Chapter 11

Lessons From a Starfish

Eva Hayward

Cripple and the Starfish

Mr Muscle forcing bursting
Stingy thingy into little me, me, me
But just ‘ripple’ said the cripple
As my jaw dropped to the ground
Smile smile

It’s true I always wanted love to be
Hurtful
And it’s true I always wanted love to be
Filled with pain
And bruises

Yes, so Cripple-Pig was happy
Screamed ‘I just completely love you!’
And there’s no rhyme or reason
I’m changing like the seasons
Watch! I’ll even cut off my finger
It will grow back like a Starfish!
It will grow back like a Starfish!
It will grow back like a Starfish!
Mr Muscle, gazing boredly
And he checking time did punch me
And I sighed and bled like a windfall
Happy bloody, happy bruisy

I am very happy
So please hit me
I am very happy
So please hurt me

I am very happy
So please hit me
I am very very happy
So come on hurt me

I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish

I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
Like a Starfish …

(Antony and the Johnsons 2000).

I call this piece a critical poetics rather than a cultural account, so as to foreground the process of writing in it. For I want this to be a doing and a knowing that get written into—a kind of phenomenological telling. I am not only describing and articulating, not merely charting the geography, but am pulled into the gerunds of what I write out. That is to say, I am not creating a new narrative; rather I’m simply pulling at the stitches of ongoing processes. I am here not to confess, but to confect; I bear witness through relating.

Of Species and Sexes

I have been in an e-mail exchange with Susan Stryker. During this correspondence, Stryker brought to my attention a particular song, ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’, by Antony and the Johnsons. Stryker thinks that Antony is probably ‘trans or at least gender-queer’, and that the song seems to point toward a yearning for transformation. Although it is difficult to say anything definitive about someone else’s ‘transition’ or gender identity, I agree with Stryker.

1 Susan Stryker has enormously influenced this essay. She was the first to suggest to me that the song was about transgender transformation, and that the song demonstrated how transformation is a means of ‘addressing a hurt, and of moving through that hurt’. Thank you, Susan.


3 In a Björk Podcast (#6), Antony explicitly defines as ‘transgender’. However, I think the content of the song illustrates a kind of transgender/transsexual embodiment
LESSONS FROM A STARFISH

I listen to the song I find the layered tones in Antony’s voice haunting, and the lyrics startling: ‘I’ll even cut off my finger’; ‘I’ll grow back like a Starfish’; ‘Happy bleedly, happy bruisy’. My iTunes player calls the song ‘alternative’, that ambiguous over-populated term. The music ‘ripples’ through styles and textures. Antony’s voice vibrates (vibrato), fluctuating and undulating with emotional expressiveness: sometimes soft and tender and ripe with sartorial and fulfilment (‘I am very happy/So please hit me’) then shifting in cadence to declarative and triumphant (‘I’ll grow back like a Starfish’). Following the rise and fall of the song, Antony’s voice shifts between low and high, deep and bright. Antony’s voice creates a waving space, a singing sea – the pace and rhythm of his/her phrasing expresses frenetic and calm movements, the periodicity or the punctuated changes of things and events. Could it be that Antony sings the tones of whales calling, the synecdoche of herds, the transfiguring surf? This is to ask: how do the tone and the wording of ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ put us in touch with things that it mentions or hints at?

I wonder, thinking about the transsexual trans-formations and the starfish re-generations that are suggested in the song, ‘What is the transformative and relational power of prefixes like trans- or re-?’ I mentioned this wonderment to Stryker. She wrote in response, ‘What this calls my attention to is the need to become more specific in how we think about the re-/trans- distinction in trans discourse.’ My question grew insistent; I wanted to understand how re- (as is re-turn or re-new) and trans- (as in elsewhere) were differently embodied. Beyond my own identity as a transsexual woman, or the political formation of transgender/transsexual,¹ I wasn’t certain about the ontological processes of bodily transformation (my own or others'). How does re-assignment define transitioning for some trans-subjects? Moreover, I wondered if starfish – ‘I’ll grow back like a Starfish’ – or more properly ‘sea stars’, might provide some preformal lessons or guides through language, metaphor and other tropological terrains. Do some starfish not re-generate themselves from injury? Is the ‘cripple’ not re-pairing him/herself through the act of cutting? Is transsexual transformation also re-generative? Am I not in part a transsexual through the re-working and re-folding of my own body, my tissue and my skin? In being transsexual, am I also becoming ‘like a starfish’ as the song suggests? When regardless of Antony’s own identity – after all musicians do not need to be faithful to their identities.

¹ I use transgender and transsexual interchangeably in this essay. I do so not to elide the significant differences between these identities, but to foreground the shared concerns and desires for embodiment. This is to say, being transsexual does not exclude bodily change, nor does being transsexual mean one will have sex-reassignment surgery.
does metaphor transform into metonymy? Is the metaphorical device of ‘likeliness’ (like a starfish or like a woman) too clumsy a rhetorical device for the kind of poetic and material enactments of trans-sexing/speciating?

In addition to stirring my interest, Stryker also provided me with several interviews with Antony and other promotional materials. I have excerpted two key quotations from Antony that evocatively link the group (and Antony him/her-self) both to trans histories and human-animal relationships. During an interview with Velle Magazine, Antony, the founder of ‘Antony and the Johnsons’, discusses the emergence of the band:

The Johnsons’s name is a reference to a hero of mine named Marsha P. Johnson, who was a street activist from the mid 60’s [sic] all the way through to her death in the early 90’s [sic]. Marsha P. Johnson was a street prostitute and a very visible figure on Christopher Street through the 70’s [sic] and 80’s [sic], very renowned for her kindness. You know, her nickname was Saint Marsha. She was a very gregarious sort of outsider street presence and she was rumored to have thrown the first bottle in the Stonewall Riot – I mean whether that was true or not was a bone of contention among several different queens.6

Marsha Johnson,6 or Saint Marsha, and Sylvia Rivera,7 an important figure in the nascent ‘transgender’ civil rights movement, started a group in 1970 called STAR, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.8 In Antony’s own words, a transgender legacy is written into the music group; ‘she’, an ‘outsider’, a queen of colour, who threw ‘the first bottle’, who was murdered in 1992, structures the creative and political intent of the band. Johnson is Antony’s ‘hero’, perhaps, and I say this only speculatively, an ego ideal.


7 For a bio on Sylvia Rivera, which sadly is also an obituary, see <http://www.workers.org/ww/2002/sylvia0307.php>.

8 My suggestion that STAR was a ‘transgender’ political organization is a bit ahistorical, considering that ‘transgender’ as a social identity was still only emerging during these years. All too often, gender variant communities and their contributions to social change, however, get lost in more traditional gay/lesbian historiographies. So, I risk playing the part of a ‘bad historian’ in the hopes of encouraging more inclusive historical projects.
LESSONS FROM A STARFISH

Antony is clear to emphasise the ‘collage’ quality of her/his music and sound in relation to her/his creative process:

I think my creative process has always been what I’ve described as accumulative. I collect a lot of different shards and pieces, and I create something that feels meaningful to me by finding relationships between them and putting them into a kind of a collage … You know, for me, I’m really drawn to singers that are full of feeling and are seeking transformation. I like transformative singing, you know, singing that starts one place and ends in another place.9

Classification is evaded for something more ‘transformative’, something ‘that starts one place and ends in another place’. Trans-, a prefix weighted with across, beyond, through (into another state or place), does the now-familiar work of suggesting the unclassifiable. To be trans is to be transcending or surpassing particular impositions whether empirical, rhetorical, or aesthetic. Antony speaks of the affective force of his/her transformation in songs and in singing. Transformations – not unlike transgenders – are produced through emotive forces. ‘Shards’ and ‘pieces’ (again, of something broken) are reworked into meaningful integrities, but not wholes.

In another interview with The Guardian,10 Antony discusses her/his album, I Am a Bird Now, which was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial.11 The record has been described by Antony as ‘A record of transformations and survival. Its characters move between states – life and death, male and female, human and animal – searching for sanctuary and fulfilment.’ Antony proposes transformation as a trope for reworking the relationality of male and female, human and animal. Perhaps I am the only one hearing it, but in the texture of Antony’s voice, the instrumental variations and in the lyrics themselves, boundaries of sexual and species differences, artificial and authentic orderings, and nature and culture are affectively and literally trans-ed in their music.

‘Trans’ is meant to disturb purification practices; the well defined is confounded at multiple material and semiotic levels. Psychical and corporeal


253
experiences are blended. For example, gender and the embodiment of gender are contingencies that may hold for a moment then fall away into another set of relationships. Species exist in taxonomic differences (\textit{Homo sapiens sapiens} are not the same as \textit{Octopus vulgaris}), but species are also \textit{always already} constitutive of each other through the spaces and places we cohabit – his of course includes language and other semiotic registers. Indeed, species are relationships between species – relationality is world-ness. Matter is not immutable, Antony and the Johnsons suggest, it is discursive, allowing sexes and species to practice trans-materialisation. The meat and meaning for humans and starfish have no structuring lack, no primordial division, but are sensuously intertwined.

\textbf{Trans-form}

In ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’, transformation is indeed a fusing of organisms, energies and sexes. I am intrigued by the phrase ‘cut off my finger, it’ll grow back like a starfish.’ Let us start with the cut – the ‘cripple’ wants ‘Mr Muscle’ to ‘please hurt me’ and ‘cripple’ will ‘even cut off my finger’. From what has been suggested by the song and Antony him/herself, I presume that ‘cripple’ wants to transform through cutting (amputation or castration); the ‘cripple’ can be heard as a transsexual/transgender M2F seeking transformation.\(^\text{12}\) At first, the cut finger leads me, and perhaps other listeners/readers, to think that the cut is an act of castration – the finger works as a substitute for the penis. ‘Cripple’ wants to become a ‘woman’ through the cutting-off of her penis. Certainly, some transsexual women ‘cut off’ their penises in order to have solidarity with females\(^\text{13}\) or to become female themselves.

I am not interested in how the cut is an absence (as in castration) but how it is a generative enactment of ‘grow[ing] back’ or healing. The cut enacts trans-

\(^{12}\) Again, I risk reading the ‘Cripple’ as a trans-subject not to iterate the pathologisation of trans-folks, but to explore the imaginings of the song. For the transsexual/transgender subject, gender assignments can feel ‘disabling’, even wounding. I’m speaking about this traumatic experience, not about transgressive exceptionalism in which gender/sex changes prompt ‘revolutionary potential’. I am simply returning to my own bodily knowledge – carnal logics – of pain and possibility.

\(^{13}\) I use solidarity to suggest something other than identification. I’m not suggesting that transsexual women do not become female (some certainly do), but I want to hold out the possibility that the transsexual woman can also become a kind of woman \textit{made of} her various ontologies. I want to value the experience of becoming transsexual as something particular to transsexuals, even as that experience is constitutive of other sexes and their constitutiveness – together all the way down. This line of reasoning is explored in Stone (1993).
embodiment – to cut is not necessarily about castration, but an attempt to re-cast the self through the cut body. The whole (body) and the part (cut) are metonymically bound in an attempt to trans-form in teto. However successful or not, however uncomfortable for listeners/readers, however seemingly masochistic, ‘cut off my finger’ and ‘please hit me’ can be understood as wished-for metamorphosis by the ‘crippl’. To cut off the penis/finger is not to be an amputee, but to produce the conditions of physical and psychical re-growth. The cut is possibility. For some transsexual women, the cut is not so much an opening of the body, but a generative effort to pull the body back through itself in order to feel mending, to feel the growth of new margins. The cut is not just an action; the cut is part of the ongoing materialisation by which a transsexual tentatively and mutably becomes. The cut cuts the meat (not primarily a visual operation for the embodied subject, but rather a proprioceptive one), and a space of psychical possibility is thereby created. From the first, a transsexual embodiment does not forego a wish to ‘look like’ or ‘look more like a woman’ (that is, passing). The point of view of the looker (those who might ‘read’ her) is not the most important feature of trans-subjectivity – the transwoman wishes to be of her body, to ‘speak’ from her body.

When I pay my surgeon to cut my penis into a neo-vagina, I am moving toward myself through myself. As the surgeon inserts the scalpel and cuts through the thickness of my tissue, my flesh immediately empurples. For weeks afterward, my groin remains discoloured and swollen. Between the surgeon’s efforts and my body’s biomechanics, my cut spills blood and affect. My cut enacts a regeneration of my bodily boundaries – boundaries redrawn. Through my cut, I brush up against invocations and revelations; my cut is not passive – its very substance (materially and affectively) is generative and plays a significant role in my ongoing materialisation. My cut is of my body, not the absence of parts of my body. The regenerative effort of my cut is discursive; my transfiguring cut is a material-discursive practice through which I am of my body and of my trans-self. My cut penis entails being and doing, materiality and affect, substance and form. My cut is generative within material limits but not with affective fixity, my tissues are mutable in so far as they are made of me and propel me to imagine an embodied elsewhere.

Not surprisingly, scholars, activists, students and artists have questioned the meaning and significance of transsexual/transgender embodiment. Some have suggested that the experience of transsexuals is determined, both negatively and positively, by the forms of our bodies. Rather simplistically, it has been suggested that the pre-operative transsexual feels constrained by the ‘wrong body’ and longs to acquire the whole or healed body, which is represented by the male or female form. According to this account, transsexual selfhood is
entangled with images of bodily wholeness – what’s more, there is an idea of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the body that are at odds. The body is a container – a body-bag of nouns to keep the proper ones in order. The transsexual aspires to make the so-called ‘defective body’ intact, entire, complete, in order that it may be owned as mine, as me. It is undeniable that such agonising experiences of bodily disownment are true and important for some transsexuals, nor is it difficult to believe that transsexual alterations are not simply chosen or kinds of mutilation, but the transformation of an unlivable, fragmented body into a ‘livable whole’.

What I find disconcerting about this description of the transsexual is not the trouble of containment; it is the limiting of the body to containment alone. To be comfortable in one’s own body is not only to be restricted, limited, contained, or constrained, or not this alone. It is to be able to live out the body’s vicissitudes – its (our) ongoing process of materialisation. The body (trans or not) is not a clear, coherent and positive integrity. The important distinction is not the hierarchical, binary one between wrong body and right body, or between fragmentation and wholeness. It is rather a question of discerning multiple and continually varying interactions among what can be defined indifferently as coherent transformation, de-centred certainty, or limited possibility. Transsexuals do not transcend gender and sex. We create embodiment by not jumping out of our bodies, but by taking up a fold in our bodies, by folding (or cutting) ourselves, and creating a transformative scar of ourselves. For example, neo-vaginas are made from originary penises or skin grafts, and the beards of F2Ms emerge from their own testosterone-invigorated hair follicles. There is no absolute division, but continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my different historical bodies. Again, I am of my body in order that I might experience a subjective, energetic transformation.

A transsexual (myself, for example) is never discontinuous from different states of embodiment, or at least I am only generally distinguished from different historical states of my own beingness. By nature, the body has something tautological about it: skin here is always intractably skin. It is as if a M2F transsexual always carries her various embodiments with herself. Let me be clear here, I am not suggesting anything as banal as that ‘male privilege’ is carried into female embodiment – I am not making a socio-cultural argument about authenticity (such arguments should be put to rest by now!). If my subjective embodiment has always been ‘transgender’, then my material transformation is meant to conceal my differently trans-embodied experiences of body and mind. What I am suggesting when I say that embodiment is coherence, is that I am always of my tissue even in its ongoing transformation. Whatever the transsexual grants to vision, the subjective embodiment is always only partially visible. We
see the physical efforts, but the psychical energies only express themselves within the limits of the body.

Changeability is intrinsic to the transsexual body, at once its subject, its substance and its limit. Our bodies are scarred, marked and reworked into a liveable ‘gender trouble’, sex trouble, or uneven epidermis. Transsexuals survive not because we become whole, but because we embody the reach and possibility of our layered experience – we have no choice. This is all to say, the transsexual body, my body, is a body created out of necessity, ingenuity and survival – to carry the heft of social identity. I, like many transsexuals, may desire some mythic wholeness, but what is truly intact for me, what I live, what I must be part of, is a body pliant to a point, flexible within limits, constrained by language, articulation, flesh, history and bone.

Re-form

‘I’ll grow back like a starfish.’ From the start, I notice two things: first, my finger has been substituted for ‘I’; secondly, we have moved from the metonymy of the cut to the metaphor of trans-speciation. The starfish seemingly appears as a stand-in for transsexual transformation – the animal appears only as a tool for thinking about beingness. Let us not forget, the metaphor is a displacement: a nominative term is displaced from its everyday context and placed elsewhere so as to illuminate some other context through its reconfiguration. Thus, the relationship is based on the relationship of ideas rather than objects – metaphor does not owe any allegiance to the literal object. The ‘cut’, in contrast, is structured by a metonymy of embodied correspondences and correlations. Metonymy is a tropological operation quite different from metaphor. Metonymy brings together two objects, each of which constitutes a separate whole. Metonymy refers to conditions of correspondence: cause to effect, instrument to purpose, container to content, ‘cut’ to trans-body.

I wonder if the starfish is more than metaphor (not that metaphor isn’t enough). Playing on the side of zoomorphism, I wonder if being starfish shares in the ontological imaginary of becoming trans-sexed. I don’t want to propose that transsexuality is the same as trans-speciation, but rather that both share in the materialisation of the trans-figure described in ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’. Both the starfish and the transsexual ‘grow back’, differently but with similar phenomenological goals of bodily integrity and healing. Is it possible, and here I take a leap, that while the ‘cut’ has a metonymic force in trans-embodiment, could not ‘like a starfish’ also suggest a metonymy of trans-speciation. For example, literal animals are always part of figural animals; animals cannot be displaced by words, rather words carry the nervous circuitries, the rhythms, the
tempo of the literal. Animals are always constitutively formed in language – human and not, animal and not. Animals (though not necessarily animals alone – but that is for another collection of essays) are bound in language such that language cuts into flesh but does not completely devour the body. The literal ‘cut’ bleeds around the word ‘cut’, which is where the conditions of subjective transformation emerge. Likewise, the starfish, an echinoderm, a regenerating body, an invertebrate that can in some species reproduce new individuals through bodily divisions, exceeds the metaphoricity of ‘likeness’ because the starfish is only ever partially digested, defined, explained, used by language.

Some species of starfish also reproduce asexually by fission, often with part of an arm becoming detached and eventually developing into an independent individual sea star. Some sea stars have the ability to regenerate lost arms. Most species must have the central part of the body intact to be able to regenerate, but a few can grow an entire starfish from a single ray. This bit of morphological knowledge leads me to wonder about transformative versus regenerative. Trans-prefix has more to do with the sense of across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing or state to another. If we think about re-prefix however, the original sense of re-in Latin is that of ‘back’ or ‘backwards’, but in the numerous words formed by its usage, the prefix acquires various shades of meaning. For example, re-generate: to form, construct, or create anew, especially in an improved state; to give new life or energy to; revitalise; and in biology, to replace (a lost or damaged organ or part) by the formation of new tissue.

How might the ‘Cripple’ yearn for regeneration in order to transform? ‘I’ll even cut off my finger. It will grow back like a Starfish.’ To me, this is a literal instantiation of sea star biodynamics – s/he will re-grow her/his finger, but not necessarily transform her/his finger. In broader terms, s/he is also re-sexed body just as she/he also becomes subjectively transsexed. Although subtle, the work might be in how prefixes shape and re-shape the prepositions of the discourse; re-is of the body, not in the body (as trans embodiment is often articulated – for example, ‘trapped in the wrong body’). Re-makes all enactments constitutive of the ‘form-er’ (even if that ‘form-er’ is an ongoing process of materialisation). Re-might offer a more ‘crippling’ approach to the limit and containment of the flesh. Re-generativity is a process that is enacted through and by containment (the body). In this way, regeneration is a re/iterative enactment of not only growing new boundaries (re-bodying), but of imperilling static boundaries (subjective transformation). Re-generation can attend to desire, pathos, trauma, but also to modes of corporeal intimacy, fleshy possibility and, most importantly, re-embodiment.

Re-generation is something that both transsexuals and starfish do. Transsexuals and starfish do other kinds of prefixial relationships between
inside/outside, subject/object, or predator/prey, but in re- they share a phenomenological experience of re-shaping and re-working bodily boundaries. How might prefixes help us to understand the ways that we (starfish, transsexuals and others) autonomise and generate embodiment? Re-grow, re-differentiate, re-pattern, re-member, re-nucleate: our bodily structures, our biodynamics, are materiality enacted through ongoing relationships with the world, as part of that world. Transsexuals and starfish challenge disembodied metaphors (such as ‘like,’ resemblance, or simile), and propose ways in which we are metonymically stitched to carnal substrates. In other words, I’m not like a starfish; I am of a starfish. I am not trapped in my body; I am in my body.

**Meat of Meaning**

As for language, I turn to Akira Mizuta Lippit’s important discussion of ‘animetaphor’ (a play on anti-metaphor and animal-metaphor; that is, animals exceed metaphorically). Lippit writes, ‘The animetaphor is … never absorbed, sublimated, or introjected into the world but rather incorporated as a limit … The animetaphoric figure is consumed literally rather than figuratively’ (Lippit 1998, 1115). The ‘animetaphor’ (that which tries to speak for/about specific animals) is metonymic, foregrounding the ways that the lived being always already inhabits language, grammar, syntax and metaphor. The ‘animetaphor’ is about how animals exist within practices of signification – nonhuman animals are not merely subjected to primate language; nonhuman animals are always already reworking language. The real animal is constantly present in Adam’s Genesis. Animals, in their own ways, inhabit language. Language emerges from an ontology that is ecological, animal, the animal den, the wave and the invertebrate.

Lippit suggests that the ‘animetaphor’ foregrounds the complex ways that animal representations are always haunted, vexed, reworked and enfolded by real animals. Animals expose the limits of representation. Lippit shows how animality, animal spirits and organisms themselves reside as ‘real’ within representations. He writes:

> On the verge of words, the animal emits instead a stream of cries, affects, spirits, and magnetic fluids. What flows from the animal touches language without entering it, dissolving memory, like the unconscious, into a timeless present. The animal is magnetic because it draws the world-building subject toward an impossible convergence with the limits of world, toward a metaphysics of metaphor. The magnetic animal erases the limits of the metaphor, affecting an economy of the figure that is metamorphic rather than metaphoric. It forces a transformation of the figure. [1998, 1120]
Lippit posits that metaphors and representations create spaces where nonhuman animals can be pointed to ‘without naming’, subsumed ‘without securing’. That is to say, the animetaphor, the living metaphor, is always pointing to a space (even if it is always already in language) outside of language, exposing the limits of language.\textsuperscript{14}

Working with the ‘animetaphor’ figure of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994), Lippit is suggesting here that, animals in language are always transforming figure into flesh, always dis-figuring representation. Animals are always troubling the language that attempts to name them. In this way, nonhuman animals seem to put an oral void into language. Animals cannot be named without invoking the limits of the process of naming. This is not a tautology. Animals are in and of language and representation, but their lived bodies are always restoring words to beings. Lippit writes, ‘When the metaphoricity of the metaphor collapses, the concept becomes a metonymic thing that can be eaten’ (1998, 1122). Animals in language rest at the edges of the mouth, my mouth; I taste the failure of language to describe animals, and savour the presence of real animals flanking my sentences, my words. My language cannot digest the tissue and meat of nonhuman animals – a meal that cannot be digested.

Taking Lippit’s ‘animetaphor’ and applying it to ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’, ‘starfish’ point to the limits of representation, where ‘like a starfish’ has corporeal meaning. The starfish referent is constantly touching me and devouring its representation. Antony’s starfish is fiercely present as a regenerating body in the song about it. Eating and hearing are collapsed as phenomenological modes of encounter within this starfish song. Antony’s starfish consumes me through the excess of its referentiality. The listening subject (myself, for example) is wholly or partially touched by the soma of the named starfish. The referent itself establishes itself as that-which-is-re-embodifying-this. As I listen to Antony’s song, rather than anthropomorphising the starfish through identification, I am simultaneously chewing on and being chewed on an economy of excess, carnality, materiality and indexicality.

The word ‘starfish’ puts me in contact with starfish themselves. As Antony sings ‘starfish’, the literal starfish resounds in his/her voice. The word maps out the dense tissue of starfish lifeways. For me, Antony intensifies the encounter, the meeting between the bodies of species. ‘Like a starfish’ enacts an artistry on the starfish and the subject of the ‘animetaphor’. ‘I will grow back like a starfish’ solicits both ‘I’ and the starfish to inhabit those words; with those words we move into life. ‘I’ is a word that finds roots in oneself; ‘starfish’

\textsuperscript{14} Lippit is working here from Jacques Derrida’s work on the limits of subjectivity (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000; Derrida and Kamuf 1991).
transplants a figural element into a literal one. Out of the murmuring sensations of ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ come words and the babble of others that are uttered into oneself, into one’s bone marrow, one’s anatomy and one’s circadian rhythms. This inter-somaticity of starfish (material) and ‘starfish’ (semiotic), of ‘I’ and me is a kind of loving, a kind of nearness that invokes a voluptuary of trans-speciation, and imagines a co/passionate kind of presence. Language and music enacts a caressing, a sensuous immersing in the ardent materiality of world-ness.

**Ripple**

‘Ripple’ (Oxford English Dictionary):

1. A slight cut, scratch, or mark. Verbs: to scratch slightly; to graze or ruffle.
2. A piece of shallow water in a river where rocks or sandbars cause an obstruction; a shoal.
3. A light ruffling of the surface of water, such as is caused by a slight breeze; a wavelet.
4. A wave on the surface of a fluid the restoring force for which is provided by surface tension rather than by gravity, and which consequently has a wavelength shorter than that corresponding to the minimum speed of propagation.
5. A sound as of rippling water.
6. To mark with or as with ripples; to cause to undulate slightly.

‘Ripple’ creates the ruffling within the subject that allows ‘Happy bleedly, happy bruisy’ to become the conditions for bodily regeneration, psychical transformation and trans-speciation. ‘Ripple’ tears and fiddles with the idea that language/representation is a cut between the phenomenal world and the knowing subject. ‘Ripple’ with the ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ creates the carnal foundations for prefixial enactments that take meat and meaning seriously. The ‘cripple’ and ‘like a starfish’ provide an extreme collapse between the figural and the real. In other words, prefixes (trans- and re-) are kinds of relationships that ripple and rupture the field of representation. The starfish and the transsexual point beyond the limits of language, allowing both figures to exceed any kind of palliative function (‘like a woman’ or ‘like a starfish’).

The transsexual — again I speak of this experience not to the side of my body, but because of my body — energetically ripples the body, marks the meat, with re-form, re-grow, re-shape so that subjective transformation may occur: transition, transsex, trans-be; this is prefixial rippling. The prefix re- must take up the body in order that trans- might become. The starfish, depending on species, can re-

261
grow a damaged ray. The lost ray, again in some species, may become another individual, rippling into another state of being. This is to say, the starfish changes its bio-geometry in relationship to its environment— it is entangled and reshaped and transfigured through encounters. Moreover, the metonymic qualities of embodiment always links semiotics to matter. ‘Starfish’ is a representation with tube feet; transsexual is an identity that bleeds and is cut.

‘Ripple’ reminds me of starfish locomotion. Starfish have hydraulic water vascular systems that facilitate movement. Ocean water comes into the system via the madreporite (a small opening in the aboral surfaces of starfish). Saltwater is then circulated from the stone canal to the ring canal and into the radial canals. The radial canals carry water to the ampullae and provide suction to the tube feet. The tube feet latch on to surfaces and move in a wave, with one body section attaching to the surfaces as another releases. ‘Ripple’ defines the biomechanics of tube feet.

‘Ripple’, on a somatic level, reminds me of my own physical vulnerability—my animant transsex flesh. Might I share this same somatic sensitivity with the starfish in the most basic sense of redressing harm: regeneration as an act of healing. Transsexing is an act of healing. This is some kind of mutuality—some kinds of shared ontology. Trans-morphic as zoomorphic— if we can understand the cut as an act of love, then can we not imagine that ‘like a starfish’ is an enactment of trans-speciating? We, transsexuals and starfish, are animate bodies; our bodies are experienced and come to be known through encounters with other animate bodies. These epistemological moves describe a shared phenomenological ontology. This is sensate intertwining—inter-corporeal zones between these bodies in language and in experience. Starfish and transsexuals share world- hood both semiotic (as metonymic kinds) and phenomenological enactments—is this not some form of inter-somaticity?

‘It's true I always wanted love to be hurtful', sings Antony in ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’. If, as I hope I've illustrated here, the literal and the figural— the matter that means and the meaning that means—emerge as interlocking and dynamic. ‘Hurt’ is not a masochistic enactment (or, at least, not this alone), but signals a breach in language and a tear in the traditional subject/object formation. The material, the literal matter of being, surfaces and resurfaces as a constitutive force that cannot be digested in the acid fluids of anthropic concerns. ‘Animetaphor’ and metonymy applies a figurative sense as a literal one, while yet retaining the look or feel of figularity. A phenomenology of the rippling subject having and making sense of the song reveals to us the inter-corporeal function of lived bodies—as both carnal and conscious, sensible and sentient—and how it is we can apprehend the sense of the song both figurally and literally.
LESSONS FROM A STARFISH

Correlatively, a phenomenology of the experience of this lived intersomaticity and differentiation in the song reveals to us – in the metonymic articulations of language – the reversible and oscillating structure of the lived body’s experience of language. To put it simply (if densely): in the act of ‘making sense’ of the song, metonymy is to language as rippling is to lived bodies. Ambivalently substanting fusion and difference, ambivalent in its structure and seemingly ambiguous in meaning, metonymy not only points to the ‘gap’ between the figures of language and literal lived-bodies experiences but also inter-corporeally, rippling, ‘bridges’ and intertwines a sensate ontology. Thus, ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ mobilises, differentiates and yet entangles lived bodies and language, and foregrounds the inter-somaticity of sensible matter and sensual meaning. As zoomorphic, re-morphic and trans-morphic subjects, then, we possess an embodied knowledge that both opens us beyond our discrete capacity for listening to a song, opens the song far beyond its containment in iTunes’s ‘alternative’ and opens language to a metonymic and biodynamic knowledge of specific carnal origins and limits. This is what my being transsexual knows about being a starfish.

References


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