Exploring the Cultural History of Continental European Freak Shows and ‘Enfreakment’

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INTRODUCTION

ANNA KÉRCHY AND ANDREA ZITTLAU

This international, interdisciplinary collection of essays attempts to recover the lost histories of Continental European freakery and enfreakment. Our aim is to explore, throughout the centuries, both local and transnational dimensions of the social construction and spectacular display of wondrous, monstrous, or curious Otherness associated with the freak in geographical regions formerly left unexplored by systematic academic research.

All essays rely heavily on Rosemarie Garland Thomson's notion of "enfreakment" introduced in her study on the rise and fall of the freak show and its most popular human exhibits from the 1830s through to the 1940s.[1] Accordingly, "freaks of nature," i.e. extraordinary embodiments induced by congenital or developmental disorders (like the "Lilliputians," "Armless Wonders," and "Siamese Twins" examined in this volume), come to be reinterpreted as "freaks of culture," who have been consistently "stylized, silenced, differentiated and distanced" from the norm by the cultural rituals of ideologically-infiltrated (medical, religious, political) representational practices. Thus—much in line with today's social constructionist view of disability[2]—the distinction between these "born freaks" and artificially, artistically deformed "made freaks" (e.g. "Tattooed Ladies") eventually becomes blurred, since all freaks always-

[1] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, (ed.), "Introduction. From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body,* Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p.10.

[2] While impairment refers to an injury, an illness, or a congenital condition that does or may likely cause a loss or difference of physiological or psychological function, disability denotes the loss or limitation of *opportunities* to take part in society on an equal level with others due to social and environmental barriers. See e.g.: Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body* (New York: Routledge, 1996), Michael Oliver, *Understanding Disability from Theory to Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1996), *Online Archives at the Centre for Disability Studies of the University of Leeds* (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/ Accessed: 14 August 2012).

already[3] seem to emerge as socially constituted, "enfreaked" "icons of generalized embodied deviance."[4] The show-personas presented communal anxieties and fantasies of Otherness in highly commercialized, fetishized, colonized forms, which served entertainment and educational purposes, conditioned responses of revulsion and pleasure, and consolidated the comforting, illusorily self-same identity of the ordinary average majority populace. Paradoxically, as Garland Thomson argues, enfreakment's "elaborate foregrounding of specific bodily eccentricities" results in the solidification of "a single amorphous category of corporeal otherness" coined "freakery;" as the exhibitions simultaneously "reinscribe gender, race, sexual aberrance, ethnicity, and disability as inextricable yet particular exclusionary systems legitimated by bodily variation—all represented by the single multivalent figure of the freak."[5]

Manifestations of the anomalous or unusual human bodily form hold a tremendous fascination and constitute a particularly complex interpretive challenge for the collective cultural imagination, precisely because the (image of the) body re/presents, especially from modernism onwards, the human being measured in terms of our own identities and its received images of integrity.[6] Thus Otherness is necessarily compared to, inter/faced with, and touches upon the self-same. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it, the spectator's awe and fascination

> lies in the recognition that this monstrous being is at the heart of his or her own identity, for it is all that must be ejected or abjected from one's self-image to make the bounded, category-obeying self possible.[7]

In other words, freakery emblematizes an "in-between being" simultaneously indicating and imperilling the physical, psychic, conceptual limits, which divide the subject from ambiguities beyond normal, knowable, visible

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[3] "Always already" is a collocation used by feminist philosopher Judith Butler with reference to the unescapable subjection (i.e. ideological discipline) of the human being inherently located, from/and even before his/her very birth, within the social matrix in a hegemonically organized web of power positionalities and prescriptive meanings. See *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[4] Garland Thomson, "Introduction," p. 10.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Hans Belting. *Bild-Anthroplogie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (München: Fink, 2001).

[7] Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit," in *Freakery. Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body,* Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 55–69.

human subjectivity, and outside its corporeal limits effecting the lived and represented identity.[8] This is why Margrit Shildrick insists on the intimate interconnection between the imaginary activities of making (up) monstrosity and fearing our vulnerable selves.[9]

These theoretical considerations constitute communal starting points for the authors of this volume's primarily cultural historically oriented essays. All tread in the footsteps of outstanding scholars, such as Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Robert Bogdan,[10] Rachel Adams,[11] and Leslie Fiedler,[12] who finely documented, among others, the fascinating phenomena of freak shows, sideshows, and dime museums, thoroughly discussing cultural critical, historical, legal, ethical, identity political questions in connection with freak show celebrities (e.g. General Tom Thumb), human exhibit's victims (e.g. Sarah Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus"), famous owners and entrepreneurs collecting or exhibiting human oddities (e.g. Phineas Taylor Barnum), and memorable sites of the entertainment industry preoccupied with displaying extraordinary bodies as major attractions (e.g. Coney Island).

It is by now common-sense wisdom that the "culturally enfreaked" otherness intimately related to the self-same has never ceased to preoccupy human fantasy. Already Stone Age cave paintings depict wondrous-horrendous human-anomalies, Antiquity praises sacred *lusus naturae* and sacrifices the deformed, Medieval treatises speculate about marvels and monstrosities, the Renaissance nobility's cabinets of curiosities house collections of human (and non-human) oddities, the Enlightenment establishes "museums of living pathology,"[13] late nineteenth century witnesses the heyday of the display of corporeal anomaly for the sake of entrepreneurial profit and mass entertainment in the form of the famed "freak show" attractions, the 1960s' human rights movements embrace physiognomic deviation as a token of egalitarian political subversion, and

[8] Ibid., p. 57, p. 65.
[9] Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster. Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: SAGE, 2002).
[10] Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show. Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[11] Rachel Adams, *Sideshow USA. Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
[12] Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks. Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).
[13] Christopher G. Goetz, *Charcot, the Clinician* (New York: Raven Press, 1987), p. xxiv.

the freak-hype of today's post-industrialist consumer societies functions as a mode of volatile self-expression.

However, the editors of this collection of essays could not help to notice the fact that nearly each of the excellent case studies authored by the above experts of freakery has tackled examples from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States and Great Britain. It seems symptomatic of the current consensual critical understanding of freak shows that—while Marlene Tromp's collection relates historical freakery to Victorian Britain[14]—Garland Thomson most obviously locates them in Victorian America, arguing that these "public rituals that bonded a sundering polity together in the collective act of looking"[15] helped to promote, in an era of crisis and change, an American identity threatened by inevitably being lost amidst the challenges of modernity. Thereby a risk emerges of creating the impression that the exhibition of freaks for amusement and profit is a primarily modernist, and a uniquely and entirely Anglo-American cultural phenomenon. The aim of the present volume is to demonstrate that this is by far not the case. A plethora of research and leisure activities concerned with the adequate scientific documentation of physically deformed people or the spectacular exhibition of the cultural(ly) other(ed*)* set their sceneries elsewhere in Europe, and freakery proves to have been an established part of the Continental European entertainment industry, too, with shows attracting masses in amusement parks, funfairs, vaudevilles, circuses, human zoos which both resembled and differed from the ones overseas.

Despite the lack of comprehensive analysis, Continental European scholars have not remained entirely silent on the issue of freakery either. We shall just mention here a few examples of the sporadic but significant publications in the field: chapters from Interdisciplinary.net research group's long-term project on *Monsters and Monstrosity* have been investigating in nine succeeding publications the enduring influence of the monstrous on human culture throughout human history;[16] Jan Bondeson's volumes *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities* (1999) and *The Two-headed*

[14] Marlene Tromp, (ed.) *Victorian Freaks. The Social Context of Freakery in Britain* (Columbus**:** The Ohio State University Press, 2008).
[15] Garland Thomson, "Introduction," p. 4.
[16] See the detailed bibliographical data of the nine volumes at the website: http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/at-the-interface/evil/monsters-and-the-monstrous/ (Accessed: 7 August 2012). E.g.: Niall Scott (ed.) *Monsters and the Monstrous. Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi 2007).

Boy and Other Medical Marvels (2000)[17] inspect anomalies of human development, the lives of the extraordinary individuals concerned, and the social reactions they provoked, through a variety of original European (French, German, Dutch, Polish, Scandinavian) historical cases; Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park's 1998 book on *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750*[18] provides an intellectual history of the evolving collective sensibility of Continental European naturalists, tracking the setting of the limits of the known, formations of monstrosity, and the place of wonder from the high Middle Ages until the Enlightenment within the context of the emerging sciences, especially medicine; the volume *Der falsche Körper. Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Monstrositäten* (The wrong Body. Contributing to a History of Monstrosities) edited by Michael Hagner[19] investigates monstrosities in their cultural and historical settings from Antiquity to the nineteenth century and covers cases from the hypertrichose (extreme hairyness) to hermaphrodites, the criminal and the ethnographic other, the medical and the popularly condemned; and, perhaps most spectacularly; Hans Scheugl's 1974 *Show Freaks and Monster*,[20] a visually impressive exhibition-catalogue, locates corporeal difference within the context of the entertainment industry—via a mixture of encyclopaedic listing of freak-show celebrities in Frederick Drimmer's[21] style and of historical (medical and popular) categorizations introduced by Leslie Fiedler[22]—focusing on over 300 photographs from the material of the Adanos collection, one of the most exciting Continental European storehouses of records of freakery.

The Adanos collection, today a part of the archive of the Pratermuseum in Vienna, can be considered emblematic because of the adventurous figure of the initiator of this treasure-trove that still holds plenty of freak-related material to be explored by curious researchers. Felix Adanos (1905–1991) was an Austrian (then Slovenian)-born circus celebrity, "the last of Vaudeville's great gentleman jugglers"—famed for "manipulating common objects [pool cues, pens, coffee pots, and soda straws] in

[17] Jan Bondeson, *A Cabinet of Medical Curiosities: A Compendium of the Odd, the Bizarre, and the Unexpected* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), *The Two-headed Boy and Other Medical Marvels* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
[18] Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).
[19] Michael Hagner, Der falsche Körper. Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Monstrositäten (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1995).
[20] Hans Scheugl, *Freak Shows & Monster* (Köln: DuMont, 1974).
[21] Frederick Drimmer, *Very Special People* (New York: Amjon Publishing, 1973).
[22] Fiedler, *Freaks*.

common ways"[23]—who toured Europe, finished the war as an American prisoner, got engaged with the Ringling Circus, earned international fame, and throughout his career collected intensively anything connected to the freak show business. His publicity photographs and newspaper clippings evidence a rich European tradition vivified by American inspirators and followers alike, during a fruitful collaboration of the two continents. As Adanos' and numerous other archives attest, many freak-show acts, like the Missing Link, the Two-Headed Nightingale, Giants, and Dwarfs appeared simultaneously, successively on various stages worldwide; many American celebrities toured Europe and vice versa. The dwarf performers discussed in this collection also provide prominent examples for these transnational careers: the Doll Family of the Schneider dwarf siblings, the Singer Midgets, and Lilliputian Companies were German, Bavarian "imports" to the U.S entertainment industry, became stars of the Hollywood silver-screen (e.g. as Munchkins in the 1939 *Wizard of Oz*[24]), and then returned to Europe on tour as "tiny artists from the Big World."[25]

It was the realization of this intensive Euro-American exchange, recorded by the Adanos collection too, that urged several authors in this volume to adopt a transnational approach, deemed to be apt to explore unjustly neglected dimensions of the representation of extraordinary bodies that cannot be grasped uniquely by the means of national discourses. Way beyond the late-nineteenth century heyday of freak shows, the transnational dimensions of enfreakment are made obvious in the present collection through topics ranging from Jesuit missionaries' diabolization of American Indians, to translations of Continental European teratology in British medical journals, and the Hollywood silver screen's colonization of European fantasies about deformity.[26]

Another prominent example for the simultaneous resemblance and difference and the strange interconnectedness of the American and European freak-show traditions is provided by a historical figure who certainly deserves to be mentioned—even if only in passing and without

[23] Anonymous. "Flash Back. Adieu To Adanos' Uncommon Way With Common Objects" *Juggler's World*. Spring 1991. Vol. 43, No. 1. http://www.juggling.org/jw/91/1/flashback.html (Accessed: 16 August 2012). Based on an article by the Raspyni Brothers in *Juggler's World*. Summer 1986.

[24] Victor Fleming, dir. *The Wizard of Oz*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.

[25] See Herza, McAra, and Kérchy on little people in this volume. The variety of names (Doll Family, Midgets, Lilliputians, Dwarfs, Tiny Artists) used to refer to little people illustrates the polyvalent significance that can be attributed to (apparently) one single form of anatomical alterity.

[26] See Kristóf, Crockford, McAra in this collection.

further in-depth analysis in the succeeding essays—in the introduction of a collection undertaking to explore the diversity of Continental European freakery. He is one of the most renowned local impresarios, Carl Hagenbeck, Hamburg's famous wild animal trainer, zoo owner, and later circus manager, who organized several ethnic shows between 1874 and 1926, often casting as performers indigenous people marked by their physical alterity. Hagenbeck's first ventures staged the ethnographic Other involved in supposedly daily routines (cooking, eating, mending equipment) portraying "savages in their natural state:" his 1874 exhibit presented the "purely natural population" of "Laplanders" (Sami people) surrounded by their tents, weapons, sleds, aside a group of reindeer, and "reenacted daily life in Lapland for German audiences."[27] Visitors caught a glimpse of apparently authentic Sami life-style that, according to the Hagenbeck schedule, included the building of tents and dismantling them to build them up again a few meters further away, and catching the reindeer for no obvious purpose.[28] The indigenous people had to live as if unobserved, providing a view of the life of the ethnic other whose mundane routines appeared to be strikingly different and yet easily comparable to the ones' of the spectators. Hagenbeck's "reproduction of a realistic copy of natural life" unsettled the legitimacy of the concept of naturalness. His insistence on refusing throughout his shows artificial backdrop props and theatricalized performances of "wildness"—widely used by freak-show frauds of his times—aimed at (even if somewhat illusorily) creating an authentic ("echte") representation of indigenous people, avoiding their fantastification. His "habitat exhibits"—including scheduled presentations of native skills, with weaponry, canoeing, handicrafting, tribal singing and dancing—were replaced by increasingly scripted and spectacularized anthropological-zoological shows, like African tribal warriors driving massive horse-drawn carriages, set within zoo surroundings evoking the sensation of geographical/cultural distance. Yet they also deviated considerably from the usual carnival attractions which displayed performers merely for their physical difference.[29] Unlike in the case of Congolese Mbuti pygmy Ota Benga who was exhibited, labelled The Missing Link, caged together with chimpanzees and an

[27] Carl Hagenbeck, *Von Tieren und Menschen*. Rev. ed. Lorenz Hagenbeck. (Leipzig and Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1948).
[28] Haug von Kuenheim, *Carl Hagenbeck* (Hamburg: Ellert und Richter, 2007), pp. 96–8.
[29] Hilde Thode-Arora, *Für fünfzig Pfennig um die Welt. Die Hagenbeckschen Völkerschauen* (Franfurt/M.: Campus, 1989). The book also provides a list of all of Hagenbeck's shows.

orang-utan in the Monkey House of Bronx Zoo in 1906, and due to humiliations committed suicide in his thirties, throughout Hagenbeck's shows, indigenous people have never been degraded to an animalistic status,[30] but took an active part of a touristic experience of exotic entertainment.[31] As Eike Reichardt suggests, Hagenbeck "freed the phenomenon of ethnographic spectacles from their association with sideshow tents and carnivals and moved them closer to the respectability of popular science," while he consistently emphasized the necessity of the freak-show organizer's "benign intentions" at "respectable entertainment."[32] The scientific motivation behind his gambit is illustrated by the facts that several German ethnology museums benefited from his donations of ethnic objects used in his shows, while pathological expert Rudolf Virchow (introduced in depth in this volume)[33] studied the anthropological background of Hagenbeck's actors to place "the 'tribe' of Germans in unified Germany within a grand hierarchy of peoples."[34] (Certainly Hagenbeck's aims at authenticity did not prevent German audiences from projecting their own fantasies upon the racial other: black indigenous people represented for lower-class spectators a romanticized past of national superiority, and for the bourgeoisie a dream of workers disconnected from labour unrest.[35])

[30] In fact, Hagenbeck's barless zoo, a precursor to today's wildlife adventure parks, was famed for the docile treatment of animals, too, made homely in their life-like environs, modelling their natural habitat.

[31] Ota Benga was first exhibited at the Lousiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. See Philip Verner Bradford, *Ota Benga* (El Dorado: Delta Press, 1993).

[32] Eike Reichardt, *Health, Race, and Empire: Popular Scientific Spectales and National Identity in Imperial Germany, 1871–1914* (New York: State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2006).

[33] See Stammberger's essay in this volume, as well as Birgit Stammberger, *Monster und Freaks: Eine Wissensgeschichte außergewöhnlicher Körper im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011).

[34] Reichardt, *Health, Race, and Empire*, p. 26.

[35] David M. Ciarlo, *Consuming Race*, *Envisioning Empire*. *Colonialism and German Mass Culture, 1887–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003), pp. 233–4. Cited in Reichardt, *Health, Race, and Empire*, p. 27.

Kaiser Wilhelm II. im Gespräch mit den Äthiopiern bei Carl Hagenbeck in Tierpark Hagenbeck, Hamburg. 1909. (Emperor Wilhelm II in conversation with Ethopians in Hagenbeck's zoo) Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst—Zentralbild (Bild 183). Image by unknown photographer provided to Wikimedia Commons by the German Federal Archive. Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R52035 / CC-BY-SA. Hamburg, 12183-09.

The exhibition of racial others also featured in fairs in Europe and the United States alike.[36] The shows were characterised by an intensive exchange of information, ideas, and performers. Hagenbeck did not only ravish entire Europe he toured with his ethnographic exhibits of Nubians and Esquimaux (Inuits)—likely inspiring Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire's similar 1877 human zoo in the Jardin d'Acclimatation de Paris—but he also contributed to the success of the founding father of American freak-showman-ship, Phineas Taylor Barnum[37] by supplying him with trained exotic animals who also gave shows on Coney Island. Besides exchanging ideas with Barnum, Hagenbeck, on his turn, was likely inspired by William Cody's *Wild West Show* that toured Europe and the United States with the same success despite the cultural differences between audiences.

Characteristically, throughout the Continental European cultural history of freakery pain has had an equal share with amusement.

[36] Both the 1878 and the 1889 Parisian World Fair presented an immensely popular *village nègre*, a "Negro Village."
[37] Saxon, A. H., *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

Especially during the Second World War the caged human earned completely new associations, not only because of the Nazi genocide that interned masses of people (othered on religious, racial, political, sexual grounds) in extermination camps, but also because of the solidarity of a few brave persons like Warsaw zookeeper Jan Zabinski and his wife who saved hundreds of Polish Jews during the 1939 German occupation by hiding them in empty cages of their abandoned zoo.[38] A newspaper article from the Adanos collection adequately reflects the contemporary *Zeitgeist*'s condemnatory attitude to freaks when it comments on the photograph of a performer with *hypertrichosis* (extreme hairiness) as "another case illustrating how to make business with illness" and argues it to be "more beneficial to put this poor man … into a medical institution than to expose him to the sympathy of the dime of sensation-seeking elements."[39] From the 1930s onwards, in entertainment ventures all around Europe performers were no longer allowed to participate in the freak shows unless they could produce a medical certificate testifying to their physical and mental health. However, since most performers were denied such an official permission to continue their business, as a consequence of the Nazi eugenics programs, many of them were transported to concentration camps where they died in the gas chambers, while others managed to immigrate to the United States, never to return to Europe.

This collection of essays aims to consistently highlight that freaks are made to circumscribe and enforce boundaries of normality in spatio-temporally specific modes which result from traumatic historical circumstances, decisive geographical contextualizations, as well as related socio-political concerns and communal anxieties. The Holocaust and the Nazi eugenics programs is just one of them, next to phenomena like state Socialism and mandatory humanist normativization, or the Chernobyl catastrophe and repressed fears of nuclear mutations. Some essays of this volume observe closely the impact of these events on enfreakment.[40] We bear in mind that Central European historical cataclysms contributed to the re-evaluation of anatomical difference in quite ambiguous ways: e.g. while the proliferation of the World War veterans allowed for the gradual

[38] Diane Ackerman, *The Zookeeper's Wife. A War Story* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

[39] Newspaper article *Berliner 8 Uhr Blatt*, 3 February 1938 cited in Hans Scheugl, *Show Freaks & Monster*, p. 20. Andrea Zittlau's translation. The original reads: "Auch ein Fall bei dem man mit der Krankheit Geschäfte macht. Es erscheint uns zweckmäßiger, diesen bedauernswerten Mann … in einer Heilanstalt unterzubringen, als ihn dem Groschenmitleid sensationslüsterner Elemente auszuliefern."

[40] See essays by Kuznetsova, Benkő, Kérchy in this volume.

engulfment of the realm of the normal by the disabled and an increased visibility of the formerly othered, the Nazi race-cleansing euthanasia programs, that undertook the systematic, total extermination of the "degenerate," contributed to the disappearance of many freak-show performers, and still constitute a historical baggage extremely difficult to come to terms with—an unexplored, silenced,[41] yet crucially important segment of trauma studies. Thus, the collection undertakes to fill a significant gap of current freak-studies by proposing to trace the inadequately explored cultural history of Continental European freak shows, with a focus on the singular, locally distinguished dimensions of the interpretation and exhibition of extraordinary bodies within their particular historical, cultural and political context.

Forgotten stories are uncovered about freak-show celebrities (including feral children, dwarf nobilities, limbless supercrips)[42], medical specimen (including mummies, lepers, conjoined twins)[43], and philosophical fantasies (natural anomalies, graceful disabled youths)[44] presenting the anatomically unusual in a wide range of sites, including curiosity cabinets, anatomical museums, and traveling circus acts. The cultural construction of other(ed)s is investigated on various grounds: on levels of racial/ethnic, gendered, classed, or religious marginalization, through examining iconic figures such as the demonized American Indian, the interned Jewish dwarf, or the freak as a monstrous mirror to bourgeois spectators and the "aristocrat" of the commons (coined so by Diane Arbus, famous photographer of freaks).[45]

Although Continental European freaks are introduced as products of ideologically-infiltrated representations, they also emerge as embodied subjects endowed with their own voice, view, and subversive agency. Some articles in this collection pay special attention to self-writings of freak performers which narrate their private and public trials, tribulations and triumphs in their own words. To recover the agency of the freak performer is at the heart of the contributions which accordingly negotiate

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[41] A book breaking this silence is Suzanne E. Evans, *Forgotten Crimes: The Holocaust and People with Disabilities* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2004).

[42] See essays by Small, Herza, Storchová in this volume.

[43] See essays by Zittlau, Aghtan, Crockford in this volume.

[44] See essays by Székesi, Benkő in this volume.

[45] The full Arbus quote is: "Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats." Cited in Michael Kimmelman, "The Profound Vision of Diane Arbus: Flaws in Beauty, Beauty in Flaws," *The New York Times*. March 11, 2005.

the showbiz-made star-image and the "tremulous" private selves whose individual joys and tragedies seem to be inevitably part of the freak discourse of their time.

The diversity of the rhetorics employed for the representation of freak Selves and Others is stunning: we encounter a wide range of discourses, ranging from aggrandization to abjectification, from medical pathologization to normativization, from social realism to counter-imaginative fantastification. And each representational/rhetorical mode turns out to be heterogeneous and heteroglossic on its own right, alternatively serving submissive or subversive ends, as in the case of "fantastification," a polyvalent term that denotes in one context a hegemonic means of cultural othering and in another a survival-strategy of the marginalized fighting their traumatisation by historical circumstances.[46]

The cultural history of Continental European freak shows, enfreakment and freakery outlined by the essays of this collection remains necessarily fragmented, incomplete, and non-comprehensive, obviously limited by the physical frames of the publication. But our essays also deliberately embrace partial perspectives and situated knowledge(formation)s, in Donna Haraway's sense,[47] refusing to settle for a finalized, objective historical truth and rather opting for keeping the notion of histories in/on move in a relative and dynamic process, while respecting the agency of those about whom stories are being told.

The complex and challenging histories of Continental European enfreaked's can only be appropriately explored through adopting an interdisciplinary approach, combining methodologies of Disability Studies, cultural anthropology, philosophy, sociology, museology, popular entertainment research, and trauma studies, to name just a few of the involved disciplines. Interdisciplinarity is certainly beneficial on grounds of combining fresh, new perspectives, and escaping cultural biases, but it also holds the major disadvantage of a difficult canonization resulting from more conservative academics' suspicious attitude towards mixed methodologies of what we could risk to call "freak-show studies."

The contributions deal with cases situated geographically in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Germany, France, Italy, the Ukraine and Russia, while interfacing local and transnational characteristics. None of the cases remain isolated within a particular community: with the travelling of exhibitions, performers, showmen, or the news about them, stage acts were refashioned, mutually formative of each other, their

[46] See Kérchy's and McAra's articles in this volume.

[47] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

representational strategies and interpretative guidelines tailored to the needs of national and international audiences. People from different countries, from different periods, and at different status of the spectrum of normality seem to have interacted with one other.

Although the overlappings between the essays could have allowed for a number of different thematic and logical structurings, for simplicity's sake, we have opted for their chronological ordering.

Kamillea Aghtan's analysis of the medieval religious significance of leprous bodies relies on Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection to explain the pivotal role the leper's putrescent carnality plays in the attainment of transcendence through the interconnected performances of Christian charity and the struggle to overcome earthly horrors, on the path to salvation followed by Saint Francis of Assissi, Thomas of Celano, and Angela di Foligno. The essay excels in seeking to recover the leper's, this "freakish and deformed, silent shamblers'" agency.

Ildikó Sz. Kristóf, likewise, concentrates on meaning-formations within the context of Christianity; she scrutinizes exciting archival sources from the Jesuit Libraries of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Upper Hungary with the aim to fully understand the background knowledge that missionaries gained—usually before embarking on their way to the New World—from stereotypical representations of diabolization, envisioning the cultural encounter with the indigenous population in terms of a demon show.

Susan Small deconstructs the course and coverage of the life of a Human Curiosity dissected under the hot glare of the French Enlightenment, as she recovers the traces of Marie Angélique Memmie le Blanc, the Wild Girl of Champagne, deemed a liminal creature, a taxonomic curio in Linneaus' system, existing in what Giorgio Agamben has termed a "zone of indeterminacy" or a "state of exception," who fascinated as a favourite freak spectacle the seventeenth century Parisian salons, and continues to haunt the shadowy margins of society and collective imagination ever since.

Dóra Székesi reads Denis Diderot's speculative philosophical discourse to highlight how his parade of monsters (including physical ones like hermaphrodites and Siamese twins, mythological ones like Cyclopses and Satyrs, and imaginary ones like human polyps or spiderweb organisms) has been shaped by personal experience, contemporary scholars,' physiologists,' surgeons,' and anatomists' experiments, as well as by his philosophical views of Nature (conceived as infinite and timeless, yet eternally dynamic), the most significant elements of his materialism, and his notion of order and disorder.

During the nineteenth century the interest in extraordinary bodies climaxed in both popular and scientific culture. Three contributions dealing with this period reveal how medicine—as an emerging science—makes use of monstrous bodies in the same way the entertainment venues of popular culture do.

Ally Crockford analyses Bertram Windle's extensive serial reports on teratological literature published in the *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology* between 1891 through to 1909, (along with J.W. Ballantyne's and Sir John Bland-Sutton's articles) to reveal how the cases he discusses stem nearly all exclusively from Continental European journals of medicine and are presented to the English readers of the journal in a freak-show simulacrum fashion.

The creative interaction between medical academic and popular entertainment discourse is further explored by Andrea Zittlau who uses Erving Goffman's notion of stigma to show how the exhibits of medical collections come to be identified with enfreaked outcasts of the society—on accounts of the criminal, the ethnographic other, and the physically deformed, who all find their way into medical collections where they form an "assembly of freaks."

This point is taken up by Birgit Stammberger who tackles the relationship between elitist scientific and public popular means of Foucauldian knowledge-formation in her study of Rudolf Virchow's medical collection at the turn of the century in Berlin, Germany. One of the most renown European physicians of his time, Virchow fashioned himself with his collection, while continuously crossing the borders between showman-ship and the anthropologist-pathologist's professionalism throughout his presentations of monstrous objects to various audiences.

After medical sciences, our focus shifts towards mass entertainment events popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Lucie Storchova discloses how discourses of difference, narratives of normalcy, and supercrip scenarios intermingled throughout shaping subjectivites self-articulated in autobiographical accounts of pre-World War II Central Europe's top Armless Wonder performers, German Carl Hermann Unthan renowned for his violin performances and Czech František Filip celebrated as "an exemplary entrepreneur" of his nation. Her focus is on how bodily difference could overlap with culturally determined ideologies of modern nationalism, capitalism, liberal individualism, economic productivity, civic fitness, and ideals of completeness and homogeneity.

Filip Herza examines textual, rhetorical strategies of conferring meanings upon non-normative bodies by analysing a rich archival corpus of promotional and press material related to the 1928 Prague performance

of Singer's Midgets, a troupe of little people of European origins, organized by the Viennese showman Leo Singer, who mostly earned fame throughout their U.S. tour, and in particular their impersonations of Munchkins in the Hollywood hit, *The Wizard of Oz*. Herza's main aim is to describe how the exhibition of physical difference helped to instruct, edify and reinforce the Czech middle-class identity, along with discourses of republicanism, and consumerism, while at the same time allowing for locally specific sentiments of self-criticism and irony.

Dwarf performers are also at the centre of attention in Anna Kérchy's contribution, but she undertakes to compare the rhetorics of the entertainment industry with those of confessional self-definition and fascist ideology on the basis of the life-stories and reminiscences of Hungarian Jewish dwarf comedians. Although clown Zoltán Hirsch died in the concentration camp while the Lilliputian musicians Ovitz family became Dr Mengele's favourite research subjects whose medical enfreakment ironically saved their lives, the memoirs resemble in using self-fantastification as a subversive discursive device to resist "othering." On describing the fatal consequences of the Nazi eugenics programs for freak-show performers, the significance these memoirs hold for trauma- and disability-studies is stressed.

Eugenia Kuznetsova discusses another major European historical cataclysm and its effects on fantasies and phobias of freakery. Recalling the fatal explosion of the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in 1986, as well as the fictional revisiting of the tragic event in Tatyana Tolstaya's novel *The Slynx* (2003), she focuses on the figure of (post)nuclear freaks by uncovering urban legends, the politics of their spreading, and mutants as embodiments of the ever-so imminent threat of nuclear catastrophe and of social uncertainties of the post-Soviet reality. Alex Cheban's haunting photographs of graffitis in the abandoned residential districts of Prypyat offer uncanny visual illustrations of the monstrous atmosphere.

Krisztián Benkő remains in the same geographical region when providing personal and philosophical reflections on the pitfalls of socialist humanist attempts at the normativization of enfreaked bodies by means of institutional confinement, and the more successful model of Post-Soviet social integration, illustrated by a 2009 marionette theatre project performed by disabled youth. Heinrich von Kleist's (anti)aesthetics of "grace"—introduced in connection with non-self-conscious, "natural" automatons and puppets—provides an adequate model for an empowering reinterpretation of disability.

Catriona McAra returns to the dwarf performers and deals partly with the same assembly that has been discussed by Lucie Storchova earlier, but

from a different perspective: taking the careers of the classic sideshow star German "Doll Family" and contemporary English dwarf actor Warwick Davis for her examples, she reveals how dwarf performers were often appropriated or stereotyped by producers of culture in order to heighten representations of the fantastic. Relying on Susan Stewart's ideas on the nostalgic longing for the miniature, she reads the figure of the dwarf on the Hollywood silver screen as a metaphor for structural inversion and for the American film industry's reverse colonization of European history and fantasy from the *Wizard of Oz* to *Star Wars*.

The articles cover a huge time frame from the medieval to the postmodern eras and wish to prove that the research exploring the cultural history of Continental European freak shows is of vital relevance today, since it might eventually teach us a number of important lessons. It might help us to discover an unexpected continuity between the nineteenth century exhibition, the twentieth century annihilation, and the twenty-first century hyper-spectacularization of freaks. It thus urges us to try to do our very best to avoid making the same mistakes of othering that-which-differs in terms of a lesser state of being, and instead encourages all to strive to appreciate the alterity of disabilities both as a general human condition, and even a right in the sense of Lennard Davis' dismodernism,[48] and as a token of the colourful diversity of our very existence.

Since freaks shows are entertainment sites empathically distinguished by their spectacularity, the editors of this volume found it to be of vital importance to produce a collection illustrated by plenty of ravishing visual material. We are proud to state that each essay is decorated by stunning visual evidence recording Continental European processes of enfreakment. Moreover, many of the images have not appeared in print before, either because they are formerly unpublished original artworks, or because they come from archival sources, old manuscripts carefully explored by our contributors. The editors would like to thank for their permission to reproduce visual material: the British Library; the Berliner Medizinhistorisches Museum der Charité; the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz; the National Library of Prague; the Archive of the National Theatre in Prague; the National Széchényi Library, Budapest; the University Library of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest; the Somogyi City Library, Szeged; the Old and Rare Book Collection of the Somogyi City Library, Szeged, especially chief curator Erzsébet Szőkefalvi-Nagy; as well as individual artists, Emiliano Leonardi, Alex

[48] Lennard J. Davis, *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

Cheban, Francois Chartier, along with Tim Lawes, General Manager at Prop Store.

We are truly grateful for visual artist David Caines' marvellous cover design and for his generously allowing us to use on the dust-jacket of the book one of his unsettling and visionary paintings, of an amazing oeuvre often portraying freakish figures such as amputees, mutants, and circus performers. His *Humboldt's Wedding* (oil on canvas, 2010)—quite appropriately featured in the *Ordinary Monsters* exhibition, and inspired by Alexander von Humboldt, the eighteenth century Prussian scientist baron, the first European to explore, with his Frenchman companion, the wilderness of South America—seemed to fit just perfectly a collection governed by the aim to explore the *terra incognita* of Continental European enfreakment from a transnational, transdisciplinary perspective, embarking on the exploration of the mundane in the unusual and the unusual in the mundane, tracking the blurring of the scientific objectification and the aestheticizing fantastification of the Other– uncategorizable within the self-same.

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LEPROUS BODIES AND ABJECT CHARITY

KAMILLEA AGHTAN

Introduction

The corpus of European medieval Christian thought is liberally populated by leprous bodies. Freakish and deformed, silent shamblers on the outskirts of the city limits or contained behind hospital walls, it has often been argued that the leprous body possesses a very particular performative value within the texts left by saints, clergymen and medical monks. Hideously tainted by a disease of the flesh which mirrors the post-mortem processes of putrefaction, the decaying, living corpse of the leper has at once played the stage (but never the actor) for both extreme revulsion and divine bliss. Sacred and profane, unviewable and untouchable, the leprous body thus becomes available to play a pivotal role in the attainment of transcendence through the interconnected performances of Christian charity and the struggle to overcome earthly horrors.

Current critical historical research, however, has destabilised the previously entrenched paradoxes of divine–profane, familiar–absent that were, until recently, undeniably inscribed within the social sphere upon the leper's corporeality.[1] It is within the resulting fissures in Christian discourse which manifest upon such interrogations that this chapter positions itself, particularly in relation to the accounts of Italian and German holy figures which were written in the thirteenth-century, when leprosy was both incredibly endemic to most of the European continent

[1] See, e.g., Luke E. Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007); François-Olivier Touati, "Contagion and Leprosy: Myth, Ideas and Evolution in Medieval Minds and Socieities," in *Contagion: Perspectives from Pre-Modern Societies*, Lawrence I. Conrad and Dominik Wujastyk (eds.) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); and Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

and in the process of being more fully managed by various institutional socio-medical measures.[2]

The chapter begins with a rough and potted history of the social negotiation of leprosy, particularly during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in light of recent academic contributions which now challenge various assumptions concerning the contagiousness of the disease and the ostracisation of its sufferers. It then conducts a textual and performative analysis of the freakish site embodied by lepers in key moments within the tracts of three figures of Christendom: namely, the Italian friar Thomas of Celano's account of the meeting of medieval mystic Saint Francis of Assisi and the leper in *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (1247),[3] the tale of the unnamed bishop meeting a stranger in the German prior Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum* (c.1220–1235);[4] and the story of the Blessed (but never sainted) Angela of Foligno's visit to a leper hospital in *The Book of Divine Consolation* (c.1297).[5]

This chapter argues that within the majority of the religious accounts falling within the genre of "encounter with the leper" in a theatrical performance of charity, spiritual transcendence is reached through a particular situating of the leprous, in which the freakish, diseased body is instrumentalised as both a prop for the metaphorical play of transcendence and as the very stage or backdrop upon which the attainment of divine knowledge operates. Within the literature of Thomas of Celano and

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[2] While not addressed with any specificity in this chapter, the medical development of specialised institutions and strategies nonetheless sets an important backdrop to the arguments at play herein. For further detail, see Katherine Park, "Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe: 500–1500," in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, Andrew Wear (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 59–90, providing a useful synoptic study of these developments throughout medieval Europe, and Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine*, for a general history of social and medical attitudes to leprosy.

[3] Thomas of Celano, "The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," in *Francis of Assisi: Early Document— the Founder. 1245–1247*, vol. 2, Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann and William J. Short (eds.), trans. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 2000), pp. 231–393.

[4] Caesarius von Heisterbach. *Caesarii Heisterbacensis Monachi Ordinis Cisterciensis Dialogus Miraculorum.* Vol. 2. 2 vols. (Cologne, New York and Brussels: J. M. Heberle (H. Lempertz & Company)), 1851.

[5] Angela of Foligno, *The Book of Divine Consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno*, trans. Mary G. Steegmann (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909). This book is comprised of two parts, *Memorial* and *Instructions*. This chapter primarily scrutinises the former section, written c.1297.

Caesarius of Heisterbach, instances of charitable contact with and consumption of leprous fluids (their saliva and their putrefying flesh) act as the catalyst for such transcendence: their proximity to leprosy invokes a form of communion with God. However, the ascetic structure of this experience simultaneously requires a denial of the leper as an active player in this theatrical performance of charity in various ways and, moreover, the *erasure* of the leprous body once it has fulfilled its purpose.

If interrogations into medieval society have yielded evidence of a greater visibility—and perhaps even direct participation—of the leper community in aspects of daily life, this chapter argues that such research indicates the possibility of a far greater significance for the leper in religious narratives of charity and transcendence than simply functional enfreakment. Indeed, a close analysis of the account of contemporary Italian mystic Saint Angela of Foligno, in engagement particularly with theorists Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille, may reveal an alternative performative relationship with leprosy which repositions both the *dramatis personae* and the casting within a theatre of charity, destabilising the rigidity of concepts of the freakish, diseased body, of benevolence, and ultimately of transcendence itself.

Fig. 1: A Leper with a Bell from a Pontifical, c.1400 (vellum). British Library Lansdowne 451. fol. 127. This image is in the public domain.

Society of Freaks: The Rise of Leprosy and *Leprosaria*

The affliction of leprosy itself and its attending social implications bear a confused and extensively palimpsestic history. During the Middle Ages, leprosy was generally viewed as a disease that cancerously riddled the body in its entirety. Based on the medical premise of Galenic humours, it was understood, at least until the mid to late thirteenth century, to result from a severe imbalance of the vitreous substances which constituted the flesh (the blood) and a disequilibrium of the internal composition of the body (the humours).[6] That is, before the identification of the specific strain of leprosy bacteria *microbacterium leprae* in the 1800s, the common belief was not of leprosy as a cutaneous disease but rather one in which the pustular and disfigured complexion was merely symptomatic of a chronic disruption of an individual's bodily fluids.[7]

The degenerative effect of leprosy on the body was inexorable and incurable. Indeed, by the time the signs of leprosy started appearing as waxy, discoloured or nodular blemishes on the skin, it was considered by many writers of medical tracts to have already thoroughly infected the body.[8] In its later stages, leprosy could impact upon not only the skin but also the cartilage and bone, causing paralysis and a subsequent shuffling and ponderous gait. Chronic contraction seized the muscles in the hands and feet, freezing them into claws. It could infect the larynx and render the voice raspy and hoarse, often eventually taking away speech entirely. The face could swell and distort into a bestial visage, assuming the guise of a lion, an elephant or a satyr;[9] the bridge of the nose might collapse; corneal ulcerations could glaze over the eyes and cause blindness. Bones became prone to fracture, and infected boils caused pussy fluid discharge accompanied by the foul smell of decay.[10] The unnerving result, as Catherine Peyroux descriptively elucidates, "mimicked walking death, or

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[6] Touati, "Contagion and Leprosy," p. 186; Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine,* pp. 103–17.
[7] Touati, "Contagion and Leprosy," p. 186.
[8] Luke E. Demaitre, "The Relevance of Futility: Jordanus De Turre (Fl. 1313–1335) on the Treatment of Leprosy," in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70.1 (1996): pp. 25–61; see also, Touati, "Contagion and Leprosy," pp. 187–9.
[9] Julie Orlemanski, "How to Kiss a Leper," in *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 3.2 (2012): p. 148.
[10] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 3.

life animating a rotting corpse."[11] This was not merely an affliction residing upon the flesh; rather, it was a disease *of* flesh, whereby the very matter constituting the body rots and dies.

While such freakish bodies could be consigned to institutions that provided specifically for leprous ailments from as early as the sixth century,[12] it is only with the rise and spread of leprotic symptoms across the European continent that these leper houses—otherwise known as "*leprosaria*" or "*lazarettos*"—became both increasingly common and institutionalised. Indeed, some of the larger houses organised into "an almost monastery-like form and size" adopting an equally monastic daily regime.[13] Through the late eleventh to fourteenth centuries, Carole Rawcliffe calculates that between one quarter and one fifth of all known English medieval hospitals were intended to care specifically for lepers, although other patients were sometimes also sheltered.[14] Katherine Park remarks that by the twelfth century, half of all the new hospitals in Europe were committed to functioning as *leprosaria*.[15] While the number of active *leprosaria* is not an exact measure of the commonness of the disease, there is nonetheless no doubt that by the thirteenth century, leprosy was an extremely *visible* phenomenon.[16]

However, despite the prevalence of the disease throughout the continent, and contrary to popular opinion of previous historians, recent scholarship indicates that it was not likely to have been considered a contagious disease in the modern meaning of the word before the spread of the Plague in the mid-fourteenth century.[17] Indeed, the principle of leprosy

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[11] Catherine Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," in *Monks & Nuns, Saints & Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, Barbara H. Rosenwein (ed.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 177.

[12] Park, "Medicine and Society," p. 71.

[13] Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 182.

[14] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 108.

[15] Park, "Medicine and Society," p. 71.

[16] Researchers have posited infection rates ranging from 0.5 percent to five percent of the total European population at leprosy's peak in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," p. 177, and Carole Rawcliffe, "The Earthly and Spiritual Topography of Suburban Hospitals," in *Town and Country in the Middle Ages: Contrasts, Contacts and Interconnections, 1100–1500*, Kate Giles and Christopher Dyer (eds.) (Leeds: Maney, 2007), p. 257.

[17] Scholars such as Carole Rawcliffe, Luke E. Demaitre and François-Olivier Touati all call for a re-evaluation of the concept of leprosy as contagious, as well as the assumed social rejection of the afflicted, in the Middle Ages. Touati calls this narrative of contagion the "historiographical myth," bred from, firstly, a