Spoken Word Videos and the Automodern Femme: Subversive Agency and Technologizing Safe Spaces

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Abstract

The emergence of digital media and the world-wide-web altered the texture of agency, and digitally-mediated performance poetry like the spoken word became pivots to women agency. But how do pre-programmed technologies like new media—as social forces—permit human autonomy without hedging it? What concessions are made or limits excised when women wrestle repression through automated units? To what extent do women exercise agency through technologized forms like spoken word, considering the inherent contradiction? Engaging these questions, this paper argues that the paradox is resolved in the automodern femme, a female who is automation-/technology-reliant yet autonomous. Formulating its theoretical base within feminist thought in combination with Robert Samuels's automodernity, and using selected works of Eva Alordiah, the study reflects on how spoken word provides safe avenues to thread female experiences. It identifies new media's automated infrastructures as exploitable tools against repression. Tropes of self-retrieval, self-imaging, and self-therapy in the selected performances challenging notions of what is permissible and taboo for the woman are engaged. The paper also explores how female autonomy is achievable and enhanced via new-media's automation by isolating technologies of performance and performative techniques that aid creation of safe spaces for agentive and therapeutic purposes.

Keywords: Spoken Word Videos, Automodern Femme, Performance poetry, New-Media, Automodernity, Technology, Robert Samuels, Eva Alordiah

In an age where technology persistently conditions humanity, redefining the limits of human subjectivity or what it means to be human, perform humanness, and co-exist with mechanized social forces, the idea of an 'automodern femme' is not fantastic. The paper addresses the

texture of female agency through oral performance in a modern digital age. Does technology shape women's performance of individuality, particularly through new media? To what extent does digital-reliant performance poetry like the spoken word allow women to establish agency? What concessions are made, paradox created, or boundaries erased when women seek to wrestle repression through (pre)programmed technologies? Ruminating these questions, the paper explores the idea of the 'automodern femme' as a female whose sense of autonomy is heightened by her transactions with technologies and who achieves agency through algorithmic and pre-programmed digital media. This allows for establishing a convergent zone between directions in media studies, postcolonial feminist theorizing, and key positions in oral literary studies. In addition, foregrounding the idea of the automodern femme as the female digital subject whose agency is 'uncaptured' through her interaction with new media, and who relies on technology generally to perform individuality and engage female experiences, expounds on the idea of automodernity. It projects oral performances such as spoken word[1] as organic systems defined by inherent contradictions and composite interactions between technology as an automated force and the human as an autonomous unit. In exploring automodernity's relationship with spoken word, the paper expounds on the relevance of the concept beyond its current emphasis on human uses of technologies like "automobiles, personal computers, word processors, iPods, and computer games" (Samuels, *New Media* 15) by applying it as a paradigm to study the performance of self through new media-generated poetry and the use of technologies by performance poets as apparatuses of engaging with the self.

New media studies like Samuels and Baya (2013) have theorized on the idea of the automodernity as an age of unusual concessions and paradoxical collusions between machine automation and human autonomy and as a theoretical concept capable of unpacking these contradictions. These contradictions characterize much of contemporary cultural history. Exploring female spoken word performances as avenues of technologizing safe spaces, cyber-therapy, and exhibiting subversive agency—that is, empowering the woman through technology—helps to locate the place of performance poetry

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[1]In this study, reference will be made to 'spoken word' as the broader form/genre with several performative realizations and sub-types like spoken word CDs, audio tapes, stage performances, etc. Spoken word video is a sub-form and is used to designate spoken word in audio-visual format. Spoken word texts as specialized poetry are performances; hence, with the study's focus on oral performance, the term spoken word performance is used where performance is emphasized. Also, spoken word poetry and spoken word are used interchangeably, since spoken word is inherently poetic.

and emphasize oral literature's relevance within this cultural history, implicating spoken word as manifesting this crucial paradox. To drive home its arguments, the paper centers between a more generic viewpoint on spoken word as automodern and using the Eva Alordiah example, that is performing a close-reading of three of her spoken word performances.

In refuting universal truths, modernist positions or its regnant logic, the postmodernist philosophy births aporetic conditions where complications flourish, fracturing reality into irreconcilable bits. However, in the process of grappling with the consequent ruptures, we are paradoxically returned to a dualist reality that Abdul Janmohamed affirms as a Manichean[2] metaphor of binary oppositions, albeit a veiled one (4). Set binaries like good and evil, modernity and primordiality, self and other, subject and object, nature and culture, machine and human return as foundational structures securing composite realities that ultimately fail to rest those familiar stereotypes, incidentally priming arenas for the transgression of overt boundaries. Past historical structures are never simply eradicated, Robert Samuels claims, a position in consonance with the foregoing given that "older models of culture and subjectivity are constantly being retained and remediated by newer models…[and] modernity helps us to see how the undermining of traditional foundations often results in a call to return to these discredited formations" (*New Media* 35–36). In validating Samuels' proposition, new media proves an instructive apotheosis. The proliferation of new media compels curious concessions and unities in the pursuit of representation and control. Netizens, a demographic comprised mostly of iGens and Millennials, then Gen X and Baby Boomers, utilize technology as an integral part of the circadian experience in fermenting

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[2]Manichean, as used here, is anchored in the philosophy of dualism, borrowing from Janmohamed's recognition of a binary configuration to postcolonial (African) reality (in literature, social-history, culture, and politics). It also follows in the logic of Frantz Fanon's reference to the colonial world in *The Wretched of the Earth*, as a Manichean world defined by binary splits, particularly to the extent that colonialism (its machineries and structures) is a footnote to postcolonial reality. Both Janmohammed and Fanon admit to a bifurcated representation of life within the postcolonial imaginary, either in response to colonialism or rejection of the driving philosophies of colonialism. This term is used here to brand present-day modern reality as pillared by such bifurcations, especially since modernity (as it is presently), European modernity (its industrial revolution), colonialism, and postcolonial realities are all diachronically related and since postcolonial reality, with its colonial trappings, is essentially a modern one. Adopted and adapted to signify beyond its (post)colonial inflections, the term references the fundamental dualistic schisms inherent in life/modernity as a product of historically configured negations occasioned by European colonialism and carried over to or transparent in postcolonial spaces as sites of modernity.

individuated truths. The number of internet users worldwide from the global digital report as of 2019 peaked at 4.388 billion, social media users at 3.484 billion, and mobile phone users at 5.112 billion; this is 57%, 45%, and 67% of the world's over 7.7 billion population respectively (Kemps).

This demographic relies on the smart phone, computer technologies, or the internet to exercise selfhood, privatize experience, or communicate, bringing to the performance of self-sufficiency a reliance on automated technology and digitized participatory networks. Such 'universal' acts are exhibits of the unification of conflicting forces: machine automation and individual autonomy, private and public realms, self and other, machine and human. On the surface, the algorithms, mechanizations, and programming that permit automaticity, through which technologies function in predeterministic ways, challenge human self-control. Maintaining human sovereignty from technology's predeterministic imperatives therefore requires preserving the human-machine split. However, this is hardly convenient in the digital age where technology blurs distinctions between producer and consumer of media/culture, and aids the personalization of technology and culture (Samuels, *New Media* 33). The impracticality of divorcing the human from the machine, the private from the impersonal, and the self from the other demonstrates the superficiality of these binaries—even though these binaries secure personal truths, ultimately fostering deep contradictions.

New media compels the 'techno-aestheticization' of cultural phenomena. Oral performance and poetry in the digital age experience momentous redefinitions via electronic digital imaging technology that has expanded the limitations of physical performance (de Hass 1). Accessibility to previously exclusive media like video and electronic technology democratizes performances (Meigh-Andrews 3), as internet technology fosters the recording, transmission, and reception of these performances. The intersection of technological progress and cultural evolution is bound to galvanize creative reinvention of extant folkloric forms. Apropos oral performance an effective admixture is the spoken word (hereafter SW) which harnesses the infrastructures of new media/digital technology in remediating poetry performance. Spoken word, used synonymously with spoken word poetry (hereafter SWP), is a contemporary poetic form that fuses old media such as live and stage performances and the technology of print culture with those of new media like social media applications, internet, digital media, and computer technologies to register its artistry. As oral performance, it is characterized by distinctive verbal poetics, oratorical strategies, ges-

tural and tonal inflections, kinesis, and audience engagement; it is also replete with sound metaphors and imageries, affecting subjects and other textures of performance identified by scholars of African orality and performance.[3] Its contemporariness styles its reliance on digital and mobile technologies for its performativity, re-emphasizing a quality Samuels describes as the "synchronic layering of new media on old media" (*New Media* 3). Spoken word facilitates paradoxical reconciliations: its video realization (as videopoetry) technologically juxtaposes the visual (text, images, and the corporal), the verbal, and the audible (aural or sonic)—previously mutually resistive and independent poetic mediums—for the production of a different form of poetic experience where, as Tom Konyves posits, there is a perceptible but unique synthesis (4). Furthermore, it presents technological automation as an effective fulcrum for performers questing for representation. In dismantling fixed divisions, reconciling contradictory forces, revising and re-adopting existing media, and synchronizing multiple modes of media production for maximum agency, spoken word obviates the logic sustaining the Manichean reality.

The paper focuses on the texture of female agency through oral performance in a modern digital age by exploring how spoken word as digital poetic performance facilitates femme agency and how the unique symbiosis of automated technologies and human autonomy in spoken word videos (hereafter SWV) engender the construction of safe sites for representation and agency. In addressing the interconnections of poetry performance and digital technologies, the study accentuates the profile of the automodern femme as technology-reliant but equally autonomous female digital subject resolving paradoxes and enabling unusual concessions. To do this, it interrogates how predeterministic technological facilities facilitate the technologization of safe spaces for engaging female issues, subversive performance, and agentive representation. Also, it examines how technologies, as social forces and pre-programmed units, shape human performance of individuality, indicating a resolve of the aforementioned contradictions and polarities. The paper proffers modes of realizing individuality and rescuing the self from oppression through programmed technologies with the help of arguments that establish parallels between automodernity, spoken word, and the automodern femme, and that map aestheticization of oral performance through technology in spoken word, and construct safe spaces for females, as such Alordiah's example, to substantiate its position. The combination of oppositional forces in the performances, the automodern leanings in SW, and the idea of an automodern female

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[3]For detailed explanation, see Beidelman and Finnegan (141), Akporobaro (3–4), Okpewho (6), Sekoni (141–142); and Finnegan's *Oral literature in Africa.*

are engaged with the intent of emphasizing the contradictions contouring the contemporary cultural period, and that SWV synthesizes these paradoxes to advance self-preservation.

Automated infrastructures of mobile and digital technologies persistently shape contemporary reality as the human species advances through/with technological progress. Peter-Paul Verbeek's hermeneutical and practical mediations, instructing on technology's influences on perception and actions, respectively, buttress this point[4]: digital technologies shape patterns of interaction while also redefining human conception of space. Beyond this though is a level of co-dependence: the extent to which programmable devices occasion accessibility to resources, condition subjectivity, or rethread sociality confirms this human-machine interrelatedness. On the one hand, algorithmic processes rely on human aptitude and programming, while on the other hand, technological artifacts as social forces shape subjectivity. However, in assessing this interdependence, pessimistic positions have emphasized a rhetoric of technology's dominance (Giroud 2), construing the digital subject as passive, autonomy or agency as illusory (Dean 2), and technology as commodifying subjectivity (Jekins and Carpentier 2; Dean 3). Pigeon-holing technological infrastructures as predeterministic, they question the formation of subjectivity through programmed algorithms thought to secure capitalist agendas or serve state regulation; the resultant automation is tagged as 'capturing' or trapping digital subjects, thus foreclosing individual resistance or rendering them politically passive or disengaged (Giroud 6).

This reaffirms the alarmist rhetoric that technological automation and human independence are irreconcilable, with the former adjudged to hedge the other's autonomy by ensnaring users in communicative loops.[5] Longstanding estimations like these establish mechanical predetermination as antagonistic to individual autonomy (Samuels, "Automodernity" 210), proffering orthodox binaries of social/cultural, public/private, self/other, living/machine as irreconcilably discrete. They also find traction in the future industry's apocalyptic envisioning of lifeworlds overrun by sentient machines. However, in reinforcing these positions, three pertinent things are often glossed over: human-machine intersubjectivity is best valued in performance not (social) roles; technologies and humans are complementary (social) forces; the

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[4]See Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do* for more explanation on this.
[5]Dean and Giroud explain unfulfilled desires as the continued quest for visibility and collectivity, with which capitalist networks 'capture' digital subjects, trapping users in communicative loops under false impressions of sustaining communication through participatory networks.

interactivity of both portends a discrete cultural eon. This cultural period has the markings of automodernity as digital youths turn to automated technologies and virtual publics to assert their individuality and privacy.

Automodernity, a term coined/theorized by Robert Samuels,[6] marks a distinctive shift in human cultural history where technological automation and human autonomy are combined for social action. This cultural period is loaded with contradictions, evinced by the collapse of the "[…] modern divide pitting the isolated individual against the impersonal realm" (Samuels, "Automodernity" 219)—a divide that postmodernism, championed by theorists like Jean-Francois Lyotard as succeeding modernist cultural aspirations, radically intensifies (84). The fusion of these opposing categories kept distinct by postmodernist theorizing is integral to the character of this automodern age, which Samuels posits is replete with paradoxes and the logical successor of modernity ("Automodernity" 210). The premise of Samuels' argument is that automodernity advances, and not effaces, modernist aspirations: "While the key ideological processes of modernity are the separations of the individual from the machine, the private from the public, and democracy from capitalism, what we find in automodern convergence culture is a bringing together of these modern oppositions" (*New Media* 31).

So, while the predeterministic mechanization of technologies that generate automaticity may, superficially, presuppose the illogicality of autonomy on the part of users, they actually do not compel the forfeiture of personal control, particularly not in the way alarmist rhetoric has espoused. New communication technologies require active participation by humans to be consumed (Samuels, *New Media* 33). This applies to the use of new media technologies in performing the self for virtual social interactivity. Automation bolsters systematic reciprocity in the navigation of individual reality and the resultant exchange of roles, discountenancing the postmodern position on the mediatized passivity of audience or users. Digital technologies endorse mutability of roles in social communication (Barichello and Carvalho 238), maintaining individual unity and agency. A crucial reference here is how researches on new media interaction[7] have moved from

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[6]See for a better understanding of the concept from several perspectives Robert Samuels, *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory after Postmodernism: Automodernity from Zizek to Laclau*.
[7]See, for instance, John L. Sullivan, *Media Audiences,* Sage Publications, 2012; Marilyn Cooper, "Postmodern Pedagogy in Electronic Conversations," in *Passions, Pedagogy, and 21ˢᵗ Century Technologies*, eds. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe, Utah State University Press, 1999; Jenny Pickerill, *Cyberprotest: Environmental*

mass media's paralysis of its audience-users via its one-way interactivity to the active user-audiences of new media communication, who can be followers, fans, and buddies at the same time, armed with various agendas, political or cultural. Apart from being involved in an organized system of exchange, users are active and engaged; they possess heightened senses of agency and autonomy through involvement in participatory networks.

Presenting automation as hostile to self-sufficiency betrays a failure to separate political and aesthetic aspects of new media consumption (Baya 158), or failure to unsubscribe to postmodern invalidation of any (inherent technological) truth as suspect, identifying virtual subjectivity within algorithm-charged new media as an evidence of consumer-capitalism's commodification of user experiences for the market (Giraud 7). Media studies with postmodern social cynicism often queries the nature and end of virtual participatory communication or the autonomy new media purportedly grants since it feeds information to the capitalist networks in charge of its programming, signaling the location, intention, and participatory networks of the communicants (Dean, *Blog Theory* 24). An evident flaw in this position is that it conflates the capitalist networks' political orientation with the users' in a way reminiscent of old media use, disregarding the subjection of automation to personal use. Unlike old media, new media technologies afford users an increased sense of control, freedom, and choice over the public sphere and what is provided/produced or consumed ("Automodernity" 229; *New Media* 16–17). In the same vein, spoken word performers use new media technologies to achieve control and freedom, a position reinforced by David Yanofsky et al. that spoken word has become a popular tool for youths to unmask and sustain their voice in a world filled with irrelevant clutter (340). This ability to use automated systems to contrive such levels of individuation and individuality is what automodernity champions.

While postmodernism's distrust of technology glosses over the facility of users to utilize unregulated automated social systems (like the internet/YouTube) in fashioning an increased sense of control and power (Samuels, "Automodernity" 226), automodernity provides avenues to create these unregulated automated social systems, fueling the resolution of social and cultural conflicts. It, thus, stands to reason that spoken word performed through digital media constructs worlds where, as Desai asserts, performance can "[…] foster civic engagement, increase critical thinking, provide safe spaces to discuss oppres-

Activism On-line, Manchester University Press, 2003; Arturo Escobar, *Territories of Difference*, Duke University Press, 2008.

sion and a site for transforming…individuals" (8). By doing so, digital automation induces the connection of the private with the public, permitting the recording, observation, commentary, and viewership of personal performances. In its redefinition of interaction, technological automation increases the capacity required to reinforce selfhood, so that pegging automation as opposed to autonomy is simply glossing over the ironies that human-machine combination creates—which automodernity provides an improved understanding of, compared to other approaches. Automodernity not only stimulates the reconciliation of previously discrete social forces and spaces, resolving longstanding antagonism in the process, but also offers insights to the modes and patterns of compromise prompted by human use of technologies. Its emphasis, for instance, on the publicizing of the private realm and privatization of the public by humans in their use of computer technologies for communicative goals tends toward identifying the ironic collusion of opposing spaces for human self-representation in a digital age. By providing insights to new patterns of communication that involves unusual fusions of previously considered antagonistic forces, automodernity demonstrates itself as an important paradigm toward creating and comprehending a unified reality. Essentially, while postmodernist conceptions continually fracture structures of unified subjectivity, unified science/technology, or objectivism, millennials and their cohorts return to automated technologies to locate individual unity and control, reinforcing these modern universal realities in the process. One such way is through spoken word whose reliance on technology confirms what Samuels asserts as "…the power of new technologies to reinforce the imaginary and real experiences of individual autonomy through automated systems" (226).

In light of the afore-discussed, the profile of the automodern femme as automation-reliant continues to reject postmodern argumentations that discount virtual subjectivity. Automodernity's spotlight on technological access as heightening a sense of individual self-sufficiency extends into the psycho-technological underpinnings of autonomy (Samuels, "Automodernity" 225). Self-hood is an invention of self-reflection or a corollary of a process of differentiation initiated by the presence of the 'other,' reflective or representational (like lenses, mirrors, cameras, or humans)—a theoretical pivot in psychoanalysis. In psychoanalytic thought and phenomenology, the concept of the mirror stage offers important insights to the process of self-recognition by subjects, owing to its position that the mirror as a literal object or any symbolic contrivance capable of inducing experiential self-awareness—that is, apperception—is pivotal to the structure of subjectivity or principal to recognizing the self. Initially preoccupied

with infant development, the theory, through Jacques Lacan, would be expounded to account for development of human identity and personality by adults.[8] Selfhood in adults is often a corollary of the moment of achieving wholeness, i.e., attaining knowledge of the self. Attaining selfhood is usually contingent on the presence of the other as an antipodal entity against which the self can be defined; this other could be the Constitutive other, whose differences from the self as another human constitute an essential cumulative part of a person's self-image or validates the knowledge of the self's realness and, hence, is essential to self-definition. It could also be what Lacan tags the ego as mirror-image,' that is, the self's specular image, which helps the fragmented body[9] achieve wholeness through self-recognition of the ego as other-identification. Whichever is the case, both validate the idea that the self is always bound up in the scope of the other, for they propose that self-hood is determined to a large extent by the existence of the other. In a sense, selfhood is anchored in identification via a symbol capable of inducing (ap)perception. Technology in the hands of the automodern subject can be a self-affirming and mirroring object, inducing reflection, identification of the other, or apperception. The camera induces apperceptions, affirms selfhood in the process, and facilitates the procedures of identifying the other—whose presence is implied in the act of recording for others' consumption—serving as a symbolic mirror. As opined by Krishner, the extent to which the self, its feelings and desire, are heard by others determines the psychotherapeutic effects on the self, including self-acceptance, increased freedom in expressing inner desires, and heightened comfort in relating to others (159). On the other hand, utilizing computer technologies for self-affirmation presupposes or manifests an implicit recognition of a present other. Essentially, the image of the performer onscreen is the specular image that proffers a sense of wholeness to the self.

Automodernity's conflation of automation and autonomy mandates a paradoxical collusion—not collision—of the self and the other, as self-autonomy through automation requires a degree of 'othering'—

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[8]For improved understanding, see Jane Gallop, "Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': Where to Begin," *SubStance,* vol. 11/12, 1982, pp. 118–128.

[9]The idea of the fragmented body in psychoanalytic thought proposes that the body is being pulled apart from within, which is exemplified by the various and partial drives, and the fragmentary or incoherent states in an individual. An encounter with the image of the self (the ego as/or the other) assists in unifying these fragmented pieces of the body. This idea is held by Melanie Klein and is linked to Lacanian conception of the symbolic and mirror-image. For more explanation see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Microscopia," in Jacques Lacan, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, W.W. Norton, 1990) and Robert Hinshelwood et al, *Introducing Melanie Klein*, Icon Books Ltd., 2006.

of recognizing the place of the other as integral to the performer's recognition of self. This presupposes the essentiality of the 'constitutive other' in the moment of self-awareness induced by technological interaction. The extent to which digital technology users, like a spoken word performer, achieve self-sufficiency is significantly anchored in the range of the performance/performer's desire to be visible and visibility to other users. If audience is central to performance (Akporobaro 3; Sekoni 141), recognition and viewership are germane to digital performance, essentializing the dynamics of digitally defined differentiation/contrast. In comparing spoken word performances with conventional poetry recitals, for instance, de Hass reiterates the expansive nature of the former: "In contrast to conventional readings of poetry, during which the audience's role is mainly that of listeners, spoken word performances feature an immediate, often urgent relationship between the…poet and the audience" (5). This interactive audience can be physical or virtual, depending on the interactive framework. The real time communicative quality afforded by digital technologies to users allows born-digital spoken word performances[10] to be situated in an immediate communicatory network of virtual performer and audience. For digitized spoken word performances, the audience is extended into the virtual public; while the traditional conception of time is distorted for each performance by the process of digitization, the phenomenon of real-time communication, which allows for instantaneous interaction between digital subjects maintains the audience-performer network. Despite experiencing time differently, owing to the translocation of performance from a physical setting to a virtual one, audiences of digitized performances can interact while engaging with the digitized performance as a new or recurrent experience, without losing the sense of immediacy that comes with each interaction. The fact that performer employs facilities of automation in technologizing the performance for increased impact across senses transforms the spoken word performer from a user to a producer.

A public invite for witnessing private performances and communing privately—even in a virtual public sphere—is initiated and rewarded with audience. Unlike with post-modernist posturing as regards 'othering,' this virtual differentiation summons and reassigns power equitably between the distinct parties, provoking a rethinking of the Manichean stereotype of othering. The paradox is even more palpable: the virtual world is the deregulated social public where the private space is constructed. This, like Samuels reiterates, does not imply

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[10]'Born-digital' is a category often used to refer to works (text or recordings) that are both created and produced on the digital network. They are produced in digital form rather than converted.

the substitution of the public realm with the private realm, but rather the privatization of the public and publicizing of the private, which "…echoes the larger political movement to undermine the notion of a modern public realm protected by [regulatory forces]" (*New Media* 17). The public is therefore that required 'other' to witness this performance, engage it, and participate in what is a private commune, while the regulatory force of the public realm is obviated, expunged, or hidden. In the digital age, boundaries are collapsed as they are maintained, a point Samuels in *New Media* accentuates: "In this radical reworking of the private and public realms, new media serves as both a disruption and a connection between individuals sharing the same social space" (31).

Set against postmodernist socio-cultural philosophies, automodernity, as laid out by Samuels, offers significant insights into these paradoxes and the fusion of contradictory forces shaping agency in the digital age. Virtuality and psychological representations as elements of selfhood are indispensable to the forging of contemporary subjectivity. Where postmodern social commentaries highlight social structures of subjectivity, to the relative neglect of the psychological, automodernity emphasizes the virtual and technological as integrated, negating a generalized undermining of any unified subjectivity. The fusion of advanced mechanical automation with an increased sense of personal autonomy through technologies such as digital recording cameras, mobile devices, computer programs/technologies, electronic sound systems, and the internet reflects the contradictions of the contemporary world: where automation customarily signified loss of control, but now defines augmentation of individual freedom (Samuels, "Automodernity" 219). Automodernity, for that reason, accounts for the particularizing reconciliations of these contradictions that are testaments of new (technology-mediated) approaches to social-cultural activity. The automodern femme naturally embodies these paradoxical combinations; through social action and the threading of private experience in the (digital) public, her use of new media technology displays an unusual symbiosis of virtuality and subjectivity, self-independence and external (other) validation in ways that instruct on how new media is being lived and experienced.

The automodern femme, as conceived in light of the aforesaid, is the female digital subject whose individuality and sense of autonomy is 'un-captured' and heightened by her transactions with technologies. In scotching social and cultural interference in the performance of self, the automodern femme deploys new media's mechanized infrastructures. Her aptitude in exploiting technological automation to ar-

chitecture a safe space in the (virtual) public for private commune heightens her awareness of self-sufficiency, and achieves for her free-dom—alluding to the paradoxical associations of the public and the private—the impersonal and the private, the algorithmic and the bio-logic, the automated and the autonomic, and the self and the other dis-tinct to the digital age. In what follows, the paper puts the foregoing into practice, using selected works of Eva Alordiah—"Feed the Faith," "If They Broke You," and "Dying to Live"—to explore how spoken word as a new media performance form technologizes safe spaces for self-agency.

The spoken word performances of Alordiah have their feminist inclinations grounded in teleological expressions, which are gestural, verbal, or technological. The digital and videopoetry[11] form of the per-formances provide crucial leverages in exporting the thematic under-pinning of these expressions. Her works fall into that category of born-digital works primarily for being conceived in a digital format rather than merely digitized: the dynamic and mixed-media configuration of each performance as an organic unit demonstrates this. Another reason is the recreation and re-combination of naturally isolated components to allow for juxtapositions that render the agency, pre-occupations, and communication of the performer effectively. This reconstructive strat-egy stresses the role and agency of technology and its automatized in-frastructures in contriving spaces where a host of media features are appropriated for maximum representation.

Where female representation across socio-cultural categories remains bleak, desperately deserving of expedient posturing, technolo-gy's pervasiveness, reach, and accessibility retool it into a critical ally. Its invaluableness becomes incontrovertible when its structures permit multimodal displays whose affect and effect on the public senses are unassailable. Spoken word video's multi-media patterning augments a performer's engagement with the public. Given that interaction be-tween humans is defined by sensory exchanges, SWV's combinatorial prospects allow for multi-tiered networks of sensory relationship. Its reliance on technology's systematic structures in advancing teleologi-cal performances, where the end is unconcealed at any juncture, de-flects a measure of technological precision and procedural order to the

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[11]While the term and category of videopoetry is keenly contested with regard to what fits the taxonomy and its difference from nomenclatures like video poetry—as mere poetry in video form—my use of the term here draws upon Konyves' conception of it as video performance where text, audio, verbal, sonic, and visual properties are democratically harnessed together to relate a holistic experience, without one com-ponent superimposed over others. See Konyves for more on this division.

performance of self. Since technologies themselves are "[…] center[ed] on the preprogramming of 'universal' templates and systems of scientific order" (Samuels, *New Media* 17), Alordiah's performances being methodical manifest what Foucault posits as technologies of the self: "a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and rule of procedure, may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing" (297). Foucault's technologies of the self stress the tactical fashioning of the self within a systematic frame, which is the premise of Alordiah's performative preoccupation with what it means to be a femme. The digital world she has fabricated is analogous to a training ground, an industrial space where procedures of disassembling, reconstructing, and rebranding of the self are initiated. Self-fashioning,[12] informed by learning and relearning the self, clear of the rote practices of self-knowing sanctioned by the community, is thus the desired end—one technology assists to methodically execute.

With the aid of computer technology, the said spaces are primed into virtual strongholds with a surfeit of counter-mechanisms: Alordiah's performances, for example, are suffused with a medley of media forms and overlapping cuts; the collage of still shots, visual arts, graphics, texts, soundtracks, gestures, and camera superimpositions not only reinforce the procedures of self-engagement but also ensure we receive these technologies (of self and machine) holistically. The combinatorial technique of alternating shots, camera movements, image overlaps, dissolves and superimpositions or fades, and condensation of several materials on screen at the same time is potent enough to offset dismissive receptions of each performance.

In "Dying to Live," the longest of the three videos at over 5 minutes, we are locked in Alordiah's world, pulled in first by the chaotic state of a sea forced into distress by a crashing tide. Instantly, the words "I am not happy" appear on the screen, disappearing concomitantly with a solemn utterance of the same words. A somber Alordiah

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[12]Self-fashioning emphasizes the process of attaining or redefining the consciousness of selfhood. Selfhood can be constituted through Shirley Neuman's poetics of difference, which emphasizes the self as constituted by multiple differences within and from itself (Lovesey 36)—this relates to Klein's concept of the fragmentary body that achieves wholeness from the specular image and also the homuncular self identified by traditional philosophy as internal to self consciousness (Kirshner 157). It can also be attained by an awareness of the difference between the self and the existing other. Self-fashioning, as employed here, is a statement of identity construction or process of self-affirmation within a structure, what Neuman calls a space of representation (46) and Lovesey a frame (36), where the image of the self is dared by its other.

appears on screen—her gaze averted to the side as if distraught by her own reflection—superimposed on the sea now reflecting through her as background, perhaps as a visual metaphor of depression, while the scripted lyrics slide across the screen. Even if a viewer dismisses Alordiah's utterances, he/she may find it hard to discount the shot of the crashing sea and its implications or the textures of the melancholic soundtrack lacing the motion-picture. Alordiah's side-stare and its connotations cannot be unseen in the context of its signification, alongside that of the sea which Alordiah's digitally faded body keeps in perspective. The entire first 9 seconds are tailored this way, with each new shot tied to the previous so that, although sequential, the shots are kept in remembrance. How possible is it then to deny, say, the effects of Alordiah's utterance on the public auditory sense when it is tethered to multiple visual and sonic realizations? The multi-layered and collaged cuts attack the human sensory system simultaneously and at several levels, in ways stage performances cannot. Alordiah's warfare against mental illness, a hushed up subject demonized by cultural intolerance that equates mental illness to witchcraft and wizardry, adopts a hydra shape; shutting out one form of representation empowers others as they become major sources of communication/transmission, bearing down on the senses with less competition for attention or concentration.

The entire performance adopts this methodical synthesis of various media so that the gist is never glossed over at any point. Whenever Alordiah talks of deep personal issues, there are rapid camera movements and extensive cuts. Her reference to having spent years molding an image that eventually subsumes her introduces a muted cut from one of her previous onstage performances: in it, she dances exuberantly, while fans raise cell phones to record or cheer her. Before this scene are moments of self-judgments where vocalizations of depression like "deep dark hole," "pain," and "despair" are accompanied by rapid shots of cinders coasting through a fiery night, a previously lit corridor going dark, silhouetted doors, and a blank screen with the words "self-inflicted depression" centralized. When she speaks of shutting herself in a self-made prison, a 2-dimensional image of a prisoner gripping the bars comes up, with the sound of bars slamming shut interjecting the tenor of the background track. When she laments her failure to value the splendor of existence, a clip of flowers pollinated by insects is accompanied with that of sunrise and sunset—an apt signification of an eclipsed soul augmented by digital juxtapositions. Her vocal and scripted reference to losing love is juxtaposed by a playback of her on stage and walking toward a man assumed to be her lover; this

shot is sundered in half and digitally tossed off the screen before both parties could meet.

While Alordiah's words are suggestive of her struggles with a socio-culturally proscribed phenomenon, the visual and audio components reiterate this narrative, so that the full multi-sensorial experience is compact for consumption and self-therapy is achieved on both discrete and integrated levels. It would seem that one of Alordiah's principal statements is if women cannot discuss mental health issues in public, they can in a technologized room of their own. This stimulates the approval of Konyves' assertion that video performances like the SWV house perceptible synthesis of speech, text, soundtrack, images, and gestures. The additions, to what otherwise would have been a lone performance, more than adumbrate the agency of technology in the assembling of templates upon which self-fashioning can effectively ferment. With the limitless poetic association of image, text, and sound, Alordiah successfully and privately threads experiential issues, precluding public disruption by devising procedures and marshalling facilities supplied by technology.

The suggestive power of the unusual associations of text, image, and sound in videopoetry provides Alordiah's performances simultaneous meanings. Konyves calls the montage association as products of syntactical decisions, where 'distant realities,' "the ambiguous or enigmatic relationship of a particular image to a portion of text, for example" (4) are deliberately engineered to induce the possibility of suggestive, surprising, and mysterious meanings. To Konyves, and as manifest in Alordiah's works, the distance does not cause incongruity within the work or disengagement with it by viewers, but promotes a synchronization and multimodal equilibrium between sound, text, and image capable of providing a new poetic experience (4), which new media technologies aid greatly. Hence, if marginalized categories like blacks in America, politically oppressed groups in Africa, and digital youths can turn to new media and its performative praxes to experience and convey independence or impair tyrannical social formulas of being, it is expected that women, as subaltern subjects, can turn to spoken word to achieve the same (Desai 8; de Hass 1–2; Samuels, "Automodernity" 219).

The infrastructures of web-based, electronic, or mobile technologies through which spoken word performances are produced in the digital network afford unregulated communication. Not unlike Foucault's technologies of self, which are procedures of identity change, maintenance, or transformation extant in civilizations and thus provided or prescribed as requisite (Foucault 87), new media technologies

also promote miscellaneous approaches to self-redefinition. However, in contrast with imposed or recommended methods to self-transformation provided by customary social forces that Foucault's position intimates, new media's automation advances a performer's control of said provisions. The performer retains power over what is expressed and the nuances of interaction. Alordiah's monopoly on dictating the conditions of interaction by setting the pace and proximity levels and by choosing the extent of habituation within the virtual public, which returns us to Samuels' privatization of the public and publicizing of the private (17), can hardly be gainsaid. Privatizing the public occurs in different ways, one of which is appropriating public information. Alordiah's visual images, even if technologically reprogrammed, are borrowed public information. In using smart devices, internet, and computer technology for image processing, recording, production, and cyber-storing of her multi-modal performances, she has privatized the public without absorbing it, mixing personal expressions with borrowed materials in what Samuels describes as appropriative endeavor.

At a point in "Dying to Live," cuts of responses fill the screen to suggest the acceptability of (as well as aid) Alordiah's cyber-self-therapy as they pop up simultaneously in form of viewers' comments. To do this is to harness technology's real time effect on communication and to privatize public interaction by performing what Samuels describes as appropriating open information for unpredictable personal purposes (*New Media* 18). Also, this reinforces automodernity's paradoxical collapse of the self-other binary and public-private divide, for viewership validates self-engagement, referencing a pre-modern folkloric practice where audience engagement shapes performative direction and breeds effectual performance. Digital technology, by effectuating a performer's control on expressivity, visibility, and interaction, empowers a performer like Alordiah to take on several issues—mental issues, depression, sex, weed, love, betrayal, fear, and self-will—while addressing herself, other women, and the femme image in general.

The three performances uniquely harness technology, although in diverse ways: the degree of Alordiah's physical presence differs from one performance to another. "Dying to Live," the longest of the three, has the least onscreen presence of Alordiah, with her sharing screen time with overlapping film clips and numerous still shots. Her presence dominates "Feed the Faith," so that there is an adequate appreciation of the significance of onscreen corporal kinesis, gestural manipulations, and vocality in extracting meaning from the exhibition. Unlike "If They Broke You," "Feed the Faith" boasts of an appreciable

degree of camera movements that capture several performative positions which provide alternate meanings not dissociable from the performer's fixations. Modulations in voicing to exactly correspond with physical directions during performances are tempered by vocal synthesizers and electronic technology so that there is apparent harmony between text (kinesis) and sound; and there are fewer overlays, cuts, or superimpositions as the camera stays fixed on Alordiah, capturing every detail and changes in tempo, texture, and tenor of performance enhanced by Alordiah's close proximity to artificial light. "If They Broke You" lies between the two performances, with an equal footing of performer's presence and a medley of visual representations charging the collage mentality peculiar to SWVs.

In each performance, Alordiah dictates the direction of communication without censorship, a function of new media in retaining individual agency from state regulation or male suppression. This echoes Samuels' assertion that "[t]he power of new media to cater to real and imagined feelings of self-direction threatens to hide and render invisible important social and public forces" (*New Media* 16). If Alordiah's thematic and performative expressions transgress the boundaries of what is tolerable for women, it is because new media has not only provided user-performers the power to express but has also created a space loaded with defense mechanics to engage subversive subjects, self-fashion a desired image, however transgressive, and contest with society. Technology, orality, performance, and visuality in such hands become innovative means of resisting and subverting social-cultural tyranny on a large scale.

The unfettered and individuating social-system of the cyberspace allows for inimitable expressions of individuality and modes of self-fashioning. This absence of regimentation can be inferred from the thematic concerns in Alordiah's presentations. By publicly engaging socially proscribed subjects from the sanctuary of her digital fortress, she deactivates her subaltern status as second sex, a condition brought about by the subordination of women to men that denies the former visibility and voice (Beauvoir 25). Her preoccupations and techniques of engagement propel her into the center where her visibility is incontrovertible. In "Dying to Live," Alordiah flexes the muscles of self-fashioning via provocative self-exhibition, relocating herself in trangressive ways: the 'transgressive acts' are mostly performed within enclosed spaces, shut out from public view, as seen in the performance. In making these acts public through the new media, she reasserts her power to self-define as well as re-invent her image. Where the transgressions are already public physically (previous on-stage per-

formances), she extends her audience to the larger and expansive virtual world. In several cuts her head is cleanly shaved; in others she has a part of it closely cropped and the other half-woven; in another shot, she is sultrily postured against a man. Emphasis here is on the transformative power of self-engagement dissociated from socially accepted procedures. Neither a clean shaven head nor a half-braided one conforms to socially satisfactory demonstrations of femininity;[13] still, Alordiah unabashedly shows off these collages of different selves as moments of truth in her thirst for self-retrieval. The medley of playback cuts and still-shots or graphics art and Alordiah's voice-overs pool into a portal through which we relive the past with her—a transgressive past made present through meta-performance:

> I made money, I lost money
> I got in debt, I got out of debt
> I fell in Love, and loved till I was pushed out
> I wanted sex, I wanted weed
> I wanted to eat / I wanted to sleep
> But most of all I just wanted to be me
> I had forgotten who I was,
> so I would look in the mirror and not know who stared back at me
> So I shaved my head, and lost a lot of weight
> I changed my name, then I changed it again… (Alordiah, "Dying to Live" 00:01:31–47)

To an orthodox audience, these words are self-indicting, capable of inciting public uproar, reprimand, and charges of irresponsibility and waywardness. To Alordiah, they are stepping stones with which closure from depression can be achieved. The subject of sex being a 'social taboo' for women is not novel, having necessitated sexual revolution at different junctures in history under different banners (Glick 24). In Africa, it is a topic to be mumbled behind closed doors. Mcfadden, Hollibaugh, and Ampofo et al. report on the treatment of public discussion of sex by women as filthy and unbecoming; this censorious stance toward female sexuality is a corollary of repressive attempts that deny women the power derivable from sexual pleasure, eroticism, and desire in order to keep them acquiescent. Hushing sex-talk advances a culture of silence. But Alordiah never mumbles the

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[13]See Tabora A. Johnson, and Teiahsha Bankhead, "Examining the experiences of Black women with natural hair," *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 2, 2014, pp. 86–100; see also Tracy O Patton, "Hey girl, am I more than my hair? African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image and hair," *NWSA Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2006, pp. 24–51.

subject. Although in her private world, she asserts her desire for sex as she does food and sleep—an unusual association through which sex is 'essentialized'—following in the path of second-wave feminists' advocacy for embracing female desires and body pleasures. The same applies to 'weed.' The technology-aided integration of playback videos, visual images, soundtracks, silence, and utterances in an automated sequence eliminates abstraction of reality that threatens to undermine oral performances.

Automation ensures that the viewer systematically feels the weight of Alordiah's reality in tandem with the performance's unfolding. When several playbacks of previous Alordiah's on-stage performances take up screen-time sequentially, as if naturally contiguous, the viewer not only feels as if he/she is part of the experience (in their original and separate forms and as a whole) but is also ushered on to locate the underlying thematic thrust through her voice and the accompanying and synthesized images as the performance continues. Whether it is the scene where empty pages are flipped by wind after she tosses a book on the table or where she is scribbling frantically in her diary, narrating simultaneously her choice to call her diary "Notes on Tuesday" in order to talk to herself, the viewer relives these moments with her. Also, when she refers to the invisible audience, the other of the virtual world, images of comments float on screen as they occur in web spaces, heightening the effect of Alordiah's communication with the viewer. Oral performance in Africa is never merely acted in pursuit of distraction, or as Furniss and Gunner claim, "folksy domestic entertainment," but a space where individuals can perform political functions by "…comment[ing] on power relations in the society" (x). Alordiah's digitally-mediated spoken word performance is anchored in this principle. Inasmuch as what is visually rendered are manifestations of self-conversation and techniques of closure through which self-therapy can be realized, they rupture cultural hold on what is communicable and/or utilizable in self-fashioning. This shredding reinforces individuality in remarkable ways: visibility to others complements the therapeutic process, as technology continues to induce formation of new modes of privatized social subjectivity—one virtual reliant.

If "Dying to Live" approaches the undermining of patriarchy's expurgation of women's communication as a means to an end, "If They Broke You" completes the campaign, eviscerating the bowdlerizing propensity within the male-dominated society where communication is regulated by patriarchal cultural codes: it centralizes the issue of sex. The subaltern female is thrust beyond the margins where she is

encumbered by patriarchal yokes of expectation, conformity, and objectivization when Alordiah addresses her, the male figure, and herself. She initiates the conversation by addressing a frequent contemporary display of affection among women: "She says she has never hit it raw / but will give you a chance if You Promise to pull out" (00:00:01–04). Prominence on the two words with their initial letters capitalized—as offered in the accompanying text subtitles—is enhanced by a rise in vocality as Alordiah articulates, her head cocked sideways in defiance of an unseen male gaze as she stares at the camera, exposing male predatory sexual maneuvers. With the next few lines, Alordiah's gestural expressions display increased intensity, alongside a backing melody that also adopts an urgent tone: "In her mind this is proof of her feelings and she's calling it love / but that is far from what you are thinking about" (00:00:05–10).

The promise of security (social, economic, physical, or financial), even though ultimately quixotic, has been a device of female subjugation. Sex as a tool of submission promotes regnant philosophies that cast women as sexual minorities. Placing cultural embargo on female sexuality creates avenues for women to internalize sexist messages. Sexual dominance by men ensues, just as Mcfadden and Hollibaugh have averred, since females are taught to fear sexual desire, see it as social aberrance, and reject (unknowingly sometimes) the power that derives from it. The repressive frames that silence female desires are preserved by a culture of shame that promotes male ego, inadequacy, or sustain male dominance, precluding the illumination that stems from sexual volubility and freedom. The consequence perpetuates, endlessly, the equation of male dominance—female subordination, a condition pro-sex revolution quests to eclipse. Imbuing sexuality with the power of resistance is the coherent aftermath of centralizing sexual freedom in the struggle against female oppression (Glick 24). According to Glick, women's sexual struggle takes central place within the feminist war against oppressive structures. Radicalizing the struggle for efficacy thus often involves weaponizing defining attributes of women shunted to the sidelines or censored by the state/culture. As a consequence, women accentuate their liberties to self-define and co-exist with men beyond objectifying practices by demonstrating and deploying their sexuality as they deem fit, especially in ways that reject stereotypes and male suppression. This way, sexuality is deployed as offensive or becomes an affront to oppression, which underscores its consequentiality in relation to the feminist struggle. To deny this is to consolidate the type of exploitation that ignorance births, which is Alordiah's intention when her next line reveals the true intent of such predatory men: "You just want to get your dick in her thighs / and she

wants to see some love in your eyes / when she holds on to you, she is hoping you keep her safe / but when you hold onto her, you hope she gives you a taste" (00:00:11–21). If sexual freedom culminates in offensive practices against socially adequate performance of sexuality (Ferguson 109), that is, if the liberty to own and perform one's sexuality antagonizes normative sexual behaviors, tendering sex in exchange for male love preserves the social schema that commodifies the female body. Consequently, Alordiah canvasses for female self-love.

Without prescribing or prevaricating, she reinforces the need for women to guard against boys who love women less; this is achievable by rechanneling love to the self. She says, "the sweetest thing you can do is love yourself" and that predatory men cannot "…give you the love that you haven't thought about giving yourself" ("If they Broke You" 00:00:27–38). All the while, the automated camera pans in and out, zooming in on select portions of those words penned down in ink for visual reinforcement. The scenes after this mark a significant shift as Alordiah turns the metaphoric lens onto herself, as if to heed her own advice, setting herself in perspective without ignoring the larger femme subject of the public realm. She implores the audience to trust her, so that the focus is on her as she continues in the same self-therapeutic fashion found in "Dying to live." Exploring her wants, desires, and thirst for more knowledge, she yells: "Trust me I'm learning, I'm still only learning / I'm still Daily tossing, in my bed and Yearning / For someone to hold me, kiss me in the morning / I might be alone, but I'm never lonely / I'm spending Time by myself now, I am getting to know me / I am understanding that the deeper I fall into my own self-love / the higher I can vibrate at the frequency of love that is best for me" (00:00:39–60). The last two lines are spread between various media: as subtitles during her physical presence on screen, as voice-over with a blank screen, and as a display of digitized scribbles, while the camera zooms in on "the deeper I fall into my own self-love." In this scene, the efficacy as well as the structural and syntactical importance of the 'distant realities' is pronounced. This portion of the performance instructs on the measured balance and the suggestive weight that the layering of image to texts and sound can produce in SW as videopoetry performances. All through the visual transitions, her voice remains audible, pulsating in accord with the accompanying tune. When the camera refocuses on Alordiah, her own focus also returns to the generic female and with it her counsel for self-love. This self-fashioning leads to an assured Alordiah in "Feed the Faith"— defiant and self-aware, who takes on the subject of fear. With chest-thumping gestures, she announces her triumph over evil by "inclining

[her] ears to wise words"—a triumph made possible through cyber-therapy and digital technology.

Alordiah's presence here differs from the other two performances. Her head, with a part closely cropped and the other weaved, is rebelliously cocked closed to her shoulders as she rests against polished plywood; her dress is pulled down her right shoulder. With facial muscles visibly contorting and relaxing, the words "I get up on my feet and stand" issue out with force. She says the same evil—metaphor for oppressive forces—no longer deters her as she is strong now. She demonstrates this with her entire being. Her hands shoot to her face in disgust when she says that social propaganda instills fear and lies. Her solution is to retreat within herself, a decision made with a bold face glaring at the camera, daring the social other, and her fingers poking at her chest. To her, "in there is all the strength that [she] needs" ("Feed the Faith" 00:00:37–38). The momentum gathers as she utters a deep growling guttural sound—this is a signifier of her bellicose posturing against fear, which she has exorcized. Fear of being unloved, ostracized, or rejected is, although generic, unique to subaltern minorities and marginalized groups; fear detracts from the possibility of mounting an oppositional force. It becomes instrumental in the hands of the nation-state and its phallogocentric institutions, denying the realization of other unregulated systems capable of engendering agency. A phallogocentric reality is characterized by patriarchal hegemony over sexuality and state structures (Joodaki and Bakhshi 129); such societies situate the idea of the 'phallus,' a symbol of the superiority of masculinity, as the "signifying source of power" for individuals in search of meaning, relevance and stability (Childs and Fowler 171). Alordiah yells this without saying it directly, underscoring fear's capacity to blind the femme against the truth. When she says "I know who I want to be" ("Feed the Faith" 00:00:50–51), she thumps her chest severally, equating her words to prophesies for their living and portentous quality. This performance is no longer the re-learning or medicating of the self typifying the previous videos. Her subjectivity is fully formed, with the virtual world re-shaped from a sanctuary into a battle ground. It would seem that the Alordiahs of the two previous performances have coalesced into one and that this performance is the natural coda to the other two, indicating a performative growth within a digital private precinct. At the end, leaning close to the camera, she reminds the femme that "in life there are two options; feed the faith [in one's self] or feed the fear [of the adversarial forces]" (00:00:54–59).

Alordiah's retooling of digital technologies and employment of the spoken word form in fashioning a democratic space for self-

assessment, her aptitude in adapting the automaticity of computer programs, word processors, digital camera technologies, cyber-networks like YouTube, mobile technologies, and recording systems in generating a multi-media milieu and aestheticizing a multi-tier, multi-modal, and multi-sensory poetic performance defines her as the automodern femme. She relies on these contrivances to locate and relocate herself through salutary, subversive, and evocative performances. Technologically mediated performance forms like the spoken word and its video poetry realization are fulcrums resituating the femme from the position of a marginalized cultural subject or social minority to that of visibility. Through technological aptitude, the woman contrives spaces where her subjectivity is positively transformed, appropriating public information and choreographing multiple media for effective representation. With the visibility, privacy, and security from regulation that new media affords, she engages in performative practices that shunt her to the center as 'uncaptured' digital subject, while addressing her reality in ways outside the perimeters of existing modes of social communication. Technology and human agency thus lose any sign of mutual exclusivity, particularly in relation to control and agency. Boundaries and borders are collapsed as private issues are publicly rendered for the public to privately relate with. In the privatization of the public and publicizing of the private, paradoxes are revealed as characterizing the digital age as automodern: they reveal the inherent contradictions shaping this cultural period, and how digitally mediated oral performative practices perpetuate such contradictions, aiding the leverage women hold over social, cultural, and institutional regulations. The automodern femme is the woman who has the skill to marshal technological structures and automation to co-shape her subjectivity and activate her agency through performance, in the way Eva Alordiah has done.

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