Discursive skin: Entanglements of gender, discourse and technology

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‘Skin’: a permeable boundary or (digital) interface that defines and shapes perceptions, and which is increasingly fashioned by the contemporary convergences of info- and bio-technologies. This study starts from the premise that these permeable boundaries are constituted by, and in dialogue with, gender, discourse and technology.

Feminist technoscience studies has produced a rich body of work theorising both the ways in which gender, discourse and technology co-constitute one another, and the consequences of this on the construction of gendered bodies. This study builds on this existing research to examine in more detail the relationship between gender, discourse and technology as it occurs in three case studies: cyberpunk fiction, (in)fertility weblogs, and the naming of biotechnologies. In this context, ‘skin’ encompasses (but is not limited to) the graphical user interfaces of blogs, the substitute human skins created in biotech research, the palimpsest of the cyberpunk texts, and the material-discursive bodies constituted therein.

This study proposes a knot figure as a means of illustrating the relationship between gender, discourse and technology more clearly. Tracing this knot over the different case studies highlights the role it plays in the construction of norms governing viable and unviable bodies across a range of differently regulated and managed spaces.