

Books in Review

Sherryl Vint

Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity Science Fiction

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Science fiction holds a privileged position to reflect upon the unpredictable consequences of scientific and technological progress. Its role as a platform to highlight the implications of such developments increased during the last decades of the 20th century with the rise of cyberpunk fiction and a new wave of hybrids, ranging from Replicants to RoboCops, Terminators and AIs that looked back at us from spectacular cinema screens. Thinkers like Donna Haraway, Rossi Braidotti or Vivian Sobchack began to include these frontier entities as core characters of their theories, and Sherryl Vint pursues this line of thinking further in *Bodies of Tomorrow*, a critical analysis of selected science fiction texts.

Vint exposes the insufficiencies of disembodied posthuman theories through a methodological mixture of literary studies and critical theory. The two main arguments of the book, as the author explains, are “first that discursive struggles over representation are also political struggles about valid subject positions, and second that we are currently in a moment of defining a new human subject, a posthuman subject” (171). These central points are condensed on the picture of the Möbius Band (a surface with only one side and one boundary), a metaphor that Vint uses recurrently to accentuate the complexity of the human subject focusing on the centrality of the body, which is both material and discursive. Following Judith Butler, Vint argues that the material body is read and experienced through the consumption of cultural representations that talk sense into it as a social subject (17). *Bodies of Tomorrow* elaborates this idea exploring science fiction texts featured by unfitting and marginalized bodies struggling to process the paradoxes and contradictions of their universes.

The book is divided into six chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction (*Problem-*

atic Selves and Unexpected Others) outlines the general structure of the book and focuses on the body as a necessary nexus for any theory of the posthuman (16). The first chapter (*Gwyneth Jones: The World of the Body and the Body of the World*) comments on Gwyneth Jones’s *Aleuthian* trilogy. Jones’s novels are the starting point of the essay because the aleuthian culture manifests the idea that identity is socially acquired without forgetting the fundamental importance of the biological dimension. The second (*Octavia Butler: Be(com)ing Human*) centres on Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy and the Oankali, an alien species of gene traders, to emphasize the need to balance technological and ethical investment to counter risks such as the rise of genetic essentialisms or new ways of slaving bodies through technological dominance. The third section (*Iain M. Banks: The Culture-al Body*) explores Ian M. Banks’s *Culture*, where the Culture impersonates an apparently perfect form of society that has eradicated the need for work and discrimination for race or gender.

The two next chapters (*Cyberpunk: Return of the Repressed Body* and *Raphael Carter: The Fall Into Meat*) offer a critical review of cyberpunk writings. Although the popular opinion depicts cyberpunk as a cultural phenomenon that renders the body as obsolete flesh, Vint brings to light the ambiguities of the genre and demonstrates how characters like William Gibson’s Case in *Neuromancer* or Pat Cadigan’s hackers in *Synners* are fully aware of their physical condition despite their role as cyberspace jockeys. The sixth chapter (*Jack Womack and Neal Stephenson: The World and the Text and the World in the Text*) comments on Jack Womack’s *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* and Neal Stephenson’s *The Diamond Age*. Both works illustrate the power of technologies (an enhanced book and a diary are central elements



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of the novels) to remake ourselves (169), thus closing the argument started with the analysis of Gwyneth Jones's trilogy.

Vint concludes by claiming the need of an embodied posthumanism and presents the transhumanist movement as an example of a disembodied theory of the posthuman that updates the postulates of modern liberal humanism. According to Vint, the posthuman should indeed stitch the cartesian divisions of modern philosophies (mind/body, interior/exterior, nature/culture) and open scenarios where every-body can find cultural representations to materialize their identities in the politic space.