

Book Reviews

Compte rendus de livres

SHELLEY MCKELLAR

Review of

Smith, Marquard and Joanne Morra, eds. 2005. *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Pp. 340, illus. Cloth \$34.95, ISBN 0-262-19530-5.

The Prosthetic Impulse is a collection of commissioned essays written by scholars from various disciplines that explore the body, modernity and prosthetic technologies. In this volume, the authors move beyond the common medical definition of prosthesis (as an artificial device that replaces a missing body part) to explore broader meanings as an addition, a replacement, an extension, an augmentation or enhancement and its nature within body-technology interactions. In modern Western culture, this contact between the body and technology has led to a “prosthetic impulse.” What is the prosthetic impulse? In answering this question, the more conventional approach focuses on “human contact with a modern world as ever more mediated and determined by communication technologies, biomedicine and information” (4). Indeed, many scholars have studied body-technology contact and its impact (or the enactment of the prosthetic impulse) on communication technologies, biomedicine and information such as the telegraph, computer, microscopes, laparoscopic surgery, unmanned space travel, cameras, medical transplantation and artificial organs—as well as its presentation in culture, literature and the visual arts (science fiction, horror movies and comic books would be examples).

The authors of this volume, however, pursue a less conventional answer to the question, suggesting that “the point of prosthetic contact ... is also a part of a process that recognizes exactly how ‘the prosthetic’ is an integral or ‘interconstitutive’ part of the ‘human’” (7). Citing N. Catherine Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman*, the editors state that the posthuman body, as an initial prosthesis, undergoes

manipulation from birth thereby identifying the prosthetic impulse as a process already found in humans. Their argument is: “the prospect of the body and prosthesis are already of one another in specific ways that are lived out and experienced through material as well as metaphorical considerations that are embodied in and theorized directly out of particular histories, bodies, objects and practices” (11).

This volume is an eclectic collection of essays, drawing from theories and methodologies in gender studies and philosophy, to literary criticism and visual culture, to psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Because of the variety of approaches to the topic—which is arguably both a strength and weakness of the volume—the editors provide a short introduction to help the reader navigate this interdisciplinary selection of works. They highlight the question of the prosthetic impulse, which frames this collection, and they emphasize how each author’s work addresses the theme of material and metaphorical figurations of prosthesis. Well-written and succinct, the introduction could have expanded further on the related literature and debates that whetted this reader’s interest.

In terms of organization, the volume is divided into two sections. Part one, entitled “Carnality: Between Phenomenology and the Biocultural,” includes essays by visual culture scholars Vivian Sobchack, Marquard Smith, Lisa Cartwright and Brian Goldfarb. Well-known disability studies scholar Lennard J. Davis, philosopher Alphonso Lingis, sociologist Gary Genosko and historian David Serlin also contribute to part one.

The articles by Sobchack and Serlin were of particular interest to this reader. Sobchack's, "A Leg to Stand On" sets a strong tone for this volume. As the wearer of a prosthetic left leg, her essay foregrounds the embodiment experience of bodies with prostheses. She critiques and redresses the metaphorical displacement of the prosthetic by focusing on the lived-body experience (18). Serlin begins his "Disability, Masculinity, and the Prosthetics of War," with the story of the Amputettes—six veteran amputees who performed in drag for recuperating soldiers at U.S. military hospitals in the mid-1940s. He explores conceptions of what constituted able-bodiedness and normative masculinity during this period (159). Bringing his study forward to 2004, Serlin links his argument that able-bodied masculinity is culturally produced during wartime first, to the positive newspaper coverage of Iraq war veterans with their prosthetic limbs and second, to the well-publicized incidents of physical torture and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military personnel at Abu Ghraib prison.

Part two of the volume, entitled "Assembling: Internalization. Externalization," includes essays by gender studies scholar Elizabeth Grosz, critical

theorist Joanne Morra and visual culture scholars Lev Manovich, David Wills, Raiford Guines and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. As the section title suggests, these essays address the representation and reception of prostheses and bodies. In her essay entitled "Naked," Grosz examines sexual spectacle and sexual viewing and how the transformation of the art of depiction, to functional art, to experimental art contributed to the transformation of the body (191). Manovich, drawing from Marshall McLuhan and media history in general, examines ways in which the inside body is being externalized, or "augmenting the body by extending it outside," through new visual and imaging technologies (216). The other articles in this section explore related themes.

The Prosthetic Impulse is a collection that any scholar exploring themes of technology and the body could find useful. If for no other reason, this compilation will force scholars from a variety of disciplines (this reviewer included) to think more broadly about the body—historically, presently and in the future—and its mediation with both the biological and technological imperatives in modern Western culture.

LIANNE MCTAVISH

Review of

Daston, Lorraine, ed. 2004. *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*. New York: Zone Books (MIT Press).

Pp. 447. Hardcover \$34.50, ISBN 1-890951-43-9.

This collection of nine essays explores the relationship between objects and speech, noting how things can both encourage and shape discussion. The authors—art historians and historians of science—met three times at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin to discuss their work. Lorraine Daston, director of the Institute and editor of the collection, refers to these sessions as periods of "intensive collaboration" (7). Yet the resulting studies are remarkably different, covering diverse European and North American objects from a range of historical periods. Some topics fit more or less neatly into the discipline of art history: Joseph Leo Koerner analyzes a 16th-century drawing by the artist Hieronymus Bosch; Antoine Picon considers the shifting meaning of the free-standing column in

18th-century French architecture; Caroline A. Jones studies the mutual exchange of information between paintings made by American artist Jackson Pollock in the 1940s and art critic Clement Greenberg. Other essays feature objects that are less conventional: M. Norton Wise and Elaine M. Wise chart the changing understandings of Peacock Island in late 18th- and early 19th-century Prussia; Simon Schaffer investigates how soap bubbles inspired 19th-century British scientists; Anke te Heesen examines collections of newspaper clippings from the 1920s.

According to Daston, these discrete case studies are informed by a common goal; they consider how matter both limits and enables meaning, recognizing that "the language of things derives from certain