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**Cyborg Rhetoric and Revelation of Self:**
**Identity, Writing, and the Instantiation of the Cyborg in Digital Texts**

Donna Haraway defines, "a cyborg [as] a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). Building from this, I propose that in this digital age, wherein technology continuously proliferates, cyborg rhetoric abounds. In this study, I will examine three "digital texts" and explore the ways that writing, technology, and narratives embedded in popular culture reveal cyborg language. Drawing from N. Katherine Hayles and Marie-Laure Ryan, I will focus on five main aspects within the texts: information, identity, immersion, interactivity, and reflexivity. By analyzing texts found in books, film, and online spaces, I hope to uncover significant connections that reveal explicit cyborg instantiation, despite the media's differences. Exploring what makes these specific texts "digital" will offer insight about the implications such texts have on today's cyborgian existence.

In certain ways (prosthetic limbs, artificial hearts, synthetic eyewear, etc.), we are already cyborgs. A new kind of existence that relies heavily on technological innovations embodies our very beings. Our humanness combines with artificial, technological, and virtual means, creating in us a hybrid-like identity; by this identity we are utilized to produce and define cyborg rhetoric through praxis. Essentially, cyborg rhetoric and its development signal the instantiation of the already-present cyborg. This cyborg rhetoric persists across various forms, from traditional literature to technological instruction manuals. These examples are cyborg rhetoric in their own right; they serve specific purposes in cyborg praxis and simultaneously establish and teach us the language of cyborg rhetoric itself.

In "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," Haraway professes that "the cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (149). Still, she claims that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (149). Today, the cyborg is truly "a creature in a post-gender world" (150) and the subversiveness of Haraway's cyborg abates as we anxiously usher the digital age into our homes and the cyborg becomes commonplace. Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, offers that "people become posthuman because they think they are posthuman" (6). Hayles explains how information lost its (material) body and became embodied within humans, prompting the cultural and technological construction of the cyborg. In our efforts to figure out ourselves, we must recognize our identities in the things we do, say, write, and even read—especially within digital texts. In her book, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*, Marie-Laure Ryan approaches virtual reality as a "semiotic phenomenon," suggesting that we "rethink textuality, mimesis, narrativity, literary theory, and the cognitive processing of texts in the light of the new modes of artistic world construction that have been made possible by recent developments in electronic technology" (1). This "rethinking" can (and should) lead to a rethinking of identity construction. These works, with others in cybertheory and identity writing, form the basis for my exploration of digital texts. To add a significant thread to this ongoing conversation, I plan to build upon existing scholarship and emphasize the topic's salience in academia.

Exploring such diverse texts can proffer broad discoveries; therefore I will focus on five aspects of "cyborg language." Embodied within us, information's entire existence has changed. Information today is essentially information technology (IT). Digital texts develop and express

this information as cyborgian. IT's technological ties reveal identities that extend beyond the texts themselves. By analyzing such identities, I hope to find a common thread, an overarching, undeniably cyborg identity. Good narratives have immersive qualities that create forums for interactivity with readers. Digital texts take the virtual reality of immersion and interactivity to a new, more palpable virtuality. Exploring the holistic immersion afforded by digital texts may reveal a new kind of interactivity that encapsulates today's cyborg reality. Immersion and interactivity reveal reflexivity between creators and created; these texts ultimately encompass the creators themselves, becoming representative of our indelible connection to digital-age technologies. These five characteristics will not constitute my entire research, but will rather serve a foundational role.

Chapter one will discuss the study's theoretical context by addressing existing scholarship on cyborg rhetoric and identity, expounding upon the specific aspects that construct the critical lens through which the digital texts are viewed.

Chapter two will focus closely on the language, narrative, and social context of P.W. Singer's *Wired for War*. Ideas once deemed science fiction continue to become reality and appear on today's battlefields. Innovations in IT and the robotics revolution have afforded societies this new face of war. Necessarily, these advances also evolve the ways in which we write (and read) about them.

Chapter three will focus on the James Cameron film, *Avatar* (2009). I will explore the movie's production as digital narrative and pay close attention to the meta-narratives of identity in the plot. The chapter will conclude with a look at the immersive and interactive features offered by the presentation of the film in digital 3D.

Chapter four will focus on two avenues representative of Web 2.0: web blogs (e.g. perezhilton.com, latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow) and video sharing websites (e.g. YouTube, Flickr). Analysis of these texts will show a juggling of entertainment, information, and identity while exemplifying reflexivity between creator and created. Web 2.0 gives us the ability to be more than users of the internet, to actually become a part of it and establish a new identity within it.

My conclusion will reiterate that writing in the digital age exemplifies the rhetoric of cyborg identity and that this rhetoric instantiates its own existence. Though this study will only cover a portion of a subject worthy of extensive research, I stand firm in the argument that as new technologies become the platform for today's writing, that very writing, in turn, reveals a progression of human identity. Within this cycle of cyborg instantiation, our writing not only serves as cyborg rhetoric, but is the product of a cyborg evolution.

Annotated Bibliography

*Avatar*. Dir. James Cameron. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2009. Film. Nominated for nine Academy

    Awards, Cameron's film is the highest grossing movie of all time (Grossing worldwide

    over $2.5 billion and counting). Culturally, the success of this movie has drawn the

    attention of this study. Technologically, from the motion-capture animation that Cameron

    tailored for this movie (e.g. specially designed cameras built into 6-inch booms allowing

    the digital recording of facial expressions to be used in the animation process) to the

    film's narrative dipped heavy in issues of identity, community, and humanity, there is a

    common technological thread that moves through every facet of the film. It is this thread

    I wish to explore as it moves from the writing, filming, and presentation/viewing of the

    movie. The technology needed to create the film called for the highest budget ever spent

    ($237 million), but that very technology allowed the film to multiply the investment ten

    times.

Chanen, Brian W. "Surfing the text." *European Journal of English Studies* 11.2 (2007): 163-176.

    *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 2 Mar. 2010. In this article Chanen explores

    the digital environment of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. I will study Chanen's

    methods of analysis to discover my own method for a "cyborg reading" of the digital

    texts, especially the in-print Singer book. Though I will refrain from mirroring Chanen's

    structure of analysis, this article will prove useful in helping me look at the aspects of the

    texts most applicable to my study as a whole.

Choney, Suzanne. "Internet Making Our Brains Different, Not Dumb - Tech and Gadgets-

    Msnbc.com." *Breaking News, Weather, Business, Health, Entertainment, Sports, Politics,*

    *Travel, Science, Technology, Local, US & World News- Msnbc.com*. Web. 17 Mar. 2010.

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35464896/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/>. I offer this online source as an example of the most current issues I would like to explore pertaining to online spaces and affects on the individuals who frequent them. Choney opens, "A decade from now, Google won't make us 'stupid,' the Internet may make us more literate in a different kind of way" (1). It is apparent to many that the digital age is changing us, and I hope to use this article and others like it to gauge the most current views, opinions, and criticisms of the technologies driving the change.

DeVoss, Dànielle. "Rereading Cyborg(?) Women: The Visual Rhetoric of Images of Cyborg (and Cyber) Bodies on the World Wide Web." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 3.5 (2000): 835-845. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 2 Mar. 2010. In this article DeVoss discusses images of "cyborg" men and women found online and argues, "most visual representations of cyborg bodies are actually representations of 'cyber' bodies, which reinforce contemporary notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and power" (835). Though Haraway and other theorists argue for the "allure of the cyborg," DeVoss shows there are "spaces where the cyborg concept has been explored at the level of the physical body" (836). The focus on the physical presentation of the cyborg is what gives this study a place in my own exploration of cyborg identity.

Dibbell, Julian. "A Rape in Cyberspace." Julian Dibbell. 23 Mar. 2009 <http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle.html>. An article about a series of events that takes place in a Multi-User Domain (MUD) called LAMBDA MOO. A man commits a virtual rape in the online community and other users respond by banning him from the system entirely. This article raises the question of whether or not a crime can be committed in cyberspace and reveals the heavy emotional and psychological investment

users have in such cyber worlds. I feel this article raises important questions that may

prove useful in my exploration of connections between identity and/through technology;

especially in Chapter three (Web 2.0) of my study.

Faigley, Lester. "Literacy After the Revolution." *College Composition and Communication* 48

(1): 30-43.Faigley's take on the "digital revolution," especially the internet and World

Wide Web can serve foundational in my explorations of technological literacy and the

identity we have in and because of that literacy. Faigley describes the "revolution of the

rich" and the "digital revolution" as "different aspects of a larger scale change" (32).

Looking into this "larger scale change" he suggests may run consistent with my study of

changes in society, culture, and identity in this digital age.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the

Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.

New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-81. In this article Haraway defines a cyborg as "a

cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as

well as a creature of fiction" (149), a definition that my study will use as a starting point

for discovering all things cyborg within the three genres of digital text. Haraway's take

on feminism, society, culture, and power struggles that surround cyborg identity may

prove useful in analysis of texts.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments."

*Configurations* 10.1 (2002): 297-320. In this article Hayles continues her exploration

(from *How We Became Posthuman*) of the distinction between the body and embodiment.

In her earlier work she makes an effort to avoid ideas of a mind-body split, but here

delves into the possibility that, "Embodiment is experienced from the inside, from the

feelings, emotions, and sensations that constitute the vibrant living textures of our lives—

all the more vibrant because we are only occasionally conscious of their humming

vitality" (297-298). This study of the questioned discourse of body and embodiment may

prove to be an insightful source as I strive to explore similar dualisms within the digital

texts.

---. *How We Became Posthuman:Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*.

Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. This book gives an account of how we have come to the

digital age. Hayles explores various mediums spanning from literary texts to electronic

media and views literature and science as more than an aspect of cultural study, but

instead sees them as "a way of understanding ourselves as embodied creatures living

within and through embodied worlds and embodied words" (24). I will draw from her

definition of reflexivity: "[T]he movement whereby that which has been used to generate

a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it

generates" (8). This idea that creator becomes part of created, including more of Hayles's

take on posthuman identity, will play an important role in most aspects of this study.

---. "Refiguring the Posthuman." *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.3 (2004): 311-316.

*Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 3 Mar. 2010. Though this is an introductory

piece to a special journal issue on posthumanism, I present it singularly and as

representative of other works from this particular issue. Hayles recognizes, "the

integration of humans with intelligent machines has become more extensive and at the

same time more diverse in its implementations, effects, and significance" (311). With this

in mind, she urges the questioning raised in the essays regarding the posthuman,

illuminating the importance of continued posthuman studies. As Hayles realizes, "The

posthuman […] cannot and will not mean only one thing" (316), she assures all those who are studying/thinking/recognizing posthuman that we may still have a long and complex road ahead. The questions raised in this introduction and its ensuing essays will help me consider my exploration of cyborg rhetoric within a broader range of posthuman theory.

Ivanic, Roz. *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998.  In this book, Ivanic affirms that the self is connected to social struggles through the act of writing. To Ivanic, there is a strong relationship between identity and social contexts, saying that, "if people entering higher education experience an 'identity crisis', it is not because of any inadequacy in themselves, but because of a mismatch between the social context which they have constructed their identities in the past and the new social context which they are entering" (12). Ivanic writes this book to assert that writing is not just about expressing content but also about expressions of self. The identity in writing helps to construct the discourse of society, just as society plays a role in the "discoursal" construction of identity in academic writing. I intend to use this book to draw on the connections between writing and societal constructs.

Newkirk, Thomas. *The Performance of Self in Student Writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1997.  In this book, Newkirk emphasizes that the act of writing is a performative expression of self. When writers decide upon what "turns" to make in their writing the writing itself becomes a personal representation of its author. This book is both an analysis and tribute to personal writing and emphasizes that our writing is actually more than just a presentation of self, but a creation of self. This book will be used for the

introduction and when speaking specifically about writing within all three chapters of the study.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Narrative as Virtual Reality:Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. New York: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. This book juxtaposes virtual reality with narratives while studying the immersive and interactive aspects of various narrative forms. Although virtual reality itself may seem outdated, Ryan's premise of narratives as forms of reality will prove useful through most aspects of this study. In the same vein that "literary fictions can elicit the same spectrum of emotional reactions in the reader as real-life situations: empathy, sadness, relief, laughter, admiration, spite, fear, and even sexual arousal" (148), I will explore the emotional immersion that is evident within the digital texts. A close look at the immersion and interactivity within these texts may aid in ascertaining the ultimate goal (and underlying affect) of each. Ryan's take on cyberculture will add clarity to this study's argument for the instantiation of the cyborg within the digital texts.

Selber, Stuart A. *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Selber writes about the three aspects of developing "multiliterate" students: Functional Literacy, Critical Literacy, and Rhetorical Literacy. His argument that a change is not only imminent but necessary may lend important insight on implications of changing identities in this digital age. Selber's "multiliterate student" may be an example of the type of labels we attribute to the identity revealed by exploration of cyborg rhetoric. An in-depth look into the digital texts may give a clearer understanding of the necessity of the digital multiliteracy Selber so strongly promotes.

Singer, P.W. *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21$^{st}$ Century*. NY:

Penguin, 2009. In this New York Times Bestseller, Singer reveals the evolving world of robots and war. His affirmation that some aspect of science fiction plays into all our memories rings true in his look into the past, present, and future of robotic warfare (3). Elaborating on issues ranging from the military's robotic bomb squads to the "duality" created by collaboration of robot and human, Singer offers a narrative that captures the essence of our changing world and the identities of those living in it. *Wired for War* reveals that we are not far removed from the fantasy and fiction of stories, movies, and narratives of past; as many of those scientific and technological myths have already become reality.