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**Handout week 5 - Abstract and questions: Munoz and Hayward**

**Eva Hayward (2008) More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves (pp. 64-74)**

Published in the Women's Studies Quarterly in 2008, Hayward’s complex piece embodies and theorizes the experience of the trans being and becoming in relation to the ontology of a starfish. She does so through the encountering of the song “The Cripple and the Starfish” from Antony and the Johnsons, in which the starfish’s bodily transformation and its capacity to grow back the lost ray contributes to? Refiguring her trans identity. In the relational and animated essay, she reformulates the meaning of ablation commonly associated with transsexuality, particularly the practice of cutting as not as lack but generative possibility of the becoming of the body. To build her account, she engages with language and representation differently, through an attention to ‘words [that] carry the nervous circuitries, the rhythms, the tempo of the literal’ (2008, 75). She refigures the stability of bodily boundaries through transformation and regrowth. She initially addresses the cut in “cutting my finger” from the song as becoming “I” which stands for a metonymy of the finger/penis and the cutting/surgery.

Hayward’s engagement with the starfish is prompted by Antony’s haunting voice and lyrics. She presents Antony, the singer, who is transgender and whose music, from the name Johnsons of the band and its music advocate for his/her community. Indeed, named after the forgotten transgender activist M. Johnson, the band carries [or embodies] ‘a transgender legacy […] written into the music group’ (68). She incorporates his/her haunting voice and transformative singing focusing both on how ‘the tone and the wording of ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ put us in touch with specific senses, things, places, and relations that it mentions or hints at?’ (66). Antony offers ‘transformation as a trope for reworking the relationality of male and female, of human and animal’ (68). Hayward reinterprets the cut as a ‘corporeal act and affect of transformation’ (71) – trans as surpassing particular impositions (68) as the re-generation the starfish permits. All starfish can grow back a lost ray, but some sub species can also produce new organism from the process (70). This capacity to change and produce new forms of embodiment allows the trans being and becoming to ‘create a transformative scar for [themselves]’ (73) through ‘removal’ whether literal or symbolic which is recast as the possibility of constituting a new form of embodiment. The body itself constitutes multiple possibilities of becoming. Drawing on critical disability studies and crip theory, she suggests that dis-ability initiates re-signifying embodiment – they ‘diss’ (or reject) the label dys-phoria. By dismantling the prefix “dys-”, she argues that the cutting is a possibility, ‘not [a] cure but trans-figures embodiment’ that allows ‘a generative enactment of ‘growing back’ or a ‘physical and psychical regrowth’ (72). Indeed, cutting flesh is not considered as an amputation or absence but as the potential of mutable tissue and ongoing materialisation. Therefore, it refigures the medical trope of being born in the ‘wrong body’ (dysphoria). As productive of potentialities, cutting is ‘to feel growth of new margins [and] to create new psychical possibilities. The transwoman becomes ‘of her body’ (72). It contrasts powerfully with any sense of primordial identity and proposes in its place a generative bodily becoming – ‘created out of necessity, ingenuity and survival’ (74). According to Hayward, the body’s capacity for trans-formation and re-growth is not limited to trans bodies and must be understood as the body being ‘not a pure, coherent and positive integrity’ (74). This possibility becoming ‘of the body’ is not unlimited, however, but ‘pliant to a point, flexible within limits, constrained by language, articulation, flesh, history, and bone’ (74).

**Jose E Munoz ([2009]2019)- ‘A jeté out of the window: Fred Herko’s Incandescent Illumination’s Abstract’ (pp. 147-167)**

In this essay, Munoz presents the figure and practices of Fred Herko, a queer choreographer and dancer connected to many countercultural performances in the 1960s in New York, who at the end of his life was homeless. Munoz traces Herko in queer community. He develops a conception of choreography of surplus and of minor movements that carry ‘utopian traces of other ways of moving within the word’ (2019, 147). Munoz’s aim is to point out how Herko’s movements are carrying utopian traces of other ways of being and making change in the world. Here Munoz focuses on the energy and meaning of Herko’s movements – his incandescence (153) whilst describing him as a lost object who decides to end hislife. The practice of performing differs from and interrupts the capitalist and heterosexual strictures of normality. The notion of surplus also draws on while referring to Antonio Negri’s description of surplus value as unmanageable and possibly destructive for capitalism. According to Munoz, “Herko’s movement through the world and the performance space was always disruptive” (159), linked to excess, madness and a utopian surplus. The performance’s purpose was to show the interwovenness of life and death. Suicide serves to examine his life and queer performances, including his use of drugs and sociality. ‘traces’ – the possibilities, reverberation of thought, aesthetics and politics within his performances that can be located in ‘ephemera’ (149), the fleeting and undocumented of the queer archive.

First, Herko’s unordinary final act was his views on relationships with life performances, death and art are very important, because death art ‘move[s] beyond death as finitude’ (149). Munoz describes Herko’s dance practice as ornamental, flamboyant, exuberant, over the top, mesmerizing as well as his outfits scandalous, abstract and feminine queer. His controversial performances were to entertain as well as disrupt and move spatial and temporal boundaries. His work was direct commentary-like, to express ‘the cultural/aesthetic surplus of queer potentiality’ (150) and be the voice of minorities, the political side of his work is cultural surplus that resists the norma, Herko’s ornamental shows were to detach ourselves from everyday realities that stress us and focus on the utopian fairy-tale-like performativity. His work attempts to change its norms, rules and perception of queer community. Queerness and the politics of failure are linked because they are about doing something else and challenging people and society.

Munoz argues that Herko’s drug use combined with queer desire led him to experience queer and ordinary world differently and made him leap away from a world in the ‘straight time’ and its realities. Indeed, the combination of hope and disappointment can reveal that in hope there can be disappointment. By witnessing Herko’s inner and outer transformation, he is a failure according to prevailing standards, yet, we might feel Herko’s incandescence.

Munoz considers Herko’s ‘utopian surplus’ is also examined in his performance’s participation in Andy Warhol’s movies through nudity, expression, loneliness, drugs. Hence ‘negativity’ is not rejected, it is his expression that communicates more. And yet, viewing Herko’s final performance simply as a utopian ‘performance’, misses something: the profound loss of queer life, and the guilt that we failed as friends. There is nothing easy about losing.

**Discussion questions**

1. Eva Hayward reworks transsexual identity through the encounter with a starfish in a song by Anthony and the Johnsons. How does the starfish’s capacity for regrowth reconfigure the experience of transsexual surgery beyond the medical trope of gender dysphoria and being born in the wrong body? Explain how the cut is generative and what Hayward means when she writes that the transsexual is ‘of’ her body?
2. How do you understand the notion of trans-speciation? What does Hayward mean when referring to the starfish as being “more than a metaphor”? (How does she understand metaphor differently from merely a figure of speech? (pp. 74-76, optional).
3. Jose Munoz argues that the queer performances and movements of Fred Herko carry a utopian surplus of other ways of moving and being in the world. What is are these utopian traces and what do they do?
4. Compare Herko’s movement practices and Anthony and the Johnson’s use of music and voice. How are they performative and transformational?
5. Explain how Munoz refigures failure and heroism in queer performance. How does Herko’s suicide performance ‘move beyond death as finitude’? If Warhol knew about Herko’s suicide, why would he ask him for permission to film it? And considering the final page, what is missing in interpreting the suicide as utopian performance?
6. How do Hayward and Munoz describe their relation and involvement with their objects of study?

**References**

Hayward, Eva (2008) ‘More lessons from a starfish: Prefixial flesh and transspeciated selves’, Women’s Studies Quarterly 36 (3/4): 64-76.

Muňoz, José Esteban (2007) A jeté out of the window: Fred Herkos incandescent illumination’, In Cruising Utopia: The There and Then of Queer Futurity, pp. 147-167, New York: New York University Press.