Title
Authenticity, Authority, and Assemblage Masculinity: Geek Identity and Hardware Production in Networked Spaces

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Authenticity, Authority, and Assemblage Masculinity: Geek Identity and Hardware Production in Networked Spaces

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Ian William Ross

December 2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Authenticity, Authority, and Assemblage Masculinity: Geek Identity and Hardware Production in Networked Spaces

by

Ian William Ross

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, December 2014
Dr. James Tobias, Chairperson

My project asserts that to truly understand masculinity and its alternatives within digital publics, we must first understand how physicality and embodiment inform these spaces. The work here focuses two interrelated questions, asking A) whether an attempt to create an alternative assemblage masculinities which ignore or erase hardware and embodiment will inherently recreate the hierarchical and "othering" violence against bodies within new social boundaries, and B) how/if reincorporations of material (hardware, embodiment) factors within digital publics are able to create truly alternative masculinities for "othered" bodies. Creating a theoretical foundation based upon both the examinations of Hayles Posthuman and Haraw's Cyborg, the project focuses first on geek cultures which engage with hardware and the ramifications of these engagements on gendered and racialized bodies, and then examines the ways in which alternative economies of valuation inform identity, agency, and authenticity in a corporate/fan dichotomy that defines itself through both Henry Jenkins “textual loyalty” and hardware limitations.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1: Hardware and Assemblage Identity
- The Post-Human and the Cyborg 9
- Hardware Modding, Gatekeepers, and the Recreation of Embodied Trauma 16
- Politicized Making and Hardware Identity Performance 21
- Final Thoughts

## Chapter 2: Cyborg Female Masculinities: The Projection of the Feminized Other, Patchwork Subjectivity, and Literary Reappropriations of Agency 32
- The Rhetorical Position of the Female in Geek Cultures and Cultural Productions 39
- Female Masculinities, Blurred Binaries, and “The Bathroom Problem” 43
- Literary and Cinematic Traditions of Gendered Assemblage 50
- Hypertext and Assemblage Identity 65
- Female Modders and Final Thoughts

## Chapter 3: Mutation as Modding: Stitched Bodies and Histories of Racialized Trauma 70
- Hard Body Hardware, Digital Erasure and Trauma, and the Assemblaged Monster 77
- Spawn, Othello, and Deathlok: Traditions of Over embodiment as Erasure of Self 82
- Assemblage Performance and the Gaze 89
- Final Thoughts 95

## Chapter 4: Biocomics: Industrial Biocapital, Eventization, and Transmedia Manipulation as Resistive Assemblage Identity 97
- The Secret Origin of Biocomics: Copyright Infringement and Economic Motivation 103
- Non-Organic Life: Fictional Histories, Retconning, and the Industrialization of Memory 106
- Transmedia and Fan Intersection in Narratological Manipulation 111
- Event and Memory in Biocomics 115
- Breaking The Fourth Wall: Erasure and Genetic Manipulation Given Voice 117
- The Digital Language of Animal Testing: Cyborg Weapons and Shared Suffering 119
- Final Thoughts 122

## Chapter 5: Biocapital, Technocapital, and Ownership: Hardware’s Role in Digital Identity Production and Authorship of Meaning 124
Chapter 1: Hardware and Assemblage Identity

"I made a discovery today. I found a computer. Wait a second, this is cool. It does what I want it to. If it makes a mistake, it's because I screwed it up. Not because it doesn't like me... Or feels threatened by me.. Or thinks I'm a smart ass.. Or doesn't like teaching and shouldn't be here..."
The Hacker Manifesto, Anonymous, 1986

If one searches “hardware modding” on Youtube.com, they will find hundreds of examples of users displaying their examples of a relatively new niche in DIY communities. Hardware modification, the practice of altering both the aesthetic embodiment and functionality of the mass produced hardware apparatus is quickly becoming popular, with projects available online ranging from neon tracking lights on arcade cabinets to drastic alterations such as the creation of portable videogame systems.

The hardware mod, like many software mods and hacks, is accompanied in most cases by both a strong evangelical tinge and a performative element of display, as the vast majority of hardware mod videos feature step by step instructions and (paradoxically) a degree of performative one-upsmanship circulating through the community members that hold membership in this particular group. Hardware modding is sometimes knowledgably politicized, and sometimes not, but I will argue that the practice, which can be defined as performative and/or aesthetic modifications to the mass produced technological apparatus, is already inherently politicized in a variety of ways, and that it functions as a kind of complex identity performance where the self and self-presentation of those known as "geeks" emerges as an assemblage of the organic body, engineered equipment (hardware), and the coding of hardware (software). The invocation of the
embittered teacher or the intellectually inferior in the epigraph for this project highlights the ways in which the politicized making already struggles with the differentiation between official and unofficial learning.

The epigraph for this project comes from The Hacker Manifesto, a piece widely understood as a central touchstone for early hacker communities, and introduces us to a psychological sense of self that is important to understanding how hardware modding is both inherently politicized and functional as identity performance. The epigraph itself is indicative of an attempt by members of geek communities to reconfigure the hacker identity construction into a kind of intellectual outlaw. The implicit “flaws” or “dangers” argued here to exist within dominant public perception of the hacker are laid out through the rhetorical presentation of the narrator, as is the valuing of the precision and control that an engagement with the technological apparatus affords. The social agency and labor power that emerges from the engagement with the technological apparatus can be read as an attempt to formulate a new kind of alternative masculinity in response to social perceived flaws, a masculinity which allows for a masculine agency not only outside of the embodied masculine hegemony, but one which attempts to function in opposition to established or essentialized conceptualizations of masculinity even while its virtuosity with equipmental assemblage becomes a kind of social currency or power in its own right. Crucially for my work, this masculinity is not simply a matter of software manipulation, but the hardware that is brought to heel through variegated practices of assembly, dissassembly, or re-use.
The hacker as intellectual outlaw, while most often associated with the software mastery of the computer geek, is an important figure to examine as contextualization in reading hardware modding as both politicized and performative. The practice, by attempting to create an alternative masculinity, is able through networked systems and digital spaces to do so much more communally than has been visible in the archetypal figures discussed historiographically. Christopher Kelty's *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software* describes the importance of networked culture to the geek and his digital community, describing both as recursively internally produced and self-sustainable, but also as inherently “othered”. This is referred to by Kelty as a “recursive public”, understood as,

>a public that is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives…[It] differs from interest groups, corporations, unions, professions, churches, and other forms of organization because of their focus on the radical technological modifiability of their own terms of existence” (Kelty 3).

The “recursive public”, as Kelty understands it, is a community that sustains itself as such by the same means through which that community originally comes together, facilitating forms of sociality that foster evangelical proselytizing to embolden those communities and focus on the act of making, of production. However, these makers, according to Kelty, often function outside of the hegemonic sociality. For example, he argues that, "The term geek is meant to be inclusive and to index the problematic of a recursive public...Geek means to signal, like the public in 'recursive
public', that geeks stand outside power..." (Kelty 35) This project then uses Kelty’s conceptualizations of evangelical and politicized modification of code and software as methods by which to redefine agency and existence as a springboard into a discussion of material hardware and embodiment.

Embodiment in geek culture has been heavily theorized by critics like Henry Jenkins, who in his seminal text on media fandom Textual Poachers, discusses many identity concerns, not the least of which being his text’s examination of the common stereotypical representations of fans in terms of masculine/feminine performance and treatment of narrative ownership. Textual Poachers, in opposition to Kelty's account of geeks' inclusivity, also discusses the creation of “camps” characterized by specific reader-text relationships which informs my analysis of arguments of “nerd authenticity”: hierarchical structures and cyber bullying enacted by those digital presences who ironically place themselves as cultural outcasts. Authenticity determined by these hierarchical structures, and soon Virno’s concept of virtuosity, will emerge in as a form of cultural capital in the communities surveyed throughout this project, functioning as a means by which hardware literacy attempts to replace othered embodiment. However, material embodiment should not be understood here to take the place of cognitive identity and hegemonic othering of the geek. Hiroki Azuma’s Otaku: Database Animals, which examines the motivations of Japanese Otaku culture, discusses the degree to which popular opinion and even critical writing has theorized a kind of psychological disorder or imbalance should be associated with the levels of fandom seen in the kinds of groups we are discussing. The “sickness” associated with concepts like Jenkins’ “camp”
loyalty then is just as important a signifier of hegemonic othering as the material embodiment this project attempts to add to the conversation.

The cybercultures, nerd practices, and geek publics which circulate around hardware-oriented digital sites of fandom that I discuss throughout this project have often been imprinted in popular culture with a variety of identity traumas which begin to explain the attempted politicized redefinition of masculine agency. The physical signifiers of popular portrayals of geek- or nerd-dom (obesity, glasses, poor fashion and social sense, poor physical ability, etc.) illustrate the degree to which physical embodiment and physicality as masculine is an integral part of the traumatic “othering” of the body from hegemonic masculinity in geek culture. The focus on embodiment within the dominant discourse also explains the celebration within geek cultures of the supposed erasure of the physical in digital spaces. It is important to note early within the project that the validity of these claims of erasure is irrelevant, in that belief in their validity as a means by which to other bodies is the fuel that leads to the kinds of production performance surveyed here. After all, while these geek embodiment and psychological stereotypes of course often have very little basis in actuality, the increasing relevance of the digital, the technological apparatus, and the geek to dominant social structures is bringing geek figures and perceptions of this social archetype back to the foreground of dominant culture in a very real and changing way. Geeks are also becoming "sexy" - that is, attaining to the status of dominant masculinity in their own right, in some ways, to the degree that technology and capital become further integrated or enmeshed in the production of everyday life. This project tracks that trajectory from
"alternative," outlaw geek masculinity as we see in the epigraph to the emergence of a recognizably powerful, if not dominant, technocultural authority and mastery associated with geek identities.

Many of the geek digital publics surveyed here are participating in a reappropriation of masculine agency through a redefinition of the physical enabled through mastery of computing software and hardware. It is here that the project departs from Kelty, as he asserts that “It is important to understand that geeks do not simply want to level the playing field to their advantage- they have no affinity or identity as such. Instead they wish to devise ways to give the playing fiel a certain kind of agency…Geeks do not wish to compete qua capitalist or entrepreneurs unless they can assure themselves that (qua public actors) they can compete fairly” (Kelty 10). Two Bits attempts to assert a responsive modification that emerges from evangelical recursive publics as a means by which to “right the wrongs” of othering. Instead, this project will argue that, while this is a possibility, the alternative masculinities created through politicized making in hardware modding communities represent a potential for recreation of trauma in an attempt to reclaim dominant masculinities.

The redefinition of masculine agency being discussed here is accomplished through a shift in the signifiers of masculine agency away from the physically signified and towards the technologically projected. This technologically projected masculinity takes place through a process of identity production conflated in many cases with hardware production: through a performance of technological virtuosity, members of these publics begin to define an alternative masculinity through that virtuosity. We can
understand the implications of this through Kaja Silverman’s text *Male Subjectivity in the Margins*, in which she surveys the ways in which relation to lack separates the male figure from the phallus of dominant masculinity (as characterized by agency, patriarchy, etc.), and discusses compulsory repetition as a paradoxical means by which to attempt to achieve "mastery" of phallic power in these instances. However, perhaps most important to understanding the creation of an alternative masculinity is Chapter 7 of Silverman’s text, entitled “White Skins, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis” in which Silverman investigates the inversion of Fanon's colonial desire for the identity of the oppressor, examining the ways in which clothing oneself in alternative (i.e. racial) masculinities opens one to the possibility of searching for true masculine agency as opposed to holding onto the imaginary phallic masculinity of the dominant discourse (Silverman 299-300).

It is important to acknowledge that the positioning of the intellectual as outlaw rather than outsider as a process by which to reproduce socially powerful agency is by no means a new one. The historiography of this practice informs the kinds of politicized making and othering that take place in the contemporary publics examined here. For instance, *The Jew of Malta*’s Barabas, a villain created through a reaction to experiences of intolerance and his sizable intellect, represents, in some ways, a not dissimilar archetypal role to the geek figure presented by "The Hacker Manifesto" in the form of the paradoxically victimized and vilified Jew. The thinly veiled Machiavelli which opens the play compares Barabas' actions within the play to his own (also contextually vilified here) value system, arguing that, “I count religion but a childish toy/And hold there is no sin but ignorance...Grace [Barabas] as he deserves,/ And let him not be entertained the
Because he favours me” (Prologue). The similarly ostracized social group to which Barabas belongs causes the character to develop into what is nearly a prototypical Elizabethan super villain through the chaos he employs in the narrative, most noticeably through his intellectual superiority and literacy with science, technology, and poisons (as we see in his poisoning of his daughter in Act 3, scene 4 and of his co-conspirators in Act 4, scene 4). As previously mentioned, Barabas within the play is defined in comparison to Machiavelli, most notably through his hatred of Christianity (similar to the hatred of the status quo as seen in the epigraph) and perceived ignorance. Barabas’s comparison to Machiavelli most specifically insinuates a socially relevant (if not socially acceptable) rebellion against the dominant discourse. His hatred of his oppressors (which is illustrated most powerfully through his eventual murder of his daughter after he perceives that she has betrayed him by converting to Christianity), his tragic positioning within the masculine hierarchy, and his social manipulations of the political elite, all mark Barabas as an early example of the othered male figure attempting to reposition himself within his social context in order to gain agency.

Barabas is echoed most obviously through contemporary characters such as Shylock in The Merchant of Venice and Richard III in that titular play. However, contemporary popular culture remains obsessed with the archetypal role which Barabas embodies, and this obsession is sometimes directly reflected within the literary descendants of these characters. Harry Potter’s Severus Snape mimics both the popular portrayals of Machiavelli and the intricacies of Barabas’s motivations, for example. A wide variety of popular comic book super villains, such as Lex Luthor and The Joker, fit
similar criteria. In fact, in an NPR *Talk of the Nation* spotlight interview with *Washington Post* writer Hank Stuever⁹, the writer notes that these villainous characters are often considered much more culturally resonant than their heroic counterparts (*Talk of the Nation, July 21, 2008*). These archetypally cerebral villains commonly act in response to an antagonist who is their masculine superior through any embodied definition, marking them, like the geek cultures we have discussed thus far, as functioning outside of any kind of lawfully embodied agency. The historical tradition of the cerebral villain demasculinized by the embodied hero brings us then to the common misconception of the erasure of the physical within digital space, and the appeal of this supposed erasure to a kind of intellectual outlaw whose genealogy I have briefly described here.

**The Post-Human and the Cyborg**

So how then, does this paradoxical collection of perceptions come together, and in what ways do the formation of the intellectual outlaw and the production of hardware mods inform one another? We have self-styled outlaw intellectual communities, formed through both a dismissal of and a (perceived) dismissal from the hegemonic patriarchy. These community are, as we have seen, self identified by a historically contextualized culture of traumatic othering. How will both identity production and communal systems as pertains to these groups then produce new kinds of alternative masculinities in the digital spaces around which members of these groups circulate? And crucially, how does the modding or inventive re-use of hardware function in the production of these masculinities? Answering these questions and investigating the ramifications of the
masculinities built within the material-semiotic systems of capital are the focus of this project.

Benjamin Heckendorn, known to the internet gaming community as Ben Heck, is one of the forefathers of the modern console modding movement. He has become most famous for altering console computer towers into portable gaming systems that include, among other things, internal power sources and built in monitor capacities. These videogame console hardware mods are perhaps the most popular subcategory of hardware modding examined within this project, and perhaps the least consciously politicized. However, it can be more easily understood through the concepts of bricolage and assemblage. Building off of William Seitz’s construction of assemblage as simply, “the fitting together of parts and pieces” and Claude Levi-Strauss’ creative bricoleur as, “someone who speaks not only with things but also through things”, modding can be understood as a communal performance of reappropriation and production, both redefining the signifiers of masculinity and performing those signifiers through production itself, leading to a kind of assemblage masculinity that flows both through hardware and hardware performance (Deuze 31).

However, this process is a consistently evolving one. As Heckendorn in recent years has evolved from the modding of old generation systems like the Nintendo 64 and the Sega Genesis to modern incarnations of “the big three” systems, corporate control of these kinds of alterations which we have already discussed again plays an important part in the process. We can see a recreation of the kinds of patriarchal exclusion experienced by the likes of Anonymous in Heckendorn’s blog, where he positions himself as
gatekeeper, as a kind of "elder" of technological mastery through his ridicule of a game store employee’s lack of knowledge. In one entry on his DIY modding forum, he posts a cartoon of himself as a huge and overly musculatured man speaking to a cross-eyed Gamestop employee as he scoffs at the clerk’s lack of knowledge on the subject of cracking open consoles to mod them. This image is especially interesting, when we consider the degree to which Heckendorn conflates physical and intellectual superiority in his interpretation of the experience of modding hardware. This conflation is our first real look at the confusion surrounding the blurred lines between hardware and software, material and cognitive embodiment in our survey. It is equally important to recognize the ramifications of his proposed project itself, as Heck clashes wits with this “lesser” geek in his production of an X-box branded laptop. At this point individualized identity and corporate identity come into tension with one another through the reinvention of recognizably corporately branded hardware into an individualized apparatus in a way that still retains aesthetic corporate identity.

Through the problematic conflation Heckendorn displays here, and the desire to impose masterful will by way of intellectual superiority upon material identity in the form of corporate hardware, embodiment and physicality in relation to the producer become just as important as materiality in hardware. Heckendorn engages in a form of assemblage which produces both a masculinity that circumvents the embodied signs of masculinist hegemony (which, at least, ideally, needs only the power of the cognitive mastery of the masculine body itself) and which produces material hardware that informs that new masculinity. As Anna Dezeuze argues in her essay “Assemblage, Bricolage, and
the Practice of Everyday Life”, “While the concrete nature of assemblage allowed it to underscore the new dominance of the commodity, it was its emphasis on process that suggested the ways in which subjects are formed through this changing set of relations” (Dezueze 32). Heckendorn’s work functions here as an evolution of Kelty’s modification of technological means of existence and Dezeuze’s subject formation via commodity assemblage, in order to produce in such a way as to redefine hardware and self simultaneously.

Drawing on the theoretical work of Katherine Hales and Donna Haraway, we can engage in direct conversation with the digital erasure of the physical self that exists in the geek communities surveyed here. Through her conceptualization of the Posthuman, Katherine Hayles disregards both a "naturalist human" understanding of self/identity as mind's mastery of the body and the problematic understanding of the mind as entirely distinct from the materiality of embodiment, instead attempting to problematize the binary of informatic (cognition) and material (physical embodiment) in relation to one another. Donna Haraway takes this examination of blurring binaries even further in her “Cyborg Manifesto”, where we can see her examine the changing distinctions between binary relationships such as the organism/machine, and the previously mentioned embodied/cognitive binaries within the age of the cyborgian technological apparatus.

Haraway examines, most notably, the pleasure to be found in blurring the lines between these distinctions in order to apply a feminist theoretical framework to them, especially in regards to a de-essentializing of binary gender assumptions. Understanding the importance of blurring the lines between these binaries without conflating them, as
Heckendorn has done, we have as a theoretical platform the concept that the physical and the immaterial are not only both required for an informed discussion of identity (and for this project, masculinity specifically), but are themselves both informed by the cognitive and by an embodied relationship to hardware. Examining Haraway’s idea of a “cyborg theory of wholes and parts” through Hayles characterization of the posthuman as a relationship between cognitive and embodied self allows us to further our image of an assemblage masculine self, created through the evolution of Kelty and Deuze outlined above.

If we can apply the sort of psychoanalytic approach discussed by Silverman to the publics we are examining here, and the means by which both the digital and hardware inform identity performance within them, we can see that a major danger in this equipmental reappropriation of masculinity is the potential for geeks to replicate a tendency to project onto others the traumatic separation from agency geeks themselves have previously experienced - and, in geek publics, to thus make this kind of othering a condition of public assembly in networked spaces. Here, narratives of the networked self in hypertext narrative become particularly useful to reconsider. In many cases we will see that such identity production acts similarly to the loosely knitted hyperlink connections through which bodily construction in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* proceeds: the identity cannot by definition fully cohere without the digitally erased physical signifiers by which othering was originally achieved, creating a kind of Patchwork Boy, an imperfect assemblage of emergent masculine identity. This new form, this assemblage identity is what this project explores specifically: I thus focus on projects and text which,
attempting to assemble, if only through readership, the kind of masculinity which can move beyond the recreation of trauma and paradoxical ideological constructions into a new means by which the self may exist indefinitely. This is a complicated request, as Dezeuze notes, “contemporary practices of *bricolage* tend to focus on...the practice as an everyday model of activism...that establishes a set of fragmented and entropic temporalities” (Dezeuze 34).

Perhaps the most noticeable flaw in the kinds of assemblage identities formed in the communities surveyed so far is their recreation of the patriarchal hierarchy built through performance of knowledge and authenticity in communities like Heckendorn’s. The othered body exhibited in the *Hacker Manifesto* defines itself through literacy and authenticity, i.e., virtuosity as is understood by Paulo Virno, specifically “activity which finds its own fulfillment (that is its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end project...” (Raley 29), and this redefined hierarchy of masculine power is produced within geek publics more pervasively today than it did in the 1980's. In fact, the policing of social boundaries on the basis of some perceived, encroaching influence of "inauthentic" geeks within these communities is even more influential in geek communities today. A July 2012 www.collegehumor.com article entitled "The Six Super-Villains of Nerd Culture" illustrates this point clearly, vilifying the hegemonic masculinity of the muscular *Call of Duty* fan as "The Bro", the casual gamer and apolitical media consumer as "The Youth", the corporate producer/manipulator as "The Executive" and the ironic hipster/inauthentic fan as "The Imposter" (Tanner 2012). While the parody is intended to be humorous, the point is clear: technological masculinity
produces masculinity as an assemblage of multiply-bounded, highly fragile practices of self. Each of these "villains" represent various perceived “threats” to the outlaw identity we have seen constructed thus far: “The Bro” for his over-valuing of physiologically endowed masculinity, “The Youth” for his lack of virtuous, politicized making, “The Executive” for his trust in or status in relation to the corporate media, and “The Imposter” for his inauthentic technological mastery.

Interestingly, however, two of the other "Super-Villains" of the piece much more paradoxically invoke the authenticity and literacy which hacker groups like Anonymous and geek communities more generally seem to require. The first is the culturally castrated Otaku caricature in the form of "The Pervert" as an attempt to distance the "geek" from the sexually othered body, and the second is the gatekeeper himself in the form of the "Alpha Nerd", whose hyper-masculine and judgmental digital presence is as evidenced through the article itself as it is through the caricature of the figure. The Pervert functions, for the purposes of this project, both as a means by which to illustrate the lacking embodiment and psychological “illness” associated with geek groups. However, what is more interesting here is the characterization of this final villain, “The Alpha Nerd” in that the he seems to represent the same gatekeeper mentality which this article employs through its rhetorical positioning of individuals as “authentically geek” or not. Paradoxically, like many of the attempts at alternative masculinities we will see throughout this project, this positioning of the Alpha Nerd suggests both an embracing and a reluctant acceptance of reappropriated masculine tendencies.

Obviously these
boundaries set up a system where membership itself becomes impossible, which again functions as a kind of recreation of trauma as seen through Silverman.

**Hardware Modding, Gatekeepers, and the Recreation of Embodied Trauma**

Before further examining these problematics, we must first examine the ideology of the Modder beyond the intellectual outlaw identity being performed, by examining his connection with hardware itself. To place the ideologies constructed through and revolving around modding, consider the following: in a “how to” text by MIT graduate Scott Fullam entitled Hardware Hacking projects for Geeks, Fullam details full point-by-point instructions on the “modding” processes of fifteen different projects. Project number five is entitled “How to Hack a Furby (and Other Talking Toys)”. I note the importance to the project of retaining the hardware’s identity as “Furby”. The project does not call for the cannibalization of parts to create some singular new product. Instead, the retaining of branded identity is absolutely essential to the ideological motivations behind the hacker production of altered hardware. In the concluding points of the instructions Fullam states, “To reassemble your Furby, hold the left side of the shell in place and mark the location…Place the half shell back on and adjust the size of the hole so that the plug fits. Your Furby will look like himself again. You will now need software tools for programming your new Furby” (Fullam 86, emphasis mine).

There are two important things to take note of in this rhetorical positioning of the making act. The first, which we have already briefly discussed, is the importance of the retention of the hardware’s identity as Furby. However, the second, the status of that hardware as “new”, different, and therefore “owned” by the hacker in a way that it was
not before, is significant on an entirely different level. And while greater issues of ownership between corporate production and individualized enhancement will be dealt with in much greater detail in Chapter 5, we are now interested in the aspects of ownership and performance as these apply to the community in which this project is presented and distributed.

This desire to own and to make one’s own through console modding is central to the practice, and is based on the increasing restrictions applied to videogame console hardware through the inclusion of network accessibility. The current generation of “the big three” systems is by far the most prominent producer of software system updates and patches distributed through digital networks. Many newer games cannot be experienced to the fullest without network access, be it through multiplayer modes for games such as *Halo* or *Gears of War*, or access to downloadable story and gameplay content for additional expansive gaming experiences such as *Alan Wake*, *Far Cry 3*, or *Red Dead Redemption*. In fact, although Microsoft recently backed down from this position, early marketing for the *XBox One* stated that the functionality of the system itself would require constant network access. Because of the increasing requirements for “always on” networked systems, modern gamers are faced with the choice of extremely diminished gameplay experience or allowing corporate suppliers of these systems access to their status. The increasing prominence of digital networking to console gameplay is especially important to this project because of the increasing occurrences of the “bricking” of console systems by corporate suppliers as a penalty for illegal hacks found during software updates.
The term “bricking” was first coined regarding the iPhone in reference to Apple’s policy to lock their users out of their product if illegal or unregistered software was found in the phone, essentially making it nothing more than a metal and plastic “brick”. Corporate policies vary in terms of unlocking those systems: depending of the number of times the offense has occurred, a perpetrator may be issued no more than a warning, for instance. However, the important element here is that this practice has essentially ended the practicality of software hacking in mainstream videogame culture, especially interactive and/or communal videogame culture. Because of these new levels of digital control structure, I would argue that this culture of hardware modding has arisen in many ways as an alternative option for the individualization of the gaming experience that still toes the line of that experience being recognizable as a specifically branded one. If we look at prominent console modders within the culture, this becomes abundantly clear as a core ideological motivation for such production.

To look at these concerns by way of their collective, and not just individual, impact we return to Christopher Kelty. The act of political production is in this case complicated by Kelty’s conceptualization of the “recursive public”. As we have seen, the recursive public is, “a public that is constituted by a shared concern for maintaining the means of association through which they come together as a public” (Kelty 28). Therefore, hardware modders, as a community whose production does not in itself guarantee its future existence to the same degree as hackers’ manipulations of the internet, may not on the surface appear to represent a recursive public. However, I would
argue that if we examine a prominent trend in productions such as Ben Heck's, the ways in which hardware modding itself can be argued to ensure the community's further existence becomes clear. To hardware modders, the dissemination of the means of production is just as relevant as the production itself. For example, exhaustive blog posts chronicling both the physical and creative process by which this making occurs exist for every one of Heck’s projects. Heckendorn’s work on hardware then becomes both a rarefied display of Virno’s virtuosity as we have already discussed and an evangelical invitation, a more work-intensive sign of communal recursion as Kelty understands it. In simpler terms, we can see that the first motivation behind hardware modification is its own continued existence by way of recording and disseminating the means of production which sustain it.

One of the major semantic differences between these two groups is also one of the most obvious: while Ben Heck can create products marked at a part of Azuma’s “grand narrative” (i.e. a modded console retaining, for example, the aesthetic and technical identity of an Xbox) which also function as a highly individualized “small narrative” to resist the censorship inherent in corporate control of informatic flow in those grand narratives, this production cannot reach the masses in the same kinds of ways as Kelty’s free or open software. While BitTorrent file-sharing and Napster-esque downloadable software enact an outmaneuvering of censorship that is available to anyone with internet access, Ben Heck’s laptop Xbox cannot function as anything more than a largely unattainable symbol to others of the possibility of this kind of resistance within the world of hardware. Through the limitations of hardware then, the production itself is not
entirely the point. The display of virtuosity and the assemblage masculinity produced through this display become the value of modding for producers like Heckendorn.

While Kelty (and I) see this recursive public as an inherently positive characteristic, one that manages, within geek publics, to avoid the oppressive response of more hegemonic masculinity by relying solely on its own means of production, the potentially damaging hierarchical structures immanent to these same communities are also worth noting. The kinds of performance we have seen in this maker communities thus far, then mirrors some of the argumentation surrounding fan communities which Henry Jenkins notes in *Textual Poachers*, in which he discusses textual loyalty- a phenomenon in which sociologically similar fan communities will war with each other over the content of their respective fandom as well as the implementation of hierarchical structures based on levels of fandom, culminated in a (usually) merit based raising of an individual as a site of adoration, which we see in the performative claims and worship in the comment sections of websites like Heck's.

We have also seen this gatekeeping figure in our “Supervillains” article from the beginning of the project. The Alpha Nerd, the gatekeeper within these communities, therefore is paradoxically understood to be problematic to the evangelical and recursive natures on which the function, and yet seems to continually arise. A scholar of African American fandom, Jeffery Brown discusses the concept of Hypermasculinity, a deceptively destructive form of masculine performance which erases any vestiges of the
feminine, often taking place in reaction to the emasculation of the racially identified male body. Jenkins describes a similar emasculation in Textual Poachers, criticizing stereotypical representations of the soft bodied and comical male fan, most notable in pop cultural representations like that of the Trekkie. Therefore I would argue that the digital, raced and gendered performance of internet communities like Ben Heck's partially engage in a reactionary hypermasculinity in response to their emasculation by technocapitalist social hegemony.

**Politcized Making and Hardware Identity Performance**

In her article, Dezeuze argues that within industrial society, the *bricoleur* exists in a space of ambivalence between production and consumption, further stating that “amateurs are not invested in institutional systems of knowledge production and policy construction, and hence do not have irresistible forces guiding the outcome of their efforts…” (Dezueze 36) If we can understand bricolage to include the practices of using computing hardware in the service of assemblage identity as discussed thus far, we can also understand the resistance of conventional boundaries experienced through hardware's production and consumption and re-use. Additionally, examinations of connection between identity production in these spaces and interaction with the technological apparatus can be bridged here in a way that potentially allows us to begin discussing the productive aspects of alternative and assemblage masculinity through making. Therefore, while we have thus far examined some of the problematics of performance identity and hierarchical masculinities created in new digital spaces, we must ask ourselves what occurs within these outlaw identities when they are created, not
through the digital dissemination of ability, but through the implementation of hardware itself?

For example, in a court case gone recently to trial according to the New York Post, a trio of African American men in June 2013 robbed a check cashing business of $200,000 after ordering custom latex masks produced by CFX Composite Effects, an established Hollywood practical effects studio, so that they would appear to be Caucasian. The group was successful in their robbery, caught at a later date because of a series of emails sent to CFX praising the company for the quality of their product and because of noticeable spending habits, rather than because of any eyewitness accounts. In fact, the authorities spent the entirety of their efforts searching for white suspects up to the analysis of email content and financial transactions. Interestingly we see a rift here between the performance of virtuosity through production and identity performance, as the makers who function within this story unwittingly create the means by which the equipmental making of masculinity shifts and the technical assemblage of outlaw identity can function for others, while the others engage in a kind of politicized repositioning of the self without the performance of technical virtuosity. Therefore while these men have engaged in what is perhaps an unwitting performance of redefined masculinity through hardware, the greater question becomes this: can they engage in a productive performance of alternative masculinity without personal engagement in the hardware production from which this shift becomes available?

Perhaps more directly applicable to our search for a productive assemblage identity, a productive Patchwork Boy, is a critical examination of Cody Wilson and
DefenseDistributed.org. Cody Wilson, a law student at the University of Texas Law School in Austin, started a major public debate in the Fall of 2012 with his (and fellow DD members and programmers Benjamin Denio and Sean Kubin’s) Liberator Pistol, a fully functional firearm composed of composite plastic parts that can be printed from a 3D printer. 3D printers use a process known as stereolithography to create a cross-sectional pattern of an object designed digitally, quite literally bringing the virtual object into the actualized material realm. And while these machines are generally used in the legitimate production of architectural models in a way that does not directly connect to the modding and hacking concerns of this project, they represent a move from the virtual to the actualized in a way that is extremely theoretically important to the project, most obviously through its blurring of the binary between cognitive and embodied, software and hardware, in ways that recall Hayles' deconstruction of these boundaries. 3D printers are also increasing in popularity as a focus of maker communities themselves, as evidenced by Rylan Grayston’s Peachy Printer, a photolithographic printer comprised of compact mirrors and controlled lasers, as well as a newly patented photosensitive resin, combined with the processing power of a computer sound card (or camera to make a 3D scanner), in order to produce a 3D printer that costs less than $100 dollars (Peachyprinter.com). The increasing availability of this kind of technology to the layperson positions Wilson’s Liberator as a new form of widely accessible firearm (one that can dangerously avoid metal detection).

In Bergsonism, Deleuze argues that, unlike the inherently fallacious problem which maintains that the real is "more" than the possible and that the possible is
retroactively given significance in the past by the present, the virtual is instead inherently already real, and has only to become actualized in the present to come into being. Therefore, not only is the present a constant state of "becoming" actualized rather than static existence, the infinite possibility of the virtual informs this present rather than the commonly assumed reverse (Deleuze 55-6). Analytically, I will be approaching the virtual here through a critical lens informed by Deleuze and Guittari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the virtual or actualized can be identified through the conceptualizations of the Smooth and the Striated. The narratologically Smooth as utilized in reference to many of primary texts examined by this project, refers to the kinds of fluid or uncertain embodiments through which characters/artifacts are presented to the reader/viewer. This Virtual can coarsely then be observed to contain similarities to the Digital, such as the apparent lack of materiality/embodiment and the possibility inherent in the pre-actualized. However, the two must be understood as separate conditions, most importantly because of the following: while the virtual appears as a smooth materiality in these narratives, it is still a materiality. While many of the texts to be utilized throughout this project contain moments in which this embodiment is actualized, brought into striated focus, here we see a technologically produced demonstration of masculinity as reactive hardware assemblage, in this specific instance tied directly to politicized and arguably masculinist identity through Defense Distributed.

Given this discussion, the Liberator obviously becomes a major concern for gun control legislators and activists, given its inherent circumvention of legal roadblocks such as waiting periods, serial numbers, and other registration concerns. However, as a form of
politicized making that drags the smooth into the striated, it also complicates our
definitions of hardware modding by further introducing software and digital space to the
conversation. In connection with earlier examples surveyed throughout this project, the
work that is being done here clearly represents the creation of an outlaw identity that
functions outside of the dominant masculinity as control. In fact, Wilson and his
organization engage in the same kinds of rhetoric of resistance to control of informatic
flow that has been evidenced in Hacker ideology since the 1980's, stating in regards to
one design during a February 2013 interview, "The file is the message. Anyone can have
it, anyone can print it, anyone can use it." (The Economist.com) However, the Patchwork
masculinity Defense Distributed creates here is fascinating not only because of their
relationship with hardware modification, but by the politicized meaning they attach to the
product. Defense Distributed is rhetorically positioning themselves not as protectors of
the right to bear arms, but as Miltonian protectors of the dissemination of knowledge
against a dominant, normative opposition presumably oriented towards social control.

When one clicks on the heading “Manifesto” within their website, one is
redirected to John Milton’s *Areopagitica*, or *For the Liberty of Unliscenc’d Printing. to
The Parliament of England*, published in 1644 during the English Civil War
(Defdist.org). The speech by Milton, as a philosophical defense of free speech within
the context of speech as printed and disseminated information, then, is used here in order
to position both the *Liberator* and the technologies which make it possible as knowledge
rather than weaponry, as virtual rather than material. The *Areopagitica* as it is used in
this position, then becomes a transformational tool by which the *Liberator* serves a very
different function than is assumed by its critics, mirroring the evangelical motives we have seen in other distributions of knowledge. Consider the following excerpt from the *Areopagitica* in light of its connection to the above discussion, for example, “... as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but hee who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life” (Milton par. 9)

The positioning of a firearm as informational and politicized (especially considering the interesting slippage from the 2nd to the 1st Amendment) then ties us back to the question posed at the outset of this project: can the kind of assemblage identity discussed thus far be produced through a digital bridge to embodied making? Can this unique hybrid of Libertarian politics and hacker outlaw identity lead to a new masculine gendering which responds to these questions productively and critically? Defense Distributed certainly contains many of the earmarks of resistance to the hegemonic in a way that forms a new kind of agency. Governmental action against the groups efforts resulted in a removal of *Liberator* plans from the website in May 2013, and Defense Distributed responded by providing clear and easy access to Bittorrents which make that information available from other, less easily controlled, sources. Public attention to firearm legislation and the politics of the group specifically has clearly been affected by the group’s appropriation of 3D printing technology, as evidenced by the hundreds of professional articles written about their efforts during the height of their design
distribution. However, while the group certainly represents a kind of evangelical maker community in some ways, the technologies associated with their production lack the kinds of technical skill and more importantly virtuosity by the maker necessarily associated with the kind of assemblage identity we are discussing. Instead this more clearly falls in line with Rita Raley’s concept of resistive “hacktivism” (Raley 19).

Raley’s theory, regarding the ideological foundations of technical resistance, introduces a heavily politicized motivational element through her analysis of “persuasive games” and synchronized “denial of service attacks”. Games involving border crossing attempts that cannot be won, or digital happenings that result in the intentional crashing of anti-immigration websites, while perhaps more specifically political than what we will encounter in the world of hardware modding, involve an element of ideologically fueled motivation for resistive production which I would argue is absolutely essential to hardware modding culture as well. In her description of the justifications for this kind of digital resistance, Raley explains, “‘Electronic civil disobedience is an extremely useful tool when dealing with a virtual organization that is only virtual.’ When one’s targets are networked rather than physical and grounded, in other words, the battle has to be taken to the network” (Raley 85). The militant language aesthetic inherent in such rhetoric is undeniably absent from the majority of popular hardware modding we have seen thus far. However, when one reads these two cultures as relying upon the language of production itself, whether it is of media or material, as a vehicle by which to challenge restrictions to informational flow, we see that though their motivations may be distinct, the distribution systems of those motivations become remarkably similar. In simpler terms, both hackers
and modders engage in a knowledge of the technical (be it code fluency or electronic proficiency) in order to resist informatic control based on corporate manipulation of that very technical, through the act of material production of which "making and re-making hardware" is a privileged site of activities and, possibly, critical analysis.

With this in mind, an examination of performance group Survival Research Laboratories illustrates the potential inherent in maker communities that engage both in a show of technical virtuosity and in a politicized production of resistive hardware. SRL was formed in 1979, and is organized around what could be categorized as hardware performance, participating in organized spectacles that intentionally undermine and re-categorize the aesthetic and functional purpose of mass-produced hardware. According to its own website, SLR “has operated as an organization of creative technicians dedicated to re-directing the techniques, tools, and tenets of industry, science, and the military away from their typical manifestations in practicality, product or warfare.” (srl.org/about). The group engages in a kind of play with industrial complex aesthetics, producing technologically modified apparatuses of performance. Choosing to produce in a way that retains Virno’s virtuosity while moving beyond a retention of corporate identity (as Heckendorn attempts within his own work) then positions the act of production within the maker him/herself, and reappropriates the encoded meanings of these machine parts, along with the virtuosity of performance, into a kind of resistive bricolage, a hardware sibling to Raley’s hacktivism.

Reading the hardware bricolage that takes place here as a functionality of the production of alternative masculinity through assemblage identity becomes complicated
here, as the virtuosity and authenticity within the body of the modder give way to a kind of play for the sake of it that positions rhetoric outside of the self and inside the hardware, removing intentional identity production or patriarchy from the process. Apparatuses such as the “Flame Whistle”, which “was modified for the Austin event by the addition of a large police whistle [and] Fuel injectors were added along with an ignition system, thereby creating the loudest flamethrower in history” (srl.org/projects) reflect both the performance virtuosity we’ve seen thus far in the console modder community and a satirical political rhetoric that seems to consciously and ironically mimic what we have seen in our examination of Defense Distributed. Therefore we can see in SRL the potential to move past some of the problematic masculinities of the pop culture modders and their culture of hierarchical exclusion we’ve examined thus far, as well as directly function within the technical performance we find missing from our racially ambiguous stick up men and our Liberator producers. Here instead we find a unique balance, one which engages directly in the resistive practices Raley discusses, and plays with the cyborg subject invoked by Hayles and Haraway. SRL showings are never automated, which means that they engages both with the act of performance through technological happenings, and the embodied masculinity of the producer and production, engaging in both remote and live performance that requires a human pilot. We then find a bricolage identity created through a repositioning of all of these factors, stitching together a politicized self that is both new and familiar.
Final Thoughts

Video game console modding, the act of physically altering the hardware characteristics and aesthetic appearance of a particular computing system, has become increasingly popular in recent years as increasingly monitored gameplay, especially within non-PC systems that utilize proprietary technologies, has begun to weed out all but the best of the software hackers and modders. What makes this relatively new practice uniquely suited for my research is that the communities which form around these practices are as much defined by digital displays, instruction, and competition regarding physical modding processes as they are by the "modded" hardware itself, further blurring the binaries both between cognative and embodied self as Hayles outlines, and the gendered essentialism Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” critique.

However, some of the modding communities we’ve discussed demonstrate the problematic of ludic "plug and play" masculinity through their attempts to reconnect with masculine authority through the creation of a patriarchal hierarchy based on virtuoso masculine identity performance that exists much in the vein of the "Alpha Nerd". Virtuosity, as understood by Virno, is performance of expertise and literacy through the production process rather than through the final product, and this is clearly illustrated within this community, as modding becomes a public demonstration of knowledge and skill through the monitored and recorded creation of hardware objects which are highly individualized and yet paradoxically retain both aesthetic brand identity and the appearance of professionally produced consumer products. Like Anonymous, or Marlowe's Barabas, this plug and play masculinity is characterized through a literacy
with, and, at least nominally, against the structures of power that constitute dominant masculinity as residing in and of itself. However, a masculinity through making which specify or transform requirements for technical ability within the identity production process introduces new problematics to the equation, as we can clearly see through our survey of race-shifting bank robbers and Defense Distributed: "outlaw Patchwork Boys". The answer then, seems to be a newly emerging combination of politicized and virtuous making which neither attempts to erase embodiment nor the constitutive markers of the intellectual outlaw which come with this processual embodiment.
Chapter 2: Cyborg Female Masculinities: The Projection of the Feminized Other, Patchwork Subjectivity, and Literary Reappropriations of Agency

As the project has been understood thus far, embodiment engaged with politicized technological production create a narrative and a process of othering that potentially reproduces patriarchal hierarchies and reintroduces the gatekeeper role to sites of communal production through informal policing of techno-masculine authenticity. However, examining questions of politicized production solely through recursive geek communities ignores older and more widespread forms of othering: with very few exceptions, the identity signifiers we have discussed which these communities are trying to either reappropriate or dismiss through the erasure of the body are almost exclusively male and white. As we have seen, these groups do not feel that they belong in any real way to the kind of heteronormative hegemony that they perceive as limiting the scope and meanings of their actions and potentials. Rather, they create a kind of cultural capital as seen through our survey of the intellectual outlaw that is valued by that very exclusion, as camps and textual loyalties are tied to authenticity outside of heteronormative hegemony. Interestingly, if we return to Silverman’s *Male Subjectivity in the Margins*, we can see that the kind of belonging sought after by the intellectual outlaw persona prevalent with DefenseDistributed.org or BenHeck.com perhaps does not exist. Silverman extensively discusses the “dominant fiction” of perceived, normative masculinity in Chapter 1 of her text as a fiction that helps to define difference in the "other".
For Silverman, this othering refers to a kind of attempt to reclaim the phallus that moves beyond the ability of the male sexual organ to encompass that agency (Silverman 2). Indeed, Silverman surveys the (so-called) “deviant” masculinities and their sometimes refusal of power as it is understood by the dominant fiction. Using Foucault and the concept of historical experience as a vehicle for analyzing trauma, Silverman surveys the ways in which relation to lack, especially during the cinema of WWII, separates the male figure from the phallus of the dominant fiction. Silverman also notes that the creation of war and violence often takes place as a way of protecting the imaginary connection to the phallus, saying, “far from belonging to a kind of ‘sacred time’, beyond the vicissitudes of ideology and history, the phallus/penis equation is promoted by the dominant fiction, and sustained by collective belief” (Silverman 45). With the introduction of collective belief, the project then enters a new category of identity production that further builds on the Dezeuze and Kelty formulation produced in chapter one, as the modification of identity signifiers through assemblage is already being produced by the dominant fiction. Therefore the kinds of resistive alternative masculinities which the project searches for are no longer a production of new masculine formations through assemblage, but rather a modification and mutation of hegemonic assemblage identity which traumatizes through othering into a new form. The idea of collective belief as fuel for an essentialism of gender and agency gives us pause to move past these essentialisms and investigate what Silverman calls “deviant masculinities outside of the male body” in more detail.

Our first concern, then, comes to us by way of separating a search for the phallus from any kind of gender essentialism, as we have seen in our previous chapter a kind of
masculinity centered around a preoccupation with bodily power and/or the erasure of bodily power. The projected traits of the oppressor finding their way into bricolaged appropriations of masculinity in digital space then can only with great effort avoid repetition of these traits, as Silverman notes in relation to male subjectivity’s “failure to recognize” manifesting as “…either to the self or to the other. The subject classically refuses to recognize an unwanted feature of the self by projecting it onto the other, i.e. by relocating it” (Silverman 45). Additionally white, male, straight and cis gendered communities run the continuous risk of ignoring the othered groups from whose narratives they are borrowing in an effort to emphasize their own disconnect from hegemony as described in chapter 1. As we have seen in that chapter, the essentializing of the geek figure as both materially and cognitively problematic mirrors traditional gender essentialisms, and the invocation in chapter 1 of Haraway’s problematizing of gender binary in “The Cyborg Manifesto” introduces this concern as a foundational one to the project. The appropriation of gendered and racialized othering becomes especially relevant when one considers that their erasure of the bodily self also allows for an erasure of the bodily other in the kinds of recreations of trauma already foreshadowed. In other words, as we see in Silverman, the production of outlaw identities through an engagement with the technological apparatus create the potential for projection of erased bodily identity onto more historically othered bodies (racialized, gendered, queered, etc.) in order to dissociate themselves from the traumas imposed on those bodies. Therefore, this chapter examines both the fear response of trauma projection onto gender essentialized female bodies common within the kinds of outlaw intellectual maker
communities discussed in chapter 1, and the more productive mutation of hegemonic othering into alternative female masculinities through technological modification. Additionally, we will be critiquing here the kind of “new stereotype” of the essentialized female digital guide in fiction like *Neuromancer*, *The Matrix*, and *Avatar*, and how cyberpunk film and literature is able to blur the binaries of both gender and hardware/software discussed thus far to create a technofemale masculinitity that is able to function both materially and cognitively.

Through the kinds of attempts to erase the bodily other which Silverman outlines, many alternative technomasculinities then not only dismiss the historical patterns of traumatic othering experienced by or assigned to such bodies, but engage in a reappropriation of the signifiers of that othering for the geek community which ignores the traumas experienced by the gendered and racially othered bodies from which their rhetoric of alienation or belonging is borrowed. We will then attempt first to examine and survey the kinds of gendered biological essentialisms that occur in digital communities where maker masculinisms predominate, and secondly to more closely examine how alternative technomasculinities can function to digitally produce an alternative assemblage masculinity that identifies as female, without the above mentioned erasure of the embodied self. As Katherine Hayles acknowledges in her introduction to *My Mother was a Computer* in relation to her evolving construction of the Posthuman, “Although I have not abandoned my commitment to the importance of embodiment, it seems to me that contemporary conditions call increasingly for understandings that go
beyond a binary view [of cognitive self and embodied self] to more nuanced analysis” (Hayles 2).

Simone de Beauvoir’s classic “The Second Sex” (1949) engages directly with gender assumptions and essentialism in popular spaces by arguing that these essentialisms become fact through belief, even in the face of opposing experience, saying “Thus it is quite true that woman is other than man, and this alterity is directly felt in desire, the embrace, love...In actuality, of course, women appear under various aspects; but each of the myths built up around the subject of the woman is intended to sum her up in toto...In consequence, a number of incompatible myths exist, and men tarry musing before the strange incoherencies manifested by the idea of Femininity” (Beauvoir 4, emphasis mine). I turn to this text, which might seem dated within a project such as this, in order to observe the bricolaged and stitched together markers of the feminine and the female body, importantly produced through collective belief through similar means to Silverman’s phallus, becoming norm by way of myth. Unlike the geek masculinities surveyed in chapter one, the feminized or biologically essentialized female body is already inherently a patchwork here, made up of the social myths that come to define that bodily self. These essentialisms are made more complicated through an engagement with two things brought to inform female assemblage identity through this project: The first is an engagement with reappropriations of identity signifiers through embodiment and the second is evolution of these signifiers and how they are asked to function in narrative and in material culture. Therefore, as others have done, Haraway’s Cyborg here then
becomes a literal one, blurring the binaries of “antagonist dualisms” of gender and organic/technologic identity in the creation of a female masculinity.

In order to engage directly with the production of the kind of female masculinities we discuss here, we must clearly illustrate the kinds of a) replications and relocations of othering and b) the kinds of bodily erasure of that other which Silverman discusses. “The Imposter” for instance, as she appears in “The Six Supervillains of Nerd Culture”, is a young woman marked as the “fake geek” who carries lens-less glasses, a Nintendo 64 controller, a bow and arrow with a Facebook “like” icon for an arrowhead. The text next to her states that her weakness is, “Playing a videogame other than MarioKart” (Tanner 2012). Her portrayal here is designed to specifically undercut any claims to virtuosity or authenticity as they are defined within geek communities, especially in the context of the intellectual outlaw and their engagement with the technological apparatus, but with a unique addition to the conversation. This “supervillain” is the only woman in the bunch.

The rise of rhetoric in digital communities around the “Fake Geek Girl” in recent years is in part connected to the patriarchal and exclusionary practices we have seen thus far, and is a practice tied to the marshalling of credibility Henry Jenkins discusses in his Textual Poachers (1992). Textual Poachers, as previously discussed, examines the concept of credibility, first and foremost through the creation of textual “camps” within various geek communities. Jenkins of course also acknowledges, by way of Pierre Bourdieu, that “Concepts of ‘good taste’, appropriate conduct, or aesthetic merit are not natural or universal; rather, they are rooted in social experience and reflect particular class interests...these tastes often seem ‘natural’ to those who share them precisely
because they are shaped by our earliest experiences as members of a particular cultural
group...” (Jenkins 16). “The Imposter” is then quite literally vilified by way of her textual
loyalties, which are accusatorily mainstream and accessible, therefore immature and false
(Zelda, MarioKart, Facebook, etc.), functioning outside of the concepts of “good taste” as
applied to geek authenticity and virtuosity.

This vilification functions similarly to the literary tradition of the intellectual
goat as surveyed in chapter 1, as character archetypes such as the villain Jew (in the
form of Shylock and Barabas) are punished by the hegemony for functioning outside of
the “textual loyalties” of Christian piety. Therefore, we see here a demonstration of
Silverman’s projection of erasure, as the intellectual outlaw first is othered by hegemonic
laws of good taste, and then reclaims a sense of agency through the projection of that
othering onto the essentialized female form to rise above historiographic trauma
(Barabas’ relationship with and eventual betrayal of his daughter further bolsters this
claim). The vilification of “The Imposter”, in conjunction with her embodied gendering,
also expands upon my previous analysis of arguments of “nerd authenticity”, hierarchical
structures and cyber bullying enacted by those digital presences who ironically place
themselves as cultural outcasts, by way of Virno’s virtuosity as much as Silverman’s
othering projection. Again, this kind of marshalling, as noted previously, is ironically
just as critiqued by the Supervillain article as “The Imposter” herself, through its
portrayal of the “Alpha Nerd”.

In fact, Chapter 3 of Textual Poachers engages directly with the dismissal of the
female geek, and the stereotypically feminized making with which this fan is associated.
Jenkins surveys the perceived requirements for romance and happy endings in regards to female identified fan texts in chapter 3 of his book, arguing that the television show *Beauty and the Beast* was specifically retooled and subsequently canceled because of show runners being “convinced that the program’s survival depended upon its ability to attract ‘priests’ (and other masculine viewers) rather than an ‘exotic’ following of ‘nuns’ (and other female spectators)...” (Jenkins 122). We see here a split between the kinds of making that are considered acceptable and functional as a kind of patriarchal sign of credibility, of authenticity and virtuosity as examined thus far: the physical and embodied is much more clearly attached here to the masculine, while cognition, narrative and software are femininized through accusations of gender essentialized “poor taste”.

**The Rhetorical Position of the Female in Geek Cultures and Cultural Productions**

Examining the means by which gender essentialisms both a) function within geek and maker communities and b) prescribe the characteristics that are able to be attached to assemblages of identity that suggest "female technomasculinities" as a mode of failure, we must also examine more clearly the kinds of ways in which digital communities which center around textual loyalties and fan production engage with the female and the feminine (meaning both embodied and cognitive gendering). In May of 2012, for instance, Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist pop-cultural critic and blogger announced a Kickstarter campaign, with a funding goal of $6000, to create a series of critical videos exhaustively examining gender tropes through a feminist critical lens in video game media. The announcement of her work instigated a (to outside observers) fairly bizarre backlash of misogynist outcry within the vocal elements of much of the gaming
community. Amy O’Leary of the *New York Times*, in an article entitled “Sexual Harassment in Online Gaming Stirs Anger”, reported that the critic received death threats, numerous attempts to hack her online accounts, and emails containing doctored images of her in pornographic positions. One Ontario-based group created an online game in which players could punch her image, creating bruises and cuts on her face until the screen went red (O’Leary 2013). ix

This instance of resistance to criticism or change in response to figures perceived as legitimately existing only outside of a particular geek community is not an isolated case. In the same article, Amy O’Leary reports on an occurrence during a week long webcast Cross Fighter (a popular Capcom fighting game) competition, sponsored by Capcom, in which contestant Miranda Pakozdi was continuously and openly sexually harassed for four days by her own team leader before finally forfeiting the competition. O’Leary writes that team leader Aris Baktanians, “interrogated her on camera about her bra size, said ‘take off your shirt’ and focused the team’s web cam on her chest, feet, and legs” (O’Leary 2013). There is extensive footage online of all of this behavior, which went on for multiple days, as well as of the team leader aggressively smelling her as she plays. The importance of the occurrence to this project, however, is the team leader’s response. When online outcry about his actions reached a noticeable level on day four of the tournament (Pakozdi had already complained to Capcom officials on multiple occasions with no result), rather than denying his actions, or arguing against their categorization as sexual harassment, Baktanians admitted that the categorization was correct before he accused his detractors of attempting to remove an integral aspect of the
online fighting game community, arguing that sexual harassment was necessary for the
continuance of the community and that his detractors’ positions were “unethical”. With
this condemnation of social critique, intellectual outlaw masculinities expand
classifications of good taste to not only textual camps but to social interaction, further
producing a potentially damaging erasure of the projected other in the process of
redefining historicized othering of the self within the hegemony.

There is, then, a negative aspect to the recursivity and evangelical communal
behavior of the digital publics we are examining. In the cases I have reviewed here, the
reappropriation of patriarchal signifiers into the kinds of resistive, outlaw identities I have
described can recursively generate a traumatizing separation from the phallus for those
identifying as outside the dominant symbolic order, but equally importantly can generate
a symbolic violence against individual or collective members of a digital public. The
redirection of trauma then expands upon the dangers examined by Jenkins and Bourdieu,
as Jenkins notes, “Materials viewed as undesirable within a particular aesthetic are often
accused of harmful social effects or negative influences upon their customers” (Jenkins
16). Jenkins here invokes the cultural indoctrination associated with High Art tastes and
the putatively harmful (or liberating) ramifications of a textual engagement which
violates the boundaries of that taste, but in relation to O’Leary’s article, especially when
read in reference to Silverman’s conceptualization of the projected-then-excluded other,
social anxieties regarding a violation of hierarchies function instead to create or shore up
technomasculine agency and to thereby equate this agency-through-exclusion as both
corporeal and community mastery. Through the rigid rules of “good taste” applied to
recursive geek communities like the fighting game community, we see a direct engagement with both the damaging effects of gendered limits helping to construct technomasculinity, and perhaps just as importantly, we see the ways in which constructions of taste, virtuosity, and textual loyalty produce a fairly predictable resistance to political change by these technomasculinities when confronted with those damaging effects.$^{\text{x xi}}$

As we have seen in Baktianans’ response to his critics, as read through Jenkins and Silverman, such rhetoric protects itself from attack by simultaneously othering critics and positioning them as violators of good taste, but it does so not in the name of high art but in the name of fan or geek community cohesion [because the class of those who demonstrates technological mastery stands in for economic class as determinant of social status]. The popular “Fake Gamer Girl” meme, which has a pretty girl with glasses proclaiming things like “My favorite superhero? Probably X-Man. Hugh Jackman is sooo hot.” illustrates the pervasiveness of these perceptions within gaming communities, as do blogs that critique violators of good taste in action such as Kotaku.com’s ”Fake Gamer of the Week.” Because of this positioning, in order to a) cut through the vast amounts of chaff accumulating around this conversation and b) find a way to clearly articulate female masculinities within online fan spaces, we will return to our expanded understanding of the cognitive/physical binary by way of Hayles, and to our construction of Haraway’s cyborg, most specifically through her blurring of physical/immaterial binaries. Additionally, in response to the positionings of the feminized other and feminized production as we have seen thus far, we will attempt to engage with a kind of
female alternative masculinity which resists the erasure of the bodily self that is projected onto it by such groups through a directed engagement with alternative masculinities that are specifically embodied and gendered.

**Female Masculinities, Blurred Binaries, and “The Bathroom Problem”**

Creating a context for a kind of female masculinity means examining attempts at an alternative masculinity that potentially mutate an already externally produced patchwork identity rather than one that is produced whole cloth. In order to provide this context, I examine how these mutated assemblage masculinities are asked to function in both literary and filmic tradition, illustrating the ways in which the cognitive and embodied self inform these new constructions of alternative masculinity. For example, Silverman critiques contemporary understandings of the feminine within the male homosexual body saying, “Not only does this formulation afford a preposterously monolithic reading of male homosexuality, but it depends upon a radically insufficient theory of subjectivity” (Silverman 339). Additionally, through a survey that includes both Foucault and Halperin, Silverman discusses the conceptualization of the interior androgyny of the passive sexual participant, regardless of biological gender, and argues that, “homosexuality cannot be analyzed in isolation from sexual difference,” but also that, “the ‘feminine becoming’ must be sharply distinguished both from female subjectivity, and from ‘the category of woman as considered in marriage the family, and so on’” (Silverman 347). With this in mind, we can see that this aspect of the project must acknowledge the deeply ingrained queering of the kinds of shifts in masculinity we will be examining here. Is it important to separate the kinds of female masculinity we
will be observing here from a politicized homosexuality? In other words, does the queering of the masculine female body we will be observing essentialize the alternative masculinities we will see in a restrictive way? xii

Within the current chapter of this project, I will be examining instances of female masculinity in both feminist and SF fiction (Most notably Neuromancer, The Female Man, Avatar, and Ghost in the Shell) and geek public discussions of gender as exhibited above. To address those concerns, I will be employing Judith (now Jack) Halberstam’s Female Masculinities in order to examine the various ways in which femininity can be reappropriated and redefined through its connection to the embodied and to the technological. Using Halberstam as a starting point, my examination of a new formulation of female masculinity is read here through an examining of the necessary balance between cognition and body within Hayles' Posthuman in the creation of a productive alternative masculinity. Hayles acknowledges in the introduction to My Mother was a Computer that it is through a mastery of the cognitive self (i.e. the digital self, in this instance) that the Posthuman can move past a passive interaction with informatic flow which makes up these spaces and instead take part in a proactive redefinition that flow. In other words, while we can see Hayles does not hold to the fallacious concept that the mind can exist separately from the body within digital space, we can use the construction she provides here in order to describe an era of digital publics in which the cognizing mind certainly takes primary control of any communications process.
In chapter 6 of her text, entitled *Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson’s Patchwork Girl*, Hayles discusses both the positioning and assemblage nature of the cyborg female identity, writing of the hypertextual protagonist, “For the female monster, it is mere common sense to say that multiple subjectivities inhabit the same body, for the different creatures from whose parts she is made retain their distinctive personalities, making her an assemblage rather than a unified self…This conflict highlights the monster’s nature as a collection of disparate parts. Each part has its story, and each story constructs a different subjectivity” (Hayles 148). As we have also seen in chapter one, the patchwork bricolage of identity production is an important part of the mutation of hegemonic signifiers we search for here, as Hayles categorizes Jackson’s protagonist as both materially and cognitively patchworked. Dezeuze contextualizes this process as well in her survey of the bricoleur, saying, “As conceptual artists sought to dematerialize the art object as a commodity…assemblage’s deliberate focus on objects was seen as regressive at best and, at worst, complicit with the ever more dominant forces of capitalism. The figure of the *bricoleur*, however, did not disappear: rather, his tools changed. Instead of glue or nails, the conceptual *bricoleur* used words and documentation in works privileging process, performance, and language over the object” (Dezeuze 32).

For their part, Halberstam discusses the importance of embodiment as it applies to her construction of female masculinity in the introduction to her text, stating in regards to the attachment of masculinity to biological maleness,

Such an attitude has been bolstered by a general disbelief in female masculinity. I can only describe such disbelief in terms of a failure in a
collective imagination: in other words, female-born people have been making convincing and powerful assaults on the coherence of male masculinity….what prevents these assaults from taking hold and accomplishing a diminution of the bonds between masculinity and men” (Halberstam 15).

Therefore, we can examine Hayles’ construction here as a cognitive assemblage of patchwork identities that blur the cognitive/embodied binary and function in relation to embodied self, and Halberstam’s as an assemblage of patchwork physical signifiers that blur the essentialized gender binary function in relation to cognitive identity. And while Halberstam’s Female masculinity engages with the technological at times (most notably through photography, as we will see shortly), it does not rely on an engagement with the technological apparatus. My aim here is to engage with both analyses in order to produce a description of an emergent female technomasculinity as applies to this project, a kind of cyborgian female masculinity that is created through an assemblage of technological, cognitive, and embodied signifying materials.

As mentioned previously, Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” examines the changing distinctions between binary relationships which include the animal/man, the organism/machine, and the physical/immaterial binaries within the age of the cyborgian technological apparatus. She examines, most notably, the pleasure to be found in blurring the lines between these distinctions in order to apply a feminist theoretical framework to them. However, in this process, Haraway specifically ignores another binary, that of gender essentialism, an issue which Judith Halberstam attempts to deconstruct in her text Female Masculinities, using as a key example “the bathroom problem”, in reference to the paradox which transgender individuals experience in their
two choices for public bathrooms. Halberstam’s construction of alternative female masculine identities, which function through a reappropriation of embodied gender signifiers, is illustrated most powerfully through her survey of photographer Catherine Opie, whose work includes well known examples of Drag King individuals (female identified individuals who perform/satirize male identity through a series of hypermasculine signifiers such as exaggerated body hair and military dress). Of Opie’s photos of Drag Kings, Halberstam writes, “The close-up [in an early project called “Being and Having”] articulates what feels like an intimacy between the model and the artist, an intimacy, moreover, not available to the viewer. The person looking at the photograph is positioned simultaneously as voyeur, as mirror image, and as participant” (Halberstam 33).

Halberstam’s interpretation of the voyeuristic gaze as applies to this project then does two things: firstly problematizing the gender binary through the subject matter itself, and secondly positioning the viewer into a kind of cognitive dissonance within his/her relationship to the subject. Therefore we can see the ways in which an engagement with the technological apparatus does provide potential applications in Halberstam’s work. She continues her critique of Drag King photography with Del Grace, and her engagement with transgender individuals whose masculinized physical form, achieved through intense exercise regimes and hormone therapy, are undercut by the presence of both male and female bodily signifiers (such as “Jack,” a female model who exhibits male coded musculature, dresses in attire such as Navy uniforms, and is only identifiable as transgender based on the presence of natural breasts), and even instances of self
mutilation (such as one butch dyke model who has carved a happy heterosexual family in the style of a child’s drawing into her back, allowing the physical pain of the image to contrast with, or perhaps inscribing, her queered embodiment).

This physically embodied blurring of gender distinctions can be understood to some degree as speaking to Haraway’s erasure of the biological/technological binary in the age of the cyborg. That communication takes place through the manipulated gaze of the technological apparatus (here, the camera) which allows us to blur the lines and cut through assumptions regarding these images. That reappropriated gaze most noticeable in relation to “Jack” who is only identifiable as transgender in the last picture of his series, where the gaze of the camera allows us to see his breasts.

For Hayles, the Humanist view that the mind, through cognition, is the master of the embodied form is problematic, as is the assumption in the age of cyberpunk literature and digital spaces that the mind can exist entirely separately from and undefined by one’s physicality. Rather, Hayles attempts to problematize both of these assumptions, instead creating a theoretical construct through which both the mind and the body function and perform self-identity in relation to the technological apparatus. Halberstam’s engagement with the relation between the cognitive subject and the analog technological apparatus here suggests Hayles work by way of our construction of the cyborgian female, as Halberstam argues that, “The stare of the spectator is forced to be admiring and appreciative rather than simply objectifying and voyeuristic. The tattoos and piercings and body modifications that mark the Opie model become in her portraits far more than
the signifiers of some outlaw status...we look at bodies that display their own layered and multiple identifications” (Halberstam 35). Therefore through the patchwork identity signifiers produced here through embodiment and the engagement with and manipulation of the gaze that the photographic apparatus provides, we reach a kind of embodied cyborg female masculinity that circumvents the limiting boundaries of socially constructed “good taste” and authenticity we find in our survey of digital geek communities.

Because of the kinds of projection, erasure, and othering, as seen in the first sections of this chapter, obvious female masculinities are either wildly de-legitimized or nonexistent in many of the digital communities we are examining. Therefore, in this chapter I engage with fictionalized representations of cyborg, female masculinities as modding narratives in order to develop a more critical take on technomasculinities than we have seen in hacktivist modding practices I look back to Deleuze and *Bergsonism*, during Chapter 3 of which, entitled, “Memory as Virtual Coexistence”, I will being utilizing Deleuze's extrapolation of Bergson's virtuality throughout most of the primary texts I read in this project. As outlined briefly earlier, understanding the virtual as potentially “more” than the actualized in terms of the different possible actualizations, and understanding the virtual as existing before the present rather than given meaning or significance retroactively through the present, greatly informs my understanding of pre-actualized spaces. This construction of the virtual is integral to my reading of both a) aspects of digital community and b) the narratological processes that take place in many of the cyberpunk texts I analyze. I will be arguing that certain embodiments as we will
see them as surveyed below are in fact are narratologically virtual until fully actualized through either a narrative or representational closure determining their characteristics and capabilities.

**Literary and Cinematic Traditions of Gendered Assemblage**

William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1986) engages directly with the cyborgian female body most noticeably through the body of Razorgirl Molly. Molly’s archetypal positioning immediately can be used as a contextualization of cyberpunk filmic inspirations or offspring, such as *Blade Runner* (2012 Final Cut) and *The Matrix* 1999. As a Razorgirl, technologically modified in order to convey physical embodiment and masculine agency, Molly is more than a modified female; her capacity for action, in fact, suggests that attributes once "owned" by masculine agency have been transferred to a virtuoso female body now capable of movement and agency in networked spaces. Molly thus becomes an example of cyborg modding producing a type of female technomasculinity. In particular, Molly is narratologically actualized as a cyborg embodied both through her animalistic claws and her camera-like ocular enhancements.

The importance of the cyborg and cyberspace to the concepts of cognition and material embodiment examined here are a hallmark of cyberpunk literature like *Neuromancer*, as Michael Heim writes in his excellent “Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace”, saying, “I explore the philosophical significance of cyberspace. I want to show the ontological origin from which cyber entities arise and then indicate the trajectory they seem to be on. The ontological question, as I see it, requires a two-pronged answer. We need to give an account of (1) the way entities exist within cyberspace and (2) the
ontological status of cyberspace--the construct, the phenomenon--itself. The way in which we understand the ontological structure of cyberspace will determine how realities can exist within it” (Heim par 4). Heim describes this process as Cyber Eros, through a semiotic understanding of the Platonic Ideal, arguing that, “In her speech in Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima, the priestess of love, teaches a doctrine of the escalating spirituality of the erotic drive. She tracks the intensity of Eros continuously from bodily attraction all the way to the mental attention of mathematics and beyond” (Heim par 15).

With Heim again, then we find a construction of embodied self that is not separated from cognitive self but rather informed by it as the production of the cyborg progresses. The question then becomes, in what ways do alterations and mutations of the embodied self in the kinds of ways we’ve seen Halberstam survey inform the cognitive self when the kinds of intellectual outlaw erasure we’ve seen in the first half of this chapter are removed from the conversation. Therefore, before continuing with a conversation around Molly, I will first be examining literary manifestations of female masculinity through Joanna Russ’s postmodern feminist text *The Female Man*, in order to both illustrate the importance of my construction of the virtual and actualized within fiction that allows for those mutations of embodiment, and to illustrate the potential within these spaces to reappropriate signifiers of agency into a production of the kind of assemblage identities this project argues for.

*The Female Man* resists the fully “realized” realities which typically categorize hard science fiction or even cyberpunk fiction in a way that seems to purposefully set the reader up for these expectations before playing off of them. In the first page of the novel,
Russ describes the Utopian world of Whileaway, a parallel earth society devoid of men, with a series of passages which invite the reader to infer the SF “rules” which differentiate this world from our own, including the production of surnames, the reference to nonexistence coordinates and continents, and the suggestion of exotic technologies. (Russ 1) However, the world of Janet Eason immediately exists outside of the traditional structures of SF despite this presentation, as Whileaway and Janet have already appeared in Russ’s more traditionally hard SF story “When it Changed”, in which Whileaway is a small colony on another planet in the far future, rather than an alternate earth in the present. While elements of these fictional societies are similar, the deconstruction of narrative continuity between the two suggests from the start that this world does not physically “exist” in the same kinds of ways that the establishment of rules in SF typically suggest.

This suspicion is further established with the inclusion of the character of Joanna, who exists on a 1970’s earth nearly identical to our own in most respects (except for the actual portrayal of gendered interactions, which I will touch upon shortly), and of course the revelation in the final sections of the novel that the four J’s (Janet, Joanna, Jeannine, and Jael) are four versions of the same woman. The narrative inclusion of a shade of the author, hailing from a universe which at least casually attempts to replicate our perceived reality, when read in conjunction with the obviously metaphorical alternative histories of the other women and the breakdown of established rules in these universes, all suggests a metafictional lack of reality which places these worlds and characters firmly within the realm of the virtual. Unlike the Whileaway of “When it Changed”, the Janet of this novel
is not actualized in any kind of significant way (it is important to remember that according to Deleuze’s definition of the virtual, this does not mean that these worlds or characters do not exist, but simply that they have not been actualized as “real”).

Of course, the illusory reality of Joanna’s world, as we are reminded by the epigraph at the start of this project, is simply that: an illusion. One must not look very closely to see that every character outside of the four J’s are at best caricatures of social archetypes. As we can see in Janet’s first exposure to a party in Joanna’s world, gender roles are exaggerated here to the extreme:

Peals of laughter from the corner, where Eglantiss’s latest is holding up and wiggling a chain made of paper clips. Wailiss fusses ineffectually around him. Eglantissa- looking more and more like a corpse- sits on an elegant, brocaded armchair, with her drink rigid in her hand...Aphrodiss was sitting on someone’s lap, her left eyelash half off...

[An academic looking man to Janet] “Well Janet, I’ll tell you what I think of the new feminism. I think it’s a mistake. A very bad mistake.”...

I haven’t got anything against women’s intelligence...Some of my colleagues are women. It’s not women’s intelligence. It’s women’s psychology. Eh?”

He’s being good-humored the only way he knows how. Don’t hit him.

“What you’ve got to remember...is that most women are liberated right now. They like what they’re doing. They do it because they like it” (Russ 40-43).

Obviously, neither the women described here nor Janet’s unfortunate conversation partner are intended to be understood as fully realized characters. Joanna’s world is entirely defined by polarized gender relations which are entirely defined by intentional exaggeration. However, this too suggests a connection to the virtual: this time, in the more common sense of the digital space. The language which composes this world is made up of the male/female, the phallic/vaginal, the 1/0.
So why is this substantial? By situating Russ' "female man" as a signal entry amidst recent narratives of the self as assembled, either through language or through computation, this example of nineteen seventies Feminist SF provides an introduction to fictions of the "virtual" self as "digital" self and as "digital native." As a study of a female character’s attempt to create an agency for herself normatively reserved for men (hence, \textit{The Female Man}) through a fracturing of her Self across four separate identities in virtual space, the novel is in many ways attempting to test the boundaries of gender fluidity through an embodiment unessentialized by physical presence (illustrated in the disembodied narrator employed throughout the text as well as the soon-to-be-discussed feral transformation of Jael) and a queering of desire which is also not essentialized by heteronormative gendering (most obviously through Janet and Laura’s relationship but also through both Jeannine’s confusion and the criticism of physical gendering in the presentation of Jael’s world). Therefore a reading of the novel as a conversation regarding gender perceptions within cultures of both the digital and of queered desire can reopen what could conceivably be considered a dated text to inform current understandings of how the virtual generally, and the internet specifically, redefines gender.

Utilizing \textit{The Female Man} as a postmodern exaggeration and satirical critique of gender roles, in which the masculine and feminine in the world(s) depicted are so polarized that they make up the binary code between which meaning is produced (the masculine 1 and the feminine 0 as static categories of being), I intend to categorize Joanna, Jeannine, Janet and Jael’s encounters as attempts within the virtual space (in both
the Deleuzian and more coarsely digital sense) of this “reality” to actuate some kind of functional female agency and female masculinity through a sliding scale of agency in which the material functions in cooperation with the digital. For instance, despite the stop-gap (according to Halberstam's *Female Masculinities*) digital agency which she performs in the novel's "society", it is only through the removal of the male body, the phallic 1, that Janet is able to achieve unthreatened agency with Laura. It is through violent erasure of the male dominator that Jael achieves actualization, the narratological striation of Jael's body that she gains physical form. Her positioning within the text as an identity literally created through biological essentialism, considering the war-of-the-sexes with which she participates, strengthens her connection to a masculinity created through the virtual. In part seven of the novel, Joanna describes in detail her earlier claim that she has “turned into a man” before in her life:

For a long time I had been neuter, not a woman at all but One Of The Boys, because if you walk into a gathering of men...you might as well be wearing a sandwich board that says: LOOK! I HAVE TITS!...If you get good at being One Of The Boys it goes away. Of course there is a certain amount of disembodiment involved, but the sandwich board goes...They split me from the neck up; as I said, it demands a certain disembodiment...I thought that surely when I had acquired my PhD,...when I had grown strong, tall, and beautiful, when my IQ shot past 200, then I could take off my sandwich board...I’m a man with a woman’s face. I’m a woman with a man’s mind. Everybody says so (Russ 134-135, emphasis mine).

With the preceding discussion in mind it is not difficult to understand Joanna’s attempts at separation between her essentialized physical form and the disembodied masculinity which she attempts to perform as highly relevant to studies of digital cultures such as that of gender identity and the avatar. Joanna is discovering what will later be practiced in
chat rooms and online games in recent decades: when one is able to separate oneself from their physicality, interpretations of gender may begin to function very differently, although with costs.

Obviously, the above passage is at least partially meant to be satirical of her efforts, especially in the sense that, within her world, she is of course unable to truly separate perceptions of gender from her physical existence—in fact, her ultimate failure to “achieve” masculinity and the agency which comes with it indicates the fact that she must become man first: her perception is that she cannot become masculine without becoming man, and because she cannot truly cross that gap she becomes an aberration, simultaneously existing as both 1 and 0 and neither. It is in the search for a solution to this problem that physicality is blurred throughout the novel in a variety of ways. If all four J’s are facets of the same woman (Joanna), then what does it mean that their physicalities are so different? Janet is an amazonian warrior, Jeannine is a soft housewife (despite the fact that she has “failed” to achieve marriage), and Joanna is on most occasions essentially little more than a disembodied voice (according to Jael on page 162). However, most important to a discussion of fluid physicality is Jael herself. Upon first meeting her, Jael is entirely defined by her fluid physical presence:

Now J[ael] is really terrifying, for she’s invisible. Against the black curtains her head and hands float in sinister disconnection...Real teeth. Those disembodied, almost crippled hands clasped themselves. She sat on her black leather couch and vanished again; she smiled and dropped fifteen years; she has silver hair, not grey, and I don’t know how old she is (Russ 158).
This physical fluidity is an extension of her ability to navigate the virtual/digital space of her world and to become disembodied in a way that is entirely empowering. Later, in her interaction with the slobbering behemoth which is Man in Jael’s literal Battle-of-the-Sexes world on page 181, Jael becomes the epitome of fluid embodiment, her pre-actualized bodily self transforming into a kind of feral animal with talons and steel fangs as she asserts a fully realized form of masculinity which has not yet been achieved in the text. Even as Janet disarmed her assailant at the party earlier in the novel, she was a subject of oppressive masculine dominance as a being existing in Joanna’s world. However, here Jael has discarded the physical feminine self and become the penetrator, in complete control as she exerts an animal dominance over her assailant entirely founded upon a fluidity of embodiment.

This change is even further evidenced by the creation of the girlboy characters in Manland, whose forced femininity and subversiveness echoes the kinds of gender essentialisms resulting from the operations of that dominant fiction we have seen analyzed, respectively, in Silverman and de Beauvoir (as well of the dangers of queered essentialisms in alternative masculine and feminine constructions). This section of the text explains the existence in Jael’s world of “the half changed”, a group of men who are selected to become the “women” of a society which is at war with its actual women. When meeting Anna, one of the half changed, he is described through assumed history of experience:

I myself am respectful of ruined lives and forced choices. On the street once Anna did not fight hard enough against the fourteen-year-old toughs who wanted his twelve-year-old ass; he didn’t go to the extremity of berserk rage...Everybody knows that the half-changed are weak and can’t
protect themselves...I’m cynical enough to wonder sometimes if the manlanders’ mystique isn’t just an excuse to feminize anybody with a pretty face... (Russ 172).

While the inclusion of the half-changed reveals a certain kind of homophobia in the novel that seems to only apply to men (any kind of homoerotic activity is infused with at least a suggestion of rape), it in many ways is a continuation of the polarized gender roles we have seen thus far in the text, and therefore a further critique of the binary which now places it definitively outside of biologically gendered essentialism. Russ’s exaggerated version of maleness, which we have seen is necessary in forming the binary language which gives the text meaning through difference, becomes here an observation regarding the essentializing of the physically feminine which Russ and the four J’s are resisting. For the Manlanders, desire is absolutely tied to the gap between the penetrator and the penetrated, and therefore is also indelibly tied to physical embodiment and to control.

Cyberspace narratives translate this double problematic of gendered binarisms and violent control for a world where cybernetic binarisms organize everyday life. Additionally as we have seen both through our examination of theorists like Heim and Haraway, and characters like Jael, a narrative that is able to remove striated embodiment from its characters allows greatly for the kinds of mutation of signifiers into an assemblage female masculinity we search for here. Returning to Neuromancer and the character of Molly, for example, we see Molly manipulate her physical form, although the Gibson novel allows her to do so through far more material narratological means than what we have seen through Russ’ Jael. Like Jael, Molly reclaims access to physical
superiority through her mutations, but unlike Molly this initially appears to be notably embodied without a connection to the cognitive. For instance, Molly functions on the outskirts of the digital in the novel, but nonetheless acts as a guide through the novel's networked spaces for Case, the real digital native here.

However, Molly is able to mutate cognitive signifiers of her patchwork hegemonic identity for herself in surprising ways, cognitively speaking. This navigation function is illustrated through Case's interaction with her cyborgian sensory output. In a satiric flipping of the gaze, Case looks uncontrollably through Molly's eyes, subject to her physical and even sexual agency, as she uses the opportunity to impose a dominant sexual interaction onto Case by touching herself while he is controlled by her sexual and visual sensory input, imposing her physical and erotic will onto another through a cognitive navigation of her cyborgian body. Unlike Jael or the other women of Russ' novel, Molly attains a kind of masculine mobility and masculinist sexual desire at the expense of achieving thought adequate to her own ability to navigate physical and digital space. I would argue that Halberstam’s engagement with female masculinities represents a similar potential danger of erasure of the cognitive, especially considering the theorists engagement almost exclusively with aesthetic markers of gender and agency.

As we can see here with Molly, the cyborg female masculine identity begins to function with a more clearly defined social and spatial agency as she becomes guide and protector for the protagonist. Returning to Heim, who characterizes this process through language as understood by Gottfried Leibniz, the writer argues that,

“Leibniz believed all problems to be, in principle, soluble. The first step was to create a universal medium in which conflicting ideas could coexist
and interrelate. A universal language would make it possible to translate all human notions and disagreements into the same set of symbols. His universal character set, *characteristica universalis*, rests on a binary logic, one quite unlike natural discourse in that it is neither restricted by material content nor embodied in vocalized sound. Contentless and silent, the binary language can transform every significant statement into the terms of a logical calculus, a system for proving argumentative patterns valid or invalid, or at least for connecting them in a homogeneous matrix. Through the common binary language, discordant ways of thinking can exist under a single roof. Disagreements in attitude or belief, once translated into matching symbols, can later yield to operations for ensuring logical consistency” (Heim par 47).

Therefore through the kinds of virtual or pre-actualized embodiment seen in the mutation of Jael’s embodied self, as well as in the literacy with both embodied and cognitive manipulation with which Molly is so literate, we find in Heim’s survey of Leibniz an argument that it is through moving and mutating the signs and signifiers of othering attached to Molly and Jael that these texts use the digital space of language to search for alternative masculinities in ways similar to what we see in our survey of community groups in earlier sections of this project. Here we begin to find female technomasculinities as functioning both through the manipulation of language as seen through Jael in virtual space presented above, but also through the kinds of reappropriation and assemblage through connection to hardware as we see through Molly.

Jael engages in a manipulation of the virtual and Molly exists on the borders of the digital through her cyborgian construction. However, the hardware connection moves to a much more cognitive and digital interaction as we move towards *The Matrix*’s Trinity and *Avatar*’s Neytiri. It is within these texts that the cyborgian engagement with the technological hardware apparatus falls away and moves more identifiably into the
digital, and therefore the cognitive. A move towards the cognative/the digital, and away from agency through embodiment mirrors the argumentation we have established in Hayles text, and plays also into a much more contemporary narrative as we engage with James Cameron’s *Avatar*. Neytiri and the Navi, while presented in a way that applies biotechnological science fiction to the stereotypical portrayals of Native American belief systems, also represent a kind of literal digital native in a way that becomes incredible productive for studies of digital culture. Here then, we begin to move from a feminist critique of gender semiotics to a critique of gendered digital native identity and how language becomes able to circumvent the restrictions placed on the othered body through that process, both in terms of patchworks of gendered identity that can be grouped as "female technomasculinities".

As a “jacked in” member of the ecosystem and flora/fauna around her, Neytiri represents a naturally literate member of the metaphorically technological landscape which Jake Sully’s avatar attempts to embody. Additionally the narratological positioning of Jake’s Navi body as avatar, as well as the distinct shift in aesthetic design between the two, technological and biological spaces, positions Pandora as a kind of metaphorically digital landscape to which one can belong as a "native," making Neytiri both a primitive native and a true digital native. Given the way that technological enhancement for or against masculinist practices of cognition or semiosis seems to result in female bodies attaining masculine agency and mobility via what are in effect techniques of animal enhancement (albeit differently for each of Jael, Pris, Molly, or Trinity), I am most interested in the animal-like and specifically female embodiment
which Neytiri inhabits as Jake Sully's guide, and how this allows for a female masculine agency through technologically assisted gender performance that appears repeatedly in narratives of the technologically literate and expressive female body.

The importance of technical materiality to this archetype comes into play as we see the character-type evolve from the virtual female man, to the cyborg, and to the digital avatar: as we move from *The Female Man*, and follow a much more recognizable path from *Neuromancer* to *The Matrix* with Trinity, we watch as the Razorgirl slowly lose her claws and become more reliant on male protection (and her sexualization shifts from an active to a passive one in the process) as she also becomes further corporatized and corporealized. However, as the figure of primitive digital nativity, Neytiri reinscribes various elements of the animalistic onto herself, erasing technics (linguistic or digital), allowing for a more naturalistic engagement with the female technomasculine body. And in fact as the film moves forward, narratologically Neytiri becomes more clearly actualized in the world in which Sulley emerges as the “other” who must learn to use technology to become publically expressive.

Within our survey thus far then, we’ve found a series of alternative technomasculinities that either function predominantly on one side of the embodied/cognitive binary such as Molly or Jael, or naturalizes technological modding to the point of an improbably native status like Neytiri. In contrast to these texts then, let us examine a form of female masculinity that more definably ties to the arguments put forth by Halberstam. *Ghost in the Shell*, a Japanese anime film interested in both cyborgian bodies/identities and cyberpunk themes of virtual spaces, follows Motoko, a cyborg
police officer in the near future in pursuit of a digital terrorist known as the Puppet Master. Motoko is oversexualized on multiple occasions throughout the film, appearing nude and/or in the style of the anime pin-up girl throughout, but her physical ability and her control of informatics (through a “jacking in” style of digital investigation and communication) undercut this femininity, traditionally marked as lacking agency, allowing her to arguably function as the kind of cyborgian masculine female which I argue through Halberstam’s Female Masculinity and Hayles’ Posthuman. However, while the “Puppet Master” is eventually revealed to be a military artificial intelligence, it is consistently presented as a masculine presence, and its moniker, when one considers Motoko’s large, doll-like unblinking eyes and artificial body (not to mention that Puppet Master’s illegally created new slave body drastically resembles Motoko) suggests that his presence represents a traditionally masculine encroachment on the agency Motoko wields through her female masculinity.

Interestingly, we see Motoko attempting to wield this agency both physically and cognitively in the climax of the film, and the outcome of these expressions of masculine self tend to bolster the argument Hayles is making in regards to the active engagement with informatics. While battling Puppet Master, who has inhabited a giant tank of sorts, Motoko strains her body to its upper limit, her musculature transforming into the hypermasculine physical musculature we also uncannily see in [explain] FTM Del Grace’s photograph entitled “Jack’s Back”. However, this effort ultimately fails against this traditional masculine and militarized form which Puppet Master has taken, causing Motoko’s body not only to fail, but for her extremities to rip off so that she now even
more clearly resembles the slave body which Puppet Master had constructed. It is only through “jacking in” to the informatics flow of the AI and allowing it to merge their two identities into one that Motoko succeeds. When she awakens, Motoko, now a peacefully hybridized entity (one that is cognitively even more clearly masculine through her merging with Puppet Master), finds that she has been placed into an artificial female child’s body, which means that this active engagement with the informatics process has caused Motoko to rewrite her identity both cognitively and materially, and to perform a kind of cyborgian female masculinity through more than simply her embodiment, and instead relies on a cognizing self that flows along with the technological apparatus (i.e. networked body) with which it intersects. Here, the digital native, finally, breaks apart from hypermasculinist technological supplementation, loses its external claws or weapons while inventing a new form of embodied agency, and avoids the oppressive male gaze through appearing as a child wise beyond her years.

This theoretical framework as applied to *Ghost in the Shell* clearly informs digital contexts and how they allow/produce new forms of female masculinity which are unintelligible through the essentialized binary of gender identity that Halberstam critiques. The long running fallacy of online communities and online identity production, that online interaction erases the bodily self, has long since been dismissed within academic investigations of the digital. Additionally, of course, we have now examined via Silverman the ways in which othered communities exhibit the potential to engage in a projection of signifiers of the other onto unaffiliated groups, causing a kind of traumatic re-othering of racialized or gendered groups as we see here. Through our
readings of Jael, Molly, Netiri, and Motoko, we see a concrete example of how the cognitive and embodied self can be argued to actually function positively in networked or perhaps "disseminated" spaces. I would argue that it is essential to avoid the dismissal of embodied markers of gender (not of the problematic binary gender that Halberstam suggests, but of any indications of personal identity as informed by gender identity), as Haraway seems to do in relation to gender in “The Cyborg Manifesto” under the assumption that these new categories of hybridity will come to define our identity both physically and cognitively. Instead, we can use this framework in order to efficiently examine the ways in which a shift towards the digital (cognitive virtuoso) realm allows one to circumvent traditional obstructions to alternative technomasculinities and also to allow for a blurring of gender binaries rather than an erasure of them, or an enforcement of their violences.

**Hypertext and Assemblage Identity**

As we have seen thus far in our survey of SF and cyberpunk fiction, especially given how the gaze functions in different ways through Molly in *Neuromancer* and Motoko’s cyborgian body in *Ghost in the Shell*, we find here a strong connection back to queer theories and aesthetic practices, that is, to Halberstam's treatment of transmasculinity and to Catherine Opie’s or Del Grace's photography, illustrating examples of constructions of female masculinity clearly needing to employ aspects of the thinking, feeling assemblage of self in the same kinds of ways that Opie’s models perform that thinking, feeling assemblage of self. To better demonstrate how this assemblage of identity works in the formal realm of digital textuality, I turn to Shelley
Jackson’s hypertextual *Patchwork Girl* 1995 to examine more clearly how the gaze and the incorporation of the viewer into the technological apparatus is able to build a kind of body that can wield female masculinity.

*Patchwork Girl* is a CD ROM hypertext that allows readers to quite literally stitch together elements of the protagonist’s body through the act of reading and digital exploration: every piece of the dissected body contains links that lead to paragraphs of prose, each of which contain hyperlinked words that lead to new paragraphs, creating a stiched together narrative indelibly attached to the creation of the body, the construction of which the reader is directly involved with. The text heavily employs elements of both Mary Shelley's date Frankenstein’s creature and Frank L. Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl* 1995, firmly tying its protagonist to a strong literary tradition, and by doing so allows the reader to play with not only notions of the gaze but also of authorship directly. In fact, the text’s subheading is “By Mary/Shelley, and Herself”, blurring the lines between Jackson, the reader, the protagonist, and its literary ancestors.

In fact, Shelly plays with the idea of the self and authorship even more in her essay “Patchwork Girl: Stitch Bitch”, which she begins, “It has come to my attention that a young woman claiming to be the author of my being has been making appearances under the name of Shelley Jackson.” She continues,

“The body is not one, though it seems so from up here, from this privileged viewpoint up top. When we look down that assemblage of lobes and stalks seems to be one thing, even if it looks nothing like our ID photo, but it routinely survives dissolution, from hair loss to loss of limb. The body is a patchwork, though the stitches might not show. It's run by committee, a loose aggregate of entities we can't really call human, but which have what look like lives of a sort; though
they lack the brains to nominate themselves part of the animal kingdom, yet they are certainly not what we think of as objects, nor are they simple appendages, directly responsible to the conscious brain” (web.mit.edu).

Again, the question of embodied and cognitive being comes into play here. Shelley (aka the Patchwork Girl) refers to the body which is at play in the text as the “banished body”, one which erases the real, actualized body and replaces it with one that is unhierarchical accepts paradox, and is unstable. In otherwords, Shelly’s patchwork body with which the reader interacts engages both in an erasure of the signifiers of othering attached to the actualized body and yet through a kind of hypertextual bricolage creates a new body that is not only more fluid, smooth like Jael, but which retains and acknowledges the historical striations, the traumas placed upon it in a way that the communities of chapter one seem to find much more difficult to acknowledge.

**Female Modders and Final Thoughts**

Here then, I conclude with a noticeable disconnect from the kinds of productions and evangelical interactions we see in Chapter 1. While I have focused in this chapter on theorizing female transmasculinity, I want to note, too, that contemporary digital practices exemplify numerous exceptions to the "rule" of masculinist recursion critiqued in Chapter 1. Muffin Girl Modders, a small electronics group congregates around discussions of women’s IT rights and aesthetic design productions that cater to a female audience, but the group is relatively small, and currently exists within a unique web presence after their benefactor homepage Blackcell.com was taken down. Small community outlets for female modder masculinity do exist, such as Seattle, Washington’s Ada’s Technical Books, a bookstore dedicated to introducing their customer base to the
core mechanics of soldering, coding, and production of basic electronics. The store, named for Ada Lovelace, daughter of Lord Byron, and often described as the world’s first computer programmer because of her work with Charles Babbage and his information engine, attempts to create a safe space for entry level makers, thereby avoiding the gate keeping virtuosity and authenticity we’ve seen in chapter one while simultaneously attaching female-ness to the concept of making. However, the infrequency of such communities suggest the kinds of damage that erasure of the bodily other through project cause for female identified members of maker communities as a whole.

Facebook.com/ Geekfeminism.org encourages hardware hacking in their blogspots. However this activity is done most specifically in opposition or in order to satirically position patriarchal modding productions and communities as exaggerated versions of themselves, creating remote controls that look like unicorns, or calculators made of flowers. What we see in this satirical exaggeration of femininity is a noticeable absence of the kinds of performances of virtuosity we see throughout chapter 1, which begs the question: is the evangelical/hierarchical display of virtuosity which we have seen to be exclusionary or harmful elsewhere, also necessary for the establishing of a public space for these politicized actions?

Throughout this chapter, we are able to see a more complex genealogy of female transmasculinities through the histories of literary, cinematic, and digital fictions, but I also note an extremely aggressive exclusion of these same kinds of female transmasculinities in many digital communities. As we examine the numerous attacks on authenticity and virtuosity as they are applied to women and to female transmasculinity
in the beginning of this chapter, the answer to our question seems to be that yes, without the kinds of technical prowess which are aggressively put on display in more mainstream modder communities, the recursiveness which seems necessary for these communities’ successes perhaps cannot exist. But that doesn't mean that other communities cannot be built up out of the histories that the work of Russ, Haraway, Hayles, or Halberstam enable us to bring to light. After all, through our survey of the narratological forerunners of the kinds of mutation and reappropriation of self identity through a modification of hardware and software, embodiment and cognition, these texts begin to provide a pathway to the kinds of alternative masculinities that are not fueled by projection of trauma or recreation of hierarchical othering as we have seen in chapter one. Therefore, while the communal spaces in which female masculinities function through making are perhaps less visible here than they are in chapter one, it is through an examination of the literary and cinematic texts provided here that a map towards a less harmful alternative masculinity in the form of a female technomasculinity that embraces both hardware and software begins to form.
Chapter 3: Mutation as Modding: Stitched Bodies and Histories of Racialized Trauma

In November of 2010, news quickly spread across the internet/web regarding a claim by videogame review website Gamespot.com that the Microsoft Kinect, a recently released interface for the Xbox 360 console system utilizing cameras and gesture mapping motion to allow players to control the actions of their digital bodies through voice commands and body gestures, was racist. The site posted,

“While testing out the Kinect, two dark-skinned GameSpot employees experienced problems with the system's facial recognition abilities. The system recognized one employee inconsistently, while it was never able to properly identify the other despite repeated calibration attempts. However, Kinect had no problems identifying a third dark-skinned GameSpot employee, recognizing his face after a single calibration. Lighter-skinned employees were also consistently picked up on the first try.”

The claim was soon debunked, by Consumer Reports as well as a variety of other sources, which found that any technical problems had far more to do with ambient lighting in the room than with skin tone (Sutherland). However, the rise of the concern of a racist interface device in the first place nevertheless suggests that the cyborgian interaction between biological and technological is introducing new wrinkles to prior concerns regarding race and the bodily in technoculture. This debate on race, body, and technological space can be historicized with respect to David Tomas’s “The Technophillic Body”, where Tomas defines the term as follows,

A technophilic body is the product of various degrees of aesthetic and functional transformations directed to the human body's surface and functional organic structure. Such transformations can be divided into two distinct categories. The first category is composed of techniques and technologies that are used for various aesthetic manipulations of the body's surface. These include cosmetically redesigned faces, muscle
grafts, and animal and/or human transplants that effectively blur visual cues for gender and human/non-human differentiation. The second category is directed to fundamental functional alterations to the human body's organic architecture. It includes biochip implants, prosthetic additions mediated by myoelectric coupling, and redesigned upgraded senses” (Tomas 144).

Tomas argues that new forms of kinship rooted in former ethnic or familiar systems of kinship is coming, claiming that “These processes for 'technologizing' ethnic and individual identities are fundamental to the composition of Gibson's version of a cyborg culture, as are questions about social power in relation to bodies whose architectures are subject to continual ‘disassembly and reassembly’ and potential sites of (cyborg) resistance in a post-industrial society increasingly dominated by corporate formations and a global information economy” (Tomas 145). The disassembly and reassembly discussed here is of course part of a larger conversation regarding the cyborg body that first emerged in the 1980’s, and yet it also begins to inform the assemblage identities we’ve seen created in chapter 1 and mutated in chapter 2, while accepting the role which race and embodiment must play in that production.

With the kind of racializing, digitizing gaze feared in regards to prostheses like the Kinect, which reinterprets physical embodiment and embodiment signifiers into game space, there seems to be a real fear that blackness has no place in cyberspace as illustrated by the above example. After all, as we have seen in Chapter 2, the kinds of erasure and projection of the bodily self that takes place when the othered geek is attached to identity signifiers which he does not want or reacts to by resisting, he potentially projects them onto more traditionally othered bodies. Silverman acknowledges this kind of dynamic othering in general psychoanalytic terms, describing
male subjectivity’s “‘failure to recognize’ manifesting as ‘...either to the self or to the other. The subject classically refuses to recognize an unwanted feature of the self by projecting it onto the other, i.e. by relocating it” (Silverman 45). The fear of racial erasure within the digital by the hardware apparatus speaks directly to Silverman, then. At least some of the fear of the technological gaze as empowering erasure of embodied signifiers of race seems to follow the process Silverman describes. Within the techno-assemblage of the transmasculine geek, any kind of oppressive or traumatic gaze may be projected onto another other as a kind of collateral damage incurred in cobbling together a viable self-capable of digital being.

This discussion of the digitized gaze and the place in which it allows or disallows embodied blackness can be extended to the assembling and dissasembling of identity through image, sound, and gesture at the digital interface through critical discussions of "cyborg identity." As Thomas Foster argues, by way of Hayles but re-writing the pre-history of the cyborg as that of racial passing in his text *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory*, “if the extent to which one has become a cyborg is measured in terms of impact on psychic/sensory organization rather than difficulty of detaching parts, VR [virtual reality] users…are more thoroughly cyborgs than are people with pacemakers” (Foster 137). And while Foster (and Hayles before him) are referring to the input received by the biological component of the posthuman body making sense of a world mediated through digital symbols, we can see that this sensory organization is a two way street: The racialization of the black body is subject to a kind of white, geek transmasculinity through the implementation of a technological apparatus that
reintroduces the gaze and its powers of erasure, albeit via a intensively technological assembling of material-semiotic experience.

However, such potential for erasure is often ignored in discussions of the digital black self. Foster notes that, “the discourse on cyberspace demonstrates a striking lack of engagement with the possible racial implications of such theoretical work”, suggesting that the digital gaze and this fear of black erasure within it is a new kind of concern for contemporary civilization (Foster 138). As we have seen thus far in our project, othered groups in digital spaces often attempt to create a new form of assemblage identity which not only erases bodily signifiers of othered identity as mobilized by dominant biocapital but appropriates those material semiotic signifiers to create a new kind of patchwork masculinity (stitched between physiological body, software and hardware). However, we have also seen that such performances can be inherently harmful, creating both the replications of hierarchical othering behavior we have seen through Silverman, and the kinds of limitations of “good taste” circulating around textual loyalties we have seen through Jenkins and Bourdieu. How then do questions regarding the masculinitiy of the racialized black body in digital space become further complicated by issues of historical trauma and (what I will argue is an) already imposed patchwork identity created by the dominant discourse which such transmasculine bodies attempt to escape through the digital?

Recent scholarship has begun to explore the ways in which dominant patchwork identity attaches to male blackness. In his article entitled “Comic Book Masculinity and the New Black Superhero” Jeffery Brown discusses the social ramifications of
"overembodiment" via Hypermasculinity among Black Maleness in popular culture, noting that, “While the gay man, the Jewish man, the Asian man (and many other ‘Others’) have been burdened by the projection of castrated softness, the black man has been subjected to the burden of racial stereotypes that place him in the symbolic space of being too physical, too bodily” (Brown 28). In other words, to the degree that black masculinities are constructed as masculine on the basis of excessive embodiment rather than, say, upon educational achievement or socially legible intellection, he must magnify his physical power into a hyper-masculinity in order to hide these deficiencies. Brown goes on to say that in comic books, this tendency appears as the trait noticeable in virtually all black superheroes of what he refers to as “the hard male body.” in reference to the startling degree of over-musculature seen in such figures.

For some, hardware modding and assemblage manipulation of signifiers allows for a kind of resistance to the construction of black masculinity in terms of problematic overembodiment discussed above without invoking digital erasure. Beginning with an analysis of website afrotechmods.com we can immediately see the kinds of ways in which the space both avoids hard body and hypermasculine signifiers in the kinds of ways that Brown argues these characteristics limit the expression of social self: instead, the afrotech geek creates a new assemblage identity through the aesthetic personality of his mods. The website moderator, calling himself "The Afro Man", operates outside of the systems of virtuosity and patriarchal competition we have seen in Chapter 1 in his production and manipulation of hardware, instead abandoning such virtuosic aestheticism in favor of practicality and feasibility for his audience, organizing his website by price,
difficulty level, and pedagogy. All of this pragmatic organization is framed within a design aesthetic that is consciously unimposing, and comically so, especially when compared to other modding communities we’ve examined thus far. His website is littered with randomly placed hyperlinks in the form of doodles, loose wires, scrawled sharpie messages, and ripped pieces of cardboard. These lead users to step-by-step instructions for projects that value pragmatics, accessibility, budget, and ease over the kinds of virtuosity we’ve seen elsewhere.

Unlike the hypermasculine "cool pose" aesthetic which Brown warns against, designed to signify power, opulence, and esteem in response to a history of being vilified and oppressed, Afro Man asserts his digital masculinity by functioning outside of the hypermasculine, instead incorporating an internet practice called "sweding", as seen also in Gondry's Be Kind, Rewind (in terms of the aesthetic and technological means by which the films' modded effects are produced, rather than the narrative content of the film).

Sweding, coined in the film by "Mike" as portrayed by Mos Def, involves replacing corporately produced content with extreme lo-fi and unedited fan replications which rely on creativity in place of budget (such as a cardboard and duct tape recreation of the film Robocop within the narrative, or drawing a hallway on a spinning piece of cardboard behind an actor running in place to replicate 2001: A Space Odyssey). The concept became so popular among fans of the film, that the website swededmovies.org arose following its release to catalog and present fan made swede films. Afroman is playing with a similar aesthetic, essentially producing his hardware as a kind of rhetorical argument that places creativity and accessibility first; ignoring many of the more
problematic elements of the aggressive masculinities we’ve seen in other recursive
cultures. Interestingly, what we see in response to Afroman specifically, and sweding
culture more generally, is a choice to express transmasculinity in ways that resist,
subvert, or simply make ludicrously visible the kinds of signifiers of masculinity that we
saw defining the authenticity and virtuosity of digital masculinities in Chapter 1. Instead,
a kind of production takes place in a way that functions specifically as anti-virtuosity.

With the appropriation aesthetic of Afro Man, the producer of hardware as
content then allows the physical signifiers of racialized bodies to be redefined in order to
establish the changing political motivations behind content and identity production along
racial boundaries within his work. We see a kind of hardware modding and a
dissemination of procedures for assembling identity that specifically eschews patriarchal
structures defined by virtuosity; the result are cobbled together aesthetic materials and
signifiers of identity not unlike those modeled in the hypertext metafiction of *Patchwork
Girl*, and which, like that hypertext's feminist stance, acknowledges the embodied
histories that help to define the self as legible within histories of expressive, that is both
intellecting and affecting, black bodies. Sweding here becomes a kind of counter-racial,
anti-virtuous assemblage form in a patchwork of expressive production, through the
ability of these productions to function both in conversation with race and technology,
but resistant to dominant constructions of blackness, especially to dominant constructions
of blackness as technologically incompetent, innocent, or deprived?
Hard Body Hardware, Digital Erasure and Trauma, and the Assemblaged Monster

Having seen the potential then for hardware modding to actually respond through the means of production to dominant patchwork representations of blackness, it is important to understand the kinds of dominant assemblage identity productions of blackness to which we are referring. The digital history of the black body is already a complicated one, especially regarding the kinds of signifiers which the black body invokes in technological engagements with the posthuman. It is important to note after all, in conversation with Brown’s account of raced hypermasculinity, that the hard body cool pose, the fear of the erasure of historical self, and the creation of a dominant assemblage identity utilizing physical and labor signifiers contribute to systems of meaning in which the black body is most often either conflated with hardware or erased or made illegible in digital space. This push to mobilize as digital character the kinds of hypermasculinity which Brown warns against speaks to the kinds of bodily signifiers that black gamers may be attempting to escape or resist with recourse to cyberspatial expression in the first place. Foster notes this desire by way of Allucquere Stone, saying “Stone’s virtual systems theory sets out to rearticulate debates about the public sphere, and specifically the modern, liberal narrative of the formation of the rational citizen through the transcendence of bodily particularity” (Foster 138).

Stone's claim was that the virtual and abstract citizen is one who is traditionally signified as white and male. Foster extends that discussion by bringing the racialized body into play through his argument that the reason for this exclusion of the racialized body has to do with the same kind of overembodiment we are seeing in the games
described above, as read through Brown. This exaggeration of bodily self as a means by which to reach for the phallus will be examined for its failures shortly. However, Foster is more interested in the racialized attempt at digital citizenship, through which one acquires a new body through mimicry and prosthesis, “That is, a desire to be overembodied in a different way.” (Foster 138) This is nothing new, as Foster notes Hayles comparisons between the performance of a cyborg identity that holds much in common with seminal African American novels such as *The Invisible Man*. Embodiment and erasure have traditionally played a prominent role in African American Literature regarding identity, as we can see much more recently in Percival Everett’s *Erasure*, which chronicles a failing African American author’s descent into identity erasure through the un-ironic public success of his critical satire of *Native Son*, entitled *We Lives in da Gheto*. *As the Invisible Man* erases its protagonist within a variety of settings, letting him function as an Invisible source of meaning to be defined by the white gaze later on, Everett’s text finds Thessallonius Monk Ellison, writer of *We Lives in da Gheto*, quite literally reprogrammed by the white gaze, transforming into the signs and signifiers his audience projects upon him.

However, in looking at Silverman and recalling the dissemination of trauma through newly assembled technological bodies discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, we are reminded of the dangers inherent in “marked bodies, longing for invisibility” (Foster 141). Here, too, we see with the introduction of the cyborgian relationship between social body and technological apparatus, an opening for self-erasure that functions distinctively from the dominant discourses of erasure we have discussed above. Unlike
TM Ellison, the cyborg production of the material-semiotic body suggests expression of, not merely subjection to, a contingent and tactical erasure of the self. Regarding this distinction, it is important to note that both Silverman and Foster warn not to conflate gendered and racialized desires to erase the bodily self. And while there are certainly connections between the quest for alternative masculine identity in the transgender subject and the black body, as we have discussed them thus far, Foster notes in *The Souls of Cyberfolk* that it is important not to conflate the two, invoking Judith Butler to state that, "...race cannot simply be analogized to gender and that gender or transgender practices in cyberspace might differ significantly from their racialized counterparts."

(Foster 139)

In her book *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*, Elizabeth Young usefully notes the importance of the Black male body as signifier of a produced American monster, stating, "The Frankenstein monster is particularly close to the rhetorical process of personification, which turns inanimate objects into people; the monster is the personification of personification…not only animated but reanimated" (Young 70). Additionally, she notes the comparisons to linguistic metaphor arguing that "mixed metaphors are created when the reader reanimates dead metaphors, bringing them back to life as a grotesquely mixed whole. This is…what happens in *Frankenstein*, not once but twice. The creation of the monster enacts the process by which dead metaphors are brought back to life and reassembled into an amalgamated whole.” (Young 79) In other words, Young is arguing that Blackness is inherently monstrous according to linguistic interpretations of metaphor. Ostensibly then, Young is arguing that
metaphorical production of the black body is already also a cultural bricolage, a patchworked, assemblage identity, and more importantly, is one that is potentially open to redefinition.

If we are able to concede this American conceptualization of Blackness as a kind of patchwork identity already, stitched together through metaphor, as Young describes, we must then examine the ways in which this kind of signifier functions, and how this stitching takes place. In his seminal book *How to do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin discusses the concept of statements as not only a sign of the occurrence of an action but as in *some* ways becoming action itself. For example, in discussing the social and religious construct of marriage, Austin describes,

“...the utterance ‘I do’ (Take this woman to be my lawfully wedded wife), as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony. Here we should say that by saying these words we are *doing* something—namely marrying, rather than *reporting* something, namely that we are marrying. And the act of marrying, like, say, the act of betting, is at least *preferably* (though still not *accurately*) to be described as *saying certain words*, rather than as performing a different, inward and spiritual, action of which these words are merely that outward and audible sign” (Austin 13, emphasis original).

Therefore, while statements are not themselves solely responsible for the perceived “taking place” of an action, they are by no means separated from that taking place, and in many ways represent to both the speaker and the audience a marker for contextualization of what is happening. In the case of the patchwork monster race we are describing here, these statements and rhetorical positioning are the stitching that brings this patchwork black body of meaning together. If we are to understand the
monster-metaphor of stitched together blackness as already existing then, we find that in order to mutate or redefine that blackness into a new kind of masculinity, an alternative masculinity such as this project examines, such identity is at least in part built out of its engagements with a hegemonic assemblage identity which is, in turn, in part produced from this engagement. Foster discusses the importance of this fraught engagement from another point of view, calling it an acceptance of historical trauma, which he describes as, “the difference his race makes for him, the mark of racial difference that allows other people to classify, stereotype, and therefore to ‘look through’ or forget and render invisible the protagonist of Ellison’s novel” (Foster 154). Foster is arguing that the voluntary erasure of physical signifiers of racial self will not erase the historical traumas imposed on the black body any more than will dominant erasures discussed here. Both Foster and Young's work warn against simply desiring both a) an erasure of physical signifiers of blackness and b) an erasure/ignorance of previous statements of action/historical trauma in the production of alternative masculinities.

Working from Young’s argument that the black body represents a kind of stitched together series of metaphors that transcends linguistic logic in its resurrection as an identity construction, we can apply this understanding to Foster’s critique of the abstract, digital citizen and of the exaggeration in virtual reality of the difference between discursive and physical space (Foster 138). Understanding a kind of racialized patchwork boy as already existing here, we see in the creation of a black alternative masculinity,
instead of a stitching together of embodied and disembodied identity signifiers, a mutation of those signifiers in the construction of so-called "virtual space." Indeed, as we have also seen, this mutation of embodied signifiers of patchworked meaning are often accompanied in these bodies with a patchworking of hardware and software expression of this new self as a facilitator for the kinds of mutation being discussed. As Foster notes, “the relation between physical and virtual is not fixed in a one-to-one relationship, but instead can be ‘provisional’…that is, continually produced and reproduced in successive moments of rhetorical performance.” (Foster 142).

**Spawn, Othello, and Deathlok: Traditions of Overembodiment as Erasure of Self**

Often to a truly shocking degree, perhaps because of the genre or narrative styles often appropriated by the industry, mainstream videogames’ depiction of black bodies seems to be consistently problematic. *Resident Evil 5*, released in March of 2009, sparked widespread debate over its narrative, in which a White American Special Ops officer runs through impoverished African villages where the residents have been infected with a zombie-like virus, requiring the player to mow down horde after horde of infected African townspeople. The game later found protagonist Chris Redfield among even more problematic imagery, fighting infected African bushmen who are armored in wooden masks and headdresses and attack with ornate spears, *a la* the savage motifs of common to turn of the century pulp serials such as *Doc Savage* and *Jonathan Swift*. 2012’s *Far Cry 3*, engages with similarly problematic material, employing the trope of the magical native as White upper-class party boy Jason Brody is shipwrecked on an
island of Somali Pirates, and must utilize the magical warrior teachings of the native peoples to stop the pirates.

While these stereotypes obviously play into the kinds of mixed metaphors of resurrected blackness discussed by Young, we need to examine the ways in which an engagement with the digital redefines how these identifiers function in a way that could be described as modded alternative masculinity within the black male body. As Foster argues,

“Through the vehicle of blackface, for example, racial norms have historically been constructed through the kind of antifoundational performative practices that have come to be associated with postmodern modes of cross-identification and gender bending... It is precisely in terms of these histories of nonexpressive, nonhumanist modes of performing and producing ‘blackness and whiteness’ that African-American culture might be understood as prefiguring the concerns of virtual systems theory” (Foster 143).

Foster engages with the comic book cyborg Deathlok, and Young engages with both the original and reinterpretations of the novel *Frankenstein*, giving us a literary lineage by which the history of black male struggle both against the stitched together cultural monster of blackness that Young illustrates, as well as the historically and traumatically informed mutations of these identity signifiers through the introduction of the digital. At stake here is the need to engage in a literary examination of both dominant patchwork identities and their digital mutations that can illustrate the kinds of potential for productive alternative masculinity such mutations also produce.

This production is both historically deep and familiar in literature. Shakespeare’s *Othello* has become synonymous with discussions of Elizabethan conceptualizations of the racially marked “other”. The character of Othello, an African man who lets his own
fears of inadequacy allow him to become unwittingly manipulated and damned by those he considers allies, is inherently a perfect foundation upon which to discuss issues of interracial desire and racialized masculinity. However, such understandings of the importance of race to the play are often discussed from a problematic and limiting authorial perspective, specifically regarding an assumption inherent in these discussions that Othello’s racial characterization is not especially relevant to discussions of modern portrayals of male minority figures.

This tendency makes it hard to make sense of, say, the reconfiguration of Othello's "damnation" in Todd McFarlane's comic book Spawn, although the comic book narrative considerably expands on the basic template configuring blackness in terms of betrayal and vengeance. Spawn tells the story of an African American man named Al Simmons, an ex-Secret Service hero and military black-ops agent who is betrayed and murdered by his closest military friends. He goes to hell, where he makes a deal with Satan for his soul: he will lead Satan’s army if he can see his wife, Wanda Blake, again. Satan gives him a new body, equipped with demonic super-powers and sends him back to earth, where Simmons discovers that he has been dead for five years, that his wife has married his best friend Terry Fitzgerald, and that, unlike Simmons, he was able to give her a child. Simmons (now known as Spawn) is then followed by a manipulative demon known only as Clown\textsuperscript{XV}, who uses Spawn’s love and jealousy for his wife to trick him into furthering Hell’s plans. Historiographically, the tale shares obvious connections with both the Greek myths of Orpheus, who walks through hell to save his love, and to Prometheus, who was punished by the Gods for sharing their power with humanity.
We see similarities here, too, with the central text Foster engages in his discussion of the black cyborg: the comic book *Deathlok*. Of *Deathlok*, he writes,

The narrative of the four-issue limited series…establishes how an African-American scientist named Michael Collins has his brain transplanted into an experimental cyborg body, designed as a prototype of a cyborg soldier…Collins is a programmer and software designer at the company responsible for this secret weapons research, Cybertek. When he learns that his own work designing human-machine interfaces for prosthetic limbs is being appropriated for this secret weapons research, Collins confronts his employers, is kidnapped, and his brain is used as ‘wetware’ in the experiment…This new version of *Deathlok* is clearly designed to intervene in the film genre of violent cyborg action heroes…as well as to rewrite the racial implications of cyborg narratives” (Foster 144).

Using Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, we can examine the theorist’s impact on writers such as Silverman and Foster in order to construct a cyborgian reappropriation of masculinity. An internalized desire for “whiteness” begins at the physical level (skin darkness, perceptions of white beauty, etc…) and reaches out to the social and economic (wealth, culture, language, authority, etc…) for Fanon. Therefore, the colonized begins to equate the power and control of the colonizer with the race of the colonizer, and therefore attempts to emulate him. However, Fanon also argues that the colonizer does not fully understand the ramifications of the inferiority complex which he creates, and therefore will always see these attempts to achieve “whiteness” by the racially “othered” (non-normative) figure as not an attempt to willingly assimilate, but rather a dangerous (for the colonizer) attempt to take back his power, his agency. If we read the kinds of desire for the colonizer we are discussing here with our construction of dominant patchwork blackness as understood by Young and Foster, we can see here that such a desire ignores and or attempts to erasure the bodily identity that has already existed.
With Simmons’ and Collins transformation the mask has moved then beyond the metaphorical and become the technological apparatus in conjunction with the body. Both Simmons and Collins must reacclimate to a bodily self that is now cyborgian and tied to a controlling hegemonic power.

To complicate this discussion further, if we examine Chapter 7 of Silverman’s text, entitled “White Skin, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis, or With Lawrence in Arabia”, we see her argument in relation to T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* that, “That text dramatizes the curious paradox whereby a white man, ostensibly working on behalf of imperial Britain, comes to assume the psychic coloration of the Arabs he seeks to organize” (Silverman 299). This both explains the appropriation of signifiers of oppression that we have seen in Chapter 1 and the kind of narratological blackface we see at play with the likes of Jason Brody in *Far Cry 3*. If we acknowledge this double mimesis and the kinds of engagements with patchwork metaphors of racial identity it produces via Young and Silverman, what then are the possibilities of for constructions of productive alternative masculinities within the actual black male body?

On this subject of white approval, Fanon writes, “Above all, [the black man] wants to prove to others that he is a man, that he is like them. But let us not be misled: [he] is the man to be convinced. It is in the very depths of his soul, as complex as any European’s, that his uncertainty dwells” (Fanon 48). We see then in each of these characters that military heroism functions as a means through which to establish masculine identity in the personal consciousness as well as the social consciousness. The development of these characters as superior social beings in matters of force and power
arises directly from the most basic of desires: for the black male figure to see himself and to be seen by others as powerful and in control. Physical embodiment again, then, plays an important role in these attempts at reappropriation of signifiers.

In fact, in “Comic Book Masculinity and the New Black Superhero” Brown discusses the social ramifications of such desire, saying that, “While the gay man, the Jewish man, the Asian man (and many other “Others”) have been burdened by the projection of castrated softness, the black man has been subjected to the burden of racial stereotypes that place him in the symbolic space of being too physical, too bodily” (Brown 28). In other words, as the black man is made (by his colonizers, as Fanon would refer to them) unable to establish a masculinity that is based upon education or intellect, he must magnify his physical power into a hyper-masculinity in order to hide these deficiencies. Brown goes on to say that in comic books, this has created two noticeable traits in virtually all black superheroes. However, it is through both Deathlok and Spawn’s interactions with the cyborg bodily self and the feminized digital space that the importance of embodied and cognitive assemblage self becomes clear.

The first is what Brown refers to as “the hard male body” in reference to the startling degree of over-musculature seen in such figures, which essentially stands in for what a history of military prowess achieves for Othello and Spawn, namely power. Throughout the Shakespeare play, Othello is repeatedly described as an animal or by animalistic characteristics, called both “an old black ram” and a “Barbary horse” by Iago in the first dialogue introducing the character (Othello Scene 1 Act 1 ll. 99,126). Although being “the animal” labels Othello as stupid, easily manipulated, emotional, and
unrefined, it also labels him as physically imposing and overly passionate. It is with these characteristics that Othello or Spawn construct their masculinities, a trend very similar to what Brown recognizes throughout masculinity in modern comic books.

Othello and Al Simmons both stand upon a foundation of masculinity that is composed completely of physical capability. Deathlok, alternatively, has a kind of military hard body quite literally forced upon him, as Collins is forced into an embodiment of weaponized government steel. Simmons attempts to reclaim that military hard body through weaponized tools of the state. However, both find these signifiers of masculinity to be limiting. Collins agency eventually comes from his traversing of cyberspace within the hardware of his body, and when Simmons weapons fail him, he regains agency while traversing a limbo state that functions similarly as virtual space. By embracing the cognative self through available through cyborg bodies, rather than falling victim to the hegemonic oppression that hypermasculinity and overembodiment affords their enemies, both Simmons and Collins are able to mutate the patchwork physicality which they embody for their own means.

Interestingly, we can see that while Othello and Spawn unwittingly occupy the kinds of hypermasculinity which Brown discusses, Collins, both as a pacifist and as an unwilling participant in the Deathlok project, experiences this hypermasculinity thrust upon him. This unwilling engagement with a forcibly produced embodiment by Collins and the cognitive, digital means with which he wars against it, as excellently surveyed by Foster, indicates the fraught relationship of the cognitive to the embodied in digital production. Collins must question both in his engagement with the technological
apparatus in order to produce an alternative, technological masculinity. As Young writes of the kinds of hypermasculine embodiment that we discuss above, “the affiliation of ‘savages’ with children [by way of lack of cognition] suggests their feminization…[and the connection] between the bodies of men and texts aligns literary embellishment with cosmetics and costume; its consequences are both femininity and feminization…” (Young 76). The history of patchworked masculinities conditions black masculinity as both exaggerated and feminized, instead functioning both as “savage” and “mechanical” artifice according to Young. We have seen this very phenomenon through our discussion of Brown and Foster. However, with Collins and Simmons, we see that mechanical embodiment retains the potential for mutation hegemonic assemblage through a connection with the virtual and the cognitive. Uniquely then, through Deathlok’s Collins and Spawn’s Simmons, we find the example of a kind of black technological embodiment which neither denies the history of bodily trauma placed upon the character nor remains imprisoned by it. With Collins, we begin to see for the first time here the ways in which a dominant patchworked black masculinity can be mutated through a reappropriation of those signifiers by means of the technological apparatus and a slide towards Hayles cognitive self.

**Assemblage Performance and the Gaze: Reggie Watts as Cyborg Mutation of Identity Projection**

In order to more clearly illustrate this chapter’s construction of a productive black masculine identity as mutated out of a previously existing patchwork identity, I want to examine how reappropriation and mutation can be seen as operating in sociological
performance. I will be working through the ways in which the technological apparatus allows for a kind of reappropriation and reinterpretation of the dominant black patchwork identity in order to mutate it both through a) play with gaze and identity projected by the viewer and b) play with the very histories of trauma/embodied monstrous metaphors of blackness that we have previously discussed. Unlike sweding, which mutates assemblage through a kind of politicized anti-virtuosity, the kinds of production and performance which take place in regards to the project’s next subject come out of a direct play between performance and self, allowing virtuosity to function while simultaneously mutating the means by which it exists.

In the opening of her book *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject*, art historian Amelia Jones discusses the concept of *hoc est corpus meum*, the tendency towards, “conflat[ing] the ‘thing itself’ (in this case the art work) with the bodily self of the artist...” as an entry point to discussions of how the subject/object relationship and the artist/critic relationship function both productively and damagingly in the art world. She continues on to state that, “this *hoc est corpus meum* tendency in interpretations of the visual arts...is a dangerous one, reinforcing as it does naive conceptions of meaning and value as ultimately securable by an interpretive subject residing fully outside the work and untainted by its seductions” (Jones 14). Jones herself is primarily interested in recorded or static uses of technological and artistic production in order to argue for the merits of artists whose work attempts to deconstruct such belief. I will apply her insights, though, to analyze the ramifications of
technological manipulation in live performance upon this reductive ideological structure through what is perhaps an unlikely source.

Reggie Watts, an African American musician/comedian based out of New York City exemplifies the current incarnation of this movement perhaps more than any other performer working today. Reggie is what he terms a “loop artist”, employing his incredible talents for vocal mimicry of musical genres, speech affectations, and beat-boxing, as well as a variety of digital recording and playback devices, to produce entirely a cappella and improvised musical performances throughout his otherwise spoken word act. In addition, Reggie employs a variety of fictionalized personas through posture, mannerisms, and voice to segue in and out of these musical performances as well as to supplement his more traditional spoken word comedy. These personas, which are absolutely critical to an understanding of his performances, I hesitate to refer to as “impressions” for two reasons: firstly, the term undermines the illusion of authenticity and originality with which they are executed, and secondly, unlike traditional methods of impressionist performance, Reggie’s audience is often not “in” on the fact of their fictionality.

The overall purpose of this examination then, to tie everything back together, is to illustrate the ways in which these decisions on the part of the performer are designed to dissipate that problem of Hoc est Corpus Meum in relation to his performance. After all, if we follow through on the logic produced by his looping procedures, Reggie is his
performance, and the performance is his body. Yet Watts’ plays with the processes and expectations outlined above and manages to illustrate them overtly to his audience, and in the process, to undermine the reductive violence performed by reducing the expressive body to the status of a thing. At the same time, he in a way *mutates* the processes which make up this identity *without erasing their historiographic importance on his body*.

To discuss Watts’ performances in any kind of specific way is complicated, as he (ironically, considering his affinity for short term recording technologies) avoids documentation of his performances for the most part and rarely performs the same piece twice. Therefore, I will be referring to a series of primarily bootlegged YouTube clips of his performances in order to engage in an analytical reading of his work. For instance, in an unauthorized clip filmed during his *Why S#!+ So Crazy?* Tour entitled “Reggie Watts - People So Different”, Reggie evokes the nineties African American comedic stylings made most famous by performers on the HBO series *Russell Simmon’s Def Comedy Jam*, repetitiously engaging the audience directly with phrases such as “Know what I’m sayin’?” and “You feel me?”, as well as performing observational comedy which is now considered “hack material” such as “men and women are different”, “Black people and White people are different”, etc. What makes this particular performance relevant to a discussion of embodiment and the gaze is that during the two and a half minutes in which he embodies this character he manages to
mimic the comedic rhythms and rhetoric of this familiar sub-genre without actually
telling a single joke. For instance,

“Sometimes women be like, y’know, they like decide something in they
head...know what I’m sayin’? They put something in they head and then
they like, try it out? An like, an like, Men? You know what I’m sayin’? Like they be like makin’ a sandwich or whatever...you know? An then
they might...they might like turn to someone? You know, and like
suggest something? An it’s like that over an over, you know? I mean
that’s Palestine...That’s Rwanda...That’s why this shit be happenin’...”

Instead, the joke that occurs is of course a satirization of the recognizable rhythms of
this brand of comedy in a way that biologically reproduces the structures of
technological playback. The process by which performance is deconstructed extends to
his technological process itself- in several “how to” videos included on the DVD
component of his hour stand up special Why S#!+ so Crazy, Watts introduces views to
his looping platforms in a bizarre reversal of traditional evangelical and recursive
behaviors we’ve seen thus far, only instructing views in nonsensical modding, such as
allowing layer records to turn of the refrigerator, or rewiring a reverb button to
electrocute you.

In this case, the necessity of the interpolation of the audience by this fictional
persona makes the audience’s awareness of its fictionality from the start of the
performance also necessary. To counteract the sacrifice of control which this requires,
Watts’ manipulation of the gaze his audiences generate is also heavily cultivated by a
specifically designed physical appearance: Reggie has an enormous beard and afro which
not only further mark him as African American but also cover most of his face, in
addition to his bizarre dress style, which usually consists of suspenders, baggy knit sweaters, flood pants, oversized costume jewelry, and combat boots. However, Watts also in some cases forces acknowledgement by the audience of these cultivated assumptions of identity attached to his body through disguising the fictionality of the various embodiments at his performance disposal. For instance, in a YouTube clip from the Australian variety show *Good News Week*, Reggie “performs” during the interview portions of the program as a shy and slightly nerdy British man, not breaking character for the entirety of the show (and to my knowledge without anyone hosting or working on the show actually being aware of his “real” personality), thereby artificially creating a baseline gaze against which to more powerfully juxtapose his actual performance, in which to a stunned audience he creates a looped a cappella version of *Simply Red*’s “Money’s Too Tight (To Mention)” infused with intense seventies funk stylings and an almost absurdly impassioned vocal performance in complete opposition to the persona he had presented up to that point, leading to a confused but benevolent standing ovation from the crowd. Here we see, unlike sweding, a performer taking direct control through the technological apparatus and virtuosity of assemblage itself, using both not to deny the process of virtuous identity production through making, but to deconstruct and illustrate the steps of that production to his audience directly.

Through his looping apparatuses, Reggie Watts is able to digitally access the recently produced auditory past, the once aura infused immediacy of his own vocal
performances, in some cases accessing sounds and words that had been uttered only moments earlier. In this way, the process of audio looping with which he engages is by its very nature a process of stripping a moment of its aura, its immediacy and originality. However, in doing so Reggie also layers other recently captured audio of his own creation into this reproduction as a means of creating an entirely new audio text infused with a new aura. In this way, Watt’s use of technological reproduction is at its core a paradox, only magnified by the irony of the fact that the majority of these performances are not recorded for any kind of long term use, except by unauthorized bystanders. However, it also quite literally represents an immediate reappropriation of the patchwork elements of the dominant black masculine identity, which he is laying out before his readers back into the self. Through his looping technologies, Watts is able to fold these elements back into a performance in a new way, essentially creating new meaning and context for them as he simultaneously acknowledges their existence to his audience, thereby not only denying an erasure of embodied traumatic history through the technological apparatus as Foster discusses, but also achieving a controlled mutation of those elements through performance itself.

**Final Thoughts**

Central to any understanding of this project as it has been laid out thus far are two observations: 1. That it is through an interaction with the technological apparatus that hardware production is able to become argument, allowing for redefinitions of masculine identity that assemble and redefine social signifiers, and 2. That it is through
engagements with the erasure and dismissal of historical trauma and of embodied
signifiers that these new masculinities develop the potential to challenge or replicate the
same kinds of hierarchical structures which they were built to escape. With this chapter
however, a new element enters the conversation, as we see that when it comes to the
kinds of black assemblage masculinity, the cyborg interface and the modded production
of hardware and identity performance have as much potential to mutate (instead of erase)
the already established dominant patchwork of identity that black male bodies are
attempting to escape. Watts play with embodiment and self through his interaction with
the technological apparatus suggests a kind of performance mod, one which breaks the
boundaries of *Hoc en Est* in order to place control of making meaning back into the
performance. Afro Man not only subverts the virtuosity and hypermasculinity imposed
upon him by the dominant discourse, but he engages in a kind of hardware modding that
is itself argument regarding those very tropes. Watts, on the other hand, embraces these
concepts completely, avoiding the destructive potential we have seen from them in other
sections by utilizing them only as a means of illustrative deconstruction. Here we see the
means by which hardware modification functions not only as argument, but as the means
by which mutation of dominant patchwork identity, essentially identity modding, can
itself form argument through the technological apparatus.
Chapter 4: Biocomics: Industrial Biocapital, Eventization, and Transmedia

Manipulation as Resistive Assemblage Identity

“Marx locates the generation of surplus value not in the labor that the worker exchanges for wages from the capitalist but in the potential of the worker to perform work in excess of that wage. It is this potential that Marx terms “labor power”. As creative potential, labor power is not predetermined value. Therefore the apparent act of equivalent exchange (worker’s labor for capitalist’s wages) has hidden within it…the potential for creation of value over and above the money expended in wages.”

Rajan, Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life, 17, emphasis original

Rajan’s Biocapital attempts to answer questions regarding the place of ownership and authorship in a post-genomic world where labor value in relation to genomics has not historically translated to labor power. Because this work inherently dictates a indelible relationship between genomic work and the economic systems from which this work emerges, Rajan utilizes Foucault’s concept of biopolitics to argue that, “The biopolitical [political economy as not just a system of exchange but a foundational epistemology that allows us to conceive of a system of valuation] does not just refer to the ways in which politics impact everyday life…but rather points to the ways in which our very ability to comprehend ‘life’ and ‘economy’…are simultaneously enabled by, and in tern enable, particular forms of institutional structures” (Rajan 13-14). Rajan importantly examines the ramifications of the relationship between epistemological valuation and biopolitics in order to map the flow of contemporary information, capital, and bioindustry. However, as he acknowledges in chapter six of his text, access becomes a problematic concern of such work. Rajan writes that, “ Corporations are understandably wary of researchers like me who will be traveling to a range of other cites, including possibly visiting their competitors. In addition, corporations are very careful about regulating what gets said
about them” (Rajan 234). Because of this, bioindustrial research becomes limited, similarly to Kelty’s survey of 1980’s technological systems as will be surveyed in chapter 5, creating a vacuum of socio/political bioresearch and the ramifications therein that is not easily filled.

With this concern in mind, I intend to use Rajan’s updated understanding of Marxist labor power as described above to examine the ramifications of bioindustry within my project through a slightly different lens. As we have established the importance of cognitive and embodied (or software and hardware) making/modification and performance within the digital communal sphere in chapters one through three, chapters four and five will specifically examine the ways in which biocapital and industrial capital inform identity production by way of the masculinities previously established. This chapter specifically will examine the ways in which assemblage production in geek spaces as we have seen so far creates an alternative kind of masculinist agency that both understands the ramifications of biocapital and finds ways around those restrictions. After all, as Rajan explains,

“one of the key transformations in the life sciences that genomics marks…is that biology increasingly becomes an information science. Therefore any analysis of Biocapital involves asking at the outset where value resides as biology becomes an information science, and what work and whose agencies are required to create these values” (Rajan 41).

Therefore, if we can understand biology both as data and as data given artificial value, the kinds of assemblage productions and the politicized semiotic meanings that are associated with them surveyed in the project thus far become labor power in and of themselves. And with the introduction of labor value and labor power to the biocapitalist
sphere of production must come an investigation of that value and how that is defined within these productions.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the project begin to examine the ways in which othered bodies already created through hegemonic assemblage become able to mutate the patchwork of signifiers that inform othering to create a new form of assemblage masculinity that circumvents the hegemonic. We saw that the requirements for computing cognition in gendered and racialized bodies are further informed by Foster’s history of bodily trauma and Silverman’s projection of erasure as a process of further defining virtuosity and authenticity in these spaces. However, thus far, we have examined such mutation almost entirely through performance of virtuosity in its cognitive or discursive modes, which in some ways, as Rajan's analysis makes clear, risks ignoring the processes of post-genomic production and economy in their materiality (although alternative economies of textual loyalty and “good taste” have been briefly discussed as modes of valuation).

Furthermore, post-genomic materiality is also intensively time-based; networked spaces are intensively time-disciplined. In what ways then, are we able to find further means by which the temporalities of biocapitalist production informs self and vice versa through an examination of the geek products which come out of the communities we’ve surveyed? And, perhaps just as importantly, if we are to understand the biological as information science according to Rajan, then we come to a (problematic) binary relationship between the cognative and the embodied once again, this time through the “software” of biocapital value making and the “hardware” of technocapital value making.
Therefore, with Chapters 4 and 5 of this project, I intend to illustrate clearly the ways in which assemblage identity, authorship, ownership, and value production are produced as much within the final “made” or “modded” product they are by the virtuosity of production performance that takes place concurrently with making according to Virno.

In *When Species Meet*, theorist Donna Haraway explores in depth the interactions of technology, the human species, and other biological entities within the context of modern American economic, social, and industrial constructs. Like her previous work in cyborg feminism, Haraway here claims that the interaction of human and other biological organisms creates a system in which the two become inescapably entangled in both their biological and technological existences, that is, in terms of material-semiotic practices. She refers to this process of entanglement by several names. She first categorizes the human/pet relationship as that of “companion species” early in her book, saying, “We have had forbidden conversation; we have had oral intercourse, we are bound in telling story on story with nothing but the facts. We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh.” (Haraway 16) xvii

Building from the biocapitalist framework which Haraway provides here we are able to continue our examination of the embodied self and the cognitive self as they have been analyzed throughout the project thus far, where both the cognitive and embodied self are given value through their labor power, even as the self and power are both disseminated in temporalized, networked forms. Through an invocation of biocapital in relation to fan and geek produced objects and texts, rather than through the process or
performance of production, we are here able here to examine how Biocapital in this chapter and Technocapital in Chapter 5 inform the production of assemblage identity through an examination of the ways these productions are politicized.

Haraway is generally concerned with the ramifications which the pervading material and semiotic practices of Biocapital can have upon the bio/technological interactions which humanity engages in every day. Biocapital refers to the growing industrial forces based upon patenting and marketing biological processes, information, and eugenics. Genetic manipulation, historical erasure, animal cruelty and more are implemented daily in the interest of promoting the economic success of this biological industry which has seemed to arise prominently in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In response to this, Haraway paints a picture of the ways in which these trends affect the condition of companion species, infoldings of flesh, and other cyborg relationships by closely examining the biological/historical contexts in which these relationships are forged and grown, as well as the ramifications and consequences of producing consumer products within those contexts.

Looking at the kinds of interrelations between both the embodied (biology as materiality and hardware) and the cognitive (biology as data and software) relationships coming into play, an understanding of the ramifications of these assemblage masculinities needs to be informed by a biology that also means labor value. Exploring this problematic through a reading of US comic books, emphasizing transforming operations of publishing and fan labor reflected in what I analyze as narrative mutation, I engage in a second theoretical framework which explores directly issues of post-genomic mass
media and how it functions in these spaces. Key here are questions of memory and time. In his text, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, Bernard Stiegler works specifically with what he calls the “Industrialization of Memory”, which examines the effects that a transference of social memory into artificial structures produces, essentially arguing that based on certain characteristics, an event can be erased from industrialized memory or immortalized by it (a concept which I will discuss in far more detail shortly).

The interactions and evolutions of the comic book industry throughout the American twentieth century often mirror the characteristics and ramifications of these kinds of “eventizations” (as Stiegler calls the processes that allow events to have “occurred” within artificial memory) as well as the critique of biocapital which Haraway discusses, not only through narrative design, but also through copyright and patent issues, consumer demand shifts, and even the technological evolution of printing and distribution processes themselves. Comics’ mirroring of the concepts which Stiegler discusses, such as the eventization and/or erasure of occurrences within the artificial memory of the long term American perspective, combined with Haraway’s criticism of biocapital, reveals comics as an at once metaphorical placeholder for the biological, and as an industrial product that functions very similarly to methods of bio-industrial production, and that thus functions as an allegory of contemporary biocapitalist assemblage.

Using the term “biocomics” to refer to entanglements between comic books, technology, and humanity, I will discuss the similarities between biocomics and the biological entities affected by biocapital in Haraway and Stiegler’s work for two reasons. Firstly, I would like to examine the unique ways in which comic book narratives and fan
histories are able to acknowledge and respond to the negative effects of Biocapital as non-biological consumer products endowed with a narrative voice. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, I show the degree to which biocapitalist values are often capable of manipulating the hegemonic American ideology to mutate the biological product and the ways it is economically implemented in order to produce newly politicized meanings.

**The Secret Origin of Biocomics: Copyright Infringement and Economic Motivation**

In the introduction to *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway discusses “Jim’s Dog”, a photograph taken by friend James Clifford of a grouping of various forest fauna that when viewed from the correct angle and with the appropriate technology and social conditioning presents itself to the audience in the shape of a domesticated canine. Haraway acknowledges the various entanglements necessary for this entity to emerge, saying, “We touch Jim’s dog with fingery eyes made possible by a fine digital camera, computers, servers… [and] infolded into the metal, plastic, and electronic flesh of the digital apparatus is the primate visual system that Jim and I have inherited” (Haraway 5). Therefore we see that for Jim’s Dog to exist within the perspective of the human observer, it must navigate a weave of biological, historical, and technological infolding. Likewise, “This dog could not have come to [Clifford] without…Those urban walking pleasures [who] touch the labor practices of late nineteenth-century loggers who, without chainsaws, cut the tree whose burned stump took on a post-arboreal life.” (Haraway 6) Therefore, this interaction must not only navigate the histories which allow Jim’s Dog to exist, but also must acknowledge that those histories are intertwined. For Jim’s Dog to
present itself, a combination of past human action (logging practices) and current human perspective (the internal visual conceptualization of a dog) must be mapped onto naturally occurring forest growth by means of a technological entity (the camera). It is impossible to understand Jim’s Dog through only one element of this lineage: the infoldings of flesh have become so deep that attempting to separate them is to dissolve at its core the very entity which they form.

Together, a complete understanding of these interlocking lineages forms a kind of “birthing context” in which the single entity is able to be understood. This is applicable to any aspect of the study of the machinations of biocapital, and I argue that an understanding of the “birthing context” of any product or production is absolutely essential to a study of its evolution. I therefore apply this same critical framework to a study of biocomics for the purposes of this project: an understanding of the various players, goals, and interactions which occur to “birth” any specific comic book narrative, character, ideology, etc. is absolutely necessary to intelligently and successfully discuss the genre’s evolution and progression in any kind of informed way. As we have seen, this birthing is produced by the creative, technological, and financial interests involved in its conception. However, as we will soon see, this is followed with an existence characterized by clashing external loci of control: for while those involved in a product’s “birthing context” often attempt to guide the product along an evolutionary path that complements that context, the fluid evolutionary nature of biology, technology, and sociology often cause the product’s evolutionary path to progress much more naturally and uncontrollably. It is the pressures produced by these clashing “guidance systems”, of
organic evolution and of industrial interest, which I am especially interested in for the purposes of this project, specifically regarding the ramifications of these clashes upon the product itself.

Therefore, while we might assume the development of a non-biological consumer product and industry would emerge with a certain degree of premeditated control by its founders (i.e., its birthing context), we see here that the immediate evolution of the comic book industry is no less organic and malleable than the development of, for example, a specific dog breed: in order to reach a newly forming market of consumer demand, the comic book industry combined elements of preexisting industrial characteristics in a controlled setting to create a niche in the market which conformed to that demand. However, we see how economic and social influence quickly wrench control from the hands of the creators, as attempts at mimicry become organically infolded into the organism itself, establishing new characteristics that are under the control of no single industrial player. Therefore, the comic book industry, while guided by and controlled to a certain degree by its creators, writers, and artists is also guided by its own organic evolution as defined by consumer demand, economic shift, and publication technology or intellectual property law.

The same, as Haraway makes clear, can be said of the purebred industry. For instance, specific animal breeds do emerge based upon a combination and manipulation of previously existing physical characteristics as dictated by consumer demand shifts. However, once that new biological category is released into the market, imitators, entrepreneurs, and amateur breeders remove absolute control from the hands of the
original creators. Instead, the breed becomes an organically evolving and progressing biological organism emerging from a birthing context that not only includes economic demand and industrial action, but also an organic and essentially uncontrollable process of evolution. Therefore, we see the emergence of this conflicting “guidance systems” at work within the evolutionary progress of both of these products. As a result, comic book narratives and their re-engineering, once read as "biocomics," become an allegory for biocapitalist transformations.

Non-Organic Life: Fictional Histories, Retconning, and the Industrialization of Memory

Having illustrated the evolutionarily dynamic nature of the fandom and the comic book industry in particular (especially through the intersection of the biological and the technological apparatus), it is important to discuss the degree to which startling similarities begins to arise between the bio-industrial elements of the comic book’s evolution and the materiality of trans-species being that Haraway is discussing. For example, the infoldings of flesh and matter that define the characteristics of this product and its functions exist far beyond the original bed of plagiarism and financial desire in which the comic book industry was spawned. In point of fact, these infoldings of flesh also exist within the narrative, visual, and thematic structures of the products themselves, not just in the legal and financial context from which they emerged. For example, continuity is a prominent buzzword within the comic book community, referring to the cross-publication fictional histories that emerge out of narrative necessity as multiple characters begin to exist and interact within the same narrative universe. The core fan-
base of comic book readers, within the super-hero genre in particular, places an immense amount of value on the legitimacy of and adherence to these fictional histories. However, as characters are bought and sold across companies, integrated into preexisting continuities through liquidations and company mergers, and narrative characteristics are forced to change because of anything from legal attack to evolving social taboos, comic book continuities are altered significantly, sometimes to the detriment of the legitimacy or even the acknowledged existence of previous events. Franchise concerns and fan memory become contested within multiple narrative derivations, producing events in which cultural memory competes with industrial prerogatives to produce ever greater franchise memory. In effect, comic book narrative derivations produce the need to learn, and accept or reject, retroactively generated narrative memory prompted by the design of publication events through which narrative mutations are distributed. Comic book narrative undergoes "eventization"; here is where Stiegler's work becomes useful.

I would like to engage, therefore, in a discussion of “retconning”, a term short for retroactive continuity coined by fans of the industry to refer to instances when, in the name of economic interest, fictional histories are altered, manipulated, or even erased to stoke or to conform to demands in the consumer market. I believe that on a higher level this practice takes place for many of the same economic reasons as genetic manipulation, animal testing, and other such practices within industries of biocapital; as allegories of biocapital, examining the effects of retconning within the comic industry allows for a simplified foundation upon which to discuss the results and repercussions of these memory-intensive practices.
Bernard Stiegler’s theory surrounding what he refers to in his text *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation* as the “industrialization of memory” is greatly useful for understanding the potential and ramifications of retconning. While Stiegler is primarily concerned with the emergence since the late nineteenth century of globalizing audiovisual media systems like cinema, television, and digital networks, his notion of eventization is also relevant to mass-visual cultural productions such as this one. The industrialization of memory as Stiegler understands it deals specifically with the results of human memory and experience being placed outside of finite biological memory potential through various technological processes, including everything from handwriting to networked computer systems to digital streaming of live broadcasts generally, and is specifically important to my discussion of biocapital and biocomics in its discussion of “eventization” and erasure.

Eventization is the degree to which an occurrence is made to have “taken place” officially within social memory because of the technological processes recording and distributing it as well as the economic, social, and political demands which decide its importance/relevance. Stiegler uses the example of the space shuttle *Challenger* exploding, saying “the death of eight people in an extraordinarily dangerous undertaking of this kind would not be exceptional in itself. But these deaths, which were *covered live* as they occurred, for the vast majority of the planet, were (potentially) a political catastrophe and a sensational tragedy. The event-ability of the event is thus inseparable from the media which, at the very least, ‘co-produced’ it.” (Stiegler 113) Eventization thus helps describe the ways in which social, political, technological, and economic
threads must all come together in a viable “birthing context” in order for an event to be registered in cultural or national memory (made up of news articles, footage, exposition, etc.) in a way that allows it to have “occurred” historically as a memorable event.

Similarly in comic book production, the social, political, technological, and economic event of any particular instance of publication can be understood as composed of a temporal force that can undermines the fictional history and the narrative continuity of these characters and stories. Examples of this re-writing of temporal or narrative meanings abound within the industry’s publication history, but interestingly, the eventization process which decides the remembrance of an event’s “occurrence” functions much the same way within comic book publication as it does within news coverage, making these examples inaccessible unless one knows exactly where to look. For instance in the mid-nineteen-fifties, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published a book called *Seduction of the Innocent*, a decidedly anti-comic book manifesto which warned that comics promoted (among other things) extreme sexual deviances such as homoerotic behavior and sado-masochistic tendencies among young readers. In an attempt to discredit these claims, which were interpreted as valid by the dominant American perspective at the time, DC comics made several radical changes to its flagship *Batman* series that directly conflicted with established continuity in order to foster a sense of sexual homogeneity. (Hajdu 241) xix

Deciding what has “occurred” through the process of narrative eventization is not the only way in which Stiegler's work is relevant to this discussion, however. The
industrialization of memory not only allows informatics and telematics to help construct what has happened and how, but also what did not and (perhaps more importantly) will not happen. Stiegler argues that one of the most unusual effects of the eventization process is that by deciding what has “occurred” in the interest of placating the national memory, a measuring stick of an event’s importance is created that is used to guide the eventization of an occurrence in the present and future, essentially deciding what is occurring and what will occur. In other words, if something is deemed unimportant by the processes of artificial memory (reporters, authors, audiences, etc.) the figures behind those processes will continue to ignore that (un)event even if it continues to exist or take place. This creates an erasure, not only of an event’s “occurrence” within the artificial memory, but also of the possibility of a validation of its occurrence at any point in the future. It is this kind of erasure in the national public perspective which I believe Haraway faults for the prevalence of industrialized animal cruelty, among other things. It is a process that allows the public perspective to ignore potentially immoral and damaging practices and actions to take place within the industrial landscape.

This ability to define what “will have occurred” is wonderfully illustrated by a company-wide narrative event published by DC comics in 1985 called “Crisis on Infinite Earths”. In order to balance the bizarre assortment of characters, universes, and narratives which DC comics had legally accumulated throughout its existence, until the “Crisis” the company separated characters and even alternate versions of characters across a system of “alternate earths” to protect the legitimacy of DC comics’ narrative continuity. For instance, the fact that Superman couldn’t fly according to popular
narrative until he reached Metropolis as an adult, but was published as a teenaged “Superboy” with flight abilities across a variety of publications, was explained by saying that Superboy’s adventures took place in alternate reality from Superman’s. However, by 1985, this web of alternate earths became so convoluted that DC cleaned house, using a narrative device within the “Crisis on Infinite Earths” miniseries to erase the existence of all earths but one, and combine the most popular elements of each of those alternate characters and alternate universes into a single earth. While this obviously demonstrates retconning as event and as erasure that we have discussed so far, it also essentially causes the erasure of an infinite number of future possibilities within these series. For instance, as both fan and company demand forced this erasure of Superboy to take place, this industrial “guidance system” also essentially guarantees that no new Superboy adventures will occur at any point in the future, as they have already been identified as industrially unviable, and therefore unnecessary.

**Transmedia Franchises and Fan Communities in Narrative and Cultural Memory**

Utilizing Henry Jenkin's notion of transmedia storytelling (the existence of a narrative produced across multiple media platforms), and Stiegler's theories surrounding media events and information, I now examine the processes by which the gendered, raced assemblage of identity informs narrative evolution and production, particularly by the way of the textual fan. In order to do so, I pay special attention to the relationship between "official" and "unofficial" production across media platforms and how multi-platform narrative production often shifts the power of what is official to the fan public, in a way that is sometimes harmful to fan interest? or otherwise restrictive. The
importance of continuity in the kinds of genre fiction, and more specifically comic book
genre fiction, we will be discussing here will help demonstrate the ways in which
material formats (like hardware) constrain narrative play; I follow with a discussion of
information economies within geekdom and how digital geek cultures decide "what
counts" within corporately branded narrative production. These productions conform to
what Jenkins describes as transmedia, which, considered as subject to processes of
eventization, allows an examination of how information economies produce value by
deciding what has narratively "counted" within a specific narrative sandbox universe
across various media platforms. And while Jenkins’ transmedia refers most specifically to
the functionality of world building across multiple media platforms, the processes of
eventization laid out here remain applicable to the relatively new phenomenon of
“rebooting” and “retconning” narrative universes as well.

For instance, in the case of popular franchise, The Walking Dead, because the
comic book and the television show follow different narrative events, we begin to see fan
discussion of what is “canon”, of what is true, in the same types of ways that Stiegler
identifies the erasure of the unpopular from externalized memory in the news cycle. For
instance, the introduction of Michonne, a lawyer-turned-samurai warrior, into the
television show in advertising prior to the start of this season led to a fan dedication to the
character even before her official appearance that in turn caused the comic book series to
publish new Michonne specific stories and art (in much the same way that Jenkins
discusses the expansion of mythology surrounding Star Wars bounty hunter Boba Fett in
that franchise's games and novels). Likewise, highly popular characters from the
television series who have not yet appeared in the comics are being requested monthly in fan letters to the publishers, prompting an appearance of series favorite Darryl in the *Walking Dead* comic series sometime in 2015.

Throughout this process, loyalists to either the comic books or the show or both are creating, through the eventization process (Stiegler's term for the "having counted" of a particular series of information), a hybridized "canon" of what has "happened" based on the popularity of characters, events or even alternative interpretations of events (fan productions surrounding characters who have disappeared or left, but are not dead, are becoming increasingly popular within this genre, and have appeared as fan fiction, fan art or comics, and fan films). Rather than an example of fan determination of narrative content, rather, through this active engagement with the multiplatform aspects of the *Walking Dead* franchise, the canon of narrative rules and timelines from which new installments can be derived becomes even more clearly cemented. This restriction of narrative potential is not necessarily a good thing, and in fact, contributes to the gendering of identifications with series content in limiting ways. As Jenkins notes, before the demand for further Boba Fett fiction, fan fiction on the subject was able to imagine the mysterious character as a woman. Therefore we can see how this process of narrative assemblage in many ways limits further exploration within transmedia storytelling in terms of gendered assemblage of identificatory processes. This process is further evidenced in the *Walking Dead* video game, which follows a new set of characters within this universe through a decision tree based narrative, leading to multiple and conflicting events and conclusions to the story. As fans pore over the series and analyze the effects
of their “choices” during gameplay, Umberto Eco’s “cult” of interpretation (Eco 23) takes over, as the appearance of online guides which discuss the “best” narrative options and lead players towards them begin to appear.

Some would argue that Stiegler is referring to a system that allows information and historical events to disappear through their failure to be recorded into digital memory, while examples such as this videogame in all of its narrative permutations are by definition recorded into digital memory. However, as we have seen in relation to the fan discussion and demand regarding the franchise’s comic book and television components, what is eventized in fan culture is perhaps more based on the energy put into examining certain aspects of each text, and less on what has actually been recorded (a process which we are beginning to see in fan groups ignoring unpopular sequels, adaptations, and extensions of the universe in franchises such as Star Wars, Indiana Jones, and Die Hard). Also, unpopular, that is, non-eventized narrative strands, now exhibit a tendency towards erasure even within potentially massively capacious or variable digital texts such as videogames. Fan outcry against the ending of BioWare’s recent space opera video game Mass Effect 3 was so negative that the company bowed to public pressure and released an software update patch that actually altered the conclusion of the game to something more palatable to fans. Of course, it is less important here to vilify or celebrate the overwriting of fan pressure onto the kinds of cementing of narrative possibility here than it is to examine the erasure taking place. Similarly on the corporate end of the spectrum, for example, the expanded universe of the Star Wars franchise (books, videogames, comics, etc that extend the sandbox universe beyond the original
films) has been recently announced to be “non-canonical” by Disney films in order to clear the way for a new series of films in the *Star Wars* universe. Therefore it is not a condemnation of fan pressure or corporate redefinition that is specifically taking place here, but rather an examination of the problematic erasure which comes with an eventization of those pressures. For its part, the popular *Walking Dead* franchise spans television, comics, web series, and video games, and the different functions of each media format allow different levels of fan control, both of consumption and of fan production, leading to the production of fan sites within which “what has happened” is decided, restricting the sandbox potential of a transmedia franchise by deciding what is "canon" to the franchise. Through the kinds of restrictions taking place here as influenced by the biocapitalist system that paradoxically values fan authenticity and corporate brand identity in the same kinds of ways as Ben Heck’s community, a new form of economic system is put into place that privileges intellectual property by legitimating fan interest as recursive feedback supporting the franchise. Importantly, through this process, the erasure of more interesting, critical alternatives becomes more centrally featured.

**Event and Memory in Biocomics**

In order to build upon these narrative examples, and move forward into a more directed investigation of Biocomics, we will illustrate the ways in which processes of the industrialization of memory are extremely relevant to this discussion for both their allegorical and *actual* connections to Biocapital industries. For example, the similarities between eventizations such as the retconning that goes on within the comic book industry and the genetic manipulations/eugenics programs which exist within biocapital research
and development are often startling. In her book, Haraway uses the work of an animal advocate named C.A. Sharp as a way to illustrate the dangers inherent in failing to acknowledge the histories and birthing contexts which surround biological products.

C.A. Sharp works closely with Australian Shepherds, a purebred category of canines that commonly suffer from a genetically inherited eye disorder called Collie Eye Anomaly (CEA) because of the very genetic histories and birthing contexts that produced them as a breed (Haraway 111-12). The existence of this problem in the breed is an illustration of the kinds of damage which genetic manipulation done in the name of consumer interest often causes. It also connects directly to my discussion of Biocomics. For example, both Australian Shepherds and the Batman comic book series have been crafted into an economically viable product in opposition to their organic progression, and as a result both have experienced negative effects. For Australian Shepherds that effect is a genetic disease, and for the Batman series that effect is a homophobic reactionary narrative, but despite their differences, the metaphorical results are the same.

While this functions in direct connection to the retconning and narrative manipulation applied to comics in the name of consumer interest, it also directly connects to issues of eventization and erasure within the US context as informed by informatics. For instance, Sharp relays through Haraway the difficulty in getting the American public to even acknowledge the existence of and the damage caused by CEA, saying, “…it was more than Aussie breeders who denied the existence of CEA in these dogs. Simply put, Sharp explained, ‘collie eye anomaly in Aussies wasn’t ‘real’ when we started working with it’…Sharp recalled breeders around the country telling her about attempting to get
genetic advice from vets who told them to relax-Aussies don’t have CEA; it’s not in the literature” (Haraway 112, emphasis mine). We see that the industrialization of memory allows biocapital industries to shape knowledge through processes of eventization and erasure in addition to the genetic manipulation already underway.

**Breaking The Fourth Wall: Erasure and Genetic Manipulation Given Voice**

Unlike the biological victims of these practices in biocapitalist industries such as Australian Shepherd breeding, the very nature of comic books is that they give a voice (albeit a fictional voice) to characters who experience the ramifications of these eventizations and erasures to their artificial histories and continuities as a part of their narrative existence, making comics a unique site for the critique of such practices and their outcomes. Grant Morrison, an avid animal rights activist and prevalent comic book author whose work will be explored in multiple facets during this discussion, is a perfect example of an author who takes direct advantage of biocomics’ unique critical position. In his 1988 limited series *Animal Man*, Morrison takes a previously established second rate superhero named Bucky Baker, AKA Animal Man, and uses him to deconstruct the effects of retconning and erasure in comic books, playing specifically off of the narrative fallout from DC Comics' “Crisis on Infinite Earths”. Upon becoming aware of the multiple conflicting histories which make up his origin story (caused by the purchase of the character by DC comics from a competing publisher in the 1960’s) Bucky Baker slowly becomes aware of his own fictional existence, eventually visiting a limbo of
discarded and “erased” characters before finally coming face to face with Morrison
himself.

Wandering through “comic book limbo”, as it is referred to by its inhabitants, Baker
witnesses a hellish and barren landscape full of economically unviable characters
without purpose, all hoping for reinvention in a way that would make them culturally
relevant once again. As one inhabitant points out regarding his Mad Magazine-esque
super team, “I think the Inferior Five must be due for release any day now. They could
even do us serious: Dumb Bunny could be used to make a feminist statement…”
(Morrison 189) Others rage at the injustice of their own predicament: as Baker comes
across a figure and asks who he is, the man angrily replies, “Well, who do I look like, for
God’s sake? Don’t you know me? I’m Mister Freeze. What’s the matter…has everyone
forgotten me already? I was one of Batman’s greatest foes! I shouldn’t be here at all!”
(Morrison 196) When Baker eventually emerges from this terrible place, only to meet
Grant Morrison in person, he is so enraged by the fact that his life is nothing more than
entertainment for others that he throws Morrison through a window, killing him.
However, Morrison appears immediately behind him, explaining, “I made you do that.
Sorry, I just thought I needed some action at the start of the story to keep people
interested. You can’t hurt me.” (Morrison 210-11) Baker is horrified by the lack of
control over his own history, personality, and even actions.

Morrison, in this series and out of it, is an outspoken advocate for animal rights,
touching upon animal testing, poaching, animal cruelty, and other such thematic within
the series. Therefore it does not take much imagination to see that Baker’s suffering and manipulation fits neatly into a critic of treatment of animals. After all, the character’s name is *Animal Man*, which makes the animality he experiences at the hands of his creator and his audience all the more overt. Through Baker's hopelessness, emotional trauma, and coming to insight, we see this text as an allegorical criticism of the damage done by economically fueled genetic manipulation, which allows, if only in the comic book text, for the victims of this manipulation to voice their grievances.

Interestingly then, we have in this series a meta-narrataive treatment of the birthing contexts of biocomic narrative, theme, memory, and economy, as well as an understanding of the conflicting guidance systems which characterize the medium, as Morrison acknowledges both the eventized erasure as well as the normative narrative evolutions which the character experiences. By achieving this critical literacy with the medium, genre, and platform of biocomics, Morrison is able to appropriate the unique narrative opportunities of serialized comic books to critique industries of biocapital in ways resonant with Haraway's critique. We see that, unlike the previous examples given within the medium, comic books are not simply similar in their industrial characteristics to the bio-industrial practices which Haraway critiques, but are also able to be used to overtly critique these practices through their narrative and literary potential.

**The Digital Language of Animal Testing: Cyborg Weapons and Shared Suffering**

Following this discussion of allegorical biological manipulation and fluid progressions of franchise evolution, it is perhaps a good idea to bring the argument home
with a literal collision of comic book narrative and bio-industrial action. Returning to Haraway’s *When Species Meet*, I would like now to investigate the nuances of her concept of “shared suffering” regarding animal testing within the context of the US comic book. Haraway argues that for animal testing to exist as a justifiable condition of the human experience, the human being must mitigate that suffering by experiencing it for him/herself. She discusses the (im)moral nature of such action, stating that, “This is a ramifying tapestry of shared being/becoming among critters (including humans) in which living well, flourishing, and being ‘polite’ (political/ethical/in right relation) mean staying inside shared semiotic materiality, including the suffering inherent in unequal and ontologically multiple instrumental relationships. In that sense, experimental animal research is, or can be, necessary, indeed good, but can never ‘legitimate’ a relation to the suffering in purely regulatory or disengaged and unaffected ways.” (Haraway 73)

Haraway continues this train of thought later in the chapter when she discusses the uneven nature of this suffering on the part of the human animal. Continuing a dissection of a story in which a scientist allows biting flies to attack his skin as they do to his guinea pig test animals, Haraway explains that, “[Baba Joseph] sustained bites not to stand in as experimental object, but to understand the rodents’ pain so as to do what he could about it, even if that was only to serve as a witness to the need for something properly called forgiveness even in the most thoroughly justified instances of causing suffering” (Haraway 75).

Shared suffering as a theoretical concept is not a rhetorical attack on the existence of animal testing but rather an attack on the levels of erasure which the practice receives
in US popular and political perspectives. Industrializations of subjective and material memory are, especially within the mainstream telematics flow, disinterested in the suffering of the biological organisms that allows for the betterment of various aspects of human life. Even within the eventizations that do take place regarding animal testing within artificial memory often center around animal rights groups being labeled as extremist and reactionary. Haraway argues that to ignore this suffering, as is often the case, is to deny forgiveness for the act, while a mitigation of that suffering places human progress based upon such experimentation within a morally acceptable realm of being.

So how can we this relate this concept of shared suffering to biocomics? To answer that question we must once more return to the works of comic book writer and animal activist Grant Morrison, this time engaging specifically with his text *WE3*, published in early 2005. *WE3* is the story of three universally recognizable companion species and their forced evolution into consumer product based upon industrial demand through a process of intense animal testing. Three pets, a dog, a cat, and a rabbit are kidnapped from their domestic lives by a US Government research and development branch and, through the use of cyborg enhancements, are fashioned into prototype biological weapons designated 1, 2, and 3 respectively. With limited verbal communication abilities and extremely lethal physical abilities, the three test subjects escape from their lab and attempt to find “home”, a safe haven that they remember only through emotional connection. The labeling of the animals within the narrative as domesticated companion species makes the series a heart-wrenching and bizarre combination of *Robocop* and *Homeward Bound*, touching upon issues of cyborg
interaction while not shying away from emotional trauma. In the miniseries, Morrison presents us with a literal interpretation of the future of biocapital, companion species, and the cyborg. Through his writing, he subtly reminds us of K-9 units, attack/guard dogs, the rising prevalence of unmanned military vehicles, etc. This clearly fits into the *modus operandi* that we witnessed in his handling of *Animal Man*. However, the extreme emotional impact of *WE3* suggests that Morrison is also dedicated to forcing his audience to participate in a form of Haraway’s shared suffering through an engagement with the emotional and physical trauma that these three animal characters experience. Here, narrative identification, I argue, forged in our exposure to the emotionally charged content of *WE3* can potentially function in the same way as Baba Joseph’s exposure to the biting flies of his experiments. The text then, serves simultaneously as a resistance to the levels of erasure which animal testing often experiences in the US industrialization of memory and as an affective conduit through which to engage in a mitigated, mediated form of the shared suffering for which Haraway argues.

**Final Thoughts**

Through a survey that allows us to examine both the labor power inherent in fan production and the politicized eventization of that production, we are able at this point in the project to tie a variety of lines of thought on assemblage identity and memory together. Like the resistive performance as discussed in relation to *Survival Research Labs* in Chapter 1, for instance, we can see through the critical response to retconning through biocomic characters like *Animal Man* a similar resistance to gate keeping and to
falsely legimating arguments around textual authenticity. Also, given the separation of performer and performance as discussed with regards to Reggie Watts use of looping performance technologies in Chapter 3, we are able here to extend a critical examination of the politicized manipulation and mutation of assemblage identity and memory through the commodity media product itself, and not simply through the act of production as seen thus far. The kind of labor power that Rajan invokes by way of Marx here takes on new meaning, in a new form of cultural currency that resides not only in the labor itself, but in the final product to be re-used or re-written. However, here, the biocapitalist valuation we have seen thus far functions within the cognitive, within the data stream of cultural software; hardware, whether the biocapitalist computing machine or the programmable, modifiable body itself, remain only as allegorical referents. Now the question then becomes, how does this biocapitalist cultural currency function and value differently than a technocapitalist cultural currency produced through hardware modding and the labor power that produces it? In the next chapter I turn specifically to hardware modding as an example of resistance to biocapitalist containment of assemblage identity and memory.
Chapter 5: Biocapital, Technocapital, and Ownership: Hardware’s role in Digital Identity Production and Authorship of Meaning

In 1989 a Japanese video game company named Tengen, an offshoot of Atari, went to war with Nintendo over a rights dispute regarding the smash hit videogame Tetris, which Nintendo eventually won. In retribution, the company reverse-engineered a lockout chip called the 10NES in the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), which prevented unlicensed third party companies from producing playable game cartridges for the console without Nintendo’s permission. With the key to the kingdom, so to speak, Tengen produced and self distributed over 20 games, including Tetris, within their own self-manufactured black game cartridge cases (the system’s “legitimate” cartridges were light grey), some of them Sega and Atari titles for which Nintendo itself couldn’t get the licenses. (Reeves 111-12) By the end of the year, Tengen had lost several copyright infringement cases to Nintendo, the company shut down, and the now illegal products were removed from shelves. However, in junk shops, garage sales, and collectors conventions around the country one can still find these black cartridges, serving as a reminder of the events that took place, and of the possibility of hardware hacking as a source of less legally restricted software.

While Tengen as an organization does not perhaps represent the politicized intentions of the modder or the modder community as seen thus far, the effects of its actions clearly fall under the category of recursive informational flows and the capacity of such flows to constitute community, identity, and memory. Software exclusivity, the fact that a vast majority of game titles are only available on specific systems and that the
software is unable to interface with any hardware system other than the one it was specifically designed for, is an element of console video game culture that has existed for the majority of the industry’s existence, and harkens back to the early days of “closed systems” proprietary computer technology which Christopher Kelty surveys in Two Bits. And while the possibility of playing Pac-Man on the NES may not seem like a remarkable occurrence as a stand-alone event, when read within the larger analysis offered here as a method of restricting biocapitalist flow in the interest of sustaining technocapitalistic growth (without Tengen, Pac-Man fans were forced to go to an arcade or purchase an Atari), it becomes a wholly more significant and politicized occurrence.

The importance of “availability” in response to biocapitalist research has already been touched upon in reference to Rajan’s exclusion from the kinds of research necessary to critically engage with ramifications of genomics work in chapter four. However, now, through Kelty’s survey of closed and opened systems as read in response to corporate modding like Tengen’s, we see the possibility of a similar availability informing technocapital by way of hardware. Therefore, if we are to understand biocapital and eventization as potentially creating problematic erasures as evidenced in the previous chapter, most specifically through a valuation of labor power tied to virtuosity and authenticity, how then does hardware, the technological apparatus, and technocapital specifically inform this potential for erasure or production of alternative masculine identity?

Monfort and Bogost’s 2009 Racing the Beam examines the ways in which hardware console platforms and proprietary software advances inform both the
videogame as media artifact and contextualized social production. In response to the multitude of critical analyses of narratological impact which these media artifacts can produce, they write, “…studies have seldom delved into the codes of these programs, and they have almost never investigated the platforms that are the basis of creative computing…Digital media researchers are starting to see that code is a way to learn more about how computers are used in culture…” (Bogost and Monfort 2). With this in mind, the duo attempt to look past the digital spaces and narrative meaning created by contemporary gameplay to examine the means by which early consoles (namely the Atari VCS) technologically produce the meaning and value. Here, I would like to consider the kinds of work being done here as an examination of technocapitalist value making. For example, the book’s title is a nod to the fact that the Atari VCS didn’t contain enough random access memory to allow for a frame buffer, and therefore created graphics in real time, essentially chasing the electron beam creating images in the television by “redrawing” the landscape from scratch as the player moved, rather than pulling from a memory cache. Within the kinds of limitations tied to hardware capability then, we return to Stiegler and retentional finitude, the concept that hardware cannot by its very nature contain all information, and therefore a process of eventization fills the gaps. Through hardware limitation then, we can see that technocapital orients itself around a cognitive virtuosity defined by the valuation of labor production and communal laws of good taste that are, in turn, defined by retentional finitude and eventization. Through this process, technocapital as a system can be argued to capture and contain the more radical transformations enabled in biocapital.
Montfort and Bogost’s text is insightful and necessary. Examining the means by which data processing console hardware works together with data code to create the digital spaces through which the virtual narrative space of a game takes place is largely absent from contemporary criticism. However, spring boarding from an argument which attempts to move past criticism that engages only with the social and individual productions of meaning (the biocapitalist productions of valuation as seen in Chapter 4), we can use *Racing the Beam* as a stepping stone from which to fully examine the ramifications of an intersection between biological and hardware components of the game. Digital gameplay, like any other form of digital performance or identity production, as we have seen thus far, in an inherently cyborgian relationship, and therefore must be included in the kinds of meaning being made, not in replacement of, but in *conjunction with*, the kinds of criticism that *Racing the Beam* engages with. Haraway illustrates this need clearly in *When Species Meet*, where she discusse “Jim’s Dog”, as we have seen in Chapter 4. However, while we have examined the nature of biocapitalist economics in that chapter, we have yet to examine the ramifications of biocapital within the context of the technocapital that Montfort and Bogost lay out. To what degree, in other words, do the biocapitalist structures of geek publics integrate with the technocapitalist structures of available hardware technology, and through this produce new forms of assemblage identity?

Montfort and Bogost understand the console platform as at least partially dictating narrative, arguing that, “In addition to allowing certain developments and precluding others, platforms also function in more subtle ways to encourage and discourage different
sorts of computer expression... Only the serious investigation of computing systems as specific machines can reveal the relationships between these systems and creativity, design, expression, and culture” (Montfort and Bogost 3). However, while such a statement intercedes in a way that importantly introduces hardware to the conversation of digital play, it also avoids the importance of the cultural implications of the ways in which meaning and value are produced in both technocapitalist and biocapitalist modes. For example, as already discussed, video game series Mass Effect 3’s narrative ending was rewritten because of fan outcry regarding the quality of the story’s multiple conclusions after three games worth of choice tree decision making led to three endings that were remarkably similar. However, when Bioware released a digital patch for the game expanding these endings, how did biocapital and technocapital inform the occurrence? In other words, to what degree did available technology (considering that “choice” in gameplay is often restricted to a binary choice tree that can only mimic actual decision making) both require the release of a game that cannot end narratologically with an infinite series of choices and simultaneously allow for the release of software that hid this weakness more clearly? To what degree did fan outcry both emerge from an expectation of certain hardware performance and a denial of retentional finitude via hardware? If we are able to understand politicized fan response here as the same kinds of “retconning” biocapital value makes of transforming bodies seen in Chapter 4, to what degree does the technocapitalist value of data as cognition we see addressed in Racing the Beam elide the larger issues of authorship, selfhood, and memory which make up assemblage identity?
This question rises in response to the various ideas of both ownership and authorship tied to experience within the modern cyborg body. Chapter Four’s *Animal Man* deals with this, as do more broad understandings of the relationship between corporatized and fan “modded” narrative. Of course, *Animal Man* sheds light on the complications of the exploitations of companion species beyond its internal narratological criticism of animal cruelty: the fact that Bucky Baker as a narratively embodied character is shown to suffer from the machinations of industrial demand stands in as a direct metaphor for the damage to animal bodies caused by unnecessary experimentation, and as an invocation of shared suffering if only in terms of identificatory affect arising in reading and viewing the narrative. One of the critical benefit in analyzing fictional character as metaphor for the suffering experienced at hands of the creator as controller is that, unlike in the case of canines which Haraway illustrates, the victims of historical revision in texts like *Animal Man* or Octavia Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* are able to voice their suffering. Another benefit, then, is the acknowledgement of a system of technocapital and hardware that greatly informs biocapital. In other words, technocapital attempts to contain the more radical value potential of biocapital helps us to create a process by which narrative identifications of assemblage identity can be understood in terms of shared suffering.

The anger and shock which these characters feel, when read in the right light, can give metaphorical voice to the animals of Haraway’s arguments, illuminating the kinds of emotional, physical, and historical damage caused by the kinds of social concerns which we have discussed thus far. Morrison even embodies the concept of shared suffering
itself when meeting with his creation, discussing his decision to kill Baker’s family, saying, “I told you about my cat Jamara. I took her to the vet every Tuesday and Thursday. I liquidized her food and fed her with a dropper. I prayed for her to get better… I’d have done anything to save her really. And yet there was a part of me- the part that observes and writes- rubbing its hands and saying, “Well, at least if she dies, I’ll be able to use it in Animal Man.” (Animal Man, issue 26) Baba Joseph interacts with his guinea pigs, sharing their experience, via a bridge of pain that is the biting flies in his experiments. Morrison interacts with Bucky via a bridge of emotional pain that he conducts through the death of his cat/Bucky’s family. However, while Morrison feels his pet’s pain, he also admits here that his is complicit with the very processes of biocapital that he is condemning, but that through an admission of this guilt he becomes able to narrativize it for cognitive apprehension, again illustrating the potential of work like biocomics to draw attention to systems of erasure.

Therefore, if we add Haraway’s conceptualization of Biocapital to the already existing conversation of Technocapital and hardware with which Monfort and Bogost are interacting, we find a new kind of differentiation that needs to take place. Drawing a line between software and hardware functions as a starting point, but where do the relevant players fall on the board? Cribbing from our interactions between Haraway and Hayles in Chapter 2, we can argue that the cognitive self aligns itself with software as the embodied self does with hardware. However, the importance of bodily memory as seen in Chapter 3 suggests that identity performance blurs the lines between these distinctions, as Foster’s Deathlok functions neither as bot or robot, but as a kind of…well, cyborg.
Therefore, this chapter attempts to extend concerns presented in *Racing the Beam* in an attempt to locate the problem of hardware’s place in identity production that does not erase the biological.

**Proprietary Technology, Corporate Ownership, and the Intellectual Outlaw**

In *Two Bits*, Christopher Kelty discusses the emergence and ramifications of the open/proprietary systems debate during the first American mass computer age of the 1970’s and 80’s. He gives real focus to the cultural context of origins of the operating systems he surveys (although he does so badly on occasion). Like Montfort and Bogost, Kelty also examines the limitations of hardware both through actual technological constraints and *technocapitalist* constraints. Referring to the need to create new definitions of terms in this emerging age of capitalist-inspired technological progress, Kelty states that, “…the opposite of open in this case (specifically, “open systems”) is not closed, but ‘proprietary’ - signaling the complicated imbrications of the technical, the legal, and the commercial”. (Kelty 143) Essentially, the open/proprietary debate stemmed from the attempts to standardize operating systems among a vast array of electronics producers who had, in Kelty’s words, “painted themselves into a corner” through their desire to lock customers into their products by keeping their technology completely proprietary (Kelty 145).

Attempts to combat this emerging problem became known as the “open systems” philosophy, and called for standardized operating systems, technological interfaces, and more. The movement which developed around this concept hoped for, “an open market in which it is possible to buy standardized things which are neither obscure nor secret, but
can be examined and judged-a ‘commodity’ market, where products have functions, where quality is comparable and forms the basis for vigorous competition” (Kelty 151). However UNIX, the most prominent standardized operating system created with open systems in mind, is a good illustration of what makes such a simple idea so complicated in execution. The corporate entity, by its very nature, eschews the concept of fair competition in favor of the compartmentalization of progress, and UNIX soon developed into multiple incarnations created by multiple companies, each of whom engaged in spirited public debate about the merits of its own version of the “standardized” product, and each of which was unable to interface with its contemporaries. As Kelty explains, “Figuring out the moral and technical order of open systems went haywire around 1986-88, when there were no fewer than four competing international standards, represented by huge consortia of computer manufacturers…” (Kelty 155).

Hardware and technological support has perhaps never been as influential on understandings of game design and play as has been the case in recent years with the development of Palmer Lucky and John Carmack’s Oculus Rift, an immersive media (sometimes more coarsely called “virtual reality”) headset display system. Game and hardware developers have been attempting to design a commercially viable headset display system to incorporate into videogame play for over 20 years, although most have either suffered from technological constraints (like the underwhelming Nintendo Virtual Boy) or have suffered from effects of an uncanny valley of movement response that cause severe motion sickness. However, the newest version of the Rift seems to be moving towards solving these problems, creating over a ninety-degree field of view in all
directions, and infrared motion sensors that eliminate many of the dissociative movements that have been found to be the largest culprits in creating the kinds of motion sickness that have plagued platform development. However, the system, which even up to two years before any attempt at a widespread release is being heralded as the onset of virtual reality gameplay, found itself entering the murky waters of authorship and control in March 2014, when Facebook announced its purchase of the company.

In “Some Simple Economics of Crowdfunding” by Agrawal, Catalini and Goldfarb, they note that successful crowd funding often “facilitate a hybrid approach and allow creators to bundle the sale of equity with other rewards they wish to offer (e.g. early access to products, limited-edition productions, recognition…” so that the creators can “lower their cost of capital by ‘selling’ goods that are otherwise difficult to trade in traditional markets for early-stage capital.” (Agrawal et al 71) The authors go so far as to argue that many participants in crowd funding are funding products simply for an early access to information about said products. (Agrewal et al 71) Therefore we see here a kind of value making that circulates around technocapital through informatics control as previously discussed. With companies such as Kickstarter, investors are not investing in a piece of ownership in a product or company. Instead, they are investing in a new form of cultural currency which produces authenticity through knowlege production, similarly to the valueing of virtuosity that we see in Chapter 1. However, with the announcement of Occulus Rift’s buyout by Facebook, we are able to more clearly examine the fragility of such valuing, as well as to illustrate the ways in which biocapital and technocapital work together to create identity value through produced objects.
Even excluding the kinds of concepts of fan ownership surveyed through Jenkins in earlier chapters of this project, ownership of the *Oculus Rift* is culturally complicated, as the majority of early backing for the device came via Kickstarter crowd sourcing. Recent news involving Facebook’s participation in the selling, mining, and various monetizing of personal data has served as a central conversation point in regards to the issue as well, with online communities vilifying the kinds of corporate control of data production and narrative they associate with the social media company in very similar ways to what we have seen in response to digital modding, brickling, always on games, etc., in Chapter One. However, interestingly, the largest area of contention in the wake of the buyout announcement was one of authenticity. *Oculus* founder Lucky released a statement shortly after the announcement, saying "Oculus continues to operate independently! We are going to remain as indie/developer/enthusiast friendly as we have always been, if not more so…I guarantee that you won't need to log into your Facebook account every time you wanna use the Oculus Rift." (Gorkey) *Minecraft* creator “Notch” (Marcus Pearsons), a vocal proponent of “indie” game development, immediately announced that he was ending any design work for the system following the buyout. The fear expressed by Lucky regarding shifting public perception of his product, and the reaction by figures like Notch towards the corporate buyout of what is generally understood as potentially transformative hardware thus directly shows the degree to which biocapital, premised on data inhering in bodies and their actions, informs technoculture's production of value through knowledge, and how the value making that each provide are interconnected or infolded in the same kinds of ways as the cognitive
and embodied selves discussed in earlier chapters. Therefore, if we return to the problematic masculinities surveyed in Chapter 1, we see in the disavowal of hardware systems via corporate ownership the reemergence of the intellectual outlaw identity. We also see, now, how this assemblage of masculine selfhood is divided, through the eventization privileging some ways of indexing and remembering bodies and actions over others, between biocapitalist and technocapitalist modes of transformation.

It is in the intersection above of hardware production and intellectual outlaw masculinity that we see the flaw in Monfort and Bogost’s work with *Chasing the Beam*, as the *Oculus Rift* becomes perhaps even more defined by the social and contextual identities functioning within the valuation systems of biocapital and technocapital previously identified than it is by the hardware modding and geek masculinities that birthed it. Therefore, we are able to identify a dissociation between the embodied and cognitive identities informing hardware and digital production that suggests that a critique that erases one or the other is only partial. In order to examine hardware then, as it functions both in response to fan pressure and recursive community production, we must not only examine the biocapitalist and technocapitalist means by which that hardware both is created and functions within a system of virtuoso authenticity, but we must read the cognitive/digital pressure response within an embodied/hardware retentional finitude in order to see the cyborg masculinity capable of being produced in its entirety.
Hacktivsm and Politicized Making: Dataflow’s Presence in the Production of Hardware

The restrictions that corporate manufacturers of these products are able to impose through the production of essentially “locked in” technologies deeply affect the consumer’s access to a free flow of information. In order to move forward with the cognitive/authentic/biocapitalist embodied/limited/technocapitalist binary laid out above, politicized resistance via these avenues needs to be examined. “Hacktivism” coined in Rita Raley’s Tactical Media will be used here to argue that a culture of hardware modders represents a kind of politicized resistance to these methods of corporate control that specifically targets the erasure of the embodied and/or the cognitive. Both data and hardware production function here then as argument, politically aligning identity with both sides of the binary, and therefore, illustrating the need for resistance to outside control of either.

In her survey of persuasive digital and non-digital productions of tactical media projects, Raley engages with what she calls “hacktivism” in reference to politicized digital actions intended to inform and influence media consumers, or at least to provide a critique of information control. And while this digital resistance reflects a somewhat different ideology of computing resistance than that of hardware modders which are to become the focus of this chapter, they also represent the “birth” of modern technological resistance to corporate and political restrictions of informational flow, and are therefore absolutely necessary to any understanding of such resistance.
Raley’s theory surrounding the ideological foundations of technical resistance introduces a heavily politicized motivational element through her introduction of “persuasive games” and synchronized “denial of service attacks”. Games involving border crossing attempts that cannot be won, or the intentional crashing of anti-immigration websites, while perhaps more specifically political than what we will encounter in the world of hardware modding, involve an element of ideologically fueled motivation for resistive production which I would argue is absolutely essential to hardware modding culture as well. In her description of the justifications for this kind of digital resistance, Raley explains, “Electronic civil disobedience is an extremely useful tool when dealing with a virtual organization that is only virtual.” When one’s targets are networked rather than physical and grounded, in other words, the battle has to be taken to the network”. (Raley 85) The militant language aesthetic inherent in such rhetoric is often absent from any kind of popular hardware modding to which we have been exposed thus far. However, when one reads these two cultures as relying upon the language of production itself, whether it is of media or material, as a vehicle by which to challenge restrictions to informational flow, we see that though their motivations may be distinct, the distribution systems of those motivations become remarkably similar. In simpler terms, both hackers and modders engage in a knowledge of the technical (be it code fluency or electronic proficiency) in order to resist informatic control based on corporate manipulation of that very technical, through the act of production.

The act of production as politicized is complicated again by Kelty’s construction of the “recursive public”, which he argues “geek” digital hacker communities definitively
qualify as. In his words, the recursive public is, “a public that is constituted by a shared
concern for maintaining the means of association through which they come together as a
public”. (Kelty28) We have discussed the recursive nature of hardware modding
communities by way of evangelical virtuous production performance already. However,
now we are able to see the recursive nature of bio and technocapitalist production through
the concerns regarding authenticity and ownership evidenced throughout this chapter.
When labor power produces value that circulates around one’s actions and productions
deciding their role in a public, that public becomes recursive through the sense that value
making requires members to make according to the “good taste” of that community.
Therefore, the biocapitalist value of authenticity and the technocapitalist value of “indie”
production, requires makers to produce in ways that support that recursive public directly
to maintain membership. Here then we find a system in which masculinity and identity
circumvent the hegemonic and become assemblaged not through virtuosity as we see
with performance production, but through the politicization of the product itself.
Therefore a geek-like desire for “open systems” of accessibility exists within both
communities that attempts to circumvent structures of restriction and control while
simultaneously acting in reverence toward the entity (be it code or hardware) being
utilized as the vehicle for that resistance.

To borrow briefly from Hiroki Azuma’s Japan’s Database Animals: “If
consumers, through their cumulative consumption of “small narratives”, get their hands
on the entirety of the program that is a “grand narrative”, they will freely manufacture
small “narratives” with their own hands.” (Azuma 30) Azuma is making the argument
that independent production based upon corporatized consumer products represents an attempt to continue independently of the restrictive narratives of the “official” product and to appropriate its narrative for individualized further evolution without destroying the existence of the original narrative form.\textsuperscript{xxiv} We can make the argument then that, while a culture of hardware modders does not constitute a politicized recursive public in the way Kelty describes, nor does it manufacture specific persuasive media in the way that Raley discusses, the act of production here is nonetheless highly ideological and relevant.

Therefore the issue at the heart of this project becomes as follows: Proprietary systems are preferable to open systems in the eyes of the corporate manufacturers as long as they are possible, as they allow a level of control of media and informational flow to/from its consumers that would otherwise be impossible to maintain. We have seen that to some degree hardware modding is a politicized response to that control in many of the same ways that digital resistance operates as a politicized response to the dissemination of misinformation according to Raley. Therefore, the question becomes, in light of the varied existences of these groups, how does the existence of the hardware modder complicate Kelty’s recursive public and Raley’s digital resistance when one accepts that the political rhetoric for each of these groups lies at least partially in the act of production? And to what degree do the intersections between the kinds of value making taking place within bio or technocapital inform the ways these productions are politicized?

A recent surprise phenomenon on a website called twitch.tv may inadvertently help us to begin to answer some of these questions. In February of 2014, the video
streaming site began something of a social experiment which utilized a Gameboy Advance emulator program called Visual Boy Advance to literally crowdsource a playthrough of the videogame Pokemon Red. The “twitchplay” version of the game asked volunteers on the website to enter character commands which were then achieved based on a voting system where any majority command took place. By the second day of gameplay, the game had 175,000 players, and the player character’s actions became increasingly erratic because of the actions of trolls or dissenting factions on the game’s message board. In response to this, Twitchplay instituted a democracy mode and anarchy mode. Anarchy mode played as the game traditionally had so far, but democracy mode allowed a veto system to be placed on actions before they were undertaken. A supermajority had to be achieved to switch modes at any time. With this we see several things- like the eventization and retconning discussed in Chapter 4, what is allowed to have happened here is dictated by a biocapitalist structure of value. However, it is also dictated by technological production itself, as hardware modification has created a digital space where this kind of digital communal valuing is allowed to take place.

However, the ramifications of Twitchplay Pokemon become even more interesting when one notices that communities have formed around the experience that extend beyond the original modders and coders, and even beyond the players. As the game became more popular, it began to draw a strong lurker audience of viewers who did not take part in command input and instead began to value meaning and identity in the experience narratologically. Blogs, subreddits, and 24 hour coverage on major gaming sites like Kotaku began to lead to new forms of meaning being placed on the actions of
Pokemon Red’s player character. Randomized checking of items within the game led the audience to notice that the player character was constantly looking at a useless item called a “helix fossil”, and message boards began to proclaim that the fossil was the deity of the “worshippers” of anarchy mode, which led to claims that another item, the dome fossil, was the deity of those “faithful” to democracy mode. When the player character, in anarchy mode, accidentally released his strongest pokemon in the game, losing them forever, blogs began calling the event “Bloody Sunday” and cursing the wrath of the Helix god. As gameplay continued then, a third form of labor value emerged from play. While twitchplay.tv created a modded and recoded system by which their input mechanic could occur, and the player community dictated further revisions to that mechanic through the labor of play itself, the watcher community imposed a narrative onto the action taking place, so that we reach a real example of crowd sourced labor and support in which ownership belongs to everyone and no one.
Coda: Pedagogical Implications and Final Thoughts

So how might this complex production of circulating data as labor value and as social relation inform digital humanities moving forward? How does this infolding between cognitive and embodied, biocapital and technocapital, inform the production of assemblage identities, as well as the cultural valuation of production and corporatist or resistant making that I have explored throughout this project? Looking to the classroom, we can see the importance of such work, especially as digital integration and hardware begin to more directly inform education. The pedagogical implementations of digital technology have been discussed in a variety of ways, but this frequently becomes a discussion of how traditional pedagogical procedures can become more conveniently accessible (online classrooms, digital office hours, etc.). However, there is a largely ignored degree to which digital production itself is helpful to composition, comprehension, and critical thinking in the classroom. Unfortunately, the primary roadblock to pedagogical digital production in curriculum centering on this production is the inaccessibility of coding as a means of that writing.

In an attempt to work around this problem, I have enacted a classroom project based around the free and universally available program Inform7. Inform7 is an interactive text based video game production space, designed to use English language “coding” to create digital spaces with which the audience can interact. The first attempt at this project involved individual students building games using a peer produced message board for guidance (within the digital classroom), and produced limited results, ending
with most students circulating around an “expert” with previous experience. Interestingly, on the classroom message boards, these sites of expertise began to mimic the sites of worship and performances of virtuosity I’ve described in this project in relation to Ben Heck and other modders like him. The failure of this attempt can be argued then to have arisen from the very kinds of gendered structures which we see in Chapter 1, here, introduced into the pedagogical context through insufficient critical re-framing as well as through students' own complex perspectives and desires.

However, the second attempt was designed as a group project and much more informed by critically guided classroom instruction. Students in groups of four posted their games and the code, and were asked to play the games designed by the three other groups before looking at the code which Inform7 translated into game play. This created an identifiable divide between author and audience, and allowed for a direct discussion of production, symbol, icon, and metaphor. The program uses binary logic (i.e. one thing cannot be two things) within an English language code to produce games. Giving “objects” (which are defined by description, portability, and/or their ability to contain other objects) names helped students understand the arbitrary nature of language and concepts like “simulacra.” For instance, a container is given size by the decoding audience: there is no difference between a “wallet” and a “bucket” unless the programmer provides a difference. Finally, “scenes” could be created which redefined game parameters in regards to any action taken between their beginning and conclusion. Through this process, students were encouraged to built game systems and narrative which rewarded puzzle building and dynamic play. For example, a sample game’s
source code I built to introduce students to these primary elements of building was as follows:

The White Room is a room. The description is “This is boring”.
The Blue Room is a room. The description is “This is boring and blue”.
The Green Room is a room.
The First Door is a door. It is north of the White Room and south of the Blue Room.
The First Door is locked.
The Second Door is a door. It is north of the Blue Room and south of the Green Room. The Second Door is locked.

The bucket of grease is a container. The bucket of grease is in the white room. The description is “Gross, but it looks like there is a key at the bottom”.
The First Key is an object. It unlocks the first door.
The First Key is in the Bucket of Grease.
When Slippery begins, say “You plunge your arms into the goo and come up with a greasy, shiny key. Woohoo!”.

The Second Key is an object. The Second Key unlocks the second door.
The second key is in the blue room. The description is “oooh, shiny!”.

Slippery is a scene. Slippery begins when player has the First Key.
Slippery ends when Player does not have the First Key.
Instead of taking the Second Key during Slippery, say “You’re hands are all greasy. It slips out of your hands”.
Win is a scene. Win begins when player has the First Key. Win ends when player is in the Green Room.
When Win ends, end the story finally saying “Congratulations!”.

The above system works, contains items that function in specific ways and containing a scene that requires players to drop the first key before they can take the second, integrating a minor puzzle into play. However, this source code also functions as a means by which to illustrate the importance of narrative and language to play. After examining the source code, students were asked to play this game, at which point they
began to comment that they didn’t know what the goal was, how to reach the next point, or why they were traversing rooms in the first place. These limitations in the source code provided allow students to see the importance of description and narrative. In inform 7 source code, anything put into quotations is understood by the game as narrative the player can see. Therefore while the player is not aware that a scene has begun that keeps them from picking up a key, any “notes” or narrative direction built into the game by the creators will help them to understand and therefore progress. Using language to define meaning, and illustrating the degree to which this takes place in everyday life and media consumption is a central benefit to this project. Further, illustrating the ways in which language in this context is determined by hardware constraints and software rules made clear to students the at once cognitive and embodied aspects of contemporary uses of digital tools.

Putting the student in the position of the producer allows the student to more clearly understand how creation takes place as well, especially within a limited system. In my second attempt with this project, students worked around coding limitations in ways that were unapparent to their intended audience when playing, essentially participating in a smaller version of Bogost and Montfort’s *Racing the Beam* and circumventing Stiegler’s retentional finitude. One group built a door called “the laptop”, locked it with “the flash drive” and then named each attached room a different URL address, creating the understanding among the audience of interacting with a spatially static computer, while the translating program understood what was happening as geographical movement and location. Another group had a player drink beer and then mimicked intoxication by
creating a scene which instantly transports the player to an identical room now described as “spinning and blurry” when the beer was drunk. Students who either built or played games were then able to more clearly engage in close reading and authorship when they were confronted with the digital illusion of reality, as well as understand the benefits and meaning production of metaphor. Because the project also asked students to provide their code to the class for inspection, these virtuous moves were made public after play, allowing students to show of the ways in which they circumvented technological limitation to produce a more engaging story.

These circumventions of technological limitation produced other interesting results. A large outcry after playing one particular game from males in my class was eventually discovered to have arisen because of the team’s inclusion of a mirror part way through the game. Because no object can function like a mirror in Inform7 coding, the group simply put a static object in one room, named it a mirror, and had its description include a description of the player’s reflection. The outcry arose from the fact that the team had decided the mirror would describe a female player, thereby implicitly gendering the character which players assembled and controlled. Male students almost unanimously argued that this gendering ruined the illusion, as they had assumed until that point that their virtual self traversing the space made of words was them, which led to a very productive discussion of gender identity and virtual space that informs the kinds of concerns which I analyze in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

This pedagogical work with language gaming, and the ways in which even simple questions of defining digital icons or game items as "gendered mirrors" informed the
range of assemblage identities I have surveyed in this dissertation. In its own right, it also allows for an illustration of the ways in which digital humanities critique can inform the pedagogical process in contemporary classroom environments concerned with transforming modes of literacy. Beyond those specific concerns, the project also is able to function in many ways as a microcosm of the kinds of identity production and memory or event construction afforded by, perhaps required by, processes of media and technological production as surveyed throughout this project. Through engaging with a digital interface both as authors and audiences, students found themselves producing assemblages of identity and meaning and memory, both through the final products they turned in at the end of class, but also through their processual performance of virtuosity as seen in their shared production of those products (illustrated in the class setting by students also uploading the code they wrote for the program). Interaction with identity assemblage in digital space to such a degree caused students to rewrite their prior ideas of materiality and even their own embodiment.

Like Spawn and Deathlok, like Jackson’s Patchwork Girl or Russ’s Jael, these students cannot escape issues of gendered or raced embodiment through the digital, but a literate interaction with that digital space allows them to rewrite what the signs which compromise that othering signify by revaluing them in a different context. The kinds of assemblage identity discussed throughout this project do not exist entirely in the digital or the material, but in fact require both to function. This assemblage identity production, whether produced from whole cloth or mutated from previous hegemonic bricolaged identity, occurs both through the act of production and through the product itself,
operating in a new economy of cultural currency. As we have seen, this economy can easily tip into new forms of disenfranchisement and othering, as we’ve seen through misuse of virtuosity and hierarchies of literacy, or even fan striation of narrative and character. However, this still emerging mode of assembling authorship, identity, and memory, which exists in the space between the cognitive and embodied, the digital and material, the software and the hardware, biocapital and technocapital, represents a significant and effective means of engagement by which to reclaim or redefine agency for othered bodies, for geeks of all stripes.


Cameron, James. *Avatar*. 20th Century Fox, 2010. [DVD]

Chappell, Ben. "Take a Little Trip with Me: Lowriding and the Poetics of Scale"


Fat, Ugly or Slutty. <fatuglyorslutty.com/about>


Heckendorn, Benjamin. www.benheck.com

Jackson, Shelley. *Patchwork Girl.* [CD ROM].


150


Smith, Craig. *Frotz 1.5.3*. IOS Program Application, 2011.


Tobias, James. “Going Native with Pandora’s (Tool) Box: Spiritual and Technological Conversions in James Cameron’s *Avatar*”.


However, in opposition to these kinds of claims, popular culture artifacts such as Lev Grossman's 2005 *Time Magazine* article "Geeks will Inherit the Earth" can act here as an historical marker for an identifiable and changing understanding within the dominant discourse of geek cultural relevance, value, and therefore power as Kelty understands it. Further complicating this discussion, as the epigraph above reminds us, publics marked as "Geek" still consider themselves (whether or not this remains the case) to be rooted in the alternative masculinity of the socially othered.

To compare Otaku directly to American geek cultures is most certainly painting with a broad brush, and ignores not only the obvious cultural distinctions between the two groups, but the levels of fan authorship and ownership, as well as the far more specific attention to aesthetic detail, that are attached to Otaku fandom. However to talk about the two groups as similar through their perception by the Dominant Discourse as engaging in an unusual level of knowledge and conversation with genre fiction seems acceptable here, and therefore any comparison between the two groups in reference to Azuma’s work should be read through this lens.

Obviously modern scholarship would dismiss the personification of Niccolo Machiavelli as presented in *The Jew of Malta* and as presented here as reductive. However, for the purposes of this project, I am far more interested in this intertextual pop cultural caricature of Machiavelli and how that informs these types of characters. See HBO’s recent *The Borgia*, or Ubisoft’s *Assassin's Creed II*, for other direct examples of this reduction.

Because of the slightly sociological characteristics of some aspects of this project, I will be employing information like that provided here, not as any kind of theoretical argument, but to better contextualize the changing social landscape in which this conversation is taking place.

Cultural examples of identity bricolage are not new to this project. In his essay, "Take a Little Trip With Me: Lowriding and the Poetics of Scale", Ben Chappell examines the class, race, and gender power structures which inform the American Lowriding tradition along similar lines. He argues that the practice is a form of bricolage, pulling from the Zoot Suit aesthetic, the 1960's Chicano muralist movement, and the architectural language of Californian and Mexican missions of the nineteenth century, among other examples, to produce a narrative of individuality and ethnic identity on the canvas of a mass produced technological commodity. In short, Chappell argues that lowrider culture "represents a hybrid urban folk culture in progress". (Chappell 103) Like the subcultural set which Ben Chappell examines, Hardware modding is highly patriarchal in organization, is centered around the individualization of mass produced technologies, and is reliant as much on the pedagogical dissemination of modes of production as on the act of production itself. However, equally important is the digital landscape in which this community functions and is circulated. As we have seen thus far in our discussion of Hayles and Haraway, the body and its connection to the cognitive self becomes not only a necessary aspect of the identity which is produced while engaging with the technological apparatus, but informs the cognitive self before the Posthuman transformation even begins. And, as we will see, while Modding communities are evangelical in their dissemination of making performances (commonly emerging through a display of virtuosity as we have already discussed), this almost exclusively informs a digital identity that attempts to erase the physical self.

Although there is a far greater distinction between hacking and modding than the divide between hardware and software respectively, I will continue to argue that modding is at least partially categorized by a politicized view of ownership inherent in the project and a large degree of virtuosity built into the manipulation of the hardware itself, both of which are present in this particular example, allowing me to argue that the term hardware hacking is mislabeled in this instance. The importance of digital performance and interaction even in relation to this actualized event should not go unnoticed here.
Returning briefly to Chappell, I would like to touch on his criticism of Lowrider community as excessively patriarchal. Chappell notes that not only are the means of dissemination (lowrider magazines, websites, etc.) responsible for a very noticeable commodification of the female body, the act of production itself is considered to be extremely masculinized. The space of the garage, the automobile, and the sources of aesthetic inspiration are almost exclusively male. Similarly hardware modding communities (unlike the majority of fan based communities online) is highly male dominated and reliant on a social hierarchy that is strongly patriarchal in nature.

Interestingly, Jenkins’ examines the direct relationship between fans and character/plot development which leads to fan productions such as fanzines and slash fiction, and acknowledges the feminized identity attached to such making. However, it is important to take note, as this chapter evolves, of the ways in which fan production becomes specifically gendered as well, and creates a kind of “garage” male masculinity attached to hardware manipulation while seemingly dismissing fan narrative maker communities as feminine and therefore inconsequential to the assemblage identity which the outlaw intellectual strives towards.

The backlash was so widely reported that the response then received its own backlash, causing Sarkeesian’s project to accumulated over $150,000 dollars, but the immediate reaction within the community begs the question as to where this hostility to a feminist scholarly perspective in gaming comes from?

I concede that the vocal contributors to this conversation that side with Baktanians may be the minority; that many established online communities are attempting to actively shed light on these dynamics or combat them directly; and that much critical scholarly work has long been concerned with analyzing them from a variety of perspectives. However, this does not reduce or counteract their presence within digital geek communities, nor their effects as examined by this project.

Cleary, a vocal resistance exists in response to the kinds of limiting and projected gendered othering which occurs in the spaces discussed above. Many groups attempt to do so by illustrating that these rhetorically violent positions at all, such as fatsuglyorslutty.com, which asks female gamers to post examples of extreme misogyny and reductive identity projection in online play with the tagline, “So you’re a girl who plays games? Let us know if you’re fat, slutty, or ugly!” in an attempt to ridicule these widespread categorizations and the overall positioning of the female gamer within online communities. [www.fatsuglyorslutty.com/about](http://www.fatsuglyorslutty.com/about) After G4 videogame pundit Aisha Tyler recieved widespread accusations regarding her authenticity as a “real fan” following a hosting job at a Ubisoft presentation in 2012, she posted an open letter to facebook.com commenting on the perceptions of gender and gaming identity that was widely reposted and discussed, mostly in productive ways. (G4.com/thefeed) Regardless, the vocal reaction to this positioning of biological gender with authenticity within online geek communities seems to do little to stem the tides of such reaction.

Gender identity production and agency has a strong literary history, and has always been tied up in erasure of embodiment, as we see in the redefinitions of characters such as Twelfth Night's Olivia. This gender erasure and blurring within the play’s narrative is clearly tied to notions of agency both physically and socially, most clearly through Viola/Cesario’s interactions with a smitten Olivia, which clearly place Olivia in a subservient role. However, this gaining of agency is also by definition defined through a devaluing of another, in this case Olivia, in a mimicry of the problematic alternative masculinities we see in Chapter 1 and in the survey of misogyny we have examined thus far.

For example, videogame play has historically had a problematic relationship with blackness that remains fairly shocking. Most recently, popular Elder Scrolls series games Oblivion and Morrowind have
come under scrutiny for the kinds of bonuses and penalties players receive in picking the race of their initial character. Redguard characters, narratively standing in for the Egyptian and African ethnicities of this fictional geography in these games, start the game with a significant deficiency in stats like Intelligence and Willpower which control magic proficiency, (severely limiting players’ ability to follow storylines involving the intellectual elite of the Mages Guild) and replacing these deficiencies with boosts to Strength, Speed, and Stamina. (Orona)

xiv In his text Full Metal Apache: Transactions between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America, Takayuki Tatsumi discusses similar racialized assemblage identity through the “Japonoid”, arguing that “…Just as the emperor has survived postwar life as a cyborg chimera, so too have the Japanese people all become cyborgs- what I refer to as ‘Japanoids’- transforming a once divine nation into a monstrously hybrid one.” (Tatsumi 25). Note the similarities to national citizenship of the body that Foster discusses, as well as the importance of racialized and nationalized bricolage that inform the body through historical trauma, also similarly to Foster.

xv It is important to note at this point that Clown is in no way connected to, nor does he even represent the purposes of, Shakespearean characters of the same name (the demon is named so because he actually dresses as an ugly demonic clown). In fact, in all of my research, I have found nothing to suggest that Spawn was knowingly or directly influenced by Othello in any way, which makes a comparative reading between these two remarkably similar texts all the more intriguing.

xvi In addition to his play with audiences’ subconscious attempts to oppress the body of the performer through the gaze, Reggie Watts is engaging through his comedy in a critique of technological reproducibility and the digital historical archive as concerns the role of the performance artist in a way which connects nicely to Jones’ work in Self/Identity. In response to video artist Pipilotti Rist, Jones argues for, “the potential for artists, who often work at the edges or against the grain of permissible or common ways of using technology in mass media contexts, to push technologies of visual representations to their limits and beyond- thus to probe and even push beyond the limits of the contemporary self.” (Jones 11) This paradox of technologies and their effects on the artistic world so heavily influences modern understandings of Art specifically because of the reproducibility which accompanies new technologies. Benjamin’s conceptualization of “the aura”, of the immediacy of the Original in a world of prints and recordings, has informed pop artists such as (perhaps most famously) Warhol in terms of understandings of imagery, but how does this critical intersection within reproducible media inform understandings of the perception of embodiment of the artist within his/her art?

xvii Later in the text, when referring to CritterCam, a camera apparatus as well as the title of a television show which follows the implementations and ramifications of combining wild animals and technological recording devices, she calls this entanglement an “infolding of flesh”. She defends her choice of label here saying, “I like the word infolding better than interface to suggest the dance of world-making encounters. What happens in the folds is what is important…Interfaces [on the other hand] are made out of interacting grappling devices.” (Haraway 249)

xviii Any understanding of the “birthing context” of the American comic book industry must first acknowledge the fact that the industry as an entity was formed in a primordial soup of lower and immigrant class illiteracy, copyright infringement, and intense economic interest. In his book, The Ten Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How it Changed America, David Hajdu discusses the origins of the genre in an American context, saying “The first mission of the funny pages was to convoy the lower classes…[In 1902] publisher Joseph Pulitzer decided to experiment with his populist New York World to increase its appeal to the public that did not read, at least not English…[he commissioned] what quickly became America’s first comics sensation and licensing bonanza, a cartoon series published as Hogan’s
Alley…” (Hadju 9) The series, about a group of adventurous immigrant children, was so successful in fact that only a few years after its initial publication, competing publisher William Randolph Hearst unabashedly transposed an exact recreation of the series, down to its title characters, into his own paper, the New York Journal. (Hadju 10-11) This birth of American comics initiated several trends that existed in the industry for decades: comic books were often written by and for America’s lowest common denominator in terms of both class status and literacy, establishing a foundation that was built mainly upon the work of Jewish and Italian immigrants. (Hadju 15-16) Also, and perhaps more importantly, mimicry and plagiarism ran rampant within the industry because of an intense economic need to provide what the consumer base wanted, because of the low success rate in protecting intellectual properties, and because of an uneducated consumer base which did not care where their product came from.

For instance, Commissioner Gordon, a main character in the series, was given a teenaged daughter named Barbara, so that she could become Batgirl and exist as a romantic foil for Robin. (Stewart 92) Additionally, when publishers realized that they did not have any immediately obvious romantic partners to pair with Bruce Wayne, Catwoman, who until this point had been a prostitute and thief of poor economic standing, was transformed into Selena Kyle, a rich white socialite and thrill-seeking cat-burglar. (Stewart 94) Like the eventization process which Stiegler describes, a series of birthing contexts here come together in the face of empirical truth (truth in the sense that these changes conflicted directly with hardcopy products that had already been publicly dispersed) to reorganize and re-categorize events in the name of industrial, consumer, social, and political interest.

Rebooting has been applied in immediately recognizable ways to film in recent years, with the resetting of the Star Trek universe and the multiple recreations of various superhero film franchises. However, the phenomenon was originally forged within superhero comic books, most notable with the 1960’s DC series Crisis on Two Earths and the previously mentioned 1980’s DC series Crisis on Infinite Earths. Important-to-note characteristics include a narrative functionality of that reboot within the story itself (i.e. the time travel of Spock within the Star Trek rebooted franchise) and the acknowledgement (often dismissively referred to as fan service by advocates of the new continuity) of the previous existence of that continuity without allowing it to interfere with contemporary narrative.

In the final issue of the series, Animal Man confronts Morrison within the page, sobbing over the death of his family and the depressing journey through the land of “unwritten” characters he has made to reach his creator. Similarly, in Lilith’s Brood, the last survivors of nuclear war, preserved by the genetic manipulating alien species the Oankali, express their anger and horror at the concept of their genetic revision.

Both personal and industrial computer systems eventually reached a level of acceptable intercommunication, but because of a bigger monster (Microsoft emerged during this period as a giant within the industry, and became so prevalent that manufacturers were forced to design around its products, despite their remaining highly proprietary) rather than through the voluntary surrender of control over the consumer by way of proprietary systems.

However, as (arguably) purely entertainment technology, video gaming hardware operates under none of the responsibilities or restrictions perceived to be inherent in the computer industry, and as the gaming industry becomes more and more fluent in the language of internetwork accessibility (especially with the last two generations of “big three” consoles: the Playstation, The Xbox, and the Nintendo Wii), its desire to continue operating under the business model of proprietary systems becomes all the more apparent.

Azuma makes this point in reference to Japanese anime fanboys: “Otaku” and the self production of, for instance, a new set of stickers based on a preexisting line of commercially distributed stickers which are in turn based on pop-cultural narrative media. However, despite the obvious differences of source material, the essential point is still highly relevant to this project.