



Exploring the realms of Technoculture and the Cyborg World through Donna Haraway's Essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto'

Dr. Temjentula Pongener, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Joseph University, Nagaland,
India

Abstract: In Comprehending the essence of Humanity believed to be transpired into the Cyborg world. This paper will establish the social construct of evolution in humans which has been pictured, believed and assimilated in today's world of Technology. By exploring the Cyborg world presented by Donna J. Haraway, in her works such as 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 'Simians, Cyborgs and women' and 'when species meet', these works will elicit the reality of a future we are living in now, wherein we are perceived and identified as Cyborgs. This reality enabled by scientific advancements entail all realms of our existence, such as political, social, religious and cultural, that can be influenced and affected by this approach. My argument gravitates towards the optimistic approaches along with philosophical notions in order to salvage the possibility of a humane Technoculture in today's world and the future. Donna J Haraway's essay is pregnant with hypothetical question of a world of Cyborgs and in the ways it's going to blur the boundaries between man and the machine and man and animal. And hence, essentially breaking these boundaries could be the solution to a humane Technoculture.

Index Terms - Humanity, Cyborg world, Technology, Optimistic, philosophical, humane, Technoculture, Boundaries.

I. INTRODUCTION

Donna Haraway was trained as both a biologist and a philosopher, and she is associated with socialist feminism, which combines feminist ideas with concerns about social and economic equality. She first published "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985 and later revised and expanded it in 1991. The manifesto was written during a period of rapid technological and military development, including Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" (Strategic Defense Initiative) and the growth of advanced military communication and intelligence systems. Haraway also responded to the radical feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, which sought to identify the root causes of women's oppression. The term "radical" comes from the Latin *radicalis*, meaning "root." In her manifesto, Haraway challenges traditional feminist ideas by arguing that technology has transformed human identity and that fixed categories such as "man," "woman," and "machine" should be reconsidered.

As a materialist critic, Haraway was sympathetic with the impulses that propelled radical feminism. As philosopher of science, however, she took issue with the radical feminist idea that the "roots" of a socially constructed problem like patriarchy could be located with enough research. In particular, Haraway worried the radical feminism espoused by writers like Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde seemed to promise for women an Edenic "starting point" of gender and identity, prior to other mitigating cultural factors. In poststructuralist terminology, this is called the error of "essentialism." Haraway's worries were born out in the "Goddess

feminism" movement, an American attempt to reject things technological and return women to nature. Haraway saw this movement in particular as reactionary rather than progressive feminist politics. Still, certain feminist thinkers of the 1980's held great appeal for Haraway. She was particularly influenced by the French writers Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray, who exhorted women to reject masculinist histories and instead "write the truth of their bodies" through methods like autobiography and performance. This practice, that they called "feminine writing", influenced a generation of Feminists. To a large degree Haraway's Manifesto operates in the spirit of "l'écriture féminine", using non-linear, performative and autobiographical language to describe the truth of a new kind of body: that of the Cyborg.

The Cyborg for Haraway was the way out to reckon with Political patriarchal hegemonic Capitalist culture. Citing the practical success of post-war scientific and cultural theory in deconstructing the hierarchical dualisms of western thought, Haraway famously insisted that they have been cannibalized or "technodigested" the dichotomies, between mind and body, animal and human, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically. For Haraway, this required the development of a new kind of Posthuman cultural politics, that of the Cyborg. "The Cyborg is a kind of dissembled and reassembled Postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self that feminist must code." (Haraway, 163) Through this essay Donna Haraway has helped look at Cyborgs and course of socialist feminism differently. This paper will attempt to explore the Cyborg world through Haraway's concept in the way she desires to find liberation.

II. The Manifesto as an Ironic Political Mythology

Haraway begins her essay by telling her reader she wants to write a "political myth" for today's times, one that is faithful both to feminism and materialism. In the spirit of other Manifesto writers like Marx and Marinetti, Haraway explains her new political myth ought to strike readers both as "blasphemous" and "ironic". In particular, Haraway salutes irony as a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one that she would like to see "more honored in socialist feminism."

Definition of a Cyborg

A Cyborg, short for "cybernetic organism," refers to an entity that combines organic and artificial components, often including mechanical or electronic elements. This term typically describes a living being, such as a human, animal, or plant, that has been augmented or enhanced with technological devices or implants. These enhancements can range from simple prosthetic limbs to more complex integrated systems like brain-computer interfaces. The purpose of cyberization can vary, including medical reasons such as restoring lost functions or enhancing capabilities beyond natural limits, as well as for experimental, functional, or aesthetic purposes. The concept of cyborgs often intersects with themes of transhumanism, exploring the possibilities of merging humans with technology to expand or redefine human potential.

The anchoring metaphor for her essay, Haraway writes, is the image of a Cyborg. She defines this image in four different ways. The first is as a "cybernetic organism." The second is as "a hybrid of machine and organism." The third is as "a creature of lived social reality", and the fourth is as a "creature of fiction." Social reality consists of lived social relations, which are our most significant political constructs, essentially forming a transformative narrative. The international women's movements have not only crafted the concept of "women's experience" but also revealed and explored this vital collective phenomenon. This experience, both factual and fictitious, holds immense political significance. Liberation hinges upon the cultivation of consciousness and the imaginative comprehension of oppression and its potentiality. The cyborg represents a fusion of fiction and lived reality, reshaping the landscape of women's experiences in the latter part of the twentieth century. It encapsulates a struggle that transcends mere existence, delving into the realms of life and death, yet blurring the perceived boundary between science fiction and social reality into a mere illusion.

III. Cyborg changes what counts as experience

It is important to understand that for Haraway, these four descriptions of the Cyborg (cybernetic, hybrid, of the present, of the future) are not discrete, but rather co-determinate. For instance, Haraway argues that in philosophical terms, there is no real space between "lived social reality" and "fiction", because one category is constantly defining and refining the other. Haraway points out how feminists have deployed the notion of "women's experience" using it both as "fiction and a fact of the most crucial, political kind." In a similar way, Haraway argues, the Cyborg will "change what counts as experience" for women in the late twentieth century.

IV. The border of the Cyborg is an optical illusion

The struggle to define and control the Cyborg amounts to a border war, Haraway argues. Ironically enough, she adds, this war is fought on a terrain that is largely an "optical illusion": the space between science fiction and today's fact. Anyone who believes Cyborgs are things of the future is mistaken. Modern medicine is full of Cyborgs already, Haraway points out, as is modern reproduction, manufacturing and modern warfare. In short, writes Haraway, "we are Cyborgs", whether we know it or not, if only because it is the Cyborg which "is our ontology, it gives us our politics."

Thus far, argues Haraway, Cyborg politics have been linked to oppressive mythologies: scientific progress; racist, male-dominated capitalism; the exploitation of nature to serve the needs of culture. This doesn't have to remain the case, however. Indeed, Haraway writes that her Manifesto is an argument for "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction."

V. Cyborg does not have a Freudian Origin

Haraway shares that part of the reason she is attracted to the metaphor of the Cyborg lies with its ability to help her reconceptualize socialist feminism in a "postmodernist, non-naturalist" mode. Because it doesn't depend on human reproduction for its existence, the Cyborg is "outside gender", reasons Haraway. Indeed, she suggests, the Cyborg might the potential to reach beyond Freudian mythologies that have haunted feminism for centuries. The Cyborg is no Frankenstein, Haraway argues, waiting to be saved by its master/father. Neither does it seek completeness by searching for a heterosexual soul mate, nor desire community by way of a nuclear family, as psychoanalytic mythologies would have things.

Fractured Identities is another section in her essay where Haraway deals specifically with the issue of feminist political organizing in light of Cyborg politics. She counsels against identity politics, noting "there is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women." Instead she advocates the practice of affinity politics which operate by way of "oppositional consciousness." She strongly criticizes the radical feminism of Catherine MacKinnon, arguing that the search for the "essential woman" is not only elusive, it is dangerous. Indeed, feminist might be better served, Haraway notes, by considering "woman" to be a socially constructed category, deployed in a communications network, along the lines of "homosexual" and "youth." It is important to look at how Haraway is taking the feminist approach to illuminate the genderless glory that a Cyborg embraces according to her.

Donna Haraway also ponders upon the idea of a Cyborg feminist science fiction, where she has in the later part of her essay established the fact that Cyborgs are a political myth. Haraway points out that because the Cyborgs populating feminist science fiction blur boundaries between the status of men and women, human and machine, and individual and community, it is often difficult for student readers to identify with them in any traditional sense. Haraway details some "classic" Cyborg tales, like Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, which is the story of four versions of one genotype, all of whom meet, but even taken together do not make a whole. She mentions Samuel R. Delany's *Tales of Neveyn*, which mocks stories of origin by redoing the Neolithic Revolution, and James Tiptree, Jr, who tells tales of reproduction based on non-mammalian technologies like alternation of generations of male brood pouches and male nurturing. Author John Varley is cited for constructing a supreme Cyborg in his arch-feminist exploration of Gaea, and Octavia Butler is celebrated for writing a series of novels which interrogate reproductive, linguistic, and nuclear politics in a mythic field structured by late twentieth-century race and gender. Finally, Vonda McIntyre's *Superluminal* is mentioned as a fiction where no character is 'simply' human, and human status is highly problematic, and where feminist theory collides with colonial discourse in the sphere of science fiction. One of the ways the feminist Cyborg science fiction has worked as a mode of progressive politics, Haraway argues, is that it has emphasized regeneration over rebirth (a common theme of traditional stories involving monstrous entities.) She points to the salamander, (a creature in nature that routinely regenerates) as a way of understanding what she means, here. "For salamanders," Haraway notes, "regeneration after injury, such as the loss of a limb, involves regrowth of structure." She concedes that although the regrown limb can be monstrous it can also be profoundly potent. In a similar way, Haraway argues, "We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender." (Haraway, 171)

VI. Conclusion

The Cyborg world for Haraway is genderless and it is a place where regeneration is considered more promising rather than rebirth. For Haraway a monster is the synonym for a Cyborg, she critically makes this analogy on the monster and the Cyborg by saying that being attributed to a monster is a good thing because monsters do not have feelings and are genderless. First she points out that monster have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations, mentioning the Centaurs and Amazons in Greece, un-separated twins and hermaphrodites in early modern France as examples of what she means. But Haraway notes that in feminist science fiction, Cyborg monsters "define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman." (Haraway, 173) If nothing else, Haraway argues, feminist science fiction's reconceptualization of the cyborg shows readers that "The machine is not an 'it' to be animated, worshipped, and dominated." Rather, she maintains, "The machine is us, our processes, and an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us." (Haraway, 177) Hence by citing more examples that support her argument that we are all machines and how this is possible she here, makes what is her only real reference to prosthetics and disability in her entire essay, in a discussion of Anne McCaffrey's 1969 novel, *The Ship Who Sang*. The novel is about a severely handicapped girl whose brain was connected to complex machinery, in which machines serve as "prosthetic devices, intimate components, and friendly selves." Haraway wonders aloud, "Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (Haraway, 165) This for Haraway is the perfect answer to a utopian future and her ironic praise for a Cyborg world where we ourselves are Cyborgs regenerated and living in a genderless society. Finally, she admits that though both creation and destruction are bound to be part of this "spiral dance" of a Cyborg future, she would still "rather be a Cyborg than a goddess." Once again, Haraway emphasizes that hers is not a dream of a universal feminist language for all, but rather of a "powerful infidel Heteroglossia." For Haraway, a Cyborg politics will be both pleasant and dangerous, and will require both a building and a destroying of "machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories." But this Cyborg world would always be a better one than the condition of the present world we live in.

References

- [1] Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist – feminism in the late twentieth Century*: Routledge, 2009.
- [2] Sandoval, Chela, "New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed", in Chris Hables Gray (ed.), *The Cyborg Handbook*, New York: Routledge, 1995.
- [3] Senft, Theresa M. "Reading Notes on Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'", 21 October 2001. [Online](#), 1 February 2006.
- [4] Young, Robert M. "Science, Ideology & Donna Haraway", in *Science as Culture*, 15.3. 1992.
- [5] Webster, Frank. "Cybernetic Life: Limits to Choice." *Living with Cyberspace*. Ed. John Armitage and Joanne Roberts. New York: Continuum, 2002.