



---

Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway  
Author(s): Constance Penley, Andrew Ross, Donna Haraway  
Source: *Social Text*, No. 25/26 (1990), pp. 8-23  
Published by: [Duke University Press](#)  
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466237>  
Accessed: 25/01/2011 13:13

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=duke>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Social Text*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway

CONSTANCE PENLEY AND ANDREW ROSS

*Andrew Ross:* Many people from different audiences and disciplines came to your work through “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” which has become a cult text since its appearance in *Socialist Review* in 1985. For those readers, who include ourselves, the recent publication of *Primate Visions* and the forthcoming *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* provides the opportunity to see how your work as a historian of science was always more or less directly concerned with many of the questions about nature, culture and technology that you gave an especially inspirational spin to in the Cyborg Manifesto. So we’d like to begin with a more general discussion of your radical critiques of the institutions of science. Although you often now speak of having been a historian of science, almost in the past tense, as it were, it’s also clear that you have many more than vestigial loyalties to the goals of scientific rationality — among which being the need, as you put it, in a phrase that goes out of its way to flirt with empiricism, the need for a “no-nonsense commitment” to faithful accounts of reality. Surely there is more involved here than a lingering devotion to the ideals of your professional training?

*Donna Haraway:* You’ve got your finger right on the heart of the anxiety — some of the anxiety and some of the pleasure in the kind of political writing that I’m trying to do. It seems to me that the practices of the sciences — the sciences as cultural production — force one to accept two simultaneous, apparently incompatible truths. One is the historical contingency of what counts as nature for us: the thoroughgoing artifactuality of a scientific object of knowledge, that which makes it inescapably and radically contingent. You peel away all the layers of the onion and there’s nothing in the center.

And simultaneously, scientific discourses, without ever ceasing to be radically and historically specific, do still make claims on you, ethically, physically. The objects of these discourses, the discourses themselves, have a kind of materiality; they have a sort of reality to them that is inescapable. No scientific account escapes being story-laden, but it is equally true that stories are not all equal here. Radical relativism just won’t do as a way of finding your way across and through these terrains. There are political consequences to scientific accounts of the world, and I remain, in some ways, an old-fashioned Russian nihilist. My heroes are

the women who set off to get agronomy and medical degrees in Zurich in the 1860s, and then went back to serve the revolutionary moment in Russia with their scientific skills. A lot of my heart lies in old-fashioned science for the people, and thus in the belief that these enlightenment modes of knowledge *have* been radically liberating; that they give accounts of the world that can check arbitrary power; that these accounts of the world ought to be in the service of checking the arbitrary. I hold onto that simultaneously with an understanding that I learned from the discipline of the history of science, that the sciences are radically contingent. They are specific historical and culture productions. So, I felt like a political actor and scholar trying to hold those two things together when the disciplines, as well as social movements, want to pull them apart.

AR: So there remains a sense of responsibility to provide reliable knowledge about the world. In your new book, you push this responsibility to what might appear, to some, to be rather bizarre lengths. At one point, you say that to have a better account of the world — the laudable goal of science after all...

DH: Yes, which one always says with a nervous laugh...

AR: To have that better account of the world, you propose that we ought to be able to see the world and its objects as agents to the extent that we ought to be aware of what you call “the world’s independent sense of humor.” We’re curious about this phrase, and were wondering if you could give us a more concrete example of the world’s “sense of humor”?

DH: Someone asked if I meant the earthquake (laughter). Well obviously what’s going on there is some kind of play with metaphors. In this respect, I’m most influenced by Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory which argues that in a sociological account of science all sorts of things are actors, only some of which are human language-bearing actors, and that you have to include, as sociological actors, all kinds of heterogeneous entities. I’m aware that it’s a risky business, but this imperative helps to break down the notion that only the language-bearing actors have a kind of agency. Perhaps only these organized by language are *subjects*, but agents are more heterogeneous. Not all the actors have language. And so that presents a contradiction in terms because our notions of agency, action and subjectivity are all about language. So you’re faced with the contradictory project of finding the metaphors that allow you to imagine a knowledge situation that does not set up an active/passive split, an Aristotelian split of the world as the ground for the construction of the agent; nor an essentially Platonist resolution of that, through one or another essentialist move. One has to look for a system of figures to describe an encounter in knowledge that refuses the active/passive binary which is overwhelmingly the discursive tradition that Western folks have inherited. So you go for metaphors like the coyote, or trickster figure. You go for odd pronouns, which encourage an acknowledgement that the relationship be-

tween nature and human is a social relationship for which none of the extant pronouns will do. Nature in relation to us is neither “he,” “she,” “it,” “they,” “we,” “you,” “thou”...and it’s certainly not “it.” So you’re involved in a kind of science-fictional move, of imagining possible worlds. It’s always important to keep the tension of the fiction foregrounded, so that you don’t end up making a kind of animist or pantheist claim.

There’s also the problem, of course, of having inherited a particular set of descriptive technologies as a Eurocentric and Euro-American person. How do I then act the bricoleur that we’ve all learned to be in various ways, without being a colonizer; picking up a trickster figure, for example, out of Native American stories? How do you avoid the cultural imperialism, or the orientaling move of sidestepping your own descriptive technologies and bringing in something to solve your problems? How do you keep foregrounded the ironic and iffy things you’re doing and still do them seriously. Folks get mad because you can’t be pinned down, folks get mad at me for not finally saying what the bottom line is on these things: they say, well do you or don’t you believe that non-human actors are in some sense social agents? One reply that makes sense to me is, the subjects are cyborg, nature is coyote, and the geography is elsewhere.

*AR:* It seems that you are increasingly, in your work, sympathetic to the textualist or constructionist positions, but it’s clear also that you reject the very easy path of radical constructionism, which sees all scientific claims about the object world as merely persuasive rhetoric, either weak or strong depending on their institutional success in claiming legitimacy for themselves. Your view seems to be: that way lies madness...

*DH:* Or that way lies cynicism, or that way lies the impossibility of politics. That’s what worries me.

*AR:* And your way of retaining political sanity is?

*DH:* Politics rests on the possibility of a shared world. Flat out. Politics rests on the possibility of being accountable to each other, in some non-voluntaristic “I feel like it today” way. It rests on some sense of the way that you come into the historical world encrusted with barnacles. Metaphorically speaking, I imagine a historical person as being somehow like a hermit crab that’s encrusted with barnacles. And I see myself and everybody else as sort of switching shells as we grow. (laughter) But every shell we pick up has its histories, and you certainly don’t choose those histories — this is Marx’s point about making history but not any way you choose. You have to account for the encrustations and the inertias, just as you have to remain accountable to each other through learning how to remember, if you will, which barnacles you’re carrying. To me, that is a fairly straightforward way of avoiding cynical relativism while still holding on, again, to contingency.

*Constance Penley:* In an essay on the history of the sex/gender split you argue that one of the unfortunate results of the anti-essentialist position of feminist constructionists is that biology (which you equate with the “sex” side of the sex/gender split) has been undervalued as a realm of investigation, where it really ought to have been seen as a much more active site for contesting definitions of “nature” that concern women quite directly. We can see where a sustained investigation of biology is useful for revealing historical and ideological links within science between “nature” and “femininity,” but we’d like you to say what role you see biology playing in the future “reinvention of nature.”

*DH:* This is actually very close to my heart, because there’s that crypto-biologist lurking under the culture critic. The simplest way to approach that question is by remembering that biology is not the body itself, but a discourse. When you say that my biology is such-and-such — or, I am a biological female and so therefore I have the following physiological structure — it sounds like you’re talking about the thing itself. But, if we are committed to remembering that biology is a *logos*, is literally a gathering into knowledge, we are not fooled into giving up the contestation for the discourse. I subscribe to the claim of Foucault and others that biopolitical modes of fields of power are those which determine what *counts* in public life, what counts as a citizen and so on. We cannot escape the salience of the biological discourses for determining life chances in the world — who’s going to live and die, things like that, who’s going to be a citizen and who’s not. So not only do we literally have to contest for the biological discourses, there’s also tremendous pleasure in doing that, and to do that you’ve got to understand how those discourses are enabled and constrained, what their modes of practice are. We’ve got to learn how to make alliances with people who practice in those terrains, and not play reductive moves with each other. We can’t afford the versions of the “one-dimensional-man” critique of technological rationality, which is to say, we can’t turn scientific discourses into the Other, and make them into the enemy, while still contesting what nature will be for us. We have to engage in those terms of practice, and resist the temptation to remain pure. You do that as a finite person, who can’t practice biology without assuming responsibility for encrusted barnacles, such as the centrality of biology to the construction of the raced and sexed bodies. You’ve got to contest for the discourse from within, building connections to other constituencies. This is a collective process, and we can’t do it solely as critics from the outside. Gayatri Spivak’s image of a shuttle, moving between inside and outside, dislocating each term in order to open up new possibilities, is helpful.

*CP:* Well, this brings us to the role of the Cyborg Manifesto in the “reinvention of nature.” One of the most striking effects of the Cyborg Manifesto was to announce the bankruptcy of an idea of nature as resis-

tant to the patriarchal capitalism that had governed the Euro-American radical feminist counterculture from the early 70s to the mid-80s. In the technologically mediated everyday life of late capitalism, you were pointing out that nature was not immune to the contagions of technology, that technology was part of nature conceived as everyday social relations, and that women, especially, had better start using technologies before technology starts using them. In other words, we need techno-realism to replace a phobic naturalism. Do you see the cyborg formulation of the nature/technology question as different from, or falling into the same alignment as, the nature/culture question that you had spent much more of your time exploring as a historian of science?

*DH:* That's an interesting way to put it. I'm not sure what to say about that. What I was trying to do in the *Cyborg* piece, in the regions that you're citing there, is locate myself and us in the belly of the monster, in a techno-strategic discourse within a heavily militarized technology. Technology has determined what counts as our own bodies in crucial ways — for example, the way molecular biology had developed. According to the Human Genome Project, for example, we become a particular kind of text which can be reduced to code fragments banked in transnational data storage systems and redistributed in all sorts of ways that fundamentally affect reproduction and labor and life chances and so on. At an extremely deep level, nature for us has been reconstructed in the belly of a heavily militarized, communications-system based technoscience in its late capitalist and imperialist forms. How can one imagine contesting for nature from that position? Is there anything other than a despairing location? And, in some perverse sense which, I think, comes from the masochism I learned as a Catholic, there's always the desire to want to work from the most dangerous place, to not locate oneself outside but inside the belly of the monster.(laughter)

It's not that I think folks who are doing other kinds of work more directly oppositional, more critical of technological discourse, aren't doing important work, I think they often are. But I want myself and lots of other people to be inside the belly of the monster, trying to figure out what forms of contestation for nature can exist there. I think that's different from reproducing the cultural appropriation of nature, reducing nature yet again to a source redefined culturally. Without the nature/culture split, how can nature be reinvented, how can you make those moves? In my more recent work, for example, on the discourse of immune systems, that means discovering extraordinarily rich resources for avoiding the narrative of the invaded self, the defended, walled city invaded by the infecting Other. These discourses have the potential for telling very different stories about relationality, connection and disconnection in the world. We need to ask how those kinds of extant languages, practices,

resources in immunology could become more determinative of the practices of medicine.

*AR:* We'd like to try and clear up some of the more obvious misreadings that no doubt have been attached to your notion of the cyborg.

*DH:* (laughs) Yes, let's.

*AR:* It seems clear that there are good cyborgs and there are bad cyborgs, and that the cyborg itself is a contested location. The cyborgs dreamed up by the Artificial Intelligence boys, for example, tend to be technofascist celebrations of invulnerability, whereas your feminist cyborgs seem to be more semi-permeable construction, hybrid, almost makeshift attempts at counterrationality. How do you prevent, or how do you think about ways of preventing, cyborgism from being a myth that can swing both ways, especially when the picture of cyborg social relations that you present is so fractured and volatile and bereft of secure guarantees?

*DH:* Well, I guess I just think it *is* bereft of secure guarantees. And to some degree, it's a refusal to give away the game, even though we're not entering it on unequal terms. It is entirely possible, even likely, that people who want to make cyborg social realities and images to be more contested places — where people have different kinds of say about the shape of their lives — will lose, and are losing all over the world. One would be a fool, I think, to ignore that. However, that doesn't mean we have to give away the game, cash in our chips and go home. I think that those are the places where we need to keep contesting. It's like refusing to give away the notion of democracy to the right wing in the United States. It's like refusing to leave in the hands of hostile social formations tools that we need for reinventing our own lives. So I'm not, in fact, all that sanguine. But, a) I don't think I have a lot of choice, and I know we lose if we give up. And b) I know that there's a lot going on in technoscience discourses and practices that's not about the devil, that's a source of remarkable pleasure, that promises interesting kinds of human relationships, not just contestatory, not always oppositional, but something often more creative and playful and positive than that. And I want myself and others to learn how to describe those possibilities. And c) even technoscience worlds are full of resources for contesting inequality and arbitrary authority.

*CP:* Your image of the cyborg paradoxically both describes what you see as a new, actually existing, hybrid subjectivity and offers a polemical, utopian vision of what that new subjectivity ought to be or will be. In other words it's something actually existing now but also an image...

*DH:* A possible world.

*CP:* A possible world. But our question is really not about the paradox, because we think the paradox is a suggestive and productive one. Most utopian schemes hover somewhere in between the present and the future, attempting to figure the future as the present, the present as the future.

Rather, we're wondering if the way you have constructed your cyborg leaves any room for anything that could be called "subjectivity," and what the consequences of that possible omission may be. In other words, how useful to us now — "us" meaning socialist-feminists — is a myth or model that asks us to think and theorize without the categories of sexual difference, infantile sexuality, repression, and even the unconscious, because it is clear that your cyborg wants to have no truck with anything as nineteenth-century and archaic as the unconscious?

DH: Well, I think that might have been true in 1985; I was more of a fundamentalist about psychoanalysis than I am now, partly having been worn down by all my psychoanalytic buddies. (laughs) But my resistance to psychoanalysis is very much like my resistance to the Church. I really think I've been vaccinated. Precisely because of understanding the power of a truly totalizing dogma that can include all stories, and my sense that the psychoanalytic narratives as they have been developed in the human sciences and in feminism, have a potential that I recognize with my vaccinated soul...

CP: When I read *Primate Visions* I have to say that it really gave me a much stronger sense of why it was so important for you to come up with a creature that wasn't about Oedipal subjectivity...

DH: Yes, which isn't quite the same thing as coming up with a creature without an unconscious. As a strategic and emotional matter, I really am hostile to the Oedipal accounts and their mutants — not because I don't recognize their power but because I am *too convinced* of their power. Again, it's the problem of being in the belly of the monster and looking for another story to tell, say, about some kind of creature with an unconscious that can nonetheless produce the unexpected, that can trip you, or trick you. Can you come up with an unconscious that escapes the familial narratives; or that exceeds the familial narratives; or that poses the familial narratives as local stories, while recognizing that there are other histories to be told about the structuring of the unconscious, both on personal and collective levels. The figures that we've used to structure our accounts of the unconscious so far are much too conservative, much too heterosexist, much too familial, much too exclusive. Much too restricted, also, to a particular moment in the acquisition of language; I think there are many kinds of acquisition of language throughout life; coming into history in different ways that isn't the same thing as coming into the familial. This all sounds very utopian, but I end up wanting a psychoanalytic practice — which I don't do myself — that recognizes the very local and partial quality of the Oedipal stories. Instead I see them cannibalizing too much of what counts as theoretical discourse. They're very powerful cannibalizers because they're very good stories. And I know in my heart that by analogy, I could have remained a Roman Catholic and thought anything I wanted to think if I was willing to put

enough work into it, because these universal stories have that capacity, they really can accommodate anything at all. At a certain point you ask if there isn't another set of stories you need to tell, another account of an unconscious. One that does a better job accounting for the subjects of history. It's true that the '85 cyborg is a little flat, she doesn't have much of an unconscious.

*CP:* Well, it doesn't have the unconscious of the Oedipal stories because you've removed that. But, perhaps too it doesn't have that which in the unconscious resists...

*DH:* and that's a bigger problem...

*CP:* precisely the imposition of those Oedipal narratives...

*DH:* In some ways, I tried to address this in my notion of "situated knowledge" which, with the Coyote, brings in another set of story cycles, where there is a resistance and a trickster, producing the opposite of — or something other than — what you thought you meant. Some kind of operator that tricks you, which is what I suppose the unconscious does...

*CP:* Maybe a trickster cyborg!

*DH:* Something like that.

*CP:* Along the same lines, we were especially wondering if your wish to construct a "myth" or model that makes an end-run around Oedipal subjectivity and the unconscious is in fact the best one for ensuring that socialist-feminism take into account the mechanisms of racism — which is one of the most important aspects of your project. You look to the fiction of black science fiction writer Octavia Butler to give us "some other order of difference...that could never be born in the Oedipal family narrative." This new order of difference — and these are your words — is "about miscegenation, not reproduction of the One," because Butler's characters interbreed and create new gene pools across not only race but species. In other words, cyborg subjectivity will be hybridized, mixed, and plural...

*DH:* What you never have with Butler is the original story. You never have the primal scene. You always have the chimeric...

*CP:* Right. So you end up with a subjectivity that's hybridized, mixed, and plural, rather than split.

*DH:* That's exactly right.

*CP:* But doesn't something get lost in our understanding of the dynamics of racism when we eliminate the split subject? If we no longer have a subject of the unconscious, this makes it difficult if not impossible to give an account of psychical mechanisms like displacement, projection, fetishism, which writers like Frantz Fanon or Homi Bhabha would consider crucial terms for being able to explain the dynamic of the psychic structure of racism.

*DH:* I believe it is correct that you can't work without a conception of splitting and deferring and substituting. But I'm suspicious of the fact that

in our accounts of both race and sex, each has to proceed one at a time, using a similar technology to do it. The tremendous power and depth of feminist theories of gender in the last ten or fifteen years could not have been achieved without psychoanalysis. Similarly, I think you're right that Bhabha and Fanon and some others could not have worked without those tools in understanding race. But it has remained true that there is no compelling account of race and sex *at the same time*. There is no account of any set of differences that work other than by twos simultaneously. Our images of splitting are too impoverished. Consequently, we say, almost ritualistically, things like "We need to understand the structurings of race sex class sexuality etc." While these issues are related to one another, we don't actually have the analytical technologies for making the connections. So, when I draw from a writer like Octavia Butler, or a theorist like Hortense Spillers, I try to say the following. Those people who have, in fiction and in theory, laid out for us the conditions of captivity in slavery in the New World, have among other things done something very important to our theories of psychoanalysis. They have said (and here I'm borrowing primarily from Spillers, who is saying the same thing lots of African-Americans have said for years, that the situation of the human being in slavery is the situation of the body that passes on the status of "non-human" to the children; it is the story of the people who exist outside the narratives of kinship. The white woman married the white man; he had rights in her that she didn't have in herself. She was a vehicle for the transmission of legitimacy, so she was precisely the vehicle for the transmission of the Law of the Father. The person in captivity, however, did not even enjoy the status of being human. The mother passed on her status, not her name, to the child, not the father; and the status of the mother was not human. And it is precisely that historical and discursive situation which, in Spiller's language, positions black men and women outside the system of gender governed by the Oedipal story of incest and kinship.

Those are the people — the hybrid peoples, the conquest peoples, the enslaved peoples, the non-original peoples, and the dispossessed native-Americans — who populated and *made* the New World. If you retell the history of what it means to be white, then you see the perversion of the compulsion to reproduce the sacred image of the Same: the compulsion of race purity and the control of women for the reproduction of race purity. And if you foreground the stories of captivity and conquest and non-originality, the New World then has a different set of stories attached to it. Now I think that these are stories that very much involve an unconscious structuring, that they are unconscious structurings that really do throw into question the relationships of gender and race.

Octavia Butler is a very frustrating writer in some ways, because she constantly reproduces heterosexuality even in her poly-gendered species.

But I am drawn to the “non-originality” of her characters: as diasporic people, they can’t go back to an original that never existed for them, and therefore they are not embedded in the system of kinship as theorized by Freud and Lévi-Strauss. Too much of Anglo feminist theory has started out from Freud, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan. And I think that’s unfortunate.

AR: On that note, we’d like to question you on the rhetorical force of the phrase “We are all cyborgs.” On the one hand, it seems to be a general description of women’s situation in the advanced technological conditions of postmodern life in the First world. On the other hand, it seems to function like the kind of identificatory statement or gesture which is often made in support of oppressed or persecuted groups, like “we are all Jews,” or, now, “we are all Palestinians.” It’s difficult not to think of this latter sense in terms of the specifically Asian women of color whose labor primarily is the basis of the microelectronics revolution, and who, in your essay, seem to be privileged as cyborgs that are somehow more “real,” say, than First world feminist intellectuals.

DH: Which, I agree, won’t work. My narrative partly ends up further imperializing, say, the Malaysian factory worker. If I were rewriting those sections of the *Cyborg Manifesto* I’d be much more careful about describing who counts as a “we,” in the statement, “we are all cyborgs.” I would also be much more careful to point out that those are subject-positions for people in certain regions of transnational systems of production that do not easily figure the situations of other people in the system. I was using Aihwa Ong’s work there, in her remarkable study, in *Spirits of Resistance*, since published, of Malaysian factory workers in the Japanese techno-science based multinationals. A U.S. immigrant, Ong was born an ethnic Chinese woman in Malaysia and was adopted by a Malay family when she did her ethnographic fieldwork for her Ph.D. from Columbia University. She writes about young women whose families acquired the colonial status of “Malay” when the British imported Javanese immigrants to create a Malay peasant yeomanry for subsistence food production in the plantation economy of British Malaysia. Consequently, to be native Malay was already to be the product of a colonial migration, subsequently repositioned in the Malaysian state in the 1970s in ethnic contests, among other things, between the Malay and the Chinese. At that time, a whole nationalist discourse foregrounded the ethnic status of Malay, and promoted the look-East policy to Japanese transnationals rather than to American transnationals. What kind of personal and historical subjectivity did the young women in these factories develop? This is an incredibly contradictory situation, and naming those contradictions seems to me crucial now; to name them “cyborg” seems to me more iffy. I think what I would want is more of a family of displaced figures, of which the cyborg is one, and then to ask how the cyborg makes connections with these other non-original people (cyborgs *are* non-original peo-

ple) who are multiply displaced. Could there be a family of figures who would populate our imagination of these post-colonial, postmodern worlds that would not be quite as imperializing in terms of a single figuration of identity?

AR: Would your talking about that family, today, also be posed less in terms of the rhetoric of survivalism? This critique is often made of intellectuals who speak about working-class people, especially from another culture, as if their situation was primarily one of survivalism...

DH: You mean, "well gee thanks, but we live a more fully human life than that." I think that's right, the survivalist rhetoric doesn't give enough space to more than survival, to the way people live complicated lives that aren't simply about insertion in your system of explanation.

AR: This is a kind of rhetoric and style question, it's about the manifesto format itself, which has its own particular "generic" demands historically. Your manifesto, as we read it, is about as far from being programmatic, in the sense of espousing a party line, as could be. But it's also more legislatist than the manifestos of, say, artistic avant-garde movements. There's a kind of poetic license there, on the one hand, that is a curious bedfellow to the otherwise earthy sense of political realism, which is on the other side. What is your experience of finding readers who might have been bewildered by that heady mix?

DH: Yeah, I've been surprised by the reactions of readers, because I had almost no idea whether people would read this. The original assignment was to do five pages on what socialist-feminist priorities ought to be in the Reagan years. The *Socialist Review* collective asked a whole lot of people identified as socialist-feminist. The writing of that piece immersed me for a whole summer in the process of finding a set of metaphors I didn't know were there. It was a summer about writing. I didn't set out to write a manifesto; or to write what turned out to be a heavily poetic and almost dream-state piece in places. But, in many ways, it turned out to be about language. As a result, the Manifesto is not politically programmatic in the sense of proposing a priority of options, it's more about all kinds of linguistic possibilities for politics that I think we (or I) haven't been paying enough attention to.

CP: Yes...that comes across. We'd like to focus now on popular practices, rather than intellectual debates about women and technology. One of the intended aims of your work is helping women to overcome their culturally-induced technophobia. You do so through getting readers excited about specific areas of science that have heavily involved women, like primatology; by frequently citing utopian science fiction narratives by women like Joanna Russ and Octavia Butler that offer empowering visions of a new relation to gender, race, nature and technology; and by imaginatively demonstrating, in the "Cyborg Manifesto," that we are already cyborgs, already creatures that are wondrously both human and

technological. Do you see any evidence in everyday life that women are in fact overcoming their technophobia? What seems to be the present possibilities and difficulties?

DH: That's tough, because if you go at it statistically — look at the most recent National Science Foundation statistics, for example — fewer women are getting engineering degrees, fewer women are entering science programs than was true ten and fifteen years ago. The gains of women, in the sixties and seventies, as practitioners of science and engineering have been eroded, and the same thing is true for people of color, men and women alike. There has been a massive retrenchment in affirmative action programs, especially for loans for students at entering stages; heavier pressures on families; all exacerbated by the economics of Reaganism and Thatcherism. While there are a few little gains here and there, overall we're losing again. On the other hand, I also see, for example, in the development of eco-feminism some very savvy new relations to science and technology developing at the level of popular practices.

AR: How about everyday practices in the household, or in non-professional spaces?

DH: I think I would like to know a lot more about them. What we need are thick ethnographic accounts of those very practices, in various social, regional, ethnic, racial settings. I could tell anecdotes of women I know who have achieved wonderfully heterogeneous kinds of technological literacy, but I have no idea what that means in terms of broader social issues.

AR: In general, you're very much opposed to any kind of holistic response to the tyrannies of technological rationality. How do you expect a philosophy of partialism — which at least is one of the ways of describing your position — to become a popular philosophy? Especially in an age in which millions upon millions of people have been attracted by the holistic principles of New Age movements and practices, from the "pseudo-science" of alternative therapies to the intense fascination with the scientist-cum-mystic who meditates about quantum physics. That sort of holism is not exactly the kind of anti-science metaphysics that your cyborgism condemns...

DH: No, it's a kind of mirror-image.

AR: Right. A mythology of alternative science that is deeply in love with science. But if the appeal of holism runs so deep for people who want to resolve a sense of loss or absence in their lives, how can cyborgism make headway in contesting that kind of popular appeal of science's promise of completion for people?

DH: That's a tough one. It might come down to this. How can there be a popular, playful, and serious imaginative relation to technoscience that propounds human *limits* and *dislocations* — that fact that we die, rather

than Faustian — and so deadly — evasions. Again, this might be a psychoanalytic question, since those holisms have the appeal of bridging all the parts and promising an ultimate Oneness. They promise what they cannot, of course, deliver, or only pretend to deliver at the cost of deathly practices, almost a worship of death. The kind of partiality I'm talking about is resolutely anti-transcendentalist and anti-monotheist, fully committed to the fact that we don't live after we die. In religious language, that's what it comes down to: no life after death. Any transcendentalist move is deadly; it produces death, through the fear of it. These holistic, transcendentalist moves promise a way out of history, a way of participating in the God trick. A way of denying mortality.

On the other hand, in the face of having lived forty-five years inside nuclear culture, in the face of the kind of whole-earth threat issuing from so many quarters, it's clear that there is a historical crisis of the sort that might really be able to shake the hold of these monotheisms. Some deep, inescapable sense of the fragility of the lives that we're leading — that we really do die, that we really do wound each other, that the earth really is finite, that there aren't any other planets out there that we know of that we can live on, that escape-velocity is a deadly fantasy. What's also clear from popular culture, is that large numbers of people are at least aware of the crisis we're facing, a crisis of historical consciousness where the master-narratives will no longer soothe as they have for a couple thousand years, in Christian culture at any rate.

*AR:* As cultural critics we often find that the kind of vanguardist culture criticism, which tends to focus on vanguardist texts, can very easily embrace partialism and a philosophy of subjectivity which doesn't depend upon secure identifications. But when you deal with popular practices...

*DH:* You're in a different world...

*AR:* it's usually the opposite: the circuit of identification tends to be more important, and probably necessary to the affective appeal of the text.

*DH:* The whole technology of pleasure works that way. I recognize what you're saying, but there's also a part of me that's a little bit unsure about the generalization. I can think of someone like Ursula Le Guin, who's a very, very popular writer. And you can read Ursula Le Guin either as a holist who has a sense of an earth that can remain unviolated — a kind of naturalist holism — but she equally cries out to be read in terms of her insistence on limitation. It's not holism she's insisting on, but rather on fragility and limitation by avoiding narratives of completion. The pleasure of her stories derives from being reminded of one's materiality. The pleasure of being at home in the world, rather than needing transcendence from it. And being at home in the world is about a kind of partiality: you just plain aren't everywhere at once. To relocate, you have to dislocate. (A's painful laughter.)

*CP:* There is the same kind of split in more popular practices — a wish for holism and completion, but at the same time an incredible play with the idea of partiality.

*AR:* And a sense of relief?

*DH:* Relief, and sanity, that you can let go of an illusion which had felt necessary. The mother of my lover is a person who had been interested in channelers and various New Age phenomena. I don't think it's very useful to think of her as someone who needs some kind of scientific transcendentalism: I don't think those are her pleasures, which are more like science-fictional pleasures: of imagined historical connections into pasts and futures — not at all about being masterful, or being in charge of the whole.

*CP:* What we especially like in the Cyborg Manifesto is the use of the term “scary” to describe the new informatics of domination that sponsors of advanced technology have installed everywhere. It suggests a nightmarish quality, but it also hints at excitement and adventure, especially girls' adventures in realms hitherto off-limits to them. In this respect, it seems to be different from the note of technoparanoia usually sounded in orthodox left accounts of tech surveillance and social control. There's a fictional action-adventure cast to your version of “scariness”...

*DH:* the funhouse!

*CP:* ...that more accurately reflects the everyday response of ordinary people to control technologies, rather than the paranoid vision of unrelieved domination everywhere. If you agree with that characterization of scariness, does that mean to say that you don't think we ought to be too scared?

*DH:* Certainly not fear unto death. Paranoia bores me. It's a psychopathology, and it's an incredibly indulgent one. It sees the Eye everywhere, and it strikes me as a kind of arrogance. The paranoid person takes up too much social space, their friends have to take care of them all the time, and it's a lousy model for how we ought to be feeling collectively...so I agree about the rejection of paranoia in the face of the panopticon of postmodernism, or the “polyopticon,” or whatever you want to call it. The funhouse, however, is too weak an image, because this is a house that can kill you. It does kill people unequally, kills some people more than other people. But “scary” is a little bit like the situations of Joanna Russ's “girlchild.” I love the figures of her girl-children, her growing-up stories about the older woman who rescues the younger woman, which involve a passage into maturity. Toni Cade Bambara does the same thing; she has lots of “girls coming into responsibility in a community” stories. And those are scary transitions: you become an adult, and one of the things that's involved in becoming an adult is that you know that you actually can get hurt, you actually can die, and these things are not jokes. But they're also adventures, they're part of being grownup. So I like the idea

that in some metaphorical way we are maybe becoming “adults” about technology. And that involves being a little scared, but not paranoid; and realizing that these are not devils, but they are real weapons.

CP: This is a question only Andrew can ask.

AR: I wonder whether you’ve been able to gauge how men read a text like the Cyborg Manifesto, especially its concluding line, “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.” It seems to me, for example, that a certain kind of masculinist response to the Manifesto, which followed all your arguments to the letter — the whole trajectory of your arguments against naturalism — might be able to conclude his reading with the following last line: “I would rather be a cyborg than a ‘sensitive man.’”

DH: That’s wonderful! I would rather go to bed with a cyborg than a sensitive man, I’ll tell you that much. Sensitive men worry me. No that’s paranoid.

AR: Isn’t there a sense in which this is a kind of “bad girl” manifesto...

DH: To a certain extent, yes.

AR: Because it’s about pleasure *and* danger...

DH: And it takes a certain analogical alignment in the pornography debates...

AR: Right. But the “bad boy” element is a troubling one?

DH: Yes, who wants a bad boy, you don’t want the masculinist response. But there’s a way in which the sensitive man is the androgynous figure; the figure who is even more complete than the macho figure. And more dangerous. That’s my resistance to the fact that fact I *do* like sensitive folks of all sexes. But the image of the sensitive man calls up, for me, the male person who, while enjoying the position of unbelievable privilege, also has the privilege of gentleness. If it’s only added privilege, then it’s a version of male feminism of which I am very suspicious. On the other hand, that line is written to and for women, and I think I had never imagined how a man might read it. This really is the first time I have had to imagine that line being read by people — not just male people — in a masculine subject position.

AR: There are lots of them.

DH: Yes, it never ceases to surprise me how many of them there are on the planet.

Ong has pointed out that one very specifically American thing is to have a biological body separate from a cultural body. You find yourself in the world in a particular kind of biological body, marked with certain race, ethnicity, sexual, age characteristics, and that particular kind of marked body can, in principle, occupy any kind of subject position, but not equally easily. A male body, a male person of various kinds, could occupy the feminist cyborg subject position *and* the goddess subject position. Okay? But not equally as easily as folks who would come into a sentence like that from other histories. And the ironies would be different

if you imagine yourself in such a place. Because the cyborg is a figure for whom gender is incredibly problematic; its sexualities are indeterminate in more ways than for gods and goddesses — whose sexualities are plenty indeterminate.

AR: Anyway, I like that, but I don't quite know what to do with it. I'd like to know what you do with it.

CP: Maybe it would have been better to say, "I would rather be a cyborg than a male feminist."

AR: Mmmmm. Yes, well that's a different can of worms.

CP: So, *your* cyborg is definitely female?

DH: Yeah, it is a polychromatic girl...the cyborg is a bad girl, she is really not a boy. Maybe she is not so much bad as she is a shape-changer, whose dislocations are never free. She is a girl who's trying not to become Woman, but remain responsible to women of many colors and positions; and who hasn't really figured out a politics that makes the necessary articulations with the boys who are your allies. It's undone work.