Cyberfeminism

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1. Introduction*

In her now classic "A Manifesto for Cyborgs", Donna Haraway ([1985]1990)
brings together a number of disparate philosophical responses to the increasing
sophistication of technology, and identifies a new feminism. Arguing that the
blurring of the boundaries between human and machine will eventually make the
categories of female and male obsolete, she contemplates the "utopian dream for
the hope of a monstrous world without gender" (610). Her futuristic vision,
inspired in part by the gender-free utopias of feminist science fiction,[1] is an
extension of the postmodern interest in challenging essentialist and dualistic
understandings of gender. With her concluding pronunciation "I would rather be
a cyborg than a goddess", Haraway urges feminists to give up their gender-
emphasizing icons in favor of gender-neutralizing ones. "This is a dream not of
a common language," she explains, "but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia"
(610).

Haraway's dream of heteroglossia is born from the theoretical tenets of
postmodernism, which Jacquelyn Zita (1992) claims "make[s] possible the
transmutation of male to female as a matter of shifting contextual locations that
'reinvent' the body" (110). The most recent realization of this emphasis in
American academia has been the development of queer theory (e.g., Butler
1993; Sedgewick 1993). Although the field is rapidly changing and expanding,
proponents generally argue that since it is an unyielding, dichotomous notion of
gender that has rendered people of alternative sexual persuasions invisible, a
cultural conceptualization of variability is necessary before visibility can occur. It
is no coincidence that many queer organizations and social groups have
embraced the computer as a cultural icon, theorizing it as a utopian medium
which neutralizes physical distinctions of gender, race, and sexual orientation.[2]
Less often addressed, however, are the ways in which these utopian theories
correspond to the reality of gender in cyberspace.

In this essay, I attempt to reconcile two conflicting feminist responses to computer-mediated communication in the early 1990's. Since both responses reflect the intersection of computer technology with subversive feminist counterculture, I refer to them collectively as *cyberfeminism*.[3] The first, influenced by postmodern discussions on gender fluidity by feminist and queer theorists, imagines the computer as a liberating utopia that does not recognize the social dichotomies of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Because of its similarity to what is often referred to as "liberal feminism" in the non-virtual world, I identify this perspective as *liberal cyberfeminism*. The opposing perspective, grounded in a reality of male-initiated harassment on the Internet, has resulted in the separatist development of numerous lists and bulletin board systems which self-identify as "women only". Although this on-line *radical cyberfeminism* has developed alongside the utopian predictions of liberal cyberfeminism, their mutual incompatibility reflects the often irreconcilable differences between theory-based and practice-based feminisms in the non-virtual world. It is doubtful that Haraway envisioned either of these feminist developments when she wrote her cyborg manifesto, yet both serve as logical extensions of their real-world counterparts.

My essay focuses on the discursive styles that characterize each of these feminisms, revealing the complexities of what might be referred to as bodyless pragmatics. While it may seem that body-free interaction would foster the kind of gender neutrality proposed by liberal cyberfeminists, in fact it brings about radical creations of gender which exaggerate cultural conceptions of femininity and masculinity. In support of this claim, I compare the theoretical position taken by the women editors of the cyberporn magazine *Future Sex* with the actual computer-mediated interaction of women participants on a separatist discussion list called SAPPHO. Participants on SAPPHO, which is sometimes frequented by as many as 400 subscribers, collaboratively construct a female-gendered discourse in opposition to the textual and sexual harassment found elsewhere on the net. Gender is not erased in the virtual world as the editors of *Future Sex* would claim, but intensified discursively. The gendered exchange that results is often so unsettling for its female participants that increasing numbers of self-proclaimed cyborgs are unsubscribing from the heteroglossia in search of a common *cyborgess* language.

2. Liberal cyberfeminism

The magazine *Future Sex* is one of the more extreme contributions to liberal cyberfeminism. It embraces the tenets of Haraway's cyborg feminism in order to advance *sexual liberation theory*—a political ideology which developed out of the feminist debates on sexuality in the 1980's, and which continues to influence today's feminist politics. Proponents of the theory argue that women's sexual

liberation is necessary before gender equality can occur, and oppose the claim of radical feminists that pornography is inherently harmful to women and should be made illegal.[4] The unyielding antagonism between these two views is said to have divided American feminism into the misleadingly labeled camps of "anti-pornography" radicalism and "pro-sex" liberalism, a split represented in the 1990's by anti-porn activist Catherine MacKinnon on one side and pro-porn activist Suzy Bright on the other.[5]

A number of women self-identifying with the latter branch of feminists—feminists who place primary importance on freedom of expression—have now embraced cyberculture as a new frontier of sexual activism and rebellion. Their most recent efforts have culminated in a successful infiltration of what is often referred to as the *cybermag scene*, a male-dominated pro-computer subculture which is characterized by slick, high-tech magazines like *Mondo 2000* and *Wired*. Framing their enterprise within a discourse of sexual liberation, the feminist-identified editor Lisa Palac and her supporters produced a magazine that the editors of these male-oriented magazines would have never dared to publish: its name *Future Sex*, its subject cyberporn, its goal virtual utopia.

The creators of *Future Sex*, together with other women uncomfortable with the similarities between Jesse Helms's and Catherine MacKinnon's anti-pornography activism, are developing a feminist discourse strikingly different from those that have preceded it—a discourse that, by denying the social existence of gender and sexual hierarchies, assumes a futuristic equality. In the magazine's 1992 premiere issue, Palac welcomes her readers to "the sexual evolution" and invites them to "explore the guilt-free zone of erotic infinity". The essay, entitled "Crystal Ball Persuasion", frames a photograph of the red-lipped editor holding the earth in her hand as a crystal ball. It is only electronic erotica, Palac suggests, that will "promote the evolution of sexual intelligence", allowing women and men to come together in a virtual world where gender identities and sexual persuasions are crystal ball fantasies instead of physically grounded categories. The magazine instigates this evolution through visual and verbal challenges to constructions of race, gender, and sexual orientation, among them transsexuality, interracial coupling, cross-dressing, role-playing, bisexuality, butch/femme, and sado-masochism.

The notion that futuristic technology will free its users from the limitations of the physical world, thereby allowing for a more democratic society, has been bandied about for decades, long before Haraway wrote her cyborg manifesto. When the growing sophistication of computer technology in the early 1980's added new fuel to the claim, fiction writers began to theorize on the instability of the physical body, and, subsequently, on the inappropriateness of physical categorizations. Central to the science fiction of those associated with the 1980's *cyberpunk movement*,[6] for instance, is what Bruce Sterling (1986:xiii) calls "the theme of body invasion". Paralleling Haraway, cyberpunk writers imagine an electronically-mediated world where the mental is no longer limited by the

physical. When Sterling argues that "the technological revolution reshaping our society is based not in hierarchy but in decentralization, not in rigidity but in fluidity" (1986:xii), he imagines a utopia that will free its inhabitants from the rigid nature of physically based hierarchies.[7]

The extension of this utopian notion to sexuality is a more recent development, influenced by the growing affinity between liberal feminism, postmodernism, and queer theory. In Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's collection *The Last Sex: Feminism and Outlaw Bodies*, theorists from all three groups offer diverse perspectives on what the Krokers call the "virtual sex"—a third sex (non)identity which personifies the intersection of virtual reality with postmodern thought. Asserting that electronic communication will encourage the evolution of "intersex states", the editors argue that body-free interaction will liberate participants from the binary oppositions of female/male and homosexual/heterosexual:

> Neither male (physically) nor female (genetically) nor their simple reversal, but something else: a virtual sex floating in an elliptical orbit around the planet of gender that it has left behind, finally free of the powerful gravitational pull of the binary signs of the male/female antinomies in the crowded earth scene of gender. A virtual sex that is not limited to gays and lesbians but which is open to members of the heterosexual club as well and one that privileges sexual reconciliation rather than sexual victimization. (Kroker & Kroker 1993:18)

For the Krokers, as well as for the editors of *Future Sex*, the absence of the physical invites infinite sexual possibilities—possibilites which will "reconcile" the two sexes "rather than victimize". Like the cyberpunks before him, Arthur Kroker (1993) inundates his experimental text *Spasm: Virtual Reality, Android Music, Electric Flesh* with discursive images of physical disintegration and confusion;[8] chapter headings include "Organs Without Bodies", "Floating Tongue", "Severed Heads", "Transistorized Face", "Nose Spasms", "The Transsexual Voice", "Liquid Self", "Displaced Ear", and even "The Eye Has a Penis". With these severed and disjointed images, Kroker suggests that virtual interactants will be able to achieve conversational utopia only when they are freed from the physical aspects of speech production—e.g., the tongue, face, nose, voice, and ear.

The idea that computer-mediated communication is bringing about a new "in-between" gender awareness has also influenced the fiction of Kate Bornstein, a transsexual playwright and performer from San Francisco who considers herself to have a "fluid identity" rather than a male or female one (see Bornstein 1994). Her most recent play *Virtual Love*, which opened in New York City and San Francisco in 1994, focuses on a futuristic virtual reality game. By creating seven differently oriented selves through the aid of the computer, the main character, a male-to-female transsexual lesbian, attempts to come to terms with the fact that her female lover has suddenly decided to become a female-to-male transsexual heterosexual. In a similar vein, the third issue of *Future Sex* carries a feature story on a post-operative transsexual named Max, entitled "From Dyke to Dude: How Does a Gay Girl Transform Herself into a Straight Boy?" Max, who used to be a feminist lesbian but now identifies as a straight man, is nothing short of a liberal cyberfeminist success story. With the help of modern technology, Max was able to evolve beyond the limiting categorization "lesbian feminist" and appropriate a more powerful and all-encompassing position in society. "I lost the queer subculture," Max exclaims at the end of the interview. "But, god, I've got the whole world!"

The logical extension of this sort of optimism is a de-emphasis on gender oppression, a stance recently articulated by Trudy Barber, a London-based virtual reality artist and active member of the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce. Barber criticized the British government for its failure to support virtual sex technology by arguing that the feminist emphasis on oppression is not only old-fashioned, but irrelevant. "I like sex. I like men. I like women," she proclaimed. "I don't care about what language you use. I don't think I'm being oppressed by any male. I think that people should try and explore their sexualities, and virtual reality is one of those tools which they can use."[9] A similar reasoning is perhaps behind the growing popularity of the identification "humanist, not feminist; queer, not lesbian", an e-mail signature sported by a number of female Internet surfers. By negating the two categorizations which entail gender ("not" feminist, "not" lesbian) and replacing them with non-gendered terms denoting unity and sexual plurality ("humanist", "queer"), e-mail correspondents assert that gender is irrelevant to self-identification. Liberal cyberfeminism, in short, is identified by an insistence on equality rather than oppression, plurality rather than binarism, fluidity rather than categorization, unity rather than separatism—a vision inspired by the increasing sophistication of technology and the advent of body-free communication.

2.1. Liberal cyberfeminism on the Internet

Liberal cyberfeminism has not been the exclusive property of cybertheorists and feminist pro-porn activists; its tenets have also been embraced by a number of participants in actual computer-mediated interaction. The on-line practice of this theoretical position is evidenced by the growing number of women who dabble in *cross-expressing*, a term I used in an earlier article on the conversational styles of telephone sex workers (Hall 1995) to refer to the practice of "verbal" gender-shifting. Cross-expressers exploit the potentially anonymous nature of the technology in order to perform other personas. Since the success of their encounters is dependent on their ability to "pass" textually, they must learn to appropriate discursive fields which are normally foreign to them.

When I posted a query to several women's lists with the subject heading "cross-expressing", I received over thirty enthusiastic responses from self-

identified gender-shifters. One woman, whose posting is reproduced below, explains that she frequently shifts personas electronically in order to test her own limits—appropriating categories which, for obvious physical reasons, are inaccessible to her in the non-virtual world:[10]

(1)   Heh heh heh heh heh!!!...

      Yeah, I've done cross-expressing, a couple of different ways. I used to play on a couple of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeon), which is basically interactive, on-line dungeons&dragons (more or less). I've played a couple of different male characters, a bi woman (i'm lesbian), and also an asexual seal named Selkie (well, she wasn't exactly asexual, but she flirted with women and loved to be stroked.) Yes, sex was included some of the time -- I was in an LDR [=long distance relationship] with a woman in San Diego, and she had a female character that took my male character as a consort, so we could get away with getting "caught" having sex on-line without her blowing her cover of being straight. ::grin::

      Well, near as I can tell, there are plenty of identities I would shift to. In my D&D days, I played a prudish virgin (str8 [=straight]), a bi woman, men of different characters (one was truly evil -- boy, THAT was a stretch for me!). I had one femme character on-line, but she was a great deal like I would be if I were in that universe (another medieval MUD), so it wasn't nearly as much role-play as just being myself.

      I'm not entirely certain that I *have* any limitations, truth be told. I'm still exploring my boundaries...I think I want to look into my submissive side next...I tend to get a bit dominating in bed...

The anonymous nature of the medium, as this MUD-user goes on to state, has enabled her to change not only her gender (female to male), but also her sexual persuasion (lesbian to bisexual to asexual), her in-group orientation (butch to femme), her sexual behavior (dominant to submissive), and even, albeit fantastically, her animacy (woman to seal).

Intrigued by these gender-shifting possibilities, a number of feminist artists have turned to computer-mediated communication as a new form of artistic expression.[11] Helen Cadwallader, a freelance curator in England, is currently producing an exhibition of computer-inspired aesthetics entitled "Simulated Identities". One of the pieces in the exhibition, jointly produced by artists Pat Naldi and Wendy Kerkup, is a collection of on-line conversations created through the Citizen Band simulation option of Compuserve. Under the pseudonym *SIS*, the artists engage in experimental conversation with participants on Compuserve's *alternative lifestyles* and *alternative genders* chat lines, recording their dialogue in an exploration of gender identity and sexuality. According to Cadwallader, it is the ephemeral nature of computer-mediated communication—or more specifically, "the absence of the material body"—which allows these participants to construct what she calls a "multiply locatable"

identity. No longer restricted by physical limitations or categorizations, users can cross-express into other identities successfully, or in Cadwallader's words, they can "enter into and explore a constantly shifting, almost fictional world of assumed identities".[12]

These assumed identities, for many cross-expressers, include those of sexual orientation as well as gender. A number of women who responded to my query, both heterosexual and lesbian, reported that they had cross-expressed as gay men, appropriating what they referred to as a "gay conversational style". One of them offered the following electronic example of conventions she might use in her "gay mail" persona:

(2)   I guess with e-mail we are what we write and I could *easily* impersonate a gay mail. "Hi hon. How are you today? I saw so-and-so and sister did he look *bad*. A *serious* fasion no-no. Throw *that* boy back to the straights..." etc.

The subject matter of her impersonation, with its emphasis on "so-and-so's" fashion sense, is a recognizable stereotype of gay male conversation; moreover, her insulting remarks recall an in-group verbal behavior identified as *dishing* by members of the gay community.[13] Not only does the author employ a number of address terms and vocabulary items associated with gay conversation (e.g. "hon", "sister", "fashion no-no", "the straights"), she decorates the adjectives, adverbs, and demonstratives that modify them with double astericks for added emphasis (e.g., *easily*, *bad*, *serious*, *that*)—perhaps to suggest the greater pitch variation and flamboyancy stereotypically associated with the speech of gay men.[14] A second cross-expresser identified these exaggerations as flaming "in the original sense of the word", drawing a contrast between the emasculated meaning of "flaming" in the non-virtual world (where it is used to refer to extremely effeminate men) and the hypermasculine meaning of "flaming" in cyberspace. "In the real world," she explained, "a 'flamer' is a man who talks like a girl; in the electronic world a 'flamer' is a man who talks like an asshole."

2.2. Cybermasculinity meets liberal cyberfeminism

The physical anonymity that fosters attempts at cross-expressing, however, also encourages a certain on-line hostility. Researchers have studied the expression of "affect" in computer-mediated communication for some time, with Kiesler, Zubrow, Moses, and Geller (1985) claiming nearly a decade ago that electronic mail has a more emotional structure than other types of written discourse. Indeed, Niko Besnier (1990) finds the stylistics of on-line affect so compelling that he includes a discussion of it in his review of research on "language and affect" for the *Annual Review of American Anthropology*. Pointing to the development of electronic discourse as "an interesting case of emergent tensions among affect displays, their folk accounts, and normative control" (433),

Besnier explains that while folk models account for the frequent occurrence of emoticons and flames on public electronic forums as "a natural adaptation to the technological characteristics of the medium", normative discourse "targets them as disruptive of academic social order" (433).

What Besnier does not say, however, is that the employment of these verbal features, whether discussed as adaptive or disruptive, differs markedly across gender lines. Recent linguistic studies of computer-mediated discourse have illustrated, both statistically and pragmatically, that women and men have different ways of displaying affect electronically. Male interactants have not only been shown to dominate mixed-sex electronic conversation, they have also been identified as frequent instigators of on-line sexual harassment—observations difficult to reconcile with the liberal cyberfeminist notion of a gender-neutral utopia. What might be viewed as "disruptive of the academic social order" by male participants is being perceived by an increasing number of female participants as gender-based verbal abuse.

2.2.1. Conversational dominance

The majority of linguistic studies on gender differentiation in computer-mediated communication have paralleled the results of early feminist studies on face-to-face conversation in mixed-sex groups. Linguists Susan Herring (1993a; Herring, Johnson and DiBenedetto 1992, 1995) and Laurel Sutton (1994) both found that male participants, even when in cyberspaces overtly formed for the discussion of feminism, silence their female conversational partners by employing electronic versions of the same techniques they have been shown to employ in everyday face-to-face interaction (Lakoff 1975; Edelsky 1981; Fishman 1983)—ignoring the topics which women introduce, producing conversational floors based on hierarchy instead of collaboration, dismissing women's responses as irrelevant, and contributing a much higher percentage of the total number of postings and text produced. Similar gender differences have been noted by CMC researchers in a variety of disciplines, among them Selfe and Meyer (1991), Taylor, Kramarae, and Ebben (1993), Turkle and Papert (1990), and We (1994).

2.2.2. Textual harassment

While the linguistic evidence for on-line conversational dominance is impressive, still more research is needed on the qualitative differences between women's and men's electronic contributions—differences realized in choice of imagery, lexical items, and metaphor. The linguistic observation that men "talk more" in mixed-sex electronic discussions, or that men regularly ignore women's topics in favor of their own discursive threads, does not account for the misogynist nature of many of the flames posted to public lists, nor does it

explain ongoing reports of aggressive sexual harassment over private e-mail and bulletin board systems. The masculine discursive style witnessed on the Internet is a kind of verbal violence that only rarely occurs between strangers in the non-virtual world, where its employment in casual interaction would be perceived as the exception and not the rule.

Indeed, the incident of sexual harassment on Multi-User Dimensions (or MUDs) has occurred often enough to have acquired the electronic designation "MUD-rape". Julian Dibbell (1993) exposes an extreme case of such harassment in his discussion of a disturbing interaction on the LambdaMOO, where a character sporting the pseudonym "Mr. Bungle" exploited the tools of the medium in order to slander women interactants and force them to perform sexual acts.[15] Using the "voodoodoll", a program which allows users to attribute actions to other characters without their permission, Mr. Bungle created a series of violent textual images: "As if against her will, Starsinger jabs a steak knife up her ass, causing immense joy. You hear Mr. Bungle laughing evilly in the distance"; "KISS ME UNDER THIS, BITCH" [a belt buckle inscription]. Electronic interactants like Mr. Bungle have become so common, both on multi-user dimensions and on personal e-mail, that the *National Law Journal* (Weidlich 1994) and the *New York Times* (Lewis 1994) recently came out with articles on electronic "stalking", reporting in particular on the legal aspects of an e-mail stalking case, via America Online, in Michigan. Similar instances of sexual harassment have been reported by participants on a variety of interactive databases, among them Prodigy, Compuserve, and the Well.[16] The computer lab at the University of Illinois' College of Engineering went so far as to issue a sexual harassment policy for its computer users, after the university's Center for Advanced Study found that a significant number of women had been victimized by sexist jokes, obscene limericks, and unsolicited pornographic pictures.[17]

2.2.3. Heterosexism

An important sub-genre of cybermasculinity is what might be called *heterosexism*, a prejudice realized on the Internet through the proliferation of "anti-homosexual" discursive threads. Frequently instigated by male participants in mixed-sex interaction as a means of sexualizing the discourse, homophobic hate-mail on public forums has escalated dramatically during the past two years. One of its realizations, promoted by anti-homosexual agitator Ben Phelps, is an ongoing invasion of lesbian and gay discussion lists. For example, shortly after the lesbian and gay celebration of the 25th anniversary of Stonewall in New York City, a string of hate messages such as the following were sent to the QSTUDY-L ('queer studies') list:

(3) So, did you filthy sodomites see us picketing at your parade? Just in
      case anyone is wondering, I was the one holding the "SHAME" part of
      the "FAG SHAME" signs. The other side of mine said "2 GAY
      RIGHTS: AIDS AND HELL." A few other of my personal favorite
      signs said "GOD HATES FAGS", "FAG GOD = RECTUM," and
      "FEAR GOD NOT FAGS." It is interesting how you lying, filthy, vile
      murderers pretend to ignore us, but we always seem to become the center
      of your fag parades. I like all the attention we get.

GOD HATES FAGS.

Other examples of homophobic commentary are readily available in the personal
profiles of *America Online*, where over fifty subscribers during the spring of
1993 mentioned "gay bashing" as a favorite pasttime. Hiding behind
pseudonyms like "Hetro", "Pyro Slug", "SpeedKiller", and "NeoNazi1", *AOL*
subscribers identified themselves as having "hobbies" such as: "Fag bashing,
being an asshole"; "Burning things, killing innocent animals, and gay bashing";
"It's not how many fags you bash, its how hard you bash them"; "Gay bashing,
offending feminists, defacing environmentalists"; "Gassing jews, blacks,
spicks, fags, etc."; "Killing, torturing fags, murdering and raping women".
These examples bind together homophobia, misogyny, and racism—a
connection which merits further research.

2.2.4. Physical hierarchies and the "talking penis"

In the shelter of physical anonymity, a significant number of male users have
adopted this new discursive medium as an electronic "carnival" in the Bakhtinian
sense (Bakhtin 1968), viewing it as a kind of institutionalized outlet for violence
and vulgarity. Masked behind a medium that is exclusively textual, interactants
find themselves freed not only from the politeness expectations of face-to-face
interaction, but also from the more identifying physical characteristics of
vocality. According to cybertheorist Mark Dery (1994), this separation of word
from body serves to promote the acceleration of electronic hostility: "The
wraithlike nature of electronic communication—the flesh become word, the
sender reincarnated as letters floating on a terminal screen—accelerates the
escalation of hostilities when tempers flare; disembodied, sometimes
pseudonymous combatants tend to feel that they can hurl insults with impunity"
(559). In keeping with Dery's claim, male conversants in public forums may fail
to take responsibility for the words they create, drawing a distinction between
computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication. Mr.
Bungle's demand for impunity with respect to his MUD-rape because it was not
"real life existence" (Dibbell 1993) is typical in this regard. "I engaged in a bit of
a psychological device that is called thought-polarization," Mr. Bungle explained
to his MOO community; "The fact that this is not RL [=real life] simply added to

heighten the effect of the device. It was purely a sequence of events with no
consequence on my RL existence."

Dery's interest in the disembodied nature of on-line discourse is shared by
a number of male cyberphilosophers, who frequently wax poetic on the physical
disintegration of self. In their discussions, the electronic loss of the physical self
ultimately leads to a violent and sexualized verbal compensation. Kroker (1993),
when theorizing "the tongue in virtual reality", identifies this compensation
overtly when he calls it "the talking penis":

> What is the fate of the tongue in virtual reality? No longer the old
> sentient tongue trapped in the mouth's cavity, but now an improved
> digital tongue. A nomadic tongue that suddenly exits the dark cavity of
> oral secretions, to finally make its appearance in the daylight [...] The
> tongue might begin by curling back in the mouth with all the
> accompanying nasal sounds, but then it migrates out of the mouth,
> travelling down the chest, out of the toes, and even taking libidinal root in
> the talking penis. Not a surrealistic penis where objects lose their
> originary sign-referent, and float in an endless sign-slide, but a tongue
> referent that has actually lost its sound object. (23)

It is illuminating to compare Kroker's statement with an actual cyberspace
posting which appeared in the feminist newsgroup *alt.feminism* studied by
Sutton (1994), in which the author countered another subscriber's opinion
through the creation of a rape scenario. The electronic discussion, a portion of
which is reproduced below, concerns the controversial subject of gay men in the
military. When a woman participant takes the more liberal position in the debate,
she is met with a retort that, I would argue, is uniquely cybermasculine:

(4) >What disharmony will they cause? The people that are worried that a
      >member of the same sex will be looking at them in the shower or
      >coming on to them in the barracks should stop flattering themselves
      >and start thinking about what their jobs really entail.

      Really "entail"! Quite a punny lady aren't you. Of course I would
      consider true social justice to be when you get assaulted by a bulldyke
      named Bertha. Twice as big as you, she laughs as you suddenly realize
      how aggressive female homosexuals can be if they think they have an
      easy lay like a white liberal. Especially when the liberal no longer
      recognizes right from wrong or the implications of having to live in the
      amoral world she has tacitly created.

With this response, the male participant subordinates his conversational partner
through the verbal creation of a sexual assault, projecting his own aggression
onto what he names "a bulldyke named Bertha". He sets the scene by subverting
and sexualizing her own use of the word "entail", thereby reducing her
comments to a mere homophobic pun. Moreover, perhaps to compensate for his
own physical anonymity, the speaker constructs hierarchies of size and race,

creating a Bertha who is "twice as big" as her "white liberal" opponent.[18] Bodyless communication, then, for many men at least, is characterized not by a genderless exchange, but rather by an exaggeration of cultural conceptions of masculinity—one realized through the textual construction of conversational dominance, sexual harassment, heterosexism, and physical hierarchies.

3. Radical cyberfeminism

In response to this cybermasculinity, increasing numbers of women have organized their own lists and bulletin board systems, creating women-only spaces where participants can collaboratively construct an oppositional gender. One of the largest such spaces is SAPPHO, a women-only list dedicated primarily to the discussion of lesbian and bisexual issues. This electronic discussion group, according to a recent survey conducted by one of its subscribers,[19] is made up of women associated with three major professional groups: university students and professors (27%); women working in computer-related fields (22%); and women employed by universities in non-academic positions (21%). The e-mail postings reproduced in this portion of the study are drawn from exchanges which occurred on SAPPHO between January and June 1993.

It is important to mention at the outset that the aggressive stylistics which characterize cybermasculinity have also been reported on a number of gay lists. Many of the women on SAPPHO complained that they had received hostile and insulting messages from men on GAYNET and QSTUDY-L—messages that occurred with such regularity that the women were ultimately compelled to unsubscribe. In the posting reproduced below, a lesbian-identified subscriber to SAPPHO points out the need for separatist cyberspaces, or in her own vocabulary, a net where women can go to avoid "gwm [=gay white male] cybermogs" who "egofill on flaming to an fro":

(5)   SOME gwm cybermogs egofill on flaming to an fro on gaynet. I've lurked around gaynet for a time and many of the participants speak a queer language i don't EVEN want to interact with-let alone read. My subscription didn't last long ... due to the moderately high level of toxic banterings filling my mailbox.

I prefer to dedicate my lurking and scripting time to a net where those who subscribe know how to respect other netter's opinions and not do ad hominims, which take up bandwidths. I am grateful for having the option of SAPPHO. I want SAPPHO to maintain its lesbi [=lesbian and bisexual] only protocol.

In contrast to the "toxic bantering" identified by this contributor as characteristic of gay male lists, the discursive environment which characterizes SAPPHO could be described as aggressively collaborative, as women participants, most of them lesbian or bisexual, jointly create a way of cyberspeaking that opposes the type of talk encountered elsewhere on the Internet.

Although it would seem that maintaining a "women-only" status on an anonymous e-mail list would be a difficult, if not an impossible undertaking, subscribers to SAPPHO have devised a number of methods for determining the gender of new participants. Essential to what might be called the *on-line screening process* is the new subscriber's ability to meet the list's discursive standards, with list veterans becoming quickly suspicious of anyone who does not conform to their idea of discursive femininity. The elements which constitute this collaborative women-only cyberspeak are numerous and complex; taken together, they impose a female/male dichotomy instead of obscuring it. Among the elements discussed below are an expectation of name conformity, an aggressive "anti-flaming" policy, a demand for conversational support and respect, a "politically correct" politeness strategy rarely found elsewhere on the net, repeated discussion of overtly "female" topics, a pro-separatist and pro-woman attitude, and the employment of feminist signatures.

3.1. Name conformity

The screening process begins with an examination of the subscriber's name. In spite of the potentially superficial nature of electronic pseudonyms, participants are expected to bear a feminine-sounding e-mail title. The importance of name conformity is spelled out by the author of the response in excerpt (6) below, who answers the doubt expressed by two newcomers with a succinct explanation of how the on-line test works:

(6)   >In this virtual world how do we determine the gender of another? [...]
        >Unless you can physically see the person, then women-only space on
        >the internet is a farce and impossible.

        >But now I'm confused by the "women only". Have you had this
        >discussion before and are all bored with it? What is the collective
        >definition that is being used to allow access to SAPPHO? Do you use
        >self-definition?

        As I recall, we use the old McCarthyist definition: If it looks like a duck,
        and it quacks like a duck, well then its a duck. (Looks on e-mail result
        in things like questions about atypical names.)

While most of the subscribers to the list carry overtly female names, a few members have what this veteran calls "atypical names", or rather, ambiguously gendered names like "Lou" or "ibu6tys"—hence the veteran's statement, "If it looks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, well then it's a duck." New subscribers who "look" like ducks (i.e., who carry more masculine-sounding names) require greater scrutiny, and the on-line veterans watch to see if any

"quacks" will betray maleness. One woman subscriber sporting the name "James", for example, ultimately had to justify her name choice in a public posting after receiving a flood of questioning messages through private e-mail. "I'm a female who has a traditionally male first name," she explained. "I am quite definitely female, at least that's what they told me when they handed me those books on the 'birds, bees, and puberty' [...] I chose 'james' because I _like_ the name! It's cool, and men shouldn't have a monopoly on it."

3.2. Anti-flaming policy

Even if a participant joins the list bearing an overtly feminine name, she is still expected to conform to the list's idea of discursive femininity. Essential to this femininity is the avoidance of any verbal behavior which could be perceived as adversarial. Although electronic insults certainly appear now and then, particularly around the discussion of political issues, the majority of SAPPHO participants adamantly oppose the practice of flaming. In excerpt (7), for instance, a list member, disturbed by an aggressive exchange on the list between two participants, criticizes their behavior with ironic reference to the John Wayne Bobbitt affair.

(7) It appears we should prepare ourselves for another bonfire in sappho. I'm donning my asbestos suit, gloves, boots and helmet and am taking refuge underground. Let me know when the flames die down a little. Me and John Wayne Bobbitt will bring the hotdogs - I'll carve! Oh, and S'mores [20] would be good too!

   -L., who now knows how Campfire girls got started.

For this subscriber, aggressive flaming is equivalent to an undesirable Bobbitt-like masculinity, and as such, should not occur in women-only space. The visual image she constructs of John Wayne Bobbitt, the hotdogs, and the carving knife, certainly offers a different interpretation of Kroker's "penis talk"—one that is unabashedly cyberfeminist. In a similar vein, another participant reprimands a fellow subscriber for overreacting to a posting on the virtues of internet spying:

(8) Hey! Lighten up on E.! Her post was primarily about the "finger" command, which makes one feel like somewhat of a spy, but certainly does not constitute breaking into private files. I thought it was humorous, and think that the heat from the current flame wars is getting to some people's brains. Abusive responses like telling E. to "eat shit" are unacceptable, no matter how strong one's opinion.

Although this author's posting is much more direct than the previous one, her intent is the same: verbal abuse is simply not acceptable on a women-only list.

A different realization of the same anti-flame mentality is illustrated in the posting reproduced in (9), in which a veteran subscriber criticizes a new participant for her violent discursive behavior. The messages in question were sent privately to one of the older sapphites, who had in a public posting expressed the need for a "committed, monogamous, loving relationship with a woman", even though she was currently in a relationship with a man. "I'm available," the new subscriber said. "But I might as well warn you that I intend to kill the next bitch that leaves me. I should have killed the last one who, like you, left me for a man." The highly aggressive nature of this and other responses, which the recipient subsequently posted to SAPPHO, shocked the other members of the group and provoked a thread entitled "Despair".

(9) When I see such despair, hatred and anger as is reflected in the note below I get scared. This is the pivotal point, women... are we going to follow the poor example of the white male patriarchal system... or are we going to set our own example?! Such self-centeredness and poor sense of self that is the cause of the posts that K. shared is going to be our challenge. We must hold on to our identity and improve and apply our values and world views. Do you think this is possible? What can we do to support this kind of focus and introspection in others? It is so disturbing to hear a woman "talk like a man". I was amazed that the posters who responded to K. were women. That is not a high-and-mighty judgementalism ... but a real and deep concern.

I am scared by the world and alot of what is in it... and when I see those specters reflected in the eyes of my sisters... I AM TERRIFIED!

This response, influenced by the reality of a male-dominated cyberspace, is indicative of the commitedly collaborative techniques in cyberfeminist practice. The author's perspective is notably different from the liberal interpretation of computer discourse as gender-free, particularly since she argues that there is gender differentiation in electronic talk and that women participants should not "talk like a man". Like many messages appearing on this women-only list, this participant's response emphasizes that cyberspace *is* a form of reality—an emphasis very different from male claims that on-line interaction is nothing but fantasy. The author suggests that the computer can become a very real tool for battling gender oppression, or, in her own words, a place where women can set their own example in opposition to "the white patriarchal system".

Occasionally, however, the list's demand for discursive conformity will lead to an incorrect gender diagnosis. The author of the posting in (6) above continues her explanation of the on-line screening process by telling the story of a verbally dissonant subscriber who challenged the list's anti-flaming policy:

(10) The funniest version of this I remember was when J. first joined sappho. She upset and offended so many people, there was concern that she was really a man. *Lots* of concern. (This may have been near the first discussion I remember about transexuals on the list.) Anyway, it finally calmed down when someone from So. Cal. posted saying that while they found her offensive too, they had met her and she was a woman.

The member in question, who I have abbreviated as "J." in order to preserve her anonymity, launched participants into a number of angry discussions on whether her aggressive interactional style demonstrated femaleness or maleness. In this particular case, the matter was resolved only when the subscriber was identified in a real-world interaction as a woman. As an interesting reversal of this situation, another subscriber mistook one of her e-mail correspondents to be female, only to find out weeks later that "shade" was male: "There was no overtly 'male' stuff in his notes, in terms of stereotypical gay male phrases, descriptions of behavior, etc. Now, I know not all men (or gay men) or even all those who are gendered male act like assholes. But usually, someone will say something that can be taken in our society as a gender marker."

3.3. Support and respect

Perhaps to avoid the fate of subscribers like J., participants quickly learn the rules of a supportive and respectful cyberfeminist discourse. When the author of the posting in (11) criticizes a contributor's insulting remarks by emphasizing the importance of respect, she pinpoints the list's first and foremost rule of netiquette, a rule usually taught to new subscribers at the appearance of the first wayward message: *Respect your e-neighbor as your self.*

> (11) i think the "jargon/cant/gibberish" and "most unintelligible academic rambling of the year" comments were a little out of lin[e], especially since [k.] was making a perfectly valid point about respecting other's spaces. perhaps we not only need to respect each other's spaces [...] but each others ideas and opinions as well."

The author's interest in keeping the list a safe space for its participants is rather different from the male 'if you can't take the e-mail heat, unsubscribe' perspective which often appears on mixed-sex lists. A male member of the gay list *gl-asb* for instance, recently explained, "NO mailing list is 'safe space'... If an issue is so delicate, so close to one's heart, so much 'the soft underbelly' that a flame would cause you psychic damage, DON'T expect e-mail to give you a safe forum for it." These conflicting approaches to what constitutes appropriate behavior on the net support the results of Herring's (1994) research on gendered attitudes toward netiquette, in which she found that "women and men differ not only in net behavior, but in the values they assign to such behaviors." Sapphites overwhelmingly favor what Herring calls a "politeness-based communicative ethic", showing overt contempt for the "ethic of self-determination and vigorous debate" favored by male participants in her study.

3.4. Political correctness

The list's desire for discursive conformity is so strong that one subscriber satirized it in a public posting of netiquette rules entitled "How to be Politically Correct on Sappho; or, How to Answer Posts Without Starting Flame Wars." Some of these rules are reproduced in (12) below:

> (12) a. Only politically correct language is allowed (wimmin, herstory, etc.)
>
> b. No words that imply racism, sexism, republicanism, or any other ism for that matter will be tolerated.
>
> c. Only people with correct political views will be allowed to post. What are these correct political views? Well if you have to ask, then you don't have them.
>
> d. People from outside of the good ole U.S. of A. are nice to have on the list, but don't talk too much. Your views tend to differ from the right ones, and we'd prefer to not take up valuable bandwidth with propoganda.
>
> e. Sometimes, some new rookie on the list will post something that is unacceptable. If you should happen to agree with it, post to them personally that you agree, but by no means let any other sapphite know you support this radical.

"All of these rules are set in stone," the message concludes, "so please respect them if you wish to maintain your subscription. Any lurkers felt to be unfriendly are subject to be searched by the PC police." The self-imposed conformity that this message satirizes—e.g., the list's expectation of feminist orthography, "correct" political views, and uniform agreement on all topics of conversation— points to an ethic of collaboration even more severe than that discussed by Herring in her articles on computer-mediated ethics and politeness (1994, 1996). The rules which constitute this netiquette are not only *characteristic* of the postings on the list, they are *required* as proof of one's femaleness.

3.5. Separatism and the creation of a cyberculture

Corresponding to this female-gendered netiquette is a separatist attitude that, in the words of one subscriber, "will not tolerate the discussion of anyone's bf [=boyfriend], or any other men for that matter." A transsexual subscriber to SAPPHO, after migrating to another list in disgust, identified this attitude as "the lesbian rhetoric that shoves Goddess overworship and intolerance of men down our throats." But in the message reproduced below, a SAPPHO subscriber outlines the reasons behind this intolerance, pointing to the necessity of separatist cyberspaces:

> (13) SO- When women get together to create women's space (or virtual space)...we do it to strengthen ourselves and other women, to learn from and with other women, to share resources with eachother and affirm our experiences, create culture with eachother, etc. Exclusion of men from this context is a precondition...not the purpose itself...of creating women's space. When we ask men to respect women's space, we ask

them to let it happen WITHOUT making a fuss, WITHOUT trying to convince us that "really I'm very sensitive and aware, not like other men, so you should let ME in", WITHOUT accusing us of being man-haters, and WITHOUT imposing upon us the arrogant posture that they are entitled to be included in everything and allowed access to every part of women's lives. Women's space is simply not FOR men, and a man with a clue about what it means to be respectful will simply say to himself "oh, that's not FOR me...I guess I'll go do something else".

The above post was written in response to a male-initiated anti-separatist thread on GAYNET, where a number of participants condemned SAPPHO for its exclusion of men. When a woman subscriber to GAYNET posted a poem by the Native American poet Chrystos in an effort to explain the need for women-only lists like SAPPHO, she was quickly silenced with the following retort :[21]

(14) It seems to me in my humble opinion,
       That La Femme Chrysto, is Satan's minion!
       Stirrin up trouble whenever she can,
       Against whites, heteros, and sensitive men
       Who want to commune with their love and pain,
       But who just get kicked out, into the rain.
       Pardon me for all my white male confusion?
       I thought we were against this kind of exclusion?
       Segregation is hate, like it or not,
       Even when it's the hate that "hate begot."

Needless to say, the poem was not found amusing by sapphites, who began their own *anti-* anti-separatist thread on SAPPHO. "This is *our* list," one of the participants wrote. "We do not need to justify our existence, nor do we need to apologize for running the list the way we choose. And we are most emphatically not answerable to the aforementioned twerp... harumph!"

The "creation of culture" alluded to by the author of the posting in (13) is accomplished exclusively through textual practice. One of the primary ways that subscribers participate in this creation is through the collaborative development of lengthy threads on women's topics, as well as through the overt discussion of what it means to be female, and more specifically, a sapphite. In the month of February 1993—a typical month for sapphite exchange—major threads of discussion involved femininity ("Learning to be Female", "Women in Non-traditional Careers", "Butch vs. Bitch"), feminine appearance ("Fat Oppression", "Long Hair", "Getting Dressed"), lesbianism ("Lesbian Sex", "Class A Lesbian", "Lesbians on Emergency 911"), gender-bending women in the news ("Lily Tomlin", "Nancy Kerrigan is Gay", "K.D. Lang Video", "Roseanne's Kiss", "Truth Behind Bobbitt Case"), and patriarchy ("Male Doctors", "Violent Men"). More personal contributions included intimate references to difficult experiences in the non-virtual world ("Rape", "Positive Coming Out Experience", "One Woman's Longing") and affirming experiences

on SAPPHO ("I Wuv Sappho", "Family"). "I LOVE SAPPHO," one enthusiastic subscriber exclaims;

(15) I think this is a most unique, peaceful, joyful and beautiful place. Every day, all of us women gather together and discuss *whatever*, we share our thoughts, feelings, and days with each other cross country and overseas. The fact that I have this place to talk, share, listen is one of the more joyous and special things in my life... I value all of your opinions (even if I don't agree) and feel the knowlege and perspective I gain through all you lovely women is priceless. I think this group of women is unique, special and *blessed*... I am very fortunate to have met you all!

Also instrumental to the creation of culture is the assertion of a pro-woman attitude; participants frequently set up womanhood in opposition to manhood, exaggerating the qualities stereotypically associated with each gender. The author of the posting reproduced in (16), for instance, is responding to a discussion of gender identity by James, who, perhaps influenced by the utopian imaginings of liberal cyberfeminism, had mentioned that she preferred to adopt a male persona in cyberspace. In stark contrast to the other women on the list, James had explained that she felt more comfortable talking with gay men on the internet than with lesbians, claiming that the men's talk was "more real and interesting".

(16) James, James, James,.... Girl... <sigh> where to begin? [...] Women are more caring, compassionate, holistic, introspective, accepting, beautiful, centered, earth/cycle centered, natural and basically are the pivot of our species (er... IMHO).

       If you look at the biological basis of behaviour theories... men were simply created to guard or "serve" the child bearing ones (women!) I see a different plane of conscience, emotionability and pacifism that is absent in many men... no matter how "progressive". For the emotions, the perspective, the beauty, the sensativity, the intelligence, the nurturing, and the UNDERSTANDING of the world... I would never trade my gender... no matter what the cost.

The exaggerated nature of this response (e.g., "women are more caring, compassionate, holistic, introspective, accepting, beautiful, centered, earth/cycle centered, natural, and basically are the pivot of our species") illustrates how some of the list's subscribers, in order to develop a gender for themselves on the Internet, take cultural conceptions of womanhood and femininity to the extreme in their postings.[22]

3.6. Signatures

Finally, participants on SAPPHO create a female gender overtly in their e-mail signatures, which many of them regularly attach to the end of their messages. These signatures are almost always pro-female, representing each subscriber's take on being a woman:

(17) =---=-=-=-=-=-
       [Name]   [E-mail address]
       To most of the world, Said Gertrude Stein, It's me who is the star, the star,
       But here at home, Sweet Alice B., And in my heart, you are, you are.
                                           -- graffiti found in New York city, 1970
       =-

(18) ===
       [Name]   "Women who laugh too much, and the women
       [E-mail address]   who love them." --- Jamie Anderson
       ===

The strategies employed in the signatures reproduced in (17) and (18) are frequently seen on SAPPHO; both authors have taken quotations from other discursive spheres and subverted them for a woman-oriented electronic distribution. The quotation about Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas is taken from graffiti, a medium which is similar to electronic communication in that it serves as an outlet for anonymous and underground forms of resistance (Leap Forthcoming; Moonwoman 1995; Nwoyi 1993)—in this case lesbianism. The quotation in the second signature is a conflation of the titles of two popular psychology books on heterosexual relationships: *Women Who Love Too Much* and *Men Who.Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them.* With the subversion "Women who laugh too much and the women who love them", the subscriber projects a lesbianism that is sane and happy, and which thereby opposes the pop psychology image of the tortured heterosexual.

A third signature, although less typical, reveals much about the nature of gendered discourse on-line. There is a small number of male-to-female transsexuals on SAPPHO, some of whom have joined the list as a means of learning more about women's conversational patterns. One of these participants regularly tags the following signature to her messages:

(19) ===
       I am Woman, hear me Roa....oh, sorry, was I interrupting.. no no, it
       wasn't important... no, really; it's fine.   // [Name]   <[e-mail address]>
       ===

Her signature says it all. What more would a man-who-became-a-woman want to do than to assert her newfound womanhood: "I am Woman! Hear me Roar!" Yet in the end she realizes that in order to pass electronically, she has to appropriate the corresponding conversational style and cater to a cultural expectation of discursive femininity: "Oh, sorry, was I interrupting... no, no, it wasn't important... no, really, it's fine."

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have identified two varieties of cyberfeminism—one inspired by the utopian imaginings of Haraway's cyborg feminism, the other by the reality of male harassment on the Internet. Rosi Braidotti, a pioneer in virtual studies, recently made the observation:[23]

> One of the great contradictions of cyber-images is that they titillate the imagination, promising marvels and wonders of a gender-free world or a multi-gender world; and yet, such images not only reproduce some of the most banal, flat images of gender behaviour imaginable, they intensify the differences between the sexes.

The same is true of computer-mediated communication; rather than neutralizing gender, the electronic medium encourages its intensification. In the absence of the physical, network users exaggerate societal notions of femininity and masculinity in an attempt to gender themselves. Gender may well be an unfortunate dichotomy, as postmodern virtual theorists argue, but cyberspace is generating goddesses and ogres, not cyborgs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. In her manifesto, Haraway explicitly mentions the science fiction of Octavia Butler, Suzy McKee Charnas, Samuel Delaney, Anne McCaffrey, Vonda McIntyre, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Jr., and John Varley.

2. In addition to real-world organizations such as the San Francisco-based *Digital Queers*, there are over 150 active lists and bulletin board systems in the U.S.A. devoted to the discussion of queer issues, some of which have as many as 2,000 subscribers. In response to this development, the new electronic quarterly *Queer-e*, an interdisciplinary journal for research in "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer" studies, is devoting one of its special issues to a theoretical exploration of the notion *cyberqueer*. For an overview of lesbian electronic culture and activism, see Haskel's (Forthcoming) article "Cyberdyke".

3. After arriving at the term independently, I noticed that some participants in the 1994 London conference "Seduced and Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World" spoke of "cyberfeminism" as a derivative of Haraway's "cyborg feminism". Virginia Barret of the VNS Matrix (an electronic art project) in Adelaide, Australia, and Sadie Plant at Birmingham University, England, have been influential in popularizing this use of the term. The VNS Matrix first employed the term in their 1991 billboard manifesto *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century*. Plant has discussed cyberfeminism from both a philosophical and activist standpoint in a number of short articles (1993a, 1993b), and is currently expanding her ideas in *Beyond the Spectacle* (Forthcoming).

4. In employing the labels "liberal feminism" and "radical feminism", I do not mean to suggest that all politically self-identified liberals are "pro-porn" or that all politically self-identified radical feminists are "anti-porn"; the many different opinions expressed in the works cited in this article speak to the inaccuracy of such a generalization. Many thanks to Margaret Chon for her thoughts on this issue.

5. I have considerably simplified the history and import of this theoretical division; see Bacchi (1990) for an illuminating and thorough portrayal of these two strands. Interesting discussions of sexual liberation theory include Echols's (1983) and Rubin's (1984) early essays, and more recent articles by Butler (1990), Valverde (1989), and Freccero (1990). Discussions of radical feminism (often referred to as "cultural feminism" by its opponents) include Dworkin (1981, 1988), Jeffreys (1990), and MacKinnon (1987, 1993).

6. The *cyberpunk movement* developed in the mid-1980's when a San Francisco-based group of diverse social activists (rumored to have been composed of computer revolutionaries, anarchists, and Deadheads) adopted computer-mediated interaction as a tool of resistance, using it to bring elements of underground counterculture to the fore of technological advance. The movement's more celebrated science fiction writers include William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and Pat Cadigan. See Sterling (1986) and Springer (1994) for an interesting in-group and out-group analysis, respectively.

7. The characterization of the computer as a democratic medium also figures prominently in the discourses of popular CMC analysts, e.g., Rheingold (1993).

8. Sterling (1986) summarizes the two central themes of the movement in the following manner: "The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry—techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of self" (xiii).

9. From the transcripts of an untitled paper first presented as part of an Institute of Contemporary Art/Arts Council of England conference, "Seduced and Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World", London, March 1994.

10. I have maintained the original punctuation and spelling in these electronic excerpts, but not the original formatting (unless clearly used to emphasize a textual point).

11. One of the more extreme examples of this trend is the work of the French artist Orlan, who periodically alters her appearance with cosmetic surgery so as to reflect computer-created self-portraits. To date she has undergone nine operations, which were recorded and distributed by video, telephone, modem, and/or other technology media as part of a performance piece. Her goal is not only to illustrate that "the body is obsolete", but also "to bring out the internal image towards the external image", thus blurring the boundaries between the physical and the mental. Since her operations challenge the feminine ideal (e.g., in one of her operations she had cheekbone implants placed above her eyebrows; in a forthcoming operation she will have her nose dramatically lengthened), Orlan refers to herself as a "woman to woman transsexual". (From the transcripts of an untitled paper first presented as part of the Institute of Contemporary Art/Arts Council of England conference, "Seduced and Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World," London, March 1994.)

12. From the transcripts of an untitled paper first presented as part of the Institute of Contemporary Art/Arts Council of England conference, "Seduced and Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World", London, March 1994.

13. The term *dishing*, short for "dishing the dirt", refers to the gay male custom of gossiping about other members of the gay community who are not present, either acquaintances known to all participants or celebrities known to be gay. Participants in the discourse jointly reveal information about a third party, particularly of a sexual nature, that would otherwise be kept hidden.

14. For an interesting article on stereotypes of gay male pitch variation, see Gaudio (1994).

15. A "MOO" (short for MUD, Object Oriented) is a kind of Multi-User Dimension designed to give users the impression that they are moving through a physical space. Users may be given brief textual descriptions of various "rooms" in the database's mansion, for instance, replete with a listing of all the objects available in the room. Users interact with each other under pseudonyms, employing the various objects available to them. See also Deuel (This volume).

16. Recent articles and personal accounts of on-line harassment include Armstrong (1994), Brail (1994), Burns (ms.), Campbell (1994), Holderness (1993), Jerome (1994), Lewis (1994), Magid (1994), and Petersen (1994).

17. The full text of the University of Illinois' code on electronic harassment can be found in *The University Code on Campus Affiars and Handbook of Policies and Regulations Applying to All Students*, University of Illinois.

18. "Bigness" becomes a pervasive metaphor through many of these postings, and in cyberphilosophy in general. One of my male colleagues recently joked with me about "the ultimate in computer-sex". His futuristic vision? "Eliminating the people completely," he explained, "so you could have this cute little Mac getting it on with some big hefty mainframe." For my colleague, as with many network users, the absence

of a physical body leads to the creation of a verbal one, and suddenly, "this cute little *Mac"* has sex with *"some big hefty mainframe".*

19. Many thanks to sapphite Kris Shanks for these percentages, which are based on responses from 198 list subscribers. Questions in her survey addressed a number of areas, among them age, lifestyle, occupation, relationship status, dependents, and reasons for joining SAPPHO. As a complement to Shanks' survey, I analyzed the actual postings that occurred between January and June in order to see how list participants chose to self-identity: 74% self-identified as lesbian, 14% as bisexual, 8% as heterosexual, and 4% as transsexual.

20. *S'mores* are a campfire sandwich made of graham crackers, marshmallows, and chocolate; they are especially popular on Girl Scout and Campfire Girl outings.

21. One GAYNET subscriber who had secretly joined SAPPHO in order to "gain insights into lesbian thinking" contributed his own personal experience to this thread, explaining how he had suffered "verbal abuse" at the hands of separatist women: "Most women in our society are conditioned to 'let the man speak' and will stop talking if you interrupt them. But just try interrupting a woman who has learned to recognize this behavior! When I first entered into lesbian discussions, I brought with me this behavior. And when I tried interrupting one of them, they ignored me (rejecting my male priviledge), verbally rolled right over me and finished their thought."

22. Unless, of course, they are engaging in parody.

23. From the transcripts of an untitled paper first presented as part of the Institute of Contemporary Art/Arts Council of England conference, "Seduced and Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World", London, March 1994.