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Beauty Unlimited ed. by Peg Zeglin Brand (review)

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explicitly in *Empire*, namely, that deconstruction has been outstripped by the mechanisms of capitalist development and is no longer an effective mode of response. Given the chapter's immediate proximity to the analyses of Nietzsche and Adorno, Nealon misses an opportunity to offer a more radical reappraisal of Derrida, who might have been cast as the last great representative of the hermeneutics of suspicion and, as such, a thinker to be treated with some caution. The difficulty that this chapter presents for a more decisive break with theory's past is not repeated in later ones where Nealon makes a compelling case against the paradigm of endless, open interpretation as a resistance strategy or research program for the present. There is, of course, a prescriptive aspect to this endeavor and a clear shift away from the relatively neutral tone that marks the first section. After taking measure of the historical grounds, Nealon turns to the question of response. Whereas the postmodern period fostered an "ethos" of fragmentation that helped establish reading as a "linchpin practice" (149), the post-postmodern ethos is intensification, and globalization is the dominant process (150). Reading the part to get a handle on the whole makes less and less sense as the whole becomes increasingly global. Consequently, Nealon suggests that interpretation should be de-emphasized as a mode of literary scholarship. New approaches should be explored, ones that can navigate or even circumvent the pitfalls of a lingering hermeneutics of suspicion. To this end, Nealon suggests a renewed focus on literature's "strong power of the false," by which new intensities are imagined or created, as a corrective to decades of work stressing its "weak" counterpart, by which ideologies are subverted and binaries undermined (160-63). Such critique has been undeniably useful but can't continue to serve the same purpose when the ground on which it works has shifted so drastically, and Nealon's meta-theoretical turn at book's end represents precisely the kind of work he advocates, an attempt to find a positive function for theory as the returns of interpretation continue to diminish.

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Peg Zeglin Brand, ed. *Beauty Unlimited*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2013. 427 pp.

Plato writes in the *Symposium* that Diotima, the woman from Mantinea who educates the young Socrates in the ways of love, tells the seeker after Beauty to use beautiful things like rising stairs; to ascend from admiring the beauty of a body to the beauty of all bodies, from the beauty of bodies to the beauty of customs, from customs to learning, and finally to Beauty itself. Lost in the contemplation of eternal, absolute, pure Beauty, the seeker will no longer measure Beauty by "polluted" human flesh or other earthly and erotic

delights. Only Beauty, absolute and abstract, is worthy of the attention of the philosopher.

Diotima's staircase comes at the expense of the view from the stairs. *Beauty Unlimited*, edited by Peg Zeglin Brand, offers twenty essays, each of which implicitly criticizes the abstract theory of Beauty offered by Diotima, from a diverse range of philosophical, critical, and artistic perspectives.

Part One, "Revising the Concept of Beauty: Laying the Groundwork," focuses on the cultural and political conventions which give rise to different conceptions of Beauty. For example, Gregory Velazco y Trianosky ("Savages, Wild Men, Monstrous Races: The Social Construction of Race in the Early Modern Era") argues that the American Indians encountered by European explorers fit neatly into neither the category of the solitary woodland Wild Man nor the category of the monstrous, the beauty of their bodies, remarked upon by the explorers, led to the creation of a new racial category, the savage. Monique Roelofs ("Beauty's Relational Labor") argues that "beauty reveals conflicting moral and political commitments" during the Enlightenment (73).

The political conception of beauty is explored further in Part Four, "Beauty and the State," featuring essays concerning female bodies in the Middle East, North Africa, and China. Cynthia Freeman ("Orientalism Inside/Out: The Art of Soody Sharifi") captures the political power of beauty when wielded by an artist from inside the culture to be critiqued. Soody Sharifi is an Iranian resident of Houston whose work focuses on "representations of Muslims and Muslim women in particular" (348). Her work uses the images of bodies of young modern men and women to criticize the policies of the Iranian government. Some of Sharifi's collages mimic traditional 15th century Persian miniatures, but insert images of modern veiled Iranian young women. Another work parodies *American Gothic*, featuring a young Muslim couple in place of the stern farmers.

Two essays focus on present-day China. Eva Kit Wah Man, ("Beauty and the State: Female Bodies as State Apparatus and Recent Beauty Discourses in China,") describes how political changes in 20th century China informed conceptions of female beauty. Mary Bittman Wiseman ("Gendered Bodies in Contemporary Chinese Art") explores the body in contemporary Chinese avant-garde art, as informed by two frameworks, "the absence of the nude in the art of China, and...the failure of communication between Chinese and Western feminisms..." (387). Plato's "beauty of customs," rather than a mere stair on the way to Beauty, informs the concept of Beauty adopted by a culture.

Part Two, "Standards of Beauty" also focuses primarily on conceptions of female beauty, but on the particulars of individual conceptions of beautiful bodies rather than the broader political context that give rise to such conceptions. Essays by Mary Devereaux ("Is Medical Aesthetics Really Medical?") and Jo Ellen Jacobs ("The Bronze Age Revisited") critique two modern trends in physical beauty: elective cosmetic surgery and tanning, respectively. Diana Tietjens Meyers' study of the nude portraits of Jenny Savile ("Jenny

Saville Remakes the Feminist Nude: Feminist Reflections on the State of the Art”) highlights how Saville’s work reclaims and repurposes the female nude from its historical place as the focus of the male gaze, “radically [remaking] the female nude by painting psychocorporeal agentic capabilities into her images” (139). The Beauty of bodies challenges the Platonic conception of Beauty by grounding the aesthetic appreciation of the human form in its time, culture, and place.

In Part Four, “The Body as Performance,” the authors focus on the activity of bodies. Two essays (Peg Zeglin Brand, “ORLAN Revisited: Disembodied Virtual Hybrid Beauty”; Keith Lehrer, “Feminist Art, Content, and Beauty”) treat the performances of the artist ORLAN, who underwent several surgeries to give her physical self the features of women as depicted in famous works of art. Brand argues that although ORLAN’s work has been described as monstrous, it is best understood as a critique of beauty, a “fake beauty, causally disembodied, based on the effects she intends to create from an imaginative use of hybrid imagery” (308). Stephen Davies (“Beauty, Youth, and the Balinese *Legong* Dance”) investigates the connection between beauty and youth in Balinese *legong* dance, a highly formalized dance in which a dancer reaches retirement age before puberty.

Beauty Unlimited does not, unsurprisingly, offer a theory of Beauty to replace the Platonic ideal; rather, the essays together provide a sustained critique of the possibility of a unitary theory of Beauty divorced from particular beautiful experiences. It provides a place on which to build future research. Philosophers of art and aesthetics, whether analytically or continentally trained, should find the volume useful for the diversity of its perspectives.

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Andrew N. Rubin. *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012. 184 pp.

As the Introduction suggests, Andrew N. Rubin’s project is defined ambitiously along several conceptual lines. Theoretically, this book “engages recent efforts to develop a new paradigm for comparative literary historiography” (1), one that revisits critically Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur*. Yet this revisitation is rendered problematic from two opposed directions: on the one hand, the paradigm of *Weltliteratur* is upset by “the corrosive forces of totalitarianism, nationalism, provincialism, racism, and imperialism” questioned periodically in this book (2); on the other, the globalized vision of literature is problematic in itself, conjuring up a “world literary space” for “sweeping transhistorical movements” that cancel out specificities of experience (4). Against this confrontation of paradigms (global vs. local, dynamic vs. static),