CRACKING THE GENDER CODE: WHO RULES THE WIRED WORLD?
by Melanie Stewart Millar
Toronto: Second Story Press, 1998
230 pages with index sc
Reviewed by PEG TITTLE

This is one of those books that had to be written. <u>Cracking the Gender Code: Who Rules the Wired World?</u> "explores how digital technological change is being packaged and sold to the public through cultural messages that support a particular view of how the future should be organized" (25)--a view that is "profoundly sexist and racist" (25).

Nevertheless, I was vaguely disappointed. Partly, I think, it's because, well, <u>this should have come as no surprise</u>: the rest of the world is profoundly sexist and racist, and white men are still controlling, so why should we have expected the wired world to be any different?

And partly, though Millar applies standard feminist discourse analysis to <u>Wired</u>, apparently <u>the</u> magazine of the computer world, with thoroughness and competence, there are no <u>new</u> insights from this application. For example, men have been impressed and obsessed, in a sexual way, with big things, fast things, and shiny new expensive things, at least since the Model T Ford. So instead of, or in addition to, telling me about their fetish with technology, tell me that the mouse was invented by men for men because they can't type (digital dexterity is not their forte; spatially-oriented point-and-click, they can handle).

I liked, however, Millar's observation of "the common technical practice of using nouns as verbs in order to emphasize the power and excitement generated by technology" (122). My boss does that a lot--trying to convince others of the power and excitement generated by his life? (He also uses complex words where simple ones will do, something else Millar points out--you know, 'utilize' instead of 'use'.) And certainly the book is informative for those of us who've never picked up a copy of <u>Wired</u> (and now, of course, won't bother).

Maybe I was wanting exactly what Millar says the book is not, an analysis of "the online culture of the Internet". For example, I would've liked a gender analysis of the characteristics of digital discourse--"discontinuity, speed, symbolic and linguistic spectacle, the tendency to exaggerate the novelty of the present" (35). What does it mean for us that men, in positions of power, are attracted by such elements? And maybe such analysis is in the work of Heather Menzies, Neil Postman, and others, to which Millar thoughtfully refers her readers.

Though Millar attempts to empower women with her last chapter, "Beyond the Gender Code: Asking Different Questions", she doesn't quite succeed for me. Perhaps I need to see the answers actually happening before I feel hopeful. I don't want to dismiss the value of this book, though--for those who haven't yet asked any of the questions Millar asks, it's sure to be worth reading.