Murray, S. (2020). *Disability and the posthuman: Bodies, technology, and cultural futures.* Liverpool University Press

Emine Öncüler Yayalar[1]

In *Disability and the Posthuman: Bodies, Technology, and Cultural Futures* (2020), Stuart F. Murray presents an insightful exploration of the intersections of posthumanism and disability studies and offers a compelling framework for understanding how these disciplines can mutually inform and enrich one another. Embedded firmly within critical disability studies, Murray explores the productive potentials of an encounter between posthumanism and disability studies. His analysis mainly focuses on the disruptive nature of disability and its implications for envisaging a posthumanist future. While integrating posthumanism with disability studies is not unprecedented, Murray distinguishes his work through a unique emphasis on cultural representations, contributing a fresh perspective to the literature.

The book begins with Murray highlighting the notable omission of disability in posthumanist studies. He suggests that a meaningful dialogue between these two fields is not just beneficial but necessary. Murray commences by acknowledging the elusive and "slippery" nature of both 'disability' and 'posthumanism' as concepts. He underscores the importance of adopting "flexible vocabularies" and embracing fluid ontologies to navigate these complex ideas effectively. Drawing upon the narrative of the Tin Woodman from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), which he introduces in the preface, Murray artfully argues that everyday experiences of disability can offer a grounding perspective for posthumanist theories. He elaborates on this point by suggesting that such real-world insights could potentially enrich and contextualize posthumanist arguments.

The first chapter contrasts the excitement around the emergence of the "posthuman horizon(s)" with what Murray argues are lackluster attitudes toward "disability futures." While acknowledging the tensions around transhumanist tendencies, drawing from Braidotti, the author argues that claiming the political in posthuman spaces could be accomplished by grounding it in the lived experiences of disability. Murray is deeply influenced by Siebers' concept of "disability aesthetics" where the disabled body is understood to be a fundamental and integral part of modern art. In a similar vein, the author asserts that "the bodies, minds and experiences of those with disabilities are central manifestations of a posthumanist present" (49). This is why Murray chooses to focus on cultural representations of disability which allows him to "explore the tensions between transhumanist ideas of the transcendence of limitations, posthumanist notions of non-unitary subjects, and disability accounts of complex embodiment" (57). Murray provides an analysis of the movies *X2* (2003) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) as a means of illustrating the tensions and contradictions in portraying posthumanism and disability. These films both challenge and reinforce

---

[1] Political Science and Public Administration, Bilkent University, Türkiye. E-mail: emineonculer@bilkent.edu.tr

existing perceptions of disability, offering insights into the complexities of embodying a posthuman future in a predominantly humanist cultural landscape.

The second chapter, "Design, Engineering and Gendering the Disabled Body" opens with an encounter with the humanoid robot Pepper, prompting Murray to engage with the engineering/design processes that shape/imagine posthuman futures. While this call for a closer and more critical engagement with the practice of engineering is a much-needed addition to the literature, the chapter remains limited in its recognition of the complexities of the design process and the ethical considerations inherent in creating technology meant to augment human bodies. An expanded discussion on how materiality and social representation are mutually constitutive could be beneficial in addressing these shortcomings. Delving into a range of visual and literary works, the chapter aims to "explore how gender, design and mechanical production produce specific stories of a posthumanist disabled presence, particularly as that presence is manifested though the meeting of bodies and technology" (103). This exploration is noteworthy with regard to its interdisciplinary approach and theoretical engagement. The chapter also provides a valuable examination of gender and race in cultural representations as well as considerations of "technology as (an) appropriative power and tool of oppression" (110). The tensions between technology as absence/excess and empowerment/oppression enrich our understanding of the multifaceted relationship between technology, disability, and posthuman futures.

The following chapter, "Visualising and Re-Membering Disability Body Politics in Filmic Representations of the 'War on Terror'" is noteworthy in its attempts to engage with representations of disability from the global south. Murray provides a posthuman understanding of contemporary warfare where bodies, clothing, armor, and weaponry "are equally networked and part of the representation of a killing process that is global in its connectivity" (141). This chapter emphasizes the importance of considering disability within a global context as "how disability is *seen*, both literally and conceptually, varies across the globe" (133). However, confining this analysis to a single chapter rather than integrating it more broadly throughout the book presents a significant limitation to the overall volume. This chapter also investigates how posthumanism reconfigures the traditional narratives of humanism, particularly in the context of war, and how films like *Source Code* (2011) offer a posthumanist perspective while maintaining humanist tropes. Through an in-depth analysis of visual representations of war, Murray provides a critique of the portrayal of disability in these films, examining how they are often used as narrative devices or metaphors for broader socio-political critiques and often result in the potential misrepresentation or oversimplification of the complexities surrounding disability.

The final chapter, entitled "Reading Disability in a Time of Posthuman Work: Speed, Sleep, and Embodiment"*,* provides an analysis of the changing contours of disability within the framework of posthumanism, particularly in the context of work and labor as impacted by contemporary technology. Murray explores different texts that "represent disability within ideas of work, speed and time" and analyzes how disability is constructed in relation to efficiency and productivity (184). In his critique of the valorization of productivity, Murray makes use of Kafer's concept of "crip time" which challenges the normative expectations and perceptions around pace and scheduling in favor of the needs of non-normative bodies (188). Following the theme introduced earlier, the author makes use of "disability ontologies" to provide a critique of neoliberal post-industrial work cultures which he summarizes by stating that "the productive use of critical disability logics … allow for the investigation of nondisability states" (185).

While the analysis of cultural representations in *Disability and the Posthuman: Bodies, Technology, and Cultural Futures* is undoubtedly rich and expansive, there is a notable absence of a unifying framework that could weave these diverse narratives into a more lucid and productive analysis of the current directions of posthumanism. However, the book significantly contributes to initiating a critical dialogue that challenges the techno-utopian tendencies of transhumanist thought. It advocates for a vision of the future where technology not only augments but also harmoniously aligns with the vast diversity of experiences. In this respect, the book marks a vital step towards a more inclusive and critically engaged posthumanist discourse. It acknowledges the agency and creative potential inherent in disability and diversity while remaining cognizant of the socio-political structures that influence our collective interactions with technology.

An area ripe for further exploration, and one that the book touches on but does not fully develop, is the manner in which individuals actively engage with, negotiate, and resist technological impositions. The concept of lifehacking, introduced in the volume's Introduction, does not receive substantial development or analysis in the subsequent chapters. Additionally, a significant oversight in the book is its insufficient engagement with non-Western perspectives on disability, which limits the discussion. The article could benefit from a more evident justification for the selection of certain cultural artifacts for scrutiny, particularly those originating from Western contexts, which is not adequately clarified. This omission raises questions about the representativeness of the analysis. Moreover, the absence of a robust ethical framework for discussing technological interventions in disabled bodies is a notable gap. These areas, if addressed, could greatly enhance the depth and breadth of the contribution in future works on this subject.