

SIMON STRICK, *American Dolorologies: Pain, Sentimentalism, Biopolitics* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014), 229 pp.

The idea of biopolitics, coined by Michel Foucault, and importantly developed further by Giorgio Agamben, Robert Esposito, and others, figures as a key concept for cultural studies and critical theory today. At the same time, it has been noted early how these thinkers limit their conceptualization of biopolitics to a European context and usually ignore categories of difference in the biopolitical management of populations based on race, gender, or sexuality (see the work of Ann Stoler, Achille Mbembe, Judith Butler, among others, on these issues). While the publication of Foucault's later lectures demonstrates that he acknowledged the fundamental link between biopolitics and a logic of state racism, there are more wide ranging implications of a "power over life" that "makes live" according to certain perceived normativities in particular socio-political situations that have led to a number of publications in settler and post-colonial studies, Indigenous studies, Black studies, animal studies, and queer studies—to name just a few fields that productively interact with a biopolitical framework. Simon Strick's work importantly contributes to this research context—and together with Kyra Schuller's more recent *The Biopolitics of Feeling* (Duke UP 2017) to the nexus of biopolitics and sentimentalism—as he investigates the biopolitical processes by which bodies are racialized and gendered in regard to their perceived suffering of and capability for bodily pain.

Strick's study centrally argues that through "a complex, discursive logistics that pervades scientific and social discourses on the body, difference, and the political throughout the nineteenth century ... [b]odies and subjects are constructed as their relative pain of oppression and violation is recognized and discursively defined" (2). This takes place particularly in ways that "the discursive evocation of pain negotiates the social meanings of race and gender in American modernity on the level of corporeal materiality" (3). Strick labels these "racialized and gendered encodings, symbolic meanings, material effects, and political functions of pain in North America" (3) *dolorology*, adapting the term for the scientific study of pain for a cultural studies context. Situating *dolorology* "between two crucial epistemic transformations that characterize

modernity: sentimentalism and biopolitics" (3), Strick's work makes an intervention in at least three fields of inquiry. First, Strick adds to and reflects on studies of pain and trauma, acknowledging Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) as a classic text in the field. Whereas Scarry highlights the non-discursive quality of pain, its "unspeakability," a quality that remains a touchstone for much trauma studies that emphasizes how the traumatic experience resists representation and discursivity, Strick focuses on how pain is mobilized "as a discourse" (7), particularly "on behalf of bodies that are constructed as *unable to speak their pain*" (12, original emphasis). Secondly, Strick argues for the centrality of sentimental discourse in this discursive mobilization of pain, as bodies in pain take on social and political relevance in the nineteenth century, particularly through the "compassionate recognition" (4) of bodily pain and the politics of "affective inclusion into the national body" (4) tied to sentimentalism. The inclusionary politics of sentimentalism can nevertheless be complicit in reinstating established racial and gendered hegemonies. In this way, Strick contributes, thirdly, to the field of biopolitical research, as he argues for a "collaboration" of sentimentalism—"the compassionate recognition of subjects"—and biopolitics—"the scientific objectification of bodies"—which are otherwise largely seen as "opposing forces" (4). Strick's focus on how the meanings of bodies in pain are differently distributed brings to the fore the intersection of sentimental inclusion and biopolitical classification. He traces the production of specifically racialized and gendered bodies in their perceived capability of pain and compassion. These bodies are included in the national population only on the grounds of their differences to the presumed norm of white masculinity, and only to the extent of insisting on the sociopolitical significance of their corporeality.

Strick outlines these *American Dolorologies* in three chapters. The first chapter performs a reading of Edmund Burke's *Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Pointing out its crucial link between "the two fields of the biological and the political" (14), Strick's reading also takes into account the transatlantic dimension of sentimental thought, and its importance in the founding of the American republic for the development of democratic sentiment. Crucially, the chapter provides insight into how Burke con-

structs in the *Enquiry* the bourgeois subject of sensibility strongly in relation to its access to and mastery of bodily pain in terms of a “rigid gendered and racialized order,” so that “political authority” (47) which should stem from universal human nature is restricted on the grounds of perceived “‘natural’ differences” (30). With a focus on the transatlantic transfer and transformation from “European sensibility” to “American sentimentalism” (47), Strick analyzes the sensible and sympathetic bourgeois subject as a foil upon which the national American subject was defined in its capability for *feeling* American. The following chapters then demonstrate how the ability to show compassion and recognize the pain of racialized and gendered bodies functions as a means to reinstate white masculinity as the biopolitical norm of the American self. At the same time female and black bodies in pain are figured as ‘bodily states of exception’ that reinscribe American democracy as ‘pain-free’ and help to forget the “structural violence” of racism and sexism, instead “reconstitut[ing] the national compassionate subject as again innocent and universal” (49).

This first chapter “provides material blueprints for nineteenth-century sentimental bodies in America” (44); yet the heart of the book lies in the extended analyses of the following two longer chapters. The second chapter focuses on the medicalization of birth pain and the pathologization of female bodies in the context of anesthesia, and the third addresses images of enslaved and tortured bodies in the context of abolitionism and post-Civil War U.S. society. In these chapters, the book makes a particularly strong case for the continuity of racialized and gendered hegemonomies that are mobilized through the discourse of pain and compassion while they are employed to serve various, even opposing political ends, and in which the site of the body in pain becomes an indicator for national belonging, civilizational status, or degree of humanization. In the second chapter, “Birth-pain, Anesthesia, Civilization,” such a structure produces the “corporeal figurations [of] the compassionate white male scientist, the nervous female, the insensitive savage” (61). The white male scientist in his ability to feel and master pain embodies detached rationality by confronting the body and transcending it through intellectual scrutiny at the same time. White women’s bodies, however, are pathologized as suffering too much pain without the

ability to control it, and black women’s bodies are primitivized and dehumanized as not feeling sufficient pain to be regarded as fully human and civilized. It is in this employment of a comparative dolorology that Strick’s analysis yields the most interesting results. Whereas ‘oversensitive’ white women are seen as feeling too much pain due to being ‘overcivilized’ so as to bear many children, nonwhite, ‘uncivilized’ women are constructed as insensitive to birth pain and hence more prone to reproduce in larger numbers, feeding fears about the degeneration of the white national body of the U.S., and tying the argument for anesthesia during parturition to eugenic concerns. Furthermore, the discourses of scientific sexism and racism in order to maintain white male hegemony are, in their transformations to “biopolitical rationales employed in the management of racialized populations” (78), adopted by late nineteenth-century white feminists in order to advocate the relevance and increased social status of the woman: as the most important agents for the reproduction of a racially ‘pure’ and ‘healthy’ nation, women needed to be healthy, fit, vigorous, ‘pain-free’ and thus should no longer be confined to the domestic sphere but be allowed to move freely in the public sphere as full national citizens.

The same question of inclusionary politics coexisting with a re-inscription of racial and gendered hierarchies also concerns the third chapter on visualizations of racialized pain in the context of what Strick calls “photographic abolitionism” (97). In a comparative reading of pictures of former slaves tortured in slavery and of white soldiers injured in the Civil War, Strick draws out the differentiating potential of pain in visually constructing racial and national trauma. The visualized pain of a former slave may be mobilized in order to further the abolitionist cause, but at the same time the black male is fixed in a “traumatically racialized body” (115). Simultaneously, the white viewer is enabled to become a compassionate subject feeling for the former slave and thus is put in the superior position to humanize the formerly dehumanized slave and liberate this passive and silent object of photography from captivity. In contrast, the photographs of white injured soldiers display a superior capacity for enduring and, more importantly, for transcending pain, for showing compassion to one another in a form of gendered companionship, and thus moving forward in the fight for a future America. Thus white suffering not

only signifies national trauma—as opposed to racial trauma—but also the capacity for healing this trauma. Whereas the depiction of physical pain and its distribution of racialized meanings is persuasive, the portrayal of emotional hurt or healing in depictions of children and family as results of miscegenation requires a greater effort of interpretation; in addition, the analysis of these representations also calls for a slightly different conceptualization of ‘pain’ than otherwise employed in the book. Consequently, these examples seem less well integrated than others—despite being argumentatively well incorporated. Overall, the presentation of these “visual dolorologies” (141) works to show an “iconography of biopolitics” (143) in which racialized and gendered bodies in pain are ascribed different degrees of national significance, and thus used to organize a seemingly democratic and inclusionary post-war population along lines of differently perceived corporealities.

As the coda moves the book into late modernity and explores the implications of dolorology for the national constellations after 9/11 and the representation of torture, the book ends by briefly exploring how the examined nineteenth-century discourses on pain, biopolitics, and sentimentalism matter today. This potential is most thoroughly explored in a reading of the CIA torture thriller *Unthinkable* (2010), whose analysis works very well to argue for the continuity and reposi-

tioning after 9/11 of the traumatized yet insensitive black male, the oversensitive white female central to the idea of family, and the white male even as terrorist able to perform and embody pain and compassion in service of the (injured) nation. At the same time, the reading also makes one wonder—considering especially the theorization of the terrorist by Puar and others as perversely racially and sexually different—how an inclusion of different paradigms beyond race and gender (e.g. sexuality, creed, ableness, age) in the investigation of contemporary dolorologies might enrich a more extended look at pain and its socially relevant distributions of meaning in late modern America. It should ultimately, though, not reflect negatively on the work that it leaves the historical period of its main focus in order to trace the figurations of dolorology in the present, and thus opening a much wider discussion that strongly invites further exploration. Instead, this step accounts for the lasting relevance of the discursive constellations explored for the nineteenth century in the book. Furthermore, it demonstrates the book’s wider intervention in the field of pain/trauma studies, sentimentalist discourse, and biopolitics in ways that stimulate further conversation on “pain as positionality” (168) without setting a fixed ending.

René Dietrich (Mainz)