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Stuart Murray. (2020). *Disability and the Posthuman: Bodies, Technology, and Cultural Futures*. Liverpool, MSY: ISBN: 978789621648.

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The debate on the intersection between disability and posthumanism has focused, in recent years, on two topics: the entanglement between critical disability studies and critical posthumanism, due to its common critiques of normalcy and the material boundaries concerning the "human" (Nayar, 2014; Goodley *et al*, 2014; Mitchell, Snyder, 2019); and the ethical implications of possible enhanced posthuman futures to disability discrimination (Vehmas, Watson, 2016; Lee, 2016; Wee, 2022). In his groundbreaking "Disability and the Posthuman: Bodies, Technology, and Cultural Futures", Stuart Murray seeks to set the dialogue between posthumanism and disability in the crossroads of cultural narratives such as that of Tin Woodsman – the Oz's technologized being who through the yellow brick road finds his humanity lying beyond the possession of a heart. As in other works in which he dived into media representations of autism (Murray, 2008, 2012), the author explores embodied narratives of contemporary art as signs of a posthuman future that displays disability as "a central driver of depictions of subjectivity" (p. 22). Professor Murray is a leading scholar on the field of cultural representations of disability, and his works on the field of medical humanities and critical disability studies have been highly influential for me. This is mainly because his background involves postcolonial studies – for a disability scholar and activist engaged in critical autism studies, it is always a challenge to decentralized cultural representations of

autism whilst acknowledging the very westernized roots of the term "autism". Murray, as he states in the now reviewed piece, is committed to the kind of cripping methodology that depends on "messiness and contradictions". From my positionality as a Brazilian neurodivergent law scholar, it seems that the only way to smooth the self-suspicion is precisely to embrace this kind of unruly and inexact scripture derived from working and thinking in contested zones.

Whilst acknowledging that there is a possible clash between posthumanism and disability – especially regarding the connections between eradication of disabilities and transhumanist assertions –, Murray argues that critical strands of both disabilities studies and posthumanism studies present a large common area, which involves "a critique of humanist norms; a recognition of complex embodiment; and a commitment to intersectionality and inclusive practice among them" (p. 20). This statement intertwines with other disability posthumanist theorists arising from Disability Critical theory, such as Dan Goodley. Alongside Lawthom and Runswick-Cole, Goodley states that "disability is *the* quintessential posthuman condition: because it calls for new ontologies, ways of relating, living and dying" (Goodley *et al,* 2014, 348; original emphasis).

In chapter 1 – the most important of the oeuvre –, Murray explores the exciting birth of literature about posthumanist in the 1990's. Through future-optimistic references of passages from Halberstam, Livingston, Moravec and Hayles, the author shows how the emergence of new entities – amongst which are not only robots, but also human-alike subjects not considered to have fully human bodies – made posthumanism rise as one approach in the family of antihumanism cultural theories, mostly influenced by Foucauldian's "death of the man" prediction. On the other hand, disability futures were at that time – the 90's – theorized as undesirable, appearing to be "rather as fraught spaces of struggle" (p. 40). This scenario

changed dramatically in the past 20 years. Disability studies went through a global transformation due to a shift in the political landscape. On the other side, initial posthumanist predictions were contained by bleaker postures through which the possible threats post-humanism poses to "common humanity" are highlighted. Critically engaging with this scenario, Braidotti advises us to remember that the narrow humanistic conception we so seek to preserve when opposing posthumanism has rather excluded many humans. Her advice is hence to acknowledge "the possibilities offered by disability to trouble, reshape and re-fashion the human, while asserting disabled people's humanity" (Braidotti, 2019, *on-line*).

To prove his point, Murray analyzes movies such as Ghost in the Shell and X-Men. What strikes me as remarkable in this chapter is the analysis of the X-Men sequel as a crip "DisHuman" (Goodley, Runswick-Cole, 2016) tale. To the author, Xavier's character "becomes the transhumanists' cyborg, a hybrid not only in terms of physical and cognitive capabilities, but also of judgment and morality, convinced that the evolution that has produced the X mutation has also created moral and ethical clarity" (p. 60). Although Professor X's stances about the mutants are very important to portray inclusive attitudes through empathic experience, it is his chair that situates the aesthetic site in which a differently abled body in assembly and an – apparently – external object become *unified,* providing modified versions of what is it like to be human. Thus, his wheelchair is "full of a technologised posthumanist confidence" (p. 60) in a complex embodiment that sees "technology aligned with disability possibilities' (p. 64). What I think is missing from this analysis is the possible connection of X-men with the supercrip stereotype, described by Schalk as the character holding "abilities or 'powers' that operate in direct relationship with or contrast to their disability" (2016, p.81). Although Schalk praises the potentialities of these narratives, the supercrip has been a contested

zone in disability studies, not rarely being portrayed as a harmful representational device (cf. Kama, 2004) due to fetishization and exoticisation outcomes.

I am also not fully in line with Murray's stance on the topic of transhumanism. Although commenting on Sandberg's proposal that disability and transhumanism are deeply intertwined, Murray oversees that the problem in this intersection is deeply ethical, embodied in the question: Does transhumanist endeavors harm disability-related claims – and if so, why, and how? I believe approaching this matter directly should also be considered, even more so when we consider the book's goal is to tackle cultural representations – a site where imagination can offer a glimpse of the ethical intricacies related to arriving at enhanced futures. Even though it makes sense from a critical perspective sense to maintain the avoidance of plainly ethical problems, given that this would require accepting the very possibility of navigating normative oceans, it seems that the most pressing matter on imagining futures relies now on figuring out the moral limits – if there are any – that disability claims imposes on transhumanist goals. That follows what Ian Hacking has once advised: "if the point of the exercise is moral, one should not be squeamish about saying so" (1999, p. 59).

Just to give an example, one direct artifact to contest the anti-discrimination claim against transhumanism is the portray of super-crips - meaning, people with disabilities that become *more than human* due to the use of prosthesis. In fact, it is said that whilst the first ones to use ultra-human enhancing devices will be not the ones complying with body normativity, but rather the ones with a disability, the claim that pro-enhancing technologies are discriminatory *must be* wrong (cf. Minerva, 2015). To argue against that assertion – and create the ground for what Murray says later in the book, i.e, that transhumanism is "simply an updated version of an old story that in its ultimate form leads to genocide and the

characterisation of a 'life not worth living'" (p. 230) – he would have to set the ground from the very beginning for a moral investigation to be in place.

In Chapter 2, "Design, Engineering and Gendering the Disabled Body," Murray analyzes different films (such as Metropolis, Ex Machina and Blade Runner) and literary books (authored by figures such as Thomas Berger, Mary Shelley and Becky Chambers) through what he calls a 'messy', 'blurred' and 'impure' gaze on fiction aesthetics (p. 104). Relying on critical gender theorists, namely Kafer and Shildrick, Murray can "explore how gender, design and mechanical production produce specific stories of a posthumanist disabled presence, particularly as that presence is manifested through the meeting of bodies and technology" (p. 103). At this point, my main concern is that reasons for selection of these specific pieces are never fully displayed, and the lack of selected works from the south of the border obliterates gendered cosmologies from the south. In fact, it can be argued that crip theory – one of Murray's theoretical frameworks – would not have come to light comes without Anzaldúa's "conciencia mestiza" (1987) and Muñoz desidentification strategy (1999; Schalk, 2013). Murray himself once said that "there has been little sustained analysis of the representation of disability in postcolonial literatures and cultures" (Baker, Murray, 2010, p. 219); therefore, a work that claims to focus on "textual moments where representations and deployments of disability and of the posthuman (…) combine and inform one another" must also explain why such textual moments come mainly from the global north.

Nevertheless, these preoccupations with decolonial and postcolonial thinking can be found in Murrays third chapter, "Visualising and Re-Membering Disability Body Politics in Filmic Representations of the 'War on Terror". From the very beginning, it is important to remember that reserving a different chapter in the *ouvre* follows an already exposed strategy of making the postcolonial case as a special one,

while the general or standard analysis remains located in the global north. In my opinion, this is not in line with the kind of epistemological revolution calls us to raise. Chapter 3 is mainly based upon Clare Baker's perspective on 'disability wounding' in postcolonial literature. The main reference to her in this chapter is the somewhat ambiguous affirmative that "to tell a story about colonialism or its aftermath, it is often necessary to tell a story about disability" (p. 132). As stated before by Murray and Barker, a globalization of disability "problematically transports theories and methodologies developed within the Western academy to other global locations, paying only nominal attention to local formations and understandings of disability" (Barker, Murray 2010, p. 219). Although 'decolonizing disability' seems now as a sound and obvious path for the critical disability theorist, we, who speak from the South, have sincere difficulties to identify the practical possibilities of a so-called productive cross-fertilization. This is true especially when socially oriented analysis about disabilities is so poorly funded and promoted in places where survival in an austere setting is as pressing as the next minute. As I stated, I believe a hint of this problematic point of view can be grasped through the very division of chapters. While X-men and Metropolis continue to be standard examples of the crossings between disability and posthumanism in cultural representations, the "global" chapter depicts local pieces of art – as if (North) America and Europe were not also local, embodied sites, but rather abstract and ethereal art-making grounds. More than anything, postcolonial disability literature must focus on that which is "inscribed in white ink" in the very colonizers art. That is to say that maintaining disability as a reified outcome of colonization and its neoliberal descendants it is a task that may lead to subtly stabilizing the Other in its Otherness. To paraphrase Spivak, "both as object of colonialist historiography and as

subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of *disability* keeps the *non-disabled* dominant".

In the fourth chapter, "Reading Disability in a Time of Posthuman Work: Speed, Sleep and Embodiment", Murray entangles disability with debates about augmentations, which are commonly related to increase of productivity, efficiency, and speed (Cf. Wellner, 2018). The author establishes fruitful alliances with Wendell, Kafer and McRuer – all of who think critically about time as a categorical pacer of neoliberal working lives. This chapter should be a mandatory reading of all critical disability scholars, who seldom see *sleep* as a *quasi*-revolutionary action in a world that requires staying permanently awake and aware. Sleep, as the author shows, is a place of "blurred boundaries, thresholds and ambiguities" (p. 216) but also a place to explore vulnerability, trust and embodiment. The 'hasteful sleepless night' of Adorno, "when time seems to contract and run fruitlessly through our hands" (2005, p. 165), are here a site for productive posthuman imagination. Although I found this chapter a wonderful reading for a sleepless night, it strikes me that Jonathan Crary was chosen as a main reference, especially considering this author's dismissal of social media as a site for democratic interchanges. As someone engaged in the autistic movement in the Global South, I can safely say Twitter and Whatsapp are the main locus of our confabulations against normalization (see also Singer, 2016), which does not amount to elevating these platforms to "privileged and sacrosanct determinants of an entire constellation of historical events" (Crary, 2013, 120-121). Besides that, Crary's use of "autism" as a metaphor for inertia (as in "mass autism", p. 120) and the overture for speculations on the correlation between television and autism (2013, p. 85) makes him a less than obvious choice for a disability-oriented analysis. The use of this literature is not only a stretch, as Murray himself recognizes [by saying that "it is only a partial against-the-grain reading that can characterize Crary's vision of the future as a space of disability" (p.

217)], but it is also a choice that overlooks other contributions on the correlation between the rebuttal to 24-7 productivity, neoliberalism and post humanity, such as the ones written by Byung-Chul Han.

In his last chapter, Murray makes a substantially interesting claim about transhumanism. To the author, there is a general death-avoidance posture of transhumanists – transhumanism, he says is "explicit in seeing biological death as a state that can eventually be avoided" (p. 230). This "fear of death" – in which one can read between the lines "fear of aging, frailty, disability and all that is involved" –, is related to a "a contemporary retelling of humanism's hatred of disability" (p. 230). I cannot help asking: if disability shows us different ways to live in posthuman futures, why "fear of death" should be so straightly associated with disability? Doesn't this comprehension of disability twist its potential material boundaries, deflating while automatically associating them to a *quasi* no life? Why should the fear of death call forth fear of disability more readily than of other lived embodiments? That said, I am also not so sure that transhumanism is another given strand of the long and complex building of disability structural discrimination – more would have to be said for this to be sound.

Regardless of the above critiques, this book is sure a significant step on understanding the connections between posthuman and disability studies. The criticism offered can only indicate ground to further development in the margins of what was left unwritten. Even though this book may not be a very enlightening piece for disability scholars unfamiliar with posthuman literature, I believe the exploration offered by Murray will be specially interesting for advanced academics working in the fields of media representation of disability and posthuman narratives.

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