

Mutatis mutandis in corpore

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Abstract: This summary of the book *Corpos Mutantes: ensaios sobre novas (d)eficiências corporais (Mutant bodies: essays about new corporal (d)efficiencies)*, organized by Edvaldo Couto and Silvana Goellner, edited by the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (2007), has the objective of analyzing the investigative peculiarities of each manuscript in relation to the collection's central theme: technologies for human performance repairing/potentialization.

Describers: Human body. Cultural characteristics. Review.

Corpos Mutantes: ensaios sobre novas (d)eficiências corporais (Mutant bodies: essays about new corporal (d)efficiencies) is a collection of ten texts that are linked analytically around the potentialization of human performance generated by a sophisticated machinery of corporal mutation. Writings from the view of physical education, education, communication, philosophy, nursing and arts, the piece stands out for each text's theoretic consistency and the ensemble's thematic unity. The reading flows without disturbance because there is textual cohesion and coherence from the beginning to the end, something hard to find in collections. The careful selection of originals and the harmonious organization of the manuscripts are fruits of a very well conceived editorial project by Edvaldo Couto and Silvana Goellner, responsible for the collection's organization, and well carried out by the UFRGS publishing company.

Despite there not being any direct mention to the origin and to the criteria of ordering manuscripts in the book's presentation, it is possible to classify them in two main groups: reflective-theoretic and analytical-empiric.

"Body, fragments and connections: the micro-story of some organs and certain promises" (a micro-história de alguns órgãos e de certas promessas), by Ieda Tucherman;

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“Cyborg body and the new technology device” (*Corpo cyborg e o dispositivo de novas tecnologias*), by Homero Lima; and “An esthetic for mutant bodies” (*Uma estética para os corpos mutantes*), by Edvaldo Couto, are part of the first group. They are texts that work as a sort of guide wire for the collection, for they present, under distinct perspectives and focuses, the conceptual “post-human” board which gives sense to the analysis about repair techniques of deficiencies and/or optimizing of corporal efficiencies present in the subsequent pieces. An extract from Edvaldo Couto’s text illustrates will the pieces ensemble:

We live an era of important technical-scientific victories – implants, transplants, artificial organs, genetic mapping, cloning, industrial production of diagnosis test kits, new medicines etc. – which allow for survival of ill people who would be sentenced to die in a short period of time and, especially, the corporal perfecting of people who want to improve their appearance and performance in general (COUTO, 2007, p. 49-50).

The other seven texts compose the second main group. They differentiate from the previous ones due to being, basically, excerpts or displays of dissertations and thesis developed in the Post-Graduate Programs at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), the female organizer’s institution of origin, and at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), the male organizer’s institution of origin. Except “*Corpus ex machina: immediate contacts because mediated*” (*Corpus ex machina: contatos imediatos porque mediados*), by Mara Vargas and Dagmar Meyer, extracted from the masters dissertation in education by the first author and oriented by the second, the other manuscripts linked to UFRGS were developed in the Post-Graduate Program in Human Movement Sciences (PPGCMH) under the orientation of Silvana Goellner. Now the projects coming from the UFBA Post-Graduate Programs (Visual Arts and Communication and Culture) were developed under the orientation of Edvaldo Couto. They are, therefore, the result of long winded academic investigations about corporal mutation of the most different orders.

Taking as a reference the investigative focus of this group of analytical-empiric texts it is possible to separate, independent of the institution, two more subsets: those which are predominately centered on *repairing* of the body in function of some lost (of youth, of a

determined organ or of a body movement, etc.); and those which are centered on the *optimization* of physical *performance* (trainings, chemical substances, computers, etc.).

“Old age, a almost forbidden word, third age an almost hegemonic expression” (Velhice, palavra quase proibida; terceira idade expressão quase hegemônica), by Annamaria Palácios, belongs to the first subset. She analyzes the discursive change resulting from the slow substitution of the expression old age (negative) for the expression third age (positive) in cosmetic publicity advertisements. Palácios points out that such a change does not mean rupture with joviality as the central esthetic reference, on the contrary. Associating old age with physical decrepitude and third age with a state of being jovial in maturity does not just reinforce a young beauty standard as it also marks aging as a physical deficit.

In the text “Amputated and prosthesis bodies: ‘naturalizing’ new forms of inhabiting the body in contemporary days” (*‘naturalizando’ novas formas de habitar o corpo na contemporaneidade*), by Luciana Paiva, the idea of repairing a deficiency is more explicit. The author describes with much sensibility how nine adult patients of a clinic specialized in rehab and prosthesis began to deal with the prosthesis after amputation of part of the body. She shows the initial phase of incorporation of this artifact in their lives and the manner with which each one of them makes sense of this process of gearing their own body.

Closing this first subset, Varlei Novaes discusses in “The *performance* of the hybrid: body, deficiency and potentialization” (*A performance do híbrido: corpo, deficiência e potencialização*) the cultural meanings attributed to athletes that use wheelchairs produced with high technology for competitive means. The author points out that these chairs do not serve just as a movement repair "vehicle", but also as a prosthesis that potentializes their sportive efficiency. The author employs the hybrid notion to question the human/machine relationship and show how the natural/artificial, organic/inorganic frontiers have been blurred in this process and have generated new cultural identities.

Among the texts associated to the subset of performance optimization “The ring show: sports and potentialization of corporal efficiencies” (*O espetáculo do ringue: o esporte e a potencialização de eficientes corporais*), by Cláudio Nunes and Silvana Goellner stands out. It is a study of ethnographic character held in two gyms and a training center of

Mixed Martial Arts (popularly known in Brazil as *Luta Livre*), which seeks to show how the participants of the modality of fighting explore their corporal potentials through the routine of training, competitions and use of chemical substances. The authors give special highlight to the work of refining the warrior body that each participant auto inflicts on himself daily, visible in the materiality of the “scars, inflated muscles and plump ears” (p. 60).

“The body’s courses in contemporary culture” (*Os percursos do corpo na cultura contemporânea*), by Malu Fontes, is based on the concept of the “canonic body” to analyze the growing feminine investments in physical exercise programs, diets, medications, surgical incisions, etc. They are more subtle optimization techniques, but not less attention drawing, for they demand a detailed adjustment of the body to the physical characteristics shown as an esthetic standard by the media. To the author, the canonic body is not summarized in a nice body, it is connected to “a (re)constructed body from a set of speeches, practices and procedures of various natures which seek to make it culturally fit, capable of serving the demands of a corporeity supposedly considered ideal” (p. 83).

“*Corpus ex machina: contatos imediatos porque mediados*”, by Mara Vargas and Dagmar Meyer, discusses the process of “cyborging the nurse” through the therapeutic practice in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Through the analysis of the clinical algorithm, “explicit description of the steps to be carried out in the care of a patient in specific circumstances” (p. 129); the authors show that the intensive care nurse’s work with ICU patients in cardio-respiratory arrest is done through computer language and devices which define, step by step, each action on the ill body. It is a cybernetic technology that at the same time it leads to the reanimation of a patient it gives the intensive care nurse “life”.

Danillo Barata’s text, “The body and videographic expression: video-installation as a corporal narrative strategy” (*O corpo e a expressão videográfica: a videoinstalação como estratégia de uma narrativa corporal*), does not directly handle body repair techniques or performance optimization techniques. Barata takes on two video-installations to question in his research the obsessive search for correspondence between corporal materiality of each one with bodies idealized by the fashion world. Presenting on video dissonant bodies in not favorable angles in the view domesticated by the fashion culture was one of the strategies used to potentialize the image of bodies transgressing the dominant esthetics. Physical

diversity projected in the videos produced for the installations bothered those who watched them, according to the author, excess “normality” causes strangeness in those who are used to corporal exuberance in television format.

“Corpos Mutantes” is a collection of texts well prepared around the technologies of transformation of materiality and corporal subjectivities. There is no praise or aversion to biotechnology, there is a call to the discussion about our post-human condition through the analysis of the impact of different body configuration techniques: surgeries, transplants, prosthesis, cosmetics, training, medications, implants, computers, etc. Machinery that establishes the contours of new practices, new identities, new prejudices, new marginalization and new cultural representations. It is a more and more common and, in a paradox manner, stranger and stranger social context .

It is worth pointing out, at last, that the divisions that we establish in building this summary had as a purpose to point out the texts’ peculiarities, independent of the disposition in the summary, to evidence the thematic complexity and the successful composition of the book. Our idea was to give visibility to the guide wire which passes by the specific study objects of each text in this collection. It is very probable that the future readers interested in the subject find other lines that compose this instigating trauma thematic. Another good reason to dig into the reading.

Atenção: o título se mantém, pq, é em latim. Não traduzir

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Resúmen:

Spanish: Human body. Características culturales. Revisión.

REFERENCE

COUTO, E. S; GOELLNER, S.V. (Orgs.). **Corpos Mutantes:** ensaios sobre novas (d)eficiências corporais. Porto Alegre Editora da UFRGS, 2007.