

MEL Y CHEN ANIMACIES

BY: Victoria Pope

PHOTO OF MEL Y CHEN



BIOGRAPHY

- MEL Y. CHEN IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GENDER & WOMEN'S STUDIES AT U.C. BERKELEY AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SEXUAL CULTURE

- THEY ARE A AFFILIATE OF THE CENTER FOR RACE AND GENDER, THE INSTITUTE FOR COGNITIVE AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE, THE CENTER FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, MEDICINE, AND SOCIETY, AND THE HAAS DISABILITY STUDIES AND LGBTQ CITIZENSHIP RESEARCH CLUSTERS.

THEIR AREAS OR RESEARCH ARE:

- QUEER AND FEMINIST THEORY
- DISABILITY THEORY
- MATERIALITY STUDIES
- CRITICAL LINGUISTICS
- CULTURAL POLITICS OF RACE, SEXUALITY, ABILITY, AND IMMIGRATION
- PARADIGMS OF INTER-AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

WHAT THE BOOK IS ABOUT

ANIMACIES: BIOPOLITICS, RACIAL MATTERING, AND QUEER AFFECT IT CAME OUT IN 2012. IT IS ONE OF MANY PUBLICATIONS THAT WERE PRODUCED. THEIR BOOK INVESTIGATES THE UNCLEAR SEPARATION BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, HUMAN/ANIMAL. MEL STRESSES HOW THE USE OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENTIATES THE INANIMATE AND ANIMATE.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

MEL BEGINS BY EXPLAINING THE STRUCTURE OF THE WAY ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKERS UNDERSTAND T CONTEXTUALIZE THINGS.

CONSTRUALS OF LIFE AND DEATH:

- WHAT HAS 'SOUL' OR LIFE AND WHAT IS 'DEAD' OR HOLDS THE LACK OF ABILITY TO BE ALIVE OR ONCE WAS ALIVE.
- WESTERN CIVILIZATIONS DON'T CONTINUALLY HOLD ANIMACY AND INANIMACY WITHIN SUBJECTS

ANIMATE CURRENTS:

- WHAT IS THE BODY AND WHAT WOULD BE THE END OF LIFE IN A CONSIDERED LIVING OBJECT
- WHAT HOLDS A CONTINUAL CONSCIOUSNESS OR NOT?
- ANIMACY CANNOT ESSENTIALLY BE PINNED DOWN TO A SET DEFINITION.

STRUCTURE CONTINUED

- IN MELS BOOK THE WORD "AFFECT" HAS NO SET DEFINITION IT ISN'T CONTAINED TO A SINGULAR BODY. IT IS NOT "CAPTIVE".

HOW THE CHAPTERS MOVE

- THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED INTO THREE PARTS, WITH TWO CHAPTERS EACH: "WORDS," "ANIMALS," AND "METALS"
- THIS PART EXPLAINS AND EACH CHAPTER INVESTIGATES THE WAY ANIMACY IS IDENTIFIED WITHIN EACH CONTEXT.

WORDS:

- THIS CHAPTER SHEDS LIGHT ON THE HEIRICAL WAY BANINACITY HAS IMPACTED THE WAY VARIOUS PEOPLE LIVE THEIR LIVES.
- "THE CHAPTER EXAMINES A SEEMINGLY EXCEP-TIONAL FORM OF LINGUISTIC USAGE TO THINK THROUGH GRADATIONS OF ANIMACY AND OBJECTIFICATION: THE INSULT, A MOVE OF REPRESENTATIONAL INJURY THAT IMPLICATES LANGUAGE AS CAPABLE OF INCURRING DAMAGE"
- (PAGE 13)

STRUCTURE CTD.

- "CHAPTER 2, "QUEER ANIMATION," THEN ASKS: IF LANGUAGE HELPS TO COERCE CERTAIN FIGURES INTO NONBEING, OR TO DEMOTE ON AN ANIMACY HIERARCHY, THEN WHAT ARE THE MODES OF REVIVAL, RETURN, OR REJOINER?" (PAGE 14)
- IT ANALYZES THE DE ANIMATED AND REANIMATED LINGUISTIC FORMS OF QUEERNESS

ANIMALS

- "I LOCATE QUEERNESS, IN THIS CHAPTER, IN BOTH WRONG MARRIAGE AND IMPROPER INTIMACY. USING PERFORMATIVITY AS A POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR A THEORETICAL KINSHIP FREQUENTLY FOUND BETWEEN QUEERNESS AND ANIMALITY" (PAGE 14)
- IN CHAPTER 4, "ANIMALS, SEX, AND TRANSUBSTANTIATION," I ASK WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE MATTER OF GENDER, RACE, AND SEXUALITY ITSELF SHIFTS, EITHER IN OUR DIAGNOSTIC ONTOLOGIES OR IN ITS OWN FIGURAL ACTUALITY. (PAGE 15).

METALS

- "THE CHAPTER TRACES THE PHYSICAL TRAVELS (ANIMATIONS) OF LEAD AS AN INDUSTRIAL BY- PRODUCT, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY OBSERVING LEAD'S CRITICAL ROLE IN THE REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS, INTERESTS IN SOVEREIGNTY, AND RACIAL AND BODILY INTEGRITY IN THE UNITED STATES" (PAGE 15)

STRUCTURE CTD.

- "FINALLY, CHAPTER 6, "FOLLOWING MERCURIAL AFFECT," SHIFTS THE BOOK'S PERSPECTIVE FROM A THEORETICAL EXAMINATION OF ANIMACY TO THE BIO-POLITICAL IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL TOXINS ON HUMAN BODIES IN THE CONTEXT OF PRESENT-DAY EMERGENT ILLNESSES"(PAGE 16).

DISCIPLINARY ANIMATION, SHIFTING ARCHIVE / THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

- THIS SECTION EXPLAINS WITHIN MANY DISCOURSE ANIMACIES REORIENTS CONSTRUCTS THAT PEOPLE FOLLOW. THE CHAPTERS INTERANIMATE WITH EACH OTHER IN A COHESIVE MANNER USING SEVERAL POINTS OF VIEW TO EXPLAIN AND INTERCONNECT THEM.

QUOTES AND QUESTIONS

“DEBATES ABOUT THE PRECISE STATUS OF ANIMALS AND THINGS, PROPOSED THAT “SOUL” COULD BE AN ANIMATING PRINCIPLE FOR HUMANS, ANIMALS, AND VEGETABLES, BUT NOT “DEAD” MATTER SUCH AS STONE. “(PAGE 4).

Q: WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER ALIVE AND HAVE ‘SOUL’ AND WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER ‘DEAD’?

“... REJECTS THE IDEA THAT THERE IS A FIXED ASSIGNMENT OF ANIMATE VALUES TO THINGS-IN-THE-WORLD THAT IS CONSISTENTLY REFLECTED IN OUR LANGUAGE, TAKING INSTEAD THE COGNITIVIST APPROACH THAT THE WORLD AROUND US ANIMATES ACCORDING TO WHAT WE HUMANS MAKE OF IT.”(PAGE 8).

Q: DO YOU THINK IN OTHER LANGUAGES/REGIONS/COUNTRIES/NON WESTERNIZED AREAS PEOPLE WOULD SEE ANIMATE AND INANIMATE OBJECTS DIFFERENTLY THAN WESTERNERS? HOW DO YOU THINK THEIR SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STANDARDS IMPACT THEIR VIEW OF WHAT IS ALIVE OR WHAT IS DEATH?

“HERE I CONSIDER IN DETAIL A PARTICULAR POLITICAL GRAMMAR, WHAT LINGUISTS CALL AN ANIMACY HIERARCHY, WHICH CONCEPTUALLY ARRANGES HUMAN LIFE, DISABLED LIFE, ANIMAL LIFE, PLANT LIFE, AND FORMS OF NONLIVING MATERIAL IN ORDERS OF VALUE AND PRIORITY.”(PAGE 13).

Q: WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF EVERYDAY LIFE FOLLOWING THIS ‘ANIMAL HIERARCHY’ IN THE ORDER OF VALUE AND PRIORITY? WHERE WOULD YOU SEE YOUR LIFE ON THIS SCALE GIVEN THE WORLD TODAY?