

Cyborgs, Coyotes and Dogs

A Kinship of Feminist Figurations

Interview med Donna Haraway⁰

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Interviewet fandt sted, da Donna Haraway besøgte Danmark som en af hovedtalerne ved konferencen "Cyborg Identities – The Humanities in Technical Light", 21.-22. oktober, 1999, arrangeret af Randi Markussen og Finn Olesen, Institut for Informations og Medievidenskab, Aarhus Universitet. Konferencen var en del af initiativet "Humaniora ved Årtusindskiftet", ar-

i. Færdiggjort til *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* af Nina Lykke.

rangeret af Center for Kulturforskning og Det humanistiske Fakultet, Aarhus Universitet. Interviewet blev lavet som del af en workshop med Donna Haraway, organiseret af FREJA-forskningsprojektet “Kyborger og cyberspace – mellem fortælling og socioteknisk virkelighed”, som de tre interviewere alle er deltagere i.



Let us start with the “Cyborg Manifesto”.¹ Many women have been fascinated by the idea that the cyborg could be a woman. Why did you insist on the femaleness of the cyborg?

Donna Haraway: For me the notion of the cyborg was female, and a woman, in complex ways. It was an act of resistance, an oppositional move of a pretty straightforward kind. The cyborg was, of course, part of a military project, part of an extraterrestrial man-in-space-project. It was also a science fictional figure out of a largely male defined science fiction. Then there was another dimension in which cyborgs were female: in popular culture, and in certain kinds of medical culture. Here cyborgs appeared as patients, or as objects of pornography, as “fem-bots” – the iron maiden, the robotized machinic, pornographic female. But the whole figure of the cyborg seemed to me potentially much more interesting than that. Moreover, an act of taking over a territory seemed like a fairly straight forward, political, symbolic technoscientific project.

From my point of view, the cyborg was a figure that collected up many things, among them the way that post-World War II technoscientific cultures were deeply shaped by information sciences and biological sciences, by the implosion of informatics and biologics that were already well under way by the end of World War II, and that has only deepened in the last 50 years and transformed conditions of life. These are not matters of choice, neither are they matters of determinism. These are deep materi-

alizations of very complex socio-technical relations. What interested me was the way of conceiving of us all as communication systems, whether we are animate or in-animate, whether we are animals or plants, human beings or the planet herself, Gaia, or machines of various kinds. This common coin of theorizing existence, this common ontology of everything as communication-control-system was what interested me. It made me very angry and anxious, but interested me in more positive ways, too. Among other things, I was attracted by an unconscious and dreamlike quality, and I was interested in affirming not simply the human-machine aspect of cyborgs, but also the degree to which human beings and other organisms have a kind of commonality to them in cyborg worlds.

It was the joint implosion of human and machine, on the one hand, and human and other organisms, on the other, within a kind of problematic sub-communication that interested me about the cyborg. There were many levels in this, for example labor process issues: the particular ways that women – working-class women, women of color, women in Third World countries with export processing zones that would attract international capital, among other things for micro-electronics manufacture – were implicated in the labor process of cyborg production, as scientists, too, although in relative minorities. Women occupied many kinds of places in these worlds, in biomedicine, in information sciences, but also as a preferred workforce for transnational capital. Strategies of flexible accumulation involved the productions of various kinds of gender for men and for women that were historically specific. The cyborg became a figure for trying to understand women’s place in the “integrated circuit”² – a phrase produced by feminist socialists.

Moreover, the cyborg was a place to excavate and examine popular culture including science fiction, and, in particular, feminist science fiction. A novel like *Superlumi-*



Lynn Randolph, "The Annunciation of the Second Coming", 1996

*na*³ by Vonda McIntyre, made a strong use of cyborg imagery in complex, interesting ways that were quasi-feminist. Joanna Russ' clone sister fiction of the mid-1970s⁴ and, certainly, Octavia Butler's work⁵ intrigued me a lot. There was a great deal of feminist cultural production, which was working with the cyborg in fascinating ways.

Also, the cyborg seemed to me a figuration that was specifically anti-psychoanalytic. But in contrast to what a lot of people have argued, I do not think of the cyborg as without an unconscious. However, it is not a Freudian unconscious. There is a different kind of dreamwork going on here; it is not ethical, it is not Edenic, it is not about origin stories in the garden. It is a different set of narrations, figurations, dreamwork, subject formations and unconscious work. These sorts of figurations do not exclude ethical narrations or other kinds of psychoanalytic work, but they are not the same thing. It was important to me to have a way of dealing with figurations in technoscience that were not quite so hegemonized by psychoanalysis as I found it developed around me in really lively places of feminist cultural work such as film theory. Some marvelous work has been done with Freudian or post-Freudian tools here, but they did not seem right for the analysis of technoscience. So I turned to literature as well as biology and philosophy, and questions of figurations interested me a lot.

Cyborgs are also places where the ambiguity between the literal and the figurative is always working. You are never sure whether to take something literally or figuratively. It is always both/and. It is this undecidability between the literal and the figurative that interests me about technoscience. It seems like a good place to think with. Moreover, it involves a physicality that is undeniable and deeply historically specific. It is possible to extend the cyborg image into other historical configurations, allegorically or analogically, but it seems to me that it had a privileged historical emer-

gence. You can use it to inquire into other historical formations, but it has a specificity.

In a way, you know, I am doing this analysis of the meanings attached to the cyborg retrospectively. I cannot imagine that I thought all these things in 1983 (laughter). It is a funny thing to look back at something I actually began writing 17 years ago ...

Please, tell us about the intriguing history of the Cyborg Manifesto, which has taken on a life of its own in a way that academic papers seldom do.

Donna Haraway: I began writing the manifesto in 1983. *Socialist Review* in the United States wanted socialist feminists to write about the future of socialist feminism in the context of the early Reagan era and the retrenchment of the left that the 1980s was witnessing. Barbara Ehrenreich and I, and many other American socialist feminists, were invited to contribute. Moreover, Frigga Haug and the feminist collective of the West German socialist journal *Das Argument* wanted me to write about reproductive technologies, and the cyborg is an obvious place for making reflections on the technologification of reproduction. Almost at the same time, a left democratic group in the former Yugoslavia was holding a conference and I was designated as one of the American representatives from *Socialist Review*. I wrote a version of the *Cyborg Manifesto* for this occasion, although I actually did not deliver my paper at the conference, because, instead, a small group of us made a demonstration about the division of labor at the conference, where the women were invisibly doing all the work, while the men were not so invisibly doing all the propounding!

So in the beginning the *Cyborg Manifesto* had a very strong socialist and European connection.

Where did you read the word, cyborg, the first time? Do you remember that?

Donna Haraway: I do not remember. I tried

to remember it, and it felt like I made the word up, but I cannot have made it up. I read Norbert Wiener, but I do not think I got it there. I did not read Clynes and Kline⁶ until way after I had written the *Cyborg Manifesto*. I did not know about Clynes and Kline and that fabulous connection of the psychiatrist, the systems engineer, and the mental hospital. It was a graduate student of mine, Chris Gray,⁷ who told me about the cyborg-article of Clynes and Kline from 1960.

How do you yourself look upon the remarkable history of the Cyborg Manifesto? How do you evaluate the reception, in terms both of positive and negative responses?

Donna Haraway: I am astonished ... But to answer your question, I can tell you that the reactions, right from the beginning, were very mixed. At *Socialist Review* the manifesto was considered very controversial. The *Socialist Review* East Coast Collective truly disapproved of it politically and did not want it published. But the Berkeley *Socialist Review* Collective did, and it was Jeff Escoffier, a very interesting gay theorist and historian, who was my editor at the Berkeley Collective, and who was very enthusiastic about the paper.

So from the beginning the manifesto was very controversial. There were some who regarded it as tremendously anti-feminist, as a kind of blished-out, techno-sublime euphoria. Those readers completely failed to see all the critique. They would read things that for me are highly ironic and angry, a kind of contained ironic fury – they would read these things as my literal position, as if I was embracing and affirming what I am describing with barely detained fury.

The reading practices of the *Cyborg Manifesto* took me aback from the very beginning, and I learned that irony is a dangerous rhetorical strategy. Moreover, I found out that it is not a very kind rhetoric, because it does things to your audience that are not fair. When you use irony, you assume that

your audience is reading out of much the same sort of experiences as you yourself, and they are not. You assume reading practices that you finally have to admit are highly privileged and often private. The manifesto put together literacies that are the result of literary studies, biology, information sciences, political economy and 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. I learnt something about that from certain receptions of the manifesto. On the other hand, most of my readers shared the same privileges (laughter).

There were also readers who would take the *Cyborg Manifesto* for its technological analysis, but drop the feminism. Many science studies people, who still seem tone-deaf to feminism, have done this. It is generally my experience that very few people are taking what I consider all of its parts. I have had people, like *Wired Magazine* readers, interviewing and writing about the *Cyborg Manifesto* from what I see as a very blished-out, techno-sublime position.

But I have also had this really interesting reception from young feminists – a reception, which I love. They embrace and use the cyborg of the manifesto to do what they want for their own purposes. They have completely different histories from mine, from this particular moment of democratic socialism and socialist feminism, the transition of the 1980s of which I just narrated. This is not their history at all. They have a totally different relationship to cultural production, to access to media, to use of computers for performance art and other purposes, to technomusic, and they have, to my pleasure and astonishment, found the *Cyborg Manifesto* useful for queer sexuality work, and for certain kinds of queer theory that take in technoscience. I found 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 (laughter).

These young feminists have truly re-written the manifesto in ways that were not part of my intention, but I can see what they are doing. I think it is a legitimate reading, and I like it, but it really wasn't what I wrote.

So sometimes people read the manifesto in ways, which are very pleasant surprises to me, and sometimes it is really distressing to be confronted with the reading practices. But, anyway, it is a hard paper to read. Difficulty *is* an issue. On the other hand, I swear, I meet people without academic training who read the manifesto and who do not give up. They read it for what they want, and they just do not care about the difficulty issue.

I have been teaching gender and technoculture to registered nurses, and for many of them, the manifesto was a revelation. It helped them to see their practice as nurses in a new light and to avoid being caught in the dilemma between a humanistic and partly technophobic concept of care, on the one hand, and, on the other, the powerful and uncritically self-glorifying visions of progress, embedded in the discourses of medical science. Your cyborg was for them a critical tool, a position from which they could think their professional identity differently.

Donna Haraway: This is very interesting. I think that part of the feminist argument of the manifesto is exactly in line with this. It is neither technophobic, nor technophilic, but about trying to inquire critically into the worldliness of technoscience. It is about exploring where real people are in the material semiotic systems of technoscience and what kinds of accountability, responsibility, pleasure, work, play, are engaged, and should be engaged.

Another aspect of the cyborg, which I would like to ask you about, is, how you evaluate the danger that it might lose its critical potential and become a mainstream figure, closed within a certain mainstream narrative, sin-

ce it today – much more than when you started writing about it in 1983 – has become a so obvious and inescapable part of society and culture.

Donna Haraway: I think that as an oppositional figure the cyborg has a rather short half-life (laughter), and indeed for the most part, cyborg figurations, both in technical and popular culture, are not, and have never been, oppositional or liberatory, or had a critical dimension in the sense that I use critique, that is, in the sense that things might be otherwise.

It is a sense of critique that is not negative, necessarily, except in the particular way that the Frankfurt School understood negativity – a way, which I think is really worth remembering and holding on to. It is critique in the deep sense that things might be otherwise. There is much of the Frankfurt School that I have never embraced, but that sense of critique as a freedom project is important.

There was a certain amount of work, and there even still is a certain amount of work in that freedom project that oppositional, or critical cyborgs can do, but I agree that it is much less true now than it was in 1983. Precisely because of the kind of tightening of the internet around us all; precisely because we are now in the matrix in such a relentlessly literal way that there is some really new tropic work that has to be done in this figure.

I take figurations and the question, how they work, very seriously, as a practice trying to understand what collects up the life-and-death concerns of people. It seems to me that we need a whole kinship system of figurations as critical figures and in that sense, I think cyborg figurations can continue to do critical work. But it can quickly become banal, and mainstream, and comforting. The cyborg may be an alibi that makes the technoscientific bourgeois figure comfortable, or it may be a critical figure. *You pointed out that a whole kinship of figu-*

rations is needed ...

Donna Haraway: Yes, (laughter) littermates, a kennel, a breed ...

I would like to leave the cyborg and look at another figuration that has emerged in your work: the coyote. I read the coyote figure in your texts⁸ as a figuration that becomes necessary because your complex approach to the deconstruction of the dichotomy between "nature" and "culture" implies a refusal to consider non-human "nature" as nothing but stupid, soulless matter. To me your coyote figure is a figuration in which the search for alternative understandings of the phenomena we are used to call "nature" is embedded. But why did you choose this particular figuration?

Donna Haraway: It is partly a regional issue. You know, I am a Westerner, not just in the sense of inheriting Western traditions, but I am from the Western United States. Coyote figures are important to Native Americans in many places in North America, including various groups in the South-Western United States. When I use the coyote figure, a double issue is at stake. First of all, my use of the coyote is marked by the middle-class, white feminist appropriation of Native American symbols, about which one must be very suspicious. There is a particular way in which feminist spirituality has operated in a rather colonial way to Native American religion. I have a certain criticism of my own use of the coyote figuration on this background. However, saying that I do not mean to dismiss or to forbid, what I and others have been doing in terms of using Native American symbols. What I want is to add a certain caution, because figures do travel, and they travel outside of their places of emergence in various ways, and certain figures like the raven and the coyote do work in Anglo culture, as well as in Native culture. We do live in a world that is made up of complexly webbed layers of locals and globals, and who is to say that

Native American symbols are to be less global than those produced by Anglo-Americans? Or who is to say that one set of symbols has got to stay local, while all the other ones get to figure so-called globalization? So I think there is a way in which this cross-talk between figurations is politically interesting, although certainly not innocent.

Thus, the coyote is a specific figuration. It is not nature in a Euro-American sense and not about resources to the makings of culture. Moreover, coyote is not a very nice figure. It is a trickster figure, and, particularly in Navaho figurations, the coyote is often associated with quite distressing kinds of trickster work. Coyote is about the world as a place that is active in terms that are not particularly under human control, but it is not about the human, on the one side, and the natural, on the other. There is a communication between what we would call "nature" and "culture", but in a world where "coyote" is a relevant category, "nature" and "culture" are not the relevant categories. Coyote disturbs nature/culture ontologies.

I chose coyote and not, for example, Spiderwoman, because of the already overdetermined feminist appropriations of the latter, and for one thing the coyote is not female, particularly ...

Is it post-gender?

Donna Haraway: No! I have no patience with the term "post-gender". I have never liked it.

But you used it in the manifesto ...⁹

Donna Haraway: Yes, I did. But I had no idea that it would become this "ism"! (Laughter) You know, I have never used it since! Because post-gender ends up meaning a very strange array of things.

Gender is a verb, not a noun. Gender is always about the production of subjects in relation to other subjects, and in relation to

artefacts. Gender is about material-semiotic production of these assemblages, these human-artefact assemblages that are people. People are always already in assemblage with worlds. Humans are already congeries of things that are not us. We are not self-identical. Gender is specifically a production of men and women. It is an obligatory distribution of subjects in unequal relationships, where some have more property than others. Gender is a specific production of subjects in sexualized forms where some have rights to reproductivity, and sexuality, and other modes of being in the world. So gender is specifically a system of that kind, but not continuous across history, which means that things need not be this way. In this particular sense it puts focus on a critical relationship to gender along the lines of critical theory's "things need not be this way", and in this sense of blasting gender, I approve of the term "post-gender". But this is not "post-gender" in a utopian, beyond-masculine-and-feminine sense, which it often is taken to mean. It is the blasting of necessity, the no-necessity of this way of doing the world.

Going back to the coyote and your choice to include it in your kinship of potentially critical figurations instead of such explicitly female figures as Spiderwoman or the goddess – did that have something to do with coyote being post-gender in the sense that you just defined?

Donna Haraway: Oh yes! It has much to do with "post-gender" in the sense of blasting the truth scandal of gender and with a feminism that does not embrace Woman, but is for women, and which involves the particular powerful theories of intersection that came out of post-colonial theory, and women of color feminist theory, and that came overwhelmingly, though not only, from people who had been oppressed in colonial and racial ways. They insisted on a kind of relentless intersectionality, that refused any gender-analysis standing on its

own, and in this context, I find that the term "post-gender" makes sense. Here it can be understood as a kind of intensified critical understanding of these many threads of the production of inequality.

To go a bit further into your deconstruction of the nature/culture-dichotomy, I will ask you to comment on your concept of the "apparatus of bodily production".¹⁰ Like the cyborg and coyote figurations, this concept is a useful tool, when you want to shift the traditional nature/culture-boundaries and create new ways of understanding bodies as well as the sex/gender-dichotomy. How do you yourself look upon the link between the concept of "apparatus of bodily production" and the breaking down of the "sex/gender"-dichotomy?

Donna Haraway: Sex and gender is an analytical device, that is clearly indebted to a way of doing the world that works through matter/form categories. It is a deeply Aristotelian dichotomy. It works on the cultural appropriation of nature for the teleological ends of mind. It has terribly contaminated roots. Nonetheless it has been a useful tool for analyzing the sex/gender system. In that sense, it was a radical achievement at a certain moment. But the analytical work was mistaken for the thing itself, and people truly believed, and believe, in sex and gender as things. It is the mistake of misplaced concreteness. Instead it is important to remember the contaminated philosophical tradition, which gives us tools of that kind. In order to do the world in other than Platonist and Aristotelian ways, in order to do ontology otherwise, in order to get out a world that is done by notions of matter/form, or production/raw material, I feel aligned with ways of getting at the world as a verb, which throws us into categories like practices, worlds in the making and apparatuses of bodily production – without the categories of form and matter, and sex and gender etc.

And without reducing everything either to

purely social constructions or purely natural things?

Donna Haraway: Absolutely. I am neither a naturalist, nor a social constructionist. Neither-nor. This is not social constructionism, and it is not technoscientific or biological determinism. It is not nature. It is not culture. It is truly about a serious historical effort to get elsewhere.

You have recently included a new member in your kinship of potential critical figurations: the dog. Why?

Donna Haraway: Dogs are many things. They occupy many kinds of categories, breeds, populations, vermin, figures, research animals, sources of rabies, the New Guinea singing dog, the Dingoes etc. Dogs are very many kinds of entities. The ontology of dogs turns out to be quite big, and there are all those names for dogs that are about various kinds of relationalities. Dogs have many kinds of relationality, but one kind that is practically obligatory is with humans. It is almost part of the definition of a dog to be in relationship with humans, although not necessarily around the word "domestication". Though "domestication" is a very powerful word, it is not altogether clear. In fact, it is probably *not* true that humans domesticated dogs. Conversely, it is probably true from an evolutionary and historical point of view that dogs took the first steps in producing this symbiosis. There are a lot of interesting biological-behavioral stories that have a certain evidential quality. These are partly testable stories, partly not testable stories.

So dogs have this large array of possible ontologies, that are all about relationship and very heavily about relationships with humans in different historical forms. And dogs then do a tremendous amount of semiotic work for people. They work for us not only when they are herding sheep, they also work as figures, and dogs figure back

very important kinds of human investments.

For me, there are many, many ways in which I am interested in dogs. I am interested in the fact that dogs are not us. So they figure not-us. They are not just cute projections. Dogs do not figure mirror-of-me. Dogs figure another species, but another species living in very close relationship; another species in relation to which the nature/culture divide is more of a problem, than a help, when we try to understand it. Because dogs are neither nature, nor culture, not both-and, not neither-nor, but something else.

The notion of companionship becomes important here, I assume?

Donna Haraway: Yes, although the notion of companionship is a very modern way of seeing the dogs. The notion of the companion animal is a quite recent invention. Seeing dogs as companion animals, but not pets, is a rather recent contestation. We have necessarily to be in an ethical relationship with dogs, because they are vulnerable to human cruelty in very particular ways, or to carelessness, or stupidity. So dogs become sites of meaning making and sites of inquiry: ethical inquiry, ontological inquiry, inquiry about the nature of sociality, inquiry about pedagogy and training and control, inquiry about sadism, about authoritarianism, about war (the relationship between the infantry and the war dog as tools in military history) etc. Dogs become good figures to think with – in all sorts of circumstances. There is the development of service dogs, for example, the seeing-eye dogs. There are all the different ways that dogs are brought into relationship with human need, or human desire. There are dogs as toys, toy dogs, dogs as live-stock guardians in charge of protecting sheep against wolves, bears, coyotes, and so on. Working dogs interest me a lot and so does the relationship of a human being and a dog in the sports world. There are also dependency is-

sues, but dogs are not surrogate children. Dogs are adult. Adult dogs should not be permanently infantilized! When you live with a dog, you live with another adult who is not your species. I find this cross-species companionship and the questions of otherness that are involved really interesting. Dogs confront us with a particular kind of otherness that raises many questions, ethical, ontological, political, questions about pleasure, about embodiment etc.

How does the dog relate to the cyborg and the coyote? Is it an in-between figure in the kinship of figurations?

Donna Haraway: It is, and in that sense, you know, I feel like I have written about many sorts of entities that are neither nature nor culture. The cyborg is such an entity, and the coyote, and the genetically engineered laboratory research animal OncoMouse¹¹ is also in this odd family – this queer family that is neither nature nor culture but an interface. The family includes, for me, in terms of what I have written about the cyborg, the coyote, the Onco Mouse, the FemaleMan,¹² the feminists, the history of women within feminist analysis, the dogs in my new project, and, of course, the non-human primates.¹³ All these are entities that require one to be confused about nature and culture.

Are they all on the same level, or do you consider the cyborg to be a kind of meta-category?

Donna Haraway: Well, sometimes the cyborg functions as a meta-category, but I am actually much happier to demote it to one of the littermates. Sometimes I do end up saying these are all cyborg figures, but I think that is a bad idea. I like to think of the cyborg as one of the litter, the one that requires an awful lot of intervention in order to survive (laughter)... It has to be technically enhanced in order to survive in this world.

NOTER

0. Nina Lykke har tidligere introduceret Donna Haraways arbejde i *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*: no. 4/1996 og no. 2/1999. Kyborg og koyote er gennemgående metaforer i Haraways arbejde. En kyborg er en kybernetisk organisme, som udviser grænser mellem menneske, organisme og maskine. En koyote er en amerikansk prærieculv, som optræder i indianske myter.
1. Haraway, D.: "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Free Association Books, London 1991.
2. Cf. Haraway, D.: "A Cyborg Manifesto" (op.cit.), p. 170.
3. McIntyre, V.: *Superluminal*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MD 1983.
4. Russ, J.: *The Female Man*, Bantam Books, New York 1975.
5. Butler, O.: *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), *Imago* (1989), all three published by Warner Books, New York.
6. Clynes, M.E. and N.S. Kline: "Cyborgs and space", *Astronautics*, September 1960. Reprinted in C.H. Gray et al: *The Cyborg Handbook*, Routledge, London, New York 1995, pp. 29-33.
7. Se note 6.
8. Cf. Haraway, D.: "Situated Knowledges" in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (op. cit.), p. 199ff. and D. Haraway: "The Actors Are Cyborg, Nature Is Coyote, and the Geography Is Elsewhere: Postscript to "Cyborgs at Large", in C. Penley and A. Ross: *Technoculture. Cultural Politics vol 3*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Oxford 1991, pp. 21-26.
9. Cf. Haraway, D.: "A Cyborg Manifesto" (op.cit.), p. 150: "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world ..."
10. Cf. Haraway, D.: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, (op. cit.), p. 197ff. and p. 208ff.
11. Cf. Haraway D.: *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.Female Man@_Meets_OncoMouse*TM. *Feminism and Technoscience*. Routledge, London, New York 1997.
12. Cf. note 10.
13. Cf. Haraway D.: *Primate Visions. Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, Routledge, New York, London 1989.