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THREE



Cyborg Mothering

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As new communication technologies transform everyday life in the twenty-first century, personal, family, and other social relations are transformed with them. As a way of exploring the larger question—How exactly does communication technology transform love and how love is lived?—this chapter examines the cell phone, e-mail, instant messaging, social networking, and other communication technologies as electronic extensions and modifications of maternal bodies connecting (cyber)mother to (cyber)children. Such transformations of maternal bodies, I suggest, open a space for new and liberating forms of maternal love.

There is a notable lacuna in feminist, postmodernist, and queer scholarship pertaining to these issues. The past two decades have witnessed the emergence of a rich body of feminist scholarship on mothering alongside an equally burgeoning body of postmodernist scholarship on digital technologies and a rapidly proliferating and challenging body of literature in queer theory. However, there has been little dialogue between feminists theorizing motherhood, on the one hand, and cultural theorists (including feminists and queer theorists) investigating the transgressive potential of our posthuman, postmodern condition, on the other hand. Here I wish to begin to put these areas of scholarship into dialogue by exploring how mothering in the postmodern world is inescapably (for me, at least) intertwined with technology in ways that are both the effect of and affected by queer domestic space and critically reflective love.

The space I inhabit is located at a particular intersection of feminism, postmodernism, and queerness. I am the mother of two daughters whom I hope will become independent, autonomous, self-supporting, and fulfilled young women. I am a primary breadwinner in my family. I have a career and friendships that are important to me, and I do not define myself simply as a mother. I am a divorced mother who is attempting to live well in a complicated, extended, blended family. I am a joint custodial parent who is on friendly, albeit not intimate, terms with my ex-husband. He and I (try to) parent cooperatively, making large decisions together while allowing for individual parenting styles and sharing certain economic resources, while not others. I have a same-sex partner. She and I negotiate living among several homes, sharing some, but not all, domestic chores and sharing certain economic resources, while not others. This is a lived reality that demands taking account of different strands of cultural theory in order to provide an adequate analysis of different facets of my struggles and aspirations as a mother.

In the last several years, after ending a long marriage, I have been immersed largely in trying to think through ways of loving my now teenage daughters consistently while—as a joint custodial parent—only occupying shared material space with them half of the time. An important way in which I retain consistent contact with my daughters is to inhabit virtual space with them during the times during which we do not share material space. I talk with them on the cell phone; I e-mail and instant message them; and I visit their My Space and Facebook accounts. Indeed, given the proclivity of my daughters to be attached to a cell phone or computer even when we are in the same physical domicile, I often meet them in virtual space even during the weeks I am living under the same roof as they. Sometimes, as I will argue here, technology enables a co-presence that physical proximity does not.

Given the number of commuting parents, divorced parents, diasporic families, and wired teenagers who exist in our postmodern era, I think it unlikely that I am the only mother who relies on technology to care for her children. For feminists and queers interested in both mothering and technology, important questions arise, namely: Is mothering transformed by our uses of technology, and, if so, how? Can technology liberate us from the patriarchal institution of motherhood, and can it be used to subvert the heteronormative paradigm of family, or does it simply reinforce gendered relations of oppression?

Without minimizing the legitimate feminist concerns about the ways in which technology may reproduce relations of oppression under patriarchal capitalism (see, e.g., Edley 2001; Gurley 2001), my focus here will be on some of the ways in which cellular and digital tech-

nologies might help us disrupt patriarchal, heteronormative practices of motherhood. New communication technologies do not, I argue, merely reproduce existing gender and domestic relationships; they also transform those relationships. Transformations in those relationships, in turn, engender new uses and conceptions of technologies. Indeed, if we take seriously, as I think we should, cyberfeminist Donna Haraway's claim that postmodern humans are cyborgs (1991), then the distinction between human animals and machines breaks down in ways that invite us to revise the questions we ask about technology. Thus instead of inquiring about the oppression engendered by the production and consumption of communication technologies, here I sketch the ways in which technology functions as an extension and a modification of human embodiment, transforming our experiences of intimacy and our ability to create, maintain, and transform responsible, loving relationships with others. More specifically, I will argue that digital and other technologies queer cultural processes of reproduction by queering the temporal and spatial structures of mothering and that this, in turn, transforms the meaning and experience of maternal love.

As this overview suggests, my interest here is not in how communication technologies enable mothers to bridge the much discussed gap between work and home but is instead in how these technologies enable us to decompartmentalize and transform our private lives themselves. This is particularly important for queer families, such as my own, who do not inhabit material domestic space in normative ways. When separating from my husband several years ago, we agreed to an unconventional living arrangement wherein our young daughters remained in one home which we as custodial parents time-shared, along with a rental apartment in which we lived alternatively as non-custodial parents. Although we have recently divorced and split property, we continue to alternate custody on a biweekly basis (with flexibility as needed), maintain a joint bank account for basic children's needs, consult one another on parenting issues, and maintain a fluidity between and amidst homes. Our homes now number four—his, mine, his girlfriend's, and my girlfriend's. Navigating multiple homes and diverse styles of caregiving and domesticity is an intentional, cooperative effort that gives all of us—including my now teenage daughters—access to both city and suburban amenities, as well as time alone when needed. As Judith Halberstam (2005) suggests, queerness may be less a matter of sexual identity than it is "an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" (1).

Such queerness is not without its challenges. Despite wanting to teach my daughters the value of queering domestic configurations, I

continue to find it difficult to live *as a mother* outside of the nuclear family and maintain consistent physical proximity to my daughters. How does one "leave" her children and still mother?

Mothering at a distance, I am learning, requires queer uses of time and space; inhabiting time and space queerly is made possible by communication technologies—or what I call here "technologies of co-presence." In the following section, I begin my argument for embracing the ideal of cyborg motherhood by drawing on the canonical cyberfeminist work of Haraway and the queer theoretical work of Halberstam to sketch the notion of cyborg motherhood as an evolution of non-normative motherhood. Following this, I explore the importance of technologies of co-presence as extensions and modifications of maternal bodies in families that diverge from the heteronormative paradigm of the nuclear family. Borrowing feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver's (2001) notion of "response-ability," in the third section I suggest that technologies of co-presence enhance the subjectivity of both mother and child by increasing their mutual ability to respond to one another—especially, although not exclusively, in queer time and space. I conclude that insofar as cyborg identities open spaces of critical self-reflection that are necessary to non-self-sacrificing maternal love, we should embrace the potential of cyborg mothering.

MOTHERING AS/WITH TECHNOLOGY

Haraway (1991) asks how our "natural" bodies can be "reimagined—and relived—in ways that transform the relations of same and different, self and other, inner and outer, recognition and misrecognition into guiding maps for inappropriate/d others" (3–4). Her answer lies in viewing ourselves as "hybrids of machine and organism" or, in other words, as "cyborgs." Cyborgs, Haraway suggests, live intimacy in ways that embody an oppositional politics, that transgress the boundaries of mind and body, culture and nature, and abandon "the polarity of public and private," in part, by reconfiguring "social relations in the . . . household" (151). Urging us to embrace "the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts," including those parts that find pleasure in reason and technology, Haraway concludes her famous cyberfeminist manifesto with a rejection of cultural feminism's celebration of an idealized femininity, claiming that she would (and we should) "rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (181).

In an essay contemplating technology and gender, queer theorist Halberstam (1998) concurs with Haraway's recommendation, rejecting a feminism predicated on a "goddess-given right to birth children" as ultimately rooted in a patriarchal story about women's essential connection to nature and moral superiority to men (478). Disparaging the notion that there is "some 'natural' or 'organic' essence of woman that is either corrupted or contained by any association with the artificial," Halberstam claims that "femininity is always mechanical and artificial—as is masculinity" (478). The female cyborg, a fusion of femininity and intelligence, as described by Halberstam, "thinks gender, processes power, and converts a binary system of logic into a more intricate network. As a metaphor, she challenges correspondences such as maternity and femininity or female and emotion. As a metonym, she embodies the impossibility of distinguishing between gender and its representation" (479).

While I am less optimistic than Haraway (1991) about the cyborg as "a creature in a post-gender world" (150), I agree with Halberstam (1998) that "gender is a technology" irreducible to "natural" bodies and that "[g]ender emerges within the cyborg as no longer a binary but as a multiple construction dependent upon random formations beyond masculine and feminine" (480). Viewing ourselves as cyborgs certainly does blur the distinctions between mind and body, culture and nature, and public and private in ways that both complicate and multiply our notions of gender, in part by denaturalizing them and, related to this, by throwing into question assumptions about women's "place." In so doing, it complicates and multiplies our notions of mothering by rejecting any residual essentialist ideas about mothering as rooted in "natural" or "instinctual" female practices of caregiving performed in particular bodily ways or in particular material spaces. Mothering, like gender itself, is a technology (a social artifice produced by shifting power relations), not an essential identity tied to natural bodies. One way to see this is to recognize the ways in which technologies (machines) are integrated into the practices of mothering in ways that transform the maternal body, its location in time and space, and its engagement with others, making possible resistant forms of maternal agency.

As Haraway (1991) notes, "communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools for recrafting our bodies," tools that "embody and enforce new social relations" (164). Among the social relations transformed by these new technologies are the relations of sexuality and of reproduction (168–69). Sexuality, as conceived by

sociobiology, Haraway notes, becomes an instrumental activity emphasizing a genetic calculus as well as desire-satisfaction (169). This is sexuality as repro-sexuality: an “interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity” (Warner 1991, 9). The straight personal identity supported by sociobiological accounts is closely interwoven with biological reproduction; it is, as queer theorist Michael Warner (1991) has contended, a “breeder identity”—a self-understanding and conception of one’s sexual identity closely tied to one’s status as procreative (9). Breeder identities combine with medical technologies in the postmodern era, however, in ways that transform reproductive relations, making clear the social nature of such relations. As Haraway (1991) observes, these technologies—sonograms, amniocentesis, in-vitro fertilization, and so forth—permeate the boundaries of women’s bodies via photographic and biochemical means, undermining claims about the “naturalness” of reproductive bodies and identities (169).

Biomedical technologies are not, however, the only technologies that reveal mothering as artifice. Also noteworthy are the wide variety of domestic technologies producing and satisfying maternal desires. As both feminists and queer theorists have suggested, “reprosexuality involves more than reproducing. . . . [I]t involves a relation to self that finds its proper temporality and fulfillment in generational transmission” (Warner 1991, 9). Generational succession requires us to feed and clothe and teach and nurture our offspring so that they can, in turn, reproduce our values as well as our genes. This is closely linked to Halberstam’s recent critique of temporal norms as followed by “bourgeois families.” These temporal norms include not only the “time of reproduction” (women’s “biological clock”), but also the “normative scheduling of daily life . . . that accompanies the practice of childrearing” (“family time”) and “generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next” (“the time of inheritance”) (Halberstam 2005, 5).

These cultural processes of reproduction—and with them the temporal and spatial structures of mothering—are also intertwined with technologies (machines) that reveal mothering—a specific gendered identity—as a technology (an artifice produced by relations of power). In *The Cyborg Mommy: User’s Manual*, performance artist Pattie Belle Hastings (2002) focuses on the postpartum technologizing of mother and child. In the introduction to her ongoing multimedia work, Hastings (2006) suggests that in contrast to “movies and fiction that depict the cyborg as a futuristic, superhuman, or technological monster . . . it is actually your average mother and housewife that are among the first

so-called cyborgs.” The machine, she observes, has “extended the body of the mother for centuries”; mothers have “tended the stove, cranked the washer, peddled the sewing machine, and vacuumed the house.” Today, mothering occurs in an environment in which “microchips are embedded in everything from toys and greeting cards to thermometers and baby monitors,” leading to a situation in which mothering relationships are increasingly “mediated, complicated, and enhanced by machine” (Hastings 2002, 79).

It would be easy to interpret this environment as being oppressive and reproductive and domestic technologies as being invasive (see, e.g., Edley 2001; Friedan 1963; Rakow and Navarro 1993). Nonetheless, I wish to suggest, following Haraway and Hastings, that the cyborg stands as a potentially utopian figure. As Hastings suggests, the Cyborg Mommy is liberated and not merely oppressed: “As machines and bodies increasingly become fused, Cyborg theory celebrates” as well as “criticizes and condemns the process—the machine/body relationship is at once liberating and oppressive” (Hastings 2002, 79). To see the liberatory potential of cyborg mothering, however, it is fruitful to focus on a particular type of technology, namely, communication technologies such as cell phones, e-mail, instant messaging, and social networking sites such as My Space and Facebook. I term these *technologies of co-presence* in order to emphasize the ways in which these technologies allow us to be present to and with others in ways not tied to the physical facticity of the body. These technologies thus permit us, as mothers, to inhabit space and time differently—in ways that enable resistance to bourgeois family norms (especially self-sacrificial forms of mothering) and suggest different forms of intimacy between family members.

TECHNOLOGIES OF CO-PRESENCE: QUEERING SPACES AND BODIES

Cultural theorist Mark Poster distinguishes between a modernist (enlightenment) understanding of machines as tools or prosthetic devices enabling humans to have greater control over (natural) reality and postmodern understandings of machines as, instead, reconfiguring our reality and transforming who we are. Speaking specifically of the Internet, he says:

The Internet is more like a social space than a thing, so that its effects are more like those of Germany than those of hammers: the effect of Germany upon the people within it is to make

them Germans (at least for the most part); the effect of hammers is not to make people hammers . . . but to force metal spikes into wood. . . . The problem is that modern perspectives tend to reduce the Internet to a hammer. In this grand narrative of modernity, the Internet is an efficient tool of communication, advancing the goals of its users, who are understood as pre-constituted instrumental identities. (Poster 2001, 177)

Poster's analogy is useful for thinking about the distinctions between two paradigms of technology; however, it may underplay the ways in which tools themselves are misunderstood as mere extensions of the human will. It is no more a "preconstituted instrumental identity" that uses a hammer than it is a preconstituted subjectivity that uses the Internet. Technological tools—including the bottle washers, vacuums, and washing machines used by Hastings's cyborg mommy, as well as Poster's hammers—do not merely *extend* the embodied will of their users, they also *mediate* and *transform* human agency and social norms. As Betty Friedan argued, the domestic gadgetry imported into suburban U.S. households in the mid-twentieth century produced (in addition to being produced by) new norms of good housekeeping and good mothering (Friedan 1963). As such, these tools played an important role in transforming (bourgeois) women's desires, goals, and identities. In this sense, Hastings is right: cyborg mothers—mothers whose agency can only be understood as being inextricably intertwined with domestic technologies—have been around a long time.

There is, however, something qualitatively new about the ways in which communication technologies, such as the Internet, transform our human subjectivity. This is captured, in part, by Poster's emphasis on the Internet as a *space* rather than a *thing*. It is further unpacked by Allucqu re Rosanne Stone's (2001) distinction between relationships with technology that are characterized by playfulness and those characterized by work. Like Poster, Stone rejects a conception of computers as tools extending the human will, arguing that this framework for thinking about digital technologies is rooted in "a human work ethic" that renders invisible the beliefs and practices of many playful cyber communities, including many programmers, hackers, and discussion groups (12–14). Following anthropologist Barbara Joans's distinction between those who play with technology ("Creative Outlaw Visionaries") and those who build and sell it ("Law and Order Practitioners"), Stone suggests that the paradigm of computers as tools only makes sense from the latter group's perspective. Visionaries, however, are "thoroughly accustomed to engaging in nontrivial social interactions through the use

of their computers—social interactions in which they change and are changed, in which commitments are made, kept, and broken, in which they may engage in intellectual discussion, arguments, and even sex" (Stone 2001, 15). Thus visionaries "view computers not only as tools, but also as *arenas for social experience* (Stone 2001, 15, emphasis in original). Unlike the Law and Order Practitioners, who view computers as little boxes containing information, Visionaries understand that "inside the little box are *other people*" (16).

Recognizing communication technologies as opening new social spaces requires us, Stone argues, to "rethink some assumptions about presence."

Presence is currently a word that means many different things to many different people. One meaning is the sense that we are direct witnesses to something or that we ourselves are being directly apprehended. . . . Another meaning is related to agency, to the proximity of intentionality. The changes that the concept of presence is currently undergoing are embedded in much larger shifts in cultural beliefs and practices. These include repeated transgressions of the traditional concept of the body's physical envelope and of the locus of human agency. (Stone 2001, 16)

Intimacy, as sociologist Gill Valentine (2006) notes, has been typically assumed to require physical proximity: "The word 'close' is a synonym for intimate, and literal closeness is often assumed to be essential for familiarity and commitment" (367). Yet as the number of families "living apart together" (Holmes 2004, 181) indicates, physical distance need not bring an end to intimacy (Valentine 2006). For Valentine, as for Poster and Stone and other theorists of technology, viewing technology as an arena for social experience enabling familial and other forms of intimacy is closely linked to the advent of the Internet:

The Internet expands the opportunities for daily meaningful contact between family members locked in different time-space routines at work, school, traveling, and so on. In this sense online exchanges and daily Internet use are adding a new dimension, rearticulating practices of everyday life and lived spaces. (Valentine 2006, 370)

While there may be an element of truth to this, I am less inclined than they to insist upon an essential difference between new digital communication technologies and earlier "tools of networking," such as the

telephone. What is important for thinking about transformations in the way love is lived is, I think, Stone's point about presence in shared social spaces. The telephone and the Internet, it seems, allow for intentional social interaction between agents—including intimate and transformative engagement between family members—that is not grounded “in the physical facticity of human bodies” (Stone 2001, 17). Women have long used the telephone as a vehicle for sustaining relationships across cities, countries, and continents; it is largely men who have traditionally viewed the phone as merely a vehicle for transmitting information (Rakow and Navarro 1993; Honey 1994). It is in order to capture the array of technologies that may be understood as “arenas for social experience” for at least some users that I speak here simply of “technologies of co-presence.”

What all technologies of co-presence have in common is that they restructure—to a greater or lesser degree—our experiences of ourselves as agents in space and time. As Poster (2001) notes, “the vectors of space and time are drastically reconfigured” by the computer. Bodies move almost instantaneously through space and time with/in the technological vehicle; “the simultaneity of e-mail and chat modes on the Internet completely erases spatial factors and implodes time” (26). It would be inaccurate to indicate that the telephone “erases space” or “implodes time” in the same ways as the Internet; nonetheless, as the Bell telephone slogan “reach out and touch someone” indicated, the phone does allow us to move through space and time with/in it. This experience of moving through space and time becomes intensified with cellular phone technologies that allow us to reach out (and be reached) wherever we may be. The cell phone may thus be envisioned as “an entry-level, cyborg technology” (Clark 2003, 15).

For some, like cultural studies theorist Paul Virilio, the technologies by which space and time are transgressed give rise to dystopian anxieties (see Virilio 1986, 1995). In *La vitesse de liberation*, Virilio worries that online chat groups and other social spaces may promote forms of eroticism that threaten to destroy loving relationships and undermine fundamental social institutions such as the family:

The end of the supremacy of physical proximity in the megalopolis of the postindustrial era will not simply encourage the spread of the single-parent family. It provokes a further more radical rupture between man and woman, threatening directly the future of sexual reproduction . . . the Parmenidean rupture between masculine and feminine principles broadens to allow remote acts of love. (Virilio 1995, 130)

Virilio's dystopian vision highlights the heteronormative anxieties underlying concerns about social spaces ungrounded by relations of physical proximity. As Poster notes, it is not the family—much less love itself—that is endangered by relationships without physical presence. What is threatened is a particular historic arrangement, namely, the heterosexual, nuclear family (Poster 2001, 115). At the same time technologies of co-presence undermine the normativity of the nuclear family formation, however, they enable, promote, and respond to new forms of love and families. In queering time and space, technologies of co-presence make room for queer love and queer families. As Halberstam (2005) notes, the models of temporality and place-making practices that emerge within postmodernism allow for creative, non-normative organizations of community, identity, embodiment, and agency (6). This includes new forms of relationships between mothers and children and new forms of maternal identity, maternal embodiment, and maternal agency.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR BOUNDARIES

In contrast to Virilio's claim that technologies of co-presence threaten the reproductive family and thus humanity's future, Haraway (1991) argues that coming to terms with our cyborg identities includes rejecting the dichotomy between us (as vulnerable subjects) and machines (as threatening objects). It thus allows us to accept our pleasure—including maternal pleasure—in machine skills and technological communications not as a sin (or some sort of false consciousness) but simply as an aspect of embodiment:

The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. (Haraway 1991, 180, emphases in original)

What does it mean for a cyborg mother to be responsible for boundaries? How do boundaries oppress and/or liberate us? And how can boundaries assist or detract from our ability to love and be loved? In addressing these questions in a postmodern era, feminists studying technology have largely focused on the virtual boundary between the public and private spheres. There has, moreover, been considerable ambivalence about this boundary. On the one hand, feminists have long

been critical of the distinction between the public and the private, sensing that women's oppression is closely linked to their relegation to the (devalued) private sphere and their (unpaid) responsibilities therein. Insofar as a variety of technologies of co-presence (e-mail, the Internet, instant messaging, cell phones, pagers, and so forth) have permitted the blurring of boundaries between the public and private spheres, these technologies free us from rigid constraints on where we must be when. They enable us to be at work while at home and at home while at work. On the other hand, many feminists are also simultaneously wary of this blurring of boundaries between work and home, sensing that it "extend[s] work and one's availability into all periods of time and into all places," thus making it difficult to be present to those with whom one is (at work or at play) in physical proximity (Rakow and Navarro 1993, 148; see also Edley 2001; Gurstein 2001).

What has gone largely unnoticed in this debate over dismantling or protecting the boundary between the public and private aspects of our lives is the way in which there are also boundaries *within* the public and, as I discuss here, *within* the private aspects of our lives. These too are boundaries that communication technologies permit us to transgress, and these transgressions require equal attention and responsibility.

It is somewhat surprising, given widespread feminist awareness that the nuclear family is a somewhat mythical creature, that so little feminist attention has been given to the geographical and emotional boundaries that exist within the private sphere. In addition to the lack of geographical proximity to our extended kin networks, the postmodern era has witnessed a proliferation of commuter relationships between adult partners and between parents and children in the case of separation and/or divorce. The way in which people are "doing" family has changed radically in recent decades (Morgan 1999), as have "traditional patterns for delivering love and care" (Valentine 2006, 368). The postmodern family, as feminist philosopher Cheshire Calhoun (1997) notes (and Virilio [1995] fears), is a family configured by affectional choices rather than biology or proximity. This both requires and enables intimacy to be lived differently.

I have been suggesting here that technologies of co-presence can transform our lived experiences of intimacy, providing us with a means of embodying love in queer space and time. It has simultaneously extended our responsibilities and our abilities to respond to others with whom we are in a relationship. It is, I think, the extended responsibilities (here as with work) that may be experienced as oppressive. The extension of our abilities to respond, however, may be experienced as liberating.

Like several of the "remote mothers" interviewed by Rakow and Navarro (1993), I originally refused to purchase a cell phone because of resistance to additional responsibility. I emphatically did not want to be accessible to others—at work or at home—all of the time. In retrospect, however, this stance manifested a particular standpoint of privilege—namely, the standpoint of being an administrator with staff who could competently handle matters in my absence and take messages for me and the standpoint of being a primary breadwinner in a family that included a husband with flexible work that accommodated my children's needs during the weekdays. My stance also reflected my ability to respond in physically embodied ways to the needs of others (colleagues and children) who might need my reply. It was permissible to be out of (virtual) touch sometimes because most of the time I was within (physical) reach: as an administrator, I was in the office for extended periods of time every weekday, and as the member of an intact nuclear family, I was at home with my children almost every night and weekend.

The embodiment of my work and family life has since shifted significantly, however. After stepping down from administration, I volunteered to work at a satellite campus and began to commute between cities and campuses on a regular basis. Around the same time, I chose to separate from my husband, and we mutually agreed to a joint custody arrangement wherein we, as co-parents, time-shared a family home (where our children consistently lived) and an apartment (where we each lived separately on alternating weeks when we were not with our children in the family home). On some of my noncustodial weeks, I lived not in the apartment but with my new partner at her home. Hence, in addition to commuting between two workplaces, I was regularly commuting among three homes. These lived divisions within my public sphere and especially within my private sphere could only be transgressed by embracing a cyborg identity and, in particular, the identity of a cyborg mother.

I frequently refer to my cell phone as my electronic umbilical cord, and this is, indeed, how I experience it—as an extension of my body that sustains and nourishes my relationship with my now teenage daughters. Sometimes this is a frustrating part of my identity—for example, when I am awoken from sleep by the phone's ring in the middle of the night because of a child angered by frustrations or frightened by nightmares, or when I am called away from my work because a child has missed her school bus or forgotten a needed item. Their father is sleeping in the same house as they, and working in the same city, but I, several miles away, am the one being interrupted. Like the

breastfeeding mother, I resent at these moments feeling like the only parent to sustain my children and thus the only parent deprived of time to sleep or work. On the other hand, the umbilical cord, unlike perhaps the breast, is a two-directional connection for which I am grateful. Yes, my daughters have greater access to me, but I too have greater access to them. A greater responsibility to be available, yes, but also a greater knowledge of their lives, a stronger and more consistent connection to them than I would otherwise enjoy. When my daughter phones me (cell phone to cell phone) from the school bus on her way home, she is considerably more enthusiastic and informative regarding her day at school than she is in a face-to-face dinner conversation. Indeed, as my daughters have become teenagers, family meals have largely become a thing of the past: my youngest daughter is apt to be involved in an after-school activity of some sort; my elder daughter remains glued to her computer, chatting with friends in virtual space.

Oliver comments on the connection between responsibility and what she calls "response-ability" (the ability to respond) as the foundation of personal subjectivity. She says:

We are obligated to respond to our environment and other people in ways that open up rather than close off the possibility of response. This obligation is an obligation to life itself. . . . Subjectivity is founded on the ability to respond to, and address, others. . . . Insofar as subjectivity is made possible by the ability to respond, response-ability is its founding possibility. The responsibility inherent in subjectivity has the double sense of the condition of possibility of response, response-ability, on the one hand, and the ethical obligation to respond and to enable response-ability from others born out of that founding possibility, on the other. (Oliver 2001, 15)

If, as Oliver contends, subjectivity is response-ability—the ability to respond and to enable responsiveness from others (91), then my subjectivity is enhanced by the various electronic umbilical cords without which it would be difficult for me to respond to and enable response from my daughters. As Clark (2003) indicates, cyborg technologies "impact what we feel capable of doing, where we feel we are located, and what kinds of problems we find ourselves capable of solving" (34). By technologies of co-presence, I become potentially capable of mothering, of feeling—indeed being—close to my daughters and caring for them, despite physical distance. I can—regardless of where I am physically located—sing lullabies to my daughters when they have

nightmares, kiss them good night when they miss me, empathize with them about romantic breakups, remind them and be reminded about important tasks and events, hear or read about the highlights and low moments of their days, and share with them my important moments and daily routines as well. I can be present in their lives and they in mine. Technologies of co-presence allow me to open up the possibility of responses delivered in *both* directions, and my identity as a cyborg is thus essential to my maternal subjectivity and not merely an adjunct to it.

CHOOSING LOVE, CHOOSING FAMILY

While technologies of co-presence do serve to enable "presence at a distance," they should not be seen "merely as imperfect attempts to recreate real world relationships" (Clark 2003, 184). Such technologies also enable new forms of personal contact, presence, and relationship than may be forged in relationships of physical proximity. They allow us to not only reconfigure domestic space and time, for example, but also to transform familial intimacy—and, in particular, maternal love—itsself. Cyborg mothering is thus a practice that enables us to resist self-sacrificing ideals of motherhood. Such practices are especially important in the context of the "new momism" that insists on standards of perfection for mothering that are both unrealistic and debilitating for women (Douglas and Michaels 2004; see also Warner 2005). Technologies of co-presence do not require—from mothers or others—that we respond *without thinking* to all calls on our time and attention. Instead, they enable the critical distance necessary for love that is reflective and transformative.

To see the importance of distance to the feminist transformation of maternal identity and practice, it is useful to consider the reasons mothers leave their children—for work, for sexual freedom, or for other autonomous pursuits. Examining the story of Lilith, a woman who chose to leave her husband and children, sociologist Petra Büskens (2004) asks, "What happens to motherhood when it occurs outside the conventional nuclear or single-parent family?" (106). Her answer is that mothering, as a practice, is reinvented. The act of leaving, Büskens suggests, "can be understood as one way of resisting the totalising institution of self-sacrificing/desexualizing mothering" (109). By leaving her familial home, a mother "opens up the space to be something other than a mother," creating a room—and perhaps even a *home*—of her own. Once she has established her own autonomy, Lilith reestablishes a connection

with her children, ultimately inviting her teenage daughter and sons to share this space with her, but as contributing members of a shared household manifesting *mutual* care and responsibility. By "altering the terms and spaces from which she mothers," according to Büskens, she "repositions the whore within the madonna, or the woman within the mother," thus deconstructing notions of selfless, asexual, instinctual mothering (109). In view of Lillith's return to mothering, Büskens contends, Lillith is best understood not as leaving her *children* but, rather, as leaving "the hegemonic *institution* of mothering" (2004, 116, emphasis added). Leaving, for Lillith and others like her, may be most accurately viewed as "a *strategic withdrawal on the mother's behalf geared to disrupt and reorganise the terms on which parenting is conventionally organized*" (2004, 117, emphasis in original).

Cyborg mothering may likewise be seen as a strategy for reorganizing the terms of mothering. Communication technologies—or technologies of co-presence, as I have been calling them—make it possible for mothers to live autonomous lives outside the confines of the nuclear family on an intermittent or a more permanent basis. Doing so need not require "leaving" one's children but instead intentionally and consciously reorganizing the terms on which, and spaces and times in which, mother and child are present to one another.

According to bell hooks (2000), love is a choice. Love is not, however, always experienced that way. Love may often feel involuntary and beyond our control as captured by the phrase "falling into love." Or it may feel obligatory, as though we have no option but to love another, as a mother feels obliged to love her children. For cyborgs, however, love is more clearly a choice. The would-be cyborg lover does not just fall, against her will, into her lover's arms. She makes conscious decisions, for example, to say this rather than that in her electronic correspondence and to send or not send her flirtatious messages. Similarly, the cyborg mother does not just instinctively respond to her child's cry. She makes conscious decisions to turn the baby monitor, cell phone, online indicator, or other communication device on or off. And each time a communications device beckons her, she must make a conscious decision to answer or not answer the call. Cyborg love is thus more likely to be experienced as the practice of freedom. Through various circuits and send and delete buttons and on and off switches, we can, in Oliver's (2001) words, "choose to close ourselves off to others or we can choose to try to open ourselves toward others" (220).

In addition to choosing whether to open ourselves to others, we choose how to open ourselves to others. And we leave records of our choices—their traces are on voice mail, message machines, e-mail

archives, and social networking "bulletins" and "walls." These traces do not guarantee, but they do make it more likely that we will be vigilant about our choices on each occasion that we make them. The secret lover hesitates to leave a message on her lover's answering machine, for fear it will be overheard and in that hesitation has the opportunity to reflect on what she is doing. The cyborg mother chooses her tone of voice and words to her child to more carefully reflect loving concern when she reprimands or cautions her child via electronic communication than she might in the exasperation of the in-person moment. Moreover, where vigilance is not practiced at the moment of decision making, the historical record left enables learning through post-partum analysis and interpretation. As Oliver, following hooks, also suggests, it is "only through vigilant reinterpretation and elaboration of our own performance" of opening ourselves toward others that we can maintain a loving attitude: "love is not something we choose once and for all. Rather, it is a decision that must be constantly reaffirmed through the vigilance of self-reflection" (2001, 220–21).

This is, then, the liberating aspect of loving from afar. As Oliver (2001) notes, space is not empty, and thus distance need not be experienced as "unbridgeable, empty, or alienating" (213). It is "the gaps or spaces between" the lover and the beloved, the mother and child, that open up possibilities for "communication and communion" that may exist, but are not as readily discernable, when we are in close proximity or enmeshed in relationships that seem "natural" rather than voluntarily constructed (221). Insofar as cyborg identities enable this form of subjectivity, we would do well to embrace, rather than resist, them. Technologies of co-presence are not artificial and inadequate bridges between subjects. Instead, they make possible extensions and transformations of ourselves that engage in the critical self-reflection necessary to loving one another consciously and intentionally across emotional and cognitive, as well as geographical and temporal, boundaries.

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