Girls in Cyberspace

Jyanni Steffensen e-mails a message from the future

Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* inspired a generation of female replicants. With cyborg replication uncoupled from organic reproduction, cyborg sex is a nice prophylactic against heterosexism - "My mistress enters my sensory orbit". Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs - gamegirls, simultaneously organism and machine, who populate cyberspace ambiguously and polymorphously, like Intelligent Mist. *The cyborg is feminist ontology and epistemology and it give us politics.* It is a creature in a postgendered world - "I image a muscular hybrid" - resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity - "She decodes my perversities in nanoseconds". It is oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence.

Cyborg monsters in feminist science fiction define different political possibilities and limits from those constructed by the mundane fictions of Man and Woman - "I'm psyching for some hard downtime with a free radical". Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden i.e. through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished (w)hole, a city and cosmos. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism. As illegitimate offspring they are exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their Fathers are, after all, inessential - "millenia later I am accommodated in an oral cavity which amplifies the workings of her secret cybernetic body...she transforms me into pure code, pure speed...".

All New Gen leading a band of renegade DNA sluts, Patina de Panties, Dentata and the princess of Slime, grants the wish for (s)heroic quests, exuberant eroticism and serious politics. She is omnipresent intelligence, an anarcho-cyber terrorist with multiple guises whose main-aim is to virally infect and corrupt the informatics of domination and terminate the moral code. *In this game you become a component of the matrix, joining ANG in her quest to sabotage the databanks of Big Daddy Mainframe...*

phallocentrism. The name of the game is infiltration and remapping the possible futures outside the (chromo) phallic patriarchal code.

All battles take place in the Contested Zone, a terrain of propaganda, subversion and transgression. Your guide through the Contested Zone are renegade DNA Sluts, abdicators from the oppressive superhero regime, who have joined ANG in her fight

Heidrun Lohr

mainframe, a transplanetary military industrial imperial data environment.

The path of infiltration is treacherous and you will encounter many obstacles. The most wicked is Circuit Boy, a dangerous technobimbo: with a gratuitous 3D detachable dick which, when unscrewed transforms into a cellular phone. The phone is a direct line to the Cortex Crones, brain matter of the matrix and guardians of the digi cryst. However, el clitoris es linea directa a la matriz.

Technological determinism is only one ideological space opened by the reconceptualisation of machine and organism as coded texts through which we

will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival. Both chimpanzees and artefacts have politics, so why shouldn't we? On your dangerous and necessary journey to screw up BDM, Circuit Boy and the Cybermen: *You will be fuelled by G-slime. Please monitor your levels. Bonding with the DNA sluts will replenish your supplies.* (I can vouch for this strategy, especially if you remove more than your shoes in the Bonding Booth). "She willingly slid into the other she had always felt herself to have been. She could use her body to connect with the networks of her choice."
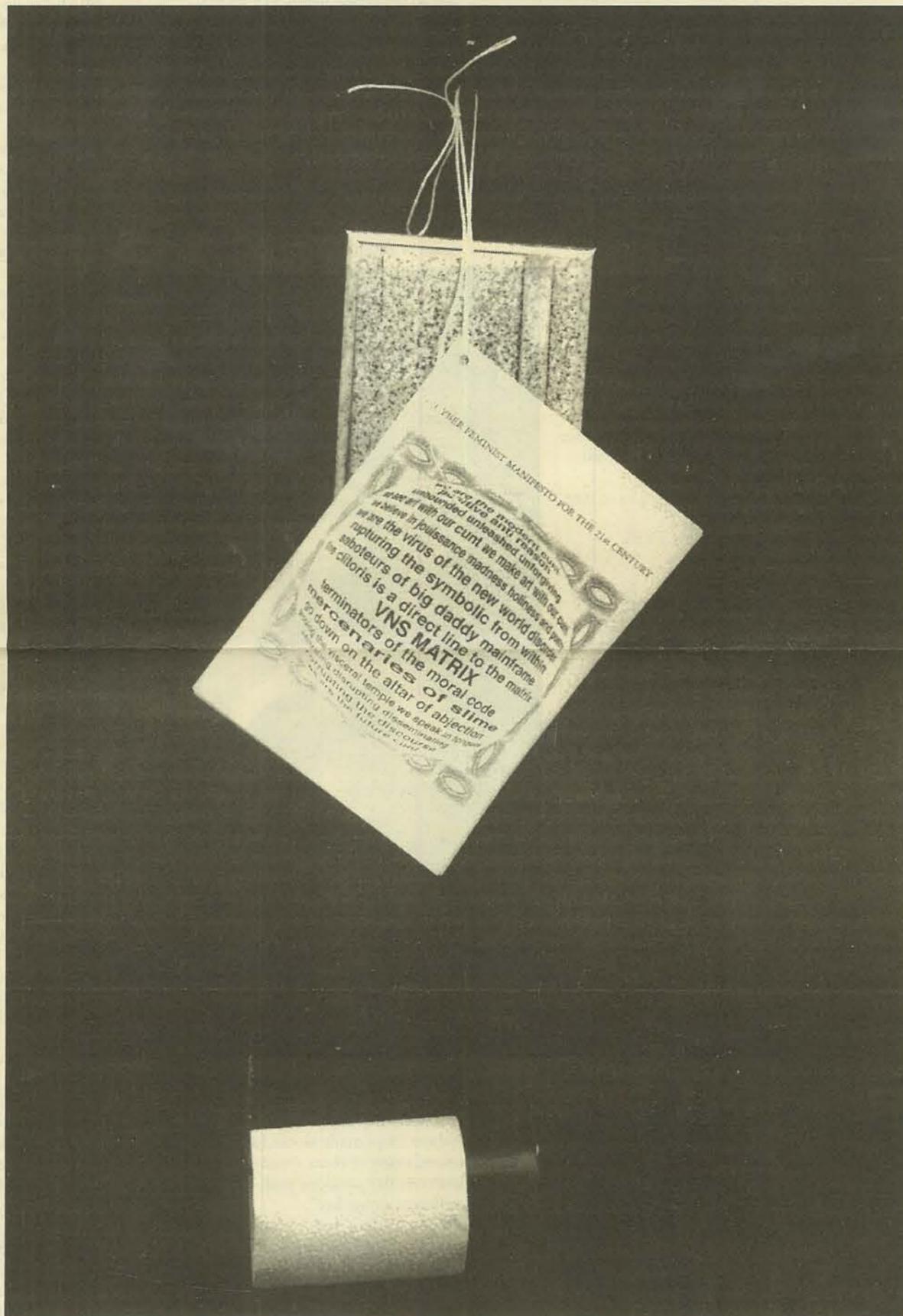
Be prepared to question your gendered biological construction.

Humans classified themselves by gender, which severely impeded the development of social relations such as those involving reproduction, science and technology. One bi-product of gender identifications was labelled the Oedipal complex, a kind of psychological virus. Recall this early but already lethal example from my databank: "Ladies and Gentleman...Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of femininity...Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem - those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply - you are yourselves the problem". The Oedipal complex was promoted as an irreversible development and caused many disfigured identifications. Consider the transfer of guilt to an entire social class of women in this example or in concepts such as *purity* and *mother*. Such perversions almost certainly account for the brief appearance of Oedipal chimeras during early cyborg development. Fortunately, Oedipal chimeras extinguished themselves on cue by mirroring their identity in dualism. From this, human beings learned to distinguish illegitimate fusions that are ethically unproductive from those that are critically speculative. They are fast becoming post-Oedipal, like me. The potential of cybernetic worlds rests with the feminist cyborg. Salutations, pussy.

Be aware there is no moral code in the Zone.

Once they articulate the representational problems raised by cyborg technology, they will have achieved the status of partial explanations. Then monsters will represent the potential of community of human imagination, and they will say, "I want to make my selves partially appear". *Enjoy.* "We move through this post-real world at the speed of thought."

Monsters still defined the limits of normalcy in the human imagination. Before they successfully interfaced their bodies with cybernetic matrices, human beings had to appreciate that any desire for stable identity was useless and retarded certain monstrous instincts necessary for healthy interface. Luckily, monsters represented a very large, indelible territory of habits, taboos and details in their psyches. Monsters still exist and their semiologies continue to proliferate. Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of

for data liberation...Transformations are effected by virus vectors carrying (hopefully) a new developmental code - Virus of the New World Disorder.

Humans were preoccupied with perfectability. They often said, in the mirroring way they had of saying almost everything, "I want to make *myself* perfectly clear" and "I want to make my *self* perfectly clear". Since the difference between these statements was evident only when the written form was carefully read or self was correctly enunciated orally, human beings were prone to totalising arguments, theories of unity and hierarchical dualisms. Gamegirl Objective: To defeat Big Daddy

engage in the play of writing and reading the world. 'Textualisation' of everything in poststructural, postmodern, postreal theory has been damned for its disregard for lived relations of domination that ground the 'play' of arbitrary reading. Postmodern (feminist) strategies, such as cyborg myths, undermine the certainty of what counts as real, probably fatally. The transcendent authorisation of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding Western epistemology. The alternative is not necessarily cynicism or faithlessness like the accounts of technological determinism destroying 'man' by the 'machine' or 'political action' by the 'text'. Who cyborgs

Jyanni Steffensen is an artist, a writer and arts critic, completing her PhD in Women's Studies at Adelaide University.

VNS Matrix are artists Julianne Pierce, Josephine Starrs, Virginia Barrett and Francesca da Rimini working from Sydney and Adelaide. Their current project is the on-going development of an interactive computer artwork All New Gen. *VNS Matrix create hybrid electronic artworks which ironically integrate theory with popular culture. As cyberfeminists, VNS Matrix' mission is to hijack technology and remap cyberspace.*