

Goddesses and Zombies

Before and After *A Cyborg Manifesto*

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Hello. My name is Masakazu Tanaka. I am here to give a talk entitled “Goddesses and Zombies: Before and After *A Cyborg Manifesto*.”

There are three points that are critically discussed in *A Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna Haraway. The first one is about Marxist or socialist feminism. In this case, “being critical” can be interpreted as a way to develop further rather than as a rejection. The second one is the perspective of what is defined as “radical feminism.” The last, although there are no references at all for this one, is what I personally consider to be a criticism of “ecological feminism.” Radical feminism challenges our understanding from the perspective of women who have been sexually exploited, such as those who become the objects of male desire. Socialist feminism encourages us to acquire the perspective of women who work—women as workers. On the other hand, I have understood ecological feminism to be centered on a goddess.

At the end of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, there is a sentence, “Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.” (Haraway 2006 (1985): 147)

It is a clear critical reference to Starhawk’s book, *The Spiral Dance*.

First, let me tell you about Starhawk. Starhawk—although this is probably not her real name—is a woman who was born in 1951 and grew up with Russian-Jewish parents. She played a very important role in the Women’s Spirituality Movement that gained popularity in the United States in the late 1970s, as well as in the antinuclear movement, in Neopaganism—although this was not exclusive to women—and in religious feminism such as witchcraft. I think we can safely say that she has been involved in the ecological feminism movement in a broad sense, which includes all these various other movements.

Starhawk’s first major book was *Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (Starhawk 1979), which was translated into Japanese by Ryuji Kagami. In the book,

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interactions with nature, sexual ecstasies, and the view that regards the Earth as a goddess are strongly emphasized. The book also presents goddess worship as antithetical to the male-dominated world, the criticisms of the modern world and Christianity.

In the book, Starhawk writes about wandering around, sleeping rough along the coast of California in the summer of 1968, when she was 17 years old.

“...I lived in direct contact with nature, day and night. I began to feel connected to the world in a new way, to see everything as alive, erotic, engaged in a constant dance of mutual pleasuring, and myself as a special part of it all.” (Starhawk 1979: 2)

She studied cultural anthropology at UCLA. Although there is an age gap between them, she and Carlos Castaneda are alumni of the same university. She writes that she created several rituals during her time at the university. She got into rhythms with drugs, and meditated in groups. During that time, she encountered the goddess:

“The Goddess tradition opened up new possibilities. Now my body, in all its femaleness, its breasts, vulva, womb, and menstrual flow, was sacred. The wild power of nature, the intense pleasure of sexual intimacy, took center stage as paths to the sacred instead of being denied, denigrated, or seen as peripheral.” (Starhawk 1979: 7)

Starhawk met Z. Budapest, a famous witch from Hungary, in her 20s, and she decided to spend a year cycling around North America when she was 23.

The theme of *Spiral Dance* is that the Earth is sacred. Specifically, she claims that the Earth is Gaia—or the goddess. The title refers to an erotic dance of life that recurs in nature and in all cultures and is based on animistic beliefs. Starhawk writes that the worlds of nature and culture are full of energy and that we can interact not only with nature, in its myriad forms such as trees, flowers, rocks, and seas, but also with books, paintings, poetry, music, friends, and so on (Starhawk 1979: 17).

Starhawk lists three core principles of goddess worship: immanence, interconnection, and community.

Immanence means that every living thing or object on Earth contains a goddess or deity. This is a criticism of monotheism because nature and cultures are all considered to be sacred. Interconnection means a state in which each person is interconnected to these sacred things, forming a universe. Community refers to the fact that a community centered on goddess worship has already emerged in a specific way. Multiple communities are interconnected and cover the entire Earth; it is then that we become aware of the Earth for the first time and develop a desire to protect it. She writes that we can feel our mission to protect nature:

“The Goddess continually offers us challenges, but knowing that she is within us as well as around us, we find the strength to meet them, to transform fear into power-from-within, to create communities in which we can grow, struggle, and change, to mourn our losses and celebrate our advances, to generate the acts of love and pleasure that are her rituals.” (Starhawk 1979: 22)

There has been criticism, not only against Starhawk but also against all those who emphasize spiritual and religious aspects in feminism, claiming that they naturally lack a political perspective or an involvement in political movements. Starhawk herself rejects that criticism. In fact, it is not true that goddess worshipers have never been involved in political movements.

“A manifesto for cyborgs: science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s” by Donna Haraway (1944-) was published in *New Left Review* in 1985. *A Cyborg Manifesto* advocates the idea of achieving gender equality by minimizing the differences between men and women. In contrast, the ecological feminism represented by Starhawk is a perspective that emphasizes (maximizes) the differences between men and women and insists on a complementary relationship between the two genders.

Haraway herself states that a cyborg is a hybrid and that we are cyborgs, although I believe that such a claim lacks impact. She also says that a cyborg is a kind of self, repeating the assertion that we are cyborgs.

Cyborgs are positioned at a point where three boundaries are broken down in a post-gender society. First, the boundary between humans and animals is blurred. Haraway claims that cyborgs reside at the very point where the boundary between humans and animals is violated and appear in mythologies. Second, the boundary between living things—including humans and animals—and machines also collapses. Third, the boundary between the physical and the nonphysical collapses as

well. This way, Haraway recognizes a new image of human beings, that of cyborgs, where the boundaries that form existing human beings disappear.

“The permanent partiality of feminist points of view has consequences for our expectations of forms of political organization and participation. We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradiction. Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos. From the point of view of pleasure in these potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology, there might indeed be a feminist science.”
(Haraway 1985: 139)

As we discern from this quote, Haraway argues that we can learn from our interactions and fusions with animals and machines. What do we learn from them? Her answer is “how not to be Man”—meaning how not to be humans or men who embody the Western logos.

What is relevant here is that Haraway mentions animals and machines that have been represented as “the other” in the sense of disrupting the boundaries of classic human existence. However, another important concept is logos—meaning that humans can only be understood as rational beings. That is believed to be the human nature and human ideal; however, we can learn that that is not the case as she argues through the concept of the cyborg.

“Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind.” (Haraway 1985: 142)

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Further, she states that by putting themselves in the position of the oppressed, women end up creating a *universal structure of conflict* and that a cyborg’s perspective is needed to criticize this. What does that mean?

“From the perspective of cyborgs, freed of the need to ground politics in ‘our’ privileged position of the oppression that incorporates all other dominations, the innocence of the merely violated, the ground of those closer to nature, we can see powerful possibilities. Feminisms and Marxisms have run aground on Western epistemological imperatives to construct a revolutionary subject from the perspective of a hierarchy of oppressions and/or a latent position of moral superiority, innocence, and greater closeness to nature.” (Haraway 1985: 142)

In short, she argues that introducing the concept of a cyborg allows women to position themselves in a perspective different from that of the victims of violence or discrimination.

Going back to feminism, Haraway proposes a perspective different from those of socialist feminism and radical feminism, that is, the perspective of “cyborg feminism.”

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, we can notice her critical attitude toward ecological feminism. This is not explicitly stated—but let me quote a few related points.

One is about the women who gathered at Greenham Common in England. These were the same women who participated in the protest against the deployment of cruise missiles that could carry nuclear heads at a military base in that town. On this topic, Jill Liddington wrote *Witches and Missiles: History of the British Women's Peace Movement*. I will quote from *A Cyborg Manifesto*:

“[Missiles are] blocked more effectively by the witch-weavings of the displaced and so unnatural Greenham women, who read the cyborg webs of power so very well, than by the militant labour of older masculinist politics, whose natural constituency needs defence jobs.” (Haraway 1985: 121)

We cannot claim that Haraway is overly critical in this quote because she states that the movement of witches from an ecological perspective is more effective than that of workers. I will quote another section:

“Ironically, it might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail whose constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies.” (Haraway 1985: 121)

Although it may be a little difficult to understand what that means; in this section, what she implies is that those who are performing spiral dances in antinuclear protests at the Santa Rita jail are comparable with cyborg women.

The third quote is about the way she understands modern society:

“It's not just that ‘god’ is dead; so is the ‘goddess’. Or both are revived in the worlds charged with microelectronic and biotechnological politics.” (Haraway 1985: 129)

Further, as I have already mentioned, in the last sentence of the *Manifesto* she states that she would rather be a cyborg than be caught in the spiral dance.

This concludes my examination of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, particularly in relation to the goddess feminism movement and the spiral dance. Next, I will examine a paper entitled *A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition* by Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, which draws from *A Cyborg Manifesto*. According to the authors, it is a tribute to it, rather than a criticism.

First, I would like to clarify that although it mentions women near the end, this is not necessarily a manifesto that is conscious of feminism or gender. In addition, although it is coincidental, I feel that the “swarm” that came up in the first presentation—a consciousnessless being that is a swarm organism¹—will be a keyword for this workshop as it is one of the forms taken by the zombie.

“We will investigate why this specter has captured the American imagination for over a century. We want to take a deeper look at the zombie in order to suggest its usefulness as an ontic/hauntic object that speaks to some of the most puzzling elements of our sociohistorical moment, wherein many are trying to ascertain what lies in store for humanity after global capitalism.” (Lauro and Embry 2008: 86)

¹ “...the zombii, a consciousnessless being that is a swarm organism...” (Lauro and Embry 2008: 88).

Here the authors address why they want to reflect on the zombie and discuss these ghost-like beings that have captured the imagination of Americans.

One important point here is that the zombie is exactly halfway between the two types of existence, ontic and hauntic, translated as human and ghost, respectively, in the above quote.

Now, I will unpack *A Zombie Manifesto*. Unlike the cyborg, the zombie is not an agent that frees us. Haraway regards cyborgs not only as a post-human form but also as the very path to the liberation of humanity from today's late capitalist societies. What the authors of *A Zombie Manifesto* are emphasizing is that to be a cyborg, we have to be conscious of it. Therefore, a cyborg is not a being that is denied logos or consciousness. On the other hand, the authors argue that we should think of the zombie as a being without consciousness and that it is more appropriate as a post-human in that way.

In *A Zombie Manifesto*, three different terms are used for the zombie—"Zombi," "Zombie," and "Zombii."

Zombi has originally been ethnographically depicted in Haiti. It has a historic and ethnographic existence; it is the dead that comes back to life or gets up and starts working in a sugarcane field. It represents a slave-like being; in other words, he was a slave in life, and after death, he still worked tirelessly as a slave as ordered by his master. In 1791, shortly after the French Revolution, there was a revolt by peasants in Haiti that drove the French troops away. The memory of the peasants' revolt is also included in the representation of Zombi. In this sense, both slavery and resistance are recognized in the representation of Zombi, which has been the subject of ethnographic and historical studies (Davis 1988). Ethnographic zombies invaded, spread, and developed in Western popular culture; however, my own interest reminds me of the history of fetishes, that is, the objects of worship discovered in West Africa by Portuguese merchants in the 15th century, whose name was imported back into the Netherlands and France and subsequently became a common word. A similar development can be found with zombies. Furthermore, just as the concept of fetishism influenced the thoughts of Freud and Marx and has developed in its own unique way, it may be possible to see the development of zombies in the psychological field as well. Interestingly, we also have terms such as "zombie economy" and "zombie company."

The ethnographic zombi is known as the "classic zombie," and the second zombie, which is a familiar onscreen presence is known as the "modern zombie." Zombies can be distinguished from vampires, which have individual consciousness, in that zombies attack people as a consciousnessless

swarm, and those who have been attacked, in turn, become zombies. While classic zombies carry a distinct image of farmworkers, modern zombies are closely associated with modern mass production and the consumeristic society in their depictions such as those working in factories and shopping malls where they attack people. Below are a few quotes from the paper:

“Humanity defines itself by its individual consciousness and its personal agency: to be a body without a mind is to be subhuman, animal; to be a human without agency is to be a prisoner, a slave. The zombi(i)/e is both of these, and the zombi(i)/e (fore)tells our past, present, and future.” (Lauro and Embry 2008: 90)

The zombie is without consciousness and agency.

"The figure of the infectious, consuming zombie illustrates humanity's attempt to transfer its burden onto others—as well as our fears of increasingly publicized diseases. In its frenzied state of pure consumption, the zombie seeks to infect those who do not yet share in the oppression of their state: the zombie does not attack other zombies. It seeks to transfer its burden, but the result is only a multiplication of its condition: no zombie body is relieved of its condition by passing it on. Therefore the zombie once again deters the possibility of catharsis. The boundary between Man and Slave that allows one to shift the burden of necessity onto the other— whether in ancient Greek society or in the global capitalist superstructure of today—is threatened by the zombie: no appetite is sated, all become slaves. (...) Therefore, we see that the insatiable zombie of contemporary cinema incarnates this kind of social critique and forebodes capitalism's monstrous future.” (Lauro and Embry 2008: 100)

According to this quote, the master makes his slave carry his burden. However, having become a new burden himself, the zombie does not take such a form and creates new zombies to spread the experience of the same burden. We can recognize pure consumerism there. There is no production in a strict sense in their process of biting humans and producing more and more zombies: zombies are simply producing zombies. The mechanism of zombies turning others is used as a kind of criticism of modern capitalism.

Finally, I will explain the zombie proposed as a post-human in *A Zombie Manifesto*. According

to the authors, the zombie is a consciousnessless being, a ghost that is a swarm of organisms, and the only post-human imaginable; in other words, being consciousnessless is what distinguishes the zombie from the cyborg. A swarm is a form of being that negates the individual, which also makes the zombie different from the cyborg. Furthermore, it is pointed out in *A Zombie Manifesto* that the expression “hybrid” used in the discussion of the cyborg does not transcend the conflicts between machines and humans or between humans and animals.

The authors of *A Zombie Manifesto* have mentioned some beings that are comparable with the zombie. They refer to those who are dependent on medical equipment for their survival, and while not explicitly stating so, they also refer to the prisoners of Auschwitz, and especially those called Muselmann, who were waiting only for death as real living zombies.

It is pointed out by Fujita (2017) that in addition to ethnographic zombies and modern zombies that appear in American films, we have begun to see zombies that are conscious of themselves and can move quickly, particularly since the start of this century. According to the book, they are a fluid rather than a swarm. This fluidity also reflects the way of modern society.

I will conclude the talk with the following words.

It has been argued as the *raison d'être* of cultural anthropology that we should not only learn about different cultures but understand ourselves by learning about them. To that end, cultural anthropology always requires difference between us and them. We can imagine a criticism stating that it is not proper to use others for understanding ourselves.

When we discuss the goddess, the cyborg, and the zombie, which I introduced today, from the perspective of a post-humanism, we do so for the purpose of criticizing or understanding our modern society. Nevertheless, I think these are presented as a possibility that we, rather than others, may become this kind of beings ourselves in the future. This is very different from the traditional view of cultural anthropology, which is to know ourselves by knowing different cultures with the acceptance of the boundary between self and others, or spatial “detour thinking.”

Finally, I would like to share with you the impression Christian Boltanski had when he visited Musée de l'Homme (the Museum of Man) in Paris when he was young (Tanaka 2019):

“(After May 1968) It was also the age of discovery of ethnology, of The Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man) and of beauty, no longer just African art, but an entire series of

everyday objects: Eskimo fishhooks, arrows from the Amazon Indians...The Musée de l’Homme was of tremendous importance to me; it was there that I saw large metal and glass vitrines in which are placed small, fragile and insignificant objects. A yellow photograph showing a “savage” handling little objects was placed in the corner of the vitrine. Each vitrine presented a lost world: the savage in the photograph was, without a doubt, dead; the objects had become useless, anyway there is no one left who knows how to use them” (Gumpert 1988: 52).

I visited the Museum of Man a long time ago, and it was like that in those days.

If you read these sentences alone, it gives you the impression that Boltanski was criticizing the museum for being a terrible place and that he thought that the museum was treating Africans as savages or as dead people. That is to say, you may think that he was critical of the museum’s representation of others. What the museum is doing now—if anything—is conducting a movement in the form of a forum to move beyond such criticisms. However Boltanski says the following: “The Musée de l’Homme seemed like a big morgue to me” (Gumpert 1988: 52).

In other words, Boltanski regards the museum not as a place where we and the “barbarians” are contrasted but as a place that he as well was entering. This idea is very similar to the stances toward beings such as goddesses, cyborgs, and zombies that I have talked about today. I aim to consider what this might mean for ethnology in the future.

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