

Between Crooked Lines:

Disability in E.T. Russian's Feminist Comic Books

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How are we to translate the lived experience of disability? The North American feminist disability artist E.T. Russian admits: 'to explain it with words can be very hard.' Not least because of this insufficiency of language Russian, in her recently published *The Ring of Fire Anthology* (2014), deploys a form of hand-drawn comics that present a strong, honest and empowering testimony to her life as an amputee and challenge normative constructions of female able-bodied subject positions.

While the author's account of the train accident that led to the amputation of her legs, the pitfalls entailed in prosthetics as well as gender and class struggles is captivating in itself, the force of her work resides elsewhere. The reader cannot escape the ecstasy of fragmentation and intertextuality provoked by the arrangement, or derangement, of image and text. My discussion of Russian's comics hinges on the line as the minimal building block of both writing and drawing and its significance for the creation of in-between spaces. Like scars, Russian's lines are crooked and discontinuous and the emerging in-between spaces tell complementarily odd stories. Never exclusively committed to their function to separate, her lines repeatedly transpose inside and outside on the material, subvert oppositions of female and male, disabled and non-disabled on the conceptual level.

In my presentation, I will discuss selected comics and explore the ways in which printed, handwritten and typewritten, crossed-out and tippexed words and drawings as well as the spaces these lines create resonate with disability scholar Margrit Shildrick's claim that the body is a 'provisional imbrication of disparate parts, [and that] it is no longer appropriate to think of bodies as either whole or broken, able-bodied or disabled.'

Kurzbiographie

Olga Tarapata specializes in North American literature with an emphasis on contemporary fiction. Her research and teaching interests include disability studies, literary theory, cultural constructivism, and new materialism. Since April 2015, Olga is a scholarship holder at the a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities Cologne. Her dissertation project, *Extraordinary Bodies in the Work of William Gibson*, examines literary representations of the human body and disability in William Gibson's fiction from the late 1970s until today. Olga is the guest editor of "Bodies on the Line: Intersections between Gender and Disability," the spring issue of *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies*.