

HARAWAY AND BRAIDOTTI CYBORG SUBJECTIVITIES AND POSTGENDER FUTURES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Posthuman feminism combines both decay of anthropocentric humanism and new glimpses of non-binary gender. The paper presents the ideas of the posthuman, feminist theory, and the postgender discourse and frames the analysis in the context of the posthuman feminist thinking. It prefigures the Cyborg Manifesto by Donna Haraway and the Posthuman by Rosi Braidotti as some of the most significant works that redefine subjectivity and gender in a techno-ecological world. The paper explores the concept of cyborg subjectivities as a model of conceptualizing postgender futures with a particular focus on how their transgressive models of boundaries disrupt fixed identities. The theories of Haraway and Braidotti are compared by means of critical-textual approach, and it is important to note that they are similar in their themes, such as hybridity, relationality, and criticism of Enlightenment Humanism. The discussion concludes that the theorists view postgender futures as emergent, relational, multiplied process of ethical becoming: the cyborg of Haraway transcends gender binarism, and nomadic subjectivity of Braidotti breaks the human-centeredness. Such frameworks indicate new perspectives of new feminist theory and posthuman studies, incorporating technological embodiment and ecological ethics. The importance is in the expression of a postgender praxis, in which gender hierarchies are broken, attempting to suggest a political-ethical transformation toward interspecies solidarity and new-materialist ethics.

Keywords

Cyborg Subjectivities, Postgender Futures, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Posthuman Feminism, New Materialism

1. Introduction

Feminist and posthumanist studies nowadays are exploring the frontiers of gender and the human. The posthuman name is applied to those theories that oppose humanist exceptionalism and anthropocentric prejudices, whereas feminism has long criticized the exclusionary universality of the Man of the enlightenment. Their overlap posthuman feminism challenges the category of the human and hard and fast gender dichotomies. The concept of a postgender world appears in this discussion: the world where sex/gender hierarchies are no longer

fixed or even imagined by such thinkers as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti. The Arctic posthumanist texts by Haraway, the Cyborg Manifesto (1985), and Braidotti, The Posthuman (2013) are seminal texts in making connections between posthumanist criticism and feminist issues. Haraway employs the image of the cyborg to confuse organism/machine and mind/body categories and Braidotti creates a materialist nomadic subjectivity, which disconnects identity with the male/white humanist standard. In this paper, I will explore cyborg subjectivities as a postgender future. It poses the question: How do Haraway and Braidotti each in their own tradition periodize a world in

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which gendering is no longer the order of things? What is the purpose of comparing their visions in order to think about the future of gender and identity? It is taken in a comparative-theoretical form: the main passages in *A Cyborg Manifesto* and *The Posthuman* are examined together with secondary literature to reveal their similarities and differences in terms of their vision of the embodiment, technology, and morality. The objective is to integrate these models into a powerful theory of the post-gender futures demonstrating that both authors offer hybrid, processual forms of identity that cross-cut across classical gender and human models. The approach is, therefore, largely interpretive and syntactic, reading their texts interlocutarily and placing them in the context of more widespread feminist-posthuman discussions.

The analysis concludes that Haraway and Braidotti are similar in their observation that post-gender futures are created through relational, hybrid process instead of definite states. The cyborg in Haraway does not conform to the essentialist gender scripts (the concept of bodies being a hybrid of machine and organism) and imagines a post-gender world. The nomadic subject proposed by Braidotti, in its turn, breaks down the Man-centric humanist heritage into the ecosocial ethics of care (zoe, the life-force) and multiplicity. Collectively they believe the identity of gender will become more fluid and conditional as man gets trapped by technology and ecology. It has significant implication: it implies new lines of feminist and queer politics, it educates digital-era identity politics, and on the ecological ethic beyond anthropocentrism. Finally, the Haraway and Braidotti dialogue is beneficial to the cause of posthuman feminism in demonstrating that cyborg imaginaries can be used to create more inclusive and anti-binary futures.

2. Theoretical Framework

The fundamental theoretical perspectives of this study are given by Donna Haraway (*A Cyborg Manifesto*, 1985) and Rosi Braidotti (*The Posthuman*, 2013). In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway

restages feminist politics by revising the picture of the cyborg, as a creature of social reality, as well as as a hybrid between the machine and the organism. The cyborg figure deliberately breaks the conventional boundaries: between man and animal, organism and machine, nature and civilization. Haraway talks of delight in the state of confusion of boundaries and duty in their creation. Differently put, she recommends a strategic approach to hybridity as feminist practice.

Cyborg ontology denounces essentialism: it is not concerned with any of the lures of organic wholeness, which suggests that identities (gender, species, or otherwise) do not have to follow the paths of a pure origin. Rather, the cyborg is delighted with partiality and perversion (in its perversely cross-cutting categories) as anti-dialectical construction materials. The manifesto of Haraway, therefore, is a transgressive commentary on Enlightenment dualisms (man/woman, nature/culture) that also reinvents socialist-feminist community in relation to technoscientific imaginaries.

The Posthuman by Braidotti is based upon post-structuralist and new materialist waves to develop a nomadic subject. She claims that the traditional Humanist subject (the white male who is autonomous and rational) is now under crisis and subjectivity needs to be reshaped. Her posthuman philosophy is linked to relationality, embodiment and becoming. The so-called critical posthuman subject as defined by Braidotti is a being that is a product of an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, a relational subject made in and through multiplicity that is embodied and embedded but only partial. This topic traverses through the distinctions and is based on shared responsibility. According to Braidotti posthumanism involves the departure of anthropocentrism: humans are not alone in the web of life (which Braidotti refers to as life-force zoe), and nonhumans should be ethically considered. She goes as far as prescribing three ways of becoming animal, earth, and machine to bring human beings back in contact with animals, ecosystem, and technology demonstrating how subjectivity is

played out in the entanglements.

The two theorists have a great application in postgender thinking. Haraway clearly imagines the cyborg in a post-gender society that is non-gendered. The posthuman turn described by Braidotti also carries with it a postgender orientation: she frequently points out that feminist criticism was a relatively unrecognized precursor to posthumanism in that it revealed how the notion of human has always been exclusive of the female and others. In this regard, the two writers offer means to challenge gender as a strict category. In short, both of their frameworks encompass fundamental ground: Haraway presents an anti-essentialist, technoscientific version of gender-fluid ontology, and Braidotti brings to the table a philosophical-ethical perspective of identity as dynamic, diffused between species and life issues. The meaning of postgender in this case is far-reaching, in that the idea of postgender refers to any speculation on futures beyond the existing gender regime inspired by these posthuman critiques of humanist patriarchy.

3. The Cyborg Subjectivities and the Deconstruction of Genders

The gender essentialism of Haraway is radical. Instead, she suggests, holding on to binary gender roles is a remnant of disproved myths (e.g. the phallic mother or primeval unity) that becomes used in serving patriarchal authority. Rather, she introduces the cyborg as a postgender ontology: according to her, the cyborg is an animal of a postgender world, it knows no bisexuality, no pre-oedipal symbiosis, no other temptations to organic wholeness. Within the framework of this vision, neither man nor woman is natural or complete, cyborg bodies are incarnated in the non-oedipal stories of another logic of repression. The cyborg does not have to resolve the difference into one identity as he/she skips the step of an original unity. It is the outcome of this partiality, of this fracturing, that the subject leads a life of deliberate incompleteness, of half-commitment, to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity instead of unity or purity.

This is the solution proposed by Haraway to identity politics: be plural.

The cyborg model, in art, as in theory, breaks down established identities. The cyborgs are manifested in the contemporary society as a creature that is both animal and machine, which moves on the ambiguous worlds of nature and the world of machines. They are alien to conventional family, or norms of reproduction. Haraway even plays off the concept of reproduction: in her world, the ferns and invertebrates with their beautiful replication of a baroque world is being replenished by Cyborg sex... The replication of cyborgs is not tied to the reproduction of the organic bodies. Essentially, technology-mediated reproduction will be an alternative to multiplicity, disarming human sexuality and kinship with heteronormative scripts. The political power of this technological embodiment is devastating: it compels to the assertions that the body of women should be submissive to natural reproduction and makes the gender self more permeable. To demonstrate that new embodiments can bear postgender identities, feminist posthumanism provides a visual expression of cyborgs.

The cyborg, as portrayed by Haraway, is also political in how it relates. It is not waiting to be rescued by its father in the process of creating a heterosexual partner, i.e. it denies the fatherly salvation discourses (e.g. that women require men to fulfill them). Rather, the cyborg constructs the community by means of mutual hybridity. Even though the text of Haraway is playful or ironic, it has practical consequences to identity politics: it proposes alliances across the gender boundaries and criticizes the very category of woman when it is believed that it is one and has only one experience. As has been pointed out by feminist critics, anti-essentialism actually makes identity-based activism more difficult, but Haraway would claim that it is what broadens the possibilities of coalition. According to one commentator, Haraway interpreted feminists who initially demanded shared humanity with men and later understood that feminism is not a humanism in the sense that Braidotti

describes it. Simply put, the cyborg ontology created by Haraway dismantles gender as something that was historically contingent and technologically changeable, and this approach allows postgender alternatives when bodies and identities are free to mix and morph.

4. Posthuman Feminism and Postgender Futures

Rosi Braidotti, who is a poststructuralist, moves the feminist agenda to liberate the broader anthropocentric context. Her posthuman ethics represent embodiment and relationality. In the case of Braidotti, ethics is based upon an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings: subjects are never solitary, but entrenched in social and ecological milieus. She compares it to the atomistic subject of the Enlightenment humanism. A postgender future is not an isolated aspect of a posthuman project: in her vision it is a decentering of the privileged human (and in it, the privileged gender).

In practice, Braidotti proposes what he terms the zoe-centric ethics: the generic force of life (zoe) is insisting that it should be preserved, and not the grandeur of manly or prosperous existence. According to her, high-tech capitalism has already established a sort of panhumanity of market vulnerability, but the unity that has been forced is one that continues to promote individualism. Rather, she proposes a “post-anthropocentric model whereby zoe is the central focus, and to accomplish this she describes becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine as the means of change. The disconnection of man/woman dichotomies in each of these becoming: becoming-animal ruptures the human/animal split; becoming-earth ruptures the culture/nature split; becoming-machine ruptures the organic/inorganic split.

The idea of nomadic subjectivity developed by Braidotti is also used in favor of postgender futures. The wandering subject transgresses gender, race, species boundaries and rejects fixity. According to

her, the critical posthuman subject is a relational subject formed in as well as by multiplicity, and operates across differences and internally differentiated, yet remains based and responsible. It implies that an individual could be living with two or more identities at the same time, queer, cyborg, plant-speaker, and had to negotiate between them. One axis is gender with the many others in this schema. It is never mature, it is becoming: never quite male or female, or human, but by-half, half-other.

Notably, Braidotti correlates this fluidity with responsibility. She writes that posthuman subjectivity is a form of embodied and embedded and therefore partial accountability which is founded upon a sense of strong sense of collectivity, relationality and thus community building. To put it another way, when we decenter the human, we are more conscious of being caught up in nonhumans and with one another, an ethical way of being known as response-ability. According to this, a postgender future is emergent and relational; that is to say, gender categories are negotiated in the web of life but not fixed.

This framework supposes tangible imaginaries. To illustrate, Braidotti sees the collaboration of technology and biology in improving life and not only profit. In the terminology of Braidotti, a post gender cyborg would not be a superhuman warrior (like in certain science fiction), but an intra-active entity who develops along with others. At the same time, in her subsequent writing, Haraway (replacing posthuman with compost and humanism with humus) points out that people are elements of sloppy ecological systems. These two theorists are therefore adamant that the subjects of the future are constructed through a relation with other people (animals, machines, earth) rather than being born into a predetermined hierarchy.

The futures of postgender are becoming those in which identities are produced in a fluid co-production. According to one critic, and Braidotti would agree: we are not to view ourselves

as the measure of everything, but as one of an extraordinary number of species which are connected with each other in a Zoe. Gender is not eliminated in such a future but distorted: it is one form of existing in a world where gender and species boundaries are blurred.

Such art reflects the manner in which postgender people could look: changeable and tech enhanced, and not divisible by the nonhuman. The *Elegant* by Ruggiero positions the expression of the face of postgender identity, it is neither male nor female, quite the opposite, it is neither one nor the other. It illustrates a visualization of Haraway concept of entangled companion species and Braidotti concept of zoe centric being and demonstrates that there are new aesthetics of the body in posthumanism. With such examples in place, postgender futures are no longer utopian fantasies but based on creative, technological possibilities that already obscure physical and virtual, human and machine.

5. Haraway and Braidotti in Dialogue: Synthesis

Both Haraway and Braidotti find common ground in their fundamental criticisms: both stop humanist exceptionalism and the androcentric Man as the only standard of humanity. They say feminism should cease the call of inclusion in a defective humanist paradigm. According to one source, feminism is not a humanism: the ancient type of the human has been structured to ostracize women, people of color, and animals, the disabled, etc. As a matter of fact, both Haraway and Braidotti present the subject models which are breaking the boundaries. The cyborg that Haraway aims at transcends across dualisms and declares feminist alliances that recognizes the entanglement of techno-science.

The nomad of Braidotto is a spiritual character who moves in cultural and species borders with materialistic and affirmative ethics. They both focus on multiplicity and hybridity. The identity of a polyglot of the identities into the singular body is exemplified in Haraway (a condensed image of

imagination as well as material reality), whereas Braidotti describes generic beings that can be seen as having an identity that is overlapping in terms of complex assemblages.

Nonetheless, it has some deviations. The work of Haraway can be traced to a science-fiction-tinged tradition and socialism; through irony and myth, she interferes with stories of origin. Her earlier works are more techno-optimistic on the idea of cyborg liberation whereas her subsequent companion species orientation (the Chthulucene) highlights ecological interdependence and even criticizes human-centered designations such as the Anthropocene. Braidotti, in her turn, lays her foundations in the continental philosophy (Deleuze, Spinoza) and openly focuses on criticism of capital and animal domination. She puts her ethics as the point of departure, as compared to the culture/technology as the start point of Haraway. Those who criticize Haraway mention that her cyborg is able to abstract social differences (e.g. race, class), and Braidotti has been accused of being too Eurocentric/jargonist.

Additionally, the language of Braidotti can be viewed as unfriendly to people who struggle to get the most fundamental rights. Even with these variations, their hybrid theories provide a better theory of postgender futures: Haraway provides the radical disconnection between body and identity with history, and Braidotti provides the moralizing approach toward shared life. The two authors suggest together that gender is not a given entity, but rather a variable of assemblage which will require gender equality in the future to embrace multi-species and ecological solidarity in addition to social justice.

6. Implications and Future Research

The implications of the above arguments are far reaching, in the aspects of ethics and politics. Posthuman feminism demands an ethic of response-ability morally: every subject has to be responsible to others, both human and non-human. Gender enters into a broader power grid comprising

of species, race, and environment. This has political implications of gender justice movements supporting animal rights, disability rights and environmental activism.

As an example, the idea of tentorial weaving of interspecies that Haraway introduces suggests that the liberation movements should use coalition in all these areas. It pedagogically implies a reconsideration of the curricula: women studies or gender studies must include science and tech studies, ecological thinking and critical AI/biotech studies. Cyborg feminist perspectives are part of the digital humanities and media theory that examines the identity construction through algorithms and prosthetics. Haraway compost metaphor and zoe-centrism in ecological ethics can be seen as stating that we should base sustainability on the recognition of our own cyborg status.

These frameworks are important to the feminist theory since it continues to criticize the patriarchy into post-anthropocentric space. New materialist or techno-feminism is labeled feminist posthumanism by some offers a way to express the gendered embodiment of the bodies in techno-social ecologies. With queer studies, postgender discourse is an automatic accomplice, in both de-centering the fixed sexual/gender norms. They also ask feminist theory questions of embodiment (e.g. pregnancy tech, cyborg babies) and the performance of identity on virtual space.

The ideas could be studied empirically in future research. As a case in point, sociology of transhumanist communities can challenge those arguments by Haraway on technology and gender. Ethnographies of lab animalsimal projects may study animal relations as developed by Braidotti. Pedagogical interventions designed based on art (such as the incorporated images) could be created in interdisciplinary projects to educate students on cyborgist ethics. The Western chauvinism of these theories might also be critiqued through comparative work by involving non-Western or indigenous posthuman conceptions (e.g. Maori tikanga or Ubuntu

conceptions of human-nonhuman relations). Finally, with the development of AI and biotech, the concept of cyborg rights and AIs or genes being a person will need a theoretical contribution; posthuman feminist thought will be timely to populate such discussions.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have followed how Haraway and Braidotti are both co-articulating a vision of post-gender futures. By assuming cyborg subjectivities - unstable, cross-gendered bodies that are not limited to definite gender roles - both theorists challenge the naturalized dichotomies of patriarchal humanism. The cyborg created by Haraway is a symbol of genderlessness in the world, identity being a condensed image of science and myth. The nomadic subject of Braidotti moves this even lower in the ethics of the earth: she reinvents the subject in the terms of becoming-animal, earth, and machine and responsibility to zoe. The principal finding is that postgender futures, in the eyes of these theorists, do not constitute future locations but are processes that take place: identities are never complete, they are always forming. Gender hierarchies are dislocated because gender becomes relational a node of a network of difference.

This is an important argument since it broadens the aims of feminist theory: not equality within the categories, but a change in the categories. It is important to posthuman studies as it brings out the feminist sources and interests of posthuman thought (Braidotti writes that Feminism was one of the antecedents of the posthuman turn). And it adds to the expanded discourse by providing an inclusive, eco-technological imaginaries of the future. Overall, cyborg subjectivities be it Haraways playful cyborg-feminists or Braidotts ethical vitalists would offer a postgender politics that would be sensitive to the interwoven crises of the present, the gender, the technology, and the environment. They welcome us to exercise solidarity not only with the human beings of both gender but with all life forms in a shared common tentacular world..

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