

Book Review

Körper 2.0

by Karin Harrasser, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2013

Matthias Moosburger[†]
moosburger@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

Top-class sport prosthesis, individually adapted running shoes and Google glasses are only a few examples of several cultural symbolisations that seem to suggest the increasing presence of the bodies nowadays which do not simply conform to organic originality but urge to be conceived as “bodies 2.0”. In her recent essay *Körper 2.0* the professor for cultural studies at the University of arts in Linz, Karin Harrasser, gets to the bottom of enhanced, optimised and marketed bodies that witness the symbiotic coexisting of technology and/on the human body.

Karin Harrasser only at first glance seems to follow the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who recognises these body modifications and optimisations as “anthropotechnics” differentiated in strategies of immunisation and enhancement. Whereas the former serve the viability of deficient beings, and the latter meet a “vertical tension” and longing for self-transformation and perfection, both interpretations of anthropotechnics for Karin Harrasser are obliged to a “too strongly modernistic” narrative of loss (p. 11). She in contrast tries to situate current entanglements of logics of improvement, technologies and human bodies as consequences of historical, epistemological and political highly pre-conditionally dependent assemblages. By portraying two athletes, the world record holder and currently in media present Oscar Pistorius and the athlete, actress and fashion model Aimee Mullins, who both have been amputated their legs lower the knees in childhood due to a genetic malformation, Karin Harrasser illustrates her thesis: the development in anthropotechnics corporated here, exemplified by those, who the British TV broadcaster “Channel 4” promoted as “the Superhumans” at the Paralympic Games in London 2012, not merely reveals an “expression of a

[†] Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany.

inner culture of self-improvement”. This phenomena refers to an entanglement with a “neocapitalist logic of self-optimisation” that produces “privileged, diverse-corporal” role-models following the motto:

You just have to imagine or wish your body in one way or another – namely stronger, faster, more beautiful, more mysterious –, it yet transforms into it.

Following this logic corporal adversities aren't disclose limitations any more, but challenges that evoke militancy.

Harrasser tries to situate her essay in between this dubious optimism on technological body enhancement as well as an exaggerated hostility towards technology on the other hand. She finds argumentative support in Donna Haraway and proclaims that “the exploration of technology's and fiction's transformative potential doesn't inevitably leads to omnipotent fantasies like trans-humanism, crypto technics and space conquering” (p. 13). She tries to diffuse the logic of alienation and optimisation, and suggests another story to be told on corporality, acting as a product and setting of multiple negotiating practices instead of mourning the loss of an isolated, omnipotent [male] subjectivity, that has never existed anyway.

Here Harrasser's theory of partially sovereign bodies draws on. She understands body technologies as “artefacts that animate our imagination and have already transformed bodies in another”(Harrasser, 2013 p. 103). These biotechnologically hybridised bodies have to be recognised as an assemblage, “that is what it is, but could be any different as well” (ibid., p. 73). Therefore she develops a perception of technology that does not simply represent “neither capitalism's machines of dominance or added value nor the material basis of an endlessly reconfiguring promise of the future. They are rather embodiments of past and current relations and world generating milieus” (ibid., p. 103 f.).

Since she analyses “technological body processing out of an horizon of re-evaluation of what matters as living” (ibid., p. 87) Karin Harrasser consequentially calls for a disciplinary opening to encounter the entanglements of self-techniques, productivity and a graduation of life's value in prospect of health-care policies (Dickämper, 2013 p. 3). And with Donna Haraway she promotes a “parahumanism” (ibid., p. 103 f.) that spots a potential for emancipation in the interactivity of organic and technological agents, without misrecognition of implicit menaces.

Partially sovereign bodies do not inevitably *own* agency that implies ethics of reduction and redemption. Karin Harrasser emphasises corporal agency as being always “partially sovereign agency, always situated, never scalable or generalizable” (Harrasser, 2013 p. 119). Nobody decides confidently to which bundle oneself is associated. Since every acting is accompanied and generated by both, active and passive procedures, Harrasser and Haraway argue against relativism in knowledge and acting but rather in favour of a “strong form of responsibility, that further extends on what is not seen from a momentary point of view” (ibid., p. 125).

By finally refusing the initially given question on bodies 2.0, Harrasser disbands the idea of an open step ladder towards perfection and the forecast to any next step of improvement. But she confirms body technology’s collaboration on “partial sovereignty, an on-going amalgamation and complication of agency” (ibid., p. 73). And this denial of narratives of sovereign agency gives potential to an opposition.

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