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**Review of 'Gender circuits: Bodies and Identities in a
Technological Age'
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REVIEW

The world around us [...] shapes who we are and who we think we can be. [...] I suggested that how people come to know and understand their self has changed throughout history. [...]. By examining how technology has created new physical and social possibilities for gender we can learn a lot about *how* our modern technological world is changing who we are in fundamental ways.

Feminist re(con)figurations of bodies and identities in a discursive society and the material world suggest a shift in focus (primarily in feminist theory) in favour of the process of subject formation, as this quotation from Eve Shapiro (2010), *Gender Circuits*, indicates. Feminist debates on the discursive nature of the body or the material nature of it have permeated recent contemporary feminist philosophy. How do we reconceptualize bodies and identities without falling into an extreme linguisticity? Does the technological material body affect gender constructions? If so, how do these questions interrelate with each other? Shapiro configures her theoretical framework building upon the dualisms identity and body, and gender and technology as constructive to each other. This book is part of a long history of work on the shaping of gender and technology.

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Nevertheless, instead of categorizing technology as always active and gender as a passive dichotomy (or the other way around), Shapiro positions herself along the lines of authors such as MacKenzie and Wajcman (1999). Starting from Haraway's cyborg subject, Shapiro presents materiality, as inscribed in technology, which relates bodies and identities with technology in a multi-directional level.

The discursive construction of the body and its submission to different cultural symbolic rules has been widely explored by authors such as Judith Butler. The affect that society has on bodies has been widely theorized, but how a gendered body may affect society or technology has been less explored (Vergés et al, 2009). What is truly interesting in Shapiro's book is how she explains this complex theoretical framework with real examples: the group DBT (Disposable Boy Toys), the website "Second Life" and the "bloomers".

Shapiro's book is divided into three chapters (plus "preview" and "review" which include the more "epistemological part" with the "empirical part". These two sections correspond to the traditional introduction and conclusion. The first section includes also another empirical case, "tattooing", and how its concept has evolved together with society. That is to say, she uses the tattooing technique to show how the body is inscribed in technology and how this relation has had a different effect in society throughout time. The review offers an insightful summary of the book as well as further lines of research. Starting with an anecdote in her "preview", Shapiro situates the state of the art of technology and gender and its effect on contemporary society. Throughout the book, she demonstrates how technology is reshaped through our experience and the development of ourselves in society, as well as how this process (or "identity work" as she calls it) is reshaped through technology.

Chapter one offers the reader an understanding of technology through the research on a transgender/transsexual group called "Disposable Boy Toys", in California. This group serves to exemplify for the author the discursive-material implications of medical technology on gendered bodies and how "identity work" is materialized in multiple different gendered ways that open-up the concept of gender through its interaction with technology. Going beyond gender binarism, Shapiro is able to demonstrate how different technological techniques help people to transgress this dichotomy and perform on a stage their own "identity work", their own fluid self. The second chapter takes the "bloomers" as a case study. Bloomers are an article of clothing, originally long baggy pants cuffed at the ankle and worn under a skirt, which were less of a hindrance to women's activities than the long full skirts of the Victorian era. At the same time that they became fashionable, they became controversial since women were not "supposed" to wear trousers. Shapiro intertwines technological innovation (even fashion) with feminist politics.

In the following chapter, Shapiro performs an extremely well-documented reading of Donna Haraway in order to show the connection between technology and gendered bodies. In addition, she goes a step beyond by exploring how technology reproduces the same inequalities on gendered bodies as society in general through the study case "Second Life". The web site "Second Life" provides a participant with the opportunity to include multiple "beings" in just one "I" (Hayles, 1999). Even though the internet is a safe place for transgender/transsexual people, it may also reproduce sexual-race-class social injustices.

In her third and final chapter Shapiro explores the meaning of these dynamics through the case study of the intersex subject. Reading it with the previous chapter in mind, the reader obtains the positive side of technology through online "consciousness-raising" groups for intersex people. While the DBT group was a very homogeneous (in terms of race and class) group, the one presented in this chapter is much more plural (without forgetting the classic digital divide that the internet may produce). Although technological innovation proves to be creating openings for subjectivities which cross the line between femininity and masculinity, it also proves to be disciplining, regulating and transforming for the material body.

Technology may be empowering at the same time as it can be restrictive, as Shapiro's reading of Weseley's research on strip-dance demonstrates. According to Shapiro, Weseley's research shows how technology may confine the female strip-dancer to her body as a dancer. The dancers try to distinguish themselves by adding to their bodies technologies such as tattooing or piercings. However, these are things which cannot be removed once they are out of the club as perfume or clothing may be. They cannot liberate their dancing identity from anything else. Even though at times Shapiro's analysis may be regarded as extremely socially constructivist, the main theme of the book is very well-documented: how technologies are reshaping gendered bodies and identities and their meanings. Insightful definitions are provided of concepts such as "social analysis", "technology", "information technology" or even "gender", which may be very useful in any feminist methodology class. What is more, providing the book with grey boxes to illustrate better the significance of these definitions makes the argument more visual.

One of the strongest points that Shapiro is highlighting is the approach of feminist politics through new lenses. By disrupting established gender identities thanks to the study cases she deploys in her book, Shapiro enhances the fluidity of identity and the need for a dynamic method which explores the mechanisms by which society is changing in general; or in Grosz's terms an onto-epistemological political shift towards a "politics of the process". According to Shapiro, "[e]xamining technology and gender through a mutually constitutive lens can help make sense of how the changes in gender and technology that are at the core of this book are historically situated".

Thus by connecting sociology with "ideology, scripts, technologies, and embodied identities" (ibid), she generates feminist knowledge based on empirical facts which at the same time provoke alterations in the dynamic process of identity work. In addition, Shapiro disrupts the notion of 'objectivity' by becoming part of the research study herself and includes herself in the research group DBT, as a participant as well as a researcher.

Although I regret static categorizations of concepts, it is true that Shapiro has suggested how to unite the often separate fields of epistemology, empiricism and politics. This union is paramount in feminist theory and politics in order to provoke changes in society and it is acquired thanks to the union of gender, bodies and technologies. In addition, albeit keeping the concept of identity, she has been able to reflect its dynamism and fluidity, and the need to think of gender, technology and identity through the relationship rather than as separate entities.

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