Emily Russell, *Reading Embodied Citizenship: Disability, Narrative, and the Body Politic*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-813-54939-2 hbk. 253 pp. £38.95.

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Emily Russell’s *Reading Embodied Citizenship: Disability, Narrative and the Body Politic* sets out to challenge the notions of homogeneity and independence at the heart of American liberal individualism through a focus on literary representations of physical disability. It explores a range of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American narratives that examine encounters between physical difference and the body politic. Russell’s opening claim, about the importance of narrative in defining and shaping conceptions of disability, is well established in disability studies, but her emphasis on texts that occur at particular “crisis moments” (18) across the twentieth century offers a fresh perspective on the growing field of writing about disability and citizenship. This focus on moments of historical and “narrative collision” (5) includes an analysis of anxieties in America following the Civil War, the failures of Reconstruction, the Vietnam War, and transnational influences of the 1990s. The scope of this book is wide-ranging, examining texts from 1894 to 1998, from established literary greats such as Mark Twain and Flannery O’Connor, to lesser-known authors such as Ruth Ozeki and Ron Kovic. The monograph also draws on films, newspapers, autobiographical accounts, legal contexts, and a selection of disability studies criticism to provide a theoretical and contextual grounding for the interdisciplinary analysis.

The opening chapter on Twain explores fascinating primary material, highlighting his often-overlooked *Those Extraordinary Twins* (1894), and the ways in which the text uses conjoined twins as a metaphor for a body politic at war with itself, “an embodied failure of individualism” (Russell 24). Russell’s insistence that humour can provide a “fraught” but “productive way to make strange normalizing narratives” (40) offers a valuable perspective on representations of physical difference that is rarely explored in disability studies. The first chapter also establishes several key concerns that run throughout the book and help to connect this temporally and geographically disparate set of texts together:
disability and spectacle, the relationship between metaphor and materiality, the dangers of mass production and, perhaps most importantly of all, the “homology of physical, social, and textual bodies as the terrain for constructing social narratives of disabled citizenship” (3). Throughout this monograph, Russell confronts taboo issues, including the sexualization of disabled bodies, reproductive rights, and the notion of an uneven ideological distribution of embodiment, in which visibly different citizens marked by disability, race, gender, and sexuality carry a greater “burden of materiality” (15). Chapters one and two work well in close dialogue with each other, as Russell moves on from Twain’s novel to explore the ways in which bodies perceived as grotesque in the works of Carson McCullers and Flannery O’Connor are used to represent an alienating modern state. Chapter two draws on biographical information about the authors, conceptions of commerce, and modernity in the period to examine social as well as individual bodies.

There is a large temporal leap between chapter 2, which closes with an analysis of McCullers, and the opening of chapter 3, which begins with an examination of the role of war veteran Max Cleland in the 2004 presidential election. This chapter on the Vietnam War deals with less strictly “literary” material in its focus on Larry Heinemann’s Paco’s Story (1986) and the Born on the Fourth of July (1976) memoir by Ron Kovic, but it does explore a sense of the illegibility of physically disabled bodies and an undeniable crisis in twentieth-century American ideals of embodiment. Chapter 3 examines the prosthetic, “hybrid bodies” (98) of soldiers, whether attached to guns or to false limbs, and connects dominant discourses of rehabilitation to “the national desire for a uniform body” (110). Russell argues that this crisis moment, when warfare threatened notions of the body as a communicator, highlights the ways in which “the acts of interpretation required to read all bodies” (53) are key to understanding citizenship and constructing identity more widely.

Russell’s analysis of Katherine Dunn’s Geek Love (1989) and Ruth L. Ozeki’s My Year of Meats (1998) in chapter 5 connects back to the freakshow settings in Twain’s works, this time through a more contemporary focus on discourses of disability, commercial production, and physical reproduction. A contrast is drawn between Ozeki’s use of physical disability as a metaphor for the tragic effect of agribusiness and the more complex play with realist conventions and radical celebration of difference in Geek Love. The chronological structure of Reading Embodied Citizenship does not, Russell insists, suggest a progress narrative or an “easy historical progression of expanded rights and understanding” (22). In fact, the final chapter, on David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest (1996), contains what is perhaps Russell’s most condemnatory reading of all, as she
criticizes Wallace’s often “exploitative practice” (197). The notions of textual assemblage and models of interdependent rather than individualistic citizenship and identity, explored in this chapter in relation to Wallace’s work, also draw upon and contribute to wider debates in disability studies. In fact, Russell’s analysis sets up dialogues with contemporary disability studies criticism, such as the works of Tobin Siebers, David Wills, Lennard Davis, David Mitchell, and Sharon Snyder, which inform the readings throughout the monograph. Concerns about the ethical problems and possibilities of metaphorical uses of disability, along with the relationship between metaphor and materiality, connect all of these critical works. The dialogue between the different novels and narratives explored in *Reading Embodied Citizenship* also disrupts a linear interpretation of the texts as a progress narrative; in both the first and the final chapter, for example, Russell returns to the recurring “problem of individualism” (20) articulated through the fragmented, hybrid literary forms of both Twain’s and Wallace’s writing. In the analysis of both Twain and Wallace, the publication history, the materiality of the books themselves, and the embodied experience of reading them, are at the fore in Russell’s reading.

A strength of this book is Russell’s openness to the potential for sensationalism or exploitation of disabled figures through literary representation, as well as the importance of literary narrative in constructing and understanding disability. In *Reading Embodied Citizenship*, Russell opens up an interesting discussion about the possible costs and benefits of “institutionalizing” (202) disability studies itself, though this remains largely undeveloped. There are points at which Russell’s emphasis upon theoretical rather than literary analysis means that the details of the novels themselves, such as in chapter 2, are somewhat overlooked. There is also a striking absence of certain key theorists of disability and citizenship, such as Martha Nussbaum’s *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (2006), which could perhaps have added to the short conclusion. Yet, this is an impressive and ambitious book in its willingness to engage with the underexplored areas of humour, sexuality, paradox, and difficulty in relation to the study of literary representations of physical disability. In her acknowledgements, Russell herself highlights the methodological difficulties of placing so many “seemingly far-flung sources” (i) and contexts in dialogue with each other. However, she refuses to locate disability studies on the margins of critical discourse. *Reading Embodied Citizenship* argues that disability is a defining, if often hidden, feature of many American ideals of embodiment and citizenship throughout the twentieth century that exposes “a string of national anxieties about the changing shape of the nation” (22). Russell proposes disability itself as a productive theoretical model, putting
forward “homeopathic methodology” (169), that does not seek to find cures or fixed endings but, instead, aims to reconfigure questions about the representation of textual, social, and bodily forms altogether.

Ine Gevers, *Difference on Display: Diversity in Art, Science and Society*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2010. isbn: 978-9-056-62715-7 pbk 400 pp. £27.95. Dutch title: *Niet Normaal: Diversiteit in Kunst, Wetenschap en Samenleving*.

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In 2002 Tom Shakespeare and Nick Watson declared disability to be the “quintessential postmodern concept”; it defies classification because it is “so complex, so variable, so contingent, so situated” (19). *Difference on Display: Diversity in Art, Science and Society* exalts this postmodern view, offering the reader a complex and varied response to the shifting frontier between disabled and non-disabled. The book was devised to accompany Niet Normaal: Difference on Display, an exhibition of new and existing artworks by international and contemporary disabled and non-disabled artists, designers, film-makers, and their collaborators. Niet Normaal was conceived in the Netherlands, originally exhibiting in Amsterdam. The exhibition came to the UK in Liverpool as part of the DaDa Fest and the Olympic Games Cultural Programme for London 2012. The result is a book that is part exhibition catalogue and part visual treatise on the ambiguity of the human condition in high modernity. Importantly, the book is also an artefact, a physical object evidencing a world at the margins of media and discourses. As Editor-in-Chief, the activist and curator Ine Gevers states that the artworks depicted express a “visual and non-discursive discourse” (24). This “non-discursive discourse” identifies the process of manifesting what is unsaid in its “brute being” (Foucault 131). Accordingly, diverse cultural products that examine normalcy are gathered to establish a new perspective on the self in society. In this way, *Difference on Display* asks “what is normal” and “who decides this” from a variety of angles, supplying a welcome resource to viewers/readers across disability studies and related disciplines.

In an interview, Fulya Erdemci, director of SKOR, the Foundation for Art and Public Domain, states that the Niet Normaal exhibition could be summed up in two words: “plurality” and “polyphony.” Likewise, the book of the exhibition is marked by this plurality and polyphony. More than 90 artworks are represented across the book’s 400 pages, including works by familiar and acclaimed artists