

Noir Surrealism: The Hybrid Bodies of Charles Burns

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The imagery of the influential American cartoonist and illustrator Charles Burns is characterized by a certain surrealism that especially derives from the way he modifies the (human) body. Burns' protagonists display both physical and psychic deviations from normative body images, as in his stories, the boundary between reality and the surreal is blurred by grotesque or uncanny mutations. The altered body images he puts forward, or the representation of dis/ability arouses an immediate and affective sense of uneasiness and poses questions regarding difference, sameness and normalcy. Burns' comics incorporate narrative, visual, and structural elements of the Film Noir and Body Horror genre in a self-aware manner and are a valuable contribution to discourses regarding corporeal images and their hybridity, diversity and identity in comic literature specifically and socio-political discourse in general.

By focusing on selected comics from Charles Burns' oeuvre, I will analyze the role of hybrid bodies in his take on the noir surreal, with recourse to its foundations in the film genre. In my talk I will argue that Burns' fiction serves as a prime example of how the interplay of *mise-en-scène* and the debatably invoked binarism of 'the two sexes' addresses the issue of increasingly altered body images and their standing in society. Burns' modes of using the human body as a surface to negotiate otherness in a corporeal (instead of metaphorical) manner posits the body as a vessel for difference by consciously invoking the innate human fear of disruptions of its physical intactness. Consequently, Burns' portrayal of a surreal experience of body images that revolve around excrescences, mechanic amalgamations or sexually transmitted diseases touches upon tropes of the body horror genre and can be read as a plea for more diversity in human body perceptions.

Kurzbiographie

Jonas Neldner is a BA student of English, German and History at the University of Cologne. From July 2016 to April 2017 he studied at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John, Canada, as part of a scholarship program organized by the University of Cologne. His essay "I should have let her die": a Posthuman Future between (Re)-Embodiment and Cyborgian Concepts" was published in *Gender Forum. Special Issue: Early Career Researchers IV, Issue 60* in 2016. His research interests revolve around postmodernism, posthumanism, feminism, comics, science fiction, gender and film studies, literary naturalism, subculture, cultural-history as well as political philosophy.