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Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture

ByLuciana Parisi

In the aftermath of Donna Haraway's seminal 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1985), cyberfeminism emerged as a critical fictional platform to weave nonlinear connections between machines and women. In its multifaceted manifestations crossing the fictional, the theoretical and the political, cyberfeminism cracked the code of first and second wave feminisms, rejecting the category of woman as given (natural) or constructed (cultural) at the core of the patriarchal economy.

As the editors Austin Booth and Mary Flangan argue, *Reload* is the first and overdue anthology that collects women's cyberfiction and feminist critical theory. Material is organised into three main sections: Women Using Technology; The Visual/Visible/Virtual Subject; and Bodies. The anthology presents a great variety of women's fictional pieces, from C. L. Moore's *No Woman Born* (1944) to Laura J. Mixon, *Proxies* (1998), and the marvellous Octavia E. Butler's *Speech Sound* (1983). It also contains critical discussions of digital projects from Suzanne Treister's CD-ROM *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky* (1999), to Flanagan's production of benevolent computer viruses [phage] (1999), plus re-published and new critical essays.

Reload aims to be an accessible text book that challenges common visions of cyberspace 'as a new disembodied space' celebrated by the 'almost exclusively male cyberpunk writers' (with the big exception of Pat Cadigan!), the technoculture of *Wired* and *Mondo 2000*, and some cyberfeminist trends aiming to dissolve the markers of gender, race and class. But this challenge still relies on the logic of representation, confining sex and skin to an inert materiality only animated by discursive performances of gender and race. The few exceptions to this canon are Ramirez's discussion of the productive mixing of bodies and cultures in afrofuturism, Octavia E. Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa's contributions, and Diane Currier's fresh critique of cyberculture which attacks its redundant binary identification between information patterns and gender, materiality and sex, through a Deleuzian conception of biodigital assemblages.

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