NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

Susan Broadhurst and Sara Price, eds.
Digital Bodies: Creativity and Technology in the Arts and Humanities
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
xxii + 270 p. £99.99.
ISBN: 978-1-349-95240-3.

Our bodies have become more digital over the past year or so than they were before 2020. Through multiple national lockdowns and international travel restrictions, we have all had to project our bodies through digital technology. The possibilities for creative engagement with technology have become far more broadly evident than they have been for the past three decades. This book was written in the years immediately before all this, at a time when we had already starting thinking and talking about the post-digital. This was a response, for some, to what comes after the posthuman cyborg popularized in academic discourse by Donna Haraway and other since the 1980s.

Digital Bodies has four sections, each one grouping four chapters around a specific theme. The first of these groups is around the performing body, offering contributions by academics who have engaged with this topic for quite some time – Susan Broadhurst, Johannes Birringer, Dani Ploeger, and Maria Chatzichristodoulou. Taken together, their essays supplement Steve Dixon's *Digital Performance* quasi-canonical book from 2005 with more up-to-date examples of creative projects associated with contemporary themes like recycling and privacy.

The second section contains new writings by a small number of scholars of Human Computer Interaction design. Even so, the topics covered here are perennials in HCI studies: presence, embodiment, mediated emotions, and tactile perception. As collaborative computing specialist Steve Benford puts it in the foreword to this same book, HCI scholars frequently see the human body as 'a key frontier for creating powerful and deeply engaging ways of interacting with computers'. Reading through the essays presented here, it is very evident that the authors – Michaela French, Helga Schmid, Caroline Yan Zhang, and Laura Ferrarello – concur fully.

The remaining two parts of the book deal with creativity in fashion design and meaning making in the social sciences. Douglas Aitkinson discusses 'post-industrial' fashion, while Kat Theil considers fashion without products. Camille Baker proposes critical interventions in wearable tech, going beyond

ideas of digital prosthetics that have circulated since at least the 1980s, whereas digital fashion tools are taken into consideration by Bruna Petreca, engaging, once again, with the fast-evolving HCI topic of tactile perception. The final four essays in this collection provide a plethora of topics in which any performance studies enthusiast will find something of interest, going from Anna Xambó's creative design synergies between music and HCI to digital museum installation creative engagements by the book's co-editor Sara Price. Caroline Pelletier and Roger Kneebone take a playful perspective on medical simulation, in contrast with Carey Jewitt's rumination on methodological innovation within areas touched upon more than once in other parts of this publication.

All in all, this book provides both an excellent update for scholars interested in contemporary creativity and technology in the arts and humanities and a current introduction to the subject matter as it stood right before digital bodies found a wider online world in which to roam with the onset of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

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Maggie B. Gale
A Social History of British Performance Cultures 1900–1939: Citizenship, Surveillance and the Body
Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2020. xii + 244 p. £34.99.
ISBN: 978-1-13-830438-3.

While the period 1900–1939 in British theatre is relegated in the minds of some as a 'historical hinterland of obsolete forms of entertainment for conservative audiences', Maggie B. Gale's new book provides a stimulating and highly readable corrective in an extensive materialist reconnoitre that considers how the economies generated by the performance industries worked in multifarious and interdependent ways, not only to influence patterns of consumption but also to help shape behavioural patterns of citizenship. Building on Tracy C. Davis's work, Gale in particular considers interconnectedness between early cinema and theatre in ways that suggest the relationship was considerably deeper (and in the case of cinema more interdependent in its early years) and more complex than previous histories might suggest.

The book's chapters adopt a catholic approach that includes discussions on the social make-up of audiences; the role of impresarios in introducing