Queer Interventions

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Somatechnics
Queering the Technologisation of Bodies

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ASHGATE
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Bernard Stiegler prefaces the first volume of his five-volume opus *Technics and Time* with two bold assertions. Firstly, that ‘the object of this work is a technics, apprehended as the horizon of all possibility to come and of all possibility of a future’ (*Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, ix). Secondly, that ‘technics is the unthought’ (ix). We might preface this remarkable volume of essays edited by Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray by confidently proclaiming that, firstly, the critical project of this work is a somatechnics, apprehended as the horizon of all possibility to come – for a queer ethico-practico-politics and a new philosophical orientation – and of all possibility for a future – for a queer somapolitics knotting self, others and world. And, secondly, that somatechnics is – or rather was – the unthought. *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologisation of Bodies* mobilises a technological turn in and of queer studies, or better, a technological twist, since the body and technology are shown to have been always already mutually interdependent, woven through each other. The editors and the authors continually remind us that there is not soma or bios plus techné and that neither has any prior or originary status. The body (and gender) are only ever illusorily pre-technological and, this is less acknowledged, technology never precedes the soma. As David Wills puts it in *Dorsality: Thinking Back Through Technology and Politics*, a project which has much in concert with the present collection, ‘at a moment in which the human appears to be moving inexorably forward toward a biotechnological future, it is strategically important to recognise – to be cognizant in return of – the fact of a relation between bios and tekhné so complex and so historic that any presumption of the priority of one over the other can be sustained only by means of an appeal to a metaphysics of creation’ (5). Somatechnics, a constellatory critical neologism cognisant of the mutual enfleshment of technologies and technologisation of embodied subjectivities, enacts a double process. Stiegler would call this a ‘double plasticity’, an awareness of the ways in which the technological (the object) and the body (the human or nonhuman) are (in)formed of and by the other. Queering somatechnics alerts us to this world formation, to the somatechnical assemblages which bind us and the social world together. Of course, as the contributors admit, such processes should not always be viewed as equipollent. Somatechnologies harbour possibilities for disruptions, counter-actualisations, destabilisations and for the creation of new selves, affinities, kinship relations, and cultural possibilities. Yet, they also contain within them the danger of
being reterritorialised, of being dammed up by various apparatuses of capture – the state, the body politic, the nation, heteronormativity, neoliberalism. That technics are both inclusionary and exclusionary makes the project of queering, of the double plasticity, so pressing.

The essays in this collection make clear that somatechnologies are heterogeneous, with both emancipatory and deleterious effects. There are somatechnologies of suffering, disease, the public sphere, improper corporealities, sex trafficking, stem cell technoscience, intersex surgery, circumcision, transsexuality, cinema, gender, the banded body, body modification, dance, and crystal meth. On the one hand there are somatechnologies in the service of regimes of normalisation (such as law or medicine), of the regulation of improper, inappropriate, unviable bodies and lives. On the other, there are somatechnologies which queer (or crip) the idea(l) of normalcy, integrity and which pay attention to the always already tornness and incoherence of the so-called proper, sovereign, ipso-phallic self. If, like Steinbock, we are reading ‘cinematically’ and are alert to the technologies of the cut and the edit, we will see that there are also somatechnologies of liminal bodies or threshold lives, disposable bodies which Giorgio Agamben designates as inhabiting a state of exception called ‘bare life’. The queer dispositifs the authors anatomise offer routes of escape, Deleuzian lines of flight, create spaces which are open and permeable, where ‘new forms of social connectivity as well as new forms of embodied subjectivity, can begin to be articulated’. This queer political imperative is called ‘mayhem’ by Stryker and Sullivan, an anarchic act which is invested in new ‘manners and forms of living’, new ‘somatechnical assemblages’, new ‘forms of social relationality’ which challenge the coercive hold of biopower, biopolitics (and even necropower) over our anatomopolitical existence.

Sullivan and Stryker announce that our ‘bodily being-in-the-world is always a somatechnic event’. This truism may sound obvious but in order to appear in a world, a subject must have a body and to live is, the ‘somatechnicians’ who write here tell us, to commit oneself to the disruptive implications of a somatechnical event which allows that which has hitherto, to follow Badiou in ‘What is it to Live?’ his conclusion to Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II, ‘inexisted’ (or been out of place) to appear instead as ‘maximally intense’ (507). To live, the Foucauldian ‘art of living’, (un)becoming, Heideggerian poiesis, means to subordinate oneself to the discipline of the new and emergent somatechnological body of truth, to recognise that the bringing forth of such a body must proceed, as Badiou says, sequentially, ‘point by point’ (508), and to appreciate that the formation of such a body has no necessity other than its own determination to create and impose itself. This creative self-imposition, guaranteeing the efficacy of a body, is where we can foster new possibilities, potentialise alternative materialisations of the body, continually create and reconstruct, and ‘search for new conditions’. As Badiou forcefully
asserts, ‘we are open to the infinity of worlds. To live is possible. Therefore, to (re)commence to live is the only thing that matters’ (514).

Our ‘originary technicity’ has been much discussed in the philosophical tradition which subtends the critical project this book inaugurates. For Jean-Francois Lyotard, in *The Inhuman*, “life”, as they say, is already technique’ (52). For Jacques Derrida, in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ‘at the origin there is technics’ (248). In Derrida’s writings on both Jean-Luc Nancy and Stiegler, he takes up the questions of originary technicity, technics and ‘technical prosthetics’, but particularly in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* he extends the idea of writing as *archi-écriture* and *techné* to think the ‘body proper’ (or the proper body) as originary implicated in the interconnections of technical supplementarity. Here, Derrida comes close to Nancy’s own writing on what he calls ‘ecotechnics’. In *Corpus* (which it would repay to read alongside the present volume), Nancy writes, ‘unless we ponder without reservation the ecotechnical creation of bodies as the truth of our world, and a truth just as valid as those that myths, religions, and humanisms were able to represent, we won’t have begun to think this very world’ (*Corpus*, 89). As Nancy understands it, ecotechnics, that which allows us to begin to think this world here, in a radicalisation or queering of Martin Heidegger, describes the manner in which the body emerges as a locus of interconnection, originarily inserted into a technical environment, always already foreign to itself. Ecotechnics deviates from an essentialised or proper (pretechnical body) not to make of the body a technical object. Rather, Nancy’s disoriginating move – which perhaps approaches an *ecosomatechnics* – is to demonstrate an originary technicity operative in the coming into appearance of bodies in the world. Similarly, Sullivan and Murray disclose that there is not just an originary technicity but also an originary somaticisation of the technological object. Their queer intervention, the space they open for us in a deft disoriginating move, is to begin to think an *originary somatechnicity*.

Michael O’Rourke and Noreen Giffney
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The history of Western thought is, as Elizabeth Grosz and others have argued convincingly and at length, subtended by ‘a profound somatophobia’ (1994: 1). From the Ancient Greeks, through Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, Hobbes, and so on, to the common-sense fictions that shape contemporary life, the body has been conceived (and thus constituted) as a natural, biological entity, the fleshly shell of a soul, a self, and/or a mind that is superior to it. Given its status as both prison – or dungeon (sēma) – and property, the brute matter of the body (as object) is conceived as that which the subject must transcend, transform, master. There have, of course, been various challenges posed, particularly from the mid-twentieth century on, to the kind of determinism associated with this model of the body, the self, and the relation between them, but all too often such attempts reiterate – albeit inadvertently – a sort of naïve materialism in which ‘the body’ appears as a fleshly substrate that simply is prior to or in excess of its regulation. This is particularly apparent in dominant conceptions of, and debates about, ‘technology’.

For example, for many second-wave feminists, female biology and women’s reproductive roles (at least as they were commonly conceived and lived) play an integral role in gender inequality. As such, the aim of much second-wave feminist work was to devise ways for women to transcend and/or transform female embodiment and the allegedly oppressive practices to which it seemed inextricably linked. In The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution, Shulamith Firestone (in)famously argued that women must transcend their ‘sex’ and free themselves ‘from the tyranny of reproduction’ (1970: 238) in order to participate fully and equally in public and political life. And this, she asserted, could best be achieved by technological means or ‘cybernetic socialism’ (1970: 238). For Firestone, then, the answer to the problem of ‘biology’ or soma, lay in the development of seemingly neutral technologies that would enable extra-uterine gestation. In freeing women from their biology such technologies would, Firestone argued, undermine the forms of social life organised around biological reproduction and thus make possible alternative forms of relations and relationality. Whilst the specifics of Firestone’s utopian vision may be somewhat dated, it is nevertheless true to say that this utopian view of technology as a neutral tool separate from the self, which, if deployed correctly, will enable us to
fully realise our true potential, is everywhere apparent in contemporary Western culture and in fact, works hand in hand with the logic of consumer capitalism. One of its most recent manifestations is the work of those who identify as transhumanists, extropians, and/or techno-progressivists.\(^1\)

On the other hand, anti-technology radical feminists – or, as some might call them, bio-conservatives – such as Gena Corea (1986), Renate Klein (1987), Maria Mies (1987), Janice Raymond (1993), Robyn Rowland (1992) and Sheila Jeffreys (2005), have fiercely challenged the idea of technology as a neutral tool of transcendence and/or self-realisation, arguing that reproductive technologies, sex reassignment procedures, cosmetic surgeries, and so on, are, by definition, tools of patriarchy which function (at the level of the body) to ensure women's servitude. Similarly, although often for significantly different political reasons, technologies such as blood transfusion\(^2\) and euthanasia\(^3\) have been considered by some to impinge on the sanctity of life, on the ‘natural’ if you like, whilst sex assignment (intersex) surgeries and infant circumcision are regarded by those opposed to their practice as normalising technologies that function to the detriment of those whose (‘natural’) bodies are transformed (or, more specifically, mutilated) often without their consent.\(^4\) What becomes apparent when one looks closely at such wide-ranging debates, is that even in the work of theorists who have a nuanced understanding of the complex and often contradictory ways in which corporealities are formed and transformed, particular technologies tend to be demonised whilst others are constituted (often by their very absence) as qualitatively different and heterogeneous in their effects. This is particularly true in feminist accounts of cosmetic surgery as a singular, monolithic, definable, phenomenon.\(^5\)

Much poststructuralist writing has attempted to problematise the conception of technology as either good or bad, neutral and open or wholly determined, arguing instead that ‘technology’ is not a transcendental signifier, a monolithic cultural object or force whose essence is innate and knowable, nor is it simply a tool or object separate from the subject who then deploys it to particular ends. Technologies, as writers as diverse as Donna Haraway (1990), Anne Balsamo


\(^2\) For a discussion of the refusal of blood transfusions and transplants from a religious perspective, see Sarteschi (2004).

\(^3\) See, for example, Sullivan (2005).


\(^5\) See Tong and Lindemann (2005) for an overview of the positions on cosmetic surgery taken by feminists.
INTRODUCTION

(1995), Teresa de Lauretis (1987), Michel Foucault (1980; also see Martin, 1988), Judith Butler (1993), Bernard Stiegler (2002; 2008) and N. Katherine Hayles (1999) – to mention just a few – have clearly shown, are heterogeneous in their histories, their uses, and their effects, and, perhaps more important still, are thoroughly embedded in contextually specific cultural processes. Anna Munster, for example, argues that technologies are ‘always in a dynamic relation to the matter which gives [them their] substance and to the other machines – aesthetic, social, economic – which substantiate [them] as … ensemble[s]’ (1999: 121). Further, insofar as technologies are always already inextricably bound up with systems of power/knowledge, they do not stand outside the subject, but rather, are constitutive of the very categories integral to the construction of embodied subjectivities, categories ‘such as the real, the natural and the body, which remain the bedrock of humanist forms of feminism’ (Munster, 1999: 122). Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert make a similar point when they write: ‘technologies, as organised systems, produce a range of products, effects, representations, and artefacts, chief among them … what we could call technologies of gender, race, and sexuality’ (1997: 5).

In short, then, what has begun to emerge in and through critiques of popular common-sense understandings of the body, technology, and the relation between them, is the notion of a chiasmatic interdependence of soma and techné: of bodily-being (or corporealities) as always already technologised, and technologies as always already enfleshed. And here technologies are never simply ‘machinic’ as they so often appear to be in the popular imagination. Rather, technés are necessarily epistemic: as Lily Kay puts it, ‘Technology and theory generate each other, epistemic things become technical things and vice versa’ (2000: 36).

In late 2004, a group of academics centrally involved in the Body Modification: Changing Bodies, Changing Selves international conference (2003), and the Body Modification Mark II international conference (2005), coined the term ‘somatechnics’ in an attempt to highlight the inextricability of soma and techné, of ‘the body’ (as a culturally intelligible construct) and the techniques (dispositifs and ‘hard technologies’) in and through which corporealities are formed and transformed. This term, derived from the Greek σῶμα (body) and τέχνη (craftsmanship), supplants the logic of the ‘and’, suggesting that technés are not something we add or apply to the body, nor are they tools the embodied self employs to its own ends. Rather, technés are the dynamic means in and through which corporealities are crafted, that is, continuously engendered in relation to others and to a world. As such, the term reflects contemporary poststructuralist understandings of embodiment as the incarnation or materialisation of historically and culturally specific discourses and practices, as fundamentally inter-corporeal, (trans)formative and ethico-political. Interestingly, techné was conceived by Socrates (in Plato’s Ion) as a threat to peace, order and good
government. Similarly, in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, Heidegger argues that techné, ‘belongs to bringing forth … it reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us’ (1977: 295). This collection attempts to mobilise this term in order to do just that, to queer order and good government, to bring to light the operations of power that shape corporealities and that are often so naturalised as to be almost invisible.

Much of the research undertaken under the umbrella of somatechnics to date could be said to share political, ethical, epistemological, and methodological commitments with what is currently referred to as queer theory and/or practice. Queer, at least as we understand it, is a heterogeneous and multidisciplinary practice aimed at ‘bringing forth’ and thus denaturalising the taken for granted, the invisiblised, the normalised; in short, the dispositifs or technés of (necessarily material) (un)becoming. Somatechnics could likewise be conceived as a form of ethico-political critical practice (rather than a definable, circumscribable discipline, field of study, or methodology). However, at the same time, the term somatechnics is used by the contributors to this volume to refer to the operations of power that are the subject of critical practice. In other words, one of the things that distinguishes this particular deployment of somatechnics from much of what passes as queer practice is a foregrounding of the ‘doubleness’ of techné as simultaneously constitutive and critical, as the dynamic materialisation of becoming and unbecoming.

Whilst there is an awareness in much queer theory of the limits of presupposing the definability of the counter-hegemonic, it has nevertheless been the case historically that some practices (SM, for example) have been conceived – at least implicitly – by queer theorists and practitioners as ‘more queer’ than others (for example, parenting). The implication is thus that those associated with the former are ‘more queer’ than those associated with the latter. This is partly because despite the call for ‘desexualization’ (Foucault, 1980), queerness has, in much queer theory, been inextricably linked to what is commonly understood as ‘the sexual’. Given queer theory’s historical roots this is, in one sense, understandable. However, it is this knotty association of queer with ‘the sexual’, or more specifically, with sexual practices and identities conceived as counter-hegemonic that, in our opinion, limits some of the interventions practiced under the banner of queer. Consequently, one of the things that differentiates this collection from most anthologies that use the term ‘queer’ in the title, is that many of the articles herein do not focus primarily on matters narrowly conceived as sexual. Nevertheless, we suggest that each constitutes an ethico-political intervention that queers the somatechnologies with which

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6 See, for example, Murray (2008); Osuri (2006); Mackenzie (2008); Sullivan (2009a; 2009b; 2007; 2006).
it engages in ways that are never distinct from ‘the sexual’ – whatever that may be. Each recognises that such interventions ‘ramify in an unimaginably large number of directions’ as, Michael Warner claims in Fear of A Queer Planet, do political struggles over sexuality (1993: xiii). Like Warner, the contributors to this collection are interested in the regulatory mechanisms, or technés, associated with the formation and transformation – the materialisation in and through bodies of flesh, knowledge, politic – of ‘gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, … consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy … truth and trust, … intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care …’ (Warner, 1993: xiii), and so on. However, unlike Warner we do not conceive the interventions contained here as evidence of the queer status of the work itself or of those who produce it; of the fact that ‘Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer’ (Warner, 1993: xiii). In short, then, insofar as this collection is informed by an ethico-political commitment to queer, its (hetero-generative) queering(s) of specific somatechnologies is simultaneously a queering of the somatechnics of queer.

Each of the chapters in this collection takes the constitutive relation implied by the term somatechnics as given, however, each tends to focus predominantly on or to foreground one aspect of the equation. Consequently, we have structured the collection to reflect these differences in foci, and have done so in such a way that the collection could be said to move from the macro structures of corporeal governance associated with social bodies such as the State (in Section One) through to the (en)gendering of (sexed) bodies and selves (Section Two), and finally, to the micro bodily practices conceived here as techniques of the self (in Section Three).

The chapters in Section One critically examine the co-constitutive effects and the tensions between social bodies and individual bodies, and in doing so could be said to queer the kinds of social imaginaries that are perhaps most apparent at the level of the macro. Each focuses on a particular idea(l) of the social body and traces its contradictory mobilsation in competing accounts of specific somatechnologies. In Chapter 1, Jessica Cadwallader interrogates the complex role of the dominant notion of suffering in the (trans)formation of the social body or body politic, as well as the body in/of medicine, queering the idea that suffering, which belongs to the realm of the ‘natural’, can and should be prevented in and through various technological interventions. In Chapter 2 Rosemary Betterton, like Cadwallader, raises the question of how invisible, unmarked and undeclared somatic norms operate in public life to shape not only individual bodies, but simultaneously the body of the nation. In her analysis of Alison Lapper Pregnant, Betterton argues that Lapper’s ‘disabled’, pregnant (female) body – a body out of place in Nirmal Puwar’s terms – queers the masculine and imperial domain of the nation and, simultaneously, reveals
its symbolic norms. This notion of improper, disruptive bodies, or bodies that can not be fully integrated into the (imaginary) body politic is further explored by Susan Stryker and Nikki Sullivan in Chapter 3. Via a discussion of transsexualism and self-demand amputation, Stryker and Sullivan develop an account of bodily integration and the somatechnologies that shape bodies such that they are able to be integrated as a biopolitical resources into a larger sociotechnical field, or apparatus such as the State. At the same time, they show that the integrity of the body – that is, the ability of the body to be integrated – is paradoxically dependent on its enfleshment as always already torn, rent, incomplete, and unwhole. Chapter 4 continues the theme of ‘wrong’ bodies and their relation to the body politic via an analysis of what Audrey Yue calls the somatechnologies of trafficking and queer mobilities. Beginning with the death in custody of Puangthong Simaplee, an illegal Thai sex worker who was placed in detention by the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Yue elaborates an account of ‘queer’ migration patterns which deviate from the white, heterosexual and family-centred norms that are promoted by the institution of immigration as necessary to good citizenship and desirable to national identity and/or for the health and well-being of the State.

Whilst one of the aims of the collection is to challenge the dominant critical approach to ‘queer’ by moving beyond a focus on sexual identities and practices, we nevertheless remain mindful of the critical history of queer theory, and its roots in feminist thought, and, more particularly, in Gay and Lesbian Studies and activism. This, in conjunction with a recognition of the centrality of technologies of sex and gender (de Lauretis) in the formation of bodies and selves, is reflected in Section Two of this collection. The four chapters in this section queer the normative idea(l)s that haunt our understandings of the ‘proper’ male and/or female body by each critically interrogating specific somatechnologies and their role in the (trans)formation of sex/gender. In Chapter 5 Robin Mackenzie queers rhetorical figurations constituting the somatechnics of stem cell technoscience, arguing that the gendered harvest of stem cell technoscience begins by delineating salient mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion. These technics, she suggests, rest upon and reproduce naturalised hierarchised categorisations purporting to be self-evident, but which are, in fact, an effect of the technologies which purport to merely describe them. In Chapter 6 Marie Fox and Michael Thomson queer(y) the histories, assumptions and structures that allow differential approaches to non-therapeutic and non-consensual genital surgeries on children, arguing that by literally inscribing particular identity(s) on the infant male body, circumcision, like intersex surgery, may be understood as a normalising somatechnology which validates particular corporeal interventions and particular sexed and embodied identities whilst constituting others as necessarily excluded or improper. The notion of exclusion is again taken up by Eliza Steinbock in Chapter 7. Like the other authors in this
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section, Steinbock does not call for the inclusion of (naturally) different bodies, but rather, elaborates a critical analysis of the somatechnological production of difference and the effects it produces, via the related notions of the cinematicity of transsexuality and the trans-somatechnics of cinema. In the final chapter in this section, Samantha Murray offers a critical account of the lived experience of gastric banding which aims to queer the size-specific notion of ‘health’, and the (en)gendering of normative bodies and forms of (hetero)sexual desire and relations associated with the somatechnics of bariatric (weight loss) surgery.

The third and final section of the book is dedicated to mapping a range of micro bodily practices or somatechniques of the self. The contributors herein are each concerned with foregrounding the self and the ways ‘queerness’ operates at the level of the subject. However, whilst discussing specific practices commonly regarded as ‘individual’, the chapters each demonstrate (as does the collection as a whole) the fundamental inextricability of self, others and a world. The section opens with Elizabeth Stephens’ comparative analysis of two accounts of technological self-(trans)formation, one written in the seventeenth, and the other in the twenty-first century. In both Bulwer’s and Braidotti’s texts, Stevens argues, the modified body is represented as monstrous, however, monstrosity – as the empty site onto which cultural anxieties are projected – is differently valued by the authors discussed, with the latter arguing, like Stephens, in favour of the monstrous body’s capacity for queering the somatechnologies associated with heteronormative (re)production. Chapter 10 further develops the kinds of claims made by Braidotti via an analysis of ‘non-mainstream’ body modification, deploying Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the Body Without Organs (BwO). But rather than suggesting – as so often is the case in accounts of ‘non-mainstream’ body modification – that such technologies are simply transgressive or liberatory, Matt Lodder elucidates the heterogenous effects produced through and by specific modificatory practices in a particular historico-cultural context. In Chapter 11, Philipa Rothfield develops a Nietzschean account of the dancing body and of dancerly technique as simultaneously a force against corporeal change and an incitement towards it. Focusing, as it does, on the ‘doubleness’ of this particular technology of the self, Rothfield’s chapter, like Lodder’s, performs a queering of ‘taste’, (im)propriety, and the forms of individual and social life shaped by such invisiblised idea(l)s. In the concluding chapter, Kane Race returns us to the concerns presented in the first section of the collection, via his consideration of the neoliberal state in his account of drug use. Race argues that whilst the use of ‘illicit’ drugs is perfectly intelligible within the neoliberal context as a mode of consumer pleasure, drug (ab)use is governed by a range of somatechnologies which, though waged in the name of safety, have consistently been shown to function at the expense of public health objectives and thus – albeit inadvertently – to queer the (presumed) body of the neoliberal state, its integrity if you like. Elaborating a Foucauldian
understanding of ‘bodies and pleasures’ and ‘care of the self’, Race thus proposes a ‘counterpublic health’ which at once troubles the neoliberal state and its ideal body and seeks to offer an effective approach to harm reduction which neither denigrates nor naively celebrates pleasure.

In the diversity of writings collected herein, the authors concede that the ethico-political critical practices in which they are engaged themselves contribute to the formation and transformation of bodies (of flesh, knowledge, politic) in hetero-generative and unpredictable ways: such theoretical contributions are themselves technés that are implicated in the materiality of everyday life in ways that are unpredictable and potentially boundless. As such, the varied and compelling arguments presented by the contributing authors in this collection – who write as ‘somatechnicians’ – constitute a series of queer interventions necessarily open to continual (re)evaluation, and modification, rather than static answers to circumscribable ‘problems’ which the authors and their engagements stand apart from or simply operate in opposition to.

References


INTRODUCTION


SECTION ONE
The Somatechnics of the Social Body
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Chapter 1
Diseased States:
The Role of Pathology in the (Re)Production of the Body Politic
Jessica Cadwallader

In cases of suffering, contemporary culture inundates us with cries to visit the doctor, to seek a cure, to find a way beyond this hideous state. Medicine offers a veritable arsenal of weapons for battling whatever it is that ails us, from pharmaceuticals through to major surgeries. Yet for the most part, medicine is thought of as a neutral form of knowledge, only ever describing the world the way it is, representing it, not participating in the terms of its construction. The term ‘somatechnics’ offers a unique way into thinking the cultural milieu, particularly the politics of embodiment. Conceiving of the body as always already shaped by its intertwining with technologies both hard and soft offers consideration of the connections that bind the social world together. It also, as I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, offers the means for interrogating the naturalisation of those experiences deemed to arise purely (preculturally) from the body, and the ways that these are transposed into other sites: into the imagining of the political corporation, in this case.

Suffering constitutes, perhaps, one of the experiences most readily imagined to be ‘purely’ bodily. Not-so-coincidentally, suffering finds itself at the heart of political concerns. Liberalism dresses suffering up as the more objective-sounding ‘harm’, and situates itself as the solution to it. More radical political activism argues for measures to prevent suffering, an appeal which is effective (when it is) because it seems a prima facie fact that suffering is something that ought to be prevented (although the dedication to this ‘fact’ is often diluted by other political factors and concerns). Yet because of this, suffering has a particular political significance, and considering how it is situated within the political structure can help us to reveal spaces of weakness, tension and indeed, potential sites for the queering of embodied, political subjectivity.

Before I move into my discussion of the body politic, it is important to note the dominant contemporary technology of the body: medicine. Medicine is situated as the expert par excellence on both the body and suffering, although this latter is swiftly transmuted into the objective scientific conception
of ‘pathology’. Throughout this chapter, then, I will argue that for all that pathology is conceptualised as non-political, as a truth which pre-exists the social and political order, this apparent naturalisation conceals the efficacy of the somatechnics of suffering, by obscuring the role that the state plays in the production of suffering, and the biopolitical usefulness of suffering to the production of normalised individual citizens.

**Contracting the Body Politic**

The imagining of the state or nation as a body has a long genealogy in Western political philosophy, especially the development of liberalism. The modern description of it in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* may seem somewhat outdated, especially because it clashes so with the contemporary (popular scientific) familiarity with basic aspects of human anatomy. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that Hobbes’ elucidation of the formation of the state stages a complex and telling negotiation with ideas of naturalness, divinity, artificiality, suffering and economy:

Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the art of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal. For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within, why may we not say that all automata (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body, such as what intended by the Artificer? Art goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of Nature, man. For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE (in Latin, CIVITAS), which is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the magistrates and other officers of judicature and execution, artificial joints; reward and punishment (by which fastened to the seat of the sovereignty, every joint and member is moved to perform his duty) are the nerves, that do the same in the body natural; the wealth and riches of all the particular members are the strength; salus populi (the people’s safety) its business; counsellors, by whom all things needful for it to know are suggested unto it, are the memory; equity and laws, an artificial reason and will; concord, health; sedition, sickness; and civil war, death. Lastly, the pacts and covenants, by which the parts of this body
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politic were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that fit, or the Let us make man, pronounced by God in the Creation (Hobbes 1998, 1).\footnote{In this quote, and throughout my discussion, I retain sexed specificity of the language that Hobbes himself uses. This, as will become clear in my discussion, is because the use of the specific as the universal is a key part of my concerns here.}

For Hobbes, the divinity of man, who is made in the image of God, is reflected and enacted in and through the production of the body politic. This body politic is made, in turn, in the image of those men whose agreement made it. Famously, the function of this “man … of greater stature and strength” is to protect and defend those ‘natural men’ who have breathed life into it through contract – that is, through the economic arrangement of the social contract in which absolute autonomy is ceded to shared safety. But what, in all of this God-given nature, produces this need for safety? What dangers does the \textit{Leviathan} protect against?

These dangers, as it turns out, arise from relations between ‘natural men’. In a description that demonstrates the extent to which Hobbes’ account is bound up with the development of liberalism and its associated model of subjectivity, the social contract is imagined as binding together pre-existing, radically discrete and \textit{naturally selfish} individuals into the political corporation. It is against the selfishness of others that these naturally selfish individuals require protection; it is, in other words, protection required precisely \textit{because} of their naturalness (which might make one wonder at the wisdom of the divine Artificer!). The body politic is specifically designed to shield those within it against the infamous terrors of the state of nature: against a life which Hobbes infamously and pessimistically describes as one of “continual fear … [of the] danger of violent death … [a life] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes 1998, 84). At the same time, naturally-occurring selfishness motivates each man to be rational about his own lot, and thus arise the semi-divine covenants with others which ground the contract. The Commonwealth is designed, then, to protect each individual subject against the suffering and death that is inevitably, according to Hobbes, the primary characteristic of the state of nature. Thus the subjects who participate in the formation of the artificial body of the political corporation are defined as naturally given, and it is on the basis of this naturalness that they accede to the social contract. In a carefully-constructed argument, Hobbes situates the body politic as both natural – and thus not challenging God’s divine authority – and as artificial. Natural man’s selfishness, tendency towards violence, and suffering, is adopted, superceded and repudiated by the body politic.
Imaginary Bodies and the Specificity of the Body Politic

Turning to an analysis of the imagining of the body politic itself, I want to explore Moira Gatens’ incisive consideration of Hobbes’s description. She focuses on the “construction of the image of the modern body politic” (Gatens 1996, 21), arguing that the specificity of this image has a range of often unacknowledged consequences for the shape of the contemporary political landscape. Her critique is grounded in an observation of the slippage between the two senses of representation – one metaphorical, and the other metonymical – which allows her to examine the significance of claiming that the social contract produces a body. First, “[j]ust as man can be understood as a representation of God’s creative power, so the political body can be understood as a representation of man’s creative power, that is, as art(ifice)” (Gatens 1996, 21). Second, the metonymical sense of representation comes into play, whereby one body is situated as representative of a range of bodies. These two senses of representation are not fully separable: “[t]he metaphor here slides into metonymy” (Gatens 1996, 21), meaning that those who are capable of being represented by the body politic are those whose bodies match the body politic, a body politic imagined in the image of those who produced it.

Politics, in Hobbes’ description, works well when the body is happy and healthy: when each aspect of the political structure – joints, heart, nerves and so on – is functioning towards the end of the survival of the body politic itself. This description is allegedly an echo of ‘real’, ‘natural’ bodies. To Hobbes, what this means is seemingly transparent: the body is watch-like, a machine made of ‘springs,’ ‘strings,’ ‘wheels’ and so on. This clashes fairly sharply with contemporary understandings of the body. These differing conceptions point to the historical variation in what Gatens refers to as

the (often unconscious) imaginaries of a specific culture: those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment (Gatens 1996, vii).

Thus when the political corporation is described as a body, this is not an innocent claim, and nor is it an ahistorical one: it is a somatechnical one. Rather, it suggests that the political body ought to function in the way that ‘the body’ is imagined to work – whatever is meant by ‘the body’ in any given time, and supposing there to be such a thing. In this way, a singular image of ‘the body’ is made to stand in for the diversity of bodies which are, in fact, part of the body politic. This is the slipperiness of the metaphorical and metonymical functions of representation, which Gatens argues arises because the specificity of the imaginary body is often so naturalised that it goes unrecognised:

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Discourses which employ the image of the unified body assume that the metaphor of the human body is a coherent one, and of course it’s not. At least I have never encountered an image of a human body. Images of human bodies are images of either men’s bodies or women’s bodies [or of black trans* bodies or Latina intersex bodies, or Asian disabled bodies and so on]. A glance at any standard anatomical text offers graphic evidence of the problem with this phrase ‘the human body’. Representations of the human body are most often of the male body and, perhaps, around the borders, one will find insets of representations of the female reproductive system: a lactating breast, a vagina, ovaries; bits of bodies, body fragments (Gatens 1996, 24).

Gatens’ turn to medicine for an authoritative depiction of ‘the body’ is a telling one, as medicine shapes contemporary corporeal imaginaries in a way that is less evident in Hobbes’ text. It is on these grounds that I would add to Gatens’ emphasis on the sexed specificity of ‘the body’ the following observation: this allegedly universal body is recognisably specific as not only male but middle-classed, able-bodied, heterosexual, cissexual, white and even circumcised (Njambi 2004, 292). He can be found within the pages of anatomical textbooks.

This has the effect of excluding those who fall away from this ideal in various ways and/or constituting them as politically insignificant, by virtue of being “inappropriate analogues to the political body” (Gatens 1996, 23). The generosity, then, of women, trans* people, immigrants, non-white people, gay men, lesbians, people with disabilities, and so on, in the sustenance of the body politic is ignored, devalued and even understood as a drain on the ‘health’ of the body politic. Gatens argues that those who cannot become part of the body politic by compact, because their bodies are inadequate analogues, are instead “swallowed whole, made part of the corporation … by incorporation. The modern body politic has lived off its consumption [of difference]” (Gatens 1996, 23). This consumption renders difference invisible, such that, for example, only certain forms of contribution to the function of the body politic – namely, those recognised as economic, and contractually exchangeable – count as contributions. Women’s labour in running households, raising children and so on, is rarely even recognised as labour; and those forms of ‘women’s work’ now recognised, such as that performed by childcare workers, remain dramatically underpaid.

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2 The term ‘trans*’ has arisen as way of grouping together those traditionally (medically) identified as transvestite, transsexual or transgender, whilst still resisting the circumscription of their various experiences by the existing structures of gender, sex and so on, and the limits of the psychological definition of their ‘disorder’.

3 The term ‘cissexual’ has arisen as a way of drawing attention to the unmarked norm, against which trans* is identified, in which a person feels that their gender identity ‘matches’ their body/sex.
In addition, this specific imaginary of ‘the body’ is taken to represent the ideal citizen in legal discourse, and as such it is for his protection that the majority of the laws are designed. The numerous examples of the difficulties that this engenders for those who fail to live up to this allegedly universal body are well documented, particularly in relation to rape law, maternity leave, provocation provisions, immigration laws, and in the limited requirements for contemporary architecture and design, which tend to lack the accessibility required for various disabilities. These fragmentary provisions, allegedly offering protection for those deemed marginal, in fact, often wind up safeguarding those who ‘match’ the body politic: to take only one example, rape law retains the requirement that rape is only produced by the woman’s articulation of a lack of consent, such that the presumption of male access to women’s bodies remains. Feminist commentators have argued that the requirement for ‘enthusiastic assent’ would alter the conception of women’s bodies as well as the cultural scripting of sexual encounters, yet these suggestions have yet to be made law. Perhaps more generally still, the ‘reasonable man’ used in common law proceedings is deployed as an aggregate of societal expectations of behaviour, and has now been replaced with the more generic-sounding term ‘reasonable person’. However, the characteristics of this supposed aggregate continue to be shaped by the most generalised conceptions of reason and personhood, reflecting, once again, the apparently universal imaginary of ‘the body’. The protections that are allegedly the very reason for the body politic’s existence are demonstrably adequate only to those who are considered successful analogues for that body. These protections, then, are often inadequate to the defence of those who fail to embody this analogy.

The injustice of the consumption of, and inability to protect, difference constitutes the grounds for a variety of forms of activism: those agitating for recognition of women, of queers, of the working class, of immigrants and so on argue over and again for recognition adequate to each of these heterogeneous others. For the most part, however, the most convincing of these arguments are not those which argue simply for recognition – which risks placing difference at the centre of the picture in a challenge to the fantasised homogeneity of the population, a challenge that will not be tolerated. Those which are parsed in terms of experiences of suffering – and thus vulnerability – which ought to be alleviated, tend be more easily heard. Whilst many of these arguments have, over time, been successful – for example, women’s suffrage in various countries around the world, the anti-slavery movement and the civil rights movements in the US – have perhaps unsurprisingly, done little to destabilise the liberal basis upon which the body politic is produced:
the continuing fascination we have for the image of the one body is an image that belongs to a dream of equity, based on corporeal interchangeability, that was developed to the full in nineteenth century liberalism (Gatens 1996, 26).

This suggests that part of the problem with political activism is that it tends to argue for equality: an equality always premised upon the dominant imaginary of ‘the body’, and without a reimagining of what ‘equality’ could mean beyond ‘corporeal interchangeability’. Thus while there may be small capitulations to specific differences, the system which allows these differences to be marked only as deviations from the dominant imaginary – what Irigaray calls ‘specularity’ – remains unquestioned.

Despite the small concessions to difference, however, there is still suffering within the body politic. The question seems almost inevitable: if the body politic’s continued existence is premised, as Hobbes suggests, upon its capacity to protect those within it from lives ‘nasty, brutish and short,’ how then is the existence of suffering within the body politic negotiated? How, precisely, is the stability of the dominant imaginary, allegedly defined by its opposition to suffering, maintained? I want to suggest that the centrality of medical discourse here ought not to be underestimated: as I have already indicated, it is a major source of authority in the formation of the dominant imaginary of ‘the body’. It is telling, I would suggest, that medicine both provides a clear imaginary of ‘the body’, and offers a discursive and practical framework for negotiating with suffering. Gatens makes a claim that indicates one way in which medical discourse can shape and contain notions of discord within the body politic: “disorder created by women, in the political body, is … retranslated into a physical disorder thought to be inherent to the female sex [hysteria]” (Gatens 1996, 25). This analysis opens up a critical engagement with medicine. However, I want to suggest that something significant is at work here: where Gatens argues that medicine simply devalues women’s voices through pathologising them, I want to ask about the experience of these women. I want to consider how and why the very experience of suffering, which, according to Hobbes, ought to threaten the stability and coherence of the body politic, is constructed, through medical discourse, as something of which the state is innocent.

**Medical Pathos**

Suffering holds a particular place in contemporary conceptions of life. As we have already seen, it is over and against suffering that the body politic is constructed. Yet for all of its ubiquity, suffering remains difficult to grapple with, conceptually as well as experientially. Suffering is commonly considered to be incommunicable, as Elaine Scarry argues: “[p]hysical pain does not merely
resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language” (Scarry 1984, 4). Suffering resists the possibility of being shared; it is situated at the limits of the possibility of meaning. Indeed, according to Levinas, suffering is experienced as an ‘ontological perversion’ (Levinas 1998, 95) This fascinating claim suggests that suffering takes being and perverts its ends, so that suffering is an experience, a thing, a state, that ought not to be. The production of suffering in this way, I would suggest, is premised upon the idea that a civilised life – a life beyond the state of nature – is specifically designated as one protected from suffering. Being, then, ought – naturally – to be able to be protected from suffering, namely by being part of the body politic. Thus when suffering occurs within the body politic, it threatens the coherence of the social contract, which is, after all, premised on the protection of those within it from suffering. Indeed, Hobbes is clear that such a failure of the state’s protection can produce the dissolution – the dismemberment, the disarticulation – of the body politic altogether.

Yet suffering is no longer primarily conceived of as a political matter. More and more, it falls within the purview of another increasingly authoritative set of discourses and practices: those associated with medicine. As Eric Cassell claims, “[t]he mandate for the existence of a profession of medicine in society is its obligation to relieve … suffering” (Cassell 2004, 61). Suffering may vary significantly, but nonetheless, medicine is situated as the primary means of engaging with it. Foucault’s analysis suggests that the shift from a simpler framework of disciplinary power to the complex workings of biopower has also produced the legitimisation of medical discourses and practices. He argues that medicine is a power-knowledge that has both disciplinary effects and regulatory effects … [T]here is one element that will circulate between the disciplinary and the regulatory … [t]he norm … The normalizing society is therefore … a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect along an orthogonal articulation (Foucault 2003, 252-3).

The dual elements of medicine Foucault evokes here as ‘disciplinary effects’ and ‘regulatory effects’ are what makes it such an effective tool of biopower. He argues that one element of biopower is “focused on the species body … [on its] supervision … and regulatory controls”; this is called the “biopolitics of the population” (Foucault 1990, 139). Biopolitics, then, functions through statistics, institutions and power/knowledge. It is perhaps most evident in the practices of public health policies, taking a larger, longer view of the development of the nation and/or the race.

The second pole of biopower is identified by Foucault as the “anatamo-politics of the human body”, and is focused on the production of “the body as a machine, its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of
its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic control” (Foucault 1990, 139). Medicine is uniquely situated to function in relation to both poles, which intersect in the medically-designated norm (Foucault 2003, 253). If the first pole, biopolitics, can be identified as negotiating with the construction of the political corporation, in the sense that it shapes and reshapes the population in the image of the body politic, then it seems peculiarly significant that it is most often to the discipline of medicine that individuals turn if and when they suffer. Medicine works both as a (perhaps) primary locus of biopower, and as the power-knowledge most expert in alleviating suffering. If medicine is a technology of biopower, what, then, is the medical somatechnics of suffering?

Medicine tends, Cassell suggests, to understand suffering as the “lineal manifestation of disease” (Cassell 2004, 91). Although the very term ‘pathology’ has its roots in the Greek words for the ‘study’ of ‘suffering’, in contemporary medical discourse, it has come to be associated not with the subjective experience of suffering – described now as a mere symptom – but with that which, apparently, causes it: the underlying disease, or condition, which, it is assumed, is the necessary and sufficient cause of suffering. The clinical encounter is almost entirely shaped by the process of drawing a strict line between the objective – namely, the disease – and the subjective experience of that disease. The clinician seeks to ‘get beyond’ the patient’s experiences of the symptoms, which are “inherently unreliable (because … [they are] subjective and ‘soft’) sources of information in which the patient may, metaphorically, get between the symptom and the doctor and distort the disease” (Cassell 2004, 91). Disease, on this understanding, ‘lies behind’ the experience of it. Suffering is rendered a symptom, but a symptom of something within the body. Not only is suffering radically individual, as Scarry suggests, but so is the disease: it is contained within this individual body.

The imagining of pathology, then, is of particular significance, because it allows suffering to be conceptualised as arising out of the individual body, and from the individual body’s objectively observable ‘ontological perversion,’ rather than from any natural (and thus supposedly politically manageable) cause. In other words, the body politic is situated as perfectly capable of managing the normal body in such a way as to be able to protect it. If and when an individual body becomes pathological, however, the suffering engendered is not, apparently, the work of the body politic: when the source of suffering arises from a perversion within the body, it cannot be the responsibility of the political incorporation. Indeed, more than this: the political incorporation has no responsibility to change its structures to protect this perverse body; in many cases, in fact, the body politic is thought to have a responsibility to resist changing, to resist the queer claims made upon it by those who suffer their own perversion of nature. Medicine protects the body politic against fragmentation.
or query because of the suffering that arises within it, specifically by situating this suffering as objectively and indeed experientially individual and unnatural.

The Individual, the Objective, the Normal and the Pathological

The notion of disease, so familiar and so self-evidently true, thus needs further interrogation. According to the investigations of Georges Canguilhem, there have historically been two main ways of thinking about the normal and the pathological: one understands them as radically distinct, even polar opposites, and the other understands the pathological as situated on a continuum with normalcy, such that the pathological state is the product of the same functions as normalcy, taken to excess. Both of these models of pathology and normalcy, I want to argue, play essential (if contradictory) roles in the way that medicine, as a key discourse of biopower, situates the suffering individual in relation to the normalcy of the body politic.

Canguilhem challenges the commonly-held presumption that pathology refers to an objectively-existing state of being which is inherently different from any other, a difference that medical science is uniquely equipped to find. He queries the very presumption which seems to ground medicine: that there is, in fact, a naturally given law of ‘the human body’, which, when broken, gives rise to the sense of an ‘ontological perversion’; namely, suffering. It is a singularly anthropocentric understanding of ‘nature’ (itself, obviously, a culturally given conception) to imagine that nature is inherently designed to prolong life, and to avoid death, and that pathology is thus an unnatural phenomenon. It is against this position that Canguilhem argues that “[t]here is no fact which is normal or pathological in itself. An anomaly or a mutation is not in itself pathological” (Canguilhem 1991, 144). To recall, Gatens drew attention to the pathologising of women’s speech, demonstrating that the term ‘disorder’ requires a particular (political) value judgment. Canguilhem goes further, arguing that such a judgment is involved in every attempt to differentiate between the normal and the pathological:

there is not in itself an a priori ontological difference between a successful living form and an unsuccessful living form. Moreover, can we speak of unsuccessful living forms? What lack can be disclosed in a living form as long as the nature of its obligations as a living being has not been determined? (Canguilhem 1991, 31)

The diseased state, in other words, is not given by nature, because the specifics of a being’s ‘obligations’ – that is, what counts as successful living – is not naturally given. The ‘obligations’ against which the diseased or disordered state may be conceived are naturalised by medical science, but they are not naturally
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occurring. Canguilhem’s argument thus already queers the contemporary medical somatechnics of disease, because it situates pathology not as an objectively given, naturally defined state, but as a state defined as diseased only ever within a context. When we define “the normal state as one where ‘the organs function with all the regularity and uniformity of which they are capable,’ we cannot fail to recognise … an ideal of perfection” (Canguilhem 1991, 57) at work. This contextually defined ideal, I would suggest, is that already identified by Foucault at work in the ‘normalizing society’, and in Gatens’ description of ‘the body’.

This critical engagement with medical notions of pathology contradicts contemporary notions of suffering, which understand it as simply caused by something going wrong in the body. Experience would seem to tell us that this contextualising approach denies something essential (and essential not least to political activism): the very experience of suffering. Yet Canguilhem is seeking to mark the contingency of pathology, rather than denying the reality of suffering. Suffering – the most subjective and incommunicable experience of all – lies at the very heart of medicine’s notion of disease:

[w]hen an isolated symptom or a function mechanism is termed pathological, one forgets that what makes them so is their inner relation to the indivisible totality of individual behaviour … [C]linical practice puts the physician in contact with complete and concrete individuals and not with organs and their functions. Pathology … can be known as pathology … only insofar as it receives from clinical practice this notion of disease, whose origin must be sought in the experience men have in their relations with the whole of their environment (Canguilhem 1991, 87-88).

It is not, then, an unnatural pathology that causes suffering and is discovered and described by medical intervention. Rather, it is when and where suffering is experienced that a particular state is defined as pathological, and becomes comprehensible as one in which a pathology exists:

“[d]isease is what irritates men in the normal course of their lives and work, and above all, what makes them suffer.” The state of health is a state of unawareness where the subject and his body are one. Conversely, the awareness of the body consists in a feeling of limits, threats, obstacles to health. Taking these formulae in their full sense, they mean that the actual notion of the normal depends on the possibility of violating the norm (Canguilhem 1991, 91).

There are two points of note here. First, that in order to have a lack of suffering, one needs the possibility of suffering; this point, I think, is quite telling for our analysis of the construction of the state. Disability theorists such as Lennard Davis echo this analysis, suggesting that
Davis’ observation demonstrates how profoundly conceptions of the political – particularly contemporary notions which are so bound up with ideas of progress and the elimination of deviance – are imbricated with the imaginary of ‘the body’. Second, it is important to note that suffering arises not from some inherent incapacity, nor from the perversion of ontology (even if it is experienced that way). Rather, suffering is the manifestation of the experience of an awareness of ‘limits, threats, obstacles.’ This is what Drew Leder calls the ‘dys-appearance’ of the body, wherein the abrupt and experiential production of a disjunction between body and mind causes suffering (Leder 1990, 84). Such experiences of suffering arise through the constitution of particular forms of bodily being as limited, as threatened. Given the relation between the normal and the pathological we saw above, this means that it is the living out of these norms which shapes the experience of the body: normalcy, then, is a somatechnology, shaping the embodied subject and producing its susceptibility to suffering. Thus it is the context within which one lives which constructs particular forms of life as normal and not suffering, and those others which are abnormal, limited, under threat, and thus sources of suffering. Canguilhem puts this point succinctly:

It is no coincidence that discourse commonly refers to someone ‘suffering’ abnormalcy. For Canguilhem, these two are bound up together: contra medical conceptions of disease, suffering is the result of the particular body’s inability to live up to a particular conception of the norm. The inability of the specific body to live up to ‘the body’ is what defines the diseased state. The situating of the pathological in relation to “certain activities, which have become a need and an ideal” allows us to see that the nature of the ‘obligations’ which define successful and unsuccessful lives are shaped by the context. The contextual imaginary of ‘the body’, then, reflected and reinforced in and by the function of the body politic,
also enforces a sense of what is expected of the individual body. This expectation, when breached, is experienced as suffering; a suffering, however, which is individualised and constituted as an unnatural breach of natural ontologies.

The situating of the normal and the pathological as binarily opposed thus constitutes particular bodies as always suffering only because they are diseased, because they are unable to achieve the natural body the body politic demands of them. Yet this would indeed seem to offer a challenge to the homogeneity required of the population, and thus a queering of the social contract which is thought to produce the body politic in the image of those within it. As Butler puts it:

[w]hat challenge does that excluded and abjected realm produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life,’ lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving? (Butler 1993, 16).

This challenge would indeed que(e)ry the function of pathology, and the function of the body politic as requiring something of those bodies within it, rather than merely protecting them.

Yet this challenge is rarely heard at the level of the political, and certainly not as querying the centrality of the allegedly universal but in fact deeply specific, dominant imaginary ‘the body’. I contend that this is partly because biopower retains the dual sense of the pathological – both as that opposed to the natural, normal state, and one set on a continuum with it. Medical discourse thus ensures that the challenge posed by suffering bodies to the coherence of the body politic is reduced in three ways. First, as I have already argued, by individualising suffering, medical discourse conceals that suffering can only ever arise in a context, given (the norms and ideals of ‘the body’ within) that context. Second, by situating such bodies as ontologically perverse and responsible for their own suffering, suffering is located as beyond the state of nature, and thus as a form of being the body politic was never constructed to negotiate, and indeed, to which it ought never cede its natural authority.

Third, however, by situating normalcy and pathology as on a continuum, the unnaturality of the suffering body is constructed as always capable of remedy, in and through the achievement of the natural body, a body capable of being an analogue for the body politic, and thus one the political corporation can protect. This third element is key in the production and reproduction of a body politic shaped by normalisation – a ‘normalizing society,’ as Foucault calls it. Its effects can be seen in the extraordinary availability of medical technologies (pharmaceutical, surgical, and so on) designed to assist those bodies which deviate from the dominant cultural imaginary of ‘the body’ in achieving naturalness, normalcy, and a morphology which will be sufficiently analogous to the body politic that it might be protected.
Conclusion

Natural man’s consent to the social contract and the production of the body politic is, according to Hobbes, produced by the rational desire to avoid a life ‘nasty, brutish and short.’ The suffering that occurs within the body politic bears with it the possibility of testifying to the failure of the political corporation; a queering of the exchange involved in the social contract. In this context, it is unsurprising that the dual elements of biopower (the biopolitical and the anatamopolitical) function (a) to naturalise and universalise the specific imaginary of ‘the body’, (b) to constitute suffering as the individual perversion of nature and (c) to lend the conception of normalcy and its perversion the objectivity of the medical sciences in the concepts of the normal and the pathological. Yet as I have argued using Canguilhem’s analysis of the concepts of the normal and the pathological, it is suffering that is taken as the clinical indicator of disease; suffering as the grounds upon which disease occurs, rather than vice versa. Further, this suffering is produced neither naturally nor through some unnatural perversion of natural being. Rather, suffering is part of the somatechnics of normalisation: it is experienced by the individual body upon deviation from the norms of his or her context, a norm reinforced by the imagining of the body politic as made in the image of a body white, male, able-bodied, rational, cissexual and heterosexual. Indeed, medicine provides the means by which the body politic makes requirements of those who suffer, the means by which the body politic offers them a way out of their suffering: they would be perfectly adequately protected, if only they were sufficiently natural and normal, where natural and normal are given by the ideal of the body politic. In this way, medicine protects the body politic by situating suffering as no longer its responsibility, inoculating it against its own inefficacy, and permitting the continued fantasy of the success of the social contract as protection against suffering.

Significantly, those medical technologies deployed to ‘treat’ suffering are only the visible edge of the technologies through which bodies are produced. Suffering itself functions as a normalising somatechnics, evidence of, rather than proof against, the ‘technical plasticity’ of that which we refer to as ‘the body’. The suffering body, pitied and marginalised, is then not an unnatural phenomenon, and nor is it natural. It is not neutral, or politically insignificant. Diseased bodies are no longer merely the sad falling-away from the ideal, but produced through political technologies as the very grounds upon which that ideal is constructed. The body politic itself disavows its queerness, its trouble, its disease, seeking to exclude and normalise those aspects which exceed the ideal of ‘the body’. However, these suffering bodies are the disavowed but constitutive underside of the continuing fantasy of the freedom and happiness made possible by the liberal humanist political corporation.
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References

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In September 2005, Marc Quinn’s marble sculpture *Alison Lapper Pregnant* was unveiled on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square, London, to mixed acclaim.
and dissent. Celebrated by its supporters including the then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, responses from tabloid newspapers and art critics were more ambivalent. The unveiling of the statue had been much trailed in the national media, in television documentaries about Alison Lapper, and in ongoing debates about what befits a monument for London’s most famous public square. The focus of this interest was on the appropriateness of the sculpted portrait of a pregnant woman with severe limb impairments to occupy a national site encoded as heroic and masculine, and signified as such by Nelson’s Column. This point was made explicit by Quinn when he suggested that, ‘Alison’s statue could represent a new model of female heroism’.  

In this essay, I argue that Lapper’s limbs and pregnancy can be seen to threaten the masculine and imperial domain of the nation and, simultaneously, bring to light what has been naturalised as an ‘invisible, unmarked and undeclared somatic norm’ (Puwar 2004, 8). Alison Lapper Pregnant represents the entry of an embodied maternal and dis/abled subject into a highly charged political space of cultural nationalism and heteronormativity. The entry of this corporeality into a privileged location raises aesthetic and political questions about which bodies are deemed appropriate for representation in national sites and what symbolic forms these might take. In making a critical reading of the statue I explore the questions raised by the representation of a somatic other – female, pregnant and dis/abled – within a national space previously inhabited in sculptural terms by white male unmarked bodies. Drawing on Lauren Berlant’s concept of the ‘intimate public sphere’ (Berlant 1997, 4), I ask which somatic norms can embody national citizens in post-imperial times? What does it mean for an historically excluded body to enter into public visibility, and in what ways can this queer national space? Here I engage with the project of queering somatechnics in the public sphere in three ways: through an investigation of the critical and media discourses that frame the production and reception of Alison Lapper Pregnant; in an exploration of the aesthetic and ethico-political norms that underlie decision-making processes involved in the placing of sculpture in Trafalgar Square, and in a consideration of recent changes in public culture that might queer the ideal of a national body through an engagement with different somatic identities.

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1 This chapter is part of an ongoing research project on maternal bodies in visual culture. My thanks go to colleagues who have commented on earlier versions of paper including Gail Lewis, Imogen Tyler and Dorothy Rowe.
Alison Lapper Pregnant: ‘Sculpture’s Unveiling is Pregnant with Meaning’

The Lapper sculpture began as a smaller portrait by Marc Quinn entitled Alison Lapper (8 Months), made in 2000 as one of a series of sculptural studies of people with disabilities, mainly artists, writers and musicians. As the original title suggests, it represents Lapper not only as pregnant, but evidently in the late stages of pregnancy. The medium of white marble is associated with memorial art and to use it for a portrait of a living woman already subverts an aesthetic norm. Quinn drew on a model of beauty defined in Greek classical sculpture and by choosing to portray a heavily pregnant woman with limb impairments he challenges aesthetic preconceptions that connect notions of ideal form with a certain somatic identity. He invites us to consider whether an embodied ideal that is readily accepted in the Venus de Milo can be recognised in a portrait of a woman with no arms, thus ‘using the weight of tradition to undermine itself’ (Quinn quoted in Tate Gallery 2002, un-paginated).

Sculptural practices have frequently offered the means of thinking through relations and modes of embodiment: the classical tradition of sculpture offered models for the public, heroic, masculine body, while in the twentieth century a fascination with the private, erotic and usually female body emerged. Quinn’s statue stands in dialogue with these two traditions, using the conventions of classical sculpture while celebrating the material reality of Lapper’s singular embodiment. His sculpture questions the nature of public responses to the sight of disability and pregnancy and, implicitly, raises the contentious issue of the rights of women with disabilities to bear children. Rosemarie Garland Thomson has argued that ‘pressures to deny, ignore, normalize, and remain silent about one’s own disability are both compelling and seductive in a social order intolerant
of deviations from the bodily standards enforced by a quotidian matrix of economic, social and political forces’ (1996, xvii). Lapper’s choice to ‘come out’ publically in sculptural form challenged this compulsion to conceal, but as she recounts in the documentary film ‘The Woman with the Remarkable Body’, she met with constant scrutiny to assess her ‘fitness’ as a mother (Channel Five 2005). Lapper’s life story had already attracted a great deal of media attention and by 2005 she had become highly visible, appearing in a prestigious BBC television series, as well as in the Channel 5 documentary and in features in the national press. Her media presence, however, derived primarily from her identity as a highly articulate dis/abled working class mother, rather than from her own professional practice as an artist. By asserting her presence as a maternal body and as an artist in her autobiography, My Life in My Hands by Alison Lapper (2005), and in her work in photography and digital imaging, Lapper challenges the boundaries that confine physically impaired maternal bodies to invisibility. She insists on her physical presence in order to question aesthetic perceptions of what constitutes beauty in the human body, as well as those who would deny her rights to be a mother born with severe limb impairments. In collaborating with Quinn as his model, Lapper saw his sculpture as a significant statement on her own behalf and used the public visibility it gave her to launch her own career as a professional artist: ‘The sculpture provided a platform for my work. But hopefully it is being exhibited on its own merits because it has taken a long time to achieve some acceptance that images of a naked disabled woman can be considered as art’ (quoted in The Independent, 14 May 2004).

In September 2005, the new version of Quinn’s statue, entitled Alison Lapper Pregnant and enlarged to 3.55 metres high, was unveiled by the Mayor of London on the plinth to the left of the National Gallery façade in Trafalgar Square. This followed considerable public debate about how to fill the empty Fourth Plinth, which had been occupied by a series of temporary artworks and was the subject of ongoing dispute about the appropriateness of contemporary art as a form of national monument. In 1998 the Royal Society of Arts commissioned three contemporary artists to produce temporary sculptures for

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9 In 2005 Alison Lapper appeared in the documentary series ‘Child of Our Time’ on BBC television, which follows the life of 25 babies born in the new millennium including Alison’s son, Parys, and in Channel Five’s ‘The Woman with the Remarkable Body’ in the Extraordinary People series (13 June 2005). An extract of her autobiography appeared in the Guardian Weekend (3 September 2005).

10 See my discussion of Lapper’s artwork in Betterton (2006).

11 Alison Lapper has a medical condition called phocomelia, which means that she was born without arms and with shortened legs.

12 See http://wwwlondon.gov.uk/.fourthplinth/ for details of past and current Fourth Plinth Projects. The plinth was designed by Sir Charles Barry in 1841 and left unfilled due to lack of funds at the time.
the empty plinth: Marc Wallinger’s naked male statue *Ecce Homo* was erected in 1999; Bill Woodrow’s figurative *Regardless of History* in 2000, and Rachel Whiteread’s abstract monument, *Plinth*, in 2001. In 1999 Ken Livingston took over responsibility for the commission in the newly created office of Mayor of London and it was under his authority that Quinn’s statue was commissioned. In her book *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey argues that attempts to fix the identity of a particular place are always challenged by changes in social power. Massey identifies this as, ‘the site of social contest, battles over the power to label space-time, to impose the meaning to be attributed to a space, for however long or short a space of time’ (Massey 1994, 5). She continues that the particular heritage of a site establishes ‘the identity of a place by laying claim to some particular moment in time-space when the definition of the area and the social relations dominant within it were to the advantage of that particular claimant group’ (Massey 1994, 169). This is particularly the case in Trafalgar Square where, as Deborah Cherry has shown, both its physical boundaries and symbolic identity were the products of discontinuous histories of planning and rebuilding up to 1868, when it was stabilised as the national site of Nelson’s memorial at the height of British imperial power (Cherry 2006). The installation of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* under the aegis of a socialist Mayor and a liberal arts establishment marked a new stage in the successive reframings of the Square’s identity and meaning. Sandy Nairne, Director of the nearby National Portrait Gallery, who led the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group recommended the installation of Quinn’s sculpture to the Greater London Authority in 2004: ‘The debate about public art is one of the most valuable aspects of this project. While no single commission – and no single use for the plinth – will please everyone, contemporary work that gets people engaged with this vital public space is extremely valuable.’ Public art is one of the somatechnologies through which the relationship between individual bodies and social bodies is revealed by its invoking of the concept of a shared public sphere that engages people as civic subjects. Critical practices that address the making of bodies in public space need also to examine the shared assumptions that structure the normal

13 One of Ken Livingstone’s mayoral projects was to transform the symbolic space of Trafalgar Square through public events and sculpture as he had earlier done in the 1980s on London’s South Bank as Leader of the Greater London Council. Since writing this essay, Livingstone has been replaced as Mayor by the Conservative Boris Johnson.

14 See Deborah Cherry (2006) for a detailed account of the re-shaping of Trafalgar Square and its changing symbolism. Doreen Massey quotes Edward Said on national identity as ‘an invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it, that it is sometimes important to represent’ (Said in Massey 1994, 6).

in a given location, in order to identify how the normative is constituted as well as how it may be contested. In the media and critical discourses engendered by the emplacement of Alison Lapper Pregnant, commentators articulated a familiar rhetoric of heroism and nation that attempted to claim a new political identity for Trafalgar Square through their citation of the unique figure of Alison Lapper herself.

The Fourth Plinth Debate: ‘A New Model of Female Heroism’

As Nairne predicted, the statue certainly did not please everyone: the headline on the announcement of its commission in the influential The London Evening Standard read, ‘So, Is This Really What We Want On Trafalgar Square’s Empty Plinth?’ (quoted in The Independent, 17 March 2004). Most reactions focused on the legitimacy of Lapper’s figure in the context of existing sculptural monuments in Trafalgar Square and one trope that recurred throughout the controversy was the reversal of gender identity enacted by the statue and Lapper’s status as a female hero. Thus, on unveiling the sculpture, Ken Livingstone commented that, ‘Alison’s life is a struggle over much greater difficulties than the men who are celebrated here.’ Lapper herself said: ‘I regard it as a modern tribute to femininity, disability and motherhood. It is so rare to see disability in everyday life – let alone naked, pregnant and proud.’

This emphasis on the somatics of the statue was taken up by Charles Saumarez Smith, Director of the National Gallery, who commented that ‘Alison Lapper is much more beautiful than Nelson. The colour of the stone is wonderful and the proportions are perfect.’ Greg Hilty, Director of Visual Arts and Literature at Arts Council England summed up this view by suggesting that the ‘work considers questions of idealism, heroism, femininity, prejudice and identity.’ And Marc Quinn stated:

At first sight it would seem that there are few if any public sculptures of people with disabilities. However, a closer look reveals that Trafalgar Square is one of the few public spaces where one exists: Nelson on top of his column has lost an arm. I think that Alison’s portrait reactivates this dormant aspect of Trafalgar Square. Most public sculpture, especially in the Trafalgar Square and Whitehall areas is triumphant male statuary. Nelson’s Column is the epitome of a phallic male monument, and I felt that the square needed some femininity, linking with

16 See, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,1571296,00.html.
18 See, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,1571296,00.html.
Bodies Politic?

Boudicca near the Houses of Parliament. Alison’s statue could represent a new model of female heroism.²⁰

Quinn draws attention to Nelson’s own disabilities, albeit invisible atop his ‘phallic male monument’, and connects Lapper to ‘femininity’ by citing the presence of Boudicca nearby. This comparison is highly charged, given that Boudicca was the first national heroine and legendary Queen of the Iceni who led a rebellion against the Roman occupation of Britain in 60 AD.²¹ The statues of Lapper and Boudicca are thus presented by Quinn as similarly gendered, albeit differently embodied, feminine ideals of an imaginary national identity. In fact, the public representation of historical women in the form of statues in Trafalgar Square was already the subject of dispute, following an unsuccessful proposal by women Members of Parliament to commemorate the women of World War I and II on the Fourth Plinth.²² To sum up this debate, Alison Lapper Pregnant had the endorsement of the political authority for London and of the English arts establishment as a valuable public sculpture and a celebration of female heroism and disability. At the same time, the public visibility of a sculpture of a woman’s pregnant and dis/abled body was questioned by critical voices in the press. Quinn’s statement reveals what was at stake in this debate: whose bodies are deemed appropriate to represent the nation and what forms should these bodies take? I want to examine the terms of this debate more closely for what it reveals about the encoding of white, imperial masculinity and the counter-hegemonic representation of different somatic identities in a national site.

‘Ghosts of Modernity’: White Space and Somatic Norms²³

The dispute over the placing of Quinn’s work hinged on its performativity as a public sculpture in a specific historical site. 2005 marked the bicentenary of Nelson’s death at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and the Square had been built

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²¹ The legendary but historically real figure of Boudicca has echoes in the allegorical figure of Britannia and reappeared as such in cartoons of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the time of the Falklands conflict in 1982, Puwar (2004, 6).
²² Another more recent contender for the Fourth Plinth is the Bronze Woman Monument designed by sculptor, Ian Walters, which celebrates the contribution of Caribbean women to British society.
²³ The phrase is David Goldberg’s: ‘[G]hosts of modernity, whites could assume power as the norm of humanity, as the naturally given. Unseen racially, that is seen as racially marked – or seen precisely as racially unmarked – whites could be everywhere’ (Goldberg quoted in Puwar 2005, 55).
in his honour between 1830 and 1845. The National Gallery was designed in 1835 to house the nation’s new collection of art, and Nelson’s Column was erected in 1868. The Square remains a memorial to British imperial history – the Canadian, Ugandan and South African embassies are located here and two other plinths bear statues of military ‘heroes’ of the British Empire. Trafalgar Square is thus a site richly invested with symbolic meaning as the centre of national monument and imperial display and a famous London tourist landmark, but it is very much a contested space. The Square is also the focus for national protest and political dissent that in recent history has included marches against unemployment in the 1980s, the Poll Tax riots in 1990, the banning of Irish demonstrations, anti-apartheid and pro-Mandela marches in the 1990s, and protests against the wars in Iraq and the Lebanon since 2003. Within this political space of contradiction, the placing of the Lapper sculpture was never going to be straightforward.

In *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (2004), Nirmal Puwar discusses bodies in relation to what she terms an ‘invisible, unmarked and undeclared somatic norm’ (Puwar 2004, 8). Citing an earlier debate over the positioning of a statue of Nelson Mandela in Trafalgar Square opposite the South African embassy, she argues that, ‘[t]he moment when the historically excluded is included is incredibly revealing … this is a presence that prods us to look again at … the production of national space’ (Puwar 2004, 5). In inviting us to consider somatic norms in racialised as well as in gendered contexts, Puwar suggests that, ‘the coupling of particular bodies with specific spaces is at the heart of this conflict, even though the issues are declared to be of a purely aesthetic nature’ (Puwar 2004, 4). As with *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, the dispute over the position and scale of the Mandela statue was framed within somatic norms: Westminster Council’s Public Arts Committee apparently considered ‘the size and shape of the hands disagreeable’. This displacement of body politics onto

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24 Ken Livingstone called for the removal of these Victorian statues to a different location on the basis that they no longer held any symbolic value for contemporary Londoners. Citing Livingstone’s call in 2002 for recognition of the Square as a continuing forum for free speech, Cherry suggests that it has been ‘re-fashioned as the people’s square’ (Cherry 2007, 690).

25 Puwar describes the anti-Iraq war protest at which the sound of Muslim prayer ‘in the most famous and politicised square in history, steeped in Empire, created an altogether different echo’ (Puwar 2004, 3). I took photographs of the Lapper statue during a demonstration against the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon in July 2006.

26 For other accounts of the dispute over Mandela’s statue, see Puwar (2004), Cherry (2006) and Ian Walters’ obituary ‘Sculptor and Socialist’ in *The Guardian* 18 August 2006, 38. It was finally unveiled in Nelson Mandela’s presence in October 2007 near the Houses of Parliament at Westminster.
aesthetic critique is also evident in the comments on Quinn’s statue made by the conservative art critic, Robert Simon, editor of the British Art Journal:

I think it is horrible. Not because of the subject matter I hasten to add … I think she is very brave, very wonderful, but it is just a rather repellent artefact – very shiny, slimy surface, machine-made, much too big.27

Simon’s embarrassment is palpable, caught between the desire not to be seen to criticise Lapper herself – in the patronising ‘very brave, very wonderful’, and his evident horror of the ‘repellent artefact – very shiny, slimy surface’. He articulates the disturbance that Puwar suggests occurs when there is, ‘a notable metonymic shift in the increased presence of women and racialized minorities into spaces in the public realm which have been predominantly occupied by white men.’ This is a process in which, she continues, they become ‘highly visible as deviations from the norm and invisible as the norm’ (Puwar 2004, 59). In the context of Trafalgar Square, this means deviation from the previously un-remarked white maleness of the national and imperial figures that occupy the three other plinths.28 Vron Ware suggests that the critical project of making whiteness visible, ‘requires an acknowledgement of the way that other complex factors – notably gender, sexuality, class, and geography – compound social identity and hence produce a complex configuration of whiteness’ (Ware 2002, 284). Just as the black figure of Mandela challenged the white imperial body of the nation, Alison Lapper Pregnant makes visible the unmarked somatic norm that maintains English national identity as always already gendered and able-bodied. Against the phallic backdrop of Nelson’s Column the figure of the dis/abled maternal body throws the statues of earlier ‘heroes’ into new visibility and queers the flow of their imperial narrative.

For, if the statues that populate Trafalgar Square represent the emergent nineteenth-century subject of the British Empire – a masculine conception of body and self with its emphasis on boundaries, limits and a manly confinement of interiority – then the visible contrast of Lapper’s dis/abled body dislocates that unmarked ideal.29 Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price argue that the body in modernity ‘must appear invulnerable, predictable and consistent in form


28 An equestrian monument depicts King George III, while two other statues commemorate military and imperial figures: General Charles Napier who commanded the British army in India, and Major General Sir Henry Havelock, who was responsible for savagely quelling the Indian Mutiny in 1857. For further discussion of the history of these figures, see Dawson (1994) and Cherry (2006).

29 Henri Lefebvre links the spaces of modernity to ‘phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire’ (Lefebvre quoted in Massey 1994, 182). See also Beckett
and function, above all, free from the possibility of disruption’ (Price and Shildrick 1998, 232). Writing specifically about the female nude in art, Lynda Nead suggests that ‘the notion of unified form is integrally bound up with the perception of self, and the construction of individual identity’ (Nead 1992, 7). As a pregnant dis/abled body given monumental form, *Alison Lapper Pregnant* thus disrupts the metonymy that connects the rational coherent subject with a unified somatic identity. Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that it was through the extraordinary body of the ‘freak’, defined by the nineteenth century as a ‘human corporeal anomaly’, that normative somatic subjects were constituted (Garland Thomson 1996, 4). By framing and heightening physical differences between bodies in freak shows, their viewers were themselves constituted as normal: ‘Thus, singular bodies become politicized when culture maps its concerns upon them as meditations on individual as well as national values, identity and direction’ (Garland Thomson 1996, 2). She further suggests that in America between 1840 and 1940, ‘modernization reconstituted the human body’, a process of institutionalisation in which the figure of the freak became central in fashioning ‘the self-governed, iterable subject of democracy – the American cultural self’ (Garland Thomson 1996, 11, 10). Should the entry of Lapper’s singular body into a privileged national site shaped in the same period in Britain’s history be seen as contesting or continuing a similar process of institutionalising normative identity? Against a backdrop of white imperial masculinity, does this image of different embodiment denote its antithesis, a shift in public feeling towards a queering of national space?

**The Intimate Public Sphere**

In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* Lauren Berlant claims that the late twentieth century witnessed another change in the American cultural self: ‘the political public sphere has become the intimate public sphere’ in a way that redefines citizenship and ‘locates the nation’s virtue and value in its intimate space’ (Berlant 1998). She suggests that the feminist and queer movements are examples of this process. The work of Cherry (1998), Betterton (1998), Wolff (1990, 2000) and Wilson (1992) on the gendering of modernity, urban space and cultural practices.

30 In her dialogue with Margrit Shildrick on the dis/abled body in *Vital Signs*, Janet Price quotes herself, ‘I felt, effectively, invisible and/or “Othered”, fixed by a single/unitary identity that labelled me as “disabled”, as “wheelchairbound”’ (Price and Shildrick 1998, 232).

zones’ (Berlant 1997, 4, 261). Berlant cites the rise of the Reaganite right in the 1980s followed by the Clinton era in the 1990s as reinstating ‘family values’ and the ‘citizen child’ at the heart of American civic politics (Berlant 1997, 261). She argues that, in reaction to the citizenship claims of different racial, sexual and economic minorities, a new ‘public rhetoric of citizen trauma’ has emerged, through which the self image of the United States has once again been re-shaped (Berlant 1997, 2). While there are specific national and cultural differences, it can be argued that political discourses in Britain similarly became saturated with intimate public feeling, a shift often identified with the 1997 election of a New Labour government under Prime Minister Tony Blair, which was swiftly followed by the mass-mediated narrative of the death of Diana Princess of Wales. The political commentator Andrew Marr suggested that the ‘Diana moment’ provoked ‘an emotional revolution’ (Marr 2000, 47), which brought about a revived culture of public sentiment. This ‘popular emotionalism’ was the hallmark of New Labour (Wilson 1999, 53), and was exploited in Tony Blair’s famous speech referring to the ‘People’s Princess’, in which he suggested that, ‘Diana taught us a new way to be British’ (quoted in Bennett 2007, 9). British identity thus simultaneously was seen to embrace public trauma and the politics of intimacy within its ‘intimate core of national culture’ (Berlant 1997, 5).

I want to suggest that, in this context, the reading of the Lapper monument as a positive icon of an heroic dis/abled mother is only possible in the sense that Berlant argues now permeates public life in the US:

[These ‘positive’ icons of national minority represent both the minimum and the maximum of what the dominating cultures will sanction for circulation, exchange and consumption … as minority exceptions, they represent heroic autonomy from their very identity (Berlant 1994, 156).]

Berlant’s account of the permitted tolerance of sexual, racial and differently embodied minorities within a national culture resonates with contemporary

32 See Berlant’s America, “Fat”, the Fetus’ for an analysis of how the foetus has become the exemplary citizen of the United States (Berlant 1994). In ‘Coda: Pregnancy, Paranoia, Justice’, she argues that a sentimental culture of pregnancy: ‘takes pregnancy as the condition of ordinary women write large’ in a way that ‘actively disaffirms the political public sphere’ (Berlant 2001, 150-1).

33 Marr is unsympathetic to this sentimentalisation of Diana: ‘she had all the modern disorders – bulimia, self-hatred, celebrity’ (Marr 2000, 47). In ‘Princess Diana: A Sign of the Times’, Rosalind Brunt argues that the death of Diana ‘marked the entry of icon into the vernacular’ (Brunt 1999, 22): ‘She was the people’s Princess’ (Tony Blair quoted in Brunt 1999, 29). The subsequent outbreak of public mourning with massed flower tributes and personal memorials focused on national sites in London, particularly on Parliament Square and Kensington Gardens, but not on Trafalgar Square.
debates in Britain about the place of minority ethnic, sexual and disability cultures.\textsuperscript{34} If we are looking for a public image of the national body in relation to new taxonomies of Britishness, the statue of \textit{Alison Lapper Pregnant} is not so much ‘a new model of female heroism’, as Quinn and Livingstone suggest, but as a ‘minority exception’ it represents ‘heroic autonomy’ in a way that could make it an affirming icon within a national sentimental culture.\textsuperscript{35}

In an earlier article, Berlant argued that such bodies cannot be abstract citizens occupying the privileged position of the white male embodied norm, because their ‘surplus corporeality’ is ‘hyper-embodied, an obstacle and not a vehicle to public pleasure and power’ (Berlant 1991, 113-14). My initial impression on seeing \textit{Alison Lapper Pregnant} a few weeks after its unveiling was indeed that its huge scale and whiteness was shocking, a hyper-embodied obstacle to my (expected) pleasure. My response was very different from when I first saw Quinn’s original sculpture in a solitary and silent viewing space at the Tate Gallery Liverpool in 2002.\textsuperscript{36} Berlant’s idea of the intimate public sphere neatly captures the shift in Lapper’s status from private subject to public citizen in the interval between the two versions of her portrait. It also metaphorically maps the physical re-location of Quinn’s sculpture from the intimacy of the gallery to its new visibility as a public monument. In the crowded setting of Trafalgar Square, the statue appears against the noise of passing traffic and London buses, a hybrid mixing of English and foreign bodies, of tourists and pigeons. This is not an intimate or local space, nor is it a space of the everyday that Massey suggests has been coded as feminine and maternal (Massey 1994). In this location it seemed to be \textit{too} big and \textit{too} white, incongruous within the public space of the Square. I can rationalise my response in aesthetic terms: the figure is out of scale with the other statues; the glistening white marble stands out against the dull grey of weathered stone and London sky and, while public sculptures often mediate between the scale of surrounding buildings and that of

\textsuperscript{34} Current examples include ongoing debates about British Muslim legal rights within the context of global terrorist activity, the status of homosexual priests within the Church of England, and physical access for wheelchair users to the English countryside (BBC Radio Four \textit{Today} 1 December 2007).

\textsuperscript{35} It is difficult to imagine a similar monument in London to the dead soldiers of the Iraq war, still less to any military heroes following the various accusations of misconduct and torture by the occupying forces. However, in the summer of 2007 a traditional memorial in a rural setting in Staffordshire was dedicated to British military personnel who lost their lives in all conflicts since World War II.

\textsuperscript{36} Quinn’s sculpture suffers from translation by mechanical means onto a larger scale and, like Michelangelo’s \textit{David}, its monumental size exposes a certain weakness in the round.
the human body, this statue is literally larger than life.\textsuperscript{37} Robert Simon’s critical comment that it was ‘machine-made, much too big’, seemed to reflect my own feeling, which was that the mechanical enlargement of the original in favour of an heroic gigantism had lost the subtle modelling of Lapper’s singular body and exposed its vulnerability to a hostile gaze. Although our responses were shaped by very different political affiliations, I recognise that my own discomfort, like Simons’, stemmed from an immediate affective response rather than from an aesthetic judgement. My reaction was more akin to embarrassment, a feeling of (something) being exposed, of what had been an intimate encounter being made public.

This sudden embarrassing intimacy with a larger than life naked, pregnant and physically impaired body suggests a certain discomfort in the field of the visual. These are, as Elspeth Probyn suggests, ‘feelings in a spatial sense’, they are what makes certain bodies ‘feel or appear to be disgusting or out of place’.\textsuperscript{38} It is because of spatial, economic and geo-political changes in the relations between social subjects that a dynamic and continuous sense of socio-subjective embodiment is made possible, but this can also produce a discomfort that Probyn identifies as ‘shame’s public intimacy’ (Probyn 2005, 41). Whereas for Berlant writing in the US public sentiment is politically suspect, shame for Probyn is a productive affect, because it helps us to reflect on our individual and collective identities and thus our affective investment in our own and other bodies: shame is ‘productive in how it makes us think again about bodies, societies, and human interaction’ (Probyn 2005, xviii).\textsuperscript{39} Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, she derives her account of shame from clinical psychologist Silvan Tomkins’ theory of affect as a ‘phenomenology of emotions’ through which the social is embodied (Kosofky Sedgwick and Frank 1995, 2).\textsuperscript{40} Shame is thus relational; it is publically and communally felt and attaches to the body, whereas guilt is defined in legal terms and experienced individually. Probyn prompts us to think about the role of shame in daily life and in academic reflection when she asks: ‘How does shame make us think differently?’ (Probyn 2005, 13). In considering my ambiguous response to \textit{Alison Lapper Pregnant}, I recognise that the embarrassment here is

\textsuperscript{37} Responses to it amongst conference participants in discussions of my paper range from negative aesthetic and political reactions to positive affirmation and respect.

\textsuperscript{38} Probyn’s comments were made at the Feminist Media Research Group seminar at Lancaster University on October 2007. She explores the relations between theory, politics, embodiment, the emotions and the affects’ in \textit{Blush Faces of Shame} (Probyn 2005, 2). See also Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank (1995), Berlant (2000) and Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) on affect, shame and public feeling.

\textsuperscript{39} Probyn cites the Australian Reconciliation Convention and the Stolen Generation report in 1997 as examples of the politics of shame in a national context.

\textsuperscript{40} See also Kosofy Sedgewick (2003) \textit{Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity} (Durham: Duke University Press).
not Lapper’s but my own, and is connected to a sense of (her) being bodily out of place. My reaction can be seen as productive in that it is connected to the experience of imagining my body in place of hers, of putting my self in her skin, which in turn provoked my enquiry about ‘the production of national space’ (Puwar 2004, 5). If shame is always connected to bodily experience, then the blush is its signifier: ‘Blushing is the body calling out its interest’ (Probyn 2005, 28). In her investigation of blushing and whiteness in visual culture, Angela Rosenthal makes a link between Neo-Classical sculpture as a fetishisation of the white body and ‘the spectacular performance of whiteness as an erasure of corporeality’ (578). Blushing stages both gendered heterosexual relations and a ‘racialisation of skin’, which produces gendered whiteness (Rosenthal 2004, 582). And, while Alison Lapper Pregnant emphatically does not blush, my corporeal encounter with the sculpture produced an effect that is not dissimilar. To say that I ‘blushed’ implies a lingering sense of shame attached to female intimate bodily exposure that I suggest can be seen as part of a wider affective response to an encounter in which ‘private’ emotions are brought into the public sphere, and may be seen as linked to the queering of national space.

Maternal Bodies and the Queering of National Space

As we have seen, Quinn represented Lapper not only as dis/abled, but in the shape of a naked pregnant body. Like disability, the spatial taxonomy of the pregnant body is constituted by a juxtaposition of opposites: it is at the same time hidden and exposed, intimate and yet subject to public scrutiny. The pregnant body also entails, by definition, another kind of disruption of the metonymy between individual autonomy and bodily integrity in favour of an incomplete, vulnerable and changing somatic subject. Maternal subjects occupy sites of multiple attachments and investments in everyday life, which may define them as normative – heterosexual, able-bodied and within stable relationships – or under particular circumstances as deviant. Berlant argues that certain bodies remain illegitimate within the sanctioned, albeit expanded sphere of public intimacy, including those of an increasing minority of pregnant women who are the subject of surveillance and intervention. Single, immigrant, drug-taking or ‘welfare’ mothers are ‘linked to each other by a collective experience of being public and scrutinized in pregnancy’ (Berlant 2001, 152).41 Structurally, the pregnant body is located in the private familial sphere, which is seen as separated from the public world of work and politics, but it is disciplined and regulated through the welfare system, health and safety legislation, and legal

41 See also Anne Balsamo on public pregnancies (1996, 80-115) and Imogen Tyler on the figure of the ‘chav mum’ (2008).
and medical control over maternity and reproductive rights. Thus, the ‘private’ sphere of somatic and affective life is increasingly subjected to national state power and legislation. These regulatory mechanisms affect ‘gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy … truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care’ (Warner 1993, xiii). While pregnancy seems to belong naturally to what Berlant and Warner have called the ‘intimate relations of private personhood’ that reinforce heterosexual privilege, some representations of the sexual pregnant body will potentially queer the pitch of sexual binaries in unexpected ways (Berlant and Warner 2000, 319). Representations of pregnancy like *Alison Lapper Pregnant* that de-familiarise the maternal body can be seen as ‘queering what counts as nature’, and thus have the potential to destabilise somatic norms (Haraway 1992, 300). But, to what extent can such a deviant maternal body in public be said to queer national space?

Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as ‘a constellation of practices that everywhere disperses heterosexual privilege as a tacit but central organising index of social membership’ (Berlant and Warner 2000, 319). In this context it is helpful to consider how queering can function as a critical methodology for analysing cultural and social texts across multiple axes of difference. Indeed, new spatialisations of queer belonging emerge as the term expands to challenge the ‘normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, normal or perverse’ (Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 2005, 1). If queer is a theoretical perspective from which to challenge the normative, the representation of Alison Lapper as a ‘heroic’ figure of minority can also be seen as one instance of ‘resistance to regimes of the normal’ (Warner quoted in Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 2005, 3). Alison Lapper’s determined public visibility challenges heteronormativity as a

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42 In the UK, the Labour Government under Prime Minister Gordon Brown is increasingly introducing legislative sanctions over the family through, for example, placing parenting directives on families deemed to be dysfunctional.

43 Rozsika Parker suggests that the patriarchal and heterosexual regulation of families prescribes norms of motherhood with particular rigidity: ‘Our culture permits flexibility in other activities that involve intimacy, some heterogeneity, some diversity of styles, but hardly any at all when it comes to mothering’ (Parker 2005, 2).

44 See Braidotti (1996) on embodied difference and Betterton (2006) for an account of how differently imagined body schema by contemporary artists disrupt maternal ideals.

45 The authors contrast this queer critique with ‘queer liberalism’ in which gay and lesbian identities are subject to mechanisms of normalisation in order to be included within mainstream practices, for example, in same sex marriage (Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 2005, 10). Anne-Marie Fortier suggests that queer diaspora
social index of belonging, although she does not reject heterosexuality per se, indeed her active sexuality is important to her identity as a dis/abled individual. Her narrative as a dis/abled single woman who has become the subject of intense scrutiny during her pregnancy however does seem to offer, ‘the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture’ (Berlant and Warner 2000, 312). I do not suggest here that it was ever Quinn’s intention to produce queer imagery, indeed much of his work is relentlessly heteronormative, but that queering the maternal is one strategy for disrupting and reconfiguring gendered and sexual norms. In the context of Trafalgar Square and its public sculpture, the inclusion of the historically excluded figure of a dis/abled pregnant woman not only points to material inequalities in gender, class and embodiment, but also suggests that it can be a site for challenging national imaginaries. To embrace what is excluded as a space of possibility for different figurations of embodiment may, in Donna Haraway’s terms, offer ‘performative images that can be inhabited’ (Haraway 1997, 11).

Trafalgar Square is a space of political representation then in a double sense. It is a public space in which figures and concepts are given new meaning by their material representation in the form of sculpture and architecture and, as a national space it is the site of symbolic and literal struggles for the successive re-framing of contested bodies and identities. I have suggested that different conceptualisations of space and of historical processes in which new representations are produced can destabilise the ‘norms and principles of national embodiment’ to produce the potential for new queer identifications (Berlant 1997, 98). In this context we can imagine national space as open and porous, a spatiality in which many bodies co-exist in different relations of alignment or contradiction. A dynamic concept of the ‘space-time’ of Trafalgar Square ‘challenges any possibility of claims to internal histories or to timeless identities’ (Massey 2004, 5). And if, ‘[s]patiality cannot be analysed through the medium of the male body and heterosexual male experience’ (Massey 2004, 182), then Lapper’s pregnant body can be seen to queer space insofar as it, however temporarily, disrupts established embodied norms. Garland Thomason suggests that the extraordinary body is ‘fundamental to narratives by which we make sense of ourselves and our world’ (Garland Thomson 1996, 1), and thus can also become a critical site that contests concepts of the nation state, citizenship and identity (Fortier 2008).

an embodied queering of public space marks one small shift in the stories that are available to us for narrating the nation. From this perspective, *Alison Lapper Pregnant* was much more than another statue installed in Trafalgar Square; it has become an active and signifying presence that altered the dynamics of national space and expanded its symbolic potential to embrace other bodies and queer identities.

**Postscript**

Ironically, when *Alison Lapper Pregnant* ended its tenure of the Fourth Plinth in October 2007 it was replaced briefly during the Rugby World Cup by a life size wax model of Johnny Wilkinson – a desired return perhaps to the iconic English hero. The most recent commission announced in June 2008 has been awarded to two unorthodox works of contemporary art by Anthony Gormley and Yinka Shonibare: the former will invite a thousand members of the public to stand on the plinth for an hour each as individual living statues, while the latter’s proposal is a model of Nelson’s ship *Victory* in a giant glass bottle, dressed in sails made of African batik symbolising London’s multicultural identity. The Fourth Plinth sculpture commission has therefore become not only a focus for debate about contemporary art in Britain, but also an index of contemporary resources for different sexualised and racialised identities, signifiers and subjectivities. Trafalgar Square can be seen as a national space of becoming, which is mobilised by the presence of sculptural objects that inhabit it and contingent on the narratives and histories of the bodies that frequent it.

**References**


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47 *Alison Lapper Pregnant* was replaced by an abstract sculpture by Thomas Schutte, *Model for a Hotel 2007*, a coloured glass model of a 21 storey hotel that was unveiled in November 2007, marking a resumption of the spatial and ideological ambiguity previously signified by Rachel Whiteread’s *Plinth*, 2001. A brief earlier incarnation of the hero figure was a wax model of David Beckham, which appeared on the plinth in 2002.


BODIES POLITIC?


Chapter 3
King’s Member, Queen’s Body:
Transsexual Surgery, Self-Demand Amputation and the Somatechnics of Sovereign Power
Susan Stryker and Nikki Sullivan

Political philosophy still must learn how to cut off the head of the king: Michel Foucault’s well-known model of power as decentralised and anti-juridical could justly be characterised as a radical conceptual operation accomplishing precisely that theoretical feat. In Foucault’s analysis, political power is not, as in liberal political theory, an alienable property possessed by individual subjects who rationally choose, in the name of a greater good, to cede it to a sovereign entity, vested in the person of a king or an impersonal state apparatus, which then in turn, through the threat of force, guarantees the rights and responsibilities of citizenship for its constitutive members (Macpherson). That concept of power, Foucault suggests, is a ruse that masks the mechanisms through which power actually operates – but it can also, we contend, map power’s legitimating fictions, fictions specific to the emergent nation-states of Eurocentric modernity.

The most well known example of this power schema, can, of course, be found in Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan, in which Hobbes conceives of the modern political anatomy as a sort of bodily unity.¹ He writes: ‘by art is created that great leviathan called a commonwealth or state … which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended: and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body’ (Hobbes, 1968: 81-2). Hobbes elaborates at great length on the contiguous relation between the body of ‘man’² and the political anatomy, but ends with the claim that ‘the pacts and covenants, by which the parts of this body politic were at first made,

¹ For a depiction of Hobbes’ conception of the body politic, please see http://www.univie.ac.at/science-archives/fulda/bilder/leviathan.jpg.
² See Cadwallader, in this volume, and Gatens (1996) for a detailed discussion of the gendered character of the Leviathan.
set together and united, resemble that *fiat*, or the *let us make man*, pronounced by God in the creation’ (Hobbes, 1968: 81-2).

In wanting to make a concrete analysis of power relations within Eurocentric modernity, Foucault dispensed with the Hobbesian notion of a single locus of sovereign power, such as the king or the head of state, and turned instead to asking how power is organised through multiple ‘relations of force that intersect, refer to one another, converge, or, on the contrary, come into conflict and strive to negate one another’ (Foucault, 2004: 265-66). Society within the nation-states of Eurocentric modernity is not, for Foucault, in its actual operations, an orderly arrangement, structured like an organically integrated social body, as Hobbes imagined. If this society has a figure, it is rather more like the one drawn by André Masson in 1936 for Georges Bataille’s surrealist journal *Acephale* – not merely a mutilated, amputated *Vitruvian Man* who stands the humanist Enlightenment on its head; but rather a decapitated figure who negates the very seat and space of reason, leaving the body to be animated by the chaotic forces of the marketplace; a figure whose inner workings are laid bare, and who holds the tools capable of producing its own dismemberment.3 With its genitals reconfigured ‘as death’ rather than ‘for life,’ it is the figure demanded by Deleuze and Guattari’s state apparatus, after the state has appropriated the war machine:

It is true that war kills, and hideously mutilates. But it is especially true after the State has appropriated the war machine. Above all, the State apparatus makes the mutilation, and even death, come first … The State apparatus needs, at its summit as at its base, predisabled people, preexisting amputees (Deleuze and Guattari, 425-26).

How, we ask in this chapter, might embodied being be conceived in such an anti-juridical, anti-sovereignty world? In *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, Foucault calls for a history of bodies, for an analysis of ‘the manner in which what is most material and most vital … has been invested’ (Foucault, 1980: 151). He rejects the notion of ‘the anatomical body overlaid with culture’ (Gatens, 1996: 70) in favour of an understanding of what Moira Gatens describes as ‘the (often unconscious) imaginaries of a specific culture,’ (1996: viii), of what we understand as the mutually generative relation between bodies of flesh, bodies and knowledge, and bodies politic – or, in short, as somatechnics.

How, in a context in which bodies are always already enmeshed/enfleshed in (and through) a sociotechnical apparatus, are technological ‘enhancements’ to be distinguished from the technologised norm? In critically exploring the somatechnics of (im)proper corporealities we hope to queer the idea(l) of

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integrity as that which at once enables certain modes of bodily being, and denigrates or forecloses others. The chapter proceeds via a discussion of two disparate somatomorphic practices, transsexual surgery and self-demand amputation. Our research on these topics leads us toward a new understanding of bodily integration, one predicated not on the organic integrity of the human organism, but rather on the body’s suitability for integration, its ability to be integrated as a biopolitical resource into a larger sociotechnical field, or into an apparatus such as the State.

Hobbes’ vision of the modern body politic as a cultural artifact founded on an a priori or ‘natural’ body, is one in which integrity (in both the material and the moral sense) is the original and perfect condition, and the necessary condition, for the continued well-being of its members and itself. Whilst many would argue that the body politic described by Hobbes has undoubtedly become increasingly dismembered, disarticulated, and differentiated, it seems to us that ideals of, and ideas about, bodily integrity nevertheless continue to (in)form current social imaginaries – that notions of integrity, in short, still create somatechnic effects on individual bodies, social bodies, and the relations between them. Indeed, it is the long shadow cast by Hobbes’ Leviathan that makes the questions raised by both transsexual surgery and self-demand amputation so curiously central to contemporary biopolitical concerns about embodiment, technology, and sovereign power.

What most interests us about this vision of the modern body politic – an imaginary body whose ‘reality’ is, to borrow a phrase from Linda Alcoff, ‘internal to certain schemas of social ontology’ (Alcoff, 2001: 267) – is the vitalising character of the pacts and covenants that constitute a tacit form of consent integral to the notion of social contract. Insofar as the Hobbesian pacts and covenants that constitute the body politic resemble that fiat pronounced by God in the creation, they are quintessentially performative speech acts, whose ‘social magic,’ to use Pierre Bourdieu’s turn of phrase, lies precisely in the efficacious force of their authority to cause certain operations of sovereign power to take effect – a force ultimately dependant, Bourdieu contends, not on language itself, but rather on the material power of the social group ‘that authorizes and recognises’ the power of the performative utterance (Bourdieu, 1977: 110). Performativity, in other words, works its magic by using language to orchestrate and coordinate an act of social power.

Judith Butler has further argued that performative linguistic acts draw their seemingly magical social power through the citation of preexisting norms. The reiterative citation of these norms, their incorporation as the body’s history and condition of possibility, precedes the emergence of the subject, and interpolates or initiates the subject into the symbolic order, which in turn is constituted by hegemonic imaginaries circulating at any particular time, in any given culture. ‘In order to remain viable, to maintain the position of subject,
the subject must cite the regulatory idea(s), the pacts and covenants, that created its intelligibility in the first place. Thus the intelligible body(subject) is the materialisation, or sedimented effect, of these specific (tacit) pacts and covenants’, or somatechnologies.  

The foregoing arguments assert that the figuratively isomorphic relations between the collective body politic and an individual corporeality is therefore not merely representational, but also material: somatechnologies function as ‘the capillary space of connection and circulation between the macro- and micro-political registers through which the lives of bodies become enmeshed in the lives of nations, states, and capital-formations’ (Stryker, Currah, and Moore, 2008: 14). The socially allowable formations and transformations of individual bodies are thus intimately related, in a non-analogical manner, to the forms and formulations of integrity through which society, as the body politic, coheres. Feminist philosopher Rosalyn Diprose enlarges upon this point with her claim that:

The regimes of social regulation, which dictate the right way to live, implicitly or explicitly seek to preserve the integrity of every body such that we are compatible with the social body. Not only do these thereby dictate which embodied existences can be transformed by whom and to what end but, as it is here that comparisons are made and values born, not all bodies are counted as socially viable. In short, the privilege of a stable place within that social and political place we call the ‘common good’ is secured at the cost of denigrating and excluding others (Diprose, 1994: 131).

Transsexual surgery and self-demand amputation are two practices, we suggest, that have, at different historical moments, produced individual bodies and collective subject positions that have been denigrated within, and excluded from, the body politic on the basis of their perceived incompatibility with interrelated notions of bodily and social integrity.

Self-demand amputation is described in medical literature and in the popular press as the removal of ‘healthy’ tissue or ‘healthy’ limbs, and as such it is generally regarded as anathema. That the surgical reduction or removal of healthy breast tissue, or the removal of healthy genital tissue through circumcision or intersex surgeries are never conceived as forms of elective amputation, only calls our attention to the high moral charge invested in the concept of willful amputation. How, we might ask, and on what basis, can one distinguish self-demand amputation from other somatomorphic practices? How is one to understand the relation of members and limbs to questions of gender and sexuality? The distinction, frequently posited in both medical and personal accounts of self-

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demand amputation, between the removal of so-called healthy members or limbs (i.e., self-demand amputation), and the removal of other forms of healthy body tissue (i.e., cosmetic surgeries, sex reassignment surgeries, circumcision, or simply institutionally authorised surgeries) is founded on the unquestioned assumption that the former results in ‘disability’, whereas the latter procedures allegedly do not (or at least not intentionally). However, in arguing that cosmetic procedures ‘parade mutilations as enhancements’ (Garland-Thomson, 2002: 7) feminists and critical disability theorists such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson call into question popular assumptions regarding the separation of procedures which allegedly ‘disable’ from those which supposedly ‘enhance’, and highlight, as Diprose does, the embodied costs of such justificatory fictions.

Self-demand amputation, a discursive phenomenon once labelled by John Money as the paraphilia ‘apotemnophilia’, has more recently come to be understood by medical practitioners and self-demand amputees alike, as an ‘identity disorder,’ or more specifically, as ‘body integrity identity disorder’ (BIID). This ‘condition’ is frequently compared to so-called ‘gender identity disorder’ because in both cases, ‘the individuals involved [allegedly] experience the persistent desire to have their body physically match the idealised image they have of themselves. This desire forces [self-demand amputees] to deal with the [seeming] paradox of losing body parts in order to become whole’. For example, in the BBC documentary Complete Obsession, Gregg Furth, a middle aged psychoanalyst who has desired a leg amputation for as long as he can remember says, ‘it’s about becoming whole, not disabled. You have this foreign body and you want to get rid of it’ (cited in Dotinga, 2000). Furth, it appears, feels that through amputation he will gain the sense of bodily integrity he previously lacked – an integration achieved through the congruence of his phantasmatic body image with the space occupied by his corporeal substance.

Ironically (but understandably, given hegemonic conditions of reiterative citationality) arguments against the surgical removal of healthy limbs tend to be informed by the same assumptions about bodily integrity that inform arguments in its favour: that integrity is essential to the well-being of individuals and of the body politic more generally. However, as medical ethicist Arthur Caplan puts it in a statement that no doubt reflects commonly held opinions about the removal of a healthy limb, it is ‘utter lunacy to go along with the request to maim someone’ (cited in Dotinga, 2000, our emphasis). Elective amputation and the integrity of individual bodies and collective society are constructed as mutually exclusive. For Caplan, then, insofar as elective amputation involves the maiming of someone, it constitutes ‘mayhem’, and it is at this point that the history of

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6 See www.biid.org.
transsexuality becomes particularly pertinent to our discussion of self-demand amputation, and to the argument we seek to advance about bodily integrity.

Between 1949 and 1966, when the medical ethics of transsexual surgeries were first widely debated in the United States, doctors routinely objected to ‘sex-change’ operations, along much the same lines that doctors now object to self-demand amputation. The early attention to ‘sex change’ was accorded primarily to male-to-female individuals, and the procedures involved consisted more often than not of penectomies and orchidectomies rather than vaginoplasty. Doctors and lawyers argued that such procedures were in fact illegal insofar as they contravened mayhem statutes, which forbade the ‘willful removal of healthy tissue’ (Meyerowitz, 2002: 120-21). This was the position explicitly advanced by California Attorney General Edmund Brown in 1949, in the first legally significant attempt in California to conduct genital transformation surgery for the purpose of what might be called ‘self-demand’ change of sex (rather than genital surgeries carried out by the state as part of eugenics programmes, contraception, attempts to eradicate homosexuality, or the normalisation of morphologically ambiguous genitalia). No less an authority than Alfred Kinsey weighed in with his opinion that transsexual genital surgeries were in fact disabling, in that (he thought) they destroyed the possibility of orgasm and deprived their recipients of reproductive capacity. In subsequent attempts to perform transsexual genital surgeries in the United States, Mexico, Canada, and several Western European countries in the mid-1950s, after the spectacular publicity generated in 1951 and 1952 by Christine Jorgensen’s headline-grabbing transsexual operations in Denmark, the legal objections and medical refusals to perform transsexual genital surgeries were less formally pronounced than Brown’s and Kinsey’s had been, but they were no less socially powerful. One early US transsexual, writing to her doctor on 8 July 1957, about her inability to locate a vaginoplasty surgeon in the US subsequent to her castration in Europe, complained that ‘there is no law that would restrict a surgeon from completing the necessary surgery once the castration had been performed. Yet I find that no-one “feels” free to do it’ (TR [anonymised] 1957).

More striking still, for purposes of the discussion here, are accounts of yet other mid-twentieth-century transgender individuals who sought surgical

8 Surgical removal of the penis.
9 Removal of the testes.
10 The construction of a vagina.
11 Confidentiality guidelines at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction (hereafter referred to as the Kinsey Institute) at Indiana University require that all patient names in archival medical records be anonymised or pseudonymised; in this chapter we provide the initial of such authors’ first and last names.
transformation, at a time before a dominant narrative of transsexual identity and embodiment had taken shape. In some of these accounts, orchidectomies and penectomies, often carried out as first and second steps in a surgical series, were considered by the recipients and the surgeons alike to constitute the actual ‘sex change,’ whereas vaginoplasty, in the event it was ultimately carried out as a third step (which was not always the case), was considered an optional ‘plastic’ or ‘cosmetic’ procedure. One male-to-female transsexual, who had lived as a woman in Berlin throughout the 1920s and 1930s and knew other people there like herself, spoke openly of friends who desired ‘amputation’ of the penis without necessarily simultaneously desiring vaginoplasty – for it was the former operation, and not the latter, that changed the relationship between the individual and the state (CVC, 1956). In light of such accounts, contemporary transsexual discourses that focus on the transformation of one normative genital morphology into another normative genital morphology appear as complex, historically contingent, narrative productions that mask the disarticulations and dismembered parts from which the narrative has been assembled. To what extent, then, might the word ‘amputation,’ a word largely erased from contemporary transsexual discourse but recoverable from its history, describe an act of negation that opens a space of possibility, a space in which the desire for new forms of social connectivity, as well as new forms of embodied subjectivity, can begin to be articulated – a desire which at first cannot, because the enabling historical conditions have not yet taken shape, name and express itself in more positive terms?

Over time, as a new medico-legal discourse on transsexual embodiment began to emerge, it became possible for society to recognise, in some limited and highly controlled and contested sense, the legitimacy of transsexual desires for bodily transformation. Dr. Harry Benjamin’s influential 1966 book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, deserves significant credit for promulgating this new understanding (Benjamin, 1966). As several works of feminist history have pointed out in the past decade, the medical management of transsexual and related intersex phenomena has in fact been instrumental in developing the tripartite conceptual framework of *somatic* sex, *social* gender role, and *psychological* gender identity that informs currently dominant cultural notions governing the intelligibility of bodily-being (Meyerowitz, Hausman). In the new discursive context that emerged in the wake of the mid-twentieth-century transsexual phenomenon, the figure of the transsexual came to be seen as one who could, through newly sanctioned medico-juridical processes, properly come to (re)integrate sex, gender and social role – rather than improperly stage their disjunction.

However socially marginalised many transsexuals remain, some members of the self-demand amputation community now point toward the perceived discursive triumph of transsexuality, and seek to replicate something analogous
for themselves. The logic of their argument stresses the historical dimension of embodied and subjective positionalities. The moral ‘sex hierarchy’ diagrammed by anthropologist Gayle Rubin in her influential 1984 article, ‘Thinking Sex’ is useful for schematising the self-demand amputation argument. Rubin distinguishes between forms of sexuality clearly labelled ‘good,’ such as reproductive heterosexual monogamy, and those clearly labelled ‘bad’ such as fetishistic cross-dressing or street prostitution, and identifies a ‘major area of contest’ between these poles that encompasses sexual practices that are morally ambiguous within the dominant culture, such as promiscuous heterosexuality or long-term romantic homosexual couplings (Rubin, 1984: 14). Self-demand amputees have essentially begun to argue that transsexuality has moved over time from ‘clearly bad’ to the ‘conflict zone,’ while they themselves, having recently appeared on the horizon of cultural visibility as ‘bad,’ have a clear path toward potential legitimation laid out before them; or – dare we say it – toward social integration. ‘Mayhem,’ in the logic of this argument, might best be understood not as ‘the willful removal of healthy tissue,’ but rather as a term through which we morally condemn somatomorphic practices which have not – or not yet – been legitimated, practices of bodily transformation that advance claims of personal integrity which remain, for the moment at least, unreconciled with the pacts and covenants that integrate the social body.

Common to some personal accounts of both transsexualism and self-demand amputation is the image of a self trapped in a body that is both alien and alienating. The claim of one anonymous 1947 correspondent to Sexology magazine medical advice columnist David Cauldwell, that ‘I am a woman in the shell of a man … I am marked by Nature as a male, but, I have the … heart and soul of a woman’ (Cauldwell, 1949: 7), is one with which we are all by now familiar. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that self-demand amputees sometimes articulate their embodied existence in similar ways, claiming, for example, that they are, in effect ‘one-legged people trapped in two-legged bodies.’ In Melody Gilbert’s documentary, Whole, for example, one would-be amputee says ‘My legs are extraneous. They shouldn’t be there. It doesn’t feel right that they extend beyond where I feel my body should end’; another interviewee, who successfully self-amputated a leg, says, ‘I have to your way of thinking, mutilated myself. But to my way of thinking, what I’ve done is I’ve corrected the body that is wrong’.

12 We are by no means suggesting that all those who require the amputation of a healthy limb conceive themselves in this way.

13 The experience of a disjunction between self and body is not, of course, unique to trans-people and self-demand amputees (nor even common to all trans-folk and/or amputees). Rather, whilst ideas about wrong bodies also abound in accounts by applicants seeking other forms of modificatory surgery – for example, the woman
In keeping with dominant ontology, these examples of self-narrativisation posit a distinction between mind and body, and presuppose a self which, although ‘invisible and unquantifiable, is claimed as the authentic core of be-ing’ (Wilton, 2000: 241). Moreover, these narratives conceive the body as the improper object of the subject. Transgender theorist Jay Prosser describes this impropriety as the refusal of the subject to own its referential body; that is: ‘I do not recognize as proper, as my property, this material surround; therefore I must be trapped in the wrong body’ (Prosser, 1998: 77). Clearly, in a socio-political context in which the body is commonly understood as an object owned by the subject who inhabits it, such an improper state is both undesirable and something that the subject has the right to overcome. Here we can clearly see how the very concept of ‘wrong body’ as a somatomorphic legitimation strategy acts as a transposable citational practice, in which the subject is configured as having alienable rights in the private property of its own body, with a concomitant right to act upon that property according to its sovereign will. It is to the question of sovereignty and bodily integrity that we now turn, by returning to the question of mayhem.

According to William Veit Sherwin, mayhem statutes in the United States have their roots in English common law, which, in the pre-modern period, held it a crime punishable by death for a man of fighting age to cut off the fingers of his sword hand, thus rendering himself unfit for military service – while continuing, no doubt, to pursue most other activities in life (Sherwin, 1969: 421). Interestingly for the sake of our argument here, a male’s loss of genitals was specifically not classed as mayhem, for this did not interfere with the ability to bear arms (Money and Schwarz, 1969: 258). Historically, then, it appears that the legal question of mayhem emerged not in reference to dismemberment per se, but rather in reference to a form of bodily transformation that compromised a particular body’s ability to be integrated into a particular social field as a resource for the exercise of sovereign power. This mayhem is an act that aims to preserve life itself for the body that lives it, rather than for the instrumentality that claims it – an act of resistance to being consumed, rather than becoming the victim of sovereign violence. It was, moreover, not a crime committed against an individual, but rather one committed by an individual; as Elizabeth Loeb has who argued that her emotional health was threatened by the fact that she ‘look[s] like someone who is always pigging out on cake, but [she isn’t]’ – it could be argued that it is an experience shared by most people, to varying degrees, and in specific circumstances. However, we suggest that for most people the experience of a split between body and self lacks the continued intensity that motivates self-demand amputees and transsexuals to seek radical forms of surgical intervention.

14 Transsexual narratives, like the narratives of self-demand amputees, could be said to exceed this logic, however, this excess is continually denied in and through its reincorporation into a liberal ontology.
recently noted, ‘the demand that bodies remain available to discorporation solely at the prerogative of the sovereign has deep roots in Anglo law’ (Loeb, 2008: 49). Mayhem is thus a crime against sovereignty and the collective body politic, one that simultaneously dismembered the pacts and covenants binding together bodies of flesh, bodies of knowledge, and social bodies. As such, we contend, mayhem is a somatechnology that can queer or skew the relationship between individual corporeality and the body politic. Or as Hobbes might have put it, mayhem precipitates confusion, disorder, disability, and the disintegration of leviathan. In short, mayhem constitutes an act of war – civil war – which augurs a war of all against all. It is, in effect, cutting off one’s member to thereby cut off the head of the king.

In this analysis, what we are calling ‘the king’s member’ is that body part which facilitates specific uses of the biopower of the bodily remainder – it is the sovereign claim upon the body of the manually dexterous sword hand, the body of the reproductively capable genitalia, the body of the labouring limbs. By ‘the queen’s body’ we mean to suggest, through reference once again to transsexual history, a particular strategy for resolving these tense negotiations over life and death between sovereignty and its subjects. In one of its vernacular senses, ‘queen’ is camp argot for a feminine man, often a homosexual man who dresses in women’s clothing as a way of signaling a certain kind of sexual desire for other men, and who often engages, either for pleasure or for lack of other opportunities in life, in illicit public commercial sex activities. In the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, the emerging availability of transsexual discourses and modes of embodiment revealed the heterogeneity of urban street queen subcultures, and simultaneously became a mechanism for differentiating these populations. Not all of the male-bodied people with feminine dispositions who were called ‘queens’ by others, or who participated as such in homosexual subcultures, thought of themselves as being properly interpellated by that name. They lived, half willingly, in and through that category because none other was available that better matched the configuration of their own desires and identifications. In a mid-1960s interview in San Francisco, such a person complained of being considered ‘a common queen.’ She resented that she could not ‘get away from it, no matter what I do; I am put into this category; I am labelled as this,’ when what she wanted was for ‘society [to] let me live my life as I want to live it, which is as a respectable, normal, ordinary woman, period’ (Prince and Muckerman, 1970; Stryker and Silverman, 2005).15

15 The quote, spoken by an unidentified transgender woman, originally appeared in the 1970 film Gay San Francisco (directed by Jonathan Price and distributed by cinematographer Ed Muckerman); this film is not readily publicly available, but a clip containing the quoted material is included in Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker’s 2005 documentary Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria.
The queen's body secures its passage to transsexual womanhood, to life as she wants to live it, through a perilous exchange that frees her from a double bind. In seeking the embodiment that sustains her life, she must appeal to the sovereign power vested in the medico-juridical complex, whilst simultaneously countering the threat of mayhem upon the king's member – a radical threat to the very power she solicits with her promise of a newly productive body, one capable of amplifying its potential as a biopower resource. This transsexual body, though dismembered in one register, becomes re-membered and re-articulated in others. For the embodied subject, it achieves the integration of corporeal space and phantasmatic body, and simultaneously becomes a more socially integrated body, no longer confined to an underground economy. It becomes a body that reproduces, though its atypical technologisation, the visual norms of gendered embodiment that form part of the routine functioning of the social body; it becomes a body more suited for taxable work, for labours more readily harnessed to purposes of state. The queen's body is one that strikes a deal with sovereignty to access the power of certain normativities as an avenue for its own peculiar life.

A final historical episode may serve to illustrate this claim in concrete detail. When Harry Benjamin's book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* was published in July 1966, outlining a new rationale for the provision of medical services to transgendered individuals, it was followed within a few weeks by the first consequential instance of collective, militant resistance to the social oppression of street queens – a small riot at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighbourhood, where many transgender prostitutes (some of them patients of Harry Benjamin) gathered to socialise, and where they banded together to fight back against a routine police raid one night in August 1966 (Armstrong, 2006: 732-33; Silverman and Stryker, 2005). The social sources of the riot were manifold, rooted in the denial on every front of their means of life – employment discrimination that compelled survival prostitution, housing discrimination that necessitated living in the sex-work ghetto, policing practices that kept them physically confined to the place they worked and made their working conditions dangerous and sometimes fatal. For some participants in the riot, the shift from survival to resistance was motivated in part by the prospect of a newly available transsexual mode of embodiment. In the months subsequent to the riot, in response to political organising among Tenderloin street queens who embraced transsexuality, the city of San Francisco took the first tentative but critical steps to integrate these formerly abjected bodies into the social order. It made hormones and psychological counselling services available through the city public health service, created gender-appropriate identification cards, enrolled former prostitutes in job training programmes, and liaised city-funded services with new non-profit and church-based support activities, and with a newly established surgical sex-reassignment programme at near-by Stanford University (Silverman and Stryker, 2005).
Dan Irving has recently suggested that contemporary transgender politics represent an accommodation to neoliberal capitalism that belies the promise of transgender radicalism manifest in events such as the Compton’s Cafeteria Riot, arguing that assimilative activist strategies prioritising ‘the necessity of integrating some trans people into the labour force, and of protecting the employment status of others, appear to foreclose critiques of capitalist productive relations and of the embeddedness of trans subjectivities within capitalist systems of power’ (Irving, 2008: 39). While sharing his assessment that transgender status tends, with increasing rapidity, towards being a ‘normalized transgression’ within neoliberalism, our interpretation of the ‘queen’s body’ suggests that sovereignty’s recuperation of transgender biopower was historically simultaneous with its recognition of transgender ‘demand,’ rather than a subsequent, depoliticising development. From the beginning, the mobilisation of a pathologised category of deviant identity – the transsexual – functioned as a means of ‘making live’ bodies that sovereign power formerly had ‘let die.’ A contemporary radical transgender politics thus cannot simply valorise, or unproblematically return to, the successful tactics of an earlier historical moment. Both moments, the present and the past, are caught up in a larger strategy of individual ‘responsibilisation’ within Eurocentric modernity, in which the deployment of identity itself as a liberatory political category becomes ‘a technology through which dominant actors … and networks obscure and thus reproduce the structural workings of power … as legitimate despite the widespread oppressions at play’ (Loeb, 2008: 56). The present political imperative, as in the past, is to perpetually invest in new manners and forms living – new somatechnologies – that resist concrete threats of immanent death, and yet aim life along a line of flight that seeks escape from the coercions of sovereign violence.

What might this argument imply for the future prospects of contemporary individuals who seek limb amputation for the sake of their own happiness, and perceived integration of their own bodily being? What gambit with sovereign power might win life for themselves, what appeal to justice might be viable? While speculation would be reckless, we can follow Derrida in suggesting that ‘justice is not a present entity or order, not an existing reality or regime; nor is it an ideal’ (Derrida, 1995: 307) towards which we can chart a path. Claims of justice solicit us from a future we cannot know; they are a becoming, an opening to alterity, to differences, or to différance. Our experience should prepare us to ‘welcome the monstrous arrivant’ (Derrida, 307).

To conclude, we would suggest that whatever shape this monstrous arrivant should take, in which the claims to life of self-demand amputees, like those of transgendered people, can be recognised, we think it should not take the form of a right to morphological self-determination, as some liberal theorists of body
modification and human enhancement technologies advocate. First, because to do so clearly expresses a historically and culturally specific legitimising fiction, one specific to Eurocentric modernity, in which freedom and responsibility are imagined in the form of capital – that plastic and transformable form of private property. This fiction is not without its material costs, for it imagines an autonomous, transcendent, universalisable body that, in its infinite maleability, is ultimately unattainable. This is the unreal fantasy of capitalism. Embodiment, we contend, is always materialised as integration, as we have defined it – that is, in and through connection to the sociotechnical apparatus that engenders being in all its specificity, that produces us as individuals and links us to others. The integrity of the body – that is, the ability of the body to be integrated – is thus, paradoxically, dependent on its enfleshment as always already torn, rent, incomplete, and unwhole. It is this aspect of bodily being that the liberal discourse of property rights in oneself does not, and cannot, account for; it is this aspect of bodily being that we seek to highlight when suggesting that individual demands for bodily alteration are also, necessarily, demands for new forms of social relationality – new somatechnological assemblages that ethically refigure the relationship between individual corporealities and aggregate bodies.

In making this claim, we are not in any way suggesting that somatomorphic technologies should not be embraced – indeed, we see no other possibility, given that bodily being in the world is always a somatechnic event. Rather, we want to suggest that what is required is not a more persuasive or meaningful account of the good – or better – life to be attained through the proper application of somatomorphic technologies. What we need, rather, is a critical interrogation, a queering, of the contextually specific ways in which such legitimising fictions as ‘integrity’ simultaneously enable certain modes or forms of bodily being, whilst denigrating or foreclosing others.

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Chapter 4

Asian Sex Workers in Australia: Somatechnologies of Trafficking and Queer Mobilities

Audrey Yue

On 23 September 2001, Puangthong Simaplee, an illegal Thai sex worker in Australia, was detained by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, placed at Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney and died less than 72 hours later. A coronial inquest into her death concluded that Simaplee, a heroin addict, died not as a result of sex trafficking, but of the lack of medical attention given to her at the Centre. The case received sustained national media attention as the first coronial inquiry on sex trafficking. The inquest pointed to the inadequacy of care given to people in detention and the country’s failure to control people smuggling. What the inquest did not point to was the way Australia legitimated its new border paradigm by appealing to the intimate domains of sex, marriage and reproduction. As an illegal Asian sex worker, Simaplee’s irregular or queer migration deviated from the white, heterosexual and family-centred norms that are promoted by the institution of immigration as necessary to good citizenship and desirable to national identity.¹

The case of Simaplee exposes, I argue, how sex is regulated through immigration policies that exclude prostitutes but also how the Asian sex worker has materialised in Australia’s institutional economies as a result of her inclusion in recent anti-trafficking border protection policies. This chapter critically examines the governance of queer mobility in the Asian Australian border. Queer mobility refers to the literal process of irregular migration, and the symbolic process by which non-normative sexualities construct their practices of freedom. It is a critical term that enables one to evaluate how Australia’s racialised immigration, prostitution control and anti-trafficking policies have constructed the migrant Asian sex worker. Central to this, then, is the somatechnology of trafficking. The somatechnology of trafficking refers to

¹ ‘Asia’ is used as a discourse and a collective term to describe a heterogenous region with disparate economies. In Australia, it is often invoked as a racial stereotype to refer to people of South-East Asian descent.
the ways in or through which technologies such as migration and anti-trafficking policies and prostitution control programmes govern and ‘make present’ the migrant Asian sex worker. By considering these technologies through official and unofficial discourses of mobility, this chapter shows how specialised bodies of knowledge are produced and disrupted through immigration laws, abolitionist feminism and sex worker activism. I argue that the practices of queer migration by Asian sex workers in Australia expose the buffer and tension between policy and population, state and community, the Australian nation and its intimate other, Asia, revealing, in the process, how the somatechnologies of trafficking are also the trajectories of queer mobility.

The relationship between technology and its presencing of the body is evident in Foucault’s work on governmentality. Foucault uses the concept of technology interchangeably with terms like the social apparatus, programme and rationality to refer to the techniques and processes of governmentality (1991). Here, technology refers to more than just policies and institutions, and their practices; it encompasses the whole range of regulatory procedures and calculations that are used to govern the population for the purpose of economy, security and territory (102). Central to governmentality, as the management of the social, is the exercise of biopower through the anatomo-political disciplining of bodies and policing of the population. Deleuze extends Foucault’s decentralisation of power by referring to the dispositif not simply as social apparatuses of visibility, enunciation and subjectification, but a ‘multilinear ensemble’ comprising heterogeneous lines of forces capable of generating a ‘surplus-value’ that enables the apparatus to produce and make possible a subjectivity (1992, 159-161). Thus, as a dispositif, a technology is also ‘a line of escape’ (1992, 161). These dialectics of control and freedom are similarly echoed in Heidegger’s philosophical questioning of technology as a mode of revealing the structure and essence of ordering (1977). Through devices such as unlocking, distributing and switching, the practice of revealing brings forth and exposes how the technology of governmentality has enframed and concealed the truth of its order, structure and power. In the following, I examine how migration, prostitution control and anti-trafficking policies in Australia have included and excluded the migrant Asian sex worker in order to reveal the heteronormative mode of intimacy that structures the country. I show how these somatechnologies make present the Asian sex worker as an instance of Australian modernity, and trace her tactics of queer mobility through the resources produced by local sex worker organisations and filmmakers.
Queering Somatechnologies of Trafficking

While human trafficking is arguably one of the world’s oldest crimes, its problem has surfaced in recent years as a result of the globalisation of market and labour forces, and the liberalisation of travel restrictions. In search of employment opportunities lacking in home countries as a result of poverty, war or crisis, labour migration has witnessed the large-scale movement of people from poorer to richer countries. Women, generally regarded as economic burdens in some societies, are especially vulnerable to the potential exploitation that arises from such migration. The International Labor Organization estimates there are currently at least 12.3 million in forced labour, bonded labour, forced child labour and sexual servitude (United States Department of State 2007, 10). Human trafficking is “the most hideous incarnation of globalization” (Datta 2007, 7).

In 2000, the United Nations adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Article 3 (a) thereof defines trafficking as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations General Assembly 2001).

The Protocol is the first global agreement that addresses trafficking at a transnational level, and provides an international framework for judicial cooperation among countries. Although it sets the benchmark for best practice and produces the first universal definition on trafficking, it has sparked many interpretations and debates. Some consider it a ‘criminal enterprise’ and a transnational threat to national security and economic growth (Miko 2007, 38), others treat it as a violation of human rights (Barry 1995; Carrington and Hearn 2003, 2; Jeffreys 1997; Raymond 2002) or a form of forced labour migration (Fergus 2005). While these studies overlap in their disciplinary foci on gender, health, labour, crime and human rights, and diverge in their calibration of deception and consent, they share the central focus on the generally illegal nature of migration as a threat to national security, a form of human exploitation and a tactic of complicit appropriation. None of these studies, however, have focused directly on trafficking as a form of irregular migration that instigates new policies of identification, inclusion and exclusion, and the resistance to these strategies by migrant sex workers. These developments are evident in Australia since signing the Protocol on 11 December 2002 and ratifying it on 15 September 2005.

During this period, anti-trafficking legislation has produced a range of instruments including tighter border protection policies, witness protection
visas and regularisation programmes that have inadvertently ‘made visible’ migrant sex workers, some of whom have also potentially exploited these official anti-trafficking tools. This chapter works with, combines and extends the aforementioned approaches to anti-trafficking by engaging queer migration studies to show how these discourses in Australia are framed by the technology of trafficking as a mode of irregular migration characterised by the transnational mobility of sex and sexual labour. Australia is an exemplary case study: it is a major destination country for sex workers from East Asia and the former Eastern Europe (United States Department of State 2007, 59); it is situated in a region notorious for its non-compliance with the minimum standards required of the Protocol; and its history with Asia is also based on the migration policy of exclusion.

Irregular migration is defined as the “crossing (of) borders without authority, or violating conditions for entering another country” (Jordan and Düvell 2002, 15). According to the International Organization for Migration, it “occurs outside the rules and procedures guiding the orderly international movement of people” (cited in Lupini 2006, 27). There are three criteria for this typology: “There is legal and illegal entry, legal and illegal residence, and legal and illegal employment” (Broeders and Engbersen 2007, 1594. Emphases in original). Irregular migration accounts for more than one third to one half of new entrants into developed countries (Newcombe 2005). In Australia, it is estimated that about one thousand women are trafficked and/or in contract at any one time (Project Respect 2004). They may have entered the country legally, for example, by travelling on tourist or student visas and become illegal or irregular after their visas have expired while working legally and/or illegally in the sex industry (Skehan 2005, 3). They may have also entered the country on false identification papers, and worked illegally in legal or illegal brothels.

This chapter considers the irregular migration of sex trafficking as queer migration since, as I will show, this somatechnological practice rejects the regimes of the normal (Warner 2002), and resists neo/colonial orthodoxy and state bureaucracy: it challenges “the state’s notions on legal mobility and territoriality in a globalized world” (Broeders and Engbersen 2007, 1594); it threatens border control because it suggests to the states they have lost control

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2 ‘Contract workers’ in Australia work under the following conditions: seven days a week, ten to twelve hour shifts, seventy clients a week, or seven hundred to one thousand two hundred ‘jobs’/clients to repay A$35,000-A$50,000. See Fawkes, McMahon, Baker, Futol and Jeffreys (2003).

3 There are currently two types of sex industries in Australia as a result of the deregulation of prostitution. Legal industries include registered brothels, escort agencies and private escort workers. Illegal industries include unregistered brothels and sexual service providers such as relaxation therapy and massage industries.
on immigration and the centralised means by which they can identify, monitor and govern their population (Sassen 1996); and it creates a shadow economy, informal markets and ‘bastard institutions’ (Hughes 1994 [1951], 193-194). Queer migration is particularly reflected in sex trafficking or migrating for sex work because it also embodies a sexuality that cannot be contained within institutionally approved categories. Prostitutes are disciplined through refusal of entry because they are ‘peripheral sexualities’ that threaten the nation’s heteronormative sexual and gender order (Foucault 1976, 40; Lubhéid 2002, xiv-xix). Although immigration literally constructs the boundary of the nation and limits the means of citizenship, the queer migration of sex workers challenges these limits (Lubhéid 2005, ix) and potentially opens up a trajectory for queer mobility. Queer mobility refers to the literal process of irregular migration, as well as the symbolic process by which non-normative sexualities construct their practices of freedom and subjectivity. Queer migration studies offer a theoretical platform to focus on the norms that have shaped the territoriality of the nation-state, as well as the non-normative practices that challenge such foci. It provides a framework through which to reveal how the migrant Asian sex worker has been materialised through the somatechnologies of trafficking in Australia.

**Migration, Prostitution and Anti-Trafficking Policies: Materialising Asian Sex Workers and Mapping Queer Mobilities**

This section critically examines the historical development of migration and prostitution control policies that include and exclude the Asian sex worker in Australia. It maps the exclusion of legal migration, the regulation of prostitution and the inclusive legislation of anti-trafficking border protection to demonstrate how Australia’s somatechnologies of trafficking are rationalised through heteronormative white intimacy. While these somatechnologies make Asian sex workers visible through the modernising institutions of immigration, public health and homeland security, they also function as sites of counter-strategies. I will elaborate on this claim via a critical examination of queer mobilities which draws on sex worker resources and two recent Asian Australian films, *Trafficked* (Acquisto 2005) and *The Jammed* (McLachlan 2007). These somatechnologies produce the sex dispositif as a multi-linear ensemble of contradictory forces that govern and liberate the queer Asian migrant.

When the Chinese arrived in Australia during the gold rush in the 1850s, Asian prostitution in Australia quickly followed suit. In the 1890s, Japanese sex workers, known as Karayuki-san, were recruited to service the Chinese in the goldfields in the West and East, and the Chinese, Malays and Kanakas in the mining, pearling and sugarcane industries in the North (Sissions 1977).
They were from the poorer agricultural regions in Japan and were first taken to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to be trained before they were shipped off to America and Australia (Warren 1993). Upon their arrival in Australia, they worked in settlements near the mines and the pearling areas under transient and uncomfortable conditions. Around three hundred Japanese prostitutes were reported at any time. The entry of Japanese prostitutes to Australia during this period reflected Australia’s anxiety about the preservation of its white race: “They [the colonial authorities] were especially worried about ‘coloured’ men raping white women. The importation of Japanese prostitutes was seen as a good solution to the need to provide some sexual outlet for ‘coloured’ men, whilst maintaining the status of the white race” (Francis 2004, 189). Many of these women stayed on in Australia after they had repaid their debt and went on to become brothel and small business owners, and some even invested in the pearling industries (Hunt 1984). Their permanent settlement through marriage and entrepreneurship provided an early glimpse into how emergent queer mobility was constituted in and through the biopolitics of racialised sex migration.

Australia’s racial anxiety as a white nation in an Asian region became the impetus behind the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act. This Act instituted the country’s White Australia Policy that remained in place until 1975. Immigration control was regulated to promote sexual norms and maintain white heteronormativity. The same exclusionary measures that were used to prevent entry to Asians were also applied to prostitutes lest these result in the dilution of the white race such as half-caste children or immoral sexual conduct. Article 3(e) explicitly listed “any prostitute or person living on the prostitution of others as ‘prohibited immigrants’” (Government of the Commonwealth of Australia 1901). This was further institutionalised in the 1958 Migration Act that enforced penalties for those involved in prostitution. Traffickers were imprisoned and fined while sex workers were subjected to deportation and the costs of repatriation (Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Indigenous Affairs 2004, 95). This Act reinforced heteronormative intimacy by favouring families and subsidising arrivals from British and European backgrounds (Jupp 1998, 15-19). It ensured a proper sexual order for a country that privileged white heterosexuality, patriarchy and assimilation. The 1958 Migration Act remained in place until the White Australia policy was abolished between 1966 and 1973.

This period saw changes to immigration policy that eased restrictions on the entry of Asians. The country’s decreasing population growth, together with increasing bilateral trade and military ties with Asia and the decolonisation of various Asian countries, contributed to these changes. To build a mass migration of skilled workers, Australia began to allow the entry of mixed-race European families who were leaving the new post-colonies of Asia (Jupp 1998, 117).
It also encouraged the permanent settlement of highly skilled temporary Asian residents. In 1973, ‘race’ was removed as a barrier to immigration (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007). In 1975 with the fall of Saigon, special concessions were made to accept Vietnamese refugees. By the following year, Asian immigration comprised 35 to 40 percent of settler arrivals.

In 1978, a new migration programme was formalised with the implementation of the nine migration principles. These principles favoured skilled migrants and family reunion, and allowed the humanitarian entry of refugees and homosexuals. They formed the backbone to the influential Galbally report that introduced the implementation of multicultural programmes and services for migrants. These policies and programmes of inclusion reflect how the somatechnics of migration regulate and materialise the potential Asian migrant through practices of heteronormative intimacy structured around proper heterosexuality and the (re)productive family. By favouring skilled migrants and their families, these somatechnologies make intimacy central to the economy. This is also evident in the regulation of same-sex migration. Initially approved under the humanitarian visa category and then subsequently under the family interdependency visa category, the peripheral sexuality of gays and lesbians is normalised by migration policy guidelines that emulate the institutions of heterosexuality and the family (Yue 2008). As regulatory apparatuses of incorporation and intimacy, such somatechnologies create the conditions for normalising deviant migrants as potentially good citizens. Against these milieus of humanitarianism and multiculturalism, prostitutes continued to be denied entry.

When Australia officially introduced multiculturalism as a social policy to manage migration in 1989, the population of Asians markedly increased with the arrival of Vietnamese refugees, Chinese asylum seekers, and economic and professional migrants. Sex tourism to the region also proliferated. Australia’s multicultural turn, like its antecedent White Australia policy, paradoxically saw the continued emasculation of ‘Asia’ and the increased hypersexualisation of Asian women. ‘Asia’ and Asian women were constructed as ambivalent erotic and exotic objects to be feared and desired (Hamilton 1990). Filipino

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4 These principles include: the government alone decides who can enter the country; migrants must benefit the country (although special considerations apply to refugees and family members); migrants must not threaten the social cohesion and harmony of the country; selection is non-discriminatory; applicants are recognised as individual or family units; migrants’ backgrounds must suit the country’s laws and social customs; migrants must intend to settle permanently; settlements in cultural enclaves are not encouraged; and migrants must integrate into the country’s multicultural fabric and be given the opportunity to maintain their cultural heritage (MacKellar 1978, 2-3; Hawkins 1989, 288).
‘mail-order brides’, for example, attracted media controversy and generated negative stereotypes about immigrant Asian women marrying Australian men (Robinson 1996). By escaping poverty in their home country and marrying a foreigner from a more developed country, these women were constructed as transgressive of romantic love, and branded as opportunists, prostitutes and sex slaves. While some of these women were trafficked into Australia through bride migration (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, 62), the moral panic created by this phenomenon reflected the changing gender relations that threatened the institution of marriage. Asian women were perceived to be more ‘traditional’ and ‘submissive’ than the more emancipated Australian woman, while Australian men who married Asian women were perceived to be ‘failures’ incapable of attracting Anglo-Celtic Australian women. These representations expose the core of white heteronormative intimacy that continues to structure Asian Australian cultural imaginations. Bride migration and the trafficking in brides also reveal how inclusive inter-racial spouse migration policy has become a site of exploitation and appropriation.

As Asian women began to be made more visible through diversity multiculturalism, and media sensationalisation, the Asian sex worker became the object and subject of prostitution control policies. Since the 1990s, prostitution has undergone partial deregulation and decriminalisation in various major cities such as Canberra (1992), Melbourne (1994), Sydney (1995) and Brisbane (1999). However, these policies continue to discipline women, control their bodies and promote culturally ‘correct’ behaviours in relation to mainstream gender and national identity (Jeffrey 2002). The regulation of prostitution follows the public health institutionalisation of sexually transmitted diseases that created “prostitution as a distinct legal category” (Sullivan 1997, 19). It foregrounds female sexuality, marks out certain types of women as dangerous, and produces the prostitute as a distinct site of disease and pollution. As somatechnologies of sex, gender, nation, and so on, these policies regulate intimacy and reform sexual behaviour. They produce the conditions for what constitute good or inappropriate sexual conduct, proposer relationships between men and women, husband and wife, as well as the broader sexual culture of exploitation and sexual justice. In Australia, the regulation of prostitution not only legitimated its status as a form of work and a type of industry, rather, its institutionalisation also became a somatechnology for making visible Asian sex workers. This is evident in the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria’s (PCV) prioritisation of Asian sexual health campaigns when sex work was decriminalised.

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5 For more research on prostitution in Australia, see Banach and Metzenrath (2000); James (1998); Milentis and Bridge (2004); Perkins (1994); Sullivan (1997) and Sullivan (2007).
PCV was the first sex worker organisation in Australia and operated as a peak and peer-run organisation for sex workers in the state from 1988 to 2000. As prostitution shifted from prohibition to work, the organisation evolved from its socialist feminist grass-roots commitment to the rights of prostitutes, to a mainstream sexual health advocate for the sex industry (Sullivan 2007, 91-133). It adopted the harm minimisation technology of sexual law reform as a pragmatic move, and aligned itself with the HIV/AIDS public health agenda, gay and transsexual rights, and stakeholder business interests. The organisation gained public legitimacy and made the issues faced by Asian sex workers visible through sexual health campaigns funded by multicultural health policies: “By 1994, the Commonwealth Health Department had provided the PCV with A$70,000 to produce safe sex literature. A further A$150,000 was specifically designated to produce materials for those within the industry who came from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB)” (Sullivan 2007, 115). During this period, the PCV employed the state’s first ethno-specific peer support worker, produced Sirens Speak (Surgey 1994), the country’s first multi-lingual and multimedia resource kit for Asian sex workers, and formalised the policy of multicultural queer sexual health.

*Sirens Speak*, launched in 1994, inaugurated the first nation-wide multicultural public health harm reduction campaign. Among the many resources in this kit is a first person narrated cartoon strip about a Filipino sex worker who is recruited to the country by the prospects of marriage and work. The narrative details how ‘Lina’ is transformed to the smart ‘Siren’ when she arrives in Australia, how she obtains her resident status through marriage and continues to work as a sex worker. This bilingual kit in English and Tagalog targets Filipino sex workers, who, along with Thai sex workers, were considered the two largest and most ‘at risk’ group of sex workers in the country at that time. The transformation of ‘Lina’ to ‘Siren’ demonstrates the code of switching as a tactic of queer mobility enabled by the somatechnologies of trafficking and prostitution. As the process of changing from one position to another, switching exposes the ‘uprootings and regroundings’ (Ahmed, Casteneda, Fortier and Sheller 2003) encountered by queer migrants as they become materialised through various symbolic economies in their new countries. Similar to the emergent queer mobilities of the Japanese sex workers the century before, the tactic of switching reveals the sex dispositif as an ensemble that not only assembles the devices and tools of social management, but also can potentially re-order the subjectification of the Asian sex migrant.

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6 Mary Sullivan (2007) criticises the harm minimisation technology of sexual law reform for failing to protect and empower women. Her radical feminist analysis has not pursued further the impact of such NESB funding, nor examined the effects of NESB safe sex and sexual health campaigns or the success of NESB sex worker outreach programmes.
In the mid-1990s, PCV estimated that there were about 1,250 Asian sex workers in Australia, comprising 10 percent of the female sex work industry (Surgey 1994, 8). By 2002, there were about 2,000 sex workers from non-English speaking backgrounds at any one time in Australia, making up 25 percent of the legal brothel sex industry. While these statistics create a bureaucracy that is part of the somatechnology of ‘moral science’ (Hacking 1991, 182) that seeks to normalise deviancy and immoral behaviour, the institutionalisation of the Asian sex worker has indeed made visible her indelible presence in Australia. Recent anti-trafficking policies further scale her presence and enumerate her risk by disciplining not only her queer migration but also her regional body politic.

In 2004, anti-trafficking legislation was introduced as part of the country’s border protection and counter-terrorism strategy (Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department 2004). This was the result of ratifying the Protocol after meeting all the domestic requirements for ratification. The Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons consists of a A$20m package with four aims: to prevent, detect and investigate, prosecute, and provide victim support and rehabilitation (Australian Government Attorney-General Department 2004, 4). It involves increased offshore personnel in the Australian Federal Police in Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines; a senior migration officer in Thailand; victim support; assistance for reintegration for victims who return to South-East Asian countries; and; a domestic awareness strategy (ibid.). Included in this plan are new visa arrangements for victims. A bridging and criminal justice visa enables victims to receive support including access to temporary accommodation, counselling, legal aid and social support. If they contribute to the investigation that leads to the prosecution of offenders, they are eligible for a witness protection (trafficking) visa (Australian Government Attorney-General Department 2004, 14). By 2005, 22 women were in this programme (Burn 2005) but to date none has been granted permanent visa. Although Russian, Korean and Japanese women are increasingly part of the trafficking trade to Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, 48), these policy developments, evident from the high profile media, detention and prosecution cases of Gary Glazner in 1999, Puangthong Simaplee in 2001 and Wei Tang in 2006 (see for example, Fergus 2005; Project Respect 2004; Sullivan 2007), explicitly focus on and single out women from countries in South-East Asia.

Australia’s South-East Asian regional focus is ideological and at odds with the watch list announced in the annual Trafficking In Persons (TIP) report. Published by the United States of America’s Department of State, the annual TIP report is the only global report that ranks countries according to their

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7 This figure is based on NESB outreach conducted by the organisation, Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry (RhED, the former PCV). The author would like to thank the RhED programme for this information.
efforts to eradicate trafficking. Tier 1 refers to countries that fully comply with the minimum standards enforced by the country’s Trafficking Victims Protection Act; Tier 2 places countries that do not fully comply but are making an effort to do so; Tier 3 places countries that do not comply and are making no efforts to eradicate trafficking (United States Department of State 2007, 29). According to the 2007 TIP report, Australia and Korea are listed as countries in Tier 1, and Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Russia are in Tier 2 (United States Department of State 2007, 44). The omission of Korea, Japan and Russia from Australia’s anti-trafficking policy, and the prominence given to the South-East Asian countries, show how Australia manages its border protection according to the region’s differential narratives of development. Japan and Korea have elided surveillance because they are high-income and investment-inducing countries, while the rest are low-income countries. This policy scales risk according to capital, does not address the structural demand and supply issues central to resolving migratory sex work, and ignores the cause of trafficking by focusing on responding to trafficking after the fact. Two recent Asian Australian films, however, explicitly engage this policy to show how the women who participate in this traffic can also acquire queer mobility.

*Trafficked* (Acquisto 2005) is an Australian investigative documentary that charts the journey of anti-trafficker Chris Payne as he travels to Thailand to uncover the mystery of Simaplee. *The Jammed* (McLachlan 2007) is a thriller centred around the main protagonist Ashley, an Anglo-Australian woman, and her chance encounter with Sunee, a Chinese woman who has come to Australia to find her daughter whom she suspects has been sex trafficked into the country. Both films reveal how the somatechnologies of trafficking are also the sites for the counter-strategies of queer mobility; the former through the technique of unlocking, the latter through distributing. As I will demonstrate, unlocking and distributing disassemble the sex and anti-trafficking dispositifs as multilinear ensembles that not only forbid but also allow specific practices that signify queer mobility.

*Trafficked and Unlocking*

The documentary begins with Payne in his suburban Australian home as he recalls his time as a former member of the Australia Federal Police who was involved in the first brothel raid that discovered trafficked Asian sex workers in Sydney in 1994. He recounts (almost post-traumatically) how he left the police force in 1997 and how his marriage fell apart soon after. As the first person narrator and in his roles as an ex-police officer and a private investigator, Payne functions as the self-reflexive authorial voice. By focusing on unlocking the enigma of the woman as an antidote for closure to the male narrative, the structure of the documentary resembles classic film noir.
When Payne and a translator arrive at the idyllic rice paddy fields of the Mekong River in Chiang Mai to meet the parents of Simaplee, the latter (Dei and Pojanee) refute the claim that Simaplee was trafficked into Australia at the age of 12. They show him many photos of her. Soon, a photo montage begins to mount an archive reconstructing Simaplee’s life. We see images of her happy childhood outside the family home, her teenage years at school and as a young adult at nightclubs. This pictorial archive reveals that Simaplee left Chiang Mai when she was 19 to work in Malaysia. The family communicated frequently with Simaplee until she was 21 and she arrived in Australia. Once in Australia, she told them she was unable to return because she did not have a passport and needed to earn more money. Once, they said, she told them she was going to return for the Thai New Year, but a package arrived instead of her. The next time a package arrived it was a box containing her cremated ashes. This box is lovingly enshrined in a corner on the floor with the dead woman’s photo. A disposable plastic drink cup placed in front of it is used as a joss urn.

In this documentary, the technique of unlocking refers to, on one level, the literal process of actualising Simaplee’s invisible, ghostly life. The evidence of photos and her parent’s biographical account validate the presence of her corporeality and agency. By giving a life to her after her death, this process of actualising is queer because it adopts an anti-teleological chronology. Queer mobility, as irregular migration, is also physically present, in her travel to Malaysia and arrival in Australia as a tourist on false identification papers, and her last days as an illegal un-bonded sex worker in a local Sydney motel prior to her arrest. On another level, unlocking also refers to the process of uncovering why she constructed herself as a 12 year-old victim trafficked to Australia, and why popular media, feminist and government discourses continue to report this even after knowing this account to be false (see for example, Lamont 2002; Devine 2003; Carrington and Hearn 2003; Commonwealth of Australia 2004; Fergus 2005; McSherry 2007). In the documentary, Payne speculates that Simaplee may have represented herself in this way in order to engender more sympathy and in the hope of a lighter sentence. Here, unlocking shows Simaplee seizing upon and reproducing the official narrative of sex trafficking, and conforming to the norms of the stereotype demanded of that discourse. This stereotype of the migrant Asian sex worker as a ‘victim’ is consistent with the official hegemonic and benevolent discourse constructed by sensationalist media, abolitionist feminism and the anti-trafficking policy development of the witness protection visa. Unlocking exposes this dominant discourse as an instance of how Australia’s immigration, judicial and public health institutions have functioned by subjugating, disciplining and containing the intimate Asian other. Unlocking also reveals Simaplee’s tactic of queer mobility. By self-performing victimisation to pragmatically fit the official category of the ‘victim’, the non-normative deviant sexuality of the prostitute has also become a ‘line of escape’ for potential legal
residence in the country. The discrepancy between the official representation of the victim and Simaplee’s unofficial enactment reveals the anti-trafficking dispositif as an ensemble connecting and problematising the discourse and the material. This gap betrays the country’s reliance on the deviance of such private introspections to shore up its public status as a dominant nation in the region. Trafficked reproduces this enlightenment logic through the paternalistic white male narrator as an ex-police officer enforcing law and order, a private detective investigating testimonies and facts, and a failed husband and father exorcising his guilt. These strategies of benevolence and its anti-trafficking dispositif are also reproduced in The Jammed.

The Jammed and Distributing

The film begins in an interrogation room, with Crystal, a Eurasian woman being questioned by immigration officers keen to acquire her ‘witness’ story. As she begins to tell her story, the film flashes back to three weeks earlier when Ashley, the film’s main protagonist, first meets Sunee, the mother of a trafficked woman. After giving her a ride from the airport, Ashley finds herself embroiled in Sunee’s search for her daughter.

Central to revealing the technique of distributing is the process of exposing how systems of orders are arranged. Crystal’s ‘witness’ story unmasks the stages in the order of trafficking: recruitment, transport, ‘breaking-in’, debt-bonded prostitution and detention. As the eldest from a poor single parent family in Shanghai, Crystal decides to accept the overseas work offer as a table top dancer after meeting Lian at a nightclub. A Vietnamese man, Phuc, arranges her visa and travels with her to Sydney. In Sydney, she is transferred to another man who keeps her passport, locks her in an apartment, and rapes her after she refuses to work as a prostitute to pay off the fifty thousand dollars she owes him for her visa and travel. A month later, she, along with Rubi (Sunee’s daughter) and Vania (a Russian sex worker) is taken to Melbourne. In Melbourne, they work at Vic’s brothel, and are guarded by Wade and Loi. This sequence continues until Ashley finds Crystal and Rubi. After Rubi reunites with and confronts her mother, she kills herself. Crystal is arrested and detained. These stages of trafficking reveal the queer mobility of the informal sector of bastard institutions.

Bastard institutions are institutions that deviate from the norm. They operate on the fringes of legal institutions, and outside the realms of the law and respectability: “they are corrections to faults in institutional definition and distribution” (Hughes 1951/1994, 193). Crystal’s confession exposes the bastard institution of trafficking which usually begins with female recruiters.

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For theoretical accounts of these stages, see Commonwealth of Australia (2004); Fergus (2005).
(Lian) or deceived family members (for example, Sunee who sells Rubi thinking that she will be sent to work in a factory in Hong Kong). After recruitment, the transport stage continues with mules (Phuc) arranging visas and priming the woman with stories about her travel. The breaking-in stage continues in the Sydney apartment when the mule passes her to the trafficker. As she realises the deceit and refuses to work, she is beaten, raped and threatened until she submits. At this stage, she is introduced to her contract. According to Vic, the women perform around five hundred jobs per day. During the debt-bonded prostitution stage, the three women work at Vic’s illegal brothel for at least 12 hours a day, and after this shift, resume work at another brothel. They are constantly watched, by clients, minders, and via Vic’s close circuit television. The women come to know Vic, Wade and Loi well as these are the only people they know in the country. These men cultivate the women’s dependency on them with occasional acts of kindness, such as city trips, takeaway meals, presents and even drugs.

These subterranean practices, making up the multilinear ensemble of the informal economy, are anchored in the film through multiple night shots and claustrophobic framings from the interiors of cars capturing the usually silent and glazed women staring out of the window. Entrapment is connoted through this juxtaposition of motion and stasis. Driven around monotonously from the brothel to their home while the streets are full of passing cars and crowded buildings abutting noisy train stations, these women are anonymous and isolated. They work and live alone in a shared room with a single barred window at the back of a building at the end of an alleyway. These practices, what Kaleveld calls ‘Melbourne’s shadows’ (2007, 10), expose the lacks and faults in the sex dispositif: the legal exclusion of sex work migration, the heteronormative code imposed on prostitution and the moral distribution of legitimate sexual relations. Prostitution satisfies needs considered immoral in the society while sex trafficking fulfils demands created by poverty and exploitative labour migration. Ashley’s status as ‘the saviour’ and her relationship to the trafficked women problematises the way legitimate institutions discipline the deviance of trafficking and prostitution.

Ashley is a thirty-something woman who lives in Melbourne to avoid her family after learning her mum has lied about her father’s death. She has also just left her boyfriend Tom, and reluctantly attends blind dates arranged by her friends. Riddled with guilt for walking out on Tom, she is not only a failed partner; she is also a failed date and a failed daughter. Her encounter with Sunee provides the antidote to redress these faults. In their search for Rubi, Ashley enlists the help of ‘Tom, returns to his house and rekindles their relationship. When she discovers the location of Vic’s brothel, she plans the rescue, and saves Rubi and Crystal. She even returns to the brothel again to save Vania. At the end of the film, Ashley is redeemed as a loyal girlfriend and filial daughter.
The thriller constructs the crisis of the film as Ashley’s personal crisis, and seeks to resolve this by making her the benevolent saviour and accordingly, the real heroine. This persona exposes the Eurocentric racial hierarchy of the film. Like Payne in *Trafficked*, the white woman has corrected her faults by sacrificing a dead Chinese, a detained Eurasian and an illegal Russian. The moral of the story further subjugates these ‘other’ women by reproducing the stereotyped clichés of Sunee’s ignorance, Rubi’s helplessness, Crystal’s desperation and Vania’s opportunism. Even Vic remains unpunished at the end of the film because he has laundered his profits to his wife’s philanthropic art gallery.

However, at the same time, the film disassembles the structures of rehabilitative and benevolent distribution. Through reproducing the stages of trafficking, it makes visible the queer mobility of its bastard institution. On the one hand, this reproduction disciplines the deviance of sex work migration, trafficking and prostitution; on the other hand, it performatively exposes the moral and intimate arrangement of white heteronormativity. While its didacticism quantifies queer migration through death, detention and illegality, its specters, as potential lines of escape, reveal the queer mobility of survival and freedom.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how Australia’s somatechnologies of trafficking have also become the sites for the tactics of queer mobility. It has critically examined the development of sex migration from Asia through immigration, public health, prostitution control and border protection policies. From the importation of Japanese prostitutes at the turn of the twentieth century to the current witness protection visas given to trafficked victims, the inclusion of Asian sex workers in the country’s migration programmes reveal how regimes of border control are regulated by heteronormative white intimacy that have also produced somatechnics that make present the diasporic Asian sex worker. Although these policies regulate as sites of containment, they also function as sites of materialisation and individuation. Through the framework of queer migration studies, this chapter has detailed how queer somatechnologies expose the discrepancy between governmentality and its lived realities, revealing in the process how the dispositif, through tactics such as switching, unlocking and distributing, is also a heterogeneous assemblage of surplus effects and counter

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9 On the representation of the sacrificial Asian in recent Australian cinema, see Khoo (2006).

10 Indeed, the director confirmed this when she revealed that the difficulty she encountered with funding and distribution stemmed from the fact that she did not have the budget to hire “a big-name actor like Naomi Watts” (quoted in Ennis 2007, 11).
possibilities. The self-performances of victimisation and witness confessions by migrant Asian sex workers, together with the myriad of creative and often dangerous ways by which they poach, rework and undo their exclusion from official policies of migration, detail the trajectories of queer mobilities. These trajectories disassemble the benevolent claims to Australia’s modernity, questioning, in the process, the exclusionary logic of heteronormative migration that has inadvertently created the milieu for people trafficking and the exploitation of female migrant labour.

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SECTION TWO
Somatechnologies of Sex/Gender
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Introduction: Non-Innocent Taxonomies as Inclusionary/Exclusionary Mechanisms

My queering the somatechnics of bodily taxonomies associated with the gendered harvests of stem cell technoscience begins by delineating salient mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion. These technics rest upon naturalised categorisations purporting to be self-evident, such as the claim that natural kinds are groups of objects whose characteristics reflect real differences in nature (Dupre 2001). Such somatechnologies impact on research subjects in ways which matter. We tend to be kinder to those we accept as kin, or kind like us. Those we see as kind, or like us, will be expected to take part, or supply body parts, only after their consenting to do so. Those who are deemed not to be may be subjected to procedures up to and including death without consultation (Weinstein 2001). Yet the schema of who is kin or kind possesses only contingent validity: corporeal materiality as a basis for knowledge production is negotiated through culturally mediated classification systems (Dupre 2006). Naturalisation of taxonomies constituted by inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms obstructs their recognition as pluralistic, non-innocent and contestable.

Bruno Latour has famously criticised contemporary intellectual culture as based upon such artificial constructed binaries, the arbitrary Great Divides between Us and Them: humans/non-humans, nature/culture and Western/non-Western societies (Latour 1993). Latour documents two ways in which these constructed binaries are maintained. Mechanisms of translation, or mediation, generate networks of techné. I will focus on his second conception, inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms of purification, which function by decontextualising. I explain below how removing the vulnerable from their historic, socioeconomic and gendered contexts constitutes a corporeal somatechnology which may render them excluded from moral consideration. Similarly, Agamben positions Western philosophical thought as founded upon
what he calls, in a term borrowed from Furio Jesi, the anthropological machine, the contingent distinction between human and nonhuman animals (Agamben 2004, 26). While Latour expands his models in actor/network theory, Agamben focuses on the part played by invisibilised spaces constituted as anomalous in inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms. One example of this is how those deemed to be disposable, outside the protection of law, might be contained in zones of exception which function to maintain sovereign rule. By being outside yet inside the law they support its power. Agamben develops the idea of bare life in this light, where those who are excluded from bios, or political life, yet are not simply zoe, or biological life, become treated as bare life, disposable people. These are the inhabitants of zones of exception: slaves, refugees in camps and the moribund (Agamben 1998, 2005). Theorists of neo-liberalism have traced how the citizenship of those lacking in market worth lapses, placing them within comparable zones of exception (Giroux 2006; Ong 2006).

Latour and Agamben have been criticised for excluding from in-depth consideration women, animals and vulnerable Others. Haraway, for example, characterises Latour’s networks as including men and machines but excluding women and other nonhumans (Haraway 1992, 331). Calarco considers Agamben’s interrogation of the ethico-political status of animals underdeveloped (Calarco 2006) and Plonowska Ziarek argues that Agamben fails to consider the question of resistance and the ‘negative differentiation of bare life along race, ethnic and gender lines’ (Plonowska Ziarek 2008, 92). Yet at the same time, the work of these theorists is perceived as providing promise for rereadings. Jones, for example, regards what she calls the andrological machine, which distinguishes between male and female, and Agamben’s anthropological machine as equally central (Jones 2007). Asking how Agamben’s portrayal of politicised life would be altered were ‘born of women’s bodies’ to be inserted, Deutscher reads abortion laws as providing an included space of exception (Deutscher 2008). In this light, I suggest that some of the inclusionary/exclusionary technics Latour and Agamben describe assist in the queering of the somatechnologies of stem cell technoscience.

Purification, functioning as an exclusionary mechanism, decontextualises the fact that stem cell technoscience impacts primarily upon female bodies, i.e. both human and nonhuman female animals, as will be elaborated upon below. Agamben’s anthropological machine is thus also of undoubted relevance, especially as finding stable differences between humans and nonhuman animals is proving increasingly difficult (Keneally 2008). To address this issue fully is the subject of another article, particularly the possibility of combining human and nonhuman tissue to create cytoplasmic hybrid embryos, or cybrids, as a source of stem cells. Instead, I use the term female bodies explicitly to denote both human and nonhuman female animals. This is partly in recognition of the tendency of exclusionary mechanisms to elide differences between excluded humans and
animals as objects of use (Benjamin 2008; Colebrook 2008) and partly as a step towards what Deranty calls ‘a paradoxical posthumanist humanism that would fully acknowledge the nonhuman, yet avoid the mistake of simply erasing the difference between human and nonhuman’ (Deranty 2008, 166).

Part of my queering rhetorical figurations constituting the somatechnics of stem cell technoscience involves placing this within the context of neo-liberal tissue economies (Waldby and Mitchell 2006). Agamben’s zones of exception and disposable humans read as bare life provide a theoretical anchor for the importance of insurance and the appeal of fantasies of unceasing health, productive vigour and companies who care for neo-liberal citizens. Such understandings of bodies, based upon designations of Us and Them, are non-innocent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion which constitute a somatechnics of corporeality. How, then, might a somatechnics of corporeality based upon inclusivity operate? In this light, I now pass to feminist and deep ecology environmental theorists’ readings of Spinoza and Deleuze as philosophers of immanence who offer promising all-embracing inclusion. Yet, as will be expanded upon below, an alternate reading of their philosophies evidences disquieting homologies with neo-liberal corporealities.

Spinoza, Deleuze and Ethical Difficulties Associated with Immanence

Part One of Spinoza’s *Ethics* begins with fifteen propositions to prove that all that is, is substance: *Deus sive Natura*, i.e. God or Nature, where God and Nature are two words for the same reality (Spinoza 1985). Substance is an entity with infinite attributes and modes; there is no place for transcendent principles or external cause for action or the world, so that life itself produces life. As Schmitter explains,

> Spinoza interprets the ‘perfection’ for which we strive as a matter of ‘the power of action’. It is simply the force [vis] or individual conatus expressing itself. One of Spinoza’s most general principles is that we all strive to preserve our own being, or what comes to much the same thing, to increase our power of action (Schmitter 2006, 4).

Deleuze builds on Spinoza to read substance as perpetually differentiating. Our ‘conatus’, or impetus of being, is to become all we can be, without judging what that might be by restrictive transcendent criteria: ‘to bring into existence and not to judge … what has value can be made or distinguished only by defying judgement’ (Deleuze 1993, 135). Differentiation is difference in degrees of power, or, as Smith explains,
the ability to affect and be affected, to form assemblages or consistencies, that is, to form emergent unities that nonetheless respect the heterogeneity of their components … in an assemblage or consistency, the ‘becoming’ or relation of the terms attains its own independent ontological status (Smith 2008).

To become all that we can be involves counteractualisation, a movement to overcome the limit of current incarnation to the potential of the infinite possibilities of the virtual. Deleuze and Guattari describe this in terms of a body-without-organs, the BwO, ‘you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit … the BwO is what remains when you take everything away’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 149-50).

Hallward describes the philosophy of both Spinoza and Deleuze as animated by a presumption which is ‘quite literally, simplicity itself: there is only one reality, one substance (or God) and everything that is or rather acts is a modifying of this one substance’ (Hallward 2006, 10). This ontological univocity grounds a conception of being and the material as manifesting an infinite power to exist, differentiate, develop capacities and connect. Hence, although manifestations of multiplicity stem from unity, i.e. substance, inequalities of creativity exist. In the field of living things, more complex organisms experience and are capable of more affects, i.e. able to sustain more actions and interactions. In a sense, these inequalities, like all time-bound characteristics, are illusory, in that those manifesting them stem from the same immanent Source, substance. In Book 1, proposition 15, scholium 5 of his *Ethics*, Spinoza illustrates this in terms of water:

insofar as it is substance, it is neither separated nor divided. … water, insofar as it is water, is generated and corrupted, but insofar as it is substance, it is neither generated nor corrupted (Spinoza 1985).

Under immanence, then, given the illusory nature of the separation between ourselves and those who appear to be other, how we should construe ethical relations between ourselves and those apparent others is not self-evident. The Spinozan/Deleuzean imperative to become all that we might be does not necessarily imply other-regarding. Deleuze, drawing upon Spinoza’s view that distinct attributes are necessarily compatible since they are manifestations of substance (Deleuze 1990, 79-80), locates productive force in individuated differentiation rather than in relations between entities. He points out that organisms contain multitudes. ‘Underneath the self which acts are little selves which contemplate and which render possible both the action and the active subject’ We speak of our ‘self’ only in virtue of these thousands of little witnesses which contemplate within us: it is always a third party who says ‘me’ (Deleuze 1994, 75). Asserting with Guattari that we should ‘become-animal’, he
conceives of the human subject not as a given but as formed through a process which should be unfixed and denaturalised in order that we might become all we can be via counteractualisation. This need not imply concern for others. It is in this sense that we should ‘become-animal’; like an embryo or a larva we should manifest potentials from within, denaturalising those imposed from without: ‘[t]he philosopher is a larval subject of his own system’ (Deleuze 1994, 119). Thus, where the imperative to become all we can be involves connections with others, this is not necessarily mutually advantageous.

Nonetheless, readings of Spinoza and Deleuze which interpret their assumption of immanence to portray embodiment in terms of connectedness, transformation and ever increasing capabilities have provided inspiration for many feminists (Colebrook 2000). A philosophical approach anchored in mobile physicality holds promise for the redressing of perspectives conflating women with material nature placed in opposition to male intellect, culture and transcendent values (Gatens 2000). Spinozan/Deleuzean neo-materialist relinquishing of species or gender specific transcendence for an acknowledgement of the material as inherently creative, powered by an inexhaustible \textit{\'{e}lan vital}, has an appealing optimism for ecological activists (Naess 1977). They may be read as providing a prospect of joyous exchange located in material bodies affording visions of metamorphosis (Braidotti 2006).

Braidotti has erected a programme of eco-feminist sustainability upon the assumption that our capabilities as immanent entities would flourish best in a context of generous mutual support for all life forms. A millennial evolutionary impetus underpins her reading of the emphasis upon connections and becomings to be found in the work of Spinoza and Deleuze as promoting inherently cooperative, altruistic and noble ways of being. Acceptance of immanence implies a recognition and respect of the other, and hence a rejection of all forms of exploitation and inequality. Animals, machines and earth others, as well as humans, can become equal partners in an ethical exchange (Braidotti 2006, 121).

In a similar vein, Gatens draws upon Spinoza and Deleuze as support for a feminist re-thinking of the possible which could open up alternative, more equitable, forms of sociability (Gatens 2000). Considering how Spinoza and Deleuze have influenced Australian corporeal feminism, Colebrook remarks that, ‘[i]dentity is defined \textit{positively}, as the particular and finite expression of a dynamic substance, and as an expression that affirms becoming in general. This leads to an ethics of desire, affirming one’s own becoming is maximised in the becoming of others’ (Colebrook 2000, 88). Lloyd interprets Spinoza’s ethics of joy as a site where the affirmation of one’s becoming expresses one’s desire for self-preservation, and where the affirmation is made stronger by desire for and by others (Lloyd 1996).
Yet, I contend that for Spinoza and Deleuze the somatechnics of immanent corporeal embodiment is mediated by inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms. Spinoza’s emphasis on harmonious relations with other humans is predicated upon their being reasonable men, presuming that reasonable men will always find consensus through agreement. In *Ethics* Book 4, proposition 18, scholium, he asserts that,

the reasonable man is always just, honest and honourable, and [wants] for others what they want for themselves. … Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree on all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body, that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all (Spinoza 1985).

Spinoza’s model of community, then, excludes those who are not *sui iuris*, who lack the capacity to manage their own affairs. Chapter 11, section 3 of his *Political Treatise*, specifies that women, servants, foreigners and those who do not lead a decent life are not part of the reasonable community (Spinoza 1985). Nonhuman animals are also excluded, and may also be used for the benefit of humans. In his *Ethics* Part 4, proposition 37, note 1, Spinoza states,

Still I do not deny that beasts feel, what I do deny is that we may not consult our own advantage and use them as we please, treating them in a way which best suits us; for their nature is not like ours (Spinoza 1985).

Spinoza’s vision of equals striving to preserve their beings and seek the common advantage of all thus necessarily excludes those deemed to be non-equals (women, servants, foreigners, those leading indecent lives, nonhuman animals and presumably all entities aside from reasonable men). Thus, according to Spinoza, commonalities of substance do not entail the recognition of entities ‘whose nature is not like ours’ as equals. Hence, for him, while non-equal entities share the common ultimately constituting source of substance with reasonable men, their current contingent embodiments as inferiors renders their instrumentalisation by the latter ethically acceptable.

 Similarly, Deleuze consistently privileges the virtual (the creating) over the actual (the created). He positions actualised organisms as obstacles which limit the creative becomings of the body-without-organs as a field of potentiality. Commonality of substance, in his theophanic vision, grounds ontological connection between entities, but need not imply reciprocity. Hallward contends that, ‘counteractualisation … requires the sacrifice of that most precious sacred cow of contemporary philosophy – the other … Nothing is more foreign to
Deleuze than an unconditional concern for the other qua other’ (Hallward 2006, 92). I shall now explore the implications of these readings for the somatechnics of stem cell technoscience.

Sacralisation, the Symbolic Universe and Stem Cell Technoscience

Regenerative medicine centres around the potential of various means to replace defective organs or tissues, either by relatively straightforward substitution or by the stimulation of bodily processes of renewal. Hence it may be framed within a Spinozan/Deleuzean framework of bodies connected in networks of transferral, where capabilities are enhanced and incapacities potentially remedied. My focus is on the regenerative medicine of embryonic stem cells, where the associated risks and burdens fall largely upon female bodies of human or nonhuman animals. Establishing stem cell lines is a complex work in process requiring many embryos, created from sperm and ova. Fertilised ova may be enucleated to insert genetic material with specific disease characteristics in order to study how certain diseases develop and may potentially be cured. Both the impact, and the promise, of stem cell technoscience are highly significant and significantly uncertain. This gives rise to specific rhetorical figurations, somatechnologies wherein ageing and infirm bodies are portrayed as renewable, healthy and vital and female bodies invisibilised as sources.

Stem cell technoscience is, as I said, based upon renewal. Multi-cellular organisms contain stem cells, which act as a repair system for damaged tissue and replenish regenerating body parts such as blood and skin. Stem cell technoscience seeks to harness their ability for self-renewal and differentiation to develop custom-made cell types which could treat disease and injury. As the ability to differentiate is most pronounced at the beginning of life, the most promising source is embryonic stem cells, which have the potential to develop into all (totipotent) or many (pluripotent) differentiated types of bodily cells. While stem cells may be obtained from adults’ bone marrow, fat and menstrual blood, these are difficult to isolate and more specialised, so their potential developmental options are limited.

Although the promise of stem cell lines to remedy degenerative conditions and chronic diseases has been the focus of much publicity, the results of research so far are still at the suggestive stage. Most have been derived from the use of human embryos, either those donated as superfluous after IVF treatment or those created to address specific disease conditions. Further development will involve large amounts of reproductive tissue from female bodies and the creation of many embryos specifically for research. In as much as stem cell research is seen as involving the creation of human life in order that it be destroyed, as well as therapeutic cloning, it has aroused ongoing global
Anti-abortion activists continue to condemn it, while attempts to circumvent these objections by relying upon embryos from alternative sources, or created by parthenogenesis, or on non-human/human cybrids, raise their own ethical issues (Denker 2006). Rather than repeat these well-rehearsed arguments, I turn to the gendered symbolic universe within which stem cell technoscience takes place.

Discussing stem cell technoscience in terms of donated sperm and ova disguises a gendered imbalance. Sperm is plentiful regenerative tissue, emerges pleasurably from the body and its transferral involves no risk. Ova are limited, do not regenerate and the extraction process involves significant iatrogenic risk and discomfort. Yet discussions of the ethics of stem cell research commonly focus upon the moral status of the created embryo rather than the burden placed upon women. As Dickenson points out in relation to women’s donating ova, ‘the lady vanishes’ (Dickenson 2006). Stem cell technoscience is embedded in the gendered commercial practices of tissue economies, such as the global trade in ova imported from women in poorer countries, the results of nation-state competition such as junior researchers in Korea ‘donating’ ova and the increasing biovalue associated with women’s body tissue (Waldby and Mitchell 2006).

A possibility proffered as a solution to the ‘shortage’ of human ova has been the prospect of cybrids, where ova taken from slaughtered cows or female nonhuman animals from research laboratories are emptied, human genetic material inserted and the resulting hybrid embryo used as a source of stem cells (Hagen and Gittens 2008). This somatechnics of stem cell technoscience constructs equivalences based upon convenience of use between the female bodies of human and nonhuman animals. Female bodies become read as alike in kind, providers of body parts to be used, akin to nature as held in common as raw material for the use of all. Slippage takes place between female bodies figured as the source of life through childbirth, the store of potentiality as providers of stem cell plenitude and sacralised cornucopias. While the associated rhetoric does not negate existing protections such as the need for consent, nor deny women’s agency, it establishes a symbolic universe of gendered altruism and expectations wherein women’s decision-making takes place. In some senses, then, this creates a space where human and nonhuman animal female bodies may be seen as components of bare life, described by Agamben as ‘a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast’ (Agamben 1998, 109). This included middle instantiated by the prospect of transferral of tissue sourced from female bodies (human and/or non-human animals) between humans raises specific issues over the somatechnologies of rhetorical inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms. In order to queer these, I turn now to the neo-liberal symbolic universe within which these developments take place.
Neo-liberal nation states foster biomedical industrial enterprise on economic grounds. In that this involves research on, and propertisation of, areas which many regard as sacrosanct, socio-cultural negotiations within and amongst nation-states over the boundaries of ethical permissibility are ongoing. Salter has argued that this has instantiated a moral as well as a trade related economy, where policy makers must sustain nation-state economic and political interests while fostering ethical compromises among populations who disagree (Salter 2004). My queering the somatechnics of stem cell research involves defamiliarising this deployment of figurations associated with sacralised narratives and symbologies to ensure assent in neoliberal nation states. Imagery derived from deep shared human concerns such as ageing, death, immortality and plenitude becomes superimposed over moral pluralism. How these figurations relate to conceptions of nature, gender, time and life itself are central to ascriptions of the sacred and their persuasive force. It is these to which I shall now turn.

Humans are haunted by finitude: Heidegger distinguishes humans from nonhuman animals as only the former are preoccupied with finite time and death (Lovibond 2006). Archetypes of cornucopias of plenty, fountains of youth and magical potions promising immortality form common cultural narrative tropes. These are mirrored by their opposites: those who take rather than give include the stealers of children, the vampires and succubi who suck away vital force and the angry ghosts, cannibals of the spirit. These sacralised figurations provoke awe, proffer salvation and demand propitiation. This reflects an ambivalence inherent in ascriptions of power to those whose goodwill is hoped for, but whose favour is uncertain. One entity may embody the power to do good or ill, as in the goddess Kali, who embodies fearsome devotion and delivers death, or ascriptions of good and evil may be separated, as in the antimonies of angels and demons. Specific religious figurations and fairytale forms add time-bound and gendered elements of salvation, atonement, self-sacrifice and wishes fulfilled. These elements together constitute the metaphoric underpinnings of languages and cultures’ shared symbolic universes. Often homologous with figurations justifying inclusion or exclusion, such as homo sacer, they constitute fundamental mechanisms for the fostering of group cohesion (Agamben 1998).

Thus those who seek to persuade us draw upon them, as in the plethora of vampire imagery in Marx’s Capital, where the moral turpitude of the capitalist bosses is contrasted with the integrity of the victimised workers as a device to garner support for socialism (Neocleous 2003). Here the sacralisation of working class heroes is accomplished partly through the exclusionary device of the demonisation of exploitative employers. Such ascriptions of symbolic meaning render elements of our lives dense with subjective force. Including the chosen and excluding others via sacralisation and demonisation is one way by which we come to know who we are (Tyler 2006). Sacralisation is hence a
means by which the new may acquire a comfortably familiar categorisation. In this sense, each symbol is a palimpsest, the Mother Mary of Christianity superimposed over many pagan matriarchal goddesses with Son/Consorts who died and were resurrected each year at Eostre/Easter. Thus each time and place will have its characteristic iconography, constituting a negotiated socio-cultural symbolic universe. This will be drawn upon in rhetorical strategies and/or somatechnologies which seek to influence decision making and to shape human being in specific ways. Favoured groups or activities will be associated with sacralised imagery, while those who are perceived as a threat will be demonised as excluded others falling outside culturally sanctioned narratives (Mackenzie 1996). Thus, while there are commonalities within different cultures’ symbolic universes, culturally specific sacralised figurations will hold particular symbolic force for each. Thus I suggest below that given what is constructed as sacred within twenty-first-century neo-liberal nation-states, somatechnologies based upon the promises of stem cell technoscience decontextualise female bodies as source in favour of a figuring of stem cells as a cornucopia of potentiality.

The ongoing negotiated construction of our symbolic universes has particular salience for those entities seen as liminal, poised at transitions or borders between states, and states such as life or death. In many cultures, women menstruating or giving birth, together with those who are seriously ill or about to die, have been associated with the ambiguity inherent in our relationship with sacred mysteries and the incomprehensible. Stem cells and embryos, whether human or nonhuman animal or a combination of both, may be seen as liminal entities par excellence, in that they are of undoubted moral significance, yet uncertain moral standing. In that stem cells and embryos differ in their potential for development, they tend to be associated with differing figurations. An embryo may become a specific unique being, or cyborg entity, whereas a stem cell may develop into specific cell lines, organs or body parts which may transform the bodies and futures of many persons. Thus, while those seeking to influence how we treat embryos may draw upon imagery of babies, since stem cells afford the promise of almost unlimited productivity, longevity and perpetual health, they inhabit the symbolic niche of perpetual motion machines, cornucopias and infinity and beyond. As I will argue below in relation to fantasies of care, this lends them a special power within the neo-liberal symbolic imaginary, since to be regarded as less than functional, or disposable, in neo-liberal societies is to be vulnerable indeed.

In this sense, stem cells are the opposite of the liminal humans of neo-liberalism, those who increasingly attract moral opprobrium on the grounds that they are economically unproductive, and, as such, threaten the well being of the social group as a whole. Thus, particularly where the failure to provide for themselves may be viewed as self-produced, the unproductive under neo-liberalism risk becoming demonised, categorised as excluded others or disposable.
This process of othering the disposable has formed a focus within postcolonial theory, particularly in the work of Mbembe and those he has influenced (Mbembe 2003). Elsewhere I have drawn upon his concept of necropower at end of life decision making within medical law and ethics, in relation to state orchestration of the dying process under neo-liberalism (Mackenzie 2007b). Where stem cell technoscience is concerned, the somatechnics of this neo-liberal ascription of liminality constitutes a form of purification, or decontextualisation, an ahistorical categorisation which removes bodies and body parts from developmental time. Queering these figural technologies involves a defamiliarisation of the rhetorics of sacralisation, temporality and liminality which may read bodies and body parts as disposable, or as anonymised sources of temporal and material plenitude.

For those deemed to be disposable under neo-liberalism, the somatechnics of purification constitutes a rendering invisible of the social, economic and institutional forces which render some bodies within populations economically unproductive under globalised capitalism. In terms of stem cells sourced from the reproductive tissue of female bodies, the somatechnics of purification is associated with a sacralised and reductionist focus upon the potential of stem cells to afford the chosen permanently healthy, forever young and endlessly productive, leaves the source of this magic invisible. At the very most, acknowledgements of female bodies as sources will be constituted by associations of the female with the natural read as nature or the commons of intellectual property law, gendered altruism and the provision of the ‘gift of life’ already established within fertility treatment (Mackenzie 2007a). The contradictions which many have remarked upon between the expectation that human tissue samples will be provided on an altruistic basis in order to promote social bonds and the value to the biomedical industrial complex and the nation state of the intellectual property rights derived from such samples (Tutton and Corrigan 2003), will be rendered invisible through categorisations enabled by the rhetoric of sacralisation (Mackenzie 2007a).

### Stem Cells, Sacralisation and the Somatechnics of the Neo-Liberal Socio-Cultural Symbolic Universe

The somatechnologies by which we categorise stem cells within today’s socio-cultural symbolic universe matters. Imagery which foregrounds similarities between the very young (largely) human entities which constitute embryos created as sources for stem cells, foetuses and newly born children will be used by those who seek to persuade others that the extraction of stem cells is close to abortion, which involves the killing of unborn children. Indeed, much of the visual material relied upon by those involved in anti-abortion campaigning makes use of just such connections. Those who oppose stem cell research frequently
do so from an ethical stance shared by anti-abortionists: both categorise post-fertilisation human entities as unborn children. In a similar vein, many feminists have commented upon the power which images of foetuses have to represent the foetus as an entity in its own right who is temporarily contained by a woman’s womb, rendering the woman concerned invisible, or reduced to a more or less hospitable or hostile environment for the unborn child (Haraway 1997). Thus the somatechnics of the strategic rhetoric representing very young human entities as unborn children relies upon mechanisms of purification which marginalise or exclude the centrality of women’s bodies and body parts.

Those who favour stem cell technoscience categorise stem cells other than as very young unborn children. In the United Kingdom in the 1980s, the events leading up to the Warnock report and the eventual passage of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 placed those favouring fertility treatment and research involving embryos in a similar position. Michael Mulkay, Sarah Franklin and others have charted the process by which the concept of the pre-embryo was created as a means by which a boundary on permissible research might be agreed upon (Franklin 1997; Mulkay 1997). Such rhetorical devices permit negotiated compromises amongst decision makers whose values differ. I have argued elsewhere that initiatives consistent (or rendered consistent) with socio-culturally valued narratives will attract public support, whereas those which conflict with them, such as surrogacy, will be condemned (Mackenzie 2007a). How, then, would those policy makers charged with improving the neo-liberal English nation state’s share of the biomedical patent pie in relation to regenerative medicine manage to massage the moral economy?

Those who succeeded in persuading Parliament to pass the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 in a form permitting embryo research and fertility treatment did so not only through the creation of an entity, the pre-embryo, which was able to be distinguished conceptually from the foetus, but also through a campaign where rhetorical figurations of infertile women longing to be mothers were provided with hope by the magic of biomedicine as embodied in the scientists and doctors in white coats. Sacralisation of approved modes of motherhood was accompanied by the demonisation of those who failed to fit within its parameters. Thus fertile women, prepared to become pregnant and pass the resulting children to the infertile via surrogacy arrangements, were pilloried as falling outside the approved typology of maternal love (Mackenzie 2007a).

Stem cell technoscience demands to be embedded in a different narrative structure in order to muster similar persuasive force. Rather than a focus on remedying the cruel denial of motherhood, the healing of the sick and the possibilities of perpetual youth and economic profit have constituted the salient narrative tropes. As will be explored below, both have special resonance in contemporary globalised neo-liberal Britain. Readings of the Parliamentary
debates and the media presentations of the issues reveals a focus upon healing the ill who are otherwise, without hope, condemned to lingering and unpleasant deaths. Influential narratives of personal misfortunes, or those of relatives, involving chronic degenerative conditions and much suffering, were foregrounded in campaigns to persuade decision makers to permit stem cell research to proceed (Parry 2003). Thus, rather than a focus on the stem cell as an entity comparable to that of the pre-embryo, the emphasis in the campaigns was on what the use of stem cells could achieve. The magic of biomedicine, exerted again by the scientists and doctors in their white coats, took centre stage in this instance, underpinned by figurations of eternal youth, lasting health and immortality.

I have considered above how sacralisation, in functioning as an inclusionary/exclusionary device to sustain group cohesion, may deal with the ambivalence inherent in the response to liminality by demonisation of the excluded other. Elsewhere, I have explored some ways in which those who are infirm, incapable, and economically unproductive may be, as liminal creatures, deemed to be disposable under neo-liberal policies (Mackenzie 2007b). It is to this I wish to turn now, in order to suggest that the somatechnics of the sacralisation of medical science as the healer of bodily ills is accompanied by an unpleasant subtext which characterises neo-liberalism. Here necropolitics, or necropower as explicated by Mbembe, constitutes the ability of the state to specify who matters and who does not (Mbembe 2003). Those who are economically unproductive are at risk of being deemed not to matter, to be seen as disposable, bare life, vulnerable to the exercise of necropower which justifies their being sequestered, starved of resources and subjected to violence and premature death (Agamben 1998). Citizens deemed disposable may find their claims to civic rights and protections unfulfilled, as in the abandonment of those affected by Hurricane Katrina (Giroux 2006). Risking being categorised as disposable under neo-liberal necropolitics, and already viewed as liminal creatures from the perspective of sacred taboos, the chronically ill and those at end of life are peculiarly vulnerable to strategic rhetorical constructions.

This is particularly so in twenty-first-century England, where the progress of neo-liberalism’s love affair with globalised economic fundamentalism has established a chasm between the rhetoric of care for the vulnerable, and the reality of the lack of it. Hence, during the campaign to achieve public approval for stem cell research, while an ageing population and their carers were undoubtedly persuaded by visions of potential and actual illnesses transformed into lasting health, the economic aspects of the promises of stem cells were significant. Ongoing revelations of insufficiencies of pensions provision, an increasingly troubled and underfunded free National Health Service, high costs and shocking scandals associated with ‘care’ homes for the elderly, the prevalence of familial elder abuse and continuing debates over the desirability of rendering
euthanasia lawful all contributed to, and continue to reinforce, a subtext that ill health and a lack of economic productivity are unsafe states of being. Media popularisation of demographic trends which ensure that a shrinking proportion of the population in Britain will be young, whereas an increasing percentage will be ageing, ailing and economically unproductive ensures that this subtext remains a public preoccupation. Hence the promise of stem cells has particular salience for the neo-liberal citizenry, where the proportion of those adults involved in unpaid care as either the cared for, or the caring, is currently one in five and growing, in an unease-provoking context involving under-resourcing and uncertain legal liabilities (Biggs and Mackenzie 2006).

The somatechnics of twenty-first-century citizens’ corporeality thus rests upon inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms constituted by vectors of productivity, health and independence. I conclude by arguing these operate through a sacralisation of temporal purification. My starting point is that neo-liberal societies are characterised by a decontextualisation of dependencies associated with life cycles and inevitable occasional misfortunes. Neo-liberal nation-states impose increased responsibilities for health and economic self-sufficiency upon citizens while withdrawing welfare safety-nets (Harvey 2005). The decline of the welfare state leaves citizens both economically at risk and emotionally vulnerable to the hopes and fears raised by new technologies (Mackenzie 2008). Those who find themselves unable to maintain the role of the productive neo-liberal consumer may find temporary surcease in that of the addict, able to take time out with the status of the shriven sick before returning to the economic responsibilities of neo-liberal citizenship (Mackenzie 2006). Nonetheless, the insurance industry is based upon the reality that the loss of job, health and property threaten to expel neo-liberal citizenries from the status of the elect. It is in contemplation of this prospect that this paper will now conclude.

**Neo-Liberal Fantasies and Temporal Purifications: Free Lunches, Stem Cells and Time**

The neo-liberal fantasy is that of the free lunch, or being able to have one’s cake and eat it too. The millennial thrust of economic fundamentalism constructs a heaven on earth powered by the perpetual motion machine of production and consumption. Sustaining this vision depends upon various purifications. ‘Nature’ or ‘life itself’ is construed as unowned matter or the commons, able to be drawn upon freely in order to source production and ground the work which gives rise to intellectual property rights. In addition, sacralised figurations of feminine creativity and power, such as Mother Nature, equate the female with cyclic, renewable production of the naturalised world of primary produce.
I have argued above that a conflation of female bodies with nature in this light underpins the somatechnics of stem cell research and fertility treatment. Additional purifications involve a marginalising of the developmental changes inherent in human bodies. In that the lives of those who are not yet productive, and those who are no longer able to be so, together with those who care for them on an unpaid basis, take place away from the centre stage of productive maturity, childhood, nurturing and age become judged as lesser. In a similar vein, the infirm, disabled and economically disenfranchised are edged towards disposability (Mackenzie 2007b). Hence the sense of time in neo-liberalism is inherently purified into a progressive present which excludes vulnerabilities associated with ill fortune, loss and bodily infirmity.

How does this purified temporal space of an eternal progressive present where free lunches and self-regenerating cakes abound come into being? In my view, this takes place through the two narrative tropes which are central to the symbolic universe of neo-liberalism. One is the eternal cycle of production and consumption, and the other is that of perpetual millennial evolutionary progress. Both also anchor Spinozan/Deleuzean immanence, or the location of the sacred in the material. The eternal cycle where the independent monads struggle to maximise their capabilities, in order to return to the source (substance) at the highest possible level, has identical elements of cyclic and evolutionary time. In both models, material resources are unlimited, progress perpetual and productive (self) transformation has normative force. The sacralisation of the material found in Spinoza and Deleuze, then, is not incompatible with the materialist reductionism characteristic of neo-liberalism. The eternal progressive present may be instantiated in both through purifications of materialist visions.

The somatechnics of such inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms involves the designation of some as bare life, or disposable. In neo-liberal societies, this means the economically unproductive (Giroux 2006; Ong 2006). Geeta Patel argues that the uninsured and underinsured are constituted as moral failures, and that the practice of insuring against loss creates entanglements which ‘permit people to accede to the state of exception as a form of care for oneself, and in doing so render the law of the camp utterly commonplace’ (Patel 2007, 101). Patel constructs what she calls insurance fantasies, based upon Begona Aretxaga’s view that ‘fantasy is not opposed to social reality but constitutes its psychic glue’ (Aretxaga 2003, 403). She contends that the normative obligation to purchase insurance provokes fantasies of care as hope, or futures where potential losses will be held at bay. Patel locates the genesis of a security state for neo-liberal citizens whose ‘life is one in which you take on the job of life as a job … as an individual, you become an enterprise’ (Patel 2007, 105) in the purchasing of insurance, since this constructs a personhood and an idealised future where corporations and states are fetishised as caregivers. While she does not advert to Spinoza or Deleuze, she does refer to
those who purchase insurance as independent monads linked by connections allied to risk of which they may be unaware.

I have drawn upon Patel’s work in part in order to demonstrate how readings of Spinoza and Deleuze may prove compatible with not only neo-liberalism but also the exclusionary mechanisms associated with the state of exception, or being deemed to be disposable. Her description of insurance as having a kind of enchantment, and being shaped through mystification, or insurance fantasies, also resonates with the technics of sacralisation as explored above. Patel explains that:

through insurance fantasies, you, the consumer, strike a contract with time that your future of care provision will go according to plan. … You captivate or capture time … You will be cared for (Patel 2007, 110).

Insurance fantasies, as described by Patel, create an illusory temporal space similar to that I have described as the eternal progressive present within neo-liberalism. Both may be represented as a temporal gated community, in that the ill effects of loss associated with bad times are kept at bay. In addition, the disposables, who may otherwise infect us with bad luck, may be coded as justifiably excluded others via what can be framed as their self-inflicted misfortune. Their deliberate omission to provide for their future losses, whether these are induced by economic or bodily mishap, frees those within the gates from any obligation of empathy or mutual support.

It is easy to see the promise of stem cells technoscience in this light. The rhetoric of its somatechnologies is a quintessential manifestation of the enchantment of insurance fantasies. The cornucopia of regeneration and unending productive youth potentially enabled by stem cell technoscience may offer neo-liberal citizens permanent residence in the temporal space which I have described as the eternal progressive present. The female bodies which provide body parts for stem cell technoscience and the disposable bodies of the economically non-productive are rendered invisible through sacralised rhetorical figurations of the purificatory mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion. These somatechnologies are disquieteningly compatible, as I have said, with readings of Spinoza and Deleuze which focus on potential and counteractualisation, where a regard for the other within immanence applies only to certain others. Stem cells’ similarity to bodies-without-organs is evident. What the somatechnics of stem cell technoscience accomplishes is the purified construction of organs (stem cells) without (female source) bodies.

Queering the somatechnics of stem cell research has involved the unpacking of the sacralisation and purification drawn upon to render female bodies as sources of stem cells invisible, or naturalised as part of the commons. The strategic value of intimations of immanence has been problematised, along
with taxonomies constructing divisions of kinds. The salience of resonances between archetypal narrative figurations, rhetorical sacralisation and temporal fantasy in the politics of inclusion and exclusion in biomedical industrial globalised capitalism has been demonstrated. In doing so, I have sought to promote an explicit renegotiation and recontextualisation of the socio-cultural symbolic universes which takes into account the operation of the somatechnics of purification and sacralisation. This has foregrounded included spaces of exception, the inclusionary/exclusionary technics that construct these, and their potential for destabilisations. In this way, I hope to contribute towards the more finely modulated ethical vocabulary necessary to queer the somatechnics of both the anthropological and the andrological machines.

References


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Chapter 6
Sexing the Cherry: Fixing Masculinity
Marie Fox and Michael Thomson

Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle.

Winterson 1990, 9

Introduction

This chapter concerns two forms of non-consensual sexual surgery. Both types of surgery are generally accepted as falling within the realm of clinical discretion and parental choice. Both are usually non-therapeutic but are attended by risks. These risks can be life limiting and life threatening. Whilst the first type – surgery on children born with intersex conditions – is relatively uncommon (though it is claimed to be under reported),¹ the second procedure – the circumcision of male neonates – was until recently routinely performed on infants in the UK and Australia, and remains a majority choice in the US.²

This edited collection has afforded us the opportunity to revisit and reconsider – in the light of subsequent work – research we originally published in an intersex special issue of the Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender (Fox and Thomson, 2005a). Interestingly in the context of this collection, it was the volume that marked the shift in the journal from Women and the Law to Law and Gender. In that article we had argued for recognition of points of similarity in both the histories of routine male circumcision and non-therapeutic intersex surgeries and in arguments that aimed to problematise these procedures. We identified and interrogated early justifications for circumcision, which we suggest have much in common with the justifications promulgated for intersex surgery, in order to further challenge surgical intervention in the case of babies

¹ Some estimates suggest that 1-2 out of every thousand babies is born with ambiguous genitals resulting from various aetiologies – see Blackless et al. 2000.
² For an indication of the incidence of the procedure in these jurisdictions see Darby 2005.
and children who are unable to consent. In this paper our more specific focus is on an argument underpinning the Cardozo paper, which is that circumcision (like intersex surgeries) has historically been used to solidify or position the infant sexed body and, in so doing, respond to cultural idea(1)s regarding the masculine body. A similar claim has recently been articulated by Chantal Zabus, who contends of female genital cutting that “excision accounts are stories about interventions … in gender formation since it marks the infibulated girl child as ‘enclosed’ and therefore unambiguously female in the cultural mapping and marking of bodies along sexually segregated lines” (Zabus, 2007: 137). Thus, each of these genital cutting practices plays an important symbolic role in the somatechnical formation and fixing of ‘proper’ male and female bodies.

Our wider project, of which this chapter forms part, engages with an understanding of the sexed body as a variable idea(l) in history and the product of cultural and economic relations – an analysis clearly congruent with the bodies of the somatechnics project. In our contribution to this volume we aim to develop our analysis which has queried the histories, assumptions and structures that allow differential approaches to non-therapeutic and non-consensual genital surgeries on children. We argue that by literally inscribing particular identity(ies) on the infant male body, circumcision, like intersex surgery, may be understood as a normalising somatechnology which validates particular corporeal interventions and particular sexed and embodied identities. Focusing primarily on male circumcision we return to the history of this procedure (“… a forgotten angle”) in order to firmly locate the shifting rationales for the procedure in the desire to ‘fix’ (in both senses) the infant body. This historical work is increasingly pertinent and politically important as the HIV/AIDS rationale gathers momentum against a backdrop of research findings which are unlikely to be generalisable to other populations. Returning to nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses of the pathologised foreskin is in our view essential, as commentators continue to depict the foreskin as a ‘reservoir of infection’ (DeHovitz, 2000: 64), and calls grow for universal adoption of circumcision as a response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In previous work we have queried the discursive relationship between male circumcision and practices of female genital cutting, and have attempted to place these and other procedures under a heading of ‘non-consensual genital cuttings’ (Fox and Thomson, 2005b). More specifically, we have challenged the somatechnologies whereby practices of female and male genital cutting are constructed oppositionally for strategic and political purposes, and the manner in which such oppositions become encoded in legal responses to the practices. In this sense we would argue that, given its power to define and produce normal practices, and its tendency to reify boundaries, law itself may be understood as a somatechnology. Thus, we contend that an analysis which draws on the conceptual framework of somatechnics and other cultural studies methodologies
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is useful in moving beyond simplistic views of the body as merely an object of analysis, and enables us to engage more critically with legal approaches to regulating bodily interventions by taking embodiment seriously. Building on earlier work, in this chapter we extend our analysis to examine the place of the male imaginary anatomy in facilitating differential approaches to genital cutting of sexed bodies. Specifically, drawing on the work of Moira Gatens, we explore how idea(l)s of male embodiment – notably ways in which we corporealise the body politic – leads law to legitimise some body modifications and not others. That is to say, we explore the extent to which the masculine imaginary anatomy helps explain the lack of an over-arching framework for addressing non-therapeutic/non-consensual genital cutting. In arguing this we are nevertheless conscious that we are situated in what has become a predominantly non-cutting perspective and are encompassing in this discussion communities where cutting is an integral expression of cultural belonging (Sullivan, 2007: 407 citing Alcoff, 2006: 117). More generally, we are aware of the problems of evaluating procedures and bodily interventions that are firmly entrenched in the religious practice of others:

There is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions, and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves (Said, 1989: 216).

In addition, we recognise that cultural outsiders who seek to engage with issues of genital cutting may not “truly grasp … all the ambiguity and difficulty of the predicament”, posing questions as to “who has the moral authority to judge excision in this insider/outsider debate” (Zabus, 2007: 212). And certainly on occasions outsider critiques have been blind to their own cultural partiality (Gilman, 1999a). Yet, we would argue that, as law is increasingly forced to mediate between different perspectives in determining the best interests of a child too young to choose for himself, it is problematic to exclude or silence ‘outsider’ perspectives as having no stake in such debate. Indeed following Anne Phillips, we believe it is important to interrogate the concept of ‘culture’ and to be wary of “exaggerat[ing] not only the unity and solidity of culture but the intractability of value conflict” (Phillips, 2007: 8).

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3 For further analysis of the potential usefulness of embodiment and other concepts drawn from cultural studies methodologies in analysing legal responses to bodily interventions see Fletcher, Fox and McCandless 2008, and for the particular contribution of somatechnics to this project see Mackenzie 2008.
Intersections

Whereas adult transsexuals can choose from a range of hormonal and surgical treatments for a condition that begins with their own self diagnosis, intersexuals face the opposite scenario: mandated medical treatment prior to the age of consent (Turner, 1999: 472).

Parallels between intersex surgeries and other non-consensual surgical interventions on infants have, until recently, attracted little ethico-legal attention. Although we would take issue with the characterisation of such procedures as ‘treatment’ – a word that presupposes pathology – Turner’s statement contains clear echoes of debates around non-therapeutic circumcision of infants. We are mindful of Les Haberfield’s point that “[I]t is too simplistic to link all cultural practices, or indeed even practices involving alteration of the human body, in examining their acceptability” (Haberfield, 1997: 93; see further Pedwell, 2007), and would concede that differences exist in the degrees of harm which may result from various forms of genital surgery, in motivations for performing them and in their implications for sex identity. Yet, we will contend that societal and legal attitudes to male circumcision cannot be fully informed unless the practice is first contextualised against the uneven terrain of attitudes to childhood genital surgeries as a whole.

The nexus between these forms of genital surgery on children has been noted in passing before, but it has largely been ignored or its relevance denied (for example, Chau and Herring, 2002: 353-4). In an important contribution to this debate Nancy Ehrenreich has traced similarities in arguments utilised by opponents of both intersex surgery and female genital cutting (Ehrenreich, 2005). While she is more sensitive than other commentators to the critique we offer below, and is concerned not to be read as condoning male circumcision, she does nevertheless suggest that:

A number of factors distinguish male circumcision from intersex surgery, including: (1) religious reasons often stand behind the decision to circumcise an infant, raising First Amendment questions that are not raised by intersex surgery; (2) intersex surgery has a much more serious negative impact on physical well-being and sexual function than male circumcision usually does; (3) male circumcision does not permanently preclude alternative sex identities that may be more consonant with the felt identity of the individual; and (4) male circumcision does not seem to enforce patriarchal gender norms, as I argue FGC and intersex surgery do (Ehrenreich, 2005: footnote 9).

In this chapter we argue that, contrary to Ehrenreich’s fourth contention above, the practice of male circumcision is in fact a somatechnology implicated
in enforcing patriarchal gender norms by serving as one means of rigidly demarcating the sexes and an important site for early training in masculinity. Further, we argue that circumcision clearly aligns the infant male body with the imaginary male body and consequentially further privileges this masculine ideal and distances the female body from that ideal. Whilst these are the aims of this contribution, it is important to first refute the assumption that a clear dichotomy may be drawn between male and female circumcision, since, in our view, this is a key factor in understanding how ethico-legal debates around male circumcision have been constructed. As noted above, elsewhere we have traced the tendency of legal commentators to boldly contrast the harms of male and female circumcision, but it is helpful to provide one vivid example here. Layli Miller Bashir contends that “FGM would only be similar to male circumcision if the penis was amputated” (Bashir, 1998: 430; see also Haberfield, 1997: 104). Her contention also draws attention to Ehrenreich’s second point regarding male sexual function. Both authors engage with a particular model of male sexual acts which allows them to ignore the loss of sensory and other possibilities that flow from circumcision (Cold and Taylor, 1999). On this understanding male sexual performance becomes functional; privileging a certain popular understanding of male sexual pleasure and behaviour. This acts to further deny harms caused by routine male circumcision. More generally, such downplaying of harm to male children, when contrasted to the harms inflicted on females, seems particularly characteristic of certain strands of feminist scholarship. Yet as Dena Davis has highlighted:

When one begins to question the normative status of the male newborn alteration in the West, and when one thinks of female alteration as including even an hygienically administered ‘nick’, one begins to see that these two practices, dramatically separated in the public imagination, actually have significant areas of overlap (Davis, 2001: 588).

Just as Davis highlights the problems in viewing forms of male and female circumcision as unitary and distinct procedures (see also Zabus, 2007: 14-15), we have also noted our concern about drawing distinctions, as Ehrenreich does, rooted in the patriarchal justifications for female circumcision. We shall argue

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4 Other commentators argue for FGM to be regarded as a gender specific human rights violations without even acknowledging the routine acceptability of male circumcision – see, for instance, Wallerstein, 1999-2000.

5 And as Margaret Somerville (2000) notes, seeking to interrogate the practice of male circumcision often incurs feminist hostility for somehow detracting from debates about with female cutting. Interestingly Katrina Roen (2005: 263) has argued that “feminism in general does not sit easily with intersex issues” either.
that male circumcision is equally implicated in differentiating the sexes and upholding patriarchal norms. Thus, Carol Delaney (1998: 12, 18) observes, in her attempt to untangle how religious myths are woven into the moral fabric of our society, that the story of Abraham, with its inter-related narratives of circumcision and child sacrifice, is the “most patriarchal of stories”, and one which is “inextricably entangled with the meanings of masculinity”. In this chapter we aim to establish that the intersections between various forms of infant genital cutting signal the need to interrogate rationales for all of these practices in the absence of compelling and rare medical justifications.

Medical Practice

The most obvious parallel between non-therapeutic male circumcision and early gender assignment surgery is the involvement of health professionals in surgical interventions which remove healthy tissue from the body of a child unable to consent. With both surgeries the aim is to redesign infant bodies. However, while acknowledging that other meanings and interpretations are possible, we argue that in the case of intersex the motivation is to ‘normalise’ the child by assigning it to a definite sex category, whereas in the case of male circumcision it is to ‘perfect’ the child’s body and signal membership of a privileged category. As Roen argues, “clinical practice seeks to create bodies that approximate normative ways of being sexed and of expressing sexual desire” (Roen, 2005: 267). Given the overwhelming tendency to surgically assign children born with intersex conditions as female – a point to which we return below – we will argue that these technologies do further work in confirming the place of the penis as a signifier of masculinity and the importance of the phallic body in social imaginaries. In each case, the fact that law has refrained from regulating these surgeries has served to normalise and legitimise them.

Indeed, a striking similarity between the practices of male circumcision and intersex surgeries is how, until very recently, and in sharp contrast to female genital cutting, they have not been constructed as ethically or legally problematic. As far as the discipline of bioethics is concerned, it appears that intersex surgeries have failed to attract attention since they have been relatively small in number and shrouded in secrecy, whereas male circumcision has eluded critical scrutiny because of its construction as a common and acceptable practice which is “almost part of the mainstream” (Bridge, 2002: 284). Indeed as Davis has noted, citing Ronald Goldman (1998: 5), even the use of the term ‘circumcision’ with its ‘vaguely medical’ connotations is used to normalise the practice of male genital cutting (Davis, 2001: 589). Interestingly, because these forms of genital cutting take place on the terrain of Western scientific medicine
it tends to screen both practices from legal enquiry. To put this another way, and as Nikki Sullivan has argued in exploring the asymmetry in legal regulation of female ‘circumcision’ and cosmetic genital surgery, the location of these procedures within a specific time and culture renders them invisible through our culturally specific way of seeing – what Sullivan refers to as ‘white optics’ (Sullivan, 2007: 395). This screening occurs even when things go dramatically wrong. The most extreme example in this context, which highlights both the terrible harms that can be occasioned by sexual surgeries and the spurious basis of medical justifications for intersex surgeries, is the now infamous case of John/Joan. Ironically, given that it was to operate as the benchmark case which spawned the contemporary medical model for managing cases of intersex infants, the case concerned surgery on an infant who was clearly biologically male, but whose penis was ablated during a negligently performed circumcision to treat phimosis (Beh and Diamond, 2000: 5-12; Chau and Herring, 2002: 335-6; Hermer, 2002: 202-4). In furtherance of his theory that the acquisition of sexual identity is a matter of social conditioning rather than biology, the paediatrician and psychologist John Money advised the parents that the child’s best interests required that he should be hormonally and surgically treated to appear female, and be raised as a girl. In the 1970s Money proceeded to publish claims in the pediatric literature that this social and surgical experiment was successful, notwithstanding emerging but unreported evidence of ‘Joan’s’ decisive rejection of her assigned sex. Ultimately, following disclosure of the truth, ‘Joan’ opted for a mastectomy and phalloplasty in order to revert to his original sex, yet the case continued to be cited, and formed the basis for standard medical practice in the United States for a further twenty years. As Chau and Herring point out, notwithstanding the absence of any corroborating evidence, “as late as 1996 Money’s approach was still followed by the American Academy of Paediatrics”, which in that year published guidelines advocating that for intersex children sexual identity was a function of social learning (Chau and Herring, 2002: 335, citing American Academy of Paediatrics, 1996). Only in the late 1990s, when the truth about this most prominent sex assignment experiment finally emerged, was medical orthodoxy regarding the appropriateness of early surgical intervention challenged. Even then, as Roen documents, clinicians tended to point to technological failure as the cause of surgical complications, rather than challenging decisions to operate per se (Roen, 2005: 260-5). Thus, Gilman could argue that, for Money, “[s]urgery becomes the means of restoring order and making the psyche happy through the establishment of a unitary identity” (Gilman, 1999b: 270). Space precludes a more detailed history of how a surgical

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orthodoxy in response to intersex conditions emerged and we wish to turn now to a brief consideration of the emergence of routine male circumcision, with the aim of demonstrating how this practice shares with intersex surgery a tradition of spurious medical endorsement. In both cases prominent medical men were accorded an influential platform from which to promote scientifically flawed proposals advocating routine surgical interventions which were motivated, we would contend, by shared ideals of ensuring sex/gender stability.

... a Forgotten Angle

Money’s prominence in the intersex literature is paralleled in the history of male circumcision by that of Dr Lewis A. Sayre (see Darby, 2005). In February 1870 in New York the highly respected and influential orthopedic surgeon visited a young patient suffering paralysis. Discovering that the five year old boy’s penis, whilst otherwise normal, had ‘very small and pointed’ glans “tightly imprisoned in the contracted foreskin, and in an effort to escape, [it] had become puffed out and red as in a case of severe granular urethritis” (Sayre, 1870: 206), Sayre responded by performing a circumcision. This led to almost immediate improvements in the boy’s health and before long he was walking normally. Sayre went on to perform a number of surgeries that Spring, and subsequently informed colleagues that circumcision was the answer to a range of ailments: “Many of the cases of irritable children, with restless sleep, and bad digestion, which are often attributed to worms, [are] solely due to the irritation of the nervous system caused by an adherent or constricted prepuce” (Sayre, 1870: 210). This case marked the beginning of the professional and popular rise of Phimosis, an ill-defined and fluid pathology (Hodges, 1999: 37) the recoding of the foreskin as pathological, and, as we discuss below, its feminisation. Beyond the ailments of children, circumcision came to be seen as offering a cure for more problematic and elusive illnesses, as Miller notes:

Within fairly short order, circumcision was promoted as a remedy for alcoholism, epilepsy, asthma, gout, rheumatism, curvature of the spine and headache, ... paralysis, malnutrition, night terrors, and clubfoot; eczema, convulsions and mental retardation; promiscuity, syphilis, and cancer (Miller, 2002: 527, references omitted).

Given our challenge to the assertion by Ehrenrich and others that male circumcision is not implicated in patriarchy or managing children’s sexuality, it is

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7 For more detailed accounts of this history and discussion of a range of issues see the intersex special issue of the *Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender* 12 (1) (2005).
important to recall that at the same time that circumcision was being advocated as therapy for an increasing number of problems, clitoridectomies and ovariotomies were being used to alleviate psychological symptoms in women, with the “clitoris subjected to a variety of surgeries, manipulations, and chemical preparations” (Gollaher, 1999: 9). As with this form of female genital cutting, a belief emerged that male circumcision cured masturbation, at that time pathologised as causing degeneracy and insanity. The role of fears concerning the masturbating child in the history of the acceptance of routine circumcision deserves recognition. Circumcision of both female and male children allowed the Victorians to manage cultural anxieties (Miller, 2000-2001; Zabus, 2007: 206-9), which had prompted a pervasive campaign against masturbation (Miller, 2002: 534). Emerging from this crusade, it was argued forcefully that circumcision diminished the incidence of masturbation as it removed or prevented adhesions, which otherwise led to the penis being handled, leading in turn – almost inexorably – to self-abuse. Indeed, curing masturbation was understood, at least by early supporters of circumcision, as its key health benefit (Miller, 2002: 527). To this end, certain medics, lifestyle and health advocates (such as J.H. Kellogg) also advocated circumcising young boys without anesthesia to create an association between the procedure, its pain, and masturbation (Kellogg 1888). Later justifications, beginning in the 1880s, focused on hygiene. By 1914 Abraham Wolbarst was calling for universal circumcision as a ‘sanitary measure’ (Wolbarst, 1914: 92). Assessing medical opinion in the UK and the US, Wolbarst concluded that “the vast preponderance of modern scientific opinion on the subject is strongly in favor of circumcision as a sanitary measure and as a prophylactic against infection with venereal disease” (Wolbarst, 1914: 92).

**Morphology, Masculinity and Sacrifice**

A striking feature to emerge from the history of both forms of genital cutting is the preoccupation of Western medicine with genitalia and their role in assigning and managing sex and sexuality. Significantly, the penis has been the main preoccupation, functioning as the marker of the standard/normative body. Mirroring popular cultural practices, this fixation continues to play out in contemporary medical practice, with practitioners of sex assignment surgery and male circumcision displaying excessive concern with the morphology of

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9 This assertion is better understood if we examine the construction of masturbation as at the root of nearly all illness (Miller, 2000-2001).
the genitals in terms of measuring size and assessing aesthetics. Turner has demonstrated how form is privileged over the functioning of the genitalia or reproductive organs, noting that “the greater emphasis on genital form over reproductive function has served to uphold male social status and maintain heterosexuality despite the existence of the sexually ambiguous body” (Turner, 1999: 458). In similar vein Chau and Herring state:

The traditional approach to deciding the assignation of sex was summarized by Money, “too small now, too small later’ is a useful working rule with regard to construction or reconstruction of a penis.” In the United States, the ‘locker room appearance test’ was seen as of particular importance. The doctors would imagine the child when older showering with other children: would the child be accepted by the others as a boy or girl or would they be teased (Chau and Herring, 2002: 337).

Unsurprisingly, given the deployment of such tests, the vast majority of intersex children – some estimates suggest as many as 90 percent (Chase, 1998) – are assigned to the female gender, following surgery to reduce the size of the clitoris and/or create a vaginal canal. As Stephanie Turner comments (drawing on Kessler, 1990), this percentage indicates the pervasive sexism of a medical establishment which “devalues the female body and female sexuality by emphasising form over function – an aesthetically acceptable ‘phallus’ (a term applicable to the erectile tissue of both males and females) over a functional one capable of sensation” (Turnerm, 1999: 461). Such practices also reinforce notions of female bodies as “non standard or aberrant (not-male) bodies” (Naffine, 1997: 88). These features – as well as arguments regarding the centrality of the penis in the constitution of identity – are borne out in sex assignment case law, where possession of a defective phallus seemingly will confirm a legal designation as female (Sharpe, 2002: 49). More generally, through surgically ‘fixing’ children born with intersex conditions, we deny gender variability and shore up the key idea(l)s of gender dimorphism. As Nikki Sullivan writes:

One of the imperatives, then, of intersex procedures … is to create and confirm (the appearance of) gender dimorphism, and in doing so, to render white optics natural, normal and thus invisible … in the majority of cases, atypical genitalia pose a threat to the infant’s culture, to the binary system of categorization we hold so dear, rather than to the health and well being of the child, and thus surgical intervention serves aesthetico-politico purposes rather than strictly medical ones (Sullivan, 2007: 41).

In a companion piece to this chapter – ‘Foreskin is a feminist issue’ (Fox and Thomson, 2009) we explore further aspects of the relationship between
circumcision practice and the management of masculine corporeality. In that paper we argue that circumcision is in some respects related to the need to perfect the male body. That is to say, we argue that the foreskin is feminised; characterised as a permeable and dangerous interior space.\textsuperscript{10} The persistence of male circumcision (following its routinisation in the 1890s), can be understood in terms of its role in distinguishing male from female, and how this tapped into and refied myths of female disease, contagion and uncleanliness (perhaps representing what Judith Butler refers to as “bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order” (Butler, 1990: 132)). On this reading the foreskin provides an inner sensitised world that appears incompatible with – and disrupts the aesthetic of – the phallic body – the culturally privileged model of masculine embodiment. The uncircumcised penis with its inner dimensions and permeability are at odds with this ideal masculine aesthetic. Here, in another attempt to unpack the significance of this phallic ideal in explaining the persistence of circumcision, we focus on this imaginary ideal in the context of the body politic. We argue that actions to perfect the infant male body need to be understood in terms of how we imagine or corporealise the body politic. Unfolding from this, we go on to argue that a key to understanding masculinity, genital cutting and social organisation lies in the notion and practice of sacrifice.

In her consideration of representations in and of the body politic Moira Gatens has illustrated how the modern body politic is based on the masculine body. Gatens details how since the seventeenth century the masculine body has been both metaphor and metonym for the body politic. Considering imaginings such as Hobbes’ \textit{Leviathan} – ‘an artificial man’ – Gatens explores the limitations and violence caused when our political body is isomorphic with the masculine body. She argues that in philosophy and political theory the metaphorical use of the male body slides into metonymy, where the male body is not merely representational/heuristic, but becomes a signifier for all bodies and as such – perhaps circularly – is the only body represented by the body politic. So the move from metaphor to metonym affects “whose body it is that is entitled to be represented by this political corporation” (Gatens, 1996: 21). This somatechnology of exclusion affects those whose bodily specificity marks them as inappropriate analogues to the political body as this political body becomes \textit{the} social body.\textsuperscript{11} And it is clear that this imagined body influences or determines how we manage bodies and their modification. As Rosalyn Diprose argues:

\textsuperscript{10} This argument is given greater currency when we explore historical understandings of the physiologies of the sexes (Laqueur 1990).

\textsuperscript{11} As Gatens writes: “At different times, different kinds of beings have been excluded from the pact, often simply by virtue of their corporeal specificity. Slaves, foreigners, women, the conquered, children, the working classes have all been excluded from political participation, at one time or another, by their bodily specificity” (Gatens, 1996: 23).
… regimes of social regulation which dictate the right way to live, implicitly or explicitly seek to preserve the integrity of everybody such that we are compatible with the social body. Not only do these thereby dictate which embodied existences can be transformed, by whom, and to what end, but, as it is here that comparisons are made and values born, not all bodies are counted as socially viable. The privilege of a stable place within that social and political place we call the ‘common good’ then is secured at the cost of denigrating and excluding others (Diprose, 1994: 131).

We argue that the attempt to make the neonate congruent with the phallic ideal explains how both non-therapeutic intersex surgeries and routine circumcision have been cast – through white optics – as non-issues. It also helps to account for the fact that, as already noted, in intersex surgeries 90 percent of surgical assignments are to female, as the size of the phallus (the aesthetics of analogy) determines surgical action and belonging.

To recap: developing work where we have argued that the practice and prevalence of male circumcision may be partially attributed to the desire to perfect the masculine body we have argued that this need to perfect is amplified by the imperative to render the male body congruent with the masculine imaginary anatomy and the social body. That is to say, circumcision may be seen as the excision of feminised tissue in pursuit of the phallic ideal. However, while such desire may account for aspects of the phenomenon, it is worth exploring a further dimension of the phallic body. Within this construction of the male body a persistent narrative of sacrifice recurs. This is evident in discourses around circumcision and can be considered using the paradigm of the covenant. The practice of circumcision as integral to the covenant is, of course, narrated in Genesis (Sliverman, 2006). As part of a/the covenant circumcision status therefore marks belonging; it marks membership in the cultic community (Garet, 1991: 121). It speaks of being chosen. Circumcision and sacrifice are inextricably linked in biblical texts, since both traditionally take place on the eighth day (Zimmerman, 1951; Delaney, 2007: 98-101) and have common functions (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990). As Bruno Bettelheim has argued, circumcision may originate as a sacrificial offering (Bettelheim, 1971: 93, BMJ editorial, 1949) – an offering that Freud understood as stemming from the power of the father:

Circumcision is the symbolic substitute for castration which the primaeval father dealt his sons long ago out of the fullness of his power; and whosoever accepted this symbol showed by so doing that he was ready to submit to the father’s will, although it was at the cost of painful sacrifice (Freud, 1939: 192).
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In similar vein Levenson suggests that it is specifically blood which is important in the practice – “the blood of circumcision functions within the larger redacted story of Moses and Pharaoh as a prototype of the blood of the lamb” (Delaney, 2007: 97 citing Levenson, 1993: 50-1). On Levenson’s view, along with the substitution of animal for human sacrifice, circumcision may be viewed as “a sublimation of child sacrifice in ancient Israelite religious practice”. Delaney adds that circumcision may be understood:

as pars pro toto, a part of the child for the whole of the child; it could symbolize the sacrifice of the child or the idea of the sacrifice of the child created by the anxiety generated by the notions of paternity and the problem of illegitimacy. At the same time, circumcision would also symbolize that, despite these anxieties, the child is accepted (Delaney, 2007: 97).

Sacrifice can thus signal belonging and reward. Of course, it must be acknowledged that belonging does not always bring reward; and the Holocaust revealed how bodily significations may become a potent and ineradicable marker of identity and thus danger. As Gilman highlights:

By the middle of the twentieth century, with the rise of the Nazis in Germany, circumcision of the male became the symbolic sign of inherent male difference and danger. When male Jews in Germany imagined the act of disrobing, revealing the body, which reveals the nature of the Jew, they imagined revealing their circumcision (Gilman, 1999b: 130).

Inevitably therefore, circumcision, along with other bodily markers of Jewish identity, has “come … to be coded in complex ways” (Gilman, 1999b: 130). In attempting to engage with notions of the covenant and sacrifice it is important to attend to how anti-Semitic attempts to construct Jews as primitive were connected historically to narratives of ancient Israelites engaging in blood sacrifice (Delaney, 2007: 261, note 4, citing Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990). Nevertheless, and without wanting to trivialise these anti-Semitic technologies, we would contend that the secular penis can be understood in similar terms outside Hebraic, Muslim or other sacred signification. This is the case if we turn to a broader understanding of the sacrificial masculine body. Looking to the male body, there is a general denial of vulnerability in Western industrial cultures. As Cynthia Daniels has argued, masculinity is signified in part through the denial of vulnerability and risk, and the projection of these characteristics onto the female body – particularly the maternal body. The construction of the invulnerable male body has been a clear marker of masculine status (Daniels, 1997). And as we have argued elsewhere, there has been an insistent denial of the pain and risks that circumcision entails (Fox and Thomson, 2005c).
These denials of can also be understood in terms of the sacrificial. The risks to which Daniels refers are primarily those of warfare and employment, which are routinely denied or downplayed. Yet it is the sacrificial element of this denial that is given cultural currency. To die for one’s country, to spend one’s health for one’s family – both notions resonate with ideas of sacrifice and martyrdom. Since ancient Greece, willingness to bodily sacrifice – most notably in warfare – has been one side of a ‘covenant’ that affords men fuller participation in the body politic. Returning to Gatens:

Certainly, not any human form, by virtue of its humanity, is entitled to consider itself author of or actor in the body politic. From its classical articulation in Greek philosophy, only a body deemed capable of reason and sacrifice can be admitted into the political body as an active member. Such admission always involves 

forteit. From the original covenant between God and Abraham – which involved the forfeit of his very flesh, his foreskin – corporeal sacrifice has been a constant feature of the compact. Even the Amazons, the only female body politic that we ‘know’ of, practiced ritual mastectomy (Gatens, 1996: 23).

As such, understanding the “copiousness of significations still devolving on circumcision and uncircumcision” (Boon, 1994: 562-3) requires that we recognise the tensions that understandings of the phallic body and masculinity create for the intact male body. Specifically, the impermeable phallic ideal locates the foreskin as feminised flesh, the excision of which ‘perfects’ the neonatal body providing an analogue with the phallic body and the (imagined) body politic. Building on the stabilising or ‘perfecting’ of this idea(l) of masculine embodiment, is the sacrificial aspect of circumcision. This is meant in two respects. First, there is the sacred Abrahamic covenant. Second, there is the secularised covenant of bodily sacrifice (marked by a ‘secularised religious practice’ (Dozor 1990)) that is rewarded not by eternal belonging, but by more immediate and material social, economic and political markers of success.

Conclusions

The biomedical ethics of the human subject continually conflates, defines, and privileges masculinity and the phallic body … Within this framework, the terms ‘health’ and ‘masculinity’ become isomorphic. Health is understood as the ability of the body to arm itself against the world. In this respect, the female body (and the receptive male body) occupy a uniquely precarious position in modern times. The conditions of receptivity, passivity, and permeability read like an epithet for disease or disintegration (Race, 1997: 42).
Running through the historical narratives of male circumcision and intersex surgeries is a belief in the power of surgery as a somatechnology which normalises and perfects and thus is validated in law. In these medico-legal narratives the body of the child is constituted as a surface to be inscribed and improved, rather than understanding it from the perspective of the embodied child susceptible to pain and suffering. What aligns these surgeries and appears to distinguish them from the practice of female circumcision is that they are sanctioned and performed by practitioners of Western medicine. The fact that female circumcision is not practiced within these confines partially explains the differential and extreme legal response that female genital cutting attracts. In contrast, the ideology of Western scientific medicine, redolent with the notions of neutrality and objectivity, which are also seen as hallmarks of Western law and the wider societal perspective in which we are located, means that traditions of genital cutting sanctioned in Anglo-American jurisdictions have been shielded from the accusations of cultural barbarity and attendant ethico-legal scrutiny applied to female circumcision. As Ehrenreich notes:

To the extent that scientific (in this case, medical) assessments of, and treatment protocols for, various human conditions are seen as merely descriptive of a biological reality; they are not seen as cultural, socially constructed, or contingent (Ehrenreich, 2005: 89).

We would argue that the harms of male circumcision have been rendered less visible by the long history and widespread acceptance of routine circumcision in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. This acceptance means that, unlike female cutting, male circumcision cannot be assigned as a property of ‘other’ cultures, and renders critiques that deem it to be barbaric or primitive particularly inappropriate. It is ‘our’ cultural acceptance which blinds us and our legal systems to the embodied consequences of these choices – of the risks imposed by surgeries, the pain occasioned by removal of healthy tissue, and the possibility of psycho-sexual problems in later life. To some extent these harms are now being accorded recognition in professional codes (for instance, British Association of Paediatric Surgeons, 2001; British Medical Association, 2006). However, it is clear that infant male circumcision is being constructed in such codes and legal norms as a risky practice, rather than a harmful one. Consequently it is deemed a private decision, which can appropriately be entrusted to parents. We would suggest that compelling evidence of benefits should be forthcoming before parents can consent to

12 See, for instance, Re J (Specific Issue Orders: Muslim Upbringing and Circumcision) [2000] 1 FLR 571; Re S (children) (Specific Issue: Religion: Circumcision) [2005] 1 FLR 236; and discussion in Fox and Thomson 2005c.
such procedures. And the same must also apply to intersex surgeries where there is no therapeutic justification for surgery.

Thus, while harm is readily discernible and accepted by almost all commentators on female genital cutting, we suggest that opponents of all sexual surgeries on unconsenting children should be more receptive to seeing the harm entailed in each of these practices. Opponents of female genital cutting have distanced these practices from routine male circumcision for ethnocentric and political purposes. Yet, whilst our focus has been the parallels that can be productively drawn between intersex surgery and neonatal circumcision, there are political advantages to be gained from aligning in opposition to all non-consensual non-therapeutic surgeries on children. Such benefits are, of course, additional to the ethical and legal cases against such surgeries.

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SEXING THE CHERRY: FIXING MASCULINITY


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Chapter 7
Speaking Transsexuality in the Cinematic Tongue

Eliza Steinbock

Theoreticians Sandy Stone, Susan Stryker, and Judith Butler all deal with the issue of transsexuals’ difficulty in finding a place from which to ‘speak’ (1992, 1994, 2004).1 In their accounts, this is an effect of how oppositional sex-gender nodes determine placeholders in discourse.2 As they track this problem, they each ask a version of the question ‘can the transsexual speak?’, echoing Gayatri Spivak’s question ‘can the subaltern speak?’3 In other words, each asks how one might theoretically capture, or ‘listen to’, a discursively excluded expression. For example, Stone writes, ‘How, then, can the transsexual speak? If the transsexual were to speak, what would s/he say?’ before she launches into the section ‘A Posttranssexual Manifesto’, which is also the subtitle of her groundbreaking essay ‘The Empire Strikes Back’ (1991/2006), p. 230. Responding to this query, Stone speaks in the language of myth, Stryker performs a critique mobilised by the affect of rage, and Butler maintains that speaking is always ‘acting in concert’ (2004, 1, 16). Given this discussion, I want to suggest that the project of transgender studies, as mapped by these key thinkers and the texts included in The Transgender Studies Reader (Stryker and Whittle (eds) 2006), is often marked by the development of theories that are hospitable to both articulating and reading

1 ‘Transsexual’ is now the common term for the subject who experiences and/or engages in practices of transsexuality. The terms ‘transsexuality’ and ‘transsexualism’ came into use by scientists in the mid-twentieth century. It was mainly propagated by the work of Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany (seldischer Transsexualismus or ‘psychic transsexualism’; referring to extreme transvestism [1923]), David O. Cauldwell in the United States (psychopathia transsexualis [1949]) and Harry Benjamin, a German émigré to New York (transsexualism [1954]).

2 Following my sources, I rely on the Foucauldian definition given in The Archaeology of Knowledge: ‘discourses are the practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (1972, 49).

‘trans’ embodiments and practices.\textsuperscript{4} Thus far, the response to this dilemma has been articulated via a variety of theoretical frameworks: for instance, post-structuralism, history, feminism, queer theory, narratology, sociology, law, and phenomenology (see Stryker and Whittle (eds) 2006).

With transgender studies’ experimental spirit in mind, I wish to investigate what may be gained from engaging another medium, such as film, to approach the question of a ‘trans language’. If it is true that the transsexual cannot ‘speak’ in (intelligible) discourse, I wonder whether s/he can find a suitable mode of utterance in the visual and moving ‘language’ of cinema. Following that, I would like to speculate how cinematic language might suggest new ways in which transsexuality might be read. Instrumental to this approach is the notion of ‘somatechnics’ at issue in this collection, a notion that pertains to both cinema and transsexuality. I will explore ways in which this term opens up new modes of analysis of sex-gender constructions; I seek an understanding of gender and language wherein transsexual embodiments and practices are intelligible.

With the conceptual frame of somatechnics, I see that transsexuality and cinema both show the extent to which the \textit{soma}, the body as a culturally intelligible construct, and \textit{techné}, the technologies through which bodies are transformed and positioned, are inextricably bound together.\textsuperscript{5} While highly particular, transsexuality and cinema can also be compared, to some extent, as forms and/or effects of somatechnics. Feminism and transgender studies have paved the way to an understanding of how gender is a kind of technology that makes the body culturally intelligible; in turn, media studies questions the ways in which the techniques of film position and transform the viewer’s body. The tenet of inextricability embodied by the composite term ‘somatechnics’ is crucial to my understanding of both cinema and medicalised transsexuality, which comprise of the body merging with and emerging from the historical development of technologies. Transsexuality and the cinema share a ‘queer’ affinity as somatechnics, in the sense that they are related thematically rather than directly.\textsuperscript{6} I will draw on this newly coined notion of somatechnics since, as I

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} I use ‘trans’ here and elsewhere as an umbrella term to refer to people with transsexual, transgender, gender variant, genderqueer, and/or gender non-conforming experience, or who are perceived as such.
\item \textsuperscript{5} This formulation is from Susan Stryker’s ‘(De)Subjugated Knowledges’ that cites her development of ‘somatechnics’ with scholars such as Nikki Sullivan and Joseph Pugliese at Macquarie University (2006, 12); see \url{http://www.somatechnics.mq.edu.au/index.php}.
\item \textsuperscript{6} The work of Nikki Sullivan (2006) and those included in this collection are evidentiary of the innovative analysis that somatechnics fosters. I qualify such new arrangements and connections as ‘queer’ due to the different kinship relations explored. I am referring to how kinship has been considered a queer question by both Butler (2002) and Stryker (2004) amongst others.
\end{itemize}

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have briefly suggested, it allows for new kinds of relationships to be established between what may otherwise be conceived as divergent and isolated cases of ‘body modification’.

In a number of texts by critical theorist Walter Benjamin, a forerunner ‘somatechnician’, I locate further support to conduct an analysis of cinema and transsexuality in analogy. I first employ Benjamin’s theory of language to develop a paradigm in which I relate the somatechnics of transsexuality and cinema as translatable, in the sense of comparable, languages, which can be said to ‘express’ and to be ‘read’. From Benjamin’s famous Artwork Essay (1936/2002), I seize on an oft-overlooked insight that the production and reception of cinema is like a surgery. In a discussion of cinema as that which cuts into reality to extract perception, Benjamin provides an affirmation of cinema as surgery, but not without stipulation (Benjamin 2002, 115). I find this vision of cinema a boon to my own project to affirm the expression of transsexuality as it has become defined by surgical incision. This productive analogy, for Benjamin, finds a new home in transgender studies where surgery is intrinsic to transsexual experience and practice. My method is to elaborate the queer affinities between transsexuality and the cinema as somatechnics through the cognate terms ‘cut’, ‘flash’, and ‘transfer’. This development of Benjamin’s work in the purview of somatechnics will ground the larger discussion of the ways in which ‘language’ might be said to technologise the body.

Instead of engaging with a film wherein the transsexual is the subject of speech, I will approach the relation between the somatechnics of cinema and transsexuality by investigating the ways in which a written text on transsexuality might be read ‘cinematically’. What I mean by ‘cinematically’ is that my reading will pay attention to the form and delivery of the text – the editing – as if it were a film. In filmmaking, the process of editing consists of selecting and joining camera takes, and in the finished film, it refers to the set of techniques that governs the relations among shots (Bordwell and Thompson, 199: 493). The attention to ‘editing’ is intended to illustrate the broader applications of somatechnics for transgender studies, extending it beyond the medical and lived arena to a discursive domain. My sense is that in the realm of text, the dynamic fusion of embodiment and technique, highlighted by the term somatechnics, is also at stake.

For my case study, I focus on the first available writings of a transsexual woman, Lili Elbe (b.1880-d.1930), entitled *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record*. Following Miriam Hansen (1999) and others, I name the essay more generally for brevity and since there are two English versions. I refer to the second version ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility’ (1936) in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings* Vol. 3 1935-1938 (2002), since this was the one Benjamin considered complete.
of a Sex-Change (1933/2004). This text demonstrates how a strictly linguistic concept of discourse excludes speaking as a transsexual, urging me to read its discursive construction of transsexuality through the language of cinema. I stage a Benjaminian (or, perhaps, I should say ‘somatechnical’) analysis of Elbe’s text to expand and specify the ways in which transsexuality speaks in the cinematic tongue. I analyze the ways in which Elbe’s text composes itself through certain kinds of ‘cuts’, or editing patterns, which express trans speech. Finally, since Man into Woman proposes not only a trans speaker, but also assumes and even necessitates a certain kind of reader, I elaborate the ways in which the text calls for a reader to cinematically perceive the speaker’s gender.

Expression through Cuts: Cinematic and Somatic Surgery

The assertion, ‘There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language’, encapsulates Benjamin’s expansive theory of language (Benjamin 1916/1978, 314). As a cultural theorist and a language scholar involved in translation, Benjamin shows concern for the ways in which language transmits and shapes socio-cultural meaning for and on its speakers. His theories form a critique of an instrumentalist concept of language, which assumes that the people reading objects give them meaning, reducing things to mere representations of human language. Benjamin reserves this utility function, to express contents through language, but also emphasises a poetic expression within language (Busch 2006, 2). In ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’, Benjamin asserts a view that extends this ‘expressive’ dimension of language to all things and events:

Every expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language … It is possible to talk about a language of music and of sculpture, about a language of justice … [or] a language of technology (Benjamin 1916/1978, 314).

The poetic dimension of expression, especially for technologies, is the most compelling for Benjamin – and interesting for this study – because even as it is spoken it cannot be grasped or represented, yet it acts on the reader. Language’s labile, elusive, and nevertheless vigorous properties are, by many accounts, also properties of gender.

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8 The 2004 English reprint changed the title to Man into Woman: The First Sex-Change, A Portrait of Lili Elbe, with the even longer subtitle A True and Remarkable Transformation of the Painter Einar Wegener.

9 See, for example, the analysis of gender in Joan Scott’s article ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’ (1989), Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion
SPEAKING TRANSSEXUALITY IN THE CINEMATIC TONGUE

Are the ‘languages’ of transsexuality and the cinema, perhaps as subgroups of the language of technology, translatable, and if so, in what way? According to Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’, the translator must presume the translatability of both languages (Benjamin 1923/1999, 70). For Benjamin, translatability refers to the manifestation of a ‘specific significance inherent in the original’, which enables the translator to find an analogous ‘significance’ in another tongue (Benjamin 1999, 71). This significance is not about what is signified, nor about the signifier, but about what that piece of language indexes in the text in relation to the other words. Looking at the contiguous index or placement of words suggests a theory of translation that focuses almost exclusively on the ‘expression’, rather than the ‘communication’ of language.

How then might transsexuality and cinema be understood to ‘speak’ in a ‘kind of language’? In a reading of Benjamin’s essays on language, Kathrin Busch explains that the object’s appeal or claim to our attention defines its act of ‘speaking’ (Busch 2006, 3). Language, then, is not necessarily bound to spoken or written words. For each object, humans included, expression can also be physiognomic and thereby given by its form. Hence, cinema may speak a translatable language in the sense that it attracts our attention through specific patterns of significance; that is through the various cuts in editing a montage sequence. Further, Benjamin provides a vision of cinema in the Artwork essay that develops the importance of editing into a socio-political critique of perception. He does this by viewing the ‘cuts’ of editing as an intervention. He writes that the notion of the camera operator ‘is familiar to us from surgery’, where the surgeon ‘makes an intervention in the patient’ (Benjamin 2002, 115). What cannot be heard or seen, in short perceived, due to the numbing elements of modernity in Benjamin’s time, such as the factory and the crowd, is therapeutically transformed by the camera cutting into the world.

In film terminology, ‘to cut’ relates to the way in which shots are arranged by cutting into the celluloid and piecing different frames together. This technique can be compared to the way in which the transsexual’s flesh is cut and reassembled into a new sexual order. From a medical point of view, transsexuality has been primarily defined by the utilisation of sex reassignment of Identity (1990), Donna Haraway’s “Gender” for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word (1991), and Elizabeth Grosz’s Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism (1994).

10 This forms a crucial difference from other language theories, such as those of Ferdinand de Saussure, which insists on the arbitrary relationship between the signified and signifier. See, for example, Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics (1966).
surgery and hormone therapy to assuage the condition of gender dysphoria. As Stryker says of the transsexual body, ‘it is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born’, stressing the transsexual as a surgical subject (Stryker 2006, 245). Following Benjamin, I posit that the cinematic ‘language’ of cutting and its formalisation into editing techniques can lend coherence to trans language. The Artwork Essay helps to identify the translatable ‘significance’ between the languages of transsexuality and cinema as ‘surgery’. Surgical incisions are how transsexuality as well as film ‘express’, whether through ‘cuts’ in flesh or celluloid.

Just as surgery offers a language of cuts, ‘surgical incisions’ are also rendered through language. Stryker points out that, ‘phallogocentric language, not its particular speaker, is the scalpel that defines our flesh’ (Stryker 2006, 253). Language cuts to mark out male and female positions. The result of this linguistic incision in the flesh is the sustained illusion of gender’s (somehow pre-technological) naturalness. Stryker goes on to assert that the ‘transsexual body literalises this abstract violence’ by demanding to go under the scalpel to redefine its meaning (Stryker 2006, 254). In the same way that the transsexual body literalises an abstract violence, film consists of a series of celluloid seams that join up ‘cuts’ that redefine the meaning of the images (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 493). Like Stryker, Benjamin sees an opportunity to affirm the subjectification that results from this violence as a form of critical therapy (Benjamin 2002, 115). Film’s technological interpenetration of reality, which Benjamin praises for its ability to ‘trigger a therapeutic release of unconscious energies’, connects with the therapeutic necessity of surgery that is part of the transsexual experience (Benjamin 2002, 118). I wish to develop Benjamin’s affirmation of therapeutic incisions into a paradigm in which transsexual surgical practices can be read as a means of expression.

See, for example, Harry Benjamin The Transsexual Phenomenon (1966), The World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care (6th edition) <http://www.wpath.org/publications_standards.cfm>.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, IV of the American Psychiatric Association lists the diagnostic criteria for ‘gender identity disorder,’ known to lay people as transsexualism. Foremost is the ‘a strong and persistent cross-gender identification, manifested by a repeatedly stated desire to be, live as, or be treated as the other sex or by the conviction that the person has the typical feelings or reactions of the other sex’, and secondly, ‘a persistent discomfort with their bodies’. These criteria suggest that the treatment for the disorder would likely involve sex-reassignment surgery because it both alleviates discomfort and enables the desire to be, live as and be treated as the other sex to be achieved.
The Mimetic Faculty: Reading Flashes in Time

It remains to be seen how one might ‘read’ or understand trans ‘speech’. A central term in Benjamin’s theory of language is the ‘mimetic faculty’, introduced to name the capacity to ‘read what cannot be said, or put into words’, but which language expresses (Benjamin 1933a/1979; Busch 2006, 2). That which cannot be put into words but which is recognised in the activity of reading, Benjamin names ‘non-sensuous similarities’.12 The act of mimetic reception, whether of language or cinema, perceives the non-sensuous similarity between the concept-word and thing. The mimetic correspondence is called ‘non-sensuous’ because it is intangible to the other senses; mimeticism employs an intellectual ‘faculty’ for recognition. Paradoxically, the use of the mimetic faculty to read non-sensuous similarities is granted a somatic impact in so far as the body registers the similarity. The mimetic faculty is thus a somatechnic, a bodily device for the reading and expression of non-sensuous similarities.

The ‘not there’, but nevertheless actively ‘there’ element of non-sensuous similarities, names a certain potency expressed in language (Benjamin 1933b/1979, 68). The potency is what the speaker expresses or the reader receives in the transmission of language. The mimetic faculty covers both the ability to perceive similarities, or to read mimetically, and the ability to become similar, or to express affinity. With this formulation of the mimetic faculty as a bodily apparatus to express and read non-sensuous similarities, Benjamin sets a new horizon for ‘language’, which includes the expression of meaning that may or may not coincide with the semantic content. This notion opens the way to a language theory that accounts for the unrepresented, for that which falls outside of discourse proper. As such, it might prove useful in the context of transsexuality wherein the voice of the transsexual appears excluded from discourse, unrepresented by the positions of either male or female.

I wish to suggest that the (trans)sexed body produces meaning in and through non-sensuous similarities by way of the mimetic faculty. From the point of view of Benjamin’s theory of language, transsexual embodiment, indeed any gendered embodiment, entails more than the adjustment of gender signs. Through surgical incisions, some transsexuals are able to express a non-representable dimension of gender we might call, after Benjamin, its ‘non-sensuous similarity’. The element of similarity, as Jodi Brooks clarifies, has ‘less to do with identity and sameness than with affinity’ (Brooks 1990, 4). The meaning may not be identical to the object, such as a body, yet the

12 The term ‘non-sensuous similarities’ is first elaborated in ‘Doctrine of the Similar’ (1933a/1979) and ‘On the Mimetic Faculty’ (1933b/1979), which were developments of his programme for a philosophy of language first set out in the essay ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’ (1916/1976).
non-sensuous similarity registers a certain affinity between the object and its expression, or a body and its expression.

The neologism ‘gender similarities’ would indicate the ungraspable, but potent affinities between gender and body. The concept of gender similarities counteracts the dominance of the gender identity model based on sameness, which has the drawback of requiring a transcendental concept of masculinity and femininity with which to evaluate one’s gender. The idea of ‘gender’ being an expression of affinity between bodies that might be recognisable to others situates gender historically and locally in the context of that gender’s expression. For some trans people, in some locales, non-sensuous similarities may be marked by the practices available, such as surgery, hormonal therapy, name change, binding of breasts or genitalia, all of which achieve a somatechnical effect of constituting a body through and in technologies. A somatechnical reading of these practices would register the ways in which each literal cut of flesh expresses the non-sensuous language of gender and furthermore, attending to the ways each abstract cut of language performs a cut of flesh. Within a Benjaminian somatechnical framework, the expression of gender reverberates in a historical context, a historical moment.

In ‘On the Mimetic Faculty’, Benjamin promotes a historicisation of the mimetic ability itself, which humans share with nature even though, ‘the highest capacity for producing similarities … is man’s [sic]’ (1933b/1979, 160). Benjamin argues that becoming and behaving ‘like something else’ has been passed down and canonised in language (1933b/1979, 160-161). From a historical vantage point, Benjamin sees that where the ancients used their mimetic faculty ‘to read what was never written’ from the stars, entrails and dances, the modern readers’ mimetic faculty is absorbed into spoken and written language itself (Benjamin 1933b/1979, 162-3). The mimetic element in language manifests itself through the semiotic element of the word. However, the graphic and spoken word is only a kind of bearer that Benjamin likens to a flame (Benjamin 1933b/1979, 162). The notion of the bearer being like a flame, an ungraspable light that has perceptible qualities, reminds me of cinematic technologies. The cinematic ‘language’ created by flashing lights on a screen also carries the mark of cuts that modulate one unit of meaning to another. In this way, cinema provides an externalised model of the mimetic faculty that might shed new light on its function as a somatechnical apparatus at work in reading gender.

Cinema’s flickering vision is technological; at the same time, cinema purports an unhindered immediacy. On this point, Benjamin claims enigmatically that the cinema enables its viewer to perceive ‘the “blue flower” in the land of technology’ (Benjamin 2002, 115). The blue flower refers to the ‘sight of

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immediate reality’, which film provides through the highly technological process of shooting and editing (Benjamin 2002, 115). This cinematic illusion works in the same way as the illusion of gender’s natural immediacy, wrought from the incisions of phallogocentric language. Benjamin refers to the proverbial ‘blue flower’ critically, for it is the unattainable image from German Romanticism. This usage infers that a pure vision of ‘immediate reality’ is as unattainable as the fantastical flower. The mimetic faculty incorporates the sense of an immediate vision of reality (of gender), while maintaining that this vision is a part of a mechanism.

Benjamin attributes the sense of immediacy to the speed that is necessary and integral to reading cinema and gender: one is read and one reads in an instant, or in Benjamin’s words, in a time-moment (Zeitmoment) (Benjamin 1976, 66). Benjamin visualises the principle of speed as a flash of light:

The perception of similarity is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash. It slips past, can possibly be regained, but really cannot be held fast like other perceptions. It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars (Benjamin 1979, 66).

Perceiving similarity takes place ‘instantly’; the reader cannot linger in the moment to analyze the process, much less the meaning. Benjamin asserts elsewhere that for film ‘perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle’ (Benjamin 1939/1999, 171). The effect of shocking images is rendered through images ‘flashing’ from one cut to another. The flashes produced by the movement of filmic cuts become for Benjamin the perfect training ground for improving the capacity for mimetic reading. Even as early as the essay on the mimetic faculty, he proposes that the ‘rapidity of writing and reading heightens the fusion of the semiotic and the mimetic in the sphere of language’, suggesting that cinema’s flashing language of cuts could play an enlarged role in training humanity to ‘read’ (Benjamin 1933b/1979, 162).

Clearly, the concept of reading in Benjamin has a broad meaning as well as a political weight. It stands to reason that the discussion in trans circles on ‘reading’ gender might be clarified or even be expanded by Benjamin’s notion of reading. Sociological research concludes that the strategies used

14 The shocking effect of the flash becomes key to both Benjamin’s political agenda and analysis asserted in the Artwork Essay (1936/2002).

by transsexuals to establish a ‘reading’ of their bodies are the same, whether for their birth sex or preferred gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 127). Put another way, the usually tacit process of ‘gender attribution’, the sociological term for reading someone’s gender, rarely consists of seeing a person ‘flash’ him or herself to reveal genitalia. The sexing of a person is a contingent practical accomplishment, dependent on what enters the viewer’s perception in the flash of their reading. An activated mimetic faculty would be able to index these changing relationships of material contiguity, which hinge upon the particular instant when reading takes place (Hansen 1987, 195).

Gender, when seen from a Benjaminian angle, becomes a contiguous indexical sign, located in a specific time-space as it is read off a bodily surface. Facial hair, vocal pitch, gait, occupation, for example, might be cited as indexes of gender, but they certainly do not function as stable signifiers. Within Benjamin’s paradigm, gender readings are bound to the time-moment, to the flash of one’s particular ‘gender constellation’. By gender constellation I mean the contiguous grouping of indexes (stars, lights, or similarities) that one expresses and can be read ‘in a flash’. This concept is suggested by Benjamin’s detour to a discussion of astrology in presenting notes on the mimetic faculty, a section of which I quote above: ‘[the non-sensuous similarity] offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and transitorily as a constellation of stars’ (Benjamin 1979, 161). A constellation of stars is seemingly stable; the ancient’s supposed a proper reading of the star’s alignment could determine the direct correspondence of one’s birth time to one’s life course. Constellations can be thought of as heavy, set, and eternal, but in Benjamin’s hand they flash with meaning; a different reading is possible each changing moment. Likewise, a gender constellation suggests a flash of meanings that can change from one time-moment to the next, depending on the perceiver’s receptiveness. The cinema might be able to train readers to perceive ‘flashings’ of gender, which shift each instance, producing new sparks, possibly new affinities.

In transposing Benjamin’s theory of language into the problematic of speaking/reading transsexual expression, I understand gender as immaterial, yet as some ‘thing’, just as a non-sensuous similarity is a thing. Gender is non-representable, but nevertheless perceptible as the ‘blue flower’ is perceptible. As a perceptible non-sensuous object, gender has its own ‘language’, or way of sparking attention through the flashes produced by cuts. Gender can thus be analyzed as detached from the body, as a non-sensuous similarity that is then incorporated and made manifest matter when read. Reading is thus a somatechnical involvement, a system that incorporates that which one understands as the body through a looping of the material into the semiotic. With Benjamin, I now want to suggest that in this circuit gender similarities are transferred; and in the incorporation of the transference, meaning is made matter.
Gender Mimesis: Transfers of Meaning

Benjamin holds the mimetic faculty responsible for the sensate, yet cognitive process of reading, which I consider in terms of reading gender. Importantly, in this terminology Benjamin (and the Frankfurt School) defines ‘mimesis’ in contrast to Platonic and Marxist theories of imitation and reflection. With this re-conception, the Frankfurt School sought an alternative to the Platonic notion of mimesis. They shift from identity to affinity – from sameness to similarity. In a dialectical reversal, mimesis, as Benjamin and his peers understand it, is a concept that dissolves ‘the contours of the subject/object dichotomy into reciprocity and the possibility of reconciliation’ (Hansen 1987, 195). In no way does Benjamin’s conception of mimesis resemble a realistic concept of representation entailing original and copy. Rather, with mimesis Benjamin insists on the perceptibility of another dimension of language, which he believes transmits what is otherwise the ‘inexpressible’ correspondence between word and thing, meaning and object. Through the mimetic faculty language becomes the ‘medium’ for the potent transfer of meaning. In this transfer, the inexpressible can become apparent, but it does not follow that this layer of language will become present or representable (Busch 2006, 2).

Pace Teresa de Lauretis, with Benjamin I propose a way of reading gender mimesis that can grasp the ‘something else’ that is transferred in the flashes of transsexual constellations. In her book Technologies of Gender (1987), de Lauretis advances a semiotic reading of gender that expands the gender system to include technologies of representation. Thinking along the lines of Michel Foucault’s ‘technology of sex’, de Lauretis proposes,

that gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life (1987, 2).

Gender is the product of technologies, a term she usefully extends in her analyses to discourses, criticism and social practices. However, the somatechnics of language that Benjamin asserts suggests that instead of the gendered body being a ‘product’ of representational technologies, it is constituted through the expression and perception of gender similarities. Further, the mimetic faculty regulates this central relation wherein the body is always already technologised, and technologies are always already enfleshed. de Lauretis’ framework is useful for pointing to the formation and transformation of ‘gender’ as a term; it falls

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16 Matthew Potolsky’s Mimesis (2006) is a useful reference point in wading through the academic literature on this concept.
short of articulating a theory of somatechnics because it can not account for the bodily forms and effects the technology of gender renders.

De Lauretis states a similar argument to my own – gender acts as a kind of technology of the body – with the claim that gender is not an innate property of bodies, but a set of effects produced in bodies by the deployment of a complex political technology (1987, 3). Somatechnically speaking, however, the body matter acted on is not separate from technologies of gender, though gender may be heuristically detached, available to perception in its reading. Gender is not the effect, but the ‘something else’: a potent transfer carried out in flashes and (possibly failed) transmissions by the speaker. It is not an effect – rather, its reality is the effect. I contend that what one takes to be ‘reality’ or ‘real’ is the locus of politics. In other words, with Benjamin, I suggest that the restricted politicisation on perception is more so than that of the frustratingly narrow field of (gender) representation.

A critique of perception avoids certain dangers that come from insisting that gender is ‘(a) representation’, as de Lauretis asserts (de Lauretis 1987, 3). Thinking in terms of representation gives into a Platonic version of mimesis where a represented version of gender – a copy – would be judged by some long lost original. Thus, a theory of gender that reduces it to either being a representation or the act of representation is accompanied by the problem of relegating trans expressions to being false copies, or falsely identified with an original masculinity or femininity. Benjamin’s mimetic paradigm is more hospitable to the development of a trans language because it takes into consideration the bodily practice of speaking and reading. With Benjamin, I want to assert that gender is not (a) representation, but a non-sensuous similarity available in the instant of expressing/reading to become incorporated and passed on.

To clarify what exactly happens in the transfer of meaning I want to return to the analogy between cinema and transsexuality. The cinematic apparatus might be considered as primarily a ‘communicational technology’ for expressions of similarity in a way not unlike transsexuality, as Stryker characterises it:

a medico-scientific, juridico-legal, psychotherapeutic apparatus for generating and sustaining the desired reality effects of … gender identifications through the manipulation of bodily surface, thereby extending those effects … into widely shared social spaces (Stryker 1998, 151).

Like a cinematic screen, the body is an apparatus to receive and transmit marks; in other words, to montage gender. The manipulation of bodily surface, through hormonal and surgical treatment, changes more than the semiotics of the body for oneself and for others. It puts into motion a gender language on the body’s surface. The somatechnical apparatus engages in an effort to sustain reality effects, which are nevertheless fleeting. The ‘reality effects’ produced by the
apparatus of transsexuality’s practices is the bodily expression and constitution of a desired semio-materiality. Like the cinematic apparatus working on the world’s skin to produce a desired vision, the surface of a transsexual’s body has to be cut into to produce the desired reality effect. In order to achieve a likely transfer, the film edits in conventional patterns, whereas a transsexual might try to secure the successful transmission of gendered meaning by indexing well-known patterns.

I have proposed that gender in general and transsexuality in particular might be understood as having a language significantly analogous to that of cinema. To this end, I have utilised Benjamin’s expansive theory of language to propose some initial terms for a ‘trans language’. My process of translation found that the somatechnical apparatus of cinema illuminates the way that ‘gender’ transfers meaning to the bodily surface, that is, through flashing cuts. The concept of affinity, which at first described the queer relationship of transsexuality and cinema, returned to revise the body’s gendered relation to other bodies, expressed and read in terms of affinity. Further, to see that gender meanings are expressed and read through mimetic transfer has the advantage of displacing the conundrums of gender identity (identical to what?). Benjamin’s attention to the non-representational in expression relocates the political to the perceptibility of gender’s ‘reality effect’, which the ‘edits’ of transsexual practices could potentially secure.

To specify the ways in which cinematic language provides a register for speaking and perceiving trans language, I will examine an instance of trans expression, namely the writings of a male-to-female transsexual. In the following analysis, I seek to account for how Lili Elbe’s written, and highly edited, language expresses her gender affinities in the memoir Man into Woman (1933/2004). With a somatechnical frame, I will look at the way her ‘cuts’ index patterns of meaning and relate these written patterns to systems of filmic editing. Afterwards, I consider how desire might influence the readers of the textual gender expression with recourse to some concepts developed in spectatorship theory. Throughout, I position the mimetic faculty as a sensory apparatus responsible and necessary for expressing and reading the somatechnics of transsexual embodiment.

**Man into Woman: Expressions of Gender Similarities**

The creative principle, or ‘mode of expression’, of film is cutting, editing in film terms, which I conceive in relation to gender editing. I believe that by analyzing the discourse of texts on transsexuality as montage or edited material I will be able to propose a way in which transsexuality may make sense in the terms of its expression in ‘cuts’. This suggests that transsexuality is not primarily about sex
or gender, but about the presentation of material, that is, about experimenting with formal aesthetics of corporeal experience. Texts on transsexuality include a range of medical sources, sociological treatments, as well as personal accounts. Just as with a cinematic text, the intended audience, the message, and the framing gaze all influence the choice of certain editing techniques and not others.

In general, editing is the coordination of one shot with the next (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 247). The way in which we get from one shot to the other can vary greatly. The most common means of joining two shots is the cut, which can be direct or indicated through ‘optical effects’ like the fade-in, fade-out, and dissolve (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 247). Editing can be used to create a system of time and space continuity or of discontinuity for the viewer. The cinematic style of ‘continuity editing’ was developed in classic Hollywood cinema during the years 1905-1945, and continues today as the most prevalent form of editing to maintain an ‘unbroken connection’ between shots.\(^{17}\) It is the seat of convention, a system of cutting to maintain continuous and clear narrative action (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 492). It relies upon matching screen direction, position, and temporal relations from shot to shot (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 492).

Continuity is only one answer to the predicament of editing that Bordwell and Thompson describe, which transsexuals also face:

\begin{quote}
Editing might appear to present a dilemma to the filmmaker. On one hand, the physical break between one shot and another may seem to have a disturbing effect, interrupting the viewer’s flow of attention. But, on the other hand, editing is undeniably a primary means for constructing a film. How can one use editing and yet control its potentially disruptive force? (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 261)
\end{quote}

Continuity editing responds to the potentially disruptive force of cuts by encouraging the creation of a smooth flow from shot to shot. A primary way to smooth out the flow is by matching the graphic qualities of shots. Moreover, space in the cinema must continuously match. To maintain the effect cinematographers only shoot along what is called the ‘axis of action,’ which divides in half the 360 degrees of the scene’s space. It ensures common space can be identified from shot to shot (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 262). This key construction of division informs all of the continuity techniques. For cuts that join person to person, or subject to object seated at either end of the axis of action, the Hollywood system developed the shot/reverse-shot pattern. By

\(^{17}\) Bordwell and Thompson attest that by 1917 the fundamental techniques of continuity editing were in place, and could be found in nearly every narrative film after that time (Bordwell and Thompson 1994, 72).
cutting back and forth, this edit establishes a relation between the two images (even where there might not be one). Key to this editing pattern is that in neither shot are both looker and object present; they are divided in the breakdown of the shot (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 265).

Division also plays a central role in transsexual narratives that explain an internal split or a psychic-physical rupture. The story of transitioning follows a pattern akin to the continuity editing technique of shot/reverse-shot that cuts from one image to another to establish a relationship and crucially, a distance between the two images. Engaging this shot pattern in transsexual writing means to reveal the birth name and gendered life before transitioning, in other words, to ‘out’ oneself as a transsexual looking back at a previous incarnation. This ‘looking back’ in the reverse-shot risks breaking down the careful division between the self that exists before the transition and the self that one wishes to establish post-operatively. Taking this risk of complicating the division by opening it up to scrutiny, however, means that one continues to cut long after surgery is over. The narrative of telling and showing oneself as divided (even if only in time or by name) reveals that the process of ‘gender editing’ is ongoing.

Memoirs such as Elbe’s, which engage the reader in a plotline where one character is subdivided into male and female, exacerbates the conflict of division, but it does so carefully and in her own words. For example, Elbe’s story is edited to highlight a divided frame where man and woman stand on opposite sides, even as each find harbour in the same body. Stryker argues that the voices in these memoirs that demonstrate an editing of themselves ‘are something more, and something other, than the creatures [or films] our makers intended us to be’ (Stryker 2006, 248). This suggests that the process of ‘transsexualization,’ or transition, is not entirely bound to the doctor’s surgical practices. The technologised body continues to be rendered through the cuts of language. In writing, transsexuals such as Elbe negotiate the scalpel of phallogocentric language through the montages of word-images, which in turn continuously ‘make’ a suitable body. The montage sequence assembles a compressed narrative that technically involves potentially disturbing cuts from one shot to the next, specifically from one character to another. Each sequence reflects the aesthetic negotiation of de-subjectification, which would result from a totally discontinuous montage. However, even if a transsexual like Elbe commits to narrating a compressed version of her life with montage sequences, she does not necessarily obey the continuity (medical) system of editing. To specify this point, I want to look more closely at Elbe’s writing, which may be perceived as conventional in its use of gendered language. When translated into filmic terms, however, it can be appreciated anew for the ways in which it draws on editing techniques that are used in the continuity system, yet to different effect.
The partially autobiographical work on Lili Elbe, entitled *Man into Woman: A True and Authentic Record of a Sex Change* (1933), was the first text available in which a transsexual speaks in the first person. Yet, it was edited by Elbe’s ‘German friend’ Ernst Ludwig Hathorn Jacobson under the pseudonym Niels Hoyer. The book is about the semi-famous Danish artist Einar Mogens Wegener, who became Lili Elbe, but who is represented in the book under the birth name, Andreas Sparre. Comprised from diary entries, letters, and dictated material, the story is a highly personal account, but one whose narrator is displaced from Sparre to Wegener to Elbe, and then from Jacobson to Hoyer. The title, nevertheless, seeks to assign truth to the narrator (whoever that narrator may be) as a record-keeper, thereby ascribing the value of authenticity to the ‘results’ of the sex change. Elbe often writes as though she is the first to receive a male-to-female sex change, but this posture is not historically accurate.\(^{18}\) Her five operations from 1929-1931 were among the earliest that German and Danish doctors had conducted with the goal of transforming a human’s physical and hormonal sex.\(^{19}\) In many places, she expresses hope that the story would be helpful in promoting an understanding of her kind. On the eve of her final (and fatal) surgery, she writes to Hoyer the following instructions: ‘now you will understand me and now you will be able to teach others to understand me’ (Elbe 2004, 264).

Who is the ‘me’ here? In what ways is this gendered ‘me’ indexed by the text’s editing patterns? In the beginning of the book, it was unclear to Elbe herself what her desire to be ‘fully woman’ meant. She unravels the mystery of her persistent desire to cross-dress and interact with people as a woman with the assistance of her wife Grete. It was Grete who first suggested Elbe wear women’s clothes, ostensibly to model designs for her, which she was illustrating. After many failed attempts at seeking medical assistance, Dr Werner Kreutz finally took seriously Elbe’s desire to be a woman, promising to surgically complete her physical status as female. In a Benjaminian sense, they are her first ‘readers’. They demonstrate the ability to read the tentative ‘expressions’ of gender similarity, to see in Sparre another being’s feminine affinity. The

\(^{18}\) Indisputably, the fame of Elbe’s experimental surgeries was due to her status as a well-known artist. However, Joanne Meyerowitz notes that Dorchen Richter was the first male-to-female to receive complete genital transformation, arranged through Hirshfeld’s institute (Meyerowitz 2002, 19). In 1931, Dr Felix Abraham published an article on two such surgeries (one of which was on Richter). Ludwig Levy Lenz also was reputed to have performed surgeries at this time, the total of which are unknown (Meyerowitz 2002, 20).

\(^{19}\) Although the technology and the skill for such surgeries existed in many parts of the world, Germany and Denmark were likely places for sex-changes to be pioneered due to their then sympathetic atmospheres toward sexual diversity fostered by vocal campaigns for sexual emancipation (Meyerowitz 2002, 21-23).
book signals the presence of these non-sensuous similarities by describing the drastic changes brought on by the increasing expression of the Lili persona. New *accoutrement,* such as flowers and clothing are highlighted as transformed from Sparre’s taste to Elbe’s. Old hobbies like cigar smoking and painting outdoors are cast off for Elbe’s preference for talking to friends over tea. The consistency of such details in the writing emphasises the thoroughness of her gender affinity.

Her apparent engrossment in the process also intimates that Elbe is discovering how to signal a trans-feminine affinity. At one point, Elbe discloses why she might have trouble ‘reading’ her own particular expression, even as she begins to speak it more forcefully:

Formerly, I had found distraction in reading. Now, I never opened a book or journal. What were the fates of strange persons to me, unless I could find consolation in reading about a person of *my own kind*? But of such a person no author had been able to write, because it had never occurred to any that such a person could ever have existed (emphasis mine; Elbe 2004, 110-111).

This passage suggests that her difficulties in articulating a trans expression might be because languages to describe people like her had not been invented, yet. Elbe’s comment proposes that her particular embodiment gives rise to a unique perception as well as the ability to write about a person of her ‘own kind’, perhaps in what we might call a ‘trans language’. Elbe’s *Man into Woman* seems to take up the challenge of authorship that speaks such a language of her kind.

The portrait Elbe creates of herself is in the image of a particular kind of ‘pre-historical’ transsexualism, insofar as she draws on sexual inversion to explain her affinity to femininity, as the concept of transsexualism had not yet taken root.20 With the aid of the current knowledge of internal hermaphroditism (she showed no external signs), Elbe came to match her feelings of being a woman with her doctor’s discovery of ‘withered ovaries’ in her abdomen, which were apparently trying to overcome the testicular hormones.21 The illness of her body was understood as signaling the presence of

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20 A side note that Wegener was a well-known *visual* artist should not be missed in considering the effort that Elbe undertakes to draw a *literary* portrait of her life. This is especially important, since Elbe totally rejects painting, as that was something that Wegener did. By the end, Elbe returns to painting through teaching. She demonstrates being conscious of the symbolic value of integrating her selves in this action. It strikes me that the written portrait is also highly visual in its descriptions of her life, suggesting that Elbe may have set down the brush only to pick up the pen.

21 This particular intersex condition is highly implausible, as no other case of developed testes and ovaries has ever been found (Meyerowitz 2002, 30-31).
two beings, separate from each other, unrelated to each other, hostile to each other, although they had compassion on each other, as they knew that this body had room only for one of them. (emphasis in original; Elbe 2004, 111)

The story an internalisation of masculine and feminine traits justifies the divided sexual self into Sparre/Elbe. The continuous assertion of this division guides the narrative about her ‘kind’ by way of montage sequences based on what I identify as shot/reverse-shots. This editing technique serves to drive the narrative – cutting from Sparre to Elbe and back – engaging the reader in the life and death drama, in which ‘one of the two beings had to disappear, or else both had to perish’ (Elbe 2004, 111). The question becomes, at what point will the ‘film’ cut back to find that Sparre has disappeared?

The shot/reverse-shot expresses a vision of her ‘own kind’, otherwise not present in common knowledge. That is to say, the editing technique introduces the transsexual as a divided self along the axis of action. The shot/reverse-shot can be taken as instructional for how transsexuals are supposed to separate their changed selves from their gender history. It is well documented that clinical staff on ‘Gender Teams’ often encourage transsexuals to concoct a ‘plausible history’ to enforce a single-sex presentation.22 Stone identifies this division as a strategy of building barriers within a single subject to maintain polar personae (Stone 2006, 225-226). Although the divided individual is the same person, he or she must deny the mixture existing in one body, the mixture of s/he. During the course of Man into Woman, the expression of gender similarities go from mixed, to bi-polar, and then segue into an integrated expression of masculinity and femininity.

For the purposes of demonstrating how the text signals this changing expression, I want to focus on the first instance in which the surgical and the textual cutting merge. Following the protagonist’s first surgery to remove the testicles, the shot/reverse-shot pattern linking and distancing Sparre and Elbe accelerates in intensity. Sparre/Elbe and the medical staff discuss the ‘simply astounding’ transformation from man to woman through the flick of the scalp, which results in a miraculous change of vocal tenor and handwriting.23 In this

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22 Gender teams in academic hospitals often comprise of a psychologist, endocrinologist, urologist, and surgeon. When transsexualism was first treated often one doctor played all the roles. On the issue of providing a convincing single-sex presentation, see Dwight Billings and Thomas Urban, ‘The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique’ (1982) and Stone (1992/2006).

23 Modern science now confirms that the effects of castration (actually, the non-effects) have no bearing on tonality and certainly not on handwriting. This seems to be a case of the ‘jaundiced eyes’ of clinicians, which Stone refers to in her analysis of this scene (Stone 2006, 225).
scene, the shot/reverse-shot pattern is established through the use of changing names and voices. It is Sparre who wakes up and is crying out. He asks if he screamed much. The nurse replies that he made a little noise, ‘and the strange thing was that your voice had completely changed. It was a shrill woman’s voice’ (Elbe 2004, 125). The doctor then comes in to congratulate him on having a ‘splendid soprano voice’ (Elbe 2004, 126). Even Sparre’s lifetime friend who is visiting does not recognise who the new voice belongs to.

The drama of this first recovery scene in a Berlin hospital is encapsulated by the division of Sparre/Elbe who lies awake in pain wondering, ‘Who am I? What am I? What was I? What shall I become?’ (Elbe 2004, 127). These questions are answered through the change in ‘voice’ from tenor to soprano, male to female, leading the reader to believe that the feminine Elbe will take over as the narrator. The existential crisis is also present in the ‘writing’; in the next sequence, Sparre/Elbe writes a note thanking a friend for sending flowers. A nurse reads the card and gives it back to Sparre/Elbe to look at, apparently with the intention to prove that ‘Lili Elbe’ is ‘there’ – a reality that Sparre/Elbe struggles to accept: ‘He [Sparre] gazed at the card and failed to recognise the writing. It was a woman’s script’ (emphasis mine; Elbe 2004, 128). Although the reader does not see the writing on the card, one is able to see its expression in the text: in the shift of a shot/reverse-shot from one sentence to another here, from the narrator to the evidence of the card, a cut linking and distancing ‘he’ and ‘woman’. This cut expresses Elbe’s perceptibility through her pronounced script. It also enables the reader to ‘look back’ at Sparre to find a weaker character, one whose castration seems to cause the impotency in no longer being able to speak or write.

The book’s title Man into Woman suggests that Sparre will transform instantly into Elbe. This vision could be given with a ‘trick shot’ that uses a direct cut from the same static position to show a character in one frame who then disappears in the next. The trick shot edit is produced in the montage sequence depicting the recovery scene where Sparre disappears in the blink of an eye, the flick of the scalpel, the space between two sentences. Yet, the narrative continues to cut back to Sparre until well into the last quarter of the book. At this stage, Elbe is unable to remember the place where Sparre’s parents were buried; she announces, ‘Andreas Sparre was dead’ (Elbe 2004, 230). Only then does Elbe declare herself alone in the world, with neither father nor mother – and also without Sparre in the picture.

If Sparre dominates the ‘screen’ of the first quarter of the text and the battle between Sparre and Elbe takes up the second and third quarters, then the

24 George Méliès of France pioneered the trick shot in The Vanishing Lady (1896) using in-camera editing, specifically by stopping the camera and substituting the woman for a skeleton (Bordwell and Thompson 1994, 16).
final quarter of this ‘filmic portrait’ concludes with the transformation of Elbe into a woman through the slow erasure of Sparre’s expressions. No one single surgery transforms Elbe; transformation is slowly wrought from the ongoing semio-material montage sequences that reconfigure the gender image. A cut, the castration, accelerates the flashing cuts of the montage, but the text does not end here. The story follows a coherent narrative of becoming a ‘woman’ in as far as it presents time and space as linear with proper use of shot/reverse-shots; however, the textual technique of shot/reverse-shot serves to maintain a discontinuity between Sparre and Elbe. The shot/reverse-shot edits in the text doubles up to express the drama of Elbe’s emotional and physical division, which she desires readers to perceive and hopefully understand.

Gender Readers and the Bridge of Desire

My tracking of the way in which Elbe’s narration employs the shot/reverse-shot to constitute her subjective transformation seeks to perform the activity of gender reading. This Benjaminian analysis attentive to the ‘significance’ of Elbe’s editing complicates Sandy Stone’s reading of this text as an example of discursive invisibility for transsexuality. Stone compares Elbe to the transsexuals who ‘go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women’ (Stone 2006, 225). She concludes that ‘[t]here is no territory between’, which suggests to her a false expression of transsexuality (Stone 2006, 225). In fact, the territory between Sparre and Elbe is the cut, the imaginary space that we readers have to ‘fill in’ for the filmic narrative to work. Our desire follows the action that flows over the cut so that we may understand Elbe’s discontinuous subjectivity. The cinema viewer’s desire to follow the action across the cut is so powerful that most ignore the cut itself (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 268). This desire not to notice cuts is shored up by the similarity of movement from shot to shot, which likely holds the viewer’s attention more than the difference resulting from the cut. This desire suggests that despite the divided and piecemeal images, the viewer is able to make sense of ‘Lili Elbe’ as a coherent character in part because of his or her desire to follow the flow, and to imagine a space emerging beyond the image. The reader’s role and desire is as much a part of the expression as the speaker.

In film terms, this desire to relate one shot that is cut, or joined, to another gives rise to what is called ‘the Kuleshov effect’ (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 258). This effect describes how, in the absence of an establishing shot, any series of shots will cue the spectator to infer a spatial whole on the basis of seeing only portions of that space (Bordwell and Thompson 1993, 258). Thus, even though the viewer is only able to ‘see’ a portion of Sparre or Elbe at a time, she or he will infer that Elbe successfully holds together over the abyss of the cut.
In the book, the ‘German friend’ (who is the posthumous editor) describes an abyss to Elbe, one that is ‘between man and woman’ (246). Both Elbe’s and the reader’s desire flows over the abyss of the cut, willing a bridge. This flow of imagination brings a new resonance to the film term for obliging spectatorship, ‘a suspension of disbelief’. The viewer’s disbelief would interrupt the narrative coherency, but the willing suspension of it serves like a suspension bridge over the cut, connecting one edge to the other.

This bridge from man into woman is figured in the text as the bridge over the Elbe River into Dresden, where the final surgeries were carried out. The character ‘Lili Elbe’ takes her name from this river, the water that laps around her place of ‘birth’, in Dr. Werner Kreutz’s Dresden Municipal Women’s Clinic. For the protagonist, the Elbe River marks the wavering boundary between the banks of man and woman, which the text traverses. Upon her first crossing of the bridge, Elbe describes the water’s magical ability to reflect the city’s architectural feats, which ‘emerge from the shimmering water’s surface’ like ‘phantasmagoria’ (Elbe 2004, 152). The protagonist imagines that she, too, emerges from the Elbe’s surface.

Lili’s embrace of the Elbe River as her namesake suggests a mimetic affinity beyond femininity or gender, to the movement of the river’s shimmers. The affinity to the ubiquitous flow of the Elbe introduces the potential for being a mere flash of light, a phantasmagoria of modern science or for being erratic and therefore incoherent. Hence, the overarching narrative drive towards ‘woman’ is crucial to easing the disruption to the reader’s perception caused by Elbe’s wayward trajectory from man to woman. In this sense, Elbe’s narrative traverses the abyss between man and woman thematically by way of opening up the process of transitioning to a general readership and somatically via the intertextual workings of non-sensuous gender flows edited to achieve the effect of ‘woman’. There is the literal bridge the train crosses in her text, but there is the second bridge of Lili Elbe, whose flow of non-sensuous similarities bridges the dividing cut between the banks of man and woman. The title might thus be revised: instead of a story that tells how a man shockingly became a woman, the filmic portrait narrates with a flow of gender similarities, which suggests a titular subjectivity more like ‘bridging man and woman’.

The text’s continuous use of the shot/reverse-shot and banking on the Kuleshov effect indicate that Man into Woman is shaped by Elbe’s anxiety of being ‘read’ (as transsexual), as much as by her desire to be ‘read’ (as a woman). Her venture of writing a memoir to be read by people who might then understand her ‘kind’, necessitates a negotiation of the reader’s potentially conflicting perceptions. The tension produced in the text seems an early precursor to negotiating today’s notion of transsexual ‘reading’ and its conceptual twin ‘passing’. Stone boils down transsexualism to the successful ‘act of passing’ as nontranssexual, or as a supposedly uncut, ‘naturally’ gendered person (Stone 2006, 232). The notion
of passing hardly makes sense in Benjamin’s paradigm, for the perceptibility of
gender is nuanced for each passing moment, not in passing for something else.
The notion of gender passing belongs to a Platonic version of mimesis, where
a copy could be passed off as an original. As such, passing stands opposed to
the activation of mimetic perceptibility in ‘the act of reading’ gender. Yet, this
Platonic paradigm has a strong hold over most commonly held theories of gender
perception based on the mechanism of identity. Stone confesses,

I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo
passing, to be consciously ‘read’, to read oneself aloud – and by this troubling and
productive reading, to begin to write oneself into the discourses by which one has
been written – in effect, then, to become a … posttranssexual (Stone 2006, 232).

Stone’s manifesto exactly calls for transsexuals to ‘read’ themselves in defiance
of the transsexual edict: to overcome the silence and the imperceptibility that
defines transsexual success.

Although Stone’s declaration inspires this article and numerous other
projects, it does not make explicit who hears this reading of oneself ‘aloud’; in
other words, what the consequences might be for a theory of an active gender
listener. Memoirs such as Elbe’s are emphatic that it is not enough to read
oneself, and thereby write oneself into gender discourse. Even surgery doesn’t
put the issue to rest: genderisation is a life-long process of speaking/reading
in conjunction with a social scene. The call Stone makes for ‘reading’ ought to
also include those readers who co-write gender expressions in the expression
of their desire. Man into Woman proposes not only a trans speaker, but also calls
for a certain kind of reader, one who acts more like an interlocutor. Contexts
and readers of gender, as well as bodies, produce the expressions of gender
affinities. In this way, the gender reader’s task seems to resemble the labour of
Benjamin’s translator: to operate between different languages, to actively bridge
them (Benjamin 1999, 71).

Translation according to Benjamin is a process of renewing mimetic
expression and perceptibility (Benjamin 1923/1999). Against the intuition that
translation focuses on the foreign language, for Benjamin, translation consists
in extending the boundaries of one’s own language via the encounter with
new languages. For gender readers, then, the first task of translating another
language into one’s own is to break through the ‘decayed barriers’ of one’s
mother tongue (Benjamin 1923/1999, 80). In this way, the ability to read
different genders would entail encounters with new speakers, new languages.
Acts of gender reading affect one’s own ‘gender’ tongue, expanding the shared
gender language. The growth of (trans) language depends on the proliferation
of nonce taxonomies, the little word offshoots produced by non-sensuous
similarities combusting with the desire to articulate.
The problematic of transsexual discursive invisibility and inarticulateness with which I began might be summarised with Eve Sedgwick’s axiom that ‘people are different from each other’ as well as her comment that the conceptual tools to recognise this self-evident fact are amazingly scarce (Sedgwick 1990, 22). I wish to conclude with the suggestion that the differences in gender language might not be that different at all, but instead bear out similarities with an infinite range of nuance. Thinking of gender in terms of similarity espouses the ability to locate affinity – not sameness, but genders expressed and read queerly, ‘in relation to’ others. My approach was to borrow the Benjiminian proposition that each object ‘speaks’ and to harness this to the project of transgender studies to secure for the differently gendered mode of expression. The focus in Benjamin’s language paradigm on accounting for the forms and effects of the non-representable provided many theoretical tools to help trans language become conceptually plausible and actually possible. The paradigm that Benjamin offers has the advantage of not forcing transsexuality through the filter of identity, where the so-called ‘mismatch’ of body and gender becomes a question of an identity disorder, namely because the body and gender are perceived as not identical, or the same. I explored the ways in which Benjamin’s mimetic faculty could be conceived as a somatechnical apparatus for becoming and perceiving gender similarity. My discussion of how this faculty functions to facilitate the reading and expression of non-sensuous similarities provided new terms upon which a ‘trans language’ may be intelligible.

Within the comparing frame of somatechnics, I translated from the systematised expression of cinematic cutting to the cuts of transsexual surgical incision. In this way, my text attempted to read the ‘speech’ of transsexuality in the cinematic tongue. My task in this essay has not been to carry out a one-to-one translation from transsexuality to the cinema, something that would amount to a reproduction of meaning. In Benjamin’s view, this kind of ‘bad translation’ butchers the vital aspect of language – the aspect that is magical, potent, and carries its intangible expression (Benjamin 1999, 78-79). Instead, I sought out expressive qualities in both discourses by finding the key words in each – such as cut, flash, and transfer – that resonate with, and critically engage, the ‘other’ field. Doing so broadens each language, a move which consists in their being powerfully affected by the foreign, or perhaps less familiar, tongue, as Benjamin suggests. In this way, interdisciplinary translation, like ‘intergender’ translation, is for the greater good, the health even, of language.

25 Benjamin praises and quotes at length Rudolf Pannwitz, who ascribes to the practice of the translator that they allow their “language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue” (“The Task” 81).
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Medical narratives surrounding the apparent threat posed by the alleged Western ‘obesity epidemic’ have attempted to shift dominant responses to fatness from a cultural aesthetic objection to fat flesh, to a more ‘neutral’ politically correct concern with ‘health’ and ‘fitness’. It could, however, be argued that the discourse of ‘health’ is an effective and authoritative ‘disguise’ for generalised social anxieties over excessive bodies and non-normative modes of (gendered) embodiment. The medicalisation of fatness via the establishment of the disease of ‘obesity’ has necessarily entailed a combining of medical narratives/imperatives and historico-cultural discursive formations of fatness as an aesthetic affront. The moral panic over the apparent threat that this ‘epidemic’ represents is framed by medical discourse as endangering health, while at a deeper level, it would seem there is also an acute cultural anxiety about the ways in which the fat body disrupts privileged ideals about normative gendered bodies and aesthetic appearance. Given this, it could be suggested that the fat body, in disturbing our ideals about normative embodiment and bodily aesthetics, is always already a queer body, or at least, that it is a body that queers.

Co-extensive with the medicalisation of ‘obesity’, the past decade has seen a rapid increase in Western patients deemed to be ‘morbidly obese’ agreeing to undergo bariatric surgeries (popularly referred to as obesity or weight loss surgeries). Effecting massive and rapid weight loss, these surgeries offer the dual promise of bestowing ‘health’ and normative appearance, both perceived to be lacking in the ‘obese’ subject. In popular narratives, it is imagined that – via weight loss – the bodies of obese men are rid of their ‘feminised’ fat flesh, whilst obese women are elevated to a position of desirability within a heterosexual matrix. In this way, the gastric band could be conceptualised as a moral aid to conform bodies to ‘proper’ aesthetics, thus operating as a ‘somatechnology’ of gender. In the wake of the growing turn to these surgeries by health professionals treating obesity, considerable ethical debate has been spawned across a range of constituencies, from the medical profession to fat activists. In light of these discussions, bariatric surgery has emerged as one of the more contentious and disturbing somatechnologies in ongoing debates about the cultural and medicalised disciplining of bodies.
In undertaking embodied scholarship, Kathy Davis makes the following call:

It seems to me … that feminist theory needs to be less concerned with achieving theoretical closure and more interested in exploring the tensions which the body evokes. This would entail using the tensions evoked by … [embodied] contradictions … as a resource for further theoretical reflection. It would mean embracing rather than avoiding those aspects of embodiment which disturb and/or fascinate us as part and parcel of our theories on the body (Davis, 1997: 15).

Given Davis’ suggestion, in this chapter, I wish to engage with contradictions and complexities that reveal the ‘undecidability’ of the lived ‘banded body’, rather than condemning or endorsing bariatric surgical procedures in order to make a moral ruling on their practice. In drawing on my own bariatric post-operative lived experience, I aim to present a critical (and embodied) exploration of the tensions between the notions of ‘health’ and bodily aesthetics.

After a significant period of persistent lethargy and severe menstrual pain, I reluctantly decided to visit a doctor for investigation. Having a history of clinical consultation where most every complaint from colds to broken ankles linked tenuously (but allegedly inarguably) to my overweight, it was with trepidation and wariness that I sat in the doctor’s waiting room. After the usual battery of ensuing tests, scans and referrals, a diagnosis was made: I had severe insulin resistance, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), and a number of associated hormone imbalances that were contributing to fat storage. As a result, I was put onto a daily cocktail of seven different drugs. I was defensive and unconvinced by my diagnosis: the combination of conditions I had been told I had were the ‘usual suspects’ in weight-related co-morbidities, and I wanted to believe the diagnosis was an elaborate medical plot to ensure I would lose weight.

I have long been an advocate and engaged researcher of fat politics and fat activist commitments to challenging fat-phobia in all social spaces and interactions. I also hold a firm belief that, countering the moral panics about obesity, fatness does not have to equate to the broad collection of loosely associated health problems that overweight supposedly precipitates. Given this, I was infuriated when, on a follow-up visit, my doctor asserted that the best option for me would be the implantation of an adjustable laparoscopic gastric band. I did not want to appear to ‘sell out’ as a politically engaged ‘fat girl’ and to allow medicine to confirm the more widely held beliefs about the failed and defective ‘fat’ body. However, despite the drugs I was taking and my controlled diet plan, my pain and my exhaustion were real – and persistent. After much agonising over my political commitment to the status of ‘fat’ women, and the awareness of the deterioration of my own health, I reluctantly underwent the operation to implant a gastric band in October 2005. In the first two weeks following the surgery, barely being able to drink half a glass of water at a time without feeling
incredible abdominal pressure, I wondered what on earth I had done to myself, why I had agreed to have this done to me. In the ensuing six months, I lost 40 kilograms (or nearly 90 pounds). In the wake of the surgery, and still on a daily basis, I feel constantly conflicted about the marked shift in the responses my changing appearance elicits for myself and for others, whilst unseen, I negotiate the myriad difficulties involved in daily eating practices with a gastric band.

Given this lived experience of bariatric surgery, my aim here is to productively engage with the attendant tensions and complexities of a ‘banded’ embodiment in order to think through the contradictions between health and aesthetics that so often remain tacit, rather than explicit, in medical narratives of obesity treatment protocols. The ubiquitous ‘before-and-after’ photographs that accompany the promotion of weight loss via bariatric surgeries and the controlled eating practices that are required post-operatively suggest a relatively simple linear transition to better ‘health’ and normative appearance. However, it is the popular weight loss mythology of a transition from a pathologised existence to a vital active life that I wish to interrogate and complicate here by, as Davis suggests, “embracing rather than avoiding those aspects of embodiment which disturb and/or fascinate us as part and parcel of our theories on the body.” I am interested in reconceptualising the gastric band as an effect of somatechnologies of bodily discipline, rather than a somatechnology in and of itself, thereby examining the lived experience of ‘banded bodies’, so often relegated to a subtextual narrative in bariatric surgery discourses. In holding the competing discourses and responses associated with bariatric surgeries in a ‘productive tension’, I mobilise a mode of critical inquiry that, as Nikki Sullivan asserts, “could be thought of as a constitutive ‘double gesture’ – to use a term from Butler – of both inhabiting and challenging categorical knowledge” (Sullivan, 2009: 276).

As I suggested above, a medico-moral discourse has inf(l)ected popular understandings of ‘obesity’ as an affront to ‘health’ that gives way to more fundamental social concerns about normative appearance. Given this, bariatric surgeries could be considered not simply as offering good ‘health’, but, more specifically, as an attempt to eliminate non-normative modes of embodiment and to reproduce epistemological idea(l)s or technés that are, by definition, cultural rather than absolute. In thinking through the somatechnics of weight loss surgeries, it is my aim here to queer dominant understandings of ‘health’, normalcy and pathology, as well as associated representations of gender and bodily aesthetics. In and through a critical interrogation of the specific somatechnology of the gastric band, and its resultant reduction of fat flesh to produce a more normatively slender body, dominant understandings of ‘health’ are effectively queered.
The categorisation of obesity as a ‘disease’ could be said to have the effect of shifting responsibility away from the individual by constructing ‘fatness’ as a symptom of a legitimate physiological condition beyond one’s personal control. However, as demonstrated by the lingering presence of popular responses to fat bodies imagined as offensive, ugly, unclean, or comedic (to name a few), the negative cast of the (alleged) personal and moral failure of the ‘fat’ subject remains. Given this, ‘obese’ subjects persist in the popular (and even the medical) imagination as suffering from an absence of individual control, rather than a biological flaw. In response to these negative conceptualisations of fat embodiment, many fat activists suggest that the ongoing discrimination (‘fat-phobia’) against ‘fat’ people is the core issue, where ‘fatness’ is imagined as the last ‘acceptable’ form of social and institutional prejudice in the West. This fat activist approach has concerned itself with efforts to institute legislation to give anti-discrimination rights to fat people for fair, respectful and equitable treatment. Given this, many fat activists have worked to lobby for the legal recognition of ‘fatness’ as a disability, in order to gain protection under anti-discrimination laws. However, ‘disability’ is dominantly understood, as Susan Wendell suggests, as a ‘biological category’ (Wendell, 1996: 24) rather than as a socially constructed phenomenon. Therefore, the tension between ‘obesity’ as a disease beyond the control of the individual, and the long discursive history of cultural assumptions that have constructed fatness as caused by a personal unwillingness to correct an entirely self-inflicted condition constitutes an obstacle to the recognition of ‘fatness’ as a disability. In response to this, connections have been established between ‘fat’ subjects and the hearing-impaired, who are both, as April Herndon suggests, referred to as having an ‘elective disability’ (Herndon, 2002: 128). Members of the deaf community are regarded as being able to access a ‘cure’ via cochlear implants, just as members of the fat community are able to diet, exercise, or undergo bariatric surgeries. An unwillingness to access these curative therapies then situate fat or deaf subjects ‘as morally blameworthy’ (Herndon, 2002: 128). As Herndon suggests, “… Both fatness and deafness continue to be represented as mutable and ideally curable despite the mixed outcomes of medical technologies designed for carrying out the task” (Herndon, 2002: 130). These ‘mixed outcomes’ in obesity treatment protocols are often starkly evident in post-operative bariatric embodiment, which, as I will go on to show, can involve trading a more normative appearance for what might be considered a ‘dis-abled’ lived experience.

As I said earlier, in the wake of panicked public health warnings over increases in the incidence of obesity in the West in the past decade, and the ongoing dominant responses to ‘fat’ bodies as being aesthetically offensive, bariatric surgeries have become more widely proposed treatments for people who
have been clinically determined to be ‘morbidly obese,’ despite being generally considered as a ‘last resort’ option for those who have been unsuccessful in previous attempts to lose weight. To be regarded as eligible to undergo bariatric surgery, one must fulfill a series of criteria during a pre-operative screening process: one must generally have a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 40; have one or more obesity-related co-morbidities (such as Type II diabetes, sleep apnoea, mobility restrictions, etc.); and to have tried a number of other weight loss programmes prior to seeking surgery.

Most bariatric surgeries involve some mode of stomach restriction, thereby reducing the calories absorbed by the body, resulting in rapid and dramatic weight loss. There are various bariatric procedures, including the major intestinal resectioning involved with gastric bypass surgery, most popular in North America. In Australia, the most popular bariatric surgery is now the implantation of an adjustable laparoscopic gastric band, which is theoretically a reversible procedure (though removal of the band is not encouraged). The gastric band (which was first developed in 1986 by Lubomyr Kuzmar in the United States, and of which there are now a number of types) encircles the top section of the stomach, creating a small upper pouch, and larger lower pouch. The upper pouch is roughly the size of a golf ball, thus limiting the amount of food that can be ingested to between 15 and 20 mls at a time. The band has, on its inner surface, an adjustable balloon that can be filled up with saline to increase a patient’s restriction, or withdrawn to increase the size of the stoma (that is, the passage between the upper stomach pouch and the lower section of the stomach) to allow greater food intake (for example, during pregnancy).

1 In J. Eric Oliver’s “The Politics of Pathology: How Obesity Became an Epidemic Disease”, he explains that “In the 1950s, a bariatric surgeon named Howard Payne, who was looking to expand his practice, coined the term ‘morbid obesity’ in reference to people with a BMI of 40 or more (a term that is widely used today). This special designation of a subclass of obese people allowed him to justify bariatric surgery when most doctors viewed it as a radical and elective intervention” (2006: 624).

2 The irreversible gastric bypass procedure involves dividing the patient’s stomach into two sections, consisting of a smaller upper pouch, and a larger lower section. A section of the patient’s intestine is then re-routed to the smaller upper pouch, thereby bypassing the larger stomach section (and the volume of food it can potentially hold).

3 Of 24 nations surveyed worldwide in 2003, three bariatric procedures were found to be most popular (laparoscopic gastric bypass, laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding, open gastric bypass). 80 percent of surgeries in Australia and New Zealand use the gastric lap-band, while the US and Canada more regularly perform gastric bypass procedures. For more information, see Buchwald, H. and Williams, S.E. (2004) “Bariatric Surgery Worldwide 2003” in Obesity Surgery, 14, 1157-1164.

4 Since 1993, 100,000 bands have been implanted globally (Tolonen et. al., 2008: 251).
This manipulation of the band is ongoing post-operatively, and is done via local anaesthetic: the band’s port (most often stitched onto the abdominal muscles) is located with an x-ray, and saline injected into it with a cannula needle.

While intervening in the body’s capacity to consume food is clearly major surgery, what is foregrounded in the promotion of many bariatric surgeries is the fact that they are most often undertaken via laparoscopy, or ‘key hole surgery’. This means that rather than one long incision being made, a series of very small incisions are made where tools are inserted (one of these a camera) to conduct the procedure, thus minimising surgical invasiveness and patient recovery times. These procedures, then, are presented to prospective patients not only as a ‘minor’ simple surgery involving minimal risk to the patient, but also as (at some level) positioned as preserving (and ultimately, enhancing) aesthetic appeal, by limiting post-operative scarring. In this way, what is emphasised to patients is the minor intervention at the time of surgery, rather than the major (and ongoing) physiological, behavioural, social and psychic impacts (in short, the somatechnological effects) on one’s lived ‘banded’ embodiment post-operatively.

**After the Surgery: Countering the ‘Cure’**

The intersubjective negotiation of being-in-the-world as a ‘banded body’ is complicated, confusing and, at times, disturbing. There are numerous side effects and complications specific to each bariatric surgical procedure, however, most commonly patients can suffer from oesophageal reflux, regurgitation and vomiting, hair loss and vitamin and mineral deficiencies. In my own experience post-surgery, my more visibly normative (inter)corporeality is continually haunted by a management of internal psychological and physical conflict, a hidden dis-abled embodiment. As a result of the rapid weight loss I experienced following the surgery, I quickly developed gallstones, with attacks so severe I ended up in the emergency department of the local hospital several times. In May 2006, I required a gall bladder removal. Following this surgery, I acquired a new set of chronic and upsetting physiological problems, including an ulcerated oesophagus due to acid reflux and food regurgitation, for which I take daily medication. I suffer involuntary oesophageal spasms, which mimic cardiac pain. I have depleted nutrient levels due to restricted food intake and vomiting. However, walking down the street, people I once knew walk straight past me.  

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5 In a 2004 Consultation Report entitled *Ethical Issues Associated with Bariatric (Weight Loss) Surgery*, Sabin highlights some common problems that can occur post-surgery in bariatric patients: “Vitamin deficiencies, gallstones and osteoporosis are among other complications that can occur” (2004, p. 3).
If I say hello, they screw up their faces in momentary confusion, recognition slowly dawning on their faces, accompanied by the obligatory exclamations of “Sam! Is that you? You’ve lost so much weight! You look fantastic!” My appreciably different appearance elicits such responses, and is co-extensively culturally coded with improved health, and yet, the lived experience of my ‘banded body’ is one that disturbs dominant understandings of ‘health’. These lived ambiguities are, however, rarely, if ever, mentioned in the abundance of medical literature and clinical research that almost evangelically advocates bariatric surgery as a key treatment protocol for ‘morbid obesity’. However, ethical criticisms have also begun to emerge, both in fat activist responses and in the healthcare profession. Due to the lack of longitudinal and follow-up clinical studies of patients who had undergone bariatric surgical procedures, and the risks and complications associated with the surgery itself and post-operative management, one of the key size-acceptance organisations, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) in the United States has issued a policy document on their position on weight loss surgeries, stating that they “condemn gastrointestinal surgery for weight loss under any circumstances … [and that] the psychosocial suffering that fat people face is more appropriately relieved by social and political reform than by surgery” (NAAFA, 2009: 1). Questions about the effects of bariatric surgery have also been raised within the medical establishment. In the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Mike Mitka writes:

Short-term outcomes are impressive – patients undergoing bariatric surgery maintain more weight loss compared with diet and exercise. Comorbidities such as type 2 diabetes can be reversed. But long-term consequences remain uncertain. Issues such as whether weight loss is maintained and the long-term effects of altering nutrient absorption remain unresolved (2003: 1762). Mitka raises these concerns in response to the massive increase in patients undergoing bariatric procedures, despite the lack of long-term knowledge about the effects of the surgery. With eligibility criteria for potential bariatric patients requiring them to have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 40, some people keen to have the surgery who are just on the cusp on this measurement present difficult ethical questions for physicians. Livingstone claims “you end up with patients increasing their weight just to qualify … I knew of one patient who actually went to her weigh-in with weights concealed in her clothes” (2001: 1762). Thus, in spite of risks associated with the surgery and the long-term (and sometimes irreversible) changes that various bariatric procedures effect, many who have endured psychological and physiological suffering they have attributed to their weight are prepared to undergo interventions considered by some to be radical and unnecessary.
The competing interests around weight loss congeal in complex ways with regard to bariatric surgeries. This tension that marks public attitudes towards these surgeries demonstrates the lingering construction of obesity as being a self-inflicted ‘problem’ that the individual is responsible for creating, and therefore, resolving. Bariatric surgeries, then, have been conceptualised by many as a ‘quick fix’ option and a way out of living as a fat body in a culture that abhors fat flesh. Discursively, weight loss is still dominantly understood as an undertaking that must necessarily be marked by deprivation, hardship and individual will-power. Diets, by definition, involve monitoring food intake and engaging in regular exercise activity: therefore, diets are popularly imagined as a difficult, unpleasant but nevertheless worthwhile task in the pursuit of ‘health’ and bodily transformation. Given this dominant way of imagining the project of weight loss, bariatric surgeries are at once appealing to those who have tried numerous diets without success, and regarded by others as radical procedures undertaken by those who have failed in their attempts to lose weight ‘properly’ and ‘naturally’, presumably through an absence of real dedication, personal fortitude and hard work.

Enforced from Within: Eating and Control

Plans for eating immediately after bariatric surgery vary, however in general, patients are restricted to fluids only for two weeks following the operation, and a further two weeks limited to pureed foods in order not to compromise the position of the newly implanted band. Ingesting even a small amount of fluid immediately after the procedure gives one the sensation of being overfull. After the initial four-week adjustment phase, patients progress to eating soft foods and adapting to eating smaller amounts. Patients are encouraged to eat from very small plates, using teaspoons, in order to give the impression of enjoying a full meal whilst actually consuming much smaller portions. Drinking and eating must be carefully sequenced throughout the day: one should not drink with meals as it can flush food through the band too quickly, dilating the upper stomach pouch. Fluids should only be consumed approximately one to two hours after eating, and drinking should stop about fifteen minutes before meals.

Most patients who undergo bariatric surgery have struggled with diets and the co-requisite measurements of foods in minute details, counting calories and monitoring intake. The possibility of a surgery, then, that removes the effort of managing one’s diet through the institution of a system of physiological control beyond the exercise of conscious thought, is understandably appealing, after years of careful planning, weighing and watching food consumption. As Ogden et. al. suggest, “… by handing over control to their stomach rather than
relying upon their own will-power, patients regain a sense of control over what they eat” (2005: 271). The greatest irony, then, is that the lived experience of the band is really all about constant monitoring – by doctors and by the patient – involving careful and rigorous attention. For example, social dinners can be difficult, as conversation may divert attention away from the mouthful one is chewing: if all food is not chewed to a smooth paste, it can become stuck above the stomach stoma, creating intense discomfort and pain, often resulting in the need to vomit.

In a study conducted by Ogden, Clement and Aylwin (2006), 15 patients who had undergone bariatric surgery were interviewed. Of the 15, 14 were female and eight had undergone gastric banding. Some responses from the study participants note the difficulty of negotiating life with a band, particularly as a body that is more visibly and aesthetically acceptable, but that is often negotiating unseen difficulties during social situations such as eating in public:

You’d be sick all the time … where could I be sick? How could I be sick quietly?
I developed how to be sick, you’d flush the chain and be sick at the same time (Ellen) (Ogden et. al., 2006: 283).

Following the initial surgery, patients are required to have their bands ‘adjusted’ (known as ‘fills’) every one to two months to promote optimum weight loss. As the band is tightened, the range of foods one can eat is limited further. Red meat, bread, rice, raw vegetables and some fruits are often very difficult or impossible to eat, as they simply cannot pass through the stoma created by the gastric band. If food is too hard, too doughy, or too fibrous, patients often avoid eating it in order to limit the possibility of discomfort (pain that involves intense pressure in the chest) and regurgitation. Again ironically, despite the fact that most ‘obese’ patients have an impressive knowledge of nutrition gained through years of dieting, what becomes clear after bariatric surgery is that foods that have little nutritional benefit (such as custard, ice cream and chocolate) pass more easily through the band. Patients tired of suffering pain while eating often resort to foods that their pre-surgical experience had marked as anathema to the fat body. For example, another respondent in the 2006 study by Ogden et. al. notes:

I actually love fruit and I used to eat a lot of fruit before but I can’t eat fruit. I can’t eat vegetables now … now I find that fattier foods I can actually eat better … (Sonia) (2006: 284).

This practice of eating energy dense foods with little nutritional benefit is often perceived, in bariatric medical literature, as representing ‘non-compliance’ with the band, and thus a failure by patients, who are simply seeking new ways of
satisfying their alleged ‘addiction’ to sweet or fatty foods, rather than ‘correctly’
managing their band. Given these assumptions, Karen Throsby asserts that the
gastric band “is constructed not as a resolution in itself, but as a first step, or ‘tool’: a
construction which leaves the work of weight loss with the individual, not the surgery.” (2008: 124) What is highlighted here, then, in contrast to popular ideas about bariatric surgery as a ‘quick-fix’, is that the gastric band is not simply a somatechnology in and of itself, but is an effect of, and physiologically effects a somatechnics of bodily discipline/control already extremely familiar to bariatric patients pre-surgery, despite the perception that ‘fat’ people are ‘out of control’.

Unsurprisingly, bariatric medicine also operates from the dominant (problematic) assumption that all ‘obese’ subjects are compulsive overeaters or food addicts. Consequently, numerous studies have been published that examine the rates of Binge Eating Disorder (BED) in patients seeking, or having undergone, bariatric surgical procedures, thereby increasing the pathologisation of ‘obese’ subjects by assigning many profound psychological disturbances. As a teenager, I suffered from bulimia, a ‘disorder’ that is marked by its reliance on what can be hidden and kept secret. I find a strange and disturbing synchronicity at times with the experience of bulimia and my current experience of managing the gastric band. Sharing dinner with friends, who may offer me compliments about my weight loss and changed appearance echo in concert with the distress at having food caught painfully in my chest, and repeated requests to be excused to go the bathroom, with explanations I have developed to hide my discomfort, such as “I’ve had a bit of an upset stomach over the last few days.” For those who don’t know about my surgery, my reduced food intake may simply be interpreted as part of the ‘diet’ that must have resulted in my noticeable weight loss, thus attracting little attention. As Throsby claims, for the bariatric patient, “the surgically induced inability to eat becomes a parody of ‘dieting like a normal person’ – an act of passing which is achieved through the mobilization of the normatively feminine practice of dieting” (2008: 127).

What is emphasised in the lived experiences of the ‘banded body’ as I have recounted them above are the disjunction(s) between ‘health’ and the more normative appearance expected to accompany it, and the realities of the tensions, contradictions and hidden dis-ability in managing the gastric band after surgery. Via her interactions with a number of post-operative bariatric patients in the United Kingdom, Karen Throsby observes these disjunctions

6 ‘Failed’ patients are often termed ‘sweet-eaters’ (Burgmer et. al., 2005: 685).
7 While Burgmer et. al. note that the rates of BED in bariatric patients “vary in the literature between 16% and 46%” (2005: 689), more recent studies (Rosik: 2005) suggest there are in fact much lower numbers of bariatric patients than previously thought with pre- or post-operative BED.
in her paper, “Happy Re-birthday: Weight Loss Surgery and the ‘New Me’”: claiming that “… even though many reach a ‘healthy’ weight, for some, this is at the cost of ill-health. This tension problematizes the presumed positive relationship between health and slimness that governs the ‘war on obesity’ …” (Throsby, 2008: 118).

**Selling the Image: ‘Health’ and Aesthetics**

The increased popularity of bariatric surgeries in the last decade is reflected in the numerous surgeons advertising their weight loss procedures on the Internet. As Sabin writes: “A web search under ‘bariatric surgery’ brings up advertisements from multiple regional, national and international programmes that are competing for referrals. Bariatric surgery is clearly a moneymaker for hospitals and surgeons” (2004: 6). Given this, ethical questions have begun to be asked about the appropriateness of Internet advertising for bariatric surgery, with “some physicians … [questioning] whether the profession is handling this therapy properly” (Mitka, 2003: 1761).

Salant and Santry (2006) reviewed 100 American bariatric surgery websites, and noted, on the majority of sites, women were more specifically targeted and featured, with the greatest emphasis being on visual presentations of the “physical and emotional transformation” effected by the surgeries offered. Salant and Santry report that “images of butterflies and themes of metamorphosis recur throughout the websites as do visual symbols of measurement and bodily change” (2006: 2450). Moreover, the authors assert that there is unequal content on bariatric surgery websites, effected by an emphasis on patient testimonials and the attainment of a BMI in the ‘normal’ range post-surgery, and less information about physiological and behavioural changes patients can expect post-operatively (Salant and Santry, 2006: 2452). Salant and Santry also note the marketing approach by bariatric surgery websites that employs two contradictory discourses about the medicalisation of obesity (2006: 2453): in the first instance, sites construct obesity as a disease beyond the control of individuals as opposed to more dominant understandings of ‘obese’ subjects as overeaters who are thus personally responsible for their condition. In this way, potential patients are convinced of the legitimacy of undertaking a surgical option for weight loss. However, in contradistinction to this rejection of a notion of ‘obese’ subjects as individually responsible for their ‘disease’, the failure of bariatric surgery is rarely attributed to surgeons. Rather, ‘failure’ (measured most often in terms of weight loss, but also associated with ‘negative’ post-procedural experiences more generally) is construed as a result of patients not taking responsibility for the ‘correct’ post-operative management of the band:
whereas the obese individual is absolved of blame for failing weight loss through non-surgical behavioural interventions, … inability to lose weight or sustain weight loss after surgery is not only a marker of a sub-standard bariatric program, it reflects a failure of the patient to adequately maintain a supervised regime of lifestyle and dietary change (Salant and Santry, 2006: 2451).

In my survey of numerous bariatric surgery websites advertising on the Internet, what was striking was that the process of deciding to undergo bariatric surgery, the procedure itself, and the post-surgical weight loss is most commonly metaphorised as ‘the journey’, beginning with ‘a single step’. The notion of one setting out, enduring and completing a ‘journey’ implies a project of self-realisation and self-transformation, that undoubtedly draws on the popular discourses found in self-help literature that is premised on a neoliberal humanist belief in the possibility of self-authorship. In fact, on one bariatric surgery centre website, the potential client is urged to “Reinvent your body, reclaim your health, and rewrite your life’s story with NewHope Bariatrics and the LAP-BAND System” (NewHope Bariatrics website). The notion of a ‘journey’ also implies a significant length of time and struggle. However, this conceptualisation of a ‘journey’ is seemingly supplanted via the linear logic implied by the constant deployment of the ‘before-and-after’ photographs documenting patients’ bodily transformations. Likewise, most bariatric surgery clinic websites devote a section to patient testimonials, to ‘success stories’ which similarly veil over the complexities and ambiguities associated with the lived experience of bodily transition. These testimonials tend to follow a similar formula: most patients (predominantly women) describe their pre-surgery life as an impaired, unhappy and dysfunctional existence, with their bodies positioned as de-valued, defective and ‘disabled’. The turning point, as described in these “success stories, comes with the implantation of the gastric band, which is described variously as ‘restoring life’, ‘empowering’ and ‘completing’ the individual by enabling a shift from (alleged) dis-ability to normalcy. Patients describe their ‘fat’ experience as ‘just existing from day to day’” (Weight Loss Surgery website), but after the band, feeling “empowered, because I am the woman I was always meant to be” (Official LapBand website), and “in control of my life … I look like a whole new person!” (NewHope Bariatrics website). The successful post-bariatric surgery body is predominantly measured visually. There are, as I have indicated above, data presented in the clinical short-term follow-up studies that demonstrates the elimination of Type II diabetes in post-surgery patients, the relief of joint pain, the increase of patient energy levels, etc., following significant weight loss. However, what is most strongly foregrounded in popular representations of weight loss (and bariatric surgery promotion) is the visual bodily transition that it affords, most particularly through the use of the ubiquitous ‘before and after’ photographs.
to document the supposed shift from a devalued, pathological ‘fat’ body, to a newly normative (gendered) one. Inevitably, the ‘before’ photograph is grainy and unflattering, displaying a body whose markers have come to be dominantly read and understood as desexualised, unfeminine or unmasculine, unattractive, unhealthy: in short, ‘fat’. The ‘before’ photograph invites a response of pity for what is clearly a defective body, a pathological body that must be ‘mastered’ and ‘overcome’. Immediately adjacent to this image of a ‘failed’ body is the ‘after’ photograph: usually a sharp, clear, posed full-length photograph that functions in the same way as the now infamous ‘reveal’ used in reality television shows, such as The Biggest Loser and Extreme Makeover. The apparent linearity of the transition from ‘fat’ to ‘thin’, from dis-abled to en-abled, is one that is represented as a ‘miraculous’ shift. Moreover, the joy recounted by patients is described as an effect of appearing in the world differently, or more specifically, of appearing as normatively feminine or masculine rather than as desexualised and unattractive. The use of the ‘before-and-after’ photographs foreground the value of one’s newly normative appearance, and it is this normatively (en)gendered facade that defines the ‘success’ of the post-surgery body, thus making the results of bariatric surgery immediately visible and intelligible. However, the contradictory details of individual weight loss ‘journeys’ remain obscured, simplified or invisibilised. We only understand the ‘before-and-after’ photographs as markers of ‘successful’ representations/embodiments because of our “tacit bodily knowledge” (Alcoff, 2001: 272) of normative bodily aesthetics. The bariatric surgical process may present/market itself as teleological – it regards transition as a singular movement (the ‘journey’), rather than as a way of being-in-the-world that is multiple, contingent and ambiguous. I was asked by my own bariatric surgeon to feature as a ‘success story’ on the centre’s website (and in promotional newsletters) but declined on the basis that the teleological representation of ‘success’ is, as I’ve shown here, constructed as overly simplistic, and unambiguous, obfuscating the somatechnics of the ‘banded’ body. As I have explained above, in reality, one’s banded lived experience requires the trade-off of a visibly normative body for a more hidden dis-abled embodiment (contra the dominant perception that the ‘fat’ body is dis-abled prior to surgery), where the concept of ‘health’ is called into question.

**Enabling Somatechnical Tensions: No Conclusion**

In 2009, another season of the punitive and problematic show The Biggest Loser is set to re-commence in Australia. Television advertisements for the show feature images of the couples that will be the ‘contestants’ on the latest season of the programme, and the promotional tagline runs “We will never look like this again.” The notion of ‘health’ as an aesthetic issue and a visual marker is
not even partly obscured here. ‘Health’, as it relates to the necessary eradication of ‘fatness’, is measured visually – or more to the point, aesthetically. As I have suggested here, health as it relates to the eradication of ‘obesity’ and the moral panic around ‘obesity’ as a disease is not simply about physiological well-being – it is about an anxiety about bodily difference, perceived pathology and excess. Healthy bodies are also bodies that appear ‘normative’: they are read as healthy via the cultural value we attach to a visible slenderness. Given this, the contestants on this season of *The Biggest Loser* are tacitly urged to understand ‘looking good’ (via an eradication of their fat flesh) as the ‘proof’ of their ultimate attainment of the ‘healthy’ body lauded in our culture.

The ongoing conflation between normative body aesthetics (particularly for women) and health, especially in the context of morally panicked public health directives about an alleged ‘obesity epidemic’, is one that requires ongoing critical engagement. Negotiating an embodied critical space that is animated by voices that speak of lived tensions – vulnerability, action, anger, sadness, difference, conformity – is crucial, given the fact that we are all implicated in, and socialised by, the dominant discourses and the attendant anxieties of our specific historical and cultural contexts, even as we resist them.

In heeding Davis’ call, and thinking through the critical productive potential of somatechnics in bringing to light the embodied contradictions and tensions that are central to all lived experience (and in this chapter, the lived experience of the ‘banded body’), I have mobilised a critical inquiry that aims to question what modes of embodiment one is moving between, to interrogate the complexities and potentialities of (un)becoming, and in doing so, offers a means of complicating the very constitution of dominant modes of bodily being. In this chapter, I have presented my own lived experience of ‘fatness’ and the ambiguities, surprises and tensions attendant on my experience of embodying, via bariatric surgery, a very different corporeality coded with ‘health’ and normativity by a society committed to certain perceptions of right/wrong, feminine/masculine, normal/pathological and so on.

For me it is not simply a shift from ‘fatness’ to more aesthetically normative embodiment that interests me here, but the ambiguities, contradictions and complications in the shift from an allegedly pathological body to an allegedly ‘healthy’ one. What does ‘healthy’ really mean in relation to a ‘banded body’? I am not dismissing wholesale the health benefits weight loss may afford some, nor do I wish to present myself as a victim of a cruel medical intervention, or indeed as a victim of any kind, but I do wish to complicate the monolithic conception of ‘health’ we regularly mobilise, and its tacit interrelatedness with normative bodily aesthetics.

Co-extensive with this inquiry, I have been prompted to critically reflect on the ways in which all bodies are always already in processes of (un)becoming, troubling the very understanding of bodily (or otherwise) transformations as
teleological moves with a defined end point, dominantly understood as a shift from ‘wrongness’ to a ‘wholeness.’ Jay Prosser describes this process as the “surgical transition from alienation to integration or integrity” (Prosser, 1998: 80): following this, and as discussed in Stryker and Sullivan’s chapter in this volume, gastric banding (and indeed, all forms of bariatric surgery) could be regarded as an attempt to ‘integrate’ an ‘improper’ body such that it becomes ‘productive’ to gendered norms and practices. In unsettling this perceived shift from dis-ability and ‘dis-integration’ to ‘propriety’, the somatechnics of the ‘banded body’ may go some way to queer(y)ing the alleged boundaries of dominant conceptions of ‘health’, and its complicated, but inextricable link to ‘normative’ appearance.

References


SECTION THREE
Somatechniques of the Self
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Chapter 9
Queer Monsters: Technologies of Self-Transformation in Bulwer’s Anthropometamorphosis and Braidotti’s Metamorphoses

Elizabeth Stephens

John Bulwer’s Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform’d; or, the Artificial Changeling (1650) and Rosi Braidotti’s Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming (2002), although written three and a half centuries apart and from entirely different political and philosophical perspectives, reveal a surprising degree of concordance in their approach towards bodily transformation.¹ Both texts focus on self-made bodies, on the technologies available to subjects to modify their own bodies. Both texts are primarily concerned with what such practices tell us about the relationship between bodies and selves, and what this, in turn, reveals about the broader cultural contexts in which they take place. Most strikingly, and despite the notable differences in the forms of self-transformation they examine – Anthropometamorphosis focusing on “primitive” forms of bodily ornamentation and fashions, Metamorphoses on highly technologised and hybridising forms – both writers represent the modified body as an inherently monstrous one. In this respect, both texts are centrally concerned with what Judith Halberstam has called “the technologies of monsters,” the cultural processes through which monsters are produced and normative assumptions about corporeality challenged and disrupted. Monsters, as Halberstam recognises, are “meaning machines,” figures whose forms, and cultural significance, are “remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable” (1995, 21). The monster, as recently theoretical work in this area has stressed, is an inherently empty cultural category into which the changing anxieties that characterise its various historical and cultural contexts can be projected.² It is precisely to this semantic capaciousness that we

¹ Bulwer’s text was subsequently revised and expanded in 1653, and it is this version that is referenced throughout this paper.
² Recent criticism of the figure of the monster – and its more contemporary incarnation, the freak – repeatedly emphasises that the monstrous body does not have
can attribute the longevity of the cultural interest in monsters, their enduring importance as figures of difference and disruption. Despite their mutual interest in the way the self-made body constitutes such a figure, however, Braidotti and Bulwer come to opposing conclusions about the significance of the monsters they describe: for Bulwer, their disruptive potential is the central argument against the practices he surveys; whereas for Braidotti these afford possibilities for cultural and political change that is cause for celebration. In this respect – in unsettling dominant cultural assumptions while having no essential meaning or form in and of themselves – the self-made bodies condemned by Bulwer and celebrated by Braidotti might also be thought of as inherently queer constructs. Through a comparative analysis of *Anthropometamorphosis* and *Metamorphoses*, this paper will explore the possibilities and limitations of such transformations – here examined under the rubric of somatechnics – which both constitute and challenge normative assumption about embodied subjectivity, producing a series of (un)becomings whose meanings, like those of the queer body, remain dynamic and hence unpredictable.

John Bulwer’s *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform’d; or, the Artificial Changeling* (1650) is widely recognised as the first cross-cultural history of body modification. In a series of chapters dedicated to the variety of ways in which the parts of the body – the head, hair, facial features, limbs and genitals – can be transformed, Bulwer’s text provides a comparative overview of a wide range of modificatory practices, including tattooing, piercing, shaving, painting, branding and scarification. Describing his study as a work of “Corporall Philosophy” any meaning in and of itself, but is rather a site at which meaning is created, providing a stage on which various pressing social and political concerns can be played out. We see this quite literally in the performance of modern professional monsters – such as the side show freak, whose body is a “malleable image upon which [the] audience projects cultural characteristics they themselves disavow,” as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues (1997, 55-56). Subjects exhibited within the context of side shows, Thomson writes, “inadvertently flaunt the erratic and spurn the stable, becoming emblems of physical and cultural anarchy and magnets for the anxieties and ambitions of their times” (1997, 70). This is a point reiterated by Rachel Adams, who argues that “the meaning of freaks is always in excess of the body itself, which is treated as a sign requiring reading and interpretation” (2001, 54). Thus the figure of the monster is a fundamentally fluid one, constantly reconfigured in relation to changing dominant assumptions about bodily norms.

3 See, for instance, Montserrat (1998, 1-4) or Schildkrout (2004, 324-25).

4 Bulwer himself was a physician and philosopher whose work focused on “the semiotics of the human body” (Wollock 2002, 228). His earlier works *Chirologia* (1644), *Chironomia* (1644), and *Pathomyotomia* (1649) are all studies of gesture. This latter text, as Geen and Tassinary note, appears to be the first study of the muscular basis of emotional expressions, and was “concerned almost exclusively with the study of dynamic facial actions, as opposed to permanent structural aspects of the face” (2002, 277).
(“A Hint of the Use of this Treatise,” n.p.), Bulwer’s approach to his material ranges from the ethnographic – for instance, his chapter on the modification of “the privy Parts,” the longest in the book, contains detailed accounts of genital piercing, testicular implants, circumcision and castration amongst “primitive” cultures – to the folkloric, including popular and apocryphal stories about “monstrous” races collated from ancient sources. The chapter on “Auricular Fashions” is typical of the latter aspect of his work, citing Solinus’ description of the inhabitants of Fanesii, “whose Eares are dilated to so effuse a magnitude, that they cover the rest of their Bodies with them, and have no other Cloathing” (1653, 141).

Although in this respect Bulwer’s text may appear to be simply an exemplar of a popular genre of his day – a compendium of tales about “primitive” and ancient races excerpted from classical texts⁵ – Anthropometamorphosis is nevertheless a landmark publication in two ways. Firstly, it reflects an epochal shift in the dominant mode of thinking about bodily change. Whereas earlier texts, like Ambroise Paré’s Des Monstres et Prodiges (1564), primarily understood transformation as something that happened spontaneously and unpredictably to people, Bulwer’s focus is on acts of intentional modification, on practices of self-making that are deliberately undertaken by the subject him/herself.⁶ Secondly, Anthropometamorphosis is the first text, as far as I am aware, to incorporate descriptions of contemporary English fashions alongside

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5 Such texts were enjoying a period of great popularity from the late 1500s onwards. Two enormously influential and much imitated texts from this time, which both exemplified and catalysed the popular fascination with monsters that would characterise the first half of the seventeenth century, were Pierre Boaistuau’s Histoires prodigieuses: Extraictes de Plusieurs Fameux auteurs, Grecs et Latins, sacrés et profanes (1560) and Ambroise Paré’s Des Monstres et Prodiges (1564). Boaistuau’s work is an anthology of marvels and wonders sourced from both classical texts and contemporary folklore, in which stories of comets, eclipses, floods, earthquakes and other natural phenomena are interspersed with accounts of conjoined twins, lion-headed men and monstrous births. This format was later appropriated in turn by Stephen Bateman in The Doome Warning all Men to the Judgement: Wherein are Contained for the Most Part all the Strange Prodigies Happen’d in the World Since Creation (1581), an ambitious attempt to provide a chronological overview of wondrous events and forms “since creation.”

6 While the detailed accounts found in Paré’s work and others of this period of maternal impression – that is, the belief that women’s actions, sensations and thoughts during pregnancy played a formative role in shaping their unborn children – might imply a different model of transformation, women were not seen to actively and consciously control the processes by which the monstrous births they were nonetheless held responsible for producing came about: a bad shock, an unexpected sight or uncontrolled emotions were amongst the main causes to which monstrous births were attributed by early modern writers.
exoticised representations of historically or geographically distant cultures. In his appendix on “The English Gallant,” for instance, Bulwer undertakes a comparative analysis of contemporary English fashions and “primitive” forms of body modification, comparing codpieces to penis gourds (1653, 540) and arguing that the seventeenth-century style of tall “sugar-loafe” hat, with its conical shape, is motivated by “the same conceit” as that found amongst the Macrones of Pontus and the Macrocephali, “among whom they were esteemed the best Gentlemen who had the highest Head” (1653, 531). Similarly, he argues that the use of face “Painting and black Patches,” adopted amongst the affluent of his day, “are notoriously known to have been the primitive Invention of the barbarous Painter-stainers of India” (1653, 534). Other contemporary fashions, such as ruffs, long doublets and verdingales, are condemned in the same vein as disfiguring, obscene, and prone to inciting lust (Bulwer 1653, 535-36, 541, 546).

As such criticisms make clear, the central purpose of Bulwer’s text is to mount a concerted campaign against what he sees as the increasing incidence and popularity of practices of bodily ornamentation and to draw attention to their deleterious cultural consequences. Indeed, the extent to which Bulwer explicitly frames his text as a polemical tract against the trend toward self-fashioning the body in mid-seventeenth-century Britain is revealed by long subtitle of his text: Historically presented, in the mad and cruel Gallantry, foolish Bravery, ridiculous Beauty, filthy Fineness, and loathsome Loveliness of most Nations, fashioning and altering their Bodies from the Mould intended by Nature; with Figures of those Transfigurations. To which artificall and affected Deformations are added, all the native and nationall Monstrosities that have appeared to disfigure the Humane Fabricke. With a Vindication of the regular Beauty and Honesty of Nature. For Bulwer, self-formation is by definition a deformation, a transfiguration and disfigurement, because it produces a deviation from the natural shape of the body. When English “gallants,” like the peoples of primitive cultures, presumptuously take the shaping of the body into their own hands, they render their bodies artificial and unnatural, and it is precisely this that makes them monstrous, in Bulwer’s eyes.

In order to understand why Bulwer invokes the monstrous as a category through which to condemn practices of body modification, and the significance this rhetorical move would have had for his seventeenth-century readership, his text must be contextualised within a more general early modern fascination with monsters.\footnote{For detailed accounts of the early modern conceptualisation of the monstrous, see Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes’ edited collection \textit{Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe} (2004), Jeffrey Cohen’s collection \textit{Monster Theory: Reading Culture} (1996) and the volume edited by Peter Platt, \textit{Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture} (1999).} In the century previous to Bulwer’s, an earlier medieval understanding
of the monster as a divine warning or religious omen to be deciphered had gradually transformed into a newly secularised concept of the monster as a figure of unnaturalness and deformity. We see this equally in philosophical texts written for an educated audience, such as those by Montaigne and, a century later, by Diderot (the essays “On Cripples” and Elements of Physiology, respectively, are instances of these writers’ well-known fascination with the monstrous), and in illustrated broadsheets for a popular audience on anatomically unusual bodies, such as A Certaine Relation of the Hog-Faced Gentlewoman called Mistress Tannakin Skinker (1640). Such texts have in common a reconceptualisation of the monstrous body that moves away from the medieval focus on distant monstrous races and towards a pronounced interest in “the monsters [the public] could see about them – anomalous births, strange events, occurrences contrary to nature” (Smith 2002, 267). In other words, whereas monsters in the middle ages were represented as elsewhere – like those enormously-eared inhabitants of Fanesii Bulwer describes – the early modern period relocated monsters from the margins to the middle of culture, both reflecting and precipitating a transformation in their cultural function and significance.

Within the context of an increasingly secularised and localised understanding of monsters, Bulwer’s text reflects a further shift in their meaning, representing a move from a religious to a political context – cultural domains that were not wholly separate in Bulwer’s day but whose relationship would continue to be the subject of debate. We see this enacted in Bulwer’s text in the way his initial objection to the practices of bodily modification catalogued in Anthropometamorphosis invokes a conventional rationale – that such re-making of one’s own body constitutes a kind of corporeal blasphemy. In the book’s introduction he protests that “the blind impiety of some hath led them to such a height of presumption, as to find fault with many parts of [man’s] Fabricke … [U]pon such Blasphemous fancies men have taken upon them an audacious

8 This shift is reflected in the way that, whereas famous medieval monsters like the Monster of Krakow were seen as portents or symbols, the monsters in Paré’s texts are understood to reflect the medical and environmental conditions that produced them. Paré, a physician, was one of the first to recognise that monstrous births were not always the result of demonic forces or maternal impression (although he also continued to give such theories considerable credence), but could also be caused by injury during pregnancy.

9 The full title of this text provides the narrative of Skinker’s life: A Certaine Relation of the Hog-Faced Gentlewoman called Mistress Tannakin Skinker, who was borne at Wirkham a Neuter Towne betwene the Emperour and the Hollander, scituate on the river Rhyne. Who was betwitched in her mothers wombe in the yeare 1618 and hathe lived ever since unknoune in this kind to any but her Parents and a few other neighbours. And can never recover her true shape, till she be married, & c. Also relating the cause, as it is since conceived, how her mother came so bewitched.
Art to forme and new shape themselves … moulding [their bodies] according to their own will … into diverse depraved Figures” (n.p.). Despite invoking a religious injunction against such practices, however, Bulwer’s primary concern is less with their sinfulness than their unnaturalness: it is the artificiality of the self-made body and what this reveals about the fallen state of mid-seventeenth-century British culture, to which he objects. Thus, although Bulwer frames the unnaturalness of the modified and self-made body as “blasphemous” in his introduction, the terms in which he considers the implications of this are not primarily religious but rather political – while Bulwer draws extensively on classical texts in defence of his position, his text contains no direct scriptural references.

As such, while Anthropometamorphosis does not directly address the upheavals of the period in which it was written, Bulwer’s condemnation of self-fashioning is, I would argue, implicitly shaped by his resistance to the broader political transformations of his day. A monarchist writing in the aftermath of the English Civil War and a year after the regicide of Charles I, Bulwer’s work suggests a close correspondence between the artificial, self-made body and the new republican state: both are human inventions that deviate from the “Mould intended by Nature” (n.p.), and it is precisely this that renders both of these monstrous forms. As Laura Knoppers and Joan Landes recognise, seventeenth-century public discourse witnessed an increasing politicisation of the monster, whose semantic instability made it a rhetorical figure available to be mobilised by opposing sides of the political spectrum: “in the shift from the ordered body politic of monarchy to the headless parliamentary state,” they argue, “absolutists and republicans accuse one another of bringing forth monsters” (2004, 14). The significance of this repositioning of the monster within a political context – and the use of the monstrous as a category in and through which to debate the relative merits of monarchic and republican systems of government – can be further elucidated by considering Bulwer’s account of the self-made body alongside the much better-known descriptions of the artificial body found in Hobbes’ Leviathan, written the year after Anthropometamorphosis.

In Hobbes’ account, the new commonwealth state “is but an artificial man … in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body” (1997, 93). However, in contradistinction to Bulwer, for Hobbes this artificiality does not render the body politic inherently monstrous; rather, he understood it as one based on “the body natural.” As Nikki Sullivan argues: “Hobbes’ vision of the modern body politic as a cultural construct founded on an a priori or ‘natural’ body is one in which (material and moral) integrity

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10 Anthropometamorphosis draws heavily on classical Greek and Roman texts, citing Homer, Hippocrates, Plato, Galen, Herodotus, Cicero, Pliny, Plutarch, Tacitus, Seneca and Ptolomy, amongst others.
is both the original and perfect condition, and the necessary condition for the continued well-being of its members and of itself” (2005, 328). It is precisely this sense of the (natural) wholeness of the body that Bulwer feels is deformed by the establishment of a republican state – one founded on the originary act of the decapitation of its king. As William Burns argues:

While Hobbes responded to the crisis of authority with a redefinition of the state as a body artificially constructed out of many natural bodies rather than as a natural body itself, Bulwer launched a violent attack on the artificially constructed body that he couched in the political language of monstrosity characteristic of the English Civil War. In doing so, he presented a picture of nature and the role of monsters in nature that was based on and reinforced the ideology of political monarchy (1999, 187).

Although both writers were fundamentally concerned with the significance of the “man”-made body, then, the conclusions Hobbes and Bulwer came to about the meaning of that body were directly opposed: for Hobbes, the artificiality of the new body politic is reinscribed within a grounding discourse of the body natural, whereas for Bulwer this artificiality mutilates the natural body and renders it irrevocably monstrous.

Despite their differences, however, both Leviathan and Anthropometamorphosis are representative of the new ideas about the body emerging at this time: bodies can only be thought of as something that can be voluntarily transformed within a context in which the relationship between bodies and selves has undergone a parallel transformation. In this respect, both Bulwer’s and Hobbes’s texts are representative of the rapidly changing somatechnics of the early modern period, in which the discursive practices and institutional frameworks through which bodies, both social and individual, are shaped, are reconfiguring a medieval body experienced “as porous, open, and at the same time interwoven with the world” (Benthien 2002, 37) into “an individuated, monadic, and bourgeois vessel that the subject was considered to inhabit.”11 Even though Bulwer himself is a staunch opponent of the dangerous liberties this new concept of the body allowed the subject, arguing that sovereignty over both body and self properly belonged to king and God, his understanding of bodily change nonetheless reflects this new way of thinking about the relationship between body and self: it is only with the

emergence of individuated bodies and autonomous subjects that it is possible to think of transformation as something that can be undertaken according to the will and preferences of an individual, and for which s/he can thus be held personally responsible.

This early modern understanding of the relationship between body and self has proved an enduring one, which has, in Nikki Sullivan’s words, “continue[d] to (in)form current social imaginaries, to exert covert epistemic effects on individual bodies, social bodies, and the relations between them” (2005, 328). We see this reflected in the fact that the second of the texts this paper will examine, Rosi Braidotti’s *Metamorphoses*, written at the other end of the (post)modern period, reveals many points of similarity in its understanding of self-transformation to those found in *Anthropometamorphosis*. In particular, both texts understand practices of self-making as a form of political resistance. The assumption that underpins this interpretation of the modified body – that bodily change also produces subjective and cultural change – is one that remains deeply, and centrally, embedded in modern thought. We see this in the way that Braidotti’s text continues to read practices of bodily self-transformation through many of the same interpretative frameworks as Bulwer’s, as challenging both normative understandings of the body and dominant assumptions about the prevailing cultural order. Whereas for Bulwer this potential made the self-made body a source of concern and danger, for Braidotti it is a source of possibility, enabling a new feminist philosophy and politics that would be dedicated to “undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes” (Braidotti 2002, 116). As Bulwer’s comparative approach to “barbaric” and British, or ancient and contemporary, forms of body modification made clear, he saw these as something that threatened to propel (early) modern England back into a “primitive” state. Braidotti, on the other hand, associates practices of self-making with the future and with positive possibilities for cultural change. These differences are unsurprising: while subjects whose bodies define the norm, like Bulwer, are resistant to the cultural transformations that would lessen their own power and authority, those whose bodies are defined as inherently and already non-normative, like Braidotti, have a much greater investment in the creation of new selves and cultural possibilities.

At the same time, Braidotti’s work is also consistent with Bulwer’s work in recognising that bodies that trouble or differ from current corporeal norms are often understood as disfigured or deformed. This is particularly evident, within the context of Braidotti’s concerns, in the widespread association of female bodies – and maternal bodies in particular – with monstrosity. One space in which such

12 See, for instance, Mary Russo’s *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (1994) or Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993).
representations proliferate, as Braidotti recognises, is within the genre of science fiction, with its fascinated exploration of scenes of bodily invasion and extension, its fluid and leaking corporealities, which, as many feminist theorists have argued, evince profound anxieties about femininity and maternity. Recognising that “both the feminine and the monstrous are signs of an embodied negative difference” (2002, 197), Braidotti turns to consider the way feminist science fiction has confronted this understanding of female embodiment, and provided women with a means by which to rewrite the cultural narratives in and through which their bodies and selves have traditionally been represented. They can do this, Braidotti argues, precisely by exploiting the figure of the monster as a site of semantic instability, at which meanings can be reconfigured. Traditional representations of monsters as threatening others reflect wider cultural attitudes towards difference, Braidotti argues, as “it is in the language of monstrosity that difference is often translated” (2002, 175). In her attempt to reconceptualise the significance and figure of the monster in positive terms, Braidotti’s central goal in *Metamorphoses* is thus to provide new ways of thinking about difference itself, to encourage a “joyful affirmation of positive and multiple differences” (Braidotti 2002, 20) that would enable “the creative overturning of the melancholia of negativity, bad conscience, law and lack” (75) that traditionally cohere around its representations. In this way, like Judith Halberstam, who argues that “we need monsters and we need to recognise and celebrate our own monstrosities” (1995, 27), Braidotti is concerned to explore the radical political potential of becoming-monster that results from the practices of self-transformation she examines. The first step in so doing, Braidotti argues, is to challenge the fear of difference and cultural change reflected in works such as Bulwer’s and which is often rearticulated within feminism itself: “Why is it that loss, failure, melancholia and the ontological lack continue to dominate views of the subject both inside and outside feminism?” she questions (2002, 57). If women have traditionally been constructed negatively in relation to cultural and corporeal norms, then the positivity advocated by Braidotti is a necessary prerequisite to a new feminist politics, providing the means by which to imagine difference differently. Braidotti’s agenda in *Metamorphoses* is, accordingly, to develop “an ethics of joy and affirmation which functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions” (2002, 135).

Braidotti reclaims the figure of the monster as a potential site of positive difference precisely because its resistance to the normalising influence of the cultures in which it signifies means that it affords “new figurations [that] help

13 Representations of women’s bodies in women science fiction have been widely recognised as a displacement of male anxieties about female procreation. Braidotti notes that “the genre of science-fiction horror film,” in particular, “is of great relevance to feminism because it is explicitly bent on the exploration of the maternal body and the processes of birth” (2002, 192).
us think through the maze of techno-teratological culture” (2002, 207) and a productive framework through which to rethink “the teratological social imaginary of post-industrial societies” (1991, 174). While Bulwer, as we saw above, understands self-made bodies as unnatural, Braidotti reconceptualises these as post-human, representing not a return to a “primitive” order but the promise (albeit often commercialised) and complexity of a postmodern, post-industrial culture. The post-human body, she argues, is a becoming-machine. It has been meta(l)morphosed:

the post-human body is not merely split or knotted or in process: it is shot through with technologically-mediated social relations. It has undergone a meta(l)morphosis and is now positioned in the spaces in between the traditional dichotomies, including the body-machine binary opposition. In other words, it has become historically, scientifically and culturally impossible to distinguish bodies from their technologically-mediated extensions (2002, 228).¹⁴

In other words, Bulwer’s objection to the self-made body is that it has been technologised, made to deviate from its natural state into something artificial and hence monstrous. For Braidotti, on the other hand, the body in inherently a product of the somatechnologies through which it is experienced and made intelligible. Bodies indistinguishable from the technologies that shape them are exemplary if the chiasmic interdependence of soma and techné, in which coporealities are (trans)formed by technologies that are themselves always already embodied, in a process of mutually interwoven (re)production. It is for this reason that the post-human body, like the figure of the cyborg theorised by Donna Harraway and to which Braidotti’s work owes an acknowledged debt, provides a means by which to theorise feminism outside of the totalities and binaries that traditionally structure gendered understandings of embodiment.¹⁵

Through the meta(l)morphosis of their bodies women are able to rewrite the traditional humanist understandings of embodied subjectivity, and their cultural construction as different and monstrous, through a reclaiming of the technologies usually associated with the masculine and often assumed to exclude

¹⁴ Braidotti’s account of the post-human body resonates with that of Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, who claim that: “Posthuman bodies are not slaves to masterdiscourses, but emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context” (1995, 2).

¹⁵ In Donna Harraway’s account, the cyborg enables a productive rethinking of identity and difference within feminist context: “The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self,” she writes. “This is the self feminists must code” (1991, 163).
them. This reconfiguring of soma and techné thus provides a means by which women can seize, in Donna Haraway’s words, “the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (1991, 175).

It is in attributing this outcome to practices of self-transformation that the significance of the different conclusions reached by Braidotti and Bulwer can be fully appreciated. While, as we saw above, Bulwer’s work reflects the emergence of a newly individuated, autonomous concept of the body and self – who is therefore to be held responsible for the self-making s/he undertakes – that self is nonetheless incapable of controlling the consequences of such bodily modifications: where s/he believes these to be beautifying, they are really “ridiculous,” their perceived “fineness” is in actuality “filthy,” their Loveliness “loathsome.” Braidotti, on the contrary, critiques the humanist model of the self that is emergent in Bulwer’s study, while simultaneously arguing in favour of her agency and ability to deliberately (re)create herself in and against the somatechnologies at her disposal. Accordingly, while both Anthropometamorphosis and Metamorphoses could be said to describe forms of somatechnics, it is only in Braidotti’s work that we find elaborated a technologies of the self in the Foucauldian sense. In Foucault’s account, the “technologies of the self” are those practices “which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (1997, 225). These techné of the self do not constitute a set of prescriptions to which one must obediently adhere, Foucault emphasises, but rather constitute a form of ethical work “that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one’s conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behaviour” (1990, 27).

It is precisely this capacity for (re)making oneself through these technai that makes self-transformation such a source of possibility for Braidotti and of danger for Bulwer. Like the monster, the self-made body is fundamentally unstable, produced not according to a fixed set of rules and with a predetermined outcome, but as part of a series of processes whose results can never be determined in advance. As Heidegger reminds us, techné “is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts” (1977, 13). As such, techné is a form of creative activity: a “becoming” in Braidotti’s terms; an “art of living” in Foucault’s; or, in Heidegger’s, a “bringing-forth, [a] poiēsis” (1977, 13) through which the subject creates him/herself. In each of these theorisations, there is no pre-constituted subject who directs the process of self-making while retaining a fixed and stable identity him/herself. Rather, as Judith Butler argues, the subject is (trans)formed through this process:
Engaged in “arts of existence,” this subject is both crafted and crafting, and the line between how it is formed, and how it becomes a kind of forming, is not easily, if ever drawn. For it is not the case that a subject is formed and then turns around and begins suddenly to form itself. On the contrary, the formation of the subject is the institution of the very reflexivity that indistinguishably assumes the burden of formation (2002, 225).

This mutual (trans)formation is, as Butler recognises, at once a constitutive and critical act, one undertaken within the regulatory framework of the wider culture and its expectations, but also one that enables the subject to intervene in and hence modify that culture. Just as bodies are constituted in and through the cultural processes by which they become intelligible, so do the different forms those bodies take produce – and hence have the capacity to modify – the conditions and contexts of intelligibility. As Braidotti argues: “self and society are mutually shaped by one another through the choreography of entitlements, prohibitions, desires and controls which constitute the socio-symbolic field” (Braidotti 2002, 144). It is this potential to open up a space for new possibilities, for different kinds of becoming, that gives such practices the potential Braidotti celebrates and that Bulwer rails against. This is, precisely, Braidotti’s interest in such practices – not simply the possibilities they afford for an individuated subject, who comes into being in the early modern period amidst the opposition and resistance of writers like Bulwer, but also what opportunities they open up for the collective goal of a feminist politics, to produce corollary (trans)formation of the broader culture.

At the same time, and despite her stated intention to consider the way the different modes of becoming she examines can be used to particular ends, Braidotti also recognises that their full range of consequences and effects remains, inevitably, out of the control of the individual subject. In this respect, her work draws attention to the limits of the autonomous subject who is coming into being in Bulwer’s work. Unlike the early modern self-fashioning subject, the postmodern self-making subject is not understood to be entirely responsible for the practices of transformation s/he undertakes. For Bulwer, while the subject may be mistaken in his/her understanding of the outcomes of such practices – believing them to render him/her “lovely” when really they make him/her “loathsome,” etc. – s/he is nonetheless held personally responsible for the decision to undertake such acts. For Braidotti, however, such changes – bodily and cultural – are an inevitable part of the contemporary conditions of a post-industrial age: “In these times of accelerating changes,” as she writes

16 In Bodies That Matter, similarly, Butler questions: “How can there be an activity, a constructing, without presupposing an agent who proceeds and performs that activity” (1993, 7).
at the start of *Metamorphoses*, “we need to learn to think differently about ourselves and the processes of deep-seated transformation” (2002, 3). Rather than attributing recent discussions about self-transformation to an empirical increase in the actual incidence of bodily or subjective change, however, this paper has been concerned to draw attention to the historical and cultural contexts in which the different discursive constructions of various practices of self-transformation emerge and develop, and the significance of the way such change is understood.

Such comparative analyses are important because they allow us to examine the extent to which these need to be understood within their particular cultural contexts, and also because they allow us to interrogate more carefully some of the claims that underpin both Braidotti’s work and much of the discussion of self-making found in gender and queer theories as whole: that the celebration of the post-human body represents an ethical and epistemological break with a dominant cultural understanding of the body as natural, self-contained and autonomous. As we saw in *Anthropometamorphosis*, however, Bulwer’s central aim is actually to argue for the importance of the natural against what he sees as a widespread deviation from it. That is, he is establishing, rather than invoking, a particular concept of the natural body as something that is fixed and stable. His text actively makes a case for the importance – and, indeed, the very idea of – the natural body, which there would be no need to do if this was already accepted as the dominant corporeal norm. As Burns argues:

By combining a constant attack on the deviate with an inability to point to an actually existing norm, Bulwer took the position of a despairing conservation in the aftermath of a successful revolution and regicide. The “fixed” and natural body was in fact constantly being transformed into the monstrous body in a near-universal rebellion against the authority of nature (1999, 188).

In other words, the natural body emerges in Bulwer’s texts as that which is always already imperilled: it is not itself a stable entity but on the contrary a highly volatile concept.

An obvious way to interpret the uncertain status of the natural body in Bulwer’s text, and its role as an unquestionably dominant corporeal norm in Braidotti’s, is to see this construct as one that is emerging as a norm during the early modern period and is coming under increasing challenge by the postmodern. However, we might also productively question the extent to which the idea of the natural body did become unproblematically established as the dominant model for thinking about corporeality over that 350 year period. An alternative possibility is that, despite the constant invocation of the natural body in contemporary critical theory as a cultural norm with which the postmodern, post-human body newly breaks, the natural body has only ever been invoked
as an ideal precisely in order to be championed or challenged. Rather than the stable entity it is often assumed to be, then, we might think of the natural body as something itself constantly in transformation. It is for precisely this reason that the monstrous body has retained its cultural significance and power over this period: rather than something that deviates from an existing norm, we might think of the monstrous body as something whose very function is to establish new norms. As Halberstam notes: “The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities” (1995, 27). And it in this respect, she recognises, that “Monstrosity is almost a queer category” (1995, 27). The monstrous and queer body have in common the fact that they have no essential meaning in and of themselves but are rather malleable forms or forces ranged against a dominant order they threaten to disrupt. Both, moreover, represent strong investments in the possibilities of remaking oneself in and against dominant cultural expectations and norms through practices of self-transformation. In order to mobilise the productive potential of such practices, however, it is necessary, as Braidotti has argued, to reconceptualise corporeal difference itself in more positive terms, to strategic appropriate and redefine, as queer has done, one’s cultural construction as monstrous other.

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QUEER MONSTERS: TECHNOLOGIES OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION


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Chapter Six of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004, 165) asks a very precise question – ‘How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?’ It is perhaps interesting to note that this is a riddle to which Deleuze himself offers no substantive resolution.¹ The essay in *Plateaus*, which bears this conundrum as its title, establishes at length what the Body without Organs (BwO) is, how it functions within the apparatus of desire Deleuze conceived, and offers examples of various types of bodies that seem to meet the designated criteria of the BwO. However, it never actually adequately suggests an appropriate methodology through which a Body without Organs might purposively be obtained. In this chapter, I intend to posit one such methodology, one possible solution to this particular riddle.

The chapter centres on one particular mode of somatechnological interaction – body modification. In contrast to much of the other work on these types of technologies, which are often monopolised by questions regarding the intentionality that precedes them, this analysis foregrounds the technologised body as an object of ontological, phenomenological and visual interest in its own right and, as such, moves beyond the preoccupation with the pathologising ‘why’ towards the ‘how’ of the somatechnological body in the world. I refer to the particular practices I use in illustration because they are purposive – in that sense, they answer Deleuze’s question, ‘How …’ in a straightforward manner. Nevertheless, the motivations behind these practices, or, indeed, the very fact that they are purposive, have little bearing on whether these practices constitute a Body with Organs or how the bodies produced by these practices function.

¹ Brian Massumi suggests that this chapter contains ‘practical tips on how to [achieve a BwO] successfully’ (Massumi, 1992, 175n62). I find this claim far too strong.
Desiring-Production and the Body without Organs

The BwO as Deleuze describes it is born out of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project’s² conception of desire as a real flow or force actively produced by what Deleuze terms ‘desiring-machines’.

What a mistake to have ever said the id. Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it. The mouth of the anorexic wavers between several functions: its processor is uncertain as to whether it is an eating-machine, an anal-machine, a talking-machine, or a breathing machine (asthma attacks). Hence, we are all handymen: each with his little machines. For every organ-machine, an energy-machine: all the time, flows and interruptions. … Something is produced: the effects of a machine, not mere metaphors (2004, 1).

In this sense, desire flows through an endless, recursive circuit of desiring-machines. Desire produces reality. Within its superstructure there is no differentiation between product and process of production: everything is to be understood as a machine, from human organs through human organisms and out into the ‘natural’ world, all conduits producing, mediating and interrupting the flows of desire. Particular modalities of flows are understood to produce particular conditions of existence and particular political and social structures, and, as Paul Patton puts it, desire’s ubiquity ‘is the basis for their [Deleuze and Guattari’s] analysis of territorial, despotic and capitalist forms of social organisation in terms of the different abstract machines of desire present in each case’ (Patton 2000, 68).

This unquenchable circuit binds human subjects within its apparatus of desire and the universal usine of the desiring-machines, giving rise to human experience in all its turbulent forms. As individual human beings are themselves components within desiring-production, they too mediate flows of desire: ‘Desiring machines make us an organism,’ says Deleuze, ‘but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all’ (2004, 8). What Deleuze and Guattari mean here is that the human body is biologically constructed, subjectively

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² The BwO concept is first mentioned in the first chapter of *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Collectively, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* form the philosophical project known as *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 
experienced and socially managed in such a way that the particular way the
over-arching mechanism of the desiring-machine is experienced is inescapable,
and due to the very parameters of our embodiment, we are prone to suffering.
In essence, our biological specificity facilitates the oppressive potential of
oppressive types of desiring production.

But there is hope. If the organisation of the body could be transformed, the
treadmill of the particularly oppressive forms of desiring-machine structures
might be able to be resisted. If the rigidly-organised body is at the root of
our subjective entrapment in such circumstances, then it becomes possible to
imagine that a different kind of body, or a body organised in a different way,
must surely also provide an escape route. This body is the Body without Organs.
The BwO is presented as a method of resistance within and wilful perversion of
the desiring-machine superstructure, still within the confines of the production
circuit but as an element which liberates the flows, redirects and repulses them
in subversive ways, appropriates the mechanisms of the productive purpose
for its own ends, and generally disrupts the authority of desire in order to
undermine its influence.

‘Body without Organs’ is a term appropriated from theatrical iconoclast
Antonin Artaud’s poem *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, and its context
is important to note:

Man is sick because he is badly constructed
We must decide to strip him in order to scratch out this animalcule
Which makes him itch to death,

    god,
    And with god
    his organs.

For tie me down if you want to,
but there is nothing more useless than an organ.

When you have given him a body without organs,
then you will have delivered him from all this automatisms and restored
him to his true liberty. ((1947) 1995, 307)

Artaud had long suffered from delusions, hallucinations, divine visions and
violent episodes, and whilst writing *Judgement*, although not having explicitly been
informed of the fact, he was already riddled with the intestinal cancer which
would eventually kill him five months later. The poem is, as Clayton Eshleman
so eloquently explains, ‘preoccupied with the hopeless vulnerability of the given
human body and the necessity to reconstruct it’ (in Artaud, Eshleman and Bador
1995, 37), and it reads like the exhortation of the final, forlorn hope of a man
yearning for a body which could finally liberate him from his endless torment.
The term, with all its polemic urgency and its capacity for subversion already intact, had its genesis in the desperation of a dying man longing to escape the prison of his abjectly broken physical form. Artaud’s cry was intensely and actively political; it pleaded for ‘[a]n autopsy, in order to remake his anatomy’ ((1947) 1995, 307).

An autopsy dissects and flays the dead body in order to diagnose the cause of death. It is invasive and messy. It dismembers and reconfigures the human form with little regard for its sanctity. The pathologist is simultaneously clinical in his approach and violent in his action; his purposive means justify his destructive ends. An autopsy alone, to make Artaud’s BwO, is not enough though, as how can one remake the body if it is already post mortem? There needs to be a remaking following the dismantling, and that dismantling must come before the desire of death has completed its flow through Artaud’s body (see: Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 9). Consider, then, the case of Andrew, the subject of an interview with sociologist Victoria Pitts:

I’ve had bipedal flap surgery below the erectile ligament and trans-scrotal surgery, a bipedal flap surgery on the anterior wall of the scrotum, a subincision that’s two weeks old, three ten-inch long chest cuts, a full upper chest brand with a cautery scalpel, three facial cuts echoing the contours of the chest cuts that are respectively 4½ to 3½ inches, a symbol scarificed on the forehead with a scalpel, two equilateral frenums to balance a center frenum, three other frenums, a ladder of eight 6-gauge scrotum piercings at once … a full back-piece as the first tattoo, and tribal jewelry bands [tattoos] on all appendages\(^3\) [sic] (Pitts 2003, 172).

The multitude of cuts, incisions and piercings which make up Andrew’s body modification project are approaching the invasive trauma of the autopsy carried out on, and by, a living subject. Like the pathologist, a subject undergoing modificatory procedures will select specific corporeally destructive technologies and deploy them for specific ends (though they are transformative and not diagnostic). Andrew’s ‘autopsy’, like the one Artaud so clamoured for, is destructive only in its method; it deploys the pathologist’s tools (the dermal elevator, the needle, the suture, the scalpel) to its own reconstructive ends. Andrew’s is a body produced by the deliberate and purposive autopsic processes of invasive technology. His is a body which is the end product of body modification practices which are purposive (not pathological), elective (not enforced universally as the result of a normative cultural practice such as the circumcision of infants) and transformative (not intended to return the body to

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\(^3\) ‘Frenums’ here refers to male genital piercings which are performed through the surface skin of the main shaft of the penis but which do not enter the urethra or the principal tissue of the penile shaft itself.
an approximation of its previous form following an accident). Crucially, his is a specific and particular type of somatechnological body – a body that is not body + technology, soma and techné, but a specific and particular body and embodiment that has come to be through technological mediation and interaction. Andrew’s modifications are a particularly amplified (perhaps even parodic or caricatured) example of the interrelationships between bodies and technologies, but this is not to exaggerate any disjunction between his corporeality ‘before’ and ‘after’ each successive procedure. There is no before or after technés.

This conception of somatechnics is intended to illustrate that it is not sufficient, of course, to conceive of Andrew’s body (and bodies like his; and all bodies) as a body augmented by technology. Instead, his is a body changed by technologies into another body; another type of body; a body become; a body enfleshing a particular mode of somatechnological being. Deleuzean metaphysics recognises the mechanistic properties of all forms of existence, and pointedly understands the inextricability of human beings from the technologies and systems they create, inhabit, submit to and fight against, even when such conceptions seem counter-intuitive. Similarly, the critical project of somatechnics is intended to highlight similar chiasmatic interdependency of bodies and the always-already technologised world they inhabit, bringing light to the ways in which technés (‘the dynamic means in and through which corporealities are crafted’ in the words of the editors of this collection) mediate our modes of interaction in the world.

Might Andrew’s body, and bodies like his, provide an answer to Deleuze’s question? Deleuze uses the bodies of the hypochondriac, the schizophrenic, the junkie and the masochist as his illustrative examples of BwOs, but all of these models are unsatisfactory as none of them are purposively able to be obtained, nor sustainable in any usefully productive way. As strategies of resistance within oppressive forms of desiring-production, masochism and drug-addiction are entirely useless and ineffectual, as although they do demonstrate what form resistance might take, they are unsustainable and unable to address how one can actually make or purposively produce a BwO.

**Power, Politics and Purposive Actions**

Positing potential for purposive action is often contentious within certain modes of academic discourse, particularly those which consider the inter-relations of

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4 Masochism and drug-addiction are only useless and ineffectual if you accept Deleuze’s perhaps rather contentious characterisation of them, of course. The case for the rehabilitation of masochism and/or addiction within Deleuzean philosophy lies outside the scope of this argument.
power and desire. In a system where power is pervasive, omnipresent, hegemonic and oppressive, it often becomes difficult to accept that any kind of freedom of choice, or indeed any kind of freedom at all, is even possible.\footnote{This is a key problem in certain readings of Foucault (see, for example the essays collected in Diamond and Quinby 1988; similar observations can be found in Patton 2000, 74).}

Enter Deleuze. In \textit{Deleuze and the Political}, Patton describes Deleuzean ethics as ‘an ethics of freedom’ (Patton 2000, 83), though he is careful to explain how this differs from an understanding of freedom in a classical liberal sense. Patton’s analysis is worth expanding upon at some length: Deleuze certainly does privilege creative transformation which emphasises some form of individual agency, though this is not to imply that everyone is free to do anything at any time. Quite the contrary. Freedom in the liberal tradition, Patton explains, ‘remains tied to a concept of the subject as a given, determinate structure of interests, goals or desires’. In this sense, then, freedom ‘still refers to the capacity of the subject to act in pursuit of a given set of interests, rather than the capacity to alter those interests’ (Patton 2000, 84). Liberal freedom is entirely predicated on the preservation of subjectivity. Critical freedom, the implicit concept of freedom within Deleuzean thought, though, ‘differs from the standard liberal concepts of positive and negative freedom by its focus upon the conditions of change or transformation in the subject, and by its indifference to the individual or collective nature of the subject’ (Patton 2000, 83). ‘Critical’ here is intended to indicate the transitional moment, or crisis-point, in the metamorphosis from one state to another – critical freedom, then, is ‘the freedom to transgress the limits of what one is presently capable of being or doing, rather than just the freedom to be or do those things’ (Patton 2000, 85). Deleuzean freedom is not the freedom to act indiscriminately in pursuit of selfish self-interest, but instead the capacity to challenge one’s individual modes of being, or, more affirmatively, to affect a transformation in oneself, to become. Quoting James Tully, Patton goes on to say that critical freedom ‘refer[s] to this capacity to “question in thought and challenge in practice one’s inherited cultural ways”’ (2000, 85).

In certain circumstances, body modification can be said to function in this way, enabling the transformation of subjectivities rather than simply existing as a product of deterministic desires (as I will expand upon further). If the Deleuzean model is correct, it seems that body modification practices act to queer somatechnics in a specific set of politically useful ways. The principles of political engagement within the Deleuzean project are perhaps best summarised by Michael Foucault in his preface to \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, wherein he sets out the practical utility of Deleuzean thought to working against oppressive social structures:
A SOMATECHNOLOGICAL PARADIGM

This art of living counter to all forms of fascism, whether already present or impending, carries with it a certain number of essential principles which I would summarize as follows if I were to make this great book into a manual or guide for everyday life:

- Free political action from all unitary and totalizing paranoia.
- Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchization.
- Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.
- Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force.
- Do not use thought to ground a political practice in Truth; nor political action to discredit, as mere speculation, a line of thought. Use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of the forms and domains for the intervention of political action.
- Do not demand of politics that it restores the ‘rights’ of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to ‘de-individualize’ by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization.
- Do not become enamored of power (Michael Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari 2004, xv-xvi).

What Foucault is calling for here is not that each individual subject act pursuant only to their desires, but that each individual be mindful of the critical potential (the becoming, or queering) of their actions within power structures. Power cannot be escaped, and as such resistance must instead take the form of (positive, active, queer) perversion. An individual is obviously not ‘free’ to engage in body modification projects in the sense that the means and the modes of body modification practices are universally available. They certainly are not. They are, however, free in perhaps what might roughly be called an existentalist sense, resembling that praised by Simone de Beauvoir in The Ethics of Ambiguity. The assignation of freedom in this way is certainly individualistic, ‘if one means by that that it accords to the individual an absolute value in that it recognizes in him alone the power of laying the foundations of his own existence’ (Beauvoir 1948, 156), though this should not be seen to accord with what de Beauvoir calls ‘the
anarchy of personal whim’ In other words, human beings are born with the essential (existential) capacity for self-determination, but this must necessarily be balanced with an understanding that all others have (and deserve) this same capacity.\(^6\) When Foucault, in summary of Deleuze, encourages individuals to ‘[d]evelop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition and disjunction’, he is essentially encouraging an active deployment of individual freedoms in precisely these terms. Conscious (or purposive) somatechnic engagement is but one way of expressing these critical freedoms. Critical freedom, is inalienable even if liberal freedom is not, and the conditions for critical freedom are always present in individual subjects; each embodying infinite potentialities for becomings. In other words, the modifier is free to choose to transform their body within the limits of what is available to them.\(^7\)

For Deleuze, becomings are affects and affects are becomings. ‘Defining bodies in terms of the affects of which they are capable is equivalent to defining them in terms of the relationships into which they can enter with other bodies, or in terms of their capacities for engagement with the powers of other bodies’ (Patton 2000, 78). These affects, the interactions of bodies with each other and with their environments, in some respects mirror the dynamism and notions of ‘becoming’ embedded in somatechnics (as a mode of critical enquiry and those operations which are the subject of such enquiry), understanding that technologies and techné are essentially transformative, continuously producing critical (or even occasionally queer) moments. The force for making these affective interactions politically adept is simply to become aware of when, and how they are operating. As already explained, the core argument of somatechnics as a critical project is that there is no disjunction between bodies and technologies. That much is clear. What Deleuzean thought adds to this is a political understanding that an awareness of the critical/queer potential of product bodies can render individuals subversively powerful. Because the Deleuzean world-view of the interconnectedness of Man [sic] and World parallels the central implication of somatechnics, and as the Body without Organs is in this respect a somatechnological concept, it is my contention that the BwO is a somatechnological paradigm. Understanding how you can make yourself a Body without Organs is to understand how the truism of somatechnics (that

\(^{6}\) A similar, though methodologically distinct, perspective on the inalienable freedom of human subjects arises in Daniel Dennett’s *Freedom Evolves* (Dennet 2003). De Beauvoir’s *Ethics* aims to develop solutions to what many critics had perceived as the central problem of existentialist thought — that is, the problem of combining its notions of individual freedom with models of social responsibility.

\(^{7}\) This freedom also re-affirms how a distinction can be made between understanding that a particular modification is purposive — it is the expression of critical freedom — and that the reason why this modification is undertaken is tangential.
there is no soma and no techné, only the somatechnic) can actually be useful as a programme of queerly-orientated politics and not simply as a philosophically critical practice.

**Resisting Stratification**

Counter-hegemonic practice, if it is to be possible, must be aware of the oppressive structures it is to work against. As P. O’Connor has explained,

[r]esistance is directed at not being a docile or useful body … resistance happens when we stop the search for our ‘truth’, when we fight against the experts telling us who and what we are, when we refuse to be docile bodies. If power is targeted at the body, then it is the body that is the site of resistance (P. O’Connor quoted in Cooper 1995, 124).

That is to say, even when power is understood to be everywhere – an understanding with which the Deleuzean model, with its universal assemblages, would certainly concur – freedom is still attainable if it is pursued in a way that is conscious of the ways in which power structures function. A politics which cannot conceive of an active mode of resistance is no politics at all. This is at the core of my argument here, though it is hardly a novel or controversial statement – the body as the site of resistance.

The BwO exists necessarily as a resistant entity, and as a concept which is, by its very nature, in opposition to the status quo. It is queer. Its very parameters are defined by the way in which it is able to problematise and undermine the desiring-production process, and thus it seems pertinent for this discussion to examine how the theoretical antagonisms of the BwO are born out by the material experience of those who actively choose to modify their bodies in non-normative ways. As I hope to show, this conflation of antagonisms allows us not only to posit body modification practice as a usefully subversive act (through queering our quotidian corporealities), it also serves to counter certain inadequacies in arguments which have understood body modification in a less than sympathetic way. In this way, the examination will be reflexive, as I will contend that the modified body is a Body without Organs, and simultaneously the BwO framework is a useful tool for conceptualising the somatechnological body.

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8 I use the term ‘modification’ throughout this chapter in the same sense as Pitts (2003). All bodies are, of course, modified to some degree or another; the arguments here refer specifically to those forms of modification that might be called ‘radical’, ‘non-normative’ or ‘subcultural’.
To what, then, is the BwO resistant? Deleuze insists that there are three strata that ‘directly bind us’. These three things are the sum of the desiring-machine’s power. The imposition of organisation, subjectivity and signification on the body is at the heart of desiring-production’s continued, recursive hegemonic influence, and the BwO’s principal power comes from its antagonism to these three quite specific demands:

You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you’re just depraved. You will be a signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you’re just a tramp (2004, 176-177).

Throughout the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project, Deleuze describes the organism, the signified and the subject as ‘strata’, functional components of desiring-production which in specific circumstances serve to oppress human beings and prevent them from reaching the ‘plane of consistency’, the point at which flows and intensities may move freely and the moment at which complete liberation from the desiring-machine system may be achieved.

Whereas the organism ducts and channels flows in predictable ways, the BwO produces a plane of consistency upon which desire can gush unencumbered. Deleuze imagines this plane as a ‘movement of generalized deterritorialization in which each person takes and makes what she or he can, according to tastes she or he will have succeeded in abstracting from a Self’ (2004, 174); desire is still present, but instead it is liberated from the desiring-machine apparatus. The Deleuzean masochist, for example, uses ‘suffering as a way of constituting a body without organs and bringing forward the plane of consistency of desire’ (2004, 172), which is to say that he is able to use painful procedures to liberate his body in order to achieve a desire not limited by the bounds imposed by the system of desiring-production. The BwO is the (de)construction which makes the plane of consistency possible and the limit at which the plane of consistency exists.

Each stratum is intertwined with a particular specificity of phenomenological experience, and each specificity must be detached from its corresponding stratum if a full BwO is to be obtained. The organism is the stratum of the organs and it imposes an oppressive organisation on the body itself. Signification is the stratum of the unconscious, and it encodes the content of expressive desire in a restrictive manner. Subjectification is the stratum of the conscious, and is the process through which the modes and forms of expression themselves, abstract of their content, are restrained.

I will come to each of these in turn, but I wish to examine in the first instance the organisation of the organism. Organism here refers to the totality of the...
human body and the specific organisation of its organs which precipitate the flow of desire. Hunger, want, need, lust; all these intensities and flows are the product of the organisation of the organs which we call the organism. We are subdued into finding comfort in this very organisation by the flows of desire themselves, and are in bondage to our physiology. That the intact body is docile and submissive allows the establishment of medical and political authority, and that this organism we call the body is so inherently fragile, easy to break, quick to become infected, malignant or cancerous only exacerbates our capitulation to desiring production. The organism can only function if all its parts are intact, and indeed, the very desire for the body to remain intact is in itself a method whereby the influence of oppressive power structures is keenly observed.

Deleuze and Guattari’s polemic is rich with exhortations of dismantling and deconstruction, daring subjects to ‘walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin, breathe with your body’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 167). In terms of resistance to the organism, the most obvious correlation between the Deleuzean model of the Body without Organs and the modified body is the scant regard body modifiers such as Andrew seem to show for the fragility of their bodies and the wilfully joyous way in which they seem to embrace this same fragility. Seizing upon the malleability of the flesh as something to be revelled in and not dreaded, they cut, excise, bifurcate, implant, pierce and scar their bodies with abandon. Such practices show no deference to the organism and its desires, and the parallels with the Deleuzean model seem straightforward.

Whilst no technologies yet exist, of course, which permit the sinuses to actually sing, even some quite simple body modification practices do undermine and expand upon bestowed biology. For example, a small cabal of people have experimented with the implantation of magnets in the fingers which allow the individual to ‘see’ magnetic fields, the interactions of the magnets and their nervous system providing tangible sensation when in the presence of magnets or magnetically induced currents. Tongue splitting, the separation of the tongue into two halves by slicing between the lingual muscles with a scalpel, actually produces what is essentially a new organ, blessed with ranges of movement and sensation inexplicable to someone cursed from birth to only have had one tongue. Subincision, the flaying open of the male genitals by cutting from the urethral opening down the shaft, also permits a new range of sexual sensation and behaviour anyone with a fundamentally organic penis can never experience. Desires and intensities never possible when the organism is intact are suddenly able to flow freely. These are critical moments; becomings.

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9 These experiments, whilst expanding the spectrum of sensation, have proven technologically problematic. See http://www.bmezine.com/news/pubring/20060115.html and /20060115.html as well as associated articles for more details.
It strikes me that this rupture is entirely at the heart of the somatechnics project. The disassembling and conflating logic of the very term ‘somatechnics’, eliding the ‘and’ that separates body and technology, is a linguistic and conceptual turn that neatly encompasses the freedom Deleuze envisaged. There is no ‘and’ in the combination of bodies with technologies, only a contiguous, somatechnic organism. The body is always a product of technology, always already somatechnological, but it is heterogeneous.

The eventual capacity to reorganise the human body is limited only by our technological audacity. It is a matter of excited discussion amongst cultural theorists, biologists, futurists and transhumanists, amongst others, as to where the limits of capacity to modify the human body might be found. These discussions are controversial and often ethically troubling, but, nevertheless, it becomes ever easier to postulate a utopian corporeal future where any body, of any conceivable sort, is not only possible but available to all. In the meantime, even operations which are relatively quick to carry out and require few tools outside of a scalpel and a steady hand can result in a radically different phenomenological ontology and a body which is a transgressive anathema to many people, as only small changes are required to upset the delicate totality of the organism. Even those who study body modifiers in depth from a psychiatric perspective often remain confounded by the behaviour of these individuals, precisely because these types of procedures resist the holistic integrity of the organism, and the modified body that results from them is an affront to common notions of corporeal wholeness. Moreover, they are procedures which are dealt with harshly by most hegemonic power structures: Western countries frown upon practising medicine without a licence; British law as established in R. vs. Brown forbids the defence of consent against charges of assault; 2003 saw several US states explicitly ban tongue splitting; corporate and educational structures are able to exert great control over the bodies of those within their organisations.

Essentially, as the Deleuzean model predicts, deviation from a consensus understanding of what is acceptable corporeal practice in relation to the organism’s organisation is met with confusion and condemnation. Why is the modified body so confusing? The deliberate construction of a disarticulate body leads into the second of desiring-production’s oppressive strata – signification. There is a certain resistance to signification which arises simply from the previously described antagonism, because interpreting an organism’s signification is to some degree grounded in a structuralist understanding of its organisation. ‘[S]ignificance clings to the soul just as the organism clings to the body’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 177). However, a body’s signification is not wholly how it is to be understood, but what it unconsciously wishes to be.

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10 See debates raging over xenotransplantation and stem-cell research, for example.
understood *as*, and the BwO in the first instance seems to actively, and queerly, refuse to express any coherent message at all.

This queer lack of coherency is frustrating. Simplistically, it is possible to suggest that much of the disdain for body modification practice arises from a lack of empathy caused by the modified body’s inability or unwillingness to articulate itself fully. Like the BwO and as a BwO, the modified body simply makes no sense to the organism. ‘In order to resist using words composed of articulated phonetic units’, the BwO ‘utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 10). Armando Favazza, a clinical psychiatrist, seems to concur with this, also drawing upon an auditory analogy in expressing that the ‘desperate measures [of self-mutilators] are upsetting to those of us who try to achieve these goals in a *more tranquil manner*’ (Favazza 1996, 323, emphasis mine). If there is such a thing as a language of the body, then the language of the lasting, visible testaments to the moment of wilfully inflicted wounding is entirely alien to the intact organism, which is, if Favazza is to be believed, sensibly determined to avoid injury, to prevent pain and to conceal disfigurements.

And yet the modified body’s capacity for interjecting into signification also works at another, more subtle level. I wish to illustrate the ways in which the modified body further fulfils the BwO’s mode of resistance to signification with particular reference to the act of tattooing, particularly as it would seem, at first glance, that tattooing is inherently a signifying process. The tattoo has been and continues to be simplistically read as the writing on the body of a semiotic sign produced by particular signifying subject. For example, if the fact that Theresa Green’s *Tattoo Encyclopedia* even exists is not proof enough of this phenomenon, a quote from its introduction will demonstrate precisely how pervasive this model is:

[T]attoos are forms of expression. … The thought that the tattoo is capable of expressing so many different concepts, and is therefore a means of communication, is not a new one. Writers, observers, tattooists and the tattooed have all remarked upon this aspect. We seem to intuitively seek something beneath the surface and behind the obvious to explain what we see. The silent exchange that takes place between the bearer and viewer of the tattoo may be one of the most interesting and important aspects of the whole process. Nevertheless it is an aspect that receives curiously little attention over and above its mention. That light treatment may be due to the fact that much of what we understand when we see a tattoo is communicated through symbolism (Green 2003, vii).

In *Tattooed Bodies: Subjectivity, Textuality, Ethics and Pleasure*, Nikki Sullivan argues persuasively that this ‘expression-reception model of communication as the intentional expression of a sign designating the thought of an innate I, and
the subsequent reception and deciphering of this sign (truth) by the other’ (Sullivan 2001, 47) is highly problematic, and I am indebted to her analysis of this model in my suggestions here. Essentially, the basis of Sullivan’s argument with the expression-reception model is that its simplistic reliance on what she terms ‘dermal diagnosis’ elides the constitution of the diagnostician’s own subjectivity in their deciphering of the sign, and (incorrectly) presupposes that an immutable signified truth is even productively or receptively possible. It is perfectly possible, of course, to get a tattoo that means nothing at all, one which is interpreted differently by different people, or one which is highly idiosyncratic. To illustrate this, Sullivan mentions the case of an individual with H-A-T-E tattooed on his knuckles: under examination, he claims this tattoo (now) signifies ‘Happiness All Through Eternity’, its reception simply as HATE is misguided. He has been through a journey with his tattoo, for all its appearance as a permanent, immutable sign of subjective intention, and ‘the responses of others to his tattoos will inform the ways in which he both understands and experiences them’ (2001, 20). The consequences of this contention are marked: to the untattooed, tattoos only look like non-verbal communication. In previous generations, they were diagnosed as clear marks of primitivism or criminality; now, they may be read as fashion statements, markers of group identity or post-modern cultural appropriation, but with each passing generation they maintain the appearance – at least in the West – of immutable signification of a specific truth whilst the perception of what that truth might actually be has changed with the times.

In Deleuzean terms, a subject who tattoos their body is resisting signification by playing precisely on these preconceptions that Sullivan unmasks.

You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 178).

It is not enough for the BwO to be insignificant, it must redeploy significance to its own ends. In this way the modified body is disarticulate whilst appearing articulate, an uncanny double betrayal. It is able to appropriate commonalities of perception and turn them against themselves, and is all the more unsettling and subversive for it.

The third of Deleuze’s strata is subjectification, closely bound up in signification but distinct from it. In the Deleuzean paradigm, where signification is to be understood as the expression of the unconscious, subjectification is the assignation of a conscious process which might account for the deployment of
any specific signifying sign. The signified requires a subject and a subjectivity in
to allow its genesis – put simply, what begins as subjective desire results in
signification. Because of this, desiring-production requires an orderly subject,
whose subjectivity is clear and bounded, to produce ordered signification.
Subjectification enforces a specific logic of behaviour (a specific subjectivity,
a specific consciousness) and interpretation, and throughout *A Thousand
Plateaus* the impression arises that, in relation to the BwO at least, it is the
hegemonic insistence upon a dominant logic of subjectivity which is actually
at the core of our entrapment. ‘How can we unhook ourselves from the points
of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant rebellion’, asks
Deleuze. Answering his own question, he goes on to explain that the answer
lies in ‘[t]earing the conscious away from the subject in order to make it a means
of exploration’ (2004, 177), and it is useful to try and unravel what exactly this
might entail.

Artaud is quoted by Deleuze describing that the conscious:

knows what is good for it and what is of no value to it: it knows which thoughts
and feelings it can receive without danger and with profit, and which are harmful
to the exercise of its freedom. Above all, it knows just how far its own being
goes, and just how far it has not yet gone or does not have the right to go without
sinking into the unreal, the illusory, the unmade, the unprepared (Artaud, quoted
in Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 177).

The implication here is that if this ‘knowledge’ can somehow be undermined
or perverted, subjectification itself will begin to crumble. In terms of body
modification, I wish to present one specific practice which might constitute
a useful strategy in this respect, namely flesh-hook suspension. In a body-
modification context, suspension is the practice of hanging the body from
hooks pierced directly through the skin. It has its origins in the tribal rituals
of the Mandan tribe of Native Americans (see Catlin 1976) and, whilst it has
no inherent aesthetic intention, it is relevant to the discussion at hand because
it has been appropriated and eagerly embraced in a recent Western context by
those within the body modification subculture. The only visible and material
results of suspensions are small scars left by the hooks themselves, but it is
suspension’s particular capacity for transformation of consciousness which I
wish to bring to this particular discussion.

The Mandan themselves used suspension rituals as one part of a broader
corporeal devotion to their spirit god. A young brave would have splints pierced
into his chest and then be raised by ropes attached to these splints to be hung
from the ceiling of the lodge. Wailing in devotion to the Great Spirit, ‘the
sounds of which no imagination can ever reach’, they would hang there until
they fainted and then, once their unconscious bodies were lowered, they would
be left untouched until such time as they came round again of their own accord. During this ritual, Catlin says, the braves ‘were here enjoying their inestimable privilege of voluntarily entrusting their lives to the Great Spirit’ (1976, 65), and indeed the very purpose of the rituals themselves was to allow the Mandan warriors to experience and understand God in such a way that would not be possible otherwise.

Consider these practices, then, in light of the Deleuzean model of the BwO. Before being suspended, the brave is nailed down by his subjectification and never truly able to understand the divine. In the Mandan’s belief system, it is simply impossible to truly experience the nature of their god without engaging in the suspension rituals. The strata of subjectification enforces a material limit on the brave’s consciousness; the profane consciousness is unable to know God. Once the suspensions have begun, this material limit is split asunder by the sudden, jarring disconnection of conscious experience and materialist subjection and as a result, the brave is afforded countless novel ‘forms of expression and regimes of signs’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 148): a subjectivity radically different from that originally bestowed upon him.

For the Mandan, of course, these suspensions were actually part of the dominant ideology, and I do not seek to suggest that they were subversive to the organisational structure of Mandan society. I would suggest, however, that in some respects all invasively transformative corporeal technologies function in largely similar ways when it comes to broadening and complicating the limits of conscious experience, and the clearly delineated bounds of the Mandan’s metaphysical experience in theistic terms is purely a very vivid and easily grasped example of how somatic experience may push forward an individual’s consciousness. The practice, though torturous, was rapturous and devotional in nature, and allowed each brave to seek proximity with his God; in effect, they were using corporeal practice to mediate and queerly affect conscious experience.

Can body modification liberate the individual from an oppressive structure of desire then? It is my contention that non-mainstream body modification is deconstructive, and thus resists the strata of the organism. It disarticulates, and thus resists signification and interpretation. It is consciously dynamic, and thus it resists subjectification. It seems possible to suggest, then, that the modified body, as a Body without Organs which can be achieved through purposive intention, is indeed a route out of oppression, resistant as it is to the principal shackles of human experience. Nevertheless, there is a conundrum which arises from the fact that because body modification is an elective choice, it remains mired in the structure of desire it claims to resist. The bodies of Deleuze’s masochist, schizophrenic and junkie are without organs as a by-product of their conditions, and at the very root of these bodies’ resistive power is the very fact that they lie outside of desire in and of themselves. We might envy them
and their sloughing off of their organs, but as soon as we direct that envy into emulative action, it becomes desire. Whilst I suggested earlier that body modification can be purposively used to obtain a BwO, could it not be argued that, in a capitalist system which uses the image of the tattooed body to sell designer perfume, body modification itself is simply another desiring-machine? Is the BwO wholly unobtainable precisely because to seek to obtain it would involve complicity in the desiring-production assemblage?

Is Resistance Futile?

This hopelessness at the heart of what is otherwise a hugely hopeful thesis is frustrating, but it is one which Deleuze and Guattari seek to address. They point out that all this resistance requires a modicum of caution, for you ‘don’t reach the BwO, and its plane of consistency, by wildly destratifying’ (2004, 178). As Brian Massumi explains, ‘The degree of danger [in achieving a BwO] increases apace with the degree of freedom … All the more reason to make the escape with the utmost sobriety’ (Massumi 1992, 85). Critical freedom must always be expressed cautiously. The BwO can be botched, and Deleuze and Guattari describe three particular outcomes of the destratification process, of which only one is truly emancipatory.

There are in fact several ways of botching the BwO: either one fails to produce it, or one produces it more or less, but nothing is produced on it, intensities do not pass or are blocked. … If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole or even dragged towards catastrophe. Staying stratified is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into a demented or suicidal collapse which brings them back down on us heavier than ever (2004, 178).

The first outcome, produced by over-zealous destratification, is the ‘empty BwO’. This is the body emptied of organs; the body of the junkie which, though destratified, is impotent. The junkie’s superfluity of desire, of unrestrained desire entirely divorced from the constraints of desiring-production, is precisely the problem – there is too much unconstrained desire, too much willingness to break from the order of desiring-production. Whilst resisting the strata, the junkie neglects to engage in remaking that which he has destroyed, and as such flows and intensities are quenched by a taut, resistant surface. In effect, by severing all links with desiring-production, the empty BwO loses all capacity to engage with it and to undermine it; any power it might have had as a tool of liberation is negated. As I have sought to suggest, the modified body is far from
empty – it is joyous, playful, wilfully subversive and actively reconstructive. It may be true to say that self-harm, self-mutilation or the random infliction of violence on one’s own body would produce an empty BwO, as the infliction of wounds is the totality of the self-harmer’s intention. But is something quite different to refigure corporeality after a purposive end even if using the same methods of destruction that might otherwise result in emptiness?

The second outcome Deleuze and Guattari warn against is the opposite to the first, as it is the result of an over-abundance of construction. This cancerous BwO, as Deleuze and Guattari call it, is so eager to construct dementedly that it ends up recreating the oppressive strata it has just destroyed. It fascistically reconstructs the very same strata until they are eventually as oppressive, if not more so, than those it originally sought to pervert. It is admittedly difficult to refute the accusation that the modified body is itself a cancerous BwO: body modification subculture often skirts close to this over-abundance of construction, and it has, in some ways, been complicit in replacing one set of strata with others which seem strikingly similar. The typical organisation of the modified body into a distinct sub-cultural aesthetic, for example, can often mirror the oppressive processes of ‘beautiful’ organisation which it was subject to before its reconfiguration. Nevertheless, this does not preclude any individual body from undergoing modificatory procedures outside of this sub-culturally normative aesthetic, and perhaps serves as a cautionary tale to those embarking on a modificatory project of their own. It might be necessary to use body-modification techniques to produce a BwO resistant to body modification culture itself, but this does not undermine modification’s essential capacity as a tool for producing a BwO.

Between these two poles of desolation and malignancy, then, lies the full BwO:

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find the potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of land at all times. It is through

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11 I use the terms ‘self-harm’ here in the pathological sense that Favazza seeks to constrain it in Bodies Under Siege. Whilst I do not agree that all behaviours labelled ‘self-harm’ or ‘self-mutilation’ are pathological, there evidently are pathologies which produce self-mutilating behaviour.

12 I am firmly of the opinion that similar logic can be used to rehabilitate other technologies and techniques – the practice of cosmetic surgery, for example. Perceived problems with such technologies can be overcome if they are examined with these models in mind.
meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO (2004, 178).

The fully-fledged, fully-formed BwO is able to mimic the strata of desiring production and thus use them, playfully, for its own subversive ends. This is a crucial point, as it underlines precisely why BwOs, though functioning within the architecture of power, embody such counter-hegemonic potential. It is precisely because the BwO is able to take the artefacts of power systems (in the body modification sense, for example, exchanging capital for a socially-disruptive or formally anti-materialist dispositif such as a tattoo) that it embodies such potential as a mode of resistance. The BwO remains within the structural framework of desiring-production, but only so it can gleefully redirect, scatter and pollute its flows. In this sense, whilst undergoing these types of body modifications in a Western context will always be instigated by desire and mediated by capitalism, the results of these modifications may be intensely troubling to the structures of desire and capitalism themselves. Indeed, this proximity to its mortal enemy is actually necessary for the modified body to have any resistive power at all. The queering that these somatechologies engender is a function of precisely this proximity, unravelling the power of hegemonic capitalism by turning its own modes of production against themselves.

There is a polemic of revolt woven through *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and its battle-cry is as follows:

Where psychoanalysis says ‘Stop, find yourself again,’ we should say instead ‘Let’s go further still, we haven’t found our BwO yet, we haven’t sufficiently dismantled ourselves.’ Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It’s a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 167).

If the modified body truly is a Body without Organs, imagining body modification in Deleuzean terms is endlessly useful in understanding many of its facets, many of which I haven’t even begun to explore here. By extension, the particular intricacies I have attempted to illustrate with reference to body modification practice might be of utility and relevance to the broader somatechnics project, able as it is to ground particular modes of embodiment in a framework that simultaneously explains why somatechnological interaction is so problematic for individuals and the power structures they inhabit, and how such interaction might be deployed as a means of subversive liberation: the BwO philosophy can account for much of the authoritarian and social displeasure shown towards invasive practices of all kinds; it can explain why
one tattoo or one cosmetic surgery procedure never seems to be enough; it can postulate the developmental course and aspirational goals of transhumanism; it can account for the construction of an over-arching sub-cultural aesthetic and the appropriation of sub-cultural practice into the mainstream language of capitalism; it can show why such appropriations are problematic and it can show how to resist them. It seems to offer a clarity of conception that much of the discourse on corporeally transformative technologies lack, and it simultaneously provides both a guide-book for navigating structural hegemony and a manifesto for resisting it.

References


… Transitoriness could be interpreted as enjoyment of productive and destructive force, as continual creation …

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1050

**Introduction**

One of the most tantalising features of Nietzsche’s work is his persistent appeal towards, and preference for, the body. The body in Nietzsche represents a kind of organisational mid-point between the chaos of the world, and the template of subjective interpretation.¹ To speak of ‘the body’ is to produce a kind of conceptual snapshot bound to distort that which is far more mobile and evasive. It’s very hard for us humans to grasp a reality continually in motion, because our very means of understanding tends towards stasis, towards thinking of beings and objects as fixed states of affairs.² Nor does language help in this regard.³ Language for Nietzsche is the vehicle of herd interests, rather than the singularities of corporeal life.⁴ It operates as a network of exchange, a means of transmission, whereby values are circulated, and meaning is disseminated. Human subjectivity is, in turn, the individualised corollary of the group, the

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1 ‘The body is therefore an intermediary between the absolute plural of the world’s chaos, and the absolute simplification of intellect’ (Blondel 1991, 207).
2 Claire Colebrook writes: ‘The very concept of the subject is tied to a strategy of being and essence, rather than becoming’ (Colebrook 1999, 117).
3 Klossowski notes that, for Nietzsche, ‘we have no language to express what is in becoming’ (Klossowski 2005, 38). Further, that ‘We are only a succession of discontinuous states in relation to the code of everyday signs, and about which the fixity of language deceives us’ (Klossowski 2005, 32).
4 For example, Nietzsche (2001, 211).
place where morality surfaces as a dominant and constraining interpretation of life. From a genealogical point of view, consciousness is an endpoint, the cultural residue of successive interpretations and formations of value which, crudely speaking, work against the potential of bodies to affirm and enhance life. In dynamic terms, consciousness represents active force turned in on itself. The advent of consciousness is the simultaneous demise of active force. Hence, Nietzsche’s many appeals to the body as the superior option – towards what Klossowski calls ‘the guiding thread of the body’ (Klossowski 2005, 24). Nietzsche and Klossowski argue against the lucidity of the subject-position, against its sedimented identity which, they claim, can never match a body in perpetual flux.

Nietzsche is very critical about the role which consciousness plays in compromising the good health of the body. As perhaps the art of corporeal becomings, dance would appear to be a worthy antidote to the inadequacies of consciousness. After all, dance is an art of bodily values. If Nietzsche’s rejection of (human) agency as the source of action were to be adopted, it could be argued that movement is the generative force of dance, that the body (re)produces itself through dancing. However, it’s not so easy to separate the dancer from the dance. Taking up the example of modern and contemporary dance, it could be argued that the dancing body is as much a force against corporeal change as it is an incitement towards it. I shall argue both ways, that there is a sense in which the dancer’s body is a conservative force but also that the body is ‘always already’ unstable, liable to change, and is therefore complicit in the dynamism of corporeal becoming. I want to draw out these two aspects of corporeal possibility – the kinaesthetically conservative versus the corporeally productive – by thinking about dance technique, firstly, in relation to movement subjectivity but, secondly, through the body alone, beyond or outside the subject-position altogether. These two approaches represent two moments of somatechnical thinking. The first perspective imagines movement subjectivity as a field constituted through an intertwining between the lived body and its dynamic materialisation, its somatechnologisation, if you like. The second perspective rejects subjectivity altogether, to focus on a field of transitory (queer) becomings, whose successive corporeal transformation ensues from the driving force of a Nietzschean will to power. This latter

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5 ‘Wherever we encounter a morality, we find an evaluation and ranking of human drives and actions. These evaluations and rankings are always the expression of the needs of a community and herd: that which benefits it the most – and second most, and third most – is also the highest standard of value for all individuals. With morality the individual is instructed to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function … Morality is herd-instinct in the individual’ (Nietzsche 2001, 114-5).

6 Cf (Deleuze 1983), esp. chapters two and four.
approach is embedded in the momentary meetings of force, whose relations of struggle determine the dynamic, changing character of corporeal life.

I shall argue that while the figure of subjectivity has a role to play within dance, the embodiment of technique exerts a conservative force. Technique need not be thought solely through kinaesthetic forms of subjectivity however. It can equally be conveyed as a by-product of corporeal practice (training), – of the somatechnologies of dance – and attributed to an active body which is already engaged in the management of perpetual flux. This latter sense of technique eschews the kinaesthetic subject-position in favour of the body’s ability to manage the transitory demands associated with movement. It is here that movement occurs, in the gap between the foot and the floor, via a myriad of potential pathways whose eventual contours are the manifestation of what Nietzsche understands by ‘continual creation’.

To posit a Nietzschean interpretation of dance is to queer the dancing body, away from the dancer’s kinaesthetic sensibility, beyond the subjectivity of the dancer altogether. In one sense, this goes against how ‘we’ experience the execution of movement but from another point of view, it frees up the dancing body; by conceptualising its movement as always already changing, always already dancing. One might say that, here, the do-er is subtracted from the deed. Deleuze speaks of ‘the passing moment’, as that which forces us to think of becoming as becoming (Deleuze 1983, 48). The dancing body thus queered traverses this passing moment.

In what follows, Klossowski and Nietzsche’s work on corporeal subjectivity will be discussed as a means to critique the corporeal ‘know-how’ engendered through dance technique. Taken together, their work explains why corporeal know-how is at once desirable and a creative obstacle. As we will see, this conundrum is all too familiar to choreographers who wish to make new work.

**Corporal Subjectivity and the Code of Everyday Signs**

In *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, Klossowski brings together Nietzsche’s writings on consciousness and the body, linking them to an account of Nietzsche’s illness. Klossowski elaborates Nietzsche’s distinction between the perspective of the conscious self and that of the body. Whilst consciousness represents the subject’s grasp of his/her internal life:

> … the body provided Nietzsche with a completely different perspective, namely, the perspective of active forces … (Klossowski 2005, 19).

Klossowski discusses the sense in which the body’s activity comes to be *subordinated* to the perspective of the conscious self. This occurs through the
tendency of consciousness to interpret all that occurs at a bodily level, not in line with what actually occurs, but according to its own interpretive frame. Consciousness ‘understands’ the body through the lens of its own identity, in terms of an intelligibility that is foreign to, and alienated from, the body itself:

The body wants to make itself understood through the intermediary of a language of signs that is fallaciously deciphered by consciousness. Consciousness itself constitutes this code of signs that inverts, falsifies and filters what is expressed through the body (Klossowski 2005, 20).

Building on Nietzsche’s account of language as a mechanism of the herd, Klossowski depicts the code of everyday signs as the ‘language’ of bodily understanding. Klossowski’s language-body formulation gives a certain inflexion to the poststructuralist insight that subjectivity is produced through discursive practices or somatechnologies. While language constitutes subjectivity, Klossowski reminds us that subjectivity is itself a bodily product, a linguistically mediated gloss upon the body produced by the body. We could say that subjectivity is, for Klossowski, a somatechnique, that is, a technique of the body according to which the body understands itself, albeit through an ‘intermediary’ – the code of everyday signs.

The code of everyday signs represents our means of corporeal understanding – ‘the agent thinks only as a product of this code’ (Klossowski 2005, 29). The code’s orientation and content is geared towards other members of the community rather than actual bodily activity. Klossowski uses the term ‘gregarious’ to capture the manner by which conscious intelligibility functions intersubjectively, towards communication, language and the exchange of understanding (Klossowski 2005, 59). Gregarious understanding cannot properly accommodate the body inasmuch as it presupposes an ongoing unity, the subject of experience. By contrast:

The body is a product of chance; it is nothing but the locus where a group of individuated impulses confront each other so as to produce this interval that constitutes a human life … (Klossowski 2005, 21).

The body consists of successive corporeal states, a series of confrontations between singular impulses which emerge as continual variation. Consciousness, understood through gregarious modes of intelligibility, is thus ill-equipped to discern the singularities of corporeal life.

Whilst the singular, impulsive contestations of corporeal life cannot be properly grasped by subjectivity, the subject nonetheless cleaves to his/her own interpretative framework. A body interpreted by a self, as itself, is in the grip of a tenacious self-interpretation, one which attributes the successive outcomes
of impulsive contestation to itself, an ongoing identity. So there is a sense in which the body – understood in all its multiplicity – also produces a singular interpretation, a physical self that takes the credit for all that occurs ‘within’.\footnote{7}

Although consciousness is destined to misunderstand the body, Klossowski argues that the intensity of Nietzsche’s physical maladies were such that Nietzsche had to let go of something in himself simply to survive. Klossowski contends that Nietzsche’s migraines represented an aggression on the part of the body, which was able to provoke a ‘suspension’ of his thought, inspiring Nietzsche to ‘distrust the person the body supports’ (Klossowski 2005, 19). From then on, Klossowski claims, Nietzsche took the side of corporeal flux as against subjective apprehension. To side with the body against the self is to remain on the other side of intelligibility. Despite the impossibility of veridical perception, Klossowski writes of a productive tendency – \textit{a semiotics of impulses} – which nonetheless makes use of the body:

Once the body is recognized as the product of the impulses (subjected, organized, hierarchized), its cohesion with the self becomes fortuitous. The impulses \textit{can be put to use by a new body}, and are presupposed in the search for new conditions. Starting from these impulses, Nietzsche suspected that beyond the (cerebral) intellect there lies an intellect that is infinitely more vast than the one that merges with our consciousness (Klossowski 2005, 26).

Klossowski’s ‘semiotics of impulses’ suggests a generative perspective located in and across the successive production of bodies. It posits a somatechnique wholly outside the realm of subjectivity. This ‘new’ mode of corporeal production could be said to queer the notion of embodiment; by rejecting its constitutive elements (body-self) in favour of another kind of corporeal drive, one which flies under the banner of ‘the search for new conditions’. Whilst ‘the search for new conditions’ lies beyond the ken of subjectivity, this is not to suggest that subjects may not value the search (nor its results). If Klossowski is right, then the search for new conditions is already at work in the body. Impulses are organised then reorganised according to the vicissitudes of corporeal flux. Klossowski’s (and Nietzsche’s) point is that corporeal flux lies beneath the sphere of conscious understanding and experience. Does this gel with what we know about dance? Do the movement arts affirm the search for new conditions as the manifestation of an intelligence which is ‘infinitely more vast than the one that merges with our consciousness’?

\footnote{7} The very notion of an inside is, however, also a product of the self’s interpretation: ‘Our depth is governed by a completely different system of designations, for which there is neither outside nor inside’ (Klossowski 2005, 30).
In the following, I will discuss the extent to which there is a tendency within dance to surpass the self, to generate that which lies beyond codes of bodily interpretation, towards new ways of rendering, forming, framing and encouraging successive bodily states. To invoke a Dionysian notion, this is the impetus to destroy in order to create, what Nietzsche calls the ‘enjoyment of productive and destructive force’ (Nietzsche 1993; Nietzsche 1968, 539). Here, the socially oriented form of dancerly subjectivity (qua gregarious given) is destroyed in the name of artistic creation – through what might be dubbed the creation of a new body.

In doing so I will outline two distinct notions of dance technique. One is embedded within the production of movement subjectivity; the other is attributable to the body alone. Although there is a place for the exercise of corporeal subjectivity within dance, and this represents one conception of somatechnical production (such that bodily practices produce an embodied subject-position qua the lived body), the exercise of technique in the pursuit of new conditions expresses a very different sense of corporeality. This latter sense of technique signifies a body’s capacity to manage and transit the changes brought about through corporeal flux. Whilst virtuosity is usually attributed to the dancer’s mastery of movement, this latter sense of subjectless capacity belongs to the body’s transitory achievements, the management of instability, which Nietzsche analyzes in terms of the enjoyment of productive and destructive force. The acknowledgment of this other kind of technical skill implies a certain displacement or de-centring of value, that is, a displacement of the value of subjectivity itself. Without suggesting that we somehow do without the subject-position altogether, I want to make room for another kind of somatic creativity which can be framed in relation to Nietzsche’s conception of creative power. As we will see, creative power is the body freed from the norms of consciousness. It is a queer displacement, a detour from the careful cultivations of dancerly subjectivity, a place of ongoing creation and destruction which celebrates the transitory in the name of art.

Whilst Klossowski explores deviations from the gregarious norm in terms of ‘illness, insanity’ and ‘unintelligibility’, the bodily pursuit of new conditions in dance seeks its own queer deviation from gregarious sociality (Klossowski 2005, 152). This can be posed in relation to two activities. One concerns the dancer’s attempts to accommodate new movement materials, while the other is centred upon choreographic forms of invention. The first looks at the destruction and reconstitution of dancerly subjectivity which occurs via the execution of new movements (new from the point of view of the dancer), whereas the second poses the question of ‘new conditions’ in relation to the artistic production or

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8 I am indebted to Russell Dumas for the turn of phrase, ‘management of instability’ by which he understands his own choreographic interests.
selection of movement materials which occurs in making work.\textsuperscript{9} Taken together, they attempt to conceive of dancing in Klossowski’s terms, as a succession of new bodies which ‘put to use’ those conditions which have fortuitously coalesced to produce that which is prior (Klossowski 2005, 26). The movement through difference from the singular to the singular cannot be fully captured according to gregarious modes of exchange. It therefore bypasses the intelligibility within and according to which subjectivity is inevitably bathed.

\textbf{Kinaesthetic Sensibility and the Embodiment of Taste}

I want to situate the dancer’s subjectivity in relation to two aspects of artistic creation. Nietzsche writes of the artist’s \textit{taste} as a term which applies to the artist as subject, to the artist’s aesthetic subjectivity. Taste is contrasted with creative power:

Don’t we have to admit to ourselves, we artists, that there exists an uncanny disparity within us; that in an odd way our taste and on the other hand our creative power stand each distinct from the other; each remains the way it is by itself, and each grows by itself \ldots A musician, for instance, could spend a lifetime creating things that \textit{contradict} what his spoiled listener’s ear, listener’s heart values, savours, prefers – he needn’t even be aware of this contradiction! (Nietzsche 2001, 233)

Nietzsche’s point is that there are two realms – the artist’s sensibility, which is governed by taste, value and cultivated modes of perception, and the creative power of art, something quite apart from artistic sensibility thus construed. For Nietzsche, the creation of art exceeds the aesthetic understanding of its author:

This seems to me to be almost the norm among fertile artists – nobody knows a child less well than his parents \ldots (Nietzsche 2001, 233).

Nietzsche explicates taste through the artist’s body. It inheres in the ear, in the heart, in the perceptual values and preferences of his/her ‘spoiled’ sensibilities. The artist’s body is spoilt in the sense that his/her perceptual and aesthetic dispositions resist, even ‘contradict’ the future horizon of artistic creation.

\textsuperscript{9} The pursuit of new conditions is especially pertinent to modern dance which values the creation of new vocabularies of movement, as well as within improvisational fields of dance.
Adapted here, Nietzschean ‘taste’ represents the residue, the sedimentation of technique in the body of the dancer. It is an aspect of the dancer’s (soma)technique, conceived as a product or legacy of prior training, but also, as a conservative tendency or disposition. It can be teased out through looking at the way in which kinaesthetic skills and sensibilities produce a perceptual demeanor.

Kinaesthetic sensibility stands for the perceptual manner according to which movement is apprehended in action. It is a form of perceptual orientation towards bodies in movement, cultivated through movement practices and techniques as they occur in the studio, in class and through dancing. Kinaesthetic forms of sensibility vary according to dance traditions, styles, schools and cultures. They are a somatechnical mode of embodied, subject-production. There is no one kind of movement subjectivity, but a varied terrain of corporeal and aesthetic values which become inculcated in the body of the dancer. What they share is the fact of corporeal residue. For example, modern and contemporary dancers attend workshops, classes, and commit to working with and for others in order to extend and qualify their movement qualities and facility. This is not a merely mechanistic mode of production, but involves forms of sensual pleasure and pain, relations of identification and investment. Dancers are implicated, embedded and complicit in those cultural networks according to which dance forms emerge. These are in turn situated in contexts of everyday life, whereby corporeal experience is given meaning and human relationships take place.

There are differences in the way in which dancers learn, that is, between corporeal modes of transmission and choreographic methodologies. I will address this in relation to modern and contemporary dance, and bodywork practice. Modern dance historically emerged through a close network of affective relations between the choreographer and his/her own company. Sally Gardner has theorised this field in artisinal terms, according to which artists serve a kind of situated apprenticeship, underwritten by personal relationships (Gardner 2005). In this context, the corporeality of the choreographer is central to the whole process of dancing, learning and performing, such that access to a modern dance lineage is gained via the practitioner’s body. This includes how to move, a manner of making work, how to watch, how to speak about work, in short, the development of taste through the embodiment of technique.

Whilst modern dance emerged through a form of situated apprenticeship, personal and corporeal investment, very few dancers are able today to work consistently with choreographers. This is due to insufficient state funding, and the dearth of affordable space necessary for ongoing (daily) work.\textsuperscript{10} The fact

\textsuperscript{10} Because of recent urban and inner city developments, it is difficult to find affordable studio space in New York, London, also in Melbourne and Sydney. In many of these cities, there are specific (funded) institutions which offer subsidised spaces
that very few dancers now learn in an ongoing artisinal setting is reflected in Susan Foster’s characterisation of the ‘hired body’ (Foster 1992). Supposedly generalist, the ‘hired body’ nevertheless has a recognisable look and specific skills. After all, he/she is in a position to ‘be hired’ for work on choreographic projects. So despite their ‘generic’ status, these are trained dancers and, to this extent, they manifest a particular, though hybrid, sensibility.

Workshops are a common means by which renowned practitioners travel and disseminate their work. Bodywork refers to one range of practices which inform the sensibilities of today’s ‘contemporary’ dancer. These are very often inculcated through workshops, dedicated classes or forms of training. On the whole, their aim is to enhance the subject’s perceptual access to his/her corporeality in movement, in order to produce a more nuanced kinaesthetic practice. In bodywork practice, sensations are highlighted, interpreted and pressed into the service of movement. Bodywork practices encourage specific forms of focus – whether via imagery, energetic flows and directions, or guided attention to bodily sensations – in action. These foci are then utilised by the dancer through movement. Bodywork practices by and large draw attention to the corporeal feelings of movement, although each does so in its own way. For example, Skinner Releasing Technique promotes the maximal release of muscles in the performance of movement. The process by which these skills and values are realised involves an extensive use of imagery, floor and partner work. Skinner Releasing Technique enhances a kinaesthetic sensibility and corporeal facility which is sensitive to muscle tone, and values ease of movement. It is produced through the vicissitudes of practice, and is exercised in relation to the self and others, underscoring the qualitative look and feel of movement, and figures as a particular set of sensory values which become sought after within movement. Other bodily approaches privilege other factors – lines of energy, postural direction (Alexander) or corporeal organisation (Feldenkrais). These fields each constitute distinctive ways of valuing, interpreting and approaching movement.

to dancers (for example, Chisenhale Dance Space [London], Movement Research [New York], Critical Path [Sydney], and Dancehouse [Melbourne]), but these cannot compensate for the unavailability of ongoing studio space. Time is an influential factor: hourly rentals, however low-cost, tend towards an instrumental attitude towards dancing and choreographic modes of production.

Foster’s ‘hired body’ is allied to Randy Martin’s characterisation of the ‘pickup company’, ‘a group of dancers assembled for a single run of performances’ (Martin 1992, 10). See also Martin (1990).

Although there is a tendency for each form of bodywork to posit an objective basis for itself, it could be argued that each modality generates an interpretive power over movement. From a Nietzschean point of view, this is its enabling moment, whereby corporeal interpretation functions as a means of kinaesthetic production. What Nietzsche calls ‘taste’ arises out of the adoption of interpretive approaches as kinaesthetic *modus vivendi*. In other words, dancers ‘live’ their taste through immersion in daily practice, through utilising particular sensory approaches and interpretations in the performance and perception of movement. It is not possible to be a classical ballet dancer without doing classical dance, and to ‘do’ classical dance means to seek and manifest its habitual tendencies as a form of movement subjectivity (hence the importance of the daily *barre*). Ultimately then, taste is a form of movement subjectivity which represents the legacy of training, practice and the embodiment of technique. These consist of corporeal values, kinaesthetic pleasures, preferences and styles. Each legacy could be conceived as a somatechnical form of production, articulated and circulated in terms of kinaesthetic sensibility.

**Kinasesthetic Sensibility and ‘The Vicious Circle’**

Once embedded – and techniques cannot be acquired without some sort of corporeal sedimentation – a dancer’s sensibility becomes a habitual manner of perception and action. The acquisition of dance technique creates an embodied, habitual incorporation of particular skills and their attendant kinaesthetic values. Configurations of sensory value – whether released muscles, energy rising through the head, the sense of weight in the limbs or simply the sensations associated with movement – become for the trained dancer, an experiential means of movement. Whatever the dancer’s training, technique or aesthetic-sensory attitude, these become her adoptive kinaesthetic approach. Desire inheres in the interstices of kinaesthetic taste. A body kinaesthetically interpreted is a body understood, made visible or palpable according to a prevailing code of signs. Whilst individuals do have a distinctive and characteristic corporeal manner, their kinaesthetic intelligibility has a lineage and genealogy which represents particular ways of working with and understanding movement. In short, the dancer’s kinaesthetic sensibility is governed by a code of everyday signs; networks of kinaesthetic and sensory value which are corporeally circulated as part of the dancer’s subject formation. Although Klossowski speaks of ‘the’ code, dance embodies numerous codes, each with its own corporeal provenance or lineage. The point remains, however, that codes of kinaesthetic practice are the means by which dancing subjects interpret movement, recalling Klossowski’s remark that we can only think as a product of the code. The code is an achievement, it
is the product of training. It marks the body of the dancer in particular ways, and characterises her facility or approach towards movement.\textsuperscript{13}

**Dancing Against the Grain**

Whilst codes of everyday signs underlie the kinaesthetic intelligibility of dance styles and their attendant forms of movement subjectivity, they do not reveal the fluctuating actualities of corporeal life:

For even when we are alone, silent, speaking internally to ourselves, it is still the *outside* that is speaking to us – thanks to these signs from the exterior that invade and occupy us, and whose murmuring totally covers over our impulsive life. Even our innermost recesses, even our so-called *inner life*, is still the *residue* of signs instituted from the outside under the pretext of signifying us in an ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ manner – a residue that no doubt takes on the *configuration* of the impulsive movement characteristic of each person, and follows our ways of reacting to this invasion of signs, which we have not invented ourselves (Klossowski 2005, 30-1).

Although the code forms an impenetrable barrier between consciousness and impulsive life, there is nevertheless a sense in which some dance makers aim to *displace* its kinaesthetic hold. The dance artist, Lisa Nelson, speaks of a two-year period during which she felt she had to stop a lifetime habit of dancing, to ‘be on the other side of dancing for the first time’ (Nelson 1995/6, 8).\textsuperscript{14} She writes:

During those two years I knew I was loosening the bonds of certain movement habits that were there. That was one very good way to do it. Just to stop reminding my body of these movement habits. Pointed toes, for example, weren’t reinforced by any movement in my daily life. Through resting, not doing, I knew I was letting them drop away … Those stylized movements atrophied and disappeared in those two years (Nelson 1995/6, 10).

Nelson realised that her movement habits were standing in the way of her changing. At the same time that she stopped dancing, she took up the video camera. This led her to pay attention to the ways in which people see movement

\textsuperscript{13} Cf (Grosz 1990).

\textsuperscript{14} Lisa Nelson is one of the founders of Contact Improvisation in the US, as well as founding editor of the journal, *Contact Quarterly*. She has, in recent years, conducted a practice which investigates the role and nature of vision within dance.
SOMATECHNICS

(recalling Nietzsche’s ‘listener’s ear’). Her subsequent practice has been intensely oriented to the ways in which people use their senses. For example, in workshops she has drawn attention to the eyes, examining the movement of the eyeball and the head in relation to watching. She also creates activities that exclude looking in order to highlight other senses. Nelson does not aspire to move beyond or outside subjectivity but she does aim to investigate its nuances and to shift the ways in which the senses come into play:

I am finding ways to manifest this idea about flexibility of perception. I have found this to be most important to my survival in adjusting to this world. I want to manifest in front of an audience this process of flexing your perspective, so that as a viewer you are always moving. You are seeing from the outside, from the inside. You are seeing from the ceiling, from having just walked in the door, from having just walked out of the space. I am interested in making that flexibility into a meaningful experience (Nelson 1995/6, 15).

Flexibility of perception could be construed as the attempt to shift taste, to adjust it so as to support a range of changing perceptual perspectives which, in turn, provoke the viewer to be ‘always moving’.

Eva Karczag also looks at shifting ingrained kinaesthetic possibilities, through ‘undoing habit’, and ‘allowing the moving’ rather than ‘constructing or making movement material’ (interviewed by Dempster, 1995/6, 48). As Dempster put to her:

It seems to me that your process entails a very different relationship to oneself, a different organisation of self, as compared with the process of making work through the conscious direction and choreographing of material (Dempster, 1995/6, 48).

The suggestion is that a different relation towards subjectivity itself is being activated in Karczag’s work, one which is less conscious and less directive.

Karczag explicitly adopts strategies in order to promote change within her own movement:

15 Eva Karczag is a dancer, dance maker and educator. Her performance work and her teaching are informed by dance improvisation and mindful body practices, including T’ai Chi Ch’uan, Qi Gong, the Alexander Technique, Ideokinesis, and Yoga. Eva danced with the Trisha Brown Dance Company from 1979-1986, and has taught dance at major colleges throughout the US, Australia, and Europe, including on the faculty of the European Dance Development Center, (EDDC) Arnhem, The Netherlands (1990-2002).
BETWEEN THE FOOT AND THE FLOOR

Personally I think I keep myself open to change by finding new toys, new things that interest me. At first I worked very skeletally and then I got more into organs … Now my interest is very much in terms of working with meridians and energy … (Dempster 1995/6, 50).

This is not a rejection of kinaesthetic sensibility per se (how could it be?), so much as the attempt to combine, move between and focus on new configurations, new interpretations of bodily value. To speak of a shift in corporeal and kinaesthetic values is to commit to months, if not years, of work. Remember that Nelson stopped dancing for two years in order to release old patterns.

Nelson, Karczag and others recognise the hold that codes (kinaesthetic habits) have over us, and engage in the hard work of shifting these habits, or at least, of slowly shifting between habits. By breaking with one code, they have not overcome the subject position – they haven’t overcome the habit of subjectivity – but their work is aimed towards enabling something new to arise. If there are multiple codes, then there is something to be said for moving between them, allowing some to drop away inasmuch as this provokes shifts in movement possibilities. But we should be clear that this is not some direct access to the impulsive movements themselves. Rather it is a different kind of interpretation of them, which allows for other movement possibilities.

Karczag and Nelson illustrate the sense in which dancers may attempt to move between codes as a means to confound the conservatism of kinaesthetic habits. Their strategies could be seen as a deconstructive technique, which is critically oriented to the facilitation of corporeal change. They represent a practical critique of the conservative tendencies of technique conceived as taste. Karczag’s notion of allowing movement rather than ‘making’ it eschews the notion of intentional authorship. Indeed she claims that:

There are situations where you’re totally thrown out because you’ve changed, you’ve become a little different and how can that continue to support what you’ve done before (Dempster 1995/6, 49).

By becoming ‘a little different’, the dancer’s movement subjectivity has changed. If shifting between codes enables such changes, perhaps it is because the body is ‘always already’ undergoing change, and that difference emerges in the zone created by shifting, ‘flexing’ or deconstructing prior habits. This is to put the matter in terms of strategies that support the search for new conditions as a corporeal process involving singular impulses rather than the authorship of the dancer. For Karczag, one becomes a little different through the emergence of corporeal difference.
The Search for New Conditions

Karczag speaks of the ‘body as a dynamic, 3-dimensional entity, constantly in movement – balance is movement – a finely-tuned instrument always available to change’ (Karczag 1995/6, 33). The notion of bodily availability – a body available to change – suggests some kind of search for new conditions. Russell Dumas also speaks in these terms: of how to produce a body which is available to movement. Dumas has much to say about the unavailability of bodies (to new movement) engendered by classical (soma)techniques and contemporary practices. Since his own work is focused on the creation of movement out of malleable vocabularies, he needs to work with bodies that are open to executing the unfamiliar, without (re)turning movement into old patterns or inappropriate lexicons. This is a challenge to the subjectivity of the dancer and an ongoing frustration to Dumas’ choreographic impulse.

Dumas views the body as inherently conservative, resisting rather than embracing change. One could see this as the hold a dancer’s subjectivity – qua his/her kinaesthetic identity – has over what a body can do. In light of these considerations, Dumas has, over the years, resorted to a number of strategies designed to weaken that hold. He has taken several generations of dancers to Bali to expose himself and others to the different kinaesthetic everyday which underlies Balinese dance traditions. The hope is that difference casts light upon ingrained norms, making their habits visible as forms of convention. He runs a dance residency in rural France, bringing together dancers from Europe, Australia and the US, taking people out of familiar contexts in order to work intensely. He has also tried working at odd hours, long and late, with and without warming up, using cut and paste approaches to phrase materials, and adapting tasks which hail from the work of Twyla Tharp and Trisha Brown. With respect to the dancer’s themselves, the point is to somehow create the conditions which would loosen the hold of the dancer’s subjectivity upon a body’s movement, to stage a kinaesthetic ‘migraine’. From a choreographic point of view, the aim is to find ways to capitalise upon the inherent instability of movements which are not governed by fixed lexicons, to use whatever means to make new work.

As a choreographer, Dumas is less interested in the lived body than in what a body can do. Although he tries to make his extensive background available to other bodies, he is also at pains to actually produce new movement materials. If choreographic work is not about the recirculation of movement givens (what Dumas calls ‘step arrangement’), the question is how to foster the creation of new bodily conditions which exceed their author’s ‘taste’. We are returned to the creative power of Nietzsche’s fertile artist. Susan Rethorst is aware of the difference between the artist’s taste and the production of new work. She speaks of the issue via the notion of recognition: how can the choreographer recognise what’s of value if the value of new work lies in its exceeding its
maker’s taste? Rethorst’s essay, ‘Dailiness’, clearly sets out the tension between the choreographer’s subjectivity and ‘that stranger, the unmade dance’ (Rethorst 2003, 28). She writes:

It is often a surprise when something done ‘spontaneously’ is seen to ‘work’. The surprise is often accompanied by, ‘But, I wasn’t thinking, I didn’t have any idea, I don’t know what it is’ (Rethorst 2003, 14).

In discussing the spontaneous emergence of the new she writes:

Just as often, the moment thus found is then abandoned because of this accompanying feeling [of not knowing]. The not knowing can lead to not believing in its worth. The ill-contained nature of it (provoking the ‘What?’ ‘What’s it about?’ ‘What does it mean?’) leads to its feeling that it is too unclassifiable to keep (Rethorst 2003, 32, my emphasis).

Perhaps Rethort’s difficulty lies in the gregarious nature of classification versus her aim to produce that which lies beyond familiar pathways. Rethorst writes of being in the dark, dark from the point of view of the artist’s taste.

In their different ways, Dumas, Karzeg, Rethorst and Nelson value the production of new bodily conditions in their work. Inevitably, in some sense, they all work at the level of an incorporated exteriority, which Klossowski calls the invasion of signs. But because they value change, they look towards fostering new movement possibilities. They also recognise that the way you work also affects how you apprehend – via perceptual disposition, kinaesthetic sensibility or Nietzsche’s ‘spoiled’ ear. They thereby confront the creation of new bodily conditions as a problem. This is very much a legacy of modern dance, and is not necessarily valued nor practised in all other dance forms. I have chosen to discuss these practitioners here not because they are representative of dance itself but because I want to investigate what the problem of generating new bodies might mean at the level of dancing, and whether this reflects Klossowski’s concerns regarding the code of everyday signs. I have not made a

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16 Even Dumas, who is the most clearly committed to the creation of new bodily conditions, has an aesthetic approach – connected with the underlying ease manifested in everyday forms of walking. He uses the phrase ‘walking into dancing’ to resist the separation of ‘dancing’ from the rest of our movement patterns. He also has a well developed approach towards lighting, costume, setting, and audience. His series – In Available Light and In the Room – are testimony to very carefully thought out strategies of performance and presentation. In other words, his commitment to the production of new bodily conditions emerges through a certain set of aesthetic tendencies and parameters. If not taste, there is a sense of artistic selection at work here.
hard and fast distinction between dancers and choreographers but have rather
looked at the embodiment of technique in both sedimentary and dispositional
terms, as something distinct from the pursuit of new bodily conditions. This
is not to suppose that dancers cannot change. Karczag’s becoming a little
different conveys the displacement and adaptation which occurs on the part of
the dancer when moving beyond the givenness of past practice. Dancers must
adapt in the performance of new movements but also to new environments,
for example, floor, lighting and temperature. This is also a form of technical
skill which I approach in terms of ‘a body available to change’. The point of
identifying taste is to highlight the conservative implications of technique, to
recognise that training does not create a pure, unmarked territory. It carries
with it a form of residue, a side-effect that tends to reproduce itself. If dancers
were unable to become a little different, however, then new work would never
emerge.

To return to Nietzsche’s conception of art, the artist must work on the
edge of an abyss. On the one side lies the givens of taste, embodied through
training, skill, corporeal and kinesthetic forms of sensibility. On the other
side, lies the always already of corporeal flux, the underlying succession of
impulsive movements confronted and celebrated through dancing. Inasmuch
as dance focuses on what bodies do, there is an affirmative basis by which
to evaluate change. By appealing to ‘the guiding light of the body’, artists
endeavor to facilitate new bodily conditions – to let, if not make, change occur.
Although I have made the case at the most obvious, and for me, the most
familiar, kinaesthetic level, I suspect these changes occur in minute ways – in the
momentary improvisations of Japanese Noh Theatre, in the micro-movements
of a classical gesture, in the shimmer, the flash, the twinkling of an eye. Who
is to say how a foot will find the floor? Or conversely, how the floor will find a
foot? To separate taste from creative power is to value art over and above the
artist. It is also to recognise the weight of history in the body of the artist. Whilst
artists cannot avoid history, they nevertheless have to deal with it in the pursuit
of that which is not yet created. Nietzsche celebrates the creative power of the
choreographic arts from the point of view of bodily becoming rather than the
subject position of the dancer or the artist. As Deleuze puts it, ‘To dance is to
affirm becoming and the being of becoming’ (Deleuze 1983, 176). The artist
has to find a way to get out of the way, to foil the inherent conservatism of
taste, whilst affirming what is already in motion. This is the creative impulse of
choreographic invention, to be found in the bodily becoming of dance, that is,
in the ‘enjoyment of productive and destructive force, as continual creation …’
(Nietzsche 1968, 539). This is queer(ing) somatechnics.
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References


Chapter 12

Queer Substances
and Normative Substantiations:
Of Drugs, Dogs and other
Piggy Practices

Kane Race

It’s a balmy summer night in Sydney in 2007 and partygoers are making their way through the gardens at Lady Macquarie’s Chair to attend the Azure Party on the harbour foreshore, an annual fixture of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The Sydney Opera House gleams softly in the background, as though strategically positioned to court the global gay visitor. Planning for the party has, as usual, been extensive. Alongside the outfits, suntans, drugs, lights, DJs, and show preparations, parties like this are always closely monitored by health professionals and volunteers trained to deal with the occasional emergencies that are known to occur, and a volunteer care team of this sort has assembled. But with a state election around the corner, this event presents an unanticipated form of attention which, it could be said, creates an emergency of its own. Uniformed and plain-clothes police officers are patrolling the gates with dogs trained to sniff out amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine, etc. Mild panic ensues. Some patrons down all their drugs at once in an attempt to avoid detection, unable to face the prospect of wasting the dollars they’ve spent, but putting themselves at heightened risk of danger and overdose. Others try their luck at the gates, hoping to evade the public humiliation of being searched and the possibility of a criminal record. Police with dogs roam around inside the party, apprehending individuals. By 9pm, 26 patrons are arrested with small quantities of illicit substances. At this point, a court order is obtained to shut down the party, and the remaining frazzled partygoers are dispersed out into the Saturday night city streets.

1 The writing of this article was coterminous with the final stages of writing my book, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), where some sections of the argument appear in a more extended and elaborated form. I am especially grateful to Russell Westhaver for his generous feedback on this incarnation.
This scene of intervention and panic expresses certain tensions within the government of drugs – tensions that lend themselves to a broader analysis of how certain bodily practices become subject to wider somatechnological regimes. It’s a scene whose casual violence is, if not already normalised, then rapidly becoming so, at youth events, in migrant, indigenous, and racially marked precincts, and in public, recreational and transitional spaces in Western and ‘Westernising’ nations. I am interested in how the status of certain substances as ‘illicit’ provides an occasion for the state to engage in what I would describe as a disciplinary performance of moral sovereignty. This performance bears little relation to the actual dangers of drug consumption – in fact it exacerbates them, as I will go on to discuss. It is an exercise in the politics of sending a message, the ideological content of which bears further speculation. The drug user has become a special and symbolic figure for the neoliberal state. These practices rhyme with the licensed pleasures of the market, but can also be made to exemplify their excess. When its authority or capacity to govern well is in question, the neoliberal state jumps at the chance to dramatise the ostensible danger of those pleasures that evade authoritative control. This makes unauthorised pleasure, rather than systemic factors or governmental practices, explain the broader experience and apprehension of danger. Lauren Berlant uses the phrase ‘the intimate public sphere’ to describe the ideological state in which personal acts – acts not necessarily directed towards the civic sphere, like sex – acquire a luminous power to ‘send a message’ about the moral constituency of the nation and the conditions of belonging in it (Berlant 1997). The drug test is the latest technology in this arsenal of power, and in the present climate of expanded consumer freedoms and identities it is used to effect some of the same forms of privatisation and individualisation that queer theorists have identified in relation to sexuality. Drugs would appear to encapsulate the risks of postmodern consumption for a nationalist and individualist imaginary that seeks to deflect social responsibility for current injustices by projecting, as counter to drugs, reified images of authenticity, familiarity, and individual morality. In a context where citizenship is increasingly figured around the pleasures of consumption, drug use has emerged as a trope through which different relations to pleasure, consumption, embodiment and medical authority are sensationalised.

2 Recent operations carried out as part of Thailand’s War on Drugs and Social and Moral Order campaign bear striking correspondences (for example see Phongpaichit and Baker 2004). The use of antidrug provisions to police queer social spaces is a feature of many recent operations in North America, but could also be considered continuous with the use of liquor licensing provisions throughout the twentieth century to do the same (see Chauncey 1994).

3 I am thinking of work that considers how heteronormativity naturalises certain political economic arrangements (see for example Berlant and Warner 1998; Warner 1999; Brown 1995; Butler 1997; Duggan 2003; Race 2004; Povinelli 2006).
The drug search cites the protection of the health of the population as its rationale, and, to be sure, the substances it targets are not without their dangers. This is why volunteer teams go to great lengths to devise care practices uniquely adapted to this environment, designed to respond quickly and effectively to any possible emergencies. It is also why many drug users themselves devise fairly sophisticated dosing practices and routines, which aim – as far as possible within given constraints – to prevent adverse events (Southgate and Hopwood 2001). Such care practices are frequently made precarious by these practices of enforcement, and the question of how to understand this relation is one of my key aims here. This relation could be understood in terms of the tensions between competing somatechnologies, which alternatively effect how the body-on-drugs materialises, and indeed what it is capable of. The fact that drug practices and their effects are particularly vulnerable to conflicting somatechnologies is a point worth emphasising. For the liberal state allows many forms of dangerous recreation, like football, mountain-climbing, and drinking – experiences which, though dangerous, can also be fun and even profound (O’Malley and Mugford 1992). We would be horrified if the state tried to make these legitimised forms of risk-taking as dangerous as possible in order to discourage people from trying them. But such is exactly what occurs in the case of drug operations, which in their present form preclude quality control and threaten users.

As a means of drug control, the use of drug detection dogs is known to be spectacularly unsuccessful. It uncovers drugs in only about a quarter of prompted searches, leading to successful convictions for drug supply in only the tiniest proportion of cases (Ombudsman 2006). Meanwhile, the targeting of drug use in public space generates even riskier practices of consumption as users attempt to avoid detection. The long term effect is to drive drug use underground, producing unprecedented challenges for health specialists by generating new, more private, more dangerous practices of consumption (on which more later). The persistence of these policing practices, despite their documented failures, raises questions. Questions such as: why is the state prepared to override its biopolitical commitments at the very moment that it cites those biopolitical commitments most insistently? The contradictory effects of such operations, and their ramification of entrenched patterns of social violence, are not lost on those who are subject to them. Interviewed later in the Sydney Morning Herald, one Azure partygoer put it plainly: ‘I find it hard to believe the NSW Police shut down the party for the concern and health of the people at the party. If there was genuine concern from the police for partygoers then to me it would make sense to make an announcement to patrons and step up crowd monitoring. Instead, they ejected 5,000 people out of what was a medically supervised and policed event onto the streets to fend for themselves’ (Gibson 2007).
The drug raid seizes upon and intercepts deviant groups and liminal practices, but, cloaking itself in the generality of drug law, claims not to target them specifically. This claim makes such operations difficult to dispute through established channels, since the platform of minority identity that supports liberal criticisms of discriminatory treatment seems to dissipate in the face of the universal construction of the law. It is always possible, for example, for authorities to point to another operation where the minority in question was not the target. Thus, ‘objective’ proscriptions concerning the possession of illicit substances are used forcibly to expose and confirm suspected categories of deviance in a manoeuvre that is pure spectacle, made for the headlines. What is striking about this operation is its use of a *technology of exposure* to conjure the moral state. Indeed, the persistence of these policing practices, despite the evidence accumulated against them, suggests that their counter-productivity is beside the point. For the point is the public spectacle of detection and humiliation, the making-suspect of populations, the performance of moral sovereignty and the opportunistic exposure of those who are deemed to have failed it. In periods of political instability and social unrest, the drug raid converts generalised insecurity into a matter of personal and moral regimes. It finds its counterpart in the privatising imagery of the 2001 Australian National Drug Campaign, which proposes, ‘The Strongest Defence Against the Drug Problem … Families’ (Race 2004).

**Framing Care: Health, Medicine, and the ‘Uses’ of Foucault**

In the final pages of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault proposes ‘bodies and pleasures’ as a potential rallying point against the regime of sexuality (Foucault 1978: 157). He contrasts ‘bodies and pleasures’ with ‘sex and desire’, whose insistent examination, he believes, will only bind us more tightly within this regime. The remarks are cryptic and underdeveloped and have been the source of some confusion. After all, Foucault spends most of the first volume detailing how bodily experience, sexual pleasure and desire enter into the machinery of power and confession. Since he rejects the idea that power works by a simple repression of personal desires and sexual pleasure, but rather demands their articulation and examination, it is initially unclear how an assertion of bodies and pleasures could resist the regime he describes. The

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4 Agamben sees the exposure of bare life as an inbuilt component of sovereignty in the making of a biopolitical body (Agamben 1995). But Agamben casts little light on why particular social and historical domains or activities become subject to states of abandonment. (For an account of how drugs have come to be wielded to this purpose, see Race 2005.)
question is relevant to the discussion at hand, in terms of understanding how somatechnics might enable a different materialisation of bodies – in particular those bodies that are currently endangered by prevailing disciplinary regimes.

From a series of late interviews, it emerges that the key to understanding Foucault’s proposal around ‘bodies and pleasures’ relates to the distinction he makes between pleasure and desire in terms of their relation to expert knowledge (Halperin 1995; Foucault 1997; Foucault 1997; Davidson 2001). Unlike desire, Foucault argued, there was no established theory of pleasure, no science linking it to the nature of the human subject. Where psychoanalysis purported to offer a theory of desire, depicting its structures, and proposing it as a universal law that drives the human subject, pleasure was relatively untheorised, and could not be used to diagnose individuals. Pleasure was less caught up in the whole apparatus that extracts a truth-value from embodied experience – all those therapeutic and regulative strategies whose diagnoses presuppose special insights into individuals on the basis of supposedly universal norms of desire. In this sense, pleasure could be regarded as much more open to historical construction, practical variation, and creative experimentation. It need not invoke some prediscursive domain of lived experience, as some have worried – it is social and historical material, through and through. It provided a way of conceiving the forms of creative experimentation and world-building which were going on around Foucault in queer communities, with the added advantage of being relatively less encumbered by ‘scientific’ prescription.

Of course today, pleasure may not enjoy such luxury. Normative models of reward pathways riddle the popular and scientific literature on addiction, while as early as the 1940s, the concept of anhedonia (literally, the inability to feel pleasure) was being cited in American psychiatry in order to prescribe certain patients speed (Rasmussen 2006). Still, there are good reasons for thinking that Foucault’s take on pleasure as a social pragmatic may be useful for grasping some of the struggles and issues I have so far sketched. His work on the history of sexuality was undertaken, not in any attempt to ‘know’ sexuality, but rather to understand the forms of power that, in taking life as their object, subject people to disciplinary and normalising regimes. In his subsequent work on ‘care of the self’, he wanted to conceive forms of care and relation that could pry themselves away from normative determinations where necessary, but retain some form of ethical stylisation (Foucault 1984; Foucault 1990). Taken together, this work provides a basis for conceiving how subordinated groups might devise practices of care while staving off some of the normalising effects of psychological and medico-moral discourses and interventions. Foucault’s comments about ‘bodies and pleasures’ indicate a preference for experimental practice over theory: he was interested in the cultures that marginalised groups were creating and their possibilities – including the possibility of creating innovative cultures of care. Grasped in this way, pleasure prompts a focus on what people actually do, rather
than the nature of their desires. It promotes a framing of sex and drugs as somatechnic processes, rather than rigidifying the supposedly dangerous desires of deviant groups. Harm reduction and HIV prevention can usefully be approached in these terms, as I have argued more extensively elsewhere (Race 2008). In short, Foucault's work in this area gives us a way of thinking through the valuable and life-saving, as well as regulative and coercive, aspects of health and medicine, which is important in a context where medical authority provides access to necessary goods, but may also operate as a potential source of subjection.

Recent work in the governmentality tradition has drawn on Foucault to provide a valuable set of tools for analysing the heterogeneity of government, particularly the ways in which government has sought to operationalise the self. Nikolas Rose, in particular, has pursued the point that 'the self does not form the transhistorical object of techniques for being human but only one way in which humans have been enjoined to understand and relate to themselves', promoting a focus on the diverse ways in which beings have been enjoined to relate to themselves as 'subjects, selves, citizens, individuals, generals, lovers, teachers, labourers, wives, husbands, courtesans or other types of being' (Rose 1996; Rose 1998). The result is a rich framework for undertaking a genealogy of the category of 'self' itself – a method for grasping the historicity of being that deepens and extends Foucault's genealogy of ethics. But in this influential attempt to conceive the heterogeneity of self-relation, the effects of normativity tend to slip from view. 'Technologies of the self' collapse silently into technologies of government, now figured as diffuse and heterogenous, rather than subjugating in any disciplinary sense. Perhaps this is a sign of the effectiveness of this approach? It is no longer possible to imagine any successful attempt to install a single model of the individual as a normative ideal. But what is not accounted for, from this perspective, is precisely the force and effects of such attempts – a limitation that becomes particularly tangible when considering those queer aspects of health that are paradoxically endangered by the normative force of health regimes. What is striking about the state deployment of the category of drug abuse, for example, is how it seeks to enforce and prescribe a particular model of the self, generally at the expense of agreed-upon health and crime priorities. This turns out to be precisely the prudent, rational, forward-looking, private, calculative, aspirational, but compliant self that Rose describes so well in his work on enterprising individuals (Rose 1998) – a self whose character cannot be taken for granted but comes to be despotically maintained (Valverde 1996). Exploiting high-profile practices of patrol, advertisement and reporting, such operations seek to advertise a particular image of the moral citizen.

5 But this is not meant to exempt such programmes from a Foucaultean-style critique of their regulatory effects. A number of important analyses of this sort have been undertaken (see O’Malley 1999; Miller 2001; Fraser 2004; Moore 2004; Race 2007).
by exposing its other. How should we understand this exercise of power that makes on behalf of sovereignty a spectacle of the ‘medical’ and ‘non-medical’ administration of bodies? Pat O’Malley argues that the utilisation of more punitive techniques of crime control in neoliberal society should not be considered a throwback to older, harsher modes, but is entirely consistent with the normative instatement of the rational-choice actor (O’Malley 1996).

I would take this argument further, to suggest that power increasingly seeks out the expressively-disciplinary aspects of the law in the neoliberal context. It tolerates and even stimulates a certain degree of consumer self-fashioning and somatechnic self-transformation, but also seeks to subject such activity by making of it, in highly selective circumstances, a bad example (Race 2005).

There are other ways in which the approach I would propose differs from that found in the governmentality literature, informative though it is. The concept of ‘care of the self’ has found much application in this literature, especially in relation to health and medicine, where it has been used analytically and empirically to characterise neoliberal regimes of self-care. To be sure, the terminology of ‘self’ has had much purchase in a political climate where the self is cast as both the horizon and limit of social responsibility. But in taking ‘care of the self’ to be emblematic of neoliberal regimes and rationalities in general, this literature evacuates this concept of much of its ethico-political momentum. Foucault developed this concept as part of a broader project that sought to counter the forms of totalisation and individualisation associated with the modern state (Foucault 1982). He wanted to show how in the Greco-Roman period the ethical question of ‘how to live’ begins to turn on the notion of ‘care of the self’ in a manner that was symptomatic of the growing tension between contemplative and practical knowledge. It is the increasingly individualising effects of categorical knowledge that is the target of his critical efforts here. Foucault’s ethics attempts to provide a basis for conceiving practical relations between care, pleasure and knowledge that have some chance of resisting the prescriptive and demoralising effects of official determinations of deviance.

In other words, the originary ‘self’ of Foucault’s ethics is nothing more than a claim on the world – a claim that may be differently historically formulated and reflexively practiced. It cannot be equated with the exclusive, atomised self of neoliberal regimes – the ‘soi’ of ‘le souci de soi’ merely expresses a reflexive relation in being, not a thing called the self (though this point is often lost in translation). As Will McNeill puts it in an astute Heideggerian reading, Foucault’s formulation of the ethical imperative to ‘care for the self’ functions as an ‘historical imperative that formulates ethical existence as a task, as a relation to the future. “Care for

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6 Indeed, the rubric of ethics that runs through this conceptual corpus occasionally has the unsettling effect of charging the neoliberal subject him or herself with some sort of self-evident ethical value.
yourself” – for whom? for what? who or what might that be? That is precisely the question’ (McNeill 1998: 60). We need to take Rose up here on his insistence that the Self is not the transhistorical object through which being relates to itself (Rose 1998). Rather it is an historical construct, authoritative knowledge about which has been used to develop, produce, regulate, identify, reward, isolate, and extinguish individuals according to a binarised scale ranging from moral to immoral, normal to abnormal. From this perspective, it would be a mistake to map ‘care for the self’ uncritically onto the familiar neoliberal injunction (though this is a perfectly valid place to start). Against the diminished possibilities of this limited identification, Foucault’s ethics provides a set of critical and historical tools that may be of assistance in trying to formulate one’s existence as effectively as possible to respond ethically to the situation into which one is thrown. Such a project draws attention to the somatechnological conditions in which particular desires and dangers materialise, with a view to bringing forth their contingencies.

My purpose is not to insist on some ‘true Foucault’; merely to reanimate the political purchase of this work for critical and embodied analyses of medical regimes. Because the governmentality literature often loses sight of the critical tension in Foucault’s work between the normative moral code and ethics, it has thus far been unable to convey the political stakes of some of the struggles that concern me here. The conflict between individualising and practical knowledge is particularly acutely felt in the fields of HIV prevention and drug harm reduction today, where normalising therapeutic discourses are consistently cited to block the development of practical sex and drug pedagogies that admit of, and seek to work with, pleasure. The elaboration of ‘care of the self’ and ‘bodies and pleasures’ within critical health practice has paradoxically involved a struggle against individualisation, particularly the forms of privatisation associated with the neoliberal state. In the next section of this chapter I try to illustrate some of the stakes of this distinction between normalisation and other possibilities of care by considering the somatechnological production of gay men’s use of crystal methamphetamine.

Against the Crystallisation of ‘The Drug Problem’: Gay Men, HIV and Crystal Meth

The use of illicit drugs has monopolised recent discussions of HIV prevention among gay men, with drugs such as crystal methamphetamine proposed as a principle explanation for sexual risk-taking and HIV infection in both popular and social scientific discourse. But this positioning of risk as an essentialised effect of drug use neglects a consideration of the social conditions and cultural assemblages within which particular sex and drug practices, and their effects, take shape. In this section, I return to an analysis of the somatechnological
production of drug effects by tracing how their risks take shape within, and reference, a broader disciplinary environment.

Accounting for HIV infection (as well as what has come to be constructed as ‘risk-taking’) in the highly moralised climate that surrounds the HIV epidemic is no easy task. Gay men in Western centres are presumed to be largely educated about the risks of HIV infection and the activities through which these are most likely to occur (unprotected anal sex between an HIV-infected and uninfected individual). While the latter activity has come to be constructed as ‘irrational’ in this context, the desire for penetrative sex without condoms is not that hard to understand – indeed a similar practice is largely taken for granted by most of the heterosexual population. But despite the ordinariness of this desire, which is largely unacknowledged, the occasional engagement in activities known to put one at risk of contracting HIV on the part of gay men is thought to demand extensive soul-searching and explanation, and this has given rise to a host of pathologising and psychologising discourses in recent years (Halperin 2007). Notably, it is in the context of this will to knowledge that interest in, and concern about, substance use on the part of gay men has been growing exponentially, with crystal methamphetamine acting as a lightning rod.

Crystal methamphetamine is a powerful amphetamine that is usually smoked, snorted, bumped, or sometimes injected. Use of the drug has inspired increasing levels of concern and moral panic in gay centres in North America and Australia in recent years. It is the sexual risk-taking said to be caused by the drug, rather than HIV transmission through sharing needles, that has become the official focus of these concerns. The drug has been constructed as different to other ‘party drugs’, dangerously addictive and a major source of new HIV infections, and this conjunction has inspired unprecedented community investment in antidrug moralism.

The fatalism implicit in the narrative of addiction does not tally with the experience of most gay men familiar with the drug, for whom limiting use to quite specific occasions remains somewhat effective in preventing the more serious physical and material problems associated with heavy use. Nevertheless, the participation of this drug in problems not usually associated with party drugs – such as relational breakdown, social isolation, seemingly unbreakable habits, loss of employment, financial issues, eviction, homelessness, and the many serious physiological and cognitive harms associated with prolonged and regular or heavy use – has become a familiar story within urban gay networks, prompting considerable concern and understandable alarm about a problem whose shape is under-described by, and materially exceeds, the disciplinary commitments of HIV prevention.

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7 About 20 percent of gay men report having used the drug in the last six months in community surveys.
I want to emphasise the sense in which the moral policing of public space, discussed in the first section, contributes to the shape of this predicament. The current manifestations of gay men’s crystal use cannot be understood outside the highly moralised sexual climate of the HIV epidemic, nor the increasingly punitive forms of public moralism surrounding drugs. Methamphetamine has been variously used throughout history, both clinically and within different social groups, to different effects – among truck drivers to clock up hours; among students to cram for exams; among street kids to stay alert on the street; among adolescent girls to lose weight; within medicine to treat depression and ADD. It is, in fact, a common ingredient in ecstasy pills. ‘Bumping’ small amounts of the drug in its crystallised form became common in the 1990s on the sexually charged gay dance floors of the US West Coast primarily as a means of enhancing stamina and mood. But the context of use becomes critical here. While the capacity of stimulants to enhance sexual pleasure was readily apparent to many participants in the gay dance party culture of the 1990s, the instrumental use of drugs specifically for sex has recently become a more prominent feature of gay discourse in Australia and North America. Where the culture of ecstasy was popularly perceived to involve the dispersion of sexual energies to the more diffuse eroticism and communal affection of the dance floor, the use of crystal methamphetamine is now commonly associated with ‘sex binges’, and in particular, the use of the internet to organise sexual encounters and private sex parties, where the drug is smoked intermittently through a glass pipe. A minority of gay men now participate in two supposedly distinct moral worlds, the world of everyday responsibility and normative personhood, and a world of virtual freedom and escape, facilitated by the use of the internet to organise sexual encounters and distinctive drug practices, by means of which normative prescriptions around sex, gender, and HIV infection are cast as less pertinent. Strikingly, in gay parlance, ‘do you party?’ is no longer really a question of going out in public.

The mechanism proposed for the drug-risk connection, in scientific and everyday discourse alike, is the concept of ‘disinhibition’. This is the notion that substances can lead people with ‘good intentions’ to engage in ‘bad behaviour’ (Jarlais 1997). The substance is the agent here; by virtue of its biological effects on desire and cognition. ‘The impairment in judgment produced by substance use leads to unsafe sexual practices that increase risk for HIV transmission’ (Halkitis, Parsons et al. 2001). The concept is applied straightforwardly to substances that act quite differently on the neurochemical pathways – sedatives, stimulants, tranquillisers, nitrates, psychedelics. It is also carried over into psychosocial science to draw causal inferences from very general statistical correlations.8

8 The reliance on simple correlations between substance use and HIV risk-taking for these purposes has been roundly critiqued within a considerable body of social
But disinhibition does more than fuel cultural suspicions around intoxicating substances; it is also a source of value. Thus an ad for ‘Hornitos tequila’ depicts an image of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, suggesting that one of the things the product is good for is doing away with the constraints of everyday respectability and ‘unleashing the monster within’. In other words, disinhibition does not exactly ‘take people by surprise’. It is a cultural script that is pharmacologically enacted.

One of the striking things to have been uncovered in qualitative research is the strategic manner in which many gay men use crystal. Not unlike the use of certain therapeutic substances, gay men schedule their use of the drug strategically to enhance certain sexual occasions (Green 2006). The drug is valued as being particularly good for what has come to be known as ‘uninhibited’ or ‘piggy’ sex. One man describes, ‘I use it for specific sexual encounters, if I know that there is gonna be certain activities involving anal sex that I might need to loosen up or be a lot less inhibited’ (Green and Halkitis 2006). Thus, while experts and anticrystal activists join hands to ascribe initial causality to the drug, gay users’ accounts put this relation almost completely the other way round, and put the desire for ‘disinhibition’ first.

Some sociologists have considered how the notion of disinhibition circulates in everyday discourse. They argue that, because drug and alcohol use is commonly presented as an excuse for ‘unacceptable behaviour’, it is necessary to treat such explanations with caution (Weatherburn and SIGMA 1992). Being ‘out of it’ on drugs may serve as a form of ‘normative substantiation’ which attempts to mediate between ‘bad behaviour’ and ‘good intentions’. ‘Because they are commonly believed to be ‘disinhibitive’, Tim Rhodes writes, alcohol and stimulant drugs ‘may provide socially acceptable ‘excuses’ for engaging in sexual behaviours in which people may want to engage but perhaps know they should not’ (Rhodes 1996).
Many anti-crystal activists declare themselves to be ex-users and also HIV-positive. The central motif in their community discussions consists of stories that recount escalating use of the drug for sexual purposes, culminating in HIV infection (Westacott 2005). While these activists are clearly motivated by a concern about the viability of their culture and communities – a motivation I in no way wish to criticise – it is also worth considering how such claims distribute agency in relation to sex and risk practice. In particular, it is worth asking whether this account of risk-taking and HIV infection may function, at times, as a form of ‘normative substantiation’. This substantiation works by constructing, as an innate property of a drug, a set of relations that are much more complex, and may be alternatively framed. As we have seen, this understanding of drug effects is not the exclusive province of anti-crystal activists. It finds a wealth of support in psychosocial scientific and everyday discourse. Its appeal as an explanation for risk-taking cannot be understood outside the normalising pressures that compact sexual practice, HIV infection, and drug use into moral tales about the worth of individuals. Yet it does not account adequately for the materiality of pleasure, sex, and drugs, nor how these elements may converge within specific trajectories of danger – as well as precarious formulations of care.

Crystal is further associated with a range of sexual practices which, from certain normative standpoints, are considered highly shameful. Unprotected sex is one of these, but there are others. The drug is famous for turning masculine men – perhaps especially masculine men – into ‘instant bottoms’ (Halkitis, Parsons et al. 2001). It is associated with forms of sexual experimentation which fall outside the prescriptions of legitimate intimacy – sex with multiple partners, anonymous sex, so-called adventurous sex, HIV-positive sexual activity. It is used to explain sexual encounters that, how should I put this?, pay less heed to some of the sexual segregations surrounding age, class, race, body-shape, conventional attractiveness, sexual setting, and relational context maintained by respectable propriety. The transgression of imposing norms of personal respectability and sociosexual class, implicit in these encounters, is most forcefully attested in the testimonies of horror that frequently punctuate narratives of

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9 Biology is sometimes cited here, specifically the negative effect of the drug on the ability to attain an erection. But gay men have found a ready remedy for this in the form of a licensed recreational drug, Viagra. At any rate, biochemical explanations deflect from a consideration of how norms of masculinity enter into gay men’s lives to produce shame and disavowal of the pleasures of receptive anal sex. As an object of disinhibition discourse, crystal becomes available for facilitating (but also explaining away) passionate engagement in this practice.
come-down, recovery, and moral restoration! In the absence of drugs, these forms of pleasurable interclass contact and sexual exploration might be cause for celebration! But the prudent subject of drug discourse can disavow their pleasures and parcel them away as the scandalous effects of disinhibition.

My argument, in other words, is that the discourse of ‘disinhibition’ may produce drugs as a manifest form of freedom and escape from what are experienced as overbearing normative standards. In some circumstances, the avenue that ‘disinhibition’ provides for mediating between ‘good intentions’ and ‘illicit desires’ may make drugs a seemingly essential mediator of sex. This is consistent with the argument of some psychologists that ‘for many people sexual risk does not stem from a lack of community norms or personal standards, but from a desire to escape cognitive awareness of very rigorous norms and standards’ (McKirnan, Ostrow et al. 1996). They argue that drug use facilitates a process of cognitive disengagement from such norms which allows people to act upon their desires. The availability of disinhibition, not simply to explain, but also to excuse certain sexual pleasures, could conceivably heighten the appeal of substances like crystal and make them more compelling. Some gay men report that they can only have sex on the drug (Semple, Patterson et al. 2002). This is not a universal experience, and it might be seen as a statement of preference, but the statement is striking for how it indicates a highly determined, apparently compulsory relation between sex and drugs. Can we just say no to this predicament? Is this sort of advice even practicable? I would argue instead that this situation necessitates a series of urgent questions about the somatechnologies that converge currently on gay sex. What are the conditions in which a small but significant group of people can only have the sort of sex they want on drugs? How do we account for a historical situation in which some people feel compelled to alter their consciousness chemically to even consider having sex? Given the increasing use of more potent and dangerous drugs for queer sex, could these isolated experiences be reflective of a much broader, tectonic compression in the moral landscape? What perversities of history and politics make the ordinary desire for sex and new intimate experiences so exceptional?

‘Drugsex’ could, in this sense, be considered a reaction to unworkable normative standards around sex, gender, and HIV prevention. Indeed, it is tempting to argue that drugs have come to occupy the explanatory space of the ‘unconscious’ within sexual and health regimes that only seem capable of understanding the ‘rational’ action of prudent subjects. Drugs provide a way of explaining and excusing, as uncharacteristic and unintentional, ‘illicit’ sexual practices. They become compelling precisely to the extent that they materialise

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10 See, for example, the narratives of recovering users in a recent documentary on the issue (Ahlberg 2005).
as the only avenue available for the enactment of supposedly 'irrational' practice. One response to this situation would be to refuse this explanation and insist on the priority of the intentional subject. ‘Crystal didn’t make you do it; you wanted to do it in the first place’. But this response is not without its problems. It fails to interrogate the social norms whose reiteration produces the need for escape in the first place; and, just as problematically, it would seem to reinstall a notion of the sovereign individual at the site you would least expect to find one (sex and drugs). In contrast to this moralising response, what is needed is a more generous understanding of the pleasures and circumstances of drug use, and the conditions in which different possibilities and relations between drugs and bodies, i.e., queer somatechnics, take shape.

For in fact my theory of normative substantiation doesn’t go far enough. Escape is not the only value of the drug, nor should its users be positioned merely as victims. Different groups have used the drug in different ways throughout history, as mentioned, without engaging in unprotected anal sex. Not all users of the drug have a sexual response to the drug at first, pointing to the significance of a corresponding socialisation process (Westhaver 2005; Green and Halkitis 2006). Even in the most sexualised contexts, crystal plays a part in any number of pleasurable activities that are tangential to sex: one hears reports of chatting for hours while smoking the drug at home, dancing, socialising, pottering around the house, fixing up things, cleaning obsessively, watching DVDs, filming each other, browsing the internet endlessly, comparing online applications, sites, and profiles – whether alone, or with others. Often the occasion is only nominally ‘all about sex’. In short, HIV transmission does not exhaust the sexual possibilities of crystal use, nor does ‘sex’ exactly define all its pleasures. This is not to minimise the appeal of drugsex. By all accounts, sex on crystal is exceptional (Semple, Patterson et al. 2002; Green and Halkitis 2006). But noticing these peripheral pleasures may help to grasp the contingencies of drug effects, and refuse some of the more fixed determinations of crystal discourse.

This alternative approach would also allow us to consider how this drug participates within specific somatechnical assemblages. With its stimulating effects on perception and concentration, crystal is much better suited to internet use than other drugs such as ecstasy, which has more dissociative effects. It is no coincidence that the drug’s popularity has grown in tandem with the movement of gay life online. What forms of online participation and webbed sociability do drugsex practices involve? How do these wrestle with the personalisation of the computer? The appearance of internet cruising sites has incidentally been accompanied by new online practices which attempt to negotiate sex without condoms safely. The disclosure of HIV status – and the use of other, more ambiguous signifiers to this effect – has become institutionalised on many sites, and the practice of explicit HIV disclosure is increasing. In other words, ‘piggy
sex’ may involve groups whose shared HIV status is negotiated in advance, or regular couples, or people by themselves, and it may involve any number of sexual activities – whether inventive or depraved – that pose little chance of HIV transmission.\footnote{11} Indeed, given the drug’s reported effects on self-assertion, any number of eventualities are conceivable.\footnote{12} Such virtualities are neither guaranteed nor unimaginable, they simply require much better articulation and elaboration. They could be approached as ethical possibilities that emerge specifically within new sociotechnical environments.

Given the negative physical effects of the drug, some might say it is better to just say no to these contexts and possibilities. It would certainly be unwise to ignore the fact that, when used heavily or regularly over a prolonged period, crystal is known to result in a range of serious physiological harms. But the negative physiological effects of the drug are typically conflated with moral judgments about the sexual activities associated with its use, which only adds fuel to escalating forms of sexual conservatism.\footnote{13} I believe a more open acknowledgement of the importance of pleasure is crucial if we want adequately to account for the social life and material effects of this drug. The frame of Foucault’s ethics encourages a search for possibilities in the present as given, rather than proclaiming a total break with the past. Just saying no to current forms of embodiment is not always a viable option. I have tried to suggest the value of an approach that is grounded in current formations of crystal use, and which involves queer practices of self-relation. Rather than insisting upon a sovereign subject at the site of drug use, this approach entails a degree of attention to, and curiosity about how the body is, in a given situation – the queerness of its pleasures; their irreducibility to conventional

\footnote{11} For a more detailed analysis of practical ethics of HIV prevention that forgo condoms see Rosengarten, Race and Kippax 2000; Race 2003; Adam 2005; Race 2007.
\footnote{12} One of the more careful pieces of recent research found that substance use had no effect on unprotected sex among HIV negative men, some effect on unprotected sex among casual partners of unknown serostatus, and some effect on unprotected sex among HIV-positive men. But the analysis also suggests that ‘with knowledge of a partner’s HIV negative status, HIV-positive men are able to enact their plans for safe sex, even if they use substances’. These findings are consistent with the idea that gay men use substances like crystal as part of an attempt to construct a different materiality, one less structured by concerns around HIV transmission. But it also indicates that, in the presence of well articulated risks and practical strategies to avoid them, substance use does not lead inevitably to unprotected sex or ‘irresponsibility’ (Purcell, Moss et al. 2005).
\footnote{13} The narratives of recovery that now saturate gay space conceive a pristine self engaged in ‘healthy’ activities like sports, family, and ‘normal’ intimacy. But this vision is depressing and largely unsustainable. It conflates sexual deviance with risk, and only raises the stakes of queer forms of experience.
predictions, scripts, and formulations. This practice utilises history, not to confirm that the body is in fact the victim of larger historical forces (which, from a certain perspective, it is) but to multiply and ‘free up’ possible relations among subjects, bodies, drugs, and erotic practices. But such somatechniques are difficult collectively to elaborate within current regimes of knowledge, not least because they run up against the unspeakability of drug use. Conspicuously absent from the crystal debate, for example, is the voice of the crystal user. The only authorised first-person account of the experience of the drug is framed by the discourse of recovery, the renunciative voice. Any attempt to question the self-evidence of addiction on the part of actual users is constituted as denial, their practices and ways of life as ‘condoning’ drug use. In these circumstances, perhaps a challenging question to ask is: Can the drug user, in actuality, speak? (pace Gavatri Spivak).

The empirical evidence suggests that many crystal users do in fact find ways to moderate their use and prevent the more serious dangers. But in the present antagonistic climate these strategies are precarious. In neurobiology, addiction is understood in terms of the ability of certain drugs and activities to hijack the ‘reward pathways’ which manage the normal distribution of pleasure in the brain, leading to a focus on increasingly narrow activities. We need to transpose this terminology to conduct a sociopolitical critique of the ‘reward pathways’ of everyday life; and the concrete effects of their inability to come to terms with queer pleasure. A social phenomenology of crystal addiction would trace the effect of the polarised moral climate on the production of intensely bifurcated and isolated sexual subjectivities, in which guilt become the only available mode of self-relation, and in which engagement in ‘illicit’ pleasures becomes impossible to reconcile with the demands of moral personhood. Practices of care become difficult to register and find, and this unintelligibility compounds the body’s disintegration. Space prevents me from undertaking such an analysis here. Instead I have tried to give a sense, when it comes to drug use, of the risks and possibilities of engaging in queer and careful forms of somatechnic self-relation.

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