Hemphill calls out for, that sacred ground where our digital avatars and AFK selves can be suspended in an eternal kiss. A land where we do not wait to be welcomed by those forces

that essentialize or reject us but rather create safety *for* ourselves in ritualizing the celebration *of* ourselves.

With this, the digital becomes the catalyst to a variance of selfdom. With each of us “invisible men,” we remain responsible for manifesting our own reflections, and through today’s Internet, we can find ways to hold those mirrors up for one another. Thus, we are empowered via the liberatory task of seizing the digital imaginary as an opportunity, a site to build on and the material to build with.

Glitch manifests with such variance, generating ruptures between the *recognized* and *recognizable*, and amplifying within such ruptures, extending them to become fantastic landscapes of possibility. It is here where we open up the opportunity to recognize and realize ourselves, “[reflecting]” to truly *see* one another as we move and modify. Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler observes in her *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, “One ‘exists’ not only by virtue of being recognized, but ... by being recognizable.”<sup>13</sup> We delineate ourselves through our capacity for being recognizable; we become bodies by recognizing ourselves and, in looking outward, by recognizing aspects of our self in others.

Through Hemphill’s musing on “reflections” in cyberspace, he makes plain the lack thereof within a broader social milieu, with the still-limited prevalence of such “reflections” both on- and offline. We will always struggle to recognize

ourselves if we continue to turn to the normative as a central reference point. In a conversation between writer Kate Bornstein and trans artist, activist, and producer Zackary Drucker, Bornstein observed, “When gender is a binary, it’s a battlefield. When you get rid of the binary, gender becomes a playground.”<sup>14</sup>

The etymology of *glitch* finds its deep roots in the Yiddish *gletshn* (to slide, glide, slip) or the German *glitschen* (to slip). *Glitch* is thus an active word, one that implies movement and change from the outset; this movement triggers error.

The word *glitch* as we now use and understand it was first popularized in the 1960s, part of the cultural debris of the burgeoning American space program. In 1962, astronaut John Glenn used the word in his book *Into Orbit*: “Another term we adopted to describe some of our problems was ‘glitch.’ Literally, a glitch ... is such a minute change in voltage that no fuse could protect against it.”<sup>15</sup> The word resurfaced some years later in 1965 with the *St. Petersburg Times* reporting that “a glitch had altered the computer memory inside the US spacecraft Gemini 6”; still again in the pages of *Time Magazine*: “Glitches—a spaceman’s word for irritating disturbances.”<sup>16</sup> Later, in 1971, “glitches” appears in an article in the *Miami News* about Apollo 14’s failure to perform when a glitch had nearly botched a landing on the moon.

Traversing through these origins, we can also arrive at an understanding of glitch as a mode of nonperformance: the “failure to perform,” an outright refusal, a “nope” in its own right, expertly executed by machine. This performance failure reveals technology pushing back against the weighty onus of function. Through these movements, technology does, indeed, get slippery: we see evidence of this in unresponsive pages that present us with the fatalistic binary of choosing to “kill” or “wait,” the rainbow wheel of death, the “Sad Mac” iconography, a frozen screen—all indicative of a fatal system blunder.

Herein lies a paradox: glitch moves, but glitch also blocks. It incites movement while simultaneously creating an obstacle. Glitch prompts and glitch prevents. With this, glitch becomes a catalyst, opening up new pathways, allowing us to seize on new directions. On the Internet we explore new publics, engage with new audiences, and, above all, *glitschen* between new conceptions of bodies and selves. Thus, glitch is something that extends beyond the most literal technological mechanics: it helps us to celebrate failure as a generative force, a new way to take on the world.

In 2011, the theorist Nathan Jurgenson presented his critique of “digital dualism,” identifying and problematizing the split between online selfdom and “real life.” Jurgenson argues that the term *IRL* (“In Real Life”) is a now-antiquated falsehood, one that implies that two selves (e.g., an *online* self ver-

sus an *offline* self) operate in isolation from each other, thereby inferring that any and all online activity lacks authenticity and is divorced from a user’s identity offline. Thus, Jurgenson advocates for the use of *AFK* in lieu of *IRL*, as *AFK* signifies a more continuous progression of the self, one that does not end when a user steps away from the computer but rather moves forward out into society away from the keyboard.

The glitch traverses this loop, moving beyond the screen and permeating every corner of our lives. It shows us that experimenting online does not keep us from our *AFK* selves, nor does it prevent us from cultivating meaningful and complex collaborative communities beyond our screens. Instead, the polar opposite: the production of these selves, the digital skins we develop and don online, help us understand who we are with greater nuance. Thus, we use glitch as a vehicle to rethink our physical selves. Indeed, the body is itself an architecture that is activated and then passed along like a meme to advance social and cultural logic. Historically, feminism was built on this mired foundation, first advocating for parity yet paradoxically not always across all bodies, or without anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-classist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist aims central to its agenda. As a movement, the language of feminism—and, more contemporarily, “lifestyle feminism”—has in large part been codependent on the existence of gender binary, working for change only within an

existing social order.<sup>17</sup> This is what makes the discourse around feminism so complicated and confusing.

Feminist theorist Donna Haraway's legendary 1984 construction of "the cyborg" within "A Cyborg Manifesto"—on which so many discussions of techno- and cyberfeminism have been built—complicates our understanding of bodies further. Haraway's cyborg actively argues away from the lexicon of the human, a classification that historically othered bodies (e.g., people of color, queer people) have long fought to be integrated into. Hindsight is 20/20: Haraway in 2004 looked back on her manifesto, noting, "A cyborg body is not innocent ... we are responsible for machines ... Race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts."<sup>18</sup>

In 1994, cultural theorist Sadie Plant coined the term "cyberfeminism." As a historical project and as ongoing politics, cyberfeminism remains a philosophical partner to this discourse on glitch: it looks to online space as a means of world-building, challenging the patriarchal normativity of an "offline mainstream." Yet the early history of cyberfeminism mirrored the early history of AFK feminism in its problematic reaplication of first- and second-wave feminist politics within what at that point was a third-wave feminist culture well underway.

Early cyberfeminists echoed early AFK first-wave feminist rhetoric in being phobic of transnational allyship. The public face of cyberfeminism was regularly championed and

fetishized as one of white womanhood—Sadie Plant, Faith Wilding, N. Katherine Hayles, Linda Dement, to name a few pioneers—and found dominant support within the realm of art school academia. This reality demarcated digital space as both white and Western, drawing an equation: *white women = producing white theory = producing white cyberspace*.

This white cyberfeminist landscape marginalized queer people, trans people, and people of color aiming to decolonize digital space by their production via similar channels and networks. Exceptions such as the Old Boys' Network, SubROSA, or the VNX Matrix were impactful in offering up alternative discourse that recognized peripherally racism alongside sexism, but the hypervisibility of white faces and voices across feminist cyberspace demonstrated ongoing exclusion, even within this new, "utopic" setting.

Despite this, those early days of cyberfeminism lay important groundwork in introducing the technological, the digital, even the cybernetic as a computational imaginary to mainstream feminism. With cyberfeminism, feminists could newly network, theorize, and critique online, transcending (if only temporarily, if only symbolically) sex, gender, geography. With this also came a foundational awareness of how power operates as an agent of capitalism within the edifice of online space, spurred forth by technological builders who shape how we as users experience digital worlds and their politics.

Feminism is an institution in its own right. At its root is a legacy of excluding Black women from its foundational moment, a movement that largely made itself exclusive to middle-class white women. At the root of early feminism and feminist advocacy, racial supremacy served white women as much as their male counterparts, with reformist feminism—that is, feminism that operated within the established social order rather than resisting it—appealing as a form of class mobility. This underscores the reality that “woman” as a gendered assignment that indicates, if nothing else, a right to humanity, has not always been extended to people of color.

Feminist “sisterhood” toward the purpose of increasing white range and amplified social, cultural, economic mobility, is an exercise in service of supremacy—for *white women only*. This is the ugly side of the movement: one where we acknowledge that while feminism is a challenge to power, not everyone has always been on the same page about who that power is for and how it should be used as a means of progress. *Progress for whom?* Thus, American abolitionist, women’s right activist, and freed slave Sojourner Truth’s question “Ain’t I a woman?” asked in 1851 continues to be painfully resonant even today, surfacing the ever-urgent reality of who is brought into the definition of womanhood and, via extension, who is truly recognized as being fully human.

As we wade our way through contemporary feminisms and the negotiations of power embodied by #BlackLives Mat-

ter, #MeToo, or the tradition of the Women’s March, we must recognize that these movements are defined and driven by technology, harbingers of a promising and potentially more inclusive “fourth wave” unfolding on the horizon. Still, the dangerous vestiges of first- and second-wave histories linger on. Writer, activist, and feminist bell hooks may have declared that “feminism is for everybody,” but what remains is still a long and winding road ahead until we get there.

Where *glitch* meets *feminism* in a discourse that problematizes the construct of the body, it is important to call out the historical construction of gender as it intersects with a historical construction of race. The body is a social and cultural tool. Because of this, the right to define what a body is, in addition to who can control these things called “bodies,” has never been meted out equally. In a contemporary landscape where the term “intersectional” is bandied about with such ease, it is important to acknowledge the work of blackness in particular toward the project of feminism.

Sojourner Truth’s urgent inquiry can also shine light on the queer body across a spectrum of identification. In a contemporary setting Truth’s line of inquiry calls for the recognition of humanity and a future that celebrates bodies of color, bodies that femme-identify, bodies that embrace the in-between and beyond, all as an active resistance, a strategic blur of binary. We cannot forget: it was, and continues to be, the presence of blackness that aided in establishing a primary

precedent for the notion of intersectionality within feminism. *Intersectionality* as a term was coined in 1989 by theorist and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw to speak to the realities of blackness and womanhood as part of a lived experience, neither half exclusive of one another, but rather advancing the work of both sides. Crenshaw's enduring contribution bolsters the foundation for the early thinking that drove making space for multiplicity across selves within a broader social and cultural context, one that resonates today both online and AFK alike.

As German artist and cyberfeminist Cornelia Sollfrank observes: “Cyberfeminism does not express itself in single, individual approaches but in the differences and spaces in-between.”<sup>19</sup> It is in the space between that we as glitch feminists have found our range, our multiple and varied selves. Thus, the work of blackness in expanding feminism—and, by extension, cyberfeminism—remains an essential precursor for glitch politics, creating new space and re-defining the face of a movement, amplifying the visibility of historically othered bodies.

We can find examples of this in texts such as writer Octavia Butler’s 1980s *Xenogenesis* trilogy, which galvanizes the notion of a third sex futurity that defies binary gender. Or Audre Lorde’s discussion of the erotic as power in her 1978 paper “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” which encourages us to discover our full range through a self-connection that delivers joy. These contributions did not rise up

out of cyberfeminism, but they have transformed, expanded and liberated it. Such alchemy makes limitless the capacity of glitch to mobilize.

Let us revisit, occupy, and decolonize Whitman’s words in our call for refusal:

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself,  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

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