

**Re/Producing “Normalcy”:
Bodies, Everyday Social Practices
and Photography**

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Abstract

As the white, female, able-body(ies) comes to the written and visual fore in mainstream academic, political, social and cultural circles in Euro-North-America, it is crucial at this particular historical moment to attend to how the fore needs that which it excludes, how the fore becomes *normalized* on an everyday basis. By tracing various social processes/practices that normalize and disavow particular bodies and practices, what begins to unfold is an understanding of how our everyday social practices may both re/produce and interrupt normalizing practices. Through an interweaving of visual and textual theories, of photography and written words, I attempt to make sense out of how bodies become re-presented and theorized, *normalized* and marginalized, and how bodies may disrupt and offer new and alternative possibilities through photography and written words.

Excerpt from Chapter One:

"Bodies, bodies everywhere...But which bodies?: The un/marking of gender, race, sexuality and disability"¹

"What gets occluded even as the supposedly repressed or disallowed enjoys a new celebration?" (Martin 1996:112).

The Body and Bodies

A plethora of interest in *the body* seems to be emerging over the past few decades in North America and Europe. What seems to be unfolding in feminist theories, for the most part, is the normalization of whiteness and ability. While I was searching to interview Toronto-based women photographers working on *the body*, the photographers I was directed towards by art gallery assistants and owners were predominately white women. Slowly, I became aware of a reoccurrence that I was unable to articulate until quite recently. So what I discuss here should not be taken as *the truth* that speaks for all feminist writers and artists; what I discuss here may be read as one approach to interpret what I experienced. I try to resist presenting a closed interpretation, a conclusive matter-of-fact statement. Instead, I attempt to pull at some relevant/important threads so that I may weave possible interpretations about what these threads may say, may re/produce.

It seems that through photography and other visual media, the white women photographers I encountered were working to *unfix* sexual stereotypes by opening up the possibility of thinking about desire and sexuality/ies as fluid. Much of this work has been influenced by western post-modern thought, which sets out to de-construct, to call into question and to challenge the dominant modernist framework and its scientific paradigm of positivism (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Important for my work has been

¹ For the purposes of this publication, this chapter has been re-numbered (in comparison to the numbering of this chapter in the full document), as well as slightly revised.

thoughts about and the questioning of the re-conceptualization of identity as fluid and multiple.

For many centuries, European philosophers, like Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas, have theorized a mind separate from body, where the body is a static, heavy drag on a mind which must learn to transcend the limits of its body (Bordo 1993). Briefly stated, Plato saw the body as an epistemological deceiver with unreliable senses and volatile passions; Augustine believed the body was inclined toward sinning and thus should be tamed; and sixteenth century philosophers and scientists argued that a mind, which is objective and usually of white men, is inhibited and impeded by the deceptive and untrustworthy body (Bordo 1993).

Bodies, figuring in many texts and cultural products, have historically been represented negatively in comparison to the mind—as its binary opposite. As Bordo (1993) poignantly argues, a constant historical western construction is of the body as a lower part of the self, undermining one's self-realization:

...[a constant historical] *construction* of the body [is] as something apart from the true self (whether conceived as soul, mind, spirit, will, creativity, freedom...) and as undermining the best efforts of that self. That which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God; that which is body is the albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization (5; emphasis in original).

Also working within a mind/body split is a gender-ing process. Women are often associated with body and men with mind: the over-passionate/emotional, irrational, sexually deceptive body (read woman) impedes the rational, objective, thinking mind (read man). Thus, the gender-ing of this dualism lends to a conceptualization of the body as associated with women, who are defined in relation to the perceived negativity of the body, (Bordo 1993), a negativity sometimes associated with a (phallic) lack or the grotesque, mutant, freakish body (Russo 1994).

Gender-ed bodies are further differentiated by visual and discursive practices that both un/mark bodies racially, sexually, and by class and ability, which, by extension, re/produce the privileging of particular bodies (white, anatomically female, middle-class

and able-bodied) and de-legitimize or disavow *other* bodies that come to be known only in opposition to the status quo (Russo 1994). Processes of labeling some bodies as exceeding normative boundaries (read excessive), known only in opposition to the status quo (read normal), have psychological, socio-cultural, political and material effects for many women. The effects have included political exclusion, denial of access to material, public resources and powers, forced sterilization, institutionalization, medicalization, and other forms of denying basic human rights.

Feminism and Bodies as Sites of Struggles

For many decades, feminist writers in Western Europe and North America² who have written on the body are unearthing the long repressed body in art and popular culture (Mirzoeff 1995). An entry point into discussions on the body in feminism is locating how male privilege, relations of domination and power, intertwine and are re/produced in various social institutions, cultural products and social practices (Lewis 1992). Some feminist theorists have focused on the body as a social construction thus challenging the long held assumption of the body as a fixed, passive, biological entity. This shift from an essentialist position—which views the body as only biological—and towards postmodern bodies—which views bodies as always already historical, socio-cultural constructions—, locates bodies as sites of power and control (Bordo 1993). In other words, bodies, particularly women’s bodies, are becoming re-positioned as *a medium of and metaphor for culture* (Bordo 1993).

In the constructivist approach, the body becomes re-positioned as a site, or medium, onto which historical, socio-cultural, political and economic relations are mapped. Revisiting the passivity posed by this approach, post-modern theorists struggle with the question of how bodies become more active and desiring subjects³. For example, Hooper (1994) situates the body as:

...a highly mediated space, a space transformed by cultural interpretations and representations; it is a lived space, a volatile space of conscious and

² Hereafter referred to as Euro-North America/n.

³ Thanks, Kathleen Rockhill, for clarifying my thought.

unconscious desires and motivations—a body/self, a subject, an identity: it is, in sum, a social space, a complexity involving the workings of power and knowledge and the workings of the body's lived unpredictabilities (quoted in Soja 1996: 114).

From this theoretical stance, the maintenance of a social order is re/produced through a dialectical process—a process both external and internal—that molds and regulates people's bodies right down to our everyday practices, right down to our thoughts, actions and encounters with other bodies (Bordo 1993; de Certeau 1984). Re-positioning the regulation and punishment of bodies as both external and internal involves a theoretical shift: from theorizing bodies as socially *constructed*⁴ towards an *anti-essentialist*⁵ position that theorizes bodies as socially *constituted*⁶.

A thought that keeps running through my mind as I am reading and writing on western feminist work on the body is: Whose body is the focus of analysis? Whose body has become the referent during this process?

Referential Body

I recently saw the movie Relax...It's Just Sex (Castellaneta 1998) at this past summer's *Inside/Out Gay and Lesbian Film Festival* in Toronto, Ontario. Generally speaking, the movie chronicles predominately queer lives/lifestyles in present-day California; it is one of the few queer movies I have seen of late that has a multi-racial-ethnic cast, with all characters sharing, more or less, equal story line time. However, the narrative at the

⁴ A one way, external/social process.

⁵ Many post-modern feminist theorists write against essentialist arguments, where the core of essentialist thought is rooted in a humanist paradigm that "presupposes an essence at the heart of an individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she *is*" (Weedon 1987:32; emphasis in original). In contrast, within postmodern circles, what is called feminist poststructuralism argues that subjectivity (discussed in *Chapter Three*) is "precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (*ibid*: 13).

⁶ A two way process that is both external/social and internal/psychological. Construction and constitution are further discussed in *Chapter Three*.

beginning of the film sets the stage for the normalization of queer bodies as white in spite of the movie's multi-racial-ethnic cast of characters.

The opening scene of the movie is a satirical dramatization of dominant society's homophobia. Filmed in black and white, and drawing upon 1950's American infomercials⁷, the narrator plays with heterosexual society's fear and stereotypes of queer people. The narrator begins by saying: "This is a lipstick lesbian"; the body that is shown, or referenced to, is a thin, white woman with long, flowing blond hair, draped in clothing often depicted in Greek mythology. Thus, she is presented as somewhat goddess-like. Spinning around like an object at a museum to be gazed at and probed, she is then paired with a similar looking woman. The two women then kiss while the narrator downplays this *abnormal* behaviour by saying: "This is two women kissing; see it isn't so bad". Soon after, a white, semi-muscular man appears half-dressed in Greek mythic-like clothing also spinning like the other two women. The narrator identifies him as a gay man. He is then coupled with a similar looking man. They kiss. The narrator also downplays the viewing of two (white) gay men kissing by saying something similar to what he said when the two lesbians were kissing.

I have taken the time to give a thumbnail sketch of the beginning of this film to address how particular bodies become referents. Although queer bodies are deemed *unnatural* or *abnormal*, and often excluded in various aspects of contemporary society, what tends to become normalized and essentialized as *the lesbian* or *the gay* body in Euro-North America society are white bodies. What also unfolds is a particular type of white body that draws upon Greek mythology. The influence of Greek mythology on the *ideal* body, un-named as able-body, will be addressed in more depth below. What I want to point out at this time is a paradox that seems to emerge when some marginalized communities that are multi-racial-ethnic-gendered-class-abled become more *visible* in North-American society: the heterogeneity of these communities seems to become homogenized and most of the stereotypes, like flamboyant gay men or lipstick lesbians, are *fixed* onto white bodies, both male and female, and able-bodied.

⁷ Non-speaking actors act in accordance with a (white) male narrator's discussion about the many useful uses of a particular commercial product.

Also within body discourses there seems to be a strong focus on gender and sexuality. The gender-ed body as singular and fixed, as well as the body as female, have been under attack in mainstream feminist writings and art for many decades. What seems to have come to the fore in these discussions is an interrogation of the materiality, that is the corporeality, of the body and in particular the long un-addressed notion of an assumed irreducible, fixed, sexed female body (Binhammer 1995). Much present-day non/academic work in North America on gender and sexuality is influenced by the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993). Her work on the relationship between sex and gender reveals how gender has been assumed to emerge from fixed, static male or female (the two normative sexes) sexed bodies. In contrast, Butler (1993) argues that sex is constituted, as is gender.

In this historical moment, the focus on the relation of gender to sexuality is an attempt to challenge the biological determinism of sex, which has dominated feminist theorizations of gender significantly (Binhammer 1995; McClintock 1995). This approach argues that both gender and sexuality are constituted and theorized as inherently changeable, with many identities and experiences⁸. Still marginalized in Euro-North American feminist theories is discussions on the relationship between race and gender, in particular, how sexual difference is racialized (hooks 1992).

Articulating the complexity that lies beneath the skin through the framework of identity politics has its limits. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, while our identities are theorized as multiple, complex and fragmented, our physical bodies are assumed to be whole—not complex or differently abled. Thus, even as feminist writers and artists debate over whose bodies and experiences are excluded, disabled bodies are rarely if ever acknowledged, considered or mentioned.

Re/Producing Inclusion and Exclusion

When I say *the body*, most writers and readers will visualize the female nude, and most of these visualized nude women will be white, anatomically female and able-bodied. It is argued that female nudes have been drawn, painted, photographed and filmed to

⁸ Thanks Kathleen Rockhill for helping me to clarify this paragraph.

quench the voyeuristic, heterosexual, white, patriarchal gaze in western culture. In deconstructing power relations that lay behind the white, male heterosexual gaze in Euro-North America, what has concomitantly emerged in discussions on identity politics in feminist theories is a referent, or normative body/ies.

In the context of Euro-North American art, what has become the referent of beauty, woman and desire is the white, anatomical female able-body (Davis 1995). As the white female able-body re-emerges and becomes the norm in academia, art and popular culture, which bodies are not shown, that is, erased at the same time?

The Ideal and Perfect Body

In talking about how *normalcy* feeds into the ways in which we see *the body*, Davis (1995) turns to how the body has been re-presented in western art, and particularly in photography and other visual media. He argues that the *classical body*, framed and thought of as a body that is "transcendent, monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical, and sleek. ...is identified with the 'high' or official culture of the Renaissance and later, with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie" (9), has greatly influenced Euro-North American art since the Renaissance. This *classical body*, which tends to be portrayed as white, female able-bodied nudes, has become not the subject of art but a *form of art* to the extent that a set of idealized conventions have developed that feed into the way in which our "bodies are supposed to look" (Davis 1995:133). Thus, the (female) nude in Euro-North American art, Davis (1995) argues, has served to "solidify...a preferred mode of envisioning the body" (132-3).

In attempting to sculpt, draw and paint the female nude, idealized conventions of the body in western art have sought to erase the imperfections, folds and excesses of our material bodies by trying to represent the body as perfect (Mirzoeff 1995), as opposed to the extreme opposite, which Russo (1994) calls the *female grotesque*. Although Russo (1994) tends not to explore the imbrication of racialized and socio-economic imageries that make up her framing of the female grotesque, her theorization of the grotesque as excessive, and known only in opposition to a norm at a particular historical moment, is still useful in tracing how particular bodies become normalized and

excluded.

The grotesque body, known only in relation to the norm that it exceeds, is "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple and changing..." (Russo 1994:8). The grotesque body, or *grotto*-esque, evokes the image of a cave, where a cave is "[!]ow, hidden, earthy, dark, material, immanent, visceral...[and] tends to look like...the cavernous anatomical female body" (Russo 1994:1).

And so, an unattended to (and possibly unconscious) suppression of the imperfections and excesses of human bodies in Euro-North American art has developed the concept of an *ideal body*, which draws upon Greek mythology. I will be drawing heavily upon Davis' (1995) work here.

The poetic-mythico ideal body in art is built upon the notion of a divine body, a body that cannot be attained by humans who are imperfect. A divine body, whether sculpted or painted, is composed of many ideal parts taken from non-worldly models like, the Greek goddesses Venus, Helen of Troy or Aphrodite (ibid. 1995). Davis (1995) draws upon the story of Zeuxis' process of painting Aphrodite, as told by Pliny, to further this point: "When Zeuxis painted his version of Aphrodite, he constructed her from the parts of five beautiful women of his town of Kroton. His vision of the wholeness of Aphrodite was really an assemblage of unrelated parts" (137). If the body in art is not attainable by anyone here on earth, then our material bodies on earth are positioned as less than the ideal. But, as Davis (1995) points out, during the time of Classical painting and sculpture there was "no demand that the populations have bodies that conform to the ideal" (25). Today, however, social pressures imposed upon many of us, and our internalization of these pressures, tells us that many of us can attain the ideal through consumption, as well as medical, technological advancements.

Presently speaking, the ideal female body, and there are slight variations, has emerged in Euro-North America and remains to be white, young, blonde, blue-eyed, slim, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, well-to-over-endowed and anatomically female. This particular socio-cultural *ideal* is well captured and re/produced through Barbie and actresses/models Pamela Anderson and Anna Nicole Smith. Our present-day *ideal* is not an absolute because not all well known and admired women in popular culture *fit* all of the measurements/categories of Pamela, Barbie or Anna Nicole.

However, the ideal I describe here still filters in popular culture as the type of body all women should desire to have, and from which we are often measured.

At the same time, many women also internalize, to varying degrees, this ideal. In today's context of dieting, cosmetic surgery and exercising, many women and men are disciplining and regulating their/our bodies to the extent that a slender body, re-made with the help of medicine and technology, has become a powerful social norm:

...[the] preoccupation with fat, diet, and slenderness...may function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining 'docile bodies' sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of these norms (186).

I do not mean to say that my constitution of the ideal woman is an absolute; rather, I mean to say that my point is exemplified by the growing number of women who do have surgical cosmetic procedures performed on their bodies so they can re-sculpt and improve their lacking, insufficient bodies and produce better, perfect, ideal⁹ bodies. Breast enlargements, liposuction, face lifts, calf implants, and now vaginal rejuvenation (to produce a less stretched labia and a smaller, tighter vaginal opening usually enlarged after childbirth) are becoming more affordable to middle-class women and as such are enabling women to re-form their bodies into perfect bodies. Since 1992, plastic surgery procedures have tripled despite the health risks of (silicon) breast implants; and out of those who are having breast implants, 78% of these women are white¹⁰. The ideal has now become the (surgically achievable) norm.

What needs to be pointed out in the context of beauty is how the slender ideal body erases racial, ethnic, class, gender and ability differences that would disrupt "Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual expectations and identifications" (Bordo 1993:24-25). As

⁹ I say *ideal* because having a small waistline and large bust line like Pamela Anderson, or Barbie, is not anatomically likely.

¹⁰ "Breast Obsession: The Special", City TV's *SeX* TV, re-broadcasted September 11, 1999.

Bordo (1993) questions, "Are diverse ethnic and racial styles of beauty asserting their 'differences' through such surgery? Far from it. Does anyone in this culture have his or her nose reshaped to look more 'African' or 'Jewish'?" (25).

Diaspora Bodies

As white, female, able bodies re-emerge in feminist writing and art, at the same time bodies that are absent or re-marginalized in feminist re-writings of the body are diaspora bodies. Diaspora bodies, when re-presented by anti-racist and post-colonial writers, are always already dispersed, dislocated bodies and identities, often framed within the following concepts: *hybridity* (Bhabha 1996), *diaspora* (Gilroy 1991), *borderland identities* (Anzaldúa 1987), and *thirdspace* (Soja 1996).

One way in which diaspora bodies are framed in the context of Britain is as bodies and practices of black people who define themselves through "a complex combination of resistances and negotiations" where self-definition and cultural expressions, which are mediated by *both* the immediate history of the Colonial Empire and colonization in the Caribbean, Africa and Indian subcontinent and also histories of Afro-American and the Caribbean, "draw [up]on a plurality of black histories and politics" (Gilroy 1991:155-6). Diaspora, then, may be framed as dispersed bodies that embody histories of slavery, colonialism and the reclamation of past histories in tension with the enforcement of normalcy—whiteness.

In Buseje Bailey's (1992) visual/written piece, entitled "Opening Up To a Lot of Pain", she is exploring what it is "to be an African-Canadian-artist-woman and an advocate of feminist politics"(90). This piece is a personal visual representation of her body in relation to postmodern discourse on issues of race, gender, location, space and mainstream art practices (Bailey 1992). For her, experiences of slavery and colonialism are passed on generation to generation, which reinforces diaspora Africans as having had no past before slavery:

Putting myself on the line in this work has opened me up to a lot of pain, pain that I have buried deep, deep inside my soul. Pain that I've inherited from my parents through slavery and colonialism, and them through theirs. We've lost a homeland, our names and languages. ...We never own, or

are in charge of media or institutions of change. Therefore, we are unable to purge our race of this legacy. So we continue to pass the effects of shame and domination down from one generation to the next (ibid.:90).

Bailey (1992) refuses to be silenced by people and institutions who want to silence the plights of her ancestors and who also want her to lose her African appearance: "But everyone wants to make me over, to make me acceptable, to teach me how to speak, how to dress, how to lighten my skin, to lose my African appearance. Well all this make over still doesn't work. I am still African" (90). Who are these people and institutions that want to make her over and make her forget? How are these wants enforced in daily practices?

I am not saying that there are no white feminist writers and artists critiquing norms; many white feminist, marxist and queer writers and artists are calling into question the absence of different body sizes, *vêtements*, shapes, material differences and sexualities. Instead, I argue that women of colour become re-marginalized again in most mainstream feminist work, which has been dominated by white women. It can also be argued that heterosexual assumptions have dominated the gendered theorizations of most feminist work, thereby marginalizing differences in sexual identities¹¹.

For example, much feminist psychoanalytic analyses tend to privilege sexual difference over other *differences* by arguing that *other* differences are derived from sexual difference (Butler 1993). In privileging sexual difference over *other* differences, an analysis on how race works with and through sexuality and gender becomes negated and pushed to the sidelines. As hooks (1992) points out regarding mainstream feminist film criticism, there is no acknowledgement of black female spectatorship, especially when ahistorical psychoanalytical frameworks privilege sexual difference between white men and women and, at the same time, negate discussions of racial difference and of racialized sexual difference (123). Here is an example to contextualize this debate.

¹¹ Thanks, Kathleen Rockhill, for making me aware of this exclusion.

The Exclusion of Race within Gender and Drag Analyses

Butler's (1993) work on sex/gender debates attempts to resist the assumption that gender emerges from a fixed, natural, static sexed body, an assumption predicated upon a pre-social body that is then socially inscribed, as Foucault (1977/79; 1980) argues in his earlier work. For her, the body—its ontology—is always in production and circulation through the repetition of performance.

Butler (1993) attempts to disclose that sex is not a given, natural attribute but is also socially constructed as is gender. Through the performance of gender, the binary of sex/gender is constituted and reiterated such that the illusion of two normative sexes (male and female marked by material differences) and two normative genders (masculine and feminine emerging from a fixed, sexed body) becomes re-solidified and *appears* natural (Butler 1993).

To flesh out her argument a bit more, bodies are marked through institutionalized discursive practices that set up and re/produce a natural category of sex and its *regulatory ideal* (male/female), a category that produces, circulates, regulates and constrains the bodies it controls (Butler 1993:2). A *regulatory ideal* is re-inscribed as *natural* through highly regulated practices and performances that efface the constructed-ness or assumed inherent *naturalness* of social norms.

Performance—a set of actions—reiterates a norm or set of norms by enacting or producing that which it names, where naming is at once the *effect* of power, the “setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (1993:8). The process of iteration not only re-inscribes an ideal boundary (the heterosexual norm for example), through the inclusion of particular bodies as *culturally intelligible*, but also excludes particular bodies which become *culturally unintelligible*, also called abject or disavowed bodies (psychoanalytic terms).

Regarding the process of subjectivity, according to Butler (1993) the subject not only emerges through identification with the normative of sex but also through the dis-identification with disavowed bodies. Disavowed bodies, she argues, maintain normative boundaries through their exclusion, as well as threaten to disrupt the re-production of social norms (Butler 1993). Norms, however, cannot be fully realized

because bodies “never quite comply with the norms...” (Butler, 1993:2).

Furthermore, Butler (1993) puts forth the argument that it is *within* the spaces of exclusion, also framed as excess, that resistance can occur through performances carried out by unintelligible bodies. Thus, unintelligible bodies can reveal the instabilities, illusion or artifice of a normative boundary *and* disrupt social norms.

Further complicating the concept of performance are critiques of Butler's (1993) assumption/assertion that all drag performances are subversive. Butler (1993) positions *culturally unintelligible* body performances, like gay male drag, as performances that reveal the artifice of gender norms and can become a space for re-articulating gender. Gay drag destabilizes the boundaries of gender through ambiguity, Butler (1993) argues. What is lacking in her argument, though, is the necessary grounding of bodies in their historical and socio-economic realities, which are immersed in power relations, colonialism and capitalism. Repositioning bodies in their differentially located everyday realities reveals that not all acts of drag are subversive on the same level (Fusco 1995; hooks 1992).

An example is in the film Paris Is Burning (Livingstone 1992). This documentary-like black and white film chronicles the lives of black and latino men who perform drag at Balls in New York City, circa the middle to late 1980s. Within the context of this film, hooks (1992) argues that black male gender blending and bending have “always been a critique of phallogentric masculinity in traditional black experience”, but when the construction of *feminine* is informed by the representation of whiteness as the “crucial experience of female impersonation as gender...” the subversive power of black male gender b(l)ending is altered (147).

When thinking about acts of subversion, what needs to be taken into consideration is the social location of those who are framed as *subverting*. In the context of dominant Euro-North American culture appropriating a marginalized community or society's language, dress, art, and food, for example, Fusco (1995) contests the categorization of this act as subversive. When dominant culture appropriates marginalized communities' cultural productions, this appropriative act—assumed to be creative and transformative—is defended by the liberal notion of *free will* or the avant-garde's defense of *aesthetic freedom* (67). What's removed from this liberal

position, Fusco (1995) argues, is the historical context of dominant society's history of appropriation and how its role in colonial enterprise and nationalism is masked.

I became acutely aware of the negation of non-white bodies in the visual work of a white, self-identified lesbian photographer during a practice interview. Some of her visual-textual works that I had seen before deal with tensions between desiring something/one, actualizing those desires and the commodification of desires, where desires can speak to heterosexual and queer desires. Bodies that were present in these works were of white female bodies (her friends and lovers). Before I asked a particular question, I verbalized that I recognize the visual re-presentation of lesbian bodies by lesbian artists is rather new, for throughout western art lesbians making images of lesbians for lesbians has not been widely known nor practiced (Kiss & Tell 1994). However, when I asked her which bodies are absent in her images as she is representing white lesbian bodies and desires, she replied: "I am not interested in representing all bodies; if I wanted to do that then I would go out and find those bodies"¹². What struck me about this conversation later on was, How was she thinking about race? Is race to be discussed only by people who experience racism? Can't white women also talk about race through their/our (everyday) privileges of being perceived as white?

I would like to make another point. What becomes excluded in discourses on race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and gender—be they from positions of marginality or privilege—is disabled bodies, bodies not thought of nor seen in society as whole but as missing something: limbs, reason, intelligence, humanity. I would now like to turn to how the normalization of able-bodies privileges and rewards able-bodies in this society. It is through my limited readings on disability discourse, specifically on physical impairments, that I began my shift from how identities are mapped onto bodies towards how the normalization of everyday social practices excludes bodies labelled, mapped as disabled.

¹² Personal discussion with anonymous photographer, August 1999. She did not become one of the two photographers I interviewed for my master's research.

Disability: Segregation/Absence and Dependency

Hevey's (1992) book, The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery, is one of a few books published to date that deals with disability imagery and possible alternatives. This book sets out to render visible some hidden historical, socio-economic relationships of power imbedded both in disability images (in the four-corners of an image) and behind the scenes of these images (the material and socio-cultural production processes).

Hevey (1992) begins by putting forward a complicated dilemma: How can people begin to determine their own self-image and how do you translate this into photographic images? In the latter part of his book are images he took in an attempt to create non-medical, non-tragic disability imagery that maps a physical impairment onto a body. Rather, he sets out to offer images of physically impaired people who have been historically observed and who are beginning to do their own observing (1992:6).

Disability: Separating the Physical from Social

Hevey (1992) argues that the category of disability has been constantly located exclusively on/in the body and not with/in the respective environment. Drawing upon the work of Oliver (1990) and Finkelstein (1980), Hevey (1992) conceptually differentiates physical impairment from disability: impairment is physical, the body; disability is social (also known as the body politic).

Impairment: Lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body.

Disability: The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities (Oliver 1990 cited in Hevey 1992).

By separating the physical from the social, by re-framing disability as a social construction based on the restriction of access, Oliver (1990), Finkelstein (1980) and Hevey (1992) can trace how socio-economic relationships influenced the segregation

and absence of people with physical impairments in Euro-North American society. Before tracing Oliver (1990) and Finkelstein's (1980) work in Hevey (1992), I would like to elaborate on how separating physical impairment and disability opens up another way of thinking about disability: as a continuum of differently abled bodies and practices.

Disability as a Continuum

Davis (1995) attempts to expand the concept of *disability* by arguing that the category *disabled* tends to obscure and repress how this category also includes *normal* people. He first asks, What makes up the category disabled? People who are blind, deaf, intellectually challenged, use wheelchairs and have prosthetics (Davis 1995)? However, what if we were to include people with learning impairments like dyslexia and disease-generating disabilities like HIV/AIDS, arthritis, cancer, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol; people who have had strokes, heart attacks; and people with depression, chronic fatigue? As well, as we all become older we will find that our mobility, sight, hearing, taste, intellect and touch will diminish. Thus, it can be argued, we all have some level(s) of physical impairment.

Davis' (1995) interrogation of the category *disability* questions and expands the assumed rigidity of the social category of disability to include various types of physical impairments. How I interpret his interrogation is that by broadening the category of disability to include a multiplicity of physical impairments, perhaps Davis (1995) is trying to make *able-bodied* people—a concept now questionable—aware of our/their close proximity to issues surrounding disability rights and discriminations. And by extension, by re-conceptualizing dis-ability as a continuum of differently abled bodies and practices the seemingly expansive gap, a gap rooted in relations of production, between people labelled disabled and people invisibly labelled able-bodied may shrink.

Industrialization and Institutionalization

Hevey (1992) first outlines Oliver's (1990) tracing of three implicit and historical theories of disability, which mostly focuses on western industrialized countries/nations. Firstly, in societies dominated by religion or magic, impairment may have been thought of as a

punishment by god(s) or evil magic. Secondly, probably drawing from Victor Turners' work on liminality, long-term physically impaired bodies were thought of as perpetually in a state of suspension, not either in or outside of society and neither dead nor alive. Instead, being in a state of suspension, physically impaired bodies were thought of as warped bodies not fully human. And, lastly, in societies struggling with economic survival there is the *surplus population thesis*. The surplus population thesis, Hevey (1992) argues, underpins the personal tragedy view of disability whereby weak, impaired, old people were seen as unproductive and threatening to a society's survival and so they were left to die or be killed at birth (13).

For Hevey (1992), Oliver's (1990) work is more anthropological, focusing on society's *thought systems* that have conceptualized people with physical impairments as disabled. Oliver's (1990) work, Hevey argues, can not attend to nor explain how our society has created boundaries around, and denied access to, people with physical impairments. Instead, Hevey wants to explore and trace how socio-economic relationships within society have segregated people with physical impairments. This is when he turns to the work of Finkelstein (1980).

Hevey sets out to trace Finkelstein's (1980) historical-materialist exploration of the three historical phases of disability. During the first phase, the feudal, pre-Industrial Revolution period, "the systematic social exclusion of impaired people from economic production had not yet begun" at that time (cited in Hevey 1992:14). What needs to be recognized during that time period is that as a social group physically impaired people were not segregated from society, nor was their social status (as institutionalized or receiving/dependent upon social services) comparable or recognizable to today's social status (Hevey 1992). At that time, physically impaired people existed at the lower end of the economic scale, as is similar today; however, a difference between then and now is physically impaired people were part of a "broad oppressed layer...[which consisted of] low-paid workers, the out-of-work, the mentally ill, and so on, and there were broad overlaps within this group" (Hevey 1992:14-15).

The second phase glides into the growth of the Industrial Revolution when able-bodied norms begin to appear as production lines, with their new technology and increasing size, became *geared* toward able-bodies. As the body of the industrial

worker—a body disciplined, regulated and standardized through production processes—becomes tied to productivity (Davis 1995), and as *time-as-money* begins to dominate and normalize industrial ideology, bodies that could not *produce* were excluded from the labour force.

Concomitantly, the emergence of asylums and institutions began to grow. Asylums and institutions were set up to deal with the "growing destitution of those with impaired labour power" (Hevey 1992:15). Two types of non-labourers were demarcated by charities at that time: there were the *deserving* poor and there were the *undeserving* poor. People who could not work in the growing production lines were considered deserving, and those *presumed* idle but able to work were considered undeserving. Thus, Hevey (1992) argues, as that particular historical moment/shift emerged, physically impaired people became segregated from a work-based society and placed into needs-based institutions, whereby these institutions re/produce the notion of dependency.

Needing specialists and professionals to work at these institutions, the gaze and power of these professionals developed into a *cure-or-care* ideology because it was presumed that impaired people, now grouped as disabled, needed to be re-adjusted so that they could become *labourer-givers* and/or survive (Hevey 1992). From asylums to hospitals, clinics and segregated schools, a growth of professions emerged: occupational therapists, social workers, counsellors, physiotherapists and so on (Hevey 1992). This vast institutional and professional sector, supported by social science research, depends upon the re/production of the view that physically impaired people are dependent upon these institutions¹³. A vicious circle now feeds itself.

In the third phase, happening now, a shift is set to occur as our society heads into the *electronic age*. As society shifts from large-scale industrial manufacturing technology and moves towards more electronic-based technologies, new relationships between *disabled* people and society will emerge as physically impaired people become re-integrated into society because, as Finkelstein (1980) argues, even the most impaired person can operate these new technological environments (in Hevey 1992).

¹³ Thank you, Kathleen Rockhill, for clarifying this argument.

The works of Oliver and Finkelstein, argues Hevey (1992), have separated how medical professions and social sciences have collapsed and mapped disability and impairment onto bodies through a re-framing of disability as socially created. As I state above, separating disability from bodies enables an analysis of how socio-economic systems have played a role in segregating and restricting/denying access to bodies viewed as disabled. ...

An Interrupting Post-Script, December 2001

Early November, 2001. A letter from the Research and Awards Committee offers me a web publication possibility: "We are pleased to inform you that your major paper has passed the first level of approval for the Faculty of Environmental Studies Outstanding Graduate Paper Series". Public recognition for an otherwise solitary and isolating research, writing and overall degree earning experience. Criteria: particular font type and size, spacing and margins. Length of submission: 8000 words. My major paper length: 49 076. Only a fragment of my work, a chapter and who I am now as written in my post-script can be submitted, read.

Fragmented thoughts. Fragmented pages. Fragmented growth.

Two years have passed. Two years since I last wrote and read this piece. Two years.

I re-read and re-edit the final version that sits and collects dust on the shelves in the Resource Centre of the Faculty of Environmental Studies.

I re-read and become further separated from this piece: the abstract, heady, disembodied jargon-filled sentences push me further away.

I re-read and questions, dialogues dance and collide in my mind: Where is MY body in this text? Where is MY voice in this text? Where am I?

Flesh-less, bone-less

empty pages,

words

fill these pages filled with nothing

something

I ask these interconnected questions as I presently work through my doctoral thesis proposal. You see, I raced into my doctoral programme in the Department of Adult Education and Community Development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), in downtown Toronto, Canada soon after I finished my Master in Environmental Studies (MES) degree at York University, in a northern part of Toronto. I differentiate these locations, these universities for a reason—geography, space make a difference to my body.

In the isolating, self-contained and crammed York campus it is difficult to hide

from, to be invisible to the hordes of people filling and overflowing the halls and lane ways of York. My way to hide, to be invisible was to move outside of my body. More room to breathe. More space. I wasn't my self.

Inside my body is just as isolating, just as self-contained, just as crammed as York campus.

To move inward was to suffocate.

I wasn't my self.

My MES thesis reflects my bodily disassociation. I wrote about *the body* without my body being present, alive and breathing in my text. Disassociated from the flesh and bones of my interior body so that I could survive the crowded-ness, the noise, the rush didn't allow me to move into my writing, didn't allow me to be present in my text. Plenty of /'s scatter the pages, but my body—my I—is not present; there is an absence within the assumed presence of writing with an /.

Moving downtown, weaving through the hustle and bustle of downtown Toronto, I am thrown into my body, shoved into the interior space of my flesh and bones because I can find small, quiet spaces within the chaos of downtown. Although OISE exists for the most part within one tall building, I can leave this building and enter other worlds.

boundaries collide

disrupt

rip me

open

At York University, exiting a building leaves me still inside campus: an island-like existence separated from the rest of Toronto; it's a long walk to re-entry. Exiting the OISE building leads me to anywhere downtown, anywhere I wish to go. My new campus exceeds boundaries by spilling into other spaces, by bumping into other communities: the Annex, Yorkville, Rosedale, Korean Business Centre, Chinatown, Little Italy, Kensington Market.

The closeness of these spaces and communities, the blurring of community boundaries opens me up to confusion, ambiguity, fluidity...possibilities because I am within this mess, within this chaos.

I can smell it, touch it, see it, hear it, be it. I can't run away, I can't hide, I can't disappear from this mess and chaos because I am this mess and chaos. I am a part of it all.

musty
moist
congested streets
stain my skin
burn my nostrils
seal my eyes
tickle my ears

I can't get away from it, from the mess and chaos of downtown Toronto. So the way in which I live inside all of this, survive all of this is to feel it, allow myself to feel it by turning inward, by folding within my body. And it is through the possibility of turning inward, the possibility of folding within and staying there to cradle my inner self, that I am capable of writing myself into my texts, into my words because I am more awake, more aware, more sentient, more sensual, more present in my layered body, my layered senses, my layered writings, my layered selves

to sense
beyond boundaries, beyond five senses
arouses within me
textures, desires always there, unknown before
now
awakened

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