"One Is Not Born, But Becomes a Woman": Validating Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* by Re-Locating Body Politics through Philosophical Roots.

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Abstract

Technologies have become our second skin. We have extended our thinking beyond our imagination. As McLuhan says "the medium is the message."[1] This is a new world where DNA is code, and the information is language. We are already cyborg; where it is our brain that is capable of producing a new civilization, a civilization without gender divisions or any binary oppositions. "A Cyborg Manifesto" emphasizes this notion questioning about "wo/man" identity and establishing a new viewpoint in this postmodern world. Therefore, this paper would seek to locate body politics using a philosophical outline of Rene Descartes and Martin Heidegger through Jacques Derrida and Bruno Latour.

Key Words: Cyborg, Binary Oppositions, Body Politics, Descartes, Heidegger, Derrida, Latour.

Introduction:

Donna Jeanne Haraway, a prolific American Professor Emerita in the Departments of History of Consciousness and Feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, United States, has been contributing with her lectures, journals, and books in the fields of Post-human and animal studies since the 1980s. Her "*A Cyborg Manifesto*" was a direct address to the1970s and 1980s radical movement of Second Wave feminism in the U.S and Europe. This essay has turned into a panoply of different fields including films and popular culture The worries, as we can locate in the text, was born out in the "Goddess

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[1] McLuhan coined the phrase in his book Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, published in 1964. According to him, the medium which carries the message has itself become a message in our tech-savvy world. He concedes the example of a bulb which provides lights by turning itself into a message.

Feminism" movement, an American attempt to reject technology and return back to Mother Nature which Haraway considered as nothing but a nostalgic recourse of an escapist.

A Cyborg Manifesto, published in 1985 suggested that the figure of "the cyborg" is an "ironic political myth" and a "political-fictional tool" that has the potential to introduce into socialist feminism a way of understanding "what counts as women's experience" at that moment in history (Haraway, *ACM* 150-51). "Irony" in Haraway's writing becomes a methodological tool to analyze the various forms of political and theoretical orthodoxy:

> 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 humuor 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. (Haraway, *ACM* 149)

The cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, *ACM* 149). "Social reality is lived construction,"(Haraway, *ACM* 149) a political construction where women's experience is "constructed" and liberation from this constructed image is possible through the metaphoric image of "cyborg."

The identity of a "wo/man" and Body politics:

Language in our post-modern society has become technically constructed codes working on the internally generated differences, subjected to a coded system of recognition--prone to the pathologies of misrecognition—embodied in the technological objects like computer networks. This "constructed" notion of language is now at the locus of discussion; reading, writing, creating, making seem to be very close to the thing of "becoming," a near-identity in the hyperreal world where language becomes a signifier for another signifier. Organisms are made; they are constructs of constant-change. Sex, sexualities are nowadays subjected to political strategies regarding local-investment while body ceases to be a normalized spatial map in lieu emerges as a subject to mobility. Therefore, bodies are not born but made. As Simone De Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex:*

> One is not born but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the female human presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (Simone 249)

For, de Beauvoir, the body of a woman is itself a social situation and not a simple biological fact. A woman "become"(s) not who she is; becoming is a purposive and appropriative set of acts, the gradual acquisition of skill to assume a culturally projected corporal style and significance. Becoming a woman is a matter of a perpetual project, daily act of reconstruction and reinterpretation reverberating Sartre's concept of "pre-reflective choice" along with "quasi-knowledge." Therefore, when the notion, the particular image of "woman," is constructed by our society why not we "de-territorialize" our image to be "re-territorialized"[2] In this so-called hyperreal world. The popular fantasy is that we can call the cyberspace a "rhizomatic space"[3] (Deleuze and Guattari), where everything is interconnected, and where all trajectories are nomadic and rootless, and all space is de-territorialized. Rhizomes flow in multiple directions constituting a network of multiplicities. Hence, "rhizomatic" is a form of "nomadic thought" as opposed to the thought which attempts to discipline and control rhizomatic movements.

"The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity."(Haraway, *ACM* 150). De-centering the binary opposition of nature/culture, male/female, and cyborg creates a new identity-- dismantling the tradition of racism, male-dominated capitalism-- in the tradition of progress, in lieu the imitation of the "self" from the reflections of others. Like Julia Kristeva's *In Strangers to Ourselves*, Haraway places "the other" within us, and underlines our responsibility for this other, whom Kristeva identifies as "us" (Kristeva 192). Instead of a "border war" (Haraway, *ACM* 150) between reproductions of the self and reflections of the other, adjoining in the one figure of the cyborg; this emphasis on renegotiating the lines between "self" and "other" where Haraway reveals the ethical obligation at the root of her figure. The cyborg includes --the Other without incorporating it--without subsuming it; the other remains in-itself and for-itself, existing side by side with others, meeting, but not blending, with them. They are not limited in any way. Their journey is about to begin; Haraway is afraid that this journey would not get proper articulation. They are "feminist becoming-women" as Rosie Braidotti suggested. (Braidotti 241).

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[2] "Reterritorialzsation "is the re-structuring of a place of territory that has experienced "deterritorialization", a term created by Deleuze and Guattari in their philosophical project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia.*

[3] Deleuze and Guattari use the botanical term 'rhizome' as a model of the un-centered and non-hierarchical. In botany, rhizomes produce roots from a variety of junctions that develop in a variety of directions. The traditional model that is the alternative to the rhizome is the arborescent, or tree model, which emphasizes a hierarchy of stable origins (roots), fixed identity (trunk) and meaningful end (fruit and flowers).

> The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust […] Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not remember the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection- they seem to have a natural feel for united-front politics, but without the vanguard party. (Haraway, *ACM* 151).

This cyborg image exists, what Lucy Irigaray called "interval between" in her book called *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985). Irigary's ethics is based on the Levinasian notion of ethics as first philosophy, where before "being," there is the Other. There is never a solo subject, and therefore, one is too few, because subjectivity is generated in a relationship- we cannot be without the other. Positioning the subject regarding reference (of the Other) is to have the complete self-presence based on entirely mythical imaginary completeness. This desire to have the completeness is always a matter of lack according to Lacan as subjectivity[4] is positioned necessarily in-between the conscious of intended meaning and the unmotivated Other of the (collective) unconscious. The fact that the Other is also figured by lack—symbolically the lack of a phallus. Phallocentric structures engage the signifier, i.e., the absence of the father in the subject's life (read, the Name-of-the-Father) entailing the subject's desire for its complete self-presence which is necessarily insatiable; that the subject can never attain a full self-presence. Thus, there is no complete, authentic identity for the subject as such. Identity is fluid and flexible. For Derrida, no identity can be constituted without a difference; the other is never merely an "other" but always an in- and for itself. This difference is fundamental, and the difference is in the continuing act and process of differing. For the same reason, there can never two completely individual self-contained subjects and de-centering the "constructed" identity she wrote, "One is too few, but two are too many" (Haraway, *ACM* 180).

Writing the Female-Body:

Marge Piercy in her book *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) wrote, "I want to do something very important. Like fly into the past and make it come out right." The conjoined entity of a woman as a new phenomenon can be re-written through "writing" turning into a tool of cyborg, as Haraway says, "Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century" (Haraway, *ACM* 176). This cyborg writing is an inherently political concept: "Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not by original innocence,

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[4]For Lacan, the notion of subjectivity in a child takes place from the mirror stage while the child can separate his existence as a complete entity looking in the mirror for the first time. The three stages are imaginary, mirror and the real mentioned in The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.

but by seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (Haraway, *ACM* 175). The political nature of cyborg writing is that, "[w]riting has a special significance for all colonized groups" (Haraway, *ACM* 174) and "Cyborg politics is a struggle for language and the struggle against communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallocentrism"(Haraway, *ACM* 176). What Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976) says "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard." (Helene Cixous, 138)

Re-claiming the writing:

One of the most important functions of cyborg writing for Haraway is regarding how it can "reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities [...] in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to our- selves" (Haraway, *ACM* 163). Central to this project is the "retelling" of "origin stories," through which "cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture"(Haraway, *ACM* 175). Haraway's discussion moves from the fictional writing of science fiction writers to the writing practices of "real-life cyborgs" of "people who refused to disappear on cue" (Haraway, *ACM* 177). She uses the example of "Southeast Asian village women workers in Japanese and US electronics firms" who are "actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies" (Haraway, *ACM* 177). This passage, together with references throughout the manifesto to "women of colour" (Haraway, *ACM* 144) as a cyborg identity, "US black women", (Haraway, *ACM* 174), and the importance of race analysis suggest that, for Haraway, cyborg writing is tied to particular gendered and raced bodies and practices of writing; the employment of the term "cyborg" which involves the extrication of these particular bodies, has been criticized by Sandoval. Her essay acknowledges Haraway's sensitive scholarship for the ways in which Haraway's cyborg is rooted in an oppositional consciousness connected to the politics of racial and U.S. third-world feminism readings, but claims that as this metaphor "travels through the academy" and "has been utilized and appropriated in a fashion that ironically represses the very work that it fundamentally relies upon" (Sandoval 277).

Furthermore, Haraway challenges us to rethink what counts as "writing." She deconstructs this concept at the site of a group that is usually coded as the most victimized of the victimized: third-world female sweatshop workers. Always blurring the lines between "social reality and fiction,"(Haraway, *ACM* 149) she recodes them as creative writers, where their subjectivity is requestioned regarding agency and their labor as creative. The lived lives of people in their particular embodied locations also becomes "cyborg."

Locating the Philosophical Roots and Crossing the Boundaries:

Haraway cites three crucial "border crossings" which she argues making the call to "return to nature" an impossibility for feminists. The first boundary breakdown between humans and animals, which has occurred as a result of things like pollution, tourism and medical experimentation. The second one has taken place between man and machine, for example in the film named Matrix based on William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer,* we have seen the famous character Neo who blurred the border and became a man-machine organism.

Rene Descartes notion of "cogito" ("I think therefore I am") attributes human being on a privileged position regarding rationality led down the ontological premises, based on a mind/body dualism that shaped modern philosophy. Cartesian notion projected a clear-cut among the human, animal, and machine. Man is capable of thinking which positions himself as a higher entity whether the machine is pre-programmed and rigid. While animals, in general, are distinguished from the machine by the former's organism. They have vocal cords for producing sound, but these don't make any sense; they lack reason. But, what if through technological advancements animals' sound can be interpreted as language, are we ready to accept that and negate the binary opposition? *The rise of the Planet of the Apes* is a 2011 American science fiction film directed by Rupert Wyatt where Caesar the chimpanzees utters the word "no" and protests against human oppression and pathetic tortures, and we all can guess what the result was! This mind/body dualism, we can now connect with Heidegger's thought on anthropocentrism.

Martin Heidegger in his books says that metaphysics is based on binary oppositions, wherein one aspect of the debate is privileged. Not only has no analysis of the being of each "being" been undertaken meaning this privilege is based on an assumption, but Heidegger suggests two binary oppositions dominate: the division between *essence* and *existence* and that between *subject* and *object* (1977a:232,234). In particular, it reveals that the human is the only human being defined by "Ek-sistence," by which he means a specific relationship to being which is intimately connected to the possibility emanating from being's temporality (1977a: 248). Lying between being and other entities means a human being is fundamentally different from animals.

Jacques Derrida and Bruno Latour challenge these two binary oppositions. According to Heidegger's "thinking of being, the thinking of the truth of being, in the name of which Heidegger de-limits humanism and metaphysics, remains as thinking of man"(Heidegger 1982b:128). Heidegger talked about the existence of "being" but forgot to focus on the process of becoming a "being." It is the essence that makes a "being," completely different from other "being." What we call the essence of a "being," is based upon the sole experience of a "being." These experiences are not static, but the objects of conglomeration into the process of becoming. What is at issue not human being's elevated status, but

"a kind of re-evaluation or revalorization of the essence and dignity of man" (Heidegger1982b:128). This leads Derrida to conclude that, for all his originality. The overcoming of anthropocentrism is overlapped in Heidegger's thought because his thinking of being remains locked within certain assumed privileges, such as privileging of a human being over other entities that prevents it from truly thinking difference. Haraway agrees with Derrida at this point that "being" is not fixed, rather it is more about "becoming," a continuous process and the process dismantles the fixed hierarchical notion. If we look into Derrida's methodological approach from Jacques Lacan's point of view, we will also find that the ontology of our existence is also based on "companion species." In the process of becoming, ego plays a pivotal role in separating the individual from the rest of the world at the mirror stage from the age of about six to eighteen months. When a child enters into the symbolic[i]state by performing the "normative codes" of civilization the methodological approach of creating our ontology becomes successful. Undeniably, the claim that Haraway has made that"I'm with Derrida more than others," (Haraway, *WSM* 140) and Cary Wolf's reading of Derrida locate more interesting fact of our patriarchal mythic story based on binary opposition. A new civilization of "body without organs" is possible to create by expunging this notion of binary opposition where our unconscious mind will be from structured language of man-made society as Lacan said "unconscious is structured as language" and we all know that "language is not innocent in our primate orders (Haraway, *ACM* 81). Indeed, word has been remaining an undeniable instrument of human civilization: cutting us off from the garden of mute and dumb animals, leading us to name things, shaping meanings, creating oppositions, and crafting human culture.

Bruno Latour in his book *We Have Never Been Modern (*2014) criticizes Heidegger's notion of "being." The problem Latour identifies is that this supposedly simple question (what is being?) is too abstract, too indeterminate. Despite Heidegger's assertion that being is always the being of an entity, Latour claims that Heidegger turns away from the "real" world of entities to ask about the abstract being of entities. In other words, Heidegger has such difficulty "finding" and describing "being" because he has turned away from the empirical world, with its different manifestations, to the question of being. For Latour, however, the question of being is found in and through the world of entities, more specifically relating to the theme of "companion species" (Haraway, *ACM* 173), what Haraway mentioned in *When Species Meet* "it is about that kind of doubleness, but it is even more about the cat's cradle games in which those who are to be in the world are constituted in intra- and interaction" (256). To establish her viewpoint on companion species, Haraway used the cartoon of Sidney Harris

named Leonardo Da Vinci's dog[5] in *When Species Meet* (read, in the blog of Harris I found the picture of a cat instead of the dog).
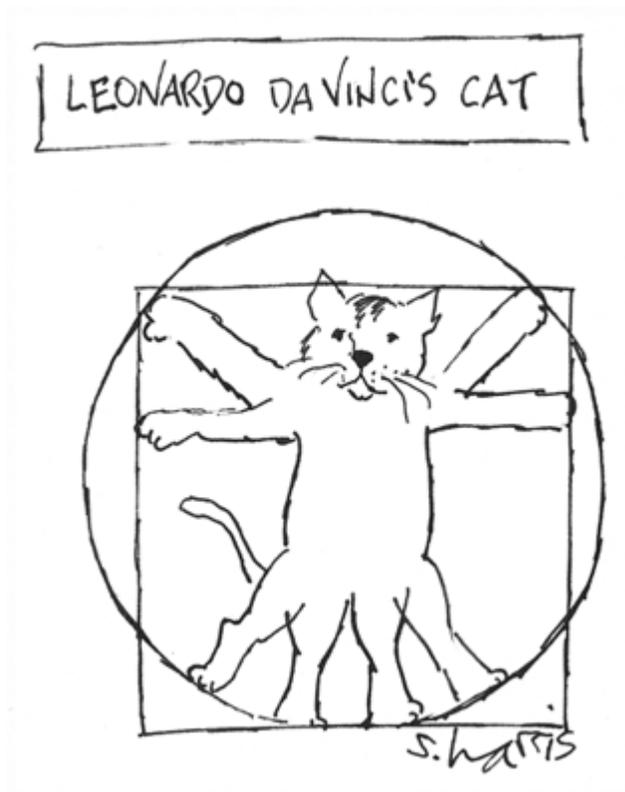

Figure: "Leonardo Vinci's Cat" from Science Cartoon Plus by Sidney Harris.

Haraway writes:

> Leonardo's dog is the companion species for techno-humanism and its dreams of purification and transcendence. I want to walk instead with the mixed crowd called Jim's dog, where the clean lines between traditional and modern, organic and technological, human and nonhuman give way to the in the folding of the flesh that powerful figures such as the cyborgs and dogs I know both signify and enact. (Haraway, *WSM* 173)

 The cover picture of the book from which the essay is borrowed is also mentionable in this context.

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[5] Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, the Man of Perfect Proportions, painted from 1485 to 1490, and had paved the way in the imaginations of techno-culture and canine pet culture alike. Sydney Harris's cartoon of Man's celebrated canine companion mimes a figure that has come to mean Renaissance humanism; to mean modernity; to mean the generative tie of art, science, technology, genius, progress, and money.
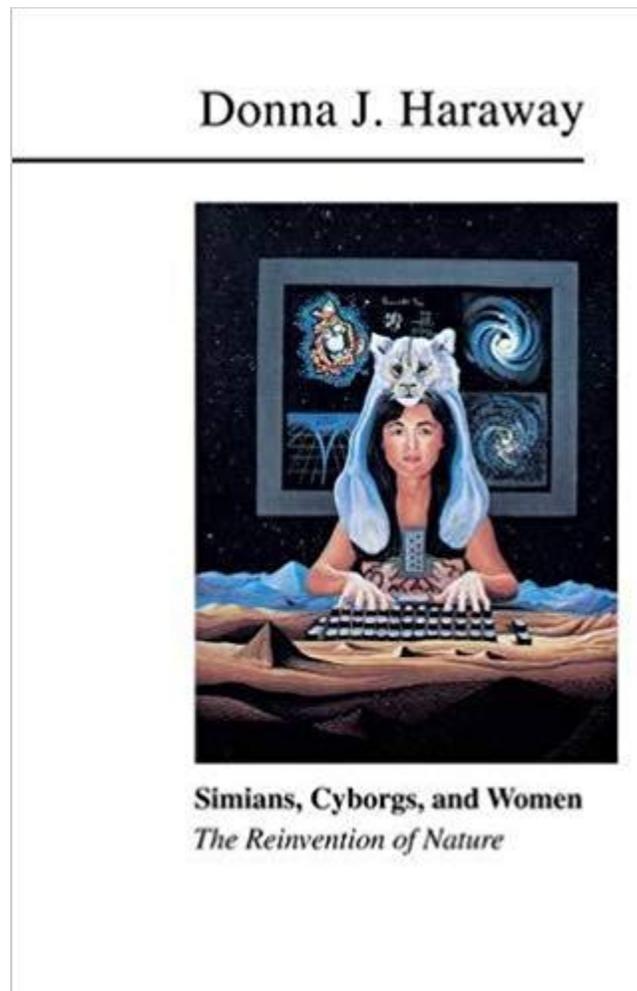
Entities are not separate from each other, but are "ecosystem of genomes, consortia, communities, partly digested dinners, mortal boundary formations (Haraway 2008)". In short, entities, whether technological or so-called organic entities are composed of multiple parts which constantly become together and through their "individual" parts. As Haraway concludes, "the kinds of relating that these introductions perform entangle a motley crowd of differentially situated species, including landscapes, animals, plants, microorganisms, people, and technologies"(Haraway, *WSM* 31), which leads her to claim that "to be one is always to become with many" (Haraway, *ACM* 177). Therefore, Haraway shatters Heidegger's notion of human/animal binary where human minus profound boredom leads to an animal who cannot suffer boredom!

The third boundary between the physical and non-physical can be uttered through virtual life we are now living in where the so-called "performative" (Judith Butler) gender role can be pulled apart, and emancipation from body politics is possible. To Butler "gendered body is performative suggests that it has

no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality." (Butler 169). Performing the role of gender is not about a matter of dressing or going out; the role is built on the exact repetition of behaviours failing to perform the role in the right way can meet with social isolation, mockery, violence, rape, and even death according to Butler. Back to Haraway, where "performativity" needs so much caution, then it is better to live in a world where "body without organ" will lead to the "abjection of a subject."(Kristeva 149)

Conclusion:

By retrieving the metaphor of the "weave," in her *The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics* (1995), Sadie Plant links the weaving of the World Wide Web (www) to the craft of weaving, a profession that has traditionally been related to women. The weave of the Web is an act of agency, where the women consciously "connect" as an assertion of selfhood and identity. Instead of cyberspace as a new frontier to be conquered and dominated, "weaving" suggests an alternate view of thinking about cyberculture. The feminist "weave" suggests a linkage, mutual dependency, and community placing them in "the integrated circuit" and emancipating from the traditional hegemonized identity roles in "home," "market," "workplace," and "state." Therefore, by using cyborg as an image in this hyperreal world women can create new history where DNA is code, and our Freudian mythic root will be free from body politics as Haraway wrote "I will be a cyborg than a goddess" in a world where "clitoris is the direct line" (VNS Matrix 1991).
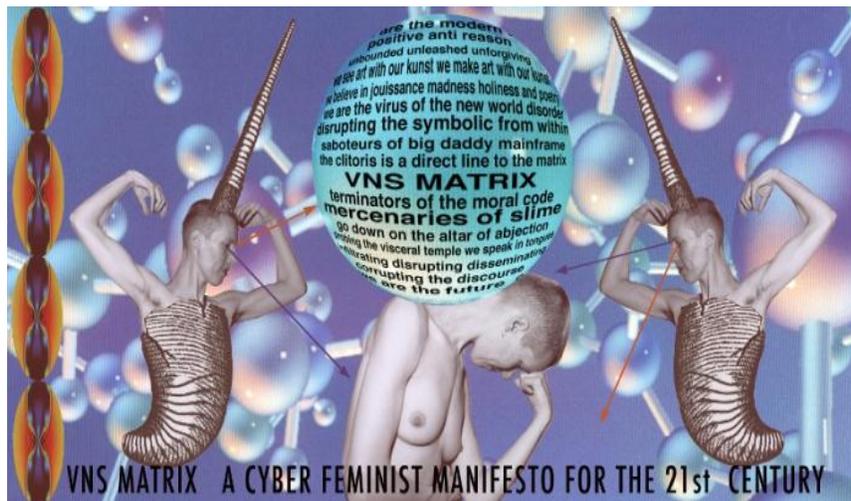

Figure: "Clitoris Is the Direct Line to the Matrix" from VNS Matrix.

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