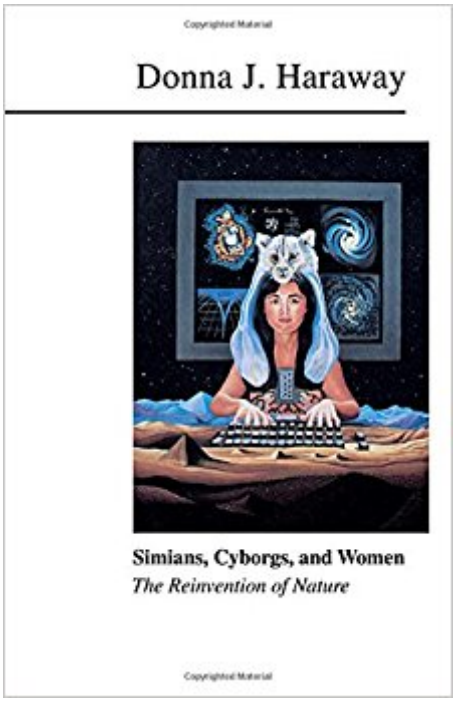
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Simians, Cyborgs, And Women: The Reinvention Of Nature



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Synopsis

Simians, Cyborgs and Women is a powerful collection of ten essays written between 1978 and 1989. Although on the surface, simians, cyborgs and women may seem an odd threesome, Haraway describes their profound link as "creatures" which have had a great destabilizing place in Western evolutionary technology and biology. Throughout this book, Haraway analyzes accounts, narratives, and stories of the creation of nature, living organisms, and cyborgs. At once a social reality and a science fiction, the cyborg--a hybrid of organism and machine--represents transgressed boundaries and intense fusions of the nature/culture split. By providing an escape from rigid dualisms, the cyborg exists in a post-gender world, and as such holds immense possibilities for modern feminists. Haraway's recent book, Primate Visions, has been called "outstanding," "original," and "brilliant," by leading scholars in the field. (First published in 1991.)

Book Information

Paperback: 312 pages
Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition (December 14, 1990)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0415903874
ISBN-13: 978-0415903875
Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.7 x 9.2 inches
Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews
Best Sellers Rank: #393,164 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 inÃ Â Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > Themes > Women in Art #423 inÃ Â Books > Science & Math > Experiments, Instruments & Measurement > Methodology & Statistics #819 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Communication & Journalism > Media Studies

Customer Reviews

Scholars of modern feminist theory, particularly of perspectives on science (notably biology) and how they relate to perceptions of human culture, will appreciate these 10 essays by science historian Haraway (Primate Visions), adapted from articles published between 1978 and 1989. They chart a shift in her standpoint during this period: the earliest works reflect a Marxist analytical influence (as befits "a proper, US socialist-feminist" of the ’70s), while the later ones also show the influence of post-modernism. "Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic" surveys primatology research of the 1930s and ’40s to explore how the "principle of domination" is

embedded in some scientific thought. "Gender for a Marxist Dictionary," in which Haraway develops a definition for the word "gender," highlights the difficulty of reducing complex concepts to keywords. "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies" views the "biomedical, biotechnical" self, incorporating modern discourse on the immunological system; bodies, like gender, she contends, "are not born; they are made" as biomedical constructs. Illustrated. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Haraway, as usual, writes an incredible book that dismantles much of the workings of subjective, patriarchal biological traditions and perspectives. Am very much looking forward to her upcoming book.

Haraway, as usual

In some parts, groundbreaking. In others, a bit longwinded and roaming. But that’s Haraway’s work in general. She’ll blow your mind and make you sigh in boredom in turns.

I want to apologize for this review, because it is less a review of Haraway’s exceptionally important book than it is a few sentences on the question of why someone should review a book on and why one should perhaps not. If you feel that you can competently say a few things about a book that will help a prospective reader know what they are getting into. If you have any kind of lingering doubt about your competency to review a book, then don’t.Most of the people who have reviewed this book to date shouldn’t have. There are books that don’t simply exist within a field of studies, but define and constitute that field of studies, and their value transcends any one individual’s like or dislike of it. Giving such a book anything less than five stars is beyond ludicrous. I do not like Freud’s INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS, but to give it less than five stars is simply silly due to its status as a classic. You don’t review a collection of essays by the philosopher Donald Davidson and give them two stars, because those essays possess a centrality in the fields of the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind and philosophy of action that persists even if you think it the most disagreeable book ever written. You may find Jacques Lacan’s ECRITS dense and unreadable (and many do, though, hint: read the seminars first; while the essays in ECRITS contain the same content condensed to the point of unintelligibility, the same themes lace the seminars in more accessible fashion). You may give Donna Haraway’s collection of essays one or two stars, but all that does is make you look silly. It isn’t quite a certification of idiocy, but it is a bit like soiling yourself

in public.Donna Haraway's essays on women in science, on the status of science, on women's studies, and, perhaps most of all, her essays on Cyborgs do not simply exist within their fields. One of my fields of specialization is Cyborg Studies. If I were to produce an essay on the significance of Cyborgs in today's society - and I believe the Cyborg is perhaps the most important key to understanding the world into which humans now exist - it would look absolutely nothing like Haraway's. I am writing such an essay, and when it is published, I pray it gets one-one thousandth of the attention that Professor Haraway's essay on Cyborgs has gotten. But here is the main difference between my prospective essay and hers (apart fro the fact that mine is analytic and critical rather than programmatic - my reasons for wanting to write about Cyborgs is different from Haraway's reasons): mine would be a study within Cyborg Studies. Dr. Haraway's essay more or less created and largely constitutes the field of Cyborg Studies. Or put it this way. One sometimes hears the expression, "You can do philosophy with Kant or against Kant, but either way you must do philosophy through Kant." The same holds true with Donna Haraway on any of a number of subjects. If you want to talk or write about academic writing about Gender and Science, then you must encounter Donna Haraway. She is inescapable. And the same is true about Cyborg Studies.You do not rate a book by Donna Haraway like you would a Stephen King novel. You will never surpass her to the point where you will reach a point where you can dismiss her with a one or two star review. Even if you adore Donna Haraway's work, you will probably never enjoy her writing. She is needlessly obscure like most academic writers. Not everyone who writes on intellectual matters is a bad writer. Haraway is not as appalling as Homi Bhoba or Judith Butler (two atrociously awful writers), but worse than almost anyone else. But here is the thing: most bad writers aren't worth taking the time to understand; Haraway is. Why academic writing is so persistently bad is a matter not sufficiently discussed, but primarily people write badly because everyone else in their field writes badly. Most will make excuses saying that they have to write this way because the issues are so complex that they require a break from everyday language. That seems to carry weight when you are talking about, say, Wittgenstein, whose ideas really did represent a break with the common place. But a number of ultra heavyweight writers are marvelously clear writers. The philosopher J. L. Austin is one such writer, and by insisting on writing in everyday language, he stripped away the false sheen of depth that some writers acquire by writing so obliquely that people assume that they are deep. If you restate Derrida in everyday language, he becomes horrendously trite. Ditto Heidegger (though his neologism do allow a sort of shorthand for ideas that would have required a lot of commonplace words). Schopenhauer and David Hume wrote about enormously complex ideas. Anyway, this is a pet peeve of mine and as much as I respect and admire Haraway

as a thinker, that is how little I think of her as a prose writer. A lot of this comes, I believe, from a disdain of everyday individuals. Immanuel Kant wrote in that hideous prose of his because Wolff and Thomasius employed the same kind of style, and they established the role models of German philosophers. So Fichte imitates Kant and so on through today. I love that historians generally don't feel the need to write badly, but there are a host of great role models within history. The first person who can generally be considered a modern historian is Gibbon, whose prose is frequently gorgeous. The same is true of Macaulay and a host of others. Some, like Simon Schama, are absolutely brilliant prose writers. For a example of someone who writes beautifully within the field of literary theory, look at Christian Thorne's THE DIALECTIC OF COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT. There are numerous passages in that work that are not only clear, but hysterically funny. How can you resist a book with a chapter that begins with the words, "There are two things you can count on a[n early modern] Hobbesean not to like: they are European civilization and space aliens; and we will have understood something important about Hobbes's political thought if we can figure out what the one has to do with the other." Or read in any book by the British literary critic John Carey.There are also bits that are hard to understand because she assumes that you and she shared a common set off issues, that you have read many of the same people and have a similar understanding of the surrounding academic controversies. She does not do the common reader any favors here. She assumes you are already a part of the club. She targets her essays at scholars within her fields and individuals who aspire to be scholars within the field. This bothers me, since I think the world is best serves by people targeting their writings at intelligent people in general (I am thinking of writers like Jane Jacobs and C. Wright Mills and Robert Darnton). I believe in a democracy of idea and while I don't blame people who write obscurely for the rise of Neoliberalism, I do think that they haven't helped matters by making their fields too obscure for the general reader. I don't recommend anyone read Haraway. She has chosen her target audience and I think that really only those in that audience are going to find reading her rewarding. I don't recommend her, but then, I don't recommend Heidegger or Julia Kristeva to nonspecialists.But Haraway's ideas are important. She may be needlessly convoluted in books like WHEN SPECIES MEET and THE COMPANION SPECIES MANIFESTO (both of which should and could have been general interest books), but the ideas are worth unpacking from all of the crud encasing them. I think the people giving this book one or two stars are confusing ideas with the way they are expressed. She is needlessly difficult, but that doesn't mean that she isn't also a brilliant thinker. Haraway is worth rereading, which is not something you can say about everyone. When I was first embarking on my study of Cyborgs, I made it a habit to read her Cyborg Manifesto at least once a week. Sometimes I would read through

the whole thing carefully, a part of a sentence at a time; sometimes I would just read through the whole thing quickly. I've outlined the essay, made notes on the essay, and copied down important bits on 3x5 notecards. I have probably read that one essay 50 times. And I'll read it again.So find your own reason for reading Haraway. But please, if you are forced to read her because other people have their own reasons for wanting you to read her, don't do her and yourself a disservice by giving her books less than five stars. Low reviews say nothing about the worth of her books and just makes such reviewers look silly.

Donna Haraway's work in this collection continues to amaze me. Her intense critical engagement with the history of science is resolutely brilliant: she takes common conceptions of the body, objectivity, power, and 'nature' and pulls the rug of patriarchal metaphysics out from under them. These essays are concerned with unravelling origins myths, pointing out the pitfalls of political innocence, deconstructing our conceptions of the natural and the artefactual--you know, the usual. Her project is immense, but the she hones her points in each essay very well with dazzlingly astute political analyses and characteristic poetic phrases. If you're interested in oppositional antiracist feminist consciousness, Haraway's yr philosopher.

The writings in this book have influenced a lot of sci-fi stories. You can trace its theories on post-humanism through many much older literary sources. You can examine books such as: Frankenstein, Paradise Lost and Do androids dream of electric sheep? If you have no interest in studying interesting concepts of post-humanism and feminism or don't have much knowledge of either then this may not be for you. Post-human and feminist concepts are discussed in great length and detail. If you don't know the link between the two--it basically talks about an eventual kind of equality that transcends conventionally defined identity.If you still don't know what I'm talking about then I guess you either have to read more or just stop and turn around shamefully, just let it be. Oh and don't make bad reviews of books because you lack the knowledge or understanding required.One of the most interesting pieces in the book is Donna Harraway's Cyborg Manifesto. It continues to influence many writers, directors and scholars to come.

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