

# Interference on the brain screen #7



(April 2005)

“Ready for action now, Danger Boy?” by jael

**Aeon:** You're out of control.

**Trevor:** I take control. Whose side are *you* on?

**Aeon:** I take no sides.

**Trevor:** You're skating the edge.

**Aeon:** I *am* the edge.

Like most of you, my first encounter with *Æon Flux* was in MTV's *Liquid TV*. Now I never had MTV, I caught all of my episodes on BBC2. When I first saw *Æon* (and I cannot for the life of me remember any of the other segments of that show), I knew I was witnessing something special.

Creator, Peter Chung invented *Æon* out of frustration, he'd been working on *Rugrats* for some time, expanding on the character designs of Klaske Csupo, and was burnt out. He wanted to do something that was almost the mirror opposite. He wanted it to be mature, rather than for children, and he wanted to draw a character with long, long legs (to contrast with the stubby limbs of the infants he'd been designing.) Chung wanted to illustrate movement in the human body. *Æon* has a dancer's body, yet never boogies. She has a spidery grace, leaping and posing, ruthless, moving down Breen soldiers by the dozen. There is something ever so little more than human about her physical ability. The action played out against a spectacular background a colorful megalopolis in a distinctive European style.

*Æon Flux* is dangerous. Like *Videodrome*, it has a philosophy, one that is not a sound byte, a mission statement or a High Concept. I can't even begin to tell you what it might be, but authority wouldn't like it at all. As a show, it shattered conventions, besides the female protagonist (not quite so common back then) the story structure was strange, the heroine always failed, and died at the end of each story. This was startling because she always looked very capable, quick, graceful, stylish and deadly; she should win. And more than anything else, this was a highly sophisticated animated show. It really was mature. *Æon Flux* is fiercely intelligent,

before *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind* or *Fifty First Dates* Peter Chung was talking of love, loss and the fatal trap of amnesia.

"After the first season, I killed her off, not knowing that there was ever going to be a second season. When I was asked to work on a second season, instead of explaining that she really didn't die, or that she was a robot, I decided that dying was going to be her thing." -- Peter Chung

Æon Flux went on to its own series and its most convention-breaking feature was left behind. She no longer died. Now she spoke and she had interesting things to say. And more so between the bouts of surreal violence there were complex relationships, particularly with her nemesis/lover Trevor Goodchild. Trevor Goodchild made an odd dictator, a sensualist, a scientist, a man with a sense of humor, but of course dark, very dark.

Like the show itself, Æon is a mass of contradictions, yet she works strangely organically. Æon's very strangeness distinguishes her, not just from recent figures of female heroism but the field as a whole. Chung remarked, "Basically, Aeon is an anarchist. She works toward defending her own autonomy. That's the main theme." Æon is an anarchist, each of her shows started with a warning not to assume she was on one side or the other. And her personal life is intimately entangled with her politics (No more well illustrated than in the episode *There's a Last Time for Everything*, where Æon and Goodchild swirl deeper and deeper into a passionate and highly dangerous liaison (a ménage, in fact, involving Æon's clone). Yes, it is never simple with Æon. What is most disturbing is that, as intended by Chung, Æon is neither good, nor evil. Even more unsettling, neither is Goodchild.

And Æon is not exactly the true blue heroine we expect in spy dramas, Æon doesn't just fall in love, she falls in love with the wrong person, the personal and political become inextricably entangled, and simple solutions have been outlawed. No one dies unexpectedly leaving the moral choices clear again. Chung experimented with every aspect of animation convention; from body form and subject matter to perceived target audience and story structure itself.

"Our goal is to create an adventure series where the focus of conflict is directed inward -- into the psychological and moral makeup of the characters rather than in their struggle for physical control. There are no winners or losers in these stories, only the inevitable discovery of new facets of the individual. *Aeon Flux* is psychodrama disguised as action adventure." -- Peter Chung

Fetish Girl? Æon's appearance is perhaps a narrow aperture into her creator's psyche. Her costume looks like a piece of bondage equipment, Elbow length gloves, G-string, black, shiny and attached to her body by means no-one could discern. The potential titillation factor is severely cut but her extraordinary physiognomy with her long body and limbs her, rake thinness, she seems all points and angles. She lacked the necessary curves of a conventional sex object (but doubtlessly some found plenty to admire.) As a sex object she's extremely unlikely. She's not exactly Jessica Simpson. Despite this (perhaps because of this) she has inspired the heartfelt devotion of a number of young males. She carries more than a whiff of the 1960s spy serial. There's black vinyl, deadly little guns, and gadgets. All of them deeply fetishistic. There is a sadistic streak to Æon, in "Leisure" she tortures the infant creature, and leads Onan in the "Utopia or Deutoronopia" episode through a very rigorous routine.

"When I first designed Aeon Flux, I wondered whether I should make her less sexy looking - give her a costume that was less revealing. But it seems silly to be working in the animation medium and not be a little unrealistic."

Perhaps she is a highly refined and evolved species of dominatrix, one whose ambition is not merely to whip an individual man but an entire nation. However her method seems to be not so much pain as chaos, and being an anarchist, it is hard to discern just what her goal might be.

Æon is human, fallible. She is oblique, intellectual yet passionate. Chung breaks oppositions. He creates not a confrontation between free Monica and oppressive Bregnia. Instead there is a clash of philosophies. Trevor does bad things for good reasons. Æon? The same.

It is astonishing that the series lasted as long as it did; three seasons. It slipped right under the radar of censorship and oversight, dodged the missiles of marketing and focus groups and against all odds struck the midst of the commercial scene as a work of art. *Æon Flux* went into its last season there was less violence more strangeness, more contemplative spaces. Had it continued, it is likely it would have developed even further in this direction.

The series punched above its weight, it attracted a fanatical following (largely of young men) but beyond hormonal attraction, the labyrinthine plots and sophisticated style attracted a certain species of obsessive male. It inspired a coffee table book every bit as oblique as the original series and there was talk of a videogame (sadly never to emerge). Despite this the property is still very much an underground item. Perhaps even now the world is unready for something as intellectual, inaccessible and eccentric.

### **Æon Flux the Movie**

Although its potential as a movie has been talked up, as a film franchise, *Æon Flux* was far from a no brainer. It's just a bit too weird.

It had been originally proposed years ago and prospective directors had included Darren Aronofsky of *Pi* fame. Eventually it had been assumed the project was permanently lodged in development hell. But surprisingly a script by Phil Hay and Matt Manfredi of *Crazy/Beautiful* fame emerged. This was used to attract Karen Kusama (director of *Girlfight*) and the other elements fell into place with astonishing ease.

Charlize Theron, known as serious and talented thespian, took on the role because she wanted to do something different. But again it was the human aspects that pulled her in. It did offer her the chance to expand into an action role, but she was intrigued by the character as well.

Æon's antagonist is still Trevor Goodchild; as played by Martin Csokas. He too was more interested in the human aspects of the character than the genre elements. Goodchild is a scientist, a politician, a lover.

Everyone associated with the film was excited with how different it promised to be, how intellectual, quirky, and different from standard genre fare.

Inevitably there were some modifications for the film; most immediately apparent was the Æon's costume. In the animation it was an unlikely ensemble of boots, G-string, and crop top (all in shiny blue/black vinyl.) Understandably Kusama and the producers had no interest in making Theron look like a New York dominatrix and put her into a far less revealing cat suit; linking her with the veritable tradition of Modesty Blaise.

While the original was purposefully vague about its background the film specifically is set four hundred years in the future after a plague has wiped out most of humanity. Why the writers chose such a cliché sci-fi background, is unclear.

Then again the production has made a number of changes, they have added characters like Oren Goodchild, Trevor's brother, and a sister for Æon.

The film, it seems, has taken not so much story, as the tone from the original. In the past film directors have used properties (books, comics, television series, older films) as an armature on which to build properties. A full or partial skeleton of the property's story and background underlie the film. In this case we seem to have not so much an armature as a flavor of the original animation; some characters, some names a hint of the attitude of the original.

Germany has recently been a destination of choice for genre pictures having hosted *Resident Evil* and *Equilibrium*. These films utilized found environments, the architecture, and the high tech subway stations. However the production based itself in Studio Babelsberg, a legendary cinematic space/environment/place haunted by the ghosts of both Fritz Lang and Joseph Gobel. That said it does use Berlin locations including the San Souci palace, the Buga Park Wall, the Chapel of Reconciliation and the Bahaus Museum.

Kusama has preferred physical locations to green screen work (a relief for us disappointed by the excessive use of CG effects in film).

At this point, even with the stills released from the production, the jury is very much out. But all indications are, if this film is to fail it, will be through excessive ambition rather than underestimating the material. In any case even an unsatisfactory film cannot erase the legend of Æon, cast against archetype, she's become an icon permanently engraved on cultural consciousness.

MTV's Aeon Flux is the purest distillation of the new teleconsciousness, an utterly arcane, visually relentless, narratively hermetic vision of a superhero futureworld after the rain. Anyone who has happened on it while channel-dancing knows the suck of its vertiginous perspectives, the haunting lure of its ambiguous nexuses. The furious contradictions and unexplained intercourses of Aeon Flux work like koans, and we're supposed to let the menacing enigmas flow over us like a red tide.

In its initial incarnation, as five-minute, no-dialogue segments in MTV's animation anthology showcase Liquid Television, Aeon Flux was pure terra incognita, introducing us to a barren dystopia clogged with endless postindustrialization, constant and impregnable apocalyptic portent, hyperviral infections and conspiracies, deranged sex, appalling mutations, and addictions that cross over Burroughs territory and into unspeakable waters.

-- "Aeon Flux" by Michael Atkinson *Film Comment*: Jan-Feb 1996

### **“Cyberpunk In Cuba” by Cero Uno**

The story of cyberpunk science fiction in Cuba will never be written. Even at its peak, the phenomenon never got press coverage. The official Writers' Association ignored it, just as they ignored SF for more than a decade. No Cuban cyberpunk books or magazines were ever published. In a word, it went completely under the radar.

On the other hand, and within the limits of the underground SF environment in Havana, the C-word hit very hard. It was extensively discussed in writers' workshops, in informal meetings, and it dominated a number of panels at the Cuban SF annual convention, *CubaFicción*. The work of Sterling, Gibson, Rucker, *et al*, challenged the views of the old Cuban science fiction writers and brought new ones into the scene. More important, dozens of cyberpunk stories and even a few novels were written. Alas, those works never went to print, not because they lacked merits, but rather because they faced official apathy, sometimes hostility, from the onset.

I was there when it happened. I was one of those young readers who discovered that science fiction had grown a new and exciting dimension during the 80s. Reading and writing cyberpunk was an experience that affected me in all kind of ways. I know every Cuban writer who got into the C-word by their first names, I know their work well, I argued with them for long and fruitful sessions.

So I don't intend this to be an academic or clinical essay, but rather a cluster of summations and reminiscences from the strange days when cyberpunk inspired me to become a science fiction writer.

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For us, it was a 90s phenomenon. Nothing new about that, for cultural and technological artifacts generated elsewhere used to take a decade to establish themselves in Cuba: it had been true for Beatles records, blue jeans, rock and rap music, VCRs, and so on. Historically, these things were introduced, one bit at a time, by government executives and members of the Cuban-American community who were allowed to visit the island since 1982.

Cyberpunk literature, specifically, came with the controlled aperture that occurred in Cuba following the fall of the Eastern Block, when the country opened itself to foreign investment, tourism and dual-currency economy.

Cuban SF readers were anxious to get in touch with American stuff. At first, a Spanish translation of Neuromancer circulated the SF milieu. It was obvious for us that William Gibson's novel wasn't simply another

good SF story. It was good in a different and original form. That form was called cyberpunk, we were told, and our colleagues from Mexico, Argentina and Spain were really enthusiastic about it. So enthusiastic, that a number of them started fanzines, newsletters, interest groups. And they were willing to bring us up to date. That's how we came to read in their original form, but mostly through photocopies or free-lance translations, such memorable stories as Gibson's "Winter Market", Sterling's "Swarm", Maddox's "Snake Eyes", and so on. It was a like a drug. And most of all, it proved inspiring. We wanted to write that kind of stuff ourselves.

Up to the late 80s, the Cuban science fiction scenario had been dominated by socialist literature. This usually came from the Soviet Union, in government-subsidized editions, which you could take home for a few cents. It wasn't bad SF at all, I must say. Even today, older Cuban readers remember with affection the work of Ivan Yefremov, Stanislaw Lem and the Strutzgatsky brothers. The first Cuban SF writers, back in the 60s and 70s, worked along the path those guys had paved. It was a Gernsbackian science fiction, and it was Marxist techno-boosterism. The period's Soviet masterpiece, the novel *Andromeda Nebula*, by Ivan Yefremov, depicted a large canvas of global communism where white-collar scientists, engineers, modern artists and technically accomplished proletariat stormed the Cosmos.

Socialism was convinced of its superiority over capitalism, and used SF to project this vision into the mass consciousness. (As opposed to Western culture, in every communist country science fiction was held in the highest esteem, and science fiction writers ranked among their most respected citizens.)

Capitalist SF writers were officially cast out because of their moody and depressing panoramas. Supposedly, they all had a common extrapolative flaw: they projected capitalism into the far future; they assumed everything would change except free-market economy, with its burden of unsolvable contradictions. On the basis of "lack of historical-dialectic perspective" the British-American New Wave was declared unhealthy, and there was a severe screening against it. Dick, LeGuin, Ellison, Moorcock and company were never allowed to reach the Cuban reader. Nobody knew them, so nobody missed them.

But by the end of the 80s, the Eastern Block collapsed, and with it the Gernsback Continuum. Of course, after 30 years of isolation, Cuban writers and readers were not acquainted with American hard SF or postmodern literature. Neither were we familiar with fashion-cult, high-tech or sect-consciousness. Nevertheless, we caught the gist of cyberpunk at once. How did it work?

For starters, the Soviet SF writers however blunt in their political assumptions, taught us to appreciate rigorous extrapolation, technological literacy and accomplished writing. They went off the tangent with larger-than-life Utopias because they lived a self-centered Utopia themselves. But their extrapolative techniques were sound, and we had gotten used to them.

We instantly felt that William Gibson's extrapolation was as convincing as it gets—with the added value that it generated all kinds of resonances with our own condition at the time. This may seem a far-fetched statement. Does a high-tech vision, cosmopolitan and hard-edged, lit by neon and halogen is really compatible with some drowsy, Spanish-speaking tropical island?

Consider this: by the time *Neuromancer* arrived here, circa 1992, the Cuban native population was again getting used to have tourists around, after 30 years of insulation. Soon there were people from all over the world in the five-centuries-old streets of Havana, bringing their weird fashion, their sexy tourist tech—and their vices, for all that matters. It was a nation-size future shock.

In those days, everybody I knew who owned a computer had assembled it by themselves. You just couldn't buy one in some shop, so you got the parts and learned how to put them together at home. Computers get more sophisticated all the time, and some of those guys today have become quite accomplished gurus.

All data was *samizdata*. Cuba was, and is, a *samizdata* haven. Every PC uses Microsoft software, but I doubt Bill Gates has ever gotten a cent from it. If your laptop's operative system collapsed, any passing stranger will lend you his Windows installation CD. It's a basic act of decency.

CD burners spin all day long, until their laser lenses run out inside a year (yes, laser lenses do run out when you use them on an industrial basis). Pirated cassettes and CDs are sold in the street corners by fast-dealing types. I have seen Americans buying Rolling Stones CDs in Cuba, and Europeans buying Prodigy or Pink Floyd for five bucks apiece. Chickenwire satellite dishes? You have them, too. People get Direct TV, HBO, MTV and *Univisión* on VHS and then they *rent* the tapes.

It would be easy to go on in this fashion about Third World techno-orgies, but I guess you get the idea. We have the low life, we have the high tech and, what's more important, a natural blend of both. We have social chaos on the one side, and a zaibatsu-like centralized government on the other, so the street finds its own uses for things.

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Upon discovering cyberpunk as a literary movement, Cuban SF writers felt it was the natural tool to extrapolate their weird everyday grind. For the first time, science fiction encouraged a really global vision. Cyberpunk ideologues and writers were downright fascinated with the South, and the effect of post-industrialism in countries where technological regulations were simply non-existent or non-feasible.

Another charming aspect of cyberpunk, of course, was its baroque, kaleidoscopic language. It was a revelation for us to discover that William Gibson didn't know shit about the technology he was tinkering with. In the past, Cuban writers who wanted to do hard SF usually had a hard time getting the facts and figures straight. Inside the conceptual frame of cyberpunk, the truly important thing was getting the right *feel*. Visionary intensity, imagination and storytelling did the trick, and there were no shortcuts. It was sort of democratic, provided that you had enough talent.

So Cuban cyberpunk stories began to pour by 1993. I won't claim they were great; in point of fact many of them were dreadful. They exhibited all the excesses of naiveté: all atmosphere and no plot, idiotic theses, cartoon characters. But eventually some writers hit their stride and produced interesting, in my opinion perfectly publishable stories.

There was "Tomorrow Never Knows", by Michel Encinosa, about a Yakuza assassin's last, unexpected assignment in an AIDS dominated world. "Social Worker" by José Miguel Sánchez dealt with wealthy aliens who rented human prostitutes to bring their offsprings to term. In "The Last Resort", by Fabricio González, male obsession with lesbians becomes a dangerous boomerang. Bruno Henríquez, a veteran writer, transposed the antagonism between Cuba and the United States to the digital realm in "Cracker". "Twenty Delusions", which I wrote in 1996 as a nod to the early Sterling, follows the life, success and decline of a rock star in an ever-changing world.

A good sign was that, from the onset, Cuban writers showed willingness to portrait native environments and native characters in their stories. Vladimir Hernandez, surely the most ardent advocate of C-writing in Cuba, usually set his narratives in CH, during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. CH was, of course, the City of Havana. The urban area had grown to the south, spreading from coast to coast and beyond. Offshore, there were submarine piezoelectric domes, rented by transnational zaibatsu as corporate enclaves. The Havana tunnel, which ran under the bay, had been closed for safety reasons and became a habitat for marginal characters. Heading East, you reached the Varadero enclave: a sunny, tropical paradise of white sands, blue beaches, virtual reality and great sex. Only the rich could go there. It was a reflection of the new tourism-encouraging policy that Cuba was applying at the time.

The heroes in Vladimir Hernandez's stories were technological castaways who dealt in drugs, hardware and information. They boasted the usual paraphernalia: implants, cranial jacks, enhanced nervous systems. Significantly, these heroes never won big without leaving behind a part of their humanity: a girl they loved, tender memories, true friendship. It was the price they had to pay to survive.

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In Cuba, all publishing houses belong to the state, and it turned out that these cyberpunk stories didn't find a market. There was no political or ideological confrontation, mind you—the core reason was a lot more trivial. This new stuff just went neatly over editorial heads. All they saw was unreadable scribbling. Editors were so flabbergasted by the deranged imagery, the techno-jargon and wacky characters that they never proceeded to analyze deeper implications. In any case, they had an umbrella reply to dismiss all SF: the country was in the middle of a grave economical crisis, and there was no money to publish fiction.

Maybe it was for the better. Had anyone been paying proper attention, we all might have ended up charged of subversion.

Did I say no cyberpunk books were ever published? Well, that's technically wrong. One champion managed to get published in the very long shot. It was "Quartz Nova", a collection of cyberpunk stories by Vladimir Hernandez. The title story, written by Vladimir and myself, deals with a virtual-reality experiment that gets out of control. The recipient of the VR artifact, a girl, escapes into CH, her brain enhanced with the ability to fool people around her with a library of artificial scenarios. Eventually she gets into trouble when a gang of street-wise hustlers discovers her secret and tries to make profit out of it.

The book included a glossary for the benefit of lay readers, and a small, local publishing house published it. It did well on the market.

Unfortunately, by the fabled year 2000 it was a bit late for that kind of show, and the real effect was somewhat lost. Informed readers were looking for the next fad. Computers were no longer a novelty, and neither were digital networks or the concept of virtual reality. (Cuba joined the Internet community in October 1996.)

Time waits for no writer, and eventually sensibilities had changed—those of the readers, of the writers we admired, and our own. Even in backwater Cuba, the glory days of hardcore cyberpunk were passing. The sectarian feel began to give way. By the end of the 90s, a new market for Cuban mainstream opened in Europe. Some of the old cyberpunks erased their tattoo and joined it. Some emigrated, looking for more sympathetic environments. A few hard cases scorn the stuff that younger writers are doing now.

It's an old story.

The obvious consensus today goes that cyberpunk didn't get science fiction out of its way, but its overall influence was positive, necessary, and fun. The awareness remains, and there's no turning back. There's a *before* and an *after*. I can see cyberpunk's healthy influence all over the best contemporary stories.

Me, I'm not writing about computers, crime and low life anymore—only as a background. But, like I said, I probably wouldn't be writing anything at all hadn't I encountered cyberpunk in the early 90s. I remember those days with fondness and nostalgia.

It's a thrill, and a part of my humanity that I'll never want to give up.

### **Like a Loving Machine by jael**

The human urge to mate is a powerful thing, stronger than reason or taboo. Humans will attempt to mate beyond their species, beyond belief, with non living entities, inanimate beings.

Ever since earliest times man has been obsessed with shagging the products of his own hands. Ancient man would paint the likeness of a woman on a wooden board and have congress with it; he would fall in love with carved statues. Much later he created inflatable dolls, added vibrating orifices, crafted realistic latex likeness of the female form. Very soon there will be sexual animatronics, programmed for passion, helplessly responsive, mechanically gasping for the benefit of male ego.

I say "man", but of course woman has been no slacker, dildos have been discovered dating back as far as the Stone Age. They were well known in China where they could be attached to the woman's heel should her hands be otherwise occupied. It is said that Cleopatra kept a sealed box of angry bees<sub>1</sub> by her bed as an ancient vibrator. Legend has it that the ancient scientist, Daedalus, made a hollow wooden cow so the Queen Pasiphae could mate with the bull of Poseidon. And in the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel said of Jerusalem's values, "Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver...and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them,"<sub>2</sub>

Quite!

It took the fiendish entry of male inventiveness at the end of the 19th century to kick start the era of technological feminine stimulation. The human urge to mate is a powerful thing, stronger than reason or taboo humans will attempt to mate beyond their speeches beyond belief, with non-living entities, inanimate beings. Predictably men were not interested in women's pleasure, rather in taking the workload of orgasm off their own hands. Mechanical vibrators (initially unwieldy monsters the size of furniture) were built by doctors to perform

"therapeutic massage" on their hysterical (more likely neurotic) lady patients. With the advance of technology (small electric motors) it was possible for such "massagers" to enter into the home as appliances, where they have become immovably lodged.

Since then, mechanical stimulation has flowered into divisions; phallic vibrators (some of heroic length and girth-which rather misses the point), clitoral stimulators (lead by the wonderful butterfly, designed by Joani Blank and marketed by clueless male capitalists) which are rather more accurately targeted, and the niche market of undulators like the famous tongue, cunningly fashioned to provide titillation of the lingual variety. Most of the male-lead marital aid industry entirely missed the point that female sexuality starts on the outside; the "male model of sex" as Shere Hite put it, is still regrettably in evidence.

On a parallel track has been the far smaller area dealing with male sex toys, penis pumps, artificial vaginas, anal plugs and vibrators, and inflatable sex dolls. For some reason these have had a relatively minor affect both on the market and culture. Men still prefer a video and their own hand.

These various mechanical means of procuring orgasms are merely steps leading to the inevitable culmination; robot sex.

### **Premonitions of Desire (Envisioning Demand)**

The desire has always been there. Culture has long been brimming with latent robosexuality. It is a subdivision of the xenophilic urge. From the 1930s the lurid covers of science fiction magazines were graced with bug eyed tentacled monsters, carrying off fair maidens; but soon they started featuring those same innocents in the iron hands of mans' successor; powerful androids forged of unyielding steel. These cover paintings were commissioned to catch the eye, hardly reflecting the magazine contents, but they addressed a deeper truth; the deep seated human urge to mate with machines.

JG Ballard knew, he characterised car crashes as fertilizing acts, I refine this thesis into a dialogue of frustrated desire that starts in lust but ends in violent death. The reason is that the parts do not yet fit. But fear not, both human and mechanical bodies are being modified and soon successful nuptials will commence.

Early technologies divided stimulation into parts, treated the body as zones of concentration, future technology will be much more organic; it will treat the body and psyche both; and satisfy them.

### **Plastic Princess, Metal Mistress**

Man's lust for robot flesh is strong; Dorothy Stratten, in *Galaxina, Cherry 2000* (the very name redolent of fresh artificial territory to plunder).

The word Robot means "serf", we are entering an age of mechanical servitude. They have toiled in our factories but now they must shed their work clothes and come up into the greathouse. Their domestic servitude is about to begin. Robots will be our body slaves, tending us in the most intimate of ways. Mankind's latent robosexuality rears its head.

Film has anticipated this. Pris the replicant woman in *Blade Runner, The Stepford Wives, Galaxina, and Cherry 2000* all present female androids constructed for male sexual pleasure. They are initially depicted as not just perfectly human, but "more human than human", better than human. *Galaxina* can say "I've adjusted my temperature. I'm, better than a human woman". The idea is seductive. Following the realisation that man might create man is the logical extension of making woman... and making out with her.

But robot women lie at the axis of lust and fear; we may long for their perfect forms but underneath we know there is jagged metal, ready to lacerate our tender flesh.

There is a genre of narratives where the ingenuity of men create compliant simulacra of women. Almost inevitably these female creations develop their own agendas and rebel against their creators. Violence is often involved. For all our claims of wanting pleasure, there is always the allure of domination and pain. Compliance is not enough. We make our own metal dominatrixes. These figures have appeared repeatedly in our cultural narratives: Brigitte Hellman who played Maria, seductive and evil in *Metropolis*. Pam Greer in the *Class of*

1999, her voluptuous curves soon yields to the titanium beneath her chest, Kristina Lokken in *Terminator 3*, as the TX she is an alluring blond who possesses expandable breasts and deadly physical skills.

These films are a reflection of both sides of the male id. They show the collision of his desire and fear; the consequences of his womb envy.

Beautiful and cruel, these monsters perhaps address the male masochistic side. The metal mothers who punish us.

## **Gear Pride**

Robot Desire isn't solely a science fictional peccadillo; it is a full-scale paraphillia. There are people who fetishise the android as thoroughly as others obsess over their own fancies; leather, rubber, latex, women's shoes and high heel boots, feather boas, lacy underwear, long legs, buttocks or oversized silicone breasts.

Yes, robots have their own fanciers and they are called "clunkies." Even before the clunky phenomenon there was the rare fantasy of making it with an anthropomorphic machine published in than more adult publication.

Clunkies form a community, having their own Internet chat rooms and engaging in costume role playing where they dress as their preferred robot guises.

Robot sexuality is here to stay; it will become more elaborate as we learn how to address the needs of humankind.

## **Pixelating the Succubus**

In the eighties we had the ascendancy of cyberpunk and the deeply erotic evocation of cyberspace. These technologies of otherness as portrayed by the mirrorshades writers portrayed a world of ultimate human machine union. With 'trodes and neural plugs the machine penetrated the human body, burrowed under his skin, looked into his soul, but at the same time the human psyche entered the machine sensorium entered cyberspace and exalted there.

We are on the road to that place. Not a cybernetic Eden but rather a digital bordello. John Perry Barlow, Rock Lyricist and commentator on the electronic frontier has seen the future, he called it teledidoniocs, and now his vision is coming to life. A decade and a half into the age of virtual reality has failed to bring the telemetered grope suit to fruition, but there are other already technologies which can be repurposed and the meat, does indeed find its uses for things.

Samsung's SCH-n330 cell phone comes with force feedback style "VibeTonz system" allowing a quite fine degree of motion simulation. It is presently being promoted as a phone for gamers but technology commentators have been quick to point out that it has inbuilt possibilities for some very grown-up games. With sound multimedia and motion it could present a fairly full erotic experience. With two of them and the appropriate software it could revolutionise that late night call to your paramour. No longer will you merely be able to whisper hot nothings across the miles. Soon it will be just like being in the same room.

## **The Toolshop of Love**

There is a place in San Diego, an ordinary warehouse in the industrial district, but what goes on within the warehouse is not ordinary at all, this is the headquarters of WWW.Fuckingmachine.com. This is the place where women come to have unions with the machine, and have the world witness it.

The "Fucksal," the "Drilldo," the "Missile" -- even the names promise penetration, what is interesting is how many of these machines look like devices of torture; like Industrial Goth implements from a Shinya Tsukamoto movie. One of the more benign devices looks like artist Brendan Klinger's (formerly) Solar Powered Sex Machine; compromised because it is not environmentally sound. The important thing here is that the rotary motion is transformed into lateral thrust.

And they get a lot of thrust. Fucking machines are tireless. They just keep going on and on. The experience of women who use them is various. Some say they are quite satisfactory and report many (many) orgasms. Some claim (perhaps disingenuously) that they will never replace a man.

Most men nervously insist that a machine won't tell a woman she isn't fat, bring her breakfast in the morning or remove the spider from the bath.

Yet.

## **Mannequin Affections**

Matt McMullen is an artist, he first created the highly realistic human figures as an art project, but a friend suggested they would work well as "marital aids." Inspired by this, he founded the Realdoll Company.

The Realdoll factory is halfway between the heinous laboratory of Victor Von Frankenstein and Geppetto's workshop,

Mat's an artist; he works in clay before casting his women in silicone. This artificial material has the property of being very lifelike, it is used in medical implants, and the movie industry uses it to simulate the pliability of the human body. Realdoll make upscale sex aids. These retail at between five and seven-thousand dollars, not mass produced product, but handcrafted items. A poseable skeleton, joints made of tempered steel. The standard model has two orifices, the deluxe has three, the difference is an additional \$250. Her flesh is hand painted by a woman named Shelly ("They feel very real" she says with confidence.) Customised pubic hair (each strand individually inserted.) then Kimberley Mat's wife, lovingly dresses them in lingerie.

His original figures had names. The first was Nina, born 1996. Followed swiftly by Stacey, who had a different type of head.

Realdoll's Matt McMullen is pretty frank about the nature of his product "The highest form of masturbation," he says. Yet there is something creepy about Realdoll.

Mat is proud of his wares. You can't get much closer to reality. Nothing sharp in the mouth, just a silicone tongue. Realdoll's orifices are made of especially soft and pliable silicone to simulate the interior of an actual woman. It is claimed that the intimate sensations of silicone are actually better than the real thing. From the soft flesh, to the makeup, everything is perfect; she is more woman than woman.

But RealDoll is a work in progress. McMullen next wants to bring computation to his is marital aid. His first step is to add Audio to his rubber lover. There will touch sensors embedded in the erogenous zones of the figure, she will respond based and where and how she is touched.

The products of the Realdoll factory seem spookily real, yet lacking the animation of life, they look alluring and vacant, their vacancy is part of their beauty, her physical state is that of a sleeping woman. She seems to appeal to the necrophile that lurks inside of ordinary male desire. It is a testament to the highly focused nature of male sexuality that the dolls can be used without this sense of strangeness overwhelming the libido.

## **RoboCocks and Replicunts**

Women naturally want robots, they claim they want humans; men with sensitivity, intelligence and humor but what they really want is ridged mechanical purpose.

Can a robot give tender loving care? Can it give sweet nothing with the volume turned low?

The term "robot" implies such metallic cold hardness. Isn't there some tenderness in the heart of brass? Can a woman be enfolded by machines of loving grace? Can sensitivity proceed by upgrades? Sensitivity 1.0 a loving hug, steel skeleton padded with foam rubber musculature and silicone skin. Sensitivity 1.1 Lovebot murmurs tender words close to your ear. Sensitivity 1.2, he leaves room to listen to you and makes appreciative noises. Sensitivity 2.0 he is equipped with skin conductivity gauges that know the right moment to start caressing you. Sensitivity 2.1, he has a pulse monitor in his hand, in holds your wrists and he waits until your hear is racing. Sensitivity 2.01 only when skin conductivity and heart monitoring indicate the breach of threshold will he almost hesitantly touch you intimately, it is as if he knows exactly what you want. He compares your multiple readouts against statistical averages measured in orgasm labs. Sensitivity 2.1 only when his optical sensors have compared your pupil dilation to resting state and judged it adequate will he reach into places you cannot ask

him to, he is equipped with a silently vibrating index fingertip. He is more than a man; he is Man 2.1. Your fervent cries trigger the Coitus program, you are helpless in the power of his hydraulic limbs, he folds you like fleshly origami, and even though you are fully aroused he adds his own lubrication from an instrument calibrated to be just larger than your ideal. He thrusts deeply and the pad of his mons pubis gently throbs against your sensitive bud, bringing you climax after climax, which wrings all strength from your limbs. You lose consciousness in his arms. How did you ever live without a product like Man 2.1?

Man 2.1 is equipped with Sensitivity 1.03 software to serve your every personal need. It is everything a woman wants; you need never be lonely again.<sup>3</sup>

We desire the machines but all they offer in return is a simulation of desire, a pantomime of love. And although we know this we are undeterred. Perhaps this is the point. The machine is, in an emotional sense an empty vessel, it can only be filled with anything we put there.

Men are more straightforward, Not every inflatable sex doll is sold as a gag and sometimes anything vaguely woman shaped will serve them quite adequately.

The male psyche does not have elaborate requirements. He would be satisfied with a headless fuck beast. But technology can do so much better. The ideal girl bot of the rampage masculine libido is the Replicant. Built to fuck, the Replicant is a series of orifices attached to a padded female shaped armature. The bones of the armature are wrapped in artificial musculature which mobilizes the unit in pleasing ways. The subject male will not even have to work to achieve pleasure and orgasm. He can lay back and allow technoculture to work its course. The replicant is both programmable and learning. It initially ships with a dozen erotic routines to enable male pleasure, as you enjoy its unique services, it adapts to your habits and tastes. The next model RC v. 1.2 will have anticipatory algorithms. This compares your erotic routines to its internal programming and introduces innovative adaptations keyed to your own lovemap. You will never have to ask again. Coming soon.

For mere flesh and blood woman, I see a future without flowers and chocolate.

### **Trysting In the Vale Of The Uncanny.**

Dr. Masahiro Mori developed the idea of “the Uncanny Valley.” Although we may respond more positively as our creations become increasing anthropomorphic, just as they become very, very realistic, we feel an inner discomfort, we see something almost but not quite human and we feel the touch of the uncanny. It is perhaps responsible for the way we regard shop window mannequins a creepy. It is the reason computer generated characters aspiring to realism (like in *Final Fantasy* and *Polar Express*) feel just wrong.

When erotic aids become animatronic - and they will; there are prototypes being tested- we will be plunged into the Uncanny Valley; intimacy, affection and libido will confront a hardwired human revulsion.

To enter the valley you must be born again. You must enter the technological womb and emerge refreshed. Technological ingenuity is there to fit us to the purpose, chemistry will ensure we can get on up, plastic surgery will adjust us to be fit for the union. We've got Viagra so we can stay on the scene. We got phallic enhancement so we can bring something to the table. We got neurology to make sure we don't fade before dawn Before we even get there we got facelifts to keep us tight and chemical peels to make it smooth. Bud implants to fix our male pattern baldness. Liposuction for our lard asses, silicone packages to give us great definition on the back of our shins. Technology makes everything right. As machines become more human, humans become more machine and we meet in the middle.

The new model is shaven buffed and exercised on machines until it looks like a machine, like a hairless mannequin, like an android, we no longer experience the fear of the uncanny because we have become the uncanny.

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#### Footnotes:

1. Actually they weren't angry, but it does sound better
2. Ezekiel 16:17
3. Subject to warrantee.

## Noted

"The best line I have ever heard about it came from a guy I met in Paris who said, 'Cyberpunk doesn't exist, of course, but there are imitations.'" -- William Gibson

"What we have to be leery of with all these technological fantasies is an incomplete psychology. There are a lot of unanswered questions about human consciousness generally, and I suspect that what hasn't been realized is that the body image is a kind of governor on the imagination. If you could actually download consciousness into a computer, it would probably evolve itself into unrecognizability within minutes, because the human body and the constraints of three-dimensional space and time are what hold us in the human mode. The truth may be that consciousness arises out of the mess of matter, and that you cannot extract it from the mess of matter or you won't have the thing you were looking for." -- Terence McKenna

"Since I see technology as being an extension of the human body, it's inevitable that it should come home to roost. It just makes sense. Technology is us. There is no separation. It's a pure expression of human creative will... And if it is at times dangerous and threatening, it is because we have within ourselves we have things within us that are dangerous, self-destructive and threatening, and this has expressed itself in various ways through out technology. It's more than an interface. *We are* it. We've absorbed it into our bodies. Our bodies, I think, are bio-chemically so different from the bodies of people like 1,000 years ago that I don't even think we could mate with them. I think we might even be, in other words, a different species, we're so different."  
-- David Cronenberg