

Abstract in English

Dissertation deals with the freak show culture in Prague and the Czech lands in a broader context of the modern discourses of dis/ability and the imaginations of the collective body of the Czech nation. Exhibitions of „Lilliputians“, „Giants“, „Siamese twins“ and other „extraordinary“ bodies are analyzed here as a part of the history of an international entertainment culture in the 19th-century Europe. The emphasis lays on the turn of the century, the decade that witnessed rash development both of the capitalist entertainment industry and the expert disciplines that dealt with the “ab/normal”. I claim, that the popularity of freak shows in this period rested in their ability to articulate fears and ambitions of their visitors, both in their individual embodied experience and their imaginative belonging, notably their belonging to the collective body of the Czech nation. In four case studies, I focus on individual freak figures and analyze how the intersections of different axes of difference – ethnicity, gender, class – within the representation of “the extraordinary”, coproduced certain notion of social order and power hierarchies that were closely intertwined with the imagined collective body of nation.