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**Cultural Representation of Disabled People:
dustbins for disavowal?**

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of sociological renderings of disablement gloss over aspects of normality, conformity and difference, and focus instead on the performative aspects of impairment. Radical views of disability have sought to situate their analysis firmly within sociology: thus Oliver draws on Comte, Marx and Weber in a very conventional analysis of the disability experience. With an explicit rejection of methodological individualism goes a rejection of `psychologically inclined' explanations: in their place Oliver puts a `materialist' approach, focusing on societal structures. In some part this is a reaction to psychological research on attitudes to disability, which has never questioned individualistic understandings of impairment (the `individual medical tragedy theory'). However, the effect is to neglect the potential contribution of social psychology and anthropology to the understanding of disability: to bracket, that is, questions of culture, representation and meaning.

Oliver devotes just two pages to issues of cultural imagery in his major monograph on disability. Writers such as Finkelstein, and the prevailing orthodoxy of the `social oppression' theories underpinning the political movement of disabled liberation are generally in accord with Oliver's position. Only recently have writers, predominantly feminists, reconceptualized disability. I would suggest that some of the lack of weight given to cultural imagery and difference stems from the neglect of impairment: Liz Crow has recently suggested that the Social Model needs to be developed, in order to conceptualize this experience (Crow, 1992). If Social Model analysis seeks to ignore, rather than explore the individual experience of impairment (be it blindness, short stature or whatever), then it is unsurprising that it should also gloss over the cultural representation of impairment, because to do otherwise would be potentially to undermine the argument.

However, this is clearly not an inevitable outcome of stressing the role of impairment. Robert Connell, in the context of sex/gender distinction, illustrates how there is no necessity of a causal linking between biological and social processes: the latter centrally concerns issues of meaning, which are socially invested:

> In fact the social practices are not reflecting natural differences with these diacritical marks of gender. They are weaving a structure of symbol and interpretation around them, and often vastly exaggerating or distorting them. (Connell, 1987, p. 80)

In this article I will first explore the role of impairment imagery, and subsequently discuss cultural representation of disabled people in terms of ideology, otherness, anomaly and liminality.

IMAGERY AND IMPAIRMENT

Here I will examine some meanings given to impairment in western culture. Subsequently, I will try and develop theoretical insights into this process, before going on to ask why impairment becomes so significant for human culture.

Some recent texts on disability have covered aspects of cultural representation. In general, these approaches are more likely to be feminist inspired, and follow on from feminist concerns with social representation of femininity, cultural stereotypes, norms of physical beauty and so forth. From this perspective, the particular situation of disabled people, women especially, is a more extreme version of the general experience of all women.

Thus the feminist discussion of media representation, *Out* of Focus (Davies *et al., 1987)* included a chapter discussing views of disability. Contemporary attitudes, for example the tendency to exaggeration and romanticization of disability, are compared with the prevailing focus on beauty and normality. The latter values are deeply divisive for all women, but particularly oppress those whose bodies do not fit the stereotype. Media treatments depoliticize struggles of disabled people by always taking an individualized perspective, focusing on disability as personal misfortune.

In *Disability, Whose Handicap,* Ann Shearer *(1981)* takes a more historical approach to representation, highlighting the moral attitudes underlying discrimination. In Classical drama, the villain had red hair; in Victorian children's books, crippled young people teach messages of courage,

forgiveness and generosity; witches were always ugly, and villains generally have had impairment-Captain Hook, Long John Silver and all.

I would point to the ubiquity of disability within wider literary sources, ranging historically and culturally: thus Shakespeare uses impairment, symbolically and metaphorically, in plays such as *Richard III* and King *Lear,* while the Bible employs such techniques extensively (Holden, 1991). Certain forms of impairment are almost exclusively used in these ways, while others are ignored. Epilepsy, restricted growth and sensory impairments, together with the figures of the cripple and the leper, are the common stock of cultural representations of disability, being conditions with specific resonance and literary utility.

> The focus on literary and cultural representation is developed in an American collection, *Images* of *the Disabled, Disabling Images.* Kriegel suggests that The world of the crippled and disabled is strange and dark, and it is held up to judgement by those who live in fear of it. The cripple is the creature who has been deprived of his ability to create a self. ... He is the other, if for no other reason than that only by being the other will he be allowed to presume upon the society of the "normals." He must accept definition from outside the boundaries of his own existence. (Kreigel, 1987, p. 33)

He goes on to outline stereotypes such as the Demonic Cripple, the Charity Cripple and the Realistic Cripple, referring to a wide range of literary sources, including *Lady Chatterely's Lover* and *Moby Dick.*

These typically negative renderings are especially oppressive for women, as Deborah Kent suggests:

> Disability seems to undermine the very roots of her womanhood. Not surprisingly, therefore, the disabled women in these works frequently feel inferior to others and regard themselves with loathing. (Kent, 1987, p. 63)

She shows how it is not the disabled person themselves that the author is concerned with, as subjects, but the disabled person as vehicle, as object:

> In many instances, the disabled woman is little more than a metaphor through which the writer hopes to address some broader theme. *(ibid.,* p. 60)

This point is made also by Kriegel, when he suggests that Clifford Chatterley is a cipher: the impotent industrialist into whom Lawrence pours everything that he abhors about modern industrial society. Not one of the many books centring on disabled women that Kent analyses is actually written by a disabled woman (although more recently several collections have been published).

A third essay in this collection illustrates how disability imagery is prevalent in contemporary film and television, yet is rarely recognized as such: Paul Longmore points out how even popular cartoon characters like Porky Pig and Elmer Fudd carry messages about impairment and identity. He argues that it is fear of disability which underlies these presentations:

> What we fear, we often stigmatize and shun and sometimes seek to destroy. Popular entertainments depicting disabled characters allude to these fears and prejudices or address them obliquely or fragmentarily, seeking to reassure us about ourselves. (Longmore, 1987, p. 66)

I suggest that these analyses, albeit individualist and fragmentary, are beginning a process parallel to that epitomized by Kate Millet in Sexual *Politics,* or Mary Ellman in *Thinking About Women,* two works of feminist literary theory that, for the first time, devoted attention to the ideologies of women evident in much mainstream literature.

Two British works have developed the analysis of disability within cultural theory. From a mainstream social research perspective, Cumberbatch & Negrine's (1992) content analysis of British TV *Images* of *Disability on Television,* reinforces many of the conclusions made in the American collection. Disabled people are either absent from the `TV population' or else occur in a limited number of roles. Colin Barnes (1992) study for the British Council of Organizations of Disabled People certainly holds to this philosophy. In an examination of disabling imagery, Barnes isolates the same series of one dimensional portrayals of disabled people, within newspapers, television, film and other areas of popular culture. Barnes' conclusions summarize this situation, and are welcome evidence that the official disability movement is recognizing the need for work in this area:

> Disabling stereotypes which medicalise, patronise, criminalise and dehumanise disabled people abound in books, films, on television, and in the press. They form the bedrock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and

exploitation which disabled people encounter daily and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion from mainstream community life. (Barnes, 1992, p. 39)

A recent work from within the movement, which develops the theme of cultural representation further than most such publications, is Jenny Morris' *Pride Against Prejudice (1991):* here, she isolates the assumptions regarding disabled people, both the absences within culture, but also the distortions.

Surely, the representation and exploration of human experience is incomplete as long as disability is either missing from or misrepresented in all the forms that cultural representation takes. It is fear and denial of the frailty, vulnerability, mortality and *arbitrariness* of human experience that deters us from confronting such realities. Fear and denial prompt the isolation of those who are disabled, ill or old as "other," as "not like us." (Morris, 1991, p. 85)

Her book is a vital development, coming out of her perspective as a feminist, as well as a disability activist and researcher: the suggestions she makes here parallel the arguments I will be developing later in this article.

I want to conclude this section by referring to the work of Susan Sontag, a non-disabled American critic, in her books *Illness as Metaphor (1991)* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors (1991).* She shows the way in which disease functions as a metaphor, focusing on tuberculosis, cancer and AIDS: while she argues strongly that illness is not a metaphor for anything, she shows that this is the way in which it has been used. Her focus is on the resonance of illness itself, not with the experience of people with illness: nevertheless, she suggests that the people with illness are the ultimate victims. But Sontag skirts the real process: it is disability which is the most active and prominent metaphor of all, and disabled people become ciphers for those feelings, processes or characteristics with which non-disabled society cannot deal. As a result, those negative aspects become cemented to disabled people.

OJECTIFICATION

Here I want briefly to underline a key theme of this article, namely the objectification of people with impairment. Earlier, I have suggested that disabled people are `objectified' by cultural representations: it is also clear that processes described above assume that disabled people are passive, akin to animals, objects rather than subjects. In seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century British society, the freak-show is a clear example of the way that

human beings were seen as non-human, as potential exhibits in what was perhaps a cross between a zoo and a museum: in this connection, see *The True History of the Elephant Man.* Roland Barthes wrote:

> The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home. (quoted in Sontag, 1982, p. 142)

I would suggest that the term `fetishism' is useful in capturing the reality of this process. Marx, of course, used fetishism to refer to the way that social relationships are regarded as things (or reified) and such a conception has been employed by writers such as Michael Oliver, to capture the way in which disability is a relationship between people with impairment and a disabling society. Freud used the term to describe the projection of sexual drives into objects, and I suggest this is parallel to disability, in the sense that disabled people within cultural representation are ciphers. Disabled people are objects, on to which artists project particular emotions, or which are used to represent specific values or evils.

Another example of this objectification, or fetishism, is evident in the way that contemporary societies provide for disabled people by means of charities, filling the gap left by the unwillingness of statutory bodies to meet their obligations to disabled citizens. Charities operate by presenting extremely demeaning images of disabled people, intended to engender pity and sympathy in `normal' people, who are then motivated to donate money. Pity is an expression of superiority: it can also be the obverse of hatred and aggression, as the post-structuralist psychologist Lacan has suggested in *The Mirror Stage:*

> For such a task, we place no trust in altruistic feeling, we who lay bare the aggressivity that underlies the activity of the philanthropist, the idealist, the pedagogue, and even the reformer. (Lacan, 1977, p. 7)

> Only saints are sufficiently detached from the deepest of the common passions to avoid the aggressive reactions to charity. *(ibid.,* p. 13)

Disabled people enable able-bodied people to feel good about themselves: by demeaning disabled people, non-disabled people can feel both powerful, and generous. Disabled people, on the other hand are viewed as passive and incapable people, objects of pity and of aid. Similar arguments have been suggested to account for imagery of developing world people's in charity campaigns: I would

suggest that the same processes of colonization and imperialism are involved in both instances.

That fetishism is not an inappropriate description is evidenced by the sexual nature of much imagery surrounding disability, whether within cultural or pornographic stereotypes: through exoticism and voyeurism, disabled people, like black people, and women in general, are presented as sexualized objects, for instance in representation of amputees. The objectification of disabled people in charity advertising parallels the objectification of women in pornography. In each case the gaze focuses on the body, which is passive and available. In each case, particular aspects of the body are exaggerated: sexual parts, in pornography, or `flawed' parts in charity advertising. In each case, the viewer is manipulated into an emotional response: desire, in the case of pornography, fear and pity in the case of charity advertising, as David Hevey has argued.

More generally, everyday interaction involving disabled people involves an invasion, by `normal' people, of disabled people:

> It is not only physical limitations that restrict us to our homes and those whom we know. It is the knowledge that each entry into the public world will be dominated by stares, by condescension, by pity and by hostility. (Morris, 1991, p. 25)

Jenny Morris' quotation captures some of this experience, in which stares, comments and unwanted attention are seen as legitimate tactics in respect to disabled people, in a way which would be wholly inappropriate for any other group except women, and perhaps black people in certain communities.

Freudians argue that the gaze is a phallic activity, a form of sadistic mastery. John Berger, in Ways of *Seeing,* discusses the ways in which women are perceived differently from men, the fact that "men act and women appear" (Berger, 1972, p. 47). In his analysis of the female nude, which he distinguishes from the naked woman, he shows how male voyeurism has always been implicit in such paintings, which present the woman as available and objectified in a way comparable to that of pornography. Disabled people, both within paintings, but also through film and media portrayals, and everyday patterns of the gaze, are similarly displayed and objectified, so that we can again use Berger's phrases: "the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man," *(ibid* p. 45) and "Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another," *(ibid., p.* 46), exchanging the terms woman/man with disabled person/ able-bodied person.

It has often been suggested that the gaze is a power relationship. Rosalind Coward argues:

> The ability to scrutinise is premised on power. Indeed the look confers power; women's inability to return such a critical and aggressive look is a sign of subordination, of being the recipients of another's assessment.

> Women, in the flesh, often feel embarrassed, irritated or downright angered by men's persistent gaze. But not wanting to risk male attention turning to male aggression, women avert their eyes and hurry on their way. (Coward, 1984, p. 75)

Harassment is a problem for disabled people as well as for women.

THEORETICAL MODELS

Here, I will briefly explore some theoretical models for understanding the processes of cultural representation and objectification which have been outlined above. My intention is not necessarily to present a clear answer or comprehensive explanation, but to raise the important questions, and suggest some suitable channels for investigation: theory has been neglected in the analysis of disabling imagery, and this analysis is a preliminary to filling that gap.

1. Ideology

Social Model theorists such as Oliver, Finkelstein, Abberley, etc, have not devoted particular attention to the question of meaning and representation. Where it is necessary to cover the issues, they have done so fairly schematically using an approach which I would suggest is close to the Marxist conception of ideology. That is, ideas about disabled people are consequences of the material relations involving disabled people. Ideology is a system of theoretical domination, which justifies oppressive social relations. A determinist view, this privileges the material level of explanation, and does not give much explanatory space or autonomy to the realm of culture and meaning.

As a consequence of this position, Social Model writers have rejected social psychologists, anthropologists, and even feminists, all on the basis that such theorizations are `idealist', and fail to pay attention to material processes and social relations. I would support any argument which suggests that it is vital to consider material relations: a theoretical explanation which neglects the disabling role of society, which ignores socio-economic structures, is a mere

fantasy. However, I would equally suggest that mono-linear explanations, reducing everything to economic factors, are misguided.

Disability is a complex process, which involves a number of causal components. Within this, the role of culture and meaning is crucial, autonomous and inescapable. In many societies, disabled people are viewed in significant ways-not always negatively-regardless of the particular socio-economic relationships. But to say this, is not to posit some universal feature of human psychology, nor to suggest that progressive change is impossible. As an example of the type of awareness I am trying to develop, I would indicate the debates within feminism, between marxist-feminists and radical feminists, which have covered very similar ground.

While the concept is useful, and any analysis has to give attention to the role of ideas in justifying material processes, ideology is nevertheless inadequate as a tool for understanding disabling imagery and representation.

2. Otherness
The inspirational text of second wave feminism, *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 1976) introduced the concept of otherness as a useful way of conceptualizing the position of women within culture. Simone de Beauvoir was paralleling the work of Sartre in the use of otherness: existentialism itself had borrowed the approach, ultimately, from Hegel.

The term, more common in French social theory than in British sociology, has been clearly and succinctly defined by Ludmilla Jordanova: I will quote at length because this will set out the basis for subsequent developments.

The term helps us to think about the ways in which groups and individuals distance themselves from each other, often by unconscious means. Such separating devices are only needed, however, when the two parties are also deeply bound together, implicated in each other's characteristics. Otherness, then, conveys the kinships, the fascination and the repulsion between distinct yet related categories of person. (Jordanova, 1989, p. 14)

In my view, the suggestion of parity and equivalence in this formulation is inaccurate: subsequently Jordanova is more explicit about the power relations involved in otherness,

> ... the distancing of what is peripheral, marginal and incidental from a central norm, of illicit danger from safe legitimacy. Women are other to men, as blacks are to whites, as animals are to

human beings, as death is to life-although different degrees and modes of otherness are here involved.

... The idea of otherness is complicated, but certain themes are common: the treatment of the other as more like an object, something to be managed and possessed, and as dangerous, wild, threatening. At the same time, the other becomes an entity whose very separateness inspires curiosity, invites enquiring knowledge. The other is to be veiled and unveiled. *(ibid., p. 109ff)*

Such formulations indicate how the disability experience discussed above can usefully be theorized as an example of 'otherness'.

The concept has exceptionally wide usage in Continental philosophy. While it is perhaps most familiar as the key theme of *The Second Sex* (discussed below), the term also crops up in a range of writers from varying theoretical standpoints: thus Barthes and Foucault commonly refer to an implicit understanding of 'otherness', which they leave unexplored. Lacan makes alterity a key element in his structuralist psychoanalysis in the form of the *petit a,* or *alter.* Feminists too, such as Kristeva, commonly adopt the expression.

Ironically, in view of its adoption by structuralists and their successors, 'otherness' originates within a humanist philosophy-widely used by Sartre as well as by de Beauvoir, it was adopted from Hegel's master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit.*

Sartre elaborates Hegel's idea that there is an unavoidable power-struggle at the heart of self-consciousness into the claim that it is only in so far as each is opposed to the Other that they grasp themselves as selves, as having "being for itself'. Confronting the Other, each asserts his right of being an individual self. (Lloyd, *1983, p. 5)*

Subsequently Sartre discusses the gaze, to which I referred earlier, where he suggests that the experience of being looked at is a denial of transcendence: the transformation into a "degraded consciousness".

De Beauvoir had started her 1943 novel, *L'Invitee,* with the Hegelian statement that "Each consciousness seeks the death of the other", and *The Second Sex is* permeated with Sartrean existentialism (a main criticism of later feminists). De Beauvoir's crucial move was to suggest that the process of alterity, the experience of objectification through the gaze, could be

specifically applied to the situation of women, who were the "generalised other" within human culture. One sex was always the "looked at": but for de Beauvoir, women were complicitous in this oppressive relationship, having accepted the benefits of their objectification-in this sense they were guilty of "bad faith".

The statement that women are other, generalized rather than as individuals, is the conclusion of a line of reasoning which starts with the observation that the masculine has been presented as the absolute human type:

> In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles. for man represents both the positive and the neutral. (de Beauvoir, 1976, p. 15)

Through citation of a range of Classical and early Christian writers, de Beauvoir shows how women have always been defined in relation to male humanity, as imperfect men (St Thomas), as suffering a lack (Aristotle). The Christian enmity to the body, as representative of original sin becomes translated into an opposition to women, as the precise expression of that flesh. Women represent Nature, with all the ambivalent feelings that the Natural arouses.

Repeatedly, de Beauvoir stresses that it is not biology, but the meaning attributed to biology, and also the way women view their biology, which is implicated in their subordination.

> Just as the penis derives its privileged evaluation from the social context, so it is the social context that makes menstruation a curse. (ibid., p. 50)

De Beauvoir therefore argues that the position of women is not natural or biological but cultural and contingent: in this she is placing herself in a tradition of historical materialism, with the consequent view of humanity as creating its own reality: "Humanity is not an animal species, it is a historical reality". *(ibid.,* p. 84) and hence the classic statement: One is not born a woman, one becomes one.

Men construct themselves in opposition to women, who play the vital role of Other in this process of identity formation.

> Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is none the less a necessity to him: he attains himself

only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself. *(ibid.,* p. 171)

Therefore, women's oppression is not merely advantageous and economically and socially beneficial to men: in patriarchal societies it is a vital part of what it is to be a man, a major component of male identity and culture. As Okeley has written:

> The individual necessarily uses `the other' for self-definition. He or she needs the other's gaze and presence as a confirmation of existence. (Okeley, 1986, p. 57)

The role of cultural imagery and stereotype is central to De Beauvoir's analysis:

> Everything helps to confirm this hierarchy in the eyes of the little girl. The historical and literary culture to which she belongs, the songs and legends with which she is lulled to sleep, are one long exaltation of man.
>
> (De Beauvoir, 1976, p. 27)

Much of her book analyses literary and cultural sources.

The Second Sex links the experience of women to that of "American Negroes": similarly oppressed, associated with nature, powerless. I would argue that there is a general process by which the subordinated person becomes `the other', common to a range of groups in society: women, black people, and also disabled people. Here, for the first time, de Beauvoir is identifying the tendency to use association with nature to undermine the status of the subordinate group. It is from this fundamental insight that the subsequent feminist literature and debate on Nature versus Culture ultimately originates: de Beauvoir first; isolated this crucial dichotomy, and explained what was at stake in the process.

These statements, on the role of the body, and the role of nature, and the way that women are identified as both body and nature, and hence as Other, are crucial to my understanding of disability. If you were to substitute `disabled people' for women in the argument as outlined above, I suggest that the fundamental sense of the analysis would remain. I am not denying what de Beauvoir has to say about women. I am, however, suggesting that disabled people could also be regarded as Other, by virtue of their connection to nature; their visibility as evidence of the constraining body; and their status as constant reminders of mortality. If original sin, through the transgression of

Eve, is concretized in the flesh of woman, then the flesh of disabled people has historically, and within Judaeo-Christian theology especially, represented divine punishment for ancestral transgression. Furthermore, non-disabled people define themselves as `normal' in opposition to disabled people who are not.

The message of *The Second Sex is* that genuine subjectivity, the goal of all existentialist philosophy, is unattainable for women, who (like disabled people) are confined to the status of object, of other:

> It is a strange experience for an individual, who feels himself to be an autonomous and transcendent subject, an absolute, to discover inferiority in himself as a fixed and preordained essence: it is a strange experience for whoever regards himself as the One to be revealed to himself as otherness, alterity. (op. cit., p. 35)

One of the criticisms of this position is the fixity, the inescapability of the identity as Other. Certainly, at the time de Beauvoir was writing, there was no feminist movement to give even the hope of positive social change for women. However, because of the firmly anti-biologistic stance of the book, the negative scenario is not as debilitating to the message as subsequent critics have suggested.

Perhaps a more effective criticism has been that de Beauvoir, in stressing meaning, culture, and using literary sources primarily, has developed an idealist position, which would have been better rooted in material realities and evidences. In the context of disability, I have already argued that there has been a firm stress on the materiality of the disabled person's oppression: in devoting attention to questions of culture and meaning, I am seeking both to give a context for the economic and political processes, but also to centre issues of identity which are crucial to the lived experience of disability by individuals.

It is clear that few would accept the Existentialist stress on freedom, choice and subjectivity as the ultimate possibility for all: the structural obstacles to such liberation, which de Beauvoir does outline consistently, can not merely be wished away. But I suggest that the analysis can be accepted, without its individualistic and voluntarist overtones: after all, the concept of alterity, as I have argued above, is familiar to many other, more structuralist, French philosophers also. My remaining doubt is over the universalistic message of the `otherness' analysis: that this is the fundamental dichotomy. Thus when de Beauvoir states that "... the temptation to dominate is the most truly universal, the most irresistible one there is..." (op. cit., p. 183) I feel concerned at the

essentialist implications, close to some sociobiology arguments. Nevertheless, it is a suggestion with which I have a lot of sympathy, given the historical realities of patriarchal, racial and disability domination.

3. Anomaly and Liminality

This conceptualization, which I would argue has strong parallels with the concept of otherness, and overlaps with much of the foregoing discussion, originates in the work of Mary Douglas. She is diametrically opposed to Simone de Beauvoir, as a British, Catholic, structuralist anthropologist. But her work Purity *and Danger (1966)* which discusses the prevalence of pollution ritual in culture, and follows on from the insights of Levi-Strauss in - *The Raw and the Cooked,* contains relevant insights.

De Beauvoir takes a binary dichotomy, between subject and other, in which the identity of the former is constructed in opposition to the latter: thus men define themselves in opposition to women, whites to blacks, straights to gays. Another way to look at this process, is to suggest that identity is being strengthened by the isolation and rejection of anomaly-that which is different, which stands out. Thus Douglas writes, "When something is firmly classed as anomalous, the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified." (Douglas, 1966, p. 50). What is being suggested here is not a dichotomous, conflictual situation, but a comparison between the dominant, normal, ordered structure, and that which disturbs or conflicts with it. For there to be normality, it is necessary for there to be an abnormality. When Allison James discusses identity development in children, I think that similar processes are involved:

> Much of the children's social life is spent in talking, telling jokes and singing songs and it is through this medium that they instruct each other in an agreed and commonly held set of norms for the physical body. Jokes. tales and rhymes abound concerning those who are physically or mentally afflicted. (James, 1986, p. 160)

Such playful interaction is important for laying down standards, centred on the body and invariably gendered. The work of the Opies has demonstrated the range of such material within children's culture, and also the extent to which important processes of socialization and identity formation are embedded in such games.

When boundaries are breached, and identities seem threatened, behaviour is devoted to re-establishing the fixities, reinforcing categories and power relations. Kate Purcell has described the constant presence of sexual tension in a factory where both men and women worked on the shopfloor: women in

such work are deviating from expected gender roles, and their subordination has thus to be enforced:

> In fact, the observations at NICO suggests that a major reinforcement of women's perpetual gender consciousness is the fact that, in the factory at least, they were rarely allowed to forget that they were women. They were addressed, responded to and handled, both literally and metaphorically, as women rather than as people or as workers. (Purcell, 1988, p. 170)

I would hypothesize that prejudice, in the context of everyday interaction, media and charity imagery, popular assumptions, etc, plays a similar role in reinforcing a subordinate position for disabled people who enter mainstream society. A particular example is provided by the massive advertising hoardings and full-page newspaper advertisements of impairment charities (for example the MS Society).

Hawthorn dismisses Douglas in terms of her "suppressed psychological premises of a need for cognitive order" (Hawthorn, 1976, p. 3): I would not be so quick to such sociological elitism, because it seems clear that the need for security is an important aspect of human consciousness. It is this requirement for order and fixity which Douglas argues underlies the extraordinarily complicated Mosaic Law, in the Biblical book of Leviticus: where of course blind people, dwarfs and menstruating women are unclean just as much as the wrong food can be contaminating. Using concepts of anomaly and order, Douglas is able to explain how the complicated and seemingly irrational prohibitions work to reinforce a monist, logical view of the world.

The arguments I have made concerning the need for dualistic conceptions, the denial of the continuum of difference, the urge to make qualitative rather than quantitative distinctions, are parallel to Douglas' argument:

It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and between, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (Douglas, 1966, p. 15)

This underlies the difference between having an impairment (a common experience) and being disabled (a specific social identity of a minority): or between various sexual practices, and between specific gay and straight identities.

I suggest that any history of disability could be categorized along the lines by which Douglas suggests primitive peoples react to anomaly: by reducing

ambiguity; by physically controlling it; by avoiding it; by labelling it dangerous; by adopting it in ritual. Historical experiences-such as the freakshow, the court jester, the asylum, the Nazi extermination and so forth -- can be conceptualized straightforwardly using such categories, and it is in this way that disability can be usefully regarded as anomalous, as ambiguous. Disabled people are seen to be ambiguous because they hover between humanity and animality, life and death, subjectivity and objectivity. The disabled anthropologist, Robert Murphy, explains this situation, not with reference to Douglas, but to Victor Turner's related concept of liminality:

> The long-term physically impaired are neither sick nor well, neither dead nor alive, neither out of society nor wholly in it. They are human beings but their bodies are warped or malfunctioning, leaving their full humanity in doubt. They are not ill, for illness is transitional to either death or recovery.... The sick person lives in a state of social suspension until he or she gets better. The disabled [sic] spend a lifetime in a similar suspended state. They are neither fish nor fowl; they exist in partial isolation from society as undefined, ambiguous people. (Murphy, *1987, p. 112)*

Thus people with restricted growth could be children or adults; mentally ill people historically were lunatics, people of the moon. In the eighteenth century there were long debates as to whether deaf people were fully human, or if they had souls. In the fourteenth century the *Malleus Maleficarum,* a catalogue of witchcraft, links the birth of deformed and disabled children to the devil, hence the concept of the changeling. Douglas herself uses the example of the Nuer peoples, who view impaired infants as `hippotamus', not humans, and consequently place the babies in the river "where they belong".

Alison James and Jennifer Hockey's recent anthropological work on childhood has shown how physically impaired adults are subject to infantilization: adults whose bodies, due to incontinence or immobility, function like young children's bodies, typically find themselves viewed as `children', with a consequent loss of social power.

Turner suggests that,

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. (Turner, *1969, p. 95)*

Turner suggests that liminal peoples have particular resonances within cultural representation, have a licence to criticize or to strip off the pretensions of

society and power-holders, citing the example of the court jester. It is for this reason that

> Members of despised or outlawed ethnic or cultural groups play major roles in myths and popular tales as representatives on expressions of universal human values. (ibid., p. 110)

Both these anthropological approaches can be used to explain the particular processes involved in cultural imagery and social practices surrounding disabled people, both historically and in contemporary societies. People with impairment are the ultimate non-conformists, and as such are perpetually threatening to the self-image of the average, so-called `normal' population. Strategies are needed to explain the prevalence of such conditions-and these are often based on cosmological explanations, on myth, and on folklore. Such processes legitimate the exceptions and ensure that the overall world-view is not damaged by the existence of these anomalous or liminal phenomena. Both Douglas and Turner, as cultural anthropologists, conclude in a reference to the basic structures of such societies, the cognitive desire for order which Hawthorn has referred to. In failing to ground their analyses in specific socio-economic contexts, in failing to develop a link between culture and material relations, they are making the opposite error to those deterministic, marxian-inspired Social Model theorists whom I criticized at the outset of this article.

DISABILITY AND PREJUDICE

The Social Model needs to be reconceptualized: people with impairment are disabled, not just by material discrimination, but also by prejudice. This prejudice is not just interpersonal, it is also implicit in cultural representation, in language and in socialization.

In order to explain prejudice against disabled people, I argue that disabled people are other because people with impairment can represent the victory of body over mind; of nature over culture; of death over life. Nothing, I would add, is fixed about this, because we are discussing the values attributed to social phenomena, not the essential meanings of this or that. But in practice, the peculiar and particular fascination the fear and loathing-that disability has for human beings is because impairment represents the physicality and animality of human existence. Nature is the enemy, women are the enemy, black people are the enemy, disabled people are the enemy: this is why there is so much in common between these different experiences, as Cynthia Cockburn and other feminists have already perceived.

Kim Chernin's analysis of *The Tyranny o* f *Slenderness* suggests:

> One of the great advantages to men, in a culture they dominate, is the ability to assign to those they oppress whatever it is they wish to disown or ignore in their own condition. (Chernin, 1983, p. 124)

She herself quotes Susan Griffin, author of *Women and Nature,* who summarizes her argument thus, in her book on *Pornography and Silence:*

> For we hunt down, suppress or attempt to inflict harm upon whatever might call us back to nature, whether this call arises from our own body or from a people to whom we have attributed those qualities of instinctual life we wish to separate from ourselves. (quoted Chernin, 1983, p. 129)

Griffin relates this argument to the role of women and black people, explaining their oppression in terms of their association with the body, with instinct, and with sensuality. I would expand the analysis to include disabled people, and also gay men and lesbians.

> The process described here can be analysed from a psychoanalytical perspective as a form of projection, defined as an operation whereby qualities, feelings, wishes or even objects, which the subject refuses to recognise or rejects in himself, are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing.

Thus able-bodied people are perpetually anxious to deny their own mortality and physicality, and disabled people are the group onto whom these difficult feelings are projected.

Jenny Morris has developed a similar argument:

> Our physical characteristics evoke such strong feelings that people often have to express them in some way. At the same time, they feel able to impose their feelings on us because we are not considered to be autonomous human beings (Morris. 1991, p. 29)

She reiterates this position towards the end of *Pride Against Prejudice:*

> Our disability frightens people. They don't want to think that this is something which could happen to them. So we become separated from common humanity, treated as fundamentally different and alien. Having put up clear barriers between us and

them, non-disabled people further hide their fear and discomfort by turning us into objects of pity, comforting themselves by their own kindness and generosity. (Morris, 1991, p. 192)

But it is not our disability, but our impairment which frightens people. And it is not us, it is non-disabled people's embodiment which is the issue: disabled people remind non-disabled people of their own vulnerability.

The key features of this argument are firstly, the equation of certain groups with nature and the body, and secondly, the establishment of a normal identity through separation from the Other. Thirdly, and arising out of these developments, is the projection of negative attributes onto the Other, either as part of a denial of those elements in the self, or as part of a general denigration of disturbing, contradictory, anomalous or threatening phenomena. I believe this is what Hevey is talking about in the following extract:

> What is happening is that non-disabled people are getting rid of their fear about their mortality, their fear about the loss of labour power and other elements in narcissism. The point I am making is that disabled people are the dustbin for that disavowal. (Hevey, 1991, p. 34)

People project their fear of death, their unease at their physicality and mortality, onto disabled people, who represent all these difficult aspects of human existence. Paul Longmore, whose cultural criticism was referred to above, has suggested:

> As with popular portrayals of other minorities, the unacknowledged hostile fantasies of the stigmatizers are transferred to the stigmatized. The non-disabled audience is allowed to disown its fears and biases by "blaming the victims," making them responsible for their own ostracism and destruction. (Longmore, 1987, p. 67)

Disabled people are scapegoats. It is not just that disabled people are different, expensive, inconvenient, or odd: it is that they represent a threat-either, as Douglas suggests, to order, or, to the self-conception of western human beings-who, since the Enlightenment, have viewed themselves as perfectible, as all-knowing, as god-like: able, over and above all other beings, to conquer the limitations of their nature through the victories of their culture.

I have drawn upon feminist work to analyse the extent to which disabled people can be regarded as other, and as analogous to women in certain key areas. It

therefore seems appropriate to end by suggesting that this ethic of invincibility or perfectibility that I have outlined, the separation of mind and body and so forth, should not strictly be viewed as a human trait, but should perhaps be specifically identified with masculinity which is the real focus of concerns with potency, with supremacy, and with domination. This notion can only be a hypothesis at this stage, but it is one which is powerfully suggested by the evidence at our disposal.

NOTE

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