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Forlano, L., & *Glabau*, D. (2024). Cyborg. The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series.

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Laura Forlano and Danya Glabau's *Cyborg* (2024), part of the MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series, situates complex debates surrounding contemporary cyborg studies for nonspecialist readers. By providing a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by the term 'cyborg' since its inception, *Cyborg* presents 'cyborg-thinking' as a way forward in confronting our collective technologized present(s). In the Introduction, the cyborg figure emerges as a sociocultural phenomenon, transgressing oppositions such as nature/artificiality, man/woman, and mind/body to understand disability, labor, human/nonhuman entanglements, and the future of inequalities with interconnected crises. In mapping the cybernetic, popular, and feminist discourses that have employed cyborg-thinking as a cartographic tool, *Cyborg* introduces "critical cyborg literacy" as a distinct approach to critically and creatively analyze the relationship between technology, society, and culture (4).

The objective is to create interconnected-interdependent-inclusive utopias in collaboration with cyborgs. While the ongoing conversation about the cyborg is deeply rooted in the rich tradition of feminist interventions in understanding the scholarship on technology, such as Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, Forlano and Glabau contextualize the cyborg as a "noninnocent figure that connects history to the future, both mapping possibilities for the future and reminding us where we come from" (19). The book is divided into seven chapters, each highlighting the challenges encountered by contemporary cyborg theory. Along with reframing interdisciplinary approaches to the cyborg and its subsequent symbiotic relationship with AI, automation, and technology, the cyborg in this work emerges as an epitome of coexistence and becoming human.

The introductory chapter presents critical cyborg literacy as a new method of engaging with intersecting questions of race, disability, gender, and technologies that we have "imagined, developed, used, and resisted" over time (6), foregrounding technological interactions as an ongoing process.

The second chapter, "Cyborg Labor," provides a noteworthy account of shifting labor conditions dictated by our neoliberal capitalist pursuits. The ongoing quest to determine whose labor is negotiated takes an unprecedented turn with the advent of AI. This chapter outlines three primary concerns: first, robots will erase humans; second, man and machine will cooperate and collaborate; and third, robots will create new opportunities of work. By problematizing the blurred boundaries between labor and machine, undervalued and valued labor, domestic and commercial labor, and credit and economic inequalities, Forlano and Glabau juxtapose *Amazon* as a case study to

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understand the intricacies of labor conditions with films such as *Sleep Dealer*, *The Zero Theorem*, and *Sorry to Bother You* to decipher the issues of gender, race, and citizenship shaping situated experiences of labor. By employing critical cyborg literacy, the chapter enumerates how multinational enterprises monitor human anatomy and enforce surveillance through AI while replacing the workforce with newer technologies. Through an interconnected and multidirectional analysis of the present and future of labor, Forlano and Glabau argue that critical cyborg literacy endorses an inclusive reading and imagining of the 'futures of work' that may allow us to nurture collaboration with human labor and automation, AI, and robots, devoid of socio-cultural identifications such as class, ability, gender, race, etc.

The third chapter, entitled "Cyborg Bodies," takes us on a what-if adventure where Forlano and Glabau present two examples of the cyborg in action—namely, Seven of Nine from *Star Trek: Voyager* as a bricolage of organic tissues and digital enhancements, and Laura's life as a disabled cyborg in "Data Rituals in Intimate Infrastructures: Crip Time and The Disabled Cyborg Body as an Epistemic Site of Feminist Science" (2017). This chapter argues that though popular culture is crowded with cyborg representations, living-as-a-cyborg is a crucial posthuman concern. For the authors, there are two kinds of cyborg living, namely gestation and disability. The grander idea of living with technology or as a cyborg becomes disrupted with the introduction of disability, race, gender, and nationality, further complicating our everyday existence. Building on the critique of normalcy projected through an ableist perspective, this chapter uses critical cyborg theory to discard the belief that assistive technologies discredit disabled people to be human, as perceived by the former. Primarily, Forlano and Glabau critique the hierarchization created between biological and mechanical body parts, as a living cyborg may create "opportunities for invention, reflection, and even activism" (66). Secondly, they present the concept of a cripborg (a portmanteau of *cripple* and *cyborg*), an active condition of accepting life with intimate technology, as opposed to "tryborg," who are pretenders accessing intimate technologies to modify bodies beyond human capacity. Since cyborg-becoming is fundamentally controlled by wealth, access, and class, the desire to live remains human. Lastly, Forlano and Glabau shed light on the role of technology in the politics of gestational labor while demanding health equity.

The fourth chapter focuses on the influx of cyborg culture in Afrofuturism, cyberfeminism, bio art, and fashion. Forlano and Glabau suggest that reading the "future" (82) as a monolithic whole is an anthropocentric construct. The intermingling of cyborg culture and artistic practices redefines boundaries and bridges cultural differences. For instance, one of the examples provided by the authors is of experimental artist Nam June Paik's collaboration with Japanese engineer Shuya Abe, as they created "Robot K-456," a performative, moving, walking art (88). Additionally, Forlano and Glabau argue that there exists a breed of artists who represent trans-speciesism as they augment their bodies to become "literal cyborgs" (92). Cyborg culture provides a safe space for in-betweenness and hybridization while facilitating new "ways of knowing and being" (98). Another art form that contributes to cyborg culture is electronic music, as recently depicted in Marvel's *Black Panther,* where cyborg culture is enhanced through traditional attires and songs. Lastly, the chapter concludes by extending a cyberfeminist perspective to art, challenging the gendered understanding of women, and technology, and situating "cyborg as a liberatory force" (110).

The fifth chapter revisits Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) to declare that, as cyborgs, we must think with the cyborg to aid more-than-human kinship, transformation, liberation, and imagine ways of creating better tomorrow(s) for all. For the authors, in this majestic quest, critical cyborg literacy allows the everyday user to apprehend gendered, minoritized, and racialized inequalities. Further,

critical cyborg literacy offers a careful integration of "seemingly different domains: work and home, identity and industrial production, self-determination and integration into a rigid system" (124). Though the cyborg represents an ontological tool employed to fight oppression, it also allows us to dismantle the ableist perspectives and the canonized views on the "masculine-coded territory of technology" (130).

The next chapter calls for an intervention— to provide a holistic view of the criticism faced by the "whiteness of the cyborg" (137) as explored by disability scholarship in the recent past. Cyborgs are not innocent "chimeras" (Haraway 1985); they possess a violent history marked by colonialism, racism, and militarism. However, the techno-optimists from Silicon Valley aspire to a smooth transfusion of human bodies into AI, enhanced intelligence, and reaching immortality. Notwithstanding, for the critical cyborg theorists, staying with the cyborg(ian) future suggests "to be truly present," bridging the gaps between disability studies, feminist studies, and body studies. Here, Forlano and Glabau present two examples of "cyborgs gone wrong": Zuckerberg's virtual reality world and Musk's Neuralink brain-machine interfaces (140). This chapter argues that such claims made by tech to improve all humanity take a singular view of the human and "erases and universalizes lived human experience" (161) by capitalizing on racialized and disabled commodities. At this juncture, the chapter situates the need to unleash critical cyborg literacy to decipher *Black Cyborgs*, *Disabled Cyborgs*, and *Cyborgs in the Real World* reading between the traumatic history of cyborgs, deeply entrenched in transhumanist desires of transcending human bodies.

The concluding chapter, "Cyborg Futures," elaborates on the cyborg's troubled past, divided present, and hopeful future. While backgrounding the contemporary relevance of the cyborg figure, both in real and imagined worlds, an emphasis on critical cyborg literacy can plant the "critical and political potential of the cyborg" (138). As cyborgs are ever emergent as controversial yet necessary nonhuman configurations, Forlano and Glabau's *Cyborg* contextualizes the need to provide informed perspectives on human and tech symbiosis. Born with an industrialized-militarized entanglement, the cyborgs have come a long way to become "tools for justice" (176).

Additionally, this work, though novel in its approach, refrains from illustrating the situated ontologies and pedagogies of non-Western approaches to contemptible labor conditions in South Asia, gestational poverty, disability and gender-based exclusion, which may use the cyborg as an ally in confronting contemporary apocalyptic scenarios. However, the juxtaposition of cyborg issues in real life and imagined worlds attempts to justify a comprehensive framework of new cyborg studies. The distinct perspective presented by *Cyborg* is further supplemented with a glossary of cyborg(ian) terms and emerging practices. While cyborgs are 'troubled' assemblages, they are true global troublemakers. Therefore, an exploration of the percolating capacity of the cyborg and critical cyborg literacy requires our immediate attention to encourage an all-encompassing collective understanding of disability, labor, gestation, and race for "all," explicated as "situated knowledges" by Haraway (167).

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