

CSWupdate
TG 2013

THINKING G E N D E R

23rd Annual
Graduate Student
Research Conference

SPECIAL ISSUE

special issue on thinking gender

CSWupdate



Thinking Gender 2013

coordinating CSW's 23rd annual graduate student research conference was an amazing experience

MY TIME as coordinator began in August of 2012 when I had the great privilege of being selected for the 2013 Thinking Gender conference. I felt excited, honored, and uncertain when I received the news from CSW Director Kathleen McHugh. Having presented myself at a previous Thinking Gender conference and attended two others, I was thrilled at the opportunity of being part of the process of bringing together young scholars. As in years past, I knew that this year's 23rd annual graduate student conference would continue to foster the intellectual

community that we have come to expect from CSW's Thinking Gender.

In the months leading up to the conference, there were moments of intense coordinating, brainstorming, and endless emails. On February 1, the 2013 Thinking Gender convened at the Faculty Center on a sunny day in Southern California. Graduate student presenters from across the nation and some traveling from as far as Austria and Norway arrived to share presentations of their original research. With over 28 disciplinary fields of study represented by the student presenters, this year's confer-



RANA SHARIF

ence captured cutting-edge multidisciplinary approaches to studying gender, sexuality and women. For example, in a summation of the twenty panels, papers reflected original research on family, health, new directions in feminisms, affect theory, kinship, incarceration, criminality, space and place, and sexuality.

During the luncheon, students, scholars and invited guests continued their conversations over ravioli or vegan paella. It was at this point—when I looked out and noticed all the lively discussions—that I was humbled by the opportunity to have been part of creating such an amazing space for sharing scholarship. Not only were the discussions about the intelligent academic labor being produced but new friendships were being developed. CSW Director, Rachel Lee, welcomed our presenters and guests and expressed gratitude towards our CSW VIPs, supporters, panel moderators and CSW team for contributing to the day's successes before leading us into the plenary session.

One of the most exciting moments of our conference this year was the Plenary Session, “Surplus Life: Infrastructure, Architecture, and

Temporality” which was moderated by CSW's current Associate Director and Associated Professor of English and Gender Studies, Rachel Lee. The plenary papers approached the imperatives of health and well-being. Margaret Fink (University of Chicago, English) presented her paper, “Toenail Polish on a Prosthetic Limb: Salience and Intersectionality in Chris Ware's Building Stories,” Jacob Lau (UCLA, Gender Studies), presented his paper, “; “Whose Queerness? On Situated Knowledges, Queer Embodiment and No Future,” and finally, Krista Sigurdson (UCSF, Sociology) shared her paper, “Valuing Milk, Care and Technology: Human Milk Banking and Sharing.” The three papers along with the commentary by Professor Rachel Lee captivated a room of 150 people.

The success of the conference could not have happened without the kindness, generosity and time of our moderators. Each moderator offered thoughtful feedback to our panelists prior to their presentations and after their presentations. In the interdisciplinary tradition of *Thinking Gender*, our moderators offered commentary on the specifics of each paper

while still linking the various approaches to the graduate student's research. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to connect with all the CSW affiliated scholars who generously contributed to fostering graduate student scholarship. Many of the moderators and presenters commented on how much they enjoyed the experience and thought-provoking scholarship. One presenter commented on her experience at TG in comparison to other conferences she attended and expressed appreciation that while the level of intellectual engagement is high and met with academic vigor, TG offered her a collective space from which she could not only learn, but also feel comfort in the process. I am pleased to announce that some of the papers presented will be available through the California Digital Library: <http://www.escholarship.org/csw>.

The conference culminated with a reception. The California Room of the Faculty Center was jam packed with presenters, moderators, attendees, and CSW staff. At that moment, all the excitement of the entire day's panels, papers, presentations and discussions were rightfully

celebrated. I will be honest, in thanking all the wonderful graduate students, CSW staff, and faculty, I remember becoming emotional. The six months of preparation, the labor of love, if you will, had come full circle. It was bitter sweet. Again, seeing the community of graduate students celebrate their accomplishments and collectivity, proved to be a very moving experience for me.

The conference could not, of course, have been as successful as it was without the patience, support and kindness of the moderators and presenters, the generosity of CSW's donors, and the many conference attendees. While my tenure as this year's conference coordinator comes to an end, there are a few people without whom I could not have had such a rewarding experience. I want to thank Kathleen McHugh, Rachel Lee, Julie Childers, Brenda Johnson-Grau, Allison Wyper, and all the work-study students, GSRs, and volunteers for their hard work, dedication, and support throughout this process. Here's to 2014!

*Much respect and appreciation,
Rana A. Sharif*

Thinking Gender 2014: Feb 7



Toenail Polish on a Prosthetic Limb

Salience and Intersectionality¹ in Chris Ware's Building Stories

by Margaret Fink

A FEW MONTHS AGO, Chris Ware's much-anticipated graphic novel *Building Stories* was released; housed in a board-game-like box, it is comprised of fourteen items of various formats (pamphlets, broadsheets, and so forth.). Focusing on an unnamed young woman with a prosthetic limb, *Building Stories* is readable in any order, and the various pieces recount scenes both as memories and in real time. A first relationship in art school that ends with an abortion and abandonment; the protagonist's single-girl worklife as a nanny and then a floral shop worker; marriage, buying a home in the suburbs, and having a child; the deaths of pets and parents; all along-

side mundane events like doing laundry, feeling depressed, and going to the grocery store.

I'm interested here in thinking about just how the protagonist of *Building Stories*' disability matters, and what sort of relationship the text proposes between her nonnormative body and the heteronormative fantasies of partnership and motherhood she pursues. Rosemarie Garland Thomson has written persuasively about what disability studies and what feminist theory might do for our understanding of embodied identity if mobilized in concert with one another. Starting from the fact that feminism is a "multiplicity of foci we now call feminisms, [...] a vibrant, complex conversa-

tion," she writes: "Integrating disability clarifies how this aggregate of systems [race, sexuality, ethnicity, gender] operate together, yet distinctly, to support an imaginary norm and structure of the relations that grant power, privilege, and status to that norm"(16). I'm working from this premise: that representations of both disability and of feminine gender necessarily exist in some relationship to definitional body norms.

The driving questions for this paper and its readings of Ware's unusual text are about salience: what does the form—comics and a multipart, nonlinear narrative resolutely committed to the ordinary—do for the ways in which gender and disability appear? What inflections of

gender by disability, or disability by gender, are brought into mattering here? Ultimately, I'd like to suggest that Ware's text, by exploiting the possibilities of comics representation, and by giving itself over to a form that enables a narrative built from repetition, local immersions, and elliptical transitions, writes disability in ways that are unfamiliar in their peripherality at the same time that it confronts readers with femininity embodied in unfamiliarly forceful ways.

I'm using "unfamiliarity" as a term that names an effect of unmooring from the set of representational normativities embedded in realism. Realism, according to Susan Stewart, depends on the rules of everyday experience and shared interpretive frameworks, including physical laws but also, importantly, dominant social norms, expectations, and behaviors.² In saying that an *ordinariness text* is the scene for representations of a protagonist who is a woman and who is disabled, I'm *distinguishing* it from a realist text as something that one encounters as representing the everyday, but as something that opens a novel view onto what is, and what kinds of persons might be (what genres of persons mean). An *ordinariness text* and a realist text have the same referent, in other words—the everyday living of a life, but *ordinariness* denotes an encounter with that everyday that's attuned to what is just a bit different. Anthropologist

Kathleen Stewart has articulated the ordinary as "a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges" that has "the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences" (1-2). My readings today are aspirational readings, ones that hope that this kind of encounter with fictionalized life might constitute a zone of contact with femininity and with disability "in solution"—unlike a realist text that, by relying on more conventionalized ways of signifying what is, tends to write them as certain familiar positions in structures and systems of power.⁴ The first storyline I'd like to consider appears on a gameboard object. Folding out into four sections, the board shows four views of the protagonist's apartment building in varying seasons of the year. The first panel focuses on the protagonist in particular, who lives on the third floor.⁵ The story is one of primping and going to meet a date procured with a personal ad, eventually being stood up (pun probably intended), returning to her apartment, and going to bed. Based on the red clocks that punctuate the narrative, the whole sequence occurs between the hours of 6:50 pm and 10:10 pm (figure 1).

The first panels show the protagonist's telephone table, where we are given access to two texts—a heavily revised, handwritten draft of a personal ad, and a note about a confirmed date, as an arrow takes us across the unfolding story

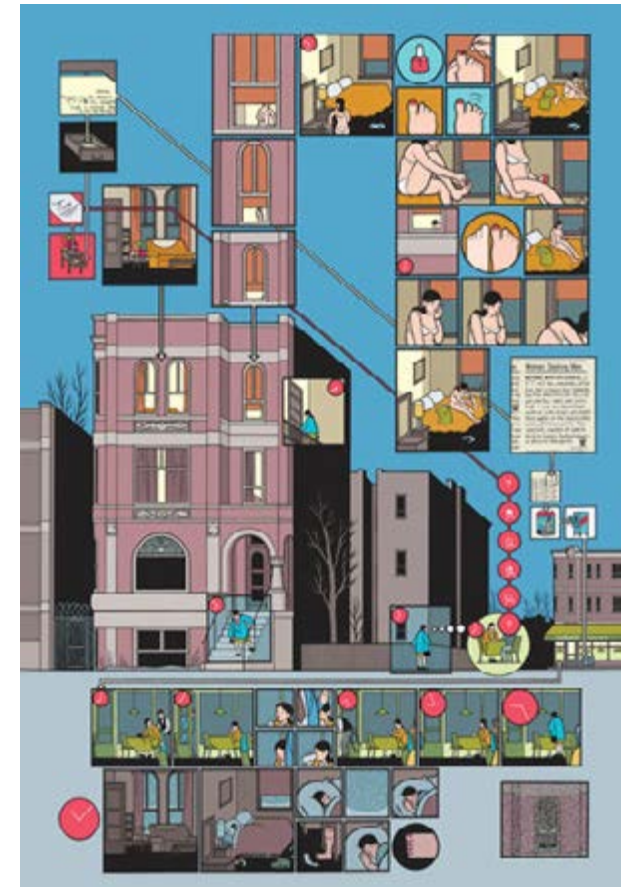


Figure 1

of the protagonist's preparation for that date to the final, printed copy of the personal ad.

These are the lone instances of any articulated, verbal sense making in what is largely a silent comic, and even the draft is revealing more as an index of a process than an actual statement. It reads: "Before winter begins (crossed out, changed to "starts"), 5'7" 140 (crossed out, changed to "142") lbs., reason... [and then we

see] Not a movie star (with a crossed out “but I hope”).” This draft is a self-composition with a certain heterosexual agenda—to create a snapshot of who the protagonist is that will create interest and desire in potential suitors. The voice of the ad is halting and uncertain— what is the difference, really, between “begins” and “starts”? We see the same selfscrutiny in the panels that follow, as the protagonist stands in her underwear before a mirror, looking at her profile, her hand on her stomach. The draft also includes a curious two-pound edit of her weight, a gesture of verisimilitude and particularity. We get the sense that she doesn’t want to overpromise and under-deliver, a move that reveals a sense that two pounds makes a difference that means something. Two meanings are suspended here: this is a difference occurring in a matrix that polices women’s weight that acutely (which it certainly does) and this is a difference that acts as some sort of self-defense against rejection that grounds itself in absolute accuracy. As the protagonist continues her preparation for the date, we see her engaging in a feminine ritual of self-adornment, painting her toenails a bright vermillion. She paints her big toe, the next small panel shows her view of the painted toe, and the next shows her wiggling her toes, a series immersing us in the process of cosmetic intervention, beholding, and then, ostensibly, pleasure, as

she moves on to paint the rest of her toes. In a round panel smack in the middle of this narrative, we pause over a view of her painted foot next to the foot on her prosthetic. They’re a pair with a discrepancy, similarity suspended with difference—her prosthetic is a slightly lighter flesh tone, its toes are more regularly shaped, and it doesn’t have the five vermillion nails. This moment is the kind of moment Ware is adept at creating, and which is so conceptually fertile, especially in terms of salience for disability: the difference between her darling women’s-magazine toes and her prosthetic is very much there, but it’s so quiet. There is no plunging into despair about the difference; and it’s certainly not a moment of her feminine efforts being foiled.

In the next panel, we see her sitting on her bed checking out her feet; in the following sequence, she scratches her face, has an idea, and bends over. The toenail polish scene ends with another long shot of her sitting on her bed, her prosthetic removed.

I’d like to suggest here that in a number of ways the comic’s medium is working to de-dramatize this prosthetic-centered scene such that the protagonist’s disability has a palpable presence that can exist apart from the kind of ideological baggage that often accompanies representations of disability. Rendered with the same level of iconicity as the other objects in the

scene—black outline filled with unmodulated blocks of color—the protagonist’s prosthetic limb is incorporated visually, not all that salient (if we recall that salient means, etymologically, leaping forth). The fly-on-the-wall shots, intercalated with close-ups from the protagonist’s point of view, give us a controlled encounter with her limbs that either put them in a view that also contains pillows, a laid out dress, and a sock on the floor, or in an intimate encounter of sustained, direct looking that might be termed consideration. The rendering of disability is also interacting in these panels with the cosmetic ritual of toe-nail painting and with the protagonist’s semi-nude body.

Toenail painting gives us a reason to look at the prosthetic, and on a first date in winter, it’s a self-aestheticization that, as a feminine desirability-building practice, might be called pointless (as the odds of her date seeing them are low). But the wiggle of the toes and the dilated moments of consideration embed the prosthetic in a ritual of self-care that generates pleasure for the protagonist and bolsters her for her meeting with an unknown, evaluative masculine gaze.

At the same time that comics’ parceling out of time and its iconicized rendering of scenes makes disability more familiar, *heimliche* (as in not *unheimliche*, unfamiliar and strange), the

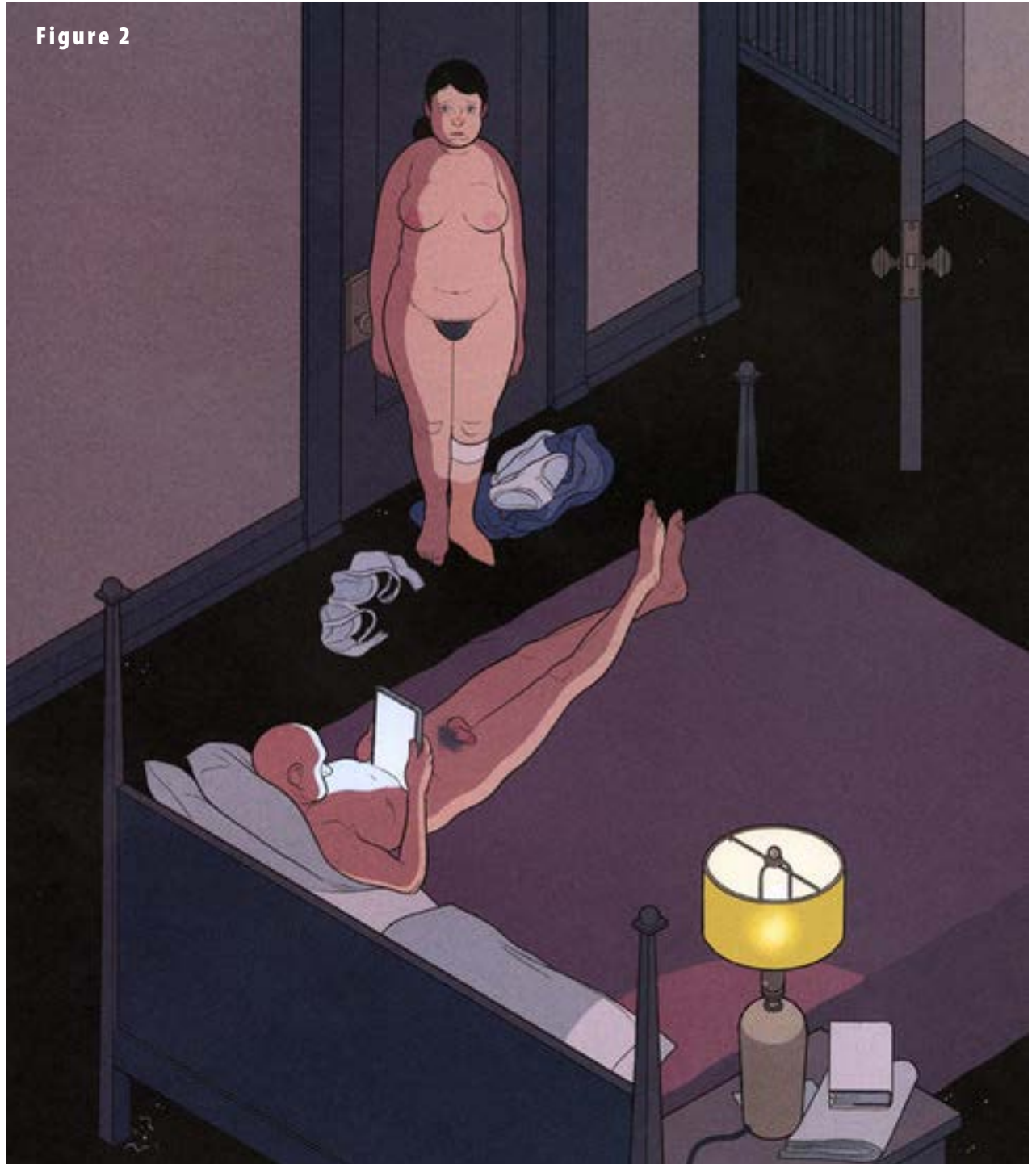
protagonist's body takes on a particular presence in its state of undress.

The protagonist's smooth curves, A-cup breasts and belly-squeezed navel are the focus of repeated panels, as she's shown with her head and her knees cut off by the frame.

This body-salience is created by the protagonist's body's lack of coincidence with feminine body norms, however actually non-average those ideals may be. Lennard Davis has written in the context of disability studies about an eighteenth century shift wherein the statistical norm started being coincident with an *homme moyen* ideal; while previous notions of the ideal conceived of it as unattainable, the norm as ideal contains the thought that everyone should embody it. Insofar as the protagonist's body doesn't, seated, coincide with beauty fascism's imagined ideal, its imaging here stands out to us.

Another of Ware's images, from elsewhere in *Building Stories*, where the protagonist is about to have sex with her husband many years later, is a much more pronounced example of this defamiliarization of what is nonetheless a very ordinary body—it stands out to us as readers in ways that the prose sentence “she stood naked, her clothes at her feet, with a dismayed look on her face” does not because it exceeds whatever we have

Figure 2



been given to conjure by the idea “female nude” (figure 2). The protagonist’s pre-date nudity orients the narrative about a blind date toward her anticipation about whether or not she could be the object of someone’s sexual desire, and this question is posed by the visual narrative in terms of her feminine body, specifically, her 142 pounds. Directly after this toenail-painting scene, however, we are presented with the final draft of the personal ad, in published form:

Before Winter Starts: 27, 5’7,” 142 lbs., reasonably attractive. Not a movie star lookalike, but few amputees are. Yes, I’ve got one leg—well, one and a half. I live in a third floor walk-up. Like: music, art, books. Hate: walks on the beach, coffee jokes, all known sports. You: sentient, capable of speech. No kick boxers, football players, or physical therapists.

This ad is conspicuous in its low expectations and its preoccupation with disability as something that needs to be noted. “Not a movie star lookalike” on account of being an amputee is a logical non sequitur, since few people, amputees or not, are movie-star lookalikes. The protagonist’s offhand introduction of the fact that she’s an amputee, plus the elaboration, ends up taking up an inordinate amount of space in such a short ad to really be off-hand, and the third-floor walk up sentence is neutral personal infor-

mation that in fact acts to challenge any assumptions about her mobility. What we’re witnessing here is a severely compressed expression of self that is trying to take on the challenges of stigma management, a complex process indeed, as Erving Goffmann explicated in *Stigma* half a century ago. After the visual narrative of being with the protagonist’s body in an intimate way as she prepares, this apparent nervousness about her prosthetic’s salience recasts the question of her sexual desirability in terms of her disability as she disembarks from her apartment to go on the date.

This new question of how much her disability matters, really, doesn’t get easily swatted away by the unfolding of the narrative. She leaves, according to the red clock, twenty minutes early when she is meeting her date a block from her apartment, which makes her seem overeager or nervous. She finishes descending her front stoop ten minutes later, however, and we stand corrected—she knows her body, it was a prudent decision for a punctual woman. Sitting down promptly at 8 pm, we watch her as time passes, until an hour and twenty minutes later, she puts on her coat and leaves. With her disability most recently primed with respect to her desirability, the narra-

tive might be suggesting that her leg is in fact (however unjustly) prohibitive in her search for love. But visually, over and over, her disability isn’t re-markable at all, obscured totally by the tablecloth at the restaurant. If her date came and saw her and decided to leave, it was not on the basis of her disability.

As she lays in bed, trying to fall asleep as falling snow blankets her windowsill, we join her in trying to make sense of her disappointment. In *Feminist Disability Studies*, Kim Q. Hall writes that “the assumption that disabled people cannot be sexual beings is a feature of disability oppression,” but this narrative is especially troubling, because what’s been produced here is not a simple case of disability oppression—that might almost be easier (4). Her prosthetic, removed, occupies two of these panels. The last narrative panel, a circle, zooms in on the toes to reveal that she had painted vermilion nails onto her prosthetic, too. In a darkened room, after the nonconsummation of her date, this reads as a melancholically lovely detail. If melancholy is the condition of having not decathected from the lost object—here, the absent male audience to these red squares of femininity--instead incorporating it, this is a scene where the ostensibly rejecting other cannot be mourned (written off) as a jerk who has a problem with

a prosthetic, since the reason for the broken date is left ambiguous. We are left with the overwhelming sense that despite the “I hope that” scratched out from the personal ad draft, the protagonist clings desperately to the promises attached to the acquisition of a romantic partner. Missing, but not admissible as loss insofar as its absence isn’t explicable, the failure and promise of heterosexual love is one the protagonist internalizes.

In this particular scene, I’ve been arguing, the iconicity of comics’ visual language and the potential for extremely dilated time across moment-to-moment panel transitions keeps the representation of a disabled woman from snapping easily into something explicable by common conceptions of disability. Ware’s text is deeply invested in the world that houses its characters; and narratives take care to depict things like spaghetti pans waiting in sinks and remote controls. But more than spatially, Ware’s work is characterized by a particular relationship to the passing of time, as repeated or minimally different panels depict experience moment by moment. These commitments collude to create a certain ordinariness in which to encounter the protagonist’s body, and this

defamiliarized representation of what is, I think, does the work of presenting disability and femininity in ways that shake up normative ways of knowing them. Particularly, as in this toenail-painting narrative, Ware’s pages manage to hold together moments that resonate with differing meanings for the protagonist’s body accretively, across panels; an ensemble that challenges reductive discourses of sexism and ableism.

But Ware’s complications of conventional ways of knowing disability and femininity don’t only happen in this immersive way—there are other moments where different readings of the protagonist’s body get imbricated on the page. In closing I’d like to briefly consider a part of a series that plays with our expectations for the protagonist’s disability by putting her on display in the style of a medicalized specimen—three pages that mimic the acetate overlays in an encyclopedia’s anatomy section. On the first page, where the protagonist is shown fully dressed, the arrows arrayed around her body point most directly to her prosthetic, her stomach, and her heart (figure 3). The large text reads: “All my life” and “every day.” Her eyebrows are upturned and her mouth frowns, as thought bubbles show her running as a child. At



Figure 3

this zoomed-out level, this seems to be a page that shows a woman dreaming of running, as arrows point to the broken heart, thick middle, and prosthetic limb that she “endures” all her life, every day. In actuality, though, the narrative that takes us around her body is disclosing the fact that a “weak heart” is the most limiting physical condition she has, causing her to have to lay on the couch after climbing to her apartment to catch her breath.

The thought bubbles are a memory of short breath playing as a kid even before her amputation, and the arrow to her stomach actually refers to a stitch in her side. The arrow to her leg relates the way in which she'd sit and listen to her heart during stationary activities that were easy with a prosthetic. There's a tension-creation here between initial glance-interactions with the pages, and subsequent necessary mental revisions as the reader engages with the actual narrative. Similarly, the last page in the series shows her skeleton and organs; the words "broken" and "NO" are the most prominent, as all arrows seem to lead to her heart (figure 4). The surrounding panels show her laying on the couch in her apartment with a cat, laying in bed next to her first boyfriend, masturbating, and laying on the grass as a child. These impressions combine the vaguely negative tenor of "no" and "broken" with quiet scenes of being alone. The issue here might be a broken heart—even at this zoomed out level, "NO" is both a grim observation and a statement of defiance at such an interpretation of her body and her life. But again, the actual narrative in the surrounding matter is about her attempts to find where she truly is in her body, and her answer is that "NO," it's not in her heart,

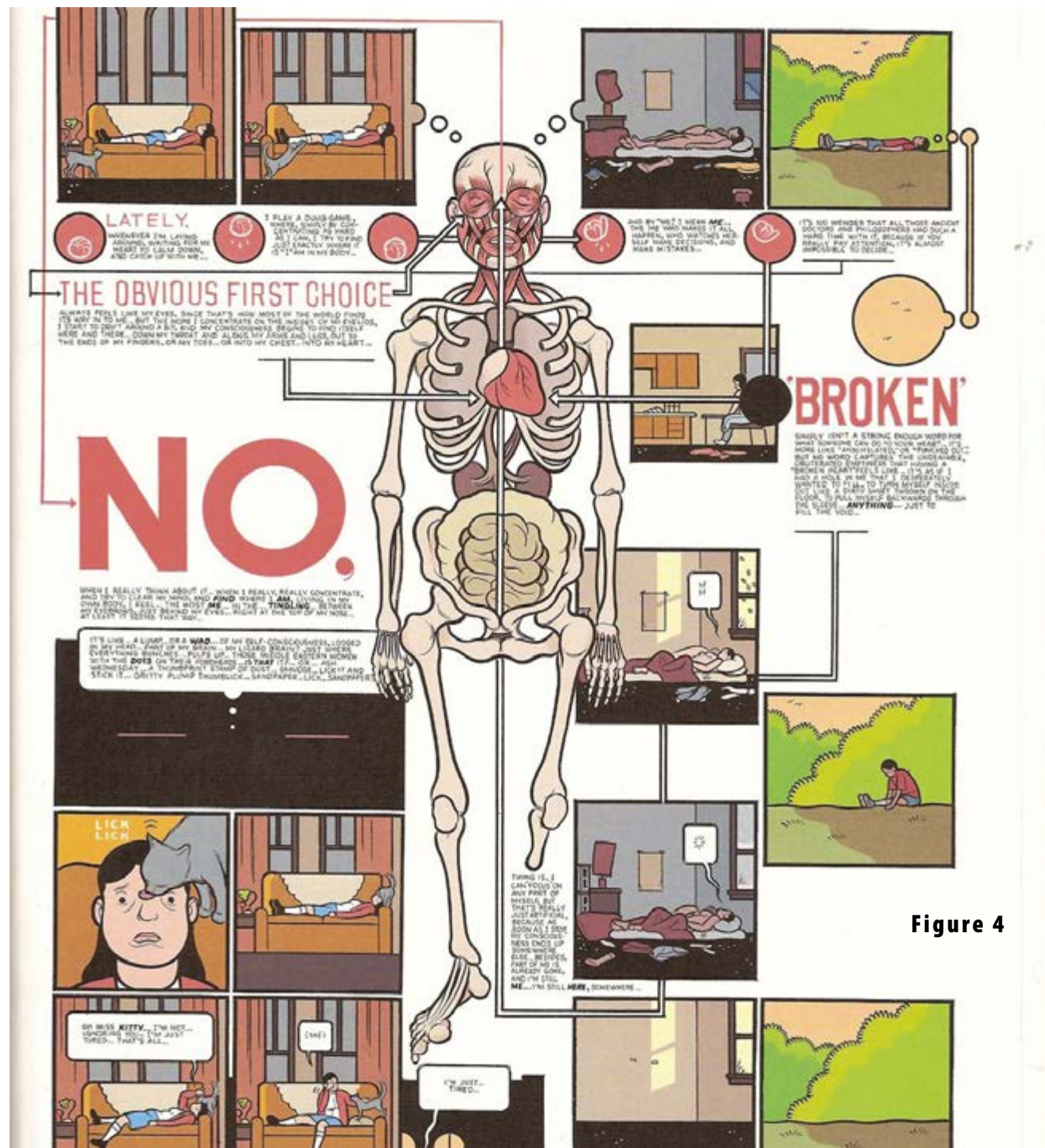


Figure 4

but between her eyes at the bridge of her nose.⁷ Here again, Ware's narrative invites normative understandings, snap judgments, of the protagonist's body and its meaning, and then peels those meanings away as not what the story is about. It's the comics' form and Ware's defamiliarized reference to what is most familiar that makes these kinds of encounters with the protagonist's body possible, and this possibility is nothing less, I'd like to suggest, than the possibility of thinking the body away from the norms that circumscribe disability and gender oppression.

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NOTES

1. I borrow this phrase from the title of a review essay published in the internet media flurry that accompanied *Building Stories*' release. See: <http://www.bleedingcool.com/2012/09/21/nail-polish-on-a-prosthetic-leg-searching-for-hope-and-understanding-inchris-ware%E2%80%99s-building-stories/>
2. See *Nonsense*, p 21. Glossed in Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Disabled Women as Powerful Women," 123.
3. See Raymond Williams.
4. I'm asserting that realism tends to operate with strong theoretical takes on its characters--there's a woman, there's a disabled person—without really questioning what each means, even exploiting mainstream conceptions of each to create a reality effect (as might happen with a minute description

of a DP's physique). When I say "strong theoretical takes," I'm thinking of Eve Sedgwick's distinction between strong theory, which can explain a wide array of phenomena but is necessarily reductive, and weak theory, which turns its attention to local textures in a descriptive and pleasure-oriented mode. See Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You."

5. The backs of each of these stories are three dimensional renderings of each of the storeys—or floors—of the building, corresponding to the narrative's main characters (that is, the third floor apartment is on the back of the protagonist's narrative, the second floor on the back of her downstairs neighbors' story, and so on).
6. See Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*
7. Location of the third eye, or enlightenment/introspection chakra.



Legacies of Incarceration *by Erin Conley*

MODERATED by Sarah Haley, Assistant Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at UCLA, the panel “Legacies of Incarceration” shed light on the varieties of institutional imprisonment that women have experienced across the globe and throughout the twentieth century. Professor Haley noted that the panel offered an intervention into the growing interdisciplinary field of Carceral Studies by introducing a discussion of women’s strategies of resistance and forms of agency. Panel participants included Diya Bose, Department of Sociology at UCLA; Andrea Milne, Department of History at UC Irvine; Jennifer Tran, Department of American Studies and Ethnicity at USC; and Megan Walsh, John Jay College of Criminal Justice at CUNY.

Bose’s paper, “Discipline or Empower? An Ethnographic Study of a Reintegration Program from Trafficked Women in Bangladesh,” examines the structural contradictions between the emancipatory and disciplinary discourses of a Bangladeshi shelter for women and children who are victims of sex trafficking. Bose argues that the shelter, run by the Bangladesh National Woman Layers Association, sanctions “coercive protectionism” through controlling and surveilling women’s lives in the shelter. Though the shelter purports to be an “oasis of freedom,” women are treated as dependent wards of the non-governmental organization and must prove they are not prostitutes in order to receive services from the shelter.

If women are able to prove their innocence, they can receive employment training from the shelter, but Bose points out that this training often simply reinforces traditional gender and class castes. Women are invited to train for low-paid jobs in domestic labor and there are no opportunities to explore areas of work that are interesting or empowering for women. For example, though many of the women coming through the shelter have interests in working in beauty salons, the shelter does not offer such training because it puts women at risk of being “too beautiful to save.” Bose asserts that this is a form of victim blaming and reinforces the shelter’s conflation of prostitution with all trafficking.

In her paper, “A Place to Call My Very Own”: Stereotypical Gendered Discourse as Radical

Action at the Carville National Leprosarium,” Andrea Milne examines the gendered strategies of resistance to medical incarceration in Betty Martin’s 1950 memoir, *Miracle at Carville*. Betty Martin is the pseudonym of a Hanson’s disease patient who lived at Carville for several years until her escape through a hole in the institute’s fence. Milne opens her paper with an explanation of why such drastic measures were necessary for White to leave the infirmary: Hanson’s disease, more commonly known as leprosy, is one of the least communicable diseases yet patients with the disease are uniquely stigmatized by representations that render them monstrous, grotesque, and asexual. The stigma attached to Hanson’s disease has deep cultural roots in Judeo-Christian doctrine, and patients who were forcibly interned at institutes like Carville experienced dehumanizing treatment and lost their civil rights to citizenship and voting.

Milne argues that Martin’s memoir resists the dehumanizing nature of Hanson’s disease treatment by embodying stereotypical discourses of femininity and placing the author at the center of a domestic narrative. While a surface reading of Martin’s memoir might reveal sexist discourses about feminine identity, Milne suggests that these discourses are actually a radical tactic of literary activism empowering Martin to reclaim the sexuality denied to her by the medical institution.

Jennifer Tran’s paper, “When the Victims



Become the Victors: Constructing Transnational Vietnamese Feminism Through the Vector of Incarceration,” also addresses issues of resistance in a carceral setting. Tran uses the oral histories of Vietnamese women political prisoners who fought against the United States seizure of the country during the Vietnam War. She argues that narratives representing Vietnamese women as anything other than victims during the Vietnam War have been erased from the archive of history.

Tran’s project recuperates a victorious history of Vietnamese women by demonstrating

Betty Martin wrote a memoir, *Miracle at Carville*, about her experiences at and escape from the Carville National Leprosarium. Photo: <http://www.leprosyhistory.org/english/gallery/gallerypeople.htm>



In “The Ruling Regulations of Reentry: Formerly Incarcerated Women’s Experiences of Street-level Bureaucracies,” Megan Walsh, researches how women navigate and resist the bureaucratic structures governing assistance programs for women released from incarceration in Los Angeles.

how women political prisoners reclaimed power in prison through solidarity, political education, and direct action. Women formed collectives and organized hunger strikes to improve the conditions of their imprisonment. Those women who were not members of the communist party were taught the promise of socialism. Prisoners transformed the prison from a state of political exception to a state of political training in service to the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The final panelist, Megan Walsh, presented her paper, “The Ruling Regulations of Reentry: Formerly Incarcerated Women’s Experiences of Street-level Bureaucracies,” Walsh’s project takes up the question of how women navigate and resist the bureaucratic structures governing assistance programs for women released from incarceration in Los Angeles. This institutional ethnography explores how one particular assistance program submits participants to extensive surveillance in order to receive assistance with housing, sobriety counseling, and employment training. Walsh’s interviews with program participants reveal a central contradiction: though participants are also required to find in order to receive services, they are often unable to do so because of the time it takes to navigate the forms, interviews, and surveillance that constitute the bureaucratic structures of reentry.

Women who participate in the reentry program report that they feel powerless when interacting with social workers and counselors assigned to their cases because they must perform a kind of emotional labor—they are not allowed to voice or show their frustration with the process, but the social workers they interact with are allowed to be rude to them. This observation leads Walsh to consider how the bureaucratic structures construct good and bad employees of the assistance programs.

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Negotiating the Sacred and Profane

by Olga Desyatnik

WHERE is the line to be drawn between the sacred and profane? Hsin-Yi Lin, Teruko Matsuhara and Gino Conti negotiate this topic through the specter of gender and sexuality, which seems to be inextricably linked to this religious dichotomy. In Matsuhara's anthropological study, women who convert to Hare Krishna find solace from the demoralizing and "disenchanting" (Weber) lifestyle of modernity by joining a Hindu-inspired religion. They are hoping to move away from an existence in which their bodies are reduced to sex objects for the pleasure of men—this, to them, is the nature of a modern "liberal" lifestyle. These women feel more "respected" and "liberated from the mundane

life," as described by Matsuhara's first case study subject, Radha. Radha claimed to have a better relationship with her husband than she did with men before conversion: she said she felt more appreciated for her "mind and soul" rather than her body, and that the ability to meet and discuss their compatibility as a couple without any focus on sex allowed them to be more open and straightforward with each other. Yet the body of a woman has "profane" meanings even in this religion; during the question-and-answer portion of the panel, Matsuhara mentioned the belief in their religion that a soul reincarnated into the body of a woman is karmically lower than the soul in a man's body—a woman is impure.

Another case of an African American woman named Deveki described her husband's desire to share her with the Lord on their honeymoon, as opposed to only having her for himself. Perhaps the presence of a third (moralizing) party in a relationship provides a greater sense of boundaries and prevents the mistreatment of women in many cases. On the other hand, the Hare Krishna religion conceives of Krishna as a deity at once 100% female and 100% male, allowing any person to "love Krishna in any way," which has seen the growth of a large LGBT community within the religion. In this sense, it is again a positive, liberating force of tolerance. But it is strangely through this questionably 'profane' sexual obsession with the deity that his

devotees interact. Traditional paintings of the Lord Krishna show him in a bacchanal setting surrounded by naked, lustful women attending to his every need—a strange milieu for liberation from sexuality, one might say. The effects of such a conception of a god can have perhaps wonderful results for some women. Yet the constraining, and even violent repercussions of devout religious belief that are avoided by Matsuhara’s case studies are reinforced by Lin’s exploration of Buddhist texts with respect to women’s bodies and punishment.

Hsin-Yi Lin examines the Chinese Buddhist text *Blood Pool Sutra*, “a text stating that women, due to their spilling of blood on the earth in the process of giving birth, are bound for hell in which they will be submerged in pools of blood, and suffer from various kinds of tortures.” She uses the framework of British anthropologist Mary Douglas to discuss how those unable to fit into the categories of society are perceived as dangerous; indeed, women’s ability to give birth gave them the power to potentially disrupt the male-dominated family structure and society. They held the power to add members to a family, and thus a punishment for this act was required in order to uphold the standards of filial piety common in ancient Chinese society. After Confucianism, Buddhism needed to find a way to ac-

commodate such a paternalistic culture, and Lin hypothesizes this to be responsible for the appearance of such a strange bloody text in the canon of Buddhism. She believes that Buddhist leaders were attempting to serve the secular needs of its followers—hence the large number of scriptures dealing with female reproduction.

Gino Conti’s project “Melancholia in Drag: Inversion as Religious Enthusiasm” looks at “female masculinity” in a way that also makes connections between sexuality and religious experience. She proposes that the classic psychoanalytic affect of melancholia experienced by “inverts” (female masculine subjects) is related to religious “enthusiasm.” Taking Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* as her point of departure, she discusses the protagonist Stephen Gordon’s religious enthusiasm as a prominent aspect of her experience of gender crossing, thereby bringing a new element into the normally secular narrative of sexual history, epitomized by Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. What was heresy (sodomy) in the eighteenth century became “psychosexual pathology” in the nineteenth and then became incorporated into lesbian literature of the twentieth century. Conti gives examples such as Henry Fielding’s *The Husband* (1746), in which a female character develops an “enthusiasm” for the female sex after being se-

duced by a Methodist. Here “enthusiasm” (an affect) is connected to both bodily humors and Methodism, and inversion and melancholia are congenitally linked. Despite the church’s rejection of homosexuality, inverts curiously harbor religiosity. Conti proposes this phenomenon be reframed as “melancholia in drag,” referring both to the temporal drag through history and the notion of crossing gender. She hopes to return to “enthusiasm” as a broadening category of gender and sexuality to think queerness differently. (The panel moderator brought up the Latin origins of the word “enthusiasm”: coming from “theos” transformed to “thu”, it literally means “the state of believing God is within.”)

Interesting relationships between religiosity, gender, and sexuality are raised in a variety of cultural contexts with the panel “Negotiating the Sacred and Profane,” adding an important element to the way we currently think of gender. Matsuhara, Lin, and Conti have provided a significant foundation from which to begin incorporating religion into our so far secular discussion of gender and sexuality.

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Rethinking the Gendered Network

Freundschaft, Facebook, and "Kefaya" by Michael Witte

RESPONDENT AND MODERATOR Alexandra Juhasz, Professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College, launched the discussion for the panel on Gendered Networks with the sentiment that across the various fields and methods, there are certain recurring modalities that connect the feminist scholar with her work. Citing Wendy Chun's forthcoming *Imagined Networks*, Juhasz went on to explain that this "imagined feminist network" is itself something to be examined, how the power of this network functions as a theoretical tool.

As Juhasz continued, she turned the question to "what is this gendered network"? And what role does it serve in mediating or explaining the experience of women? Following Chun, the idea

of the "network" encapsulates most contemporary thought, from theories on globalism to contagion and capital. These debates thus often assume a knowledge of "networks" without otherwise locating what it means to be *engaged* in one, whether a network is a technology, a planning tool, or an actually existing system. Therefore the symbolic authority claimed by the network is something to be questioned. From state philosophy and official language, to post-colonial cartography and Google maps, how do these "networks" function? How do they claim knowledge, and, likewise, how are these 'knowledges', as inextricably linked to power, informed by the actual *use* of the network itself? How exactly do rival networks exist and produce one

another, without inverting or destroying each other in the very process?

The panelists listed below explore this very issue of network "vulnerability" in their respective case-studies—about what it means for a feminist to map her existence. Gendered Networks featured the work of Susana Galán, Department of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers; Laura Stone, Department of German Studies at NYU; and Jenny Korn, University of Illinois at Chicago.

"Kefaya": The eradication of sexual harassment as a revolutionary goal in post-Mubarak Egypt
Sexual harassment has long been recognized as an endemic problem of the Egyptian street, not-



**Woman wearing a Kefaya sticker
(AP Photo/Amr Sharaf)**

ed presenter Susana Galán. In the last decade the women's movement has organized to counter the traditional blame-the-victim approach with campaigns that explain the phenomenon in terms of economic harshness and sexual frustration and denounce the passivity of the security state, thereby leading to the stigmatization of working-class youth masculinities and an increased policing of public space.

The advent of the 2011 revolution coupled with a temporary—albeit revealing—disappearance of sexual harassment from the streets in the 18 days between January 25 and

Mubarak's resignation has urged a rethinking of this argument. And even though the backlash has been fierce, with the intensification of sexual assaults on women and misogynistic attacks on activists, Egyptians don't forget that "another street" is possible.

Through a visual and textual analysis of the narratives deployed in the exhibition *Kefaya* ("Enough") hosted by the cultural center Darb 1718 in Cairo in the summer of 2012, as well as using in-depth interviews with anti-harassment activists and content analysis of female narratives in personal blogs using the hashtag #EndSH, Galán explores how a new discourse on sexual harassment has emerged in the post-Mubarak era: one that presents the struggle against sexual harassment as a political demand (*Kefaya* was also the name of the oppositional movement against Mubarak), denounces the state as a sexual perpetrator against the female protester, and ultimately identifies the eradication of sexual harassment as an inalienable goal in an ongoing revolution.

In her close examination of the depiction of the female body across the different platforms included in the exhibit—the street (graffiti), the art gallery, and online (blogging and twitter)—Galán demonstrates how each of these 'modes' seek to demonstrate state propaganda's 'smoothing over', or flattening, of bodily experience

in the representative aspect of sovereign law. In her conclusion, the intermedial representation of the female body injects and reinvigorates the very tactile, subjective experience of female vulnerability that so un-sutures the dominant network of Mubarak-era law and its residue in post-Mubarak Egyptian society.

Love Letters: Translating *Freundschaft* and *Frauenliebe* between Romanticism and Freud

In *Love Letters*, Laura Stone considers theories (and the practice) of translation as an alternative model for reading desire in the lives of two mid-nineteenth-century German "lesbian" writers. Centered around the correspondence of Adele Schopenhauer, Stone analyzes their inconsistent deployment of Romantic discourses of (hetero)sexual "love" and "marriage" and of (homo)social "purity" and "friendship." She examines a selection of letters and poems from a unique period in German history: sexual relations between women had been declared theoretically impossible (and were thus no longer punishable by death) but the mainstream pathologization of homosexuality had not yet taken place.

In contrast to Anne Lister's diaries, which were remarkably candid in content but strategic in form, Adele Schopenhauer wrote openly and poetically but still negotiated her expres-



Adele Schopenhauer (1797–1849)

sion within the limits of her lexicon. In a letter to her girlfriend, she explicitly *states* these limits and their ramifications: “*Willst Du dazu noch einige Dutzend angenehme Erinnerungen und Träume, so gönnt sie Dir Deine Freundin, fast hätte ich Freund gesagt—denn wenn ich an unsere Vereinigung, an unsere Liebe zu einander denke, ist’s mir oft als wären wir kein Mädchen.*” Evident in her conflation of *Freundin* (“homosocial [girl]friend”) and *Freund* (“heterosexual [boy]friend”) as descriptors for her “lesbian girlfriend,” Schopenhauer is forced, by means of this warped *lingua franca*, to relocate *her* experience, as Other, into the hegemonic



Portrait of Anne Lister (1791-1840), by Joshua Horner, ca. 1830

structure of heterosexuality. Thus today our difficulty in reading her letters is not necessarily due to the concealment of an intended communiqué, but to a semantic insufficiency.

Stone examines how metaphor and re-appropriation operates within the post-Romantic cultural imaginary in this instance when a woman who loves other women seeks to render herself during this period. Stone argues that we might need to think of her as an authorial figure operating within a double-structure of translation: (1) she would need to translate her own socially dissonant experience, adopting a kind of gendered “code-switching”—to borrow

from second-language acquisition theory; and (2) our own present desire to act as reader/recipient of texts that were written in the tongue of a different “cultural imaginary,” resistant even *in translation*, reveals what de Man called “a particular alienation [...] to our own original language.” That is, continues de Man, following Walter Benjamin: ‘Translation’ is not the metaphor of the original; it is the translation of metaphor, which is “not at all the same.”

Obfuscating Privacy and Getting Laid: A Feminist Critique of Facebook

With today’s practice of creating and maintaining online identities on social media sites like Facebook, one often overlooks how the interface we see and the design we use to share our information help construct or re-imagine popular gender representations. Indeed, past research on online social network sites often focuses on the self-presentational strategies and social capital accrual by individuals who use social media. In contrast, Jenny Korn addresses an understudied aspect of current online social media research by critiquing the origins and design of the world’s most popular online social network site from a feminist perspective, informed by scholars in communication, sociology, psychology, history, and gender studies. Specifically, she examines how social history,

facebook  Search for people, places and things   Brenda Johns



wikipedia.org

About Mark Zuckerberg

Politician

Mark Elliot Zuckerberg is an American computer programmer and Internet entrepreneur. He is best known as one of five co-founders of the social networking website Facebook. As of April 2013, Zuckerberg is the chairman and chief executive of Facebook, Inc. and in 2013 his personal wealth was estimated to be US\$13.3 billi...

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About Mark Zuckerberg

Professions



Entrepreneur



Businessperson



Programmer



Software Developer

Born in



White Plains, New York

Nationality



United States

especially principal founder Mark Zuckerberg's personal experiences with creating Facemash and TheFacebook (predecessors to Facebook), affects the design of today's Facebook product. Rather than center the analysis on the users of online social network sites, Korn emphasizes how the personal history of Facebook's chief founder and the cultural beliefs surrounding Facebook's precursors impact Facebook's contemporary structure and design, which influence how gender is constructed currently worldwide. Across newspapers, websites, and film from archival sources, Korn draws upon public interviews and historic accounts to re-create and analyze the choices made and events from the past that affect the way users interact now on Facebook. In this manner, what is most notable is the extent to which online social network sites reproduce offline, androcentric culture rather than threaten or oppose it and how feminist research accounts for these processes.

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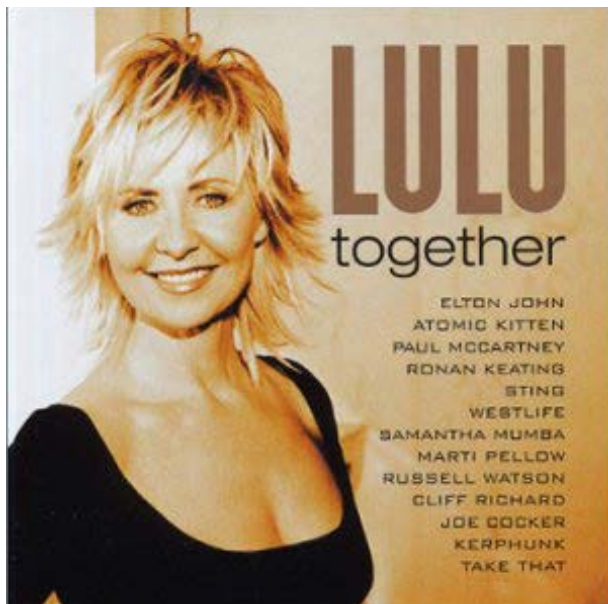
Divas by Josh Olejarz

MODERATED by Nina Eidsheim, Assistant Professor in Department of Musicology at UCLA, the panel on Divas! brought together four graduate students whose work investigates questions of gender and presentations of gendered bodies in television, music, and movies. The panel was moderated by Nina Eidsheim, Assistant Professor in the Department of Musicology at UCLA.

Stephanie P. Jones, University of Georgia, presented first. Her paper, “Becoming Wifey: The (Re)Construction of Gendered Bodies in the *Basketball Wives*,” examined the titular reality show’s participation in how the media (re) constructs black women and their gendered roles as “wives.” Jones argued that there are



Basketball Wives, a reality series shown on VH1



From the 1960s and more recently, album cover images of Lulu and Marilyn Faithfull

both human and non-human factors that help to create and control what is considered “wifery” in this context. She used actor-network theory (ANT) and visual perspective theory to reveal that what is considered the standard of beauty and appropriate behavior depends on three main elements: first, body vs. self, or human factors such as narcissism and voyeurism functioning as means of creating and sustaining acceptable ways of acting and performing as black gendered bodies; second, body vs. body, or non-human factors such as labeling and hierarchy set expectations for competition and power struggles; third, body vs. society, or the act of “wifery” is constructed through strict parameters that allow the group to continuously be recreated and expanded. ANT and visual perspective theory, Jones said, are used in her project as the lens through which to view one complete season of *Basketball Wives*. The initial episode in particular is viewed silently in order to grasp the inner workings of the group dynamic, including the human factors.

The second presenter was Alexandra Apoloni, Department of Musicology at UCLA. Her paper, “The Ballad of Lulu and Marianne: On Age, Femininity, and Singing Voices,” focused on Marianne Faithfull and Lulu, two singers who emerged into the public eye in Brit-

ain during the 1960s. Apolloni described the “Swinging Sixties” as a moment when youth culture supposedly transformed Britain into a center of music and fashion. The climate, she said, enabled some young white women to emerge as arbiters of culture. They became pop singers, fashion designers, models, and television stars, embodying new and sometimes contradictory models of femininity—ones that emphasized independence but also reproduced heteronormative models of girlhood. Apolloni analyzed Faithfull and Lulu in this context, arguing that their performances in the 1960s were models of youth that reflected larger understandings of race and gender in Britain. She traced how, as they have continued their careers into middle age, their voices still reflect their earlier performing personae, but now do so in the context of trauma and nostalgia. To demonstrate this, she played clips of their music from the 1960s, then showed video of their performances from recent years, analyzing the development of their voices. The paper, Apolloni said, examines the roles of girl singers’ voices in discourses of young femininity and explores how gendered constructions of age continue to inform their vocal performances of age as they grow older. Feminist writers have critiqued notions of aging that figure age as a process of decline and render older women invisible;

Apolloni counters this by arguing that such notions also render older women inaudible, and explores the extent to which Lulu and Faithfull use singing to redress these discourses.

Presenting third was Elliott Cairns, a graduate student at Columbia University. His paper, “Sounding Transgender: Antony Hegarty, Popular Music, and (Trans)Gender Performance,” applied Judith Butler’s theory of gender performance to popular music. Cairns said that the field of popular music is replete with what Philip Auslander calls “musical personae.” In other words, when musicians perform we are not simply seeing their real selves: musicians “perform first and foremost,” Auslander says, “not music, but their own identities as musicians.” Cairns discussed this notion in relation to Antony Hegarty, lead singer and songwriter of the band Antony and the Johnsons. The singer, who self-identifies as transgender, presents a conscious and bounded transgender performance in the context of his persona, said Cairns. Antony’s persona is a carefully constructed “I,” deeply rooted in the politics of gender. By examining Antony-as-persona as opposed to Hegarty-as-self, Cairns considered Antony’s presentation of transgenderedness as a performance of a specific (trans)gender, politically charged by its very design. Cairns illustrated his points by playing a song clip from *I*



ANTONY AND THE JOHNSONS (2000)

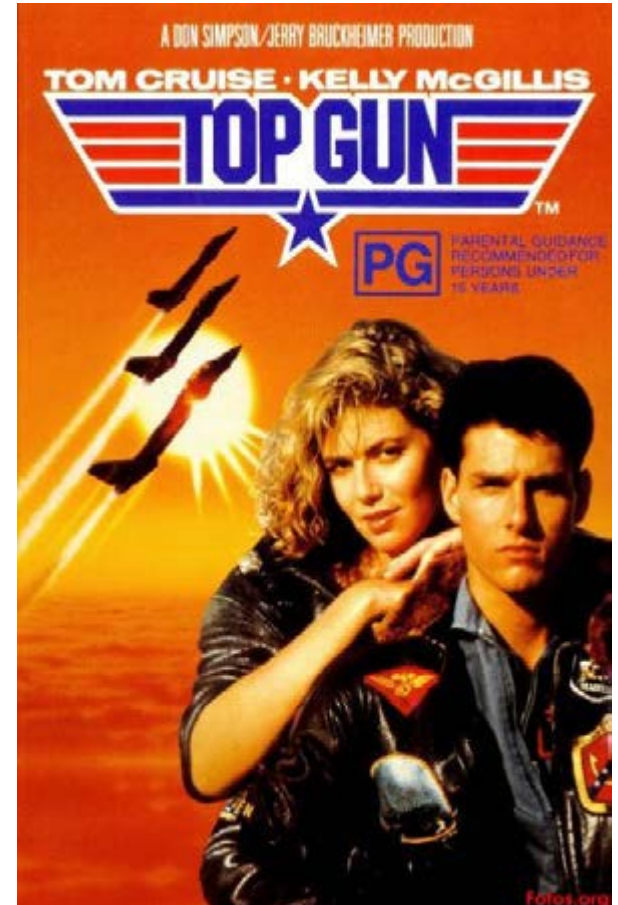
Am a Bird Now, Antony and the Johnsons’ first album. The clip demonstrated the full range of Antony’s voice as the song shifted from the verse into the chorus. Cairns argued that, in how it encompasses both masculine lows and feminine highs, Antony’s singing voice renders his transgendered self externally audible and recognizable as such, overcoming and transcending the heteronormative implications of the gender binary through sound. Only in song, Cairns said, can Antony truly overcome the “either/or” logic of the gender binary, and thus perform a gender “both/and.”

The final presenter was Andrew Myers, a graduate student at USC. His paper, “Negotiat-



ing the *Woman Warrior: The U.S. Military's Influence Over Representations of Military Women in Film and Television, 1980–2012*,” examined the extent of the Department of Defense’s influence over contemporary representations of military women in movies. Numerous movies from the past three decades, Myers said, explore and sometimes challenge the status of women in the U.S. armed forces. Although the producers of many of these films

sought inexpensive access to military resources through the DoD’s entertainment liaison offices, the majority of films featuring prominent female military characters were completely denied any military cooperation. Myers explained that previous research on the Hollywood-military relationship has revealed the DoD’s significant negotiation power in obliging potential filmmaking partners to revise scripts for “historical accuracy” and positive military representation. His project broke new ground by investigating both the concerns that military liaisons raised with producers and the potential solutions they offered; analyzing the kinds of representation that were deemed acceptable; and exploring the military’s struggle with its own image and culture in a period of turbulent gender shifts. As examples, Myers showed clips from *G.I. Jane* and *Top Gun*, two of the movies that his case study considers. Scenes from both movies showed military men and women interacting. In *G.I. Jane*, Demi Moore’s character is called before a male superior officer who questions women’s fitness for serving in the military, while Myers’s chosen scene from *Top Gun* features Tom Cruise’s cocky pilot following a woman into a bathroom on a bet that he can sleep with her. Myers explained how the military’s reaction to movies such as these has varied, with some movies being acknowledged



as realistic and others protested as fabrications. Ultimately, Myers said, he hopes to determine the extent to which the DoD’s negotiations with filmmakers have unseen influence over contemporary representations of military women.

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