



The “intellectual cyborg”

Description

My post from 26 October 2013 called “[What’s wrong with posthumanism](#)” addressed the concept of the *cyborg*. By most accounts, the cyborg is an ambiguous category of human being whose functional performance is sustained by artificial supplementation and enhancements – from reading glasses to prosthetic limbs.

The original proposition came from NASA scientists who identified the necessity of mechanical and chemical supplementation so that human bodies could exist in space, or at least beyond the surface of planet Earth.

The controversial proposition by Donna Haraway and others is that in some sense we are all now cyborgs, a condition that she expands into a critique of male-dominated capitalism.

The cyborg idea is a popular scifi trope – a biological entity that has human and machine components and attributes. It serves as a kind of monstrosity, a boundary crossing between species and categories.

Cyborg updates

I have looked into Haraway’s recent presentations for updates on the cyborg idea, especially in light of developments in conversational AI (e.g. ChatGPT). The closest I have found via web search is the concept of “intellectual cyborgs.” It’s an obvious expansion of our emerging dependence on intellectual supplementation for everyday tasks. The development of brain-computer interfaces for people with certain neurological conditions provides further promise and support for such heavy-duty augmentation.

Dementia researcher Agustin Ibanez outlines current practices and challenges as well as the potential of LLMs in science:

Becoming intellectual cyborgs would bring numerous benefits, including making scientific advancements more efficient, developing revolutionary tools for researchers, especially those in underserved regions, and improving the educational skills of massive learners, among others.

Cultural probes

In summarising and positing an update my 2013 post, ChatGPT suggested that LLMs are often treated as precursors to “digital species,” conscious entities, or near-autonomous partners. The post argued that posthumanism loses its critical edge when taken literally.

The post highlighted that science-fictional figures (cyborgs, aliens) act as cultural probes rather than predictors – a useful caution against treating LLMs as agents with interiority rather than metaphorical tools that illuminate aspects of our own cognition, institutions and desires.

The post also foregrounded irony, ambiguity and cultural situatedness, countering hyperbolic readings of AI. I think I still hold to this.

167. [What’s wrong with posthumanism.](#)

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