

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Goodley, Dan, Bill Hughes, and Lennard Davis, eds., *Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 348 pp. \$90 hardcover (978-0-230-24325-5)

From the perspective of sociology, and more specifically sociological theory, this is a valuable and interesting book. It includes an editorial introduction, conclusion, and sixteen original essays divided into four sections: cultures, bodies, subjectivities, and communities. The subject matter is interdisciplinary, but the majority of the authors are critical and community psychologists. Three essays are written by sociologists. Each essay is designed, more or less, to demonstrate the relevance of a particular theoretical perspective or perspectives for disability studies. This often involves the application of theory to a specific empirical problem. Each section is intended to emphasize a distinct aspect of the interaction between social theory and disability although, given the heavy poststructuralist slant of the volume, there tends to be significant conceptual overlap across the sections. The volume includes a well-conceived glossary of key concepts (approximately 150 words) that defines familiar theoretical terms and underlines their significance for disability studies. As indicated by the editors, the goal of the volume is to “enhance our understanding of disability, culture and society” (p. 3) and to serve as a resource for action. Theory is meant to have practical and political consequences. Indeed, the volume strives to develop a *critical disability studies* which “may be used by disabled people and ‘the non-disabled’...to interrogate and subvert conditions of exclusion” (p. 4).

In this volume, the most common variety of critique is offered from a poststructuralist perspective (roughly 9 of the 16 essays). Foucault looms large, but essays also draw on Agamben, Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari, Lacan, Latour, and postcolonial theory. This is the critique of language and sign systems. As described in many of the essays, disabled subjects are constructed through binary, cultural logics that oppose ability to disability. While ability is equated with strength, success, independence, rationality, and completion disability is equated with weakness, failure, dependence, irrationality, and lack, among others. Reeve (ch. 6), for example, draws upon and criticizes Haraway’s concept of the cyborg to better account for the use of prosthetics by disabled persons. In the

process she introduces the term “iCrip” to “represent new ways of being which are (non)disabled and (ab)normal” (p. 106). Goodley (ch. 11) uses Lacan to argue that ableist society creates a “symbolic order” that makes it impossible to imagine ourselves as anything other than strong and masterful. Campbell (ch. 13) draws on Latour to argue that ableism is produced through a “constitutional divide” that constructs and then patrols the division between normal and abnormal. The maintenance of this divide is crucial to the social order: “If the definitions of *able-bodied* and *disabled* become unclear or slippery, the business of legal and governmental administration would have problems functioning” (p. 216).

While much of this poststructuralism is familiar territory, a few of the essays use Deleuze and Guattari to develop vitalist, materialist theories of body and disability. Though loosely aligned with poststructuralism, these essays abandon the traditional focus on language and culture to describe presocial and prelinguistic affective (biological) energies. Here disability is not “lack” but an expression of vital life processes. In their essay on intellectual disabilities Roets and Braidotti (ch. 10) ask: “Can we return impaired bodies to their material roots, which means adopting a unified vision of bodies and mind as pre-social, biological essences and unchanging phenomena...” (p. 161). Overboe (ch. 7) exemplifies the perspective through analysis of his own spasms: “I now see my birth as an event where my spasms are singularities that affirm the impersonal life, rather than as the birth as an individual with impairments” (p. 125). Like many of the other essays in this volume, Overboe’s Deleuzian philosophy refuses polite, charitable, or even inclusive accounts of disability and impairment. Instead it challenges the normative order to witness the unique affects made available through impairment.

Beyond poststructuralism the volume benefits from perspectives that attend to the lived experience of disability and in particular the psycho-emotional fears that disability evokes. Phenomenologists Titchkosky and Michalko (ch. 8) draw on Husserl, Schutz, and in a compelling twist, Du Bois to argue that the taken-for-granted attitude of contemporary society encounters disability as a “problem.” On the one hand, as a problem, disability provokes a cultural desire to treat, cure, or hide from it. On the other hand, disability can lead us to rethink the “workings of culture” (p. 140). So conceived, disability has the unique capacity to challenge the conventions of our everyday make-up. Hughes (ch. 2), drawing on Elias and Agamben, offers a particularly strong account of the relationship between the civilizing process and psycho-emotional resistance to disability. Ableism, he argues, is a product of the civilizing process that not only distinguishes “us” from “them” but also renders disability as that which is disgusting: “Disgust” he says “is the emotional fuel of ab-

leism” (p. 24). McGrath (ch. 9) offers a technique for overcoming these deep-seated fears in her discussion of the transformative powers of disabled dance performance. Drawing on psychoanalysis and neuroscience, McGrath describes dance as prelinguistic communication that operates through the “gaze.” In everyday social life the gaze encounters the disabled body as something to be stared at. But in dance, the gaze becomes a “holding area” where new forms of self-other, able-disabled relations can emerge. This focus on the powers of the prelinguistic body resonates with Overboe’s work — despite their theoretical differences, both pieces suggest that exclusionary ideology will not be overcome through more language games, but through the prelinguistic capacities of bodies.

The volume’s focus on culture and identity is somewhat balanced by a few essays which attempt institutional and political economic analyses. For example, Mallett and Runswick-Cole’s (ch. 3) piece on autism engages Marxist ideas to describe the intellectual market around autism research. However, consistent with the overall tone of the volume this analysis relies on cultural rather than economic Marxism. Lawthom’s (ch. 14) essay on “communities of practice” hints at meso-level institutional analysis, but practice is conceived as shared cognitive interests, rather than the embodied structured activities more familiar to sociologists. Blackmore and Hodgkins (ch. 5) pair Bourdieu and Foucault to analyze the history of disabled people’s organization (DPOs) in Britain. The authors don’t adequately address the conceptual difficulties that arise in pairing these two very different thinkers (a problem also found in Nunkoosing and Haydon-Laurelut’s pairing of Foucault and Goffman, ch. 12). However, they do make valuable use of Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, field, and habitus to describe the institutional forces (both material and cultural) that have governed the history of DPOs.

To my mind, one of the most promising inclusions is the set of essays on globalization and disability with particular attention to disability in the global South (chs. 4, 15, 16, 17). These essays provide rich detail on the social organizations and institutions involved with disability work outside the global core. However, when it comes down to it, much of the analysis of these organizations once again draws on theories of culture and identity, in particular postcolonial theory and in the final essay, Honneth’s theory of recognition. Certainly, Grech (ch. 4) ties his analysis to political economic processes of global neoliberalism. However, as a whole, greater attention to the growing field of globalization theory, especially its focus political economic and institutional forces, would add more range to this section and the volume as a whole.

This volume will serve as a good supplement, adding numerous fine-grained examples, to senior undergraduate and graduate courses in so-

cial, cultural, and sociological theory. In addition, it could serve as a central text for theoretically inclined courses in disability studies. Several of the essays (chs. 3, 10, 12) could be assigned as stand-alone chapters in courses on the sociology of mental health and illness.

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