(RE)-FASHIONING THE TECHNO-EROTIC WOMAN:
Gender and Textuality in the Cybercultural

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Abstract: This study is to examine the techno-journals and futuristic zines such as *Boing Boing* inscribe a kind of textual prologue for cyber-culture. They are valuable in themselves because they forge a much-needed connection between late print culture and the new cyberspatial network, formatting the matrix of this social space in ways that begin to define it. *Wired* magazine, for instance, participates in a cultural dialogue concerning issues of network privacy, governmental regulation, and censorship. *Wired* also sponsors *HotWired*, its online counterpart, where participants can exchange information, chat with live guests, and buy, sell, or trade computers and software products. *Boing Boing*, while differing from *Wired* in their hyperbolic presentation, share the techno-journal's fascination with "New Edge" culture, which includes, in addition to a hacker-like obsession with computers, technological phenomena such as raves, body alteration, smart drugs, and techno-spiritual movements. Because the communications revolution has brought about a phenomenological change in our perceptions of lived experience. These publications could be said to provide a type of public service by offering interfacing media that connect the user-friendly world of print with the phenomenon of cyberspatial networking. Yet, for all or their cutting-edge potential as links to the democratizing venues of cyberspace or as media for constructing alternative cybertextual practices, many of these techno-journals remain disturbingly vested in the politics of late capitalist culture. This includes heralding the new technologies in what amounts to an almost nostalgic longing for the ultimate "metanarrative"—pronouncing technological libertarianism, and combining social consciousness with rampant consumerism.

Key words: Re-fashioning, gender, textuality, cybercultural

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengkaji jurnal-jurnal tekno dan zona futuristik seperti Boing-Boing yang menuliskan semacam prolog tekstual untuk budaya siber. Hal ini dipandang sangat penting karena mereka menjalin hubungan yang sangat dibutuhkan antara budaya cetak akhir dan jaringan cyberspatial baru, memformat matriks ruang sosial dengan cara yang mulai mendefinisikannya. Majalah Wired, misalnya, berpartisipasi dalam dialog budaya tentang masalah privasi jaringan, peraturan pemerintah, dan sensor. Wired juga mensponsori HotWired, mitra onlinenya, di mana para peserta dapat bertukar informasi, mengobrol peserta lain secara langsung, lalu membeli, menjual, atau memperdagangkan komputer dan produk perangkat lunak. Boing-Boing, meskipun berbeda dari Wired dalam presentasi hiperboliknya, berbagi ketertarikan jurnal teknologi dengan budaya "New Edge", yang mencakup, selain obsesi seperti peretas dengan komputer (hacker), fenomena teknologi seperti rave, perubahan tubuh, kecerdasan narkoba, dan gerakan tekno-spiritual. Karena revolusi komunikasi telah membawa perubahan fenomenologis dalam persepsi kita tentang pengalaman hidup. Publikasi-publikasi tersebut dapat dikatakan memberikan jenis layanan publik dengan menawarkan media interfacing yang menghubungkan dunia cetak yang user-friendly dengan fenomena jaringan cyberspatial. Namun, untuk semua atau potensi mutakhir mereka sebagai tautan ke tempat-tempat demokratisasi di dunia maya atau sebagai*

media untuk membangun praktik-praktik cybertextual alternatif, banyak dari jurnal teknologi ini tetap mengganggu politik budaya kapitalis akhir. Ini termasuk menggembar-gemborkan teknologi baru yang hampir sama dengan kerinduan nostalgia akan "metanarratif" tertinggi—mengucapkan libertarianisme teknologi, dan menggabungkan kesadaran sosial dengan konsumerisme yang merajalela.

Kata kunci: *Re-fashioning, gender, tekstualitas, budaya siber*

A. Introduction

A feminist analysis seems required, at the very least, to call into question these cultural assumptions, if not to (re)name the politics. To begin it is necessary to situate gender, on the level of representation, within the matrix of computer networking systems, for as Mary Ann Doane attests, "when technology intersects with the body in the realm of representation, the question of sexual difference is inevitably involved."[1]

Though early representations of cyberspace denied sexual difference by positioning the Net as a "gender-neutral zone", recent scholarship has focused on issues specific to gender difference(s) *within* various postmodern technologies. Allucquere Rossane Stone offers a feminist interpretation of gendered technologies by deconstructing the act of *penetrating the screen*, an act which she attributes to the heterosexual male user who empowers himself by incorporating the surfaces of surfaces of cyberspace *into* himself. Here, Stone, argues, "to become the cyborg, to put on the *female*".[2]

Claudia Springer similarly discusses the "feminization" of virtual technologies, which she distinguishes from the "masculinization" of industrial machines and technologies.[3] Specifically, Spinger relates the invisible networking of cyberspatial systems to "conventional ways of thinking about female anatomy and feminine subjectivity". Springer sees the feminization of virtual technologies as central to understanding issues of identity and embodiment within cyber-space itself.

In large part this is due to the fact that most cybernauts are white males between the ages of 15 and 45. Not surprisingly, then, the rhetoric of these print texts tends to reflect white, heterosexual male perspectives, desire(s) and idealizations. Further, at the cyberspatial sites where many of these techno-journals are inscribed textually and graphically, the narratives tend to be gendered in a binary fashion, yet often lack markers for racial, ethnic, and class difference. Difference in other words, is both exaggerated for heightened visibility and erased for (potentially) exploitative purposes. And because these publications rely strategically upon various modes of effect, defending against criticism through the displacement of their (real) subject(s).

On another level, however, it seems possible to locate more specious resonance in this discursive strategy. By drawing attention to what is still, perhaps, a widespread convention of using the term "man" to represent humanity in general, Goffman focuses the reader on the importance of semantics in relation to gender, only then to contradict his gesture by using the term in a way that negates the logic of his statement. While it might be tempting to classify this move as an ironic one (in the classical sense that the writer can't be taken seriously or doesn't mean what he says, especially given Goffman), the act itself appears more problematic. In this instance, the writer disarms potent ial critics by assuming a posture of liberal tolerance, only then to "compromise" himself by revealing his complicity in a discourse he appears to oppose. Given

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[1] Marry Ann Doane." Technophilia: Technology, representation, and the feminine". In M . Jacobus, E.F . Keller, Sc S. Shuttleworth (Eds.), *Body/Politics: Women and the discourses of science* (pp. 163-176). (New York: Routledge. 1990).

[2] Allucquere Rossane Stone. *The war between desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

[3] Claudia Springer. "Musular Circuitry: The invincible armored cyborg in cinema". *Genders,* 1993. 92, 569-584

the embedded nature of power relations within discourse, this act appears disingenuous and, therefore, serves to reinforce patriarchal values, rather than undermine them.

Postmodern theorists, from Fredric Jameson to Linda Hutcheon, have focused on irony as a particular rhetorical strategy which carries with it disturbing implications, depending upon the expression used and the understanding necessary to interpret it.[4] Linda Hutcheon writes,

> Unlike metaphor or allegory, which demand similar supplementing of meaning, irony has a evaluative edge and manage to provoke emotional responses in those who "get" it and those who don't, as well as in its targets and in what some people call its "victims."...The "scene" of irony involves relations of power based in relations of communication.[5]

Given such a description, it seems necessary to question the evasive nature of such ironic rhetoric within the context of patriarchal techno-journals, for, in Goffman's instance, magazine is the same publication that prints its subscription cards over images of topless, fethized women. Might one political outcome be that within certain contexts such rhetorical structures actually work to unsettle any grounds from which they might be criticized? If it is true, what privileges are granted this "ironic" stance? What "liberties" routinely left unchecked?

Another stylistic feature that warrants investigation is the liberatory rhetoric og the techno-journals. Couched within various masculine tropes ranging from the democratic imperative of the "founding fathers" to the *jouissance* of cyberhacking cowboys, this rhetoric has developed alongside an identity of cyberspace itself. "Technopaganism", the latest trop among such trends, raises questions about our very conception(s) of cyberspace. Described by Erik Davis in *Wired* as an "anarchic, earthy, celebratory spiritual movement that attempts to reboot the magic, myths, and gods of Europe's pre-Christian people", the new technopagans differ from their older counterparts in their claim to achieve divinity through the algorithms of computer interfacing design.[6]

Part New-Age hype, part science-fiction fantasy, these multi-media gurus promise users everything from divine inspiration to physical disembodiment and gender equality—all through the "magic" of cyberspatial networking. And while it is true that most of the 100,000 to 300,000 participants practice their "religion" self-consciousnessly, any levity regarding the matter is usually intermixed with an attitude of utter seriousness. In a subsidiary article in the same issue of *Wired* claims that this divinity can be symbolized by *female* personae. "Here", she writes, "there are bariniacs and artists and powermongers, in addition to the more traditional archetypes of sexpot and baby-maker and provider of harvests". And she continues, "in goddess-based spiritual practice, women can express their latent sense of potency without feeling they have to be crypto-male".

Technopagans are defined as "white folks drawn from bohemian and middle-class enclaves," folks who happen to "work and play in technical fields, as sysops 9systems operators0, computer programmers, and network engineers".

Thought *HotWired* prides itself on its financial and editorial independence from *Wired* magazine, it is partially owned by Wired Ventures LLC, the parent company of *Wired* magazine;[7] and despite claims that the two entities are separate, Hot*Wired* publishes an index to the articles in *Wired* and admits to being the magazine's home on the Internet. Similarly, there is little evidence to suggest that hot *Wired* is the "model of cross-cultural discourse" it announces itself to be, though it would be interesting to look for alternatives in electronic journals that do not have print counterparts and which are not supported by corporate funds. For instance, some academic institutions back electronic forums that are designed to encourage critical discussion, and they

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[4] Fredric Jameson. *The political unconscious: Narrative as socially symbolic act*. (New York : Cornell University Press, 1981.)

[5] Linda Hutchcon. *Irony's edge*. (New York : Routledge, 1994).

[6] Erik Davis. "Technopagans: May the astral plane be reborn in cyberspace. Wired". (1995): 126-133.

[7] HotWired's. *Welcome Page*. (1995) http://www.hotwired.com/

often publish a wide variety of materials from a diverse group of writers, *C-Theory* is one such example.

Yet one cannot underestimate the power of corporate control on the Internet.[8] Oftentimes, the rhetoric of the new communication technologies only serves to mystify and obscure the relations of production and labor which structure its very material enterprise. The euphoric praise nearly always associated with virtual systems can act as a kind of smokescreen, in which an emphasis on the end obscures any clear understanding of the means used to get here. This disparity between rhetoric and reality has the most devastating consequences for women, we are usually structured at the bases of operations, so that one has to ask not only to what extent women are disempowered socially through their representation in sexist media, but to what extent they are disenfranchised from a communications market that is tied to the fastest growing technologies in the world.

B. Virtually Feminine

Savvy to marketing demands, nearly all of the techno-journals feature some female staff writers, so it appears on the surface of the text that women's voices comprise a part of the discourse that is shaping the new technologies. Similarly, the occasional article that features a woman involved with the industry is usually written by a female staff person. Yet, many of these staff writers share a remarkably homogeneous voice, and it became clear after reading across several issues that it is particular kind female voice that is missing—one that would radically question or challenge the tacit assumptions governing the rhetoric of the techno-journals. In a strategic way, much like the use of ironic rhetoric without criticizing the new women who are working in the industry. Interestingly, recent studies have shown that women's conversations on mixed-gender networks often assume a *homogeneity that does not reflect the reality of the network of users*. Researchers attribute this phenomenon to the general lack of consideration or interest given women's topics and concerns.[9] Might the same be true of the minority of women who are working within the male-dominant field of communication technologies? How much force is exerted upon the female voice in the context of the cyberspatial industry?

As an example of the unsettling rhetoric that typifies this particular circumstance, consider the lengthy article that Paulina Borsook wrote on Esther Dyson in *Wired* magazine.[10] Though Dyson is one of the most powerful software consultants in the Silicon Valley, she is presented as a "Hollywood agent"—a personality. Thought out the article, Dyson is referred to by first name, Esther, a stylistic technique one would be surprised to see in an article covering a top male executive or corporate head. Similarly, bracketed off in its own lavender box, Borsook has created a section entitled "Street Myths About Esther," which includes—in addition to the categories of "Almost married Bill Ziff."

The collapse of the "social" with the "professional" marks a distinct techno-journalistic style, which nearly always demarcates the feminine subject. While in other contexts this merging of the public with the private might be read as a creative feminist transgression, in this particular context it constructs a representation of woman through difference or "otherness." As a result, it is not enough for readers to know that this partner of Mayfield, Software, Inc. is "the most important woman in computing", they must also be familiar with her sexual preference and recognize the names of the powerful men with whom she in involved.

In another article in *Wired* magazine, Jan Davidson, the owner of a $40 million educational software empire, is introduced with the title, "She just wanted to be a *good teacher*";[11] and Sueann

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[8] D. Mutch. "Business is Booming on the Net, and Business has Control". *Cristian Science Monitor,* 1995, p.8

[9] C. Kramara and H.J .Taylor. "Women and men on electronic networks: A conversation or a monologue?" In H.J. Taylor, C . Kramarac , & M . Ebben (Eds.), *Women, Informaton Technology, and Scholarship* (pp.52-61). (Urbana: University of Illinois Centre for Advanced Study, 1993)

[10] Paulina Borsook. Wired: the Goggess in every wpman's machine." (1993): 94-97, 124-126.

[11] C. Guglielmo. "Clas s leader". *Wired*, 1994. pp. 44, 46

Ambron, one of the world's experts in multimedia and interactive communication, is announced by the title, "The *Mother* of multimedia", while posing in a kitchen apron, mixing bowl in hand.[12] Such fundamentally sexist representation was the subject of feminist criticism during the 1970's but that it should garner critical attention today, nearly three decades later, suggests that network culture is not the liberal institution it promotes itself as being. Why are the new women in the industry presented in ways that are traditional and non-threatening? Why are the articles about women written mostly by female staff writers? Why are there no voices which admonish readers that these women are, in fact exceptional, and not representative of women's status in the larger culture? Finally, what requirements must a female journalist meet in order to join the ranks of *Wired*'s staff writers? What kinds or pressure are exerted on her voice?

One can easily imagine the difficulty as asserting a feminist voice of change within a cyberspatial industry noted for its libarotory and sensationalist rhetoric. Add to that its exploitation of high-profile women, featured predominantly as representatives of cyberspatial identities, and it seems unlikely that anyone is going to challenge the industry's representation of women, at least from within that industry. For example, it can be easier to find photographs of techno-cultural novelist and art critic Kathy Acker than to read about her ideas. The "visual format", a postmodern staple, seems to have set a kind of precedent in techno-futuristic publications, for silent images of women abound in place of their voices and ideas. This is readily discernible from flipping through pages of the journals randomly, both in terms of article inlays and advertisements. Seductive young women appear the excitement of the exotic "other" with the "out there" reality of VR equipment and fashion; and women's sexualized and objectified bodies merge graphically with the new technologies. Within this context it is not surprising to find that the voices allowed into the ranks are not necessarily those who oppose the conditions granting privilege and agency to the techno-journals.

Additionally, the sexism of the relations between women's bodies and the production of the new technologies is often belied by the slick presentation of aestheticized images. Though I oppose net censorship, I don't think it is unfair to suggest that this type of print exploitation leaves women vulnerable to the propagation of "virtual sex" and other sex-peddling services offered on the Internet. While it is easy to see what is objectionable about a "Virtual Sex Arcade", where you can negotiate "modifications" in the "Girl of Your Dreams", some of the arguments put forth for "virtual sex" may help to decrease violence against women, since computer-generated "whips, clamps, brooms, toasters, etc." won't leave marks. Despite the rhetoric that claims such games are "harmless," they reify a cultural way of looking at women, which is destructive and demeaning.

Consider a second virtual myth; sexism against women many be reduced through CD-ROM and virtual reality programs because men can now-log in as the female gender and "take" the woman's point of view. This speculation sounds encouraging, but it essentially ignores the fact that identities of sexuality are constructed socially in ways that cultures powerfully inscribe onto bodies. Women are socialized in a manner that can't be replicated by assuming a "different point of view". Nor can the sexual hierarchy be overturned so simplistically, for Western culture continues to privilege the male within the confines of the phallocentric tradition.

Patriarchal representations of femininity, whether through Internet communications or CD-ROM games, are notoriously sexist; and yet these text and graphic-based images are occupying the virtual space(s) where women could be defining their own relationship(s) to the new information technologies. Such lack of representation carries with it significant consequences, not the least of which knowledge or the communication of information operates as the new "capital." The exclusion of women from the technologies which produce and regulate this knowledge dispowers them in fundamental ways, especially given that virtual technologies are controlled and managed on several powerful fronts: the government (especially defense contracting), corporate America, and the media and communication channels.

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[12] R. Garner. ''The mother of multimedia''. *Wired*, 1994. pp. 5z , 54-56 .

No wonder, then, that the rhetoric of the "techno-journals" and zines sounds absurd and conservative to feminist readers—harking back to the days of the "founding fathers" and the democratic ideals of such men as Thomas Jefferson (Barlow, 1994), for the reality of this "new egalitarian society" is decidedly less utopian for women. As an example, the Silicon Valley, one of the earliest centers of the new communications industry, continues to exploit thousands of Asian and Latina women and other immigrants in entry-level manufacturing jobs, where they endure sexual harassment, poor working conditions, and threats of deportation.[13] Many of these women are exposed to toxic chemicals because there is so little adequate testing of these materials, and yet few are in any position to challenge corporate power. Recently, in an effort to put to rest rumors relating ethylene glycol to miscarriages in young female employees, IBM initiated a private study to examine the ill-effects of the chemical on its workers.[14] Contrary to the company's expectations, the chemical was found to be linked with serious health problems, including a higher-than-normal risk of miscarriage in young women. IBM agreed to delete the chemical from its operating processes before the end of 1994, but not before it had brought unwanted grief to the women whose bodies and children bought the price of the new technologies.

Thus, even while acknowledging the admirable accomplishments of female corporate managers, software developers, media artists, and scholars, it is important to recognize that women in the larger culture are still marginalized at the periphery of the communication industry, usually at its base in the lowest paying jobs. The social biases established early in education, which separate women from the disciplines of math and science, represent deeply embedded cultural prejudices against women in the technical sciences. Consequently, fewer women are qualified in the areas of research that are shaping the communications industry, and those who are often held back in positions of less pay and authority.[15]

It is no surprise, then, that on representational level many of these same injustices are present. Yet to begin to resist at the textual level is not to bypass the revolution, for our rhetoric have the power to shape the very potential of the new technologies. And here the politics *are* clear-cut: any general advancement for women within this "techno-culture" will have to begin by transforming the sexist images and the rhetoric that attends them. In place of these texts, women need to introduce their own voices, reappropriating the very "language which have" been used against them. This is, of course, easier said than done, for it means making inroads in a discipline and industry traditionally foreclosed to women. It means doing battle against powerful ideological prejudices, and, most difficult of all, reshaping one's own conception of the female.

C.   (Re)-Fashioning the Cybercultural

In the face of these challenges, I would like to propose a textual strategy by which women may appropriate a cultural space and begin to define their own relationship (s) to the new information technologies. Though I have cited the cybermatrix, including its print representatives, as the locus of conservative gender politics, I also believe it has the potential to constitute a subversive, feminist space, literally a site where women can "re-member" their own gendered self—identities. Cyberspace offers the potential for virtual communities, or "consensual loci," where women can join voices/texts to articulate (and active) issues pertinent to them. In an effort to reconstitute a feminist "subject" in the context of postmodern decenteredness, this task becomes an effort both to inscribe textual space and follow through with active (political) choice. In this instance, cyberspace becomes a narrative space, a potential authoring site in an economy where textual circulation can recover political agency. In referring to feminist science-fiction writers Joanna Russ and Pamela Zoline, Scott Bukatman describes this rhetorical act as "turn(ing)

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[13] Karen J. Hossfield. *Small, foreign, and female*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1994)
[14] Ibid.
[15] Anne Balsamo. "Feminism for the incurably informed." (Duke University Press, 1993): 125-156.

text into tactic—*a technology*—that …challenges the masculinist formations of science fiction and culture."[16]

Not surprisingly, the notion of cyberspace as a radical domain for women necessarily raises several issues for concern. As Anne Balsamo and other feminists have argued, female bodies are inscribed culturally into specific paradigms that determine the nature of identity and subjectivity.[17] For women in Western cultures, this has been a paradigm fraught with difficulties, for the physical body has been the site of fervent battles regarding female sexuality, reproduction, and identity, so much so that it becomes impossible to separate feminine subjectivity from a particular system of embedded power relations. Because of these patriarchal tensions, it is necessary to situate female subjectivity within a gendered and politicized context in the cybercultural matrix. Put differently, women stand to gain little as a quasi-disembodied subject within a network environment *without reference to the material conditions of their subjectivity.*

Yet, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, projecting a gendered self into cyberspace can be a very painful experience for women. Issues involving gender politics and representations cut to the core, and many women are simply tired of buttressing the same fronts time and time again. In short, there do not seem to be easy answers to these difficult social issues. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest a strategy for constructing an electronic space that might be more negotiable than the cyberspace we know at present. Drawing on Donna Haraway's mythos of the cyborg, I imagine an electronic space that is about "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities," called for in order to resist dominant (rational) power structures embedded within patriarchal culture. In this instance the fusion of machine and organism becomes a progressive, and transgressive, hybrid—an artificial site for ongoing political activity, which necessarily involves deconstructing "incompatible" frames of reference.[18]

In other words, situated between a gendered, material body and an ethereal, cyberspatial identity, between patriarchal culture and feminist community; between "inside" and "outside", the female participant must embrace ambiguity and conflict an order to appropriate a cultural space for feminist discourse. Because this space is electronic, such a tactic necessarily involves issues of subjectivity and embodiment. Stone acknowledges the relationship of physical bodies to the epistemic structures by which they become encoded in culture, and she is particularly careful to ascribed gender, discourse, and meaning to *the physical body itself*, as an embedded cultural phenomenon. She identifies this concept as "a body unit grounded in a self" and suggests that telling any personal narrative seems to depend upon this material identity.[19]

If we think of a cyberspatial identity as mediated through this physical "self", the *discursive feminine body* can be read/narrated in such a way as to preserve a sense of presence, politics, and history in a medium increasingly characterized by shifting fields of meaning. In this sense, an electronic community of women becomes a symbolic space, an engaged social space, that defines itself through a particular textualized culture. Overriding geographical limitations, women can gather together in ways that challenge the constraints of time and space, allowing them to explore the potent relations among agency, authority, and discursive community.[20]

Despite recent feminist regarding the totalizing effect communities can have when they attempt to reach "wholeness", the idea of a textualized, feminist cyberspace may posit an alternative concept of "community".[21] Referring back to Haraway's politics of the cyborg, it is possible to embrace the idea of community without assuming the totalizing structures that

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[16] Scott Bukatman, *et.al. Terminal identity: The virtual subject in postmodern science fiction*. (Durham , NC : Duke University Press, 1993)

[17] Ibid.

[18] Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[19] Allucquere Rossane Stone. *The war between desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Iris Mariion Young. The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In L.J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

delineate patriarchal hierarchies. In this first instance, Haraway points to the politics necessity of seeing from "both sides" (machine and animal), "because each (side) reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other viewpoint".[22] She then goes on to differentiate between "communal unity", and "affinity" and "coalition" as organizing communal factors. Haraway powerfully identifies to corpus of the cyborg as a self-conscious coalition—a political kinship forged from radical feminist initiative and action—and necessarily involving difference and contradiction. For Haraway, building effective unity does not eradicate the revolutionary subject, for the permeability of boundaries in both the body and the body politic assures transgressive leakages as well as radical fusions. New couplings must, of necessity, bring about new coalitions.

The question then becomes how to ally the new technologies with progressive political environments. And here Haraway points to the empowerment of feminist textuality, of having access to the signifying practices that "mark the world".[23] Haraway writes, "Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recording communication and intelligence to subvert command and control". What is particularly interesting about Haraway's conception is that such political empowerment is *constituted from textuality*—in other words from women's collected voices, stories, and myths. And it is here that I believe a community emerges within the cyberspacial matrix: women join the circuitry of the electronic network, responding to one another's dialogue through digitized conversation.

Steven Jones likewise, defines the nature of electronic exchange as involving aspects of community, if only because of the *ritual sharing of information.*[24] His observation is interesting, for it underscores the role that technology plays in establishing new relations among users. Judy Smith and Ellen Balka similarity report that using "talk terminology" may affect the way we conceptualize words on the network.[25] Using the term "chatting" to describe the mode of writing that takes place on the electronic network, Smith and Balka speculate of this type of informally (where writer doesn't reread or rewrite her message to correct spelling or grammar errors) may invite more people of differing educational levels and interests to enter into electronic discussions. Research like this demonstrates the powerful sociological impact that electronic communications can bring to bear on human behavior and social relations.

At the same time, the internet is powerfully conservative venue, mirroring gender-based ideologies that circulate in the larger culture. Challenging women to identity the issues of their gendered realities mean confronting behavior that has developed in response to patriarchal pressures. This situation creates a double bind for women that potentially marks cyberspace as a difficult, even uncomfortable, social space. The online service constitutes a virtual community comprised of artists, writers, and filmmakers. Stacy Horn has attracted a diverse clientele, including 40 percent female membership. She contributes this high percentage of women to her aggressive recruiting practices and confrontational politics. Yet, even Horn was surprised to find that once the women were online, they seldom interacted, engaging in the kind of electronic behavior known as "lurking" (listening in to conversations, but not speaking). Horn addressed the issue by initiating a discussion of the possible reasons for this behavior, and she found, as Stone had earlier speculated, that the women were *projecting embodied identities into cyberspace*. In other words, as the female users wrote themselves into this virtual community, they did so in an imagined social space very much defined by their experiences in a patriarchal culture. As a result, their discourse patterns were "gendered", meaning, in this case, that the female users were less participatory than their male counterparts, and other silent.

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[22] Haraway. *Simians, cyborgs, and women*, 1991.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Allucquere Rossane Stone. *The war between desire and technology at the close of the mechanical age*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

[25] Smith, Judy and Ellen Balka. "Chatting on a feminist network." In C. Kramarae (ed.), Technology and Women's Voices, 82-97. (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1988).

This is not surprising given the studies which demonstrate that women participate more readily on all-women networks.[26] Eventually, Horn did succeed in recruiting as many female forum leaders as male, suggesting, perhaps, that confrontational politics may be one way to afford real political change within virtual communities. Had Horn remained uninterested in the demographics of her online service, it seems certain that business would have prevailed as usual.

Similarly, there are women who are shaping communication technologies to meet their own political ends. One of the most successful projects, which specifically toward women and lower—income people.[27] All of the state's women programs are online, ang the agency offers thirteen displaced home-maker programs, including one which teaches women with small businesses how to do cash flow accounts electronically. With state and federal support, the agency is also able to provide loans to women to start their own businesses and enter into a profitable market economy, design to present alternative views on women's relationships to history and technology, this interfacing design melds feminist issues with high-tech capabilities.

Given the need for continued development of feminist communities amidst dwindling state and federal resources, cyborg politics demand that we reimagine social and political possibilities for communicating through electronic media—that we *utilize* and *mobilize* the powerful venue that cyberspace offers. This means existing structures, such as the cyberspatial print industry represented by Wired, and boing boing, its electronics counterparts; and educational, governmental, and corporate institutions. It also means continuing to cultivate the margins of electronic culture, where greater experimentation is taking place, for in this post-industrial present we are left with radical information technologies, possibilities for new social matrices, and issues of textuality and gebder to explore further. Though we stand little to gain by idealizing these new technologies, we can embrace their difference with the hope that they might introduce new ways to textualize both our (social) space and our bodies, allowing us to reimagine a feminist politics of the future.

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