Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture

From The MIT Press

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Most writing on cyberculture is dominated by two almost mutually exclusive visions: the heroic image of the male outlaw hacker and the utopian myth of a gender-free cyberworld. Reload offers an alternative picture of cyberspace as a complex and contradictory place where there is oppression as well as liberation. It shows how cyberpunk's revolutionary claims conceal its ultimate conservatism on matters of class, gender, and race. The cyberfeminists writing here view cyberculture as a social experiment with an as-yet-unfulfilled potential to create new identities, relationships, and cultures.The book brings together women's cyberfiction--fiction that explores the relationship between people and virtual technologies--and feminist theoretical and critical investigations of gender and technoculture. From a variety of viewpoints, the writers consider the effects of rapid and profound technological change on culture, in particular both the revolutionary and reactionary effects of cyberculture on women's lives. They also explore the feminist implications of the cyborg, a human-machine hybrid. The writers challenge the conceptual and institutional rifts between high and low culture, which are embedded in the texts and artifacts of cyberculture.

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Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture From The MIT Press Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #6224274 in Books
- Published on: 2002-04-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.00" w x 7.00" l, 2.44 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 595 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Bucking the received wisdom of the wired elite, the authors collected in *Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture* suggest that when we log on, we take our genders with us. Editors Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth balance penetrating critical theory with examples of fiction from authors like Octavia Butler, Amy Thomson, and C.L. Moore. The mix can be thought-provoking, but requires some quick shifting of mental gears to follow the arguments from essay to fiction and back again.

Exposing some cherished cybermyths as groundless or at least unproven (e.g., identity is less ephemeral than the utopians would have us believe), the anthology also makes a compelling argument simply by its uniqueness: if gender doesn't matter, then why do these writings feel so different from men's writing on cyberculture? Those readers impatient with academic jargon will find some of the theory tiresome, but much is refreshingly clear. *--Rob Lightner*

From Library Journal
Women writers, many of them lesbian feminists, have begun to explore the relationships between humans and machines. Along the way, they are rethinking how race, class, and gender affect technological change, especially given the growing gap between those with access to equipment and those without it. The entries in Reload 11 pieces of fiction and 17 critical essays assess the ways technology has, or will, affect female life. Take, for example, the notion that cyberspace levels the playing field by allowing users to don whatever identity they choose. According to contributor Lisa Nakamura, "when users are free to choose their own race, all were presumed to be white. And many of those who adopted nonwhite personae turned out to be white male users masquerading as exotic samurai and horny geishas." Chilling as this is, cyberspace remains a positive "place" for many users; writer Sharon Cumberland reminds us that women's chat rooms are often valued precisely because of the anonymity offered. Reload is filled with provocative and often contradictory glimpses into cyberculture. Unfortunately, too much of the collection is steeped in technobabble, rendering it of limited use to a general audience. Recommended for academic libraries and specialized collections only. Eleanor J. Bader, Brooklyn, NY
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Review

"Reload is an indispensable guide to a body of literature that has not received the attention it deserves. The collection makes us aware of a significant gap in our understanding of cyberpunk fiction, while at the same time filling that gap admirably. Although we have long understood the importance of cyberpunk fiction for postmodern theory and contemporary culture, many of us have made the mistake of thinking of cyberpunk as a masculinist genre. Reload shows us how women writers have been contributing to, expanding, and reimagining the genre."The collection is encyclopedic in scope with more than two dozen important essays and fiction pieces as well as a lucid introduction by the two editors. Reload is unusual in the way that it combines theory and practice. Examples from feminist cyberfiction are placed beside critical essays. The genres of fiction and critique are usually kept rigidly separate, but Reload, like feminist theory itself, blurs such traditional boundaries. The result is an exciting volume in which feminist theory helps to explain the practice of women science fiction writers, and feminist cyberfiction gives us new insights into feminist theory."--Jay David Bolter, Wesley Professor of New Media, Georgia Institute of TechnologyPlease note: Endorser gives permission to excerpt from quote.

"Witty, urbane, and informed by a remarkably wide range of reference, *Me++* surveys the ways in which digital technologies are transforming our world and ourselves. I cannot think of a better guide to these coming changes than William Mitchell. He is able to see the future without losing sight of the past, and he embodies the technologically savvy yet still deeply humanistic perspective we need to understand and evaluate where our technologies are leading us -- and where we should be leading them."--N. Katherine Hayles, Hillis Professor of Literature, English Department and Design/Media Arts, University of California, Los Angeles

"You have entered the rotunda of a gleaming, new conference center. Above you hangs a banner: 'Welcome to *First Person*.' In front of you, you see doors leading into separate conference rooms, each of which is marked with a sign in large, Futura-Bold letters: 'Cyberdrama,' 'Ludology,' 'Simulation,' 'Hypertext and Interactives,' and so on. You soon discover that every room in this virtual conference called First Person is filled with informed discussion and lively controversy from major figures in the emerging field of Game Studies. Some are arguing that digital games (as the heirs of the novel and of film) constitute the next great arena for storytelling; others respond that games are not narratives at all and require a different theoretical framework and a new discipline. Still others are describing their own exciting contributions to interactive fiction, poetry, or visual/verbal art. By the time you return from this virtual tour of the world of Game Studies, you realize that all of these rooms (and all these topics) are connected in an intricate and compelling architecture of ideas. You begin to understand the rich possibilities that computer games offer…as drama, narrative, and simulation. You come to appreciate the great theoretical task that lies before us in exploring both the formal properties and the cultural significance of computer games."--Jay David Bolter, Wesley Professor of New Media, Georgia Institute of TechnologyPlease note: This endorsement is, a bit obviously, written in the language of a computer game. I think it should be used in full to achieve its effect; however, the endorser gives permission to excerpt from it, and I think he would allow us to rewrite slightly in order to come up with a shorter version for publicity and promotional pieces, if necessary. Feel free to check with me on this. Thanks!

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ned Aguayo:

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