2027 Annual Graduate Student Conference
Cinema Studies Institute, University of Toronto
Thursday, March 4 - Saturday, March 6, 2027

Call for Papers: DOLLS—Girlbots, Dolls and Other Artificial Women: Contemporary Feminism in the Age of Technofascism

In the late 1930s, surrealist artist Hans Bellmer fantasized about cyborg women. In his essay, "Memories of the Doll Theme," he describes a mechanical doll with an internal system intended to project panoramic images on the inside of the girl's artificial belly.[1] According to Bellmer's violent diagram of a decapitated and de-limbed nude woman, the technological mechanism would be controlled via a push-button on her nipple (Figure 1). The artist describes the purpose of creating such a monstrous entity as an attempt "to construct an artificial girl with anatomical possibilities […] capable of recreating the heights of passion even to inventing new desires."[2] Bellmer's thought experiment demonstrates that from its inception, moving image technology has always been linked to issues of computation and gender.

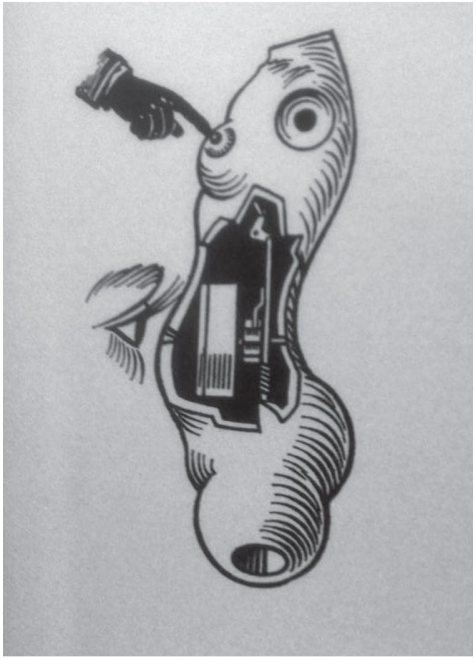


Fig. 1: Hans Bellmer, linocut illustration from his essay
"Memories of the Doll Theme" in his book of images *La poupée*.[3]

[1] Hans Bellmer, "Memories of the Doll Theme," trans. Peter Chametzky, Susan Felleman and Jochen Schindler, *Sulfur*, no. 26 (1990): 29-33.
[2] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and Other Artificial Eves* (Rutgers University Press, 2015), 84-85.
[3] Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 85.

In *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids and Other Artificial Eves*, Julie Wosk traces the link between gender and technology back to the Pygmalion myth. Most notably recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion, a King and sculptor, falls in love with one of his own projects and detests all other women for acting out of line with his constructed model of The Perfect Woman.[4] This myth carries through to the modern day where girlbots, dolls and other artificial women are still fantasized, funded and formed to embody flattening patriarchal projections of womanhood. Barbie dolls, a fantasy toy, present a standardized, yet unattainable, image of women — hairless and slender with a full face of makeup and a permanent smile. This expectation that women should act *doll-like* is now being recreated technologically in more sinister forms, such as accommodating voice assistants (Alexa and Siri) and degraded sexbots.

Today, we continue to observe how rapidly developing information technologies pervade the everyday, while simultaneously shaping social thought on a mass scale. From robot sex dolls to algorithmically guided misogynistic, or "red-pilled", internet ecosystems to deep fake pornography, Bellmer's twisted desires are made material in the contemporary technological milieu. This history of suppression and domination directly contradicts the Silicon Valley fairytale about singular geniuses (almost always male) who developed computing as means of social and economic liberation. Laine Nooney revisits and rewrites this history, concluding that "what we may discover is that the story of great men, with their great technologies, launching their great revolutions, is a story more for them (and their shareholders) than for us."[5] In other words, technological innovation has always been designed with the patriarchal and thus capitalistic purposes of extraction, surveillance and subjugation. Palantir CEO Alex Karp says as much in an interview this year where he suggests that a benefit to investing in Artificial Intelligence development is that the technology may soon be used to undermine the influence of "highly educated, often female" voters in future U.S. elections. This is just one of many examples where technology has been explicitly described as a tool to enforce patriarchal hegemony. The doll motif is the epitome of this techno-fascist agenda which seeks to control and flatten women. This conference reclaims and upholds the doll as a liberative symbol of feminist reclamation.[6]

The University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Graduate Conference seeks submissions which reinstate feminist agency and practice in symbiosis with technology studies. We are interested in papers which explore artificial women and programmed behaviors in the context of gender as fascinating objects of study. Scholars may approach this theme from a critical perspective, exploring the new challenges feminists must attend to in the face of rapidly evolving technology. Conversely, the conference is eager to

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[4] Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 7.
[5] Laine Nooney, *The Apple II Age: How the Computer Became Personal* (The University of Chicago Press, 2023), 5.
[6] Bliss Cua Lim, "Dolls in Fragments: *Daisies* as Feminist Allegory," *Camera Obscura* 16, no. 2 (2001): 37-77.

engage with papers which thrive inside the fantasy of a liberated computer. In other words, applicants may wish to theorize speculatively about how technology can be reworked in service of a feminist practice or historical papers which may trace isolated instances where this has already happened.

This conference is trans-inclusive, decolonial and anti-Zionist in its philosophy and practice. Computation began as a military venture which was then packaged into a commercial product to be sold to the masses. Imperial subjects and victims of settler-colonial violence were the first victims of the Information Age and Silicon Valley continues to test war technologies and weapons on the innocent across the globe including Palestine, Venezuela and Sudan.

Sample topics and methods might include but are not limited to:

- Afrofabulation
- Afropessimism
- Algorithms
- Black studies
- Critical data studies
- Critical AI studies
- Cyborg theory
- Decolonial/Postcolonial theory
- Eco-theory
- Feminist theory
- Game Studies
- Indigenous studies
- Industry studies
- Marxist theory
- Migration and diaspora
- Minor aesthetics
- New Media
- Programmed behaviors
- Queer theory
- Technology studies
- Technoethics
- Theories of the archive
- Transgender studies
- Utopias and dystopia

We welcome submissions from independent scholars and graduate students worldwide. Applicants must submit a brief abstract (300-500 words) and a bio of 50-100 words to csgraduatestudentunion@gmail.com by January 8, 2027. Conference acceptances will be sent out by the end of January.