

CYBORG: A CHANCE OR A WARNING

Does digital evolution erase the irony from the feminist cyborg myth?

Phd Emilija Radibratović, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade

Donna Haraway`s ironic, political idea of the cyborg represents a **hybrid** of a woman (human, organic) and a machine, which resolves and overcomes the polarization of gender identities.

The feminist cyborg is the inspiration of postfeminist and posthumanist thought, at the same time confirming itself in the modern technological environment only as a **myth**.

PSSOH Conference (Application of Free Software and Open Hardware)

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Electrical Engineering

October 9, 2021

1 From the "weaker sex" to the powerful hybrid

First and second wave of feminism: connected with patriarchal models and biological argumentation. The female gender was considered specific, by default it was "weaker" or "different" within the two cultures (male and female).

Why is a woman in "Second place"? Why is the ability to give birth less important than the ability to work, why is having a penis more prestigious than not having it, **why do the biological differences between women and men establish a hierarchical relationship** instead of a "fraternal" association? [1 p61] ("The Other Sex", Simone de Beauvoir).

The third wave of feminism: a performative approach through the **negation** of gender differences and the **"rearticulation" of gender** (Judith Butler) [2] [3]. Gender identities are socially formed from the birth of a child and are repeated and established throughout the life of the individual as a "form of cultural repetition", a "practice of re-labeling", artificially established as a hegemonic norm [3 p142).

1 From the "weaker sex" to the powerful hybrid

"Habitus": posture, gestures, thinking, perception and interpretation of social reality; it is primarily acquired "by the process of socialization within the family", and its formation continues "through interactions within a certain social field" [5 p181].

The closed circle in defining and practicing gender starts and ends in the body as a "biological reality" in which **"the principle of social vision constructs anatomical difference"** [4 p18]. From the need to establish the dominance of one sex, an arbitrary social law ("nomos") turns into a "natural necessity" ("phusis") [4 p22], by directing choices.

"Male-centric" matrix of all things and phenomena as universal and natural in which women suffer **"symbolic" violence in the act of "doxical approval"** and beliefs: [4 p49-51] ("The Musculin domination", Pierre Bourdieu).

1 From the "weaker sex" to the powerful hybrid

The answer to the biological basis of gender differences and the social construction of the gender hierarchy is the figure of the cyborg Donna Haraway [6] as a **deviation from binary divisions or their reconciliation.**

The production of a **new, hybrid, indivisible discourse of gender** thanks to the technological dominance of modern society in the spirit of poststructuralism and postmodernism, which challenge binary divisions as constructed ideologies of the powerful.

Hybrid: the core of the culture of the modern world in which notions of gender, high and low culture, reality and media reality, human and nature... are mixed.

2 Symbolism of the feminist cyborg

„**The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s**“, **1985**: An "ironic political myth" true to feminism, socialism, and materialism, a vision of **shared values and opportunities for political association** that relies on understanding the body as a cultural fact [6].

The cyborg, a hybrid of machine and organism, is taken from modern science fiction, modern medicine, modern production and replication; from social reality, political construction and ontological position of people [6 p605-606].

The product of "militarism and patriarchal capitalism" and "state socialism" **eludes the established definitions of duality** and the "story of origin in the Western sense." A cyborg has not come out of paradise nor can it be classified in public or private, nature or culture, heterosexual or homosexual, male or female, human or animal.

2 Symbolism of the feminist cyborg

"Abolition of border lines" at the end of the 20th century: "liveliness of machines" in relation to the decreasing mobility of people, "fluidity of machines" concerns "consciousness and its simulation" [6 p607-610).

A political tool for the final takeover of power, the creation of a "**grid of control**" [6 p610] that abandons "essential unity": "Cyborg feminists must argue that 'we' no longer want any natural matrix of unity and that no construction is a whole " [6 p615].

Unlike marxist-socialist and radical feminism which are constituted as "totalities", they **strive to create a partial, real connection, and not to find their place in systems of domination** [6 p621]. Cyborgs imply irony, **reconsider established identities**, sexuality, motherhood, with an intimate sense of the border and its construction and reconstruction.

2 Symbolism of the feminist cyborg

"Informatics of domination": a world system of production/reproduction and communication in which control strategies are formulated in the categories of "rates", "cost constraints", "degrees of freedom"... and in which **the real situation of women is "their integration/exploitation"** [6 p622].

Communication technology and modern biology should be "tools for reshaping the body" into a cyborg "that feminists should encode" [6 p621] with ideological "networking" that includes **"abundance of space and identity"** [6 p630].

The dualisms of Western traditions, which led to the existence of "One" - powerful including "other" - irrelevant, are challenged by "high-tech culture". **The machine and the organism cannot be "fundamentally ontologically separated"** (a connection with our tools, a "state of ecstasy" of computer users) [6 p636-637].

3 Technically incompetent, "blissful techno-bunny"

Cultural studies:

- "overcoming the limitations of the body, the transcendence of consciousness in the machine and the renewal of the subject",
- "an apocalyptic posthumanist future in which machines will eventually overpower humanity and in which the subject of humanism will lose choice, coherence, autonomy and rationality" [7 p1].

Feminist studies:

- "constructed nature of gender in power relations,
- the body as a limitation, a living experience or as a resistance" [7 p1].

(Krista Lynes)

3 Technically incompetent, "blissful techno-bunny"

Critical reviews of technological potentials:

- "modern technological discourses rely on the logic of binary gender identity", in which gender is "**a crucial cultural condition**" and „**a social consequence of technological application**" [8 p9-10] (Ann Balsamo).
- gender in new technologies is structured by "ideological and cultural processes that **remain deeply patriarchal**", and relates to the **immobilization of women in new technologies and the uneven gender approach to technological development** [7 p6] (Krista Lynes).
- identification between men and machines is a sexual stereotype that has constitutive and asymmetric effects on men and women including different degrees of exposure to technology in childhood, role models, schooling, separate labor markets: **men are "technologically gifted", women are "technically incompetent"** [9] (Judy Wajcman).

3 Technically incompetent, "blissful techno-bunny"

EU policy follows the metaphor of cyborgs - the use of machines as tools in the political action of changing the world and taking responsibility for the relations between science and technology in society.

European Parliament Resolution on closing the digital gender gap (January 21, 2021): gender stereotypes deepen gender disparities in the digital sector by preventing the full participation of women as users, innovators and creators. [10].

17% ICT students,

17% of ICT professionals,

22% of artificial intelligence experts,

20% in the field of cyber security.

Women earn 19% less than men in ICT.

3 Technically incompetent, "blissful techno-bunny"

"The gender gap between software developers and engineers is worrying, as well as **gender discrimination in the application of artificial intelligence, video games...**";

"**Sexual harassment** in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education";

"**Women are leaving** higher education, academic opportunities and careers in the ICT sector ("leaky pipeline"), due to the poor work-life balance, organizational constraints and a male-dominated environment";

It is necessary to deepen the understanding of **new areas** through a gender prism: algorithmic decision making, blockchain and cryptocurrency technology and data monitoring... [10].

3 Technically incompetent, "blissful techno-bunny"

The exploitation of women in the information reality of the 21st century has deepened in relation to the warnings from 1985, and the cyborg is placed "in the play space" or transcendence.

Cyborg turns into a (post)feminist "**blissful techno-bunny**" [11] (Haraway).

"The cyborg is **simply not networked enough**" because, as a single, hybrid whole, it "does not necessarily offer an explanation of how humans and machines coexist in coevolving and interconnected systems" [12 p159, 165] (Katherine Hailes).

"The original myth" of wholeness invokes **a utopia without gender** [13 p150] (Amanda du Preez).

4 The irony persists

The myth of the cyborg: the negation of gender as a given and the abandonment of binary "naturally implied" divisions.

Digital evolution reinforces differences with the formal recognition of rights that preserves the matrix of the two sexes. **The cyborg kept its essential place in fiction.**

"The severance of the relations of complicity that the victims of symbolic violence have with the ruling party can be expected only by **a radical change in the social conditions of production of dispositions** that lead subordinates to take the same position of the rulers, both about themselves and the rulers" [4 p60] (Pierre Bourdieu).

4 The irony persists

"Commitment, responsibility and care": affective notions of feminist politics for the 21st century and the realization of interconnectedness and social justice [14]. "**Compost**" as the most suitable figure for "dealing with the ordinary" [7 p9-10] (Donna Haraway).

The cyborg figure is a **blasphemous symbol of counter-politics** that pushes boundaries and re-examines gender identities.

Cyborg-feminism **warns of the "mud of ordinaryness"** in the process of creating a world without borders and free people (men and women).

CYBORG: A CHANCE OR A WARNING

Thank you for your attention.

emilija.radibratovic@gmail.com

The paper is available at <https://zenodo.org/communities/pssoh/>