

WHY 'FEMINISTS' NEED TO READ JANICE LEE'S 'TEXT'

When Janice Lee asked me to write something about her new book *KEROTAKIS* (2010 Dog Horn Publishing) my first instinct was to say no. Because quite frankly, I thought, Janice's brilliant book spoke for itself. But after reading some of the reviews and high praise for *KEROTAKIS*, I feel compelled to add something to the discussion that might otherwise be lost. In "The Android and The Human," an essay that Philip K. Dick wrote at the time of his research into "mind-in-becoming", he remarks: "Cybernetics, a valuable recent scientific discipline, articulated by Norbert Wiener, saw valid comparisons between the behavior of machines and humans – with the view that a study of machines would yield valuable insights into the nature of our own behavior. . . .But suppose the use of this analogy is turned the other way. Suppose – and I don't believe Wiener anticipated this – suppose a study of ourselves, our own nature, enables us to gain insight into the now extraordinary complex functioning and malfunctioning of mechanical and electronic constructs? . . . Rather than learning about ourselves by studying our constructs, perhaps we should make the attempt to comprehend what our constructs are up to by looking into what we ourselves are up to." It is precisely against this background that I'd claim that future, yet-to-be becoming *feminists*, especially certain cyborg students of Donna Haraway and Sandy Stone's Advanced Communication Technologies Laboratory (ACTLab) necessarily ought to absorb the themes and spectral apparitions presented in Janice Lee's *KEROTAKIS*. For her *text* straightforwardly addresses the nihilism that is all too often generated by the move from what we might call *premodern, naïve religious belief* to a *postmodern, secular humanist nonbelief*. For every Ayaan Hirsi Ali who broke from her strict Muslim family and became an outspoken atheist – there are countless heroic Muslim women who remain well within the horizon of Islam. Why exactly? There are a number of quite sensitive reasons for this, some of them quite horrific. But one of the more enigmatic and less reported justifications for returning and remaining within so-called *premodern, naïve religious belief* is of course the devastating nihilism generated by the genuine acceptance of recent scientific discoveries. As even the lugubrious Christopher Hitchens is want to remind us, "[W]e know this much [the universe is] blasting apart very very fast. A great deal of nothingness is certainly coming to us. There's an enormous and utter nothingness in our future. And even if we're not prepared to wait for that or wait for a species change to overtake us, we can see already in the night sky the Andromeda galaxy on collision course with our own. That's certainly going to happen, whether we destroy ourselves or the sun blows up or not." To avoid any misunderstandings, my point here is not that we ought to remain within theism to fight the nihilism inherent in science. My point here is simply that there ought to be something of a numinous, theological nature to fill in the void-chasm created by *postmodern, secular humanist nonbelief* – and that something, I would claim, is science fiction. Janice Lee's *KEROTAKIS* is by far one of the more

intriguing, recent examples of a secular genesis machines¹ because unlike her forerunners (Gibson's *Neuromancer*, Dick's *Bladerunner*, Rucker's *Ware Tetralogy*, etc, etc) Lee has given a twist to the usual Norbert Wiener assumption that studying machines would yield insights into human nature – by narrowing the focus even further. *I don't believe even Wiener or Philip K Dick anticipated this – suppose a study of the artist, the artist's nature and habits, enables us to gain insight into the now extraordinary complex functioning of mechanical and electronic constructs such as cyborgs and replicants. Rather than learning about ourselves by studying our constructs, perhaps we should make the attempt to comprehend what our constructs are up to by looking into what artists are up to.* This is probably the one essential element that is all too lacking in mainstream science fiction. From *Star Wars* to *Star Trek* – the artist always operates on the periphery of these parallel universes, always operating within boring primitive, New Age ideological edifices of good and evil, yin and yang, *let the force be with you, live long and prosper.* Are we aware that *KEROTAKIS* additionally proposes a quiet challenge not only to Male-dominated Science Fiction & Feminism – but even to you dear reader of literature and poetry specifically? *KEROTAKIS* isn't simply about the status of a future crucified cyborg named G.I.L.L., but the status of ZOSIMOSA, the timeless inaccessible MOTHER, PAINTER, AUTHOR – what Lacan would've called the BIG OTHER in relation to you and your friends. According to *KEROTAKIS* – yes, it may be the case that patriarchal logos in the form of a scientist in the past and the BRAIN known as “historical necessity” is indeed impotent, and really isn't the redeeming feature, but guess what? The artist cyborg is. Art can do what science can't do alone. If you don't believe me, read *KEROTAKIS*. –Maxi Kim / godlessly@yahoo.com

¹ As the writer Howard Bloom describes it in his newest book *The Genius of the Beast*, “Genesis happens every day. New things come into being. And from time to time the cosmos invents something radically new – the first flood of atoms, the first flood of stars, the first flood of galaxies, the first flood of black holes, and the first flood of human beings. *A secular genesis machine is the mechanism that brings radically new creations into being without the hand of a deity.*”