

## **FALL 2013 DHA NEWSLETTER**

© Disability History Association

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**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**  
**Penny L. Richards**



**WELCOME!**

Welcome to thirty-three pages of news and ideas, from Disability History Association members and friends. (Yes, thirty-three.) Thank you to all the contributors for your efforts. Always happy to have many awards to announce--DHA awards, and disability history projects being recognized in other contexts. This issue of the newsletter also features a special section on "Simondon and Disability Studies," edited and introduced by Wilson Kaiser, with essays by Kaiser, Sarah Parker, Mark Hayward and Ghislain Thibault.

**Have you renewed your DHA membership for 2014? Please consider doing that right now, while you're enjoying the newsletter, it won't take but a moment. And if you already have your membership, perhaps make a surprise gift to a colleague or student?**  
**<http://www.dishist.org/join.htm>**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Disability History Association Publications Award

It is with great pleasure that we share the results of committee deliberations around the DHA Outstanding Article award for 2013. The committee was agreed that, in addition to the winning article, several other submissions should be announced as "honorable mention" articles, "to demonstrate the depth of the field and the difficulty we had choosing a single winner." So, without further ado....

#### *Honorable Mention:*

Baynton, Douglas C., "'These Pushful Days': Time and Disability in the Age of Eugenics," *Health and History* 13(2)(2011): 43-64.

Serlin, David. "Carney Landis and the Psychosexual Landscape of Touch in Mid-20th-Century America," *History of Psychology* 15(3)(August 2012).

Dolmage, Jay. "Disabled Upon Arrival: The Rhetorical Construction of Race and Disability at Ellis Island," *Cultural Critique* 77(Winter 2011): 24-69.

#### *Winner:*

Jennings, Audra. "'An Emblem of Distinction': The Politics of Disability Entitlement, 1940-1950," in *Veterans' Policies, Veterans' Politics: New Perspectives on Veterans in the Modern United States* ed. Stephen R. Ortiz, (University Press of Florida 2012).

Here's what the committee said about the winning essay:

"The review committee had an especially hard time ranking the essays submitted in this year's competition. All of the essays were indeed quite strong. Several, however, rose to the top of the ranking system. And although it was difficult, the committee ultimately chose Audra Jennings' essay "An Emblem of Distinction..." as the recipient of the DHA Outstanding Article Award, 2013. In many ways, Jennings' essay is both exemplary and exceptional disability history. Beautifully written and powerfully argued, Jennings' work situates the voices and experiences of disabled people at the center of her analysis. She explains why rehabilitation and employment programs for people with physical disabilities grew exponentially in the United States after World War II, but were made available largely only to disabled veterans. Civilian disability activists and liberal policy makers had hoped to use the post-war interest in disability to "create a broader social safety net for all Americans." This, however, was not to be. Veterans and their allies claimed that they deserved rehabilitation and employment assistance because of their sacrifice and service for the nation. While a powerful political and organizing strategy, this argument excluded large numbers of disabled Americans from disability policy. Much can be learned from this analysis of unfortunate but consequential divisions -- ideological as well as organizational -- in the early U.S. disability rights movement."

## **Disability History Association Graduate Student Scholarships**

Four graduate students benefited from DHA travel scholarships this year, to attend conferences in their field. Jess Waggoner, Aline Looten and Sami Schalk have written reports from their respective conferences for this issue of the newsletter. Lauren MacIvor Thompson, a doctoral student in history at Georgia State University, will soon attend the annual conference of the American Society for Legal History; her work involves civil law, women, medicine, and insanity, and she is interested in the current scholarship on coverture.

## **Brief summary of AHA Disability History Mentorship Program**

(Sandy Sufian)

After several years of this idea being delayed, Mike Rembis and I decided to revisit this program and work on its parameters this past summer. Paul Longmore conceived of the idea itself during his time on the Task Force for Disability of the AHA. He originally wanted the mentorship program to be focused on students and faculty with disabilities only but Mike and I felt that mentorship was needed for graduate students working in disability history itself and that we needed to use the program to push for a strong, new generation of scholars in disability history. Where applicable, we will try to match faculty and students with disabilities together so as to have that relationship both address general mentorship issues but also particular ones dealing with accessibility, disclosure, etc., but we did not want to make it exclusively one about disability status, but rather about promoting the subfield of disability history.

We researched other mentorship programs and found that that the APA's programs (psychology) were well developed and could serve as a general template for ours. We also found the materials of the MORE program of University of Michigan extremely helpful and will disseminate public-access documents that this program has on mentoring and the mentorship relationship. See <http://more.umich.edu>.

The main purpose of the program is to create an informal relationship between a graduate student and a faculty member in disability history that would help graduate students navigate academic challenges over and above the advice given by advisors and committee members. We hope that advice by a disability historian will provide unique insights for succeeding in this field. Individuals themselves will determine the content of the relationship itself although we have specified an amount of time each set of people must devote to the mentorship relationship.

Matches will be made twice a year, at the beginning of each semester, but people will be able to apply throughout the year. All information is kept confidential via a secure server of the AHA.

The AHA has been terrific in providing support and technical expertise for facilitating this program. They are firmly committed to the program.

On top of the mentor-mentee relationship, Mike and I hope to develop online seminars for graduate students who have signed up to share their work—a sort of online reading/writing group with peer mentorship. This part of the program is less well developed (and suggestions are welcome) and may be instituted a bit later on, in order to give the central task at hand to begin. There may be a need (perhaps DHA can discuss) for early career mentorship and/or

mentorship for faculty moving from one field to disability history, but this too may be developed after the initial stage of graduate/faculty mentorship.

Overall, we believe this is an important program to offer faculty and students in disability history and we hope it will grow in the years to come.

### **New Documentary, “The Real Story”**

(Jerry W. Smith, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota)

"The Real Story," a 29-minute film documentary, explores the evolution of and biases in media coverage of disability issues in Minnesota and nationwide. Narrated by storyteller and author Kevin Kling, the film features the faces and voices of people in the disability community and reporters speaking about media bias – and gains – in coverage of issues and individuals with disabilities.

<http://www.accesspress.org/the-real-story/>

<https://www.facebook.com/TheRealStorydocumentary>

### **The Katherine C. Grier Prize**

The Katherine C. Grier Prize is awarded for the best recent article in *Winterthur*. Dr. Bess Williamson received the 2013 Grier prize for "Getting a Grip: Disability in American Industrial Design of the Late Twentieth Century."

### **The Gene Wise-Warren Sussman Prize**

The Gene Wise-Warren Sussman Prize is awarded annually by the American Studies Association, to the best paper on any aspect of American history, literature, or culture, presented at the annual meeting by a graduate student. The 2013 Prize was awarded to Rabia Belt of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, for "What Does Citizenship Mean for People with Mental Disabilities?"

### **Special Issue of the Journal of Historical Biography**

*Journal of Historical Biography* is publishing a special issue on "Disclosure and Disability" volume 13 (Spring 2013--even though it's published in the fall). This special issue takes up biographical analysis of women with disabilities who dealt with negotiating the issues of disclosing versus hiding their disabilities, due to not only ablism but sexism and racism as well. The issue includes essays on a variety of disabilities experienced by women such as Marty Mann and Lillian Roth (co-founders of AA), Mary Church Tyrell (co-founder of the NAACP), as well as women involved in the French revolution, workers' movements, and Boston and New York high society.

## **Disability and Literature Research Poster wins Conversazione 2013 Award**

PhD student Alexandra Rees has won an award for best research poster on Disability in Coalfields Literature at Conversazione 2013. The event was organised by the College of Human and Health Science to showcase Swansea health and medical research to a wider audience of academics and professionals. The subject of her poster was '[Disability in Coalfields Literature: A comparative study of South Wales, North East England and Scotland 1900-1948.](#)'

The poster outlined key research questions such as 'How did narrative representations engage with the economic, social, gendered and political history of disabled people?' These questions were then linked to selected extracts from literary texts. For example, from Welsh writer Gwyn Thomas's novel *Sorrow For Thy Sons*:

*"His father's toil had been so excessive as to make him stoop like a victim of curvature. That had been just as well, because his father's wages were so low it would have been impossible to count them standing up straight."*

Alexandra Rees has said 'I am delighted and honoured to have won this competition. Conversazione offers a rare opportunity to present research from both the sciences and the arts and humanities side by side. I am really pleased to have been able to bring new Disability Studies research to such a varied audience.'

Her work on disability in coalfield literature is part of the [Disability and Industrial Society project](#). Funded by the Wellcome Trust, this five-year project is a comparative cultural history of disability in coalfields societies 1780-1948. This interdisciplinary project is led by Swansea University in collaboration with Aberystwyth, Strathclyde and Glasgow Caledonian Universities. The literature strand is supervised by Dr Kirsti Bohata, Director of [CREW](#), the Centre for Research into the English Literature and Language of Wales, at Swansea University.

## **Attention Disability Activists! The Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University seeks your help!**

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the ADA in 2015, we're mounting an exhibit at the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley. We will highlight the Bay Area's unique contributions by exploring the told and untold stories of the historic month-long occupation of the Federal Building in San Francisco in April 1977 known as the 504 Protests. Patient No More! People With Disabilities Securing Civil Rights seeks stories and objects such as photos, buttons, newspaper clippings, placards, t-shirts, letters, diaries, and any related ephemera or memorabilia that could help others experience the excitement and understand this important event.

If you were you involved in the Section 504 protest in San Francisco in 1977, we would love to talk with you! Have you had the chance to record your experiences? Do you know others who were there? What is your story?

We regret that we can only use personal stories or items clearly related to the exhibit if appropriate. Any recordings or items lent will be treated with care, be properly insured, and be displayed or handled to professional museum standards.

For more information please contact: Emily Smith Beitiks, PhD, Assistant Director, Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability, 135 Humanities, San Francisco State University (o): (415) 405-3528; [beitiks@sfsu.edu](mailto:beitiks@sfsu.edu)

To learn more about the Longmore Institute, visit our website:  
[longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu](http://longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu)

Thank you, and stay tuned for future updates.

Catherine Kudlick  
Professor of History and Director,  
Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability

'Patient, No More!' is an exciting collaboration and timed to coincide with nationwide events commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act in July 1990. With the main exhibit at the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley, the project will also use a website and social media to create an open conversation that will engage a variety of visitors with accessibility built into all we do from the beginning. A program of public events and a companion traveling exhibit featuring video histories will complement the ERC displays and engage a wider audience.

### **Disability and Industrial Society: UK Disability History Month Blogs** (Mike Mantin)

For UK Disability History Month (22 November - 22 December) the Disability and Industrial Society blog (<http://dis-ind-soc.org.uk/en/blog.htm>) is hoping to feature a series of blogs throughout late November-December about disability history in general, themed as an introduction to the study of disability history, its development and why it needs to be studied. Potential blog posts could include:

- \* What is Disability History?: A quick introduction and historiographical overview - reflecting on values of medical history, social model, cultural history, oral history
- \* Studying Disability History - finding disabled people in history and how to read sources.
- \* Biographical History - writing about key or understudied figures in disability history.
- \* Disability, History and Policy - the political implications of writing about disability history.

...and any other themes and ideas that explore the nature and practice of disability history, using your own experiences of research and personal interaction with disability history.

Each blog should be 750-1000 words and will be featured at intervals throughout the month. If you'd like to participate please let me know what you'd like to write about and send me ([m.r.mantin@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.mantin@swansea.ac.uk)) your blog by 19 November so I can get them all together in time

for the start of Disability History Month. And if you know anyone that might want to write one as a guest post for us, that would be great too.

## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **Disability and the Global South: An International Journal**

[www.dgsjournal.org](http://www.dgsjournal.org)

<http://dgsjournal.org/research/>

Disability Research in the Global South: Critical Questions & Methodological Challenges

Guest Editors: Karen Soldatic and S. Janaka Biyanwila

Research into disability has undergone a radical transformation with the emergence of disability studies since the early 1990s. The Eurocentric masculine 'Myth of the Independent Researcher' has been firmly contested enabling more creative knowledge production processes. The emergence of critically informed counter-hegemonic knowledges is increasingly grounded within the experiential, the local and the particular with a sense of the global. These challenges to knowledge production processes have been directed by disabled people's call for knowledge production that is situated, inclusive and participatory. New methodological approaches have suggested disability-inclusive and participatory research as a core structure in the 'doing' of disability research. Many of these concerns, however, have emerged within Northern disability studies framed by the Northern experience of disability, disablement and difference. Overall, there remains little critical literature looking at the methodological, ethical and other issues involved in disability research in the global South, in particular those of Southern disability scholars, actors and activists.

This special issue seeks to open a space for critical debates and reflections on the issues and challenges of 'doing' global disability research. The overall aim is to question and challenge existing approaches in ways that contest and transform the dominance of Northern understandings of 'doing disability research', while exploring alternative disability methodologies within the Global South as a site of counter-hegemonic knowledge production. We are keen to learn from researchers, practitioners and activists, in particular those in the global South, critically engaging with theoretical and empirical work driven by and situated within Southern disability knowledges, spaces and places. We encourage contributions exploring a range of themes including (not exclusively):

- Challenges in global disability research: methodological concerns
- Ethics across cultures: contested terrains
- Southern disability methodological approaches
- Indigenous methodologies
- North-South disability knowledge production and the global dynamics of disability knowledge production
- The radical imagination, social movement research and dialogical methodologies Southern engagements and the role of the Southern disability researcher
- The role of the non-disabled researcher
- Southern movement perspectives on disability knowledge production
- The discourse of 'emancipatory' research across cultures
- Beyond methodological nationalism: institutions of global disability governance
- Making research 'productive': from 'knowledge' generation to local transformative practice

Those wishing to submit an article, please email your full manuscript to Karen Soldatic ([k.soldatic@unsw.edu.au](mailto:k.soldatic@unsw.edu.au)). Please insert 'Submission for Southern Disability Methodologies Special Issue' in the subject line. Manuscripts will be sent anonymously for double peer review, and comments and recommendations relayed to authors through the editors. Deadline for submission: 1st December 2013

**CALL FOR PAPERS**  
**2015 Special Issue of Disability Studies Quarterly**  
**on the Americans with Disabilities Act**

In 2015, *Disability Studies Quarterly* will publish a Special Issue to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA has been a watershed in American disability policy, with far-reaching effects on the status of Americans with disabilities, but has fallen far short of the expectations for social transformation with which it was enacted in 1990. The Special Issue will commemorate the ADA's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with both a look back at how the ADA has affected the disability community and the larger society, and an assessment of future prospects for attaining the ADA's goals of inclusion and empowerment.

Papers that are related (broadly) to the ADA are invited from scholars from any academic or professional discipline, disability policy professionals and advocates, and from disability activists. The issue will strive to incorporate a diverse variety of perspectives within disability studies. Priority for selection will be given to manuscripts that are broadly framed and advance our understanding of the direct and indirect consequences of the ADA for people with disabilities, rather than those which focus on narrow legal, policy, or technical aspects of the Act.

Some examples of potential paper topics include, but would not be limited to:

- The History of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- The ADA and Disability Law
- The ADA and the Workplace/Workforce
- The ADA and Public Accommodation
- The ADA and Community Living
- The ADA and Disability in the Arts and Popular Culture
- The ADA and Health Care
- Disability Culture and Pride Since the Passage of the ADA
- Disability Politics Since the Passage of the ADA
- The Global Impact of the ADA and the U.N. Convention
- Technology, Disability, and the ADA

All submitted papers will be subject to peer review, and revisions may be requested for inclusion in the Special Issue. The deadline for submission of proposals is June 1, 2014. We anticipate that peer review and editing would be completed, and the complete issue will be submitted to DSQ before the end of 2014.

Proposals or questions about the Special Issue may be directed to Richard Scotch, Special Issue Editor, at [richard.scotch@utdallas.edu](mailto:richard.scotch@utdallas.edu).

## UPCOMING CONFERENCES

27-29 March 2014

### **Undoing Health: States of Body and Mind**

Bloomington, Indiana

An interdisciplinary graduate student conference hosted by the English Department at Indiana University. Deadline for proposals is 16 December 2013. For more information:

<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/53625>

31 March - 2 April 2014

### **Disability in Jewish Thought and Culture**

Antwerp, Belgium

This conference aims to bring people together who in their research address the theology, history and practical experience of disability and Judaism.” The deadline for proposals has passed. For more information (in Dutch):

<http://www.uantwerpen.be/nl/onderzoeksgroep/ijs/>

2 April 2014

### **History of Women’s Health Conference**

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

This conference focuses on areas of women’s health from the 18th century to the present, and encourages interdisciplinary work. Deadline for submissions is 6 December 2013. Last year’s program:

<http://www.uphs.upenn.edu/paharc/collections/events/>

2-5 April 2014

### **Western Social Science Association**

Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Section on Chronic Disease and Disability welcomes abstracts and panel proposals on a wide range of topics; submission deadline is 8 December 2013. For more information:

<http://wssa.asu.edu>

5 April 2014

### **From Engagement to Activism: Public History as Civic Responsibility**

Raleigh, North Carolina

“A symposium to facilitate discussions among public historians, scholars, and the public about the work of public historians and the resonance of their labors in the civic sphere, where democratic participation is cultivated and emboldened.” Deadline for submissions is 15 December 2013. For more information:

<http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=207733>

9-10 April 2014

### **Gallaudet 150th Symposium**

Washington, DC

Gallaudet University will mark its 150th anniversary with presentations that explore deaf history and culture, especially those that intersect with Gallaudet’s history. The proposal deadline has now passed. For more information:

[http://www.gallaudet.edu/150/get\\_involved/symposium.html](http://www.gallaudet.edu/150/get_involved/symposium.html)

22 April 2014

**Southern California Latino Disability Conference**

Los Angeles, California

Sponsored by Disability Rights California. For more information:

<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/Events/20140422SouthernCaliforniaLatinoDisabilityConferenceEnglish.htm>

7-9 May 2014

**Stavanger International Conference on Disability, Illness, and Religion**

Stavanger, Norway

This conference aims to promote discussions within the fields of theology and religious studies that focus on illness and disability. The deadline for abstracts has passed. For more information:

<http://www.mhs.no/?537>

11-14 June 2014

**Society for Disability Studies**

Minneapolis, Minnesota

The theme for the 27th annual meeting of SDS is "Disability (and) Sustainability." The Deadline for submissions is 13 December 2013. For more information:

<http://www.disstudies.org>

24-25 July 2014

**Sound, Memory, and the Senses**

Melbourne, Australia

This two-day conference will explore the possibilities and limits for the Senses as object of study. The deadline for submissions has passed. For more information:

<http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=206238>

**CONFERENCE REPORT**  
**12<sup>th</sup> NNDR conference in Disability Research**  
(30-31 May 2013, Naantali, Finland)  
**Aline Wooten**

From Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> until Friday 31<sup>st</sup> of May, the 12<sup>th</sup> biannual research conference of the Nordic Network on Disability Research (NNDR) took place at Naantali, Finland. Over 300 participants from all over the world attended the conference. The programme contained an abundance of 200 presentations organised into five parallel paper sessions, which dealt with a wide variety of topics: ethics, parenthood, employment, Independent Living and much more. Researchers from different disciplines working on different topics gathered to present about and discuss disability in its broadest spectrum. When it came down to the topic of Disability History only a handful of researchers were present. However, the presentations proved to be of high quality, and the smallness of the group contributed to the pleasant atmosphere between researchers mutually and between audience and researchers during the paper session.

Most of the presentations I attended were very well-given and interesting. I will present a small selection of those presentations which attracted my attention most. Two of these presentations were on Disability History, however, as I also wanted to reflect the broadness of the themes of the conference, I further selected a key-note and a presentation on two different topics.

Presentations on the topic of Disability History covered a time-span from the beginning of our common era to the present. Anna Rebecca Solevåg had the ‘oldest’ presentation, on disability in early Christianity. Illustrated by two extracts from biblical documents which witnessed on healing and unhealing disability, she demonstrated how disability could both be perceived as both a consequence of sin or as a protection against sin. Solevåg pointed out how disability was used in order to show that God is great. In her analysis she paid attention for the interconnectedness of gender, ethnicity and most of all disability, which is seen as a narrative prosthesis.

Pieter Verstraete and Ylva Söderfeldt analysed 19<sup>th</sup> century texts from different European countries which dealt with the somewhat remarkable question ‘who is the unhappiest, the blind or the deaf?’ Hereby they revealed the connectedness between disability, happiness and education. In their presentation Verstraete and Söderfeldt focused on two texts which tried to answer this question by first placing a blind and a deaf man on an island, and afterwards in society. On the island, happiness would be dependent on the satisfaction of basic needs. In society however, it would be derived from being able to behave according to dominant rules in society, and these rules one could learn. Verstraete and Söderfeldt showed how an increasing dependence of happiness on education emerged, as happiness was something one could learn, and how

happiness thus became a tool in order to justify interventions of experts in the lives of people with disabilities. The danger of ending up in endless or superficial discussions trying to answer the remarkable question was avoided by Verstraete and Söderfeldt when they showed the reader what matters more, namely the hidden processes of power which lay behind the question.

Four keynotes were included in the programme, of which especially one captured my attention. Eva Feder Kittay talked in length about ‘normalcy and a good life’. What is a good life, and does it assume normalcy, or as Aristotle said, rationality, autonomy and reason? Kittay herself has a severely disabled daughter, but as she argues, her life is definitely not worthless. Kittay came to the understanding that the things she had valued so much before, being a philosopher, namely rationality and reason, were not pivotal to a life of meaning and value. In stead she proposed ‘joy, love and the gift of just being able to be’ to be crucial elements of lives of quality. Kittay proposes a different concept of quality of life, which she developed when observing cognitively disabled people/her daughter, but despite of that, the concept reaches beyond cognitive disabilities and applies to non-disabled people too. I must say I recognised many of the issues she addressed in the life of a disabled family member, in the lives of the many disabled children I have met, and also in my own life, but actually hearing someone talk about it and giving words to these experiences gave it a whole new dimension.

Aizan Sofia Amin presented experiences of Malaysian women with mobility impairments. Much research has been done on disability in western contexts, but less in non-western contexts. As Amin’s research was one of the few concerning a non-western research topic at the NNDR-conference, her presentation stood out. ‘To be or not to be disabled’ being the title of her presentation, Amin explained the difficulties Malaysian women face when being disabled and being identified as (not) disabled. To identify as ‘being disabled’ subjects these women to the double stigma of both being a woman and disabled, but ‘not being disabled’ poses emotional and physical challenges when meeting a disabling society. Prejudice and discrimination occur frequently, and constantly these women have to prove they are capable and deserve dignity. By linking her findings to Malaysian living conditions and illustrating them with short examples, Amin gave a clear overview on her research and gave insight in how Malaysian women experience their disabilities.

**CONFERENCE REPORT:**  
**Critical Ethnic Studies Association Conference**  
(19-21 September 2013, Chicago IL)  
**Sami Schalk**

The second bi-annual Critical Ethnic Studies Association Conference occurred in Chicago at the University of Illinois at Chicago campus September 19-21, 2013. This large “un-disciplined” conference included an incredible variety of scholars and activists from across the US and Canada in particular whose work addressed race and ethnicity broadly. The conference occurred over a three-day period with hundreds of paper presentations as well as workshops, roundtables, plenary panels, performances and film screenings occurring throughout the day and into the evenings.

The original call for papers for this conference was one of the few national race and ethnicity conferences to explicitly include disability as a desired topic or theme. As a result, an impressive number of panels included disability-related concerns and a substantial number of papers situated themselves explicitly as historical or historicist approaches to the intersection of disability studies and critical race and ethnic studies, including my paper, “Writing Intersections of the Future: Race and Disability in Parable of the Sower”, on the panel “Difficult Discourses: Intersectional and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Race and Disability” as well as papers on the racialized history of schizophrenia in the DSM, race and disability in life insurance policies and actuary science, the genealogies of race scholarship in disability studies, disability organizations in Samoa and more.

The attention to disability at this conference was apparent not only in the many papers, but also in the explicit accessibility statement in the program and the signs throughout the main conference building which educated people about the problems with ableist language like “crazy” and “insane.” Additionally, disability gained prominent attention at the conference thanks to the place of disability justice activist, Mia Mingus, on an afternoon plenary, “Activism in and Beyond the Academy” and disability studies scholar, Nirmala Erevelles, at the concluding plenary. At this final event entitled, “What is to be Done? The Future of Critical Ethnic Studies”, Erevelles took the opportunity to emphasize to the many scholars and activists in the room why a disability analysis must be central to anti-racist and anti-imperial approaches to scholarship, teaching and social movements at large.

In the program booklet the conference organizers encouraged “all social media users to engage the ideas and thought-provoking dialogues that are heard during the conference by tweeting with the hashtag #cesa2013” and conference organizers tweeted from the official conference handle @cesconference. DHA members can get a taste of the extensive and interesting nature of this conference by checking out its Twitter feed.

I want to thank the Disability History Association and the scholarship committee members who chose me for providing support to attend this conference. It was by far the largest contingent of disability studies people I have ever seen at a race or ethnicity conference and I learned so much while in attendance. The opportunity to present my work before so many interdisciplinary race and ethnicity scholars was amazing and the DHA graduate student scholarship ensured the possibility of my participation. Thank you again!

**CONFERENCE REPORT:**  
**Society for Disability Studies**  
(26-29 June 2013, Orlando FL)  
**Jess Waggoner**

I would like to thank the Disability History Association for partially funding my first Society for Disability Studies (SDS) experience. If you consider yourself a disability studies scholar, or are even just becoming interested in the field, SDS is a generous and generative space to meet scholars with similar interests, easily meet and converse with senior scholars in the field, and learn about the most recent and influential work in disability studies. In this respect, SDS is more than a conference, but also a space that impressively models accessibility and allows for beautiful socialities to erupt in the unlikeliest spaces. For instance, this year, many of the participants made use of the poolside as a space for meaningful discussions punctuated by swimming breaks. The Saturday banquet, with no assigned seating, allows you to join a table of folks you had been hoping to meet the entire conference. And lastly, the dance, one of the most incredible aspects of SDS (don't miss it!) allows you to get down with all of the new friends and colleagues you've accumulated over your time at SDS.

Feeling isolated in your discipline? Frustrated with the lack of accessibility measures at your university? SDS provides a welcoming space to recharge and refresh, where you can bring this energy back to your workspace. The various subgroups or caucuses were great ways to meet new colleagues in a smaller setting. This year boasted a Queer Caucus, People of Color Caucus, People of Color Ally Caucus, International Caucus, Family Members of Persons with Disabilities Interest Group and a Student Interest Group.

Disability history scholarship was well represented throughout the conference, inaugurated on Friday by Corbett O'Toole's, Michael Rembis' and Joanne Woiak's panel on the intersection of disability rights and histories of institutionalization. Friday also featured an undergraduate panel on emergent scholarship in disability history with papers ranging from nuclear radiation, anarchist and Marxian approaches to queer

theory, and people of tall stature in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. A third panel on disability in history addressed photography of the disability rights movement, early U.S. disabled veterans and the intersection of communism and deinstitutionalization. Saturday morning, a panel of disability historians presented various historical perspectives on cognitive ability in the U.S. Alongside the wealth of panels addressing disability as a condition for historical analysis, disability history was also woven throughout various interdisciplinary panels. For example, a historical presentation on disabled eugenic field workers by Sara Vogt was featured alongside papers on theories of neoliberalism, exceptionalism and disability. The ADA Legacy project, which seeks to “educate and raise awareness of the history, contributions, and issues still facing people with disabilities” hosted a workshop where participants could contribute feedback on the project. These panels and many others showcased the versatility of and growing interest in disability history.

Be sure to look out for the call for papers in October for SDS 2014 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 2015 there will be a bash in Atlanta, Georgia, as SDS partners with the ADA Legacy Project to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA.

### **BOOK REVIEW** **David Gerber, University of Buffalo (SUNY)**

John Gray, *Abandoned Asylums of New England: A Photographic Journey by John Gray, Historical Insight by the Museum of disAbility History* (Buffalo: People Ink Press, 2012), Introduction, photographs, maps, notes, 219pp (no pagination). Hardcover, 64.95. Available from the Museum of disAbility History, Buffalo, New York at [www.museumofdisability.org](http://www.museumofdisability.org).

This extraordinary collection of photographs of abandoned state institutions for the mentally ill, developmentally and physically disabled people, and alcoholics and drug addicts is part of the Abandoned History project of the Museum of disAbility History in Williamsville, New York. Affiliated with People, Inc., a large, private disability service agency, the museum seeks in this endeavor, in a variety of publications, to recapture the worlds of custodial care and treatment that existed in the past and to memorialize the forgotten residents of institutions for people with disabilities. In the interests of full disclosure, I need to say that I am a member of the Board of Trustees of this museum. I came by my copy of the book, without having to pay for it, from the museum’s current acting director on the promise that I would review it and, as a sort of gift, because I contribute annually in dollars as well as service to the museum’s struggle to give birth to itself in difficult times. I think readers will find that this connection and my ability to confront critically John Grey’s photographs are not at odds.

John Gray, a photographer with a particularly striking and complex style of framing that one should say results in *compositions* rather than merely *photographs*, seeks in this book to evoke these themes in explorations of closed and abandoned public institutions in New England. This is Grey's second published collection based on images of twelve New England institutions, primarily for the mentally ill (7), but also those with developmental disabilities (1), chronic illnesses/tuberculosis (3), and "dipsomaniacs and inebriates (1)." Preceded by a short and general introduction to the history of the large institution and its therapeutics, from the Kirkbride Plan through the medicalized, surgical and pharmaceutical regimes of the twentieth century, by Douglas Platt, the curator of the Museum of Disability History, the book consists almost wholly of Gray's haunting images. They are interspersed with a map and a contextualizing quote for each of the twelve chapters devoted to a different institution in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The map, a highly localized survey map, serves to point out the remote suburban or rural location of most of these institutions, which is in keeping with the Kirkbride therapeutic that informed their founding. The quote randomly addresses conditions within the institutions, or in two cases, expresses sadness that a place of monumental scale with claims to architectural grace and even beauty as well as functionality should be allowed to fall into disrepair. A number of the institutions pictured here were thought enough of in their day that postcards, some reprinted here, were published for the purchase by tourists. But in the last thirty years they have been razed, or they stand abandoned on sites where more contemporary buildings, for the original or different purposes, have been built to replace them. Though they were the pride of public architecture in the nineteenth century and symbols of what was believed to be a caring, humane society, only a few have been deemed worthy of adaptive reuse. Other than a relatively small number of historical preservationists, few seem to care if they stand or fall.

But the book raises disturbingly the question: Why should we care? It is true that the buildings and interiors Gray captures intensely, subtly, and starkly are monumental in style, extraordinarily well-constructed, and have a commanding presence against the landscape, and in one instance (the Seaside Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Connecticut) the seascape, they sit within. They are part of the cultural assets of our communities, and it seems unwise to plow our history under the ground, especially when what follows is as likely as not to be another strip mall or megamart. It is also true that the neo-liberal anarchy of the present moment in the history of public care for the same populations sees the agencies administering to the needs of physically, developmentally and especially mentally disabled people so desperately underfunded that jails and penitentiaries have become the leading facilities for the mentally ill, and sheriffs and police their primary custodians. Other models, such as community care that is adequately funded and administered efficiently and humanely, certainly exist but lack of adequate funding in many states makes their success doubtful. Certainly from the perspective of what has, as of now, replaced the large institution, we hardly can feel

superior to those who imagined other possibilities in the historic past. Maybe we should memorialize their efforts in proportion to our failures.

His muted preservationism aside, does John Gray give us reason to feel that these institutions should be commemorated as artifacts of our aspirations to improve ourselves? It is mostly in the postcards and images from the distant past that these institutions emerge as making claims to beauty, nobility, and elevated purpose. Gray's contemporary images, in sharp contrast, subvert a preservationist agenda by dealing in another aesthetic --- horror. Conventionalized horror is, in fact, everywhere in these photographs. It is sometimes quite familiar. It calls to mind symbolic representations of Nazi genocide, whether drawn from the present rather than the past, as in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, in which late twentieth century industrial sites symbolize the industrialization of murder decades before, or in the classic documentaries of the Holocaust. It also calls to mind horror films such as Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* and Martin Scorsese's recent *Shutter Island*, a disturbing fantasy set in an institution for the criminally insane on a remote island somewhere in Boston harbor, and their antecedents, the classic haunted houses of Gothic fiction. One does not have to look far below the surface to find this persistent thread weaving its way through Gray's compositions. The written text sets up this connection for us in two references to sensational murders of one resident by another that compromised the reputation of two of the institutions. It comments on another, "Dark stories of lost and escaped patients haunt its maze of undergrounds passageways connecting the hospital buildings." It offers a quote from a doctor who worked at one institution who speaks of the staff as "normal people like you and me...who were forced to work under horrific situations." Even when one anticipates claims of beauty, they are subtly subverted simultaneously, as in the most extensive composition in the book, a two-page rooftop view of a landscape from atop the Danvers State Lunatic Hospital at nightfall across a chillingly blood-red sky, an effect perhaps of a color filter.

We are thus prepared for many of Gray's sinister, individual images from representations of modern horror, and they lurk in our memories, inspiring anxiety and dread, calling to mind death, decay, and violence: dark, underground passageways with rusted pipes and peeling walls; flooded floors; broken and boarded windows; obscure laboratory machinery (e.g., "the Fisher Tissuematon"<sup>1</sup>); smashed office furniture; scattered files and documents strewn across vacant offices; and a profligate wastage of syringes, medicines, apothecary jars, electrical equipment, wheelchairs, dishes, iron lungs, bedding, and a child's stuffed doll, all abandoned in place, as if suddenly residents and staff had been abducted and had disappeared. If neglect of worthy, old buildings might still be construed as the point, it is difficult to see how we can fold into that purpose an open morgue cabinet, or two separate, close-up images of the skeletal,

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<sup>1</sup> "The new automatic instrument for fixing, dehydrating, and impregnating tissue specimens," advertisement, *Science*, 130 (1958-1959), 1606.

partially feathered remains of birds. At times, horror and dark humor conflate. There is an ominous cartoon-like shark, with a gaping mouth of sharp teeth in a mural of innocent sea creatures that was probably meant somehow to calm patients, and there is a hastily , crudely painted version of the serenity prayer that was done on the panes of a barred glass block window. The book's final image, probably carefully positioned as a coda, is someone who I imagine to be Gray himself in one of those underground passageways, heating ducts and other piping above him, and open doors ( to where we cannot know) at his side. He is standing, his back to the camera that captures him, at his own tripod framing a photograph that looks out toward the dark recesses at the end of our line of sight. His own image is poorly focused, and hence almost spectral. We do not know who is behind him or in front of him. He is at once vulnerable, and yet also menacing.

The impact of this book is mixed. It is worth the price on the strength of John Gray's extraordinary images. But its competing agendas raise question marks for the appreciation of whatever contributions we might be prone to seek in the past. Ultimately it seems to invite us less to reflect on the past than to move on, quickly, without looking over our shoulders for fear of what, unseen and unheard, might be lurking in the shadows.

## Special Section: Simondon and Disability Studies

Wilson Kaiser

I am delighted to present this group of essays for the Disability History Association Newsletter. As I will argue below, Simondon offers exciting new possibilities for research into disability history and disability studies more broadly. “Simondon and Disability Studies” provides a theoretical overview of Simondon’s main arguments as they relate to the field of disability studies. The two essays that follow – “Using Simondon to Understand Disability and Aging in the Renaissance” by Sarah Parker (Jacksonville University) and “Machinic Milieus: Simondon, John Hart and Mechanology” by Mark Hayward (York University) and Ghislain Thibault (Wilfrid Laurier University) – present specific case studies in historical and cultural research into different areas of disability. Collectively, these essays provide an introduction to Simondon and demonstrate the applicability of Simondon’s philosophy to a number of areas directly related to the study of disability.

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When Gilbert Simondon published *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* in 1958, his radical and disorienting philosophy of ontogenesis met with instant acclaim in France. After this initial interest, however, Simondon has been all but ignored on both sides of the Atlantic, and it was not until his death in 1989 that the rest of his initial work was published. Since then, Simondon has garnered increasing attention, and many of Simondon’s core works are now being translated and edited for the first time. This signals a substantial shift in today’s theoretical and scholarly climate, which has been reshaped by the work of theorists such as Giles Deleuze, Bernard Stiegler, Isabelle Stengers, Peter Sloterdijk, and Mark Hansen, among others, accompanied by a correspondent emergence of new areas of study in recent years that have successfully taken up these theoretical developments, including: posthumanism, New Media, micropolitics, and disability studies, to name a few. Generally, these areas of study are marked by an openness to new theoretical approaches that have proven disorienting to the poststructuralist approaches dominating the scene for the past thirty years. Despite his relative unfamiliarity, Simondon is a central figure in all of these changes because his theories inform the thinking behind emergent fields such as disability studies. In this brief introduction to Simondon’s philosophy, I will bring him back into the conversation on central issues within disability studies by introducing some of his key terms and demonstrating their direct applicability to the social, political, and ethical investigation of disability.

Born in the 1990s with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the early publications of Lennard Davis, disability studies maintains an uncomfortable relationship with the traditional forms of identity politics that oversaw its growth into an independent field of study. As Davis argues in *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995), disability is characterized by a shifting “threshold” rather than by putatively stable categories of identity. In addition to exploring the semiotic codes governing critical gender and race theories, disability has also tended to add deeply materialist concerns with prosthesis and genetic inheritance. These qualities generate a partial estrangement from more established interpretive models. As Davis contends, the disabled body is “a nightmare for the fashionable discourse of theory because that discourse has been limited by the very predilection of the dominant, ableist culture” (5). Like the other emergent fields I mentioned earlier, disability study’s discomfort with pre-existing theoretical assumptions has required that it become an exploratory field composed of a variety of approaches. Scholars and activists as diverse as Tobin Siebers, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, Tom Shakespeare, Carol Thomas, Sunaura Taylor and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson are characterized as much by their different approaches and concerns as they are linked by the tenuous interplay of social and physiological effects that Lennard Davis calls the “disabled moment.”

Despite the evident heterogeneity of approaches to disability studies, I would argue that we are all connected by a shared critique of normalcy and its implicit claims to self-coherent, universalizing categories. It is on this common ground that Simondon might be productively invited into the conversation. The historical work by Davis and others demonstrates that normativity is a central concept in modernity, underlying everything from the institutions investigated by Michel Foucault to the categories of the Other examined by post-colonial studies. Disability studies participates in these critiques of normate culture, but it also demands something further, because it requires a positive formulation of the differences that disrupt categories of normalcy. The disabled subject is not a “subaltern,” in Gayatri Spivak’s formulation, because socially and politically, disabilities speak through what Tobin Siebers identifies as the (un)intentionally exaggerated forms of “masquerading” that cannot help but defy the codes of normativity in an outspoken and expressive manner. Likewise, impairment and its social configuration as disabilities are not exclusively subjected to medicalized institutionalization; just as often, they are integrated into the social fabric and our bodily condition in ways that cannot be comfortably cordoned off from society through the techniques of bio-power. The “disabled,” in short, are among us. Disability studies thus raises a unique challenge by demanding a positive formulation of difference, and this demand in turn requires rethinking the theoretical approaches in which our inquiries are situated.

Moving beyond the poststructuralist insistence on lack, absence, and loss, the theoretical developments based in Simondon's work provide tools for thinking about difference as an integral part of both the biological and the socio-political dimensions of life. Perhaps the signal distinction between Simondon's work and the theories that have predominated for the past thirty years is his insistence on beginning the conversation at the pre-individual level. Whereas the overriding concern of dominant theories has been with the subject, Simondon demonstrates the continuous connections between the micro-elements that compose the subject all the way up to large-scale social movements. The emphasis on a different scale is extremely important, because it instantiates a continuous awareness of the changes below the surface of what are often mistakenly believed to be stable forms of identity or subjectivity. Disability studies is well-suited to this approach, since a "disability" is precisely the manifestation of the changeability of our state. With poststructuralism, from Foucault and Donna Haraway to Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek, the subject position has been taken as the starting point of theory. While the work of these and other poststructuralists has been immensely important for disability studies (among many other fields), they all leave open the question of what comes before and after the subject. Simondon, on the other hand, develops a rich vocabulary for exploring the minute, particular processes of everyday life that form the basis for the individual, while also accounting for how the individual necessarily changes in response to internal and external conditions.

To those unfamiliar with Simondon's work, this may at first sound like a form of naturalism, but there is no cause-and-effect necessity in his thought. Every moment of "individuation" carries unpredictable possibilities of change as well as the effort of self-maintenance. Nor is this process of becoming an effect of external accident on permanent substance, as an Aristotelian worldview would have it. The onset of Huntington's disease may be genetically determined, but how it changes the individual and how the individual adapts and changes each day is not predictable, and it is in this opening between being and becoming that a concrete, lived politics – and even an ethics – becomes possible. To take another example, the disabled person who uses a prosthesis is decidedly *not* encompassed by the simple equation of human individual + tool/technology, but is rather reshaped by what Simondon would call "technicity." Rather than seeing technical objects as tools operated by an autonomous subject, Simondon argues for a mutually informing relationship that, in the case of the prosthesis, also involves wider contact with a network of researchers and manufacturers, communities and loved ones who are interconnected through an integrated matrix of human and non-human elements. This quality of change and adaptation helps to explain why there has been so much resistance to the image of the disabled person as passive victim from within the disabled community: individuality is not abandoned so much as changed (and sometimes radically) from within the experience of impairment. The trouble with previous poststructuralist approaches is that, because they rest at the level of the subject, they do not adequately account for the micrological intensities that make up the

individual's evolving affective responses and physical adaptations to their changing technical and social milieu.

Simondon calls these small, everyday changes “transductions,” in order to indicate that they are two-way processes of adaptation and change. All individuals exist in a “metastable” condition, meaning that even their constancy signals a process open to change rather than a permanent quality. In Lennard Davis's description of the “disabled moment,” he signals precisely this constant proximity to change, but we still need a vocabulary for describing the sometimes minute shifts that cross the threshold from ableist culture to the recognition of disabilities. Adapting an example from Davis, we might consider someone who is momentarily incapable of remembering something important. If asked, that person would *normally* claim environmental or circumstantial conditions (loud music, exhaustion, etc.), and yet these moments raise the question of the changing interaction between environment and individual, as well as the past's relation to the future. This kind of forgetfulness might signal the beginning of Alzheimer's or the latent effects of an otherwise masked cognitive disability as well as those “external factors” named earlier. In such an example, the individual's future is signaled by the event of forgetting, but not determined by it. Simondon would call this moment of forgetting a “disparition,” a tensile difference between the individual's world and its process of becoming. Disparition signals the constant relationship between individuation and its opposite, “disindividuation,” which is not the same as the breakdown or loss of subjectivity, but rather signals the connection back into other latent possibilities of becoming. It is worth emphasizing that neither individuation nor disindividuation are inherently good or evil: this must be decided by the individual's evaluations from within the process of change. Disindividuation is just as central to the war veteran's relearning to walk as it is in the example of forgetfulness that may signal Alzheimer's. These constant imbalances, or disparitions, are the stuff of life for Simondon, pointing to the richness of possibility and the challenge of change that qualifies every moment of life.

One of the possibilities accounted for by disparition is pain. In Simondon's work, he discusses anxiety as an irresolvable conflict between the individual and its process of individuation. Similarly, pain, especially the chronic pain that accompanies some impairment, can be understood as the clash between the psychic, physical, and environmental phases of individuation. Tobin Siebers has written movingly and insightfully about the role of pain in disability studies, arguing that it is both a reality that cannot be discounted, and an experience that cannot be adequately generalized. Because Simondon's work refuses to segregate the body and psyche from its environment, it offers the possibility of developing a much fuller account of the experience of pain in its specificity. Just as disability is often a quality of thresholds, pain is an emergent phenomenon that depends on a variety of factors. Simondon names this variety of potential qualities the “apeiron” (derived from pre-Socratic terminology),

by which he wants to signal the storehouse of variabilities that we carry around all time. Marking both the ground from which individuation emerges and to which disindividuation returns, the apeiron is ethically neutral, and yet it is often activated by events that are anything but neutral, such as pain. Think, for example, of the not infrequent relationship between pain and the adaptations and uses of prosthetics discussed earlier, or Sunaura Taylor's argument that the often painful experience of impairment can open the way to greater community and intimacy. The crucial point here is that, for Simondon, the changes wrought by pain have the potential to create new forms of individuation, which in turn have their own validity and modes of connecting with others. Simondon calls this process of openness to becoming other, and the potential for different social, political, and ethical community that results, "transindividuation."

As I noted earlier, Simondon argues that the psychic individual is not the precondition for social formations. The transindividual indicates the points of connection that are both larger and smaller than the individual. These quantum, emergent points of shared experience and affect are what make the formation of social groups possible, and for Simondon, this is also where a politics and an ethics comes onto the horizon. In contradistinction to the imperatives of right action that found traditional ethical considerations, Simondon argues that our interactions are grounded in the networks that make individuation possible. This is a pragmatic ethics that, unlike the normative categories of ethical imperatives, focuses on the ways that communities form according to their specific abilities, needs and worldviews. Self-identifying members of the Deaf community, for example, constitute a group with a specific ethics and politics as well as a language and culture. That group's relationship to the larger disabilities community, or normate culture, is complex rather than preconditioned, specific rather than universalizable, because it involves the realization of small, everyday, transindividual potentials both within and outside of the group.

The movement from the micrological conditions of individuation to the ethical and political formations of the transindividual demonstrates an integrated worldview that allows us to see past the problematic binaries of self and other, identity and change that, I would argue, do not fully describe disability studies. As Carol Thomas has noted, there is an abiding tension between what she calls the "social deviance" and the "social oppression" models, or the contrasting views that disability is determined from an individual or a social perspective. As I hope to have made clear in this all-too brief introduction to the main lines of Simondon's thought, the process of individuation encompasses both the individual and the social in a continuum that reaches from the pre-individual to the largest socio-political formations. In its positive formulation of change and difference, Simondon's philosophy offers scholars a vocabulary and mode of thought that productively addresses disability studies' need for a theory after poststructuralism.

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## **Using Simondon to Understand Disability and Aging in the Renaissance**

Sarah Parker

While disability studies has demonstrated its vitality in many areas of academic study over the past quarter of a century, it is still a relatively young and unexplored field in early modern studies. There are important exceptions to this claim. The journal *Disabilities Quarterly*, for example, published an entire special issue on “Disabled Shakespeares” (29.4 2009) edited by Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, which consisted of a set of articles that laid the foundation for arguing that disability is a relevant category in Renaissance studies. During the early modern period, the term “disability” was not used the same way in which it came to be understood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Hobgood and Wood point out, the concept of disability was not bound up with the various manifestations of biopower that stigmatize or empower impairment in the modern world. Instead, they argue that the Renaissance expressed a fascination with the idea of variation in human form. More recently, the study *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* (Ohio State Press, 2013), assembled by the same editors, follows up on these arguments, illustrating that establishing disability as an investigative category for the early modern period will provide a helpful lens through which scholars can profitably revisit the Renaissance notion of subject-formation and the value of difference.

These are the major studies on disability in Renaissance literature to date, and they both focus on early modern England. Furthermore, although they look at a variety of manifestations of disability, from dwarfs in the Renaissance court, to blindness, to

cognitive disability, they largely ignore the topic of aging. Aging is a central theme in disability studies, because the process of aging is palpable proof that the embodied subject changes and often experiences disability and impairments that are not necessarily congenital, but are nevertheless a central part of the daily lives of most aging persons. In the short space available here, I would like to focus on the potential value of using Simondon's theories of individuation and disindividuation to understand the relationship between aging and disability in the *Essais* by French author Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) in order to propose a new approach to disability studies in the early modern period.

In his book *Disability Theory* (University of Michigan Press, 2008), Tobin Siebers points out that only 15% of people with disabilities are born with impairments. In the Renaissance as today, many people became disabled in some way later in life either through traumatic accident or the natural process of aging. Michel de Montaigne's autobiographical style in the *Essais* elegantly describes the relationship between his shifting sense of his individual self and his experience of aging with its attendant introduction of new impairments to his body. Montaigne began writing the *Essais* relatively late in his life as part of a process of retreat from his career in law and politics, a project that he began around the age of forty and that occupied him until his death at age of fifty-nine. In the course of the work's composition, Montaigne remarks on aging and the loss of a robust bodily health he had so valued earlier in life. Thus, although his *Essais* address an array of topics, they are joined by the shared fact of his aging body, a common thread that makes itself explicit in many of the books' key chapters. In the chapter "On the Resemblance of Children to Fathers" (2.37), for example, he discusses in particular suffering from kidney stones, the ailment that had plagued and eventually killed his beloved father. In relating his experience of illness and disabling pain, Montaigne uses a language of shifting identity that Simondon's theories are well-equipped to describe: Montaigne narrates a series of additions and losses, both physical and intellectual, that reshape his understanding of himself as a subject without necessarily ascribing a purely negative or positive valence to these changes.

In the beginning of "On the Resemblance of Children to Fathers," Montaigne describes what he sees as the logic guiding his writing process. He refers to his book as a "bundle of so many disparate pieces" (696) rather than as a complete work or an artistic whole.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, he describes his writing process as one of expanding additions and changes that reflect his various moods and "mutations": "I do not correct my first imaginings by my second – well, yes, perhaps a word or so, but only to vary, not to delete. I want to represent the course of my humors, and I want people to see each part at its birth" (696). Montaigne understands his book as a representation of his person, an account of the course of his "humors." In the Renaissance, humors refer to a person's physical as well as psychological features. These were the four bodily fluids that had to be kept in balance in order to maintain physical and psychological health. Montaigne

understood both his body and his mind (which he would have considered inextricably intertwined) to be in constant flux. The principle of changeability guiding his understanding of himself thus shapes the *Essais*, making it a composite formed through continual addition rather than a work aiming at formal closure.

Montaigne conflates his subject position and his aesthetic project, arguing that both are characterized by creative mutability through addition. He makes a point of including quotations from books he is reading, writing about the various quotidian events in his life that pique his interest, and in the process creating a work representing a self that constantly changes rather than arguing for a stable identity which would need to be manifested through a more rigid aesthetic standard. These small-scale changes and encounters that get taken up in the process of shaping a subject sound very much like what Simondon calls “individuation,” the largely unpredictable process in which the individual adopts and adapts certain bits and pieces of the world around her and incorporates them into her sense of identity.

Though Montaigne sees his work as inextricably bound up with the complex emergence of his sense of individuality, this does not lead him to perceive these projects, the *Essais* or himself, in a totalizing way. Instead, his writing ingeniously describes a process, rather than the achievement of a coherent identity. At the beginning of “On the Resemblance of Children to Fathers,” Montaigne achieves this by coupling a story of subtraction with a story of addition to show the subtle but surprising events that shape his shifting process of individuation. The first story is told in only two sentences and recounts how a young valet, who was taking dictation from Montaigne, made off with several pages of the *Essais* as they were in progress. Rather than expressing some sense of a loss of self or the absence of an essential part of an organic whole, he instead dismisses the entire incident in a single sentence: “It consoles me that he will gain no more by it than I have lost” (697). The book Montaigne writes and his sense of self are both informed through the complexly variable incidents that shape the process of individuation. In the very next sentence, Montaigne describes an “acquisition” that at first seems counterposed to the “loss” of a portion of his book: the discovery that he has kidney stones. Though these stones cause Montaigne a great deal of physical pain, he does not describe this change as an alien, exterior phenomenon. This does not mean that Montaigne celebrates the stones; rather, he writes to acknowledge their role in changing his sense of self. For example, the immense pain that they cause incites him to rework his understanding of Stoic philosophy and consider at length whether it is possible to grimace in pain while maintaining a calm stoicism inside.

By paradoxically reversing the binary of loss and acquisition, such that the loss becomes no loss at all and the acquisitions come in the unlikeliest of places, Montaigne illustrates a logic of compilation that characterizes his writing in the *Essais*. This logic extends into his understanding of the changes to his person that, in normative interpretations of

bodily health and subjectivity, would be perceived as purely negative or detrimental. This sounds very much like Simondon's notion of "disindividuation," in which what we might perceive as loss in fact creates the conditions of possibility for the emergence of new forms of individuation. The seeming loss of health that Montaigne experiences is no loss at all, but rather an opening onto new experiences, such as rethinking philosophies of suffering or identifying with his father. Such a process describes an innovative way of looking at what we would now call disability, the shift in the normative models of physical or mental "wholeness." Montaigne dismisses such images of bodily integrity and instead understands personal and aesthetic creation as an ever-changing process.

Montaigne was not the only Renaissance author to discuss aging, and the early modern understanding of aging and its effects on mind and body offer a fruitful avenue for further inquiry in the emerging field of early modern disability studies. The promise of this field is evidenced by the recent publications I mentioned above, as well as Ashgate's announcement in early 2013 that it is launching a new series on interdisciplinary disability studies (series ed. Mark Sherry). Similarly, Leeds Trinity University College recently hosted a Northern Renaissance Seminar on disability in the Renaissance (proceedings of which have been reported in the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies* (7.2 2013)). These are all signs that early modern disability studies is a growing field. Simondon's theories, because they attempt to describe the shifting relationship of individual and environment, are well-equipped to help us consider the early modern understanding of self and personhood before the historical institution of strongly normative models of bodily and cognitive integrity. This connection between Renaissance epistemology and Simondonian philosophy will be especially relevant in considering the process of aging and its effects on the humoral body.

#### NOTES:

1. All translations are from Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald Frame (London: Random House, 2003).

## **Machinic Milieus: Simondon, John Hart and Mechanology**

Mark Hayward and Ghislain Thibault

Our project begins from the premise that the thought of Gilbert Simondon offers a unique perspective for work in disability studies. Over the past couple of years, we have been tracing the history and development of mechanology, or the science of machines, as it evolved through discussions and exchanges between philosophers, engineers and artists beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is a tradition of research that stems from

the writings of Franz Reuleaux on *kinematics* in the 1890s, and includes the work of Jacques Lafitte on machines in the 1930s and Simondon's writing on technical objects in the 1950s.

The connection between disability studies and the work of Gilbert Simondon results from our interest in the career of John Hart, a Canadian computer scientist who actively promoted Simondon's work in the 1970s and fostered the dialogue on mechanology among scholars and writers in Canada and Europe. Hart founded the department of Computer Science at the University of Western Ontario in 1964. Alongside his interest in the burgeoning world of computers and automata that occupied his research during the 1960s, Hart was also interested in the development of philosophical frameworks that might help computer scientists to better understand the contributions of their work to society. As a result of his interest in philosophy, Hart was involved in the first translation of Simondon's *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* into English, a version that remains unpublished today. This fact is significant for our discussion of disability studies because Hart's interest in theories of machines was coupled with his research into the use of computers as a learning aid. In the late 1970s, for example, he helped create the Computer Braille Facility at Ontario and, later on, the Audio Tactile Network, both projects to develop technology for the visually impaired.

By thinking through the relationship between John Hart's work and the writings of Gilbert Simondon, we intend historicize the reception of Simondon's work in the 1960s and 1970s in order to situate his perspective on the relationship between machines and bodies in relation to contemporary debates in disability studies. We interpret Simondon's ideas about "technical objects" in relation to a cluster of work on machines as organ-extension, suggesting that his approach offers a useful framework for thinking about technology that challenges presumptions about sensorial and corporeal normativity. To this end, we sketch out two ways in which Simondon's thought holds promise for contemporary research in disability studies. The first of these arises from Simondon's attempt to integrate conceptual and concrete analyses of technology, an approach that relies on a unique synthesis of phenomenology and ethnology. The second of these, building on Simondon's hybrid philosophical method, is an elaboration of the relationship between technology and humans that focuses on modes of embodied mediation. Finally, we briefly discuss how Simondon's notion of milieus was articulated through Hart's work on human-computer interaction.

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While the scope and systematic nature of Simondon's thought suggest a high level of abstraction, Simondon is first and foremost a philosopher of concrete particulars. This is true of his writings about machines and technics, but it is equally true of his later work on biology, psychology and technical invention. Simondon's philosophical method is a

product of the disparate influences on his work, ranging from philosophy to cybernetics to the history of technology and science. In his discussions of technical objects, Simondon offers a methodological and conceptual focus on materiality and embodiment that draws on both the work of phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty (with whom Simondon studied in the 1950s and to whom he dedicated his book on technical objects) and the ethnological study of the evolution of tools and machines adapted from the writings of André Leroi-Gourhan, among others.

Simondon's project integrates the structure and operation of technics into the material and social networks that constitute individual and collective being. This approach separates him from other well-known thinkers of technology, such as Martin Heidegger and Jacques Ellul. Rather than looking for the "essence" of technology (Heidegger) or the formal logical relation of technics (Ellul), Simondon repeatedly draws upon details from the historical development of technologies in order to show that it is in the concrete instantiation of specific technical objects that one finds the key to understanding the ontology of technics. Simondon's hybrid philosophical approach offers a materialist method for the study of technics and technologies that differs markedly from Marxism, yet remains equally grounded in a materialist framework, leading to an important point of intersection with contemporary disability studies: his approach to the relationship between the body and technology.

Simondon's discussion of the technical object (particularly his thorough critique of the opposition between technology and the human) places him in the long line of thinkers belonging to what Mark Hansen and Bernard Stiegler have called "epiphylogenesis," or the co-evolutionary theory that considers tools as extensions of bodily functions and organs. In the first volume of *Technics and Time*, Bernard Stiegler's argues that Simondon provides an early elaboration of theories of the exteriorization of body and memory by technical means. The fundamental paradox of organ-extension, noted by many, is the enhancement/obsolescence duality: the tool enhances the faculties of the organ while making it obsolete at the same time.

The lexicon of the prosthetic – often called upon to describe this machinic and biological encounter – often assumes this tension in its implicit claim that the technical prosthesis eventually dis-ables the organ. As Sarah Jain has noted, the trope of the prosthesis oscillates between the assumption of a disable body necessitating supplementation and that of an able body amputated by the technical extension of the prosthesis.

Yet, it is worth noting that Simondon and others only sporadically draw on the prosthetic lexicon, which polarizes the discussion about disability and relies on a simple model of causality. The epiphylogenetic approach, and Simondon's work in particular, offers a way out of the paradoxes of the debate about prosthesis. Simondon argues that the technical object mediates between the subject and the world, what Simondon calls

the *milieu*. In the process, a new *milieu* is created. In other words, the outcome of the mediating function of the “prosthetic” technical object is not just the augmentation (followed by obsolescence) of the human body, but also includes the creation of an environment in which such relations take place. This “associated milieu” is “at the same time natural and technical.”

Simondon combines his analysis of the emergence of the “associated milieu” with a study of the internal coherence and structure of the mediating object as well. In this way, his approach to technical objects expands the focus to consider the human-tool-environment triad as immersive and intensive rather than instrumental. At the same time, he draws attention to the importance of the mode of existence of technical objects in determining the nature of these milieus. Rather than an immutable opposition that favors the organic over the inorganic, Simondon stages the encounter between technology and culture. Importantly, this encounter occurs through technical objects that serve as mediators, a “functional bridge” between the two (*L’invention dans les techniques* 85). This double approach – towards the milieu and the interiority of the technical object – centers Simondon’s philosophy squarely on the significance of the non-human, constituting a phenomenology of technology that is not exclusively oriented toward normative models of human experience or subjectivity.

By putting the milieu forward as the site within which bodies encounter technologies, one moves away from the idea of the individual as fixed either psychologically or physically. The human is not a pre-determined set of biological or cognitive capacities (a point Simondon will develop in significant detail in his later writing on individuation), but rather that which enters into relation with technical objects and the surrounding milieu. The theorist Muriel Combes writes that, based upon this approach to the human-technology-world relation, Simondon proposes “a humanism constructed on the ruins of anthropology and on the renunciation of the idea of a nature or a human essence” (Combes 49).

It is for this reason that one might pursue a fruitful dialogue between Simondon’s thought and recent work in disability studies that has sought to better understand the relationship between embodiment and various technologies, tools and supports. For example, one might see echoes of the contributions of Simondon in Papadimitrou’s description of the experience of adopting a wheelchair as the process of becoming “enwheeled.” She writes that the use of such an apparatus points to “a way of being in the world that is not merely mechanical or practical (as skill acquisition is often assumed to be) but also existential and embodied” (Papadimitrou 695). There is in Papadimitrou’s discussion of en-wheel-ment much that echoes the relationship between the technical object and human beings that Simondon describes in terms of the associated milieu, or the relations and potentiality that emerges from the interaction between the technical object, its user and its environment.

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Hart's work was not theoretical in the traditional sense and he recognized that Simondon's work on technology emerged from similarly oriented engagement with material technologies and inventions. According to Hart and his collaborators, Simondon's work was essential to the revival of the science of machines they called "mechanology," following Jacques Laffite. (It is also worth noting here that Simondon was not fully aware of the mechanological tradition, but he recognized that there was similarity between his interest in technical objects and earlier attempts to develop a science of machines.) In this way, Hart's later work with visually impaired students should not be seen as a radical shift in the focus of his interest. Rather, it was an attempt to put into practice his understanding of the role that technology could play in human development, an attempt that was an exercise in the mixture of concrete material analysis and conceptual analysis that had led him initially to Simondon's work.

Hart worked on the development of the Computer Braille Facility in collaboration with blind students on the Ontario campus. Retiring from the university in the early 1980s after failed attempts to publish his translation of Simondon and other mechanologists, Hart dedicated himself to developing computer technology for use by blind students, founding the Audio Tactile Network in 1984 (which continues to exist today in London, Ontario as ATN Access). Unfortunately, there are relatively few archival traces that explain Hart's transition from his work on mechanology to his later work on the computerization of braille and the development of other technological tools. Nonetheless, it is clear that Hart understood that new computing technologies, because they relied heavily on vision, had "severely affected" those with visual impairments. Echoing Simondon's notion of concretization, Hart worried that the visual bias of computing that emerged in the conceptual phase of computer interfaces formalized systemic barriers for the visually impaired. "What an irony," he wrote, "to think that that the desire to satisfy simultaneously the needs of the blind could produce a general progress of technology as a whole." (*Parole véhémente* 187).

In his work, Hart perceived visual disability as an agent of innovation for technological design rather than as a restrictive condition. The human-machine interaction he explored went beyond an ocular-centric interface, offering alternative ways of engaging with computers. Hart's pioneering work is part of a tradition of enabling human-computer interaction that has not relied on the augmentation/obsolescence paradox of prostheses, but instead has offered a way of addressing the co-adaptation of subjects and machines through their interaction in a complex milieu. In positioning technology as an adaptable tool rather than inflexible object, we can begin to see how Hart was putting Gilbert Simondon's philosophy to work. The trajectory we have traced between the development of mechanology and Hart's later work on ATN helps situating Simondon's

importance for understanding the relationship between disabilities and technology. John Hart's transition from his promotion of mechanology to his later work with ATN demonstrates Simondon's importance for understanding the relationship between disabilities and technology.

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