

Book Reviews

Shane Denson, **Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface**. Bielefeld: transcript, 2014, 432 pp., pb., € 44,99.

Shane Denson's *Postnaturalism* offers a highly original and scholarly sophisticated account of human-technological co-evolution that re-evaluates film and media theory from the perspective of our material interfaces with a constantly changing environment. Extrapolating from Frankenstein films and the resonances they establish "between a hybrid monster and the spectator hooked into the machinery of the cinema," Denson engages debates in science studies and philosophy of technology – Serres, Latour, Kittler, and perhaps most notably, Pickering's mangel theory – to rethink histories of cinema, media, technology, and ultimately of the affective channels of our own *embodiment*. Constantly dwelling on the question of historical contingency, media materiality, technology, and (post-)human becoming in a series of interlocking theoretical reflections and analyses, Denson's book is a theoretical and methodological *tour de force* that conceptualizes film (with Vertov and Pudovkin but also Ihde and Merleau-Ponty) as "Frankensteinian technology" and by way of techno-phenomenological inquiry, decidedly materialist genealogy, and ontological arguments makes a bold case for what he calls "postnaturalism" as both research paradigm and emphatically post-postmodern metaphysics.

The theoretical cornerstone, or key concept, of the book is the keen subtitle's "anthropotechnical interface," which is developed here with great clarity and explicit reference, among others, to the work of Benjamin, (Masumi's) Deleuze and Guattari, and media theorist Mark B.N. Hansen, whose "Foreword: Logics of Transition" perfectly supplements the book and reminds the theoretically-inclined reader that she may be well advised to study Hansen's *Embodying Technesis* (2000) alongside Denson's project. Fortunately, Denson succeeds in introducing and developing the notions of "postnaturalism," "Frankenstein film," and "anthropotechnical interface," while re-engaging the extensive body of scholarship on both *Frankenstein* and (its) cinema history, especially with regard to problems of genre and adaption/seriality as well as (post-)second wave feminist critiques and (post-)Lacanian and phenomenological film theory with great ease and

even greater clarity. Denson's introduction, indeed the whole book, displays great argumentative stringency, never losing sight of its larger project's broader concerns: "Postnaturalism, as a metaphysics of anthropotechnical change, thus acknowledges these films' provocations, to which it offers in response a theory that promises a sort of rapprochement between over-challenged humans and misunderstood technical agencies" (27). The book's well-conceived tripartite structure thus "locates the experiential [ideo-affective] challenges posed by Frankenstein films" (Part One), "theorizes embodiment, transitionality, and mediality in an attempt to articulate a framework – postnaturalism – that will meet those challenges" (Part Two), and "returns to Frankenstein films, now with post-natural theory in hand, to demonstrate the films' special relations to the historicity of the anthropotechnical interface" (Part Three).

Postnaturalism easily succeeds in moving beyond a traditional, representationalist focus and instead situates its analyses in a "robustly material realm of human-technological interaction, a realm of lived relations underlying and largely unperceived in human thinking about, and cultural images of, technology" (25). It also seeks to push beyond both the Benjaminian notion of historicity and medial disposition of experience, understood as a kind of historical apriori – an ideo-affective constellation that mediates perception itself – and the (post-)Lacanian film theoretical focus on "suture," the "stitching-in" of the spectator into the film spectacle to produce a "seamless" whole, which has traditionally (i.e. in Western Marxism and Anglo-American Cultural Studies) been theorized in terms of "subject-positions" opened up by the films themselves. To this end, Denson critically engages the decidedly post-Lacanian and non-representational theory of Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, as well as its re-development in the various New Materialisms, which finds expression in the aptly titled concluding sub-chapter, "Lines of Flight: Transitional Thoughts by Way of Conclusion."

Consciously focusing on "*how Frankenstein films act as a group*" (29n9), Denson defends both his method and the need for non-representational theory as follows: "Discursive analyses, though indispensable, cannot therefore be sufficient for understanding the reflexive feedback loops that exist here between spectator, technological milieu, and the thematic representations on the screen. The material conditions of the cinema and the embodied constitution of historically situated spectators must also be accounted for if we

are to grasp Frankenstein films' assertions of a doubly articulated anthropotechnical interface: as these movies intimate – though they often work to repress their own recognition – not only the filmic monster but also we as spectators are “bio-technical” hybrids, and our imbrication in technical networks (cinematic and otherwise) presents an additional complication in the cultural-political negotiation of “the human.” Hybridity, though, has a history. Frankenstein is not a timeless tale, nor do its filmic progenies act in a historical vacuum. Indeed, Frankenstein films confront us with precisely the historicity of human-technological interfaces – at least, that is, if we confront the films in a vigorously historicizing manner” (26).

Such quasi-Marxian call to ‘always historicize’ and “confront the films in a vigorously historicizing manner” may ironically prove to be the book’s theoretical Achilles’ heel. For what is absent from Denson’s otherwise truly vigorous and most comprehensive historicizing – of technology, of media, of perception, etc. – is the problem of the (political) event and the revolutionary social and ideof-affective transformations it may entail, including ‘non-technological’ but no less material reinventions of “the human.” Such omission, though perhaps necessary, becomes problematic in view of Denson’s otherwise exceptionally insightful reading of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (and various adaptations or spin-offs) and the major role he rightly attributes to the industrial revolution (and post-industrial technologies), because he completely brackets the French Revolution – or, for that matter, the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, or the events of May 1968 and various more recent emancipatory struggles.

Given Denson’s extraordinary powers of theoretical synthesis, which are rightfully praised by Hansen in his foreword to *Post-naturalism*, and the fact that his is one of the rare enough scholarly monographs whose collected footnotes alone provide an excellent education, it would be exciting to see the author engage recent post-Marxist political ontologies and metaphysics. Žižek’s notion of a “transcendental materialism,” Rancière’s metaphysics of the everyday and his notion of the “distribution of the sensible” may come to mind. And so does Badiou’s in many ways post-Lacanian and post-Deleuzian *Being and Event* (2005) and *Logics of Worlds* (2009). Denson’s project can be said to obviously bracket but also square-ly match many of these thinkers concerns – their turn to an emphatically post-postmodern

metaphysics and the nexus between thought, perception, feeling, and agency, in particular. Badiou’s emphasis on the analysis of “concrete situations,” for instance, may well be coupled or supplemented with Denson’s sophisticated theoretical account of the “robustly material realm of human-technological interaction” and insights into (the necessity to think) the contingent process of anthropotechnical interfacing.

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Carlen Lavigne (ed.), **Remake Television: Reboot, Re-use, Recycle**. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, 256 pp., hb., \$ 90.00.

As anyone who watches U.S. American television knows, remakes are a staple of the television schedule, their presence eliciting strong opinions from both television critics and viewers. Carlen Lavigne’s edited volume, which addresses continuations, reboots, sequels, and transmedia adaptations, in addition to conventional remakes, seeks to restore perspective to what has become a highly charged and polarizing debate. The common thread linking the fifteen essays in *Remake Television* is that studying twenty-first century television remakes yields valuable insights about the extent to which “original” television programs and remakes alike are not only contextual artifacts, reflective of their time and place, but also intertextual productions.

Lavigne’s is not the first academic book to take remakes seriously – a substantial body of scholarly criticism on film remakes already exists – but it is one of the few texts devoted exclusively to the television remake, along with Janet McCabe and Kim Akass’s *TV’s Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand* (2013), Elke Weismann’s *Transnational Television Drama: Special Relations and Mutual Influence Between the U.S. and U.K.* (2012), and Lavigne and Heather Marcovitch’s *American Remakes of British Television: Transformations and Mistranslations* (2011). Like the latter two volumes, this book focuses chiefly on British and U.S. American television programs.

The opening contribution by William Proctor provides theoretical scaffolding for the essays that follow. Proctor contends that every text is “already a remake of existing discourses, tropes, quotations, and allusions alongside narrative components and generic features” (6).