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The Cyborg Handbook



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

This classic anthology, first published in 1995, remains the definitive collection of material covering the history, culture and academic consideration of cyborgs. For me, the most impressive accomplishment of *The Cyborg Handbook* is the inspiration with which Chris Hables Gray shapes many divergent views of cyborgs into a coherent recognition of life entering a radical new stage of evolution. I admit to being seduced from the first page by the extraordinary language and vision of Donna Haraway's Foreword -- "Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living Together in the New World Order". Of course if you are new to cyborg texts, her words may feel more like "a warning shot fired 'cross your bow". In a style that is wildly and poetically evocative, Haraway introduces the impossibly high stakes strategy of merging biologies with technologies in the service of survival. She suggests it may be the only strategy that can sustain our species (while also possibly altering us forever.) "This handbook", Haraway explains, "is a valuable guide to the cyborg worlds we willy-nilly inhabit, whether we want to or not." *The Cyborg Handbook* offers us 43 separate pieces published between 1960 and 1995. Gray has staged them in a narrative arc that tracks emergence of "the cyborg impulse" resulting from a global convergence of biologies, histories and technologies. Mythological & metaphorical models for cyborgs appear long before technologies arrive to enable it. It is the space program and the demands of modern warfare, as well as increasingly intrusive medical

practices, that finally make inevitable the technological augmentation of biology. Perhaps most exciting is the special view provided of "the cyborg genesis" via interviews with pioneer engineers as well as the papers and reports they wrote.

Introduction The Cyborg Handbook, a compendium of articles and interviews about prosthetics and the historical impact of the human/machine "cyborgs" that the book contends now roam our planet and solar system is a wonderful read for many reasons. The primary thinker behind this avenue of educational effort is University of California, History of Consciousness Professor Donna Haraway. Her forward to the text, *Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living Together in the New World Order*, intends to further feminist thought, but rises above the boring, stereotypical dualities of oppressive stories such as female victim/male violator as her prose cannot be summed up by any one ontology. However this same escape from any particular system of knowledge, this attempt to transcend analysis and instead align her text with many diverse narratives, is also her weakness. This review will address both the positive, thought-provoking aspects of the book and, on the other hand, the failings of the book which are less specific in nature and more of a literal bend. Body In a broad sweep The Cyborg Handbook uses Haraway's analysis of cyborg narrative to relocate the "history of cyborgs" focusing on the field of medicine, the military and aerospace industries, the anti-racist struggles of Africa, anthropology, political processes and science-fiction. The chapters on aerospace and military cyborgs are particularly intriguing. "Cyborgs" such as fighter pilot/autopilot, the robot character in the film *Short-Circuit* who "transcends" its programming to become a sentient, peace activist and many others are addressed.

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