

Panel 9: Embodying Affect in Graphic Lives

Moderator: Sarah Brophy

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Lives at the End of the Line: Aging, Elegy, Comics, and Care

In her introduction to *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson adds, to a long list of the different forms disability might take, the observation that “**everyone** is subject to the gradually disabling process of aging,” a fact, she notes, that “many people who consider themselves able-bodied are reluctant to admit” (13-14; my emphasis). My presentation proposes to examine four recent North American visual memoirs of aging, each of which deploys a range of graphic resources to i) grapple with the facts of parents’ disintegrating bodies and, especially, their disintegrating minds; ii) witness the increasingly complex demands these deteriorations make on available forms and economies of care; and iii) specifically shape comics’ aesthetics to the frequent uncanniness of dementia’s incursions. If, as Amelia DeFalco claims, aging is a vastly under-theorized site of cultural difference (xii-xvi), comics – until recently associated almost exclusively with youth- and counter-cultures – stubbornly keeps the sight and the sights of aging front-and-centre.

Joyce Farmer in *Special Exits: A Graphic Memoir* (2010); Sarah Leavitt in *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer’s, My Mother and Me* (2010); Roz Chast in *Can’t We Talk about Something More Pleasant* (2014); and Dana Walrath in *Aliceheimer’s: Alzheimer’s Through the Looking Glass* (2016) channel their own and their subjects’ creative energy in visual narratives that document their parents’ physical and mental deterioration. I focus on the artists’ deployment of comics’ resources – including its resistance to coherence (Hatfield xiii), its formal and metaphoric mimicking of “the procedures of memory” (Chute 4), and especially its capacity to represent hybrid subjectivities (5) – for their affective potential. My particular interest is the tricky territory where visualizing the increasingly “complex embodiment” (Siebers 25-6) of aging selves potentially defuses the sometimes ugly emotions that care-giving prompts, refining and re-storying those emotions as empathy and compassion.

Chast, Roz. *Can’t We Talk about Something More Pleasant?* New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Chute, Hillary L. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics*. New York:

Columbia UP, 2010.

DeFalco, Amelia. *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010.

Farmer, Joyce. *Special Exits: A Graphic Memoir*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2010.

Hatfield, Charles. *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Jackson: UP Mississippi, 2005. Print.

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- Leavitt, Sarah. *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me*. Calgary: Freehand Books, 2010.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 2008.
- Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.
- Walrath, Dana. *Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass. Graphic Medicine Series*. University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2016.

Desenhando vidas fora de linha: idade, envelhecimento, quadrinhos e cuidado

Em sua introdução para 'Extraordinary Bodies', Rosemary Garland Thompson soma, à longa lista de diferentes formas que a deficiência pode ter, a observação de que "cada pessoa está sujeita ao processo de deficiência gradual do envelhecimento," um fato, ela nota, que "muitas pessoas que se consideram capacitadas são relutantes a admitir" (13-14; minha ênfase). Minha apresentação propõe examinar quatro memórias visuais norte-americanas recentes de envelhecimento, cada uma implementando uma gama de recursos gráficos para i) lidar com os fatos dos corpos desintegrados dos pais e, especialmente, com suas mentes desintegradas; ii) testemunhar as crescentes demandas complexas que essas deteriorações fazem nas formas e economias de cuidado disponíveis; iii) moldar especificamente as estéticas de quadrinhos para a frequente estranheza da inclusão da demência. Se, como Amelia DeFalco afirma, envelhecer é um local de diferença cultural completamente pouco teorizado (xii-xvi), quadrinhos — até recentemente associados quase exclusivamente com cultura jovem e contraculturas — teimosamente deixam em destaque a visão e as visões sobre envelhecer. Joyce Farmer em 'Special Exits: A Graphic Memoir' (2010); Sarah Leaving em 'Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer's', 'My Mother and Me' (2010); Roz Chast em 'Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant' (2014); e Dana Walrath em 'Aliceheimer's: Alzheimer's Through the Looking Glass' (2016) canalizam energias criativas próprias e de seus sujeitos em narrativas visuais que documentam a deterioração física e mental de seus pais. Eu foco na implementação dos recursos de quadrinhos dos artistas — incluindo sua resistência à coerência (Hatfield xiii), suas mímicas formais e metafóricas de "procedimentos de memória" (Chute 4) e especialmente sua capacidade de representar subjetividades híbridas (5) — por seu potencial de afetar. Meu interesse particular é o difícil território onde visualizar a crescente "corporificação complexa" (Siebers 25-6) dos eus envelhecidos potencialmente neutraliza as emoções por vezes feias que cuidados incitam, refinando e recontando essas emoções em forma de empatia e compaixão.

[Traduzido por Juliana Geizy Marques de Souza - julianamrqs0@gmail.com]

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aging, disability, and care. Dr. Venema's recently-completed manuscript – *Bird-Bent Grass: A Memoir, in Pieces* – is an interdisciplinary critical memoir that integrates creative, critical, and theoretical perspectives on the ways in which issues related to international development; spiritually-grounded commitments to social justice; war; trauma; loss; and loss associated with dementia's devastations are negotiated in epistolary discourse. *Bird-Bent Grass* is forthcoming with Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017.