

<http://somatosphere.net/?p=10951>

"Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary" - Special Issue of *Body & Society*

2015-09-19 12:00:18

By Anna Zogas

In addition to what's "[In the Journals](#)" so far, and the [inaugural issue](#) of **Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience**, September brings us a special issue of **Body & Society** edited by Margrit Shildrick and Deborah Lynn Steinberg. "[Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary](#)" includes articles on human organ transplantation, psychiatry, amputation and war, and a media ecology of cancer, which together explore biomedical governance, estrangement, dissolution, assemblage, and feminist politics. Enjoy!

[Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary](#)

Margrit Shildrick and Deborah Lynn Steinberg

This introductory article provides a contextual and theoretical overview to this special issue of *Body & Society*. The special issue presents five selected case studies – focusing on the contexts of transplantation, psychiatry, amputation and war, and a transvalued media ecology of cancer – to offer meditations on a number of interlinked questions. The first of these is the entanglement of biomedical governance – political/economic as well as self-disciplinary – with the nexus of estrangement, which can denote both the distancing of otherness and self-division. Second is the realm of feeling, of phantasmatic projection and of the ways in which the biopolitical becomes reciprocally, discursively, enmeshed in a wider cultural imaginary. Third is the shifting terrain of gender and feminist politics, a key dimension of which is the necessary reworking of feminist thought in the wake of a radically altered biomedical and biotechnological landscape. Under the rubric of *Estranged Bodies*, the collection considers themes of dissolution and the fragility of the body/subject read through bodily catastrophe, radical body modification and extreme medical intervention. Also considered is the notion of assemblage – the provisional coming together of disparate parts – which encourages a rethinking of questions of reconstituted, displaced and re-placed bodies.

[Staying Alive: Affect, Identity and Anxiety in Organ Transplantation](#)

Margrit Shildrick

The field of human organ transplantation, and most particularly that of heart transplantation where the donor is always deceased, is one in which the rhetoric of hope leaves little room for any exploration or understanding of the more negative emotions and affects that recipients may experience. Where a donated heart is commonly referred to as the 'gift of life', both in lay discourse and by those engaged in transplantation procedures, how does this imbricate with the alternative clinical term of a 'graft'? For recipients of donor organs, the experience of living on in the face of otherwise certain death is fraught with complex emotions, not only about the self and the now dead other, but the persistence of the other within the self. In contrast to our expectations of the feel-good narrative of the gift of life, recipients are often significantly troubled by the aftermath of the procedure, which may fundamentally challenge notions of personal identity, as well as having deep implications for our understanding of the relation between death and 'staying alive'. Drawing on recent research into heart transplantation, I shall theorise the field through a reflection – drawing on both Mauss and Derrida – on the meaning of the gift, before moving on to consider whether a Deleuzian approach to both the assemblage and the 'event' of death might offer a more productive framework.

[Biopolitics and Capital: Poverty, Mobility and the Body-in-transplantation in Mexico](#)

Ciara Kierans

Organ transplantation has been central to debates on medical technologies and their complex biopolitical consequences, new forms of medical governance and new opportunities for capital. Attending to transplantation has also opened up new ways of thinking about, acting on and living 'in' the body, raising important questions about what it means to be embodied under particular cultural conditions. The specific ways in which a technology like transplantation puts the body parts of some at the disposal of the bodies of others has served to (re)write bodily boundaries, commoditise body parts and reorganise the social relations of exchange, care and responsibility. The controversies that this family of technologies has given rise to are both readable and read as embedded in and expressive of wider forms of conflict and contestation. Putting these controversies and their entanglements centre-stage, this article focuses on the manner in which transplant technologies construct their publics in gendered and socially stratified terms, as they reconstruct the transplanted organ as a new site for the extraction of surplus value. Drawing on data from fieldwork in Mexico, I will examine the catastrophic consequences of transplant medicine for Mexico's poor, particularly women who bear the burden of care for the country's predominantly living transplant

programme. In carrying the costs (moral, social and economic) their accounts of these processes offer us an important critical vantage point from which to assess the interplay between state, market and the 'worn' body in the context of transplantation.

[Illness as Assemblage: The Case of Hystero-epilepsy](#)

Lisa Diedrich

This article explores illness as an assemblage of bodies, discourses, and practices by tracing a genealogy of the condition hystero-epilepsy in order to show the precarity of dominant bio-psychiatric ideology in the present. I read Siri Hustvedt's case study of her own nervous condition with and against other histories of nerves, including Charcot's treatment of hystero-epilepsy in the 1870s, Foucault's treatment of hysteria, simulation, and the 'neurological body' presented in his lectures in 1974, and Elizabeth Wilson's recent treatment of the Freudian concept of 'somatic compliance.' I assemble this eclectic hystero-epileptic archive not in order to present a definitive history of hystero-epilepsy, but rather to think about how illness is made, unmade, and remade in the clinic and narrative.

[Disciplining Pain: Masculinity and Ideologies of Repair in a Colombian Military Hospital](#)

Emily Cohen

Colombia, a country at civil war for over 50 years, has one of the highest rates of landmine injury in the world. This article is based on ethnographic research conducted at the Amputation and Rehabilitation Unit of Bogota's Central Military Hospital. Through an ethnographic description of surgical amputation and rehabilitation, I examine medical understandings of vitality and masculinity in respect to the senses – primarily that of pain in the act of amputation.

[The Bad Patient: Estranged Subjects of the Cancer Culture](#)

Deborah Lynn Steinberg

Cancer has long been a cultural touchstone: a metaphor of devastation and a spectre of social as well as bodily anomie and loss. Yet recent years have witnessed significant transformations in perceptions of cancer, particularly in perceptions of the cancer patient. This paper is concerned with the 'struggles of subjectivity' emergent in this transvalued cancer culture. Explored from the standpoint of the 'bad patient', and drawing on media and cultural methodologies, the paper will consider the convergence of medicine, morality and popular iconography as they are embedded in the imageries, imaginaries and representational economies of the cancer culture industry. Of particular concern in this context are the

(re)composures of the patient, as liminal figure, caught between clinical imperative and cultural fantasy.

AMA citation

Zogas A. "Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary" - Special Issue of *Body & Society*. *Somatosphere*. 2015. Available at: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=10951>. Accessed September 18, 2015.

APA citation

Zogas, Anna. (2015). "*Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary*" - *Special Issue of Body & Society*. Retrieved September 18, 2015, from Somatosphere Web site: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=10951>

Chicago citation

Zogas, Anna. 2015. "Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary" - Special Issue of *Body & Society*. Somatosphere. <http://somatosphere.net/?p=10951> (accessed September 18, 2015).

Harvard citation

Zogas, A 2015, "*Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary*" - *Special Issue of Body & Society*, Somatosphere. Retrieved September 18, 2015, from <<http://somatosphere.net/?p=10951>>

MLA citation

Zogas, Anna. ""Estranged Bodies: Shifting Paradigms and the Biomedical Imaginary" - Special Issue of *Body & Society*." 19 Sep. 2015. Somatosphere. Accessed 18 Sep. 2015.<<http://somatosphere.net/?p=10951>>