

Sean McQueen. *Deleuze and Baudrillard: From Cyberpunk to Biopunk.* Edinburgh University Press 2016. 288 pp. \$105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781474414371).

Aporia, wonder, werewolves and existing non-existences are part the universe where I live. In other words, I am a nerdy crosspollination of the Marvel comic world, anthropology and philosophy, therefore I ask you, my reader, to regard my question with good intentions. What happens when you add together a nerd, a science fiction enthusiast, an over-worked student of philosophy as well as motivation to turn a PhD thesis into a publication by a university press with a large dose of undiluted jargon? I think this book by Sean McQueen happens. The book explores an old cool trend (cyberpunk) and a newly trending cool perspective (biopunk) through the eyes of Deleuze and Baudrillard. McQueen brings a leftist rather than a Marxian perspective to those post-structuralist philosophers in order to discuss the transition from capitalism to biocapitalism. The book is divided into two major parts, which explore, respectively, the Deleuze-inspired notions of control and Contagion. Both, however, are overshadowed by Baudrillard.

Each chapter examines one or two novels, screenplays or movies from two subgenres of science fiction (cyberpunk and biopunk). McQueen does not share the criteria he used for his selection beyond personal interest or the notoriety of the texts or the movies. Most of his selections fall in the cyberpunk genre or between the two genres, except *Repossession Mambo* by Garcia and *Repo Men* by Sapochnik and *Never Let Me Go* by Ishiguro, which McQueen clearly distinguishes as biopunk. The introduction and chapters of the first section focus on cyberpunk texts to explain becoming-Deleuzian and its tension with Baudrillard's simulation and problems of reality. For instance, *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick is examined to situate regulated-bodies and unbounded organs within the capacity of science fiction to 'create a minor language' (35). McQueen encourages a debate amongst the dark humour of Kubrick, the partisanship of Deleuze, the cynicism of Baudrillard, and the chaff of Zizek to justify the semantic game of the science fiction genre. He has provoked a debate to persuade his reader *not* to imagine the imagined world that may not come because of the decay of subjectivities and doomsday, but to attend to the doom that is happening in front of our eyes. For instance, *Videodrome* by Cronenberg is analyzed to show the clash of body and machine in the Baudrillard-Deleuze framework of power. His analysis demonstrates the 'failure of embodied subjectivity' (70) in the era of late capitalism and how we may take it as the sign to remain vigilant of biocapitalism. However, the third and fourth chapters, which consider *Crash* by Ballard and *Fahrenheit 451* by Bradbury, forget Deleuze and stress Baudrillard's 'universe of simulation' and his chase for reality. These chapters explain the texts in detail and interpret them more with regard to their semiotic content than by unpacking their philosophical undercurrents. Therefore, McQueen does not articulate the narrative of struggling, possessed or failed subjectivities across the texts according the rhetoric of power, fascism and 'the dialectical contradictions necessary for change' (126).

Contagion (the second section) holds greater promise after the maze of riddles and jargon—such as the 'uneasy theoretical collusion of female subjectivity' (60), the 'traumatic moment where desire itself vanishes' (69) 'inversive utopia' (103), 'dialectics [that] are replaced by transpolitical' (104), and an 'America [that] is ... wilfully uncultured' (104)—in the book's first part. Contagion explores biopolitics, biocapitalism and corporeality in more detail. *Frankenstein* by Shelley, *Rossum's Universal Robots* by Capek, *Repossession Mambo* by Garcia and *Repo Men* by Sapochnik and *Never Let me Go* by Ishiguro, *Antiviral* by Cronenberg are framed by Deleuze and Guattari's

becoming-animal in ‘relevance [with] biocapitalism’ (133). McQueen seeks intersections of power through the metamorphosis of science fiction figures and highlights how these figures ‘offer possibilities *outside* overcoded cultural, social and political thinking’ (136, emphasis added). His approach to the notion of becoming by way of science fiction is fresh, but he does not explain why the cultural and social political thinking which he addresses is overcoded and not coded only.

The second section begins with *Frankenstein* and it is, for McQueen, the point to shuttle between binaries such as animal, human, Oedipal and State animal, to interrogate the ‘biocapitalistic imperative’ (149). The monster of Shelly’s story becomes a platform for imagining the ‘psychoanalytical valance’ of the biopunk genre, and its subtle reflections on what it means to be a revolutionary and human. In the next chapter, McQueen continues challenging the binaries by adding a Marxian intervention in his Deleuzian-Baudrillardian philosophy. He discusses the internal limits of capital through an analysis of *Rossum’s Universal Robot* by Capek and brings examples of ‘revolt [by robots] and the humans risk[ing] losing control over the means of production’ (166). McQueen points at how the idea of labour is framed in a fictive world that is not far from our everyday reality. He reduces the gap between fiction and reality by way of philosophy. He has chosen passages from the text where managers of the Robot industry use ‘national identity; creative capitalism’ (167), and identity politics to subdue the labour force through manipulation of their sentiments. He lucidly explains Baudrillard’s notion of ‘creating the illusion of symbolic participation’ through examples from the text rather than loading unpronounceable jargon as in previous chapters and his conclusion. By the last chapters, McQueen arrives at much more clarity about the philosophers he studies in this book. He describes the mechanism of biocapitalism and how bodies are turned into biocommodities by way of metaphors and narratives from the texts. His commitment to his texts and the philosophy that he describes through them is exemplary and provocative. For instance, his description of passages of Garcia’s novel, which portrays patients and clients standing in line for artificial organs, problematizes neo-liberal ideas of consumer’s choice and ‘generative conditions embedded in biopotential production’ (187). The next chapter repeats the earlier discussions in a different fashion by looking at Ishiguro’s novel. It seems that for McQueen, the clones who are prepared for organ donation ‘represent contemporary biopolitical production, defining themselves by affective and immaterial labour’ (197). McQueen equates the death by organ donation of the novel’s central characters with Hardt and Negri’s idea of hegemonic biopolitical production. Hardt and Negri point at the shift to a service economy to explain their concept, but Ishiguro’s characters provide a much more tangible illustration. However, in the novel, dying is a service provided for the other who intends to remain alive, but I wonder how many academic readers would go so far. The stress on the biopolitics of the body is limited by the idea of the body as a living organism, and obscures the fact that the central characters are bodies-in-waiting. Furthermore, McQueen states that these bodies ‘are bereft of futurity’ (214). One may wonder, however, whether there is any futurity in Deleuzian becomings. Deleuze was dismissive of the future since he looked at time in a Bergsonian fashion.

McQueen ends his book with an examination of *Antiviral* which interprets the motion picture through ‘biocapital ... contagious bodies, machines, thoughts, images, affects and sensations of viral capitalism’ (217). The story depicts the madness of celebrity culture and individuals who desire to live vicariously through the imagined representations and performances of others. However, McQueen sees the story of *Antiviral* as a depiction of biopunk curiosity that resembles Deleuze’s idea that ‘cinema can contribute to giving us back reasons to believe in the world and in vanished bodies.’ The last chapter imaginatively uses the movie to turn to the idea of the viral and explain the ‘inherent flexibility and adaptability of capitalist production’ (220). It gives detailed descriptions of

the movie mixed with quotations from Deleuze and Baudrillard to prove the movie 'is a remarkable schizo cinema' (229) offering a metanarrative.

Overall, the author has selected an intriguing subject to examine philosophically. He explores sub-genres of science fiction via two imaginative philosophers and invites us to follow their frames according to the new changes in the regimes of capitalism. His invitation is tantalizing, but he turns imagination into an impossible phantasmagoria that loses its political relevance and application to everyday life. All of the philosophers cited in this book oscillate between everyday reality, politics and imagination, but they never submerge one of these terms in the other. McQueen falls into the vertigo of imagination and science fiction then tries to connect them with biopolitics and the 'fourth phase of capitalism' (217). His aim is noble, but he does not achieve it, because of an overindulgence in the commodities and products of cyberpunk and biopunk, rather than by following their workings and interactions across life. McQueen has been successful in turning a truly abstract world into an inaccessible and obscure cosmos.

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