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Polly Galis, Antonia Wimbush, and Maria Tomlinson, eds., *Queer(y)ing Bodily Norms in Francophone Culture*. Modern French Identities 140. New York: Peter Lang, 2021. ix + 279 pp. Index. \$67.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781789975147; \$67.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781789975161.

Review by Daniel Nabil Maroun, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Polly Galis, Antonia Wimbush, and Maria Tomlinson's edited volume explores the evolution of the term "queer" during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing especially on how the term has recently opened up to question all normative ideas. The editors elucidate the theoretical plurality that resides inside the application of the term, underlining its capabilities for critical analysis of new temporalities. Their volume is a bold endeavor to intersect two critical approaches: querying bodily norms as well as queering them, all the while producing scholarship that questions normativity within and outside of LGBTQ+ spaces. Their introduction opens with a succinct overview of queer studies to help the reader comprehend how the editors position their understanding of queer studies and queer theory. Most interestingly, the introduction suggests, much as does Sedgwick in *Tendencies*,^[1] that we must turn our use of "queer" and its analytical power outward, to see how such an approach crisscrosses with various representations of lived experiences. For example, the editors discuss intersecting queer studies with the postcolonial, an intellectual juncture that they suggest is a "joint battleground" that deconstructs and upends "essentialism and monolithism" (p. 3). They draw from feminist scholarly work, citing Debbie Cameron and Joan Scanlon's definition according to which "queer" denotes a marginal status applied to an individual by the dominant or legitimate group,^[2] a position that furthers the argument that queer readings are readings of the marginalized, regardless of sexuality and gender (p. 3). Finally, these editors bring queerness back to the physical--the body--by engaging with disability studies to underscore how both queer studies and disability studies posit themselves against normative perspectives of the body--those of heteronormativity and ableism.

These editors argue that they coined the term "queer(y)ing" to "illustrate the value of applying approaches informed by a queer perspective in a variety of different sociocultural and generic contexts" (p. 5). They go on to elaborate on this claim by stating that this edited volume aims to "query what queer means" throughout various temporalities within French and francophone history. I praise their introduction for teasing out the variety of lenses that queer theory intersects, showcasing ideologies that overlap between queer studies and other disciplines, as well as underscoring aspects of it that complement the aforementioned critical approaches.

The editors argue that the body is central to French queer thought, hence why the volume seeks to query and queer what constitutes bodily norms. They unpack how the discussion on body

politics and autonomy that has occurred during the COVID-19 debate is one that has historical precedence and is informed by queer studies. They argue that the pandemic has placed “unprecedented emphasis on the importance of bodily health and identity” (p. 15) for all bodies, in particular marginalized bodies who were or are disproportionately impacted by the virus. They contend, further, that their volume aims to continue the tradition of French thought that studies queer ideology and identity from “the perspective of the body foremost” (p. 19). This is a stance I appreciate, for I believe we should revisit the concept of corporeality and how the body interreacts with the numerous normative social constructs (heterosexual vs. homosexual, cisgender vs. transgender, healthy vs. unhealthy, moral vs. immoral, abled vs. disabled) given the current health climate.

The volume itself is divided into four thematic sections in which contributors tease out how different genres and media queer and/or query “problematic bodily norms” (p. 19). The corpus of cultural productions that these authors examine are expansive, as the editors seek to “decentre Queer French Studies” (p. 19) by integrating works from beyond the Hexagon. These four thematic endeavors are entitled: “Queering the Body,” “Rethinking Gendered Bodily Norms,” “Hybrid and Dysfunctional Bodies,” and, finally, “Bodies in Flux.” Each part aims at nuancing our understanding of bodily and queer studies in the French and francophone context. Queer(y)ing bodily norms is a massive undertaking that seeks to comprehensively provide readers with the opportunity to rethink the tools queer studies can afford its practitioners.

The authors included in part one, “Queering the Body,” probe how “social and sexual norms are inscribed on the body” (p. 19) while simultaneously demonstrating how different forms of media contest said norms and even transcend them. Brian Troth analyzes the digital gay male body and the spaces it inhabits to show how the digitization of the body resists “a more traditional view of corporeality” (p. 29). He draws from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “corps sans organes,”^[3] functioning as an interpretive lens that allows him to underscore how the digital profile can be seen as nonproductive (i.e., it is not real), but also as a body of desire and seduction. In fact, Troth goes on to show how the digital body is productive and key to understanding how the gay male body will interact with the world in the future. Adina Stroia offers a well-paced and thorough introduction to female-authored lesbian novels in the “contemporary extreme” (p. 48) of French literature. Her chapter centers on the trope of doubles (original subject and *Doppelgänger*) in literature, in particular how the double is queered in female-centered narratives by women writers. These narratives cast the male Other “aside in favour of magnetic Sapphic attraction” (p. 51). Through the exploration of Marie Nimier’s works (notably *La Nouvelle pornographie* and *Photo-photo*), Stroia demonstrates how the double provides an important opportunity for scholars to investigate “female subjectivity and bodily identity” (p. 53), and that the double provides permeable boundaries of self-reflection. Finally, Ray Balstad draws on Sarah Ahmed’s concept of “desire lines”^[4] to analyze two films, *Ma vie en rose* and *Tomboy*. Most interestingly for Balstad’s contribution is his analysis and configuration of space as it relates to sexuality and gender; for this approach, he engages with Michel Foucault’s critical concept of *heterotopia*.^[5] What Balstad aims to show readers is the multiple ways characters in the aforementioned films reorient “themselves in gender” (p. 71) and how this reorientation produces places of resistance and deviation as they go against normative pathways outlined from birth.

In part two of this volume, “Rethinking Gendered Bodily Norms,” the contributions undertake the “gender debate” (p. 20), as the editors call it, across different media and literatures. Kathleen Rizy reminds readers that the body in biological or medical literature is consistently thought of

as male, and that this “androcentric perception of the human body has inhibited women from engaging with technology” (p. 91). Her analysis of Darrieussecq’s “Mon mari le clone” underlines how the narrative focuses on the protagonist’s interaction with reproductive technology and subsequently pushes the reader to confront traditional notions of motherhood and pregnancy as they relate to women’s bodies. Under this same section of the volume, Vanessa Lee explores “stereotypical representations and norms of Caribbean femininity” (p. 109) in the plays of French Caribbean woman writer Ina Césaire, while additionally interrogating how the plays of Suzanna Dracius “reclaim and embody the experiences of female historical figures” (p. 109). Her analysis of both authors’ works stresses the multiple ways in which the female body becomes a site for contestation and bodily emancipation. Concluding this section is an essay by Seth Compaoré in which he analyzes the cinematic aesthetic of André Téchiné’s *Quand on a 17 ans* to demonstrate how Téchiné’s film deconstructs (homo)social and cinematic norms. Such an approach allows the author to then present an argument on how the male body is portrayed and understood in contemporary space.

Part three of the volume, entitled “Hybrid and Dysfunctional Bodies,” surveys what the editors call “unusual bodies” (p. 21) in literature and film. Cristina Onesta’s examination of Anada Devi’s novel *Manger l’autre* and Isabelle Boni-Claverie’s film *Le Génie d’Abou* highlights how centering discourse on the obese feminine body affords new ways to denounce gendered, ableist, and cultured conceptions of the body, an interesting and rare analysis of bodily normativity in terms of obesity. Sara Bédard-Goulet follows in this section with a piece on Jean Echenoz’s novel *14*. Her analysis investigates the use of agency in both human and nonhuman entities in the novel, ultimately arguing for a porous understanding of the body (p. 183), examined through a “non-binary lens” (p. 21). This contribution is informative as it compares active subjectivity in both human and nonhuman entities. Bédard-Goulet’s human vs. nonhuman agency thematically segues into the next chapter where Kate Foster looks at Gaston Leroux’s *La Poupée sanglante* and *La Machine à assassiner* and unpacks how the cyborg “disrupt[s] and subvert[s] fixed definitions and relationships” (p. 188). She suggests that the cyborg’s hybrid nature (man and machine) arms him against the normative corporeal identities assigned to him. (I wonder whether we might even push for “it” instead of “him” in terms of cyborgs and indeed move away from corporeal gendering of cyborgs).

Part four of the volume, entitled “Bodies in Flux,” examines how movement transforms bodies. The editors clarify that such movement should be understood as “enforced and voluntary; conscious and subconscious; and a decision borne out of necessity and for pleasure” (p. 23). This section provides an interesting theoretical approach as the idea of “flux” entails not simply movement but an instability, a consistent shift to and from. Loren K. Wolfe’s contribution opens the section in which she studies Hervé Guibert’s later writing and the almost hagiographic status he gives female heroines (the contingent heterosexual, she argues) in his corpus. She states that “his libidinal shift towards strong, *feminine* characters displaces the boundaries of heteronormative logic that dictate what constitutes ‘straight behaviour’” (p. 210), indicating a fluctuation in terms of normative sexuality. Most pivotal to her argument is how this fluctuation can be observed in the work these women do to continue Guibert’s legacy and the posthumous proliferation of his work. Following this chapter, Jennifer Boum Make scrutinizes the testimonial dimension of exile in Haitian-Québécois author Emile Ollivier’s *Passages*,^[6] a story that bears witness to two “entangled timelines of Haitian exile” (p. 229), showcasing how vulnerable migrant trajectories become. She specifies that the aforementioned testimonial dimension of *Passages* draws public attention to these Othered bodies in so much as it brings awareness to the

“plight of migrants and refugees” (p. 242) in exile. Closing this section of the volume is Kathryn Chaffee, who draws from Deleuze’s work on movement, from *Cinema I*, [7] perceiving dance as a dialectic “between two instances or bodies” (p. 22), and arguing that movement (i.e., dance in this specific chapter) “uncovers fundamental qualities of bodies and relationships” (p. 248). She applies this critical approach across the cinematic corpus of Claire Denis. Her analysis of bodies that move in Denis’s films highlights an evolution of how “Denis thinks through movement” (p. 261), showing that these bodies that move queer the boundaries between “separate bodies” and “bodies and [their] environments” (p. 261).

The editors conclude by reminding us that the aim of this volume is to defy the “rigid definitions of bodily identity” and the norms that reify them (p. 263). The collective work in this volume interrogates what the body is and how the body can be defined, interacted with, and, finally, theorized. Queer subjectivity requires constant “negotiation and renegotiations” (p. 264); accordingly, the contributions in this volume investigate this concept by studying how queerness can be explored. Their first claim on bodily identity is the most powerful as it reminds scholars of the power of queer studies and its innate ability to query normative frameworks. Pedagogically, this volume is a great tool for instructors who want to introduce students to how queer studies facilitates our understanding of gender and sexuality as well as of other fields, specifically that of bodily identity. It is also important to stress how rich the volume is for individuals who study queerness and postcolonialism or queerness and disability; but most of all, it is essential for those individuals who study how the body is imagined and perceived outside of normative structures. The contributors’ use of this analytical approach to examine specific bodies of cultural production (literary and cinematic for the most part) provides interesting readings for scholars of those artists (please see the list of essays below for the works studied in this volume).

However, I cannot help but think of the ethical implications of querying queerness. Queerness has long been tied to marginalized communities and to “query” them runs the risk of questioning their legitimacy as a population on the periphery of society or normativity. I do not accuse the editors of doing so; I believe their volume seeks to expand how we can query bodily norms by using queer approaches. I bring this up because queerness is inherently radical and revolutionary; it interrupts, disrupts, and even upsets. When reading this volume, we do not want to doubt the theoretical potential queer studies can afford us; rather, we want to admit to its empowering potential. This is partially where I had hoped the conclusion or perhaps the individual essays might have gone, elaborating upon ways in which our analysis of bodily norms will continue to shift the cultural landscape of agency and subjectivity. But perhaps that is how the editors intended to leave us, eager to take the next steps, queering more bodily norms, disrupting normative expectations of corporeal performativity.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Part one, Queering the Body

Brian Troth, “Hookups: Social Networking and Digital Bodies in Twenty-First-Century France”

Adina Stroia, “Lesbian Selves: The Figure of the (Body) Double in Marie Nimier’s Works”

Ray Balstad, “Children Out of Line: Gender (Dis)Orientations and Paths of Queer Resistance in the Heterotopia”

Part two, Rethinking Gendered Bodily Norms

Kathleen Rizy, “Motherhood Reconceived: The Posthuman Future Is Female in ‘Mon mari le clone’ by Marie Darrieussecq”

Vanessa Lee, “The Female Body in the Plays of French Caribbean Women Writers”

Seth Comparoré, “Male Bodily Poetics in André Téchiné’s *Quand on a 17 ans* (2016): Physical Violence and Teenage Passion”

Part three, Hybrid and Dysfunctional Bodies

Cristina Onesta, “Dysfunctional Bodies, Dysfunctional Gazes: Artistic Creation and Death in *Mange l’autre* by Anada Devi and *Le Génie d’Abou* by Isabelle Boni-Claverie”

Sara Bédard-Goulet, “14 of the Missing Arm: Ontological Instability of the French Contemporary Novel in Jean Echenoz’s Work”

Kate Foster, “The Cyborg’s Undecidable Body: A Game of ‘Who Am I?’ in Gaston Leroux’s *La Poupée sanglante*”

Part four, Bodies in Flux

Loren Wolfe, “Mediating Eve: Female Protagonists and the Contingent Body in Hervé Guibert’s Late Narratives”

Jennifer Boum Make, “Exploring Encounters in *Passages* by Emile Ollivier: The Role of Testimonial Responsibility to Othered Bodies”

Kathryn Chaffee, “Dance as Encounter in the Films of Claire Denis”

NOTES

[1] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

[2] Debbie Cameron and Joan Scanlon, “Talking about Gender” (2010), <https://finnmackay.wordpress.com/articles-i-like/talking-about-gender-by-joan-scanlon-and-prof-debbie-cameron/> (accessed January 10 2022).

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L’Anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie I* (Paris: Minuit, 1972).

[4] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, and Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[5] Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22-27 (p. 24).

[6] Emile Ollivier, *Passages* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 1994).

[7] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

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