Chapter 4
Cyber–Bullies as Cyborg–Bullies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter advocates a re-introduction of the notion of cyborg in order to acquire a new perspective on studies concerning the development of human cognition in highly technological environments. In particular, it shows how the notion of cyborg properly engages cognitive issues that have a powerful resonance especially as far as social cognition is concerned, and may consequently provide a new tool for tackling the emergent safety issues concerning sociality mediated by the internet, and the moral panic occasionally surrounding it. The conclusion suggests how the notion of cyborg accounts for a better understanding and recognition of the victims of cyberbullying.

INTRODUCTION

There is no *ethics* in *cybernetics*. The missing *h* is a spy of the different etymology, but there is more to that. The Oxford American dictionary defines cybernetics as the "science of communications and automatic control systems in both machines and living things," and indeed its etymology is strictly bound to the notion of control. The root is that of the Greek verb *gubernan*. Does it sound familiar? It does, because it is the same origin from which *govern* developed, as the mastery of steering, of control. As such, the cybernetics was associated since the late 40s with the fast-developing computer science, especially as far as the evolution of control was concerned.

After being around for more than 70 years, the *cyber–* prefix sounds vintage, in a way. More precisely, it resonates with a vision of the future that belongs to the past. In the Western world, cybercafés remind us of a time where personal computers were less than widespread, let alone tablets and smartphones. The notion of cyberwar evokes vividly immersive, yet abstract, virtual realities in which opposing factions

fight each other, in something like Tron or Matrix. Popular culture, especially science-fiction, nearly appropriated the notion of cyborg, a cybernetic organism where the machine components can control the biological ones or vice versa: famous cyborgs range from the Terminators to Darth Vader, from Robocop to the Bicentennial Man.

What is less known to lay culture is that the notion of cyborg had an important theoretical value laden with a strong explanatory and predictive power, as proven for instance by Clark's and Haraway's perspectives. The aim of this paper is to show how the fertility of that notion, together with its ethical depths, still matter to current societal issues about how the Internet and computer mediated communications are affecting our lives.

While the bulk of our argumentation will focus on the behavior known as cyber-bullying, we will conclude by broadening our analysis to see how the theory of cyborg-bullies can shed light on topics such as international terrorism or foreign meddling in national elections.

A QUICK AND CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE CYBORG

The concept of cyborg was not coined in science-fiction, but by two scientists at the Rockland State Hospital, Orangeburg, N.Y.:

For the exogenously extended organizational complex functioning as an integrated homeostatic system unconsciously, we propose the term "Cyborg." The Cyborg deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments. (Clynes & Kline, 1960, p. 27)

Cyborgs (obtained by endowing men with transparent implants) were advocated for allowing man's adaptation to new environments – think of outer space – that either could not be adapted, or would require a major genetic (hence hereditary) adaptation, spontaneous or induced. It is important to note that since the beginning the notion of cyborg was connoted by what, today, could be seen as an *ecological-cognitive* necessity (Magnani, 2009). The cyborg's eco-cognitive nature derives from the stress on adaptation and on the cognitive functions: the artifactual additions have always been considered as something that ought to be transparent to one's cognition and often capable of expanding one's cognitive capabilities (Pino, 2010).

We will now briefly review two insightful positions in cyborg-related studies, which will be crucial for the rest of our argument: Donna Haraway's feminist theory (1991) and Andy Clark's cognitive-oriented approach (Clark, 2003).

Haraway's Uncomfortable Cyborg

Waite and Bourke (2013), exploring the cyborg-like features of Facebook, recently showed the untarnished fertility of Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. While we will later return on its recent use, it is worth sparing a few words on the Haraway's contentions. As presented by Haraway herself, the theory is deeply embedded in Feminist arguments. Nevertheless, some of her takes may be discussed and accepted regardless of one's sharing the ideology they are meant to support. Haraway inserted in her definition of cyborg a

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