

9. Daniel Sydney (Prof. Deb Blizzard) Science, Tech. & Society/Public Policy

It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Daniel Sydney as the Kearsse Award winner in the Program in Science, Technology and Society. Dan's essay, "The Politics of Cyborgs" was in response to the weekly essay topic, "You are at a coffee house with Manfred Clynes and Donna Haraway (lucky you!). They begin to debate whether or not the term 'cyborg' has been corrupted. You step in to settle the debate. In narrative form describe the scene, and make certain that you cover how each of you react to the possibility of the definition being corrupted."

Dan's essay was insightful, humorous, and creative. He answered the question while emulating Haraway and Clynes' writing styles in an effort to bring life to their voices. I have no doubt that Dan sat with one hand on the keyboard and the other on a thesaurus as he replicated the rhetorical play of Haraway and the clarity of Clynes. His command of the similarities and differences between the theorists was impressive. Dan placed himself in the story as at first a shy observer who later emerged with a strong argument.

To illustrate, Dan writes as Haraway: "Cyborgian definition," she continued, "essentially must integrate both the corporeal and the ethereal aspects of humans' interaction with machines. Failure to embrace all the aspects of that interface, those images and ideals, risks a cancerous evolution. Reappraisal of our viewpoint is a characteristic of our evolution which we absolutely must administer; we will not thrive if we are obdurate."

He then responds as Clynes, "I cannot accept, nor should any of us, the implication that machines with a bit of organic material clinging to them have anything to do

with the enhanced-human ideal that the word Cyborg was coined for.... A Cyborg is not a genderless, idealistic, societal consequence."

Dan's willingness to address the question and bring life to two very real "characters" by examining their arguments and rhetorical styles was ingenious and courageous. Congratulations, Dan, on an excellent essay.

Dan Sydney

Professor Blizzard

Cyborg Theory 0508-451

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The Politics of Cyborgs

It had been an impulse to go to Starbucks. I needed to clear my head of the technical support calls and pricing arguments my job was burying me with daily and just relax for a while. What I found was both revitalizing and unexpected. How ironic to find the two people who had been the center of discussions carried on during my latest endeavor at college – a sleeper liberal arts course that was turning into quite an intellectual experience – seated at one of the diminutive tables. Nevertheless, there they were, locked into a conversation that looked more like a blacksmith trying to coax a cool forge to life than two respected academicians sharing ideas: Professor Donna Haraway, speaking and gesticulating in her uniquely animated manner and Doctor Manfred Clynes, sitting with his back stiff and arms folded across his chest. Neither one seemed to have found peaceful diversion here. I slid into a soft chair nearby with my tasty beverage. *What is going on here?* I wondered as I surreptitiously watched them over my cup.

“I would say that ‘corruption’ is far from what has transpired, Doctor,” Professor Haraway was saying, “anymore than the discovery of bacteria corrupted medical science. This exclusionary mindset you adhere to is the antithesis of healthy advancement.” She reached for her coffee and then began speaking again, which interrupted her hands’ movement towards the cup.

“If humans blithely disregard the fact that with a slightly different path of science, we and our environment would be markedly divergent to the current arrangement – and perhaps not *here* at all – we are in danger of bringing about the very future we profess to so *desperately* fear. Incidentally, I have no doubt that it has been technology’s oblique path and man’s hand on the tiller that brought us to *this* decidedly dubious arrangement. Returning to my point, Manfred, there is no way to predict or organize human development without a constant and sophisticated reassessment of our perspectives. Humans have continually reevaluated our body of knowledge as it has progressed over time.”

“Try to re-examine what I wrote in my *Manifesto*: a cyborg is ‘*a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.*’”ⁱ Her hands settled to the coffee before her once again and this time stayed in place, loosely wrapped around the cup. “Cyborgian definition,” she continued, “essentially *must* integrate both the corporeal *and* the ethereal aspects of humans’ interaction with machines. Failure to embrace *all* the aspects of that interface, those images and ideals, risks a cancerous evolution. Reappraisal of our viewpoint is a characteristic of our evolution which we absolutely must administer; we will *not* thrive if we are obdurate.”

Manfred, though politely listening, was resolute. “It is not that we should reject or ignore these aspects you speak of, but that there are facets of this “cyborg theory” concept that bear no resemblance to a cybernetic organism.” He leaned over his beverage and stared for a moment into its dark whorls. “I cannot accept, nor should any of us, the implication that machines with a bit of organic material clinging to them have anything to do with the enhanced-human ideal that the word Cyborg was coined for.” His gaze rose

to hers and he spoke with quiet intensity, "A Cyborg is, *by definition*, a human being; to paraphrase my original description from my work with Nathan Kline, *Cyborgs incorporate exogenous components to extend their self-regulatory control function in order to adapt it to new environments.*"ⁱⁱ A Cyborg is *not* a genderless, idealistic, societal consequence."

Clynes sat back and blew a sigh across his lower lip. "I cannot fathom how these skewed, contemporary views have developed." His shoulders rose and fell as he shrugged and turned his palms upward. "From a precise, realistic definition to this...this all encompassing, romanticized *vessel* for all things even *loosely* interrelated with technology," he lamented, while Donna looked somewhat exasperated.

As Manfred continued to grumble about the tainted state of the definition of cyborgs, I reflected on the bizarre fact that I was a spectator to this particular dialogue. Moreover, I wondered that they had *not* reached an agreement. Doctor Clynes didn't truly seem to be 'listening' to the meaning beneath Professor Haraway's speech. Neither did it seem that she was making an effort to build a connection between Manfred's definition and her own. It was clear to me that he needed to be *led* to an understanding of the sense she was making. Should not such highly sophisticated individuals as they *logically* find a common view? It just proved that no matter what our status or intelligence, we are emotional creatures and subject to our egocentricities.

My reverie was interrupted as I suddenly realized that they were both looking over at me. "Young man," said Manfred, "you appear to have some comprehension of this subject we are debating. Do you have an opinion as well?"

"Huh? Well...I...er..." was the best I could do for a few moments. At some point I had apparently stopped being casual about my surveillance and been openly staring. Professor Haraway looked amused and Doctor Clynes raised one bushy eyebrow in invitation. I cleared my throat and tried again.

"Well, you must realize that there is room for debate on the subject, sir," I began. "I have, as a matter of fact, recently read some of both your and Professor Haraway's work. I cannot say that I completely grasp a lot of it," *now there was an understatement*, "but – please hear me out, Doctor," I said quickly as he began to turn away in dismissal and Donna's amusement grew. He had asked and now I wanted the opportunity to express my opinion.

"While it is true that your original definition of the word cyborg meant machine, or technologically, enhanced man...uh, human," I amended, in light of my recent edification on gender, "it is the nature of language to constantly develop and take on expanded meanings. It is my opinion that, while science fiction, for example, has taken great liberties with the meaning of cyborg, the fact is that its core definition has *not* been altered." They were both looking at me with a bit of interest now.

"Cyborg still means a human-machine hybrid. Consider this: as biomedical technology advances, the level of that fusion has the potential to increase. With each phase of development humans have undergone, there have been increased contributory affects and effects on evolution and environment. As our knowledge increases, so must our consideration and guidance of that knowledge. As our perceptions of the implications progress, so must our understanding of what falls into the class of cyborgian." I stood and placed my cup on their table. Now *I* was the one gesticulating,

working the bellows to the forge. “Man and machine, organisms and technologies, physiological effects and psychological consequences; there are always new facets discovered and developed as we digest knowledge along the way. It’s a perpetual growth and learning cycle.”

Clynes’ brow had begun to smooth and Haraway was nodding as I continued. “You see, we need to consider things like the image of dehumanized cyborgs created by popular culture, or questions like, ‘How will my grandchildren be affected if we meld with machines?’ as aspects of our *cyborgian culture* – related to the cyborg, begat from the notion of cyborgs and therefore, ultimately, Cyborgian.”

I was a bit stunned by my words; I hadn’t seriously thought out any of these philosophies and they were just spilling out of me. Another impulsive inspiration came to me. “Doctor Clynes, you yourself began this reevaluation of the definition of a cyborg when you expanded on the article you co wrote with Kline in 1960. As I recall, you wrote about ‘sentic cycles’ in another article dubbed ‘Cyborg II.’ In it you said, and please correct me if I am wrong, ‘to plan for space travel adequately, we need to understand man’s psychological drives, needs and qualities of satisfaction.’ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, Doctor Clynes, and I think Professor Haraway may agree with this to a certain extent, *you* began the expansion of our definition of a cyborg when you moved us to the psychological consideration. Since then, two generations of humans have rethought technology’s relationship with *life*, in all ways,” I finished, gambling that part of Manfred’s resolve was pride.

Donna’s eyes showed (what I hoped was) approval, which went unnoticed by the good doctor as he invited me to join them at their table.