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GENDER FORUM

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Kathy Acker: Portrait of an Eye/I

Edited by
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Spring Issue:
abstracts (October 1),
completed papers (January 1)

Summer Issue:
abstracts (January 1),
completed papers (April 1)

Fall Issue:
abstracts (April 1),
completed papers (July 1)

Early Career Researchers Special Issue:
abstracts (May 1),
completed papers (August 1)

Winter Issue:
abstracts (July 1),
completed papers (October 1)

About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

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Editorial

by Daniel Schulz

1 If gender is enacted like a script, then Kathy Acker's oeuvre can be seen as a re-writing of that script. Acker's texts feed on and rip off other texts with subversive irony, transgressing the sociocultural script of what women and literature ought to be. Coming from an upper-class family, she chose to speak to the working classes. This conscious choice is linked to her disinheritance because of her marriage to a man beneath her status and her subsequent divorce. Significantly, Kathy Alexander appropriated the name Acker from her first husband, while emancipating herself from the institution of marriage. Similarly, her appropriation of texts as a writer indicates her divorce from these texts, a rewriting of the terms she was expected to agree upon, of the script she - as a woman - was expected to follow. This divorce enabled her to see the upper class narratives she had been brought up with in a different light, as she started working in sex shows and as a stripper. It is this intersection of class, sex, and gender, which defines the trajectory of Acker's writing.

2 Acker came to realize how disconnected the heteronormative upper class world she had been brought up in was from the 'real' world. One of the characteristics of Acker's writing is that it not only treats 'low' and 'high brow' literature equally, but that it rewrites 'high brow' literature with a pulp sensibility, while at the same time queering the characters of formally straight narratives. The books she used as raw material are an invaluable source for research on Acker's writing. Her private library was donated to the English Department of the University of Cologne in 2015 by Matias Viegner, head of the Acker estate. In 2017 I had the honor of providing the inventory of the library, which included not only the cataloguing of books, but also of additional material (letters, flyers etc.) and of handwritten marginal notes by Acker in books and documents. The inventory was completed around the time Chris Kraus' study *After Kathy Acker* was published (2017), inciting new interest in Acker's work. Since then, the library has been visited by scholars and students alike, and has been part of a number of exhibitions.

3 Thus an edition of Cervantes' works used by Acker for her *Don Quixote*, was on display at the *Don Quixote* exhibition *Weißhaus Gallery* in Berlin (2018). Moreover, 1000 of her books were part of "Get Rid of Meaning", the first exhibition on Kathy Acker's life and work, curated by Matias Viegner for the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe (2018), followed by the ICA's exhibition *I,I,I,I,I,I, Kathy Acker* in London (2019) and an exhibition in conjunction with The Kathy Acker in *Seattle Symposium* (2019), put together by Larry Reid and myself with Fantagraphics Books and the Goethe Institute in Seattle. In October 2019 éditions ismael

launched their book *Kathy Acker (1971-1975)* and a subsequent expo concerning Acker and her writing in Paris, further demonstrating the widespread, international interest in her writing.

4 The questions raised by Acker's writing are not merely aesthetic, but existential, putting into question the confines that society imposes on identity, gender, and sexuality. Acker's writing defies the gendered mold of patriarchal one-dimensionality and its co-option by mainstream aesthetics in favor of an expansive multiplicity (of femininities).

5 Dedicated to Kathy Acker and her oeuvre, this edition of *Gender Forum* opens with Dodie Bellamy's letter to her friend. This piece, entitled "Deviant," is a masterfully cut-up text and literary essay that confronts core concepts of Acker's writing, asking about the meaning of the notion of deviancy in Acker's writing between transgression/subversion and containment as product of the structure that is being challenged.

6 Continuing the investigation into aspects of deviancy, Jonas Neldner's article "'This book is for my tattooist'" analyzes Acker's writing as a form of *écriture féminine* to overturn the patriarchal rule which in *Empire of the Senseless* is literally inscribed onto the female body. Neldner explores Acker's reclamation of the body from heteronormative subjectification, which, in *Empire of the Senseless*, is enacted in the literal imprisonment of Abhor, the main character of the novel.

7 The theme of imprisonment is also taken up in my analysis of Acker's text "Seeing Gender" and her novels *Blood and Guts in High School* and *Empire of the Senseless* as textual labyrinths, a notion first suggested by Carla Harryman. Using the notion of the textual labyrinth implied in various essays by Acker as well as in the annotations she left in the books of her personal library, my article "Gender and the Labyrinth" explores the relation between Acker's concept of gender and the architecture of her writing. The labyrinth, understood as following a single line folding into structure with a center, corresponds to the linear concept of patriarchal capitalism, which Acker's writing uses in order to subvert it.

8 Claire Finch's essay on "Kathy Acker's Dildos" adds a queer perspective to readings of Acker's literary writing. Drawing on Paul B. Preciado's concept of the dildo Finch analyzes Acker's use of other authors' texts as a form of literary prosthetics drawing 'explicit attention to implicit power relations' and to a textual pleasure subverting heteronormative concepts of the body, sex, and sexuality. Finch's essay sets out to reconceptualize Acker's literary borrowing as a 'transformational counter-action' exploring 'sources of potential agency'.

9 Another angle on Acker's work is provided in Danae Hübner's review of Emilia Borowska's study *The Politics of Kathy Acker*. The book focuses on the revolutionary politics within Acker's literary oeuvre, analyzing the writer's use not only of fictional texts, but also of

historical texts pertaining to revolutionary movements. Hübner reads Borowska's study not only as an innovative approach to Acker Studies, but also as an important contribution to Gender and Political Studies in a wider sense.

10 The collection of articles of this issue of *Gender Forum* intends to inspire further interest in Kathy Acker's oeuvre, as well as in art as visceral engagement with the very 'reality' we live in.