**Simians, Cyborgs and Women (Donna J. Haraway)**

Simians: Apes, monkeys (or other beings similar to these)

Cyborgs: Cybernetic Organism-a being with both organic and biomechatronic body parts

Donna J. Haraway is an American socialist-feminist author who is very interested in topics of feminist studies, ecofeminism and posthumanism. Simians, Cyborgs and Women, according to Haraway herself, is a cautionary tale about evolution of bodies, politics and stories, about invention and re-invention of nature. It discusses the Euro-American feminist humanism in narratives highly influence by racism and colonialism. From the title, we can see that Haraway wants to build up a context to explain the idea of body politics and dominance of certain bodies over others, the dominated ones being apes, cyborgs and women.

In the first chapter, Haraway focuses on the political physiology of dominance by critiquing on how animal sociology and knowledge of animal science is used to favor the dominant discourses of the body politic. By body politic, we mean the practices and policies through which powers of society regulate the human body, as well as the struggle over the degree of individual and social control of the body. Contemporary societies tend to segregate not only access to political power but also work, religious life, domestic work, and intimate relationships according to the sex and race of the bodies they organize. Our social, economic, and political worlds are organized to reflect these habitual and legal patterns. The text examines feminist struggles over the modes of producing knowledge about, and the meanings of, the behavior and the social lives of monkeys and apes.

The idea of body politic is not new. Haraway talks about the Greek notions of body politics according to which human societies should be considered as one body. Throughout the early period of the industrial revolution, a particularly important development of the theory of the body politic linked the natural and political economy on multiple levels, forming the foundations for capitalist industrialism. The modem evolutionary concept of a population as the fundamental natural group, owes much to classical ideas of the body politic.

**Author Intro**

American Professor Emerita History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies Department at the University of California

Interests: Feminist studies, ecofeminism, posthumanism

**Book Intro**

Cautionary tale about evolution of bodies, politics and stories, about invention and re-invention of nature.

Western accounts of women, monkeys and apes written by a white American socialist-feminist, hominid biologist who became a historian of science and a cyborg feminist.

Euro-American feminist humanism in narratives highly influence by racism and colonialism.

In this book’s context, Cyborgs are post Second World War hybrid entities made of:

* humans and other organic creatures in the “highly technological” forms of information systems, texts, and ergonomically (minimum physical effort or discomfort and maximum efficiency) controlled laboring, desiring, and reproducing systems.
* The guise (form) of these entities as communications systems, texts, and self-acting, ergonomically designed apparatuses.

Part-One of book examines feminist struggles over the modes of producing knowledge about, and the meanings of, the behavior and the social lives of monkeys and apes.

**Chapter 1:**

**Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic: A Political Physiology of Dominance**

**Body Politics**:  practices and policies through which powers of society regulate the human body, as well as the struggle over the degree of individual and social control of the body.

\* Contemporary societies tend to segregate not only access to political power but also work, religious life, domestic work, and intimate relationships according to the sex and race of the bodies they organize. Our social, economic, and political worlds are organized to reflect these habitual and legal patterns. \*

Principle of domination, so deeply embedded in natural sciences especially the ones related to explanations for social groups and behaviors.

**LECTURE**

**Biopolitics: u**nderstanding and creating social structures and politics based on the knowledge of human bodies and behaviors. Michelle Fuko defined the term

Involvement of power in all human/social interactions

**Biological Determinism**: Biology (genes, race, gender etc) determines different characteristics of humans and their behaviors.

**Naturalization**: Explaining a behavior or process using natural/biological/physiological means

**Physiological reductionism:** Reductionism of notions and ideas above the biological behaviors

Reducing social norms acc to physiology (about body)

Two forms of it are

1. capitulating to theories of biological determinism of our social position, and
2. adopting the basically capitalist ideology of culture against nature and thereby denying our responsibility to rebuild the life sciences.

**Epistemology:** how we know what we know and how we can acquire knowledge

**Bio-behavioral sciences:** studying behaviors based on biological characteristics

**Nature vs Culture:** distinction b/w natural world & processes and the cultural systems

Human interactions influenced by cultural norms

Cultures are influenced by natural environment/phenomena around you

Debate on whether a certain human behavior is a result of human nature or the culture effects it?

Culture related only to humans or other species also have it?

The presupposition that what humans do is culture and everything done by others is just part of nature

Interaction/dependence of culture and nature on each other

Nature has to do with the biology, while culture can be considered human behaviors in order to separate them (humans) from their nature (their biology).

Using both biology and social impact to explain a certain behavior. A certain action may not be a result of my natural characteristics but a result of cultural/social distinctions

**Anthropocentrism**: Humans are more important than other organisms. Humans as superiors.

The idea of culture only related to humans can also come under this ideology.

**Social Constructionism**

Part of many social- feminist scholarships and academic debates

All social discourse at some point are social constructs.

Re thinking of categorization of nature and culture in feminist scholarships

\*Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. ... Another example of a social construction is the concept of self/self-identity. \*

**Acc to Donna the notions of nature/biology and physics are biased/influenced by social/cultural norms**

**She trying to attract fellow feminists to stop neglecting science, we are getting farther from science and hence unable to add our own interests to science**

**Attempt of rescuing and re-inventing nature**

The chapter is about body politics

Greek notions of body politics->

The body has a unity in itself. So does a polity, a society -> society to be understood as a body.

The early industrial revolution.

Connections between physiological and political notions of the body.

Body as a political agent-> we have interests, we think we have rights

Human body has a physical dimension, social dimensions

Polymorphous perversity?

Nature cultural divide

**Anthropocentrism-** the idea that human are the center of the universe.

**SEMINAR QUESTIONS**

1. **Do you personally think knowledge about the natural world has been used for male domination?**

**Yes, take example of the western domination over the rest of the world.**

**Also, in more local context, male domination in our society.**

1. **Why is the notion of the body politic of importance to Haraway?**

**Gender discrimination, racial discrimination**

1. **Why does Haraway chose animal sociology to flesh out the principle of domination from natural sciences?**

**Because animals specially primates are used to model human behaviors.**

1. **In Haraway's view, what disadvantage is there of maintaining a distance from science?**

**If you are distant from science, you can’t fight trying to dominate, without you having knowledge you can’t question them can’t suggest better and beneficial options.**

1. **What are your views of the distinction between nature and culture?**

**They are distinct but, in a way, similar. The way nature and culture are currently differentiated in the world usually, is very biased behavior. Human behaviors and practices as culture, while those of animals as nature, is just an expression of human dominance.**

1. **Do you agree that the nature-culture split has been utilized for the purposes of domination? Give reasons.**

**Yes definitely…**

1. **After reading this chapter, what are your views on scientific objectivity and neutrality? Give reasons.**

**Science being neutral and objective or not… depends on ones making use of it.**