absehbarer Zeit weitere Quellenbestände zur Praxis der genetischen Beratung zugänglich gemacht werden, um die Geschichte geistig behinderter Menschen in der genetischen Beratung weiterzuschreiben.

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Bound Alberti, Fay: **This Mortal Coil**. The Human Body in History and Culture. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016. 304 p. £ 20.–. ISBN 978-0-19-979339-6 (e-book: 978-0-19-103656-9)

“Our bodies are products of the stories that we tell” (p. 19), writes Fay Bound Alberti in her latest book and thus makes us think about how the ways we move, breathe and feel have changed throughout history according to the cultural meanings that we have attached to our organs. By choosing *This Mortal Coil* as her title, she does not only pay a special tribute to Hamlet’s famous soliloquy, but also to one of the most remarkable contributions to the history of the body: Roy Porter’s *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (2003).

Doing medical history from below, as Porter has suggested, she introduces herself as a brilliant storyteller who invites us to take a “narrative journey from inside out, from our very core to the surface of our body and the boundaries between the self and the other” (p. 16). Her aim is to challenge contemporary models in which emotions are represented as mere products of the brain. As she suggests, emotions deserve to be more critically approached by taking care of past models in which they were understood as both material and spiritual experiences produced by the whole body.

Taking the spine as starting point, she proposes to travel through the landscape of anxieties raised by female breasts and genitalia, the wonders that have been associated with the heart and the brain, the social skills that we have developed thanks to the skin and the tongue, and finally arriving at the gut – this second brain. This makes it possible to establish “a narrative framework by which the language of our *somas* can become a legitimate part of our knowledge about the world” (p. 17).

This journey towards the foundations of ourselves is not just an academic exercise at the crossroads of the histories of medicine, disease and emotion. As Alberti points out, we should care about the stories that we tell because they have irremediable consequences. The story of her teenage daughter, who suffered from severe scoliosis and received surgery for a spinal fusion, led her to consider the implications of viewing the body as a machine on the way through which physicians deal with patients, while parcelling their experience of disease in medical specialties.

But not all of these stories speak about constraint. Alberti’s book also provides a fresh look by highlighting how the stories that we tell about the body can also be liberating. Thus, she provides a feminist reading of body parts enabling us to deconstruct the naturalization of gender differences that still operates in our present-day society. She points out how not only bones have been used by physicians as a proof of women’s inferiority, but how small breasts have been diagnosed as a physical and psychiatric condition, named hypomastia and been treated with implants. Giving voice to those women who suffered autoimmune disorders after having

received silicone implants, Alberti reinterprets the 1990's triumph of cosmetic surgery as a large scale technological disaster that has been neglected until very recently by the scientific community.

Women have, furthermore, been defined by their vaginas. This body part, which has often been characterized by its absence of a penis, has reflected male fears towards female sexual pleasure; an unknown territory that extends its limits far beyond the ideological representation of women as passive recipients. Along these lines, Alberti focuses on exploring the locus of female genitalia and giving agency to the vulva, considering the hair that covers (or uncovers) the pubis, the hymen and the clitoris, which – unlike the penis – has the sole function of providing pleasure.

Besides their vaginas, women have been imagined as having more tender hearts than their male counterparts. By telling us the story of Jennifer Sutton, a patient who received a heart transplant, Alberti retraces the historical shift that led to the perception of this organ as a pump pushing aside its previous aura as the site of the soul. Although the pump metaphor has been dominant since the nineteenth century, the author alerts us that there are always counter-narratives. One of them was the heart in Romantic literature; a metaphor that strengthens the connections between reason and emotion.

While the heart has been culturally constructed as a female symbol, the brain – which defines us as humans today – has been depicted as an undisputedly male organ. It comes as no surprise that women and Non-Europeans have been classified as having less developed brains than the white man. In spite of the triumph of the brain over the heart, Alberti demonstrates how the soul, the incorporeal essence of the humoralist tradition, has not been completely exorcised in our scientific age, as it still survives in our brains.

The skin and the tongue are Alberti's terrain to show us how gender, race and class differences have been inscribed in our bodies, creating social identities. On the one hand, she links our understanding of the skin with the rise of modern dermatology; a medical branch consolidated in intimate relation with the invention of race resulting from Western colonial expansion. On the other hand, the tongue is interpreted as a political weapon that provides us with the ability of speaking. Alberti shows how women's alleged inability to control their tongues has been historically shaped as a gendered vice that has justified men's violence against them.

The last stop of Alberti's journey is the gut, the organ responsible for body fat. Obesity becomes not only a feminist issue related with the overexposure of women's bodies to the gaze of others; it is also a social marker that stigmatizes the poor in Western countries and that allows us to map economic underdevelopment in a global context. The gut enables Alberti to end her voyage by regarding the body as a whole and by claiming a more holistic approach to our health care systems that could permit the embodiment of our emotional experiences. *This Mortal Coil* is definitively a beautifully written work that reminds us of the importance of taking care of our bodies through the metaphors that we use, since we are just the products of the stories that we tell.

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