

Feminist Writings
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The Cyborg Manifesto - Part 1

So hi, welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Feminist Writings, and we will begin with a new text today. So we just finished with the Bell Hook's Essay Understanding Patriarchy, so the work will start off with today is Dona Haraway's very famous uh sort of book cum long essay, called Cyborg Manifesto.

Uh that is the title of the work and there is subtitle as well which is Science Technology and Socialist Feminism in the late 20th Century. So in the very beginning we know that this is histories in late 20th Century, capitalist technocratic politics and it talks about the possibilities of Socialist Feminism, the possibilities of Socialist Feminism, engagement with science and technology in last 20th century capitalism which is the setting. The historical setting out of which the Cyborg Manifesto is written.

So it is a very famous, it's one of the feminal work on modern feminist writings; it is not least because it offers us an alternative identity into cyborg. So the Cyborg is an alternative identity, as a possible identity, it is something which is theorized and historicized, and offered by Haraway in this particular essay.

And it is one of the this book, one of those book actually which are very useful example of the mix between feminism, post modernism, (())(1:30.4) and post humanism, because they all come together in different combination in terms of offering the idea of Cyborg. The identity of cyborg as an identity mock here in post modern politics.

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AN IRONIC DREAM OF A
COMMON LANGUAGE FOR WOMEN
IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

This essay is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism. Perhaps more faithful as blasphemy is faithful, than as reverent worship and identification. Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. I know no better stance to adopt from within the secular-religious, evangelical traditions of United States politics, including the politics of socialist-feminism. Blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. Blasphemy is not apostasy. Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger



So what is a Cyborg, so we begin with the very beginning and the title of the chapter, the first section of the essay is the Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit?

The very title, and we shall spend a little bit of time on the title because the word, the phrase Ironic Dream is a very important phrase, because Irony becomes a very important category in post modernism, a very important ontological category, a very important functional category in post modernism.

Because irony, what is irony, irony is ability to say something and to mean something else, so irony has a degree of semantic slipperiness, it is slippery in terms of meaning it can take up, so irony is about the process in which meaning becomes made, unmade, and remade. You know different combinations, so irony becomes a very important category, a very important function that way.

So the ironic dream is a very interesting way to describe some kind of a utopian aspiration for a common language for a woman in Integrated Circuit. So what is Ironic Dream all about? So this essay is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism.

Right now the ironic political myth which is faithful, so again look at the supposedly opposite categories over here irony and faithfulness. So we don't normally associate irony with faithfulness, irony with authenticity, but over here these oppositional category becomes very important in the post modern perspective, so faithful defeminism, socialism and materialism perhaps more faithful, as blasphemy as faithful then as reverent worship identification.

Very quickly it moves into provocative territory as you can see and Haraway spends some time talking about blasphemy. What is blasphemy? Before we move on let's take a look at, lets discuss the idea of blasphemy. What is blasphemy? What is ontological definition or functional marker for blasphemy, how can it be, you know how can it blast the mice something.

Now a blasphemy can only occur if a certain category is over appropriated, hyper appropriated and then defamiliarized and then distorted. So distortion can only take place after complete and absolute appropriation, blasphemy requires knowledge, blasphemy requires an appropriation, blasphemy requires a certain degree of understanding.

So he understands something completely and then you deform it, you defamiliarize it, you distort it, but that distortion that defamiliarization only takes place if you understand it fully. So blasphemy is not just an activity which is ontological in quality it is also an epistemic activity. It happens a level of knowledge, you deform knowledge, you distort knowledge, after you have understood and grasp the entire origin of knowledge.

So blasphemy becomes uh a faithful tribute because in order to be a blasphemist you should be able to understand it fully and then distort it. That's the category, that's the definition Haraway is taking over here. So blasphemy has always seem to require taking things very seriously, so in order to joke about, in order to defamiliarize something, you need to be able to take it very very seriously at first and then understand it completely and then obviously play with it in different semantic possibilities.

So I have known no better stance than to adopt from secular religious eventually equal to religious traditions of United States politics, including the politics of socialist feminism, so blasphemy becomes a very important category, a very important instrument in politics according to Haraway, and she is actually celebrating blasphemy as a category as a function. And she is saying this is very important function because it is the best stance to take within secular religious, eventually including religion including the politics of United States including the politics of socialist feminism, so socialist feminism in modern United States must take Blasphemy quite seriously, because Blasphemy is a very serious representation of something.

Right so in the very outset of the book we understand that it is going to be a very provocative book and it is book about blasphemy. It is book about appropriation, ironic appropriation, etc. so blasphemy protects one from the modern majority within while still insisting the need for community. Blasphemy is not apostasy. Now what is apostasy? Apostasy is a completely renunciation of faith, it's like giving up of faith, it is complete liquidation of faith, as apostasy is absolute absence of faith, whereas blasphemy is very very complex presence of faith and anti-faith, it is a very complex play between faith and anti-faith.

Between tribute and parody, between faithfulness and irrelevance, so blasphemy becomes a very complex cognitive category, a very complex ontological cartoony etc, so apostasy is an easier category to define, it is absolute absence of something,

Right so how does irony feature over here, how does irony come into being interestingly when you look at blasphemy as a instrument of subversion, as a instrument of representation in the postmodern world of socialist feminism.

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Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes even dialectically. They are about the tension about holding incompatible things together because both are all a necessary and true. Now look at the run of opposites over here, you know run of ontological opposites, its about your know the whole idea of compatibility and fracture, and the whole idea of tensions and togetherness so all these come into being with irony and irony becomes a very important vehicle, you know linguistic vehicle semantic vehicle, ontological vehicle for this kind of complex representation.

So what is irony about? Irony is about contradictions, contradictions which never will dissolve into unity, which never really aspire for unity and that becomes a very important category, aspiration is absent there is no aspiration for unity, there is no intention for unity, when it comes to irony, it is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes even dialectically, and about the tension of holing incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true.

So there is a degree of simultaneity, there is degree of ambivalence about irony which makes it very complex cognitive function, it's about holing opposites together because both are equally true and equally necessary and equally present at any given point of time. And that equal presence, that simultaneity becomes very important condition for irony to take place.

So irony is about humor and serious play, again look at the ontological opposites which run over here. It's about humor and serious play, so it just comes across as an oxymoron, serious play but it is actually some kind of a very important activity in post modernism because play becomes very important activity in postmodern perspective.

Because play can open up possibilities, play can open up different kind of configurations which then can be taken over and can become subversive in quality, can become (())(8:39) in quality etc. so serious play becomes very important function in post modernism, and irony is about humor and serious play. It is about cracking up possibilities, it's like opening up and teasing up of possibilities in a particular ontological tradition.

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blasphemy is tantamount, than as reverent worship and identification. Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. I know no better stance to adopt from within the secular-religious, evangelical traditions of United States politics, including the politics of socialist-feminism. Blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. Blasphemy is not apostasy. Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humor and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honored within socialist-feminism. At the center of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg.



It is also rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honored within socialist feminism. So at the very outset we can see that what Haraway is suggesting that the irony should be seen as a rhetorical strategy and as a political method. It should not be limited to a language game, it should not be limited to a rhetorical play or words etc. it should also be taken over, it should also be appropriated as a political strategy as a political method.

And Haraway is saying that I would like to see irony more often feature in socialist feminism and what we live in today. At the center of my ironic faith is my blasphemy, there is a image of a cyborg. So cyborg is something which is situated right at the heart of irony, right at the heart of blasphemy in the postmodern world.

Now it's very important that we historicize the world that Haraway is describing, the world that she is talking about is the world of great scientific progress, technological innovations, the capitalist knowledge etc. and in this particular world, this is the historical setting, the material setting out of which is produced and out of which it emerges as a phenomenon, as a myth, as a possibility, but that possibility is invested with irony, is invested with blasphemy, and that blasphemy and irony carries or you know embodies the image of the side walk. The image of cyborg becomes very important center for that kind of ironic activity.

Now what is a cyborg? Rather who is a cyborg? Uh so we find that what Haraway is offering as a definition over here is again a run of opposites, so we should give some example of sidewalk as some kind of organism which is an assemblage of man and machine. Which does away with distinctions of gender, which does away with distinctions of organic and inorganic, which does away distinctions between rationality and irrationality etc.

So in other words it is very very dualistic in quality, it is something which accommodated opposites, something which celebrates opposites, in a very post modernized sense, so cyborg is a cyber-native organization, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality, as was the creature of fiction, so again look at the run of opposites over here, there is a creature of reality as well as the fiction, there is a create of materiality as well as fantasy and that is something which keeps coming up in the cyborg politics which Haraway is describing.

Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political constructions, a world – changing fiction. The internalization, sorry the international women's movements have constructed "women's experience" as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression and so of possibility.

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Cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. Now cyborg becomes a very important signifier according to Haraway, of the changing conditions that women's experience in the 21st and later in century and obviously anticipating the 21st century. So this is struggle over life and death, the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.

So let's just come to the final sentence that Haraway is describing, so the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion, so what she is saying, what is being suggestive over here is that entire border line between reality and fantasy and virtual and real is blurry. With the postmodern times, and we have instances, example of hyper reality, so hyper reality becomes a phenomenon in the postmodern times, since cyborg becomes in that hyper real universe a body which is fictional as well as material, a body which is fantastic as well as real, and obviously there is conflation of fantasy and reality or functionality and materiality, that makes a cyborg a political moment, a political persona in a certain sense.

And specially and not least when the boundary between science fiction and social reality becomes optical illusion, it is just a shallow illusion, it is optical illusion not even an existential confusion, and optical illusion, so the shallowness of the illusion is something which is

foregrounded, uh you know it is very superficial kind of illusion that is foregrounded by Haraway in this particular context.

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...sion, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.

Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs—creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted. Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that were not generated in the history of sexuality. Cyborg “sex” restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism). Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic repro-



Now contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs creatures simultaneously animals and machines who populate world ambiguously natural and crafted. So again look at the run of opposites which are happening over here, the creatures which were simultaneously animal and machine they are creatures who are natural and crafted, modern machine is also full of cyborg of couplings which between organism and machines, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that were not generated in the history of sexuality.

So intimacy becomes a very important condition in the cyborg politics, uh Haraway is saying that if you look at science fiction if you look at modern medicine, uh its full of cyborg, modern medical practices contains examples, many several examples of phenomenon, why the man and machines are simultaneously meshed with each other. So think of something like a heart transplant, think of something like a pace maker, something like an artificial ventilator which is in cooperated into particular body in order to make the body alive, so that becomes, those examples becomes very potent pointers to the emergency of cyborg in the modern medicine.

How modern medicine becomes increasingly an entanglement of organism and machine and it becomes very asymmetric entanglement because we don't quite know to what extent is it purely organic and what extent it becomes machineic quality.

Now this kind of intimacy and this kind of a powerful intimacy were you know unprecedented you know, it was never generated before in the history of sexuality, cyborg sex restores some of the lovely replicate baroque of ferns and invertebrates.

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Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction. Modern production seems like a dream of cyborg, you know uh colonization work, a dream that makes the nightmare of Taylorism seem idyllic. And modern war is a cyborg orgy, code by C3I command control and communication intelligence, an \$84 billion item in 1984's U.S. defense project.

Now what she is saying over here is when we move from the rem of the sidewalk, we move away from reproduction, and move into replication. Again the materiality of the process is something which is highlighted, is not really a organic process, it is not really reproduction in organic sense, but becomes replication which is uncoupled from organic reproduction. And of course she talks about modern production which becomes more distributive in quality rather than sequential in quality an example of tailorsim over here is quite significant, because tailorism and Fordism were the two main production principles of early 20th century, so obviously Tailor and Ford, Henry Ford they were the big industrialist of western Europe and America Incorporated you know that kind of capitalist logical production and uh consumption.

But it was more of a sequential order of production whereas the modern production principle is more dissipative, it is more, it has got more velocity about it and that makes look, makes the (())

(16:21) tailormen look idyllic in quality. it looks like some kind of pastoral past compared to modern modes of production in which the cyborg is reared. And then there is reference to modern war which becomes an orgy, a cyborg orgy, and obviously Haraway seems to anticipate much of modern combat it needs, specially when it comes to drone warfare, drone military violence.

Because drone becomes very important examples of Cyborg, so machines which will fight the war for the humans, uh again machines which are controlled by the humans, machines which have intelligence, which are governed by humans but at the same time they seem to transgress humans as well. So a transgression becomes very important activity in cyborg politics as we will see in a short while.

Now C3I becomes very important you know very important category of cyborg. And what is C3I, command, control, communication intelligence. Now that becomes a very important category of knowledge, military intelligence as well as security system in modern America. And Haraway says that it requires and demands an \$84 Billion items budget in 1984's U.S. defense budget so U.S defense budget becomes very important pointer to the emergence into this kind of a cyborg warfare. This kind of drone warfare where command control and communication intelligence become uh becomes a very important factor in this kind of a system of combat.

Not just to, I will wind up at this point but just to conclude the first lecture on Cyborg manifesto, what Haraway is saying is that we are living under condition which is very quickly becoming a very interesting entanglement between man and machine where we don't know quite know the boundary of organic ends, and boundary of inorganic machinery begins, uh because that boundary is constantly blurring away and different configurations.

And that in itself becomes a very very important activity which can become subversive in quality, but then also lets remember the fact that post modernism of the cyborg embodiment which Haraway is talking about is not necessary a subversive all the time, so it can become subversive, it can become compulsive, it can become a very important confusion between being subversive and compulsive and that confusion and that ambivalence is something which is constantly present in a cyborg identity politics as described by Haraway.

So to that extent cyborg is not a predictable organism, it becomes almost a very unpredictable phenomenon, an unpredictable process of becoming, unbecoming, and rebecoming which is what

Haraway is talking about throughout this manifesto. But then she would say in the end how that becomes uh it becomes more argentic activity to a certain extent rather than being defied, rather than being defied as goddess, rather than being defied as docile women, as virtuous women.

So cyborg becomes an argentic activity, it can become archaic, it can become violent, it require a degree of (())(19:09), but at the same time because it is blurring all the bodyline which are historically informed in your open enlightenment, it becomes an act of subversion at different micro levels of existence and operation. So I will stop at this point today and we will continue this text in the lectures to come. And this is the Dona Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto which is second text we are doing in this particular course of Feminist Writings. So thank you for attention and I will see you in the next lecture. Thank you.