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## “Woman has won”; “(Venus won)”: On Donna Haraway’s Goddess

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### Abstract

*The concluding words of Donna J. Haraway’s essay ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ read, “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess”. In this article, I aim to determine the extent to which that declaration implicates the question of the female body in representation—particularly, the goddess’s. Building on existing work that examines the female body in relation to the tradition of the nude in painting, I explore the possibility of assigning an identity to the goddess that Haraway chooses the cyborg over—specifically that of Venus, the mythological goddess of love and beauty, which I further read within the framework offered by the collaborative exchange between Haraway and the artist Lynn Randolph. In light of this, I position the cyborg and goddess within a certain vision of the relationship between women, nature and technology. In my conclusion, I call for a consideration of the possibility of a posthuman goddess.*

**Keywords:** *Cyborg; Goddess; Haraway; Venus; Female nude*

### Introduction: On “rather be[ing]”

In this article, I investigate the well-known impasse between the cyborg and the goddess that constitutes Donna J. Haraway’s provocative fantasy as articulated in the concluding words of her essay ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, namely “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (1991, 181). I would like to consider whether what is being implicated in Haraway’s declaration is an aesthetics of the female body in representation—a consideration that further brings into the picture the assumption that the goddess herself, side-lined, is, at least at her most direct, composed of female body. This is also a consideration that I hope to examine not in spite of, but alongside the analysis of Haraway’s position.

I am less interested in the modes of re-articulating Haraway’s pronouncement about the discourses around the cyborg<sup>2</sup>, than in the cult status of the cyborg as *the* mode that leaves little to no room for the possibility of “rather be[ing]” anyone or anything else. To me, the Manifesto’s conclusion suggests that the question of how a cyborg defines its limits or even constitutes itself as a cyborg is underpinned by a realm in which choice (or a lack thereof) is at play. It is in this sense that I ask if Haraway’s choice to rather be a cyborg than a goddess has since been given opportunity to lead outside itself and also outside the realm of posthumanism. Her declaration is emblematic of a concern with a certain something, and in the process of figuring out what that is, much will depend,

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<sup>2</sup> Over the years, the cyborg has served, of course, as a departure point for countless scores of critical readings, which would take several lifetimes to exhaust. However, for the particular perspective on the topic as developed in this paper, I would like to point out that I am especially indebted to M. Grebowicz and H. Merrick’s (2003) publication, *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway*.



I suspect, on what one assumes is at stake here. Perhaps this concerns less the question of what is to be gained by being a cyborg (about which much has been said) than what it is (if anything) that Haraway is bound to give up when taking her stand. I suggest that a return to the question of the goddess in posthumanism from a standpoint that takes into consideration the layered assemblages of visual and iconographic cues related to the images, simulacra, and representations of the female body, particularly in relation to the high art tradition of the nude, may constitute a significant moment of reflection on the posthumanist repercussions of the fate of the cyborg/goddess dynamic more broadly.

Can one particular goddess resist the foreclosure and subordination that is typically understood to be directed at her in Haraway’s statement? This article ponders on the possibility of assigning an identity to the goddess that Haraway chooses the cyborg over, specifically that of Venus, the mythological goddess of love and beauty, who, I argue, offers opportunities for consolidating a goddess ethos with the implications of Haraway’s “rather cyborg than goddess” problem.

### **Posthumanism**

Before I read the goddess in her capacity as this article’s main figuration, I would like to briefly outline certain elements of the posthuman, as identified by those who, I would argue, some to a greater degree than others, share a similar vision to that articulated by Haraway in the Manifesto. My argument revolves around the belief that there is a philosophical conundrum to the relationship between the cyborg and the goddess that enables said relationship to serve as a model for the analysis of ampler complexities in the trajectories and roles that the posthuman occupies in various domains of contemporary thinking, especially embodiment.

The term ‘posthuman’ has served as both noun and adjective whereby it has engaged with and defined various textual and cultural instances, as well as other related terms, such as ‘posthumanist’ and ‘posthumanism,’ to signal a hybridity that blurs the distinctions between the essentially human and the relatively nonhuman.<sup>3</sup> Such a task is itself aided by the varieties of spelling of posthuman and the prospect they present of a posthuman figuration’s relation with the human. For Elaine L. Graham, for instance, it is “post/human” that best expresses what the posthuman might be, at least in terminological terms, since it “suggest[s] a questioning both of the inevitability of a successor species and of there being any consensus surrounding the effects of technologies on the future of humanity [...] and both confounds but also holds up to scrutiny the terms on which the quintessentially human will be conceived” (2002, 11). Other ways of understanding the terminologies of and around the posthuman involve outlining the separability between anti-, non-, in- and post- human figurations and carry the implication that the fundamental process by which these modes of thinking come into being are informed by those factors that qualify the relationship with the human, namely what can be read as having been infused by a human existence and what cannot be read as such. Along these lines, Rosi Braidotti insists that “the discourses and representations of the non-human, the inhuman, the anti-human, the inhumane and the posthuman proliferate and overlap in our globalised, technologically mediated societies” (2013, 2).

However, despite the many discourses expressing unanimity regarding an understanding of the posthuman as generative force that makes possible the envisioning of alternative ways of being and seeing—overwhelmingly rooted in an awakened suspicion of the firm disciplinary boundaries of

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading on the variations in use of the terms ‘posthuman,’ ‘posthumanist,’ and ‘posthumanism,’ see B. Clarke & M. Rossini’s (2017) “Preface: Literature, Posthumanism, and the Posthuman” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*.



humanism—the posthuman remains a contested concept that is far from categorically exempt of the charges of slippage of meaning. “Although there may be some consensus that knowledge in the humanities and beyond needs urgently to take account of the more-than-human world and to redefine its concepts and methods beyond anthropocentrism,” Sherryl Vint writes, “precisely how these goals are best achieved remains a matter of considerable debate” (2020, 1).

In this light, the critical strain of posthumanism that, I would argue, is most relevant to the task of addressing the relationship between the cyborg and the goddess is one that also allows the possibility for thinking about the dynamics between the human and the posthuman in non-linear terms, that is, by rejecting the notion of the transformation of the former into the latter along a forward-moving trajectory of progression. As exemplified by Cary Wolfe’s definition, this type of posthumanism

[c]omes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world [...] But it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human [...] is increasingly impossible to ignore (2009, xv-xvi).

The preface to *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, edited by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, similarly states that there exists a significant, non-straightforward interface between the human and the posthuman: “If the limits of the human have always exercised both our thinking and our esthetic practices, then some aspects of what is now termed “posthumanism” and “the posthuman” go as far back as the beginning of the human itself” (2017, xiv–xv). Another example of a reading of the posthuman that views the subject as an exercise concerning retrospection—rather than as simply a forward-bound trajectory that is forever escaping any association with humanism—is Stefan Herbrechter’s ‘critical posthumanism.’ With specific reference to the possibility of assigning posthumanist accreditation to Shakespeare, Herbrechter argues that posthumanism can “work its way back” and make connections with “a perceived or real current shift away from a humanist knowledge paradigm”; thus, “the possible advent of a new ‘episteme’, in which the human again becomes a radically open category, for the promise of a postanthropocentric, posthumanist future” (2012, 15). Herbrechter further argues that “posthumanism does not imply a simple turning away, either from humanism or from theory, but rather a continued ‘working through’ or a ‘deconstruction’ of humanism for which something like theory is needed more than ever” (3). The modes of recognition employed by “posthumanisms,” he insists (further troubling the discrepancies between those modes by opting for the plural form, “posthumanisms”), cannot exist separately from humanist systems of knowledge—they must “reevaluate, reject, extend, rewrite many aspects of real or invented humanisms” (4).

Thus, it may prove insightful to ponder how far modes of thinking around the human are commensurable with posthumanism—a task that this article proposes to take on by reading the meeting between the goddess and the cyborg as one that speaks of past myths meeting contemporary technologies. In this sense, for those for whom the goddess cannot be extrapolated from its human affinities, there exists the possibility of viewing her relationship with the cyborg as signalling the stakes of thinking of the posthuman more broadly and, simultaneously, in a particular kind of relationship with the human.<sup>4</sup> If so, to what extent must the philosophical, aesthetic,

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<sup>4</sup> Haraway herself, relatively recently, updated her own position on ‘posthumanism,’ registering contempt for the term and suggesting it should be replaced by ‘compost.’ For further reading, see *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016).

political, and ethical ideals, among others, around the goddess, as understood both by Haraway and through the wider lens of a mythic worldview, be rehabilitated?

## Gender

Before moving to further questions regarding the cyborg/goddess dynamic, I feel that a disclaimer needs to be made with respect to certain positions that this article assumes in its treatment of gender and gendering—and the implications that this further carries apropos of the traditionally gendered facets of the goddess, nature and technology. My assessment of the posthumanist stakes around the relationship between the cyborg and the goddess is built on what is, arguably, the most extensive yet direct logic there is: I turn to familiar moves in commentaries on the female body in art history, roping in the figure of Venus, who, perhaps too conveniently, has had the familiarity of her femaleness overwhelmingly accentuated in her form as a nude in art.

Moreover, on the most basic of levels, this article will seem to manifest the female as both passive (such as in the form of inanimate nature) and submissive (when, for instance, perceiving the female body as a site and not an agent of technological manipulation); all too often, for my discussion, woman is to nature as the goddess is to the female as the cyborg is to technology. To clarify, this article overwhelmingly positions its cyborg and goddess within a certain vision of the relationship between women, nature, and technology—as well as motherhood and mothering—scripting their stance accordingly. It is not difficult to spot an inimical streak in this regard, especially if we are to agree with arguments such as Sadie Plant’s, regarding posthumanism’s dutiful ability to “undermine both the world view and the material reality of two thousand years of patriarchal control” (1996, 325). Alongside such an understanding of posthumanism’s purpose, the very implication that the goddess stands for a figural and representative sign of the posthuman may seem counterproductive. In other words, this article seems to be subscribing to the very same hegemonies that posthumanism itself so often feels apprehensive towards.

Thus, my decision to not only focus on the goddess but also read the female body as a recipient for certain perennial qualities belonging to the goddess, as well as assume the implicated gender to be female, may be criticised as essentialist. On a surface level, it suggests that a thorough investigation of the subject can afford to proceed on conceptualisations around bio-culture and heteronormativity—those very same conceptualisations through which essentialist assumptions have, historically, been made cogent and that Haraway herself openly renounces in the Manifesto. Haraway speaks of “the growing scandal of gender” (1991, 178) and insists that “[t]here is nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women” (180). Female embodiment, which “up till now (once upon a time),” she argues, “seemed to be given, organic, necessary,” gets to, thanks to the cyborg, sever its ties with the limited possibilities “proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman” (180). Haraway describes this rupture in terms of “the essence of woman [that] breaks up at the same moment that the networks of connection among people on the planet are unprecedentedly multiple, pregnant, complex” (160).

Meanwhile, Haraway, at will and on occasion, has taken the intimations of gender on and off the cyborg—sometimes even within the scope of a single argument. In one particular interview, conducted by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, Haraway directly addresses this issue:

Because the cyborg is a figure for whom gender is incredibly problematic; its sexualities are indeterminate in more ways than for gods and goddesses—whose sexualities are plenty indeterminate [...] it is a polychromatic girl [...] the cyborg is a bad girl, she is really not a



boy [and] hasn't really figured out a politics that makes the necessary articulations with the boys who are your allies. It's undone work (1991, 19-20).

In this light, “undone work” is also how I would like to understand not just the cyborg, as featured in Haraway's work and beyond, but also the goddess—as female-bodied; not as biological, essentialist, or fundamentalist, but as aware of the shortcomings of the work that scientific and mythic patterns have forced gender to do and the possibilities left in the work that certain genders have been forced not to do and, hence, are yet to do. In this sense, Haraway allows her cyborg to be female as well as to repudiate that femaleness if and whenever needs be and this, in turn, allows me to embrace her (and my own) figurations more broadly as female while remaining mindful of all the suspicions that surround the subject matter in question.

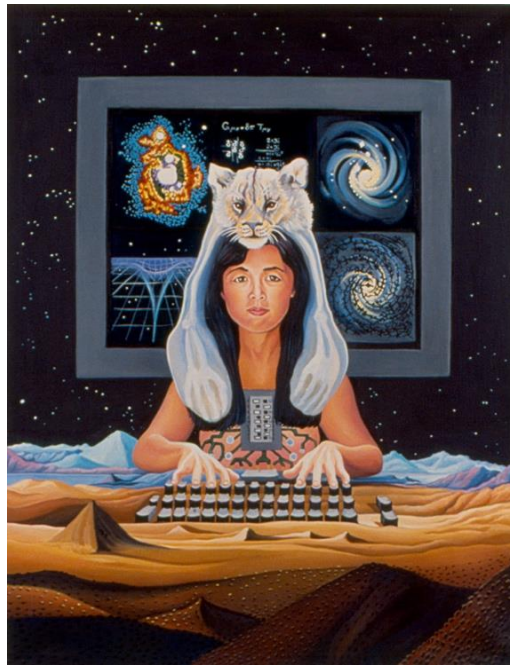
In this regard, I would like to ask, could a posthumanism that makes the case for a posthuman goddess indicate something other than the harmful reiteration of certain essentialisms? What I wish to suggest is that, in order to make a connection between this question and Haraway's convictions, the argument would also need to be formed outside the bounds of its mythical implications.

### “A game of tic-tac-toe”

When artist Lynn Randolph first read Haraway's Manifesto in 1989, she was (as she claimed in her essay on her relationship with Haraway, written years later) intrigued by Haraway's “getting up close, magnifying and focusing on science, technology and socialist-feminism while contesting the ‘old world order’” (2009, para. 1). Randolph, of her own accord, created a, what she called, “Cyborg painting” (para. 7; see also Figure 1) and sent it to Haraway who, in turn, ended up putting it on the cover of her book, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (in which the now-considered standard version of the Manifesto appears). In an essay of her own, Randolph describes the creation process of her painting as follows:

So I placed my human-computer/artist/writer/shaman/scientist in the center and on the horizon line of a new canvas. I put the DIP switches of the computer board on her chest as if it were a part of her dress. A giant keyboard sits in front of her and her hands are poised to play with the cosmos, words, games, images, and unlimited interactions and activities. She can do anything. The computer screen in the night sky offers examples. There are three images that graphically display different aspects of the same galaxy, using new high-technological imaging devices. Another panel exhibits a diagram of a gravity well. The central panel offers mathematical formulas, one from Einstein and the other a calculation found in chaos theory. In the same panel a game of tic-tac-toe has been played using the symbols for male and female and the woman has won. The foreground is a historical desert plain replete with pyramids, implying that the cyborg can roam across histories and civilizations and incorporate them into her life and work. Finally I placed the shamanic headdress of a white tigress spirit on her head and arms. The paws and limbs of the tigress reveal its skeleton. They both look directly at the viewer (2009, para. 6).

**Figure 1.** Randolph, L. (Artist). (1989). *Cyborg* [Painting]. Online painting portfolio.



*Image:* Lynn Randolph — Official Website: <http://www.lynnrandolph.com/painting-portfolio/?series=cyborgs-wonder-woman-techno-angels>

It is interesting to also think of the collaboration between Randolph and Haraway in such terms — as them both participating in a game in which “woman has won.” Of course, one may argue that this particular game is but one facet of an all-encompassing game that, for Haraway, is always comprised of patterns and ways of being that are irreducibly plural, meddlesome, and contradicting, as she states in a later work, *When Species Meet*:

[...] games in which those who are to be in the world are constituted in intra- and interaction [in which] the partners do not precede the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters (2008, 4).

Haraway makes what, I would argue, is one of her most discerning arguments regarding the interfacing aspects of the question of the game in a 1994 essay, ‘A Game of Cat’s Cradle’, where she uses the title game as a clever analogy for the multivalences of her project—a project that, much like the loop-tightening motion in the game she refers to, knots together several discourses and troubles “the established disorder of finished, deadly worlds” (1994, 66). Cat’s cradle “is both local and global, distributed and knotted together” and “is a wonderful game for demystifying notions like subject positions and fields of discourse [...] a mathematical game about complex, collaborative practices for making and passing on culturally interesting patterns” (70), Haraway explains. The game untangles, mimicks and produces new knowledges; “in a spiraling mimesis, cat’s cradle promises to be a less-deadly version for moral discourse, knowledge claims, and critical practice than heroic trials of strength” (71).

Going back to the part-woman, part-feline cyborg as visually imagined by Randolph, we may argue that it recalls another particular game—one of mythological history’s most well-known games, in fact: that concerning the Theban Sphinx, who encounters the young Oedipus and burdens him with





a riddle.<sup>5</sup> The cyborg even inhabits and looks over deserts and pyramids, “roam[ing] across histories and civilizations.” Here, however, the final outcome for the game that is being played does not belong to “the established disorder of finished, deadly worlds” (unlike, it may be argued, the Sphinx and Oedipus’s riddle game, in which, whatever the outcome, death must surely follow). The final answer is not, like in Oedipus’s case, ‘man’ but ‘woman,’ as is the final winner. Randolph, a woman, provides the answer of ‘woman’ as the winning solution; hence, as a woman, she also wins, to use a preposition that Haraway often utilises across her work, “with” the woman who is playing the tic-tac-toe game with the cyborg. The implications meander and build up; however, I would argue, one thing is clear: this signals that Randolph and Haraway’s relationship is not just collaborative but also marked by a mischievous sense of discursive collusion.

Further resonances become evident if we turn to an exhibition catalogue that accompanies Randolph’s 1998 exhibition, *Millennial Myths*, held at Arizona State University’s Art Museum, which includes an essay by Haraway, titled ‘Living Images: Conversations with Lynn Randolph’, where she offers her own explanation of Randolph’s painting:

Directing their gaze at the viewer, the eyes of both the woman and the white tigress shrouding her head and shoulders center the composition; The stylized DIP switches of the integrated circuit board on the human woman’s chest are devices that set the defaults in a form halfway between hard-wiring and software control—not unlike the X-ray-stripped, echoing, homologous bones of the feline paws and human hands; Beneath the woman’s fingers, a computer keyboard is jointed to the sandy desert-skeleton of the planet earth, a pyramid rising in the middle ground to her left. The spiraling skeleton of the Milky Way, our galaxy, appears on a screen behind the cyborg figure in three different graphic displays made possible by assorted high-technology visualizing apparatuses. The fourth square charts the gravity well of a black hole. Three tantalizing signs lace the space between the astronomical graphics: a tic-tac-toe game played with the European male and female astrological signs (Venus won) (1998, para. 4).

Her description tallies with Randolph’s—there is mention of the figure’s shamanic headdress in the form of a feline spirit, the black hole in the background, the tic-tac-toe game—except for one thing: the identification of who it is that has won the game. In Randolph, it is ‘woman’; in Haraway, it is ‘Venus’—an interchangeability of nomenclatures occurs, which may be read in several ways. Are woman and Venus, here, terminologically and conceptually speaking, synonyms? Or are they synecdochally related, marked by extended and overlapping meanings, defined by, to use a Harawayesque term, kinship? It could also be the case that writer and artist may here be in contradiction of one another. Alternately, the winner of this game may have been misidentified by either one of them, or by both. Or is the act of winning in this game, like in the case of cat’s cradle, itself a contested affair in which “[o]ne does not win [...] the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that” (1994, 70)?

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<sup>5</sup> According to legend, “man” is the answer to the Sphinx’s riddling question to Oedipus, meaning it permits philosophers to both bypass and reconcile any apparent contraries they may have to contend with in their practices. Thus, as the riddle’s solution for man, ‘man’ is offered as a common denomination of sorts—a readily and reliably tested criterion. There are, of course, deeper questions regarding the ambiguity of the use of ‘man’ as a neutral term—questions which posthumanism often readily takes on. There is also much to be said on the femaleness of the Sphinx in Greek mythology (where it appears as a beast with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a lioness, the wings of an eagle and a serpent’s tale), the unstable position that femaleness occupies in the generalised concept of human nature and the gendered complexities of posthumanism—all of which substantiate the philosophical undertones of the cyborg illustration on the front matter of *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*.

To unpack the implications of these observations for the Manifesto and for posthumanism, I suggest that I would need to look beyond Haraway and Randolph’s companionship—and at Venus, who is, of course, a goddess and, while I do not want to assume that she is the same goddess that Haraway rejects in the Manifesto, I would like to investigate what it would mean to consider that possibility.

## Venus

The goddess in her specificity as Venus also appears in the context of another collaboration between Haraway and Randolph, namely in a 1997 publication, *Modest Witness*.<sup>6</sup> The collaborative exchange happened between 1990 and 1996, a time during which the images and narratives of the book emerged. Here, both Haraway’s and Randolph’s visions of this particular goddess play a major role. Haraway speaks of Venus in relation to the form of the nude in art, as Randolph repurposes Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1485–1486) in a painting, complementing Haraway’s argument. All of this, coupled with the win that Haraway attributes to Venus in the game that she plays with Randolph’s cyborg, raises questions regarding her own predilection to favour the cyborg or, in this case, the loser of said game—a rooting for the underdog of sorts—notwithstanding the distinction that Haraway has of having mobilised the cyborg as, in Sharon N. Hamilton’s words, “the most prevalent, powerful and purloined metaphors of technoscience” (1998, 118).

It is also notable that in *Modest Witness*, Haraway turns to Anne Kelly’s 1992 cartoon interpretation of Michelangelo’s painting of the creation of Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. In Kelly’s cartoon, the position of Adam in Michelangelo’s original is occupied by that of a female nude, whose hand extends not toward God, but the keyboard of a computer, the display of which shows a foetus in its amniotic sac. “A female Adam, the young nude woman is in the position of the first man... the woman is in direct relation to the source of life itself” (1997, 176), Haraway explains. Naming the cartoon *Virtual Speculum* (Figure 2), Haraway further describes it as “a caricature in the potent political tradition of ‘literal’ reversals, which excavate the latent and implicit oppositions that made the original picture work” (176). Listing the “ancestors for Kelly’s first woman”—Dürer’s woman in *Draughtsman Drawing a Nude*; Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*; Diego Velázquez’s *Rokeby Venus*; Peter Paul Rubens’s *Venus at her Toilet*; and Edouard Manet’s *Olympia*—Haraway explains that Kelly’s nude “depends on the conventions in modern Western painting for drawing the recumbent nude female” (183). More significantly, she argues that in “potent zones of transformation, the reclining female nude seems suggestively common” (183).

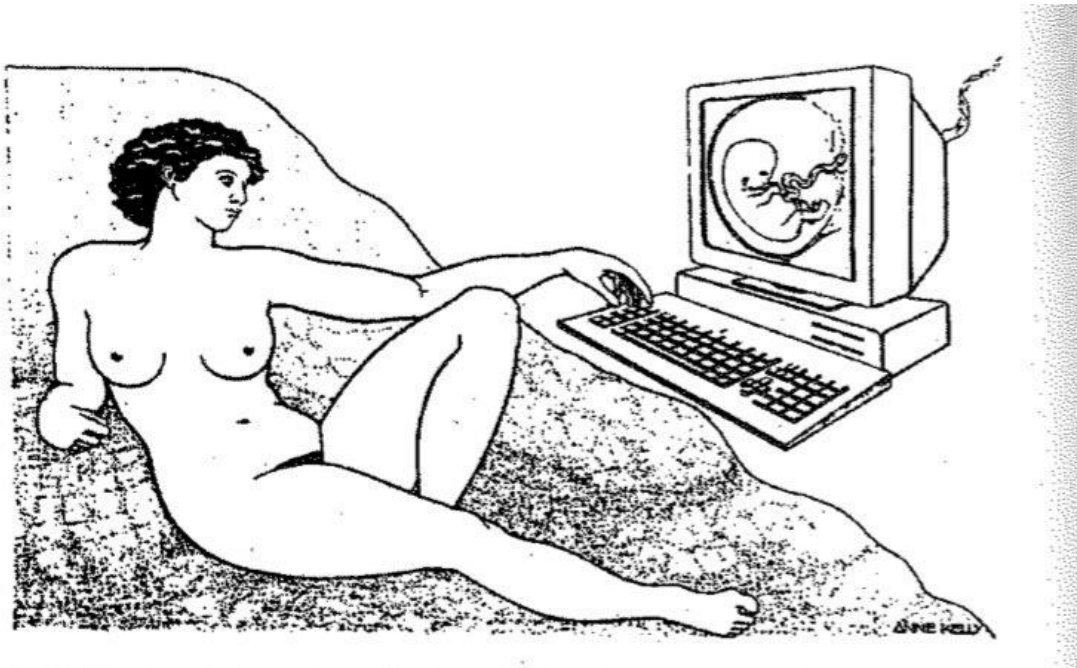
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<sup>6</sup> The book’s full title reads as an email address: *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, the baroque-ness of which Haraway recognises: “I am condemned to follow through with the consequences of my imagery” (1997, 127), she explains.





**Figure 2.** Kelly, A. (Artist). (1992). *Virtual Speculum* [Cartoon].



*Image.* As featured in *Modest Witness* (Haraway, 1997, 183)

Now, what is it exactly that “seems suggestively common” about the female nude? As a specific field in the study of art history, the female body may be said to be marked by wide-ranging meanings, values and assumptions. In its form as nude, it often remains caught up within the parameters of its own subject matter and methods, rarely venturing into terrains of representation beyond those of visual cultures, mainly of the painterly and sculptural type. In view of this, I would like to turn to an obvious but indispensable point of reference: Kenneth Clark’s *The Nude* (1958). I argue that the academic prevalence of Clark’s study is a significant testament to the unshakeability of certain critical premises, specifically in relation to how critical accounts of the female body in representation have fossilised the nude as the ultimate form of the body in representation.

In *The Nude*, Clark offers a historical overview of the human body as a pivotal force within the area of the plastic arts. Clark’s argument revolves around the ways in which “the naked body has been given in memorable shapes by the wish to communicate certain ideas or states of feeling” (1958, 335). For Clark, there has been a common tendency among artists, across the epochs, to “[feel] that [the naked body] could be given shape that was good in itself” and for many of whom this corresponded to finding “the highest common factor of significant form” (355)—a form that is, he further argues, commensurate with the Renaissance’s postulations around the Vitruvian Man. Clark explains that, in pursuit of such aims, “they abandoned, of course, the Platonic fancy that Godlike man must conform to a mathematically perfect figure” (355). When it comes to modern art, Clark writes, the nude becomes more explicitly viewed as an analogy of the body rather than simply as representation, thus linking the body “to all structures that have become part of our imaginative experience” (357). Furthermore, the qualities between the “balanced, prosperous and confident” (1) nude and the unruliness of the spectre of its negative other, that is, in this case, construed as “the naked,” are played out as stemming from an aesthetic tension between acts of de-formation and re-

formation; the naked leaves the body in its pre-aesthetic transformation state and the nude, for a want of a better term, clothes the body in art and, hence, renders it into the perfect subject. The naked and the nude are neatly differentiated through a process of transfiguration that metamorphoses the disorderly corporeal matter of the former into the ideal unity of the latter. This perpetuates a tension between the naked body as an unmediated residuum of anatomy and physiology and the nude as an idealised form, Clark argues. Hence, the nude is not a body but a set of conventions making up a body: “not the subject of art, but a form of art” (3).

It is curious to note that, despite resolving the matter/form dichotomy through an understanding of the male body as always already construed as pure form,<sup>7</sup> Clark places the stakes of his argument (in terms of the challenges it presents to fine art connoisseurship and broader cultural discourse) on the side of the form that the female body takes as nude. The legitimisation of the aesthetic configuration of the female nude is, for Clark, one of the most prominent and effective exercises of the classical high art tradition at refining and constraining the boundaries of the female body. In this regard, Clark goes to great lengths to highlight a type of unity and integrity of art that is contingent on the controlled degree of physicality that the female nude is allowed to constitute. The exercise of retracing the process by which, in Western modes of representation, the female body acquires the status as a subject of art is presented in *The Nude* as running parallel to the history of the definition and regulation of obscenity. The word “nude,” in this sense, presents the “educated usage [without an] uncomfortable overtone”—as opposed to the “embarrassment” that the condition of the “naked” implies (1958, 1).<sup>8</sup>

For the sake of this article’s argument especially, it is interesting to highlight that Clark exemplifies the workings of the nude through his discussion of the “Capitoline Venus”: “The Capitoline is posing. Herself self-conscious, she is the product of self-conscious art” (1958, 76). This pose, mediated through the arms that attempt to cover the body, he likens to a “sheath,” thus emphasising that “the transformation of the female body into the female nude is a mere act of regulation” (79). Clark’s binary logic extends to the contextualisation of his twofold definition of the female nude within the Platonic classification of the two distinct Venuses, namely the Celestial and the Earthly. The first type, daughter of Uranus, is described as belonging to an immaterial dimension and, through her status as motherless and matter-less, symbolises a beauty steeped in divinity, inviting a contemplation that ultimately translates to a transformative form of love that is universal. The Earthly Venus or, as termed by Plato, *Venus Vulgaris*, on the other hand, is composed of corporeal matter. The Platonic understanding of the two oppositely positioned figures of Venus is compromised by Clark’s suggestion that the vulgar and the earthly must undergo artistic transfiguration, be subjected to, and disciplined by form:

It is the justification of the female nude. Since the earliest times the obsessive, unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images, and to give these images a form by

<sup>7</sup> Given this paper’s focus on a mythological deity in representation, it is of relevance to see how, for Clark, the regulation of the body, which, by extension, implicates a regulation of sensory and organic perception, reaches its apotheosis in “the idea of male beauty based on harmony, clarity and tranquil authority... most shortly conveyed by the word *Apollo*” (1958, 364).

<sup>8</sup> For further reading on Clark’s understanding of the nude, see Lynda Nead’s *The Female Nude* (1992). Taking to task Clark’s thesis, Nead insists that the nude is not just any form of art but “more than any other subject the female nude connotes ‘Art’” (1). Throughout her book, Nead argues that any attempt at gaining access to a much wider domain of issues, more significant and consequential in scope, concerning the female body, primarily necessitates the recognition of the fact that, more than any other motif in art history, it is the female nude that exhibits some of the strongest connotations with “Art”—so much so, Nead claims, that the two—the female nude and Art—are often regarded as self-same.



which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial has been one of the recurring aims of European art (64).

In light of this, I turn to Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and Randolph's interpretation of it, titled *Venus* (which also appears in *Modest Witness*), to examine the question of nudity and nakedness alongside the goddess in Haraway's writing.

Recently, Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* was found to be one of ten paintings that were perceived as "beautiful" during brain-scanning experiments by the neurobiologists Tomohiro Ishizu and Semir Zeki—a study that demonstrated a distinct response from the part of the brain associated with "the experience of pleasure and reward, whether real or imagined, and its expectation" and led the scientists to formulate a "brain-based theory of beauty" (cited in DeBenedetti, et al, 2016, 15). I propose that if the aesthetic ciphers encoded into Botticelli's Venus are to be forced to address urgent posthuman concerns, they are bound to do so in tandem with the perpetual reiterations that surround the painting, the seemingly endless opportunities for the artistic exploration of gender and sexuality that it offers, as well as its status as a universal symbol for Western painting—"a brand that stands for the Italian Renaissance in the broadest sense," as Stefan Weppelmann (2016) writes. Can, in posthumanism, Venus's archetypal status still embody a paradigm of beauty? Looked at from a strictly posthumanist standpoint, does the painting in question still trigger a critique of the relevance of the original; make one immediately think of Botticelli's original and not, for example, merely of a woman with flowing hair?

### A leaking goddess

In its own right, Randolph's painting, *Venus* (Figure 3), may be described as a subversive yet still significantly stylised nude. *Venus* is part of Randolph's *Ilusas* or "deluded women" series, created in the early 1990s, which Randolph herself calls "representations of women who are out of bounds" (2009, para. 16). The project was born, she explains, as a result of her interest in a crossover between female sexuality, pornography, and spirituality. Out of her "reading, thinking, and visioning" (para. 17), Venus emerged, the image of which she based on the likeness of a friend of hers who happened to be pregnant at the time. Randolph issued the following interpretation (which Haraway includes in *Modest Witness*) of the figure in her *Venus* painting:

She is not a goddess in the classical sense of a contained figure. She is an unruly woman, actively making a spectacle of herself, queering Botticelli, leaking, projecting, shooting milk, transgressing the boundaries of her body. Botticelli's shell has been turned upside down, and it is raining. Hundreds of years have passed since Botticelli painted his Venus and we are still engaged in a struggle for interpretive power over our bodies in a society where they are marked as a battleground by the church and state in legal and medical skirmishes (para. 17).

**Figure 3.** Randolph, L. (Artist). (1997). *Venus* [Painting]. Online painting portfolio.



*Image.* Lynn Randolph — Official Website: <http://www.lynnrandolph.com/painting-portfolio/?series=ilusas>

Randolph’s *Venus* was included in *Modest Witness*, where Haraway further described it as a “formal feminist intervention into the conventions of the female nude and her associated secretions and tools [...] scrutinizing the standard line between pornography and art” (1997, 184). In an aforementioned essay that Haraway later wrote for an exhibition of Randolph’s work, Haraway explains that, in *Modest Witness*, she used Randolph’s *Venus* “to frame a double argument about the female body in technoscientific visual culture” (1998, para. 15).

In this instance, one may conclude that Haraway seems to be expressing a genuine sense of enthusiasm regarding the creative and political potentialities surrounding the figure of the goddess, as she earnestly places the conceptual stakes of her argument on the prospect of a goddess’s unscrupulous, unruly, and uncontained body and, more importantly, on that body’s power to appropriate and shatter the conventions of modest witnessing. Had Haraway, over a decade earlier, then, been thinking of a *Venus* (or any other goddess for that matter) in her pre-Randolph-esque, non-leaking form—nude, self-contained, and accommodating to the contemplative mode of viewing that Clark insists on—when she declared that she would rather not be a goddess? Would Haraway consider being a goddess if all goddesses, everywhere and always, looked like Randolph’s? And, finally, which or whose *Venus* is Haraway’s declared winner in the game against the cyborg on the front matter of *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*?



I would like to highlight that, before we could even begin to dissect the potential with which a leaking Venus is imbued, we would need to understand why and to whom her leaking body would even be considered an issue in the first place. It is also important to keep in mind that both Haraway and Randolph place their female figures, if not directly within the paradigm of the nude, in conversation with it. Taking all this back to a goddess who has been elided at the expense of the cyborg, the situation may be forced to the point of comprise, where the female body and its frames (as perceived by Clark) are to be understood as overlapping at their designated contours. Thus, I would like to consider whether the key to an accurate reading of these Venuses (positioned as they are, in Haraway's universe, in a relational position to the cyborg) is one that entails a comprehension of the philosophical trappings of leaky bodies and the potential they manifest to resist us.

I suggest that this subject may be addressed by turning to Luce Irigaray's treatment of the relationship between leakiness and feminine bodies, where flowing excesses and amniotic leakages mark and maintain a woman's sexuate economy (as different from the masculine one). In "The 'Mechanics' of Fluids" (Irigaray, 1985), Irigaray describes women as "flowing, fluctuating" (112) both figuratively, due to how they are always defying solidification within a masculine paradigm, and literally, due to their gestational and genital mucosity. In a later work, Irigaray highlights the importance of a type of fluidity that should be manifest in the language that women use to speak about their motherly identity: "It is necessary for us to discover and assert that we are always mothers once we are women" (Irigaray, 1991, 43). This, I would argue, further ties with another view of Irigaray's on how imperative it is to renew the broken bonds between mother and daughter: "Women must love one another both as mothers, with a maternal love, and as daughters, with a filial love. *Both of them* (emphasis in original)" (Irigaray, 1993, 105). The dual identities that woman holds as both mother and daughter are marked by a fluidity of creativity and communication; thus, they make up "a female whole that, furthermore, is not closed off [...] constituting [...] the sign of infinity [...] achieving through their relations with each other, a path into infinity that is always open, *in-finite* (emphasis in original)" (105). Indeed, once feminist theory starts to tackle the binary conceptualisations of form and formlessness; integrity and amorphousness; self and other, the potential for transgression comes to be seen in the transitional states that belong to neither one given category nor another.

On the question of a body's bounds more broadly, Julia Kristeva argues that an individual's recognition of the impossibility of a permanently fixed identity may be manifested in the experience of abjection. Her definition of abjection—having since been well-rehearsed across various fields of the academe, especially those related to body studies—embraces the idea of a space that, when opened up between subject and object, reconfigures itself as a site of desire and danger. Kristeva writes, "It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system order [...] [what] does not respect borders, position, rules [...] [the] in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1980, trans. 1982, 4). Along similar lines, Mary Douglas, in *Purity and Danger* (2001), insists, "All margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered" (122). Douglas differentiates between the sacred, the clean and the unclean and argues that "any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" (122). Marked by a culturally- and politically-conscious sentiment, her argument goes,

Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces, or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body [...]. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. There is no reason



to assume any primacy for the individual’s attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience (122).

Of course, the question of whether the framing of women as inherently transgressive is generalisable remains. More recent feminism has since attempted to deconstruct the historically relative and, to a degree, naturalising and idealising critical discourse of schools such as Irigaray’s and Kristeva’s. However, notwithstanding the representational context and the indisputably limiting circumstances of the binary conceptualisations that such theories around the female body necessarily come along with, there have also been feminist efforts to read beyond the easily applicable idea that a woman’s relationship with nature might only serve to be exploited in the name of legitimising a society’s gender regimes—regimes which are especially evident in the relation to the gendered mythic metaphors surrounding the nature/science divide. Evelyn Fox Keller, for instance, argues that scientific discourse “left the identification of women with nature ambiguously intact” (1992, 68), but she also insists that it is precisely due to such a scenario that men feel threatened by female bodies “simply by virtue of the fact that they articulate a boundary that excludes them” (cited in Kember, 2003, 25). Relatedly, we find an understanding of the female body’s connivance with nature as arousing suspicion in the male warrior-scientist in Sarah Kember’s argument regarding the fact that “the secrets of the female body of nature have been threatening and/or alluring to men” and how this has “simultaneously provided the irreducible ground of resistance to the final mechanization of nature”; thus, ensuring that “[a]s long as the generation of life [...] remained beyond our grasp, both women and nature would retain some of their/its sense of residual potency” (2003, 25).

Construed in these terms, such an understanding of the female body can be further notionalised, I would argue, in accordance with Judith Butler’s politics of sex. For Butler, there exists “a constitutive outside to the subjected, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (1993, 3). What is materialised, in Butler’s view, is “the constituted outside to the domain of the subject”, designating “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life that make up “the site of dreadful identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life” (1993, 3). Hence, Butler may be said to be hinting at how a disruptive other that forms at the margins of identificatory practices can turn a system’s regulations against itself, producing the ultimate form of threat:

[T]he materialization of a given sex will centrally concern the regulation of identificatory practices such that the identification with the abjection of sex will be persistently disavowed... and yet, this disavowed abjection will threaten to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject is in a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control (1993, 3).

Taking this back to and considering it alongside both Fox Keller’s and Kember’s arguments, it may be said that it is precisely because of the persistent identification of the relationship between woman and nature as charged with a sexuality—the secret of the generation of life being inaccessible to the male scientist whose role echoes that of the male hero on a quest in myth<sup>9</sup>—that the materialisation of the female as a leaking goddess yields a threat. To connect this with the problem of an excess

<sup>9</sup> For further reading that connects the quest of the male hero in mythic contexts to the question of gender in broader discourses around the relationship between science and nature, see T. Balinisteanu (2007). Balinisteanu writes, “Warrior myths have been seen as associating women with nature and sin and men with spirit and righteousness in order to justify the necessity for male leadership and guidance toward salvation” (2007, 421). According to the terms of this crusade, “women are still the abject sinners, symbols of landscapes men must stake a claim for; the guilty sorceresses impeding the masculine quest for the holy grail of science” (421).





that cannot be contained, we may further turn to Butler's views of legitimate subjects as being formed through acts of repudiation: "the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human,' the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable" (1993, 8). Butler writes,

The forming of a subject requires an identification with the normative phantasm of "sex," and this identification takes place through a repudiation that produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge. This is a repudiation that creates the valence of 'abjection' and its status for the subject as a threatening spectre (3).

This type of scenario also recalls Stacey Alaimo's provocative analysis of the material power she recognises in toxic bodies, where she argues that we must "turn back to feminist theory, thinking through toxic bodies allows us to reimagine human corporeality, and materiality itself" (2008, 261). According to Alaimo, discourses around toxic matter challenge the persistent dualisms that inform the analytical tools and ontology of the anthropocentric subject and, hence, share with posthumanism a necessary critical engagement with the distributed effects of late capitalism and climate change on material bodies and conditions. On this note, Alaimo insists,

Toxic bodies are certainly not essentialist, since they are volatile, emergent, and continually evolving, in and of 'themselves,' but also as they encounter different sorts of chemicals as they move from neighborhoods or jobs, or as they otherwise encounter various products or pollutants. These bodies are certainly post-Humanist, not merely because their borders are exceedingly leaky, but because even one's own putatively 'individual' experience and understanding of one's body is mediated by science, medicine, epidemiology, and the swirl of subcultures, organizations, Web sites, and magazines devoted to exposing dangers and cultivating alternative and oppositional practices and pleasures.

Although they are not something to celebrate, toxic bodies may help lead feminist theory out of the false dilemma of having to choose between a romanticized valorization of bodies and natures or an anti-essentialist flight from the grounds of our being (2008, 262).

Here, we find that, as we react with horror, aversion, and avoidance to exceedingly leaky bodies, these bodies manifest the potential to resist us. While there is much to be said about such a discussion of the potentialities around the materialisation of a given sex, for the purposes of this article's argument, it is significant to recall how an understanding of superfluous abject matter as threatening to the neatness of boundaries is also something which Haraway herself, as noted earlier, acknowledges in her reading of Randolph's Venus.

Overall, despite their obvious and unwieldy heterodoxies, discourses around the question of excess and abjection commonly address how meaning is generated and regulated at the boundaries of forms and categories. Taking all this back to Clark, I would argue that the process by which the transformation from the female body to the nude occurs can also be reversely retraced in the name of a critical trajectory that aims to shift the focus from the particularities of the formalised female nude back to the fluid female body and, eventually, to the wider issue of embodiment at large. As Irigaray also tells us, "the 'mechanics' of fluids" are to be reckoned with as "women diffuse themselves according to modalities scarcely compatible with the framework of the ruling symbolics" despite being held back "from jamming the works of the theoretical machine" (1985, 106–7). In light of this, the female nude can be read as a formalist integrity that contains the potential to disrupt

the ideal of the fixed form from within the fixity of that form itself. A leaking, unfixed female body occasions the instigation of a crisis from within the very confines that outline classical ideals since it has, at its disposal, an assured discernment of the procedures and protocols of its tradition. This leakiness, in terms of both the attraction and repulsion that it triggers in the subject, has radical potential to generate schemes of immense power insofar as it simultaneously engages with and challenges the very legacy of the Western high art tradition that it participates in. In this regard, the idea of non-contained matter that seeks to break the integrity of form (in its capacity as a testimony to the aesthetic of the nude) offers a strategy for a course of action by which a progressive aesthetic may materialise.

Venus’s relevance in relation to everything discussed so far is manifold. For one, the contrast between the scene of Venus’s Botticellian birth, with its enduring allure, and posthumanism’s slimy and oozing births of its own monsters is a little too recognisable—itself too excessive in its stark differences: Victor Frankenstein’s creature, with insides that seep out of sutures; countless births in science fiction film, especially of the nineteen-eighties and -nineties; H. R. Giger’s egg-laying alien queens in James Cameron’s *Aliens*; the scientist’s own rebirth as his own hybrid creation in David Cronenberg’s *The Fly*; and so many other instances of monstrous body horror, invasion and pollution, depicting the fears of its times, what Susan Sontag would describe as symptomatic of “AIDS and its Metaphors” (Sontag, 2013); and so on. The coming into being of the monstrous, as a narrative through which posthumanism has defamiliarised our birth, has also, to recontextualise Irigaray’s earlier highlighted theory regarding the sexual difference and power implicated in the relationship between woman and motherhood, framed the philosophical trappings of the question of natality.

Venus’s flesh itself, in its moment of birth, within and beyond the Botticellian worldview, signals a kind of hyper-materiality that signals the obsession with the codification of the idealised female form. A kind of gross matter that makes up her body marks the goddess’s quintessence from her very genesis. Suffice it to recall that the mythological account of the birth of Venus, as narrated by Hesiod, describes her as born of matter pertaining to Ouranos’s castrated genitals that were cast into the sea. Unsurprisingly, this act of male castration, with its violent bodily and symbolic fragmentation, has been widely read as a furiously metaphoric and theoretical sign, especially in the years around and following the mid-nineteenth century, when, as Jennifer Shaw explains, scientific studies determined that female bodies were not a “defective version of men’s” (2000, 95), only biologically distinct. As such, the female body suddenly came to represent a power in difference. Shaw explains that the goddess, Venus, born of the marriage between the remains of male castration and the “unceasingly productive and uncontrollable sea” (94), has since been fashioned as a palimpsest upon which the anxieties surrounding the primordial fecundity and sexuality of women can be either projected or disavowed. She regards this particular kind of essence of female sexuality as evidently detectable in the various depictions of the figure of Venus as a nude through history:

A goddess of love, she encompassed that which was most threatening because most unrepresentable—sexuality, productivity and desire [...] Idealising the female body to make a successful image of Venus meant transforming it—elevating it to repress and contain these associations (90).

In related terms, posthumanism also necessitates a consideration of how we otherise, repudiate, recuperate, and deconstruct nature as a life force. With the question of motherhood in mind, I would like to conclude my discussion by briefly looking at how this connects to the way Haraway



situates her earlier mentioned critique of Kelly's cartoon alongside Swedish biomedical photographer Lennart Nilsson's photo of an intrauterine eighteen-week-old foetus, which featured on the cover of an April 1965 issue of *Life Magazine*. Haraway describes Nilsson's image as a "biomedical public fetus—given flesh by the high technology of visualization [...] a sacred secular incarnation, the maternal realization of the promise of life itself" (1997, 179). After labelling Nilsson's photographs as "simultaneously high art, scientific illustration, research tool, and mass popular culture" (not unlike Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, one may add), Haraway argues that "a secular terrain has never been more explicitly sacred, embedded in the narratives of God's first Creation, which is repeated in miniature with each new life" (178-79). On the other hand, she further notes, in Kelly's *Virtual Speculum*, "the grayish blobs of the television sonogram have given place to the defined anatomical form of the free-floating fetus [...] an examination of both art and life is distinctly eccentric" (177). Here, Haraway states, "not under the arm of God but in computer-generated visual space, the fetus meets First Woman's gaze" (186). At the risk of overstating the illuminating parallels, coincidental or otherwise, between all of these subjects in Haraway's field of vision, I would like to reiterate the fact that, in the same chapter, Haraway makes reference to Venus's birth in Botticelli's painting (in relation to Randolph's "queering" (2009, para. 17) of it), which, as we know, represents a foetus-less event, where Venus is, in Plato's words, the "motherless daughter of Uranus" ('Symposium', trans. 1997, 465, 180e), born already adult in a narrative that is not about "God's first Creation" but the creation of a first generation goddess, nourished by the amniotic properties of the seas—all of which may be said to be directly opposed to Kelly's, as Haraway puts it, "female Adam [who is] not a Venus" (1997, 184).

### Conclusion: The virtual speculum

In conclusion, the implications of a, as Haraway calls it in the Manifesto, "leaky distinction" (1991, 152) and a whole literature around the very question of leakiness of and around female bodies are plenty and important. We have seen how the female nude reinforces the opposition not only between integrity and formlessness but also between that which is labelled "art" and that which is to be considered, to use a term that is frequently employed in discourses around the nude body, "obscene" and, hence, categorically dismissed as non-art.<sup>10</sup> It is significant that, etymologically speaking, the modern meaning of the term "obscene" can be traced back to the Latin *obscenus*, the literal meaning of which may be interpreted as "off-stage" (OED Online); thus, beyond representation. In this sense, it is of notable interest that, in *Virtual Speculum*, it is the "circuits of milk and diarrhea in the struggles over infant death and breast feeding" (1997, 184) that are off-stage or rather, given the technological apparatus at work, "off-screen" (187), namely outside the screen that frames the foetus in caricature.

I would like to explore the possibility (in the spirit of my interest in what is rejected and what is retained in a Haraway-prompted game of what "I would rather be") of visualising that which exists off-stage, beyond the nude's form. Hence, I anchor my conclusion to the point in Haraway's discussion of *Virtual Speculum* that not only congeals the discussion between the nude and the goddess but also provides a solution to the problem of containment and regulation with regard to the female body's boundaries. Here, Haraway makes "one conclusion inescapable" (186), the stakes of which seem to be heavily placed on the distinction between what is on-screen and off-screen; in-frame and out-of-frame; intra and extra. Haraway writes that, in Kelly's cartoon,

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<sup>10</sup> For further reading on the question of the leaking female body in relation to the nude as well as the relationship between the nude, the obscene and aesthetic philosophy more broadly, see Nead (1992).

[c]aricatures break the frame of salvation history. Perhaps that point gives the key for reading the multiple out-of-frame elements of Kelly’s cartoon. The pregnancy is ectopic, to say the least; the fetal umbilical cord and barely visible placenta go off screen on the display terminal, and the electrical cords wander up and off screen from the whole cartoon with no point of attachment in view (187).

She also argues that the screen within which Kelly’s foetus is contained, which is “more like an in vivo movie, photograph, or computer-graphic reconstruction”, is subject to formalist interpretation, “received at least partly within the conventions of post-Renaissance visual realism” (177). She describes the Italian Renaissance’s kinship with the Scientific Revolution as being “narratively at the foundations of modernity and its sense of rationality, progress, and beauty—not to mention its class location in the rising bourgeoisie, whose fate was tied progressively to science and technology” (155). The female body in representation and its own fate have, since been in the hands of those whose own fate has been dependent on science and technology, Haraway seems to suggest. Although “the normal reality established by the Renaissance perspective” is, in *Virtual Speculum*, translated into virtual reality, the “technical effects of particular apparatuses of visual culture” (185) still hold. “Both realities can only be inhabited by subjects who learn how to see and touch with the right conventions” Haraway (185) insists.

Indeed, “to see and touch with the right conventions” is, as I have tried to delineate in this article, what the historical mission of giving meaning, order, and a defining frame to the body (according to the commentary that I have referenced so far, at least) has long been preoccupied with. In Clark’s approach, we have seen how, just as the bodily matter of the female figure (presumed unformed and unruly) can be reshaped and placed within securing boundaries by the conventions of aesthetic discourse and practice, so too can the undifferentiated matter of nature be elevated from its baseness to cultural and spiritual heights. In order for the female body to be rendered an object of beauty, Clark claims, it must be regulated and contained by an adequate form—essentially, a framing device that determines what is nude from naked, metaphorically staging the body as art through the imposition of certain limits beyond which any matter must be considered artistically inadequate.

Essentially, I am arguing that, in posthumanism, the goddess still bears the weight of our misunderstandings and, hence, ends up being relegated to second-best vis à vis the cyborg and identified as one of “[t]he ‘venereal’ women with mirrors” (Haraway, 1997, 184)—doubling the beauty but also doubling the potential excess; thus, doubling the threat. For Haraway, she needs technoscience or “the technoscientific family [as] a cyborg nuclear unit” (152) to disrupt what is off-frame; to leak—and even then, like the female Adam/First Woman’s extrauterine pregnancy, she is still framed by our virtual screens; monitored, literally. The conceptual detours from Haraway to Clark to the detours that the female body’s edges themselves make, subjected as they are to the workings of Western virtual specula, always necessitate that a compromise of sorts be reached. In this sense, if, through the application of a virtual speculum, the nude goddess is transformed into ‘female Adam,’ might we speak of a posthuman nude, teeming with ‘female Adam’-ness—a firstness that does not know of mirrors and duplicates, which, nonetheless, retains the familiarity of its formalist integrity as nude, only this time to be bound by the framework of technoscience? It is, indeed, a Derridean parergonality of some kind that Haraway seems to be constantly hinting at when discussing what makes visuals readable (albeit the differences in the optical technology) and allows us, for instance, to witness “the biomedical, public fetus—given flesh by the high technology of visualization” (179). In other words, technoscience and, by implication, the cyborg accommodate the demands of this parergonality—the most that a goddess can do, to escape the confines of her



frame, is, for a want of a better term, upgrade her status to that of, what Haraway calls, a “kind of technoscientific deity” (186).

Across her oeuvre, Haraway analyses on-screen and off-screen technoscientific projections of the female body; she brings together women, goddesses, planetary bodies, species engaged in games, and technological devices to, in various ways, review her own cyborg-led tale of, to use a word she employs frequently “survival”.<sup>11</sup> Given that, in her universe, cyborgs are engaged in “couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that were not generated in the history of sexuality” (Haraway, 1991, 150), the personal statement of preference for identification with a cyborg rather than a goddess is undeniably apt—it is, after all, with the cyborg that the possibility of a radical recoding of our sexualities lies. At the same time, the dexterity with which Haraway writes about the First Woman and female Adam, alongside motherless goddesses, all the while positioning the technoscientific implications of it all within frameworks that speak of Biblical creation narratives and classical female nudes, demonstrates that she never outrightly denies the possibility for the realms of human agency and material culture to play a role in the formulation of the technoscientific desires for omniscience. It is thus that Haraway’s work offers the methods and tools with which we may establish a feminist posthuman cosmology that acknowledges our experiences as myths and rituals in our interactions with technology and its artefacts.

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<sup>11</sup> As Haraway declares at an earlier point in her Manifesto, “who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival” (1991,152). In a later work, she writes of “a kin group that includes cyborgs and goddesses working for earthly survival” (2004, 77). In light of the latter declaration, especially, should it not follow, then, that a story in which the goddess ends up elided compromises that survival?



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