

Introduction

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It has been thirty years since Donna Haraway's iconic essay *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the 1980s* (hereafter Manifesto) was first published. Broadly acknowledged as the text that first introduced the cyborg into feminist theory, the Manifesto has had an influence and impact on feminism and other scholarship far exceeding its original contexts and intentions.

A notoriously dense text, the Manifesto is often labelled as a cyborg itself—a chimera of cybernetics, socialist feminism, information science and literary studies. Beginning as technoscientific creation myth, the Manifesto has its roots in the milieu of the early 1980s, more specifically in the heightened Cold War tensions resulting from the end of détente. It poached on C³I (command, control, communication, intelligence) Reaganite military rhetoric to write a cybernetic “common language” to resist “instrumental control” (Haraway, 2004a, p. 23). The cyborg was deployed by Haraway as feminist figure through which to critique persistent Western dualisms such as nature/culture, male/female, mind/body, and other binaries¹ that have historically structured systems of domination based on the delineation of an “other” as problematic mimesis of the “self.” The informational language of coding was here co-opted to undermine boundary making practices through the always mutable political identity of the cyborg. Additionally, the Manifesto worked to commensurate the tensions between current strands of American radical feminism² and military technoscience, which had both (though in separate ways) articulated women as tied to the organic and in opposition to the technological. In the case of the latter, such views were produced and reproduced through dominant narratives of masculinity and technology that fetishised progress, instrumental rationality, and an objective and expansionist view of science—oppressive rhetoric set forth in phallogocentric discourses, such as Enlightenment humanism and the scientific revolution, and have persisted as a habit of Western culture. In the case of the former, they were reinforced through tactics such as “strategic essentialism” and standpoint feminism to counter narratives of technoscientific determinism. Ecofeminism in particular deployed figures like Gaia, the female Earth-goddess, to combat the image of the polluted technological male. However, when coupled with imagery of masculine technoscience (like the Terminator, for instance), such figures accentuated the divide between nature/culture and male/female as antagonistic dualisms. Lastly, the Manifesto also helped to make visible the role of “women in the integrated circuit” (Haraway, 2004a). This strategy aided in diminishing the ideological categorisation of women's lives as either/or in public/private, instantiated in socialist feminist analyses that foregrounded “working-class life into factory and home, of bourgeois life into market and home, and of gender existence into personal and political realms” (Haraway, 2004a, p. 29). It also worked to critique radical feminist invocations of the “‘essential’ non-existence of women” as biological group (Haraway, 2004a, p. 19).³ These positions insisted on a reading of womanhood as founded in a common experience of disadvantage; an experience which in and of itself is constitutive of “women” as unified social class. Acknowledging the work of postcolonial feminism, the Manifesto was critical insofar as it helped to expose the limits of essentialism and the embeddedness of essentialist structures, even within discourse that it sought to critique. In this case, it was the participation of radical feminism in totalising rhetoric.

Reading wholes from parts

The richness of the text means that the Manifesto is a piece that is often read in terms of its parts. These parts are then fractured amongst fields, scholars, disciplines, geographies, temporalities and literacies.

¹ Specifically Haraway states: “Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man” (Haraway, 2004a, p. 35)

² Exemplified states Haraway by Susan Griffin, Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde (Haraway, 2004a, p. 31)

³ Haraway criticises Catherine MacKinnon and her brand of radical feminism as particularly guilty of this invocation

Some of the literacies can be traced to Haraway's own practice and lived experience, others are taken from broader frames. Reading the Manifesto as another kind of cyborg, we can see how the fecundity of the text means that it can be easily co-opted in service of whatever disciplinary machine the organicism of "theory" is called to lend credence. It has been deployed in screen studies, cultural studies, literary studies, posthuman studies, science and technology studies, media studies and more. As a practice in feminist technoscience, it is sometimes separated from this base and read in terms of either/or—*either* feminism, *or* technoscience. There is no shortage of cyborg figures invoked in the examination of women and other "constituted others" on screen, in literature, in the workplace, and in the digital world. Similarly, the cyborg is liberally read in varied imbrications between humans and technology. This is the reading of the cyborg that has successfully managed to escape the ivory tower and permeates popular discourse in science, film, art, discussions on ability/disability, prosthetics, and popular reporting of technological innovation. For this reason, the Manifesto can be considered as the most promising of monsters⁴.

What is ironic in these readings is the tendency to form ideological wholes from parts of the text—a manoeuvre which the Manifesto itself explicitly critiqued (see Haraway, 2004a, p. 9). The Manifesto, when understood as moral tale for the "you are cyborg"⁵ narrative, has proven irksome even for Haraway herself. As she states in one interview:

The reading practices of the Cyborg Manifesto took me aback from the very beginning, and I learned that irony is a dangerous rhetorical strategy... The manifesto put together literacies that are the result of literary studies, biology, information sciences, political economy and a very privileged and expensive travel and education. It was a paper that was built on privilege, and the reading practices that it asks from people are hard. (Haraway in Lykke, Markussen and Oleson, 2004, p. 325)

The difficulties in the text are, of course, also its blessings as it accommodates a continuous process of reading. There are no authorised routes, no beginnings nor ends, as there are multiple entry and exit points. What is less productive, however, is when the Manifesto is decoupled from the cyborg itself. When the context is elided in favour of a more literal reading of the cyborg. This is often the case when the Manifesto is mentioned as obligatory footnote that follows a definition of the "human" (defined in the broadest sense) in relation to some kind of "other" (also broadly defined) in some kind of "turn"⁶. This is most problematic in instances in which the cyborg is no longer understood as feminist figure—as something to think with—but rather as an example of the "always, already" aspects of human coevolution⁷. In these cases, the cyborg is used in service of what Jaron Lanier calls "cybernetic totalism"—the extreme cybernetic worldview that sees "cybernetic patterns of information [as providing] the ultimate and best way to understand reality" and that "describe[s] people as no more than [informational] patterns" (Lanier, 2000, p. 2). As with all totalising discourses, such a view trivialises difference, erases polyvocality, invokes essentialism, and reproduces the very structures (in service of the very structures) with which Haraway's Manifesto was designed to critique. Irony is, indeed, a "dangerous rhetorical strategy" in this instance.

Feminism with(out) cyborgs

In the spirit of Haraway, however, it is worth reminding ourselves of the fallacy of the modest-witness. That even in feminist practice, "we have nothing but non-innocent translations, all the way down" (Haraway, 2004c, p. 4). My own critique of cybernetic totalism itself exposes an investment and fetishisation of an originary meaning to figures and texts. Indeed, as Zoë Sofoulis' Guest Editorial in this issue notes:

⁴ See Haraway, D. (2004b). The promises of monsters: A regenerative politics for inappropriate/d others. In *The Haraway Reader* (pp. 63–124). New York and London: Routledge. Originally published 1992.

⁵ See Wired magazine's 1997 interview with Haraway titled "You are cyborg" (Kunzru, 1997)

⁶ For example, the non-human turn, the materialist turn, the affective turn and so on.

⁷ See cybercultures academic David Bell (2001), cognitive scientist Andy Clark (2003), and "cyborg anthropologist" Amber Case (2015)

“Most readings and quotes from the Cyborg Manifesto place much greater emphasis on the cyborg metaphor than on post-dualist, post-positivist ironic epistemology that it figures” (Sofoulis, 2015, p. 10) and my reading is certainly not innocent in this context either.

This issue is then an acknowledgement of non-innocent translation. A collection of papers, with the Manifesto as animating object, that asks readers to consider in each article the kinds of situated knowledges that each young feminist brings to their unpacking of the cyborg figure. If there is an advantage to editing a postgraduate journal, it is that postgraduates and early career researchers are accustomed to the humbling processes of making claims to knowledge. Impositions of universality or a single language are shook out early in the modern trial by fire of the tertiary institution. For women especially (of which the majority of contributors identify), their own knowledge and their own status as “condensed node in an agonistic power field” (Haraway, 1988, p. 577) is writ large in their candidature experience as biological specificities, we are told, should ideally be no impingement on candidature or career. It is ironically the rejection of biological essentialism, to which most young feminists are accustomed, that can hamper productive critique in this situation.

Remarking on the polyvalent responses that the Manifesto has garnered over the years, Haraway has stated: “I [find] myself to be an audience here. In this context, I am one of the readers of the manifesto, not one of the writers. I did not write that manifesto but I love reading it” (Haraway in Lykke, Markussen and Oleson, 2004, p. 325). The articles collected here are an attempt to join partial perspectives to facilitate new acts of interpretation, betrayal, trickery, apostasy, and irony in the act of reading and writing the Manifesto.

Zoë Sofoulis’ Guest Editorial opens the issue with aplomb. As the only contributor to be personally affiliated with Donna Haraway and the History of Consciousness (HoC) program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, she provides crucial perspective on the Manifesto’s germination, its cultural milieu, and the limitations of cyborgs without ironic epistemology. Her reflections on the HoC and the themes of the essay help to frame an Australian response to local social and political issues regarding relations of science and technology within communities and institutions. As she states “The cyborg was just one answer to that particular question of Haraway’s. It is up to us to formulate our own questions about our contemporary situation and to invent metaphors that answer those questions, or at least help us ask better questions” (Sofoulis, 2015, p. 11). It is with this provocation that she formally introduces the issue and it is with sincerest thanks that she provides this critical perspective.

Tarsh Bates’ article pounces on the themes of figuration, playful irony, and companion species present in not only the Manifesto, but in Haraway’s broader works. Thinking through and with the framework of cat’s cradle, Bates weaves together a rich representation of cultural relations between *Homo sapiens* and the fungal pathogen *Candida albicans* (also known as thrush). She ties together research and artistic practice to delineate a new ecology of companion species she calls *CandidaHomo* naturecultures—a companion species that demonstrates fascinatingly well the productivity of ironic epistemology and figuration to expose reductive boundary practices. Whereas Haraway’s cyborg was a situated critique of tropes of military technoscience and the language of C³I in the age of Reagan’s star wars, Bates’ *CandidaHomo* is a comment on the pathologisation of women as leaky bodies through metaphors of war, security and surveillance in the age of Global Terrorism.

Emma Wilson’s thorough analysis similarly maps a familial lineage between Haraway, technofeminism, and cyberfeminism with more emergent strands of thought, specifically *Accelerationism*. Abandoning the language of linear progress, Wilson instead constructs a “mutant politics”—an emergent phenomena when cyborg ontology is put into dialogue with other subjectivities and subject positions. Unsatisfied with merely mapping a moment, this article gestures towards further collaborations between *Accelerationism* and contemporary feminisms. Xenofeminism in particular is identified and engaged with as productive discourse for further incursions between *Accelerationism* and gender politics, and the paper asks what other possible dialogues might be had with further imbrication.

Gabriela Aceves Sepúlveda offers a valuable perspective on Mexican independent media producer and feminist artist Pola Weiss. Using the Manifesto as a framework to reflect and reconcile tensions between what she calls “distinct intellectual geographies”, Weiss announces a political affinity of cyborg practice outside of the white, US-led circles of feminism. This paper explores in detail Weiss’ video oeuvre as

feminist practice that precedes Haraway's essay and in doing so makes visible the totalising narratives which have themselves been written around the cyborg as "revolutionary figure" in western feminism.

Ruby Grant's article provides an intimate analysis of cyborg subjectivity through her study on prosthetics and female amputees. Reconciling metaphor with lived experience, Grant's research speaks more broadly to the effects of cyborg discourse outside of the temporalities and localities that are often taken for granted in discussions of the Harawayan cyborg. This pertinent work around metaphorical opportunism poses pointed questions around responsibility and choice, particularly in fields that blithely exploit phrases such as schizophrenia, disability, colonisation, and queer, too often without the acknowledgement that these terms are connected to real bodies with real lives.

Finally, Anna Helme's creative/essay contribution is a fusion of queer politics in artistic practice. A contribution that has been lovingly put forward in two parts: the first is Helme's short film *MyMy* (2014), a consciously queered science fiction narrative produced with an aesthetic of mystic technology; and the second is an intimate essay on identity, artistic process and queer politics. As a film, *MyMy* is a fantastic exploration of the aesthetics of alterity. Written and produced with the Manifesto in mind, *MyMy* similarly reimagines tropes of technoscience outside of the language of cold rationality and humanist progress. When tropes such as these are blended with human flesh in embodied visions of cyborgs—for instance, James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), or David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) or *Existenz* (1999)—they become necessarily abject. They are dehumanising, monstrous and violent. *MyMy*, however, posits an alternate cyborg fantasy, a fantasy which is intimate, affectionate, and that eschews essentialist tropes of gender and master/slave dialectics of technology.

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