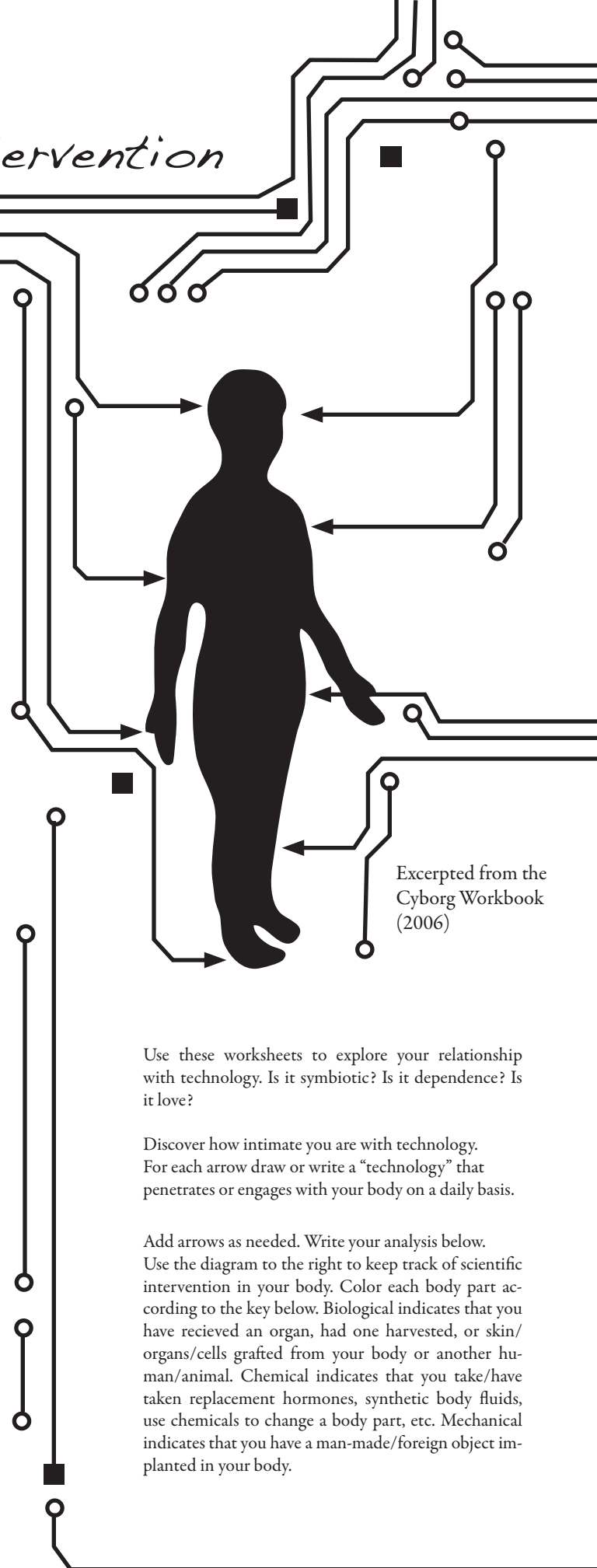


DIY Internet Intervention

Step 1: Understand the Global Picture

The fabric of webs and wires that connects our world together has holes, tears, and a number of other defects. With constant news media talking about the “Global Village” it is not surprising that many Americans do not realize that Internet users represent less than twenty percent of the world population. 1 North America is one of the most saturated markets of Internet users. In the United States more than seventy percent of the American population owns a home computer and nearly the same percentage accesses the Internet (either at home, work or school). Australia and Europe are next in line. Unfortunately there are voids in this tangle of wires, with less than four percent of Africans able to access the Internet and similar statistics in areas of unrest and war. Although forty percent of the world’s Internet users live in Asia, only twelve percent of Asians have access to the Internet. Asia is home to more than fifty percent of the world population and two thirds of the world’s population living in extreme poverty. Specific details of world wide Internet use, like divides in gender, or access to technologies outside of the home are not tracked but we can infer that those that do not have access are those without economic or educational empowerment, the majority of whom, on a world scale, are women.

There are exciting projects aimed to dismantle the global digital divide working next to innovators working to make affordable clean water, shelter and food available to the same populations. One project is 50 by 152 sponsored by AMD whose goal is to bring the World Wide Web to fifty percent of the world population by the year 2015 with the help of a number of collaborators and world partners like IAFE (Internet Access for Everyone). The thought is that by closing the digital divide, the educational and economic divide will also shrink. The former director of MIT’s Media Lab, Nicholas Negroponte, leads an analogous project, One Laptop for Every Child³. A key goal of this project is good design, good value and good technology. What is especially notable is the dedication to new technology that suit the particular needs of students in developing countries including screens that can be used in direct sunlight, protection against sand and water and alternative power sources for areas not on the electrical grid. These machines must run consistently, without the need of IT professionals because of the rural nature of the targeted areas. This need has led to the exclusive use of open source (free to use, and free to improve or expand upon) software and operating systems. Open source often leads to a more stable digital environment, requires less processing power, and lifts the burdens (exclusive software, limitations on hardware, financial) placed by big corporations like Microsoft and Apple. This move is especially useful in developing nations as it skips the mediocre sort-of-connected hand-me-downs from developed nations, that are often a burden rather than a blessing, and jumps straight toward flexible technology that may actually give these nations or individuals an edge in the global economy. As a society we should support these projects as well as investigate who is helped and empowered, and advocate for those it continues to ignore. For example, if laptops are going to schools, and the attendees of the schools are largely male (especially in developing nations), the



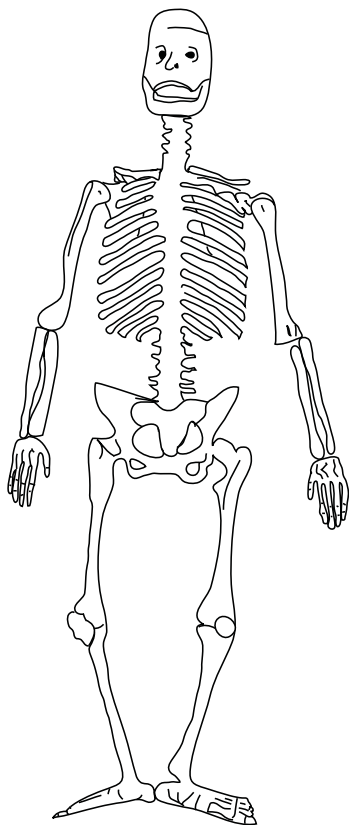
Excerpted from the
Cyborg Workbook
(2006)

Use these worksheets to explore your relationship with technology. Is it symbiotic? Is it dependence? Is it love?

Discover how intimate you are with technology. For each arrow draw or write a “technology” that penetrates or engages with your body on a daily basis.

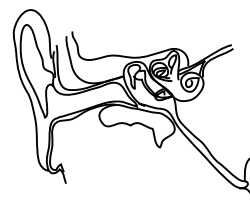
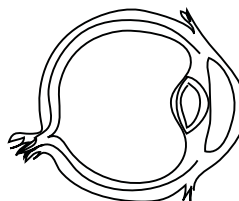
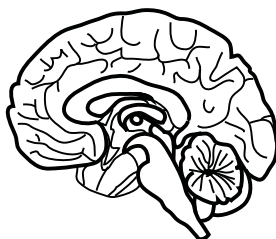
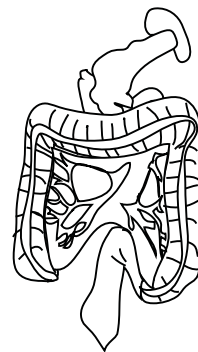
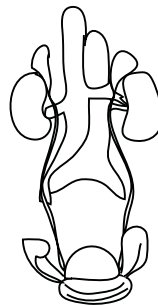
Add arrows as needed. Write your analysis below. Use the diagram to the right to keep track of scientific intervention in your body. Color each body part according to the key below. Biological indicates that you have received an organ, had one harvested, or skin/organs/cells grafted from your body or another human/animal. Chemical indicates that you take/have taken replacement hormones, synthetic body fluids, use chemicals to change a body part, etc. Mechanical indicates that you have a man-made/foreign object implanted in your body.

my body owner's manual



Color Key

Yellow	Biological (B)	Orange	B + C
Red	Chemical (C)	Purple	C + M
Blue	Mechanical (M)	Green	M + B
		Brown	M + B + C



economic divide between men and women may widen in those regions. In other words, we need to ensure that these projects do not happen in a vacuum, but rather go hand in hand with related initiatives, like the economic empowerment of women.

Many of us do not have the means-- the power, authority or technical and financial resources to wire an entire continent the size of Africa -- But we CAN make a difference. Many of us wish we could change the world with only a wiggle of the nose or a snap of the fingers, but the truth is each small act contributes to global change. If each of us thinks globally, and acts locally intervention in historical norms will occur.

Step 2: Understand the Local Picture

Focusing back locally, in a national sense, seventy percent of Americans are wired in. That means nearly three quarters of Americans are the audience for Internet activity, participation, correspondence and information consumption. This makes changing the system from within a valid interventionist option. Global change happens with a change in thinking, thinking to include those outside of our small circles. The thinking of those with the economic and decision making power, those that are privileged, needs to change in order to help those who are ex-

cluded and underprivileged. If you access the Internet, you are part of a very privileged population, a very small eighteen percent of the world population.

Step 3: Explore Your Privileged Cyborg Identity

Without understanding how the globe-less-ness of the global village affects us on the most intimate level, we cannot begin to understand how it affects others. Just like any other addiction we must admit a co-dependency with technology and our cyborg lifestyle. We need to take a look at how cyber technology, electronic and digital technology, surveillance technology, military technology, and biotechnology permeate, integrate and interact with our minds and bodies (use the worksheet included to guide this exploration). Not all mind-body-technology interactions are positive, however, most come from a place of privilege. Acknowledging this privilege is the hardest part of the intervention. Americans represent one fifth of world's privileged networked users and less than five percent of the world population. The rhetoric and language in popular media needs to identify this privilege and harsh reality.

To fully confess to privilege requires recognition of the exploitation or disadvantaged position of others. We need to magnify and popularize advocacy for those like the international women and children who are underpaid and overworked who make the components that make the computers that allow us to enter cyberspace – the same place those same workers are excluded from. It is ironic that these workers have an intimate relationship with technology, integrated with machines as machines themselves. They are robots. Robots do not have agency like cyborgs do.

Despite their agency, cyborgs are generally passive users of technology, they surf the net, check their email, read/view media, answer their cell phones and passively consume. What is disturbing is that most active/power Internet users, those that create content, create podcasts, create websites, engage with user-created content (rather than prescribed content from some person of “authority”), write articles and blogs, or comment on other users’ contributions are few, and those few are usually men⁴. Although economics may play some part in this gender disparity (as more men have high speed internet access than women), economics is not closely tied to “power” Internet use when looking only at men (in the United States). We need to change these gender-divide statistics. In other words, we, as feminists, need to become active creators, makers, and participants in our networked nation in order to change it. It is our words that need to be heard—that need to be googled and found.

■ *Step 4: Understand Point of Intervention*

A large percent of American Internet users are concentrated in younger populations, as one hundred percent of American schools are wired in. Adult between the ages of 18-29 are most likely to access the Internet, closely followed by 30-49 year-olds. If we, as feminists, create the content users are browsing, watching and interacting with, as well as keep our eyes on the newest information consumption trends, our ideas and dialogs will be far more visible and engaged with. As a fairly tech savvy privileged cyborg myself, I spent a long time looking for a good feminist podcast and couldn’t find even a bad one! Rather than surrender to content and information that is controlled by a top-down economy, work in the true grassroots spirit and help generate content that represents a feminist face, a feminist creativity, a feminist voice and a feminist spirit. Provide words, images and sounds that educate and inspire a privileged society to become partners with the rest of the world. There is an audience looking, cyborgs hungry to engage with feminist ideas and principles, who cannot find our feminist presence where they are looking.

■ *Step 5: Understand Why Feminists Must Intervene*

Like other institutions (science, medicine, military) of top-down patriarchal heritage, the Internet suffers from an elitist language and exclusive technical code meant to keep commoners from infiltrating the field, especially women. The digital lexicon provokes fear by using terms like wizards, masters, slaves, domains, servers, viruses, worms, Trojan horses, malware, identity theft and any number of mystery error codes that implicate hierarchy and levels of privilege and power both within and outside of the institution. People tend to fear the unknown and succumb to the authority of those “in the know” and are tentative in their actions and explorations. This has left most of us to the mercy of IT staff who talk in their own secret language, software that is clunky and not to our liking, search engines that others have created and limited to the information provided by others. Luckily, the current trend is towards environments that do just the opposite.

■ *Step 6: Prepare to Infiltrate the System (Use Your Cyborg Agency)*

The only way to infiltrate the system is by using the system. The following section is a brief glossary and getting started guide to bringing feminism to some of the newer facets of the worldwide web. The best news is- if you know where to look, it is easy and inexpensive to generate and publish web content. Just beware that although services are free, many are owned and operated by corporate giants, which, of course, has its pros and cons.

Blogs

Short for web log, blogs are linear or chronological websites. Blogs are a great way to provide frequent critiques or commentary on current events. Entries should be rather short and savvy and provide hyperlinks to related news stories, statistics, images or information for readers to delve into the subject with you. Most blogging sites offer the option to add pictures, allow multiple writers (great for collaboration) and/or reader comments (to start a dialog rather than maintain a monologue). Blogging sites generally have detailed help files, are very easy to use and require no HTML (the language of the web) knowledge, allow some customizability, provide you with your own unique address on their site or integrate their blogging software with your own website (if you already have one). In addition they offer RSS, real simple syndication, which allows users to constantly keep track of the latest posts of their favorite sites without having to constantly visit them. Blogs are an excellent way to promote and provide feminist critique and analysis on current issues/events and engage a wide or selective audience

Sharing Sites & Tags

Many sharing sites, like www.flickr.com for photos, www.youtube.com for videos and <http://del.icio.us> for website bookmarks/favorites allow users to “tag” contributions. Tags are keywords or labels that you attach to a particular contribution that you can later use to wade through items saved in your own account or to search through the content of everyone else’s. If Google doesn’t find what you are looking for, try searching through items labeled by hand – the process proves to be worthwhile and often results in the discovery of like-minded people, and information on non-mainstream topics. Posting your photos, videos and bookmarks on a sharing site, not only allows others to enjoy your content, but also allows you portability, as you can access your own content wherever you have an Internet connection. The greatest advantage to using tags is the promise of a user-created network of feminist content.

Podcasts

Short for portable on-demand cast or iPod cast. Podcasts are audio or video files that can be watched and downloaded on your computer or portable device on demand (can be a single file or a group of files). Podcasts range from large budget professional production to low budget amateur productions. Podcasts can include creative work, documentary, and lectures and can be included (for free) in the iTunes Store for free download or on your site or in your blog. In our information saturated age, providing audio and video on demand may be just what feminism needs to command a net surfer’s attention and be, dare I say, “hip?”

Creative Commons

A nonprofit helping authors and creative types license their work by determining what rights a creator wants to extend to her audiences and what “spectrum of rights” she wants to reserve for herself. Creative Commons also helps creators embed the license into the content file,

and to their own sites, blogs or to the Internet Archive (www.archive.org). This is an excellent opportunity to share your work and projects on your terms rather than corporate America's copyright terms.

Finding Open Source Software

Open source software is a great (and free) way to generate content and avoid large corporations. Some great open source software includes Firefox (web browser), Audacity (audio editor), VCL (video player), Open Office (text editing, spreadsheets), Blender (3D modeling) and GIMPShop (photo editing). A great place to look for open source software for Windows is www.opensourcewindows.org; for Mac try www.opensourcemac.org. Keep in mind that there is no profit in Open Source software, so although there is generally a loving, collaborative community, there is no voice of authority to complain to. Open source software allows you to create content without a financial burden, and be a part of a great community endeavor.

■ *Step 7: Infiltrate the System (Use Your Cyborg Agency)*

Start posting those podcasts, creating and updating your blog, tag content with purpose and help establish a visible feminist network online-- then tell your friends to do the same. Become an active cyber citizen and change the face and culture of the net and beyond.

(Endnotes)

1 Global Internet Statistics are from <http://www.InternetWorldStats.com>

2 For more information go to <http://www.50x15.amd.com>

3 Information obtained from the 2007 exhibition catalog for Design for the Other 90%, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum

4 Trends in national Internet use are based on my analysis of the PEW Internet & American Life Project's February-March 2006 Gadgets data set.

■ *Blogs*

Service Providers:

<http://www.blogger.com>, <http://www.wordpress.org>, and many others.

Prepare: Pick a memorable web address for your blog.

Cost: Free

■ *Sharing Sites & Tags*

Prepare: To establish an online identity (name) for tagging

Cost: Free

■ *Podcasts*

Requirements: Podcasts need to be hosted on the Internet (i.e. they require a permanent web address via a website or blog) and require a webfeed (RSS, atom). You will also need recording and editing devices/software

Prepare: There is a small learning curve, however there are many free, and easy to find, how-to resources available on the net

Cost: Free if you have a place (website or blog) to host your video and have recording equipment, minimal monthly fee if you need a place to host your podcasts

■ *Creative Commons*

Service Provider: www.creativecommons.org

Cost: Free

■ *Finding Open Source Software*

Cost: Free