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Modernism/ Postmodernism

Subjectivity of the Cyborg: Identity in the Information Age

“Of Course we have the right to resign from Section Nine, if we discreetly hand over these artificial bodies and part of our memories. But as many elements as there are that make us human, there are just as many that make up a self. The face that sets you apart from others, the unconscious sound of your own voice, the hand you stare at on waking up... Not just that: The information and the network I can access with my electric brain, all of this is a part of me, producing the consciousness I call myself, and at the same time setting limits on that self.”

-Kusanagi Motoko, cyborg protagonist in the movie *Ghost in the Shell*

Jon Rafman's video *Still Life (Betamale)* opens with dated computer graphics that quickly transition to a disturbing image of an obese man wearing a mask made out of young girl's underwear and pointing two guns at his head. Posters of cute anime girls hang on his bedroom walls. This image floats towards the viewer as a woman says, “As you look at the screen, it is possible to believe you are gazing into eternity.” *Still Life (Betamale)* is a collaboration between Rafman and the experimental composer/ musician Oneohtrix Point Never. This video was recently shown at the Zach Feuer gallery in New York City as part of Rafman's show *You are Standing in an Open Field*, but its debut was on the website 4chan.org. *Still Life (Betamale)* is a curated look at some of the bizarre images and sub-cultures that exist on the Internet. Images of furrries, cosplay, lonely workstations covered in filth, and strange Japanese computer games from the late 80's and early 90's all feel oddly at home next to one another as an image eclipses the previous one in a procession of increasing strangeness. A person in a fox costume, who is waist deep in quicksand, appears framed by a pixilated forest.

The landscape is depicted as virtual within the video, and the clips of real people dressed as fantasy characters are almost always framed by a world that exists only on a screen. This all climaxes in a flurry of hentai (anime pornography) images of a rather extreme torture/ gore variety that dissolve into one another. The video of the cosplay-fox furry is shown again, but now he is shoulder deep in the quicksand, and what frames him this time is a keyboard covered in filth. This is perhaps a reminder that the virtual body is always linked to the real, regardless of disembodied utopian dreams, and that the virtual environment is linked to the physical.

A video dealing with similar ideas as *Still Life (Betamale)*, but in a drastically different way, is Takashi Murakami's *Superflat Monogram*. This anime style video opens with a girl standing outside a Louis Vuitton store on a busy city street texting on her phone. There are screens outside the store with Louis Vuitton monograms tiled on them, and from one of these floats a small flower-like creature who breaks the boundary of the screen and enters into the world of the girl. This indicates that the world of the screen and the world of the girl are somehow connected. Next the girl's phone floats out of her hand towards the screen then falls to the ground. When the girl tries to retrieve her phone it is stolen by a large strange looking Panda that swallows the phone and the protesting girl. Both the girl and the phone are transported to the world of screens in a scene that is similar to when Alice goes down the rabbit hole to wonderland. Within this bright and colorful world are the Louis Vuitton monograms as well as a variety of Murakami's creatures. The girl floats and bounces around this virtual environment, chasing after her phone, but every time she gets close the Panda thwarts her. She finally manages to get her lost phone back when it is offered to her by a Murakami embellished Louis Vuitton Logo. Suddenly all these smiling flowers bloom and the girl is able to take pictures of herself within this bright virtual world surrounded by Louis Vuitton logos and Murakami creatures which she sends to her friends via text message. Her phone receives many text back from her excited friends and the virtual world fills with these screens. The girl indicates to the

small creature with the flower-like head that she would like to return to her world, and it complies by sending her back up the wormhole to join a group of her waiting friends.

I should define how I will be using the words “real,” “virtual,” and “fantasy” before I get to my argument. There is an ongoing debate about what reality is, as well as what is real. I understand that perhaps philosophically nothing is real, but there are certainly degrees to which things exist within this world in a physical state and are bound by rules and systems that are not the constructions of humans. I understand that this is up for debate as well, but this paper is not the place where any of this will be figured out. The “real” here will be a person's actual physical flesh and blood body that he wakes up in, the one that needs to consume calories to survive, and the one that will ultimately decay and die. The real world is the physical space in which this body interacts with other bodies and the immediate non-virtual environment. The “virtual” world is the one that exists on a screen generated by a computer or computers. “Fantasy” is a psychological state in which a person has suspended their disbelief and are willfully engaging with something that is obviously merely image, an illusion. These boundaries, of course, are often not so concrete, and within this paper I may occasionally stray a bit from these distinctions for the purpose of demonstrating how virtual the real has become.

These videos represent two narratives about what it means to be a human during the information/ screen age, but they are drastically different in most every other way. I will argue, however, that the conclusion to be drawn from both is the same: fetishizing the virtual leads to a devaluing and objectification of bodies that is ultimately dehumanizing. First I will investigate why the artist chose video for these works. Next I will explore how the transformed of humanity into image leads to dehumanization and alienation, as well as what it means to conceptualize humans as information. I will follow this with how such thinking can lead to fantasies of disembodied utopian existence and how this is depicted in the videos. Finally I will conclude the essay with how this Matrix-like dystopian future view of humanity is not the only option. What is

at stake is our humanity, our bodies, and the physical environment. Ultimately my point is that we need to be careful how much control we let screens/ information technologies exert over our lives, but they also represent an exciting and transformative time to be human.

It is beneficial to explore the identities of the two artists as well as the content in understanding these works and their relation to one another: Jon Rafman is a Canadian artist living and working in New York City mainly creating work about the virtual, and Takashi Murakami is a Japanese artist who has stated that his style, Superflat, is nationalistically Japanese. Murakami has turned himself into an international brand, and his collaboration for this video is with another international brand, Louis Vuitton. Though Murakami's Superflat style is referential to anime and manga, traditionally Japanese art forms, such images are prevalent throughout the world. This becomes apparent in Rafman's video which features a variety of images that would traditionally be considered Japanese, but in the context of *Still Life (Betamale)* are certainly not engaged in a conversation about Japanese culture, but rather Internet culture. The images in *Still Life (Betamale)* are representative of those found within Japan's Otaku culture. Otaku is a generally pejorative word (though less so recently) used to describe a section of the Japanese population who are obsessed with the fantasy worlds of anime, manga, and video games. A similar phenomena would be Bronies, which are the adult, and often male, fans of the kids cartoon *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic*. Otaku are considered to be adults who refuse to grow up and hang onto the cute images of anime for comfort, though often the shows have themes that are apocalyptic or dystopian. This hints at the rather dark side to these Otaku images. Katy Siegal writes about the subject, "These forms call on popular fascinations: sex, violence, and cuteness (as well as the repressed sado-masochism that often underlies the cute in both East and West)."¹ Rathman appropriates

¹Katy Siegal, "In the Air," In *Little boy: the arts of Japan's exploding subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami, (New York: Japan Society, 2005): 282.

products made specifically for Otaku culture for the piece *How Can You Love One Child More Than Another*, which is eighteen Dakimakura pillows arranged on the wall of the gallery. These are body pillows with sexual images of cute anime characters printed onto them. It might seem strange to see these images appear in the work of a Canadian artist in a New York art gallery, but this culture is now a global phenomena due to, and associated with, the Internet. 4chan.org is an example of such a site where images like these are found, and it is also a site associated with the hacker group Anonymous. Rafman's choice to release this video on 4chan.org is telling, as is the fact that Rafman's appropriation of these images wouldn't be possible without the Internet. Murakami also works with Otaku culture, but within Japan it has recently become much more acceptable to identify as Otaku, and such images are sold as commercial products. For example, Murakami's *Miss Ko*², a sculpture of a hyper sexualized anime character, is obviously referencing characters the Otaku desire and even sells as one, but the sculpture also participates in the global art conversation and market. It is available in a variety of forms: there is a six foot tall fiber glass sculpture that sold for half a million dollars at Christies, and there are small plastic figures that sell for around thirty dollars. These images are now an international phenomena and not limited to Japanese culture. In other words, it would be extremely reductive to limit the artwork by the culture of the artist or the art style of the work when what is truly important to consider is the identity of the viewer; a viewer who lives in a world where images travel freely between individuals and nations (for the most part). These videos are extremely different, but both have to do with identity and screens, and also how influential screens are in modern society to the formation of identity. This is a hyper, globalized example of what Guy Debord writes about in *The Society of the Spectacle*, "The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images."²

²Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 12.



Jon Rafman
How can you love one child more than another?, 2013
 18 Dakimakura /Body Pillows
 94 x 235 x 30 inches
 238.8 x 596.9 x 76.2 cm



Takashi Murakami (b. 1962)
Miss ko2
 painted fiberglass
 74 x 25 x 35 in. (188 x 61 x 88.9 cm.)

Another question that seems important to answer is why both these artists chose to use video to express ideas about the Internet. Within the postmodern, hyperreal, and post-human global society of over-developed nations, there is no escaping screens. The obvious choice is to create a work that will be seen on screens if one wants to participate in the conversation about screens. Our existence within this world is now mediated by images that constantly bombard us from all sides. Obviously these artists could use still images, and they do, but with these particular artworks there is a narrative about consuming and being consumed by images, and narrative is something that video does particularly well. Narrative is also the way in which individuals construct identity and how they share that identity with others. Both these videos are about identity and the constant consumption of images. To communicate the bombardment and overload of images that is the reality of contemporary life in any other way would also seem strange and need justification, whereas video needs no justification to be used for a purpose it already fulfills.

Both these videos are also not commercial or artistic works (assuming there is a distinction), but rather they are a hybrid where one acts as a music video and the other an advertisement, but even these categorizations are blurry. For instance: Murakami has created an advertisement with the video *Superflat Monogram* for Louis Vuitton, but it is also an artwork because Murakami is an artist. Murakami has also used aspects of the work done for Louis Vuitton as art-objects (*Eye Love Monogram*), but are they art if their initial function was product design? There are no products obviously for sale within the video, which leaves this video as a rather strange hybrid art-product. The same can be said for *Still Life (Betamale)*, which is the official music video for Oneohtrix Point Never's song *Still Life*. Of course this distinction is only being made because it is assumed art operates as something other than commodity, but this seems to be a dubious claim when considering works by Damion Hurst, Jeff Koons, or

Murakami. Murakami does not just blur the lines between commercial and fine art, he refuses to recognize them as existing. In this way his exploration of popular culture images is much different than western Pop Art. Siegal writes, "... Murakami has said recently that he is less interested in exploring Pop Art than in making what he calls 'Art Products.'"³

Everything is doomed to be co-opted and assimilated by the institutions of capitalism, and, with the advent of the virtual, everything is doomed to exist as simulation and simulacra inside the world of screens. This would be true, except for the death of the meta-narrative, which is the death of the idea of one theory that can explain all aspects of existence. This theory was stated by Jean-François Lyotard, "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation."⁴ These are both phenomena, capitalism and simulation, that are prevalent within human existence today, but there are certainly many other narratives that make up the what it means to be human. Screens are one such example where there is not one way to view our interactions with them, or one theory that can explain what future role they will play.

The dichotomy of interacting with screens is that the experience is social as well as isolating. Murakami's video is illustrative of the the social experience where one defines himself with signs and images to others via information technologies, whereas Rafman's is an exploration of the isolating experience where one feels anonymous and explores repressed desires due to the alienating nature of capitalism. In both cases the self is defined by the consumption of images and how that dictates the construction of self and identity. Our experiences have reached what Jean Baudrillard called the fourth level of image, pure simulacrum, in his seminal work, "The Precession of Simulacra." Baudrillard writing on how

³ Katy Siegel, "In the Air," 277.

⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984), 37.

images progressively transform until purely simulacrum says, "...it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation."⁵ The virtual is the best example of this simulation, which in turn is the real, or the hyper-real, or as Debord earlier wrote, "all that once was directly lived has become mere representation."⁶ A good example to concretely illustrate this is Facebook or other social media where the idea of a conversation in a public square is purely simulated on a flat screen and all interaction takes place with signs and images. It is also a place an individual can exist in a suspended state with their history collapsed into one easy to navigate interface, a place where we are cryogenically frozen in cyberspace, ready to be revived in the minds of others at the click of a few buttons. This simulation of a person defines who that person is and becomes the real in not only the mind of the person (if living), but also in the minds of others. The transformation of people into images makes it much easier to objectify them to the point where they are completely divorced from their bodies. This is a contemporary example of Debord's idea of how consumerism transformed the state of being into the state of having to finally arrive at the state of appearing (or becoming image), but taken one step further to where a person becomes a product or a brand. Facebook, or any social networking site, views its users and their personal information as a product which is sold to advertisers. This idea is one that is appropriated from Jingying Li's essay, "From Superflat Windows to Facebook Walls: Mobility and Multiplicity of an Animated Shopping Gaze." This is apparent in Murakami's video when the girl adds value to her image by aligning it with a brand and then sending her image out to be consumed by others. Li states, "... when that gaze is put side by side , on the same surface, with the commodity at which it is supposed to be gazing, the look becomes the looked-

⁵Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," *In A Postmodern Reader*, ed. Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 347.

⁶⁶Guy Debord, 12.

at, the consumer the consumed.”⁷An extreme example of this is pornography, and in particular the image of the porn star, whose body acts as a corporeal husk for the projection of fantasies. From here it seems like a very small jump to not needing even the representation of real bodies and fetishizing images that are pure simulation, a perversion that is evident in Rafman’s video with the furry/ hentai images.

The current situation is often referred to as the Information Age, and within this age the concept of human as information has become a popular one. This concept applies to DNA, as well as memory and personality. Within contemporary thought there is this idea that everything can be represented by information or code. There are even scientist who believe that the universe is a very complicated simulation being run on some vast underlying network. Hayles writes about this in her book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, “Some theorists, notably Edward Fredkin and Stephen Wolfram, claim that reality is a program run on a cosmic computer.”⁸ If humanity and the rest of existence can be refined down to information, then it is logical to assume that the materiality of existence is secondary to this underlining truth of code and information. The soul, brain, consciousness of a person has been regarded for most of human history as separate from the rest of the body, and this way of thinking has led to many fantasies that the identity of an individual could somehow live on as separate from the body. This particular dream, which once found its most persuasive form in religious texts, is now being considered as a possibility due to advancements in technology and is taking a new shape in the hybrid body of the cyborg.

⁷ Jingying Li, “From Superflat Wondows to Facebook Walls: Mobility and Multiplicity of an Animated Shopping Gaze,” In *Lines of Sight*, ed. Lunning, Frenchy, Thomas LaMarre, Marc Steinberg, Yukari Fujimoto, and Matt Thorn (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 215.

⁸ Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11.

The cyborg is both a fantasy and a reality within the modern world. The most common contemporary example is the iPhone due to its supplementation/ mediation of person's brain and social interactions, but there are also prosthetics that are controlled via thoughts and thus interface with human structures directly. A fictional example of this is the movie *Robocop* in which the human brain is transplanted into a robot where it is essentially used as a processor that interacts with software to control the machine. The most extreme example of the cyborg is the total disappearance of the human body including even the brain. The idea that we could perhaps one day upload our consciousness into a computer and thus free ourselves of our mortal bodies and the identities tied to them is a recurring theme in not just science fiction, but also in scientific theory. Katherine Hayles wrote, "Marvin Minsky precisely expressed this dream when, in a recent lecture, he suggested it will soon be possible to extract human memories from the brain and import them, intact and unchanged, to computer disks."⁹This is also the very premise of the the anime movie *Ghost in the Shell*, in which the cyborg protagonist merges her identity with a consciousness that formed within the code of the internet and is freed of her physical body.

There is a recent product called Eterni.me that takes the idea of a human as information to the grave. This program takes a huge amount of information from a person's life and uses an algorithm to emulate him in the form of a virtual avatar after he dies. It is implied the deceased person's friends and family could ask him for advice, even, and that the undead-avatar would give an answer consistent with what the person would have said. The tagline for this product is, "be immortal." The idea that such an obvious simulation would even be desirable is hard to comprehend, but many people are trading in lived experience for virtual, and that is apparently where the afterlife resides as well. The transformation of identity from being, to having, to appearing/ image, to product, to ultimately virtual is to become, finally, pure simulation. It is an

⁹Katherine Hayles, 13.

old idea that our biological death is not our true death, but rather when we truly die is the last time someone thinks about us. Murakami has stated that his brand would be able to continue after his death since his aesthetic would live on with others. Siegel writes about this, “Part of being Identifiably Takshi-like is the concept that his identity is a brand, which, like a person’s genetic code, can live on, giving form to things when he is gone.”¹⁰ Rafman’s work is exclusively about the virtual and his obvious obsession with it. An example of such a work is the *9-eyes* project in which Rafman explores the street view feature of Google Earth and finds bizarre or interesting images. This represents a literal disembodied journey through a virtual landscape. Rafman also explores the idea of artist as brand with his *Brand New Paint Job* series of digital renderings. These consist of virtual three-dimensional environments that have an artist’s distinctive style applied to their surfaces as a texture-map. An example is *Brand New Paint Job (Georgia O’Keeffe Waiting Room)*, 2013, in which he takes a painting by Georgia O’Keeffe and applies it’s image to the computer generated model of a waiting room. This once again gets back to the idea of artist as brand as well as that brand surviving after death. Both of these artists are creating art with this idea of disembodiment as central to their practice, and it is present in both *Still Life (Betamale)* and *Superflat Monogram*.

In Rafman’s film, the divorce of the physical body from lived experience is a destruction of not only the body, but also the immediate environment and psychological health of the individual. This is represented in a variety of ways. There is a juxtaposition that happens with the virtual environments and the pictures of real world spaces. The virtual environments are often scenes of the outside world, of cities and nature, of public spaces. The scenes of the real world are almost exclusively of filthy bedrooms, private spaces with computer terminals. The exception to this rule is that some of the cosplay takes place in hotel lobbies during conventions. This, however, leaves one to wonder if this is the only way that such a person can leave the

¹⁰ Siegel, Katy. “In the Air,” 280.

confines of his bedroom, essentially as an avatar. In other words, an individual has separated himself so extensively from his physical lived experience that he needs both the physical and imaginary barrier that a costume supplies him to venture out into the real world. This exception is particularly interesting when thinking about the cosplay fox character who's interactions with the real world result in humiliation and death. The fox is shown immediately after the gory hentai montage dissolves into an image of melting bodies as paint is poured onto its head. This image torrent of dismembered, mutilated, cybernetic, and mutant bodies being murdered, raped, and otherwise dominated/humiliated is presented as having not the effect of empowering the viewer, but rather the opposite. The paint becomes virtual bodily fluid, and the fox a victim of a strange sort of image bukkake that further obscures and dehumanizes an already hidden, alienated, and disconnected life. This particular point is brought home with the image of the cosplay fox drowning in quicksand framed by an image of a keyboard covered in cigarette butts, empty soda cans, ash, rotting food, and other detritus. This is another image of a room, which seems to an extent like a cell, where the prisoner's body is not confined by physical space, but rather held captive by an addiction to the virtual. The real space of the rooms depicted have been neglected to such an extent that the environment is unhealthy because of this addiction. The last image is of the obese, suicidal man in his bedroom, his body evidence of neglect, and his hopeless action evidence of mental illness that is a symptom of the solitary confinement imposed by his virtual addiction.

It is apparent that disembodiment in Rafman's video is not viewed as freeing experience, but the same could also be said for Murakami's exploration of the same topic. The girl is never presented as free within the video (another idea appropriated from Li). From the very beginning, the girl is always trapped by a frame, and the first example is the doorway and windows of the Louis Vuitton store. Once the girl has entered the virtual world - an event she had no control over - she is constantly guided and pushed around. Though she can float around in this zero-

gravity cyber-space, this aspect of flight (as free as a bird) is in its own way confining. Now the girl is trapped within the frame of the screen, the virtual world. The space here, much like in a big-box store, such as Wal-Mart, dictates how it can, and should, be navigated. There is even a helpful guide in the form of the flower-headed creature, who is just that much more trustworthy when compared to the tricky panda. The girl bounces off of the monograms to navigate this world and is watched by Murakami's eye-ball graphics the whole time. Perhaps this is not an intentional reference to how our online activities are watched and databased, but it is difficult to not make this connection after all the recent information about NSA surveillance and their massive data center in Utah. Li on the subject, "Through the virtual shopping window of the internet, our gaze in subjectivity is not just flattened and decentered, it is *databased and computerized*."¹¹ The girl is sucked into various eyes and transported to different parts of the virtual world until she is eventually eaten, again, by a smiling flower. The last virtual room she finds herself in is inhabited by a giant creature that creates the flower-like creatures by blowing them out of its mouth. It is here that she retrieves her phone, and it is perhaps this image that she wishes to consume and be consumed by because it is the combination of Murakami, Louis Vuitton, and the girl herself, which is represented with the cellphone photographs, another frame she is trapped within. Once returned to the real world, the girl looks wistfully back to the world of the screen. Her image is still framed by the store windows, and upon opening her phone, she discovers a bamboo leaf that traversed the divide with her. Two things are implied here: the first is that her escape from the virtual was not an escape from being a consumer, a product, or a virtual image, and the second is that though the virtual often feels ephemeral, and less than real, it is the real. In other words, if the virtual simulation of yourself, as constructed through the

¹¹ Li, "From Superflat Windows to Facebook Walls: Mobility and Multiplicity of an Animated Shopping Gaze," 216.

use of online simulacra, is all that constructs self in the real, then you are as constrained in the real as you are in the virtual, and thus trapped as what Debord would call a spectator.

There is a lack of freedom in both these videos, and the subjects shown are controlled by the virtual world of screens. This leads us to another reoccurring narrative: that one day machines will gain consciousness and take over the world. It sometimes feels like this is the current teleology of machine/ human symbiotic relationship. Think of the dystopian future world of the *Matrix* movies in which machines use humans as a power supply. In this example we still have bodies, and these bodies make our subjectivity possible. Not only do we want to escape our bodies, but the bodies of other people who repress and control us. This highlights why disembodiment is often viewed as a utopian dream - because it is freeing from not just mortality, but also from subjectivity. There is a fear that one day we will become the enslaved subjects of the machines we have created to make our lives easier, but in some respects that is already the reality. The virtual is shown in both these videos as a trap. The seductive nature of the internet to “suck” a viewer in is visually represented in both videos by Rafman’s sinking fox and Murakami’s giant girl-swallowing panda. It is a common complaint that one was “sucked” into the Internet to suffer the fate of losing an hour of their life watching cute cat videos or whatever. The compelling nature of the Internet is its Interactivity and feedback loops. It is a vast sea of information, social networks, databases, games, pornography, products, and almost anything else a person could desire (or wish to un-see). It is, without a doubt, a world transforming invention that surpasses even the steam engine, and of course there are going to be casualties.

Argued here is a rather dystopian narrative about losing one’s body, soul, and environment to a variety of virtual addictions as well as our freedom to a global grid controlled by corrupt governments and corporations. The thing that is great about dystopian narratives is

how entertaining they are. Utopias are boring - unless, of course, they are threatened by some outside menace. The stakes, however, are real ones. In their essay, "New New Babylon," McKenzie Wark and Ali Dur write about the Foxconn suicides, "After a spate of suicides, the Foxconn factory in Chengdu, China, now obliges its workers to sign a document in which, among other things, they promise not to kill themselves."¹² This is the Chinese plant where the Apple iPad is made, a product Dur and Wark fear represents the future of information technologies. The virtual obsession is effecting also the lives of people who don't live in the first-world over-developed countries of late-capitalism. Wark writes in his book *Gamer Theory* about the rare earth element Coltan, which is used in many electronics, much of which comes from the Congo where it has had a very negative effect on the Environment and the people who live there. These are some of the negative realities of the production of our consumer electronics, but electronic devices also require electricity, and to generate this electricity we create a great deal of pollution which then leads to climate change. Things in the material world cannot be replaced by data alone, and once they are gone we can not bring them back.

Becoming a cyborg seems rather hopeless since it represents a world where corporations, governments, and capitalism further separate humanity from true lived experience with a controlling grid of consumer driven simulations that lead to either alienation or a zombie-like state of conformity. It further advances the consumer society, it creates a system of global control, and it isolates people by offering addictive and easy alternatives to actual lived experience. Katherine Hayles writes on the subject of Post-human, a concept linked with the cyborg, "The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components."¹³ Her theory of the cyborg is counter to binary oppositions such as the boundary between male and female, screen and reality, human and machine, et cetera.

¹²Ali Dur and McKenzie Wark, "New New Babylon," *October 138*, (Fall 2011), 37.

¹³Katherine Hayles, 4.

One of her theories is that our way of viewing the world has shifted from presence/ absence to the more complicated pattern/ randomness. This world view allows for complicated systems to emerge as pattern from randomness, and in this way randomness plays a vital role in evolution. Hayles theory of the post-human has to do with a variety of different systems working together to create what we consider to be identity, as opposed to the view of it being a singular, or even a fractured post-modern identity formed from adversity and difference. Her view of the cyborg is one where boundaries are permeable and everything is connected. As far as narratives go, this is one that feels far more inclusive and even utopian. She is not suggesting that the world become homogenous, but rather that heterogenous nodes are all part of the same system. She is also making an argument for embodied experience. There is no reason why one must abandon the physical in order to also experience the virtual, and the two can in fact co-exist in a symbiotic relationship. The idea that the brain, or for that matter identity, is separate from the body is no longer a viable narrative when one considers all of existence as connected. One is not divisible from the other. In this view humans are not autonomous beings, but rather decisions are made over distributed cognition system which includes non-human entities such as machines and our environment. Hayles sums up this idea of the post-human cyborg by saying, "In this account, emergence replaces teleology; reflexive epistemology replaces objectivism; distributed cognition replaces autonomous will; embodiment replaces a body seen as a support system for the mind; and a dynamic partnership between humans and intelligent machines replaces the liberal humanist subject's manifest destiny to dominate and control nature."¹⁴ Often it is the narrative of a society or an individual that actually shapes the form reality takes and thus dictates their subjective experience of that reality.

¹⁴Katherine Hayles, 288.

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Images and Videos

Still Life (Betamale) <http://jonrafman.com/betamale/>

Superflat Monogram <http://vimeo.com/65524662>

How can you love one child more than another?

<http://www.zachfeuer.com/exhibitions/jon-rafman/>

MISS KO2

http://www.christies.com/Lotfinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=4101155