

# Introduction: Practicing Cyberfeminisms

*subRosa and the Editors*

It is also true that every new movement, when it first elaborates its theory and policy, begins by finding support in the preceding movement, though it may be in direct contradiction with the latter. It begins by suiting itself to the forms found at hand and by speaking the language spoken hereto. In time...the new movement finds its forms and its own language. —ROSA LUXEMBURG, 1900

**D**omain *Errors! Cyberfeminist Practices* was born and developed in several subRosa meetings following an intensive summer reading group on the intersections of discourses of race, technology, and cyberfeminism. In October 1999, subRosa began work on a publication project intended to initiate a feminist and postcolonial critique of embodiment, difference, and racial prejudice within cyberspace, biotechnologies and cyberfeminism—topics that had barely begun to be addressed at the time. We wanted the contents of the project to go beyond general critiques of cyberfeminism and gender, which have already been addressed in other publications, to include areas repressed in previous cyberfeminist discourse and criticism. These included: The intersections of discourses of race and technology; the embodiment of racial prejudice; the transformations of sex and gender through biotech and new medical technologies; the reification of notions of heterosexism, eugenics, and compulsory motherhood in Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) and the difficulties of connecting activism in cyberspace and conditions in Real Life. subRosa was also committed to seeking out contributions by women whose voices had not been heard in the cyberfeminist context.

Working almost exclusively through cyber communications, and distributed

geographically over many countries, the subRosa collective, three editors, and sixteen contributors took much longer to shape and finish the manuscript than originally planned. Thus some of the topics addressed here have now also begun to be discussed in publications, conferences, and lists (such as Undercurrents)—which is very welcome. We hope the contents of this book will contribute to, and deepen, these emerging discussions. As Caroline Bassett said in a paper read at the “Technics of Cyberfeminism” lab in Bremen in December 2001, “Cyberfeminism is a project with work to do.” We offer *Domain Errors!* as our contribution to the ongoing project of formulating a critical politics and practice of cyberfeminisms, and as a way of disseminating these in more accessible forms to a wider, more diverse audience.

The book’s final content closely reflects subRosa’s initial desires and concerns. Furthermore, it manifests subRosa’s social relations of collaboration and conviviality, its practice of welcoming productive differences and misunderstandings, and its commitment to solidarity with women from different backgrounds. subRosa’s social politics of welcoming, invitation, and inclusion have led to fortunate meetings, collaborations, and connections with dynamic feminists from many parts of the world who have enriched the offerings of this book and are beginning to develop a growing cyberfeminist gift economy.

As the feminization of the information society, and of work, become ubiquitous globally, women (and men) around the world are enmeshed in daily encounters with the incursions of cyber and bio technologies in their lives and communities—and many of them are struggling with ways to both resist and negotiate the power and authority of these technologies. Be it as artists, students, cultural workers, mothers, theorists, academics, technology workers, data maintenance workers, activists, organizers—or combinations of these—the contributors to this book speak and act from various economic, sexual, age, and racial positions. Our collective strengths have been enriched by this collaboration.

The relevance of issues of difference to electronic culture is often questioned as the belief in the singularity, disembodiment and anonymity of electronic communication still prevails. As in the material world, in digital realms social

and political power relations are deeply structured by sexist and racist ideologies of domination. Feminists, minoritarian groups, net activists, artists, among others, have begun to mount effective critiques of these structures and ideologies, as well as contesting imaginatively to maintain and expand autonomous territories on the Internet and in digital domains. A cyberfeminist politics must foster and welcome embodied differences and initiate desiring social relations, while refusing to disappear into the myths of virtuality. How autonomy and solidarity are struggled for and practiced matters profoundly. Doubts about the effectiveness of various contestational strategies on the Internet and in digital domains must be met with the willingness to experiment with a variety of tactics—even at the risk of failure. A cyberfeminist critique of the social relations of women—as they are affected by science and digital technologies—needs to be launched inside and outside of cyberspace simultaneously to include the many that do not have digital access. Each contribution to this book—whether text, image, performative project, manifesto or rant—suggests strategies for critical and tactical cyberfeminisms. *Domain Errors!* invites readers to jump-start new projects, theories, conversations, connections, actions, and becomings.

*Domain Errors!* is divided into three sections that combine theory, practices, critique, and artist projects. Section One, “Racism and Cyberfeminism in the Integrated Circuit,” discusses lived aspects of the intersections of race, gender, and technology in the situations of women in different countries and cultures of technology. An introductory discussion of “Situated Cyberfeminisms,” contextualizes the contents of the book within a critical history of previous cyberfeminist discourses and practices—including critiques of the cyborg—while it also suggests the outlines of a politically engaged cyberfeminism. The section also contains a proposal for a striking new approach towards identifying and combating racism in everyday life; a historical and critical analysis of why blacks are deemed to be less “technologically advanced;” an eloquent meditation on the “fortress” mentality that fostered ancient and modern methods of exclusion and xenophobia in Moscow; an analysis of race in “The Matrix;” a discussion and examples of regressive Finnish gender ideologies manifested

on commercial Web-sites addressing women; and an e-dialog about the politics of designing a cyberfeminist e-commerce for traditional hand-weavers in India.

Section Two, “The Female Flesh Commodities Lab,” offers searching discussions of the molecular invasion and colonization of the female body by Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART), recombinant genetics, and new medical and surgical flesh technologies such as aesthetic vulvar surgery. The mapping of formerly invisible bodily territories—like the clitoris and its subcutaneous tissues, and the interior of the womb—promises new understanding of possibilities for female sexual pleasure while simultaneously posing the dangers of commodification and medical invasion of the female body. Other essays tackle the appropriation of the feminist rhetoric of “choice” by ART marketeers, and the increasing application of vision technologies developed for military purposes in the surveillance and control of female (and male) bodies. The complex personal and political issues of infertility, and the increasing use of repro-genetic technologies to ‘solve’ fertility problems, are contrasted with a consideration of the potentially liberating possibilities of queer cyborg parenthood. A social/emotional anatomy of the “cyborg mommy,” figured in digital artist pages, reveals the conditions of posthuman motherhood. The section also contains a sobering summary history of eugenics in the U.S., and ends with a photo-illustrated time-line and commentary about the commodification of children.

Section Three, “Research! Action! Embodiment! Conviviality!” takes a hands-on approach to theoretical and embodied cyberfeminist practices. It offers a mix of activist and artist pages and projects, along with a photo-illustrated essay about the connections between the American Girl Doll and eugenic reproduction. There’s also an illuminating look at collaborations between feminist artists in Singapore; an interview with a feminist Reiki master; temp(t)ing job descriptions for disposable, feminized technology workers; and a rant for menopausal cyborgs.

*Domain Errors!* ends with a manifesto, “Refugia, Becoming Autonomous Zones,” that is a call for new activist concepts and projects of “becoming autonomous.” Autonomy is not a fixed, essential state or quality. Like gender,

autonomy is created through its performance, by doing/becoming; it is a political practice. To become autonomous is to refuse authoritarian and compulsory cultures of separation and hierarchy through embodied practices of welcoming difference. It is a powerful antidote to domination, exclusive expertise, and ruthless competition. Becoming autonomous is a political position for it thwarts the exclusions of proprietary knowledge and jealous hoarding of resources, and replaces the social and economic hierarchies on which these depend with a politics of skills exchange, welcome, and collaboration. Freely sharing these with others creates a common wealth of knowledge and power that subverts the domination and hegemony of the master's rule. subRosa hopes that our call to becoming autonomous will inspire tactics and actions as yet unimagined.

Arise for the struggle! Arise for action! The time for empty manifestos, platonic resolutions, and high-sounding words is gone! The hour of action has struck!

—ROSA LUXEMBURG, DECEMBER 25, 1918



