

A TRU Proposal to the Ladies, through *#selfcare*, Mary Astell, and Xenofeminism

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ABSTRACT

Brie Code, the Creative Director of TRU LUV, explains the main aim of the studio is to create “interactive experiences for your phone that leave you feeling calm, connected, and invigorated.” Code’s goals are to create a digital space in which people, particularly women, are encouraged to explore personal connections and develop a sense of personhood in line with positive expressions of emotion. The first app released, *#selfcare* (TRU LUV, 2018), is a manifestation of Code's aim to create games that follow a 'tend-and-befriend' design framework, rather than 'fight-or-flight.' Just as this games studio proposes an alternative framework, and then presents an example of a working model, so have similar feminist philosophies over history. This paper aims to juxtapose *#selfcare* with the philosophies of Mary Astell and Xenofeminism in order to draw out the similarities and differences in feminist positions over history.

Keywords

feminist philosophy, games philosophy, Mary Astell, realistic pseudo masculine nonsense, video game

INTRODUCTION

“Solitude is no more insupportable; you’ve conquered that silly dread of being afraid to be alone...”¹

“XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise?”²

“This is our shelter.”³

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Upon opening *#selfcare* (TRU LUV, 2018), I'm presented with a prompt before continuing into the room—"This room is ours." The language is intentional, not "yours" or "mine" but the collective "ours." Maybe this is the avatar in the app, the body under the covers, or it could be the app itself. In fact, my calling it an app is a misnomer—according to the co-creators Brie Code and Eve Thomas, *#selfcare* is the first 'companion' by the TRU LUV game studio, founded by Brie Code in order to "combin[e] frameworks from game design with mechanics that are inspired by oxytocin, not adrenaline."⁴ The companion presents us with a virtual representation of 'our' bedroom in which we are able to explore the space as well as our feelings and emotions without any expectation of completing missions or beating a timer. Rather, the companion interacts with us, we interact with the app, and once we are satisfied with the experience we put it away for later. We might select a tarot card for the day and contemplate what it means for us in the moment, we might pat our cat, we might follow the pattern of the crystals to reveal more affirmative phrases from the companion.

In the article titled "Video Games Are Boring," Brie Code writes about a friend of hers, Kristina, whom she describes as "an art historian who loves contemporary feminist art" and someone wholly uninterested in videogames. The main reason for Kristina's dislike seemed to stem from the very common game mechanic in which a player must attack and defend. Code had suggested a number of games to Kristina before recommending she play *Skyrim* (Bethesda 2011). Code recalls that a few weeks after this recommendation she received a distressed call from Kristina, in tears over the death of Lydia, a non-playable character in *Skyrim*.

Kristina said to me through her tears that she didn't realize that you could develop an emotional attachment to a character in a video game. She didn't realize that you could create your character and exist as a version of yourself in a world full of characters whom you care about. I had never realized that she didn't know this, because I knew this so deeply. She said to me that for all these years, it wasn't that she didn't like video games, it was that she didn't know what they were.⁵

In asking the question, "why don't my friends like videogames?", Code finds three reasons: first, they perceive a lack of depth—the videogame doesn't attempt to challenge any preconceived notions, or provide a learning experience. Second, the videogames themselves are representative of the people who make them—white, able-bodied, cisgender, straight men—and thus Code's friends often encounter moments in which they feel othered. Thirdly, the cultural touchstones referred to within the videogame often don't align with the players' interests, and so they don't feel invested in the gaming experience.⁶ It's clear that for Code, and by extension TRU LUV, their concern with game design and its impact on the player is philosophical in nature.

At my studio we are making games with people who don't like video games because we want to break out of established paradigms. We want to think about ideas from different angles and draw on different references. We want games that aren't gritty, toxic pseudo-realistic pseudo-masculine nonsense nor frustrating time wasters that leave you feeling dead inside. We want games about how each of us could be in the future, how the world could be in the future. We want games built on compassion and respect and fearlessness. This is so much more interesting.⁷

#selfcare is the first companion released by TRU LUV, and explicitly follows this alternative game design framework that focuses on compassion over antagonism. While this companion interacts on a personal level with the player, the existence of the companion itself, and the studio TRU LUV as an entity, should be considered in the same way—that is, analysis driven by understanding rather than suspicion. The most common method of analysis found in the humanities follows what Paul Ricoeur called the “school of suspicion”—the common character of analysis used by Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. Briefly, this style of critique is characterised as approaching a text suspiciously, making the automatic assumption that a text has a hidden truth that a critic must uncover, and that the only way to do this is to take the stance of an unemotional, sceptical detective-figure.⁸ Rather than follow this method of analysis, which implies the more suspicious a critic is the more rigorous they are in uncovering hidden truths, I aim to take what is called a ‘postcritical’ approach, which is “more willing to avow the creative, innovative, world-making aspects of literature and criticism. What gets built and shaped when a critic reads? What affordances and opportunities does literary form and experience open up?”⁹

Therefore, the philosophy of *#selfcare* and TRU LUV will be treated as companions to other feminist-metaphysical approaches concerned with education and technology. I have chosen to juxtapose *#selfcare* with Mary Astell’s Cartesian-influenced feminism and a contemporary technology-focused feminist framework called Xenofeminism (hereafter referred to as XF), in order to allow these three objects to interact with each other—drawing out similarities and differences, and treating each object as active, rather than a passive, static text. This style of reading, referred to by Eileen Joy as ‘weird reading’¹⁰ is a way to not close off the text to a particular reading, but open it up to multiple possibilities of understanding and interaction. Joy writes that for her, this method of reading was developed “from a desire to capture the traces of the strange voluptuousness and singular, in- or post-human tendencies of textual objects, but without mystifying texts and/or risking some kind of new sanctity, or theology, of texts, which are always co-agential with us in “earthy” ways -- which is to say, enworlded with us.”¹¹ Joy goes on to say that “[n]ow might be a propitious time to craft new reading practices that would multiply and thicken a literary text’s sentient reality,”¹²

Just as Code’s *modus operandi* for TRU LUV is to explore alternative game design frameworks to the mainstream, this paper will use this speculative realist style of ‘weird reading’ in order to explore alternatives to the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that reigned over humanities scholarship in the twentieth century. Rather than treating *#selfcare* as the corpse to my detective, I will aim to approach it for what it is—a living, active companion.¹³

“CORRUPTIBLE BODY TO AN IMMORTAL MIND”

Mary Astell was an English philosopher, writing during the early modern period in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century. She was primarily concerned with epistemology and metaphysics as it applied to women and their position in society. For Jacqueline Broad, Astell is also primarily a moral philosopher and Christian deontologist, whose philosophy is concerned with an “ethical approach that places character, rather than rules or action, at the centre of moral theory.”¹⁴ As a staunch Christian, Astell believed in religion as being the only true path to a person’s fulfillment and happiness in life, and at the same time, as a philosopher, she interrogated the difference between merely following the rules and dictates of a religion compared to a real understanding of why one would follow such rules.

Astell's focus was primarily on the advancement of women's happiness and fulfillment as a well-rounded being, which is evident from her two volume work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694 and 1697). In the first volume, Astell outlines her philosophical evidence of women's equality using the concept of the Cartesian mind/body split, and goes on to explain that it is societal constructs, not philosophical truth, that has allowed for the under-education of women in general – "Ignorance and a narrow Education lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation and Custom rear it up."¹⁵ She goes on to write that "[b]y an habitual inadvertency we render our selves incapable of any serious and improving thought, till our minds themselves become as light and frothy as those things they are conversant about."¹⁶ Thus, Astell proposes a physical space, described as being a kind of women's-only college, or 'religious retirement,'¹⁷ in which women are free to not only engage in both secular and religious instruction, but develop friendships with one another.¹⁸ After being unable to secure funding to open her proposed school, Astell wrote the second part of her *Serious Proposal*, describing a method for women to engage in intellectual and spiritual education within their own homes.¹⁹

Cynthia B. Bryson writes in her article, "Mary Astell: Defender of the "Disembodied Mind"," specifically about the way in which Descartes's mind/body split allowed Astell to present a metaphysical argument for women's equality with men. Essentially, the argument for Astell is that if one takes Descartes' statement that mind is separate to body to be true, then the gender of the body housing a mind and soul should have no bearing on its capabilities. Bryson writes that:

For Mary Astell (and John Norris and other early English Cartesian feminists), the mind is distinct from the gendered body; the "mind" as the true "self," exists as neither masculine nor feminine. [...] If the mind remains separated from "matter" (the body), then the physiological dissimilitude between men and women (the "sexual defect") is of no consequence for in matters of rationalization they are equal.²⁰

She goes on to also note that if there is any type of deficiency in thought by women, it is not intrinsic to their sex but a result of the systemic lack of access to education at the same level men have received throughout history. She posits that while women would be excited at the chance to further their knowledge, and bring themselves up to the level of men, "I know not how the Men will resent it to have their enclosure broke down, and Women invited to tast of that Tree of knowledge they have so long unjustly *Monopoliz'd*."²¹ Jacqueline Broad reads Astell as not just an early incarnation of a feminist, but primarily a moral philosopher – one in conversation with contemporaries such as Locke and Berkeley. She explains that Astell sees the true happiness for a woman as being related to her development of character, and that to be a good person one must cultivate their 'virtues,' being "love (or benevolence), generosity (or greatness of soul), courage, prudence, and moderation."²²

While Bryson points to the influence of Descartes' mind/body split on Astell's philosophy, Broad also notes the similarities between Descartes' characterisations of 'passions'—that is, emotions such as love, hate, envy, jealousy, desire, and so on. She writes that for Descartes, while passions are important for preserving the body (e.g. fear causes the body to run from danger) they can also "cause us to dwell on thoughts that do not really require our attention, and they often motivate us to perform actions that are foolish and contrary to reason."²³ It is important for Astell and Descartes that when one is in the throes of a violent passion, that one must exercise their will, and attempt to retain control over their faculties. Descartes writes that a remedy one can use is to "divert himself from it to other thoughts, until time, and rest, have wholly

allayed the emotion in the blood.”²⁴ For Astell, Broad writes, “[t]o achieve mastery over her passions, then, the female reader is advised simply to begin by focusing her attention. She is advised to withdraw herself from the hurry and noise of the everyday world, and to immerse herself in a life of contemplation.”²⁵

#selfcare is a companion, where, “[f]or 3-5 minutes you can escape to a calm and soothing room, do some relaxing, meditative tasks, and return to your life refreshed and ready to face your stresses.”²⁶ The companion is described across marketing material as being a virtual place in which to escape and recharge emotionally, before returning back to the physical world. TRU LUV as a studio aims to distinguish itself from other games studios in its focus on psychology, working with a research advisor, Dr. Isabela Granic, whose research focus is on the use of games to reduce anxiety in children.²⁷

The method here is not Stoicism, but similar to Astell’s control of the passions. The aim of the companion is not to make you completely forget your emotions. This is obvious in the mini-game where you complete partially spelled words in order to make them dissolve. The words you are prompted to solve are often emotion-based—words like ‘anger,’ ‘worthless,’ ‘yearning,’ ‘restless,’ and so on. The companion doesn’t distract the player aimlessly, rather it puts these emotions at the forefront so that the player is forced to consider them before solving and dissolving.

Brie Code writes, “[i]n this world ruled by digital overload, TRU LUV takes your phone past being a tool for personal betterment and onto providing a **truly restorative immersive experience** — one that replaces mindless scrolling with mindful intention.”²⁸ It’s important to note that the companion is not immersive in the way that it shuts out the rest of the player’s world in order to have them focus on the gameplay only. It is made clear, by Code, that the intention is for the companion to be used in consideration of the player’s current mood and attention. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Code explains that “You only play this game for a few minutes at a time. It’s not designed to hold you there.”²⁹ What is encouraged, then, through this framework, is not so much a revelling or burying of unwanted emotions. Rather, the companion allows for a brief distraction, a place in which to acknowledge one’s overwhelming emotions, and ultimately take control of them, just as Descartes suggested for one’s passions.

“It does not follow that the generous temper of mind is one of Stoic *apatheia*. On the contrary, the woman who attains generosity strongly experiences certain positive passions: she is capable of wonder, joy, delight, and love (directed at their proper objects, that is, in accordance with reason). Strictly speaking, then, we can affirm that Astell does not require the repression of the body as a necessary precondition for human happiness.”³⁰ And as Code explains, “[t]o me, mindful technology is technology that helps us know ourselves and our minds and bodies more and reflects ourselves back at us.”³¹

“IF NATURE IS UNJUST, CHANGE NATURE!”

Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation is a manifesto published online in 2015 by an anonymous collective, Laboria Cuboniks. The manifesto is a call to arms for a type of feminism that is concerned with a more radical conception of self, one that is not concerned with binary or a simplistic conception of gender but one which imagines a future of limitless differences. If gender cannot be categorised into simple binaries or groups, then it is impossible to use as a tool of oppression. This focus on differences,

the alien, as being the thing that allows for freedom is obvious from the name of the philosophy—**Xenofeminism**—and presents society with a more imaginative future. “XF seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated – but have we ever been otherwise?”³²

In the book *Xenofeminism*, written by a now identified member of Laboria Cuboniks, Helen Hester, she explains succinctly that “XF is a *technomaterialist, anti-naturalist, and gender abolitionist form of feminism*.”³³ Laboria Cuboniks makes explicit the focus on technology as a major pillar of the manifesto, writing that “XF seeks to strategically deploy existing technologies to re-engineer the world.”³⁴ Laboria Cuboniks continues, writing that “We want to cultivate the exercise of positive freedom—freedom-to rather than simply freedom-from—and urge feminists to equip themselves with the skills to redeploy existing technologies and invent novel cognitive and material tools in the service of common ends.”³⁵

Hester writes that XF “recognizes that technologies are not inherently beneficial – indeed, they are not even inherently neutral – but are in fact constrained and constituted by social relations.”³⁶ That is, technology is not inherently pure, it was born out of the social and therefore the political, and merely ‘using’ technology won’t provide one with an ‘apolitical’ solution. It is by confronting the biases built into technology, and actively repurposing this technology for feminist actions, that one then engages in Xenofeminist practice.

And so, in tearing down melancholy and illusion; the unambitious and the non-scaleable; the libidinated puritanism of certain online cultures, and Nature as an un-remakeable given, we find that our normative anti-naturalism has pushed us towards an unflinching ontological naturalism. There is nothing, we claim, that cannot be studied scientifically and manipulated technologically.³⁷

In what reads as an explicit criticism of what is colloquially referred to as “cancel culture,” Laboria Cuboniks writes that what seems like commendable interrogations can result, online, in a repression of true feminist progress. The XF manifesto eviscerates what they see as a propensity for “the Left” to wallow in melancholy and despair which “too often degenerates into factionalism and petty moralizing.”³⁸

With these curatorial practices come puritanical rituals of moral maintenance, and these stages are too often overrun with the disavowed pleasures of accusation, shaming, and denunciation. Valuable platforms for connection, organization, and skill-sharing become clogged with obstacles to productive debate positioned as if they are debate. These puritanical politics of shame—which fetishize oppression as if it were a blessing, and cloud the waters in moralistic frenzies—leave us cold. We want neither clean hands nor beautiful souls, neither virtue nor terror. We want superior forms of corruption.³⁹

These “curatorial practices” go in hand with naturalism, something XF is vehemently opposed to, seeing it as yet another category which allows for oppression. Hester gives the example that some iterations of ‘feminism’ make claim to some essentialising equalizer of biology—that all women experience childbirth, for example—and that this is rigid categorisation to rally around. She writes that XF isn’t claiming that the embodiment of the biological is to be disregarded, but that it is something that is malleable and thus not deterministic. She explains that “Biology is not destiny, because *biology itself* can be technologically transformed, and *should* be

transformed in the pursuit of reproductive justice and the progressive transformation of gender.”⁴⁰

As a tangible example of the way technology can be repurposed for feminist goals, Hester dedicates an entire chapter of her book to discussing the development of the Del-Em, a DIY machine created by women in order to provide both ‘freedom-from’ and ‘freedom-to.’ Described by Hester as a “technology totem of second-wave feminist self-help,”⁴¹ the machine was used to suck out the endometrial lining of a person’s uterus. This device was easily made with parts accessible to the average person, and could be used in order to remove a period in one sitting, as opposed to the regular two to five days. It was also patented two years before *Roe v Wade*, and could be used for early term abortion.⁴² This technology provided a way in which feminists were able to put the control of one’s body into their own hands. First, the device provided ‘freedom-from’ unwanted pregnancy and lengthy, painful periods. Secondly, the device provided the all-important ‘freedom-to’ be in charge of one’s own biological processes, and augment them however one saw fit. This device is, for Hester, a good example of what XF calls for when it describes itself as ‘technomaterialist, anti-naturalist and gender-abolitionist.’ The Del-Em is a repurposing of technology for feminist means, that easily changes biological processes, and moves the world one step closer toward the idea of a multitude of differences, as opposed to binary categorisations. If one’s gender is defined by biological processes, then if those processes are interrupted, controlled, removed entirely, the ‘freedom-from’ oppression due to biology, and the ‘freedom-to’ exist how one wishes to exist, becomes all the more real.

For Mary Astell, Bryson writes that she “simply wants each woman to move beyond her designation as “female” to nongendered reasoning and pure rationality in a disembodied “self.””⁴³ This focus on the ‘self’ is evident from the two volumes of *Serious Proposal*, wherein volume one presented a communal ‘religious retirement’⁴⁴ for communal engagement in education, and volume two moved toward a method of self-education from within the home. Astell, while making a clear metaphysical stance in her writing in her support of Cartesianism and rejection of Materialism, ultimately sees the way forward for women as a personal, and spiritual change. This is not to mistake her position as being separate from the public or political sphere; Astell’s original solution was to build a supportive community of women that would encourage education. But ultimately, this education was in service of the personal goal of character and virtue. Broad writes that “Astell’s feminism is grounded on promoting *excellence of character* in women rather than the consistent application of political concepts and principles, such as the principles of equality and justice, to women in the public sphere.”⁴⁵

Broad acknowledges Astell’s focus on rationalism and metaphysics, however claims that Astell “always makes her philosophy serve a moral or moral-theological purpose.”⁴⁶ She goes on to quote Astell, who writes, “Truths merely Speculative and which have no influence upon Practice, which neither contribute to the good of Soul or Body are but idle Amusements, an impertinent and criminal wast of Time.”⁴⁷ Broad writes that “[f]or [Astell], women’s liberty was a spiritual rather than political concept: it consisted in a woman’s freedom to choose (or not to choose) that which was good for her soul, and it could be exercised by any woman, anywhere, regardless of her social or political circumstances.”⁴⁸ In her conclusion, Bryson makes the claim that “Astell had seen what many women and men today do not see: Descartes’s method is a tool that promotes freedom and self-determination. Self-determination means the freedom to create a gender-neutral “self.””⁴⁹ Astell’s technology to harness and repurpose was philosophy, taking it upon herself to use the methods of writing

pamphlets, letters, and books, in order to present her ideas to the English reading world.

In *#selfcare*, the avatar is almost totally covered by bed sheets, the only identifiably human part being an arm sticking out at the top. Further, the companion consistently refers to ‘we’ – intentionally breaking down the barriers between distinct identities such as player, game, avatar, and opening up the possibilities for identification without rigid binary. There is no explicit human representation within the bed room; the only opportunities for interaction with objects are the cat at the end of the bed, and the plant on the bedside table. The existence of the companion itself, too, is an example of the repurposing of technology for feminist purposes. Basing a game on a completely different framework to the one Code was originally educated in—through her experience work on games such as *Assassin’s Creed* and *Child of Light*⁵⁰—and focusing on the concept of ‘tend-and-befriend’ rather than ‘fight-or-flight,’ is an example of a repurposing of technology, specifically videogame design and mobile application development in order to provide not just another game, but a purposeful call for self-care and healing in a compassionate and caring way.

“LET’S STAY IN BED”

Rather than publishing feminist academic papers, Laboria Cuboniks chose to present a digital, open-access manifesto, which explicitly called for the harnessing of technology for feminist purposes. Helen Hester, member of Laboria Cuboniks, makes mention of feminist devices created, such as the Del-Em, as a direct, physical way in which to use technology for explicitly feminist purposes. Brie Code has written about the problems she sees with “gritty, toxic pseudo-realistic pseudo-masculine nonsense”⁵¹ and established TRU LUV with the goal of developing an alternative videogame framework that focuses on connection, compassion and calm. As is written on TRU LUV’s homepage, “Our gentle companions take you on a journey of deepening comfort and friendship, not increasing challenge or complexity, to help you develop your strengths and achieve your goals without stress.”⁵² *#selfcare* is a clear example of this framework put into practice; its focus on calming sounds, repetitive activities that encourage focus without draining your concentration, and the way it doesn’t rely on the risk of failure within these activities to drive the player onwards. While all three texts are clearly engaging with the problems they see in their contemporary culture with women’s ‘freedom-to’ there are differences between their approach to the public and the personal.

Laboria Cuboniks understands the impact the domestic sphere has on women in society, they write in the manifesto “[f]rom the street to the home, domestic space too must not escape our tentacles.”⁵³ However, they don’t particularly see the solution in a personal (and certainly not spiritual) quest or change. XF sees the issue in culture and society, and for women to achieve equality it is necessary to focus outwards, not inwards. The domestic sphere is “ripe for spatial transformation as an integral component in any process of feminist futurity,”⁵⁴ not in terms of a personal and spiritual feeling expanded outward into society, but as a way of bringing the political and public concepts of feminism down to a personal, domestic level. The Del-Em is an example of this, wherein feminist ideology paves the way for the creation of a technological object that is used on the individual woman in order to give her both ‘freedom-from’ unwanted pregnancies and lengthy menstruation, and ‘freedom-to’ control her body without interference from wider society. For XF, “any emancipatory technofeminism must take the form of a concerted political intervention, sensitive to

the fused character of the structures of oppression that make up our material worlds.”⁵⁵

While it has already been noted here that Mary Astell’s self-development was a primarily personal one, she also made note of the importance of female friendship on one’s ‘excellence of character.’ As Astell writes, “[f]or Friendship is a virtue which comprehends all the rest; none being fit for this, who is not adorn’d with every other Virtue. [...] for were the World better there wou’d be more Friendship, and were there more Friendship we shou’d have a better world.”⁵⁶

The concept of female friendship is important to note here as being something other philosophers of the early modern period believed wasn’t a possibility. Jacqueline Broad notes, for example, that the philosopher Michel de Montaigne and theologian Jeremy Taylor wrote of their belief in women’s inability to have the capacity for real friendship, unlike men. If women are incapable of friendship, “a valued character trait—a worthy disposition of mind toward other people—principally possessed by *men* and not by women,”⁵⁷ then Astell’s encouragement of developing female friendship could be seen as directly challenging this preconceived notion of other philosophers, further supporting her Cartesian-feminism. This is not to say that Astell’s ideal friendship is uncritical—for her, “[t]he truest effect of [friendship] being to endeavour the bettering the beloved Person.”⁵⁸ Broad writes that Astell understood the need to have an outside perspective, or input, in order to truly develop one’s character—“[s]he conceives of friendly love, in other words, as a state of character that might lead women to reflect critically on gender attitudes in their families, neighbourhoods, and church communities, and help them to overturn customary ways of thinking about themselves and their interests.”⁵⁹

The virtual space of #selfcare is situated within a bedroom, and focuses on the inner thoughts of the player. The companion is concerned with the emotions and thoughts of the player; it is constantly offering positive affirmations and reassurances, and checking in with the player at regular intervals during mini-games. The mini-games are reminiscent of tropes of self-care: connection with animals, focus on breathing and meditation, and even the now infamous call to ‘clean your room.’ The companion is described by TRU LUV as an escape, somewhere secluded the player can go to relax, before returning to the physical world. However, while it is clear that the description of app as companion is an explicit instruction in treating the program as a being capable of reciprocity, its closed-off depiction of the bedroom also suggests solitude and personal reflection and development, away from the communal aspect of the physical world. With the recent addition of the journal option in #selfcare, it is increasingly necessary to see the companion as primarily an opportunity for self-reflection, as opposed to escape, and for a personal contemplation, as opposed to communal discussion or political declaration.

Code writes that while most current videogames are designed from the premise that humans are hardwired to feel a ‘flight-or-fright’ response to stress and receive a boost of adrenaline. Instead, TRU LUV operates from the perspective that some people feel more engaged through a ‘tend-and-befriend’ response, and rather than a rush of adrenaline they receive a rush of oxytocin. That the concept of ‘tend-and-befriend’ is an alternative, not the mainstream, is surprisingly contiguous with Astell’s theory of female friendship. At the same time, the political declaration of #selfcare’s studio, TRU LUV as positioning itself in opposition to mainstream videogame studios makes sure public sphere is within its ‘tentacles.’

CONCLUSION

The opening section of the Xenofeminism manifesto claims “[o]ur future requires depetrification. XF is not a bid for revolution, but a wager on the long game of history, demanding imagination, dexterity and persistence.”⁶⁰ The categorisations of historical context, genre, form, can encourage alienation. Astell points to the philosophical preoccupations with reducing women to their bodies over minds and uses a Cartesian-feminism in order to outline a way toward educational and spiritual freedom for women. XF explores the repurposing of technology and a way to gain freedom from oppression, but is more interested in the freedom to live however one wants once gender and biology based oppression has no foothold in society. And *#selfcare*, while one could say is focused on smaller actions like mindfulness and positive emotional regulation, is an example of Astell and XF principles operating within the ever-expanding, tangibly contemporary field of videogame development.

Ultimately, Astell concludes the first volume of her *Serious Proposal* by opening her ideas up to women at large, inviting a communal development of her ideas:

To close all, if this *Proposal* which is but a rough draught and rude Essay, and which might be made much more beautiful by a better Pen, give occasion to wiser heads to improve and perfect it, I have my end. For imperfect as it is, it seems so desirable, that she who drew the Scheme is full of hopes, it will not want kind hands to perform and compleat it.⁶¹

Each philosophical stance has some similarities, many vast differences, but by juxtaposing each next to each other a spirit of positivity is evident throughout. There is a sense of action brimming with hopefulness for ‘freedom-from’ and, especially, ‘freedom-to.’ It is hopeful that this paper has potentially drawn a through-line, not as a definitive tracing of history between the three philosophical stances of Astell, XF, and *#selfcare*, but shown how the digital scans of a seventeenth-century text, sat next to a digital manifesto, sat next to a mobile application, are companions around a firepit, living, breathing, and interacting in the same way fire burns wood, creating a new type of warmth one can huddle near.

ENDNOTES

¹ Astell, 1697, 13.

² Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, ZERO 0x01.

³ *#selfcare*, 2018, “tips”.

⁴ Code, 2018, “How do you feel about your phone?”

⁵ Code, 2016

⁶ Code, 2016.

⁷ Code, 2018.

⁸ Anker and Felski, 2017.

⁹ Anker and Felski, 2017, 20.

¹⁰ Joy, 2013, 31.

¹¹ Joy, 2013.

¹² Joy, 2013, 32.

¹³ My method of reading and analyzing follows, broadly, Rita Felski's postcritique position against the hermeneutics of suspicion, and more specifically the type of reading Eileen Joy performs in her paper "Weird Reading" for *Speculations*, in which texts are juxtaposed next to each other and the "vicarious causation" caused between them, and Joy, are drawn out.

¹⁴ Broad, 2015, 6-7.

¹⁵ Astell, 1697, vol. 1, 27.

¹⁶ Astell, 1697, vol. 2, 29.

¹⁷ Sowaal, 2007, 227.

¹⁸ The idea of female friendship as radical in the seventeenth century is explored later in the paper.

¹⁹ Sowaal, 2007, 227.

²⁰ Bryson, 55.

²¹ Astell, 1697, vol. 1, 52.

²² Broad, 2015, 7.

²³ Broad, 2015, 86-7.

²⁴ Descartes, 1650, art. 211.

²⁵ Broad, 2015, p 92.

²⁶ TRU LUV, 2018, "Press Kit."

²⁷ TRU LUV, 2018, "Press Kit."

²⁸ TRU LUV, 2018, "Press Kit."

²⁹ MacDonald, 2018.

³⁰ Broad, 2015, 105.

³¹ Smith, 2019.

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- ³² Laboria Cuboniks, ZERO 0x01.
- ³³ Hester, 6.
- ³⁴ Laboria Cuboniks, ZERO 0x02.
- ³⁵ Laboria Cuboniks, INTERRUPT 0x07.
- ³⁶ Hester, 9.
- ³⁷ Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, ADJUST 0x11.
- ³⁸ Laboria Cubonisk, 2015, TRAP 0x09.
- ³⁹ Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, TRAP 0x0C.
- ⁴⁰ Hester, 22.
- ⁴¹ Hester, 70.
- ⁴² Hester, 71.
- ⁴³ Bryson, 55.
- ⁴⁴ Sowaal, 227.
- ⁴⁵ Broad, 2016, 19.
- ⁴⁶ Broad, 2016, 20.
- ⁴⁷ Astell, 1697.
- ⁴⁸ Broad, 2009, 66.
- ⁴⁹ Bryson, 56.
- ⁵⁰ Code, 2019.
- ⁵¹ Code, 2016.
- ⁵² Code, 2018
- ⁵³ Laboria Cuboniks, CARRY 0x14.
- ⁵⁴ Laboria Cuboniks, CARRY 0x15.
- ⁵⁵ Hester, p 11.
- ⁵⁶ Astell, vol. 1, 82.
- ⁵⁷ Broad, 2015, 179.
- ⁵⁸ Astell, vol. 1, p 86.

⁵⁹ Broad, 2015, 181.

⁶⁰ Laboria Cuboniks, 2015, ZERO 0x00.

⁶¹ Astell, 1697, vol. 1, 111.

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