Kate Kaul, York University.

"Figuring Disability"

Felix Guattari suggests, "...in a certain sense people who are operating on the level of social sciences or on the level of politics ought to 'make themselves schizophrenic'…I mean that we should have the schizophrenic's capacity to range across fields" (83). Margrit Shildrick asks, "what are the figures of difference that haunt the western imaginary, and what would it mean to reflect on, rework and valorise them?" (103). Shildrick uses monstrous corporeality to explore embodiment and subject relations; Guattari uses the figure of the schizophrenic to imagine the possibilities of inter-disciplinary work.

The language of post-modern writing relies heavily on images of disability (blindness, madness, cyborg bodies) which are often presented as an inability to read the world; at the same time, these images of disability are supposed to clarify; metaphor makes the world readable, comprehensible. This paper considers not just images but the discursive tactics of post-modernism, treating Guattari's text as a particular and political textual figuring of disability which confines the schizophrenic to metaphor, outside of any possible subject -- or even object -- of writing. The paper also considers Shildrick's attempt to re-figure the category of the monstrous and its implications for disabled people as an engagement with the politics of writing. The use (and ongoing production) of disability as a category of hyper-visibility, of incoherence, or of metaphorical, symbolic meaning, leaves disability in the figurative; this paper argues that shifting the discursive

function of disability is a political, semiotic, project which is crucial to a critical disability studies.

What accounts for the extraordinary appeal of images of disability to people trying to explain the new -- in this case, to Felix Guattari, who proposes a revolutionary politics which will exceed old boundaries and binaries? He suggests, in an interview called “Capitalism and Schizophrenia”:

> ... in a certain sense people who are operating on the level of social sciences or on the level of politics ought to "make themselves schizophrenic." And I'm not speaking of that illusory image of schizophrenics, caught in the grip of a repression which would have us believe that they are "autistic," turned inward on themselves, and so forth. I mean that we should have the schizophrenic's capacity to range across fields.... calling into question the division of fields of study, questioning as well the self-satisfied air of psychoanalysts, linguists, ethnologists, pedagogues, all of this means not dissolving their various sciences, but rather deepening them, making them worthy of their objects. (83)

To be "schizophrenic" or "autistic" is to live within scare quotes, in this passage and – I will argue – in this discourse of post-modernism, post-structuralism, speed theory, or whatever you might call it. As if Guattari knows that the reality of schizophrenia might interfere with someone taking up his suggestion, and ranging across fields as an effective, or revolutionary, human scientist, he is picking and choosing, not only among images but between the figurative and the real. He rejects what he calls “that illusory image” of schizophrenics as "autistic" not as bad *science* but as a bad *figure*, as one which is not useful to him in what “it would have us believe”. In the interview’s

quotation marks, "autistic" and "schizophrenic" are set off from the text to emphasize their figurative function; they operate rather than identify. And to pick the figurative is to leave behind the real; involuntary hospitalization, for example, would surely hamper the human scientist in his work. For the schizophrenic, to be human -- to be recognized as a citizen, to have his or her needs for employment, housing, human relationships met, to survive -- is both revolutionary and political; it demands a revolutionary politics in which "schizophrenic" functions as more than an image.

The interviewer extends this strategic figure, asking, “Could psychiatry take on the role as the new human science, the human science par excellence, **so to speak**?” (83)

For psychiatry to be the new human science would mean the schizophrenic, psychiatry's object, would be the object of the human science par excellence. But that would make the schizophrenic a real object, rather than a figurative subject. And this doesn’t fit Guattari’s image so well.

Gilles Deleuze responds, "the notion of a 'human science par excellence' is not a good one... We shouldn't put the question in terms of the primacy of this or that discipline, but in terms of their use or utility,” (84) But what does it mean to say that this notion is not a good one? Perhaps we can judge it differently; to use Deleuze's own terms, what's the use of an inter-disciplinary human science which depends on this kind of figuring of disability? Who is it useful to? Does it have revolutionary possibility? Or is it, as Deleuze says of psychiatry, revolutionary only by inclination?

One problem with the interviewer’s suggestion, and Deleuze's response, is that of the object: this exchange points first to the difficult object, the schizophrenic, and second

to another difficult object, the human -- for surely the human is the subject – the object of inquiry -- of "the human science par excellence" just as the schizophrenic is the "archetypal" subject of psychiatry. For psychiatry to take on the role of "the human science par excellence," as the interviewer suggests, would make the schizophrenic the object of this science, the human subject par excellence. But this is provocative, it works as a suggestive image, *only* because we know that the schizophrenic is *not* the human subject par excellence but something opposite; the schizophrenic, in ordinary life or what we might call matter, plays the difficult role of not-mattering, his relationship to the ordinariness, the ordinates of humanity is by definition tenuous at best. Schizophrenia is called, [in my Very Short Introduction,] "the *archetypal* form of madness" – of what is often described as a failure of reason, a crisis of subjectivity. Yet at the same time, the schizophrenic plays the discursive role of pointing out the interdisciplinary human scientist who ranges across fields. This simultaneous not-mattering and mattering a great deal, is not a new one for mad people or other people with disabilities who, in their various and historically variable incarnations, designations, and appearances, have persisted in representing precisely this coincidence.

In the course of this exchange between the interviewer, Guattari and Deleuze, the possibility of the schizophrenic as something other than an image, as perhaps the object or the subject of speed theory, or just a part of a revolutionary inter-disciplinarity, quietly disappears. When Deleuze cautions that "we shouldn't put the question in terms of the primacy of this or that discipline, but in terms of their use or utility," (84), "we" – the subjects of the sentence – who have the authority to put or respond to such questions might consider taking Deleuze's sentence a little further to ask, in terms of their use or

utility to whom? To what subject? To what purpose? It is crucial to the text that the image of schizophrenia be entirely functional, useful, to someone who is by definition not schizophrenic -- who would have to *make* himself or herself schizophrenic and would have to do so in particular, useful -- e.g. not “autistic” -- ways.

This is not a complaint about the exclusion of schizophrenics from postmodern theory, from the universities, or even from "Capitalism and Schizophrenia," which is not to say that such complaints might not be well founded nor, to use the terms of this discussion that they might not have utility for particular subjects. My interest is instead in considering how this exchange, this small text, demonstrates the material function of discourse, its inseparability from its own material performances. Like "Capitalism and Schizophrenia," this is not an essay about schizophrenia at all. Deleuze and Guattari have suggested the utility of thinking like a schizophrenic, or rather – as I’ve argued – of *thinking* you are thinking like a schizophrenic. If *thinking* you’re thinking like a schizophrenic leaves disability studies out of Guattari’s wide-ranging, inter-disciplinary human sciences, then what is the utility, for *us* – another treacherous “us” – of thinking about thinking you’re thinking like a schizophrenic? Why think about discursive performance? What difference could it make?

To consider all of language as performative is to call attention to the materiality of language, recalling Judith Butler's critique of materiality, in which although it is clear that some things are objects and some things are ideas, the act of drawing a line between them is always a political one. As Butler writes in Bodies that Matter, materiality is “that which is bound up with signification from the start; [so that] to think through the indissolubility of materiality and signification is no easy matter”(30). You can’t think

them apart then, materiality and signification, or matter and meaning; but even thinking through their indissolubility is, I agree, no easy matter. This is the kind of thinking-through that I am trying to do.

Oddly enough, then, it is in the material practices of language that things seem to get away from us – but not from all of us in quite the same way. If we think of Guattari's accidental distinction between "schizophrenia" and schizophrenia, it is clear that schizophrenia has got away from Guattari to some extent – or, perhaps, that he has left it behind – but that it has got further away, or more importantly away somehow, from the schizophrenic. Guattari, after all, is using schizophrenia to figure something else. It is the schizophrenic who has disappeared, who is not figuring, somehow, in anything.

As a radical category of difference, disability always presents this dual phenomenon of being difficult talk about, and the easiest way to talk about something else. Despite this disappearance, "Schizophrenia" often represents an intensification of the sensory -- and here, my "schizophrenia" is in quotes again, since I'm talking about not the schizophrenia of the schizophrenics but Guattari's "schizophrenia," the one we all know as a set of figures -- hearing voices, seeing visions, having access to secret information. Schizophrenia is unusual in the way it is associated with seeing too much; more often, disability is associated not with seeing but with being seen, with a kind of hyper-visibility. This points to another intriguing contradiction about disability: when official definitions insist that *function* is what is important -- why is disability so often, so over-associated with the visual, with the possibility for stigma, with the requirement that the disabled body figure at least itself – or other things – to other people? Disability, even invisible disability, is expected to be almost a declaration of stigma; people like me,

who have invisible disabilities, may share this experience – that when people who aren't used to disability find out about our disability, there's a suggestion not [not always] that we aren't really disabled, but that we've been cagey, deliberately deceptive, in hiding what is supposed to be visible.

Jean Baudrillard argues, in The Perfect Crime, that, by the fact of dispersal and the relative speed of light, all things exist only in a recorded version…at an inescapable distance from each other (52), so that "otherness is a crucial illusion. The object itself is an illusion; there is no 'real' time, no real, and especially [perhaps mainly?] no visible real" (53). The visual, then, which is crucial to representations of knowledge – 'I see what you mean'; 'enlightenment' and so on, can never tell the truth, since vision sees only recorded images of objects, not objects themselves. According to Baudrillard, we cannot really 'see' objects, not in the sense of simultaneous, mutually authorizing, looking and knowing, and so we cannot really distinguish objects from one another, or even from ourselves.

This is an interesting theory; more interesting for 'our' purposes is that Baudrillard's description of this impossible, yet discursively necessary – useful – otherness, is characterized through disability images: he writes that "this distance is threatened by information, by a "lethal sunstroke, with a blinding profusion" (53). Thus, he suggests, "the objective illusion is the impossibility of an objective truth once the subject and object are no longer distinct, and the impossibility of any knowledge based on that distinction" (54). We need the illusion of objectivity in order to know anything, in traditional terms.

Baudrillard uses a bizarre array of disability images to suggest the disaster of real, or realistic, experience, without the illusion of subjects and objects, selves and others, singularity or relationship, asking:

> What would we be in 'real' time? We would be identified at each moment exactly with ourselves. A torment equivalent to that of eternal daylight — a kind of epilepsy of presence, epilepsy of identity. Autism, madness. No more absence from oneself, no more distance from others. (53)

What would we (the "we" inside or the "we" outside, interpellated by or just figuring in this discourse) be in 'real' life, without these dramatic figures of difference and separation: epilepsy, autism, madness? Here, images of disability represent the collapse of the subject-object illusion, the simultaneous collapse of figuring, relationship, knowledge

In Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self, Margrit Shildrick asks, "what are the figures of difference that haunt the western imaginary, and what would it mean to reflect on, rework and valorise them?" Shildrick presents a self-consciously postmodern inquiry into the monstrous, vulnerability and the role of these two concepts in what she calls "the constant condition of becoming," to argue that "the body -- expressly the differential body -- is not incidental to the ontological and ethical processes of the self, but intrinsic to their operation" (1). Shildrick uses monstrous corporeality to explore embodiment and subject relations; "not just to problematise further the relation between the non-normative and the normative subject as they are

embodied, but to consider the issue of subject relations in general"(103) This is necessarily an ethical project.

Shildrick aims to extend the work of feminist theorists to mobilize a reinstatement of the feminine, extending "that reassessment to take account of differently excluded others with a focus on those who are categorized as monstrous, not just as the feminine, or the racial other, but also those who are physically disabled or whose bodies radically disrupt morphological expectations" (2). In a critique of feminist and other approaches to embodied difference, Shildrick argues that too often, "the body that is recovered in its difference, remains highly normative" (2).

As Shildrick points out, *monstrare* itself means 'to show forth' -- to signify (4); persistently, she argues, monsters point to the instability, the incompletion of boundaries between self and other. In this sense, the monster is always and only figurative; for Shildrick's purposes, imaginary monsters are as suggestive as those which are better-documented since the imaginary, not the unusual body, is her object of inquiry. Monstrosity is a phenomenon of representation, in which the authority of materiality is used to show or articulate something never simply inherent in the body itself; to Shildrick, it offers a way of reading of embodiment and subject relations.

In her chapter, "Welcoming the Monstrous Arrivant," Shildrick considers Donna Haraway's "highly productive feminist deployment of the monster," as well as Jacques Derrida's hope for a monstrous future, "the monstrous arrivant," arguing for the monstrous as a site of possibility for "a reconceived ontology and a new form of ethics" (131). For Haraway, the promise of monsters is not only the promise of the real existence of cyborg or other hybrid bodies; it is the promise of these bodies as figures, the promise

of figuration, of metaphor, the materiality of discursive practice. To problematise these practices is always to suggest the possibility of change, if not to suggest what change might be like.

A recurring difficulty is the need to distinguish between figures and concepts; Shildrick consistently distinguishes between the feminine and women in a way which may not be possible for the monstrous and the monsters. But this points to a persistent problem: does Shildrick's analysis and the ethics it points to offer anything in particular to disabled people, in the way that her more thoroughgoing analysis of the interplay of the categories of the feminine and the monstrous seem to offer to women, or to feminist theory? It is when explicit references to disability or disability studies occur, that things sometimes get muddled.

Shildrick characterizes "those named disabled" as "visibly vulnerable," (76) deliberately restricting her analysis of the condition of disability to physical, visual, disability. “Although there are multiple ways that disability is experienced,” she notes, she wants to take up… a generalized icon of improper embodiment in conventional discourse” (139). If the category of "disability" must undergo a strategic reduction to visually anomalous bodies -- to monsters, or bodies which signify in particular kind of visual, embodied, immediacy -- then this reduction involves a shift from lived experienced to monstrosity itself, to figuration. The idea that disabled bodies demonstrate, that they represent something other than simply themselves, is not new, although Shildrick’s articulation is an innovative and important one. But in collapsing disabled bodies into the monstrous, Shildrick risks again reducing disability to the figurative in a way that removes the particular, "differential" embodiment of disabled

people from analysis, instead of bringing it to the forefront. The monstrous as a category in which disabled people both appear and disappear, "shows forth" something about universal, rather than particular, subject relations.

In a response to Levinas on the self's reaction to the stranger, Shildrick asks about an even stranger stranger; “what of those who do not, cannot, present themselves, who remain truly alien, or even monstrous (99)? This critique seems to suggest only the possibility of the disabled or anomalous body to be in the other position, as stranger rather than self. Within the terms of the book, the monstrous, as a figure which is neither self nor other but suggests the uneasy permeability of the two, is disqualified from either position. To identify disabled bodies too closely with the monstrous seems to risk leaving us out of universal, as well as particular, experience, entirely in the figurative. The problem is not the promising figure of the monstrous but its uneasy identification with disability. Shildrick’s analysis of embodied signification points to the difficulties inherent in problematising the language, categories and terms of disability. Like Guattari’s figurative “schizophrenic,” the inter-disciplinary human scientist who shoulders the schizophrenic out of discourse, Schildrick’s figure of “the monstrous” leaves disability in the figurative, outside of real experience.

Shildrick writes, "it is as though the monstrosity is materialized precisely in order that it might speak…And monsters do always signify." Shildrick's own transhistorical approach, a history not of monstrosity so much as of teratology – of discursive responses to monsters – argues that, "the significance of the monstrous lies…in the discursive production of those accounts…what is called for is a performative analysis of the language of the monstrous" (26). Shildrick's text gives an interesting historicization of

the category of the monster, one which forces the notion of disability toward the figurative and away from the real. The irony of this of course is that for many people with disabilities, *in*visibility is key to their experience, whether because their disabilities are invisible, or because their disabilities render them invisible, through institutionalization, poverty, or isolation. The figure of the monster and the effect – the usefulness -- of disability as an image, have not only persisted in a culture which is increasingly nervous of touch and, correspondingly, dependent on vision; they have intensified. The figure of the monster twists against this foreclosure, this absolute visibility; as a phenomenon of signification, a marker of boundaries, it always points to something outside the visual, something which persists.

Texts which pay attention to these connections between language and politics are important because writing continues to act on the world while the world insists on a separation between writing and the real which is never been supportable or ethical, although it can be useful. Its use, often, is to avoid responsibility, the call of the ethical; for if writing is not really an action, then surely no ethics is required. Donna Haraway points out the danger of this quite conscious refusal, and calls for something else. She writes,

> We need a critical hermeneutics of genetics *as a constitutive part of scientific practice* more urgently than we need better map resolution for genetic markers in yeast, human, or canine genomes…How do we learn *inside the laboratory and all of its extended networks* that there is no category independent of narrative, trope, and technique? To pretend otherwise is symptomatic of an advanced case of hardening of the categories (160-1).

Works Cited

Baudrillard, Jean. The Perfect Crime. Trans. Chris Turner. London, New York: Verso, 1996.

Butler, J. Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex". New York: Routledge, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques. Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida. Edited and with a commentary by John D. Caputo. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

Guattari, Felix. "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" in Chaosophy. USA: Semiotext[e], 1995.

Haraway, Donna J. Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_Oncomouse™: Feminism and Technoscience. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Shildrick, Margrit. Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self London: Sage, 2002.