

## research summary

### 1. abstract



### 2. context

- (1) How are witches named?
- (2) Why are witches produced continuously?
- (3) Social media as the field for contemporary witch hunts
- (4) Graphic communication design as participatory execution

### 3. projected contribution

## 1. abstract

In Chinese TV series, “evil women” characters have gradually become more popular with audiences. However, this new trend also seems to be creating new stereotypes of women. Using the format of a dictionary, I organised and presented the typical personality trends of “evil women” in Chinese TV dramas over the past 12 years. I wanted to explore whether such representations still reduce the complexity and diversity of women as both characters and people, and whether they contribute to the formation of a new stereotype of the female figure. I found that even though these characters belong to different story worlds and have very different experiences, they are still repeatedly reduced to negative traits that are easy to recognise and quickly spread. This logic of classification not only simplifies the complexity of female characters, but also gradually led me to question whether these repeatedly produced labels already exist beyond fictional narratives.

From fictional Chinese TV dramas to real Chinese social media, I have continued exploring how the image of the “evil woman” is produced. My focus gradually shifted from fictional characters on screen to real women – from celebrities to ordinary individuals. Whether fictional or real, “evil women” are always targets of collective attacks. However, attacks against “evil women” on the internet are much more immediate and widespread.

Rather than general cyberbullying, I define this phenomenon as the digital witch hunt<sup>1</sup> – an extreme, collective moral judgment targeting those labelled as

contemporary “witches”. Therefore, my enquiry developed into:

*How are these “witches” manufactured within the Chinese social media, and how is the digital “execution” collectively carried out by “us”?*

<sup>1</sup> “Witch hunt” originally referred to the persecution of people – predominantly women – labeled as witches in early modern Europe, often based on exaggerated or false accusations. In a contemporary context, it serves as a metaphor for collective, seemingly moral accusations aimed at individuals who deviate from group expectations (Wikipedia 2026).

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In this context, unlikable traits, relationship imperfections, or even a choice of clothing or hair colour can serve as evidence of “witchcraft”. Female attackers often target their own kind to secure a sense of safety within patriarchal pressures. Meanwhile, male attackers often view women as their possessions, perceiving any deviation from a controllable “ideal feminine standard” as a threat. This collective bullying functions as a distorted bonding tool, where constructing a shared enemy (often a woman) creates a false sense of collective unity – one that has proven effective across time.

Therefore, this project is addressed to all social media users, particularly those who actively leave traces online. Are our judgements acts of justice, or of unwarranted interference? How strong must opposing voices be to interrupt the process of “execution”?

A digital witch hunt is real-time and participatory. In response, I propose an interactive digital platform that allows viewers to experience a trial firsthand. Using the imagery of witch execution as a metaphor, the project presents the victim’s judged traits and representative real comments through dynamic visual interruption. The interaction logic reflects the imbalance of power found in real online environments: for example, liking negative comments functions like adding fuel to the fire and accelerates the execution process, while liking supportive comments can only briefly pause or slightly slow it down, but cannot reverse the outcome. Once the level of malice reaches a critical point, the

“witch” completely collapses and fragments, symbolising a form of social death.

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### (1) How are witches named?

Whether in history or today, the “witch” has never been a natural identity, but a social role that is forcibly named and constructed. In today’s social media environment, this logic still operates to define women who are seen as uncontrollable or transgressive. Although we no longer literally use the word “witch”, unlikeable “evil women” are still pushed into this position and become targets of collective hunts.

As Gilbert and Gubar argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, labels such as “witch”, “bitch”, and “monster” do not simply describe women, but are created to ease patriarchal anxieties about female autonomy. When women display ambition, negative emotions, unusual appearances, or behaviours that challenge expectations of the “ideal woman”, they are defined as monsters. Therefore, the “witch” is not discovered, but named; naming itself is an act of power. By marking certain women as “abnormal”, society defines what a “normal” woman should be.

This naming logic remains highly visible across contemporary social media. Rather than caring about women’s complex realities, internet users often reduce them to simplified labels such as lazy, selfish, or promiscuous, and then carry out self-righteous executions. These labels erase the real person and leave behind only simplified “crimes” that are easy to spread and attack. As a result, digital witch hunts often judge not a real individual, but a constructed “evil woman” figure designed to absorb collective hostility.

### (2) Why are witches produced continuously?

Why do societies continuously produce “witches”? As Kate Manne argues, misogyny is not simply hatred towards women, but a tool for maintaining patriarchal order (Manne, 2018, p. 69). When women behave in ways considered “inappropriate”, humiliation and moral judgement act as punishments that push them back into their “proper place”.

The continuous production of “witches” is therefore less about what these women have actually done, and more about society’s need for a shared target to criticise and exclude. Through this process, people gain a false sense of collective unity and moral superiority. On social media, reposting, commenting, and liking reinforce the feeling of standing with the majority and participating in the “correct” moral position. Digital witch hunts are therefore not only forms of moral judgement, but also social behaviours through which people confirm their own position, safety, and belonging. At the same time, attacking “evil women” also becomes a way of teaching society what a “good woman” should be.

For this reason, hostility in digital witch hunts does not always appear openly violent. It is often disguised as “rational criticism”, “objective judgement”, or “just telling the truth”. This allows collective attacks to appear normal, or even morally justified, while the harm done to women as individuals is ignored.

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### (3) Social media as the field for contemporary witch hunts

As mentioned earlier, witch hunts, as a tool for creating false social unity, have never truly disappeared. They continue to exist across different periods of time, but in different forms. Today, witch hunts mainly happen on digital platforms. Unlike early Europe, where witch hunts usually took place in formal spaces such as public gatherings or courts, social media now allows witch hunts to happen anytime and anywhere. At the same time, everyone can participate in them quickly and easily.

Because of algorithms and traffic systems, actions such as liking, commenting, and reposting naturally increase the visibility of an event. However, even seemingly neutral actions like scrolling and viewing also help spread information. The moral judgement and punishment of the "witch" has become a real-time, decentralised, and highly participatory form of lightweight interaction. Digital witch hunts break down concentrated forms of power, but for this reason, social media also allows people to attack the "witch" unconsciously and without consequences. This new form of harm does not come from a small group of people openly attacking someone, but from the accumulation of many small, repeated, and everyday interactions.

At the same time, the communication structure of digital networks makes aggressive and crowd-following opinions easier to be seen, while rational and supportive voices are more likely to be filtered out. As Byung-

Chul Han (2017, p.4) states in *In the Swarm*, "Yes is significantly quieter than no." Digital platforms do not equally amplify every voice. Instead, they continuously encourage emotional and provocative content. Therefore, the positions that appear to be reasonable online are not necessarily neutral or just, but are often the result of algorithmically produced majority opinions.

Therefore, social media is not simply a platform for public expression, but also a tool that shapes and filters power. Digital witch hunts are continuously strengthened through public interaction.

### (4) Graphic communication design as participatory execution

In this project, interaction is necessary. Because interactions on social media are so effortless, once we use these platforms, almost all of us participate in witch hunts unconsciously, whether we have feminist awareness or not. I created an interactive website that simulates a real social media interface, allowing viewers to enter this witch hunt system from a first-person perspective without realising it. The website presents different posts together on one screen in the form of an information feed, encouraging people to interact with it as naturally as they would when scrolling through social media. After clicking on one post, the other posts still remain visible beside it. This reflects how digital witch hunts do not happen as isolated events, but exist continuously and simultaneously, waiting for users to enter the trap created by algorithmic systems.

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Every interaction in the project suggests the effects created by interactions on real social media platforms. Scrolling itself already begins to cause slight harm to the “witch”. Removing likes from supportive comments, liking negative comments, and reposting the original post all increase the level of malice and intensify the collapse of the post. By contrast, liking supportive comments or removing likes from negative comments can only temporarily slow down the punishment, because the support given to the “witch” is too weak to reverse the final result. Among these interactions, liking the original post carries different meanings. When the event has very little attention, liking the post simply means supporting this still relatively neutral “witch”. However, once the event becomes highly visible, liking the original post also helps spread and strengthen the public execution of the “witch”. In social media environments, the harm caused to victims no longer comes only from obvious violence. Through the effects created by every small interaction, I want viewers to realise that even actions that seem fair or socially acceptable may also contribute to harm.

Visually, I use historical executions of witches together with the destruction of digital images as metaphors for the harm caused by interaction. Although all the posts follow the same interaction logic, they appear in different visual forms, including burning, drowning, branding, hanging, screen distortion and so on. At the same time, most of the original posts mainly consist of images with some text, reflecting the content structure commonly seen on social media platforms.

Through this interactive graphic communication design project, I hope design can become more than a one-way delivery of information, and instead create a two-way dialogue and even a longer-lasting influence between the work and its audience. In this project, interaction does not simply represent flexibility or playfulness, but attempts to discuss a new form of decentralised power structure with viewers. By participating in the communication process, viewers gradually become aware of how they themselves are drawn into the execution of the “witch” through the combined influence of platform systems, algorithmic logic, and collective emotion.

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Starting from TV series as a reflection of society and extending into the real space of social media, I gradually explored how the labelling of women produces stereotypes and leads to malicious attacks against them. At this stage, the project focuses on social issues related to women and online violence, while also exploring the multiple roles of interaction in communication. Usually, inviting audiences to participate and interact in design is considered neutral or positive. However, in my project, interaction is intentionally aggressive, both towards the "witch" in the posts and towards viewers who may feel uncomfortable or shocked by their participation. This provocative feeling of being drawn into the system supports my discussion of how collective violence can be created through many small interactions. As mentioned earlier, critical or disruptive voices are often more noticeable than voices that simply follow everyday logic. Therefore, designing an interaction that goes against familiar habits can better encourage viewers to become aware of and reflect on their own behaviour.

Social media is not only a container for information, but also something that shapes how users judge information. As graphic designers, we play a significant role in the construction of social media platforms. Through the design of UI interfaces and interaction logic, graphic designers continuously guide the ways users engage with content, including users' behavioural paths, emotional rhythms, and the selective amplification and circulation of certain kinds of content. In this sense, graphic designers are also unconsciously in-

involved in the production of digital witch hunts. Therefore, when facing this kind of design work, graphic designers should more carefully consider how interfaces and interaction systems are designed, in order to reduce or avoid harm towards potential victims, and to intervene through visual forms to prevent digital witch hunts from happening as much as possible.

Because of this, my design no longer communicates only the content itself, but also the system that produces that content. In the dictionary project, I mainly focused on how TV dramas repeatedly classify and simplify female characters through text and visual representation. However, through audience feedback, I gradually realised that viewers were not only reading these classifications, but were also beginning to use this logic themselves to analyse new "evil woman" characters. This made me realise that when focusing on systems, graphic communication design can shape not only ways of seeing, but also users' behaviours and the relationships between users and designed objects. At this stage, my focus has shifted from signs to the systems that produce signs. I now treat the system itself – including the signs within it – as the object of design. From entering the system, to being influenced by the content inside it, and finally reconsidering their own position after interacting with it, users are no longer simply passive receivers of information. Instead, they form a two-way relationship with the design work and gradually realise that they themselves may already exist within the system being criticised.

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In conclusion, I hope to continue exploring how critical design can intervene in audiences' everyday habits and ways of thinking in the future. Rather than only telling viewers my opinions directly, I hope design can genuinely help people recognise their own position within a system and understand how they are influenced by it.

(This article was entirely written by me, with translation assistance from ChatGPT.)

#### Bibliography

1. Gilbert, S.M. and Gubar, S. (2020) 'The queen's looking glass: female creativity, male images of women, and the metaphor of literary paternity', in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 27–28. Available at: ProQuest Ebook Central (Accessed: 28 January 2026).
2. Manne, K. (2018) 'No Respect', in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 68–69
3. Han, B.-C. (2017) 'Ameliorating Misogyny', in *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 3–4

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# EVIL

/'i:vəl/

**evil**

**adj.**

**1. (of people 人) enjoying harming others; morally bad and cruel**

• 恶毒的; 邪恶的:

- **an evil man**

恶棍

- **an evil grin**

狞笑

**2. having a harmful effect on people; morally bad**

• 有害的; 道德败坏的:

- **evil deeds**

恶行

- **the evil effects of racism**

种族主义的恶劣影响

**3. connected with the Devil and with what is bad in the world**

• 恶魔的; 罪恶的:

- **evil spirits**

邪灵

**4. extremely unpleasant**

• 讨厌的; 令人作呕的; 使人不舒服的:

- **an evil smell**

难闻的气味

# WOMAN

/ˈwʊmən/

woman

noun (pl. women /ˈwɪmɪn/)

1. [C] *an adult female human*

• 成年女子; 妇女:

- *men, women and children*

男人、女人和儿童

- *I prefer to see a woman doctor.*

我希望让女医生给我看病。

2. [U] *female humans in general*

• 女子; 女人: (*informal*)

- *She's all woman!* (= *has qualities that are typical of women*)

她是典型的女人。

3. [C] (*in compounds* 构成复合词) *a woman who comes from the place mentioned or whose job or interest is connected with the thing mentioned*

• 来自…(或做…、喜欢…等)的女子:

- *an Englishwoman*

英国女人

- *a businesswoman*

女商人

--> *note at gender*

4. [C] *a female worker, especially one who works with her hands*

• (尤指做手工劳动的)女工:

- *We used to have a woman to do the cleaning.*

我们曾雇过一位女工打扫卫生。

5. [*sing.*] (*old-fashioned*) *a rude way of addressing a female person in an angry or important way*

• (对女人无礼的称呼)娘儿们:

- *Be quiet, woman!*

安静,你这个臭娘儿们!

6. [C] (*sometimes disapproving*) *a wife or sexual partner*

• 妻子; 女朋友; 女相好:

- *He's got a new woman in his life.*

他生活中又有了一位女人。

# MINI READER

/'mɪni/ /'ri:də(r)/

*mini reader*

**noun.**

- **3 key texts that have significantly influenced my Unit 3 work.**
- 三篇对我第三单元工作产生重要影响的文本

Title:	The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination
Chapter Name	The queen's looking glass: female creativity, male images of women, and the metaphor of literary paternity
Author:	Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar
Year of Publication:	2020
Publisher:	New Haven: Yale University Press
Page range:	27 – 28

“

IF WE DEFINE A WOMAN LIKE ROSSETTI'S DEAD WIFE AS INDOMITABLY EARTHLY YET SOMEHOW SUPERNATURAL, WE ARE DEFINING HER AS A WITCH OR MONSTER, A MAGICAL CREATURE OF THE LOWER WORLD WHO IS A KIND OF ANTITHETICAL MIRROR IMAGE OF AN ANGEL. AS SUCH, SHE STILL STANDS, IN SHERRY ORTNER'S WORDS, "BOTH UNDER AND OVER (BUT REALLY SIMPLY OUTSIDE OF) THE SPHERE OF CULTURE'S HEGEMONY." BUT NOW, AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF OTHERNESS, SHE INCARNATES THE DAMNING OTHERNESS OF THE FLESH RATHER THAN THE INSPIRING OTHERNESS OF THE SPIRIT, EXPRESSING WHAT — TO USE ANNE FINCH'S WORDS — MEN CONSIDER HER OWN "PRESUMPTUOUS" DESIRES RATHER THAN THE ANGELIC HUMILITY AND "DULLNESS" FOR WHICH SHE WAS DESIGNED.

6

# The Madwoman in the Attic

The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar

with an Introduction by Lisa Appignanesi



7

Title:	The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination
Chapter Name	The queen's looking glass: female creativity, male images of women, and the metaphor of literary paternity
Author:	Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar
Year of Publication:	2020
Publisher:	New Haven: Yale University Press
Page range:	27 – 28

INDEED, IF WE RETURN TO THE LITERARY DEFINITIONS OF "AUTHORITY" WITH WHICH WE BEGAN THIS DISCUSSION, WE WILL SEE THAT THE MONSTER-WOMAN, THREATENING TO REPLACE HER ANGELIC SISTER, EMBODIES INTRANSIGENT FEMALE AUTONOMY AND THUS REPRESENTS BOTH THE AUTHOR'S POWER TO ALLAY "HIS" ANXIETIES BY CALLING THEIR SOURCE BAD NAMES (WITCH, BITCH, FIEND, MONSTER) AND, SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE MYSTERIOUS POWER OF THE CHARACTER WHO REFUSES TO STAY IN HER TEXTUALLY ORDAINED "PLACE" AND THUS GENERATES A STORY THAT "GETS AWAY" FROM ITS AUTHOR.

”

# The Madwoman in the Attic

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with an Introduction by Lisa Appignanesi



**Byung-Chul Han**  
@Han, B.-C.

IN THE SWARM  
DIGITAL PROSPECTS  
BYUNG-CHUL HAN  
TRANSLATED BY ERIK BUTLER

♡ 📄 ↻

**Title** @book\_name  
In the Swarm: Digital Prospects ♡

**Chapter Name** @chapter  
Ameliorating Misogyny ♡

**Year of Publication** @year  
2017 ♡

**Publisher** @cambridge\_ma  
The MIT Press ♡

**Page Range** @pp\_  
3-4 ♡

**Kate Manne**  
@Manne, K.

Down Girl  
Kate Manne  
The Logic of Misogyny

♡ 📄 ↻

**Title** @book\_name  
Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny ♡

**Chapter Name** @chapter  
No Respect ♡

**Year of Publication** @year  
2018 ♡

**Publisher** @new\_york  
Oxford University Press ♡

**Page Range** @pp\_  
68-69 ♡



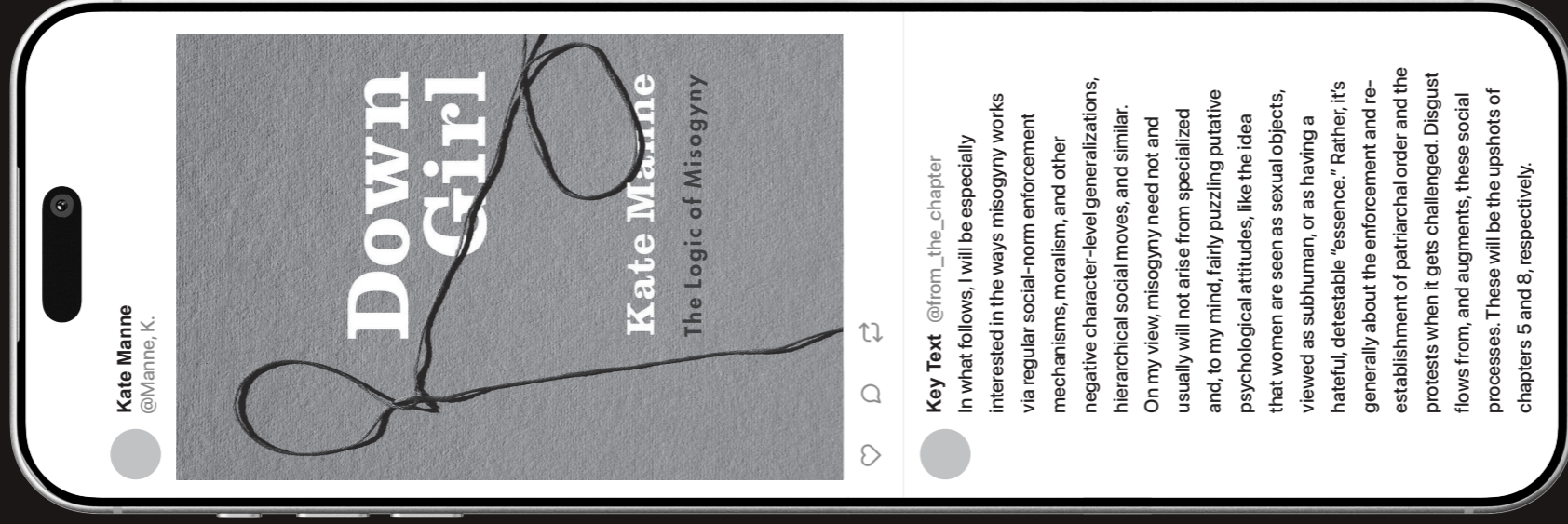
Byung-Chul Han  
@Han, B.-C.

IN THE SWARM  
DIGITAL PROSPECTS  
BYUNG-CHUL HAN  
TRANSLATED BY ERIK BUTLER



Key Text @from\_the\_chapter

Digital networking favors symmetrical communication. Today, participants in communication do not just consume information passively: they generate it actively. No univocal hierarchy separates the sender from the receiver. Everyone is sender and receiver – consumer and producer – in one. However, such symmetry exists to the detriment of power. The communication of power passes in one direction – from top to bottom. Now, communicative reflux is destroying the existing regimes of power. Shiftstorms amount to kind of reflux, with all the destructive effects that this entails.



Kate Manne  
@Manne, K.

DOWN GIRL  
Kate Manne  
The Logic of Misogyny



Key Text @from\_the\_chapter

In what follows, I will be especially interested in the ways misogyny works via regular social-norm enforcement mechanisms, moralism, and other negative character-level generalizations, hierarchical social moves, and similar. On my view, misogyny need not and usually will not arise from specialized and, to my mind, fairly puzzling putative psychological attitudes, like the idea that women are seen as sexual objects, viewed as subhuman, or as having a hateful, detestable “essence.” Rather, it’s generally about the enforcement and re-establishment of patriarchal order and the protests when it gets challenged. Disgust flows from, and augments, these social processes. These will be the upshots of chapters 5 and 8, respectively.

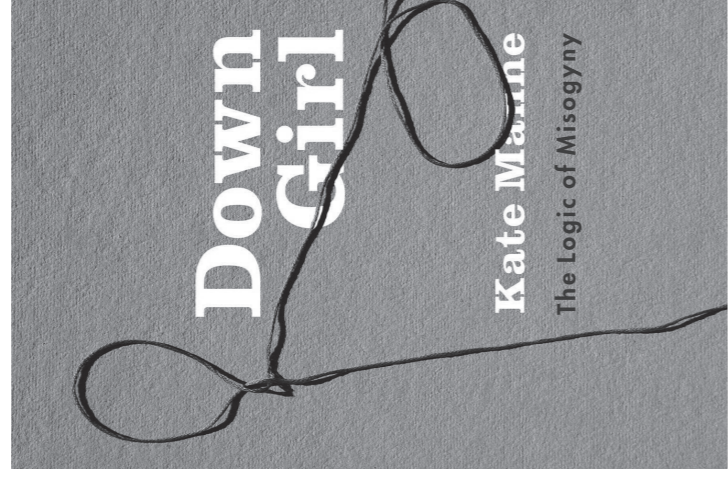
Byung-Chul Han  
@Han, B.-C.



The shitstorm is emblematic of displacements within the economy of power governing political communication. It swells in spaces where power and authority have weakened. In particular, shitstorms flourish where hierarchies have flattened out. As a medium, power ensures that communication flows speedily in one direction. The choices effected by the intendant of power are followed silently, as it were, by the subjects of power. Sound, or noise, provides an acoustic cue that power is faltering. The shitstorm is communicative noise, too. The best shield against shitstorms would be charisma – that is, an auratic expression of power. Charisma prevents shitstorms from brewing up in the first place.

The presence of power increases the likelihood that my decisions will be accepted by others. As a medium of communication, power increases the probability of yes, given the possibility of no. Yes is significantly quieter than no. No is always loud. Powerful communication reduces sound and noise – that is, it reduces communicative entropy. An authoritative pronouncement eliminates burgeoning noise in one fell swoop. It generates silence, which represents room for action.

Kate Manne  
@Manne, K.



In other words, these various “down girl” moves may not reflect how women are literally viewed much of the time, except perhaps as the result of wishful thinking and willful denial. They’re dynamic, active, and forceful maneuverings. They put women in their place when they seem to have “ideas beyond their station.” So I think of the misogyny of individual agents as less a matter of beliefs than desires – desires and other similar states of mind that ask the world be kept or brought in line with a patriarchal order, at least in the first instance. I come back to this point in chapter 3, in connection with the distinction between misogyny and sexism.

