



Unplugging the Cyborg: The Female Cyborg Experience in James Tiptree Jr.'s *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*

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Abstract – The concept of freedom is integral to cyberpunk literature and is prominently explored through the depiction of the cyborg figure, particularly female cyborg figure, as seen in James Tiptree Jr.'s novella, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* (1973). Tiptree's novella explores the intersection of the human and the machine in relation to agency, identity, and independence through P. Burke, who lives in and experiences sociality through Delphi's synthetic body. Set in dystopian future, the narrative enables a critical investigation of human existence and freedom in the cyberpunk age's intertwining organic and synthetic realms. As P. Burke navigates her existence in Delphi's body, the tension between genuine human desires and the constraints imposed by technological interfaces as well as organic limitations of the body evoke a certain question associated with such intricate and conflicting situation: Does the transformative cyborg experience liberate or subjugate the individual? Drawing on Deleuze & Guattari's notion of rhizome and Donna Haraway's explorations on how the figure of cyborg challenges the phallogocentric Western discourse, this paper aims to examine freedom and agency within the portrayal of the female cyborg in James Tiptree Jr.'s *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* and argues that the cyborg experience presents both a deconstruction and reaffirmation of humanistic values in a shifting context.

Keywords *Female cyborg, rhizome, cyberpunk literature, agency, freedom, The Girl Who Was Plugged In, James Tiptree Jr.*

Siborgu Deşifre Etmek: James Tiptree Jr.'ın Uzaktan Kumandalı Kız'ında Kadın Siborg Deneyimi

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Araştırma Makalesi

Öz – Siberpunk edebiyatının ayrılmaz bir parçası olan özgürlük kavramı, özellikle kadın siborg figürü ve temsilleri aracılığıyla öne çıkar ve James Tiptree Jr.'ın kısa romanı *Uzaktan Kumandalı Kız* (1973) da bu temsilin en dikkate değer örneklerinden birini sunar. Tiptree'nin novellası, Delphi isimli sentetik bedende yaşayan ve bu beden aracılığıyla toplumla sosyalite kuran P. Burke isimli karakter üzerinden, eylemlilik, kimlik ve bağımsızlık bağlamında insan ile makinenin kesişimine dair bir keşfe çıkar. Distopik bir gelecekte geçen bu hikâye, organik ve sentetik âlemlerin iç içe geçtiği siberpunk çağında insan varlığı ve özgürlük hakkında kritik sorgulamalar gerçekleştirmeyi mümkün kılar. P. Burke, Delphi'nin bedeninde varlığını sürdürürken, gerçek insan arzuları ile teknolojik interfazların koyduğu kısıtlamalar ve bedeninin organik sınırlamaları arasındaki gerilim, bu tür karmaşık ve çelişkili bir durumla ilişkilendirilebilecek belirli bir soruyu gündeme getirir: Siborg deneyimi bireyi özgürleştirir mi yoksa boyunduruk altına mı alır? Deleuze & Guattari'nin rizom kavramı ve Donna Haraway'ın siborg figürünün fallosantrik Batı söylemini nasıl sorguladığı üzerine araştırmalarından hareketle, bu makale, kadın siborg tasvirinde özgürlük ve eylemliliği incelemeyi amaçlamakla birlikte, James Tiptree Jr.'ın, *Uzaktan Kumandalı Kız*'ındaki siborg deneyiminin, değişen bağlamlar içerisinde, hümanistik değerleri hem yapıbozuma uğrattığı hem de tasdik ettiğini iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler *Kadın siborg, rizom, siberpunk edebiyatı, eylemlilik, bağımsızlık, Uzaktan Kumandalı Kız, James Tiptree Jr.*

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1. Introduction

The question of freedom is a concept that holds an integral part of both cyberpunk literature and cyberpunk literary criticism. This question, that is, the question of freedom and agency finds many forms of reflection in cyberpunk literature, the cyborg figure, and more particularly, the female cyborg figure being the chief of them. The different representations of the female cyborg figure and her bodily and mental experience of being a cyborg in a human society show that the concept of freedom and agency is often a central issue in a cyberpunk text with a cyborg protagonist. The experience of the cyborg figure, then, with all its dynamics and tensions, amplifies the ground of analysis, interpretation and criticism on the aforementioned questions related to freedom and agency. Such space opened by the representation and assessment of the female cyborg cannot be considered independent from the human experience. The promises and resolutions coming out of the sociality between the organic and the synthetic define and outline the promises and resolutions of the human experience and existence itself. The aim of this paper is to assess the question of freedom and agency in the representation of one of the earliest examples of the female cyborg in cyberpunk literature. *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* by James Tiptree Jr. is a remarkable example and story of the partnership of the organic and the synthetic. James Tiptree Jr. is a pseudonym used by the author Alice Bradley Sheldon, an influential American writer in the science fiction and cyberpunk genre. In Sheldon's works, it is possible to see a significant processing of freedom, agency, identity and gender through the presentation of the relationship between the organic and synthetic, and such presentation proves insightful of the human condition, that is, human existence and experience itself as well.

One of her most influential works, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* was first published in 1973 and won the Hugo Award for Best Novella in 1974. The story is set in a dystopian future where the corporations and power elites control a vast media empire and use technology to manipulate the public. The protagonist, P. Burke, is a young woman with a deformed body who is given the opportunity to live vicariously through a beautiful, genetically engineered robot (or doll) named Delphi. P. Burke/Delphi becomes a media sensation, but the story ultimately questions whether her newfound fame and beauty have truly brought her happiness and fulfilment; and what the fate of P. Burke/Delphi and the end of the narrative suggest in terms of cyborg existence, and by extension, human experience. For, after all, all P. Burke ever really wants is to be free; "free to be pretty living her pretty life with her pretty prince, free from herself, free from her past, free from her terribly ugly body," free from the identity of P. Burke, and become Delphi altogether. The idea of or desire for freedom, especially the desire to achieve freedom through the transformative and elevating effect of the cyborg experience is one of the central issues in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*. Does the cyborg experience presented through the female cyborg liberate or furthermore dominate the cyborg figure? Furthermore, if the answer to this question exists and is a clear one, what does it suggest about the human experience and existence?

2. The Many Reflections on Tiptree's Female Cyborg and Her Position in Relation to Agency and Freedom

When it comes to questions of agency, freedom and identity related to the cyborg experience (and by extension, to the human experience) it is necessary to understand the nature of the cyborg experience in the first place, and to properly comprehend the cyborg experience, it is necessary to inspect the relationship between the organic and the synthetic. The interaction between the organic and the synthetic occurs in the body; that body being either that of human or the machine. By extension, the definition of cyborg, the concept of the cyborg experience and their evolution has been extensively discussed within critical, cultural, and historical discourse. Several concepts that have become prominent in critical discourse in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such as biopower, trauma, posthumanism, and their related areas of investigation encompassing the body, subjectivity, freedom and agency, the cyborg, hybridization, and technoscience, exhibit notable similarities to themes frequently explored in science fiction literature (Ferrández-Sanmiguel, 2018, p. 4). A cyborg, on the other hand, is defined as a hybrid entity that consists of human and machine components,

resulting in the fusion of the organic and the synthetic. As an agent with multiple facets and countless fragments, the cyborg rejects the dichotomies of the phallogocentric Western discourse.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Deleuze & Guattari presents the critical concept, “rhizome” to describe a certain framework that emphasizes interconnectedness, multiplicity, and fluidity of all things. According to Deleuze & Guattari, the rhizome is characterized as a system devoid of hierarchy, wherein any point has the potential to establish connections with any other point, without the presence of a predetermined center or hierarchical arrangement (1980, p. 42). Our claim is that the operation and nature of the cyborg figure are in a certain parallelism with the structure of a rhizome.

Accordingly, this study will examine the operational mechanisms of this theoretical framework in analyzing the characteristics and portrayal of the female cyborg within the realm of cyberpunk culture. Additionally, the rhizome’s potential to disrupt conventional understandings of subjectivity and identity will be investigated in relation to established humanistic perspectives that emphasize stability and adherence to hierarchical structures. The examination of the cyborg figure, incorporating the notion of rhizome, presents new possibilities for addressing questions around the resolution of liberation versus dominance within the narrative of the female cyborg’s development and progression. Accordingly, Jennifer Rhee’s description of the presence and experience of the cyborg in relation to the “complex materiality of the world” obviously connotes the complex organization of the rhizome, which is fluid and unsettled. For Rhee, an indeterminate, fluid and ever-changing structure and organization is the explanation of the otherwise impossible autonomous animation of Delphi independent of P. Burke’s remote control. Consequently, “Characterized by indeterminacy, matter and bodies are important sites of potential that reframe agency, and thus political possibility, outside of strict biopolitical and capitalist frameworks and logics” (Rhee, 2019, p. 11). So, it is important to note the parallel between Deleuze & Guattari’s rhizome and Rhee’s claim of indeterminacy in understanding the nature and organization of the cyborg.

In her groundbreaking work *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) Donna Haraway falls in line with the perspective offered by Deleuze & Guattari and claims that a cyborg does not have an origin in the sense of a Western understanding of an origin, meaning; a cyborg is, in terms of the dominant discourse, an origin-less, beginningless and also endless being:

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense (Haraway, 1991, p. 67).

The cyborg, a figure without a clear origin or beginning, embodies a rhizomatic existence, which is fragmented and genderless, emerging from the fractures of androcentric dichotomies. Deleuze & Guattari specify rhizome as an assemblage and a multiplicity. In this sense, the rhizome’s relevance to a cyborg’s experience lies in its boundless connectedness: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 28). This underscores that a rhizome, like the origin-less cyborg defined by Donna Haraway, is a structure of organization without a beginning or an end, embodying fluidity, open to constant formation: “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 28). The image of the rhizome as an organization that constantly produces connections may once again remind the reader the nature of the cyborg as an assemblage, as a multiplicity of connections both organic and synthetic. Moreover, the rhizomatic organization of connections and semiotic chains elevates it beyond humanity’s binary conflicts and humanistic narrative dichotomies. As Melissa Colleen Stevenson suggests, “Haraway’s cyborg, by refuting essentialist connections as well as barriers between individuals, allows for the fruitful political alignment of diverse interest groups without insisting upon a monolithic understanding of ‘Women’ or, indeed, the reification of any such identity categories” (2007, p. 2).

By extension, a rhizome sustains itself and grows through the connections it forms, similar to the internet or web as an endless chain of connections without a single origin, and in quite a striking parallel to how Haraway describes the multiplex manner with which the cyborg materializes itself. Moreover, the organization of the

rhizome thrives in this constant modification. As said before, it does not matter what lies in the origin of a rhizome; as long as it continues through its connections that are attachable to each other with a nature beyond the humanist dualist narrative, the rhizomatic relational organizations will persevere. On this score, Deleuze & Guattari suggest, “A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscopic element of the root-tree, a radicle, that gets rhizome production going” (1980, p. 36). The interactions and formation of connections between the chains, regardless of size, maintain the rhizome and its organization. As Deleuze & Guattari conclude, “A rhizome has no beginning nor end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (1980, p. 46). This “middle” in Deleuze & Guattari’s terms may easily be considered as the beyond where the cyborg and where any rhizomatic organization reside. The middle is the alternative space, the map, the network, which creates a question or perhaps even the hope for a liberation from the dominant order of meaning and knowledge.

Given the definition of rhizome and its association with the cyborg figure, as well as the nature of the cyborg experience, Donna Haraway’s remarks regarding the cyborg figure gain utmost clarity and relevance: “The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity” (1991, p. 67). The cyborg existence or experience appears to challenge the dominant and phallogocentric Western discourse that promotes a mythical search for a hopeful completeness through the unattainable goal of being reunited with what is lost at birth and becoming whole again. In other words, the cyborg existence is free from the burden of an origin in a Western sense, for its organization is rhizomatic. Being rhizomatic, the cyborg figure challenges any form of unicity and thrives on the partialities of partnerships and connections that forms his/her identity and organizes his/her movements across the physical and virtual spheres of sociality. Consequently, a cyborg is a figure who, with a playful and perversely ironical charisma, problematizes the humanistic narrative and its devices of singularity, universality, detachment, and normativity.

Despite the cyborg being perceived as an obstruction or deconstruction of the dominant Western discourse and its promotion of fixed and ideal norms, it is crucial to point out that, fundamentally, the cyborg is an inevitable outcome of human technics, as elucidated by Charles D. Laughlin in “The Evolution of Cyborg Consciousness” (1997). This notion supports the idea that while the cyborg represents a limitless form of existence that transcends anthropocentric concepts such as sex, gender, and humanity, it should not be viewed as a standalone entity. Rather, it is composed of fragments, interpretations, and rhizomatic relationships. In that sense, the convergence of the organic and synthetic, as discussed by Dani Cavallaro in *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture* (2000), holds significant relevance and can be compared to the concept of the cyborg and the associated identity. In her book, especially in the section dedicated to cyberpunk and body, Cavallaro talks about a concept termed as “technosociality” (2000, p. 72), which may easily be considered as a central concept of the cyborg experience as a hybrid figure functioning as the bridge between human and the machine. Here, Cavallaro makes a reference to the academic media theorist Allucquere Rosanne Stone regarding the concept of technosociality:

Technosociality, for its part, refers to the merging of nature and technology in a shared environment. According to Allucquere Rosanne Stone, this merging is based on a ‘phantasmatic social interaction’ wherein the ‘boundaries between the living and the non-living’ keep shifting, and identity is pluralized as a ‘model of multiplicity outside a unitary physical body’ (2000, p. 72).

Considering the portrayal of the cyborg figure and its experience in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, it becomes apparent that the given depiction of technosocial and “phantasmatic” condition gives meaning to the concept of a “ghost” or a “ghost in the shell” that is commonly associated with cyberpunk literature. This concept refers to the emergence of a formation resulting from the integration and interaction between organic and synthetic elements, thereby creating a fragmented, origin-less, and relational “phantasmatic social interaction” between the two. The case of P. Burke’s association with Delphi the doll (the shell, in this case) serves as an illustration of such complex interplay between the human and the machine.

Correspondingly, the remote connection generated and operated through P. Burke with Delphi’s body deviates from the conventional portrayal of the cyborg as a site of interaction and merging between the organic and synthetic domains. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that P. Burke’s organic and humane components

engage and intersect with Delphi the doll. Interestingly, the creation of cyborgs is facilitated by human technics and technologies, which paradoxically complicates the binary nature of their existence in relation to Western discourse. The generation of cyborgs by means of human technology poses a potential risk of the cyborg becoming trapped in the very dichotomies it seeks to challenge. Does the cyborg experience present a deconstruction or a reaffirmation of the humanistic narrative? It is hard to provide a definitive solution to a topic related to such a complicated notion and person in cyberpunk culture. However, it would not be wrong to suggest that the answer to this question varies from one fiction to the next, from one writer to the next; and in the case of *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, the most likely answer lies in the shift from deconstruction to reaffirmation of humanist narrative as the reader witnesses the prominence and demise of the P. Burke/Delphi cyborg figure. As Mary Catherine Harper asserts, “Even in its simplest form, the ontological category of ‘cyborg’ is an oscillation between humanist subject and post-humanist commodity-based subjectivity” (1995, p. 406). Consequently, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* presents the experience of cyborg(ness) in relation to the conflict of deconstruction/reaffirmation of the humanistic narrative in a shifting context.

As mentioned, this novella presents the female cyborg character and the cyborg experience uniquely and differently from the current cyborg norm and form. This traditional cyborg form illustrates the reader or audience how the synthetic and organic are integrated into a single physical organism, called a “shell” in cyberpunk fiction. It is clear that, in typical cyberpunk novel or narratives, such as Masamune Shirow’s *Ghost in the Shell*, a cyborg’s humanoid body, powered by the cyber-system that gives it non-human skills, functions independently of biological control. In contrast, *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* shows Delphi, the robot body, as a vessel controlled remotely by a young woman called P. Burke. The novella’s presentation of the cyborg experience differs from that of Western and Japanese cyberpunk literature, where the cyborg is almost always presented in the same dominant structure of existence and narrative through a cyborg figure that integrates both human and machine parts. Even though Delphi the doll, the shell, the machine seems to be the cyborg, since the shell on its own is not able to speak, move and most importantly, show any signs of consciousness, at least at first, it is P. Burke who is closer to the identity of the cyborg here, since it is P. Burke whose body experiences all the enhancements of certain technologies which create a unique experience that helps P. Burke transcend her humane ugliness and become the operator of the beautiful shell named Delphi. On the other hand, considering the identity of cyborg as belonging not to a single figure but to a figure of synthesis, in this case, to the figure of P. Burke/Delphi which is born out of the phantasmatic techno-sociality between the human and the machine, seems to be much more relevant to the message and perspective the figure of cyborg represents. This message may be seen as the negotiating outcome of depolarization that finds a matrix and living space within the cyborg body and consciousness. Correspondingly, what Dani Cavallaro suggests in relation to this negotiating of polarized concepts or ideas within the body and the consciousness of the cyborg becomes significantly relevant. Cavallaro says, “The body becomes a shifting territory, a battleground for competing structures of meaning, that cannot be explained away as a stable part of nature” (2000, p. 74). As Cavallaro asserts, it is crucial to understand the body as a ground of negotiation or even blurring between conflicting points of meaning. To consider the body as a “shifting territory” epitomizes the nature of the cyborg as an origin-less being resistant to all sorts of dichotomy and stability, not to mention its almost perfect relevance and parallel to the presentation of the P. Burke/Delphi persona of remote cyborg-ness.

P. Burke, the main character of *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, is an extremely ugly and unhealthy woman who barely manages to stay alive in the future neo-capitalist system in which she lives face to face with harsh criteria and ideals for sex, gender, humanity, beauty, power, and influence. Even from the very start, Tiptree makes it quite clear that the system of capitalism is the ultimate source of meaning and regulation in this society, it is the “operative logic” (2019, p.5). As Rhee furthermore suggests, “Profit margins, commerce, dehumanization, and abuse—these are the forces that order the narrator’s future, a world of rigid and unforgiving beauty standards, covert advertising, and corporate greed” (Rhee, 2019, p.6), and in this brutal world inclusive and embracing of a certain design and categorization, P. Burke has no place and significance as a figure who fails to ensure any type of categorization and adaptation to the accepted norm.

María Ferrández-Sanmiguel suggests, “As a result of her monstrousness, the protagonist has always been barred from the social network; because of her grotesque form, she is excluded from the realm of the human, shunned and despised by others” (2018, p. 12). Her ugliness is described as a spectacle that will please no one. Accordingly, Heather Hicks states that, “The most remarkable aspect of Tiptree’s story upon a first reading is the frenzied energy it exhibits in rendering the figure of P. Burke in the most revolting terms imaginable” (1996, p. 10). Thus, P. Burke is colossally ugly, and she will never be recognized or looked at, even for her ugliness, let alone for her beauty. Moreover, due to her ugly and unhealthy physicality that does not, in any way, conform or procure the ideal beauty standards of the biopolitical capitalist environment of the narrative, the body of P. Burke is “precisely the body that does not matter,” (Hollinger, 1999, 10) the body that will eventually “be hidden underground in a hi-tech cabinet while her mind remotely operates the beautiful but soulless body of Delphi” (Hollinger, 1999, p. 10). The narrator says:

Now you can see she’s the ugly of the world. A tall monument to pituitary dystrophy. No surgeon would touch her. When she smiles, her jaw—it’s half purple—almost bites her left eye out. She’s also quite young, but who could care? (Tiptree, 1973, p. 2).

Almost as a response to such depiction, Hicks asserts, “This devaluation of P. Burke’s body must be read in ironic juxtaposition to the value production to which her beautiful counterpart Delphi is essential” (Hicks, 1996, p. 10).

In a world where gods and idols live lavish and extraordinary lives, people like P. Burke are unimportant nobodies with ordinary lives. These gods mentioned here are people who have extremely beautiful looks and therefore accepted into the economic system of commodities and capitalism as “idols.” In this world, the advertisements are seemingly banned but all the products that are presented to the market by corporations are broadcasted and announced through these beautiful influential figures. In such a system of exploiting subliminal influence, the figures of influencers, the idols, become more and more necessary for the wheel of capitalism to turn, and a whole industry of producing “brainless bodies which are remotely controlled by those willing to forsake their own bodies, under the supervision of their corporate sponsors” (1996, p. 11) materializes. These godlike figures, these idols are presented quite early in the narrative: “Love! Oo-oo, love them! Her gods are coming out of a store called Body East... The crowd moans. Love! This whole boiling megacity, this whole fun future world loves its gods” (Tiptree, 1973, p. 1). It is important to notice that the novella establishes a calculated dual conflict between the beautiful and the ugly, the winner and the loser, the idol celebrities, and the mass nobodies; the dualities may go on and on, and moreover, it is significant to point out that P. Burke’s ugliness becomes quite a significant point of such a duality conflict. Her monstrous figure and dysfunctional body are reflected in a stark relation to the beauty and functional bodies of the idols, and eventually, to the beauty and body of Delphi. It entails that if P. Burke’s ugliness is based on how beautiful the idols are, and if the criteria for beauty and the promotion of the identity and beauty of the idols depend on the power elite corporations, then P. Burke (and all the other nameless people in the mass of humanity) are also socially dependent on the power elite corporations.

After her suicide attempt, P. Burke finds herself in a hospital. It is at this place that she is presented with the life-changing proposition by the corporation GTX that will allow her to leave her miserable existence and incapable body behind. P. Burke’s body is once a flesh that let her down all her young life; because her body fits in the category of “ugly” in such a system and economics of meaning and knowledge production, her life correspondingly becomes ugly; because her body is incompetent, broken and miserable; her life is also incompetent, broken and miserable. Therefore, the only way P. Burke may overcome the pain of possessing a body such as hers is for P. Burke to have a “shell” rather than a flesh, an organic body. In the case of the narrative, her own body is not exactly transformed into a “shell,” a cyborg body open to all sorts of enhancement and evolution, but she nevertheless gets to control such a body that carries the abilities to do so. Thus, when one of the many adversaries or agents of the neo-capitalist system of commodities visits her in her hospital room and makes her the offer to work for them, with the promise that her life will never be the same, P. Burke’s submission to this offer is only normal and expectable. Hicks, in fact, quite significantly and relevantly explains P. Burke’s willingness to give up on her materiality for the sake of experiencing the virtual

materiality she gains through Delphi as an issue of disembodiment and human sociality, pointing at Tiptree's claim that the human subjectivity depends on the social standing of the subject's body, stating that the individuals with a worthless body show proneness, and even aptness to escape and embrace a more legitimate one (Hicks, 1996, p. 11). "Disembodiment, then, is not about the body ceasing to 'matter' – it is about the body mattering so much that it becomes uninhabitable" (Hicks, 1996, p. 11). On the other hand, while P. Burke's eager acceptance of the agreement seems to be beneficial to both sides, or even symbiotic, and although, as Ferrández-Sanmiguel refers to Stevenson, P. Burke is able to experience sociality and connection through the experience of becoming Delphi, in other words, through the experience of the cyborg is quite evident, it is nevertheless obvious that the power dynamics established in the framework of such capitalist and materialist system suggests a certain inequity, for "all the risks are assumed by only one of the parties" (Ferrández-Sanmiguel, 2018, p. 13). Thus, "P. Burke is railroaded into functioning as a 'remote' for the beautiful body of Delphi and has virtually no control over the merchandise she hustles" (Hicks, 1996, p. 15). On the other hand, although P. Burke's struggle as the marginal is quite evident and irrefutable, Jennifer Rhee points out in her reference to Melissa Stevenson that it would be wrong to suggest that P. Burke is entirely the victim here, for P. Burke's technosocial partnership with Delphi does in fact grant her "access to human sociality and thus inclusion in the human community" (2019, p. 11). In Stevenson's terms, though, this partnership and sociality causes her to lose "her power and agency to others but, for the first time in her life, is able to connect and interact with the human beings around her" (2007, p. 10). In that sense, although it is quite early to come up with an answer to the question of freedom versus domination as a result of the cyborg experience, it is possible to suggest that, in the particular case of P. Burke/Delphi cyborg experience, the technosociality of the relationship between the human and the machine grants a certain agency in taking part in human connectivity and sociality to the cyborg. In other words, the cyborg experience grants the experience of being human, which presents quite an intricate image of the nature of cyborg experience interwoven with human experience.

Following her acceptance of the proposal, the novella proceeds to guide the reader through the phase during which P. Burke recovers, gets even uglier than before while doing so, and is prepared for the initiative she has been recruited for. Yet her transformation, far from enhancing her appearance, seems to amplify her perceived flaws. This intense ordeal, a fusion of flesh and machinery, while priming her for Delphi, does not fully rectify the inherent constraints of her body. Accordingly, the fact that P. Burke does not and cannot leave her original body for the body of Delphi leads to a crisis of P. Burke questioning and denying the materiality and reality of her own body in the end. "The physical body is not removed from the picture. It is actually required to reassess the meaning of its concreteness by negotiating with its immaterial counterparts" (Cavallaro, 2000, p. 83). In the case of P. Burke, however, as it will be noticed afterwards in the novella and its close reading, the necessity of "reassessing" the meaning of the materiality of her own body by negotiating the reality of her own body with Delphi's body as its "immaterial counterpart" does not take place in such prescriptiveness. On the contrary, what makes P. Burke a great operator, an excellent cyber-system, a conductor of the synthesis between Delphi and P. Burke, between the artificial and the natural, is the way P. Burke denies the reality of her own body, her own materiality and become more and more immersed with Delphi's identity and Delphi's body. Indeed, it is P. Burke's denial of her materiality that begins Delphi's autonomous dreams and gestures she makes while dreaming, without P. Burke's control. It is P. Burke's detachment from her own body, from the reality of her materiality, that germinates the ghost within the "shell" that is known as Delphi. This "ghost" is the consciousness, the soul, the autonomous being born out of the technosociality between P. Burke and Delphi, the human and the machine, the organic and the synthetic.

The figure known as Delphi to the masses and known as P. Burke/Delphi cyborg to the reader immediately becomes a public figure and influencer in an alternatively capitalist world where all forms of advertisement and its sector are banned from activity and all the advertisement procedures are conducted subliminally through these very influencers, in this case, through Delphi herself. While the whole ethics of the business conducted by the corporations through Delphi controlled by P. Burke is a whole matter open to question and criticism, the only thing that matters for P. Burke is that finally, she gets to experience what is feels like to be adored, to be loved, to be accepted, to be beautiful and to be feel connected to the human sociality. So great her desire to

connect and therefore, perfectly perform the social facilities as well as the physical operation of Delphi that P. Burke's skillful performance soon blurs the border between the human and the machine, between P. Burke and Delphi. As Veronica Hollinger suggests:

Tiptree's P. Burke is the divinely feminine Delphi as long as she performs Delphi, who in these terms is neither more nor less than the sum of P. Burke's gendered performances; P. Burke is the actor and Delphi is her role (1999, p. 11).

Rhee responsively suggests that "Burke, supervised by men who look lasciviously at Delphi's apparently pubescent body, works hard to replicate their notion of ideal femininity" (Rhee, 2019, p. 8). In many ways, it is possible to suggest that P. Burke achieves a marvelous job in asserting and perpetuating the fantasies and desires of the male gaze and ideals regarding beauty and femininity. "If P. Burke is constructed as 'the ugly of the world,' Delphi is upheld as its beauty, a young girl created from and for the male gaze as the embodiment of perfect female desirability" (2019, p. 8). Moreover, Delphi is, in Stevenson's terms, "the concept girl made flesh" (2007, p. 13). In all aspects of her existence and physicality, Delphi is a design created for the pleasure of the masses often characterized and specified as male in the narrative. Accordingly, "Little Delphi is going to live a wonderful, exciting life," says one of the businessmen to Delphi, adding, "She's going to be a girl people watch. And she's going to be using fine products people will be glad to know about and helping the good people who make them. Yours will be a genuine social contribution" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 9).

Such progression in the narrative in terms of Delphi's place within the society as an influencer who contributes to a mechanism that exploits people and creates masses out of them immediately raises the irony of the nature of cyborg as the agent of those who create it. P. Burke is set free from her ugliness and physical hideousness by the hands of those who constitute and constantly reaffirm the standards of ugliness and beauty themselves. P. Burke is saved by those who set the conditions and standards of being an ugly girl in a world where a certain type of look is considered as beautiful and the other types of looks that do not fit in this set of aesthetics and beauty are deemed as ugly, and this ugliness, by judgment, passes for as a flaw and a justification for exclusion and failure. As Rhee suggests, "Burke, poor Burke, never stands a chance in a future governed by inhumane systems that raze the planet and exploit marginalized people in the name of maximizing corporate profit, growth, and power" (2019, p. 2).

In other words, P. Burke, who is presented as a figure who is doomed to fail in all aspects of human sociality and standards, is only able to form a connection to the human society and beauty ideals through a technological enhancement which is placed upon her body by the hands of the agents of androcentric authority, and thus gets to experience the life of a beautiful, perfect young girl, only to be a servant of the system and dominance which renders and imprisons her in misery and pain in the first place. In that sense, what seems as "liberation" is actually a further imprisonment. What seems as a "break" from the anthropocentric limitations and elitism of humanism is actually an inevitable and forced re-merging with it.

This, evidently and inevitably, brings us to the finalization of P. Burke's experience as Delphi, the finalization of the cyborg experience in the narrative, when Delphi meets the rich prince Paul and falls in love with him. Her encounter with Paul Isham is also significant in terms of P. Burke's recognition of the limitations of her own body as the operator of Delphi's body. It is when Paul Isham comes into her life and they become lovers that P. Burke, for the first time, actually realizes the limitations of her own body that prevents her from merging with Delphi entirely. Paul Isham's presence in Delphi's life triggers P. Burke's realization of her helplessness and entrapment in her own body, unable to shift and transition completely to Delphi's body. So, she pushes her limits beyond her capacity to be with Paul while she is in Delphi's form as its operator and in the end, loses her life. However, when they first meet, Paul has no idea about the nature of Delphi's existence, and the fact that the girl who loves him back is P. Burke, who is kilometers away, is a concept he cannot comprehend even in the very end. When Paul and P. Burke/Delphi first meet, Delphi is working on a "social sequence"—capitalist power elites' neo-ads—and Paul notices that she is unusually sensitive and resistant to the commodification system of which she is a vital part as an idol. In other words, Delphi's, or P. Burke's sensible attachment to her job, her sensitive approach to her role as an influencer of masses, and her fearless attitude towards the authorities who determine which products she must unquestioningly use and promote when she rejects any

product she finds unsafe or dysfunctional, makes Paul Isham see her differently. As an idol whose job is only to obey the power elites and make the masses obey them through capital and commercial trade businesses, Delphi's brave selectivity and protectiveness of the masses' rights and experiences with the products they are introduced to is a major point of connection between the two characters.

Paul Isham is intellectually and physically as flawless as society's idols, the idols P. Burke is so devotedly in love with. Paul's "tender-souled" demeanor and exquisite appearance start their relationship, and Delphi's sensitivity inspires him. Paul falls in love with Delphi because he sees kindness, revolution, and daring in her. As the story progresses, however, Paul Isham is shown to be one of patriarchy's numerous male characters, which may be the core of the capitalist system. He may not take part in the doings of the corporate capitalism; however, he is still a part of, in fact, a figure of the patriarchal ground of knowledge and meaning production with his constant and insistent claim on Delphi. Even though Paul and P. Burke/Delphi seem to come together because of their resistant, brave, and sensible traits, what really brings them together is a mode of feeling produced by the neo-capitalist mechanism, which they struggle to resist. Paul and Delphi love each other simply because of the concepts and notions that they offer to each other, and especially because each finds the fulfilment and procuring of the individual desires they carry in them. Thus, this pattern of passion and connection that produces love between these characters leads Paul Isham to claim Delphi. Thus, Paul and P. Burke/Delphi's connection is a product of idealization and claim, two important concepts of commodity and capitalism. This means that Paul's heroic protection of Delphi, especially his control and monitoring of her body, is just another sort of patriarchal trapping and captivity of the female body – a female cyborg body, in this case. The cyborg experience does not liberate Delphi (Delphi's body) or P. Burke, as the P. Burke/Delphi cyber-system moves from one masculine hand of control to another; as Paul Isham and GTX both fight for the control and custody of P. Burke/Delphi, the female cyborg body becomes a site of struggle over domination between masculine parties.

The conclusion part of the novella touches on the concept of autonomy regarding Delphi's bodily existence in detail, however, it may be relevant and meaningful to point out that, previously in the text, Delphi calls out Paul's name in her sleep and without P. Burke's operation. Even though Delphi shows other kinds of mimicry and autonomy in her sleep previously in the text, since these previous occurrences are not noticed by anyone on surveillance, Paul's notice of Delphi calling out Paul's name in her sleep is the first time P. Burke comes to realize the potential of Delphi and the cyber-system that is born out of her interaction with it, as well as, once again, the limited-ness of her own body of organic flesh. "Insane hope rises, is fed a couple of nights later when he tells her she called his name in her sleep" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 24). As the narrative suggests, at this point, "P. Burke dreams of healing the split between the mind trapped in her monstrous body and the idealized feminine body that remains forever separate" (Hollinger, 1999, p. 11), and she dares to hope to become Delphi as a whole, leaving her ugly and human body behind. P. Burke's hope leads her to commit herself fully to Paul and neglect her responsibilities to the corporation, as the idol of people.

The notion of freedom, on the other hand, takes on a suicidal tone in P. Burke's side. P. Burke is already physically frail and unwell at this time, in fact, she is considerably unhealthier than she was before the whole Delphi business. P. Burke's involvement is inadvertent at first, as she operates Delphi and lives and experiences life through the eyes and body of Delphi. However, the more she walks on earth through Delphi's feet, the more purposeful this absorption becomes. Her connection with Paul is the point at which the scale of intention is broken, and P. Burke's immersion in Delphi's body becomes totally purposeful, and hence suicidal. In the end, Paul loves Delphi so much that he kills Delphi (and, of course, P. Burke); on the other hand, P. Burke hates herself so much, and loves Delphi and being Delphi so much (because Delphi and operating her body grants her Paul, the prince, the god in her dreams) that she starts killing herself, through her immersion to the experience of her interaction with Delphi, way before Paul does in the end. "I will die and be born again in Delphi" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 25), says P. Burke, for she too is motivated by Delphi's sleep-talks, or sleep-calls to Paul. In other words, the occurrence that makes Paul think that he understands everything regarding Delphi's situation (her being an implant doll, an organic-synthetic hybrid who is controlled by corporations) does not fail to also motivate P. Burke because just like Paul who takes what he needs from observing Delphi's situation,

P. Burke also takes what she needs: Hope. So, Paul Isham III, finds the neurolab where he thinks they keep the actual Delphi. In order to reclaim his (and only his, as Paul's possessive imperialist claim on Delphi emphasizes), he instructs the doctors in the facility to remove the implants on Delphi. Despite all the warnings from doctors and operators, Paul, who seems to be in a desperate denial, finds the tube in which P. Burke herself is situated and when the doors of the tube are open, P. Burke, a "monstrosity" in perfect contrast to the angelic beauty of Delphi, emerges:

And inside that cabinet is a poisoned carcass to whom something wonderful, unspeakable, is happening. Inside is P. Burke the real living woman who knows that HE is there, coming closer —Paul whom she had fought to reach through forty thousand miles of ice—PAUL is here! (Tiptree, 1973, p. 29).

For P. Burke, this is the moment when all her hope and dreams are fulfilled. On the other hand, Paul, who is only there to save his beloved Delphi, is far from understanding the slightest of what is happening. P. Burke reaches out to Paul, as the narrator describes, "'Paul darling!' croaks the voice of love and the arms of love reach for him" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 29). Paul is unable to respond to P. Burke's feelings of relief and embrace. In fact, his initial inability to understand or react to P. Burke immediately transforms into a self-protective aggression, seemingly only to P. Burke but perhaps to all that he does not understand regarding the whole mysterious and complex truth of business that is interwoven with Delphi, and therefore, even himself too.

Paul's aggressive response to P. Burke's loving arms causes her weak, malnourished body to suffer a great damage, and ultimately and immediately, she dies. With P. Burke and her operation and consciousness gone, it seems, Delphi is also gone. Upon the certain death of P. Burke, Delphi utters a couple of words and even walks towards Paul. It is evidently stated in the novella: "Delphi comes to him" (Tiptree, 1973, p. 29). As it is foretold before, both Paul and P. Burke draw hope in their own way and in the form of their own understanding, from the rare moments of autonomy Delphi offers. In the end, since Delphi actually walks and utters words (chief of which is Paul's name), this hope, especially P. Burke's hope (because she had a deeper knowledge of the facts than Paul), which motivates both Paul and P. Burke to free Delphi in their own ways, proves to have a point rather than being entirely false. As the reader may clearly tell, Delphi is now operated by the ghost of P. Burke in its shell, and in many ways, this is, if not a proper awakening of consciousness, an early form of an awakening of a ghost within a shell; a prototype of a cyborg experience that the reader is introduced with in the novella. After this incident and death of P. Burke, "one of the greatest cybersystems ever known," (Tiptree, 1973, p. 31), Delphi is regenerated and released to the market once again, to be operated by other organic controllers who form a symbiosis with the shell Delphi (even if not as masterfully and immersive as P. Burke) and this commodity, as far as the ending of the novella, goes on and on, not ending with the death of P. Burke. What this resolution suggests is that the experience of the cyborg merely and simply offers a kind of liberation death offers. In other words, P. Burke's story of becoming merged with Delphi's shell in terms of experiencing a life out of her own body and in the body of Delphi, seems to be a story of liberation, however, it does nothing but to contribute in and reaffirm the androcentric tendencies, covert capitalist patriarchal systems and the humanist perspective that stands almost as a closed reference in the text.

3. Conclusion: Neither Agency nor Freedom, but Something Else

The question as to whether the cyborg experience liberates a female cyborg or furthermore imprisons her, in the particular case of *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, is answered through various perspectives of various sources, both fictional and critical. To sum up, from P. Burke's narrative, the reader may easily understand that the experience of being a cyborg or forming a cyber-systematic, technosocial connection with a machine, at first, seems to bring liberation. Both Haraway's definition of the cyborg figure and considering this figure through the critical framework of the rhizome presented by Deleuze & Guattari, reveals that the nature of the cyborg, with its radical and defiant stance against the humanist and patriarchal narrative and its fixities and categories, generates certain points of possibility both in relation to the cyborg experience and that of the human experience when it comes to the concept of freedom. Haraway's conception of the cyborg gains tangible

form in Tiptree's *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, where we witness the character P. Burke's transformation into Delphi, echoing rhizomatic complexities proposed by Deleuze & Guattari. Accordingly, Ferrández-Sanmiguel, in her "Appropriated Bodies," clearly states that P. Burke/Delphi cyborg of *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* may easily be read through the critical framework created by Haraway regarding the figure of the cyborg (2018, p. 14), and Stevenson also agrees with such claim, with her following assertion, "P. Burke's connection into the system matrix that allows her to operate the cyborg body, to become Delphi, from afar, is precisely the kind of 'disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling' between flesh and technology that Haraway describes in her manifesto (152)" (2007, p. 13). Although the technosocial partnership between P. Burke and Delphi does not seem to provide a freedom from control and exploitation, it is possible to suggest that it procures a certain sense or degree of agency in connectivity to the human sociality. While this agency may be limited in parallel with the limitation of P. Burke's bodily existence and capacity, the agency in question is still existent. In the end, it is through this agency that P. Burke experiences love and connection with Paul Isham and it is through this love that she desires to elevate her state of bodily and mental existence, to move on to a new level of consciousness and physicality, which is realized and materialized in the experiences of the female cyborgs that follow her.

In the light of this, as the narrative unfolds, it turns out quite clearly that the cyborg experience which seems to liberate P. Burke merely elevates the psychological aspect of the conditions in which she lives. In other words, while the experience of operating Delphi, "being" Delphi and controlling her perfect body gives her the agency to become part of the human sociality, it makes her become infused with the life she lives as Delphi more and more; moreover, it imprisons her to the underground lab where she operates as Delphi's controller away from the world, away from life, away from the world and life of connections she craves for. The deeper Delphi's connection to the capitalist sociality, the deeper P. Burke's exclusion from this sociality is. In return, this causes her own body to become even more unhealthy, vulnerable, ugly and fragile. Although P. Burke is never treated as "truly human" (Stevenson, 2007, p. 14), even from the beginning, and only through Delphi she gets to experience what it feels like to be human, to belong, to connect with other people, ironically P. Burke is human and it is the limitations of the mortal body that ultimately fails her to merge with Delphi; "Her cyborg identity as Delphi is for her both freedom and cage" (Stevenson, 2007, p. 14). Even though living the life through the eyes of Delphi the doll seems to be a revolutionarily liberating experience, the narrative quite overtly reflects the opposite of such a concept, not to mention the evident allusions that even the thought of achieving liberation through the cyborg experience, through an independent, ultimate merging with the human and the machine, is a delusional and desperate thought.

Let us ask once more: Does the experience of the cyborg offer liberation or furthermore conviction in the course of the cyborg experience, and by extension, the human experience? The answer to this question, in the light of all that is mentioned above, is that in James Tiptree Jr.'s semantic cyberworld of commodities, of idols, of infatuation with the capitalist codes of beauty that comes in the form of yet another humanist melodramatic narrative of "true love", of ghosts rising and falling in empty shells, "technology is the unchallenged realm of men" (Hicks, 1996, p. 30) and the experience of the cyborg is far from liberating, yet not so close to conviction either, as P. Burke is "both liberated and trapped" (Stevenson, 2007, p. 15) by her cyborg body. While it is impossible to deny the presence and effect of agency P. Burke gains through her partnership with Delphi on the representation of the experience of the cyborg, we come to the conclusion that the question of freedom is irrelevant in the company of "dearer bonds of love and companionship" (Stevenson, 2007, p. 15). Although the evidently rhizomatic nature of the cyborg experience presents a potential to disrupt conventional and dominant understandings of subjectivity and identity produced by the humanist narrative perspective and although such rhizomaticity does, in fact, disrupt and depolarize the boundary between the human and non-human through the representation of the female cyborg experience to a certain extent, in the end, the experience of the cyborg relates the doom of the paradoxical state of being both free and confined. In the particular case of P. Burke/Delphi, the experience of the female cyborg is related in close connection to the human experience, to the desire to be human, to live as a human, to love and to be loved, to be confined in a sociality rather than be free of it. In other words, in the capitalist system of commodification in Tiptree's *The Girl Who Was Plugged*

In, where the limits of the human are introduced with a humanistic point of view, the figure of the cyborg is incapable of disrupting such perspective and order, but rather, is trapped and arrested in the mindset of a humanistic operation. As the representation and construction of the cyborg experience in the novella presents a strong imagery and facility of rhizomatic nature, the multiplist, beginningless and endless, fluid and consistently open to change, transformation, communication and connection through its non-hierarchical relation of operation, the rhizome does not, in the end, offer a complete liberation for the cyborg P. Burke/Delphi from the society and sociality which controls and monitors her to her ultimate demise. Such a resolution that situates the cyborg figure to a position of arrested state does not necessarily mean that P. Burke/Delphi cyborg figure is one that presents a failure of growth and transformation. Even though the rhizomatic nature of the cyborg, in the particular case of this narrative, does not grant a complete liberation from the humanistic order and sociality, it nevertheless and undeniably grants a space of transformation, change and growth for both the human and the machine; through their technosocial rhizomatic interaction, communication and connection, P. Burke and Delphi, in a substantial mutuality, form one of the many steps of the cyborgian journey towards liberation and growth in cyberpunk literature. The rhizomatic technosociality between P. Burke and Delphi cybernetic organization offers a progenitor and fundamental image and figure of the female cyborg; as it does not present a resolution of complete liberation, it creates a space where questions regarding freedom and domination may be asked in various forms and capacity.

In such a critical space where questions regarding freedom, agency and control associated with both cyborg and human experience, the possibilities of answers branch up towards an excellent diversity, and when one looks at the empty shell of Delphi where P. Burke's final phantasmal laments echo, one can easily understand that it was never a matter of liberation or conviction, of achieving complete liberation, but it was always a matter of a promise, of hope; for P. Burke, the hope of love, solidarity and connection, for the reader, the hope and desire to witness a reframing and transformation of the limitations of the mortal body to a new state and level of existence. In the end, it is this hope and vast network of possibilities to imagine the many branches of our future that stands at the core of cyberpunk literature and at the heart of *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*.

Extended Summary

The Girl Who Was Plugged In (1973) is one of the earliest works of cyberpunk literature where the cyborg figure, and more specifically, female cyborg, is presented as the protagonist. In this dystopian narrative depicting the proto-cyborg figure in the early cyberpunk literature, corporations and power elites dominate a massive media empire and influence society through technology. P. Burke, a disfigured young woman, gets to live and connect with the society through and thanks to Delphi, a beautiful, synthetic robot. As the relationship and partnership between P. Burke and Delphi intensifies, the line between the human and the machine also becomes blurred, moreover, a new kind of consciousness is born out of the connection and interaction between P. Burke and Delphi, which inevitably raises the question of freedom and agency through the presentation of the cyborg experience. Accordingly, the central question of this paper is whether the cyborg experience liberates or convicts the cyborg figure to the categorizations, limitations and ontological as well as dogmatical system of the humanist narrative and its hierarchy. By extension, through such an analysis and investigation of the cyborg experience this paper seeks to understand the human experience as well.

The cyborg concept, as portrayed in both Deleuze & Guattari's rhizome theory from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) and Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), challenges traditional Western views on existence, sociality, and discourse. It suggests a move away from humanist structures that prioritize singularities and dualities to embrace multiplicity. However, a comprehensive analysis of literature, including the portrayal of the cyborg in *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* through P. Burke/Delphi, indicates that this cyborg representation does not promise -complete and radical freedom. By inspecting the representation of the female cyborg in the narrative of *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, various themes such as gender, identity, power, and the materiality of one's physical being can be explored. Additionally, the novella raises questions about the complexities surrounding the nature of the cyborg figure. By examining these themes and concepts, the text

offers multiple perspectives on the central issue of freedom. Through the process of a comprehensive textual analysis, this paper seeks to investigate the portrayal of the female cyborg protagonist in connection with human sociality. Specifically, this analysis will explore the cyborg's interactions with other characters and the society, as well as the collective sociality of the neo-capitalist order of the narrative, the dynamics of power and societal structures, the concept of identity, the pursuit of freedom, and the intricate yet substantial effect of technology over and amidst all these aspects. This study will draw on feminist and gender readings of the novella and of the place of the cyborg figure in the society, such as the works from Lisa Yaszek and Carlen Lavigne, to examine the manners in which these depictions mirror and perpetuate societal norms and power hierarchies. Additionally, postmodernist and posthumanist theories will be employed to analyze how these representations reflect the technosocial hybrid nature of the cyborg body and its existence, such as Dani Cavallaro's book *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture* (2001).

P. Burke the protagonist, as a cyborg, oscillates between feelings of liberation and confinement. While the cyborg experience and her partnership with the synthetic body offers moments of agency, and ironically, a taste of human social connection, it simultaneously subjects her to deeper isolation and alienation. The narrative highlights the inherent contradictions of seeking human connection and agency within a capitalist system that commodifies such experiences. This study concludes is that the cyberpunk culture, the message cyberpunk narratives transmit as well as the significance of the cyborg experience are not necessarily about achieving a complete liberation but rather navigating through a complex net of hopes, desires, and potential futures.

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All the authors equally contributed to this work. They all read and approved the final version of the paper.

Conflict of Interest (Compulsory)

All the authors declare no conflict of interest.

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