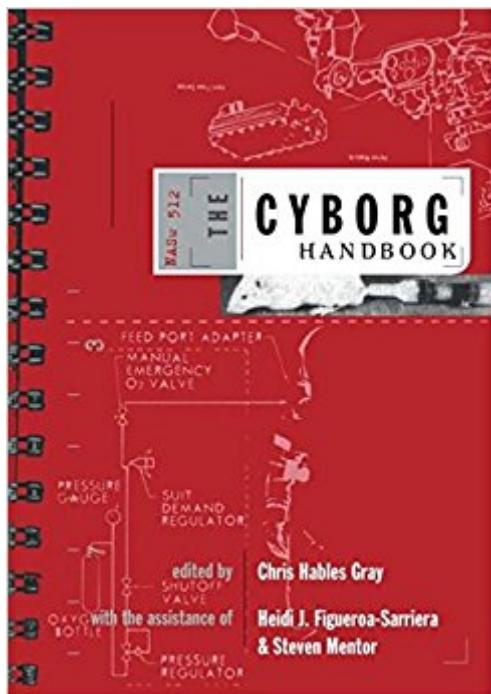


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# The Cyborg Handbook



## **Synopsis**

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## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

One of society's oldest dreams has been to create a living machine. To most of us, cyborgs are Terminator or Robocop types who combine artificial robotic strength and firepower with human intelligence/cunning. Yet Gray, a 1994-95 NASA Fellow in Aerospace History, has collected writings that explore real cyborgs (or cybernetic organisms) as any entities that mix the mechanical with the organic. Thus, humans with prostheses or implanted pacemakers qualify as cyborgs. This fascinating assemblage of essays, short stories, and research findings covers the role of this incredible modern technology through its varied uses in medicine, space research, and military applications. Articles are written by experts in the field of cybernetics, including Donna Haraway. This unique work combines scientific fact and science fiction. The bibliography and filmography are invaluable additions. For large public and academic libraries. Joe Accardi, Northeastern Illinois Univ. Lib., Chicago Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The Cyborg Handbook is an initial look at cyborg society and at the range of cyborg technologies, from the restorative and normalizing to the reconfiguring and enhancing. These technologies can restore some to health and they can prolong horrible deaths, but they can also remake humans into more effective killers. Cyborgs, good, bad, and indifferent, are with us.

This classic anthology, first published in 1995, remains the definitive collection of material covering the history, culture and academic consideration of cyborgs. For me, the most impressive accomplishment of *The Cyborg Handbook* is the inspiration with which Chris Hables Gray shapes many divergent views of cyborgs into a coherent recognition of life entering a radical new stage of evolution. I admit to being seduced from the first page by the extraordinary language and vision of Donna Haraway's Foreword -- "Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living Together in the New World Order". Of course if you are new to cyborg texts, her words may feel more like "a warning shot fired 'cross your bow". In a style that is wildly and poetically evocative, Haraway introduces the impossibly high stakes strategy of merging biologies with technologies in the service of survival. She suggests it may be the only strategy that can sustain our species (while also possibly altering us forever.) "This handbook", Haraway explains, "is a valuable guide to the cyborg worlds we willy-nilly inhabit, whether we want to or not." *The Cyborg Handbook* offers us 43 separate pieces published between 1960 and 1995. Gray has staged them in a narrative arc that tracks emergence of "the cyborg impulse" resulting from a global convergence of biologies, histories and technologies. Mythological & metaphorical models for cyborgs appear long before technologies arrive to enable it. It is the space program and the demands of modern warfare, as well as increasingly intrusive medical practices, that finally make inevitable the technological augmentation of biology. Perhaps most exciting is the special view provided of "the cyborg genesis" via interviews with pioneer engineers as well as the papers and reports they wrote. From there, this book documents the growing proliferation of cyborg memes in space, in war, in medicine and in imagination production. It goes on to introduce the future with texts on cyborg anthropology and cyborg politics. And now... 20 years after it was first published, with augmented realities and augmented identities rapidly becoming the new normal, *The Cyborg Handbook* seems more relevant than ever. And while editor Gray has carefully avoided the sensationalism that stains other cyborg-themed book, we must now recognize a reality more shocking, more radical, and more future-altering than any story about the Star Trek humans facing The Borg. I mean (with apologies to Walt Kelly and Pogo) that we have seen The Borg and they is us. *The Cyborg Handbook*, though compelling, is not exactly an easy read. Cyborgs were (and still are) a comparatively new subject. I had the sense of multiple new vocabularies being created in front of me as I read -- sort of like taking a train trip on a railroad while it is still being built. Plus there is the thud factor -- 560 pages, 54 of them the index. I found it necessary to allow myself extra time to work through the multiples voices and vocabularies of the diverse and divergent texts. I had an especially hard time navigating the post-modern, poly-syllabic worded

socialist/marxist/feminist academic texts. I was thankful for Alan Hill's playful and edgy book design that added visual adventure to often-dry text. And there are disappointments. Missing, for example, is Donna Haraway's iconic 1985 text "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century". You can still buy it on in several books by Haraway -- in The Haraway Reader as well as Haraway's Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. If you prefer a more reader-friendly introduction to cyborgs -- one you can read in hours instead of days -- I highly recommend Amber Case's An Illustrated Dictionary of Cyborg Anthropology -- just out and also available through . But even that book, in a list at the end, recommends you also read Chris Hablas Gray's The Cyborg Handbook. And for good reason. There is no other book like it.

The book is well made, thorough, and very useful for my research.

The definitive collection on our Cyborgization.... until the the "Bride of the Cyborg Handbook" comes out. It stands up. Still selling even.

A fabulous, creative, technical tour de force: Donna Haraway's book, proves prophetic, speaking from the end of the 20th century well into our own with brilliant insights about the social, political, psychological, linguistic and cultural consequences of the digital age.

## FOR THE FUTURE AND TODAY

This text was constantly being referred to in my research and with good reason: it be absolutely essential for any serious researcher/scholar/artist etc. of Cyborg Theory/Cyberculture Studies.

Introduction The Cyborg Handbook, a compendium of articles and interviews about prosthetics and the historical impact of the human/machine "cyborgs" that the book contends now roam our planet and solar system is a wonderful read for many reasons. The primary thinker behind this avenue of educational effort is University of California, History of Consciousness Professor Donna Haraway. Her forward to the text, Cyborgs and Symbionts: Living Together in the New World Order, intends to further feminist thought, but rises above the boring, stereotypical dualities of oppressive stories such as female victim/male violator as her prose cannot be summed up by any one ontology. However this same escape from any particular system of knowledge, this attempt to transcend analysis and

instead align her text with many diverse narratives, is also her weakness. This review will address both the positive, thought-provoking aspects of the book and, on the other hand, the failings of the book which are less specific in nature and more of a literal bend. Body In a broad sweep The Cyborg Handbook uses Haraway's analysis of cyborg narrative to relocate the "history of cyborgs" focusing on the field of medicine, the military and aerospace industries, the anti-racist struggles of Africa, anthropology, political processes and science-fiction. The chapters on aerospace and military cyborgs are particularly intriguing. "Cyborgs" such as fighter pilot/autopilot, the robot character in the film Short-Circuit who "transcends" its programming to become a sentient, peace activist and many others are addressed. In an interview with Patricia Cowlings, the director of the Ames-NASA psychophysiology laboratory, ones learns that Cowlings has, with the help of one other investigator, practically conquered extraterrestrial motion-sickness, a problem that has plagued NASA since the beginning of its manned space flights program. The interview showcases what may be a surprise to many liberal readers; the US "shock and awe" industry is one of the most open-minded businesses in the world today. Cowlings solution to micro-gravity, motion sickness is one clear instance of this open mindedness: NASA had been searching for decades to cure their problem of motion sickness in their astronauts; they had primarily been exploring pharmaceutical research, but after many abject failures were ready to try anything, even including alternative therapies like acupuncture. In marched Doctor Patricia Cowlings with a background in "biofeedback." A less mainstream approach to a mainstream problem has never existed. Although she used scientific methodology to develop her research, her goal was unheard of at the time. She intended to make astronauts aware of there physiology in miniscule ways. She states that she can make a trainee aware of the exterior pulse of the pinky finger of the right hand. Of course the training is accomplished in a "cyborg" fashion where body signs including blood pressure, lung efficiency, pulses, intestinal movement and about 20 others are in a continually, logically varying circuit. By changing aspects of the circuit, Cowlings can, in five hours or less, drastically reduce potential astronauts predilection to micro-gravity, motion sickness. One of the positive aspects of much of the content of cyborg narratives that go back to WWII is an often surprising use and combination of a wide ranging vocabulary and an inventiveness of probing. These attributes, which are especially noteworthy in the foreword to the text, have resulted in greater and greater manifestations of cyborg narrative at all levels of culture even including many massive, commercial texts, such as The Matrix and its sequels. Overall, The Cyborg Handbook is a thought provoking read, however Haraway's text and the focus of the book remains a post-modern fairy tale that is not grounded in reality. Literally, the times we live in, as are the times in which anyone at any time has

lived in, are "modern" times, not post-modern; post-modernity implies that we exist in the future rather than the present. Secondly, Haraway's use of the word "hybrid" to describe her cyborg is incorrect as "hybrid" signifies literal, physical procreation, not figurative "evolution." It is not true that all or even any of us are cyborg "hybrids" because we have not been bread into organisms that are part machine. The idea that we could be bread into cyborgs seems ridiculous as the line between living forms and inert objects within whose boundaries machines fall. Clearly, we are presently humans first and foremost and anything else, cyborgs for example, later and our organic basis seems likely to continue for some time. To Haraway's credit she never actually claims that cyborgs are not human beings but, she does claim, and makes quite a strong case incidentally, that her cyborg is itself a being that is not separable into live and dead or human and machine parts. Haraway's fairy tale is a futile attempt to dismiss one of the most beautiful philosophical products that human beings have yet created, as what "comes next" is absolutely unknowable, we cannot be sure of anything even the "inevitability" of death. The preceding development puts Haraway's cyborg work in an ironic light because it places her cyborg stories in the tradition of male-centric, death-drive culture, which is in stark contrast to her political aspirations. Conclusion Haraway's theory that a new species arrived in the post WWII, "New World Order" can only be applicable to where we find ourselves if prophecy were able, which it is not. Therefore, her argument is marginal. If cyborg academia founded on Haraway's "discovery" of a new species is brought up to date perhaps theorists may reconstruct her description of an assimilation between living being and machine into an exploration of the mysterious separation between life and technology however small, cosmic or poetic.

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