[**Por Mujeres en Red**]

"Slimy metaphors for technology: 'the clitoris is a direct line to the Matrix'"

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This paper examines some futuristic fantasy possibilities for constructions of perversely signified female desire through the work of techno-artists, VNS Matrix's ALL NEW GEN (1994). The framework within which this cyborgian text is read utilises recent theoretical developments in cyberfeminist thinking, including that of Donna Haraway, Zoë Sofoulis, and Sadie Plant.

ANG is an electronic art installation by Australian cyberfeminist collective, VNS Matrix. This hypertext includes a computer game; a video installation; an acoustic installation; a cyberfeminist manifesto for the 21st Century; and a 'shrine' to the Oracle Snatch. Spectators double as interactive participants - reading the text is dependent on how one negotiates the installation space. This paper, which focuses on VNS' assertion that: "the clitoris is a direct line to the Matrix," concentrates on the computer game and video installation.

One of the narrative outcomes of the game is (re) routed through a lesbian s/m video installation called the "Bonding Booth." The objective of the game is to join a band of (s)heroes - the renegade DNA Sluts - on a quest to defeat Big Daddy Mainframe, the imperalist, militaristic Machine and his technophilic son (a "techno-bimbo") called Circuit Boy. Appropriating the language of computer technology and the imaging of cyberpunk, VNS (re)structure female sexuality through a futuristic fantasy discourse which encodes the clitoris as a laser beam "phallus" - a signifier of power and a direct on-line connection - in this multi-dimensional cyberspatial Matrix. Circuit Boy's on-line access to the Matrix is possible only by unscrewing his penis-phallus and transforming it into a telecommunications device, a cellular phone. This

paper also examines what might be useful for feminist theorising beyond psychoanalytically inscribed cultural myths and practices through selective readings of Michel Foucault's accounts of the "technologies of sex," the cultural production of multiple and perverse sexualities, and Gilles Deleuze's "desiring machines" - a concept which envisages desire as productive, manufacturing things and forging alliances. My reading also turns implicitly back to Irigarayan psychoanalytic critical theory in that the maternal configured entity ALL NEW GEN collaborates with the multi-sexed "daughters" in disordering the Father's Law.

In this paper I will analyse a hypertextual installation, All New Gen by Australian cyberfeminist artists, VNS Matrix (1993). This contemporary narrative can be read as a critique of the masculinist techno-cultural discourses retrospectively assimilated and categorised as part of what has become know as the "cyberpunk" movement of the1980s. This term-cyberpunk - is now applied to a broad range of representational media and cultural practices (e.g. films, comic books, role-playing games, hacking, and computer crime). According to Thomas Foster, this textual and cultural movement emerged as a new formal synthesis of a number of familiar science fiction tropes. These can be summarised as: direct interfaces between human nervous systems and computer networks; the related metaphor of cyberspace as a means of translating electronically stored information into a form that could be experienced phenomenologically and manipulated by human agents jacked into the network; artificial intelligence, including digital simulations of human personalities that could be downloaded for computer storage; surgical and genetic technologies for bodily modification; the balkanization of the nation-state and its replacement by multinational corporations; and the fragmentation of the public sphere into a variety of subcultures. Foster proposes that cyberpunk gave narrative form to what could be called the "posthuman" condition. In this form of fiction, cybernetics and genetic engineering combine to denaturalize the category of the "human" along with its grounding in the physical body.1

Given that dominant western epistemologies, including psychoanalytic discourses on the subject, have posited the "human" as the self-sufficient phallic male subject, one can surmise that cyberpunk fiction represents a crisis for masculinist subjectivity. This conflict might be exacerbated by a western ontology which fixes unified masculinist subjectivity as transcendent in relation to the (abjectly feminised) materiality of the body. Cyborg constructions imply both penetration (of bodily boundaries) and reproduction (i.e.heterosexual femininity). In order to be made invulnerable, the masculinist body, paradoxically, must be penetrated - by technology, by information, by biological implants, by genetic manipulations. Bruce Sterling cites the thematics of "body invasion" as characteristic of this fiction, and cyborg imagery as the most explicit form given this thematics. The cyberpunk understanding of technology as "pervasive," "utterly intimate," as "under our skins" and "inside our minds" informs this writing about media technologies and computer interfaces just as much as its representations of mechanical prostheses, surgical alterations, and genetic engineering. 2

Cyberfeminist theorist Zoë Sofoulis, writing in "Slime in the Matrix: Post -Phallic Formations in Women's Art in New Media" also claims that mythic figures are not just science-fiction creatures, but are "part of technoscience's renatured reality."3 These figures, according to Sofoulis, increasingly exceed the representational capacity of a phallocentric system. For her, high-tech masculine maternity is a key example of a "post-phallic" formation. It is not that men aren't still in power, but that power has become more incorporating/incorporated. Reading post-phallic formations suggests to Sofoulis the possibility of adding a third term to the dichotomy of wholeness/lack. Along with the imaginary and symbolic, she theorises the addition of a mythic ratio in which the masculine corporate body appears as something like the pre-oedipal mother. This combinatory parent-figure body might be plundered for other purposes - perhaps feminist purposes. Sofoulis, in relation to All New Gen, suggests that: " one way for women to imaginatively enter the big body of technology is for the 'micro' option, for example by identifying with a virus that can penetrate and corrupt the data banks of 'Big Daddy Mainframe.'"4 All New Gen might be read as a re-writing, appropriating the language and narratives of cyberpunk, of a post-oedipal story for "posthuman" viral girls. While an art/technology text produced by this cyberfemininst collective does not compete with the dominant Hollywood corporate produced and distributed narratives of technology in either state of the art aesthetics or technical effects, it nonetheless critically challenges mainstream technophilic and techno-phallic discourses.

The "plot" is outlined for the spectator/player at various points on hypertextual pathways through the computer game, Game Girl. It reads, in part:

In this game you become a component of the matrix, joining ANG in her quest to sabotage the databanks of Big Daddy Mainframe . . . All battles take place in the Contested Zone, a terrain of propaganda, subversion and transgression. Your guides through the Contested Zone are renegade DNA Sluts, abdicators from the oppressive superhero regime, who have joined ANG in her fight for data liberation . . . The path of infiltration is treacherous and you will encounter many obstacles. The most wicked is Circuit Boy - a dangerous techno-bimbo . . . You will be fuelled by G-Slime. Please monitor your levels. Bonding with the DNA Sluts will replenish your supplies . . . Be prepared to question your gendered construction . . . Be aware there is no moral code in the Zone (VNS Matrix, Game Girl).

Alice Jardine, writing in "Of Bodies and Technologies" states that the fields of theories and practices covered by the words "the body" and "technology" are enormous.5 Firstly for Jardine there are questions of gender and women, especially to the extent that both are frequently absent from discussions of technology and the body - as if men's and women's bodies had been represented in the same way throughout western philosophies and histories, as if women (as historically constructed bodies) had had control over the technology. In Jardine's account, technology always has to do with the body and thus with gender and women in some form. She asserts that sexual difference is present when we investigate technology at the

level of male fantasy as with the virgin and the vamp, where technology is represented as an asexual virgin mother, neutral, obedient and subservient to man, or as vamp, castrating phallic woman, threatening and out of control. Gender is relevant psychohistorically: the maternal has been a crucial imaginary and symbolic order trope in the psychohistory of male technological fantasy, and also in the more recent histories of the ways in which, she says, machines and women have come alive and to identity at approximately the same time. Jardine, following Foucault, is concerned that we are being programmed for new and sometimes frightening megamachines and with their effects on the flesh.

Cyberfeminist theorists, such as Donna Haraway, Sadie Plant and Sofoulis, imagine and articulate a different relation between body and machine, and between women and technology. This theoretical trajectory is based less on an hierarchical dualism between dominant megamachines and submissive bodies and more on a transgressive strategy and politics which imagines and constructs a perverse alliance between women and machines. Taking Jardine's observation that women and machines have come alive and to identity at approximately the same time, Sofoulis' observation that women and computers are structurally equivalent (for man), that is, user-friendly, and Plant's recounting the tale of a paranoid man on television who thundered that "women and robots are taking our jobs," cyberfeminism simply points out the subversive alliance between women and all non-human intelligent activity, and the extent to which these connections have always been in place. Plant writes in "Cybernetic Hookers" that women and machines have become disloyal - they have begun to think for themselves. She defines a cyberfeminist end of the millenium as the "Empire of the Senseless" whose replicunts say: "Fuck him, he was only a man. Men, especially straight men, aren't worth anything. Anymore. In this city, women are just what they always were, prostitutes. They live together and they do whatever they want to do."6 Plant defines woman as neither man-made with the dialecticians, biologically fixed with the essentialists, nor wholly absent with the Lacanians. She is, for Plant, in the process "turned on with the machines."7

VNS' hypertext remains critical of the male-centred rationales of cyber-culture, while appropriating the languages of this culture, and re-writing the female techno-body within the spirit of Donna Haraway's influential, and self-admittedly utopic, essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s."8 Haraway writes that she is constructing an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource which might suggest some fruitful couplings. She argues for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. In Haraway's conceptualisation the cyborg body, linked postmodernly to pleasure, is located in the interplay of surfaces, intertexts and generic dialogisms. She writes that:

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gendered world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense; a final irony since the cyborg is also a powerful apocalyptic telos of the 'West's' escalating domination of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. An origin story in the 'Western' humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate [. . .] The cyborg skips the step or original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology in star wars.9

For Haraway the cyborg is committed to partiality, irony, perversity and intimacy. A cyborg world might be one in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory positionality. Haraway asserts that some differences are playful and that some are poles of world historical systems of domination. She defines "epistemology" as knowing the difference. Furthermore she reminds feminism that technological determinism is only one ideological space opened by the reconceptualization of machine and organism as coded texts through which we might engage in the play of writing and reading the world. "Textualization" of everything in post-structural, postmodernist theory has, according to Haraway, been damned by Marxists and socialist feminists for its utopian disregard for lived relations of domination that ground the "play" of arbitrary reading. However, she insists, post-modern strategies like the cyborg myth subvert myriad organic wholes - the certainty of what counts as nature. A source of insight and a promise of innocence is undermined, says Haraway, "probably fatally." The transcendant authorisation of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding "Western" epistemology. For Haraway, the alternative is not cynicism or bad faith i.e. accounts of technology determinism in which "man" is destroyed by the "machine" or "meaningful political action" by the "text." Who cyborgs will be is a radical question.10

One of the questions posed by Sofoulis in "Virtual Corporeality" is: "What place does the female body have in cyber-space?"11 She initially answers this question in the negative: " Femininity and maternity are present, but displaced onto masculine and corporate technological fertility." Sofoulis is not simply conflating the biological (ie. female) and the sociological category of gender (ie. woman) with "femininity" and "maternity." What she is specifying is a masculine excess which finds expression in feminine and techno-maternal figures, for instance the "womby red brain-womb" of the computer HAL from 2001: A Space Odyssey or the womby computer Mother in Alien. Instead of a female-identified woman, Sofoulis suggests, we find an Athenoid (daddy's girl), or an emotionally remote, machine-woman. We also regularly find a "fembot" like the false Maria in Metropolis who is commissioned as a sexy tool of a male-dominated state. Women in these masculinist scenarios are represented as signs or objects, but not usually as the possessors or subjects of knowledge. If women and computers are structurally equivalent in a masculinist imaginary, then cyberspace can be as a maternal or a feminine body - a matrix - to be penetrated, cut up and manipulated in quests to appropriate and control resources. However, on the other hand, argues Sofoulis, the prospect exists from a feminist perspective for adopting more dialogical and negotiated styles of interacting with computers and other material semiotic actors. One possible source of fascination with artificial intelligence and technobodies for feminists, women science-fiction writers and techno-artists, she suggests, is that "if these artificial second selves can be loved and accepted as powerful, resistant, speaking subjects, so too might women, long acclaimed as monstrous to conventional categories of self and other."12

Psychoanalytically, Sofoulis mobilises Melanie Klein's theories of part-objects (e.g. breast, penis); Klein's relocation of primary castration as the loss of the breast (for which the penis might then be a substitute); the "epistemophilic phase" (imaginary research into the mother's body for good objects [e.g. penises, babies, faeces]); and the "femininity complex" of boys as a framework for reading masculinist techno-art mythical productions such as "womb-brains." She asserts that whereas phallocentric explanations focus on the boy's discovery of woman's lack, equally decisive for subsequent cultural production is the mother-identified pre-oedipal boy's discovery of his own lack of maternal organs of breasts, vagina and womb.13 In Klein's narrative of the "femininity complex" of boys, maternal/female organs are targets of envy and appropriation. But, Sofoulis adds, following Klein, this maternal identification and envy is denied and compensated for by an over-valuation of the phallus and oedipal identification with the father.14 Sofoulis continues that the disavowed elements of maternal identification and organ envy are sublimated into "cultural activities in which men play out fantasies of intellectual and technological productions as forms of reproduction, where inventions are brainchildren of 'fertile' minds and men can unite with technologies to produce monsters without the aid of women."15 What Sofoulis is driving towards is the formulation of a realm of the mythic along with those of the imaginary and the symbolic. What she suggests is that within the context of the idea that maternal identification and envy is repressed from the symbolic order, it is not repressed from cultural production generally, but is rather sublimated into the mythic. This domain of the mythic includes, for Sofoulis, both technology and art. From this perspective, Sofoulis reasons, the oedipus complex provides a partial resolution of the boy's femininity complex. It eases the boy's journey into male dominated spheres of cultural production where pre-oedipal fantasies are legimated as culturally valued activities conducted in the Name-of-the-Father and signified as phallic. Sofoulis asserts that on closer scrutiny these cultural productions of art and technology bear the marks of a more polymorphous system of significations and fantasies (e.g. anal, oral, maternal).16 If, as Sofoulis points out, the imaginary "femininity complex" of the boy (i.e. his envy of, and fantasmatic appropriation of maternal/female organs) is sublimated in the cultural production of mythic "womb-brain" configurations then one might speculate as a corollary that in a feminine mythic the appropriation of missing male organs might apply. In "Slime in the Matrix" Sofoulis suggests just that: "If masculine sublimation in technoculture has been about acquiring the missing feminine organs (e.g. to make magical brain-wombs), the VNS Matrix images mythically develop the slogan 'Give a girl a spanner' and suggests that feminine sublimation might involve the appropriation of the phallus as a magical symbol."17

However, Soufoulis' re-appropriation of Kleinian part-object theory leaves one of Klein's basic assumptions critically unexamined. Klein developed the "womb envy" and male "femininity complex theory" as a counter to Freud's theory of "penis envy" and "masculinity complexes" in feminists and female homosexuals. What neither Klein of Soufoulis unpack is that, while the womb/penis dichotomy might work as a paradigm for heterosexual procreative sexuality it simply reproduces (in reverse) the ubiquitous understanding of heterosexual procreative sexuality as sexuality per se rather than as one minor form of sexual organisation (and combinations of part-organ referents) among many. The mother I would

argue also (along with breasts and wombs) has a clitoris. In other words the Kleinian/Sofoulis theory effects the same symbolic clitoredectomy as most mainstream psychoanalytic discourses. VNS on the other hand, explicitly adopt the slogan 'The clitoris is a direct line to the Matrix' as well as reappropriating the mythical phallus.

If one were to construct an order of the feminine mythic, then one need only return to Freud's discourses on female sexed subjective development. In Freud's narratives the idea of "penis envy" for girls could not be said to be repressed. It is to the contrary, a ubiquitous, if not universal, characteristic of the pre-oedipal female phallic stage. Summarising the Freudian discourse of normative female development, Naomi Segal writes:

Motherhood is the goal of female development; but only via a series of losses, relinquishing the preferred erotic organ (the clitoris), the first-desired parent and, finally, the wish for a penis, in favour of a compensatory desire for a child from father or husband.18

One can see quite clearly that a symbolic order which reproduces rigidly segregated sexual differences and normative "feminine" hetro-sexed subjectivity for women represses the clitoris, desire for the maternal body, penis envy, and female homosexuality. Although Freud attributed "penis envy" to all girls this envy of the paternal organ must be successfully repressed on the tortuous oedipal journey for girls toward a culturally appropriate adult form of female subjectivity.

However, in Freud's Three Essays up until the 1924 revisions, it can be assumed that before the integration of pre-oedipal component drives under the primacy of the genitals in the service of reproduction, auto-erotic (active pleasure seeking) oral, anal, genital (clitoral and penile), and epistemophilic activity was the same for boys and girls.19

It is also obvious from Freud's 1915 construction of the sexual theories of children that epistemophilic activities in children produce different results for boys and girls. Boys assume that everyone has a penis. Girls to the contrary can see the difference between genitals and their respective values very easily and immediately fall into penis envy and fantasise being boys themselves. Girls who refuse to give up the wish for, or fantasy of, acquiring the missing organ one day are marked by Freud as suffering from a "masculinity complex." These female subjects in Freud view tend toward feminism and homosexuality. In 1924 Freud added to the Three Essays a "phallic" stage of infantile genital organization in which its difference from adult genital organisations is marked by the primacy of the phallus. In the symbolic order of adult sexuality, for both sexes, only two genitals, the penis and the vagina, come into account (SE 19: 142). The clitoris as a primary signifier of adult female sexuality is repressed in the symbolic organisation of adult sexuality. One would expect then, within the framework of Sofoulis' reading, that in feminine sublimations in cultural productions not only would the paternal organ be fantasmatically appropriated but that the missing clitoris would also be re-appropriated as a leading metaphor for technocultural production and as a signifier of sexual desire. This trajectory is already discernible in Freud's narratives on the masculinity complexes of female homosexuals. On this path to female homosexuality, re-read by Elizabeth Grosz, there is a disavowal of women's castration, a refusal to acknowledge the symbolic meaning of sexual difference. The girl will continue to identify with the phallic mother and may see the father as another embodiment of the status of the mother. In refusing to acknowledge her difference from the phallic position, the female homosexual retains her pre-oedipal masculinity and maternal love-object. For Freud, female homosexuals refuse the normal path to femininity via acceptance of castration and the transfer of libidinal cathexis from mother to father (via penis envy). They retain her pre-oedipal phallic (active) sexuality and retains the maternal figure as a model for later object attachments. In other words she retains the clitoris as her primary sexual organ and continues to love maternal figures. In this fantasmatic scenario, both mother and daughter could be said to be signified as phallic (powerful) and the clitoris is dragged into the symbolic order as a primary signifier. Insofar as this fantasmatic scenario could be said to endow female subjects with the magical phallus as well as retain the clitoral signifier, then the female subject could be said to be signified in part-object (Kleinian) terms as a cunt-prick.20This is not to suggest that VNS' multiple scenarios can be, or should be, read in exclusively lesbian terms. It is to suggest that the re-writing and re-reading of paternal-maternal signifiers does not necessarily have to be arrived at through re-imagining (in reverse) masculine sublimation in cultural production in Kleinian terms. The groundwork for girls' fantasmatic "masculinity complexes" (phallic appropriation) and refusal to repress clitoral signification at the same time is already inherent in Freud's discourses on female homosexuality.

VNS Matrix frequently and explicitly evoke cunt metaphors: "we are the modern cunt", deploying "pussy" as a form of greeting as in "Salutations, pussy." Bodily organs and technical processes including cultural and technological production are resignified by this witty foursome - proclaiming themselves as "mercenaries of slime," as "cybercunts" - as extremely wet. References to female genitals and bodily secretions figure significantly in this context both metaphorically in the feminine sublimations in technoculture ("we make art with our cunts") and in the re-writing of female sexed subjective and libidinal investments ("I slide into her"). All New Gen can be read as a re-invention, a re-visioning and reconfiguration of (mutating) female subjectivities. The "cunt" signified scenarios are not deployed as sites for the production or reproduction of maternity or symbolically inscribed motherhood for women. They are redeployed as a site for the construction of libidinal pleasures, in sex, in horizontal rather than oedipal (vertical) relationships, in technological production, in sexy technology - a feminised and feminist erotics of technocultural production and politics. Cyberspace in VNS terms is re-appropriated from a symbolic order of masculine rationalist high-tech domination and recoded as feminine. The name of the game, in VNS appropriations of future languages, is "in-filtration and re-mapping the possible futures outside the (chromo)phallic patriarchal code." In this imaginative game of infiltration and subversion, of Big Daddy Mainframe, of masculine techno-production and its discourses, VNS appropriate paternal organs, spermatic metaphors, and metaphors of viral infection as well as those references on female genitals and bodily processes. The DNA Sluts are imaged as sort of

pumped-up barbie dolls ("muscular hybrids") with great laser beams shooting from their genital area. These may be read as magical phalli (undecideably clitoral or penile). Spermatic and penetrative metaphors are utilised in imaging the mutating female subject as a virus which infiltrates/ impregnates the techno-body of Big Daddy's imperialistically and militaristically deployed data banks.

What VNS and other feminist cultural producers give form to is a textuality based in Irigarayan metaphors of flow, of sliding into, in addition to metaphors of penetration and cutting up. Mythical magical female phalli allow for the spermatic option as well. Irigaray argues for a space to elaborate a new language for women which enjoys the fluidity of the imaginary and refuses to be subsumed in a fixed and closed symbolic realm. This new imaginary/symbolic register in feminist formulations might include Sofoulis' concept of the mythical, a terrain of representation in which ambiguous, transgressive, and impure signs regularly occur. "Slime" is mobilised by VNS Matrix as a recurring and insistent signifier. Within the context of the virtually real Game Girl adventure to infiltrate BDM one is told: "You will be fueled by G-Slime. Please monitor your levels. Bonding with the DNA Sluts will replenish your supplies." (VNS, Game Girl). In their "Cyber-feminist Manifesto" VNS describe themselves as "the future cunts" and "mercenaries of slime", appropriating Irigaray and re-writing Kristeva's theories of abjection elaborated in The Powers of Horror.

VNS Matrix's deployment of the concept "slime" can be read as the signification of sexual desire within a oral fantasmatic which nonetheless also articulates the symbolic separation/differentiation of female sexuality from the mother/child scenario. In their Manifesto, the foursome write that: "the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix, VNS Matrix, terminators of the moral code, mercenaries of slime, go down on the alter of abjection, probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues." Referencing Kristeva's theory of abjection ("we go down on the alter of abjection") VNS construct a textual scenario of oral sex ("probing the visceral temple we speak in tongues"). "Probing the visceral temple . . . in tongues" might be also be read as an evocation of either heterosexual or lesbian cunnilingus. It might also be read as "French kissing" within the signification of erotic practices for any sexuality. "Probing the visceral temple" might be read as penile/vaginal penetrative hetero-sex or digital/vaginal (hetero- or lesbian) sex; or as lesbian dildonics; or as the spermatic probing of magical orifices (mouth-cunts) by gamegirls with magical phalli. "We speak" suggests a re-articulation, a re-signification of sexed subjectivity and subject positions within the symbolic/imaginary as queer. Bodily secretions, slimy substances are what fantasmatically and metaphorically permits movement between sexualities.

On another of the conceptually Deleuzian plateaus in this game - the Alpha Bar - one might become complicit in a construction of female sexuality articulated in a seductive female voice. The voice, to which the spectator/player gains access through the individually intimate mechanism of headphones, could be said to simulate both "phone-sex" and "dildonics" a favoured cyberpunk terms for computer or virtual sex. One eavesdrops in a way on a seductive female voice persuading Circuit Boy - the "dangerous techno-bimbo" - to let himself be "buttfucked." Not only is sexuality and desire signified through polymorphous bodily organs but also through deconstructed sexual practices, sexualities and sexed subject positions. One might say here too that symbolic order differentiation between various sexualities and sexual practices is breached. The seductive and spermatic (through the ear) female voice entreats "Circuit Boy. I know you're there. I can sense you. Let's strip you of your defences. Show me your algorithms now. Circuit Boy. Come here. Come and let me buttfuck your cute little chrome-plated ass, honey. I want you. Circuit Boy. I'm waiting." What one could say with any certainty is that the goal of this proposed coupling is not "motherhood" although in terms of technocultural production for the future it might suggest some fruitful metaphors. The scenario suggests homo-erotic (both male and female) practices and well as hetero-erotic practices - i.e. girls with magical phalli or lesbian dildonics. The female phallic/seductive subject could be a girl with a dildo, with a magic phallus, or a fantasmatic homosexual boy. Circuit Boy might be "feminine" (a girl in this scenario), a girl/boy and the seducer might be read as a girl/boy too. What VNS' writing opens up are re-combinable and open possibilities of the signification of subjectivities and sexualities.

As de Lauretis insists, the elaborations of conscious and unconscious fantasies into images and narratives (the scenarios, scripts and stage settings) of the subject's desire - initially shaped by parental fantasies and subsequently refashioned with material from the external world - are cultural myths and fantasies open to historical and cultural changes. The fantasies of

origin are cultural myths that have a powerful hold in subjectivity. They are however not eternal truths, but historically and culturally structured as well as structuring each subject's history. Fantasies, like cultural myths, can be transformed along with historical and cultural change. Representations of the origins of sexuality are seen by de Lauretis as both private and public forms of fantasy that are open to reconfiguration.21 What my reading of VNS Matrix's hypertext suggests is an intervention into, and an imaginative restructuring of the fantasies and discourses which underpin masculine technocultural production in feminised and feminist terms. It can also be read as an imaginative restructuring of the fantasies and cultural myths which underpin the positioning (discursive and otherwise) of female (and male) subjectivity and sexuality. One might say that VNS have put a cunt (or a spanner) into the phallocratic techno-cultural reproductive machine.

Notes:

1 Thomas Foster, "Meat Puppets or Robopaths": Cyberpunk and the Question of Embodiment," in Genders 18(1993), pp. 11- 31. —>

2 Bruce Sterling, "Preface," in Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology, ed. Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace, 1988), p. xiii —>

3 Zoë Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix,"Jane Gallop Seminar Papers, ed. Jill Julius Matthews (Canberra: Australian National University, 1994), p. 99. —>

4 ibid. —>

5 Alice Jardine, "Of Bodies and Technologies", Discussions in Contemoporary Culture, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), pp. 151-58.—>

6 Sadie Plant, "Cybernetic Hookers," paper delivered at the Future Languages day of Artist's Week, The Adelaide Festival of the Arts, 1994. Published in the Australian Network for Art and Technology Newsletter (April/May 1994), p5. —>

7 Plant, "Cybernetic Hookers," p. 5. —>

8 Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," Australian Feminist Studies 4 (Autumn 1987): 1-41.—>

9 Haraway, "A Manifesto,"p. 3.—>

10 Haraway, p. 5.—>

11 Sophia, "Virtual Corporeality," p. 15.—>

12 Sophia, "Virtual Corporeality," p. 16.—>

13 Sofoulis, "Slime in the Matrix", p. 91.—>

14 Ibid. See also Melanie Klein [1928], in Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1975), p. 191.—>

15 Ibid.—>

16 Ibid. p. 92.—>

17 Ibid, p. 100.—>

18 Naomi Segal, "Motherhood,"p. 266.—>

19 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Freud on Women: A Reader (London: The Hogarth Press,1990), p. 121.—>

20 See Jane Gallop's reading of a passage in Lacan's Ecrits, pp. 735-6 in which Lacan poses the question: " Is it this privilege of the signifier [the phallus] that Freud is aiming at by suggesting that there is perhaps only one libido and that it is marked with the male sign?" Immediately following this rhetorical question Lacan uses at least four words beginning with the prefix "con" which Gallop points out means "cunt" in colloquial French. In other words every time Lacan asserts the privilege of the phallus the sublimated cunt emerges in his text. Gallop refers to Lacan as "a ladies' man," "a shameless floozie," and a "cunt-prick." Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction (London: MacMillan, 1982), p. 31.—>

21 Teresa de Lauretis, The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. xv-xvi.—>

P.-S.

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Dr. Jyanni Steffensen is an Australian Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Social Inquiry (Women's Studies, Labour Studies) at the University of Adelaide. She is currently researching a project titled 'Queer Machines: Narrative Constructions of the Subject in Technoculture' which examines the ways in which the body, gender and sexuality are fantasmatically understood in various artistic and scientific discourses. Virtual subjects for analysis have been selected from the creative ideas and practices in experimental digital arts (eg Suzanne Treister's Rosalind Brodsky and Francesca da Rimini's gashgirl), scientific softbots (artifically intelligent programs) and hardbots (robots), and some figures of science-fiction cinema (eg. replicants, fembots).

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http://ensemble.va.com.au/array/steff.html (http://ensemble.va.com.au/array/steff.html)

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