

The Alberta College of Art + Design

Space Invaders
Feminism and the Otherworldly

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“Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the [movement *Feminism*.]
Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds,
to seek [equality and new ways to progress],
to boldly go where no one has gone before.”
- Star Trek: The Next Generation.

Feminism is often considered alien, otherworldly, odd, different, strange, unknown, unknowable and curious, therefore also connected to the notion of it being dangerous, too forward, bad, rejectable. Feminists have begun to take these labels and stereotypes that society has created and show feminism to be a force for positive change in the world.

Doreen B. Massey writes about the need for feminism in connection to space, specifically the “limitation of women’s mobility, in terms of both identity and space” and the “attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere [as] both a specifically spacial control and, through that, a social control on identity” (Massey 179). In this regard, space means the geography of where people live, and also the social areas that people inhabit. It also becomes a stagnant box where people are placed based on gender, class, race, and ability.

Massey describes herself as “being a space invader”, who interrupts and upsets spaces, and calls attention to the inequalities that exist there (185). She describes that this process of becoming a Space Invader, lead to her having “more nerve and some consciousness”, which illustrates that changing spaces takes time, bravery, and knowledge. Foucault says that “Knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power”, meaning that becoming educated and aware of issues in our world gives us the power to stand up and fight against the powers of engrained social patriarchy, and all forms of inequality (69) . The imagery of feminists being space invaders, astronauts, aliens, or otherworldly appears in a number of essays by authors Marleen S. Barr, Jenny Wolmark, and Donna J Haraway, who write about Feminist Science Fiction and how it contributes to important discussion about gender roles and spaces. Using the image of the space explorer, we view feminist goals as being forward thinking, advanced, knowledge based, and therefore fighting against negative powers, all of which add up to an archetypal hero.

Using ideas presented by Massey about space, and Foucault about knowledge and power, the nature of geographic space and knowledge as the base for change and growth in society is discussed. Foucault expressed that “space was treated as the dead, the fixed...the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was ... life, didactic.”(Foucault 70), taking into account that time is most well known for its effect on gender, space and geography are also key because “gender relations vary over space” (Massey 178). This occurs when specific political, social and economic happenings act as catalysts for change, which are found in many variations and forms, making it difficult to understand these changes in history. For example, Caucasian women in Western Society are better off than almost any other female demographic, and the reasons for this include

varied governments, war, gender roles, education, and poverty. Therefore, these other spaces are seen as concrete, which leads to the purposes of feminism as a driving force for equality and change.

Social and geographical space are now the focuses of modern feminism, with the understanding that all people, in any place they may live have fundamental rights of “life, liberty and security” (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 3) in addition to freedom, voice, religion, opportunity and worth. However, despite this universal decree, our planet is sadly behind in its meaning.

Feminists, as invaders of spaces, point out the problems within our society, oftentimes these issues have been swept under the rug so often that they form an underlying, invasive fear or anxiety. Our generation has become aware of the quiet problems of today, and know that the path society is on leads to a terrifying future of inequality, injustice and oppression, and these worries come out in the form of science fiction (Auping 43). One of my peers Alana M. Hyland, an avid science fiction reader shares that to her, the genre “has traditionally been a force of great social progression...Science fiction movies explore deep moral and technological conundrums of the present and future (global warming, artificial intelligence, mass-surveillance, genetic engineering of lifeforms...)” (Hyland). Science fiction as a genre, reaches past what we are at in the moment and gives us a goal to reach towards, and warns against danger, comparable to a consciousness of good and evil that we have created to guide humanity. It creates a window through which we can judge ourselves and predict where our actions will lead us. Returning to the above mentioned image of the Space Invader, this discourse leads us to perceive this character as a hero who seeks to lay a common path towards equality, freedom, and justice.

In an attempt to shine light on the problems that exist in our world, many feminist artists create politically charged work that focus on the other-worldly such as Jenny Holzer, Lee Bul and Jamelie Hassan.

Jenny Holzer appropriates these themes and fears into her art through text and light, and for hard topics to be pondered while “other-worldly atmosphere[s]” and “science fiction qualit[ies]” allow her installations to resonate with this generation (Auping 38, 42). Holzer turns the theories of politics, feminism, and inequality into the tangible plane of installation and sculpture, and into real, important discussion points to be voiced. Furthermore, she places her work into public space through use of billboards, light signs, posters, and t-shirts, which separates the art from the traditional gallery setting and makes it accessible to the public. Her *Truisms* for example contain such phrases as “YOUR OLDEST FEARS ARE THE WORST ONES”, “RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY”, “ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE” and “PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT” (Auping cover, 10, 12, 25). Holzer creates cause for the viewer to stop and reevaluate how they feel about the overwhelming statements.

Holzer also covers topics of traditional feminism, specifically motherhood and the objectification of women in her work *Mother and Child*. The work used text on electric signs and a stone tablet in the floor to present a number of paragraphs through a mother's point of view. The message is one of fear for her child's well being, uncertainty about motherhood, and anger towards society and those who would harm her daughter. Auping describes that these opposing emotions make the mother a "victim and aggressor, life giver and life-taker," essentially smashing the sexist notions that women are docile, demure, polite, obedient, and meant only to give birth (Auping 62). On the contrary, Holzer depicts women in her work as three dimensional, being both caring and filled with roaring intensity, which is expressed through all capitalized sentences of "I AM INDIFFERENT TO MYSELF BUT NOT TO MY CHILD" and "I AM SULLEN AND THEN FRANTIC WHEN I CANNOT BE WHOLLY WITHIN THE ZONE OF MY INFANT" (Auping 59, 60). In addition, the realistic vision of females and motherhood that Holzer gives, shuts down any chance of objectification, because the work is a mental depiction and not a physical one. Also, it is written in first-person, the viewer is swayed to see the woman as Holzer does: fierce, protective, and in the habit of calling out those in authority of their transgressions and their injustices against humanity. Holzer in theory has created the mental image of what it means to be a space invader.

Lee Bul puts emphasis on the cyborg as a metaphor for feminism with inspiration taken from Donna J. Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Haraway describes the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." however, she explains that this fiction speaks of what our imaginations make in the face of our social experiences. Her definition of cyborgs and feminists, simply means that feminists are hybrid of the hopes of justice and visions of equality, and lived experience of discrimination, oppression, and sexism (Haraway 149). Raising the cyborg to a level attainment, to remove beyond the society that we have survived in and create a new space to inhabit: a mixture of machine and nature, taking the old and altering it until it is better, advanced, durable. To achieve such change, it takes "building and destroying" how societies run, how we view differences in others, how we treat those around us, and the spaces we find ourselves in (Haraway 181).

Using the idea of the cyborg, Lee Bul creates work that melds the alien with the human and show "evocative visions of the future" specifically in her projects *Cyborgs* (1997–2011) and *After Bruno Taut* (2007) (Teo). In *Cyborgs*, Bul makes use of silicone to create sexual female forms that appear to be made out of metal, and are absent of heads and often limbs. *After Bruno Taut* is another series where Bul made chandeliers that while made of crystals and chain mail,

are reminiscent of organic, grotesque shapes (Teo). These forms return us to the anxieties that feed science fiction, which lies in fear of the unknown. As artists like Lee Bul make a face for this fear, we explore science fiction with curiosity and excitement, leading to Foucault's "Knowledge" which gives us power over authority. Embracing the unknown is the cause for our freedoms.

By dissecting and exploring the works that have been presented by artists seeking to upset spaces in society, we have more to gain than we can ever lose. Much like art puts a face to the fear of the unknown in science fiction, feminism puts a face to inequality in the societal and geographical spaces of our world. By looking at history, we can see that gender limitations have been weakened one step at a time, and this pattern of improvement suggests further growth in this generation and years to come, and once feminism is considered believable and credible, it becomes a driving force for change.

Bravery is a popular topic of interest in science fiction and is a trait that is sought after by all protagonists that explore beyond our world. I hope that bravery and knowledge come to those who seek to make change, to invade spaces and to "boldly go" (Encounter at Farpoint). It is only through thoughts and actions of our own that we change, then the fate we have laid for ourselves in the looking glass that is science fiction can be altered to match our hopes in humanity.

Jenny Holzer--truisms/mother and child/ pg 44
sci fi little girl in the sand box on the moon?
Lee Bul's work x 2

Image List

Fig. 1- Holzer, Jenny. *MY SKIN*. 2004. Bregenz. *Jenny Holzer*. Web. 17 November 2014.

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"I did not go to those playing fields- they seemed barred, another world (though today, with more nerve and some consciousness of being a space invader, I do stand on football terraces-and love it)..." Pg 185 Massey, Doreen B. *Space, place, and gender*. U of Minnesota Press, 1994. Print.

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HASSAN

"Hassan's installations may be thought of as cultural engagements with the politics of the everyday and how they are negotiated in relation to often repressive social and political forces."

<http://ggavma.canadacouncil.ca/htmlfixed/Archives/2001/2001-04-e.html>

Unravelling the everyday: the art installations of Jamelie Hassan

by Monika Kin Gagnon

Jamelie Hassan on the other hand, sees a little closer to home, with work that centers on the everyday.

"By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs...The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation." (Haraway 150)

“It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective -- or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun.” (Haraway 155)
“ It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories.” (Haraway 181)

<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Haraway-CyborgManifesto.html>

Declaration of human rights <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

<http://tumblr.michaelwhelan.com/post/53123719182/the-ultimate-sandbox-1984-by-michael-whelan>

<http://www.scriptmag.com/features/sci-fi-circuit-the-purpose-and-value-of-science-fiction>

“The original *Star Trek* was groundbreaking in terms of women and people of non-white ethnicities playing valuable roles; it had a life-changing impact for me to see that as a young girl.”

LEE BUL

http://artreview.com/features/aw_2014_ara_feature_lee_bul/

“It's easy to see why Lee's work from the turn of the millennium has so often been read as the artistic equivalent of Donna Haraway's seminal 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the late 20th Century' (1991), a text that Lee has credited as an influence. For Haraway, and initially for Lee, cyborgs and monsters functioned as powerfully ambivalent metaphors; ciphers of resistance against the traditional limitations of gender, feminism, race, science and politics. Their hybrid ontology embodied the collapsing distinctions between (wo) man, machine and animal at a time when the boundary between science fiction and social reality appeared to be little more than an 'optical illusion'. Ironically, Lee found herself pigeonholed as the quintessential 'Asian woman artist', just as Haraway's theories were increasingly 'co-opted by the spectacle of the techno-sublime, manufactured by the computer and biotech industries', as Lee lamented in an interview with Kim Seungduk in *Art Press* in 2002. But the artist has proved herself to be nothing if not adaptable, and her work soon evolved in an unexpected direction. While the cyborg and monster series seemed to embody Jacques Derrida's proposition that if the future can only be defined as an absolute break with constituted normality, then it can only be 'proclaimed, presented as a sort of monstrosity', Lee's more recent works entertain another possibility, proposed by Vladimir Nabokov – that the 'future is but the obsolete in reverse'.”

“While the failed utopias of the past would similarly return to haunt Lee's practice, it was initially her evocative visions of the future that made her one of the most prominent non-Western artists of an anxious age.”

JENNY FLIPPING HOLZER:

words/text as a visual public art form--” the politically volatile dialect of feminism and gender within our reading of contemporary issues.” Auping 13

“a matter of some controversy among feminist artists, who question whether a female can be presented in art without reducing her to merely an erotic object....not relying on an objectification of the female form and instead favoring a more complex psychological portrait. moreover, rather than adhering to the male-dominated viewpoint that orders the world into active/male and passive/female constituents, Holzer depicts female persona that is simultaneously victim and aggressor, life giver and life-taker. In doing so, she creates not only a more realistic female image, but a portrait that is potentially applicable to both genders.” 62

“...a world far more disturbing than that imagined in the science-adventure fantasies of previous generation. What we are seeing today is a brutal yet elegant science fiction that is exceedingly close to science fact, an anxious and not altogether pleasant netherworld between the future and the present.” 43---

“Women need power fantasies: feminist non-realistic fiction provides women's only escape from a reality that brands them as Other.” Auping, Michael. *Jenny Holzer*. New York: Universe Publishing, 1992. 33-36, 38-40, 42-43, 45, 47-52. Print.

“Austere stone benches aligned as if in an auditorium setting- or perhaps like church pews-lead up to this electronic podium/alter and combine with acid red, yellow and green light from the sign to fill the proscenium or chapel-like space with this eerie, otherworldly atmosphere” Pg 38 Auping, Michael. *Jenny Holzer*. Universe Publishing, 1992. Print