

GENDERS, MOBILITIES, AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

BODIES IN TRANSIT 2 | A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

Anna Kérchy: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY'S "QUEERING OF NORMATIVE PARADIGMS" OF EMBODIMENT

I aim to provide a feminist analysis of disability's "queering of normative paradigms" of embodiment (Shildrick 2009) by focusing on contemporary literary/artistic representations of gendered disabled bodies as transitory cultural constructs which can be reinvented through a variety of autobiographical/autofictional manoeuvres foregrounding the dynamics of the phenomenological lived experience of alternatively incarnated selves. I study Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face* (1994) a non-fiction memoir of a childhood and adolescence inflicted by facial disfigurement resulting of cancer of jaw, Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1989) a fictional autobiography of a hunchback albino dwarf Olympia about a traveling freak show composed of her family members, and Susan Lori Parks' *Venus* (1996) a drama that chronicles the life story of Saartjie Bertram, the Hottentot Venus. I am also interested in how contemporary disability activist academics — Rosemary Garland-Thomson, Margrit Shildrick, Tom Shakespeare, Mark Mossman, et al. — integrate their own personal lived experiences of bodily difference within their theoretical texts for the sake of refusing classist intellectual elitism and to foster social sensibility and political commitment.

Disabled bodies can be easily considered as bodies in transit located in a battlefield of conflicting meanings, as it is difficult to harmonise the social constructionist and the more biological corporeally-oriented phenomenological understanding of extraordinary anatomies or neuro-atypical psyches. From an intersectional perspective, the engendering of the disabled body raises further questions because, as feminist phenomenologist philosopher Iris Marion Young has pointed out, in a patriarchal hegemony feminised subjects always already qualify structurally as disabled, lesser beings with markedly different embodiments living "the breasted experience in a phallic society".

The disabled body as an alternative zone of non-meaning and oversignification also lends itself to gender-bending practices exploiting the subversive potential of the Butlerian performativity of embodied selves: Santiago Solis' "queercrip" is a useful term to re-read heteronormative ableist masternarratives, performance artist Bob Flanagan 'fights sickness with sickness' when daringly overwriting the experience of pain in the disabled body by embracing SM practices, while cultural critique Mark Mossman, hypertext novelist Shelley Jackson, and photographer Jo Spence all 'trans-gender' themselves by identifying their uncategorisable disabled embodiments with monstrosity: Dr Frankenstein's monster, a patchwork-girl, and a freak respectively. In some exciting cases, the disabled body's challenging of the visible normative embodiment and hence of the limits of representations is resolved by intermedial or trans-mediating strategies, like in the case of Ransom Riggs' *Miss Pregerine's Home for Peculiar Children* where fantastically disabled youth are represented both visually and verbally due to photographs being inserted within the pages of the novel trilogy.

It is worthwhile to tackle pitfalls of Lennard Davis' influential notion "dismodernism" that treats disability as a general human experience we all experience in more or less transitory manners due to our physical and psychic vulnerabilities, and the very fact that with aging we come closer and closer to death with each day. Much like in the case of transgender subjects, the question here is the difficult decision between "passing" and "visibility": can equality be

GENDERS, MOBILITIES, AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

BODIES IN TRANSIT 2 | A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

reached by the erasure of differentiations or by claiming rights for otherness that should be accepted and respected (not just tolerated) in/for its alterity. In popular media representations disability is often commodified to arouse sympathy of able-bodied audiences who gain both sentimental satisfaction and a reinforcement of their moral superiority from the sight of the disabled body over-identified with its vulnerability; while the figure of the “supercrip” (eg. Paralympic Nick Vujicic, supermodel athlete Aimee Mullins) sets a normative ideal difficult to follow for many non-privileged disabled persons.

Perhaps the most fruitful attempts at reinterpreting and reintegrating disability come from Donna Haraway’s recent posthumanist work insisting on the transspecies relational bonds of all living beings inhabiting the same ‘wounded planet’.

Output (Possibly connected to issue of embodiment):

- ESSE 2018 Seminar co-convened with Dr Béatrice Laurent (Université de Bordeaux) *Sounds Victorian: Voices and Noises in Nineteenth-Century Britain*
- Special journal issue cluster on Bodies in Transit: Genders, Mobilities, and Interdependencies in *TNT Hungarian E-journal of Gender Studies* managed by the gender Studies Research Group of the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Szeged

Key-words: feminist disability studies, dismodernism, queercrip, queering of normative paradigms, trans-gendering disability, othering, posthumanism, trans-mediation

GENDERS, MOBILITIES, AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

BODIES IN TRANSIT 2 | A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

Erzsébet Barát: BEYOND MORALIZING SPECTATORSHIP (?)

I would like to study the filmic renderings of bodies as immersed in historically specific contingent relations of gender, sexuality, race, religion, ablebodiedness and ethnicity, in the context of the current forced mobilities of migration to Europe. The genre I have chosen is 'Migrant Cinema' in the sense of migration themed features — such as *Jupiter holdja [The moon of Jupiter]* (Hungarian, 2017, Mundruczó Kornél), *Worlds Apart* (Greek, 2015, Christopher Papakaliatis), or *Fremde Haut [Unveiled]* (German, 2005, Angelina Maccarone) —, i.e. movies that are made by film makers in the so-called host countries as well as documentaries, such as *(A)mare Conchiglie* (Italian, 2017, Kyrähm and Julius Kaiser). I want to select movies from different national context to see what they tell us about those societies in responding to the refugee. My aim is to study the various logics informing the representation of the suffering of the distant other. I would like to see if the filmic rendition reiterates the representation of main stream media that tends to evoke a response either in terms of some humanitarian pity (drawing on an alleged sameness between refugee and spectator) or that of irony (in the name of an irredeemable difference between the two) (Lilie Chouliaraki 2015) or whether the (fictional) filmic rendition of the suffering of the (distant) other can be opened up to ways of representation that acknowledge the refugee's agency in the diverse encounters on their journeys when appealing to the spectator's sense of responsibility – and if so, what kind of appeal would such a logic mobilize. Furthermore, as a corollary to this question, I would also need to examine which modes of contemporary film making are possible to reconfigure the encounters with the refugee beyond the spectatorial logic of commodification.