

**Margaret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick**

*Beyond the Cyborg. Adventures with Donna Haraway*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 206

**Giulia Selmi** *Università di Verona*

As stated in the title, main goal of this book is to critically engage with the thought of Donna Haraway going beyond the well-known metaphor of cyborg. It's an ambitious challenge indeed because, since the publication of the *Manifesto for Cyborg* in the early nineties, Haraway's name has been intertwined with this symbolic figure that constitutes an essential reference both for feminist and science and technology scholars. I still remember when I read it in my twenties as a young feminist and philosophy student: back then I'm sure I failed to grasp the complexity of Haraway's thought, but that metaphor stuck with me ever since giving me a powerful tool to understand many of the cultural, social and political changes that society was going through. Therefore, when I started reading Grebowicz and Merrick's book, I wondered why someone would want to go beyond cyborg? The answers the authors provide in this text are really worthy to be read.

Before moving to the book analysis, I should focus on the adverb beyond. As well explained by the authors, going beyond cyborg doesn't mean to leave it behind by seeking for something new in Haraway's theories, but rather to go in depth in the cyborg metaphor "to argue for and hopefully effect a desedimentation of this figure, putting it to *work* in ways that are more central to current feminist (and not only) concerns" (p.7). According to the authors, *putting cyborg to work* has a twofold meaning: it means trying to critically engage with Haraway's thinking looking to what in her theories and powerful metaphors is still at stake in the challenges of contemporary society; and to explore how and to what extent her contribution has been overlooked in the mainstream (but also feminist) genealogy of critical thinking of the last thirty years questioning the very process of knowledge production.

The book develops around five (always plural) concepts: natures, knowledges, politics, ethics and stories. The chapter on Natures examines Haraway's attempts to *queer* nature (or to explode the dualism nature-culture and the predominance of the human) and, more interestingly to me, in the to read these attempts against Judith Butler queer theory. Haraway's reflections on animals, sexual agency and human-animal kinship are put in dialogue with Butler's theories on sexuality, gender and queer kinship providing a deep insight in the theoretical and political consequences of the reframing of kinship relationships.

The chapter on Knowledges focus on a critical examination of standpoint theory and situated knowledges unfolding the usual ways Haraway's work on these issues has been interpreted. Using the metaphor of

the “colonial organism” – one of the member of the companion species – and creating a fictional dialogue between Haraway and Lyotard the authors re-examine Haraway’s epistemology and her intellectual journey to find “nonstable grounds of knowledge production” (Haraway 2004, 337). The “democratic faith” that underlies the traditional feminist vision of situated knowledge is here troubled in favor of an epistemology of dissent.

The chapter on Politics examines her contribution to contemporary political theory by proposing to read Haraway’s thinking on animals and non-humans as a cyborg politics that challenges the traditional (and liberal) notion of democracy. By putting Haraway into dialogue with well-know contemporary political thinkers like Toni Negri, Chantal Mouffe and Bruno Latour – to name some – the authors propose to rethink the cyborg as a tool to reframe the relationships among the technologically mediated humans and the Political. Together with Latour, Haraway wonders how to build a politic of alterity that seriously takes into consideration the encounter with non-human others. In so doing, and again together with Latour, she neglects the idea of consensus as the compulsory ground to build political relations and she moves the reflection forward: how to build a political ground of dissensus that accounts for a common space human and non human actors share? Exceeding the boundaries of science feminist theory, through this chapter Grebowicz and Merrick relocate Haraway at the heart of contemporary political theory and shows how her reflections are still worthy to be explored to understand the characteristics (and failures) of contemporary democracies.

The fifth chapter on Ethics explores how and to what extent her work on the animal trouble both the traditional categories of ethics and those developed within some feminist and post human works. Putting once again Haraway’s thinking into dialogue mainly with Derrida, Butler and Levinas the authors explore the encounter with the other and the mechanisms of recognition (in Butler’s terms) are explored. The final chapter on Stories examines the science fictional elements of Haraway’s work. While for many readers – including me – Haraway’s engagement with science fiction is one of the most interesting (yet challenging) feature of her style, Grebowicz and Merrick taught me that this is not the case for many readers, especially feminists. The authors then propose a reading of SF in Haraway’s texts both a source of inspiration and metaphors and as a methodological approach to theory and writing.

As a gift for the reader, the book ends with the text *Sowing Worlds. A Seed Bag for Terraforming with Earth Others* written on purpose for this book by Donna Haraway. I won’t sum up nor discuss what Haraway proposes in this text – for the fear of failing my interpretation and to give you the pleasure to read it without any heads up. The metaphorical seeds she plants throughout the text, however, are the proof (if any was needed) that Haraway is still an inspirational thinker and that many ideas, challenges and revolutions are waiting for us beyond the cyborg.

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## References

Haraway, D. (2004) *The Haraway Reader*, New York, Routledge.

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### **Malcolm Nicolson and John E.E. Fleming**

*Imaging and Imagining the Fetus: The Development of Obstetric Ultrasound*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2013, pp. 336

**Serena Naim** *Queen Mary, University of London*

Until fifty years ago, pregnancy could only be studied through its effects on the pregnant woman's body. Hidden from the medical gaze, the fetus was a part of a process, more than a specific subject with its own identity and rights. In the last fifty years, however, the fetus has acquired a social status of its own. In their book *Imaging and Imagining the Fetus*, Nicolson and Fleming investigate this changing perception of pregnancy by analysing the development and diffusion of the ultrasound scanner, as "both a major agent for and a potent symbol of the medicalization of childbirth" (3), retracing in a very detailed manner the complex interactions of social, medical, and technological conditions that led to the establishment of this new technology as a widely accepted medical instrument.

The book benefits from a multidisciplinary approach, thanks to the different backgrounds and perspectives of the two authors. Working side by side, Malcolm Nicolson, Director of the Centre for the History of Medicine at the University of Glasgow, and John E. E. Fleming, retired engineer who was part of a team working on the ultrasound scanner's prototypes, wrote a book that is both historically and technically accurate, making it a compelling account of how technological innovation is a winding and messy path, more than a straight line from one point to another. By investigating the original documentation as well as by re-enacting some of the experiments, Nicolson and Fleming manage to highlight the complex and sometimes fortuitous sequences of connections and coincidences that led to the diffusion and stabilization of the new technology.

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, experiments on the medical applications of ultrasound were ongoing, more or less independently, in different parts of the world. Nicolson and Fleming's work focuses on the British context and, more specifically, on the role of Ian Donald, Regius Professor of Midwifery at the University of Glasgow, and key figure in the development of the ultrasound scanner in the UK. The book is a rich ac-