

2-9-2017

Manifestly Haraway by Donna J. Haraway

Andrew Gordon Jeffrey
Sheffield Hallam University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose>

 Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Nature and Society Relations Commons](#), and the [Place and Environment Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jeffrey, Andrew Gordon (2017) "Manifestly Haraway by Donna J. Haraway," *The Goose*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol15/iss2/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Goose by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Stick in the Muddle

***Manifestly Haraway* by DONNA J. HARAWAY**

University of Minnesota Press, 2016
\$19.95

Reviewed by **ANDREW JEFFREY**

MANIFESTOS
MANIFESTO
MANIFEST
MANIFES
MANIFE
MANIF
MANI
MAN
MA
M

(Huidoboro "MANIFESTOS manifest")

"Making manifestos engages the thinker-practitioner; and in this sphere the thinker-performer is by no means a contradiction in terms" (Danchev xxvi); when Cary Wolfe opens this collection of two previously published manifestos by comparing his first encounter with "A Cyborg Manifesto" to "recalling the first time you listened to a record that really blew you away" (vii), he sums up Donna Haraway's status as a persuasive and prolific rock star-academic-thinker-performer. Wolfe's introduction also helps to emphasise the performative aspects of Haraway's work—its "stylistic and rhetorical bravado" (vii)—by focusing on her use of irony, personae, multiple voices, and tone.

The first irony I noticed when reading the "ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism" (5) from the late twentieth century is that, despite the speaker being intensely self-conscious about her historical position—"I

have a body and mind as much constructed by the post-Second World War arms race and Cold War as by the women's movements" (51)—so much of the content seems to speak to contemporary concerns. How should feminism deal with difference (16-28), the spread of precarious working patterns and the impact of technology in the workplace (29-44), and living in a "postgender" world (8, 67)? The only thing that marks the text as "acceptable in the 80s" is the lack of any engagement with environmental movements (aside from a paragraph skewering The Green Revolution [42] and a reference to "the anti-nuclear Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp" [13]). Either Haraway is a pre-cog prophetess or the text is marked by the continuity of neoliberalism.

"The Cyborg Manifesto" effectively introduces Haraway's concerns, ending with a typically ironic sentence: "Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (68). The spiral dance entwines the neo-pagan celebration of life and death and the hi-tech world of DNA manipulation; viewing the spiral through the eyes of a cyborg means taking responsibility rather than imagining some form of escape or total control. The cyborg is "not a blissed out techno-bunny" (72).

The use of dance as a trope is carried forward into "The Companion Species Manifesto." Haraway uses the term "Ontological choreographies," "the scripting of the dance of being" (100), in which

bodies human and non-human, are taken apart and put together in processes that make self-certainty and either humanist or organicist ideology bad guides for

ethics or politics, much less to personal experience. (100)

This is another ironic sentence: the querulous reader asking, How can Haraway call on "personal experience" when she questions self-certainty and humanism? I prefer to read the sentence as part of a performance that demonstrates what Haraway calls, in the entertaining conversations with Cary Wolfe that end the book, "the negative way of naming" (278). Haraway uses the idea that it is impossible to give a positive definition of an infinite and eternal God to deal with problems of finitude and mortality, putting a critic who routinely complicates oppositions on the finite side of an infinite/finite binary: "you know which is, sort of, embarrassing to say because, well, you can readily see why (*laughter*). I mean you laugh when this happens to you; language does this to you" (278). The interview performs an ironic tension in Haraway's work through the use of humour, demonstrating how a finite negative way works.

Wolfe asks Haraway to explain the differences between the two manifestos by playing down the sense of performance in the "Companion Species Manifesto:" "a lot of people read the 'Cyborg Manifesto' very much in the mode of performance, and that's very different from the voice you get later" (219). Haraway responds that, "There's a sense that in which the 'Companion Species Manifesto' grows more out of an act of love, and the 'Cyborg Manifesto' grows more out of an act of rage" (219). The difference is marked by the opening of both manifestos where we can see the love/rage dichotomy complicate. The "Cyborg Manifesto" begins with -isms, large

mythical claims and impersonal self-reference that seem to mark a controlled rage: "This essay is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism" (5). However, the 'effort to build' could also be a labour of love. The "Companion Species Manifesto" begins with interspecies relating or love: "Ms. Cayenne Pepper continues to colonise all my cells—a sure case of what the biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis" (94). We are launched into biological science by a personal story which is beyond the writer's direct control and is marked by recognition of a possible colonial relationship: "we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love" (95).

Wolfe puts this difference down to critique being "retooled within a context I would call more thoroughly biopolitical" (219). Haraway agrees with this statement. However, she calls for "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in constructing them" (7), and it is worth marking the boundary between Haraway and biopolitical thought: "The Cyborg Manifesto" states that, "Michel Foucault's biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field" (7). Haraway politely marks a boundary, herself, by pointing out that her "thickest thread" is "first of all biological" (263) and also "ecological feminist" (264). This marks an important distinction: biopolitical discourses often view the biological sciences with great suspicion and often ignore ecological feminism.

It is the type of performance that marks the difference between the manifestos and this difference is generated by Haraway's developing

relationship with writing and storytelling. Haraway imagines cyborgs as seizing “the tools to mark the world that marked them as other....The tools are often stories” (55), because “[w]riting, technology and power are old partners” (13). Writing is a technology that etches on to pre-existing surfaces: “[t]he silicon chip is a surface for writing” (13). This is writing as disruptive rage that aims to “subvert command and control” (56). “The Companion Species Manifesto” doggedly plays around with the distinction between speech, writing, and other forms of gestural communication: “We have had forbidden conversation; we have had oral intercourse; we are bound in telling story upon story with nothing but the facts” (94). This is story telling as love, binding things together, a “four part composition” (108). The manifesto starts with extracts from “Notes of a Sports Writer’s Daughter” and these notes are weaved through the piece, explaining the approach to writing that aims “to write the game stories, to stay close to the action, to tell it like it is” (109), because the game is where “fact and story cohabit” (109). This is why the manifesto ends by re-referencing “ontological choreography” (193); this is not writing that aims to scratch a surface but does aim to compose on-going movement, as

modelled by the relationship between two dogs: “[t]hey invented this game; this game remakes them. Metaplasm, once again” (193).

Metaplasm: “a generic term for almost any kind of alteration in a word, intentional or unintentional” (112). “I want to end our conversation with the seed of a ‘Cthulecene Manifesto’” (294).

M
ME
MED
MEDU
MEDUS
MEDUSA
MEDUSAS

Works Cited

- Danchev, Alex. “Introduction.” *100 Artists’ Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, Penguin, 2011, xix-xxix.
- Huidobro, Vincentem. “MANIFESTOS manifest.” 1925. *100 Artists’ Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, Penguin, 2011, xix.

ANDREW JEFFREY is a practice-based creative writing PhD Student at Sheffield Hallam University. Recent poems have appeared in *Route 57*, *Matter*, and *Plumwood Mountain Review*.