Review of the Book: *Queer Defamiliarisation: Writing, Mattering, Making Strange* (Palmer, Helen, 2020)

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In her penultimate chapter, 'Sensorium,' Helen Palmer writes 'you tell me to analyse I'd rather synthesise,' which seems like an apt methodology for the *Queer Defamiliarisation: Writing, Mattering, Making Strange*. The author argues that defamiliarisation can be queering can be mattering, which is explored both through analysis of the wider field of Russian Formalist 'defamiliarisation' and then a creative praxis of the critical areas of investigation. The hierarchies that might be attributed to defamiliarisation, queerness, and materiality, depending on different theoretical investments, are decimated through Palmer's deft movement through the three, creating surfaces and relationships that expose the potentiality of her terms collapsing into one another. Whilst the book is thorough in its references to new materialist feminisms, the book's most exciting contribution is in the enactment of theory, where 'generic boundaries are troubled and the language is made strange through a foregrounding of materiality.' Indeed, the dissolution of genre and gender conventions, as well as the sprawling nature of the text's focus, allows for Palmer to explore multiple and simultaneous conceptual paths that are held together through unlikely narratives.

Queer Defamiliarisation draws the work of of Russian formalists, who Palmer turns to with the aim of reframing and refolding in dialogue with queerness. Thinkers such as Roman Jacobson, then Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, are placed in dialogue with queer and feminist academics such as Sara Ahmed, which allows for different kinds of orientation in relation to 'making-strange'. Palmer defines queerness as a

'deliberate unstraightening and defamiliarisation of bodies, desires and orientations' (Palmer, 2020, p. 2), which leans heavily on her formulations of both materialism and defamiliarisation, further demonstrating the interrelation of the three. Queerness serves as a form of derailing for the work, which allows for defamiliarisation to be approached as 'a making strange; a shift in perception' (ibid., p. 1) that ultimately informs materialism, 'how language is matter; how language matters' (ibid.).

The matter of language is entwined with the way in which language can matter, and how shifts in perception might allow for a better understanding of literature, society, and identity categories. Palmer is compelling when she addresses how language proliferates to make capacity for new identifications, ones that might turn away from normativity, at the same time that language is necessary for challenging the very constraints of the categories it produces. This is enhanced through a very productive reading of the possibilities for trans* as flux and movement, as opposed to the much wider demands for trans to become or symbolise a form of fixed destination. This mode of reading is further explored through literature and myth, which brings into bearing a methodology that builds on the concept of 'defamiliarising can be queering can be mattering' (Palmer, 2020, p. 168): 'rewriting can be refolding can be refleshing' (ibid.).

'A Field of Heteronyms and Homonyms: New Materialism, Speculative Fabulation and Wor(l)ding' opens with a discussion between the academic and IT professionals in a restaurant in Sydney. The female academic, who we assume is Palmer, defines herself as working in a field that 'was probably several interconnecting fields, and that her own background was both literary and philosophical, and that words mattered, and that language in its material strangeness had the power to advance feminist, queer and intersectional politics' (Palmer, 2020, p. 91). What unspools is a series of hypothetical questions from an IT consultant about the size of the field, who might inhabit it, whether he would be able to camp there. The academic answers these questions earnestly, until the two are enmeshed in a form of world-building, in which the hypothetical field takes on material dimensions, queering the boundary of abstraction and concretion. When home, the academic reflects on fields as 'unstable

concepts' (ibid.) and that her unexpected conversation has articulated the ability of 'new materialism and speculative fabulation to enact worlds; to verb nouns; to story stories; to make matters matter; or to world wor(l)ds' (ibid.). This anecdotal approach to fields works throughout *Queer Defamiliarisation*, in which Palmer brings together incredibly rich literary references to trouble categories, explore repetition, and think through the role of the trickster. Nat Raha and Travis Alabanza facilitate the discussion of trans* as not-destination; Stein's roses – and Tender Buttons – leads to a reflection on the sameness and difference inherent to repetition; Audre Lorde's Afrekete introduces the figure of the trickster, reimagined as female and feminist; and Isabel Waidner's Gaudy Bauble challenges the problematic of language in the creation and destruction of identity categories. This expansion of the field also facilitates the emergence of unexpected ways of reading. Stein is a catalyst for thinking on doilies, where the exploration of the lace 'kitchen frippery' is also an interrogation of the poetic function. Similarly, a garden in Tooting is read against a postcard from Thanet to approach the interdependence and interpenetration of signs. Palmer acknowledges in her conclusion that the writing style of each chapter is intended to have 'proposed, expressed, deformed and defamiliarised itself' in an attempt to 'show through doing' (Palmer, 2020, p. 168).

Palmer could do more to ground the central idea of refleshing. The analysis of personae through rewritings of mythical figures moved with great rapidity, offering an overview of the effects of multiple refoldings. However, whilst embodiment and the body within the rewritten texts were apparent, the concept of refleshing was not as fully or clearly developed. There were also some fleeting references to the brain and its passages, which did not have the same thoroughness or nuance as the other conceptual pathways of the book. Otherwise, *Queer Defamiliarisation* is a truly radical intervention into the field (one where you could set up camp and happily stay) and an example of stylistic brilliance where the form and structure allow for a dynamic reimagining of the ways defamiliarisation, queerness and matter can relate. More academic texts need to be 'made strange' in order to matter, their content unstraightened into flux and movement, making the very language of criticism seem distinct and unfamiliar. In so doing, it would be possible to create a field in which

language itself takes on dimension; a place in which categories are simultaneously establishing and ebbing; and where the affective nature of movement becomes a form of freedom.

Bibliography

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