



ELSEVIER

Disponible en ligne sur [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

et également disponible sur [www.em-consulte.com](http://www.em-consulte.com)



Research Paper

## Agent orange, monsters, and we humans

### *Agent orange, les monstres, et nous les humains*

Susan Schweik



University of California at Berkeley, English Department, Hearst Field Annex Building B, Berkeley, CA 94720-1030n, USA

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article history:

Received 15 March 2015

Accepted 20 November 2016

Available online 18 January 2017

##### Keywords:

Disability arts culture

War and disability

Ethics of representation

#### ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the work of the American artist collective Yelling Clinic, a group of artists who have direct experience of disability and war, in collaboration with Vietnamese disabled artists and activists in Vietnam in 2011. Focusing on the toxic ecological effects of the herbicide Agent Orange, the essay explores the ethics of Agent Orange representation, focusing on a series of art pieces (and the collaborations that produced them) that work not as documentary evidence of the ravages of dioxin, not as an archive of monstrosity, but as vibrant expressions of and within a complex nexus of disability arts cultures.

© 2016 Association ALTER. Published by Elsevier Masson SAS. All rights reserved.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article porte sur le travail d'un collectif d'artistes américain qui s'appelle « The Yelling Clinic ». Il s'agit d'un groupe d'artistes qui ont une expérience directe du handicap et de la guerre, et qui ont collaboré en 2011 avec des artistes et militants handicapés vietnamiens. Se penchant sur les effets toxiques de l'herbicide dioxine, cet article considère les questions éthiques soulevées par les représentations autour d'Agent Orange, à travers une série d'œuvres d'art (et les collaborations qui les ont produites) qui fonctionnent non pas comme des indications documentaires des ravages

##### Mots clés :

Art et handicap

Guerre et handicap

L'éthique de la représentation

E-mail address: [sschweik@berkeley.edu](mailto:sschweik@berkeley.edu)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2016.12.005>

1875-0672/© 2016 Association ALTER. Published by Elsevier Masson SAS. All rights reserved.

du dioxine, non pas comme une archive de la monstruosité, mais comme des expressions vitales venant d'un nexus des cultures de l'art et du handicap, qu'on peut appeler des « disability arts cultures ».

© 2016 Association ALTER. Publié par Elsevier Masson SAS. Tous droits réservés.

In July of 2011, I joined a group of artists in a collective that calls itself the Yelling Clinic to participate in the Global Public Health Institute's web forum, "Agent Orange in Vietnam: A Humanitarian Issue We Can Do Something About" (Aspen Institute and Public Health Institute, 2011). The Yelling Clinic, a "collaborative" based in the San Francisco Bay Area with four initial members, professional working artists in the fields of painting, drawing, ceramics and film, was now expanding. On their website, the group introduced itself this way: "In her 1859 book *Notes on Nursing: What It Is and What It Is Not*, Florence Nightingale wrote, « Little as we know about the way we are affected by form: by color and light, we do know this, they have an actual physical effect. Variety of form and brilliancy of color in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery. People say the effect is only on the mind. It is no such thing. The effect is on the body, too. » We additionally believe yelling can help" (Yelling Clinic, 2011a).<sup>1</sup>

The group went on to define itself more specifically: "Yelling Clinic is. . . made up of individuals who have direct experience with disability and war" (Yelling Clinic, 2011b). In 2011, their focus was on the Vietnam War, particularly on the ongoing effects of the spraying of Agent Orange in that conflict. I had experience of disability and that war myself. My first husband was an American Vietnam War Special Forces veteran who had died of cancer in 1991, when our daughter was a baby; four years later, after being granted compensation as a widow in the settlement of a class action lawsuit involving veterans who came into contact with the herbicide, I had traveled to Vietnam, bringing the money to donate to a hospital ward for women affected in the aftermath of the spraying.

Now, two decades later, in July of 2011, as we attended the webcast, I was preparing to go as a fellow traveler with the Yelling Clinic to connect with disabled artists and activists in Vietnam in December. (The entire Yelling Clinic collective would be going, except for Ehren Tool, who had traveled to Vietnam with Chau Nguyễn the year before; in addition, my daughter, now 21, would join the group)<sup>2</sup>. In the background of the webcast talk by U.S. International Council on Disabilities Executive Director David Morrissey, a series of Powerpoint slides, presented without comment, caught our collective attention: radiant paintings of disabled people, of everyday disability life, in Vietnam, perhaps by a disabled artist – who was it? We were not the only people attending the forum to ask.

Morrissey did not know; the artist was anonymous. We did not know how to find out. But we were suddenly on fire. For us, Americans with roots in U.S. disability arts culture, the paintings hinted of a project like U.S. artist Riva Lehrer's "Circle Stories", portraits charting, in Lehrer's words, "the existence of a community of disabled innovators who provide support and context for the work of redefinition of disability in the 21st century" (Lehrer, 2004). Why not think of the paintings Morrissey brought to us not as documentary evidence of the ravages of dioxin, not as an archive of monstrosity, but as a vibrant part of a creative circle, taking critically different but nonetheless related shape in Vietnam?

This was our first guiding principle: There is plenty more to say to – and to hear from – disabled people in Vietnam than the story of toxic effect.

<sup>1</sup> Yelling Clinic was a true collective, clustered in some ways around UC Berkeley art professor Katherine Sherwood; many of its members studied with her. Sherwood continued its work in years to follow in a variety of ways, including her later series of paintings "Ever After: Venuses of the Yelling Clinic"; see Chun, K., "Katherine Sherwood uses her head in 'Ever After'", *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct 29, 2014. Retrieved Oct 30 2016 from <http://www.sfgate.com/art/article/Katherine-Sherwood-uses-her-head-in-Ever-After-5856152.php>.

<sup>2</sup> Two of the participants, Katherine Sherwood and myself, were disability studies professors at the University of California, Berkeley, and we used some faculty research funds as well as personal funds for our travels; some of the Yelling Clinic travelers funded themselves; some were funded through an Indiegogo campaign. See S. Taylor, "Help Fund Yelling Clinic". Retrieved Oct 30 2016, from <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/yelling-clinic#/>.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5119825>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5119825>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)