

GENDER AND  
NEW REALITIES  
IN  
CYBERSPACE

wired\_women

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## The Memoirs of a Token: An Aging Berkeley Feminist Examines *Wired*

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I suppose it all came to a head one night past midnight in the spring of 1995. I lay awake on the couch in the living room thinking dark thoughts until past three in the morning. *Wired* magazine had brought me to that too-often described "aha" state of women and ethnic minorities and gays and anyone else who feels marginalized and badly done by, when they reach the epiphany that requires leaving policies of appeasement behind—wounded pride, self-disgust, the infant impulse to lash out.

*Wired* is the hottest, coolest, trendiest new magazine of the 1990s. Within its first three years, it has received a National Magazine award, started sister publications in England and Japan and become the coffee table ornament/lifestyle indicator/print-based fashion accessory *du jour*. This consumer magazine that makes computers and communications and video and technology sexy and glamorous even

shows up in IBM's television commercials. *Wired* marks its readers as being with-it one-planet high-tech high-touch global citizens of the 1990s.

And *Wired* has certainly been the most successful magazine launch San Francisco has seen since *Rolling Stone* in the mid-1960s. Like *Rolling Stone*, it seeks to both shape and reflect an emerging, media-driven worldwide culture, one that's creative and anarchic and playful and loose in the hips. And like *Rolling Stone's* founder, Jann Wenner, *Wired* co-founder Louis Rossetto is well on his way to creating a media empire of his own, everything from the online *HotWired* to HardWired Books to rumors of Wired TV.

### Memories of Underdevelopment

But here's where things get tricky and uncomfortably gendered: When *Rolling Stone*, the chronicle of sixties sex'n'drugs'n'rock'n'roll culture came into being, sixties feminism hadn't really yet hit the streets. Hippie chicks were all into free love and making bread, and Janis and Grace sure could wail; but somehow girls weren't much relevant (o, sixties concept!) to making it all happen. The second wave of feminism hadn't yet spawned its kazillions of cultural commentators (How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb? One to do it, and four to write about it).

The counterculture was supposed to affect us all—however, you wouldn't know that women were up to much, really, after reading *Rolling Stone*. Women getting uppity (as they did as the sixties turned into the seventies and into the eighties) were intrinsically *not* considered entertaining—nor of much interest to the fifteen-year-old boys (*Rolling Stone's* true subscriber base) who read the magazine in the rec room of their parents' basement, and to whom the magazine represented the fantasy lives they wished to live: hip, smart, irreverent. *Rolling Stone*, like *Wired*, like all consumer magazines, acts out its readers' fantasy lives (consider that half of the subscribers to *Vogue* are size 12 or larger, and that many of those who subscribe to poetry magazines are would-be poets who hope to get published themselves someday).

Thirty years have passed since Jann Wenner started *Rolling Stone*, yet *Wired*, its spiritual child, both interpreter and vanguard of the Next New Generational Thing, is also

turning out to be largely by guys and for guys. It's as if women hadn't infiltrated, at least to some degree, every kind of traditionally male bastion since the 1960s—and as if it wouldn't be perilous and foolish and shortsighted to conceive of and record any kind of global transfiguration of culture that didn't include them.

We're not quite as invisible or handmaidently this time around, but *Wired* doesn't seem to have paid much mind. We have in us, if only as ancestral genetic memory, the experience of women civil-rights workers who began to wonder why they weren't allowed to participate in the revolution they came to foment—and who came to demand a commensurate place in it, and in their own lives overall.

Nonetheless, *Wired* has consistently and accurately been compared in the national media to *Playboy*: It contains the same glossy pictures of certified nerd-suave things to buy—which, since it's the nineties, includes cool hand-held scanners as well as audio equipment and cars—and idolatrous profiles of (generally) male moguls and muckymucks whose hagiography is not that different from what might have appeared in *Fortune*. It is the wishbook of material desire for young men.

And as with *Playboy*, whose articles can be both *great* and about things that count society-wide, women tend to be put off by *Wired*, as they seem not to be by *Wired*'s more wacked-out sister-spirit competitor publications, *boingboing* and *Mondo 2000*. When thirty women at a San Francisco talk about women and the Internet (a pretty self-selected bunch relatively comfortable with technology) were asked if they read *Wired*, they all raised their hands. And when they were asked if they hated *Wired*, they all raised their hands. It appears women, even the techno-initiated, generally do not like *Wired*.

## Looks Count

Which poses an uncomfortable question: If something looks sleek and whiz-bang, does that mean it *can't* appeal to most women? That is, if a publication exudes the smell of new machines, celebrates the whizzy and the zippy—are there subtle gendered cues that say "Boys club! Fun for us! None of that cuddly touchy-feely serious crap that reminds us of

moms/girlfriends/schoolmarms!" And does that also telegraph to women the message "trancelike boy-absorption in silly fetishizing junk on the order of model airplanes—who needs it?"

Would art directors and style-setters worldwide ape the *Wired* style if it telegraphed *girls* just having fun? Put the *Wired* visual gestalt in the same box as other mostly-male-reader mags such as *Popular Science* or *PC Magazine*. If they looked like *Ladies Home Journal* or *Martha Stewart Living*, would male readers refuse to pick them up? Why aren't the similarly laic appeals to out-there lifestyle choices of *Interview* as gendered as those of *Wired*? Is it because *Interview*, with just as tendentious an à la mode look and feel as *Wired*, is nominally about *people* and *Wired* is about *machines*?

## The Second Sex

The very success of *Wired* raises another unpleasant revenant: It's a sociocultural commonplace that when a profession, hitherto a male dominion, becomes more accessible to women, it loses status. Clerks, bank tellers, secretaries, pharmacists, schoolteachers, English professors, psychiatrists, were at one time practically all men—these are occupations that lost money, status and power as they became more female-dominated. Does this mean that a trade and a subculture can't possibly be of the moment and desirable and high-caste and way-cool and possessed of societal *juju* if it is seen as being female? Or even, female-friendly? It's a truism that women wear male clothing (either the real thing, or reinterpreted for them), but few men wear women's clothing—unless they are into gender-fuck or transgressive behaviors in general. A certain sexually charged salability aside (Swedish bikini team or dyke chic), girl-associated culture isn't perceived as cutting edge.

*Wired* says that 20 percent of its readership is women. Would *Wired* ever run an article of more appeal to women than men, just to favor for once one of those 20-percenters? Would its core readers feel betrayed?

## Material Culture

The wild success of *Wired* also touches on other equally

creepy gender-oriented uneasinesses. A peculiarly awful, misogynistic boss I once had at a now-defunct computer magazine in the early 1980s once made the dismissive remark that no general-interest magazine whose audience was mostly women could survive commercially (witness the problems with *Ms* and *Psychology Today*)—unless it was a female service-magazine such as *Redbook*. But magazines whose readership was largely male (such as *PC World*) could flourish. That ignores all the niche hobbyist magazines largely for women, and the nominally-unisex-but-really-for-women titles such as *Vanity Fair* and *Gourmet* and elides the important distinction that computer magazines, in some sense, are very much business and trade publications.

But his point still nags: Since women generally don't fetishize and aren't tool and object junkies to the extent that men are (though of course there are exceptions), maybe there can't be a magazine that guarantees to a set of advertisers (and it is advertisers, and not subscribers, who subsidize a magazine) a captive audience of readers interested in particular kinds of goods and services they have to sell. The idea is, women aren't interested in objects, unless it's the bland health/grooming/fitness/beauty/Kitchen Bouquet chachkas that show up mostly in the pages of rags such as *Good Housekeeping*.

## You Do the Math

When all else fails, you can, as they say in Internet slang, RTFM (read the fucking manual). That is, IRL (in real life), examine the text at hand. I sat down with all *Wired* issues published as of late spring 1995 and performed the lame, plodding, numerical analysis so annoyingly a part of feminist studies and employment-discrimination class-action lawsuits. I counted how many men and how many women were authors of *Wired* stories and subjects of *Wired* features, and how many were listed on the *Wired* mastheads.

It would be intellectually dishonest to expect *Wired* to practice what a male *Wired* editor calls "affirmative-action journalism," that is, to expect more women to appear in the magazine than actually scabble around in the world of digital convergence. The best figures available seem to indicate that about one third of Internet accounts are now owned by

women, but historically that has not been the case. And it's clear to anyone who spends time online that even now women aren't taking up one-third of the bandwidth. And only about 10 to 15 percent of computer-science majors (both graduate and undergraduate) are women.

And thus it appears: Women were the subject of about 15 percent of *Wired* articles and only one cover out of twenty-five as of June 1995. There are vague in-house grumbling intimations by women on staff of likely accomplished females being shot down as article-subjects in *Wired* editorial meetings and of no-account off-point numb-nut guys being celebrated instead—but that's par for the course in any mostly-male arena.

Where *Wired* numbers become dismaying lies in who is doing the article writing. The community of writers capable of writing for *Wired* is not made up of the same kinds of people who might be considered net geeks or multimedia content developers—or who in their fantasy-life might want to imagine themselves to be such.

Schools of journalism overall attract and graduate women in equal or greater numbers than men; even the staffs of male-oriented magazines such as *Playboy* are made up of sizable numbers of women. What's more, within the specialty of technical journalism, women make up 30 to 50 percent of its work force, much as women dominate technical writing and documentation—because that's where the jobs are.

But only 15 percent of *Wired* authors are women.

Because computer journalism as a specialty has been around for at least ten to fifteen years, plenty of women have been able to acquire the chops to make it to the journeyman, and even expert, ranks of this specialized writing guild. But these women seldom show up in the pages of *Wired*.

These dreary *Wired* statistics fit with what many, many women have told me: that they had pitched *Wired* and gotten nowhere, not even the courtesy of a formal rejection.

Is it that women who habitually *do* write about technology simply can't phrase their queries in ways that *Wired* guys like? Is it their choice of subjects? Is it that they look at the magazine, think "boys and their toys; no way they'd want *me*" and don't even try? And as for the women who are simply damned fine writers and could write about anything if asked (you know, like Janet Malcolm or Katha Pollit or

Cynthia Heimel)—are they not asked? Would they laugh if they were? Would the whole magazine strike them as being inaccessible and adolescent-male-wet-dream and, therefore, not worthy of their efforts? Highly paid, highly visible male writers want to be in *Wired* regardless of the pay because it's the current guy magazine of record, whereas women writers of similar status appear to not know it exists, not care, or maybe figure it's too much of a boy's club to even bother.

Historically the editorial positions of creativity, power and prestige at *Wired* have been held by men, while editorial pooper-scooper jobs, the copy editors and fact-checkers and everyone else who has to clean up and rewrite copy into acceptable shape for publication, have been held largely by women. They have contended with substandard prose written by male writers all the time (where'd they get these guys?). Are the women who can't even get in the door worse than the guys who are already in? Do the women's shoes have to be shined twice as bright? four times as bright? eight times? to compete with the boys whose output makes *Wired* staffers' eyes roll?

As for the women authors who do make it into *Wired*, they seem to write an inordinate number of articles on sex'n'dating, or profiles of other women; can they not think of anything else to write about? Or is this the equivalent of what happens in big corporations, where no one knows if it's due to women unconsciously seeking their comfort zones or men unconsciously ghettoizing their female hires? Women in management inevitably show up in human resources ("so good with people"). In the legal community they end up in family law, in urban planning they cluster in housing.

As for the masthead, it reflects who a magazine considers its stable of contributors to be, even if they haven't written a thing in months: It's a way to list membership in its club of the cool, the equivalent to "of counsel" on a law firm's letterhead.

Sad to say, in my survey of *Wired*, women made up only 8 percent of the writers listed on the masthead. There was one month when I was the only woman on the masthead. Month to month, I have been in the company of only one or two others.

Does this issue of the gender of authorship matter? To me gender and agency are inextricably bound up with each

other, though necessarily not in a one-to-one causal relationship: For example, it's still the case that women legislators, regardless of party affiliation, care more about childcare and education and family-leave than male legislators do. And just as in fiction, where men trying to write from a woman's point of view can create fascinating work that to me almost always rings false, I think it does matter that so few of the voices printed in *Wired* are female. It probably doesn't occur to the men writing for *Wired* to think about issues that might be of more importance to women than to men.

## The Personal is the Political

Then there's my own history with *Wired*, which explains how I ended up such a wreck that night on the couch. Of course, all kinds of folks feel marginalized and dismissed by the *Wired* sensibility and the *Wired* powers-that-be. Indeed, my sense of the magazine's rejecting me with a foreign-body reaction was probably just as much a function of my own intolerance of their wacky, techno-naïve libertarian worldview (technology = good, government = bad; free market = good, regulation = bad; digital = good, analog = bad) as it was the magazine's trivialization of the token girl. Although *Wired* maintains a posture of celebrating all the cacophony and lack of prior restraint net global culture has to offer, in fact, it is not open to points of view other than its own, as bounded a set as *National Review* or *The Advocate*.

Ultimately, gender and gender politics are simply part of the political mix of all humans operating in groups, and not everything can be squished through the narrow cognitive-filter of feminist critique.

That being said, commence my lament:

Back in the winter of 1993, before I'd returned to live in San Francisco, I had dinner with John Markoff, computer correspondent for the *New York Times*. Markoff is someone I've known more socially than professionally, if tangentially, for years, and he asked me if I knew about these nice, interesting people at this new startup, *Wired*, which had billboards on buses all over town. No, I hadn't heard of them, but Markoff had written for the magazine's first issue, so I figured the founders might be engaged in something decent.

A few weeks later, I received a free copy of the first issue



of *Wired* through a one-time mass mailing. The magazine had obtained my name and address from the membership roster of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a nonprofit cofounded by Lotus 1-2-3 entrepreneur Mitch Kapor and Grateful Dead lyricist John Perry Barlow and dedicated to the preservation of First and Fourth Amendment rights in cyberspace; I'd been a charter card-carrying member.

I describe this periphrastic backstory so that it's clear why I thought *Wired* was an association of kindred spirits, communicators whose larger view on technology was not so different from my own. At its start, and at the commencement of my connection with it, *Wired* and I seemed to be cohabiting the same small sector of the galaxy, and there seemed a certain synchronistic rightness to the connection. But I digress...

When I looked over that first issue of *Wired*, with its glossy literate tone (plus a Q+A with Camille Paglia, the counterfeminist of the moment), I thought, "Humm, maybe they'd get my fiction." My MFA thesis written for Columbia University's School of the Arts was a series of interconnected short stories depicting how the new information technologies deform relationships, focusing on but not limited to email. I'd been receiving Miss Congeniality award rejections on it for months, often written on manual typewriters ("you're a very good writer, and this is very interesting, but no one cares about this email nonsense and this is all unrealistic anyway").

After asking editor in chief Rossetto by email if he'd be interested (in those days, he was easily reachable), I asked my agent to FedEx the manuscript. They received it on a Friday and agreed to publish its concluding novella, "Love Over the Wires," the following Monday. I was told they were thrilled to have a Pushcart Prize-nominated writer publishing fiction with them, and they started throwing nonfiction projects my way.

Working on my first *Wired* profile, a portrait of the Hannah Arendt/Jeanne Kirkpatrick of the computer industry, Esther Dyson, I included a section on gender-politics, because I had been struck in my reporting by how often I was asked "Who is Esther dating?"—a question that had *never* come up when I had done profiles of other computer folks, that is, guys. I was also struck by the personal quality of what her

detractors had to say; that is, people made snotty remarks about her clothes or manners that I had once again never heard applied to equally socially aberrant guys. And finally, Esther was interesting as a woman who had succeeded in a male-dominated field.

Making Esther neither a feminist exemplar nor a martyr, I simply described in a limited portion of my article the comments and questions about her that I had found curious, indicated that such an anomalous set of reactions had to be related to her gender, and asked Esther how she felt about the ways her life-path had been affected by her being a woman.

Executive editor Kevin Kelly called me up to complain. Wasn't it sexist of me to call attention to Esther's gender at all? "I don't even think of whether or not Esther is a woman." Of course he didn't; Esther-the-uncoupled-off-tombboy is one of the best women I've ever met at being one of the guys. Wasn't it irrelevant of me to bring up all these feminist issues? I responded that it would be of interest to other women to see how a woman negotiated all the compromises and contradictions of making it in a male-majority polis. "Gee, I never thought about how it might be interesting to women to hear about another woman's experience." And on it went, back and forth. That section remained; it is the part of the article I have gotten the most compliments and comments on; but, of course, as Deborah Tannen has pointed out in her books, anytime a woman raises an issue of gender-politics, or a relationship issue, she is branded as troublesome, regardless of how polite or righteous her cause.

I'd never had a conversation quite like this with an editor before; puzzled, I trotted off to...

## The Salon

I was asked to participate in a roundtable discussion with various people considered Interesting and Worthy by *Wired*, perhaps modeled on the monthly Reality Club meetings of New York literary agent John Brockman (who handles clients such as *Whole Earth Catalog's* Stewart Brand and John Markoff). I was amused and flattered and thought it would be fun.

Alas, what resulted was one of those click-inducing,

radicalizing smashups I'd heard about and read about since 1969 but never before experienced for myself.

The Friday-night salon turned out to be just like those conclaves that women who attend graduate school in male-dominated fields in science report on and that women in the business world complain about. In other words, no one paid me, one of the few women invited, the smallest amount of attention.

Some of my problems that night were no doubt structural: My female tendency towards rhetorical politeness (not wanting to barge in or raise my voice to overmaster someone else's speech) and my softer voice, were, I'm sure, part of the problem. And a male friend I ran into later commented on the bombastic, bad energy in the place that night, so gender probably wasn't the only determinant of bottom-dog status.

Nonetheless, at this confab at *Wired's* South of Market offices, I was rendered mute. When I would start to talk, the other salon attendees would simply act as if I weren't present. If I made a point, it was simply ignored, evidently not worth responding to. One participant was a guy I had coincidentally interviewed on the phone a few hours before for a non-*Wired* project—he acted as if I were not even there.

The climax of the evening came when virtual-reality spokesmodel Jaron Lanier started babbling on about how “we” (who we? *Wired*? the technology community? self-absorbed guys with large and fragile egos? monomaniacs?) needed to seek out artists and humanities people, people whose comments and critiques were not normally heard. Meanwhile I had been sitting right next to him all evening, and he hadn't even acknowledged the volume of air I was displacing. I felt like grabbing him by the dreds and saying, “Asshole, I studied with Kenneth Rexroth and published poetry in little magazines whose names even I have forgotten! I've been hanging out with arty types like Leo Castelli hangers-on at places like Max's Kansas City since 1973!”

But I couldn't see what such defensiveness and such protestations and such borching would accomplish. I was appalled at having been put in a position where it was assumed I was a null set, useless until I proved otherwise. Not being inclined toward scenes, I said nothing at the time. I did throw a hissy fit afterwards (for I had never been ignored just like

that), and naturally, was not invited back.

The events at the *Wired* salon were a sign that something very odd was going on with this community/culture/cult. I hadn't expected bleeding-edge guys from their twenties to their fifties to act like the board members of General Motors sometime in mid-1957, and it's certainly not been borne out by my encounters with the Real World Out There that technophiles are, to a man, male chauvinist pigs. The manners of the *Wired* salon participants were quite different, say, from what I had run into with the friendly geeks of the Internet technical community. Those Internet technocrats were attentive, verging on courtly, once they saw I meant no harm and was at least educable.

Tending toward the dense, I couldn't reconcile the cognitive dissonance between *Wired's* representation of itself (egalitarian, democratic) and *Wired's* operational nature.

Cut a year later to...

## Femxpri

In the summer of 1994, a woman started the topic “WIRED...gendered? (oh no!)” in the *Wired* conference on the WELL, the online conferencing system/BBS I've lurked on for years. The predictably accurate but hopelessly comments were posted: the aggressive, swaggering look and feel of the mag (most likely appealing to guys, probably off-putting to gals), the emphasis on expensive toys likely to induce male vasocongestion and capable of being used as display and territorial markers (women, to the extent they care about such things at all, generally are interested in the utilitarian value, not fetish-worthiness, of tools), the generally unconscious but annoyingly present small sexismisms, and so on.

Publicly I posted a few remarks, mostly to the effect that guys have this amazing “off” switch that makes them simply not want to hear women complaining about men, or talking about topics exclusively of interest to women—unless it's about sex in a way guys find exciting and not threatening. But what signified more is that while I was posting that publicly, I wrote what I *really* felt in a private women's conference on the WELL, femxpri (a conference at least nominally for Generation X women). This public-private duality in part sprang from my not wanting to violate the confidences told

to me by female *Wired* staffers. I also didn't want to jeopardize my position at the magazine. Not totally. Not at that time. *Wired*, like many entrepreneurial organizations, is very much of the either-you-are-with-us-or-you-are-against-us mentality. It pronounces anathema on those who defect for any reason and cannot abide criticism or deviation from its tiny cell of the world-kaleidoscope. I knew to write all I thought and felt would end my career as The Woman Writer They Respect and Can Point to When People Accuse Them of Being Sexist. I was well aware, like many tokens in high-profile scenes before me, that I had a position of some status that I enjoyed and wasn't ready to relinquish.

This dodge is somewhat allied to the phenomena I'd observed in social or professional situations where it came out that I'd written for *Wired*. Suddenly I would be perceived to be more interesting/intelligent/attractive than I had been in the seconds before this revelation was made. But sickeningly enough, I came to feel this highly favorable response may have had *less* to do with the reflected sheen of *Wired* and more to do with the oddity of such an unprepossessing creature (a frowzy, lumpy, bookish, middle-aged woman) creating content capable of appearing in *that* mag. Didn't Dr. Johnson make a misogynistic remark to that effect: that women preaching is on a par with a dog's walking on its hind legs; the marvel is not that they do it well, but that they do it at all...

Which feeds, sheepishly enough, into a confession regarding...

### Writer Vanity and Thin-Skinnedness

Anyone who works for applause (actors and film editors and writers) cares if his or her work is displayed to maximum advantage, is leveraged for optimum narcissistic gratification. Which in the negative, means it's really easy to start throwing all manner of slights into one's own private cauldron of discontent: Never a cover story. Screwups on layout and design and type. Not being invited to A-list parties. Unreflective slapdash press-release journalism rewarded lavishly in others. Never being paid on acceptance, as my contract stipulates.

As a consequence, it's hard to disentangle the inevitable

gripes stemming from the general *Wired* cavalier attitude toward its writers (I know of no one, regardless of gender, currently writing for them that is happy with the magazine); the personal-to-me lack of fit between my worldview and that of *Wired*; and the instinctive antipathy I've always had toward star fucking and status seeking, which *Wired* is tending toward more and more. But considering I've been with the damned thing from the beginning, that I've been told repeatedly that I am valued as one of their best writers (when I was applying for a job at *The Economist* in the spring of 1994, the managing editor of *Wired* told the Brits that they could have me only if I was still allowed to write for him), why did I feel shunted aside? I'm not that paranoid....

Which leads to the blowout/couch-huddling/coup de grâce incident triggered by women technopagans.

Around the same time as the femxpri discussions on the WELL, I finished writing a controversial profile for *Wired*, this one of Paul Allen, the other billionaire founder of Microsoft. This was a project beset by false starts, blind alleys, confidential sources, massive use of the computer industry's bush telegraph, and reliance on the sources—and the reputation for accuracy and fairness—I'd built up over years. It was investigative reporting of the classic kind: as such, it got lots of people upset and required the services of the *Wired* libel lawyer—and exposed me to serious censorship. Rossetto deleted material that didn't fit his ideological praxis. The article took six months, eight drafts, and was exhausting for all parties concerned.

So for my next project, I wanted to do something fun, where no one would be disposed to get mad and no moneyed interests were at stake. It was a story idea I'd had in mind for a long time: technopagans, high-tech folks practicing neopaganism, nerds making like wizards on their nights off or actually using technology in their rituals. I thought they were a hoot, and I relished writing as an inquiring anthropologist from Mars about a subculture I found entertaining. And it seemed like a pure-form emergent-culture *Wired* feature.

*Wired* hemmed and hawed; wouldn't say yes, wouldn't say no. I kept presenting my case to John Battelle, the managing editor, who had always served as my first-line editor. He was lukewarm at best.



But at the same time, in a fit of pique + divine madness, my then-roommate Andy Reinhardt (fellow humanities-geek/executive editor for *PC World*) and I wrote a spoof treatment of a TV show, "beverly\_hills.com." It was silly and satirical and in the tradition of a *New Yorker* literary parody, sketching out the madcap doings of a gang of cool Gen X kids as they searched the Information Superhighway for love and adventure.

Still undecided about technopagans, Battelle dithered about actually reading "beverly\_hills.com" for weeks. When he finally did read it, he quickly snagged it for the magazine. But he had also decided to give the technopagans assignment to a *Village Voice* writer, Erik Davis, whose query came in after mine. Doing a little damage control, Battelle suggested we go out for dinner and a chat.

At dinner, he told me that *Wired* had been blown away by "beverly\_hills.com"; hadn't realized I was capable of playfulness (in other words I had been typed as the conscientious but humorless shrew; remember what Deborah Tannen said about the bad rep that attaches itself to women who kick up a fuss?), which presented the magazine with a quandary: I was on the masthead and *did* have seniority and *had* pitched the technopagan idea first; nevertheless, they had wanted to give the very-cool Mr. Davis a chance in the magazine.

Implicit, of course, is that my pitching the proposal didn't make it a worthwhile subject. As an aside, it turns out that another writer, another woman, had tried to pitch the same story to *Wired* months earlier than I had and had gotten even more nowhere than I had. But when Davis pitched the story, it suddenly became more legit. But "beverly\_hills.com" for *Wired* revealed another side of my writing, and now *Wired* was chagrined. I found it puzzling (and to be honest, I was miffed) that they hadn't thought me capable of lightness or deftness or insouciance: I had been communicating with them, by phone, email and in person for two years; they'd been reading and editing my writing for two years; they'd read my fiction—sheesh!

Battelle suggested I do a sidebar to Davis's story. Davis okayed this and came up with the idea of a sidebar on women technopagans. Davis has impeccable feminist-male credentials and is as tuned into gender politics as a guy could be; and he and I were equally cognizant of, and uncomfortable

with, the notion of ghettoizing the female aspects of the subject into their own pink-beribboned little add-on. We agreed that, best case, women would have been woven into the story naturally (unusual in tech culture, women are key players in technopaganism), but that assigning me the femme concerns was a natural and easy way to create a companion piece to round out the narrative.

Anyway, as awkward as it was for me to sequester the women pagans off by themselves (the stealth affirmative-action journalism I practice means making sure I include as many women sources as I can in a story, so that women are heard, but weaving female issues and ideas and experiences in where it fits—the best way to combat sexism is to render women visible, but not to make a big deal about them as Other), I was happy to have *part* of my story back and glad to sneak some women-centric writing into the mag.

Battelle promised that Davis's piece would run around three thousand to four thousand words, and mine around fifteen hundred words.

So I wrote my piece on girl technopagans, careful as I always am not to engage in childish "woman = good, man = bad" false dichotomies (if anything, as a straight but not narrow bet who from one year to the next is likely to have more male chums than female ones, I am a male apologist and insist on seeing and describing the world in all its non-binary shades-of-gray nuance); Davis wrote his main bar; he and I talked and swapped proto-drafts. His piece had to undergo a massive rewrite, so I heard nothing about my "The Goddess in Every Woman's Machine" until months after I turned it in.

At the last minute, arriving by email after 11 p.m. one night, only a few days before the package of articles was to head off to its final staging areas of layout and art and fact-checking and the printer—and I was off to New York for a business trip, and consequently had little time to do much squawking—I received "The Goddess in Every Woman's Machine" from managing editor Battelle. It has been cut to five hundred words and was annotated with the comment that he wasn't sure he could salvage it at all with executive editor Kelly and editor in chief Rossetto, especially since it was so different from what Davis had written.

I went berserk. I *knew* that if the article had been on

cryptography and technopagans, hot sex chat and technopagans, any *Wired* hot-button topic and technopagans—hell, pretty much anything other than women technopagans—there wouldn't have been a question of trying to get it past the executive editor and editor in chief. I also knew there was no standard magazine practice dictating that an article accompanying a main article had to be like it in any obvious way: in fact, the more variety, the better.

And the threat of killing it was particularly galling, for women really matter in technopaganism; it wouldn't be honoring the reality of that special parallel universe to leave them out. That was the message I left on Battelle's voicemail: that *Wired* would look foolish, as if it had done a shoddy job, if it didn't talk about The Girls of Technopaganism. The story did run, but cut to 750 words.

So all of this, run-ins past and thwartings present, was eating at me the night of the Pagan Girl Massacre. I was gagging on the loss of face, full of self-loathing for having thought I was exempt from the second-class treatment other women had experienced at *Wired*, seething with impotent rage at knowing that if I no longer wrote for *Wired*, I'd lose access to the high-gloss, high-visibility, high-cachet venue for my writing, and most of all, wearily confronting one of Joan Didion's home truths. In her essay on "Self-Respect," Didion was talking about writers and Hollywood but her thesis rang true: it's a loser's game when you're trying to win the approval of people for whom you have contempt.

Where had I ever gotten the idea that being the house eccentric at *Wired*—its resident feminist/humanist/skeptic/Luddite, the one they could point to as their woman writer, the writer who takes nothing at face value and refuses to cheerlead—could succeed? Silly, vain, foolish girl...

### My Wired Problem, and Maybe Yours

Where things stand now, after getting much grief and much flack, is that the editorial boykings of *Wired* are finally promoting some women out of the pink-collar ghetto of back-office functions and support roles. A very credentialed woman was recently hired as a features editor. The research editor was recently made a features editor (meaning she can seek out and edit writers and story ideas on her own). Another

woman was promoted to the position of assistant managing editor. Perhaps things really will change in the years to come.

But as I write now, I feel not very different from the very distinct minority of women I've met in high-tech who have made it there—and who quit in disgust after coming to what feels to them like their right minds and their senses. They come to feel that it's just not worth it, that it's a game not worth playing. They don't want to deal with the racket of male elephant-seal-like trumpeting and jostling for status.

If one is not interested in participating in circle-jerk exercises and paying homage to the alpha male of the moment, what is there left to do at *Wired*? All magazines engage in the happy talk of crowing about their subjects—unless their characters, like that of *The Atlantic Monthly*, are to be contrarian. In all fairness, I know it's my predisposition to ironic distance, my Petronius-Arbiter-of-Rome act, as much as my feminist malcontentions, that cause me trouble with *Wired*.

If I were more bluff and bully, if I had the heart and stomach and bile and spleen—not to mention the spirit and will—to keep slogging it out, in spite of knowing I do not belong, I would keep on writing for *Wired*. I would owe it to the principle of speaking truth to power and Not Wimping Out to assert that voice of agonized humanism and female snarkiness. But as with most folks of artistical temperament, I mostly want to be left alone to do my work, to get at that still silent voice within, and not be fighting ideological battles my editors at *Wired* might not even consciously realize they are engaging in. Progress means exchanging one set of problems for a more interesting set of problems—but my struggles with *Wired* have been generating problems of ever-decreasing interest. I strive to have other, better, more rewarding and less stupid battles to fight.

Being a token calls for tremendous carbohydrate-reserves, reserves ready to rush to the spirit-body's defense. And by 1995, in the field of publishing, where women have been present in large numbers for decades, it just seems as if this shouldn't be necessary; these are kilocalories best expended elsewhere: On the subject at hand. On saying things as best you can. On doing some small part to decrease the weight of human misery in the world or create good art. You shouldn't have to have the tirelessness of a revolutionary, or the sauciness of a turncoat, to be a woman and regularly write for *Wired*.