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WRITING THE SELF: NOMADIC SUBJECTIVITY AND CREATIVE AGENCY IN REBEKAH TAUSSIG'S SITTING PRETTY: THE VIEW FROM MY ORDINARY RESILIENT DISABLED BODY

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to examine Rebekah Taussig's Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body through the theoretical framework of Rosi Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity, reasserting creative writing as a potential mode of agency for resistance and resilience. Taussig's memoir embraces fluid, shifting identities shaped by onto-epistemological experience, memory, and socio-political context challenging static representations of disability. Her memoir unfolds as a form of nomadic becoming, conveying a process of ontology, subverting the rigid dichotomies of ability/disability and self/other. Drawing on the elements from post-human feminism, this study argues that Taussig's use of creative nonfiction functions not only as personal testimony but also as a subversive mode of knowledge production. Her portraits and sketches in memoirs and social media platforms, bearing with stark humor, vulnerability, and resistance unfold how storytelling effectively creates a space of mobility where the disabled subject reclaims agency, voice, and intellectual autonomy that have been denied for them so far. This article posits Taussigs work within a larger discourse of feminist disability life-writing by analyzing Sitting Pretty as a dynamic space to relocate her identity and power. It scrutinizes the potential power of creative writing as a counter-narrative that brings up changes in the future.

Keywords

Posthuman Feminism, Nomadic Subjectivity, Counter-Narrative, Disability Studies, Creative Agency, Disability Memoirs, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

In the contemporary discourse of post-human present, it's pertinent to examine its interactions with discussions on gender and its intersections with the tenets of feminism across the ages. The paradigms of post-humanism reconfigure the established notions of what it means to be a human in the present era, as we have transgressed the conventional boundaries such as male/female, nature/culture or able/disabled in a post-anthropocentric turn. When feminism is deeply influenced by this philosophical and critical school of thought, it envisioned a new inclusive society that goes beyond the conventional orders. Traditional western feminism, with its inception from the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, was grounded on the universal notion of humanity and they demanded equality in terms of gender and other social



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parameters. However, such a position tended to interrogate the stereotypical, docile image of women, thereby critically looking at status quo social systems. However, with the advent of post-humanism, it demands a drift from the humanistic vision of the world, unequivocally asserting that feminism is not humanism. In a post-human vision, non-human and other than human forms, those who have been marginalized and excluded from the mainstream scenario, are also represented vividly. It scrutinizes the juncture at which the domains of humanity, humanism, wholeness, body and self-intersect with the notions of disability, technology, augmentation and the future that wrapped around the figure and idea of post-human.

Da Vinci's the Vitruvian man or universal human often invoked in humanist thought is neither a neutral nor universally applicable concept. The drawing itself evoked a historical and cultural representation of the ideal image of man which frequently modeled on the white, European, handsome and able-bodied male. Traditional western feminism tended to locate the identity of women within this social framework, unwittingly reinforcing the marginalization of those already excluded by this narrow definition. The poststructuralist views of feminism, a precursor to post-human feminism, propose a radical form of anti-humanist thought, denying humanistic universalism. Consequently, post-human feminism's rejection of humanism and assertion of women's embodiment, experience and collective nature of female knowledge production are presented as a necessary step to truly challenge systemic oppression. It ultimately tried to demystify the age old convictions that act as the praxis of power and thus to establish a space in which the voices of the minorities can be heard. The movement recognizes the inherent plurality of lived human experience, emphasizing that there is no fixed ontological status for individuals, instigated a new type of discourse itself. This perspective foregrounds that a more radical break from humanism is required to open up to the others within the system so as to relocate and reestablish diversity and multiple belongings as a core part of European subjectivity, a subtle way to achieve genuine and comprehensive emancipation.

By the late 1990s when the post-anthropocentric turn sways over the feminist thoughts, it intersected with different strands of feminist thought so as to include the materialist, phenomenological analysis of women's lived experiences with special focus on embedded and embodied, affective and relational structure of subjectivity as part of women's writing. It denies the Euro-phallocentric, rational man and envisages a more egalitarian perspective of the species around us. This conceptual redirection, often referred to as the material or ontological turn in feminism, calls for an ethical turn of thought. This naval thought implies that material interlinking to posthuman feminism suggests an interconnectedness to all beings—humans, nonhumans, technology, and the environment—around us. Furthermore, it constitutes a fundamental framework for developing a more inclusive socio-cultural environment. The shift to process ontology, the doctrine that sees living matter as a being of becoming that interacts with multiple codes in complex ways- social, cultural and environmental; producing multiple ecologies of belonging, transcended the humanist ideals and propounded a paradigm shift. As Rosi Braidotti puts in *The Posthuman*, "the postanthropocentric shift away from the hierarchical relations that had privileged man requires a form of estrangement and a radical repositioning on the part of the subject. The best method to accomplish this is through the strategy of de-familiarisation or critical distance from the dominant vision of the subject" (Braidotti, 46). Braidotti's positioning of nomad as the contemporary subject can be easily extended to post-human studies also. The nomad itself as a hybrid entity allows for creating new methods to comprehend complex contemporary realities that are entangled in endless labyrinths. The elasticity of Braidotti's nomad equips it to change and evolve to infinite possibilities, to embrace differences and to reconfigure and redefine its own self.



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Disability and Post-humanism:

While post-human feminism, in trying to dismantle the traditional dualistic thinking, it goes to an extent to move further abstract philosophical disagreements which carries profound political implications. These antagonistic binaries have been systematically employed in the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals and all those labeled as others. Therefore, challenging the mind/body or nature/culture split is understood as a direct act of dismantling the conceptual foundations of oppression thus understanding reality as fundamentally dynamic and interconnected. When it comes to post-human discussions on human body, it reconfigures the inherent materiality and vulnerability of the human body, positioning a flexible and fluid subjectivity that even led to Donna Haraway's concept of 'cyborg', a hybrid being that blurs the boundaries between man and machine. Hayles proposes in *How we Became* Posthuman that we are at a stage of "technology has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer meaningfully be separated from the human subject" (Hayles, XIII). This is in accordance with the thoughts foregrounded by Donna Haraway who coined the notion of 'cyborg' itself that can so aptly define what a post-human being is. The cyborg, conceptualized as a hybrid of organism and machine, actively blurs traditional boundaries between human/animal, nature/culture, mind/body and male/female. It represents a deliberate rejection of rigid boundaries and traditional notions of feminism that often centered on identity politics. Instead, it advocates for coalition building through affinity, emphasizing shared interests over fixed identities. This figure highlights the plasticity of identity and exposes the limitations of socially imposed identities, thereby offering a model for identity that is mutable, fragmented, and inherently transgressive.

A core proposition of post-human feminism is that identity and gender are fluid, dynamic, in constant flux relational to technology, rather than being fixed or solely biologically established entities. It suggests a new world in which "no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals exist" (Hayles, 3). A symbiotic co-existence occurs where all entities are embedded and entangled in which identity is always fluid and in constant flux. Even the crux of identity cannot be a static one in a swift changing world, so too do the post-human ones. The prominent post-human feminist, Rosi Braidotti has revolutionized the notion of identity by bringing the concepts of becoming and interconnectivity or entanglement,

the sphere of creation of a nomadic subject is the one located 'in between', with the metaphors of travel found in all kinds of transit zones and means of transport. The quasi-places in which one is no longer in a given place, but also not yet anywhere in particular. To a nomadic subject, any place is exactly like that, as it is developed 'in between': languages, cultures, races, sexes, bodies, and ways of thinking (Braidotti, 47).

From this perspective, the human is not conceived as an autonomous and discrete being, but rather as a subject in perpetual becoming, grounded in fluctuating processes, and radically entangled both subjectively and materially with its environment and other entities. This process of fluctuating or shifting identities and the consequent relevance or irrelevance of origins that came with our mixed identity, creating the 'We' by dismantling the subject 'I'.

The interactions between post-human feminism and disability studies explore a powerful critique of the normative assumptions of human body. For decades, cultural theory and critical disability studies have much to say about how bodies are produced in narratives, through the mode of social discourses. Throughout the ages, disability has often been understood in either medical or



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sociological lens. From the sociological perspective, people with physical debilities are often treated as marginalized and undesirable ones, those to be excluded from the main terrains of social life while the medical school of thought considered it as a deficit, pathology to be fixed. It's high time to unpack such presumptions on disability and disabled bodies. For many post-human thinkers, "disabled bodies in and of themselves are whole and sufficient" (Murray, 17) encountering with prosthesis and other assistive technologies. Tobin Siebers has remarked of the disabled bodies that are "potentially meaningful" (Siebers, 25) and Rosemarie Garland Thomson has articulated the idea of "disability gain" that the disability life 'lived as it is' provides a footing not only to understand individual experiences, but to illustrate the subjectivity that will have resonance in the contemplation of all lived experiences. The body is thus conceptualized as a heterogeneous assemblage, a dynamic composite continually redefined through its interactions with technology (e.g., wearable devices, prosthetics, implants) and the broader environment around it. Adrienne Rich argued in her 1984 essay "Notes Towards a Politics of Location" that feminists owe to amalgamate a rationale and accountability for their locations, not as a part of some monolith women, but within the wider socio-cultural parameters of sexual orientation, race, class and nation. Posthuman feminism tends to locate and reconfigure the identity of the silenced and invalidated ones who are also a part of the society.

When post-humanist philosophies subverted the conventional boundaries, it critiqued the notions of human abilities also. Who is able or how can we perceive ability is a crucial question to be answered in the current post-human world. Rosi Braidotti in her seminal work on critical post-humanism *The Posthuman* asserted that disability studies are "emblematic of post-humanism" (Braidotti, 145). Rather than being labeled as disabled or marginalized ones, this new perspective opens up new avenues to look at the things in many different ways. People with debilities are not mere monoliths; there are varied forms of differences that can be interconnected. Critical post-humanism rejected the social and medical models of disability on the grounds that it cannot be either a physical impairment to be fixed or cured or a reason for a social stigma. It moves away from a traditional biomedical lens, which often views impairment as a deviation from a perceived normal state, and instead critiques disability as a constructed category. This construction, it argues, risks denying individuals with different embodiments their right to be considered equal citizens.

The focus on disability studies within critical post-humanism is not incidental, rather more it serves as a powerful exemplification and a catalyst for the broader post-human critique of the human. By challenging the biomedical lens and the notion of normal, post-humanism directly confronts the normative, able-bodied ideal embedded within humanism. This re-evaluation of disability as a generative power of difference extends the feminist project of valuing marginalized experiences. It demonstrates how bodies that deviate from the norm can demask the configurations and limitations of universalizing human ideals. This highlights that the post-human is not solely concerned with future technological enhancements but is fundamentally about recognizing and affirming diverse embodiments that are already present in the world. As Robert McRuer has observed, we live in crip times, a period when "unruly bodies occupy both public and imaginative spaces" (McRuer, 8). McRuer's work offers an articulation of disability within contemporary cultural and artistic productions.

Significance of Disability Memoirs:

Disability memoirs play a significant role in dismantling the conventional rigid narratives on disabled people, offering a canvas to prove that the literary form of memoir can be used as a tool to fight against social labeling and stigmatization, thus dismantling the cultural tropes of disabilities. Memoirs can significantly contribute to the trope of counter narratives as they



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introduce the struggles of life with differently-abled bodies or minds, challenging them to "face the body" (Couser, 5), going through the real life experiences of the disabled subjects dissecting the borders between 'the able' and 'the disabled'. Such a disability memoirs boom addressed the realities in a fruitful way to eradicate fear, aghast, aversion, humiliation or sympathy, the dominant cultural feelings, associated with it. Over the last few decades, it paved ways to differentiate medical models of disability between cultural/ social models of disability and how the collective consciousness, modeled upon these two models, finally coming to terms with the understanding of disability is more a cultural construction. In addition, this will open up new avenues of cooperation and solidarity among the people who are affected and as of now most of the disabled writers are able to use social media platforms prolifically, a new space to share their stories to dismantle the cultural narrations on disability. In a techno mediated world, embracing differences and equipping oneself with the changing paradigms can bring out certain convictions that people with debilities are not mere monoliths. A more subtle understanding of the myriad ways people interact with the dominant discourses of health & well-being, onto-epistemological experiences and behavioural patterns of the disabled ones will help us to accentuate more connections, collaborations and opportunities of co-existence.

Our Stories Matter: Sitting Pretty as a Counter-Narrative:

Disability advocate and creator of @ sitting_pretty (instagram account), Rebekah Taussig offers her debut memoir-in-essays, Sitting Pretty: The View from my Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body, a beautiful, dynamic portrait of a body that looks and moves differently than most. Sitting Pretty, published in 2020, is dedicated to everyone with a body that has been sent to the margins. "Our stories matter", the refrain used in the memoir, tell us the urgency of the contemporary social situation the book wishes to propagate. It stands as a seminal memoir-in-essays, a counternarrative that "offers resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives" (Andrews, 1). She deliberately chooses an experimental structural choice that facilitates a nuanced and multifaceted exploration of disability that departs significantly from linear, fixed narratives often associated with traditional autobiography. This acclaimed work is celebrated for offering a fierce and fabulous revision to entrenched ableist scripts. It challenges the inspirational, didactic or heroic stereotypes of disabled folks and goes beyond the social labels associated with disability. Taussig's vignettes, characterized by their blend of grim humor, vulnerability, and resistance vividly reflect the complex, lived experience of disability. She calls for an action "to connect and understand, heal and blossom" (Preface), not merely to unfold the differences on her body with the publication of Sitting Pretty. This memoir is an exhortation to bring out changes in the societal attitudes and narratives eradicating its stigma, isolation, misunderstanding, skepticism and ubiquitous inaccessibility often associated with disability portrayals, as she articulated, "my paralysis isn't really a problem in this context...we need to change our world to fit more people". (Taussig, 57)

As a distinguished scholar holding a Ph.D in creative nonfiction and disability studies, Taussig consciously undertakes the vital task of challenging the prevailing, constructed and distorted media portrayals of disability. These portrayals with their reductionist tendency reduce disability to simplistic tropes of tragedy or inspiration, which have cultivated a sort of shame among the people.

In the midst of my verbal wandering, I inevitably reached for the word "shame"- the box where I had lived for so very long, the box I still find myself tumbling back into with less provocation than I 'd like to admit. This is the shame that attaches so easily to a body that doesn't fit, the shame that buds,



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blossoms and consumes when you believe that your existence is a burden, a blemish on the well-oiled machine of Society (Taussig, 6).

Her work, therefore, acts as a compelling counter-narrative that undoes these reductive ideologies, representing the lived realities of the disabled folks. Counter-narratives play a dominant role in the construction of identity as it is relative, not free from its interactions within the social environment. They reveal what has been suppressed or silenced for ages, individual or collective experiences, the fact that narrative structures are "uniquely conducive to the design of alternatives" (Bamberg, 354) enables the activity of positioning that characterizes counternarratives. Taussig tried "to upload a file of memories, a dictionary of definitions, a planet of feelings" (Taussig, 13) that she experienced for herself, representing and giving voice to specific disabled communities.

This article posits that Taussig's narrative powerfully embodies Rosi Braidotti's concept of nomadic subjectivity. This theoretical framework describes a fluid, non-unitary self that is continuously redefined through dynamic collaboration and ongoing processes of becoming. Braidotti's theory provides a robust lens through which to analyze how Taussig's memoir conveys a process of ontology and nomadic becoming, actively dismantling the tenets of ableism. It directly resonates with Taussig's ontological experiences of paralysis from childhood and the ensuing journey of self-fashioning through creative writing and autonomy. She is not willing to confine herself to the social labels and when she worked as a school teacher, she tried to subvert the rigid conventions in the minds of children regarding disability, hoping to inculcate changes in the minds of young generation. Her staunch advocacy and writing serve as an illustration of becoming, as proposed by Braidotti, "instead of falling back on the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized, the posthuman predicament encourages us to undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times. To meet this task, new conceptual creativity is needed" (Braidotti, 54).

Taussig's memoir powerfully portraying a girl growing up with disability with skewed images of disability in media is a powerful lived example of this epistemic seclusion. Her creative nonfiction, therefore, transforms into a conscious and strategic act of rewriting the story and contributing nuance to the collective narratives, thereby actively addressing the common negligence to the testimonies of disabled ones. Taussig's writing functions as a creative agency reflecting the nomadic subjectivity of the self that would encounter the social injustices so far. By asserting a fluid, relational, and experientially-grounded self, Taussig not only reclaims her own narrative authority but also establishes a model for other marginalized voices to contribute to a more inclusive narration. The process of ontology is, at its core, a politics of radical questioning, identity affirmation and embodiment. In *Disability Theory*, Tobin Siebers articulates, "identities, narratives and experiences based on disability have the status of theory because they represent locations and forms of embodiment from which the dominant ideologies of society become visible and open to criticism" (Siebers, 14).

In the narratives of ableist culture, the body is perceived as whole, unmarred and perfect, but Taussig portrays "bodies that are products, while scars, breaks and changes in function make that product less valuable" (Siebers, 11). The non-fixity or the fluidity of the body which can move on with the help of assistive technologies like wheelchairs always asserts themselves in the process of becoming. The very form of Taussig's memoir, that is structured as a compilation of essays, with critical insights reflect a nomadic feature itself. She deliberately selected this non-linear style against the singular, subjective and linear autobiography to go beyond the social labeling of being a disabled one. Traditionally, autobiography often represents the life as a coherent, unified self and it follows a regular pattern to portray the identity. On the contrary, the



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essay format naturally permits the free flow of ideas, brimming with critical insights, rhetoric questions to the readers and rendition of ontological experiences from multiple perspectives, embodying open ended conclusions. This non-linear, fragmented yet interconnected structure directly encapsulates the fluid, shifting identities that Taussig personalises and explores throughout her work. Thus, the chosen literary structure of *Sitting Pretty* is not merely a stylistic choice but an accomplishment of nomadic self and nomadic subjectivity in her memoirs, both in literary work and in social media platforms. It acts as a counter-narrative to resist the ableist narratives that was imposed upon their life realities. This suggests that the medium and its inherent characteristics contribute fundamentally to the message of fluidity, anti-essentialism, and the dynamic process of becoming, making the book itself a nomadic artifact foregrounding disabled perspectives because they create a world that is "more imaginative, more flexible, more sustainable, more dynamic and vibrant for everyone who lives in a body" (Taussig, 100).

Why do these stories matter is an important question to be answered in contemporary scenario. Stories on disability continually reduce disability into something small, but Taussig has just proved that disability can give new stories for navigating an ever-changing world. Deformed bodies have always been an integral part of our collective narratives-whether acknowledged or not. Now, there is a growing tendency of foregrounding the subjectivity of disabled people and memoirs are the best literary tools to represent themselves, so we can witness a counter-discursive movement over at least the last half century, culminating in the current memoir boom. Self-representation offers compelling voices to the voiceless ones and this mode of narration occupies a sizable portion in mainstream literature.

Thus disabled people come to life writing from a position of pre-inscription: they are already known as defective, deficient, interpellated as fundamentally alien. In life writing, their charge is to undo and/or overwrite their prior representation, to offer compelling counter-representation. The challenge is to do this without deploying rhetoric already in circulation that simply reinforces stigma or condescension (Couser, 2).

Taussig didn't try to conform to the social labels of a disabled woman with a wheelchair, "disability doesn't define me. The paralysis can be fixed. None of it was traumatic. . .I liked my story as it was. I liked who I was on my own" (Taussig, 40-41). The way of constructing an identity or alternative spaces to inhabit is also poignant when it comes to disability memoirs. She made an attempt to date online, with a profile picture of sitting on a wheelchair, and even it was an eye opener to Taussig. She was happy to meet Micah through online dating reclaimed her identity that goes beyond her physical limitations. As Stuart Murray states,

All these reconfigure the spaces in which disabled people experience their lives, whether that is the space of the physical body itself or the environment it inhabits. This new sense of space challenges humanist notions of centered and individualized wholeness, with their associated assertions of rationality and control...in a technological and digital age it is more appropriate... to look towards the criss-crossing networks, assemblages and collection of multiple possible intersected locations and suggested selves that increasingly define the contemporary moment. It is of course true that the networks of difference have always defined social and cultural spaces, particularly in the modern era (Murray, 6).



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Hence, Taussig's memoir opens up possibilities of creating alternative spaces of identity through technological embodiment. Rebekah Taussig, the creator of @sitting_pretty, the instagram account, fruitfully uses it as a medium to complicate and contradict the traditional tropes on disability and to inscribes her own body and self. She often narrates and invites people into "the most personal textures of a disabled life" (Taussig, 60) by posting mini-memoirs and it brings up open discussions to deconstruct wrapped up narratives on disability. This technological embodied self-offers her another way of being or existing in this post-human world, embracing multiple identities and affirming an identity worthy celebrating. Post-humanism brings up new avenues to understand disability as a topic that needs our timely attention and worth.

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