

Call for Papers

For the Publication

Niet Normaal Difference on Display

To be published in December 2009, NAI Publishers, on the occasion of the exhibition Niet Normaal · Difference on Display, Beurs van Berlage, Amsterdam.

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Theme of the Exhibition

The exhibition Niet Normaal · Difference on Display reveals how normal it is to be different. In order to assess others we often adopt a point of reference that is based on unspoken assumptions: the norm. Artists, filmmakers and other producers will call into question how norms and difference function in contemporary society. How we construct normality is examined in the context of today's culture of perfectibility, consumerism and the interdependence of humans and intelligent technology. Niet Normaal · Difference on Display offers an alternative to a normative way of looking at the world and ourselves with the purpose of making the positive aspects of difference visible. www.nietnormaal.com

Theme of the Publication

A collection of essays will be published in conjunction with the exhibition. Central to this publication is the disability perspective, the point of view that also informs the curatorial strategies of the exhibition. Crucial to disability studies, the youngest branch of cultural studies, is an alternative definition of disability. Disability studies rejects the traditional medical model of disability, where disability and chronic illness are fixed and individualised conditions, and has developed an alternative social model for understanding disability. Recent versions of this theory no longer hold tightly to a strict either/or account of disability. Social model thinking acknowledges the importance of embodied experience, but an emphasis on disability as a social construct is crucial to its understanding. Disability is seen as a difference that can be 'made' and 'unmade' in terms of relevance in ever-changing relations and contexts.

Central question

The central focus of the publication is: *what can we gain from the disability perspective?* How can it enrich the social realm, adding lived (dis)abled experience to important issues such as norm & difference, self & strange, invisibility & recognition without enforcing the other to become the same? How can concrete and embodied

experiences bring about productive confrontations and enable us to move beyond fixations on difference and identity politics?

Situated and concrete

We invite contributions that follow a bottom-up argumentation, informed by situated practices and which analyse concrete objects of study (whether science fiction films, the daily negotiation of blood sugar levels, the complex shifting of subject and object status as doctor/patient, or personal encounters with numerous databases and techniques that presume to control bodies which are essentially nongovernmental). The areas in which disability perspectives can make a difference are numerous. To pick just a few examples from many possibilities: learning from 'other' bodies how to survive in disabling environments; the inexplicable link between pain and empathy; production of alternative aesthetics in a world where perfection is the norm; reconsidering the definition of what it is that makes us human within a world governed by normalizing technologies; challenging the ideology of autonomy and free will through the lived notion of interdependency and messy day to day reality; experiencing the limits and effects of the human-technology relationship (or how technology adapts to humans and vice versa); becoming (new) agents in an information-overloaded and 'crashed' symbolic order; precarious life and open source communities revealing deficits of democracy and at the same time offering new tactics for survival; why asymmetrical relationships matter and how they guide us to touch across difference.

Practicalities

We would like to invite you to submit a paper of approximately 3500 words. Papers will be read by the editorial board noted above. If accepted, we will contact you, make editorial suggestions and make the usual agreements.

Deadlines

- The deadline for submitting a paper proposal of 350 words is September 1, 2008
- The deadline to submit your paper of 3500 words is November 1, 2008
- The final deadline for edited and corrected submissions is February 1, 2009
- For questions please email Ine Gevers or Marjan Slob

Biographies

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