

Trapping a monster

Transgressing discursive and symbolic order in cyberspace

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Master's thesis
Intercultural Encounters
Faculty of Arts
University of Helsinki
April 2019



Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty Faculty of Arts		
Tekijä – Författare – Author Aliaksei Babets		
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Trapping a monster Transgressing discursive and symbolic order in cyberspace		
Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject Intercultural Encounters		
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master thesis	Aika – Datum – Month and year 04.2019	Sivumäärä– Sidoantal – Number of pages 46+3
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract This work explores and attempts to identify the image of monstrosity that exists in cyberspace. Over the last few decades, the Internet has had a significant impact on society. The specific spatiality, materiality, and a mode of functioning of symbolic order in cyberspace influenced monsters and the way they function within the contemporary, digitally mediated society. By examining a hate comment case at the Higher School of Equality activist group, the author analyzes the process of the formation of the image of the monstrous and outlines its main features in cyberspace. Understanding of the existing image of monstrosity provides feedback on the contemporary fears of society and allows us to see what constitutes the present-day ultimate Other. The author focuses on the role of order as a condition for the existence of monsters who always attempt to transgress it. Two chapters of the work examine two types of order: discursive and symbolic ones. The first chapter analyzes the role of discursive order in the formation of the image of monstrous by implementing the ideas of discourse and normality. Normality plays a vital role in the formation of the image of monstrous because monsters are always what is outside of the norm. The contextuality of discursive normality implies that the image of monster is also contextual. Furthermore, through the concept of materiality of media, the work articulates cyberspace as a productive location which can have its own problematics and a specific image of monstrosity. New materialist approach establishes affirmative relations between cyberspace and real space and allows for a differing image of monstrosity to exist. The chapter also discusses how the current discourse in Russian social media influences the Higher School of Equality activist page. The second chapter discusses the existence of symbolic order in cyberspace as well as its potential to influence the image of monster. The author provides an overview of the idea of symbolic order and establishes its linkage to the concept of monstrosity. Next, the mode of functioning of symbolic order in cyberspace is examined. There are three hypotheses: the end of symbolic order in cyberspace, continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace, and continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace by other means. The author discusses each of the hypotheses and claims for the presence of symbolic order in cyberspace which enables the existence of monsters. Each chapter is followed by a case analysis where the described framework is applied to the Higher School of Equality case. Case analysis focuses on the dynamics that occur on the intersection of discursive normalities of Russian media and Higher School of Equality group. The conclusion part puts the results from two chapters together and discusses what constitutes the image of monster in cyberspace. The work identifies that the main features of the image of monster in cyberspace are its contextuality and the impossibility of complete externalization of a monster. Therefore, on the Internet, the multiplicity of internet pages and contexts allows to move between normalities and thus monstrosities easily. However, one is confronted by a situation where a subject can identify together with someone who can be a monster in a different context. It brings about the second feature which is the proximity of a monster due to the impossibility of its externalization. The work concludes that in cyberspace, each subject can potentially and contextually occupy the position of a monster.		
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Monstrosity, cyberspace, order, normality, digital media		
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited E-thesis University of Helsinki		
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information		

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Introduction

Human beings have always been afraid of monsters. From minotaurs to gargoyles, we know myriads of creatures that were terrifying us for centuries. While nowadays we know that the giant squid does not exist, monsters never really disappeared anywhere. They are here, and their presence is still troubling and worrisome. Monsters stay scary because they can be what we truly fear. They change their appearance, form, and never allow us to escape the feeling of unease and anxiety when confronted by one. Also, as society changes, so do the monsters. One of the most significant changes that have happened to contemporary society is the invention of the Internet. The Internet has become a considerable part of our day to day reality. During the past decades, social media became deeply entrenched in our lives and the Internet has penetrated every aspect of social reality. Our society has become digitally mediated (Mansell 1).

My work aims to explore how the appearance of the Internet and an overall digitalization of society influenced contemporary monsters. I delve into the role of cyberspace and assess its impact on the formation of the image of the monstrous. The work attempts to reflect upon what constitutes a contemporary “digital monster” as well as the way it functions on the Internet. I do this by means of bringing Foucault’s works on discourse and subjectivity into dialogue with psychoanalytic concepts. I also employ a new materialist reading of cyberspace which enables digital environments to produce their own specific image of monstrosity.

I begin, in the first chapter, by contextualizing the concept of monstrosity. I present its definition, functions, and establish the linkage between monstrosity and such phenomena as racism, sexism, etc. Furthermore, the Foucauldian notion of power is implemented as an instrument to explain the functioning of normality and its role in the formation of the image of the “monstrous.” The first chapter of my work employs a new materialist perspective on cyberspace to proceed beyond seeing cyberspace as inferior to the real space as well as for cyberspace to obtain its specific features. I address the process of online identity formation to see how monsters can be identified in the context of the absence of visual and behavioral signifiers. To demonstrate the findings, I implement the case of Higher School of Equality activist group. The group is a Russian pro-LGBT page which aims to provide sexual education. The Higher School of Equality members are often subjected to abuse and are being forced into the position of monsters in the Russian context. The case provides a framework on the basis of which the process of monstrous deviation can be observed

While the first chapter focuses on the discursive image of monstrosity, the second chapter analyzes the role of symbolic order and its transgression in the formation of the monstrous in cyberspace. I begin by providing a brief overview of the idea and establish the linkage between symbolic order and monstrosity. Then, I engage in a discussion on weather and how symbolic order can function in cyberspace. The work outlines three existing hypotheses of this potential functioning and argues that symbolic order does exist in cyberspace. The existence of symbolic order in cyberspace, I will argue, enables the appearance of monsters-transgressors. In the last section of the second chapter, the theoretical findings are applied to the case of the Higher School of Equality. I claim that monsters come close to blurring the border between what is normal and what is monstrous in cyberspace. The Higher School of Equality example is demonstrative of how the externalization of monsters is ineffective and how monsters threaten to be incorporated into normality. In cyberspace, monsters are indistinguishable from us, and we are from the monsters.

Chapter 1: Discursive monstrosity in cyberspace and the case of Higher School of Equality

1.1. Overview of the concept of monstrosity

The concept of monstrosity has haunted Western thinking from the earliest times. Be that the monsters of ancient Greek myths or medieval demon-like creatures, the racial Others of the colonial times or the horrible Gothic phantoms, the monster has always been an object of fascination. The perception of the “monstrous” has been changing throughout history. So, before proceeding to the analysis, let me provide a brief overview of the idea of a monster and its development. Alexa Wright, a researcher of visual monstrosity, outlines the evolution of the concept of monstrosity in her work *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture*. Commonsensically, monsters are imagined to be deviant essences of different kinds with explicit bodily and facial deformities. In the past, the body of a monster was seen to bear responsibility for the monstrosity and the evil of an individual. The articulation of the problem through the body provided some tangible and visible standards where deviations could be attributed to signal monstrosity (Wright 4). The visual aspect strikes first for most of us, so appearance has been the most important marker of monstrosity for centuries.

Later, monsters evolved under the influence of ideas of criminology. In the nineteenth century, criminologists transited the perception of a criminal act from the act to an individual themselves. Crime became connected to the transgression of a law. The change in perception has led to the assumption that a crime without apparent reason is a sign of monstrosity. The endless number of criminals rendered any attempt to link their criminality to their appearances impossible. Each criminal had his specific appearance, so the focus was switched from their bodies to their minds. Monstrosity has become associated with the disease of mind. The mind of a monster was seen to be the main feature and to bear responsibility for its danger. Criminologists tried to recognize the signs of criminal insanity and viewed it as a danger inherent in the social body. In the nineteenth century, the perception of monstrosity went beyond bodily deformities and abnormal behavior integrated into the image.

The integration of the behavioral aspect was just another stage in the evolution of monsters. Analyzing twentieth-century monstrosity, researchers have found themselves confronted by a further complication of the constituencies of the image of monster. While serial killers, rapists, kidnappers undoubtedly demonstrate signs of behavioral insanity, it turned out to be not readily

observable and predictable in their personalities. Alexa Wright analyses the case of famous killer Ted Bundy. Wright refers to a widely encountered description of Bundy to be a type of nonperson, super average, terrifyingly normal psychopath (150). Ted Bundy was often described to be charismatic and nice in many regards while negative descriptions were forced on him to decrease social anxiety and provide a basis for his othering for a broader audience. There was nothing explicitly monstrous about him. Bundy's physical appearance and normal behavior undermined attempts to identify him as "the Other," monster. Narratives of deviance were attached to him artificially. Wright noticed that this case caused anxiety in public because the monster was not very different from what we perceive to be a normal person (150). The personality of Bundy rendered attempts to put him categorically aside impossible. He was later described to be "the devil himself" because of his normative appearance and behavior that were incompatible with his horrific deeds (Wright 150). The late 20th century has brought us the "abstract, faceless, colorless, genderless, sexless monster," who threw his specific markers off and became indistinguishable in the crowd (Tithecott 53).

The perception of monstrosity is changing drastically. Monstrous creatures with visible bodily deformities transformed themselves into criminal psychos with the emphasis on a behavioral aspect. The nineteenth-century criminology changed the way we see monsters. Their physical appearance has gradually lost its significance. Even the monstrosity of behavior that has substituted the primacy of bodily monstrosity lost its representativeness. The case of Ted Bundy is illustrative of the further complications of the perception of monstrosity. As demonstrated, the visual aspect is no longer a reliable detector of monstrosity because paradoxically, a serial killer turned out to be categorically normal. Ted Bundy denied to speak of himself and created a situation where the externalization of a monster like him from the social body has become nearly impossible (Wright 153). Bundy could not have been excluded from what we perceive as a normal society. According to Alexa Wright, neither physical appearance nor behavior can be relied upon as signs of monstrosity (155). However, monsters never vanished or disappeared. Monsters are ever present, and their presence is troubling. The non-representativeness of visual and behavioral aspects allows monsters to come closer and be hard to recognize.

1.2. Definition of monstrosity and its function

In this work, monsters are understood as, but not reduced to the idea of the "ultimate Other." The Other and the monster are essentially interlinked. "Otherness" is a criterion that divides humanity along the lines of what is the norm and its embodiment, and what stands outside of it

(Hyesook 35). The Other is defined by faults that makes the Other susceptible to discrimination. We can find Others within any social body. In turn, the ultimate Other, monster, is the Other that embodies the ultimate deviation from the norm (Hyesook 30). It embodies what society fears in every specific moment. Therefore, this research attempts to detect the way the ultimate Other, the monster, is defined within the social body in a digital environment.

The image of monstrosity is unstable. The monster undergoes constant modification and what is seen as “normal” as well as monstrous is getting redefined from moment to moment (Wright 3). The image of monstrosity is not stable by itself being subject to constant change in the same manner society is. “The monstrous is the inverse or outside of what is acceptable human in any particular social or cultural context” (Wright 3). Therefore, monstrosity reflects social anxieties and represent everything humanity is not. Understanding what constitutes monstrosity in a digital environment is a rich source of information on the contemporary stance of society.

However, monstrosity is never an intrinsic quality. Monstrosity is rather a “narrative imposed on certain appearances or behaviors at particular times and specific contexts” (Wright 3). In other words, nothing is monstrous by itself because it is an unstable category. A feature can be identified as monstrous, only when it is contextually recognized as such.

1.3. The Higher School of Equality case

To look for monsters in cyberspace, one risks being confused by how monstrousness is being attributed by people to one another. When people with opposing opinions have a conflict, each of the sides can blame the opponent for being a monster, totally wrong and incorrect, drastically Other. So, to support the theoretical reflection and to provide my work with an illustrative example, I want to introduce a case of an Internet group named the Higher School of Equality.

The reason I decided to employ the Higher School of Equality case is because this Internet group positions itself as a queer and non-heteronormative feminist space in the Russian context. In the HSE group, the predominant socially normative discourse of heteronormativity is disregarded. Those individuals who often occupy the position of monsters due to their sexuality, obtain the ability to be normal in the context of the HSE page. The ambiguity of the case allows for an in-depth examination of the dynamics behind the formation of the image of the monstrous. The case exhibits patterns that cut across variations and allows us to observe what constitutes a contemporary, digital monster in cyberspace. In the following part of my work, I will come back and discuss in detail how normality plays a role in the construction of what is

seen as socially acceptable and how it has an impact on what monstrosity is like in the digital environment.

The Higher School of Equality is a student lead initiative in Russia. The organization concentrates on educational activities about feminism, sexuality, queer-culture, healthcare, and disease prevention. They also run a series of lectures, workshops, arrange film discussion clubs and gender studies reading clubs. The organization aims to provide education on gender and sexuality-related issues for “enhancing the culture of the student community” (Higher School of Equality). At the moment of conducting this research, the audience of the Internet group is roughly 2500 people.

All in all, what the HSE is doing is challenging and subverting heteronormativity and contributing to a more inclusive society at Russian universities and society at large. Due to its activities, goals, and convictions shared by the participants of the group on what a normal human is, the HSE page members are subjected to harassment, Internet stalking, and abuse. There can be random individuals who come across the group and decide to express their discontent, as well as organized group attacks by members of other Internet pages. The Internet page and its members are frequently being “attacked” by members of other pages with frequently heteronormative, sexist, right-wing thematics like PLUM public page (<https://vk.com/leftradicalmuslesplatinum>). The attacks happen both to individuals like administrators, curators, publishers, writers, activists personally, and on the group as a whole. In the case of HSE, we are talking about a community of people that finds itself in a disadvantaged position regarding power distribution due to their sexuality or gender. The group members experience social pressure, abuse and harassment of different kinds and forms.

1.4. The idea of normality and its role in formation of the image of monstrosity

In this section, I will look into the mechanism of how monsters get excluded from participation in communities. The idea of normality plays an important role in the formation of the image of monstrosity. Normality is a complex phenomenon which is not limited to the representation of what is considered acceptable but also has an oppressive component to it. I implement the reading of the idea of normality as suggested by Isaak Dore. In his paper *Foucault on Power*, Dore explains the idea of “normativity” and its connection to the Foucauldian notion of power:

Power is a “multiplicity of force *relations*.” Each of these relations acquires normative force in proportion to its ability to persuade, incite, influence, direct,

repress or control the conduct of the Other. Herein lies the essence of normativity (Dore 738).

So according to the citation, power as a set of relations, has the force to control and repress the conduct of the Other, and to structure the discursive normality. Discursive normality encompasses a standard of the acceptable ways of being a part of society and represents hegemonic social relations (Dore 738). Conceptualizing discursive normality is necessary for my work because to “trap” a monster, one has to look at where it starts to deviate, at the place where normality gets transgressed. Monsters deviate from the discursive normality because they are what lies outside of it.

Let me elaborate on how normality structures power relations. Normality is a hegemonic way of being which has power over what does not fall under the category of the norm. But the norm does not imply the exercise of power in the conventional understanding where one person directly controls another. In his book *The History of Sexuality* Foucault claims: “power relations are both intentional and non-subjective” (94). Power is exercised over others intentionally because “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives” (History of Sexuality 95). So discursive normality is intentional because it involves some degree of purposive decision making and planning. However, normality is non-subjective because it “[does not] result from the choice or decision of an individual subject” (History of Sexuality 95). Social processes involve a number of actors with different motivations where no outcome can be attributed to a single individual. Society is continually created in complex processes where each can influence another individual. The process entails a continuation of reactions and counteractions while becoming “strategies without strategists” (Dore 741).

The oppressive function of the idea of normality

Let us take a closer look at how normality produces oppression through power. In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault defines power as a “set of actions upon the action of the others” (220). In turn, normality has the most power regarding influencing and controlling the actions of the Other. There can be many actors involved in acting, but some have more capacity to act on another because they have more power which is granted by the norm. For example, within the western dichotomy, women would be in a rather disadvantaged position and undervalued as the Other (Braidotti 148). The ability to act upon the action of the Other stresses the importance of an act as a key to the sustenance of normality and thus the distribution of power. “Power exists only when it is put in action” (The Subject and Power 788). The action can be but is not limited

to, violence, harassment, oppression. It also refers to the method of action which might not be applied directly on others but slowly and progressively as described by Foucault:

It is a total structure of actions...; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (The Subject and Power 789).

Foucault sees normality as operating between social agents, subjects, individuals. The agents are in constant interaction with each other, implying a constant negotiation of normality and thus the distribution of power from moment to moment, from act to act (The History of Sexuality 93). Therefore, normality and its power produce asymmetrical and non-egalitarian relations within society (The History of Sexuality 94). This asymmetry takes a form of inequality or social pressure which results in marginalization and othering. The less normal a subject is, the less power it has.

Relationality and contextuality of the norm

Normality creates pressure that comes from empowered groups of subjects and is exercised over others in the form of oppression and othering. However, the distribution of power within groups and the force relations between them are dynamic and change regularly (The History of Sexuality 93). By saying that force relations are dynamic, Foucault implies that the relationality of the distribution of power makes normality an unstable category. However, while power is continuously redistributed and determined relatively, its “repressive” force is still present (The History of Sexuality 9).

In his work, Dore conceptualizes the notion of Foucauldian power to challenge the conventional approach of seeing the power of normativity as negative. This negative vision of power is the ability of normativity to produce the truth and reality (Dore 739). The production of truth, according to this vision of the negotiation of social reality that manifests itself in the fundamental formation of the perception of the “domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Dore 739). In other words, it manifests itself in the inscribed learned and reproduced framework within which the knowledge of an individual can be gained. Normality creates a framework for what constitutes an acceptable member of society, a normal subject. In turn, the framework provides the criteria that individuals use to evaluate and categorize other individuals within a

social body. For example, the existing normality creates systems of oppression termed as sexism, heteronormativity where gender and sex determine one's belongingness to the norm. These systems of oppression are inscribed upon parts of the discursive reality that we inhabit. They cannot be easily subverted or substituted because they have the power of normality to them. So, the more normal person is, in proportion to the criteria provided by the framework, the more power they have.

Normality, as stated above, is a set of ways of being accepted in what constitutes the idea of society. It produces reality by means of creating a framework where the normal subjects exist. At the same time, existing outside the framework of discursive normality means falling under the category of the Other (Hyesook 35). The monster, then, embodies the ultimate other which is the furthest removed from the discursive normality. A queer individual does not fall under the category of normality entirely because of being anything other than heterosexual. In the mostly heteronormative context, a queer person would be in socially disadvantaged position. A subject is trapped to be located and determined within the existing framework. For Foucault, normality pervades every aspect of social life. "[Normality is omnipresent] not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (The History of Sexuality 93).

Normality and resistance

The relations between normality and otherness are "dynamic and multi-directional" (Dore 740). Normality is unstable, and the difference in power distribution produces asymmetry and inequality in social relations. The effort to control the social relations and to guide the actions of the other encounters "a multiplicity of points of resistance" (Dore 741). The resistance would enjoy a different degree of success as the image of normality is changeable and not given once and for all (Dore 741). So, it is the fluidity of it which means that normality can potentially be renegotiated.

Normality is not a one-way process of a more powerful exerting power over the weaker. Dore claims that when social bodies influence each other, oppression will always give rise to the resistance that will stem from a less powerful group. The process is not counter-reaction, but rather an "action upon acting subject" (Dore 740). So the relation is two-way. A subject that acts on another subject and tries to control the behavior of the Other utilizing the power of normality becomes the subject acted upon (Dore 740). For example, some individuals not only

admit the fact of their disadvantage regarding power distribution, but they purposely resist the existing normality. Resistance is directed onto another subject that falls under the category of normality and vice-versa. So despite one's normality and power to which a subject is consequently entitled, one still engages in a struggle for influence and control over the Other enabling the process of constant negotiation of normality and power distribution. Thus, the image of what is normal and what is not, together with the degree of otherness and oppression a subject's experience is changeable (Dore 740). The point is that besides flexibility and constant renegotiation of the image of normality, oppression is also present. Some categories would be rather empowered in the context of some framework while others would be subjected to a degree of otherness. All in all, there is always resistance to the existing image of normality (The History of Sexuality 95).

1.5. Monster as a transgressor of two types of order

The monster is a transgressor by definition who resists orders, rules, norms (Cohen 12). The monster-transgressor is dependent upon order as an essential condition for its existence because order provides what can be transgressed (Cohen 7). Discussed above is the idea of order that is created by normality. Normality creates the discursive order by means of power distribution which can be transgressed, corrupted, subverted. And while normality frames what constitutes an acceptable human being, the monster transgresses it. The existence of the order that can be disrupted is the very condition which enables the existence of a monster (Cohen 7). How monsters transgress the discursive order can be well demonstrated by the case of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. Elizabeth Young, a professor of American literature and culture, offers a comprehensive analysis of Victor Frankenstein's monster. Young analyses the racial component in constructing the character of Frankenstein's creation. She argues that his appearance is constructed in opposition to the European standards of beauty:

“His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of his muscles and arteries beneath [...] these luxuriances only form a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colors as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips” (Shelley 58).

The visual otherness of Frankenstein's creature is explicit. Moreover, she sees the monster to “offer an oblique account of white anxiety in the face of slave rebellion” (Young 21). In her interpretation, the novel presents “a white protagonist who is haunted and undone by the rebellious monster whom he has created” (Young 21).

Another novel analysis entitled *Frankenstein's Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* by Harold Malchow also focuses on the racial aspect of the monster. Malchow claims that the appearance of the monster echoes the “standard description of the black man in both the literature of the West Indies and that of West African exploration” (91). The racial aspect, rather than lack of intellect or morality, is what marks the Otherness of the monster (Malchow 91). Therefore, while normality in the context of Europe privileges whiteness and its constituencies, the monstrosity of the creature is constructed upon the idea of blackness.

However, the monstrosity of Frankenstein's work might not be functioning in the same manner if we consider the contemporary African context. The monstrosity of the character would not achieve the same effect it has had on the readers of the novel in nineteenth-century Britain. It is because the framework for what is seen as normal is different. Also, the framework is different due to the contextuality of the image of monstrosity. Contextuality poses a limit to the idea of discursive normality as explanatory of the order to be transgressed by a monster. The order based on normality covers only certain aspects of the monster formation process. It departs from discursive formations that are subject to constant change and negotiation as discussed before (Dore 740). In practice, it means that a monstrous figure loses its monstrosity over time due to the renegotiation of the discursive order or switch of context.

The second type of order monster transgresses is symbolic order. The image of monstrosity symbolic order produces has to be distinguished from the variety of those discussed above even though both lead to exclusion and othering. Symbolic order is a set of rules like language and dictates of a society that have to be accepted to deal with the Others (Lacan 67). It restricts and controls rules of communications and desires. Only through the recognition of the symbolic order one can enter into a community of Others (Lacan 67). The monster that transgresses symbolic order is getting excluded from participation in society because the image of us that is formed by symbolic order is also exclusive.

To determine what makes up a monster, both discursive and symbolic orders have to be examined as constitutive of the image of monstrosity in cyberspace. Let me begin by delving into discursive order as a basis for the deviation of monstrosity in cyberspace. I will come back to the role of symbolic order and its influence on the formation of the monstrous in the second chapter.

1.6. Cyberspace and its impact on the formation of the image of monstrosity

What are we talking about when we say cyberspace monsters? The existence of cyberspace monstrosity involves an assumption about the intrinsic difference between cyberspace and real space, or, so to say, offline space. Therefore, I have to first look at the difference between the two spaces. This issue has a crucial significance for the determination of the image of monstrosity in cyberspace because it frames the way cyberspace is approached.

Perceiving nature and technology in binary terms creates a dualistic frame where real space is equated to nature and opposed to technology in the form of cyberspace. To address the problem of articulating the nature - technology binary, I will implement an alternative media materialism as discussed by Jussi Parikka in his work entitled *A Geology of Media*. Jussi Parikka challenges the nature-technology opposition. According to him, technological progress as such is just one among numerous changes happening to humanity throughout history (3). Therefore, it might be misleading to perceive our social reality in cyberspace as separate from “real reality.”

Parikka critically approaches the idea of technology as opposed to nature by thinking about what components and materials enable the existence of technologies. He argues that instead of thinking about a computer, we should think about what it physically consists of; “instead of networking, we should think about the importance of copper and optic fiber that enable these forms of communication” (4). For him, minerals and chemical elements are essential to what we perceive as “technology” (4). Parikka insists that we should remember this when we are talking about the “digital” side of our social, and economic life. “Platinum-grouped metals, in particular, make up our computer hard drives, liquid crystal displays, and miniaturized electronic circuits” (Parikka 5). It is the nature of planet Earth that provides the conditions for the existence of technology and what directly enables it (Parikka 5). At this point, the separation of technology and nature gets blurred for the two oppositions are interconnected. Jussi Parikka argues that “we are dealing with a more entangled set of practices in which it is impossible to decipher such spheres separately” (13).

Asserting that nature and technology are not sustainable in their oppositions, Jussi Parikka continues to claim that we should instead be focusing on the co-constituted relations between the two. Cyberspace itself is enabled by the “material nonhuman reality of the form of chemical components, minerals, metals” (Parikka 14). The co-constituency of relations between nature and technology means that technology is not only enabled by nature but is also dependent on it. Parikka gives an example that cyberspace needs air (24). Cold air has to circulate properly inside hardware to prevent it from overheating. On a larger scale, air is needed inside buildings

where data servers are located to cool the servers down and to keep them working (Parikka 24). So just like humans, which belong to the nature-part of the binary, need air, so do the machines, which belong to the technology-part of the binary.

Cyberspace is also enabled by human agency (Parikka 14). Miners and factory workers destabilize the binary by taking part in the process of society's digital mediation (Parikka 14). Biological contribution to this mediation is crucial. Parikka's argument rests upon the realization that humans are indeed biological agents (20). Thus, we arrive at the understanding that in order to reflect on a broader pattern, we have to resist binary categorization of nature and technology.

Cyberspace as a productive location for the image of monstrosity

Following Jussi Parikka, we can see that the nature - technology binary is intrinsically inconsistent. Moreover, technology is directly enabled by nature so the focus should be instead directed on the co-constituency of relations between the two. Such a switch in perception opens up a new domain for conceptualization of the real space - cyberspace dichotomy. To articulate the productive aspect of cyberspace as a location and its influence on the formation of the image of monster, I will implement the strategy proposed by Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin in their work named *Pushing Dualism to an Extreme: On the Philosophical Impetus of a New Materialism* and *The Transversality of New Materialism*. Their work projects a "new materialist" perspective onto contemporary cultural problems. This approach allows us to go beyond the dualist perception of real space and cyberspace. It is crucial to reconsider the traditional way of seeing cyberspace as something different and at times disconnected from "real" space. In their work, Dolphijn and van der Tuin refer to the works of a number of philosophers such as Deleuze, Bergson, Serres, Braidotti, and Lyotard. These theoreticians are important for my work because they problematized ontological dualism each from a different position. I will be referring some of their works later in this section. In reference to them, Dolphijn and van der Tuin claim that modernist thought has structured thinking in oppositions where one thing only exists in opposition to another ("Pushing Dualism to an Extreme" 386).

The danger of ontological dualism is to be found in the very underlying logic of dualist thinking ("The Transversality of New Materialism" 156). The oppositions involve intrinsically negative relations ("The Transversality of New Materialism" 156). The first part of the binary functions as the determinant of normality and has a privileged position among the two. Thus, it sets the normality from which the Other side of a binary arises or deviates. Any "second" part of the

binary is only brought into existence and can only exist with the One, the Centre, the First pair of the binary (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 397). At this point, hierarchy gets to be installed, and from here the asymmetry arises. The hierarchy gives rise to non-egalitarian relations between binaries where the second part of binary receives the connotation of being a deviation from the first, the norm.

Dualist thinking involves hierarchy and structures things through negative relations. It results in the transformation of “different-from” into “worth-less-than” (Braidotti 147). Hierarchy privileges one side of binary over another. One side occupies the place of the correct one, and the Other is driven to the position of deficiency to the first. This has to be resisted because “it does not even capture the phenomenon of difference, only the phantom or the epiphenomenon,” so the difference between real space and cyberspace does not manifest itself visibly (Deleuze 52). Dualism does not allow real space and cyberspace to differ and ends up making one side “deviant” to another. Such relation implies that thinking starts with the phenomena that are claimed to be different from another phenomenon (Deleuze 56). This is how cyberspace has become viewed as “less” real than the offline space; space that is missing something to become as valid as the real life space. Therefore, capturing the difference between the spaces has to start with “mapping difference in itself” which is only possible when “difference” is “shown differing” (Deleuze 56). To do this, we need an “invention of the conditions of invention” to allow for the establishment of non-dualist logic. “Under the non-dualist logic, the truth may express itself” (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 396). So cyberspace can potentially acquire its specificity and problematic which is needed to articulate the image of monstrosity peculiar to it.

The problem of the ordinary dualism structured by a negative relation persists. Intrinsicly, dualism involves its own re-affirmation. The core problem of re-affirmation is hidden in the impossibility to see how one term of a dichotomy is grafted upon another making us implicitly or explicitly continuing with the modernist framework of thought (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 391). It is what conditions the stay within the lines of dualist distinction.

Moreover, in an attempt to disconnect from the frameworks of dualism, one risks getting caught in opposing it (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 389). The problem of opposition arises: “An idea opposed to another idea is always the same idea, albeit affected by the negative sign. The more you oppose one another, the more you remain in the same framework of thought” (Serres and Latour 81). So through the very opposition, it recreates the former logic. The results of

opposing are nothing but re-confirmation of the past lines of thought and narratives (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 390). So instead of simply opposing, “we need to focus on how one side of the binary grafts another” (Bergson 297). “As long as we are clear about the fact that the one term of a dichotomy is “grafted upon” the Other, we will not fall into the trap of setting up a discussion that leads us away from serious thought” (Bergson 297). The importance of this quote is not to be underestimated as it sheds light on how to proceed beyond thinking of spaces as dichotomies.

The way to proceed beyond thinking of cyberspace and real space as dichotomies and effectively get rid of intrinsic negativity is to switch from ordinary dualism to something characterized to be the “radical rewriting of modernity” (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 387). Dolphijn and van der Tuin notice that in fact, none of the dualisms “denies the relational nature” (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 391). So the problem is not so much dualism itself, but the fact that it is structured by intrinsic negativity (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 391). This is because negativity unavoidably presupposes the correct – deviant relation, not allowing for the two sides of binary to differ, and instead submitting them to a non-egalitarian, hierarchical structure. Affirmative relations are the mode that allows for the opposed sides of a certain binary to relate to each other (“Pushing Dualism to an Extreme” 395). The rewriting of modernity, in turn, resists this negative relationality between terms and tries to pass towards the establishment of affirmative relations between the two. “We are only able to work towards an absolute concept, once liberated from the conditions which made difference is made an entirely relative maximum” when we assume the starting point of the debate to be the acceptance of the statement that “related terms belong to one another” (Deleuze 30).

After all, the liberation from the modernist framework of negatively structured binaries starts with accepting the existence of a relation between nature and technology, real space and cyberspace. By acknowledging the existence of relations between the extremes of binaries, the conditions for a radical rewriting are created. New materialism rejects the kind of relations where cyberspace is seen to be “worth-less-than,” a virtual space that lacks something present in real space. Cyberspace is not to be seen as inferior. The materialist perspective denies the deficiency of cyberspace and the typical way of conceiving it as less real. Therefore, new materialism allows us to restructure our engagement with reality. The presented perspective problematizes the cyberspace image of monstrosity on its own while still distinguishing between the spaces. Therefore, the image of monstrosity encountered in cyberspace does not have to be seen as incomplete or deficient to the real-life one and obtains its specific qualities.

1.7. Identity in cyberspace or the process of self-ing

The previous section discussed how cyberspace is a space which has problematics on its own. Such conceptualization allows searching for the specific features of monstrosity peculiar to cyberspace. Therefore, this section looks into the process of the composition of the self in cyberspace and see what changes are brought into the process by relocating it to cyberspace. Relocation of the process of the negotiation of self to cyberspace can potentially impact the formation of the image of monster significantly. This is due to the influence of social discourse and its normalizing function. They have a strong presence in cyberspace too, where they remain oppressive and non-egalitarian.

In the offline reality, the presence of visual markers can effectively deprive a person of the possibility of assuming a different identity (Wright 4). So it can be impossible to escape social pressure. In turn, cyberspace seems to open such an opportunity. For example, in common sense perception, a queer person, whose identity does not coincide with the predominant heteronormativity, is supposed to be able to assume a different identity in cyberspace and to avoid the social pressure generated by the distribution of power. Postmodern deconstructionist narratives advocated for the possibility of creating an alternative self in cyberspace due to the possibility to control the markers one adopts to signify one's identity. However, escaping discursive pressure might not be so simple. Therefore, this chapter addresses the issue of "cyberself-ing" based on the work *The cyberself: the self-ing project goes online, symbolic interaction in the digital age* by a researcher of communication in cyberspace at the University of California, Laura Robinson. The work provides an insight into the process of determination of self in cyberspace. The articulation of how the self is negotiated in cyberspace will shed light on the possibility to escape the pressure of discursive normality and thus the way the monster is defined.

Robinson introduces the concept of the "looking-glass self." The concept was described by American sociologist and a researcher Charles Cooley and is helpful in the understanding of the process of the formation of the self in cyberspace. The concept of the looking - glass self describes self-ing as a threefold process. Firstly, the self is imagined as it appears to Others, to the community it inhabits. Secondly, it proceeds onto the imagination of the Other's judgment of itself — the way a random person would perceive us. Thirdly, the self produces a response to the imagined judgment of the Other (Cooley 184). The determination of self in cyberspace is a continuous process of "self-evaluation through the eyes of an imagined other" (Robinson

95). It implies that an individual does not experience oneself directly but only through the eyes of the Other. Therefore, our self is inseparable from the experience of the generalized Other (Robinson 95). Experiencing oneself through the eyes of the Other is an essential part of the self-ing process in cyberspace. So the process of self-ing in cyberspace occurs in the course of social interaction (Robinson 96). What we call self turns out to be in constant transition. In other words, there is no “biological self” which would be independent of society and interaction (Robinson 96). The self is fluid and has no unchangeable characteristics.

However, far from liberation, the “self internalizes the social world as a part of the process of anticipating and interpreting the ‘generalized other’” (Robinson 96). This quote is illustrative of the practical inability to render one’s identity as normal and avoid othering, harassment, and abuse in cyberspace. In other words, one cannot simply enter normality in cyberspace at will. Laura Robinson says: “offline realities, take precedence over online fantasies” (100). In reference back, the Other’s judgment is based on the evaluative criteria that exist in the discourse in offline space as discourse provides a framework for the Other to evaluate signs in cyberspace. The evaluative criteria based on, for example, gender, race, and sexuality are being reproduced in cyberspace. Internet users are physically real individuals who otherwise inhabit an offline reality meaning they check the social means the same way and according to the same criteria they do offline. Therefore, Robinson argues in reference to the criticism of postmodernism disembodiment that instead of neutralizing social means ascribed to individuals in the offline world, they are reinforced in cyberspace (100). Individuals find themselves caught in the system of classification adopted from the offline space.

Consequently, as has already been stated, the system bears and reproduces discursive norms attached to individuals in the offline world into cyberspace. Viewing cyberspace as something separated from offline society, therefore, is only tangible in the light of new materialist argumentation but not in a social deconstructionist approach. Identities that are reproduced in cyberspace will be recognized as not falling under the category of normal and will be othered accordingly. Cyberspace does not function as a space where it is possible to create an alternative self and surf consciously between discourses avoiding being othered because one is unable to control how the self is determined in cyberspace at will (Robinson 96).

1.8. The context of Russian cyberspace discourse

In the previous section, I discussed how the self is defined in cyberspace which is crucial to approach the question of the formation of a discursive image of monstrosity. However, referring

back, the discursive image of monstrosity is a result of a transgression of contextual normality. So before proceeding to the analysis, I want to introduce the context of the Russian digital environment where the HSE operates.

In Russia, LGBT people are outside discursive normality. In the last decade, Russia prohibited the promotion of homophobia. Homosexuality is seen as “a foreign import, that is, a direct effect of Western influence” (Healey, Baer, Stella 6). Homophobia is lifted to the level of state policy. It portrays non-heterosexual people as dangerous, alien. Although homosexuality is decriminalized since 1993, anti-gay prejudice is still widespread.

On June 11, 2013, the State Duma passed the so-called “homosexual propaganda” law, which prohibits any public messages about homosexuality unless presented in a negative light (Sleptcov 150). Under the law, individuals who promote homosexual behavior face fines. The law aims at curbing propaganda of homosexuality but what is considered propaganda is not clearly defined. According to Dmitry Isaev, the struggle with ‘homosexual propaganda’ serves as a way of coping with fear arising from a loss of identity: “Homosexuals are posed as a convenient enemy destroying the old “Orthodox,” traditional, “truly Russian” values” (Isaev 103).

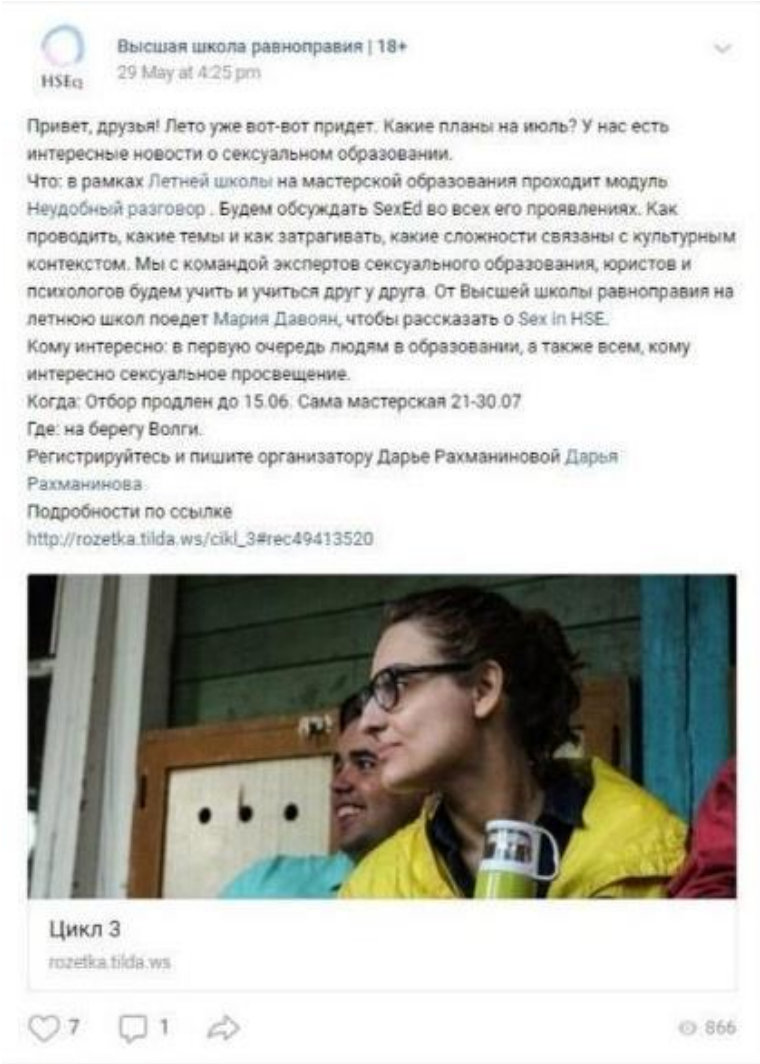
The law leads to marginalization and stigmatization of non-heterosexual people. Any manifestations of different values such as those of HSE in public space in Russia risks prosecution. Because of the law the Russian LGBT activist organizations experience increasing harassment and pressure from state authorities (Sleptcov 143). LGBT people are scapegoated and forced into the position of enemy to health and morality of society including cyberspace. As such, non-heterosexual people do not fit the idea of normality existing in Russia nor in the Russian digital environment.

1.9. The Higher School of Equality case analysis

Having presented the Russian context, I can now turn to the analysis of the selected activist group. The Higher School of Equality is a social media group operating on the biggest Russian social media platform and social network “Vkontakte.” The HSE is an educational community (Higher School of Equality). Their social media page is public. Anyone can visit, read their materials, and comment on them but join and leave the community at will. The group aims to distribute information about sex, gender, sexuality and decrease social anxiety about oppressed social groups (Higher School of Equality). Because HSE group activity is associated with

feminist and pro-LGBT agenda, the members are often subjected to different forms of discrimination and oppression.

In my analysis, I focus on the abusive comment case under one of the page posts. The post (see Figure 1) presents a summer course organized around the issue of sexuality. The module is titled “Uneasy Conversation” and aims to discuss “SexEd in all its forms and modes” (Higher School of Equality). The course organizers team consists of many experts from the fields of sexual education, law, and psychology. The aim of their gathering is to teach and to learn about sexuality from each other (Higher School of Equality). The organizers of the course emphasize the importance of sexual education especially concerning the cultural context of Russia and CIS countries at large.



Karl Verner
мерзкие извращенцы
30 May at 4:28 pm · Reply

Figure 1. Social media post advertising summer school educational module “Uneasy Conversation” with an offensive comment. “Uneasy Conversation” Workroom *Obrazovanie*, Higher School of Equality, 29.05.2018, https://vk.com/hsequality?w=wall-150957194_1359. Accessed 30.05.2018. Screenshot by author.

[Hello friends! The summer is almost here. What are your plans for July? We have interesting news about sexuality education. A part of the Summer School, there will be an Uneasy Conversation module where we are going to discuss SexEd in all its forms and modes. We will discuss how to conduct sexual education, which topics to cover, and what are the difficulties in regard to the cultural context] (Translation mine).

The only comment to be found under the post says “мерзкие извращенцы” which literally means [filthy perverts] (translation mine). It seems out of place to offend people who want to talk about sexuality education as “filthy perverts.” First of all, the description of the Summer School avoids giving any opinions or propaganda concerning homosexuality or queerness. There seems to be nothing “perverted” about the post because the description is aimed at sexual education and discussion of problems around it. For the commentator, however, the content has no importance. It is solely the fact that this post is in the HSE group which is enough to assume the course is a threat to the predominant discursive heteronormativity and thus a threat to the commentator’s idea of normality. The contents of the post have no meaning for the abuser. For the abuser, posing a question about sexual education is a trigger by itself because of where this post is to be found. For the commenting person, sexual education is unambiguously connected to sexual liberation which in turn implies women liberation and going beyond heterosexuality as the only normal sexuality.

Therefore, the reasoning behind leaving an offensive comment is not the content but the HSE public page itself. Any post could trigger the same kind of reaction. The commentator associates the whole page with its members to represent something that stands outside one’s scope of the norm. Then, the commentator tries to restore the predominant image of normality by calling page members “filthy perverts.” With that comment, the commentator demonstrates an assumed wrongness of the page. HSE members are not only “perverts” in the sense of displaying abnormal and corrupted behavior and values, but they are also called “filthy” to imply the ugliness and corruption embedded in the kind of norms promoted by HSE.

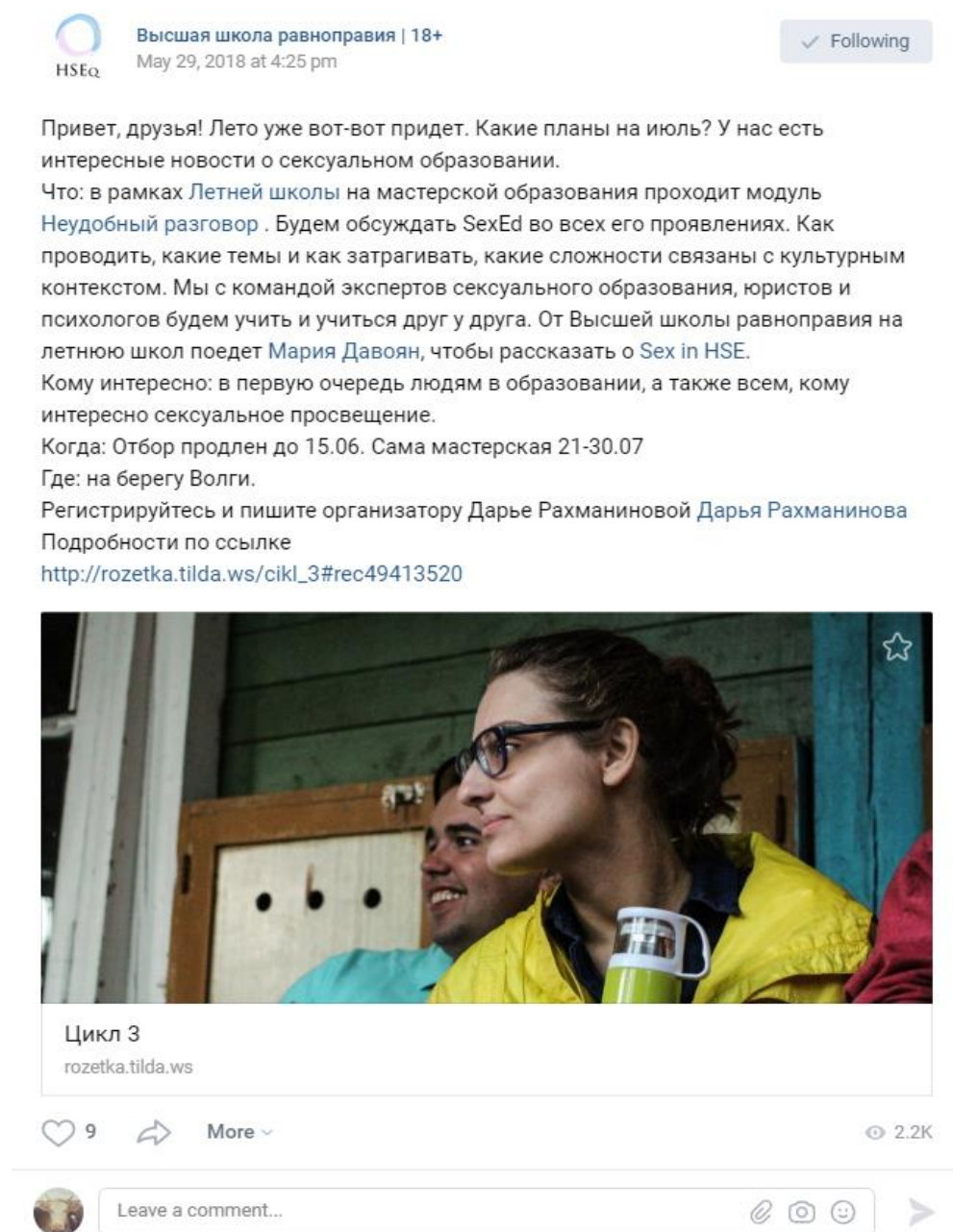
Hate comments have a discursive purpose. The offense neither targets the summer course audience nor any particular member of HSE. The reason for the appearance of the comment is the page itself. HSE is an educational page that aims to challenge the heteronormativity of discourse and renegotiate the norm. So where there is resistance, there is oppression due to the normative function of power (The History of Sexuality 95). And the “filthy perverts” phrase articulates the oppressive power of normality in the form of words. The offense functions as a tool to establish non-egalitarian relations and to other the members of the page. To subject them to the position where they are worth less than a “normal,” heterosexual person.

Although the commentator is not a target audience of HSE page content, one randomly visits the page and experiences a challenge to the discursive normality to which one feels belongingness. The abusive comment is an attempt to re-establish his vision of a norm. Referring back, discursive normality is non-subjective, so the person writing comment becomes an unconscious instrument in sustaining the predominant norm. However non-subjective, discursive normality is intentional. So, upon witnessing the challenge, the commentator purposely tries to put the community members in the position of monsters. He experiences a need to enact his privilege granted by the power of normality and to reproduce the dominant discourse through insult with little to no relevance to the content. Therefore, the insult is a non-subjective but intentional act that attempts to force members of the HSE group into the position of the marginalized Other, into what is beyond the existing image of norm, monstrosity.

Furthermore, things get more complicated because monsters are not so easily identified. From the perspective of HSE, the abuser is also outside the contextual image of normality because HSE’s norm is different. It is not merely that HSE space is queer-positive as opposed to, for example, heteronormativity. Homosexuality instead becomes incorporated into what constitutes a normal human being in the context of HSE. The whole page becomes a homogeneous unit resisting the predominant image of heteronormative normality. The commentator experiences a switch of context and intentionally violates the rules of community interaction through linguistics, the act of writing an abusive comment (Robinson 101). While on the majority of Internet pages in V Kontakte a nasty comment about non-heterosexual people is likely to enjoy discursive support, on the page of HSE such views are perceived as abominable. The aggressiveness of the comment towards members of the page does not fit its standards of group behavior. The abuser explicitly signals that abuser is no member of the community, so the nature of the tension is revealed.

1.9.1. Contextuality of a monster

Eventually, the comment gets deleted (see figure 2). For the members of the page, the views manifested by the commentator are corrupt and dangerous because the way the commentator positions is incompatible with the image of normality that exists in the context the of HSE page. The comment attempts to restore the heteronormative image of normality.



Высшая школа равноправия | 18+
May 29, 2018 at 4:25 pm

Привет, друзья! Лето уже вот-вот придет. Какие планы на июль? У нас есть интересные новости о сексуальном образовании.

Что: в рамках Летней школы на мастерской образования проходит модуль **Неудобный разговор**. Будем обсуждать SexEd во всех его проявлениях. Как проводить, какие темы и как затрагивать, какие сложности связаны с культурным контекстом. Мы с командой экспертов сексуального образования, юристов и психологов будем учить и учиться друг у друга. От Высшей школы равноправия на летнюю школу поедет **Мария Давоян**, чтобы рассказать о **Sex in HSE**.

Кому интересно: в первую очередь людям в образовании, а также всем, кому интересно сексуальное просвещение.

Когда: Отбор продлен до 15.06. Сама мастерская 21-30.07

Где: на берегу Волги.

Регистрируйтесь и пишите организатору Дарье Рахманиновой **Дарья Рахманинова**

Подробности по ссылке
http://rozetka.tilda.ws/cikl_3#rec49413520

Цикл 3
rozetka.tilda.ws

9 likes 2.2K views

Leave a comment...

Figure 2. Social media post advertising summer school educational module “Uneasy Conversation” and the offensive comment is deleted. “Uneasy Conversation” Workroom *Obrazovanie*, Higher School of Equality, 29.05.2018, https://vk.com/hsequality?w=wall-150957194_1359. Accessed 31.05.2018. Screenshot by author.

In the context of the HSE community, the predominant heterosexual discourse is rendered powerless intendedly by means of deleting comments. When the comment is deleted, the image of normality that exists outside the context of HSE is made invisible. This invisibility renders the commentator's attempt to restore heteronormativity meaningless. And when the attempt to restore the heteronormative normality fails, the commentator turns out to be in the position of the monster. Therefore, context plays a crucial role because it determines the point where monsters start to deviate from in cyberspace.

However, it does not mean that group members disconnect completely from understanding the dominance of heteronormative discourse. They are real people who live in society be that offline space or cyberspace and thus grasp the prevailing images. The point is that norm is renegotiated in the context of the page allowing otherwise marginalized and oppressed people to be incorporated into norm rather than being viewed as monsters only.

All in all, while discursive normality determines the norm from which monstrosity deviates, the norm can be contextually renegotiated in cyberspace. The image of monstrosity thus also gets renegotiated because it depends on the context. As demonstrated on the example of an abusive comment on the HSE page, it requires constant effort to sustain a space as having its specific normality. However, while contextually renegotiated, each individual within the renegotiated space still senses the predominant image. It is impossible to disconnect entirely from understanding the predominant discursive normality because this has the most power to it. Thus, normality constantly signals its presence in the context of HSE with the appearance of random abusive comments.

1.9.2. Implications of discursive monstrosity in cyberspace

In the first chapter of my work, I looked into the process of discursive formation of the image of monster in cyberspace. Monsters deviate from the existing idea of normality and embody what lies outside of it. Cyberspace and its peculiarities have the potential to bring changes to the process of the formation of the image of a monster. But, the changes are not easily sensible because both in real space and cyberspace the same predominant discourse is present. And the predominant discourse gets reproduced in cyberspace. This happens because Internet users apply the same criteria to other people they apply in the offline space.

However, the image of normality and thus monstrosity is contextual. As demonstrated with the case of the HSE page, the image of normality can get contextually renegotiated and sustained in cyberspace. HSE normality incorporates different sexualities and genders unlike

predominant heteronormativity of Russia. But, there is a limit to it. On an individual level, one is still unable to disconnect from the clasp of the predominant discourse. Page members still check the predominant image of normality. Abusive comments that attempt to impose heteronormativity serve as a constant reminder.

The contextuality of normality is not a feature exclusive to cyberspace. One can switch contexts also in offline space while still understanding the predominant discursive normality. However, cyberspace opens up a new domain that allows obtaining discursive support by entering a space where normality is renegotiated and sustained by the conscious effort of the moderators of the page. In certain contexts, marginalized people can get incorporated into the norm.

Furthermore, just like in the offline reality, displaying unacceptable traits and behavior in certain spaces results in exclusion. When somebody like the commentator challenges the contextual normality, the person lands in the position of a monster and gets excluded from participation in a community. The presence of such a transgressor-monster is unbearable because he violates the division between what is normal and what is not and threatens to put contextually normal people into the position of monsters. So the abuser gets forcefully externalized. A ban is used on those whose presence cannot be tolerated because it is too radical and dangerous.

In contrast to offline space, it is easier to enter and participate in different contextual groups in cyberspace. One can surf between contexts and normalities much quicker. So the mechanism of how discursive normality is contextually negotiated and sustained as well as the way monsters deviate from the contextual norm is similar in offline space and cyberspace. However, the distinct spatiality of cyberspace enables one to “surf” between contexts by entering one space after another and switching from one contextual normality to another differently than in offline space. Thus, the contextuality of the image of monstrosity in cyberspace, while retaining its mechanism of deviation from normality akin to the one operating in offline space, is significantly impactful due to the possibility to surf between contexts faster and more easily.

Chapter 2: Symbolic order and its influence on the formation of the image of monster in cyberspace

2.1. Symbolic order and its role in the formation of the image of monster

Discursive normality does take part in the formation of the image of monster in cyberspace. Because the monster is an a priori transgressor, discursive normality is what provides an order to be transgressed. But as explained earlier, the idea of discursive order covers only certain aspects of the monster formation process because there are more orders to infringe by monsters. Transgression of discursive order departs largely from discursive formations that are subject to constant change and negotiation. In this light, deviation happens contextually due to the locality of what constitutes “us,” acceptable human beings.

However, when we talk about symbolic order, a deviation happens differently. In order to be able to enter some contextual normalities, one has to accept a symbolic order which is a set of rules and dictates for society (Johnston). So the second part of my thesis analyzes how the image of monster morphs upon the transgression of symbolic order in cyberspace. Here, I engage critically in a discussion about the ability of cyberspace to influence the formation of the image of monster as a transgressor of the symbolic order.

To look into the process of the installation of symbolic order and see what changes are brought into the way symbolic order operates in cyberspace, I will introduce the triangulated concept of Jacques Lacan. Lacan was a French psychoanalyst who gained an international reputation as an original interpreter of Sigmund Freud’s work. His triangulated concept of the Imaginary - Symbolic - Real explains the intrinsic mechanisms of the symbolic order. Next, I will look into the changes brought to the mechanism as operating in cyberspace. I attempt to see what changes are brought into the functioning of symbolic order in cyberspace by asking the question if cyberspace continues to be installed through the so-called “Oedipus complex.” As will be explained later, Oedipus marks the installation of the primal repression which is the entrance into the symbolic order (Johnston). And symbolic order refers to the rules and dictates of society as a condition of establishing relations with Others (Johnston). So asking if cyberspace continues with the Oedipal mode of installation of symbolic order, will shed light on the way the order is installed. Building on that, I will be able to see how monsters transgress the order and what changes it brings into the formation of their image.

First of all, I will explain what symbolic order means. By symbolic order, I refer to Lacanian conceptualization of the way human minds function. Symbolic order is the “overarching “objective spirit” of trans-individual socio-linguistic structures configuring the fields of inter-subjective interactions” (Johnston). In other words, symbolic order is a regulator of social order and etiquette that determines the “rules” of social interaction (“Cyberspace or How to Traverse” 483). For example, symbolic order makes people shake hands to greet each other or say “Oops!” when we do something clumsy (“Cyberspace or How to Traverse” 483). Because symbolic order sets the fundamental order and rules of society, it plays an important role in the existence of monsters who can, in turn, transgress it. Therefore, I attempt to find out how symbolic order influences monsters themselves making them adapt to the “realities” of cyberspace.

2.2. The structure of symbolic order

Monsters always escape and defy categorization. To trap a monster, one has to look at where monstrosity becomes possible. Monstrosity becomes possible where there is an order which can be transgressed and disrupted. Symbolic order is a type of order that can enable the appearance of monsters upon its transgression. So to trap a monster in cyberspace, we have to analyze how symbolic order functions and how it potentially can be transgressed. Because monsters adapt to the environment, the image of monstrosity would be changing upon the adaptation of monsters to the order to be disrupted.

Now, let me briefly introduce the original Lacanian explanation of symbolic order. The idea of symbolic order can be demonstrated with the help of the triangulated scheme of Imaginary - Symbolic – Real. This psychoanalytic concept explains the underlying mechanism of human consciousness and allows to articulate the way I, as a subject, perceive order in cyberspace (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 811). Here is one of the final structures of the order of things as conceptualized by Lacan in all its complexity (see Figure 3). I will read the triangle regarding its core elements of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. In this section, I will also be referring to the works of Louis Althusser and Ferdinand de Saussure whose works draw heavily on Lacan engaging in psychological concepts of the unconscious and describe the structures and systems that enable the concept of self.

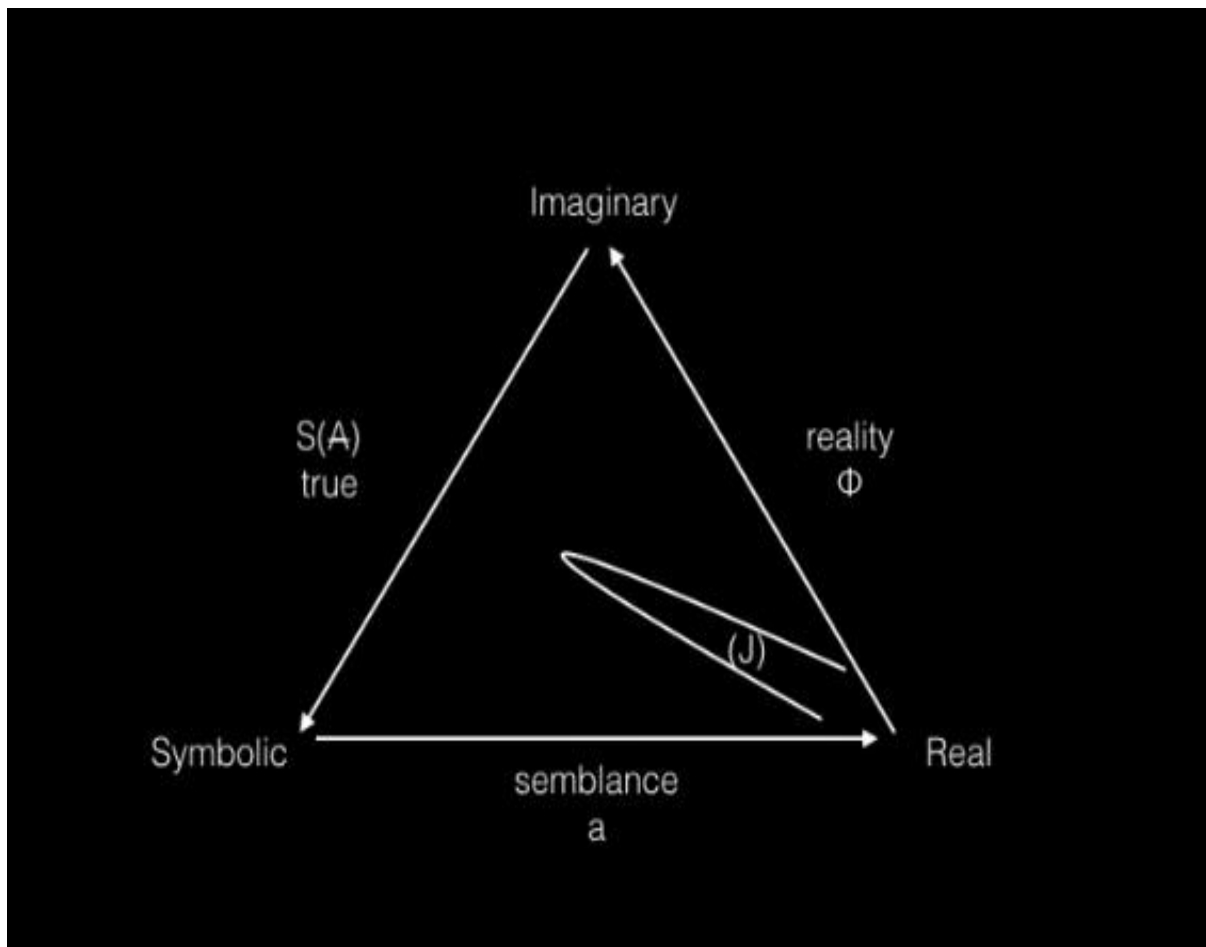


Figure 3. The Imaginary-Symbolic-Real, from Cadell Last. *The Lacanian Triad: Imaginary-Symbolic-Real*, Cadell Last *Driving in Language*. 21.02.2018; Accessed 30.05.2018.

First, we start with the Imaginary which Lacan tends to associate with the sphere of consciousness and self-awareness. The Imaginary is the domain where we construct meanings and images freely which are relevant to ourselves only (Johnston). For Saussure, the imaginary is the "signified," the concept symbolized by a sign (Saussure 68). I will refer to the idea of Saussure later in the section of the Symbolic. So the Imaginary is the "internalized image of the ideal, whole, self" (Vogler 2).

Then, we go to the Symbolic which stands for the transformation of the Imaginary into a coherent structure which also appeals to others (Althusser 26). For Saussure, the Symbolic is the "signifier" (Saussure 68). We obtain the ability to communicate with others through the adaptation of symbols and laws, a universalized and accepted set of signals that enable an exchange of our Imaginary visions, like through language (Althusser 26). What Althusser is saying is that language which already exists before us is created by others and is the way to communicate with the others. Thus, when a subject moves from the Imaginary to the Symbolic,

the subject enters the domain where one proceeds from own self towards Others. This step illustrates where the ability to communicate with others occurs.

Moving from the Symbolic to the Real, we approach something conceptualized to be the missing Other. In the gap between the Symbolic and the Real, Lacan places the objet-petit-a or so-called desired object (Johnston). In this move, we are motivated by an object that causes our motion and directs our attention in the form of an image of something we want to commune or join with (Johnston). This single object becomes a focus of subject's attention. Also, the side of joy is marked by J on the triangle. It stands for "jouissance" or sexual enjoyment. I will come back to the idea of jouissance later.

The last point of the triangle is the Real. At this stage, according to Lacan, we detect an ungraspable gap or a hole in the Real where the Real is something that exists on its own, independent of both the Imaginary and the Symbolic and thus ungraspable (Johnston). Symbolic performs a crucial function of filling in the gap between the Imaginary and the Real. The Symbolic structures our future engagement with the Real (Althusser 26). It envelopes the subject in a "network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him [...]" (Symbol and Language 42). In this manner, our minds a complete picture which our consciousness assumes to be the reality we inhabit.

All in all, the reality we inhabit is a product of complex processes in our minds. However, to become a part of society, one has to go through the process described above and enter into the symbolic order. In reference back, symbolic order gets installed through primal repression. Primal repression refers to the Oedipus complex where the paternal figure prohibits incestuous deeds and imposes repression: "It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Écrits 67). In the myth, Oedipus kills his father to remove the obstacle, prohibition, and gain access to joy. But at the moment of killing, the father is elevated to a phantasmic presence imposing the prohibition even more strongly. And prohibition is the essence of symbolic order which is what the monster, the a priori transgressor, threatens to disobey.

2.2.1. Jouissance and abjection

Inside the triangle, there is an arc denoted by the letter "J" meaning jouissance. The term originates from the Lacanian work *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. According to Lacan, "jouissance compels the subject to constantly attempt to transgress the prohibitions imposed on

his enjoyment, to go beyond the pleasure principle” (The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 184). In other words, jouissance is a reminder of what took place before the initiation into the symbolic order. What is important for my work here is not jouissance itself, but the notion of Abjection which is articulated and well exemplified by Julia Kristeva, an intellectual whose work bridges the gaps among psychoanalysis, structural linguistics, and feminist theories. In her book *Powers of Horror* Kristeva explains that prior to the subject’s entrance into the symbolic order, there is already the Other who “precedes and possesses me, [...] causing me to be” (Kristeva 10). However, once the subject enters the symbolic order, the Other becomes impossible to merge with, remaining “inaccessible except through jouissance [...]” (Kristeva 9). So the only way to access, then, is through jouissance. The abject then, is a frontier, the guard of the dissolution of the I (Kristeva 9). It is the act of the Other to establish the abject and to mark out the territory where the I is on the verge of its consistency (Kristeva 9). So for her, it is the abject that allows for the I to exist and not disappear. Kristeva claims that the Other makes the subject repugnant to keep it from foundering when it is swallowed up by the jouissance (9).

To illustrate the abjection Kristeva gives a famous example of a cadaver, the corpse. The improper and unclean are the departure points for “the most archaic forms of abjection” (Kristeva 2). Loathing food or waste are typical examples she gives in her work. And a corpse, for her, is the “utmost of abjection” (Kristeva 4). When seeing a corpse, one is confronted with the image of a dead body which reminds a subject of his own body and its mortality. When we see a corpse outside of meaning structures that allow for the adoption of distance towards the abject, then the border is becoming the object (Kristeva 4). It is something “rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (Kristeva 4). It is not merely something dirty and disgusting, but something that goes beyond pre-ascribed positions. Something that “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (Kristeva 4). The abject does not respect the order; thus it breaks through the things and interferes with our perception. For example, my body which is supposed to keep me from dying, from loss to loss, it finally becomes the very thing that causes me to die (Kristeva 3). It is a part of me that I cannot recognize as such.

2.3. Three hypotheses of how symbolic order functions in cyberspace

The existence of symbolic order in cyberspace is a debated topic in academia. Slavoj Žižek initiated the debate when he touched upon the issue in his books *The Plague of Fantasies* and *Looking Awry*. He later published an essay on digital interactivity/interpassivity entitled

Cyberspace, or, How to Traverse the Fantasy in the Age of the Retreat of the Big Other where he directly addressed the issue and developed his hypothesis of the end of symbolic order in cyberspace. In this essay, he discussed the other hypotheses of Jerry Aline Flieger, Sherry Turkle and Allucquere Rosanne Stone. Flieger responded in her *Has Oedipus Signed Off (or Struck Out)?: Žižek, Lacan and the Field of Cyberspace* where she points out the inaccuracies in Žižek's argument and clarifies her own position as well as giving her perspective on the position of Turkle and Stone. Later, Žižek published *What can Psychoanalysis tell us about cyberspace?* where he mostly restates his previous argument but also introduces some changes to his own argumentation line. He comes up with his fourth hypothesis which was later dismissed by Flieger as being a repetition of the first one.

The field of discussion is very wide. A number of theoreticians worked on the issue of the existence of symbolic order in cyberspace. Among others: Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Paul Virilio's *The Art of the Motor*. Their works explore the functioning of a subject in cyberspace specifically as they were taken up within media and cultural studies. I would argue, that the perception of symbolic order in cyberspace can be divided into three main hypotheses: the end of symbolic order, the continuation of symbolic order, and the continuation of symbolic order by other means. Symbolic order is a vital condition for the existence of the monster-transgressor because it provides the very order to be transgressed. The changes in the mode of its functioning in cyberspace can impact the formation of the image of monster.

The first one is conceptualized by Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek. In his works *What can Psychoanalysis tell us about cyberspace?* and *Cyberspace, or, How to Traverse the Fantasy in the Age of the Retreat of the Big Other*, he asserts the end of symbolic order in cyberspace. Žižek hypothesizes that cyberspace involves a break with Oedipus and undermines symbolic order. However, many of his works have been criticized by people like John Gray in his *The Violent Visions of Slavoj Žižek* for lack of rigor in argumentation.

The second hypothesis is articulated by a professor of gender studies and psychoanalytic literary theory at Rutgers University, Jerry Aline Flieger. In her works *Is Oedipus Online? Siting Freud after Freud* and *Has Oedipus Signed Off (or Struck Out)?: Žižek, Lacan and the Field of Cyberspace*, she proposes her vision on the mode of installation of symbolic order in cyberspace. Flieger asserts that cyberspace continues with symbolic order.

The third hypothesis is presented in Turkle's books *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Sherry Turkle is a Professor of Social Studies of Science

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who focuses on psychoanalysis and human-technology interaction. She assumes that both of the hypotheses that involve either the end of symbolic order or continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace are deficient. For her, the first one is too radical, and the second one is too weak. Turkle proposes a third, alternative vision, which is the continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace but in a different mode.

In the following chapter, I will gradually unpack each of the hypotheses. I aim to identify if, after all, there is symbolic order in cyberspace which would enable the existence of monsters. If so, what are the changes in the way symbolic order functions in cyberspace and what effect can it potentially have on the monster?

The end of symbolic order in cyberspace

The first hypothesis addresses cyberspace as a space where the subject's entrance into the symbolic order is marked by undermining the Oedipal complex and thus the end of symbolic order. Žižek employs psychoanalytical terms to sum his argument up as the passage to "post-Oedipal libidinal economy" through the "psychotic suspension of Oedipus" ("Cyberspace or How to Traverse" 484). He claims that nowadays, the limitless options offered by cyberspace have created an environment where a subject is constantly addressed with requests to choose something by pressing this or that button depending on what one "wants" ("What can psychoanalysis tell" 801).

However, it does not enable a subject to act out one's "free will" but disables a subject as a "free" actor ("Cyberspace or How to Traverse" 484). The variety of possible choices deprives a subject of the knowledge of what one wants making a subject lose the ability to want this or that in particular ("What can psychoanalysis tell" 801). This happens because one faces seemingly limitless possibilities offered on the Internet. Žižek refers to Lacanian: "If there is no God, nothing is permitted at all" ("What can psychoanalysis tell" 801). Žižek claims that if there is no limitation or guidance imposed or forced on a subject from outside, interfering with the field of the subject's free choice, then the freedom to choose disappears: "the vast excess of the options to choose among would be experienced as the infeasibility of choice" ("What can psychoanalysis tell" 801).

So, the unlimited possibilities of the Internet prevent the subject from enacting its will. Cyberspace does not enable the subject to act independently and does enable one to perform a choice. And at this very moment, according to Žižek, the subject is dominated by the Other completely because the Other resolves the problem by imposing guidance from above ("What

can psychoanalysis tell” 802). Moreover, when a subject is confused by not knowing what one wants, the subject needs someone, a paternal figure, that would tell the subject what to do and what to want (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 801).

The imposition of guidance in the context of impossibility to choose is explanatory of what Žižek means by the post-Oedipal libidinal economy. In his conceptualization of the symbolic order in cyberspace, the installation of the domination of the Other over the subject differs from the familiar structure of the Oedipal repression. So in cyberspace, the function of the intervening Other is working differently. In cyberspace, while the paternal figure exists, it exists not to repress the desire of the subject, but to direct it (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809).

According to Žižek, the subversion of the functioning of the intervening Other in cyberspace, and the passage to post-Oedipal libidinal economy undermines the installation of symbolic order in cyberspace (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809). Because symbolic order does not get installed, the subject experiences cyberspace differently. In contrast to the Oedipal mode of repression, the post-Oedipal libidinal economy is characterized by its potentiality to fill in the gap between the subject’s public symbolic identity and its fantasmatic background (“Cyberspace or How to Traverse” 484).

In other words, the absence of symbolic order results in the suspension of distance between the Imaginary, meaning the fantasmatic support of what the subject imagines itself to be and the subject’s public identity (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809). In this structure, the Imaginary gets socialized directly, and our fantasies become externalized in cyberspace. And the biggest “threat,” according to Žižek, is that externalization of the Imaginary and enforcement of its direct socialization happens from “without” (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809).

According to Žižek, cyberspace imposes direct socialization of the Imaginary from without. In practice, it means that computer acts like a maternal Thing which “swallows the subject” (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809). When being swallowed by cyberspace, the subject loses symbolic distance, and his fantasies become externalized in public space (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809). In reference to the HSE case comment, this would mean that the appearance of the abusive comment is imposed on the subject by cyberspace itself because cyberspace deprives one of sustaining a reflective attitude. A subject is seen as regressing to the “presymbolic psychotic stance” (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 809). In this scenario, upon the loss of symbolic distance and the absence of symbolic order, the subject is immersed into cyberspace as a space which externalizes the subject’s fantasy from without.

Continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace

Jerry Aline Flieger proposes another hypothesis of the mode of installation of symbolic order in cyberspace. In her works *Is Oedipus Online? Siting Freud after Freud* and *Has Oedipus Signed Off (or Struck Out)?: Žižek, Lacan and the Field of Cyberspace* she asserts that there is symbolic order at work in cyberspace. This hypothesis is opposed to the one discussed above. Flieger claims that the fundamental Oedipal structure of primal repression remains the same in cyberspace and continues to depend on the basic structures of the installation of symbolic order (“Has Oedipus signed off” 66). For Flieger, cyberspace itself guarantees the continuation of Oedipus. It acts as the agent of mediation/mediatization and performs a function similar to the role of a paternal figure. Cyberspace sustains the subject’s desire, while also being the agent of fundamental prohibition which marks the impossibility of complete gratification of the desire (“Cyberspace or How to Traverse” 486). So, it is precisely because of cyberspace itself that the desire cannot be fulfilled. Žižek sums up this hypothesis in his reading of Flieger’s work: “Yes, in cyberspace, “everything is possible,” but for the price of assuming a fundamental impossibility” (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 813).

All in all, the identity a subject assumes in cyberspace is invented because there is a gap between the identity we assume in cyberspace and the real identity (“Is Oedipus Online?” 21). The invented identity is featured by some signifiers that only “represent” the subject’s cyberspace identity while never being fully the subject itself (“Is Oedipus Online?” 21). This confusion becomes uncompromising when we think about our partner in communication. Flieger concludes that in cyberspace, our relation to another subject is always “inter-face” and never “face-to-face” (“Is Oedipus Online?”20). Thus, one can never know who one communicates with. One cannot even be sure if it is a human person at all. For example, in the described case of HSE, the communication of the members of the page with the commentator does not happen directly but is mediated by the computer. The computer takes the role of imposing prohibition and initiates the subject’s entrance into the symbolic order (“Has Oedipus signed off” 66). The impossibility to dodge computer mediation is equated to the imposition of prohibition.

Moreover, cyberspace continues the Oedipal mode in the sense that besides the possibility to choose markers and construct one’s identity freely, the identity is never the subject himself (*Is Oedipus Online?* 22). The computer denotes the gap between the real identity and the identity we assume in cyberspace. A set of stamps and signifiers does not represent the subject itself but an alternative of the subject in cyberspace (“Has Oedipus signed off” 66). So in cyberspace,

where everything seems possible, there is the limit, imposed by the computer-mediator which does not allow the full gratification of our desires.

Continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace by other means

The third hypothesis is based on Sherry Turkle's idea presented in her books *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* and *Life on the Screen* and claims the continuation of symbolic order by other means. The first and the second hypotheses can be placed in opposition to each other where the first one involves the break with symbolic order, and the second one claims continuation of symbolic order in cyberspace. The third one occupies the position of mediation between the two.

Turkle's scenario is a deconstructionist narrative where cyberspace is seen as opening the domain for liberation through the notion of self-construction. Opposed to the view of psychotic immersion into cyberspace discussed earlier, this hypothesis proposes that cyberspace can enable us to "renounce our fixed identities and deconstruct old metaphysical binaries and the patriarchal Law" ("Alone Together" 153). Turkle suggests that cyberspace provides the possibility to "undermine the fixed predetermined roles imposed on us by the Other through Oedipal framework" ("Life on the Screen" 140). These impositions limit our duty to the need to succeed in performing pre-ascribed roles. Hence, cyberspace is seen as an active provider of the impulse to self-creation where a subject is compelled to renounce any legally and politically fixed symbolic identity occupied ("Alone Together" 12).

In contrast to Flieger's vision where the gap between the real and assumed identity in cyberspace means the existence of symbolic order, Turkle sees it as undermining the oppressive functioning of Oedipus ("Life on the Screen" 140). There is interplay between the "assumed self" and the "real self" in cyberspace or in Turkle's words, "how rapid alterations of identity have become a way of life for people who live in virtual reality as they cycle through different characters and genders, moving from window to window on the computer screen" ("Life on the Screen" 174). And the fact that our communication in cyberspace is computer-mediated serves as a provider of the possibility for the "construction and reconstruction of identities" ("Life on the Screen" 14). To illustrate her point, let me refer to the HSE case. From the observer perspective, one may perceive that the victim needs only to turn-off the computer to stop the virtual harassment. However, the victim of abusive comment is unable to ignore the harassment that is happening to the subject's virtual self.

Nowadays, we can enjoy an unlimited number of identity plays online; we have parallel lives right in different windows on the computer screen (“Alone Together” 153). The impossibility to position the real self categorically aside from the virtual self means that we recreate ourselves into someone else (“Alone Together” 153). But however blurred the distinction between the assumed self and the real self, the law holds the real self accountable for the activities of the assumed self. But in this scenario, a subject can, at least potentially, liberate oneself in cyberspace by constructing one’s self freely (“Alone Together” 153). The subject is elevated over the fragments of the biological, political, social, and patriarchal restraint (“Alone Together” 12).

2.4. Is there symbolic order in cyberspace after all?

So does symbolic order operate in cyberspace? I would argue that it does because the trajectory taken up by Žižek does not successfully proceed to the end of symbolic order in cyberspace. Žižek’s argument on the externalization of the Imaginary and the potential to gain distance towards it in cyberspace is untenable because, as Flieger shows, the Imaginary is impossible to traverse since we can never actually confront it, even in cyberspace (“Has Oedipus signed off” 75). Therefore, Žižek’s hypothesis that cyberspace involves a break with symbolic order does not seem convincing. As demonstrated by Flieger, there is some symbolic order at work in cyberspace. And if symbolic order is present, then monsters are here to transgress it.

Žižek’s concluding move attempts to reopen the discussion on the subject in cyberspace and the functioning of symbolic order. He says that “how cyberspace affects us is not directly inscribed in [but depends on] the network of socio-symbolic relation which always-already overdetermine the way cyberspace affects us” (“What can psychoanalysis tell” 829). Flieger agrees with this conclusion but points out that Žižek’s emphasis on the “network of socio-symbolic relation” bring symbolic order back into cyberspace (“Has Oedipus signed off” 76).

However, according to the ideas discussed above, there are certain modifications to the way symbolic order functions in cyberspace. In cyberspace, one has the potential to get elevated over social, political, biological constraints. One can construct, reconstruct and shift between multiple identities. It creates an ambiguous situation where the subject and the partner in communication recreate each other in the process of communication. It opens up the domain which impacts the formation of the image of monstrosity peculiar to cyberspace. In the following section, I will analyze the case of HSE through the lens of the functioning of symbolic order in cyberspace and try to identify its impact on the image of monstrosity.

2.5. Externalization of a monster on the example of Higher School of Equality

HSE is a public page which is available for everyone to visit, read, and comment. The page is open so a hate comment can appear at any moment and there is no possibility to prevent it from happening. One can get banned from participating in a community, but exclusion only occurs after a subject offends or abuses someone, never before. In the described case, the commentator leaves the abusive comment. What the commentator manifests, through the comment, is a threat to the community members. He occupies the place of the contextual monster. His views are opposed to the ones shared by the members of HSE such as subverting heteronormativity and striving for a more inclusive society.

The views the monster displays are unassimilable for the community. The reason the monster is so unsettling is explained through *jouissance*. So what makes the monstrous Other unbearable is precisely his way of getting enjoyment, *jouissance* (Kristeva 3). When the presence of the monstrous Other becomes suffocating to us, it means that we experience his mode of *jouissance* as too intrusive (Kristeva 3).



Figure 4. Profile picture of the commentator when leaving the abusive comment. *Vkontakte*, <https://vk.com/karlverner>. Accessed 30.05.2018. Screenshot by author.

Consider an example of a neighbor listening to loud music. The way this neighbor gets enjoyment disgusts us and is considered a personal attack despite the fact that you might have even liked the song before. In the same manner, whatever the contextual monster enjoys, maddens us. Let's take a look at his profile picture (see Figure 4).

In this case, a member of the HSE page would associate this with a personal attack. Pictures of crusaders are widely employed by right-wing nationalists, neo-nationalists, and racists in Russia. A Swedish scholar of comparative religion Mattias Gardell in his work entitled *Crusader Dreams: Oslo 22/7, Islamophobia, and the Quest for a Monocultural Europe* discusses the political tradition behind the crusader image. For him, the use of Knights Templar and Crusader imagery denotes "cultural conservative nationalism, antifeminism, and selected elements of White Power [...]" (Gardell 129). It commonly denotes a racially, religiously, and ideologically exclusive society. The picture of a crusader is disturbing for a member of HSE page and serves as a representation of the monster's mode of jouissance. And although the picture provides a basis for the externalization of the monster due to his incompatible and monstrous views, here is where the monstrosity of the commentator possesses an additional danger in cyberspace.

In reference to modes of functioning of symbolic order in cyberspace discussed earlier, one is able to construct and reconstruct identity and shift it from window to window. Therefore, if we take a look at the commentator's page, we find that the person is a member of 157 different groups (see Figure 5). These groups are communities just like HSE each having its specific order, and that is where the most significant threat of cyberspace monstrosity resides. The danger is due to the impossibility of complete externalization of the monster. In the familiar structure, a monster is denied the right to participate in the contextual community because it represents everything that the community is not. In cyberspace, however, one can easily surf between contexts, groups, from one contextual normality to another. It means a monster can come very close to entering the same contextual normality with a subject in a different window. The fact that the otherwise monstrous subject is also a member of 157 public pages possesses a menace of sharing the same normality with the monster in another context.

Noteworthy pages 157



Подслушано Краснодар
instagram: krd_on



Подслушано Краснодар
Вы живёте в одном
городе с этими психами)



Телеканал ЦАРЬГРАД
Первый русский



Сумраки человечества
Music for brain



Clear Conscience
за каждым богатством
кроется преступление

Figure 5. Preview of the commentator's 157 noteworthy pages. *Vkontakte*, <https://vk.com/karlverner>. Accessed 30.05.2018. Screenshot by author.

Therefore, the content of the HSE public page, as well as its contextual normality, is no longer critical. Most important is that a person, for whom the commentator is a monster in the HSE page, potentially shares the same normality with a monster in a different window. Upon a switch of contexts, one can happen to participate together in a group and share the same normality with an otherwise monstrous subject. So in cyberspace, the proximity of the monstrous is uncompromising up to the point where it is indistinguishable from normality.

2.5.1. The cyberspace monster and its danger

Monsters in cyberspace, in their troubling and unsettling essence, come very close to us. The proximity of their presence is a key characteristic of digital monsters. The closeness and constant presence of the monstrous Others can throw the balance off in another subject's life. But no matter how close a monster comes, it can never be assimilated. It is in the nature of the monster that assimilation of it into a "normal human being" is impossible. Because with a monster, a reciprocal exchange is unattainable. Establishing direct communication with a

monster is, therefore, senseless. In the HSE case, if one of the community members would try to mediate the conflict and render coexistence with the commentator, one would get caught in a desperate attempt to understand the monster. Attempting to understand the transgressor is doomed to failure. Understanding is impossible because for the monster it is not a matter of agreeing over a certain point, but of transgressing contextual normality. One cannot relate to a monster like one relates to a human partner so no symmetrical relation can be established.

The danger of identification with a monster emphasizes the impossibility to externalize it as a specific aspect of cyberspace monstrosity. The probability of being a member of the same contextual group makes it impossible to put a monster categorically aside in cyberspace. Any attempt to externalize fails consistently, and one is caught trying to reject a part of one's self. Cyberspace monstrosity confronts one with a situation where everything about the monster is felt to be unacceptable, but one nevertheless cannot fully externalize it. Thus, one is caught in abjection. Due to the proximity of monsters, it lies very close but it can neither be assimilated nor externalized.

The unassimilable behavior of the monster leads to exclusion from participation in a context. Just like in the case of HSE, the user gets banned. The prohibition of access to the HSE group is a natural result for a subject which embraces a form of a local monster. However, this is not to be confused with the exclusion from the majority. The user, in this case, has adopted monstrousness in the context of HSE only, which has led to his exclusion. He, however, is still able to enter other Internet pages and be a part of them. In another group, the abuser could belong to the contextual norm being confronted by local monsters in the same manner.

All in all, the multiplicity of Internet pages of different kinds allows for a quick surf between contexts. The digital environments bring about the key features of cyberspace monsters - their increased proximity combined with the impossibility of complete externalization. Cyberspace monstrosity disrupts the border of normality by integrating into it. Because, in a different context, one can share the same normality with an otherwise monstrous Other. So while in cyberspace monsters cannot be effectively externalized, the opposition between a normal subject and a monster is no longer held.

Conclusion

In cyberspace, the image of monstrosity depends upon the context. As analyzed on the HSE case, the image of what is normal and monstrous can be contextually subverted up to the point where it stands in complete opposition to the discursive images. But, for the contextual image of normality to remain enacted, it has to be intentionally sustained. Sustention involves the externalization of subjects who display an incompatible behavior by means of, for example, ban.

As the case demonstrates, it is precisely the context of the HSE which determines normality and makes the commentator occupy the position of the monster. In a different context, the monstrosity of the abuser vanishes. Contextuality of the monstrous is where the danger of cyberspace monstrosity resides. It means that monstrosity is getting defined not by a certain feature, but by a context within which it is evaluated. Thus, it is the switch of contexts that enables an individual in cyberspace to occupy the position of a monster. And cyberspace allows one to “surf” easily between contexts, from being normal to monstrous.

Contextuality makes it impossible to position monsters categorically aside in cyberspace. Cyberspace monsters transgress the us-them dichotomy, which becomes indistinguishable. In the second chapter, I demonstrate how a subject risks sharing the same contextual normality upon a switch of contexts with the otherwise monster. Furthermore, the collapse of the us-them opposition leads to a situation where a normal subject is indistinguishable from a monster. The limitless number of Internet communities with their distinct contextual normalities render it impossible for a subject to be normal everywhere. No matter how normal a person is in relation to the discursive order, in cyberspace, one risks becoming the disruptor of contextual normality and occupying the position of the monster.

All in all, the impossibility to externalize together with the contextuality of the image of monstrosity are its main features in cyberspace. The monster cannot be externalized not only from something termed us but even from the I. I myself become a monster contextually in cyberspace. This is not to say that the I becomes indistinguishable from the monster who is the Other. In reference to the second chapter of my thesis, the abject prevents the dissolution of subjectivity in cyberspace. So the collapse of the distinction between the I and the countless monstrous Others does not lead to the dissolution of subject. The abject functions as a frontier marking out where a subject ends in cyberspace. However, abjection does not prevent one from

becoming a contextual monster. Cyberspace creates a domain where a subject is simultaneously and contextually both a normal subject and a monster. In cyberspace, rays of monstrosity lurk contextually within everyone.

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