

¹“Our History.” Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Health Network. 03 March 2009 <<http://www.reddesalud.org/English/>>.

KILLING WOMEN: THE VISUAL CULTURE OF GENDER AND VIOLENCE

Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord,
Eds.
Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University
Press, 2006

REVIEWED BY KATHRYN TRAVIS

Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence explores the myriad of ways that visual culture(s) represents, identifies and attempts to understand the relationships, connections, and tensions between gender and violence. Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord bring together a wide array of community activists, artists, and academics in order to continue the oftentimes quiet dialogue on women, gender, and violence. Focusing their attention on the visual, through fiction and non-fiction films, museums, art, archives, and the news media, Burfoot and Lord create a space where a critical visual vocabulary on gendered violence, gender and violence, and gender as violence are fused together. The presence of this compilation further demonstrates how the distinct paths of art, activism, and community intersect to challenge the boundaries of academic theory and practice.

The role that the body plays is significant within each of these articles. Broken into three distinct sections, this compilation of essays demonstrates the degree to which gendered representations of violence can and must be articulated. Through the various academic lenses of media

and communications, film studies and sociology, the hegemony of any one understanding of gender/violence/woman is dispelled by using many representational frameworks. The section “History, Memory and Mediations of Murder” necessarily considers the silences and gaps that exist within feminist theory and practice. Rosenberg’s article on the Montreal Massacre and O’Shea’s piece on Karla Homolka identify the ways in which specific feminisms do not take up difficult representations of femininity, evading critical discussions on women, gender, and violence. For instance, female sadists and masochists exemplify not just the inability of mainstream society to deal with women who are violent, but how feminist discourse has failed to adequately explore these identities. Through the language of domesticity, protective motherhood, victimization, and feminine transformation, western patriarchal imaginaries fail to make space for the actions of violent women. Discourse as violence is both figuratively and literally pressed into the bodies of women and left draped, as inescapable feminine identities and codes of conduct, around their shoulders.

In “Techniques and Technologies of Representing Violence,” the tone shifts from the exploration of feminine identities in relation to violence to one which focuses on how violence is represented in relation to female bodies. The medical dissection of the female body epitomizes the objectification of the female form. Burfoot’s female wax models at La Specola are sexualized as superficially beautiful, yet brutally fragmented into vagina, uterus, and pregnant womb. Just as patriarchal rationality fails to permit the female masochist/sadist to exist within western cultural understandings of the ‘feminine woman’, the medicalization of the female body is achieved through scientific rationality. In her article “I Am Awake in the Place Where Women Die,” Lisa Coulthard explores the notion of women as absence through the work

of feminist artists who use symbols of rape, murder, pain, and fear to expose the violence of being a ‘woman’.

Lastly, “National Trouble: Gendered Violence” shifts the gaze from a dominant Euro-North American western context. At a point in the book when to this reader all seems lost for women caught within the web of western patriarchal gender roles, Suzie Young’s gender defying heroines complicate the narration of predominantly western European analyses of gender identities. Overall, forms of visual media, museum/art installation, and film demonstrate how “representation functions as a materialization of violence.” “Feminist counter-violence” is necessary to challenge the epistemic violence saturating linguistic, legal, and media spaces which make up the everyday. These discussions are explicitly clear not to obscure the reality of murdered women or women murderers. Certain mediums of representation, such as the art work of Abigail Lane, Jenny Holzer, and the installation “No Humans Involved,” more aptly articulate a project of feminist counter-violence.

While some chapters explore better than others the gendered analysis of violence, examining the connection between female bodies or identities and the (patriarchal) social ideologies which define them, they all attempt to unsettle mainstream interpretations of gendered violence. One must be cognizant of how “agency” is situated within these works. Agency very much demands that readers and viewers question how their own gaze is implicated within realities of gendered violence. It is interesting to note the lack of any formal concluding piece within this volume. However, this omission can be interpreted as a political stance, as the editors’ statement that the work on gender and violence is far from complete.

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explore the ways in which urban/city spaces, performance theory, corporeal body identities, and memory intersect in order to create live social spaces. She is currently a teaching assistant in the department of Fine Arts and Cultural Studies and working on her own mixed media art.

JUDITH BUTLER: FROM NORMS TO POLITICS

Moya Lloyd
Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007

REVIEWED BY KRISTINE KLEMENT

In this book-length study and summary of the work of Judith Butler, Moya Lloyd sets out three goals: to explicate and evaluate Butler's work, both theoretically and in light of its political potential, and to engage with its feminist reception. She succeeds in these aims with admirable clarity and depth. Lloyd takes us from Butler's early philosophical roots in Hegel, through her theories of gender and sexuality, to her most recent work on ethics and politics post-September 11. Lloyd does a good job of situating all of Butler's theoretical turns within the contexts of feminist theory, philosophy, and politics. She begins by locating Butler's feminist theory as growing out of *différance* or deconstruction feminism as well as the poststructuralist turn in philosophy. Lloyd also situates Butler's early work on gender and sexuality in relationship to the identity politics of the gay and lesbian rights movement and the transformation she helped to solidify into a "queer" politics and theory.

Lloyd moves both chronologically and thematically through Butler's *oeuvre*, drawing her numerous texts together in interesting ways, noting continuities and breaks in her thought. For example, Lloyd's

explication of Butler's rereading of Freud's Oedipus complex draws from both *Gender Trouble* and *The Psychic Life of Power*. In addition, she situates Butler's engagement with psychoanalysis with respect to her interest in the incest taboo and kinship that Lloyd notes was a current in Butler's thought from her first book, *Subjects of Desire*, to its more thorough elaboration in *Antigone's Claim*. In another section, Lloyd elaborates Butler's arguments on hate speech and resignation from *Excitable Speech* together with her work on the signifier "queer" from *Bodies that Matter*.

Lloyd draws both on Butler's books as well as lesser known articles to give a thorough elaboration of the sources and reasoning of Butler's thought. Lloyd takes us through gender performativity and the radical rethinking of the materiality of the sexed body that theory made possible. From there Lloyd elaborates Butler's politics of subversion, and the place of drag and parodic repetition as possibilities for denaturalizing heteronormativity. Lloyd elaborates Butler's debt to both Freud and Foucault in her theory of subjectivation and passionate attachment, the psychical dimension of the theory of performativity. Lloyd takes us through Butler's work on the citationality of language, and her intervention in the U.S. debates over legislating against hate speech. She ends the book with a discussion of Butler's most recent work on ethics, violence, and radical democracy.

Lloyd examines various controversies and debates provoked by Butler's theories. One such debate has been over the agency of the subject and the accusations of both volunteerism and determinism that have been levelled at Butler. Butler's critics have also accused her of idealism and ignoring the materiality of the body. Lloyd responds to these criticisms in defence of Butler, using Butler's own theories to add complexity to the terms of the debate and demonstrate how Butler reworks these terms. To those critics who argue that Butler's

work is too opaque and therefore intended for too narrow an audience, Lloyd argues along with Butler that this difficult language is necessary to engage with difficult ideas and the difficult thinkers whose work she seeks to redeploy.

Lloyd has written a reliable summary and explication of Butler's *oeuvre*. The real strength of this book is that Lloyd manages to clarify Butler's difficult texts and often obscure theoretical writing without giving up any critical depth. A bibliography of Butler's works is included. I would recommend this book to anyone as a thorough introduction to any and all of Butler's theoretical interventions. More experienced readers of Butler may find this book useful as a resource for contextualizing Butler's ideas in relationship to one another, to their foundational texts and political milieu, and to their critical reception.

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STONE SIGHTINGS

Madeline Sonik
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, Inc., 2008

REVIEWED BY RUTH PANOFSKY

Madeline Sonik's poetry is not for the faint hearted. Sonik's world is dark and dangerous; in fact, she claims darkness as her joy and courts Uriel, the Angel of Death, whose ominous presence looms over her debut collection. The poet is not at peace and her discomfort resonates with readers who feel lacerated by