Normality/normativity brings together essays from a number of different fields that challenge the self-evidence of normality and bring to light its normative dimensions. Exploring how normative boundaries of normality are established, reinforced and disrupted in various ways, the essays demonstrate the co-dependence and intimate intermingling of normality and normativity and show how lines of demarcation between the normal and deviant are not always clear cut but often characterized by ambiguity.
Normality/Normativity
Normality/normativity

LISA FOLKMARSON KÄLL (ED.)
Normality/Normativity
Lisa Folkmarson Käll(ed.)

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The terms normality and normativity which make up the title of this book share the same Latin root *norma*, meaning rule, pattern, precept. The term *norma* also signifies a carpenter’s square, the square providing a standard to ensure the reproduction of right angles, straight edges and corners. The normal is in this sense the perpendicular or that which is according to a square. The right angles, straight edges and corners of the carpenter’s square mark out principles of normality and determine everything not conforming to the standard of the square as deviations of different degree and quality. These deviations serve both to reinforce the boundaries and fields of normality and to shake their very foundation.

In a more extended sense the normal is that which is according to rule, that which is conventional, customary, habitual and routine. The normal, in short, is that which conforms to norm and has been established as normative. It is interesting to note that Modern Greek uses the word *kanonikos* for normal which marks the link between normal and canon giving the normal a dimension of tradition and historicity. The normal is that which has been habituated and canonized through tradition. Further, according to *Webster’s Word Histories* the Latin *norma* is thought by some linguists to be derived from the Greek *gnomon* which designates the pointer on a sundial that casts a shadow to indicate the time of day but which also means *one who knows*.\(^1\) This connection be-

\(^1\) Webster’s Word Histories (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1989), p 321f.
tween norm and know adds an obvious dimension of power and it rather forcefully pulls notions such as normality and normativity in a certain (normative) direction. While one who knows may be thought of in quite general and inclusive terms, we are repeatedly reminded that with few exceptions the Western intellectual tradition displays a long line of white men as the ones who know something that is seen to be considered worth knowing.

In everyday language, that which is normal seems to be self-evident and this is partly due to the proliferation of meaning. Terms such as norms and normality have different technical meanings in specific fields but are also widespread in most areas of life and society. In states of crisis, normality may appear as a distant and desirable ideal but it may equally appear to be a sphere of confinement which is the ground of crisis. In both cases normality is normative, but in each case it carries a different meaning and value. While normality is constituted as that which conforms to a normative standard, normativity is in turn constituted as that which is normal. Normative standards, marking out fields of normality, are always authoritative and given within a network of power relations. This volume gathers a collection of essays that all deal in different ways with questions concerning normality and normativity. The authors bring to light how normative boundaries of normality are constructed and deconstructed, established, reinforced and disrupted. The articles show that the lines of demarcation between the normal and deviant are not always clear cut at right angles, straight edges and corners of a carpenter’s square but at times governed by uncertainty and ambiguity.
In the first article *Normative body identity in science fiction: Reading gender in “Battlestar Galactica”* Ingvil Hellstrand deals with representations of non-human, yet humanoid, bodies embodied as female in contemporary Science Fiction. Her analysis is grounded in specific, textual representations of humanoid characters found in the TV-series “Battlestar Galactica”. In the article she investigates the way representations of humanoid bodies portrayed in “Battlestar Galactica” are subject to identity categorization based on corporeal features and gendered patterns of identification. She argues that the gendering of non-human bodies as female results in a representation of women as doubly Other.

In the article *Lovesick: Lesbianism in Vigdís Grímsdóttir’s Z—A Love Story* Jenny Björklund studies the representation of lesbianism in the novel *Z—A Love Story* (1996) by Icelandic writer Vigdís Grímsdóttir and shows how love between women is connected to ill-health in the novel. Drawing on the work of Julie Abraham who claims that the lesbian novel is governed by a heterosexual plot in which lesbianism becomes a problem, Björklund demonstrates how Grímsdóttir’s novel at first seems to challenge this idea. At the same time, however, it establishes a connection between lesbianism and ill-health. On the one hand, the novel contains an ambition to normalize lesbianism, mainly through juxtaposing lesbianism and heterosexuality. In doing so the novel is politically important in the struggle to overcome judgmental attitudes toward homosexuality. On the other hand, the link between lesbianism and ill-health, and even death, is brought out clearly in the novel through the lesbian protagonist Anna’s suffering a terminal illness. Following Abraham’s suggestion that the lesbian novel includes strategies to get rid of lesbianism, Björklund argues that connections to disease and death could be viewed
as such a strategy. She concludes that while Grímsdóttir’s novel strives to normalize lesbianism and depict love between women in a positive way, such a project becomes impossible because of the narrative power of the heterosexual plot.

Varpu Löyttyniemi’s article *Professional identity and sexual difference* attempts to theorize the equality of the maternal and the feminine as professional identities without accepting them as the norm for a woman professional. In the article is presented a self-portrayal of mother-physician as a case in point that necessitates the need to constitute a true professional identity out of the culturally feminine. Löyttyniemi suggests that feminisms of difference, particularly Luce Irigaray’s philosophy, can provide a way of understanding professional differences without adhering to one (masculine) norm of career or identity. She opens up a method of wondering as an embodied way of knowing based on and accomplishing (sexual) difference. Such a method of wondering can, according to Löyttyniemi, provide us with a productive way of studying differences between physicians and of creating a collage of professional identities.

Maria Jönsson discusses menopause as a literary motif in her article *The never-ending pause? Representations of menopause in the writings of Kerstin Thorvall, Simone de Beauvoir and Doris Lessing*. She contends that to investigate representations of menopause is largely to investigate something that is invisible, silent or totally absent. Her analysis begins with the book *What if it’s the menopause* (1982) by Swedish author Kerstin Thorvall, and is developed further with examples from the writings of Simone de Beauvoir and Doris Lessing. In these writings menopause is often understood as a sense of *loss*, a loss of body and a loss of self. The article ends with a discussion on how central the ideas about re-
production and femininity are in our understanding of menopause. Jönsson argues that further investigations of this literary motif can be of use in discussions on gendered corporeal subjectivity.

In *Hysteria and metagynesisis: Female malady between normality and normativity*, Hilde Bondevik sheds light on hysteria as a cultural diagnosis by examining two novels from 1895 which both are set in mental hospitals, *Professor Hieronimus* and *På St. Jørgen*, written by the Norwegian-Danish author Amalie Skram. The discussion describes hysteria as a typical illness and diagnosis of the time that also seems to reproduce our understanding of femininity. Amalie Skram and her life experience constitutes a framework for Bondevik’s examination, in which she also suggests that Skram exploits a repressive diagnosis to experiment with productive and feminine forms of hysterical discourse and helps to draft a new and modern female typology. The article further links this to the genealogy of femininity and to what Bondevik calls a "metagynesisis" – a nomadic strategy that finds strength outside the binary system that makes women hysterics and takes into account transdisciplinarity and the multiplicity of becoming-woman.

Jens Eriksson’s article *Race mixing and contradiction: Kant’s ambivalence toward hybridity* deals with 19th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant’s theory on race and hybridity. Recent years have seen the emergence of a growing critical attention to the importance that Kant’s hitherto obscured texts on race had for his official, cosmopolitanist philosophy. Eriksson’s article departs from this growing field of research, but argues that not enough attention has been given to how the link between the peripheral and official Kant is used by Kant himself. By reading Kant’s ambivalent attitude toward racial hybridization, a teleo-normative violation of natural orderliness, as a phenomenon he both desired and
sought to prohibit, Eriksson argues that the proper way to interpret Kant’s theory on race is to situate it in light of his remarks on the usefulness of Gifte as both poison and remedy. Like dialectical illusions and antinomies, hybrids and Gifte are both the problem and the solution for Kant’s theory on race. By being installed as a problem, hybrids can consequently serve as a proof to which Kant can point, claiming it as a factual confirmation for his theory that nature organizes humans into distinct racial groups and desires racial segregation. According to Eriksson, Kant’s theory on race creates a circular movement that allows him to make highly ideological claims as if they were made by Nature herself.

In the article Aerobic exercise and health – a tenuous connection? Gunn Engelsrud provides an illumination of how women who practice aerobics talk about and perform the movements. Such an illumination is increasingly important due to the general growth and symbolic power that commercial fitness practice occupies in society. Engelsrud demonstrates how the position given to, and taken by, the women in the context of aerobics reveal how they act as subjects who perform the exercise, and at the same time become the objects of the instructive exercises. She identifies two tensions in relation to the practice of aerobics which form two different perspectives of the analysis: a tension between feeling invaded and being able to move freely, and a tension between aversion and pleasure. The article further addresses how narrow ideas of the female body appear to be central and unavoidable components of exercising in a fitness context. As symbolic markers, image-making and self-focusing override the phenomenon that the women also react with discomfort and tension while exercising, and endurance of discomfort is also something to be practiced. The manner in which meaning is ascribed to the body contributes
to a feeling of suffering and shame and the routine of the training program excludes the women practicing aerobics from exploring their own personal kinaesthetic experience and reflective subjectivity. Engelsrud argues that her findings, even with their limitations, provide grounds for claiming that, for these women, fitness training is in itself not exclusively beneficial to the experience of health and well-being.

Jessika Grahm addresses the deeply rooted additive notion of the human being based on two epistemologically and ontologically separate categories in her article *Wo/man – a social construction of meaning and matter: Steps to an ecological framework integrating the human body and mind*. Grahm takes issue with the established criticism against social constructivist thinking which claims that its emphasis on language and semiotics makes the physical body irrelevant in social constructivist discourses. In contrast to this kind of criticism, she argues that the semiotic perspective offers an outstanding opportunity for constructing an ecological framework that goes beyond this dual concept of the human being. The article aims to construct such a framework using an interdisciplinary approach integrating the social and physical realms. In a first step, Grahm elaborates the concept social construction and suggests that the linguistic (meaning) and the literal (matter) ways of constructing the world are linked in such an inseparable way that meaning and matter can be understood as two manifestations of the same reality. In a second step she draws from recent research in medicine and neurobiology to make the claim that the communicating systems of our bodies and brains are (re)constructed in relation to our daily actions and interactions. Grahm suggests that the process of integrating meaning/matter seems to take place primarily within the body and on such a daily basis
during the whole life cycle that it would be rewarding to conceptualize wo/man as a social construction of meaning and matter.

In the final article “…looking at myself as in a movie…” Reflections on normative and pathological self-objectification Lisa Folkmarson Käll draws attention to two cases of bodily alienation and self-objectification. The article turns to a phenomenologically oriented model of understanding schizophrenia in terms of a two-faceted disturbance of the self involving the two interrelated dimensions hyperreflexivity and diminished self-affection. In the article Käll puts focus on hyperreflexive distortions of bodily self-experience which are characterized by an increasing experiential distance between the self and her body and the tendency to experience one’s own body primarily as an object, external and alien to the self. She suggests that the intimate interdependence between a detached hyperreflexive attitude toward oneself and one’s body and the sometimes rather drastic alterations in the very sense of being a self that can be seen in very early stages of schizophrenia should motivate us to consider and carefully examine different ways in which self-objectification occurs and is encouraged within the spectrum of normality. She points to one such manifestation, namely the normative self-objectification of women’s bodies and particularly as this occurs in light of a pervasive threat of the risk of being raped. The article puts light on the striking similarities between the ways in which patients in the initial stages of schizophrenia describe their experience of their own embodiment in terms of dissociation and alienation and the ways in which women are socialized into approaching their bodies in relation both to normative ideals of beauty and femininity and to imperatives of safety and risk-prevention. Käll calls for further investigation of normative forms of self-objectification and bodily alienation and
concludes that such investigation may force us to re-evaluate how categories of normality and normativity are constituted.

Some of the pieces in this volume were presented in earlier versions at the meeting Normality/Normativity which was organized by the Nordic Network Gender, Body, and Health in collaboration with the Centre for Women’s and Gender Research (SKOK) at the University of Bergen, Norway. The network, which was established in 2007 and is based at the Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University, Sweden, aims to provide a platform for interdisciplinary work on gender, body, and health where different perspectives can cross and interact in productive and provocative ways. Its ambition is to facilitate communication and collaboration across traditional disciplines and established schools of thought, and thereby raise the bar and both broaden and deepen the scope for how notions such as gender, sex, body, embodiment, health, illness, normality, and deviance are understood. It gathers researchers from a number of diverse fields such as medicine, comparative literature, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, cultural geography, sports- and health sciences, psychiatry, social psychology, and history of science and ideas.

To conceptualize health and illness as biologically formed phenomena which at the same time are constituted in a social and cultural context demands new platforms for dialogue both within and between disciplines. While historically and geographically specific, many cultural understandings of health and illness share the common features of creating a split binary between mind and body, and at the same time male and female bodies. One ambition guiding much of the work within the network is to problematize such binary understandings of human beings and bodies and instead develop alternate frames for understanding health and
illness which take into account the embodied, situated, and relational nature of human existence.

* 

As always at the end of a project, words of gratitude are in order. I wish to express my gratitude to all the contributors to Normality/Normativity as well as to the members of the Nordic Network Gender, Body, and Health. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for generously giving their time to read and carefully comment on earlier versions of the articles in this collection. Finally, I am grateful to Judith Rinker Öhman for copy-editing the manuscript, to Jacob Bull for proof-reading the introduction, to Håkan Selin for typesetting and designing the cover and, last but not least, to Katarina Mattsson for offering her wits and sharp eye.

Lisa Folkmarson Käll
Uppsala September, 2009
Normative body identity in science fiction
Reading gender in “Battlestar Galactica”

INGVIL HELLSTRAND

In her landmark essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1991), feminist theorist Donna Haraway establishes the Cyborg – a cybernetic organism – as a key metaphor for identity and selfhood in late twentieth-century culture (Haraway 1991). Using the Cyborg figure as an entry point, I will analyse representations of non-human characters embodied as female in contemporary Science Fiction (SF). By non-human bodies I mean humanoid characters such as replicants, androids and robots embodied as human, all variations of the Cyborg. In this essay, I will show how representations of such non-human characters also depend on normative representations of body and gender.

My analysis is grounded in the TV series “Battlestar Galactica” from 2004. The series is a remake, or a re-imagining, of the TV series “Battlestar Galactica – Saga of a Star World” first screened on 17 September, 1978 on ABC-TV in the US. By performing a textual analysis of two characters in this series, both embodied as female, I will illustrate how representations of non-human characters are made humanoid in relation to normative constructions of body and gender. The analysis is based on one episode in the second season (BG 211: “Pegasus”). Through this analysis I will show that embodiment is material as well as a carrier of symbolic meaning. The body is the physical and material site where we anchor our identity, and, in turn, the body must be understood in social,

1 http://www.battlestargalactica.com/newbat.htm
cultural and symbolic contexts (Grosz 1994). In other words, the body as such is not neutral but rather embedded in discourses of, for instance, gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity and ability. These discourses exist in a symbolic order of signification, functioning as a system for recognition of human identity (Lacan 1998). Finally, I will argue that the two non-human characters embodied as female can function as boundary figures, situated between binary categories of identity.

Re-presenting the real
I have taken a particular interest in the embodiment of non-human characters in SF because I believe that these representations can tell us something about contemporary understandings and ideals of body and gender. Before I go into the analysis, I would like to clarify why I use SF as a medium for exploring normative understandings of body and gender. As a traditional medium for refiguring and re-imagining, the SF genre has the potential to create, or at least imagine, new realities. It functions as a medium for contrasting the fantastical and futuristic against contemporary ‘reality’ as a frame of reference (Jackson 1981). Also, SF is known to play with potentialities of science, technology and medicine, thus opening up a narrative space for exploring how humans construct themselves and are, in turn, constructed through technological development, as Haraway suggests (Haraway 1991).

From a poststructuralist perspective, representations of bodies have an impact on how categories of identity are implemented and maintained (Butler 1993, Foucault 1970). Representations of bodies in SF texts are useful analytical tools for understanding how such representations are constructions of textual bodies, existing as contemporary metaphors and abstractions of material bodies.
According to Haraway, the Cyborg figure is a “fiction mapping our social and bodily reality” (Haraway 1991: 150). Textual bodies in SF can therefore contribute to highlighting, or even subverting, normative understandings of the human identity. As a genre, SF is concerned with how “human being [is maintained] within a context that typically seems to condition, qualify or challenge our traditional human identity” (Telotte 1995: 7). Because the SF genre also changes or distorts understandings of the body, it serves as a fitting entry point in order to analyse normative structures for embodiment and its relation to gender.

Non-human characters, Cyborgs, in SF can function as potent metaphors for the sense of “Otherness” that permeates contemporary discourses of gender, race, sexuality, class and ability. However, in order to employ contemporary ‘reality’ as a frame of reference, certain elements of universal identification are required, such as Love, Human Rights or Survival (or the lack of these elements). This inclusion of seemingly universal reference points contributes to identification with humanity in futuristic worlds and societies in SF. In the following I will argue that this identification also depends on normative representations of body and gender. I will also argue that the focus on ‘universal’ reference points blurs these representations as gendered in specific ways. This, in turn, is of consequence for normative identity based on the interconnections between body and gender.

Entering the story
The series “Battlestar Galactica” (BG) is named after the military spaceship, the battlestar, bearing the name Galactica, on which the story takes place. BG portrays a distant future where humankind is under the threat of extinction by a society of machines, known
as the Cylons. The Cylons were created (by humans) as highly developed machines, with artificial intelligence (AI) and abilities based on advanced electronics. Over time they developed into a society of their own, using their own technology to evolve into having a human appearance. The humanoid Cylons are the leaders of the Cylon society. There are in total 12 models of humanoid Cylons, all able to replicate indefinitely, meaning that there can be many copies of the same model at the same time.

The series begins with a violent attack conducted by the Cylons on all human settlements in space\(^2\). Only about 40,000 people aboard spaceships survive the attack, leaving the crew of the military battlestar *Galactica* and the passengers of a small fleet of civilian ships as the sole survivors of the human race. BG has been analysed as a parable for the human condition in the wake of the ‘war on terror’ in the post-9/11 Western world (Erickson 2007, Potter 2007). In the series, BG articulates the insecurity of not knowing who the enemy might be, illustrating Western paranoia with the terrorist threat as unable to locate and, consequently, unable to stop.

In BG, the realisation that the previously so clear-cut enemy figure now looks exactly like “us” can be analysed in terms of the Freudian notion of the Uncanny. The Uncanny derivates from the German concept of the *Unheimlich*, that which is unfamiliar, un-homely. The *Unheimlich* is contrasted with the familiarity of norms and representations, that which is *Heimlich*, familiar, homely (Freud 1988). This notion of the Uncanny is relevant in relation to several Cylon models being “sleeper agents” amongst the human population: they do not know they are Cylons until they are

\(^2\) The human settlements are known as the Twelve Colonies of Man, and represent planets named by the star signs of the Zodiac.
activated; nor do their human colleagues. The uncanniness of the Cylons is also bodily: it is practically impossible to tell the difference between a Cylon and a human. However, the knowledge that the Cylons are “passing” as human, as normal, as familiar, causes an eerie sense of unknowability and unrest.

The story unfolds as the survivors struggle to maintain the structures of human society. The military regulations serve as a societal framework while the battlestar Galactica functions as command central for politics and welfare, as well as for the ongoing war with the Cylons. It should be mentioned that the human society is portrayed as egalitarian with respect to gender equality in the workplace and family life. However, it is a hierarchical system of military regulation and rank. In the middle of the second season, the Galactica is under constant threat from Cylon attackers in space. Humanoid Cylons have successfully infiltrated the human fleet, the battlestar included, and the knowledge of the human appearance of the enemy is causing paranoia and unrest among the human population. The humanoid Cylons are referred to as “toasters” or “skin-jobs” by humans, derogatory terms that emphasise the “fake” and machinic origins of these characters.

Cyborgs in the SF tradition
The idea of robots or replicants producing or evolving into having a human appearance is not novel to the SF tradition. Isaac Asimov’s novel The Caves of Steel (1954) is considered to be one of the first SF narratives in which robots are introduced as human lookalikes, and its plot relies on the replicant being able to move between the identity as human and replicant. More recently, films like Blade Runner (Scott 1982) and Alien: Resurrection (Jeunet 1997), the last
film in the *ALIEN* quadrology\(^3\), depict humanoid replicants who are programmed to desire to be human, or at least to pass as human. Traditionally, the SF tradition of replicants and/or androids is constructed around the binary human/machine. Such a dichotomous relationship between human/machine is, in turn, connected to other asymmetrical relationships such as master/slave, Us/Them, Self/Other. In *BG*, the narrative also (re-) constructs the human/machine binary as a friend/enemy binary.

As a genre, SF can be said to represent “growing anxieties about our own nature in an increasingly technological environment, and a kind of evolutionary fear” of being replaced or, in the worst case, terminated (Telotte 1995: 170). However, the fascination with Cyborgs in contemporary popular culture also indicates that the notion of changeability and evolution is somewhat appealing to human identity. In SF narratives, *passing* as human becomes necessary for survival, compassion and/or acceptance for the replicant. Sometimes the boundaries between Us and Them are blurred by narratives of relationships; either the hero unknowingly falls in love with the replicant (Blade Runner), or a friendship evolves between humans and replicants (Alien Resurrection). This ability to pass for human is also what the narratives construct as a threat or danger to the actual human, the authentic Self. Arguably a symptom of the destabilised subject of late modernity, contemporary representations of Cyborgs are complex characters blurring the binary relationship between what is human and what is machine, making them boundary figures. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, I will investigate what effect it has when the machine is embodied as a woman.

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Cylon bodies
The humanoid Cylons are created to look like human beings, with transplants of artificial skin, human limbs, constructed veins and other bodily tissue. They are programmed with human responses and movements, as well as social practices and moral codes. In other words, their robot-ness is almost undetectable from their performed humanness. This mimetic practice, this impersonation of humanity, resonates with what feminist theorist Judith Butler suggests is a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1990: 179), a performative repetition of normative practices. Machinic practices are often considered to be monotonous and repetitive, as a contrast to human free will and spontaneity. Such an approach supports the idea that there is something universally human that the machines lack, another binary contrast serving to qualify humans over machines. However, Butler uses the notion of performativity in order to stress how copying patterns of behaviour, gesture and posture supports identificatory practices based on difference between bodies gendered as male or as female.

Following on from Butler’s argument, cultural theorist Alexandra Chasin argues that “the performance of humanness entails the activation of such identity markers such as race, class, gender, […] at least” (Chasin 1995: 75). Posited as machine versus human, it could be argued that the Cylons primarily perform humanity. The Cylon ability to copy human behaviour thus highlights the performative aspects of identity at the same time as it reveals how dependent human identity is on normative patterns of behavioural practices. In the following analysis, I will show that the practices that make up the humanity performed by the Cylons are gendered in very explicit ways.

As mentioned in the introduction, the following analysis is
based on episode 211 of BG, in which the Galactica surprisingly encounters another surviving battlestar, the Pegasus. This marks the happy occasion of a reunion of humankind. Both ships have discovered Cylon agents onboard, and are holding them prisoner.

Commander Adama (Galactica): We have a Cylon prisoner aboard this ship.
Admiral Caine (Pegasus): Really? We have one on ours as well.

Considering the shared sentiment of reunion among the humans, one could assume that the social environments aboard the two battlestars share the same social codes and regulations due to their being military ships. However, the narrative relies on discovering conflicting norms and values between the crew members. These tensions are built around classic sentiments of loyalty and identity, fuelled by discourses regarding power and (military) hierarchy. I have chosen to focus on a fragment of the narrative, namely the treatment of the common enemy, the Cylon prisoners. I will show how these prisoners are represented through specific characteristics that identify them as women.

**Cylon prisoners**

The prisoner aboard the Galactica is a Cylon embodied as a female of Asian descent. This Cylon model, Number Eight, lived and worked as the human fighter pilot known as Boomer aboard the Galactica before she was activated as a Cylon agent. Once activated, she tried to murder Commander Adama and was subsequently shot dead. The prisoner is another copy of the same model, and was imprisoned as an enemy agent on the basis of being the same model as the assassin. This character is called Sharon,
and because she is Boomer’s replicant “twin”, they share the same memories and experiences as a result of a memory-download system created by the Cylons.

Aboard the *Pegasus*, the prisoner is embodied as a Caucasian female. This Cylon model, Number Six, was an active agent for the Cylons whilst impersonating as a human, and was able to establish close relations with the leadership of the *Pegasus*. We know less of this character’s history as she is introduced in this episode. However, this model is known as the imaginary girlfriend of the ship’s mad and brilliant scientist, Dr. Gaius Baltar. As the imaginary girlfriend, she is portrayed as a seductive, teasing and confident woman wearing a red, low-cut, silky dress. She also has a strong influence on Dr. Baltar that, to an extent, influences his actions and argumentations. Her appearance clearly resembles the femme fatale of film noir. Until this episode, there has been confusion as to whether she actually exists in the flesh or only in Dr. Baltar’s imagination.

The human appearance of the Cylon prisoners is of importance in order to understand how both Cylon prisoners could become integrated members of each battlestar crew before they were

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4 This character is developed in the television film *Battlestar Galactica: Razor* (2007) that was released before the fourth season of the TV series BG. *Razor* tells the story of the battlestar *Pegasus* before the encounter with the *Galactica*. There is unfortunately not enough space to include this series in this essay, although it would bring interesting perspectives, particularly in relation to normative sexuality.

5 The femme fatale was a prominent character of the film noir tradition in the 1940s-1950s, a charming, alluring beauty who attempted to seduce the male protagonist. Femme fatale literally meaning “deadly woman”, the character was a portrait of a strong-willed woman. However, her strength eventually had to be controlled, and the traditional solution for a film noir plot was to either marry her off or kill her (Doane 1991).
“outed” as Cylons. The term “outed”⁶ is used here in order to describe the shift from being considered human, Normal, to being considered an enemy machine, Other. This also involves a shift from subject to object, where the Cylon prisoners are prone to the distanced and distancing gaze of the humans as it is decided to scientifically investigate the prisoners.

Admiral Caine (Pegasus): I can never get over how human they look.
Dr. Baltar (Galactica): It’s uncanny, isn’t it?

In a Freudian psychoanalytical framework, the Uncanny represents an anxiety that stems from repressed emotion and desire. Describing what is both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, what is known but refuses to be known, the Uncanny represents “drives which have to be repressed for the sake of cultural continuity” (Jackson 1980: 70). The uncanniness of the Cylon bodies is their resemblance to human bodies combined with the knowledge that they are, in fact, sophisticated machines. The Cylon prisoners have once been considered familiar, human, but are outed as unfamiliar, as machines, as enemies, as Other. This process of outing fittingly describes a shift in bodily identity for the character, as well as changes in attitude toward them and in their status. However, the embodiment as female results in certain identifications that go beyond their status as machinic Others. In the following I will argue that the human embodiment issues specific gendered

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⁶ The word “outed” is related to discourses of sexuality, and is often used to describe the moment when a person becomes openly known as gay or lesbian. “Being outed” is something that is done to a person, not always when it is wanted, and thus carries the meaning of being revealed or exposed, as opposed to “outing oneself”; i.e. coming out as gay/lesbian.
practices and identifications. I will argue that their embodiment as female coupled with specific behavioural or contextual representations considered to be feminine results in stereotypical gender identification, in spite of their being identified as machines.

**Markings of gender**

The prisoner aboard the *Galactica*, Sharon, is represented as slim and athletic, wearing grey sweatpants and a white tank top when she is not portrayed wearing the uniform of the battlestar. Having been identified as an invested member of the *Galactica* crew, Sharon has friends and a human lover on the crew, Lt. Agathon (Helo). Their bond was formed before she was outed as a Cylon, yet it has lasted beyond Sharon’s ‘new’ identity as an enemy agent. She is also pregnant with Helo’s child. Sharon is held in the jailing facility, called the brig, in a spacious cell with a bed and a basin. The cell is made of transparent material resembling Plexiglas, enforced with iron bars in certain places. She is allowed to move freely within the confined space of her cell, but when transported she wears restraints on her ankles and hands as well as a neck-chain, all of which are tied together by a security chain. She is regarded as fairly dangerous, particularly because a copy of her tried to kill the commanding officer of the ship, but due to her cooperation and history aboard the ship, she is not considered to be a high risk prisoner.

Commander Adama (*Galactica*): Ours has proven to be an excellent source of intelligence. She’s been very cooperative.
The prisoner aboard the *Pegasus*, Cylon Model Six, is represented as a tall, slim blonde, and wears a nightgown-looking piece of clothing when being held prisoner. The jailing facilities aboard the *Pegasus* are almost identical to those aboard the *Galactica*, save that the holding cell is stripped of the bed and basin. Cylon Model Six wears the same restraints as described above, yet she also wears them whilst in her cell. The restraints are bolted to the centre of the floor. As mentioned earlier, this particular character is introduced in this episode, although the imaginary Model Six has been a character for some time in the series. Being the chief scientist of the *Galactica*, Dr. Baltar has arranged to see the prisoner in order to examine her. Before his visit, she is described by *Pegasus* lieutenant Thorne as out of control and murderous.

Lt. Thorne (*Pegasus*): Don’t get too close. It killed seven of my crew.

While the prisoner aboard the *Galactica* is allowed to move freely in her cell, the *Pegasus* prisoner is chained at all times. Sharon is described as “cooperative”, whereas Model Six is referred to as extremely dangerous. It should also be noted that the cooperative prisoner has a name and is referred to as “she”, whereas Model Six is called “it”. The difference in introducing the two Cylon prisoners is interesting, because they initially represent the same thing: the Cylon threat to humanity. However, the varying degree of familiarity recognised in each prisoner is crucial to how they are identified and thereby treated. In the following, I will argue that the embodiment of these characters must therefore be understood as both bodily and social, producing certain marks of gender that perpetuate the process of identification (Wittig 1992). I will show how the differentiation between the two Cylon prisoners indi-
cates how the uncanniness of their bodies is dealt with differently according to cultural norms of “humanity” and, consequently, of gender.

Aboard *Galactica*

Embodied as a pregnant woman, Sharon’s cooperation with the humans could be said to strengthen her feminine traits. She is represented as motherly, kind and full of empathy for her fellow humans. Her taking sides against the Cylons also represent her as a victim of their evil conspiracy rather than an agent of it. This is not to say that these are typical feminine traits, but rather that the coupling of this behaviour and motivation in the pregnant character enforces stereotypical gender types. Judith Butler argues that “sexual difference operates in the very formulation of matter” (Butler 1993). In a framework of sexual difference, then, the corporeal body becomes sexually specific within a reproductive economy (Foucault 1970). The non-human prisoner experiences yet another shift in identity, from being an impersonation of a female body to being a pregnant woman. The pregnancy makes Sharon’s body more identifiable as a woman, and less so as a machine. This, in turn, contributes to confusing her identity as non-human.

Dr. Baltar (*Galactica*): We treat this model as if it is the human being it pretends to be. That seems to make it more cooperative.

As we have seen, Sharon’s pregnancy contributes to reinforcing her gender through the specificities of the female body. However, the notion of a pregnant machine is literally inconceivable, so that Sharon’s identity in a way is forced to stabilise within a human system of identificatory practices. The representation of this Cy-
lhon prisoner is also dependent on her strong identification with the Galactica crew, and her relationship with Helo. The social relationships function to humanise her, and her pregnancy emphasises even more clearly her belonging to the human community. This belonging is arguably related to her being the bearer of future generations, representing evolution and, ultimately, survival. I therefore suggest that the pregnancy enables a representation that makes the prisoner more familiar than unfamiliar. Because of this, she is granted a humane treatment as prisoner, including similar legal rights as other crew members would receive. Nevertheless, the Cylon body as a pregnant body relies on an uncanny hybridity that entails both materiality and socio-symbolic meaning. This hybridity can be said to serve as a bridging of the binaries man/machine, friend/enemy, Self/Other. As a result, the representation of Sharon must be read as a boundary figure that refuses identification on the basis of the traditional binaries.

**Aboard Pegasus**

On the *Pegasus*, the Cylon prisoner Model Six is chained to the floor. She is lying on her side, and there are visible marks and bruises on her arms, legs and feet showing under the stained gown. Her hair is matted and tangled, and she is staring blankly into the room. The spectator is introduced to this character at the same time as are the visitors from *Galactica*, Dr. Baltar and his imaginary girlfriend. They are visibly moved by the sight of the female body lying beaten on the floor, especially the imaginary Model Six.

_Imaginary Model Six (*Galactica*): My God, Gaius! It’s me!_

Confronted with a copy of herself, the imaginary Model Six im-
mediately stops being the teasing, flirting character she usually portrays. The contrast between the beaten body on the floor and the imaginary character’s stiletto heals and evening dress is poignant, and it is as if it takes a while for the visitors to come to terms with it actually being the same body. This essay unfortunately does not allow for further exploration of the identity politics at stake here, save from the way the connotations to the femme fatale can be said to perpetuate the representation of the material Model Six. The shock of recognising the prisoner as the same model as his imaginary girlfriend is almost as great for Dr. Baltar, who, admittedly, has strong feelings for the imaginary Cylon. When the door to the cell is opened, they cover their mouths and noses due to the apparent stench from the room.

Dr. Baltar (Galactica): She must have struggled. She must have fought back.
Imaginary Model Six (Galactica): It does not justify this!

As a contrast to the Galactica prisoner, this Cylon model is represented as a confined and tortured prisoner who has been subjected to rape and humiliation. As she is a prisoner of war, all legal rights and treaties concerning her basic human rights have been abandoned. The reason for this is the acknowledgement that she is not, in fact, a human being, but a machine. Nevertheless, as a representation of a female body, she is subjected to gender-specific, sexual violence as a means of interrogation.

Imaginary Model Six (Galactica): She has obviously been abused. Tortured.
In spite of the identification of the prisoner as an enemy machine, her embodiment as female generates a simultaneous identification as a woman. Importantly, this embodiment as female not only identifies the prisoner as a woman, but as a particular kind of woman. Being the same model as the imaginary girlfriend, she is already represented as flirtatious and inappropriately dressed through that character. She has no emotional ties to the human community, and the connotations to being a “loose” woman are striking. This strengthens her representation as deviant and without belonging in the human community. Dr. Baltar is allowed to help her, but, like with the imaginary model, he establishes an exclusive relationship with the prisoner. His motivation is that of being a humanitarian, but it is also a selfish project to restore the corporeal representation of the woman he loves.

The objectification of this prisoner comes to rely on several interconnecting discourses: her status as prisoner, as a machine and as a female body. It is interesting how the double identification as both machine and woman contributes to an increase of otherness in this character. From a feminist perspective, it can be argued that this double otherness is a result of binary constructions in which both “machine” and “woman” are represented as less qualified categories of identification. The Cylon prisoner aboard the _Pegasus_ can therefore also be understood as a boundary figure, situated between various representations of the Other. I will return to this later.
Clash of civilisations

As we have seen, the treatment of and the attitude towards the Cylon prisoners differ between the ships. The *Galactica* prisoner is treated according to rules and regulations securing her human rights. This is possible due to her strong identification with the human population, and her pregnant body, which together produce a representation of Sharon as human-like, more “us” than “them”, more human than machine. As a contrast, the prisoner aboard the *Pegasus* is represented as an absolute Other, with no apparent rights or considerations in place. The different treatment of the prisoners is, arguably, a result of the different discourses concerning the human rights of prisoners of war aboard the two battlestars. It is also due to differing cultural codes of conduct that affect the attitude towards women.

*Pegasus* crew member 1: I heard you’ve even got yourselves a Cylon. I hear she’s a hot one too!

*Pegasus* crew member 2: I could get me some of that Cylon stuff – a little of the Oh! Yeah! Oh! Yeah!

*Galactica* deck chief Tyrol: You know what? That’s enough guys. Just shut up, ok?

Among the *Pegasus* crew, the discourse concerning the Cylon prisoner is clearly reliant on both prisoners being female bodies. On *Galactica*, there is a general understanding of the Cylon prisoner as a former crew member, and, significantly, still someone’s friend.

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7 The *Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996) is an influential book written by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington. He argues that cultural identity politics will be the dominant source of conflict in the world after the Cold War.
and partner. On *Pegasus*, on the other hand, the prisoner has become a sexual toy for the entire crew.

*Pegasus* crew member 1: Do you remember when Thorne put up that “Please disturb” sign?
*Pegasus* crew member 2: I got in line twice.

The episode reaches its climax when Lt. Thorne takes charge of the interrogation of the prisoner aboard the *Galactica*.

*Pegasus* crew member 1: Your little robot-girl is in for quite a ride [laughs]

The realisation that the *Pegasus* crew ignores Sharon’s status as familiar is a violation of the cultural code aboard the *Galactica*. As both ships have been on their own in space, believing they were the sole survivors of the human race, they have, to a certain extent, established their own social and cultural codes of conduct. The *Pegasus* has followed the strict military regulations that are observed in time of war, whereas the *Galactica* has been more concerned with re-establishing democracy and securing social and civil rights after the Cylon attack. The encounter with the *Pegasus* reminds the *Galactica* of the strict military hierarchy and, importantly, that Admiral Caine of the *Pegasus* outranks Commander Adama of the *Galactica*.

The failure to recognise the cultural significance of the Cylon prisoners results in a conflict between the two ships. Whereas Dr. Baltar (*Galactica*) tries to help Model Six, Lt. Thorne (*Pegasus*) tries to rape Sharon. The motivation for both these actions is reliant on both prisoners being embodied as women, and indicative of
the different attitudes towards the prisoners aboard the two battlestars. The plot relies on the conflicting symbolic meaning related to the prisoner bodies, and particularly the degradation of Sharon’s status causes the Galactica crew members to revolt. A potent allegory is that of the well-known binary of a motherly Madonna figure (Sharon) and, in this case, a nameless whore (Model Six). The Madonna represents familiarity, purity and safety, whereas the whore represents something unfamiliar, dirty and dangerous. When confused, the clash of different cultural identities is unavoidable (Huntington 1996). In turn, such a binary image results in privileging a certain kind of femininity over another, creating a normative standard for available gender identities within the human system of identificatory practices.

**Body and power**

As cultural images and representations, these characters produce meaning at the same time as they are effects of already existent power structures (de Lauretis 1994). Returning to Judith Butler, she argues that “the body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations” (Butler 1993: 117). The power structures are embedded in the binary constructions, leaving a divide that can seem impossible to imagine otherwise. One could posit that these representations echo feminist film theorist Barbara Creed, who argues that stereotypical representations of femininity have led to the construction of female characters as either monstrous or victimised (Creed 1993). However, I suggest that the differentiated identities of the Cylon prisoners enable an analysis of the Other as a multiple category.

Both Sharon and Cylon Model Six experience limitations to

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8 Particularly in the horror film genre.
their identity once they are “outed” as Cylons, as enemy agents. As prisoners of the fleet they are confined and subdued according to military laws and regulations, as well as cultural codes of conduct prevalent on each ship. In both cases, the Cylon “emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, [and as] a threat to its own systematicity” (Butler 1993: 39). As we have seen, the embodiment of the Cylons as female is decisive in how they are represented in relation to the human crew; as girlfriend and mother-to-be, as rape victim and sexual toy. I have shown that this specific embodiment enables a representation of stereotypically feminine traits and identifications. This shift in embodiment from female to woman incorporates the layers of performative gender structures.

We have seen that these textual bodies are gendered differently, depending on both their history when passing as human and the cultural significance of their gendered bodies. The difference in attitude toward the prisoners reflects differentiating levels of identification and belonging. In the eyes of the Galactica crew, the treatment of the Cylon prisoners by the Pegasus crew is de-humanising and vile. This emphasis on “humanity” by the Galactica crew members shows how the familiar body identity of the Cylon prisoner serves to identify them as more human than machine. In this respect, the Cylon prisoners are simultaneously represented as human as well as an enemy other. As a result, the identity of the common enemy is no longer clear-cut. This aspect of humanity serves as a universal reference point, and is important for the spectator to be able to identify and sympathise with the victimised prisoner.

By way of conclusion, I suggest that this results in a hybrid representation of both enemy and victim due to the uncanniness of their bodies. The simultaneous representation as both enemy
and victim manifests itself as double Otherness in the characters, albeit in different ways. Model Six is always represented as a victim, whereas Sharon is not victimised until the attempted rape. Model Six also remains unfamiliar and deviant, but Sharon’s belonging is strengthened through the clash of cultural codes. This is interesting because both prisoners somehow evade the category of “prisoner” by being either victim or familiar. However, they are imprisoned as enemy agents and are thereby positioned as a counterpart, as not-norm, in two different ways; as enemy Others, (machines) and as women. The double Otherness is manifested as difference and resemblance, unfamiliarity and familiarity, and I have suggested that the Cylon prisoners are thus represented as boundary figures.

These boundary figures challenge the idea that there is a symmetrical relationship between the material body and symbolic meaning. The multiple identity categories can thus be said to function as destabilising for the binary categories such as Man/Machine, Friend/Enemy, Us/Them. This is particularly relevant in the representation of Sharon, who destabilises the oppositional relationship between these identities. Nevertheless, the representation of Model Six as an absolute Other, embodying enemy, machine and sanctioned femininity, functions to illustrate the Other as a multiple category. This multiplicity highlights the vulnerability of the position as Other, and reveals the bias in normative identificatory practices. In spite of the apparent fluidity within the category of the Other, however, I will stress that the category itself is maintained. Even though the Cylons can be said to challenge the idea that difference must look different, the gendered stereotypes contribute to enhancing the notion that embodiment as female coupled with feminine identificatory practices are Other to the
human norm. Gender, in this case, functions as a displacement onto which the unknown, the Other, is positioned.

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Ill-health is mostly associated with somatic and mental illnesses and pain, but can also be linked to elements most people would consider healthy. Over time, various identities, behaviors and actions that have not fulfilled contemporary culture’s criteria of normality have been medicalized. One prominent example is homosexuality, which in most Western countries was viewed as an illness or a mental disorder as late as the latter half of the twentieth century. The notion of homosexuality as connected to a context of disease is addressed by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976). Foucault discusses the emergence of the science of sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to the science of sexuality homosexual actions were viewed only as actions that would not determine the identity of the individual performing them, but with sexology and psychoanalysis these actions came to be perceived as an expression of the individual’s sexual identity. Hence, with the science of sexuality our sexuality became a crucial part of our identity and culture, and Foucault argues that homosexuality as an identity or a sexual orientation did not exist before the science of sexuality. As part of this process, non-heterosexual behavior was medicalized, and homosexuality became part of the pathology that surrounded so-called deviant sexual behavior (Foucault 1990: 36–49).

The influence of important elements of sexology and psychoanalysis on the Western world’s attitudes toward homosexuality
remained during the twentieth century. During recent decades, however, the notion of homosexuality as a disease or mental disorder has been abandoned by a majority of people in the Western world. Scandinavia has been at the forefront when it comes to gay and lesbian rights, and its governments have worked hard to fight prejudice against homosexuality. However, my ongoing research on lesbianism in Swedish fiction shows, among other things, how homosexuality and disease are connected in twentieth century literature. Homosexuality and ill-health are associated not only in older novels or in novels in which homosexuality is condemned, but also in contemporary literature and literature in which lesbianism is depicted as a desirable lifestyle (Björklund 2008). The allusions to disease in contemporary novels are mostly subtle and might go unnoticed, but in Icelandic writer Vigdis Grimsdóttir’s novel Z—A Love Story (1996), they are more obvious. The protagonist Anna, who is a lesbian, is suffering from a terminal illness. This is one of the contemporary Scandinavian novels in which the link between homosexuality and disease is the most apparent, but the connection is there even in novels in which we do not notice it at first.

In the following I will study the representation of lesbianism in Vigdis Grimsdóttir’s novel Z—A Love Story (1996), and discuss how love between women is connected to ill-health in the novel. Grimsdóttir’s novel is representative in that it establishes a connection between homosexuality and disease which can be traced in other contemporary Scandinavian novels as well, but it is also unique because this link is stronger than in many other novels. By focusing solely on this novel, I will be able to perform the kind of close reading that is required in order to discover how the connec-
tion between lesbianism and ill-health is created in Scandinavian literature.

_Z—A Love Story_ portrays two sisters and their loved ones. Anna is dying and has escaped from the hospital in order to die alone at the cottage where she has spent happy times with her lover, Z. When her sister Arnthrudur hears the news that Anna is missing from the hospital, she and her husband Valgeir go to Z’s house, to wait for the police to find Anna. The three of them share stories about Anna, and the narrative unfolds through these stories and through Anna’s last thoughts at the cottage. In the final chapter Z, Arnthrudur, and Valgeir drive to the cottage and find Anna dead.

“Z’s Like Me”: Normalizing Lesbianism
Grímsdóttir’s novel does not explicitly convey any prejudice against homosexuality, and in portraying lesbianism as an acceptable lifestyle the novel can be said to strive to influence people’s values concerning homosexuality. Arnthrudur and her mother are, however, skeptical about Anna’s sexual identity when she first comes out as a lesbian, but the mother does not play a prominent role in the narrative, and Arnthrudur becomes aware of her prejudice over the course of the night she spends talking to Z. Arnthrudur realizes that she has been wrong in dismissing lesbianism as deviant, and that love between women is no different from heterosexual love. Overall the novel makes an effort to normalize lesbian love in various ways—it makes statement in emphasizing the similarities between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Through this effort Grímsdóttir’s novel makes a case for homosexuality and thus becomes a political means of influencing people’s values. I will now take closer look at how lesbianism is normalized in the novel.
The most obvious is the way the novel is structured. It depicts two love stories—one lesbian and one heterosexual—and through the juxtaposition of these stories their similarities become apparent to the reader. The novel has two first-person narrators, Anna and Arnthrudur—every other chapter is told from Anna’s perspective and every other from Arnthrudur’s. Some of the stories they tell are about the same event, so the reader is provided with a narrative of two love relationships told from two perspectives. As the narrative unfolds we learn that Z and Arnthrudur have something in common—their extreme jealousy. Each is familiar with the other’s jealousy, because Anna has told them in the past, but this night is the first time they talk to each other about their experiences of jealousy. At first Arnthrudur is reluctant to let go of her hostile feelings toward Z, but when Z confides in her and tells her about her jealousy, Arnthrudur feels “that there’s more than just the affinity that jealous people share”. She feels “a real fondness for her” and wants to embrace her: “But I can’t, / there’s still something that holds me back and I can sense / that she knows how I feel” (160).

Eventually Arnthrudur is able to abandon her prejudice and hostile feelings and embrace the similarities between her and Z. The importance of this insight is emphasized by the fact that the sentences in which Arnthrudur expresses the affiliation she feels are short and set off from other paragraphs. For instance, the following two paragraphs appear in the middle of a dialogue: “She [Z] feels the same way as I do. // There’s the same sense of loss in her voice as there is within me” (217). When Arnthrudur, Valgeir and Z arrive to the cottage in the last chapter, Arnthrudur is watching Z and her reactions. They remind her of a conversation she had with Anna about her own behavior, and this passage ends with
two single paragraphs “Z’s like me. // I know how she’s feeling” (251). The shortness of these paragraphs and the way they interrupt the flow of the narrative make them stand out as important insights, part of Arnthrudur’s growth toward becoming a more open-minded person. As we have seen, she is skeptical of Z and of homosexuality at the beginning of the novel; the fact that she is able to change after she realizes that Z is no different from her makes a stronger case for homosexuality.

Furthermore, Arnthrudur’s role as a first-person narrator, and thereby someone whose feelings and thoughts the reader has access to, also makes it possible to expose her preconceived ideas about homosexuality as prejudice. Wayne Booth discusses literature and the ethics of medicine in “The Ethics of Medicine, as Revealed in Literature” (2002). He argues that literature is an underestimated source of knowledge about ethical questions. According to Booth, many fiction writers portray ethically significant situations more deeply than philosophers do, and he shows how the writers present ethical problems and make readers reflect on them by letting the fictional characters represent different ways of relating to the problem (Booth 2002: 10–20). Booth’s article deals mainly with medical problems, but his thoughts can shed light on Grímsdóttir’s novel as well. At the beginning of the novel, Z and Arnthrudur represent different ways of relating to lesbianism. When Z meets Anna, she is hit by passion. During the first year and a half she has a secret affair with Anna and is reluctant to come out to her family and at work, but after a while leaves her husband and her secure life in heterosexuality and embraces lesbianism. Arnthrudur, on the other hand, is skeptical of lesbianism and her sister’s lifestyle. However, after talking to Z and discovering the similarities between heterosexual and same-sex
love, she abandons her skepticism. By portraying Z's firm embrace of lesbianism and Arnthrudur's road to insight, the novel makes an ethical statement—lesbianism is a lifestyle as valid as heterosexuality and should not be condemned. Arnthrudur's attitude and her role as a first-person narrator make it easier for a prejudiced reader to identify with her—and possibly to change, as Arnthrudur does.

The stress put on the similarity between the two couples on the one hand, and between Z and Arnthrudur on the other, is the most prominent way to normalize lesbianism in the novel. This way love between women, or at least the love between Z and Anna, stands out as no different than that between man and woman, or Arnthrudur and Valgeir. Another way the novel normalizes lesbianism is by portraying the love between Anna and Z as very strong and deep. Z is married to a man when she first meets Anna, and Z and Anna have a secret affair for a long time before Z decides to leave her marriage—she loves Anna so much that she cannot stay in her marriage any longer. At one point Z admits to Arnthrudur that she misses many things about her marriage, and Arnthrudur realizes the strength of Z's love for Anna: “[…] I look at this woman for a long time, this woman who has confided in me what she misses but prefers to do without because she can't do without my sister, even though she knows there's no future in a life with her” (160). There are also several passages throughout the novel in which Z and Anna are said to never have loved anyone as much as they love each other. Their love is depicted as something stronger than themselves, impossible to fight. This quality makes the argument for homosexuality stronger—why should people judge homosexual couples when they cannot fight their feelings? Z is leading a happy life in heterosexual normality, but has to give that up for her futureless love for Anna. This is
also another parallel to the relationship between Arnthrudur and Valgeir—Valgeir was already happily married when he met Arnthrudur, but fell so deeply in love with her that he left his wife. The message conveyed here is that love can hit both heterosexuals and homosexuals strongly and that homosexuality is no different in this aspect—it is about love.

“I Ask You to Go Home”: The Heterosexual Plot

In spite of the novel’s drive to normalize lesbianism, it is impossible to look away from the fact that the plot itself contains an obvious connection between lesbianism and ill-health—Anna, who is a lesbian, is suffering from a terminal illness. The illness is never defined in the novel, but it is clear from the beginning that she is dying. The connection between lesbianism and illness is emphasized by the fact that Anna learns of her illness and gets her first letter from Z on the same day:

On Monday, 8 June 1994, I received some news and a letter that changed my life. From now on it can neither be organized nor fixed or connected to the self-evident concept of endless days. All that was once immutable and manifest collapsed and I felt that the only thing that scared me was that I might never again be able to write or to love again.

Neither of these fears proved right.
My fear is usually groundless. (19)

Anna, who is a poet, decides to write a collection of poetry about Mondays, and the first poem would be about “that Monday when everything changed” (17). The passage quoted above is the introduction to the first poem which is about the letter from Z, “written because love still exists / and because i needn’t have feared losing
“it” (20). Thus, the connection between Anna’s illness and her love for Z is established early on in the novel.

In her book *Are Girls Necessary? Lesbian Writings and Modern Histories* (1996), Julie Abraham argues that lesbian novels are based on the heterosexual plot, which is her term for what previous feminist scholars have called the romance plot. Abraham focuses on British and American fiction from the first six decades of the twentieth century, but argues that the narrative patterns she identifies can also be traced in other writings (Abraham 1996: xxi–xxii). According to Abraham the heterosexual plot, or romance plot, dominates literary representations of female characters; the female protagonist is usually the protagonist of a love story, and the aim of the narrative is for her to find a man. Abraham prefers the term “heterosexual plot”, since the romance plot constructs heterosexuality as the norm. Heterosexuality is normalized to the extent to which it disappears—it is not the focus but the precondition for every issue addressed in the narrative. Since heterosexuality is the norm, there cannot be a corresponding lesbian plot, according to Abraham, so even lesbian novels are based on the heterosexual plot. Most narratives about women are about finding a man, and lesbianism represented through the heterosexual plot therefore has to be portrayed as deviant.

Furthermore, Abraham argues that lesbian novels can never “normalize” lesbianism: “In fact lesbianism, which is to say lesbianism as a problem, is always the subject of the lesbian novel, because, in terms of the heterosexual plot’s structuring of fiction about women, lesbianism is a problem” (Abraham 1996: 3). The challenge of the lesbian novel is to create a lesbian narrative out of the heterosexual plot, and Abraham discusses various strategies such as triangulation, experimental writing and turning to
history. Triangulation plays an important role in Grímsdóttir’s novel. Abraham points out that many lesbian novels have a female protagonist who is torn between a male lover/suitor and a female “friend”. The main problem with triangulation according to Abraham is that the heterosexual plot, on which the lesbian novel is based, tends to produce heterosexual endings. Thus, lesbianism has to be punished. In the three novels Abraham mentions in this context, none of the women gets to keep her girl: two of them marry and one is killed (Abraham 1996: 4–6).

When Anna and Z first meet, Z is married to a man, Hrafn. Their marriage is happy, but Z still falls for Anna, and the two of them have a secret love affair for a year and a half before Z tells Hrafn about Anna and leaves him. This is a clear case of triangulation, with Z torn between her husband and the security of a heteronormative life on the one hand and her passion for Anna on the other. At first sight, triangulation might seem to be a way of normalizing lesbianism, or portraying it as a more desirable lifestyle. However, following Abraham, the love triangle is part of the heterosexual plot, and lesbianism will eventually end up as a narrative problem. As such it has to be removed from the narrative, and that is exactly what happens in Z—A Love Story. When Z leaves Hrafn she does not know that Anna is ill. Anna has been trying to hide her illness from Z and also to keep her at a distance so that Z will not get too attached to her, and is surprised to hear that Z has left Hrafn for her. The first time they get together after Z’s break-up, Z asks Anna if she is happy:
'I'm not happy, Z,’ I said. ‘I'm not happy that you didn’t ask me if I wanted things to change. I have my life just like you do and I always have done, both with you and without you. I like my life, I wander off here and there, and I'm used to it now and I don't want things to change.' (103)

Anna does not tell Z about her disease on this occasion, and even after she tells her some time later and Z wants to spend more time with her, Anna will not let her. This is the attitude Anna has toward Z throughout the novel; she pushes Z away so that she will not miss her so much when she is dead. In spite of her struggle to keep Z at a distance it is clear that Anna has very strong feelings for her. After reading a letter in which Z describes how she and Hrafn made love passionately the night before Christmas Eve, Anna gets very jealous, and even in the present, when she is rereading the letter in the cottage before throwing it on the fire, it evokes strong feelings:

I can’t do anything about the fact that when I look into the fire I see you and Hrafn making love and I can’t help thinking that the years we were together you might have been much happier with him. Maybe you’ll go back to him and make love the day before Christmas Eve, and forget me.

I hope you don’t.
I hope so for your sake. (55)

Still Anna encourages Z to go back to Hrafn, and her distance also sometimes pushes Z into Hrafn’s arms. In her letters to Anna, Z writes that she is lonely after leaving Hrafn because Anna does not want to spend as much time with her as she had hoped, and when she is lonely she calls Hrafn who comes over and talks to her, and sometimes they even sleep together (237, 241).
When Anna cannot manage to get Z to go back to Hrafn while she herself is still alive, she encourages Z to go back to him when she is dead, but Z says she will not (198–199). In the last poem she writes to Z, who receives it when she arrives to the cottage and finds Anna dead, Anna compares her love to the autumn rain, and the poem is filled with metaphors for decay. However, the season imagery also indicates a promise of a spring that will follow: “in our season / lies the basis / for a new spring” (261). The poem also contains a request to Z to go back to Hrafn: “i recall you / as i ask you to go home / he's lonely and misses you / and i'm leaving” (262). The future for Z, and the spring, is associated with Hrafn, with heterosexuality. Anna asks Z to go “home”, thus indicating that Hrafn is the one she belongs with and that her love story with Anna was temporary, a journey that has come to an end. A journey is also mentioned in the introduction to the poem, but in that passage Anna is the one who embarks on her own journey, a journey associated with death. Anna's journey toward death stands in opposition to the new spring that is waiting for Z if she goes back to Hrafn. Lesbianism is connected to death and heterosexuality to life.

Anna obviously has strong feelings for Z and sometimes experiences jealousy when she thinks about Z's life with Hrafn, but still encourages Z to go back to him. She does so because there is no future for Z and Anna, because Anna is dying, but their relationship is also a narrative impossibility. I mentioned earlier that the novel contains an ambition to normalize lesbianism, but according to Abraham lesbianism can never be normalized in a novel governed by the heterosexual plot, in which lesbianism is a narrative impossibility. Heterosexuality is the norm in Z—A Love Story, and it does not matter that the love story between Anna
and Z is beautifully portrayed and compared to Arnthrudur’s and Valgeir’s heterosexual relationship—it is still a problem and has to be punished and removed from the narrative, in this case by death. The novel begins and ends with heterosexuality; Z is married to Hrafn when she meets Anna, and the ending indicates that she will go back to him after Anna’s death. Heterosexuality also rules Z’s view on love; she is less jealous of women than of men—she is afraid that men would be able to give Anna something that she cannot offer (135). Arnthrudur asks Z what she herself misses about being married, and Z mentions ordinary things such as listening to the news together, cooking meals and washing up afterwards (136), which connects marriage and heterosexuality to everyday life and normality. Heterosexuality pervades the narrative and creates an opposition between heterosexuality/normality and lesbianism/deviance.

Written more than half a century later and at a time when homosexuality no longer is considered a disease, Grímsdóttir’s novel seems to have little in common with one of the first novels portraying lesbianism, Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). The protagonist, Stephen Gordon, is a woman who is attracted to other women, and she draws her characteristics from contemporary medical handbooks describing homosexuality. The novel was groundbreaking in that homosexuality, along the lines with the contemporary medical context, was depicted as innate, and not a choice. The individual was not to be blamed for being homosexual, and the novel strives to evoke pity rather than judgment in the reader. But lesbianism is not portrayed as desirable, or even bearable; Stephen’s life is a sad story from beginning to end. She manages to find love and happiness for a while with Mary Llewellyn, a woman she meets when she serves as an ambulance
driver during the war, but decides to give Mary up when she realizes that Mary also can be happy with a man. Mary ends up marrying Stephen’s old friend Martin, and Stephen is doomed to a life of loneliness. *Z—A Love Story* presents a lighter attitude toward lesbianism throughout the novel but the outcome is the same; the protagonist surrenders her loved one to a male rival. The effort to normalize lesbianism in Grímsdóttir’s novel is made impossible by a plot in which heterosexuality is viewed as the only option—“girl gets girl” can never be the outcome of a love triangle. Heterosexual plots produce heterosexual endings, as Abraham puts it, and lesbianism therefore becomes a problem, in both *The Well of Loneliness* and Grímsdóttir’s novel. By applying the literary conventions of the genre, both novels reflect negative attitudes toward lesbianism embedded in the discourse surrounding homosexuality, even if they both contain an ambition to portray homosexuality in a more appealing manner.

The study of triangulation and homoerotic bonds in literature is often associated with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Sedgwick identifies a structure in the literature she studies—the erotic triangle in which two men compete for a woman. Sedgwick builds her argument on René Girard’s in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (1961). According to Girard the bond between the two male rivals in an erotic triangle is as strong as, or even stronger than, the bond between each man and the beloved woman, respectively. Sedgwick adds a gender and power perspective to Girard’s thoughts by referring to Gayle Rubin, who in “The Traffic in Women. Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” (1975) shows how men exchange women as gifts to strengthen the bonds between them. Sedgwick argues that literature in
a patriarchal society mirrors this structure through erotic triangles, where the two males do not primarily desire the woman, but strive to strengthen the bond between themselves (Sedgwick 1985).

Sedgwick has been criticized because she excludes readings of lesbian desire from her study. In The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture (1993), Terry Castle questions Sedgwick’s separation of female and male homosocial bonds. Sedgwick emphasizes that male homosociality stands in opposition to male homosexuality in our culture—it can even be homophobic—but does not separate female homosociality and homosexuality in the same way. Instead, she argues that female homosociality can contain many different bonds between women, even lesbian. Castle argues that this gives rise to a blockage in Sedgwick’s theory which, paradoxically, becomes its strength. Just because Sedgwick has identified the power of the male homosocial desire as crucial in English literature, she becomes incapable of noticing the potential of the female homosocial desire which can dissolve and break down the male homosocial triangle. The erotic triangle consisting of two women and a man is stable only as long as one woman does not relate to the other. In this type of triangle, the male pole becomes isolated in the same way the female pole does in the male homosocial triangle. If the two women furthermore have a lesbian relationship, the male pole becomes superfluous and cannot create new bonds with men since the female love object is part of a new desire constellation (Castle 1993: 67–73).

In Grímsdóttir’s novel as well as in Hall’s the love triangles do not develop the way Castle indicates, even if the two women have a lesbian relationship. Instead a man and a woman negotiate about and exchange a woman between them. Anna dies and
encourages Z to go back to Hrafn, and Stephen leaves Mary, allowing her to marry Martin. In each case the decision is made by the active woman, Anna or Stephen, and the beloved woman never gets to make a choice. This could also be read as a way of trying to normalize the lesbian relationship by making it look like a heterosexual relationship with a passive (female) part and an active (male) part that can negotiate with other men about females. However, this continuous striving to normalize lesbian love by depicting it as similar to heterosexuality can in itself be seen as heteronormative; the heterosexual relationship is seen as “normal” and lesbianism has to be similar in order to be approved. Abraham’s statement that the heterosexual plot makes lesbianism impossible in literature seems to be more extensive. The impact of heteronormativity in literature and narrative raises the question of whether lesbianism is a narrative impossibility in general. Perhaps all narration is coded by heterosexuality so that the way we construct narratives (with beginning, middle and end) is ruled by the heterosexual norm. The way we talk about lesbianism would then be colored by heterosexuality.

“An Egg of Life”: The Autumn Rain of Lesbianism
As mentioned earlier the ending of Grímsdóttir’s novel can be read as if a new spring awaits Z if she goes back to Hrafn, a spring that is reborn from the autumn rain that represents her relationship with Anna. This season imagery in which death is followed by rebirth is supported throughout the novel by a few crucial life and fertility symbols. Every time she goes with Z to the cottage Anna gives her an egg. They are not real eggs but rather painted egg-shaped stones, and Z keeps them in the cottage on a shelf near the fireplace with the poems Anna gives her under them. Every
time Anna gives Z an egg she says “Are you giving me an egg?”, and every time Anna responds “An egg of life” (10). Eggs are obviously a symbol of life or fertility, and both meanings in this case stand in opposition to the reality of life for the characters. Anna is dying, and their lesbian relationship is sterile rather than fertile when it comes to (biological) reproduction. Accordingly, the eggs are not real but are instead made of stone, a sterile material.

Z wants to have a baby, and Z and Anna play a game in which Z tells Anna stories about a baby boy and a baby girl. When with Hrafn, Z is more reluctant to have children, although Hrafn wants them. Hrafn seems, however, to be included in the two women’s dream about children, because the baby boy does not have two mothers, since “that boy would have one eye in the middle of his forehead”—instead the boy “has two mothers and one father” (140). The girl also has two mothers and one father (143). The metaphor of a physically deformed child connects the idea of two women having children together to deviance and pathology. The two mothers live together and the father sometimes visits, “chats to the mothers, picks up the baby, feels his gums for his first tooth, takes him out in his car, gives him waterproof trousers and a jacket, takes him to nursery school and, later, to school, and occasionally the little boy stays the night at his house” (145). This is a father who plays an active part in his child’s upbringing and who has a good relationship with the two women who live together. Z stops telling Anna the baby stories a year after she has learned of Anna’s illness, and Anna emphasizes that now, in the present, she wants Z to have that child and that she herself will be happy wherever she is (138–139). Just a few months after they have met, Z writes a letter to Anna describing how she and Hrafn have tried to make a baby boy or a baby girl, and Anna gets very jealous
Shortly after, Z writes a second letter to Anna about her and Hrafn’s efforts to make a baby, and she is worried: “And I start to think that I won’t be able to make a baby with Hrafn, won’t be able to make his dream come true, that my relationship with you has begun to get in the way and has drop by drop made me infertile.” (184)

In Z’s dreams about the babies the love triangle is an option—she can have babies with two mothers and one father and live happily with the woman she loves—but in the narrative, which is governed by the heterosexual plot, this kind of life is impossible. As long as Z is in a relationship with Anna she is infertile with Hrafn. The reproductive potential in her relationship with Anna is limited to fake fertility symbols—the eggs of stone—and dreams about babies. When Anna is at the cottage dying she says, as already mentioned, that she wants Z to have the baby now. She also adds that Z has to be patient with her body “and it’ll respond as you wish and hope for” (139). This indicates that Anna’s death will prepare Z’s body for babies and make it fertile again, like the autumn rain that Anna refers to in her last poem. But Anna does something else that will make room for new life to grow in Z’s body—she burns the eggs of stone:
I throw the eggs on the fire.
And hope they’ll turn black and melt, but they don’t.
Your eggs of life don’t melt like your letters and my poems.
The eggs go hard and black.
And when you find them –
Do me this favour, my dear.
Take them down to the lake and throw them far far out, hurl them out on to the water’s surface, but keep one for yourself and one for the little girl you’re going to have one day and a third one for the boy. (110)

Here the infertility of the eggs is further emphasized by the fact that they turn hard and black and do not function as fuel for the fire as the letters and the poems. Z has to throw them far away, since they will not make her fertile, but once she has children, she can make Anna part of the family by passing on the stones to them.

At the same time, Z puts the eggs on Anna’s poems which links them to the written word. The eggs of stone and Anna’s and Z’s relationship might not be fertile and result in a child, but the text could be procreative. The connection between the eggs and the poems could be read as a rebellion against heteronormativity, a way for the text to write itself out of the heterosexual plot—or at least an indication that the narrative of the lesbian relationship will live. On the other hand, Anna burns both the poems and the eggs of stone which indicates that there is no future for the lesbian narrative.

The fertility symbols play an important part in the novel, but the imagery is also drawn from the contexts of fire and snow. It is winter when Anna goes to the cottage to die, and the snow makes it almost impossible to get there. Once there she lights a fire to
get warm and to burn the letters, poems and stones. Several times the novel mentions how Anna easily gets cold and how she likes to sit in front of the fire wrapped in a duvet in order to get warm (214, 224). Anna is also cold on an emotional level—she keeps Z at a distance. Furthermore she is dying, and cold is associated with death and infertility; and the color of snow, white, can also be the color of death. Hence the snow and the cold could be connected to the infertility that saturates Anna's relationship with Z, the infertility that stems from both the fact that Anna is dying and the fact that two women cannot procreate with each other, at least not biologically. The fire can represent the passion between the two women, but it is also a destructive force. When Anna burns the letters, poems and stones she destroys the past, and in doing so makes room for something new.

As mentioned, Z is reluctant to heed Anna's suggestion to go back to Hrafín after her death. At the same time she seems to be aware of Anna's plans. When Arnthrudur and Valgeir ask Z whether she thinks Anna has gone to the cottage, she responds that they had tried to drive up there a few days ago but that the road was blocked, but she also blushes (86). Later, the reader learns that Anna has told Z of her plans to go to the cottage to die, and that Z has promised not to interfere with them (230–233). The last time they speak on the phone Anna asks Z to tell her the story of the children for the last time, and Z does so, even though she has refused to do so for a long time prior to that (233). This shows that Z knows Anna has gone to the cottage to die, but it might also be an indication that she knows of Anna's plans for her—that she should go back to Hrafín to have the children Anna and Z always dreamt about. Z normally finds it difficult to understand Anna's poems, but when burning the letters and getting ready to
die Anna emphasizes that Z will understand her last poem, the one that later turns out to contain a request for Z to go back to Hrafn (242).

The novel ends with the poem, and Z’s reactions after having read it: “She looks at the poem for a long time, contemplates each word, strokes the piece of paper, puts it on the fire, then turns to us and says, ‘I suppose it’s time to douse the fire’” (263). This is, of course, an ambiguous sentence, but one way of reading it is that Z will accept Anna’s request that she go back to Hrafn. Z has learned Anna’s previous poems by heart, in order to feel closer to her (37, 41), but, according to Anna, she has never understood them (242). She does not memorize the last poem, which could be interpreted as her getting the message right away—she does not have to memorize it to try to get closer to Anna and her intentions. After she has contemplated its content the last poem goes the same way as the other poems—it is put on the fire. Burning the poems is Anna’s work in order to destroy the past and make room for something new, and by finishing Anna’s work, Z seems to agree on the necessity of what Anna has done. Z also makes the statement that it is time to douse the fire, which could be read as it being time to douse her passion and love for Anna. Their relationship is a chapter that has come to an end. The ending is however ambiguous, and it is not entirely clear that Z will go back to Hrafn. Heterosexuality does not triumph at the end of the novel, but the heterosexual plot does; there is no future for lesbianism in the novel.

**Conclusion: A Discourse of Disease**

*Z—A Love Story* contains an ambition to normalize lesbianism, mainly through juxtaposing lesbianism and heterosexuality, and
in doing so the novel becomes a means in the political struggle to overcome judgmental attitudes toward homosexuality. At the same time Grímsdóttir’s novel establishes a connection in the story between lesbianism and ill-health, and even death. According to Abraham, the lesbian novel is governed by the heterosexual plot, in which lesbianism becomes a problem. Lesbianism as a problem is engrained in the narrative and the literary conventions and is hence impossible, or at least difficult, to overcome. Even the strive to normalize lesbianism by depicting it as similar to heterosexuality can be seen as heteronormative, which indicates that the problem Abraham identifies might have broader implications. If narration in general is coded by heterosexuality, lesbianism becomes a narrative problem. The discourse on lesbianism therefore has to include strategies to get rid of lesbianism, and connections to disease and death could be viewed as such a strategy. Grímsdóttir’s novel suggests that ill-health and death are part of the narrative conventions surrounding lesbianism. The power of the heterosexual plot indicates that disease and death are embedded in the cultural discourse on homosexuality. Literature is not only an underestimated source of knowledge of ethical issues, as Wayne Booth argues, but can also help us discover attitudes and ideologies flourishing in the society we live in, which we however might not get sight of until we look at society through the lens of literature.
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Professional identity and sexual difference

VARPU LÖYTTYNIEMI

Introduction
As I was reading through five volumes of the journal The Junior Physician (Nuori lääkäri) in search of material for a research project addressing the identity of the primary care health centre physician or general practitioner, I came across a text that became for me a site for materializing a claim I had been formulating: that equality among different kinds of physicianship and different career structures means we have to give the feminine versions of career and identity the status of a true professional identity, while at the same time denying the self-evident connection between each woman and (what we mean by) the feminine. Let me try to concretize this.

The text I mentioned is entitled The People Behind the Journal. It briefly introduces the 15 physicians, eight men and seven women, who make up the editorial team of The Junior Physician, a journal (as it says in the article lead) “made by physicians for physicians”. One of these members is the author of the text. The first introduction reads as follows:

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1. The Junior Doctors’ Association (JDA) that publishes The Junior Physician is one of the Finnish Medical Association’s three branches or groups. The other two branches are General Practitioners in Finland and The Finnish Association of Medical Specialists. The JDA was founded in 1928 to help junior doctors get paid for their hospital work (www.nly.fi). The Junior Physician is widely read among young doctors and even senior practitioners. Apart from the political argumentation, the texts are fun to read even for the politically sleepy.
This literary talent was invited to join the editorial office at the beginning of the 21st century. He takes an interest in movies, computers, writing prose, working out, and travel. Currently employed at the dermatology clinic in Oulu, this young man attaches special importance in his life to love, health, and making an imprint on the world. The only job that in Toni Aho’s mind could be better than that of a medical doctor is that of an author.3

This short description places great emphasis on life and activities outside the professional spheres of medicine: being a journalist and a “literary talent” requires a world of experiences that goes beyond the world of medicine. In this case, the result is a somewhat romantic view of an artist and a medic coexisting in the same person. The second editorial member, another male physician, is described as having an “impressive CV” for his extensive work and several memberships in medical, scientific and health care associations and on editorial boards, which combine to lend credibility to his status as a professional journalist. Reference to his favourite pastime interests – “global philosophizing, a philosophical outlook on life, and chopping firewood” adds further depth and a human touch to the picture.

The same balancing act between professional and artistic cuts through the third description, of yet another man: this is the editor of the journal, currently chief administrative physician at a private medical clinic, who has been involved in various medical associations. “Ever since he was a little boy,” the description says, “he has been creatively inclined: his drawing, painting, and playing music have now given way to writing for our famed journal, which for the time being is his only hobby besides sports”. And the “beloved troops at home, Sari [his wife], Ilari and Otto [children]”

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serve the function of “distancing [the physician’s] mind from the everyday grind”. The first two women on the editorial board of 15 are depicted like this:

Anne-Mari Kantanen, currently chair of the Junior Doctors’ Association of Finland, often makes it (just) in time to the editorial board meetings as well. She wields a vigorous pen, specializing among other things in personal interviews. Apart from her active involvement in organizations, Anne-Mari’s leisure interests include friends, cooking, singing with the girls and skiing – once she is finished fussing over her husband Olli … ;) Her brothers are also important to Anne-Mari.4

Ulla Korhonen, mother of two small children, is currently living in Joensuu where she works a 13-hour week with the city’s contraception and maternity services. Ulla has been involved on the editorial board since 2000. Apart from running a family and getting her job done, her main interests are classical singing as well as sports. The most important things in Ulla’s life at the moment are her husband and two-year-old Tellu and one-year-old Risto. Aiming to specialize in gynaecology, Ulla’s message to our readers is this: “Mother-physicians with small children and locum doctors, let us unite!”5

As a reader, I am reminded of the physicians’ gender when they are referred to by their first names or with words like young man (no. 1), little boy (no. 3), (singing with) the girls (no. 4), or mother (no. 5). The text does not reflect on how the physician’s gender ties

in with the interests and capabilities with which he/she is presented and, from a slightly different angle, how the text constructs the identities of women and men physicians. These questions are left to a gender-sensitive reader like myself.

Gender neutrality (or gender blindness) is typical of the Finnish way of conceptualizing working life in general (Korvajärvi 1998, 23; Rantalaiho 1997). Seen through feminist lenses, though, the medical profession has a male history (Riska 2001) and a masculine normative identity (Eriksson 2003; Löyttyniemi 2004). As to the organization of time during workdays and work lives, dedication to work continues to designate the mythical ideal in professional cultures, and the heterosexual familial pattern is invoked when the private and family are implied as a woman’s spheres (Epstein et al. 1999; Löyttyniemi 2004). The sociological gaze, such as those of Judith Lorber’s (1984) and Elianne Riska’s, has looked at how the social category of gender is and has been used to establish and maintain a hierarchic division of labour (Riska 1993a, 8). Women physicians face barriers on their way to success and are pushed to give priority to careers of lesser professional status, that is, specialties in which the emphasis is on interaction with patients and/or practice hours are compatible with family responsibilities.

It thus seems difficult to exclude gender from a text that discusses and describes physicians’ lives and careers; a culturally competent reader will recognize mother-physicians breaking the norm of the professional while assigned the normative femininity. A man prioritizing family responsibilities would break even his normative gender (Epstein et al. 1999) – which does not mean men cannot or do not do so, though not in the text in question. On the contrary, the three selected men are presented as actors in the professional, social, artistic, and philosophical domains, while
the women are more emphatically located in the private relations along with the professional. Of the first two references to family members, the man physician’s “beloved troops at home” have the function of distancing the physician’s “mind from the everyday grind”, while the woman physician has many interests, as soon as “she is finished fussing over [the husband]”. The priority for the man physician is thus the work while the woman gives precedence to her loved one(s), not as an equal but, in line with the existing gender order, as a servant – albeit jokingly of course ;) In the very first presentation of the male colleague Toni Aho (whose short stories in *The Junior Physician* I very much enjoy; some of them are rare openings to fresh, revitalizing understandings of gender and sexuality), I recognize the free soul that typically embodies what actually is explicated in the text: the figure of a *young man*. Further, my gender-sensitive reading responded to the stereotypical description of a woman physician as a “mother-physician with small children and locum doctor” (as her own motto is quoted in the article).

After inquiring into the representations of the two genders, I might want to emphasize the socially constructed nature of gender. I might want to read critically, undoing the difference, its naturalness; there is really no reason to believe that only women have relational obligations. Whichever emphasis I choose, the feminine or womanly choice seems annoyingly annoying. The mother-physician is too pregnant with enforced meanings and hints at biology to lend herself comfortably to the interpretation that she is only a non-gendered example of the life that every professional has to piece together. If, then, I read for the different (re)presentations of men and women, it is difficult not to accept the masculine as the norm. I create my gender trouble out of the women physicians be-
ing represented primarily as mothers or fussers over their spouses, as if they were ascribed minor identities.

Towards a professional collage
There is also a third way: to read The People Behind the Journal as a collage or field (Grosz 1994, 22) of different physicians and different career structures. After all, each physician in the article is portrayed with admiration and care, each career is given a value in its own right, whether it is a combination of work and family, organizational and charity functions, or artistic life. The editorial board members do not stand in a hierarchic relationship to each other, but are on the same (textual) level, side by side, not unified by the same model or identity but by the concrete task of writing this journal “by physicians for physicians”. Careers that can be traditionally and culturally gendered masculine and feminine are depicted as different standpoints from which it is possible and desirable to write about the physician’s experiences for other junior physicians.

Within the prevailing cultural gender order I can only read the women’s womanly choices as minor. But I can, for a fleeting moment, imagine a place for the text and myself outside the gender structure. From there I can see a professional collage in which all careers are of equal value and in which mothers are women but mothering is not attributed to each woman as her natural or culturally forced identity. In this kind of reading, sex and bodily difference are still there; they are not undone or deleted, but are cultivated as professional identities. The physicians are men or women – or former little boys or girls or mothers or fathers – but their sex is not given as a causative explanation for who they are and what their priorities are in life. They may in these short
descriptions accomplish their sexes while bringing to professional fruition their embodied identities – in different and equal ways.

The purpose of my article is to outline a frame of thought and a methodological approach for this kind of professional collage. If I succeed in doing this, I will be able to see in the “mother-physician” a true professional identity and an expression of this woman's desires. As Elizabeth Grosz (1995) suggests, theorizing the equality of the maternal and the feminine without accepting them as the norm for a woman may take the path of feminisms of difference: cultivating the difference between the sexes is done simultaneously with a major transformation of the cultural and symbolic order, so that difference is understood as pure difference, with no privilege given to either term or a pre-given (masculine) norm. With the help of my favourite philosopher Luce Irigaray, this is the line I want to pursue in my essay. The argumentation starts by explaining why identity needs to be created for the feminine, that is, for nature, body, mothers, and relations. Then, after re-visiting the question of essentialism, I will do what perhaps must be done to paint the collage: in terms of a difference-based methodology I will attempt to write the language of body and relations in order

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6 The mother-physician’s claim for identity, as well as my analysis, need to be seen in their Nordic, and particularly their Finnish, welfare-state context. The prevailing gender contract is that of wage-worker motherhood, which means heavy state central government involvement in providing the social rights and services that are necessary for the organization of everyday work and family life. The housewife (for which the Finnish word is “kotiäiti”, that is “housemother”) institution was never deeply rooted in Finnish everyday life practice, even though it had – and continues to have – ideological strength. Women do not have to fight for the legitimacy of their choice to work even when they have small children, and indeed Finnish women work full time more often than do women in the other Nordic countries (Rantalaiho, 1997). In this sense, being a “mother-physician” can truly be an option. However, in practice it is (still) women who more often and more self-evidently than men have to piece together the demands of family life with work, even among physicians (Töyry et al., 1999).
to, firstly, create a professional-academic identity for myself – and ultimately for any body – in that language and, secondly, to write the analysis and interpretation of one woman physician’s narrative identity in such a way that refuses to know her or name her by any professional norm.

Professional gender as relation

In her article *The Sociology of Professions and the Profession of Gender*, Celia Davies (1996) suggests that research on the significance of gender for professions should understand gender as a relation and as a process, while remaining sensitive to the historical and cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity as resources “from which subjectivities, identities and behavioural regularities emerge” (Davies 1996, 663). The historical and cultural meanings of profession and professional identity overlap with the meanings of masculinity and man’s development in terms of autonomy, empowering the self, setting out on a satisfactory life course. Once again, “a key feature of profession, as presently defined, is that it professes gender” (Davies 1996, 661).

My attempt to create a professional collage of difference builds on Davies’ emphasis on gender as relation and process, albeit – I hope! – in a peculiar way. As Irigaray argues throughout her philosophical work, what we must do to escape the gender hierarchy is understand anew and cultivate the relation between woman and man, the sexual difference, without adhering to the cultural and historical constructions of femininity and masculinity. We must start with the bodily difference and let it appear in another way, as a relationship between two who are different in an incommensurable way.

As Irigaray reminds us (e.g. 2004, viii), we understand other
differences in terms of sexual difference. That is, sexual difference is such a universal relationship between bodies and thought that it also shapes our understanding of other differences and structures our cultural minds and our thinking and feeling about the feminine part as minor (Irigaray 1996a, 35). These secondary differences include the hierarchy between prosperous career advancement and a career dedicated to the visceral close-to-life tasks of childcare and to other relationships in the private and professional spheres. My argumentation here is founded on the intellect that in order to create the professional collage in which all the different constellations of life and career are given equal value, I should be able to undo the gender hierarchy by supporting and constituting a true professional and cultural identity of the feminine and, at the same time, to undo the normative connection between woman and orientation to caring. Two acts, Irigaray writes, must be carried out simultaneously:

There are thus two acts to be carried out almost simultaneously: an act of constitution and an act of interpretation and departure from a cultural identity, departure from a land of exile that falsely separates man and woman, where man is attributed mechanistic and technological norms and powers, and woman physiological and affective ones (Irigaray 1996a, 46).

The departure from the land of exile means undoing the dichotomous organization of social reality and social and personal identities. The first act – the act of constitution – is one of creating cultural identity for the feminine and cultural expressions for the bodily difference.
The act of undoing gender (which is not enough)

In her article, Lorber (2000) suggests that our task be undoing gender, finding a way to an imaginary society that is not structured by gender. We must, she argues, turn our feminist drift into analysing how and where individuals are able to think and do things differently in order to resist and reshape that structuring. We must refuse to accept that social reality remains binary and hierarchic just because we are so used to seeing that reality as being based on bodily and genital differences that we can’t easily imagine an alternative.

In her way, Irigaray shares this utopia. But the ways there are different. Lorber discusses the issue of biological bodies and differences, and argues (as many other feminists do) that there is no biological body or embodied experience that is not already marked by the social and cultural. So “the end goal of feminist revolution must be (...) not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally” (Firestone 1971, 11). The bodily difference will only remain “in narrowly biological contexts like reproduction” (Sandra Bem; quoted in Lorber 2000, 80), but that difference must not have any cultural, social or psychological implications. In a gender-free society, there will be no men or women. Will there be mother-physicians? Father-physicians? Can they have culturally celebrated identities?

What I want to argue is that it is not enough to explicate and gradually undo the female connotations of the ways of doing and thinking that are now gendered feminine. That is a bit like changing diapers, an example Lorber (2000, 88) gives for a small gender rebellion: showing that men can do it and providing them with a gender-neutral baby station where they can do it does not undo
the hierarchy; changing diapers remains just another task that someone can and must do. But it does not become a task that has equal social and symbolic value as, say, the advancement of a professional career. Mothering, and other embodied and affective powers, still do not provide physicians with an identity that cannot be judged by the norm of career as less successful. Mothering still does not ground different terms of identity.

The first act: constituting a culture and identities of bodily difference

The Western tradition, including its medical cultures, defines itself in relation to nature – Mother Nature – by separating itself from and attempting to dominate it (e.g. Irigaray 2004, 68). The early ‘undifferentiated’ time in every individual life course that is conceptualized as preceding language and culture belongs (always symbolically, often concretely) to the relationship between mother and child. Mother, and the female body whose morphology is reminiscent of the natural origin, remain part of nature in opposition to human culture and identity. This is why it is not enough to only theorize the (mothering) body, still less to belittle its cultural meaning; instead, we need to create cultural forms that can express its identity, its way to relate to others, its way to speak.

As Alison Stone (2004) points out in her article reflecting on Irigaray’s essentialism, the view that the body has neither gender nor identity before or independent from the social gendering processes and cultural representations entails that the natural body and bodily differences do exist as some kind of “(proto-)corporeal materiality” (Stone 2004, 14). But bodies have no meaning or shape – not to mention the ability to give meaning and shape the process of their own acculturation – in themselves, prior to cultural rep-
presentation (Stone 2004, 14). A hierarchy is thus created between culture and body that identifies the second term as passive and dependent on the first. In other words, these terms are interpreted as masculine and feminine and the dreaded hierarchy of gender is thereby recreated in the attempt to free individual subjectivities and identities from its power. What is culturally and historically understood as the core of womanhood, her body and her closeness to nature, is again deprived of value, of cultural identity (Stone 2004.)

Like Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) emphasizes that it is exactly the opposition of the biological body to cultural reason that must be overcome so that the gender order can be changed. Grosz writes about the body that is natural and cultural at the same time, the biological body that is socially, politically, culturally inscribed but also formative and productive of culture (Grosz 1994, 4). Stone (2004) suggests that Irigaray’s recent way goes even further into nature: to the biological, physiological body as pre-given, pre-cultural. For Irigaray, the relationship between body and culture is neither causal nor deterministic, but rather expressive and generative; the body expresses itself through culture and cultural forms (Löyttyniemi 2009). She invites her reader to join her in creating a new kind of culture and linguistic forms through which (mothering and other) bodies can express their particular needs, their identities, their ways of relating to others, their ways of speaking to others words that are for love, not only for reference (Irigaray 2002a). Only then – this is my Irigarayan conviction – will we be able to see past the bonds between mothers and nature and listen to each mother and each woman, wondering at her unique way and singularity, her way of cultivating her nature as her cultural identity, of being private and professional at the same time.
In the last section of my essay, I will give this a try. I want to put into empirical use Irigaray's ideas about language suited for bodies' singularity: language in which the rhythm of speech, the colour of voice, the music of the body-instrument carry the meaning (Irigaray 2002a, Cavarero 2005). Through writing in a language that will express my body in the scientific culture I make a claim for a cultural identity of my nature, for a – and any – body of knowledge. Writing my woman's nature, however, raises the question of the nature of nature: how can the natural identity of a body-self be understood in such a way that it refuses determination and avoids the presumption that there is a feminine identity that can be expected of each woman?

Importantly, for a philosopher of becoming like Irigaray, the biological, physiological or natural body is not something static, already existing, or unfolding of a given essence. On the contrary, its form can be understood in terms of a series of unpredictable becomings in the way that all matter can be seen as “possessing its own immanent, intensive resources for the generation of form from within” driven by intensity difference (De Landa 1999, 32). The form in becoming is neither free nor determined but opens to the future, the unpredictable, the unknown. Following some currents of thought in philosophy as well as evolutionary biology and physics, Grosz (1999b) shows how the opposition between consciousness or mind and matter, or between the way of formation of social-cultural and natural-material phenomena, will be deconstructed by the temporality of becoming: the genesis of form, whether chemical, biological or social, takes place in time “that is not regulated by causality and determination but unfolds with its own rhythms and logic” (Grosz 1999a, 4).

While sexual difference, the morphological and physiological
terms of a woman’s or man’s identity, is universal, each material body faces “the singular task of being this man or this woman” (Irigaray 1996a, 28). Each woman and man needs to find their own way of unfolding, bringing to cultural fruition, their sexuate nature. Besides innate or genetic particularities, the body’s singularity lies in its having a particular genealogy, a particular history of relational becoming (Irigaray 1996a, 39). While generated from within, the bodily identity needs to meet with others in order to grow, to become. In each other person, the body meets another rhythm of life, an intensity difference that will nurture the process of personal becoming. In the final section of my article, I meet with one of the general practitioners I have interviewed for my research. I do not really try to know her; instead, I try to wonder at how different she is from my thought and to show how I keep becoming thanks to her, thanks to our difference. The culture and language of difference are both for bodies and for relations, for encounters, for a caress, for love – for the feminine identity, for women and men.

A way of wondering: outlining a professional collage
In the spirit of sexual difference, the full conviction that the other person has an identity and a behavioural style in and as her particular body (which is a sexed body of necessity) means that I cannot rely on any preconceived impressions or expectations in order to know another person. To know something – I will never know completely – about her singular way of living as a body and in this (professional) world we share I need to tone down my experience, my cultural norms, and the gender dichotomy that structure my own perception and thought. That is, I need to wonder at the other, which entails a continuous effort to keep to the very first
moment of the encounter with her, the moment when she was new to me and I could not define or judge or place her with cultural coordinates (Irigaray 1996b, Heinämaa 2000, Löyttyniemi 2005, 2008). For Irigaray (2002a), it takes a cultural transformation towards expressive forms that are not for reference but for touching and for relations between two different bodies, whatever their sex.

I want to turn this attitude of difference into a scientific way of knowing, a method of wondering at the physician who once shared with me her life narrative. As Irigaray reminds us in Dialogues (Irigaray 2002b, 64), the question of difference is a question of method, and further, change of method. The ways of knowing need themselves to be created out of respect for the other’s difference, out of listening to the other, out of keeping silent instead of speaking about, and out of talking in poietic ways that create new forms instead of communicating something that already exists (Irigaray 2002b, 85–90). By trying my way with expressive forms and touching words I will soon open up a textual space for my meeting with another mother-physician. Marjatta, as I choose to call her, has inspired my creation of the first figure in the collage of physicians in which different doctors stand side by side instead of a picture in which masculine is in front and the feminine careers make up the professional background.

I interviewed Marjatta in 2005 and asked her to tell me her story for the purposes of my research on health centre physicians’ narrative identities. The reason for my taking health centre general practitioners as my point of collage was the presumption that primary health care physicianship professes the female gender for historical and cultural reasons, in Finland and elsewhere (Riska 1993b, 157–158), and gains its secondary status from this profes-
sion. The general practitioner is situated at the interface between scientific medicine and the messy swamp of everyday lives (West 2001, 2). The everyday is the woman's element in society structured by gender, while hard specialist medicine, as embodied in its most crystallized form by the surgeon, is a male figure (e.g. Cassell 1998). The conceptual and theoretical needs brought up by the question of the general practitioner's identity (crisis 7) and gender thus remind me of the questions I am confronted with when addressing the dilemma of the mother-physician: How can I do and write research on the medical profession in such a way that I will nurture differences between careers and identities? How can I write about professional identities without letting the masculine norm sneak in? How can I highly value the messy, everyday, relational, emotional and embodied sides of physicians' work, recognizing their feminine, motherly connotations but without presuming them to be the norm or reference for any woman's identity? To summarize, my purposes with the wondering attitude, or method in a non-customary sense, are:

7 At a one-day seminar entitled Work Control in Health Centers in November 2004, Professor of General Practice at the University of Tampere Kari Mattila gave a talk about general practitioners' or health centre physicians' identity crises during and after their hospital-centred education. Medical education takes place at hospitals, not only physically but also ideationally and culturally; even at the two younger medical faculties in Kuopio and Tampere, where the curriculum includes a stronger emphasis on health centre work, most of the enculturation to the world of medicine takes place at university hospitals and within the domain of specialist medicine and in the presence of medical technology.
1) Through my way of writing science in the language of love (Irigaray 2002a), that is, language appropriate for expressing the body and the relationship between two, to create a cultural and professional identity for the feminine.

2) In the spirit of sexual difference, I will make a conscious effort to meet with each physician without imposing on him/her the cultural norms and expectations of woman, man or physician. Given the cultural condition of the terms themselves and my aim to study just physicians, my point is not to escape the whole of the culture. The effort is rather a direction of thought, to remind me that each narrative of a physician’s self and each structure of career, whether gendered masculine or feminine in the prevailing gender order, is an expression of the doctor’s singularity and bodily nature seeking a professional cultural form.

3) To try to create knowledge and a way of knowing that, to quote Elizabeth Grosz (1999a, 11), will “instead of invoking the criteria of repeatability and the guarantee of outcomes required for industrial and technological efficiency, [seek] to endlessly experiment without drawing conclusions, without seeking law-like regularities”: I want to know physicians’ identities in a way that leaves open both the identities and the knowing itself, in the continuous process of becoming (See Irigaray 2002c, 121–130).

This is what I want to do. Instead of speaking about the physician I have chosen as my example in this essay, I speak to her. This gives me the chance to celebrate the two, you and me, and the modes of language and speaking that belong to the relationship between two. Further, instead of speaking about how the two acts suggested by Irigaray – leaving behind the dichotomous gender order and constituting new identities out of bodily difference – could be carried out, I make an attempt to create (some) new forms for ac-
completing that task. I want to express myself in a language that expresses my body, my bodily self, in its continuous process of opening towards the other and closing upon oneself again. Perhaps I will create some silence and wonder in my reader? Importantly, by arguing that the ways of speaking and writing I have adopted can be used for purposes of scientific writing and knowing, I am making a serious attempt to create out of the feminine another academic identity than that of a disembodied knower, which is the norm in the (scientific) world dichotomized by binary gender.

I want to finish my essay in an untraditional way, by leaving it open to some extent. By speaking-in-writing to Marjatta I want to re-create my process of wondering at her and then returning back to myself and my inquiry into professional identities. I will come to closure in my meeting with her, show what her narrative taught me, how it changed me and my thought. But I don’t want to reach a decision about the state of the profession or the fate of my method. To me, this is the beginning of the professional collage or design in which the different elements can be arranged according to laws of reason or of chance. And this is a methodological experiment and a suggestion for a direction of scientific thought that is based on embodied knowing and, in Bakhtinian terms, open unfinalized word of dialogue (Bakhtin 1981).

Finally, I will leave open the question of how the fact that I am a woman, a woman’s body, ultimately relates to the feminine identity for which I want to claim professional status – we cannot really know, yet. At this moment this is how my body with its innate rhythms, woman’s interiors, and culturally situated history speaks. At any rate, I believe that the feminine identity is a promise of new value for every woman who has become a woman under the influence of the prevailing gender structure – equal value
and equal cultural identity given to her for the very reason that she is a woman. It is value given to her body, to all that her body now symbolizes culturally, socially, and historically. It is cultural value given to the kinds of experiences, identities, and careers that at the moment only have the meaning of less (controlled, rational, autonomous).

Dear Marjatta,

Out of your motherhood you made an opening to your telling about both private and professional relations.

Some time ago I recruited interviewees for my study using the snowballing method. One of my colleagues knew you and suggested I contact you and ask whether you would be interested in participating. So I phoned you and explained the purpose of my research: to study health centre physicians’ identities. I even said a few words about the narrative, autobiographical method we would be applying in the interview: I would ask you to tell me about your life and work as a physician, about your professional career in a rather broad sense, with different sectors of life intersecting and career becoming embedded in the whole of life. You said you would be delighted to participate, although you did have some concerns. One of your children had recently had a family accident (as you called it in the interview). You could hardly imagine talking about your life and career without touching upon that pain, and you needed to know whether it would be appropriate to go down that road in the interview.

I wondered at your trust in me already, the ease with which you could talk to me and share your motherly pain with me over the phone. That emotion of wonder, as I have learned from Luce Irigaray (1996b), means a sensing of difference between my way of being and the one I hear in your words. And in and now after the interview, I can wonder more, and start to sense how you can provide me with opening (windows) as the metap-
hor of the self while secrecy and hiding (behind curtains) are more familiar images to my material and metaphorical being in this life, this world, and this body.

Luce Irigaray writes about identity as the pulsating movement between opening toward the other and returning to oneself (Irigaray 2002a). Identity is not — as I used to believe — about the unity closed upon what is my own, the one of me. My identity is not one but two; my words are meant to be appropriate for me and for you, for two who will be and who will always remain different. I can meet with you thanks to words — and narratives — and gestures, words as gestures, but I can never know you, your mystery. So my movement goes toward you, the time of our relationship forms a space for our encounter, and then back to myself where I can rest, where I can savour your words and become something new, something still appropriate to my shadowy self. Thanks to the difference between us, I can open myself to you and gather myself — again and again — while letting you remain you. My identity is this movement, it is this difference. My identity is always in the future of our relationship, always with you.

It was springtime, the time for growth; Irigaray (2002c, 122) writes about how the state that is provoked in us by the mystery of springtime growth can be provoked in an encounter with the other person: the state of wonder, of vitality, of renewal that we experience by bathing in it through all our senses, our whole body, our whole soul. No wonder I wondered at you, at opening; the whole cosmos wondered with me, in me, back in the spring!

You live and work in a small village where you know everyone and everyone knows you, and you have told them about your family accident. Your husband cannot understand you; he would rather hide it from others and from himself. But not you. Your way is that of openness; you do not
want to cover yourself with secrecy. On the contrary, you want to be there for other mothers in pain and help to refuse your common guilt.⁸

Perhaps selves can be opened like windows, to see and be seen, to breathe in the fresh air, to ventilate the lungs and airless rooms and ideas. You are so open to new ideas, to yoga and some other Eastern influence. In my childhood atmosphere, foreign dogmas were wrong and forbidden in God’s eyes, but your God, your deep faith, sounds different. It is like your bedroom windows that you open wide open every morning so that you can breathe. Those windows are so important to you; they are a sign of and a metaphor for feeling your own way, knowing what is right for you, being faithful to you – there have been times when others did not want you to air the rooms out – and not having to hide.

We both carry our memories of our mothers in front of windows. Your memory comes as an explanation, a materialization of your not needing and not wanting to hide. You lived in a town just as I did as a child, so there were others outside your windows, others who could see you; but your mother never drew the curtains when she undressed. She thought it was about time for all those who had never seen a naked woman to see one now. I have wondered why I carry with me the image of my mother’s urge to draw the curtains. She would go from room to room to draw them all before she could undress; no one was to see her; see us, bare. Now I think I know: that image is so pervaded by fear of gazes and thoughts of others, of all that can be seen. It remains with me because it captures something of my own way of being my self, my body, in need of shelter – not because I want to protect my privacy (as Irigaray, and perhaps you, would suggest is the reason bodies do need shelters), but out of fear.

⁸ This is not to say that everyone should open up like you did, Marjatta; we all relate in different ways! But the fact that I wonder at your openness as much as I do marks a difference between your way and mine. Openness thus becomes my point of entering my own becoming thanks to you, and my knowing more about my cultural origin.
Your windows mean so much more than sheets of glass, they are the clear contour of your self that you can open whenever you need fresh air, whenever you feel for renewal, for the other. You can close these windows again to keep your warmth, your privacy. Opening oneself to the other, to the unexpected, to difference – I wonder which of you gives me greater insight into the vital opening, Irigaray or you? Both opening and gathering oneself are vital for identity (Irigaray 2002a). There must be somewhere for me to return to so that I can meet with your difference with wonder and curiosity. It takes this very gesture of returning to my self to let you change me and safely remain myself. And let you be you.

You pay attention to the reluctance of physicians in general to live among the people they treat as patients and I know what you mean; this is a common argument. As you say, not everyone likes to be watched or to be the object of gossip. But you don’t mind. The gazes of others cannot invade your privacy; you know where and when to return to your intimate space and time, and you know how to keep them to yourself. With the exception of an old rural woman who can get antibiotics for her urinary tract infection from your medicine cabinet day or night, you tell anyone who stops you on Saturdays or at the grocery store and asks about their latest blood tests to ask again during office hours. You need your own time in order not to be distressed.

So I wonder at your openness. I am not trying to grasp it or understand it, but rather to do something more like bathing in it (Irigaray 2002c, 128), listening to it in the way I listen to foreign music played by strange instruments, in unknown rhythms and melodies – I can live to that music, open myself to it, let it fill me and feel it in me. And then return to myself, the new rhythm still ringing in my cells and my soul (Irigaray 2004, 135–136). For those two hours that the interview lasted, I could take deep breaths of all the fresh air you let in through your open windows, through your words to me!
It is autumn now as I write this, time for gathering; the rhythms of nature make your words ripen in me. I can feel a possibility of new becoming in me, a new rhythm of thought and relating that respects the need both of opening and of a shelter. Thank you!

But what am I doing here? I use your words and metaphors to extract a possible identity for a physician and a woman, but it is my possibility of becoming, fresh air for my identity, not yours that I cannot know, that I can only touch with. To meet with another in difference, Luce Irigaray writes, this return to my own self is the only ethical way. Your words and your narrative form the chiasm of our paths toward each other, the time-space of asking, Who are you?; and after this question we both, the two of us who are and always will be different, will go back to our own identities where we can go on asking, Who can I become thanks to you? (Irigaray 1996b, 93). If I went your way from the chiasm, approached your identity with my conceptual, theoretical and experienced armature, trying to describe you, trying to know you, I would not cherish your irreducible difference, your mystery.

At any rate, the method of wondering does not mean that I can only write about issues that are of autobiographical, personal meaning to me. I believe I can raise questions about the subject matter of my research on physicians’ identity the way I did in my article when I wondered at junior physicians who willingly told me about their own illnesses and other bodily necessities (Löyttyniemi 2005). I had not expected to hear such narratives, so that is when I felt the first emotion of wonder – I did not know how to assess the narratives, where to put them in my organization of thought. So I had to stop; I could sense a quiet space open up in me, and I opened it intentionally in order to wonder. Only after returning to myself and feeling for the difference did I ask myself what my “customary conceptions about the other sex” were, my “cognitive attitudes, theories and convictions” that the doctors’ narratives did not follow or adhere to, what the “emotions,
perceptions and movements’ (Heinämaa 2000, 68) were that I so naturally wedded to a physician’s wounded body. I found in myself the cultural and professional expectations of invulnerability and control that apply to men as well as physicians: beliefs that perhaps need ventilation more generally. Having wondered at my male colleagues who told me about and through their diseased doctors’ bodies, my own expectations changed. The cultural order and the hierarchy between invulnerability and control gave way to a possibility to consider them two different dimensions of humanity instead of two opposites.

Back to myself after wondering at you, Marjatta, I remember reading Kristina Eriksson’s thesis on masculine physicianship and women doctors balancing between masculinity and the expectation of being true women, that is, feminine (Eriksson 2003). She notes how both manhood and physicianship are constructed as the ability to maintain distance from the patients and to maintain a distinction between the private and the professional. This is the very expectation about being a physician that I find in my own thought when I meet with you; you did not tell up to it. Quite to the contrary, you narrated your professional identity from a mother’s heart, letting the memory of your mother and your own share of mother’s pain motivate personal openness as professionality that is appropriate to you. Back to myself after wondering at you, a different frame of a physician’s identity opens up, the possibility of professional identity that goes beyond the private-professional divide. The encounter between two people that is gendered feminine in the present cultural order is then cultivated as a professional domain, as a process of becoming patient and physician, with respect for the different needs and thoughts and experiences of both, both expressing themselves and wondering at each other – and always able to go back to their own privacies.
References


The never-ending pause?
Representations of menopause in the writings of Kerstin Thorvall, Simone de Beauvoir and Doris Lessing

| MARIA JÖNSSON |

She walked around in Swedish society and found herself becoming a lady [tand]. No men looked at her in that way, she was not a sexed being anymore, and no 25-year-old feminist can imagine how it feels when you no longer have to fight for your right to be treated as a human.¹

Kerstin Thorvall, Ensam dam reser ensam
[A lonely lady travels alone], 1979

Menopause as absence

Every time I try to present my research project I feel uncomfortable. The words “I’m studying the motif of menopause in contemporary Swedish literature” always seem to pass unheard. I very seldom get any reaction at all from the person I am talking to. Only blank eyes looking back at me, no amusement, or even disgust – just nothing. I find this interesting. To not get a reaction – no response, just a blank look – is exactly what menopause seems to be about. It’s a non-topic, a negation; it’s the absence of something, a pause. After all “menopause” is nothing in itself; it’s a sign of something that has not happened. I am interested in representations of this pause – what is it a pause from? When does this pause end? How does one exist in this pause – not being recognizable in the most literary sense of the word?

In this article I will discuss these matters. Since I am starting

¹ The translations of titles and quotes from Thorvall’s writings in this article are my own.
up my post doc-project on menopause as a literary motif this article will be explorative and raise more questions than it answers. I will reflect on the absence of menopause in contemporary literature, focusing on the Swedish context and the writings of Kerstin Thorvall.

To do research about representations of menopause is largely to research something that is invisible, silent or totally absent. I had an idea for this article to look into some examples in popular culture – films, TV series, commercials etc. in which menopause is represented – but I found it almost impossible to even find a glimpse or hint of this motif. What I did find were different stereotypes of middle-aged or “old” women. It’s almost as if women slide out of the picture after their “reproductive phase” has finished – if they cannot be used as sex objects or be cast in the role of mothers they have no part to play. The only part left is that of the grandmother or the “old lady”, who is either calm, wise and mothering – with no needs and no body – or portrayed as a monstrous, bitter, evil witch. There is not much room for the woman in her 50’s who is still a corporeal, sexual subject. I find this truly sad and a bit strange. Many other taboos and silences concerning women’s bodies have been included in popular culture – but not menopause, and not much aging connected to sexuality either, with a few exceptions of course. Why is this? Is it because the myth of youth has a firm grip not only on popular culture in general but also on feminist or queer artistic expressions? Or is it because there is no one listening to these particular stories about corporeal aging?

In research things have been done concerning menopause, especially in medicine and particularly in hormone therapy. In medical terms, “menopause” signifies the date when menstruation ceases.
Even if this seems like an unproblematic “fact”, there are different interpretations of this phenomenon – menopause is sometimes understood as something natural, a “phase” in a woman’s lifecycle, and sometimes understood as a medical problem – something that requires treatment.² The feminist studies on menopause have focused on deconstructing the medical explanations of it – showing how biased and impregnated they are with misogynist myths and images of the female body.³ In feminist critique, menopause is often understood as both a natural and cultural phenomenon. The problems that can occur during this period are seen to be created by gender structures and inequalities – not by biology. This moment in a woman’s life is understood as a natural transition, during which the woman has an opportunity to find her self beyond society’s expectations. The overall impression of the feminist thinking on this issue is that menopause can be a good thing, that it can represent a reevaluation and a reorientation toward greater integrity and freedom in women’s lives.⁴

Although menopause has been investigated within medicine, biology and in feminist studies, very little has been done when it comes to menopause in Swedish art, literature or drama. In my own field – literary studies – almost nothing has been done about the artistic representations of menopause, middle age or even aging in general.

Since I had a hard time finding representations of menopause

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² An overview of the research on menopause can be found in Helene Ekström, *Keeping My Ways of Being: Middle-aged Women and Menopause* (Lund, 2005).
⁴ This dignity-oriented perspective can be found, for instance, in Germaine Greer’s *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (London, 1991), see also Ekström 2005, p. 27 for a discussion of feminist perspectives on menopause.
in popular culture I chose to look nearby where I knew I could find something about menopause that was beyond the stereotypes – which means that this article will focus on examples from the writings of Kerstin Thorvall and to some extent also those of Doris Lessing and Simone de Beauvoir to provide a relief for the Swedish context. I have no ambition to perform a real comparative analysis of these texts – instead, my article should be read as a first mapping of a literary motif that could be investigated further.

**Kerstin Thorvall: Menopause as an (im)possibility for a woman to become “human”**

Kerstin Thorvall was born in the 1920’s. In the 50’s and 60’s she wrote for children and young adults but became truly famous in Sweden in the 1970’s with the book *Det mest förbjudna* [*The most forbidden*] when she began to write so-called “women’s literature”, or “confessions” – not unlike Erica Jong in the US or Suzanne Brogger in Denmark. She was scandalized because of the outspoken sexuality in her books and the unconventional portraits of mothers; mothers running away from their children, mothers having sex with strangers on the kitchen floor while the kids watch TV in the other room and so on. In Sweden, Thorvall is most known for just that – the norm-breaking characterizations of women’s sexuality, bodies and desires. Her writings are often interpreted as being concerned with sexuality and freedom – or freedom for women through sexuality. But my point is that the norm-breaking aspects of Thorvall’s writings has more to do with the way she portrays aging women, the aging body, than with outspoken sexuality. In her writing it’s often the middle-aged, heterosexual woman over fifty who is in focus; it’s her longing, her craving, her needs that are being investigated.
Kerstin Thorvall is one of few writers who have taken the motif of menopause seriously. One of her books, from 1982, is even called *What if it’s the menopause* [Tänk om det är klimakteriet]. This book is a mix of fiction and fact, with some parts being short stories and others interviews or polemical articles. In this book Thorvall discusses the change of a woman’s life when she leaves the fertile age. Thorvall sees this period of change as a state of mind in both the woman herself and (most of all) in her social environment – it’s a change in the world outside, the way it looks back at the woman. In this book menopause is analyzed as both a biological and a social phenomenon. The book was written in the 80’s, and it’s a specific historical and social moment that is being reflected. In *What if it’s the menopause* Thorvall points out the dark sides of the otherwise successful welfare state. In this book we can see how the social democratic project originally formulated as “folkhemmet” [home for the people] – oriented toward future and change – has failed to treat certain areas of life with respect. A part of the women’s movement in Sweden has been about getting the state to take responsibility for the reproductive areas of life that have traditionally been women’s concerns. The care of children and the elderly should be a social concern, not placed on the individual. In many respects we know that this has led to a greater freedom for women, and I beleive that Kerstin Thorvall is the first to welcome this. But in the book *What if it’s the menopause* she criticizes the backside, the blind spots and the unwanted consequences of this project. Thorvall shows how the body, the female body and the aging body, have become “objects” in healthcare and in the social services. She points out the alien-

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5 Kerstin Thorvall, *Tänk om det är klimakteriet* [What if it’s the menopause?] (Stockholm, 1982).
ated attitude toward the aging female body that exists in the social care system. This book can be seen as a critique of the obsession in modern culture with youth – the connections between youth and sexuality, youth and agency, youth and change – that marks modern thinking. Thorvall’s book is therefore both a critique of the welfare state and of the women’s movements inability to think about change and transgression in relation to age and aging.\(^6\)

In the 70’s Thorvall wrote about women’s sexuality and – in line with the feminist claims of the same period – how women should claim it and take it back. In *What if it’s the menopause* she writes about the shock and confusion of once again losing her body in relation to the world around her, when entering the phase of menopause. She describes in detail how people stop noticing her, how her body suddenly doesn’t exist, how others’ looks slip away from her. She is suddenly not part of this play of looks, attraction, gestures and directions that goes on in a room. In the book she gives several examples of women who suddenly feel they have lost their bodies and thereby their status as *women*, as sexual beings, as “objects” in one sense. It’s an ambivalent feeling she describes – the unexpected loss of a role as an object.

The loss of the body is thus closely connected to a loss of heterosexual femininity. The freedom that the young feminist women in the 70’s were fighting for seems in this book – just a few years later – to be very limited. The struggle for freedom is a struggle of the young woman with her life ahead of her. The struggle is formulated as freedom “from” different things: freedom from sexualization, from body, reproductive work etc. Thorvall discusses this longing for freedom from the older woman’s point of

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\(^6\) Kerstin Thorvall has continued to write about experiences of aging and in her most recent book radicalizes her critique of society’s treatment of the elderly. Kerstin Thorvall, *Upptäckten* [The discovery] (Stockholm, 2004).
view. She seems to say that the desired free position is not actually free at all – at least not in any radical or transformative sense. In another book from the same period, *Ett fönster på glänt* [An open widow], she describes the loss that accompanies the so-called freedom for the older woman:

That little habit of being looked at, getting glances of appreciation, is of course nothing to grieve, I guess that’s what one should think. All of those who walk surrounded by attention due to their sex might think that “oh, how lovely to finally be perceived as a HUMAN”. Maybe they are right, but this is hard to get used to. You see, the signal came both ways before. The smile I got from someone was also *my* smile. Now, I have to smile in another way. But how? How and where does one learn to smile in a nice, modest and human way?

According to Thorvall the position of the subject – that is, the human position – is an inhumane position for the old woman – it is a position freed from body, desire, sex and sexuality. The position is inhumane in the sense that it has distanced itself from everything that makes a person a person – all the defects and imperfections that single out an individual, a real corporeal human. The smile she describes in the quote above is not only a smile used in conventional heterosexual role play; it is also a personal smile – a smile that directs itself toward a specific body, a specific visible person.

Thorvall’s writings make visible the dualist aspects of feminist thinking about freedom. The modern feminist movement has – at least in Sweden – been occupied with liberating women from the burdens causing their oppression: household work, unpaid work, caretaking, and lack of education and representation in the public

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world. The qualities traditionally described as feminine – emotionality, physicality, weakness and irrationality become problematic qualities for the feminist movement which associates equality with sameness. In *What if it's the menopause* Thorvall discusses what goes missing in the fight for freedom for the woman who wakes up in menopause, or the “change of life”. All the qualities she has been expected to distance herself from – being a feminist wanting freedom – have now unwillingly been taken away from her. The woman in her 50’s – perhaps with grown children – is now (or should be) that free, independent human, released from reproduction that the struggle has aimed at. But in Thorvall’s writings this freedom costs too much. Thorvall highlights the loneliness that accompanies “freedom”, the loneliness associated with being “human”. In the eyes of the other the woman in menopause is no longer sexually interesting; she does not count – and that goes not only for the heterosexual intimate life but also in many other contexts. In a passage Thorvall writes about an attractive woman who has worked as a popular TV host for intellectual talk shows, but in her 50’s can’t find employment:

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8 The tendency to confuse the categories “sameness”, “difference” and “equality” is discussed by Drude Dahlerup, “Ambivalenser och strategiska val: om problem kring begreppen särart och jämalikhet i kvinnorörelsen och i feministisk teori” [Ambivalence and Strategical Choises: The Problematic Concepts of Difference and Equality in the Women’s Movement and in Feminist Theory], *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 2001:1.
Twenty years later the same woman is perhaps even more competent and at least as verbal as before, but maybe not so good looking through the eyes of the camera, and not interesting at all as a sex object. Her appearances in intellectual TV shows become more rare, and at home she notices a lack of attention from the others, how they get irritated by the sound of her voice, by the way she fiddles with her glasses, how she puts her hair back, clears her throat, raises her voice... in short she can feel how the other person sits there, thinking that enough is enough, someone has to stop this old lady so we can move on...

Thorvall insists on just this – that the older woman loses not only her ability to attract someone, but also her entire status as someone to count on, as belonging, as a counterpart. As I mentioned before Thorvall problematizes not only the Swedish welfare state, but also feminist liberal ideas about freedom. Thorvall connects the bodily loneliness of older women to the rationalization of reproductive work. The struggle to free women from reproduction has not led to equal responsibility between men and women for what in Sweden is called “lilla livet”, “the small life” – that is caring, reproductive work. Instead, the rationalization has led to total alienation from this small life. The old woman or lady in Thorvall’s writings longs for intimacy, physical contact, affection and daily care. Menopause seems to represent this change of life – this transformation from woman into so-called “human”. Menopause is described as a borderline, a place where you get pushed out of the social, where you don’t belong to people physically. Not because you are considered dangerous or different or anything like that – but because you are no longer interesting. You can exist or not exist, you are not a burden but on the other hand you are not an

9 Thorvall, 1982, p. 89.
asset either. Worst of all, according to Thorvall, there is no awareness about it; there is no knowledge in society that going through menopause can be a very existential experience. Thorvall writes ironically about all the “positive” things she hears about becoming older:

If I, in my youth, came to read an article in popular medicine about the menopause, this sentence was always central: “But life has so many other values as well”. It never said what those values were. But I had read elsewhere that it had to do with things that were no longer appropriate. It was never specific, but one understood anyway. It was about love and sex, dancing and playing, laughing and touching. It was about pink toenails and bare dresses. In short: Everything that was fun, exciting, painful and wonderful. In return there were these “other values”. At the end of the article there could be some encouraging remarks about how culture and fine arts in this country depended on “den svenska tanten” [the Swedish lady/the Swedish aunt, maid]. Theatres, concert halls and poetry evenings would vanish and die if there were no middle-aged women in search of “other values”.\(^{10}\)

In Thorvall’s writings, to pass through menopause is to be subjected to a disciplinary process. The attributes mentioned above, pink toenails and girls giggling – that used to be important tools for constructing femininity – are not available anymore. The “other values” that are left to the older woman seem like a bad joke to someone who’s not done with things that are fun, exciting, painful and wonderful.

Even if Thorvall tries to make some positive remarks about the possibilities for the woman after menopause, the book *What* 

\(^{10}\) Thorvall 1982, p. 66.
if it's the menopause is quite a depressing read. The main point she makes is that for many women menopause means a loss of body, sensuality and intimacy not because of biological factors in the female body but due to society’s view of older women.

As we can see the motif of menopause tends to grow into something much more than a representation of the last menstruation – it’s a metaphor for the change of life that often occurs for a woman in her 50’s. But unlike other transformative periods of life like the teens, or childbirth, etc., there seems to be nothing to celebrate or make noise about when it comes to menopause.

Simone de Beauvoir: Menopause as not being recognizable
Searching for representations of menopause I have also turned to Simone de Beauvoir since she has written so much about the body and also about aging. Although she has not explicitly written about menopause, she touches on the subject in her memoirs, La force des choses from 1963. In the epilogue she writes in the present time, reflecting on her age – she is then in her 50’s. The way she describes herself is quite sad; it’s like she’s much older than her actual age, like her life is almost over – and this feeling of not being a subject, not being herself – is closely connected to the sense of losing her body:

I loathe my appearance now: the eyebrows slipping down toward the eyes, the bags underneath, the excessive fullness of the cheeks, and that air of sadness around the mouth that wrinkles always bring. Perhaps the people I pass in the street see merely a woman in her fifties who simply looks her age, no more, no less. But when I look, I see my old face as it was, attacked by the pox of time for which there is no cure.
[---] Never again a man. Now, not my body alone but my imagination too
has accepted that. In spite of everything, it’s strange not to be a body any
more. There are moments when the oddness of it, because it’s so definite,
chills my blood. But what hurts more than all these deprivations, is never
feeling any new desires: they wither before they can be born in this rare-
fi ed climate I inhabit now. [---] If this silence is to last, how long it seems,
my short future!11

Germaine Greer has also commented on this in her angry book
about menopause The Change: focusing on the negative view Si-
more de Beauvoir has on her future and the fact that she no longer
sees herself as a person with desires.12 I think the most interesting
thing here – considering Beauvoir’s existential view of the body
– is the impact she places on the body, how important it is to
be seen as a body to be a subject. The sense of losing her body in
her 50’s is devastating for her image of herself as self, as a think-
ing and feeling intellectual. Of course one could say that it is the
surrounding society’s view of older women that Beauvoir is con-
fronted with – that she assumes this view and becomes alienated
in relation to herself (which is Germaine Greer’s interpretation)
– but I believe that Beauvoir’s words reach further than that. She
truly shows what Judith Butler would later describe as the need to
be recognizable. In Excitable Speech she writes:

11 Simone de Beauvoir, Force of Circumstance: The Autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir,
Thus, to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to “exist” by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One “exists” not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense by being recognizable. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects.¹³

For Beauvoir, menopause – or the age connected to this phenomenon – seems to be a process of suddenly not being recognizable. The older female body only exists in a certain way in language – we know this body either as something clean, pure and calm or as something monstrous connected to death and decay. But there is no way to be recognizable as an intact corporeal intellectual subject at this age – as a wanting, desiring AND reflecting subject. There is a link between de Beauvoir’s and Thorvall’s characterizations of menopause. What Thorvall somewhat ironically describes as an impossible “human” position (actually suggesting that it’s an inhumane position) is described in the passage in *La force de choses* in a similar but even more harsh way: to be in menopause (although Beauvoir doesn’t use the term herself) is to be *unrecognizable* – not woman, not human, not anything specific.

**Doris Lessing: Menopause as a moment of clarity**

My last example of a literary representation of menopause comes from Doris Lessing’s novel *The Summer Before the Dark* from 1973. In this novel Lessing portrays a woman in her 50’s – Kate Brown...

– and her experience during a short period in her life, a summer that changes everything. It is a summer after something – the caring for children, home and husband – and it’s a summer before something. What “the dark” symbolizes could be different things – becoming old, dying, or something else, something unknown. In this novel Lessing places Kate a bit outside herself – Kate’s view of the world and her situation is suddenly sharpened – she notices things she had not noticed before; it’s an ongoing feeling of alienation or verfremdung that is being portrayed. This novel is interesting as it interprets menopause (although Lessing doesn’t use the term explicitly) as a moment in time when everything gets sharpened; it’s a borderline, and the person standing there has the possibility to see the world from another angle. Lessing uses this moment to undress femininity, to truly show us how femininity is constructed through masquerade, through the process of dressing, applying make-up, pushing some curves up and some curves in, walking in certain ways and not others, holding one’s head, looking up – looking down:

It was really extraordinary! There she sat, Kate Brown, just as she had always been, herself, her mind, her awareness, watching the world from behind a façade only very slightly different from the one she had maintained since she was sixteen. It was a matter only of a bad posture, breasts, allowed to droop, and a look of ‘Yes, if you have to.’ and people did not see her. It gave her a dislocated feeling, as if something had slipped out of alignment. For she was conscious, very conscious, as alert to it as if this was the most important fact of her life, that the person who sat there watching, shunned or ignored by men who otherwise would have been attracted to her, was not in the slightest degree different from the person who could bring them all on again towards her by adjusting the picture of herself: lips,
a set of facial muscles, eye movements, angle of back and shoulders. This is what it must feel to be an actor, an actress – how very taxing that must be, a sense of self kept burning behind so many different phantasms.¹⁴

Kate is acutely aware of this moment; that she is in a timegap and can play with these attributes and markers of identity. She is both disgusted and thrilled by the fact that depending on how she dresses and walks she can pass as a young woman or an old lady. She is obsessed with the way others look at her, how she can manipulate their view of her – and at the same time she is totally dependent on this look to be someone – that is to be a body, and a reproductive, fertile female body. Lessing’s novel can be seen as a concentrated lesson in gender performativity, and she gives the female reader tools and perspectives for dealing with her situation. With the help of irony and self-reflection Kate lets herself change during this summer, but not into something predictable.

To summarize: In these representations of menopause we can see how the question of the body’s relation to subjectivity is highlighted. There is a concrete connection between the feeling of losing ones body in the eyes of the other and the feeling of becoming nobody in the social world. Even though these writers all try to see the opportunities that accompany getting older, there are few solutions to the confusing situation that menopause seems to be for many women. On one hand it could mean freedom from many things: hard physical work involving the caretaking and serving of others – while on the other hand it seems almost impossible to adapt one’s view of oneself – as a corporeal, sexual, desiring subject – into the social scripts that are available.

Menopause as part of a “reproductive futurism”

The connections between reproduction, menopause and femininity I have made here are of course part of a larger heterosexual plot. The examples I have discussed focus on heterosexually identified characters who feel that they lose their bodies when the reproductive phase ends. Perhaps things could be different in a less heterosexual framework. Judith Halberstam as well as Lee Edelman have pointed out the tendency to think time and life-stories in terms of progress, development, linearity and future. In this thinking the metaphors of reproduction have a great impact. It is only within this logic of what Edelman calls “reproductive futurism” that menopause comes to equal a “pause” from something (that is, menstruation and reproduction), or a fall from something (the status of fertile heterosexual femininity), or a loss of body and identity. If one could think outside this heteronormative reproductive futurism, one could perhaps find different understandings of menopause.

In the examples discussed above menopause seems to be connected to a loss of corporeal subjectivity. This corporeality is a highly gender-based one: it is the loss of the feminine body, and more so of femininity, that is being mourned. One perhaps obvious thing worth noticing is that I have chosen three texts that were each written in a specific time and place; Beauvoir writes before the sexual revolution, Lessing in the middle of the second wave, and Thorvall just thereafter in the 80’s. These are three European authors who have very consciously written about women and sexuality throughout their literary production, often in dialogue with the women’s movement or feminist debates. This could be

one explanation for the focus on femininity and womanhood so apparent in their texts.

Outside this somewhat heterosexual logic there are many other ways to live as a body, as a corporeal subject – the body does not always have to equal ‘woman’ (although historically it often has had that metaphorical function). If the link between ‘woman’ and ‘body’ can be thought differently, it might be possible to read and write stories about women in menopause as corporeal, wanting, thinking and feeling subjects.

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Hysteria and metagynesis
Female malady between normality and normativity

HILDE BONDEVIK

As an interpretational system and field of practice, medicine has served and still serves as an important condition for our ways of understanding and experiencing sex and gender. One may even say that medicine has occupied a hegemonic position that has supplied normative terms to this understanding and experiencing. My approach, therefore, in addition to literary and textual considerations, also involves discussions concerning femininity, masculinity, health and normality on one hand, and illness, aberrations, deviations and pathology on the other – today as well as in the late 19th century.

It is striking that the fundamental and revolutionary scientific turn in medicine that took place in the 19th century emerges more or less concurrently with the constitution of a new understanding of sex and gender. During this period the ontological difference between women and men seems to increase and the categories of woman and man are constituted as binary oppositions and placed hierarchically. Speaking with Thomas Laqueur: women and men are now seen as representing two different (biological) species (Laqueur 1999). This period can also be seen as one that exemplifies Toril Moi’s assertion: that gender is permeating (Moi 1998). At the very same time, we also are dealing with a historical period in which hysteria emerges as a significant cultural diagnosis.

With these overlapping trajectories in mind, I ask what kind of connections there are between medicine, conceptions of gen-
nder and hysteria. I also ask if our understanding of femininity reproduces itself through particular diseases and illnesses – such as hysteria. The following discussion examines an understanding of gender that is historically situated in the medical culture of the second half of the 19th century. I will argue that hysteria occupied a special position in the constitution of this understanding and that gender and femininity have to be understood as constituted (at least partially) in tension between normality and pathology. I will further link this to the genealogy of femininity and to what I call a “metagynesis”.

**Cultural diagnosis: The golden age of hysteria**

Within a European context, the second half of the 19th century has been described as “the golden age of hysteria” (Johannisson 1996; Micale 1996; Showalter 1998). This characterization is especially associated with the frequent use of hysteria as a diagnostic category, the huge attention the disorder attracted among medical researchers and the relatively high number of scientific articles and debates published in medical journals as well as expositions of hysteria in fiction, such as in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*.

This is exactly what marks a cultural diagnosis. In the following, a cultural diagnosis will not be understood either as an illness or disease directly induced by culture, civilization or lifestyle, or as an illness related to certain ethnic groups. Rather, a cultural diagnosis is characterized as an illness that has some sort of “career”: it emerges in specific historical and cultural contexts and submerges in others. A cultural diagnosis will therefore reflect the history and culture of its age and often be exposed through means other than conventional medical discourse. According to Karin Jo-
hannisson and Ian Hacking, a cultural diagnosis will undoubtedly reflect significant issues of its period (Johannisson 1990; Hacking 1999).

The popularity of the diagnosis was partly a result of Jean-Martin Charcot’s work at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in the 1880s, and later Sigmund Freud marked the illness with his own definition. As we know, psychoanalysis is actually based upon Freud’s experience with his hysterical female patients. The main problem addressed by his work was the causes of the hysterical symptoms. He also makes it obvious that the history of hysteria is a part of the history of sexuality.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michael Foucault refers to the second half of the 19th century as a time when the “hysterization of the female body” took place (Foucault 1995). If we follow Foucault a step further, hysterization is consequently a way of disciplining women, and also what in a bio-political sense makes women fit into their functions in the reproductive sphere. As a disciplinary measure, the hysterization allows for a comprehensive pathologizing of women who deviate from normative femininity. In this way, the pathological expression that characterizes hysteria – the more or less powerful physical symptoms – can be read as a rebellion against the disciplining of the body. Hystera thus becomes much more than an ordinary female illness: instead, it expresses unbearable social or cultural conditions. The hysterization of the female body is therefore involved in various relations of power, both within smaller social units such as the bourgeois home, but also in larger discursive formations such as social and institutional structures.

In all these relations of power a masculine, patriarchal dominance might pathologize and segment deviation from and rebel-
lion against normative femininity through the diagnosis of hysteria. But on the other hand hysteria, according to several physicians, is immanent in women and thus also in femininity itself. Hysteria represents both a deviation from a norm as well as a norm itself. Within this dynamic it is the male bourgeoisie of the 1890’s that possesses both the right and the opportunity to define something as normal and something as pathological.

However, in a linguistic, cultural and metaphorical sense, hysteria has always been linked to women’s bodies – from its very first appearance as early as 1900 BC to our modern day “Desperate Housewives”, whose frustrated lives along Wisteria Lane often unfold according to a hysterical pattern. The existence of men with the same diagnosis does not alter its entanglement with the female body. Neither do the efforts by several physicians to separate hysteria from its exclusive connection to women. Several etiological models can be identified as operating within hysteria, and we can differentiate between three main kinds of paradigms: a gynaecological, a neurological and a psychological one. In addition to these paradigms I will suggest another one, namely the ideological paradigm of hysteria.

Hysteria in Norway: A transdisciplinary phenomenon

In a previous work I have attempted to analyse the diagnosis of hysteria in Norway and the understandings of the diagnosis that were prevalent in medical as well as literary circles between 1870 and World War I (Bondevik 2007; 2009). One of my discoveries was that it is possible to postulate a kind of a “golden age of hysteria” within a Norwegian context. There were plenty of medical articles about the diagnosis and a huge number of in-patients with the diagnosis at mental hospitals and different types of private
clinics. As fiction, hysteria appears in works by Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and especially in Amalie Skram’s novels – all these authors being well known in the Norwegian literary canon.

In short, the symptoms in both medical articles and medical records are described as comprehensive; several different etiological models can be traced and were even broadened by authors such as Ibsen, Bjørnson and Skram, and both women and men received the diagnosis. However, it was striking to observe that several of the Norwegian physicians talked about hysteria’s unknown essence and positioned themselves as opposed to every old and un-fashionable kind of explanation. But even though hysteria was not exclusively associated with the female body and psyche, it was constructed at the interface of scientific opinion and notions of femininity. It is a “female malady” (see Showalter: 1987). If we turn to Charcot and his colleagues, they state that woman is made to feel, and to feel is almost the same as hysteria. It seems that the neurological system is almost feminine.

In 1890 the well known Norwegian professor of medicine Ernst Lochmann maintained that in modern literature, such as Ibsen’s and Bjørnson’s plays, hysteria is well represented. He also said that literature of this kind is both a symptom and a cause of the disease, and when he proclaimed “The whole, so called women’s movement is in its nature hysteric” (Lochmann 1890: 133), the famous doctor made hysteria paradigmatic to his definition of woman. We can certainly talk of an exchange between medicine and culture, and of hysteria as a cultural diagnosis that reflects its time. Further, by examining the Norwegian approaches to hysteria, we can distinguish between three main analytical fields in which hysteria is defined in different but overlapping ways: The
medical, the institutional and the cultural fields. In all these three fields or spheres of research, with their different discursive expression and smaller subfields, I have been occupied with the contextualization of hysteria, which as a scholar of history of ideas is among my main tools.

The contexts are relatively clear: The medical lists of symptoms, etiological models of explication and diagnostic category, the medical prescription of treatment and medication, in short the medical order, represents a substantial and well documented context for the interpretation of hysteria. But, it is also clear that the medical understanding is marked by a contamination from the social and cultural spheres. A medical diagnosis is not “pure”, but is instead born in interplay with other contextual forces. In the cultural field, for example, hysteria is both constructed on the basis of medical knowledge and further developed through literary experiments and imaginations. And if we turn to the institutional field, that is, the life inside the asylums and hospitals, we encounter the diagnosis as something in-between the medical and the literary definitions. The medical records show this very clearly. Here real life, life as it was experienced by the in-patient men and women who carried the diagnosis on their shoulders, is represented in almost literary textual forms, also showing the profound difficulties associated with the definition of the diagnosis as well as that of sex and gender.

In the cultural, medical and institutional definitions hysteria is feminine, and on the other hand, the same cultural, medical and institutional spheres state that the feminine as such is hysteric. In this sense the construction of a diagnosis as hysteria shows, as Elisabeth Bronfen also has suggested, that hysteria only exists as an effect of several discourses and has “[...] no original identity
outside its discursive formations” (Bronfen 1998: 102). This surely doesn’t mean that there is no materiality here; on the contrary, there is: Cramps, spasms, paralysis all exist, asylums, medical records, novels, and plays too. The medical diagnosis, the institutional practices and the cultural texts are all contexts for hysteria. It is within these three fields that the disease is born, is produced and reproduced. Some wider contexts are Darwinism, positivism, realism, naturalism, modernism and feminism. The diagnosis reflects them all together, but not always everyone at the same time.

But it is possible, at the very same moment, to actualize a decontextualization; that is, displaying the principal and fundamental aspect that follows hysteria from its first appearance to our own day. We then may find something that doesn’t change, such as the constant and more or less disturbing factor of perpetual alteration, variation, transformation, divergence and difference: in short, the “la Donna é mobile” factor. In this logic of extremes, there is no space between the hysterical polarities, between the spasms and the paralysis, between the hysterical babbling and the hysterical muteness, between the hysterical delusion and the hysterical blindness, between hypersensitivity and total lack of feeling. In short, hysteria is not an Aristotelian enterprise. There is no middle of the road here. The unchanging principle of change is in some way paradoxical and plays a major part in the making of sex and gender, and I will later name it “metagynesis”.

Case study: Amalie Skram
As a “case study” I would here like to turn the attention toward an important figure in the medical, literary, cultural and feminist histories of hysteria, namely the Norwegian writer Amalie Skram and her two novels from 1895, which are both set in mental hospi-
tals, *Professor Hieronimus* and *På St. Jørgen*, in English *Under Observation* (Skram 1992). In these two novels, Amalie Skram describes female mental illness, but more importantly, how female patients interact with a patriarchal institution. The protagonist in both novels, the painter Else Kant, starts out in a more or less comfortable bourgeois marriage, but after a period of little sleep as well as having experienced great frustration with her own work, she agrees to submit to psychiatric observation. There she encounters an almost violent institution and a cruel physician. It was Else Kant’s depression regarding her own work that led her to Professor Hieronimus and Ward Six at Copenhagen’s City Hospital, a misery, “a hell” as she puts it, and from which she is unable to escape.

Amalie Skram herself was born in Alversund, not far from Bergen, in 1846 and died in Copenhagen in 1905. Her first literary work was published in 1882. For periods, she experienced depression. In 1877 Skram herself had been admitted to the Gaustad asylum in Kristiania, now Oslo. Seventeen years later, in 1894, she was voluntarily admitted for observation at Copenhagen’s City Hospital and later transferred against her will to St. Hans Hospital. These events provide a significant backdrop for understanding her two novels’ critical perspectives.

My choice of Amalie Skram is due to the fact that she covers all the three fields: *The medical, the institutional* and *the cultural* are actually unfolded in her work. As patient, woman and writer she mirrors her time, and helps to draft a new and modern female typology. First, we turn to the medical field and to the diagnosis. It is there that the diagnosis – as such – is produced and theoretical and clinical symptoms are gathered, classified, explained and discussed.
The medical sphere: The diagnosis

In the 1890’s, hysteria was in the middle of a great change of paradigms. This was the beginning of the era of Freud, as psychoanalysis and psychology step by step substituted the pure neurological perspective. Still, there were a huge number of physicians referring to old and traditional diagnostics. I will suggest that Amalie Skram exploits a diagnosis that is both brutal and representative of its time, to experiment with productive and feminine forms of hysterical discourse.

Amalie Skram’s first biographer, Antonie Tiberg, labels Amalie as the “great ‘disease phenomenon’ of her time” (Tiberg 1920: 266). With this comment, she suggests that Amalie Skram’s encounters with 19th-century psychiatry reflect wider cultural issues. Rather than a narrowly defined medical case, the circumstances surrounding Skram’s publication of her novels of mental hospitals represent a privileged gateway into the conflicts and upheavals of her age, which often positioned women and their situation at the centre. In this way, “she embodied the spirit of her age,” as it has been pointed out (Hjort-Vetlesen 1993–1998: 467). Thus, Skram can be read as a traditional case study and a case of medical history.

Because she was subjected to oppressive diagnoses – such as “melancolia”, “morbus mentalis degenerate”, “depressive hysteriform reaction” and “cyclofomia” – Amalie Skram became well acquainted with the psychiatric practices of her age. Although she herself seldom uses the term to describe the characters in her novels explicitly, the concept of hysteria is nevertheless frequently applied to both Skram herself and her fiction. Several critics have identified instances of hysteria in Skram’s fiction. A newspaper commentary from 1895 by a Danish physician ultimately diagnoses the character Else Kant as suffering from hysteria: “Mrs.
Kant has no ability to master her own emotional life and displays a troll-like, purely hysterical disposition” (Gradenwitz 1985: 71). Some of Skram’s contemporary critics even relied on biographical information in their attempts to diagnose her fiction as hysterical, thus blurring biographical, medical and fictional discourses. For instance, a newspaper’s comment upon Skram’s medical history: “Every time she worked on a new book, the author was in a state of high tension and nervousness, at times hysterical” (Ibid: 62).

However, the attempts at categorizing Skram herself and her fiction as hysterical do not end with the 19th century. As late as in 1973, psychiatrist John Bremer proclaimed that Skram’s literary works were of no value, and that she was an ugly, difficult and very sick person. More surprising is perhaps that well known professor of psychiatry Niels Retterstøl has just followed up this speculative post-diagnostization and placed Skram in categories according to modern diagnostic manuals like ICD-10 and DSM 3, such as bipolar affective illness and bipolar I, I F-31 and F-31.5 according to ICD-10, and bipolar II according to DSM 3 § 296.89 (Retterstøl 2004). But hysteria is perhaps the most adequate concept and diagnosis.

In her analysis of Professor Hieronimus, Skram scholar Unni Langås also suggests that hysteria is the central theme of Skrams book, which she sees as both constituting an exemplary illustration of the diagnosis and confirming modern feminist views of hysteria, which emphasize the cultural and critical aspects of the condition (Langås 2003: 56–58). This observation is quite adequate, and I follow her statements without question. Nevertheless, there are several ambiguities here.

The attempts of diagnosing Amalie Skram have been many. If we are, however, to take the author seriously, then perhaps the
opposite may be the case? In contrast to the objectifying practices of most critics who have been interested in Skram and hysteria, I suggest that it is she who makes the diagnosis – of her own age, of women's positions, of marriage and of Victorian society. Skram's novels therefore represent a diagnostic examination of society and culture in general, but especially of the way women and their bodies are treated.\(^1\) Rather than functioning as a purely passive and objectifying term, I propose that Skram's fiction utilizes hysteria productively. Hysteria is thus synonymous with opposition, rebellion and provocation. Although her female character is clearly subjected to these processes, her resistance to the medical and masculine paradigms of hysteria nevertheless reveals an increasingly vulnerable masculine domination.

Else Kant, the protagonist of Skram's novels, is undoubtedly "ill": She is – in some way – hysterical. According to the period's definitions of hysteria, some of the most important symptoms included inexplicable coughing, insomnia, dizziness, convulsions and nervous twitches, followed by an inability to move, stiffness and fatigue. If one is satisfied with a list of symptoms as diagnostic criteria of hysteria, Else may seem even sicker than she actually is; or more aptly put, her symptoms may overshadow the fact that her illness is also a product of – and a rebellion against – a misogynistic institution. Else's insight into her own illness is therefore significant, just as the solidarity among the women in the asylum also points beyond its walls. What Skram's novels illustrate is that hysteria might be used as a positive force that communicates with the world outside, but that it does so in a language that expresses

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\(^1\) In a Norwegian context some of the plays of Henrik Ibsen illustrate this sort of Victorian ideology and women's positions of bourgeois society – especially A Doll's House and Hedda Gabler, which also can be read as plays that stage hysteria; see Hilde Bondevik "Henrik Ibsen og hysteriet", Edda 4/05.
itself through signs of illness and a form of rebellion. This leads us to the institutional field and to the hysteric as patient inside the walls.

The institutional sphere: The hysteric as patient
The rebellious form of hysteria in Amalie Skram’s two novels represents a form of discursive transition that oscillates between objectifying diagnosis, Skram’s subjective experience of extreme distress and her rebellious discourse. Her reaction and experience with the psychiatric institution and its implied misogynist views are transformed into prose and produce prose. Skram’s two books helped trigger an intense public reaction, namely the Danish “psychiatry debate”. Famous psychiatrist and then-Chief Physician at Copenhagen’s City Hospital Knud Pontoppidan had to resign and leave the hospital. He could naturally not have anything but a negative view of Amalie Skram. He responds to her fictional attack by exploiting his supposed “impartiality.” When commenting on her novels, Pontoppidan states:

It gives a realistic portrayal of how a mentally ill person’s hateful indignation twists her mind and imparts to her distorted notions. She is not capable of giving an objective account (Gradenwitz 1985: 73).

Perhaps ironically, Pontoppidan’s accusation points precisely to Skram’s main discursive method. Her writing is in many ways characterized precisely by opposition, rebellion and provocation. This opposition, which manifests itself as a type of unrest, disorder, hysterical behaviour, is countered by the physician’s diagnosis. In-
Interestingly, Skram portrays her opposition to the infantilization, divestment of self-determination and objectification of woman—or simply, to the hysterization of herself, by exploiting the productive potential of hysteria.

In a letter to one of the best known Norwegian authors of the time, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Skram complains about her problems and describes how she agrees to undergo treatment. Her letter constitutes the first discursive experiment with these events. She writes that she has had to take a break from her work to keep from going mad, but that when she said yes to observation and the stay at the City Hospital she at the same time marched straight into hell. The following quotation from her letter represents in itself a summary of the two novels:

Then I [Amalie Skram] said to [Erik] Skram: This will not work; let me take a short break from my work, because if I continue on like this, just staring and staring at it, I think I shall go mad in the end. Yes, I shall. Then S. met with our doctor and came to me and said: Have you any objection to being admitted to the City Hospital under Pontoppidan for one and a half weeks time to speak with him and listen to the advice he has to offer you? “No,” I answered. “Not in the slightest. To the contrary,” — and left calmly, but I should not have done so, for then I marched straight into hell. S. left me with the promise that he would return to see me every other day [...] (Bjørnson and Skram 1982: letter 48).

The statement that she would go “mad” and “march straight into hell” points to her experiences with the psychiatric institution, while the account of her husband’s somewhat deceitful behavior ties into the novel’s plot. She emphatically rejects the notion that she is insane or in any way mentally ill, just as her character Else
Kant does later in the novel. It is striking that Else Kant even seems healthier when she passes the threshold into the hospital, rather than before. In the opening of the novel, her illness undoubtedly seems to fit the diagnosis of hysteria as it was defined in many of the medical articles of the day.

This power to define something as pathology and something as normal indicates in itself the constructed nature of the disease. Similar to Professor Hieronimus's defining power in Skram's novel, medical and scientific institutions and their authorities are also part of a machinery that defines and “produces” hysteria, a dynamic that at the same time also produces or reproduces “gender”. The reason for this is that hysteria tends to be accepted as a logical definition of the woman: hysteria is female, and the female is hysterical.

Skram's protagonist experiences many of the symptoms mentioned above: “Else lay motionless. Her head burned but otherwise her whole body felt dead, except when sudden, spasmodic twinges in her chest made her jump with pain” (Skram 1992: 124). The above list of symptoms is, however, not complete. Medical literature frequently supplemented and expanded their definitions with yet new forms and expressions of hysterical conditions to make the diagnosis fit even more cases and symptoms. In this sense, institutional treatment and observation can be said to have provoked and produced new symptoms of hysteria, as it often appears in the medical records from Gaustad Asylum. A new diagnosis like hysteria undoubtedly leads the medical eye in new directions. In Skram's novel, however, the main activity Else Kant engages in at the asylum is an analytical observation of the institutional conditions. This “project” draws her out of her depression and thoughts of suicide, and transforms her angst to indignation and anger. In
light of this – and here we have the turning point of the novels – it is also possible to read Else Kant’s symptoms as part of a hysterical condition that is defined by a dialectic of opposition: She opposes a world that has put pressure on her, and she is subjected to further institutional dominance. The disorder of hysteria stands in stark contrast to the order of medicine and the institutional practice, and in all its formlessness refers to a production of something new. In the conclusion of På St. Jørgen Else Kant enters an uncertain future, which suggests that her process, in both the medical and the discursive sense, is ongoing and open-ended. She is still on the verge of becoming what she will become. In other words, the novel projects the nature of hysteria as a type of productive disorder onto a future space where the novels about Else Kant can be read as a description of timeless, female self-realization.

Else Kant is treated for nervous illness. It is this confinement, or “treatment”, that Skram describes as causing Else’s breakdown. But in spite of this: Else gradually appears as something else or more than broken, or rather, the breakdown itself has created something new: “[s]he felt battered and shaken, but at the same time, strengthened” (Skram 1992: 124). Else, in this sense, is therefore not merely ill, despite her diagnosis. Skram delivers fundamental criticism not only of the patriarchy’s exercise of power, but also of its definition of madness and pathology as femininity, and of sanity and normality as masculinity. Skram’s depiction of institutional power is not only a question of sacrifice and suffering, but also a manifestation of the crisis of power. Her critique of the inhuman conditions of these institutions also reflects an inner crisis of power that made these conditions possible in the first place. This is exactly what Foucault refers to when he depicts hysteria as a kind of protest against the psychiatric institutional power and

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discursive practice and calls the hysterics “les vraies militantes de l’anti-psychiatrie” or “the real militant anti-psychiatry” (Foucault 2003: 253).

The cultural sphere: The cultural diagnosis, the hysterical text

As I mentioned initially, a “cultural diagnosis” is operational in literary representations of illness. In my opinion, some of these representations could supplement the medical discipline’s understanding of the same diagnosis, and together literature and medicine could provide a more complete (albeit ambiguous) picture of the hysterical body and hysteria as a cultural diagnosis. Skram, for example, as well as Ibsen, emphasizes the cultural and critical aspects of the condition around the hysteria diagnosis. At this point we might observe several contexts that illuminate the broader cultural function of Skram’s autobiographical fiction, and attempt to shed light on hysteria as it may be understood in her two novels from 1895 – the same year that Breuer and Freud published their Studies on Hysteria. The context is above all constituted by the Victorian society of the 19th century, that is, a European society driven by medical, social, economic, political, cultural and philosophical change. The Victorian era is present in Skram’s writings; that is, in all her writing: Her letters, her essays and short stories as well as in her novels.

The correspondence between Skram’s letters and novels, understood as the stylistic and thematic exchange between the two genres, clearly points to an autobiographical affair. The parallels between Skram and Kant are more than obvious: they mirror each other. In other words: They are not the same, but are rather a reflection of the same. Elaine Showalter goes one step further in her
interpretation of Skram when she writes that Else Kant is “clearly an autobiographical projection of her creator” (Showalter in Skram 1992: XII). Clearly, Skram’s asylum novels do not constitute autobiographies in the strict sense. But the issue is not so simple: the “autobiographical” generates certain fundamental problems that are highly significant in this case. Without evoking the entire spectrum of a hermeneutic of suspicion from Marx, Nietzsche and Freud up to our time, I propose that in her two small novels about Else Kant, Amalie Skram writes autobiographical prose that can be read as a critique of subjectivity, in which hysteria functions as a significant tool. For it is precisely through the hysterization of the female, understood here as the diagnosis of Amalie Skram or Else Kant – both of them in the same diagnostic moment – as mentally ill, insane, unsound, etc., that the notion of the unambiguous, permanent and, ultimately, “masculine” identity expresses itself most powerfully. The critique of this aspect of hysterization is the most important element of Skram’s novels. In her critique of subjectivity there is a modernist aspect that shows how much she is part of the changes in her time.

A rarely discussed, but interesting, aspect of the novels is the protagonist’s dreams, which technically operate somewhere between hallucinations and actual dreams. Sometimes in this dream-like state a number of animal figures appear, such as horses, lions, tigers, dogs, and roosters. From a Freudian perspective they read as signifying repressed yet overpowering sexuality. Else Kant’s dream about the parade of the beautiful, brown, blind horses at the beginning of the novel has thus been interpreted as a sign of sexual angst, or as a picture of an artistic crisis.

However, we should perhaps understand the dream of the galloping horses – supplemented by the conception of wild animals,
lions, tigers, wolves and dogs – as portraying figures associated with flight, or a form of identification pattern – a becoming-animal – that the imagination can use to sketch for itself a freer or different life form, a way of being pointing toward an emancipation from a human reality that has become too constricted – or human, all too human. Interpreted this way, Else is a woman with significant talent, with a visual power to represent, and an ability to rebel. Her dreams also become part of a reality-producing, critical position. Hysteria’s expressive mode rebels against a particular type of masculine domination that Skram’s novels represent by the ways psychiatric institutions position themselves as having the authority to define the human.

Read with an eye for a new approach to the author’s aesthetic orientation toward a new and productive use of experience, hysteria in Skram’s work does not only function as illness. Instead, the formlessness that characterizes hysteria can be read as an immanent part of subjectivity, because it illustrates how subjectivity is always in process, in a state of continual change and becoming. In this way, the twin novels may be read with an eye for life, not death, with a focus on that which seems to be moving toward something new and better. Else Kant should not necessarily be regarded as ill, just as her sexuality should not necessarily be understood as repressed. Instead, her hysteria displays a fluid, suggestive sexual desire, a “coming into existence,” which more than anything else functions as a becoming-woman, a process, or a path toward realization. The important intellectual historical figure that she in fact constitutes lies in the statement that she shows with great clarity how a new humanness and self takes shape. Skram’s

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2 For more on the concept of “becoming-animal” or “devenir-animal”, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Mille plateaux, Minuit, Paris 1980, page 284–380.
work thus produces an ideological paradigm that may give us new insight into the nature of hysteria. This is evident in her asylum novels. In other words, the ideological paradigm is simultaneously a literary and a political project and is constituted in the intersection between ethics, construction of gender, social conditions, morals and illness on the one hand, and poetics, genre, subjectivity and fiction on the other.

**Conclusion: The becoming-woman, the metagynetical synthesis**

Owing to its inconsistent and disorderly nature, Skram’s hysterical discourse can be read as a rebellion against masculine domination, rather than signifying dissatisfied female desire. Further, it can lead us to turn to hysteria’s traumatic causes rather than traditional gender-based theories. And it can lead us to see hysteria as something linked to the vulnerability of the common human body – not only the female body. Perhaps what Skram shows us is that hysteria represents a greater challenge than what modern diagnostic schemes would indicate?

From a historical perspective, sex and gender appear as a dynamic and dyadic concept that is constantly undergoing mutations and ruptures. The need for a conceptual division between sex and gender is but one of the many symptoms of the dynamism, and shows the necessity of a “plan of composition” in which polarizations are avoided while differences continue to proliferate.3

The figure “becoming-woman” – which is another Deleuze-and-Guattarian concept, and a truly controversial one – is included in what I initially labelled *metagynesis*, that is a concept or a vision of a non-dichotomic and non-hierarchic understanding.

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3 This is what Deleuze and Guattari discuss in their 1992 book *What is philosophy?*
of sex and gender, a process and a becoming beyond specific and static definitions of sex and gender. According to Elisabeth Grosz in 1994, “becoming-woman” was “an escape from the systems of binary polarization that privileges men at the expense of women” (Grosz 1994: 1440–1463). And speaking with Catherine Driscoll in an article from 1997, “becoming-woman” was a “way of understanding the transformation power and desire of the ‘subject’ – the way identity escapes the repressive codes of the Subject” (Driscoll 1997: 1464–1479). The concept of becoming woman is also as an elaboration on the well known expression of Simone de Beauvoir, namely that “one is not born a woman, one becomes one”. This could consequently become a vital force in the discussion of possible strategies for a new and transgressive understanding of sex and gender. Here we find the tension between the medical and the cultural bodies, as well as between biocentricity and performativity. Tension, yes – but also transdisciplinariness.

Skram’s asylum novels illustrate a certain transdisciplinarity, in Rosi Braidotti’s sense a multiplicity, moving between psychiatric institution, art, literature, womanhood, medicine, patients’ witnessing, dream – in short, hysteria as movement, this “grain of hysteria without which there is no theorization at all”, as Braidotti puts it, referring to Monique David-Menard and her book on hysteria from Freud to Lacan.

Alice Jardine’s concept “gynesis” was at the time an attempt to formulate the putting into discourse of “woman” as the process diagnosed as intrinsic to the condition of modernity, and as a “new mode of thinking” (Jardine 1985). The concept “gynesis” was a vision of a deeply rhetorical and therefore political adventure: what she called the “woman-effect” covered all that had been left out, de-emphasized, hidden. How might Amalie Skram’s texts offer
new ways of considering hysteria as a strategy, and at the same time new ways of connecting hysteria, feminism and writing? Does Else Kant incarnate the nomadic strategy of becoming-woman, that is, finding her strength outside the binary system that makes women hysterics because they do not fit into the normativity of masculine dominance? Yes, I believe she does, but in addition to this I think she points to another step that now has to be taken: After the gynesis, a metagynesis or a postgynesis, a Butlerian gender politics that takes into account the multiplicity of becoming.

To summarize: In the space between her medical record, correspondence and modernistic asylum novels, Amalie Skram is inscribing woman into the core of modernity. And she does this with what I will label a metagynetic style: Else is the bearer of a multitude of possibilities when, at the end of the novel, she stands before her new life, but not in the sense of having overpowered or neutralized the patriarchal system that made her a patient. She is an agent of the hidden forces of a metagynetic being, a female figure to come, and to start a silent revolution beside or within all the other, necessary, political struggles for women's rights and status.

Against, or beside, hysteria defined as a cultural diagnosis, we must prescribe another sort of medicine, namely different metagynetic strategies of feministic micropolitics; that is, a kind of new, transdisciplinary network building, like in contemporary art and other activities that work outside the major (macro-) political system, cultivation of discursive formations, stressing of the political and social in minor questions, that later may become larger issues; in short, intense and analytical activities, a sort of open attitude, directed toward the registers of desire, vulnerability, affect and subjective implication that generate artistic, theoretical and political practices. The key words are sensibility, flexibility
and creativity, and modern pluridimensional identity building as a critique of subjectivity.

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Race mixing and contradiction
Kant’s ambivalence toward hybridity

JENS ERIKSSON

Predecessors to today’s Kant scholars could ignore Kant’s theory on race in a way that is fortunately no longer possible. In recent years, a growing amount of research has made it glaringly apparent that Kant, while promoting cosmopolitanism and enlightened universal emancipation, did so only for a select elite. By reading and making texts central hitherto believed to be periphery, researchers have made it clear that, in order to be included in Kant’s Kingdom of Ends, it was not enough to bear the human characteristics of physiology; to uphold membership, it was necessary to be not only an adult male, but also a member of the White race. For today’s liberal tradition of Kant scholarship that continue to see in critical philosophy a valid model for progressive politics, this bias has been a cause of great embarrassment. How, if at all, is it possible to explain that Kant with untiring vigilance defended every person’s right to be treated as an end in himself and, apparently without flinching, promoted chattel slavery in the European

1 Sections of this article were presented at the seminar “Race, Slavery and the Philosophers” organized by Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörns Högskola, 2009. I thank Rebecka Lettevell for inviting me to participate in this highly inspiring event and Prof. Robert Bernasconi for being kind enough to ask me to present my research as an introduction to one of the sessions. Jacob Orrje and two anonymous referees took the time to offer valuable comments on an early draft; I am grateful to them as well.
colonies by writing that “Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. They can for this reason only serve as slaves.”

The troubling question of Kant’s racism has triggered two opposing reactions among scholars. The first acknowledges Kant’s racism as a problem, but argues that, whatever his historically conditioned prejudices may have been, they should not hinder us from regarding genuinely Kantian philosophy as an indispensable resource for political action. As Robert B. Louden argues in *Impure Ethics: From Rational Beings to Human Beings* (2002), “Kant’s theory is fortunately stronger than his prejudices, and it is the theory on which philosophers should focus.” According to this view, as truly progressive, the positive qualities of Kantian philosophy outweigh the bad ones and we can consequently turn a blind eye to its less attractive sides. Karl Ameriks is a Kant scholar who is convinced that respecting the unity of Kant’s thought is not only compatible with but even requires distinguishing the teachings that are central to it from those that are peripheral, and separating the conclusions that actually follow from his principles from the conclusions he may have drawn but do not follow. Such respect is utterly incompatible with treating a philosopher’s thought as a monolith, or using Kant’s deplorable views about race and gender as some sort of hidden key to the ‘real meaning’ of his principle that all beings are possessed of equal dignity.

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3 For a similar analysis, see: Pauline Kleingeld, “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 229 (2007), p. 582.


The other response has been less forgiving. Recent years have seen the emergence of a group of Kant scholars who focus on how to take seriously racism’s implications for texts sanctioned as officially Kantian by the philosophical community. Kant’s ‘peripheral’ and ‘central’ texts are linked in multiple ways, and how the many connections tying them together work has not yet been sufficiently addressed. Robert Bernasconi has been adamant in pointing this out, arguing that “an interest in race is not a diversion for Kant”.6 He rightly emphasizes that “[a] great deal more work needs to be done, both to establish the context of Kant’s theory of race with reference to his sources and to clarify the various aspects of Kant’s theory of race that have been treated largely in isolation from each other.”7 However, as research arguing that Kant’s theory on race did matter for his philosophy in general is beginning to grow, less attention has been given to how it mattered. A natural step would be to move from the question of whether there is a link between the peripheral and official Kant to that of how that link was rhetorically and structurally made.

A natural point of entry for such an analysis is Kant’s curious attitude toward the racial hybrid (Blendlingsart, Blendlinge, Mittelschlag, Bastart). Since his theory on race wavers in few cases in its attitude toward its object of study, its ambivalent response to the phenomenon of race mixing constitutes something of an anomaly in his work. Because hybrids were, as Renato G. Mazzolini has pointed out, “fakes, troublemakers, biological frauds, and ambivalent creatures torn between different cultures and loyal-

ties” for the majority of late eighteenth century naturalists,” it was believed that Nature wanted to stop, or at least hinder, racial hybridization from occurring.

Theories about hybridization became common in the works of naturalists during a period in which a return to Aristotelian teleology was gaining ground. This turn, for which Kant was paving the way, was based on the conviction that Nature was governed by a normative “ought” (soll), according to which organic life had to fulfill certain requirements in order to be counted as properly developed. Kant’s theory on hybridity and race is founded upon this conviction. It was by referring to teleological norms that he could argue that “half-breeds are not worth much” and that “it is good that [different races] do not mix [vermischen],” a sentence he terminates by simply stating: “Spanier in Mexico.” Kant was so strongly convinced of this that he argued that “the end of Nature would be lost if half-breed became common,” which was why Nature, in Mark Larrimore’s words, “had gone through great lengths to keep the ‘races’ apart through cataclysms and the abiding discomfort felt by anyone in a climate different from the one in which his ‘racial’ character had emerged.” In order to not disturb Nature’s Bauplan, Kant urged his reader to “avoid migration or foreign interbreeding.”

On the other hand, while repulsed by the prospect of racial

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intermixing, a violation of nature’s Norms, Kant was not straightforwardly negative toward the phenomenon. It is commonplace in today’s scholarship that his theory on race, as well as the teleological nature of Nature associated with it, was proven by Kant and his colleagues by way of reference to racial hybridization, the so-called Buffon’s rule. As a proof for his theory on race, Kant referred to what he called the “test of half-breed generation,” a hypothetical experiment that tested how the four races (the “White”, “Negro”, “Hunnish”, and “Hindu”) could be “mixed.” This test, “upon which everything depends,” attained its proving force by allowing the ‘observer of nature’ to experiment with a rule called “generatio homonyma,” the Aristotelian law of hereditation according to which a product “is in its organization itself homogenous with that which has generated it.” This experimental set-up facilitated thought experiments in which the natural philosopher was able to produce racial hybrids – “Mulatten, rothen Mestizen, schwarzen Karaiben etc.” – by making males and females of different racial Abstammung mate with each other and produce a “mix” (Vermischung) of their different racial characteristics. As truth devices, ra-

16 Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, p. AA:VII:419.
cial hybrids were attractive to natural philosophers, although Kant and his colleagues’ self-proclaimed purpose as agents of teleological normativity was to stop them from coming into existence. As Sara Eigen Figal has pointed out in her recent book, *Heredity, Race, and the Birth of the Modern* (2008), “[Kant] was both attracted and – even more – repelled by the prospect of racial intermarriage.”\(^{18}\) A textual trace bearing witness to this is that Kant, as Susan M. Shell has drawn attention to, early in his career entertained ideas about, “a promiscogenationist Utopia he later came to abandon.”\(^{19}\)

Aside from short remarks such as Figal’s, Kant’s ambivalent attitude toward race mixing has not been analysed. Why did Kant make his theory on race reliant upon a phenomenon he was unable to have a coherent attitude toward? While racial hybrids were indispensible to the turn towards the vitalist teleo-normativity of late eighteenth-century naturalism, one of the many purposes of Kant’s theory on race was to prevent different races from reproducing with each other. Clearly, the means and ends of Kant’s theory were at odds with each other. It is for this reason that it is in need of further analysis. What role did the racial hybrid play in Kant’s theory on race?

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\(^{19}\) Susan M. Shell, “Kant’s Conception of a Human Race;” p. 59.
Gifts of Hybridity

The following analysis contains three sections. The first commences with an analysis of (i) how the terminology associated with the theory on race is used by Kant to explain the novelty of his critical project and (ii) how he argues against the phenomenon of racial hybridizations in light of the link between the ‘official’ and ‘periphery’ sides of his work.

Kantian philosophy is known for having a rich metaphorical language. In The German ‘Mittelweg’: Garden Theory and Philosophy in the Time of Kant (2007), Michael G. Lee highlights how Kant, although stressing reason’s self-sufficiency, was constantly forced to ‘ground’ critical philosophy by way of examples, or analogies, traditionally regarded as foreign to philosophizing.

[Kant’s] debt to illustrative language is more profound than he lets on. For in his justification of reason’s autonomy, Kant finds that he must turn repeatedly to highly physical, i.e. non-philosophical, metaphors of ‘foundation’ and ‘ground’ in order to inaugurate that autonomy in the form of a discourse.²⁰

In Kritik der reinen Vernunft, these grounding metaphors, although unmentioned by Lee, are borrowed from the semantic network of words associated with race and race mixing. In Kant scholarship, it has been assumed that Kant, suffering from the great mental strain of writing his Kritik der reinen Vernunft, did not publish any text worthy of mention during the first Critique’s time of gestation. Accordingly, it is customary to refer to the ten-year period it took for him to fully come to grips with his Copernican Turn

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as his ‘silent decade’. However, Kant did write other texts during this period. While writing the first edition of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, he also published *Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen* (1775), his first article on race. His second contribution to the by now bourgeoning field of anthropological research on race, *Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrace* (1785), was published in *Teutsche Merkur* during the writing of the second edition of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. His last and most influential article, *Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie* (1788), saw the light of day approximately one year after the second edition of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* was published.

These two writing activities converged in numerous ways. In “Kant’s Concept of a Human Race” (2006), Susan Shell reminds us that Kant, in *Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie*, juxtaposes critical philosophy with race philosophy through a “punning linkage...of ‘race’ (Rasse) with ‘root’ or ‘reason’ (as in radicaler) – race’s etymological source.” She argues, “[s]ince human reason is itself, according to Kant, a hybrid (Bastart), whose laudable efforts toward self-union run the constant risk of straying into unproductive wastelands, it is no wonder that Kant was fascinated by the phenomenon of race”. Why did Kant regard reason and race as metaphorically interchangeable? It is not clear from his text what conclusion we have warrant to draw from his frequent use of metaphors of racialization to describe reason and vice versa. It is clear, however, that the economy of exchange between them did matter.

A central way in which Kant’s theory on race and theory on cognition mix with each other is through their shared insistence that, in order to be systematically unified as whole, different parts

must remain in their designated places. Kant’s theory on race is based upon a monogenist assumption that the various races constituting humankind have, through an hypothetical first migration around the world, ‘degenerated’ from the same Stammgattung. However, although they belong to the same line of descent, races were marked off from each other and prohibited to have contact. Racial traits, of which skin color was primary, were teleologically determined. In an initial phase, Nature had equipped the human phylum with the seeds and predispositions (Keime und Anlangen) “for all climates and for every soil”\textsuperscript{22} so as to make the skin color of humans fit the climate of their place of habituation. Since Nature did not alter this predisposed potentiality once it had been unfolded, a second migration would render the originally developed skin color unpurposive. For the same reason, it was contrary to Nature’s intentions for males and females from different racial communities to reproduce with each other since their offspring would “thereby…become fit for several climates but not to any one of them to the degree achieved by the first adaptation [erste Anartung].”\textsuperscript{23} Because Nature did not favour a Zusammenschmelzung of racial characteristics, Kant’s theory of race constituted, as Mark Larrimore has argued, “a new argument for a ban on miscegenation.”\textsuperscript{24}

Whereas Kant’s understanding of racial hybridization was occasioned by his view that “the intermixture of races [caused] by large-scale conquests, which gradually extinguishes their charac-

\textsuperscript{22} Kant, Von der verschiedenen Racen der Menschen, p. AA:II:435.
ters, does not seem beneficial to the human race”, badly disciplined metaphysics was the problem for transcendental idealism. The crux was that traditional metaphysics had allowed a priori and a posteriori concepts to “intermix”. In order to save metaphysics from catastrophe, it was therefore “of the utmost importance to isolate the various modes of knowledge as they differ in kind [Gattung] and in origin [Ursprunge], and to secure that they do not merge with each other.”

Unfortunately for Kant, most of his colleagues in natural philosophy were unaware of the dangers of cognitive Zusammenschmelzung. “I have encountered a fair amount of harm,” he complains in Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie, from the carelessness of letting the boundaries of the sciences run into each other and have pointed that out not exactly to everyone’s liking. Moreover, I have become totally convinced that through their separation of what is heterogonous and what previously had been in a mixed state, often a completely new light is cast upon the sciences which may reveal quite a great deal of paltriness that previously had been able to hide behind heterogeneous cognitions.

Since “[i]t [was] not an improvement but a deformation of the sciences when their boundaries are allowed to run over into one another”, the purpose of critical philosophy was to function as “a sober critique, which, as a true cathartic, happily purg[ing] such delusions along with the punditry [Vielwisserei] attendant to them.”

27 Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, p. AA:III:BIV.
The shared ground between Kant’s theory on race and cognition is most strongly expressed in Kant’s choice to use the same foundational myth to explain racial migration and cognitive organization. During the late eighteenth century, the interest of natural philosophers, ethnographers, anthropologists and philologists converged through their shared investment in the question of origin. From which region on earth had the human species originated? The dominant answer to this question argued that the human species had first appeared somewhere in the vicinity of the Ural Mountains. Contrary to what one may think, this mythological origin was not home to an idealized White race. Sara Figal Eigen draws attention in her analysis of late eighteenth century discourse on racial origins that “[t]he Caucasus was (and is) the most one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse regions on earth.” If one considers the following section from the first paragraph of the “Transcendentale Methodenlehre” in Kritik der reinen Vernunft, in light of late eighteenth-century philosophy’s interest in this mythological Babel of racial chaos, two things become apparent: (i) mixing was unpurposive and (ii) Kant’s official, critical philosophy was written from within the same theoretical framework as was his theory on race.

We have found … that although we had contemplated building a tower which should reach to the heavens, the supply of materials suffices only for a dwelling house, just sufficiently commodious for our business on the level of experience and just sufficiently high to allow of our overlooking it. The bold undertaking that we had designed is thus bound to fail through lack of material – not to mention the babel of tongues [Sprachverwirrung], which inevitably gives rise to disputes among the workers in regard to the plan to be followed, and which must end by scattering them over all the world, leaving each to erect a separate building for himself, according to his own design.30

Nomadism and Anti-Nomadism

In this second section, Kant’s view that racial hybrids were unpurposive is analysed in light of how teleological failures were used as truth devices by late eighteenth-century naturalists.

Kant’s prohibition against migration and interbreeding is paralleled by his insistence that a mature philosopher is sedentary. It is well-known that he was ridiculed by his contemporaries because of his stationary pattern of (non)-movement. In Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Kant makes a virtue of this by pitting critical philosophy against nomadism, a barbaric form of philosophizing “that despises all settled modes of life.”31 Kant’s argument against nomadism was, however, not actually his own, but Nature’s. To stop human beings from travelling outside their racial zones, Nature had

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31 Ibid., p. AA:IV:AVIII.
through the arranged suitability to the climate...hindered this exchange, especially that of the warm climate against the cold one. For it is exactly this poor match of the new region to the already adapted natural character of the inhabitants of the cold region that all by itself keeps them away from the former.32

It is a small wonder that Kant’s sedentary philosophy has come under heavy fire in light of today’s postmodernist yearning for more transitory ways of philosophizing. As Mark Larrimore has shown, “Deleuze and Guattari’s rehabilitation of ‘nomadic thought’ [was devised] as an antidote to thinkers like Kant.” Despite appearances, however, the nomadological critique of Kantianism is more often than not an exercise in target practice than actually exegetical. It therefore fails to see that Kant’s infamous anti-nomadism is much more complex than criticism of it leads on.

While the effects of migration and ‘foreign interbreeding’ were detrimental to systematic unity, it is, in Kant’s view, only through unpurposive activities such as these that the healthy, normal order of things becomes cognitively available. Kant’s use of dialectical illusions as ‘indirect’ proofs for transcendental idealism is an example of this. Dialectical illusions happen when the boundaries keeping the different territories of human cognition apart blur into each other. When not distinctly separated, theoretical and regulative uses of reason become mixed and the philosopher stumbles upon antinomies, that is, the experience that two claims are simultaneously legitimate and contradictory. However, while antinomies are the problem for which critical philosophy is the solution, cognitive health would be impossible to achieve if human reason did not constantly run into them.

[Because] something useful and likely to aid in the correction of our judgments...will always accrue when the arguments of reason are allowed to oppose one another; [we can] from this antinomy...obtain a true...critical and doctrinal advantage. It affords an indirect proof of the transcendental ideality of appearances.  

As critical philosophy’s aid and arch enemy, antinomies play a strained two-part role in Kant’s work. This two-fold inflection of dialectical illusions was formalized through his use of the Gift metaphor to explain how, as Peter McLaughlin has shown, antinomies were both the problem and solution in critical philosophy. Kant was able to make this move because the word Gift, as argued by Marcel Mauss in Essais sur le don (1923–24), carried enough etymological ambiguity to mean both present and poison, as indicated in the juxtaposition of the English word gift and the German word Gifte.  

Kant exploited this ambiguity to its fullest. When explaining why philosophers should not shy away from dialectical illusions, he argues that

everything which nature has itself instituted is good for some purpose. Even poisons [Gifte] have their use. They serve to counteract other poisons generated in our bodily humours, and must have a place in every complete pharmacopoeia [Sammlung von Heilmittel].

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33 Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, p. AA:III:B347.
35 Kant, Kritik der reinen Vernunft, p. AA:III:B487.
Consequently, although reason’s self-poisoning was “mischievous and malicious”, it was also a “remedy” (*Heilmittel*), that is to say, a “means of awakening it from its sweet slumber, and of inducing it to enter upon a more careful examination of its own position.”  

It was therefore critical philosophy’s purpose to cure philosophy’s illness by urging readers to “drink deep draughts of the poison.” For, Kant asks, “how can we [remove dogmatic thinking], unless we give it freedom, nay, nourishment, to send out shoots so that it may uncover itself to our eyes, and that it may then be entirely destroyed?”

The slightly contradictory logic of the *g/Gift* governing the role of dialectical illusions is similar to the logic governing the role of hybrids. While hybridity was a phenomenon of mixing, and therefore unpurposive and repulsive, its unteleological nature was, as a gift, useful to Kant. In the debate between preformationists and epigenesists, that is, the debate between the view that Nature was a mechanically dead system governed by God and the view that it was a living being teleologically producing life on its own, hybrids could be used as rhetorical truth devices. By making Nature’s fallibility evident, they showed that Nature must be seen as a teleologically self-governing organic being (*organisierte Wesen*).

[T]hey [the preformationists] … held fast to their hyper physics, finding even in miscarriages [Mißgeburten] (which one cannot possibly hold to be ends of Nature) a marvelous purposiveness … But they had absolutely no way of fitting the generation of hybrids [die Bastarde] into the system of preformation [my italics].

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36 Ibid, p. AA:III: B495
The logic of this argument turns on Kant’s conviction that “even what appears to man to be contrary to nature in his internal organization affords … an interesting, and sometimes instructive, outlook into a teleological order of things, to which mere unaided study from a physical point of view would not lead us.”\textsuperscript{40} He shared this view on teleology with many of his colleagues. Michael Hagner has analysed how the Enlightenment \textit{Naturforscher} was fascinated with, for example, ‘monstrosities’ by pointing to the fact that although natural philosophers were agents of teleological normativity, they made “bodily deviations…a constitutive part of the life sciences.”\textsuperscript{41} With the Baconian dictum that “he who has learnt [Nature’s] deviations will be able to more accurately describe her paths” in mind, observers of nature such as Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) and Joseph Kölreuter (1733–1806) deliberately provoked Nature to produce teleological mistakes by way of elaborate cross-fertilization experiments.

\textbf{The Test of Half-Breed Generation}

The third step of our analysis examines the proof structure of the test of half-breed generation in light of Kant’s ambivalent relationship toward hybrids and how it was received by some of its contemporaries. Central to the analysis is the hypothesis that hybrids allowed Kant to solve the problem of how to make an ideological text a product of \textit{Wissenschaft}.

While influential, Kant’s theory on race was not uncontested. Critics could point to a wide range of problems. For preformationists, the premise Kant departed from, the hybrid proof, was

\textsuperscript{40} Kant, \textit{Kritik der Urteilskraft}, p. AA:V:397.

incomprehensible as it was a natural phenomenon that made no sense from the perspective of Absolutism’s statically mechanic worldview. For example, Charles Bonnet (1720–1793), a leading preformationist during the eighteenth century, argued that no such thing as a hybrid even existed. According to Bonnet, the mule, a paradigmatic example explaining the phenomenon of cross-fertilization (between the horse and the ass), was either “a disguised horse [or] a hinny disguised as an ass.”42 The people who actually read Kant’s work shared Bonnet’s view to some degree. A comparison of two of Kant’s readers are of particular interest in this respect: Christoph Girtanner (1760–1800), a now largely studied popularizer of John Brown’s anti-phlogistic chemistry in Göttingen, and Johann Georg Adam Forster (1754–1794), traveling companion to Capt. James Cook, and author of the massively popular Reise um die Welt (1778–80), a travel report on Forster’s journeys.43

Girtanner and Forster reacted to Kant’s articles on race in diametrically opposed ways. Girtanner’s Über das Kantische Prinzip für Naturgeschichte (1796) was an attempt to combine Kant’s theory on race mixing with Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s theory of the so-called Bildungstrieb. Most of the article, however, focuses on how useful “the Kantian principle, or rather the great law of Nature discovered by the deep thinker Kant, namely, the law of

half-breed generation” was to natural philosophers.”

Girtanner was so impressed by Kant’s ‘discovery’ that he argued that it “[was] valid not only for the human races, to which the great philosopher applied it, but that is a universal law that can be applied to the whole of organized nature.”

Another aspect Girtanner liked about Kant’s “test of half-breed generation” was that it was “especially useful for research in natural history because it is capable of being tested experimentally.”

The claim that the Kantian principle of half-breed generation was experimentally testable was stressed by Kant in all of his three articles on race. In contrast to his own test of half-breed generation, he argued, other theories of heredation “permit absolutely no experiment.”

The logic underlying the test was simple. It argued that, although races cannot be found in Nature, their existence must be assumed “in order to account for a self-transmitted peculiarity that appears in different interbreeding animals but which does not lie in the concept of their genus.”

According to Kant and Girtanner, it was the phenomenon of hybridity that prompted reason to postulate the concept of race, not the other way around.

Kant was positive toward Girtanner’s effort. He gave it his stamp of approval by, instead of writing a text of his own on “The character of the Races” in his Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (1798), simply “refer[ring] to what Herr Geh. H. R. Girtanner has presented so beautifully and thoroughly in explanation and further development in his work (in accordance with my

45 Girtanner, Über das Kantische Prinzip für Naturgeschichte, p. I.
principles).”\textsuperscript{49} At the other end of the spectrum, Forster, who as Girtanner mockingly pointed out “did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Kantian principle” was fiercely critical.\textsuperscript{50} Particularly disturbing to him was the logic of experimentation Kant employed in his test of half-breed generation. In Forster’s view, Kant’s proof was based on the confusing claim that it was possible to ground a theory on race on interbreeding when the phenomenon of hybridization was unthinkable if one did not already have Kant’s theory on race in mind. Whereas Kant argued that “[w]e find in experience what we need only when we know beforehand what it is we are looking for,” Forster saw his experiments as “unmanly” and founded on “deceptive, shifting sand.”\textsuperscript{51} He warned his readers that “a certain caution might be needed in the employment of this thesis [‘the test of half-breed generation’] in order to avoid the most common of all illusions, namely, that we, in the appointed search for that which we need, often also believe that we have found it there, where it does not really exist.”\textsuperscript{52}

By arguing that Kant’s hybrid proof could only be found in Nature if one was convinced that his theory on race was correct, Forster had found a soft spot in his opponent’s argumentation. He argued that if hybridization as Kant perceived it actually takes place, it no longer has the power to prove anything. Since the offspring’s resemblance to his or her parents indicates that the two ‘varieties’ they represent belong to the same generative community, no actual mix has occurred.

\textsuperscript{49} Kant, \textit{Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht}, p. AA:VII:320.
\textsuperscript{50} Girtanner, \textit{Über das Kantische Prinzip für Naturgeschichte}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{52} Johann Georg Adam Forster, “Noch etwas über die Menschenräßen,” p. 61–62.
The half-breed that results from this mixing undoubtedly resembles both the father and the mother. However, its skin color is no more the chief sign of this resemblance and the mixed nature; for both parents had the same color. If a situation now comes to pass in which an assumed distinguishing sign cannot fulfill what we had hoped from it, as exists in the present case, then it no longer declares that a mixing of two human lines of descent is really taking place. We discover in this was that the distinguishing sign selected by Kant is badly chosen and objectionable.\textsuperscript{53}

Consequently, in Forster’s view, the hybrid proof “no longer concerns the application of the concept that we take to be fundamental but rather undermines the principle itself and demonstrates its inadmissibility.”\textsuperscript{54}

The different responses to Kant’s theory on hybridization show that, although he regarded the phenomenon as a factual confirmation of his theory, it was not self-evident to his contemporaries that could actually be found in Nature. How was it possible to identify a phenomenon such as racial hybridity, a teleological mistake, unless one is not already convinced that clearly defined and teleologically determined races existed? Forster complained about how unfortunate it was that natural philosophers did not observe Nature regardless of their theoretical preferences.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, p. 74–5.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p. 75.
How much trouble has from time immemorial come to pass in the world because we proceeded from definitions in which we placed no mistrust and consequently saw – without knowing why – many things in a predetermined light and deceived ourselves and others! To the extent, therefore, that the impartial observer only faithfully and reliably reports what he perceives without pondering for a long time which theory [Spekulation] his perception favors, we could look for instruction more confidently from him than from an observer who has been tempted by a faulty principle that lends the color of his glasses to the objects he is investigating. Who would not prefer the fewer observations of a simple but sharp-sighted and reliable empiricist to the many make up-like covered observations of a partisan systematizer?55

Was, then, Kant’s theory on race Naturkunde, that is, properly Wissenschaft? Or was it a theory that, in Forster’s words, was written by a “partisan systematizer”? Robert Bernasconi has pointed out that, while Kant’s writing on the human races was clearly ideological, they were not presented as political texts. Kant, he argues, “gave the concept [of race] sufficient definition for subsequent users to believe that they were addressing something whose scientific status could at least be debated.”56 However, what counted as Wissenschaft was highly contested during the late eighteenth-century. It is clear that, for natural philosophers who did not accept the contradiction of hybridization, its accompanying theory on race ceased to appear as Wissenschaft. This is why Forster saw in Kant’s articles on race claims not of natural philosophy but of a clearly biased man.

Human beings from one line of descent who were sharing in the unrecognized blessing of a cleansed moral philosophy do not show themselves for this reason to be any more tolerant and more loving toward one another. Where is the bond, however strong it may be, that can hinder the decadent Europeans from ruling over their white fellow human beings as despotically as they rule over Negroes?\textsuperscript{57}

Girtanner, on the other hand, accepted the contradiction of hybridity. Consequently, he did not see in Kant’s theory the problems Forster identified. In light of Forster’s criticism, it is hard to see how Girtanner could overlook the apparent circularity of the Kantian principle. It should be remembered, however, that a contradictory proof like Kant’s was not necessarily in conflict with the scientific methodology of late eighteenth-century naturalism. This, at least, is what Waltraud Ernst, a historian of race and science, urges us to consider:

\begin{quote}
[A]n important point in regard to the way in which racialized discourses strengthen their hegemony may [have been] overlooked. In fact, the ambiguities, contradictions and discrepancies manifest within particular racial theories … are more likely to strengthen than weaken racial discourses. Racial discourses work well not despite their logical inconsistencies, ambiguities and mixing up of premises but because of them.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} Johann Georg Adam Forster, “Noch etwas über die Menschenräßen,” p. 164.
Ernst’s last point is crucial. If Kant’s proof of half-breed generation is an answer to the question of a theory of race becomes scientific, it is an answer that performs this task by providing Kant with a proof that makes no sense outside his theory as if it existed independently of it. As a proof for teleology that presupposes a teleological understanding of nature in order to be functional, the test of half-breed generation is both inside and outside Kant’s theory in the sense hybrids both produces and is the product of the turn towards teleology. Such a move has benefits and costs. It enabled Kant to foist political viewpoints on readers as if they were Nature’s own, but it was able to do so at the price of making racial hybrids themselves phenomena of hybridity, life forms that are simultaneously inside and outside, desired and repulsive. Although this is a contradiction, it is a contradiction that makes it possible for Kant’s theory on race to be written (and read) as a scientific text without falling into the contradiction of also being an ideological text.

References


Aerobic exercise and health – a tenuous connection?

| GUNN ENGELSRUD

Introduction – understanding exercise
Fitness training\(^1\) is a culturally created phenomenon that exerts great impact in contemporary Western societies (Dworkin & Faye 2009). In recent years, the exercising body has been positioned as a site of identity construction and a consuming body in a great amount of the sociological literature (Shilling 2003, Waskul and Vannini 2006, Wolkowitz 2006, Featherstone 2000). A general concern in modern societies is that bodies should move and be active in order to achieve good health. Several researchers have pointed to how the body as a cultural object is moved and manipulated to achieve physical change, alteration of lifestyle, health and well-being, as well as thinness and appearance fixation (Markula 1995, Sassatelli 1999, 2007, Havaron Collins 2002, Loland 2000, Lloyd 1996). Other researchers point out that exercising have played a huge part in women’s liberation (Petersson McIntyre 2009). Petersson McIntyre (2009 p 1) writes “Through exercise and physical performances many woman have shown that their bodies are in fact not naturally and generally inferior to those of

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\(^1\) Fitness training is a broad concept that relates to activities in the commercial market. Dworkin & Faye (2009) criticize approaches that conflate a message of feeling good with a discourse of looking good. Several researchers have pointed to how the body as a cultural object is moved and manipulated to achieve physical change, alteration of lifestyle, health and well-being, as well as thinness and appearance fixation (Markula 1995, Sassatelli 1999, 2007, Havaron Collins 2002, Loland 2000, Lloyd 1996).
men”. This development illustrates that it is important to bear in mind that the body should not be understood as a static or fixed category, but as a moving subject embedded in changing ways of doing and valuing exercise. Moreover, the theoretical position I use regards the body as a subject that moves, and through movement human beings experience themselves and the world sensually, kinaesthetically and relationally (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, Abram 1996). I approach women’s exercise experience with theoretical inspiration from French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1994, 2004, and 1962/2005). His phenomenology of the body has inspired many within different disciplines to understand the body as a lived subject in the world. According to him, it is “never our objective body that moves, but our phenomenal body …” (2005 p. 121). The phenomenal body moves in co-existence with space in a directly experienced relationship with others in an intercorporeal and spatiotemporal field (Todes 2001). I define the intercorporeal space in an aerobic exercise session as an instructive fitness practice, where instructions shape the exercising body. Ideas and definitions of exercises run the risk of reducing personal movement and kinaesthetic sensations (Parviainen 1998).

We move in relation to others and generate the spatial and temporal fields around us (Todes 2001 p. 49). Todes writes (ibid. p. 49) “When moving we thus move from one circumstance to another, so that action takes place in circumstances, and is replete with many instances”. Active involvement and our movement responses and expressions can, according to Todes, be seen as “…a measure of the satisfaction of our needs, and that our needs must to some extent be satisfied if there is to be an experience at all”.

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2 Parviainen (1998) writes about her experiences as a dancer (p. 4) that “The body often resists movements imposed on it, felt shame at being humiliated into doing things that were against its potential identity.”
Todes’ position is highly relevant because exercising in an aerobic context is something the subject must shape and perform in a spatiotemporal field and with her feelings, sensations and the individual awareness of her own movement in relation to herself, others, and space. Space and awareness of space are related to movement since the structures of the human body relate to forward/back, symmetry/asymmetry, performed in a spatiotemporal field. In the aerobic space the moving bodies are challenged in relation to each other, how other people occupy and create space, and how space and movement constantly change with the exercises that are performed and perceived in space. How do women experience exercising in a commercial and instructive context, and particularly, how are movement and experiences performed and negotiated?

The ability to perform depends on the subject’s previous experience of similar classes, on the level of habituation as well as the kinaesthetic sensation in the moment. Due to this understanding, I included informants that had habituated the fitness form of movement in different ways. Nevertheless, following the instructions was not necessarily easier for them, although it must have been different from their first time in a specific aerobics class. As we shall also see, the work of achieving the movement style functions in different ways, even among experienced women.

Merleau-Ponty has many well-known examples that show that perception is always embodied, and that the situation is never independent of the body, or the body of the situation. A person can, for example, judge distances by going through a door without comparing the door’s width to his or her own body. In a similar manner, a blind person’s cane becomes an extension of his or her body and embodies its relationship to the world.
Methods, materials and exercise context

The production of material was carried out at a fitness centre in Oslo, Norway. The material is derived from participant observation at a medium-sized fitness club that offers classes in what can collectively be termed *aerobic exercise*. My material is comprised of texts from eight qualitative interviews with women who have extensive experience of aerobics. Additional observations and participation in the classes over a two-year period, with written notes, were conducted both during and after class. The interviews took place at cafés and lasted 90 minutes. I transcribed the interviews, the informants read the transcripts, and then we met and discussed the text (Engelsrud 2005).

In an average class containing 15-20 people, half the group followed the instructions without struggling, and the exercises seemed to have been incorporated into their own movements. I endured watching the difficulties of the other half of the group in their attempts to follow the instructions. In these situations it was my experience that the women’s difficulty with the movement strongly compelled me to look elsewhere in the room. I was challenged by my own bodily feelings when observing the classes and had to “force” these feelings into written language or “reconsider in writing” as the anthropologist Johansen (2003) states. His point is that writing makes thoughts visible and represents a clarification of thought. Getting the movement “right” in the dynamic of the music and relating to others in space was difficult for many, which was clearly visible in their tense, abrupt, static, disrupted movements, which were “painful” to watch. I agree with Parviainen (1998 p. 4), who, as a dance teacher, found herself in a difficult situation when having to teach groups of twenty and perceived them as “all unique and vulnerable in their bodies”. My own ex-
periences of clumsiness approximated the strain I observed that some women had to undergo to include themselves in the rhythm and dynamic speed of the group. I became significantly concerned about the role that each different body part was given. Hilmann and Mazzio (1997 p. XXIV), in their book *The body in parts*, point to the idea that the body in part occupies such a privileged space in the public and private fantasies of early modern European thought, perhaps because it ultimately never takes place. The history of “the body in parts” has a close relationship with the social aesthetic and the overrepresentation of beauty ideals in the media and the particular body part as foot size, eye shape, skin colour, height, etc. (Berry 2008 p. 11). Aerobics, as a form of exercising in which the exercises constitute the aerobic programme, is also oriented toward the various parts of the body: the back of the upper arms, the calves, the stomach, the back, etc.\(^4\) The exercises start from selected positions, standing or lying on the floor, and have a defined purpose with regard to the groups of muscles that “are worked”, or the joints that are affected. The exercises are “designed” to exercise the different parts of the body separately as well as stimulate endurance in a one-hour, high-impact programme.

The research process is based on rediscovering the space in which we are situated (Merleau-Ponty 2004, p. 69), although we see others and the world only from a limited perspective (our own), and we reside in space and relate to it through our bodies. In my situation in the particular space at the fitness centre, I came to know something about the potentials, responses and expressions and inter-subjective exchanges of movement that also stemmed

\(^4\) Construction of exercises for the different body parts cannot be performed in isolation, however, since even the motion of the little finger is dependent on the little finger’s relation to the whole body.
from the somatic responses of being situated in the fitness space. Merleau-Ponty says (2004 p. 86) “I never become aware of my own existence until I have already made contact with others; my reflection always brings me back to myself, yet for all that it owes much to my contact with other people”. We do not make up our minds without already being caught up in certain relationships with others, which influences us to adopt a particular set of opinions (ibid. p. 87). This helped me remember that I myself had been out on the floor and had been instructed in the movements that demanded both lack of self-denial (in order to be able keep up in a fluid way) and self-observation (in order to catch what was said and be able to relate to it myself).

I alternated between participating in the class and watching from the sidelines. The room was approximately 100 square metres and had one long mirrored wall at the front of the room. The mirror opens the space to visual perception and makes it possible for class participants to correct their performance when they have their shoulders too high, do not extend their leg properly, etc. They can also see each other and be seen by others, and the mirror enables them to have eye contact with themselves and smile at themselves.\(^5\) The mirror also has a control function: it allows participants to look at their mirror image to make sure they are performing the exercises and movements correctly, that is, in the sense of both “as they have been choreographed” and “so as not to hurt oneself”, as well as to allow them to maintain distance from, and avoiding bumping into, others.

The instructors stand in front of the group and alternate between having their face turned toward the clients and making the

movements with their backs to them. When the instructors make the movements with their backs to the group, the participants can follow the movements without having direct eye contact with the instructors. However, it is possible to maintain indirect eye contact through the mirror, allowing the clients to keep in contact with the instructor. At the start of the session, the group stands in rows facing the long, mirrored wall, turned toward the instructor. All the participants wear jogging shoes and stand “tall” on the floor. From this active bodily stance, clients are prepared, and prepare themselves, to move. The class starts with a request from the instructor to straighten up. They all take on a type of basic body stance by which the stomach is held in, chest out, back straight, shoulders down and eyes ahead. In order for them to perform the programme, definite instructions are given to motivate them to move. Definite instructions play an important part in aerobics and are something the participants are expected to perceive and respond to.

Expressions of exercise

The women in class have in common that they have chosen to participate in aerobic exercise. As other researchers have pointed out, an overwhelming majority of both aerobics instructors and participants are women. My informants also wanted to move because

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6 “Stand straight up” also embodies a whole moral code (see Strathern, Andrew J. (1966) Body Thoughts (p. 29).

7 In the following analysis, what the informants actually said is shown in italics. The presentation is based on statements from the informants, and how these statements have contributed to my creation of the themes. I draw once more on theory and data from my observations, focusing particularly on how the informants’ expressions can be traced back to how health can be understood as an effect of exercise.

8 In the book “Let’s Take Back Our Space. “Female” and “Male” Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures”, Wex (1979) documents how the use – and production – of space is gendered.
they experience *a huge difference between moving and not moving*. One situation is that *being stuck in front of a computer or always driving a car* is not something they prefer. However, even if they do describe these more passive activities as undesirable, *getting going* is also described as something that is difficult to complete. Some women state that they really have to pull themselves together to exercise properly and not “just sit on the sofa” (Hjelmeiland Grimsbø & Engelsrud 2006). Exercising or not exercising is described as a factor that makes a significant difference in the lives of many participants. It appears to be a threshold that must be crossed, and this applies to adults in particular. “Starting exercising” is a recurrent topic of conversation. Previous movement, for example in the form of taking a walk in the company of others, had a positive meaning for them. Exercise had been helpful during difficult periods of setback such as death, romantic troubles or a feeling of being let down. Being able to move functioned during these periods as a distraction and support. Moving seems to have helped to give continuity to the experience of life, and earlier experiences of moving seemed to constitute a meaningful background against which the adult experiences can be understood.

Certain personal movements that have to be kept “in check” in order to respond to the movements imposed by the instructor. What often came to my attention was the “hold-back” in postures, the habits of the postures that express both the habits that the bodies “have” and the process of habituation that is also present in the aerobic space. Movement is, according to movement researcher Warren Lamb (1985 p. 85), “posture-gesture merging”, which is a moment in movement when postures and gestures interact and “flow” through the body from the gestures to the postures and from the postures to the gestures. The informants brought
experiences of movement with them that had to be adapted to the defined exercise at the fitness centre.

**Tension between feeling invaded and moving freely**

When the participants entered the fitness room, I perceived some of them as being particularly aware of how they moved, walked in and occupied the space; they arrived early, read a newspaper, took a place at the front, etc. Entering public space creates a personal ground for acting, moving and experiencing. Movement provides a way of accessing; in this situation the world of fitness exercise. Entering a room is a signal that one makes oneself available for the exercise. Walking into a space with other people involves a certain degree of exposure. Some expressed a sense of belonging and familiarity with the space. Their comportment suggested that they regarded the space almost as a “second home”. The leader of the centre also expressed similar ideas, “We know that for some of our customers, this is their second home”. Others I perceived “like strangers”, as if the room belongs to the instructor. Since they regarded the instructor as “the boss of the room”, they felt very affected by how the instructor talked and related to them. One description is to feel invaded by the instructor’s comments. The instructions played on the culturally shaped ideas that in order to be “normal”, women must be occupied with vanity and their appearance. Specific ways of constructing women’s bodily identities are woven into the language directed at doing more and working harder, and the obligation to “keep fit”. The overall meanings con-

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According to Maguire (2001), in commercial exercise the instructors become significant carriers of the notions embodied in exercise. The instructors convey the club’s presentation of itself and its concept to the clients. Comments that refer to appearance hardly allow participants to recognize how they feel when they move and from where their movements are initiated in the body. The instructions are to build on, come on, do more, etc.
structured in the language identify the women as never fit enough. Some perceive the language as negative and hurtful, and express that the instructor’s talk was bothersome. There is always something negative or wrong with it, particularly when the instructor uses an expression like remember that people see us from behind! Even if this comment seems extreme and does not represent the comments in general, this is a type of comment that sticks with some of the women. When the women talked about the effect of being seen as someone who should always be aware of how her body looks, the tone of their voice indicated that they “never forget”. Such comments (even if they are exceptions) function as a reminder of an anonymous stare of “the other”. Anonymity acts as a placelessness within the women themselves, as described by philosopher Fredrik Svenaeus in the context of homelessness (2003, p. 76-78), in that the situation may entail that, without quite noticing it, one loses faith in the activity in which one is engaged. The body loses its conviction, as also described by Drude von der Fehr (2008). Her idea is that when the body is not fully trusted, but is commented on in a negative manner and its perceptions are overlooked, in a continuous attempt to conform to negative comments and instructions, this produces detrimental effects, such as pain, guilt, discomfort etc.

Other comments that are used imply that the act of exercise is based on a construction wherein women have a desire to use exercise to gain more sex appeal or, specifically, physical beauty. Some comments directed at me expressed that they seem to take advantage of and fit into the sex appeal “mindset”. The situation wherein women are positioned as someone who has a desire to look more

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10 Von der Fehr’s examples are from a medical context. The construction of exercise and the presumed effects of exercises are developed to train the “objectified” body constructed within medicine.
attractive, as someone who also invests in the body for self-presentation, can be seen as a norm in the cultural production of female identity. Others say that in such situations they feel *totally alone and unprotected in the exercise studio*. One woman expressed: *It's extra hurtful for me as I have used exercise as a replacement for men.* She adds that she feels *a double dose of defeat* when the instructor plays on the fact that she will feel more attractive to men, while at the same time she feels dissatisfied with her own body. She also states that she becomes *worried that the instructor's voice will prevent her from hearing the music* and that she *can't manage to work or relax during the classes*. She says she often has to leave the session to regain some sort of distance from the constant demand to be an attractive and lovely woman. Such strong testimonies make one wonder why women keep up this type of exercise, and whether there is anything positive about it.

When one is habituated to exercise as self-objectification one becomes familiar with this position, and it might be easy to continue the habit. Habits “just function” and are far from clear-cut; they are instead saturated with ambiguity. Training is not only about an “investment” in appearance, but also “training” oneself to accept comments that might fall into a type of habituated system of self-esteem that can be reproduced in communication. There is a risk of relating oneself to homogenization of what it means to exercise and to constrain oneself to the narrow use of comments and words. To see oneself through the viewpoint of contemporary visual expectations of how a fit body should look might be another risk.

This interpretation is supported by several quotes in the material; some become hurt and angry. Another woman expresses distress and makes the comment:
I just get distressed by it. I think about the melodies and the lyrics they are playing. One of the first times I was there they played a song with the words “I do not want to be lonely” while we were lying down doing muscle contractions. I wondered if that was what we were doing, and whether it was a girlie club where we were trying to get a better self-image or love life or something. I started asking myself then if that was why I was there.

This interview extract refers to the instructions as taxing and the individual not being given peace to perform the movements. However, at the same time she reflects on what she is doing; therefore the instructions apparently trigger something else in her besides “peace to perform the movements”. She continues: Inasmuch as they try to communicate with us, I find it tiring. I actually think it’s best if they do not try to talk, especially if they want a response. When I ask other clients how they experience the communication with the instructors, most of them say they do not think about the instructors’ communication as something they must reply to verbally, but perhaps just smile and respond to their glance with attention. For example, when the instructor shouts Everything OK? Can you manage just a bit more? Clients can nod to such questions and show that they can manage a bit more by intensifying their movements. However, some say they cannot bear listening to it, as one woman expresses: I close my ears; I’ve gotten so used to it. But at the same time I think it’s very stupid – it becomes something like theatre. She does not know me, and I do not know her.

11 Styles of communication are cultural and contextual. In the “American way” one is not supposed to answer, and this might be the style of communication that has been adopted and is performed in the fitness studio.
This woman reacts to the intimacy\textsuperscript{12} that she feels intrudes upon her. To continue exercising she tries to shut off her senses and distance herself from the communication situation. Her strategy is to “pull herself together” in order to keep up with the instructions and the movements of the group. Others say they have to make a great effort to give themselves space and peace so that they can get something out of the exercise. One woman stated that when she leaves class, she often feels that it simply does not pay off, and that she is frequently disappointed. The commands create new stress that cannot be compensated for by using one’s body and pushing oneself further. The tone and command of the instructions are described as the most invasive factor. The well-being element of exercise is driven into the background during exercise. Well-being and joy of the exercise take place after exercise. One woman stated I find my own movement and joy when I am outside on the street. After class she feels relief and that she can feel “at home in herself”. The two modes of focusing attention, first on self-observation and then on discovering the kinaesthetic sensation are, according to Merleau-Ponty, dependent on each other. What he calls “double sensations” (1962/2005 p. 106) are based on his examples of one hand touching the other, as one hand touching the other hand (as an object for the touch) also has the property of being able to feel. To feel objectified is not separated from the first-person perspective, but is rather felt from that perspective. A two-way information exchange takes place, regarding what the others say and do, as well as one’s own way of self-perception – a double sensation. When some women compare exercise to a ritual that aims to perfect the body, one could say that they direct their

\textsuperscript{12} Even if intimacy is culturally associated with femininity (Conradi 2009), a clear statement in my material indicates that the “own space” in threatened – a paradox in individualized training.
attention toward something “external” that they want to achieve. To speak of the body as being detached from oneself is definitely a discursive way of speaking. One example that might express alienation is:

... a rather technical view, a mechanical person or body image. It’s perfectionism on behalf of the body. Maybe it’s just the same as New Age is doing on a spiritual level. They’ve often been accused of performing spiritual aerobics or spiritual perfectionism, like different parts of the mind that are to be perfected. I can’t see very much difference! I think there’s something similar in aerobics.

In this citation, striving for perfection is associated with a particular way of behaving and performing ideas (body in parts, look orientation, etc). Involved in the exercise is an intention to attain perfection, which in this context refers to the shape and firmness of the body. One of the women connects the values of the firm and hard body with cold behaviour. She states that everyone has learned that they must be pleasant and obliging, but in a rational manner. The most important thing is not to have contact with each other, but the results of the exercise. What this woman misses most is the feeling of being together. However, she wonders whether such a longing can seem pathetic. Human needs, such as to be seen, hugged or chatted with, all form part of another body ideal than that performed at the fitness centre. The women express an uncertainty about how the instructors are assessing them, and whether they will be regarded as pathetic and clumsy or whether they can consider themselves included in a kind of kinship. From my perception this is a recognizable situation. When we move in space, we try to do like others do and strive to include ourselves as “a normal
aerobicizer”. In trying to manage, a look of difficulty appeared on the women’s faces, and I interpreted the expressed difficulties\textsuperscript{13} as an unconscious response to feeling that the communication did not correspond to their own specific rhythm or body. Experiences of sadness and insecurity regarding one’s own position in aerobic class is something that stems not only from the aerobic exercise “in itself”, but from the experience the women bring to the fitness centre, which is reinforced or stimulated in relation to the instructions and comments. Exercising in this context elicits a great variety of themes that could also be expressed regarding other aspects of their lives. It may appear as if the lives and the exercise “fit together”. Limited space is given for alternative notions of how life and movement, one’s own movements, desires, time and space fit into the manner in which one pays attention to oneself and others. Shusterman (2005, p.176) describes this as how to “...achieve a higher unity of experiences on the reflective level and thus acquire a better means to correct inadequacies of our unreflective bodily habits”. He argues that there is a need to “work consciously” with our bodily habits, because if not we might just make our body fit into expectations of being strong, thin and well-adjusted but fail to feel connected and find continuity in our movements and to appreciate that immediate sensations must be processed and understood as productive of meaning.

\textsuperscript{13} My experience from Body-Mind centering, aikido and improvisation (both discipline and movement exploration) is a condition form from which I perceive undesired tensions that appear due to a lack of attention to the individual habitual patterns that limit the perfection aimed for by the instructor. My point: there is a mismatch between the exercises and the actual bodies.
**Tension between aversion and pleasure**

Exercising is talked about as bad and good, positive and negative, but in various ways. Some women expect it to be hard and strenuous, and they experience good relations with the instructor and regard him/her as someone to motivate them to fight against human laziness, as they express it. One woman expresses a more definitive ambivalence and says that exercise can be beautiful and that you can reach your inner self through exercise. She continues:

There is something very sad about exercise... The way I have used exercise has resulted in a very unhealthy body, it is very sick; I have constant muscle problems, great difficulty in breathing and a lot of pain. But all the same... the feeling when you are in the shower after such a hard exercise session is wonderful because you feel absolutely great. It’s a real adrenaline kick, but it does not mean you can go out and meet people... I’ve spent many years doing this; you get really angry when you go around town and see all these shopping streets, commercialism and all the superficiality that affects us, but what I am so damn angry about is that I get so much pleasure from exercise. It’s a very beautiful place... or can be a beautiful place, incredibly beautiful if it’s used in the right way so that you can open up through the sweat and pumping and just be in a room with others who are more real.

So exercise is a very good thing because you can reach into your inner self.

One expression here is that of “inner self”, and here I did not ask my informant anything about what she considers this inner self to be. Her words appear to express how she becomes absorbed in “reaching into herself”, and less in reaching out to the world, or in
being and acting in the world. Her sense of interiority should not be understood as “an inner core cut off from the world”, but she expresses a singularity of experience and sense of interiority that she knows as a kinaesthetic and personal feeling of being at ease with herself in movement. She also shows how that sense of interiority is found in being in the world of exercising – this is especially relevant regarding Merleau-Ponty’s point. He makes an attempt to overcome the dualist division between the internal and the external, describing how being in the world represents a position where the subject knows itself, not by way of introspection or by “looking inwards”. In the citation, her manner of expressing herself shows that the woman cannot get what she really wants out of exercise and what she knows exercise can give when she is in contact with herself. For her, the correlation between exercise and health is tenuous. She talks about how exercise also gears her up and makes her unbalanced, and adds that too much exercise diminishes her desire for sex. However, she also states that she thinks exercise can be important, beautiful and true, but also alienating, because when she was exercising extensively it was difficult to let people get close to her: *It’s awkward letting people get close to you because you feel so superior when you train. You do not miss the contact until afterwards*. In the cloakroom it was not unusual to hear people say that they had pain in their body. I also noticed statements like *my knees hurt, I’m getting stiffer and stiffer, and it’s getting increasingly painful as I train more and more*. She says that

14 In the famous preface to Phenomenology of Perception (xii), Merleau-Ponty writes that “there is no inner man, man is in the world and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense of science, I find, not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to the world.”
she now has an unhealthy and painful body through exercise. She feels almost disabled from exercising so hard. Trying to solve stiffness and pain with more exercise fits into the traditional discourse about exercise, and this example from my material illustrates that, even if pain occurs, one can still hope that exercise can cure the pain. The experience reproduced here is that of self-objectivity and frustration, which one certainly might say is part of life, but still is not something that is pleasurable or a phenomenon associated with the experience of well-being and health.

One woman says: Sometimes I feel like I am standing there with no clothes on. I feel that the strict movements affect my very soul so I feel doubly naked. She portrays being in the exercise studio as a battle. At the same time, she and others talk about letting off steam, as they call it. Bodily expression is described as an important alternative to sitting in front of a computer the entire day. She also talks about strict movements affecting my very soul. When the exercise is over, then later in the shower, she can breathe out and enjoy the good feeling. However, she admits that it is not easy to trust the good feeling – it is more based on a “kick” and she knows it will simply disappear. Questions about whether exercise exists for them as individuals or whether they exist as objects for the exercise are raised in the interviews. Several women experience strong mood changes and struggle to recognize themselves in how the instructors say that exercise solves depression. One woman says:
It’s not true that exercise puts you in a good mood. It’s a lie, a delusion. Moderate exercise is fine, of course. We’re not made to be static and everything indicates that we must exercise, but not more than two or three times a week. I feel it deep down inside and I just want to sit down and cry. Why did I do that? It’s like an attack on me. It feels as if someone has attacked me – hit me or something. It feels so wrong, but it’s a thought that has only struck me during the past six months.

The woman continues: *This type of exercise is like committing violence to my body. It’s mine, it’s harmful. When I feel really empty and stuck I think I should go to the doctor and get rehabilitation benefits or something. And this body culture is in fact very dangerous, completely heartless.* She has become exhausted by this type of exercise and says she has harmed her body through exercise. Her body has been damaged and now she must take care of her own health. The body she has gained through exercise is so hard and muscular that she cannot even put her thighs together. Her body has lost its spontaneity, she says, and she longs for it to be soft and sensitive. The exercise hardens her as a whole person, and the hardness has made her discouraged and depressed. In feeling offended by instructions that focus on appearance, she has experienced a pressure that has had a negative effect on her experience of health.

**Further Discussions**
The perspective of “the other women”, who do deconstruct the look orientation, seems to represent a marginal position in the actual space, like the demands of the instructor’s implicit, and also explicit, statement that “we are all here to change our appearance”. If this situation is understood, it can then be seen as constitutive for the person situated in it. I would say that the women
become increasingly aware of themselves as objects for instruction. I interpret their statements in the light of how their bodies in these exercise classes are told to respond to the instructions. They get their ideas of what the exercise should do for them, or with them, from the society of exercise. They think they have to pull their bodies together by straightening and tightening them. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005, pp. 162) writes: “Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of accessing the world and the object, with a ‘praktognosia’, which has to be recognized as original and perhaps as primary.” He continues:

> My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function’. … I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time. I belong to them; my body combines with them and includes them. (Merleau-Ponty 1962/2005, p. 162)

In the fitness studio, the women’s bodies take up space and time in a way that seems to lock them in a specific muscular tone and tightness before they even start. High-impact exercise requires great flexibility, which many do not possess. The command is the signal that is intended to release movement, regardless of what state they are in, what their bodies feel, or their need to breathe, stretch, catch their breath or feel their weight. It is almost as if they must “pull themselves together” to be able to do the exercises and that this is done at the expense of flexibility.

I often heard people after class claim that they had suffered, and describe how they became aware of themselves in the fitness class, for example: *it’s not the most enjoyable thing I do, but I know it’s good for me.* In fitness activity the trainers tended to prize ef-
fort, zeal and labour and reinforce the idea that a fit body and training itself are crucial for conveying both to oneself and to others a satisfactory perception of self. Intensive exercise reduces the opportunities to dwell on what such access entails for the formation of subjective experience and for attention in encounters with others. The motivation from the instructor is directed toward the future – when you are finished you can...you are going to stop soon, only a little more… The moment of doing the exercise and feelings of being in movement are not mentioned in the communication. Being under pressure “to be finished soon” may be contradictory to having experienced access to oneself in the situation. The future counts more than the present. Valuing strain and effort is the dominating part of the communication about exercising.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) claims that a preoccupation with keeping oneself young, slim and muscular is distinct from health. He distinguishes fitness when he writes (2000 p. 77): “Health is the proper and desirable state of the human body and spirit – a state which (at least in principle) can be more or less exact, and once described, also measured”. Bauman states that “to be healthy” in most cases means being able to “perform well on the factory floor” and bear the responsibility and possess the stamina required to carry out one’s tasks as a member of society. However, while health, according to Bauman, refers to something stable and solid in a person’s social role, exercise has no definite reference to bodily capacity or social norms. Instead, he maintains that “in the life-long pursuit of fitness there is no time to rest” (ibid p. 78). Bauman criticizes the endless pursuit of fitness, saying it leads to a perpetuated state of self-scrutiny, self-reproach and self-deprecation and continuous anxiety. According to Bauman, continuous pressure to constantly improve oneself means that self-centered-
ness and anxiety come to the forefront. In contrast to the female researchers (Sassatelli, Markula and Bordo), Bauman paints a negative picture of fitness, and seems to underestimate the “healthy lifestyle” that is achieved through exercising. However, philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1996) in his book containing the article “The enigma of health” makes clear that being healthy is a tacit and silent life-force and not something one has to “work with”. To “work with” one’s health moves the person easily into more abstract and instrumental self-positioning and self-objectification, which according to Gadamer has very little reference to health. To summarize the positions and results produced from researchers such as Sassatelli (1999, 2007), Markula (1995), Maguire and Mansfield (1998) and Steen-Johnsen (2004), they are characterized by the fact that they place the act of exercise into theoretical perspectives that concern commercialization, the consumer culture and individuality. Key cultural values, such as freedom of choice and effectiveness, are linked to exercise. Exercise is also associated (in physiological terms) with good health and (in social terms) with a well-formed and pleasing appearance, and these are not always clear-cut or easy to distinguish.

The strong discourse around exercise as mentioned earlier in the article might contribute to many people’s inability to put personal words to the experience of exercise in aerobics classes. The statements of suffering made me aware of the complexity that could be inherent in the exercise situation: the body’s expression can be understood as something upon which the subjects act, but it also involves bodies reacting to a situation (in this case, instructions) with an involuntary, non-reflected response. To follow up on how this basic premise is made relevant in the mutual understanding between people, the self-awareness is of one basic hu-
man experience. However, even if the subject has the capacity for self-awareness and for interpreting his/her own actions, this self-awareness in the fitness space allows them to see themselves also as objects that instructions are “placed upon”. However, this is a level of objectifying self-awareness that already presupposes a basic self-awareness in the sense of simply being in the world. In this sense, it again becomes relevant to be reminded of the ontological relationship between subject-object, being a body and having a body.\footnote{See Footnote 1 in PP p. 203, where Merleau-Ponty discusses the relationship between having and being a body.}

Songs played during aerobic classes “determine” both the verbal instructions and the movements.\footnote{See DeNora (2000) for analyses of the relation between movement and music.} However, it is not easy for everyone to integrate the instructed exercises into their own body. Watching the instructor and following the music place considerable requirements on the women’s perceptive abilities. Basing one’s position in the room and in relation to others is a prerequisite for performing the instructed movements. The instructed exercises have a dominating impact, thus it does not seem equally relevant to accentuate the active role participants are given in shaping the exercise. Doing the utmost to manage the exercises is also important if one is to attend the classes. In being included in the group of those who exercise, one attains some of the social identity that the fitness ideals communicate; one risk is becoming disciplined in this pattern of movement. The sense of stress my informants speak about in fact testifies to an intense experience of self-affection, due precisely to its quality of being alienating, and inserts a gulf between the self-affecting and the self-affected, a gulf which paradoxically enough serves to bring out their intimate interrelation.
Expressing vulnerability illuminates a feeling that might be part of what is “normal” in this setting. It can be regarded as “normal” to habituate and incorporate these secondary ways of moving, and these secondary ways of moving seem to have an “objectifying function”. The movement is designed around itself and bound to the specific context. When feelings of loneliness and vulnerability burst out, they tend to be viewed as “something wrong” and “mistakes” that women feel they are making. Their perceptions and thoughts of themselves influence their ways of constructing themselves in line with the culturally informed ideas of femininity. Moreover, the “mistakes” could be interpreted as valuable experience, which is precisely what creates awareness of space. The informants’ experience fluctuates and changes; it is described as a fragmented roller-coaster ride when what they are really seeking is greater continuity and unity. They feel exposed and afflicted, and the negative side is their disappointment in the fact that the exercise does not fulfil their needs, and perhaps never will, due to the pressure or the people they feel they should be, the feeling they want to have, the feeling they once had for themselves, the feeling they think they could have had if all the conditions had been the way exercising is presented in the fitness magazines or advertisements for fitness, and even by professionals and personal trainers. Here, exercise is in fact presented as something that will generate good health. Even though biomedical sources state that exercise produces favourable effects on health when measured using a number of physiological variables, other research shows that excessive exercise can harm the body and break down health (Kenttä 2001).

As a contrast to shaping the body through instructive exercises for the “body in parts”, Leseth (2003) claims that movement, for
example through walking, can be understood as a way of belonging in the world, a form of affiliation and continuity. People can also touch on this dimension when they move: a changeable, somatic/visceral and rhythmic body (Yuasa 1987, 1993). An explanation for why commercial exercise also has appeal may be that it actually offers movement, which people miss in their daily lives. My informants talk about how they were able to move more freely in line with their own needs *earlier in life*. Fitness clubs also use, as Steen-Johnsen shows (2001, 2004), the concept and images of the playful and creative person who likes to exercise. Exercises are given appeal through media advertisement, which in turn creates the ideals (Wolf 2002, p. 33). Body ideals are controlled by visualization of perfect bodies that could be achieved as a result of the exercise, not the awareness of what the experience of exercise is actually like. Fulfilling the cultural expectations raises the question of the social credibility that is linked to being active and exerting effort. The risk in the aerobic context is to pay with one’s own lived body’s sensitivity. When bodies become tight, hard and painful, the consequence might be a loss of the capacity for pleasure. The experience of “making mistakes” or “not accomplishing the movements” is common, and when mistakes are made, tension and exertion are directed toward oneself. Trying to avoid mistakes plays a characteristic part in this practice. The instructions aim at precision of movement, not at helping the participants to explore the situational meaning or to feel what is going on in their body, for example memories, sensations and thoughts that occur when movements are undertaken and the meaning that is attached to them.

Since achieving results is important, exerting great effort is a key phenomenon in the exercise and is a prerequisite for at-
taining the various physiological effects. Exercise and movement are used to help people get through the day, to relax from normal daily life, or to work through emotional problems. However, movement and exercise sometimes create the same problems that they are meant to solve. The clients’ efforts are also confirmed when they hear they are “giving their all” and therefore have the potential for good health if physiological measurements are used to define such health. The potential to take pleasure in exercise, which could help women to gain a stronger position in Western individualisation processes, is deferred in favour of a continuous pressure or obligation to give specific and norm-based responses. Women stress the pressure they feel when they are constantly told to push even further, make greater efforts, keep at it and give what they can. In light of the women’s experiences, there are grounds to question how feeling under pressure is necessary to gain favourable effects from exercise. People who train have learned to both like and dislike the pressure put upon them – exercise and pressure are “normal” and incorporated as habitual body feelings. According to Bauman’s definitions of health, pressure of this type is less conducive to attaining good health. Even though the women I interviewed liked exercise, they felt invaded and experienced the exercise as suppressing their personal rhythm and sensitive awareness. The discomfort is turned against them, and fatigue, irritation and alienation arise during the session. The exercise concept symbolizes action, results and effectiveness or personal gain. The significant idea is the body as object. One’s subjectively felt body diminishes in its value and relation to others. The explicit emphasis on health as a motivating factor and the implicit aim of preventing degeneration express and create a strong connection between one’s own individual health and a normative standard for
what a healthy body is in measurable terms. Trying to “live up to” these standards never ends. Because the body is not an object with a fixed form but is rather first and foremost a living, changing subject, the promised “better body” is not a static phenomenon. However, experiencing a well-functioning and presentable body gives social advantages and admiration from others. “Working hard” to keep oneself young, slim and strong is nevertheless associated with health as a dominant perspective in Western societies. Health becomes synonymous with the individual self-presentation that can be exhibited through the body, whether this is an individual physiological goal or a firm body. However, as Sassatelli (2007 p. 169) so clearly states, achieving this “result” depends on one spending one’s spare time on making oneself physically desirable.

Final reflections
The aim of the paper has been to illuminate that women’s practice of aerobics in an institutional setting is embedded in an unavoidable paradox. It appears as particularly clear that the women become aware of themselves in the specific exercise that is organized by others at the fitness centre. The reflections and expressions they make owe much to the contact with the centre, and point to some limits in what the world of exercise can do for people who want to move. Narrow ideas of the female body appear to be central and unavoidable components of exercising in a fitness context. As symbolic markers, image-making and self-focusing override the phenomenon that the women also react with discomfort and tension during the exercise and that one of the things they practice is enduring discomfort.

One question, though, would seem to be whether there is room to embrace a more positive ambiguity than that presented
by the dominating discourse on exercise as exclusively good. The testimonies of my informants illustrate quite clearly that they fall into negative ambivalence or even clear-cut dichotomization of themselves rather than embracing ambiguity.\textsuperscript{17} The dualistic language used by the instructors traps the communication. The aerobic context represents a body-politic that defines the subject as “born to consume”. Performance of individuality within the fitness centre is intertwined with production and consumption, “as two faces of the same coin” (Sassatelli 2007 p. 19).\textsuperscript{18} In order to act as a responsible subject and a credible woman exercising is highly valued. To expose oneself to instructions in movement challenges the activation of vulnerability and nakedness. However, the routine of the training program excludes them from exploring their own personal kinaesthetic experience and reflective subjectivity. Such feelings inform the subject of his/her situation and are feelings to embrace and listen to – rather than to perform disciplined exercises to control and suppress perhaps more personal movement needs.

Experiencing good health can be a matter of providing more space for exploring movement and developing an understanding of the body’s relation to others and the world. Exercises, in a narrow sense, might be substituted with the feeling of the kinaesthetic realization as well as the feeling of being awake and capable of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{17} According to Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005 p. 342), \textit{bonne ambiguité} transgresses idealization and the abstract language use concerning exercise, because moving in the world is always meaning-based and bodily. From this perspective the negative ambiguity is defeated. It is \textit{not} therewith replaced by a clear uniqueness, but rather by a new multiplicity of meanings that is ontological and cannot be cancelled, but that always creates conditions for multiplicity and openness in the relationship between the subject and the world.

\textsuperscript{18} The concept “prosumers” is suggested as a concept that captures “Both producers and consumers respond to \textit{institutionally embedded cultural principles and hierarchies} (cultures of production and cultures of consumption) which cannot be reduced to the other” (ibid p. 77).
\end{footnotesize}
moving without being limited by instructions.\textsuperscript{19} Women can today empower themselves through exercising, but being an object for shaping the body in light of the judgmental gaze of the commercial fitness industry is not good health – Is it?\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} As Havaron Collins so clearly puts it (2002 p. 94): “Being objectified is bad enough, but being ordered around is an authoritative way is blatantly oppressive, particularly when the instructors assume that all of the participants are there for the same purpose – slimming down and shaping up”.

\textsuperscript{20} This rhetorical question is inspired for Roberta Sassatelli.
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Wo/man – a social construction of meaning and matter
Steps to an ecological framework integrating the human body and mind

JESSIKA GRAHM

Introduction
One of the main contributions by social constructivists is the revival of the questioning of the additive conception of man organizing body and mind into two epistemologically and ontologically separate categories (Connell, 1987). Yet there has been criticism both outside and within their own ranks that the emphasis on semantics and language seems to make the body and its organic processes and systems irrelevant in social constructivist discourses (Hird 2004, Gergen, 2001; Colebrook, 2000; Birke, 1999; Welton, 1998; Conboy et al., 1997; Bryld et al., 1995; Radley, 1995).

However, the body (as a biological category) does not necessarily have to be excluded or made irrelevant in social constructivist discourses. On the contrary, this paper suggests, the emphasis on semiotics – fundamental in the social constructivist theorizing of meaning and knowledge – offers an outstanding opportunity to connect the social and physical realms, or rather, go beyond the dual notion in Western culture separating man into two main separate ontological and epistemological domains. Even if social constructivism as meta-theory submits – and encourages – the questioning, elaborating and revision of scientific concepts,
theories and thinking, there has yet not appeared an operational framework that has been acknowledged by both natural and social scientists. The aim of this paper is to contribute to integrative ways of understanding human beings that can be acknowledged and made applicable to both traditions, by presenting a first step toward an ecological framework, where wo/man is conceptualized as a social construction of meaning and matter.\(^1\) A central assumption in the (human) ecological tradition, which this paper is based upon, is that the constitution and actions of human beings (and all other organisms) are dependent on a wider context and the interaction with the environment – the physical as well as the social.\(^2\)

The line of argument is presented in two sections. The first part begins with an epistemological consideration in which the concept social construction is discussed and elaborated. A study examining how the relationship between male and female bodies has been socially and politically constructed in Western history is employed to illustrate how the concept is construed in this paper. After an examination of ‘social construction’, the concept ‘construction’ itself is elaborated. It is emphasized that ‘construction’

\(^1\) Wo/man is used here instead of man because, as expressed by Butler, the fact that “the body comes in genders” is not entirely apparent in the English language (1993:ix).

\(^2\) Ecology is a multifaceted field raising questions relevant to both the natural and social scientific traditions. It is a joint term used for the study of organisms (including humans) and their interaction with the environment. Ecological questions are studied from a wide range of perspectives and levels extending from the biosphere, ecosystem, population, individual organisms down to the smallest cell level. Though its genealogy can be traced back to biology, the concept had diffused into the social sciences already in the first part of the 20th century. Cultural, political, social and human ecology are some of the most acknowledged academic fields and disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. In spite of the wide range, most ecological disciplines and fields have a common dominator; that is, they study an organism (including human beings) and its relation to its physical (and social) environment often in combination with the claim that ecological studies require an interdisciplinary approach (Worster 1994, McIntosh 1985, Young 1983).
is a concept in both natural science and the humanities, although they refer to different types or forms of constructions. Nevertheless, this paper suggests, these two forms or types of constructions – the linguistic or semiotic *construction of meaning* and the technical or literal *construction of matter* – are closely connected. It is argued that *meaning* and *matter* in fact constitute each other in such an inseparable way that they – in analogy with how energy and matter are conceptualized in physics – can be understood as two sides or manifestations of one and the same structure/process.

In the next section empirical studies are addressed to argue that not only buildings and other artefacts but also humans can be understood as *social constructions of meaning and matter*. Recent research in medicine and neurobiology provides evidence of how the communicating systems regulating activities in the body and brain are physically constructed as a result of how the subject is interacting with his/her social and physical environment. The meaning of the concept ‘*information*’ is discussed and elaborated in regard to science and the humanities, respectively. It is discussed and elaborated how information as a mathematic concept refers to some kind of *matter* while as a linguistic concept it refers to some kind of *meaning*-carrying message. In this context it is suggested that a wo/man can be understood as a *social construction* in both the semiotic (=*meaning*) and the literal (=*matter*) sense of the word construction. Let us now return to the first step on this journey of argumentation.

**Thomas Laqueur and the social construction of human bodies in Western history**

In the today rather well known work *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* by historian Thomas Laqueur, it is
claimed that the bodies of men and women were interpreted in a
totally different way in pre-modern time than today. In contrast
to the modern “two-sex” model – constructing female and male
bodies in two separate biologically categories – men and women
were interpreted in what he calls a “one-flesh” or “one-sex mod-
el” (1990). He emphasizes that today’s “two-sex model” is to be
understood as part of the Enlightenment heralded in the revo-

dutionary break with the Ancient, Classical and Christian meta-

physical universes. As opposed to today’s scientific world view,
the universe in pre-modern time was conceptualized in terms of a
hierarchically ordered “chain of being”, stretching from God down
to the “natural” world, defined by the divinely sanctioned social
hierarchy characterizing Western history until the dawn of the
Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The genital organs of men and women were considered to be
alike in substance at that time, which historical medical docu-

ments give evidence of. For example, the second century renowned
physician Galen writes in one of his texts that: “…women possess
all the anatomical parts that a man has” (1990:26). The dissimilari-
ties between female and male bodies were thus not conceptual-
ized as a difference in kind but of other things. A matter of degree
and heat rather than the modern incommensurable biological dif-
fERENCE separated female and male in the pre-modern universe.
Their genitals were perceived to consist of the same parts, but
arranged differently along a vertical axis of perfection. The fact
that men's reproductive organs are placed outside the body was
explained by the higher degree of heat they were considered to
produce in comparison to women. The warmer constitution of
men forced their genitals to fall outside the body, while the as-
sumed cooler constitution of women restrained the female organs
from doing so. The medical notes of Chief Surgeon Ambroise Paré at the court of Charles IX in France gives evidence of this notion: “…women have as much hidden within the body as men have exposed outside, leaving aside only that women do not have as much heat, nor the ability to push out what the coldness of their temperament is held bound to the interior” (1990:127). Male and female genitals were thus seen as a kind of mirror image of each other although one was considered to be an aborted, incomplete version of the other. The “vital heat” that all living beings were considered to produce not only regulated the degree of position, the maturity and perfection of the genitals, but was conceived as a direct index of its rank in a universe stretching from God through man down to the soulless animals and smallest creatures. In this patriarchal cosmology men were given the closest position to God, representing the standard and canonical human form, while women – defined as a maimed imperfect and inverted version of man – were assigned a subordinate position in relation to him.3

The notion of the unisex universe was also reflected in everyday language in pre-modern times, according to Laqueur. Separate terms seem not to have existed for female genitals until the 18th century. The vagina was conceived and described in terms of an interior penis, the uterus was called scrotum, the ovaries was called testicles, the labia the foreskin and so on. It is therefore dif-

3 The human body was construed through a totally different cosmology in pre-modern time. The body was generally conceptualized in terms of ambiguity, permeability and inherent fluidity, quite at odds with modern medicine, which conceptualizes its inner systems, organs and processes in well defined categories with rigid biological boundaries. Renaissance literature is literally showered with illustrations of this kind of cosmology, notes Laqueur; in stories of girls turning into boys, hermaphrodites, spontaneous bleedings/stigmata, virgin births and the transgression of boundaries between animal and human bodies (Laqueur, 1990).
fluict to determine which part of the female genitals a particular term is referring to in medical texts before the late 17th century, complains Laqueur (1990:96). Prior to the 18th centuries the differences between the bodies of men and women were thus established in what we today would define as social, not biological, terms. When the ideas of equality appeared on the political scene during the Dawn of Enlightenment, the pre-modern cosmology lost its credibility to explain both the anatomical and social differences between men and women. By organizing men and women into two separate biological – but socially equal – categories, not only genitals and reproductive functions but differences in character, temperament, behaviour, inclinations, social positions and status that existed between men and women at that time were – and are sometimes still today – explained in biological terms.4

The meaning of the concept ‘social construction’
To show that men and women were organized in a ‘one-sex’ model in pre-modern time is only a part of Laqueur’s intention. His main aim is to question the deeply rooted notion in Western society of the current ‘two-sex model’ as a true’ representation of ‘reality In doing so, he is criticizing the scientific search for objectivity and the claim for a universal truth of how the world is constituted. The purpose of introducing Laqueur’s theses in this paper is also epistemological. Whether or not his one-sex model is accepted, it has been used as a tangible illustration of the fact that the per-

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4 At the turn of the 1900s, for example, English biologist Patrick Geddes organized men’s and women’s cells, skeletons and nervous systems into separate biological categories. While the cells of men were classified as catabolic and were assumed to be decomposing and energy-secreting, those of women were classified as anabolic and were assumed to be constructive and energy-conserving (Ekenstam, 1993, Johanisson, 1994).
ception of how the human body is constituted varies in time and cultural context. Today social constructivism has become a rather widespread and even well established theory of knowledge in some places in the scholarly world (See for example Jefferies, 2006; Blood, 2005; Birke, 1999, Hacking 1999, Eder 1996, Harré 1986). In spite of this, the concept social construction is often torn out of its original epistemological context and used as an ordinary social scientific concept both within and outside social constructivist currents of thought. Examples are given in the following to clarify the distinction between the use of social construction as a meta-theoretical concept and an ordinary social concept, respectively.

When ‘social construction’ is used as an ordinary social scientific term
When social construction is used as an ordinary social category, it is often assumed that it does not necessarily have to be a reality ‘behind’ constructions. Or as Pinker, a social constructivist critic, expresses it, “…some categories really are social constructions: they exist only because people tacitly agree to act as if they exist…. But, that does not mean that all conceptual categories are socially constructed” (2002: 202). In this paragraph the word ‘construction’ refers to ‘created’, which is quite at odds with the meta-theoretical concept referring to the specific linguistic sense discussed above (i.e. the way a culture orders the world). In making a distinction between a socially constructed (=created) and a ‘real’ world the critics of social constructivism – intentionally or otherwise – avoid

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5 The aim here is not to examine or question whether or not Laqueur’s work is well founded. For an empirical and theoretical critique of his ‘one-sex model’, see for example Park and Nye (1991).
being confronted with the critical idea of social constructivist thinking and thus remain on safe ground, i.e. in a well known dual world organized in one social and one ‘natural’ reality.

It is, however, not only the critics of social constructivism who use social construction in this unproblematic and general sense. Many scholars using social constructivist arguments, even those openly joining the social constructivist currents of thought, seem to employ the concept in this way (Gergen, 2001). Social constructivist, feminist and biologist Linda Birke has declared that she is a convinced advocator of the position that the materially defined body and the socially defined mind are to be understood as dialectically integrated (Birke 1999). Yet, her way of understanding the concept of social construction has deprived her of an epistemological tool able to go beyond the body-mind and material-immaterial duality, this paper argues. Together with many other feminists and social constructivists, she seems namely to have overlooked or is unaware of the very essence of social constructivist thinking. When, for example, she writes that the body “…is not only socially and culturally constructed but it is also material”, she – similar to Pinker – makes a distinction between a constructed and a ‘real’ world and thereby – probably unintentionally and innocently – reproducing the body-mind, material-immaterial duality (1999:25).

Instead of using ‘construction’ in the linguistic sense (i.e. how the biological body is perceived in Western Society), Birke employs the concept in an almost trivial sense, i.e. that the meaning of the body is constructed (=created) by humans. When social constructivists, more or less unreflecting and innocently, fail to make a distinction between ‘construction’ as a linguistic and a social concept, respectively, they will unintentionally find themselves in a mental cul-de-sac, stuck in a world of binary thinking.
Replacing or confusing social construction with a common socio-logical concept is, therefore, a deceptive manoeuvre from a meta-theoretical social constructivist point of view – not only because it is deprived of its epistemological context but also, and mainly, its critical significance.

‘Social construction’- a meta-theoretical concept
But if our bodies and everything else in the world are constructed (in the linguistic sense of the word) when humans act and inter-act, how do we know what the world or ‘reality’ is truly made up of? From the perspective of a social constructivist epistemology, there is no way of describing the world or ‘reality’ in a universal and unambiguous way that is applicable to all creatures, perspectives, levels of aggregation, cultures and historical epochs. The only available way to us (as human beings) is the conversion of everything we are exposed to and experience – if not into gold as in the case of King Midas – into meanings construed through a world view, episteme or system of meanings, when acting and interacting.

To be able to act, communicate, understand, in short to ex-ist in the world, we are destined to – or to express it in a more creative way – endowed with the ability to ascribe a meaning to everything we perceive and experience in the world. From a social constructivist perspective there is thus no way of understanding and describing the world beyond wo/man and human societies; as emphasized by Fiske & Scheder: “…‘reality’ is always encoded, or rather the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture. There may be an objective, empiricist reality out there, but there is no universal, objective way of perceiving and making sense of it. What passes for reality in any culture is the prod-
uct of the culture’s codes, so ‘reality’ is always already encoded; it is never ‘raw’” (Fiske & Scheder 1986:4-5). 6

But if the world or ‘reality’ cannot be understood ‘directly as it is’, but has to be interpreted, how are the more or less unwritten and non-articulated norms and ways of ordering the world, which people generally perceive as ‘natural’ or the truth and do not normally reflect over, reproduced and transferred? In Foucault’s and Bourdieu’s theories on modern society, the knowledge or logic of how the world is constructed (episteme, doxa) – here called meaning – is primarily reproduced in an implicit, unarticulated and, therefore, often unavailable way, when people are acting and interacting in daily life7 (Foucault, 1974, 1980b, Bourdieu, 1984; Broady 1991). Or, to use the words of the social scientist and philosopher Ramirez: “The human subject acts in the world or rather, constructs his or her world by acting. The actions and life of the subject are regulated by the meaning imprinted in the subject, at the same time as it gives meaning to what the subject accomplishes in the world…” (1995). 8 Although the subject might consider that she or he constructs his/her particular meaning to the world, it has to be emphasized that the construction of meaning is always a

6 ‘Raw’ might be an unfortunate choice of word if Fiske & Scheder mean that the ‘reality’ exists even though it can never be perceived, understood or communicated outside a social context.

7 Meaning in this paper refers to both an articulated and implicit power/knowledge order regulating how the world is organized in a certain culture and historical time. Though the concepts ‘episteme and doxa’ are not comparable, Foucault and Bourdieu use them primarily to theorize how the power/knowledge system constituting modern society is ‘installed’ and reproduced in and through the human body (Broady, 1991; Foucault, 1974, 1980b).

8 The original text reads "Det mänskliga subjektet handlar i världen, eller bättre sagt, skapar sin värld genom att handla. Subjektet handlar utifrån en mening som präglar subjektets eget liv, men ger också mening åt vad subjektet åstadkommer i världen" (Ramirez, 1995) (The translation in the main text above has been done by the author of this paper).
social and cultural – not an individual – enterprise. What a certain object, phenomenon or incident signifies can only be understood through a set of meanings – a more or less coherent and logical way of ordering the world, here called meaning. It should be noted that from now on meaning refers both to the significance of a specific phenomenon and to the set of meanings constituting a social context, and by extension, the more or less implicit conception of the world shared by people from the same culture.\footnote{Saussure uses the game of chess – defined as a system of abstract rules and relationships governing the movement of the pieces in the game to illustrate how the meaning of an object is embedded in, governed by and interpreted through a set or system of meanings (Von Uexküll, 1982). In everyday speech, the word meaning is used in many different ways; in The Meaning of Meaning, Ogden and Richards identify the use of the word in 16 different ways (1923). Meaning in this paper refers to the denotative or referential meaning of a sign. Meaning does not reside within texts or words and cannot be understood outside its social context. It is actively constructed by the communicating actors (Berlo 1961). It is therefore not truly defined until it is communicated, which makes it necessary for both the writer and reader to pay attention.}

However, it is this set of meanings that people from the same culture share and what they have a more or less mutual understanding of that the concept social construction refers to. It does not imply that a specific reality does not exist or is irrelevant. It means, however, that everything human beings meet, perceive and experience has to be interpreted through a more or less coherent logic or logical framework, i.e. a set of meanings or system of knowledge that is constructed in a social, cultural and historical context. From this perspective the production of scientific ‘facts’, concepts and theories is included in this kind of socially and culturally interpreting processes. The ‘Laws of Nature’, the ‘Periodic System’, the ‘Immune System’ (Haraway, 1993) and ‘Anthrax’ (Latour, 1988) are thus to be understood as verbal representations of an existing ‘reality’ constructed by a certain culture in a certain historical period.
Buildings, artefacts — social constructions in both the semiotic and literal senses of the word

After having examined, demonstrated and specified the sense in which the concept of social construction is used, let us proceed to the next step in the chain of reasoning aimed at connecting body and mind in a framework, which understands meaning and matter as two manifestations of the same phenomenon. To begin with, the focus will be switched from the concept social construction to merely the term construction. Up to now the word construction has been employed in a linguistic or semiotic sense, referring to constructions of sentences and meanings. According to dictionaries, the term construction has different connotations depending on the context. When referring to the (re)construction of matter, such as technical or physical constructions, it is used in a technical or literal sense of the word. These two human activities or processes — the (re)construction of meaning and matter — are, as discussed earlier, traditionally perceived as separate essences studied in separate terms and fields of research. While the linguistic construction of meaning is a central theme in the humanities and social sciences, the literal constructions of matter are a central object of study in the fields of science and technology. Yet these two kinds of constructions, this paper suggests, seem to be connected to each other in such an intricate and sophisticated way that they can be seen as two manifestations of the same process/structure. Let me use an example from the field of building construction to illustrate what this means.

When a building is to be constructed, the involved actors (architects, builders, building engineers, spectators and general public) construct — and must do so — a set of meanings for the building in its entirety; for every wall, space and area, even the empty ones,
down to the smallest detail. Even if the purpose of the architect is to question what is ‘generally accepted’, the meanings ascribed to the building in its every nook and cranny are included in the prevailing social and cultural set of meanings, through which the architect, builders and people in general interpret and understand the building and its societal role and functions.\(^\text{10}\) The building can thus be understood and described as an object/artefact not only in the literal (=matter) but also in the linguistic (=meaning) sense of the word, or to put it shortly, as a \textit{social construction of meaning and matter}. From a social constructivist point of view, \textit{matter} can neither be perceived nor be literally (re)constructed if the socially involved actors, subjects and the society do not ascribe a \textit{meaning} to it. And \textit{meaning} in its turn does not – and cannot – exist outside or beyond (a world of) \textit{matter}. From this perspective, \textit{meaning} and \textit{matter} can be understood to constitute each other (in the process of acting and interacting) in such an inseparable way that they – in analogy with how \textit{matter} and \textit{energy} are conceptualized in physics – can be described and understood as two manifestations of the same process/structure.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\) See for example Landzelius’ \textit{Dis(re)membering Spaces. Swedish Modernism in Law Court Controversy} for an interesting Foucault-inspired discussion about the Court House Annex in Gothenburg. The annex, constructed by internationally renowned Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund, and the meanings it was charged with is discussed in relation to the controversy displayed in Swedish media during the 1930s, is in the center of discussed (1999).

\(^{11}\) In natural science the universe is assumed to be composed of energy and matter that cannot be destroyed. According to Bohr’s so-called complementarity theory, light can be described and manifested as both a wave (energy) and a stream of particles (matter) (Bohr 1999). In this way energy and matter are considered to be two kinds of properties that can appear and be transformed into the state or form of each other. For an interesting approach based on Bohr’s complementarity theory and what she calls the “intertwined” relationship between meaning and matter, see Barad (2007).
Wo/man – a social construction of meaning and matter

In the next section it is argued that we as human beings not only linguistically and literally (re)construct buildings, artefacts and the world we inhabit. When we interact in the world, it is suggested, we both (re)construct the world and ourselves in both the semiotic and the literal sense. The notion of the world and the body as a social inscription or construction in the *semiotic sense* has been considered above and it has also been widely discussed and even accepted in certain areas of the social sciences (Sullivan 2005, Gergen, 2001; Price and Shildrick, 1999; Welton, 1998; Turner 1996, 1992; Benabib et al., 1995; Falk, 1994; Shilling, 1993; Featherstone et al., 1991). It will therefore not be elaborated further here. Instead, the human body as a social construction in the physical or *literal* sense will be elaborated in the following section.

First current studies in neuroscience and bio-medicine are employed, indicating that the biological body and its communicating system are physically constructed in relation to what the subject experiences and how he/she is acting and interacting. The concept ‘information’ in biology is then elaborated and connected to the way it is conceptualized in the humanities. It is further pointed out that the term ‘information’ signifies different things in natural science and the humanities. While it generally refers to some kind of physical entity (=*matter*) in biology, it means some kind of mes-

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12 It should be mentioned that the body was studied in the humanities and social sciences already at the beginning of the 2000s as locus, a non-verbal carrier and mediator to conceptualize how modern civilization, social order and knowledge/power have been produced and reproduced in pre-industrial and modern society (Douglas, 1991/1966; Foucault, 1980a/1976; Bourdieu, 1977/1972; Elias, 1989/1939, 1991/1939). For the past two to three decades, there have been a growing number of epistemological critics, particularly feminist scholars, who have problematized the very nature of ‘matter’ (Hird, 2004; Braidotti, 2002; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Birke, 1995; Oudshoorn, 1994; Butler, 1993; Haraway, 1991; Latour 1987).
The human brain - a social construction in the literal sense of the word

Merely by browsing through the titles published during the past five to six years in neurobiology and neuroscience, one can find evidence of a new notion of the brain as not only a biological organ, but also a social organ (Adolphs, R., 2003, Karren et al., 2006; Cozolino, 2006; Pascual-Leone et al., 2005; Koizumi, 2004, Brunson et al., 2001, Damasio, 2001; Martin 2002, Castro-Caldas et al., 1998, Schrott, 1997). Russian neurologist Alexandr Luria is regarded as one of the main pioneers in introducing ‘the social dimension’ in understanding how the brain is constructed (Luria, 1973). In the 1970s he observed that the brain seems to adapt and remodel itself in relation to how the subject interacts with its environment. His claim that the brain should be seen as a dynamic – rather than a given – organ, has contributed to an interdisciplinary understand-

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13 Luria is also well renowned for being one of the first to claim that many of the brain functions are scattered across the brain and that these widespread networks of neurons are in continuous interaction with each other. His findings contributed to the revaluation of the previous notion of the brain as a relatively fixed organ composed of a set of more or less delimited systems and functions located in specific places (Solms and Turnbull, 2005).
ing of the brain as open to influences from both the physical and the social environment (Solms & Turnbull, 2005). Up to the end of the 20th century, most studies of environmental impact on the brain were performed on animals and human corpses. Since advanced techniques of functional brain imaging have been introduced in neurobiology, however, there has been a steady increase in the number of studies performed on the human brain in vivo14 (Tyc & Boyadin, 2006; May & Gaser, 2006; Rossini and Pauri, 2000).

A new view of the brain is emerging in the neuro-biological field of study

A study that attracted a great deal of attention was performed on taxi drivers in London (Maguire et al., 2000). Its aim was to investigate whether learning would have an impact on the physical structures in the hippocampus, where spatial memory is assumed to be located. Taxi drivers in London were chosen as study objects because they had to go through an extensive and rigorous two-year training before being employed. The main requirement for being a professional driver is memorizing how to find one’s way to all the hundreds of thousands of addresses in the city of London with its seven million inhabitants. When the brains of the study objects were examined, they showed significant changes of volume substance in the hippocampus in comparison to a control group. In addition, the volume changes demonstrated a direct correlation to the number of years they had been working as professional taxi drivers. On the basis of these observations, the research

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14 Some of the new techniques are fMRI, TMS, MEG, PET and HD-EEG (fMRI is the abbreviation for functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, TMS for Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, MEG for Magnetoencephalography, PET for Positron Emission Tomography and HD-EEG for High-Density Electro Encephalography) (Rossini and Pauri, 2000).
group claimed that “...these findings indicate the possibility of local plasticity in the structure of the healthy adult human brain as a function of increasing exposure to an environmental stimulus” (Maguire et al., 2000:6).

When the ‘taxi drivers report’ was published at the latest turn of the century, it attracted much attention. Since then, the study of environmental influence on the brain has become an established and growing field of research. There have emerged a number of studies indicating that environmental interaction is an essential factor in understanding how the topography as well as the more detailed structure of the brain is biologically shaped and (re)constructed. Eyesight – defined as a number of networks of neurons – has for some time been one of the most thoroughly investigated areas of the brain. Neurobiologist David Hubel was one of the first to claim that the visual cells produced during gestation and the first period of life (circa 125 million in number) have to be exposed to light and sensory impression during the so-called critical periods or time windows to be able to develop the sophisticated set of networks of communicating neurons that constitute eyesight (Lagerkrantz, 2001). If, for instance, a child born with compact cataracts is not operated on swiftly, it will remain blind for the rest of its life, even though the physical equipment to see remains intact (Hubel, 1995). It has been established that the time window for sight is open from birth through the following six weeks, after which it slowly closes until the age of ten years, when it is shut for good.\(^\text{15}\)

Though the majority of brain cells are produced during gestation and the first year of life, it was observed around the latest

\(^{15}\) The time windows of animals are generally both shorter and have sharper boundaries than those of humans. For instance, the cat’s time window is estimated to be between four weeks and four months (Hubel, 1995).
turn of the century that the adult brain also has the capacity to produce stem cells on a daily basis. These stem cells seem to be recruited to current networks of communicating cells if the subject is engaged in stimulating activities (Clarke et al., 2000; Eriksson et al., 1998; Frisén, 2000; Johansson et al., 1999). These observations have contributed to the reassessment of the notion of the brain as a given organ made up of a set of neurons, reaching “…its ultimate form at birth” (Hubel 1995: 91). Current studies indicate instead that the remodelling and (re)construction of the brain take place on a daily basis during the whole life cycle (Rossini et al.; 2007; May and Gaser 2006; Pascual-Leone et al.; 2005; Rossini and Dal Forno, 2004). “…a very important recent finding of magnetic resonance-based morphometry is the discovery of the brain's ability to alter its shape within weeks, reflecting structural adaptation to physical and mental activity”, according to May and Gaser (2006). The capacity to remodel and reconstruct itself, called plasticity, seems to be one of the most crucial characteristics of the brain, as explained by Pascual-Leone et al.: “Plasticity is an intrinsic property of the human brain…” (2005).

It should, however, be pointed out that plasticity does not only

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16 The stem cell is a type of flexible, multi-potential cell with an inherent ability to adjust to its environment. Stem cells are produced in several parts of the adult brain such as the hippocampus, prefrontal cortex and the olfactory bulb (Frisén, 2000).

17 The conception of the brain has been reassessed in several stages. Before the 1990s: “…we have been thinking of the brain as a fully formed, mature machine” (Hubel 1995 p. 191). Even if it was established that the brain continued to develop after birth, it was not known until the end of the decade that there was a production of new neurons in the adult brain. These new neurons also seemed to be dependent on the action and interaction of the subject to develop and be involved in the existing networks of neurons (Frisén 2000).

18 The brains of other mammals also seem to have an inherent capacity to change on a regular basis. Studies of birds and small animals indicate that their brains are provided with an advanced capacity to adapt to their environment. They actually show seasonal volume changes, which is assumed to be related to the great variations in food access for non-migratory birds (Maguire et al., 2000).
refer to the capacity to grow, to produce and strengthen neurons, synapses or neurological networks in relation to environmental interaction. It also refers to the capacity of the communicating neurological network to diminish, to be weakened or even eliminated. These two modes of brain plasticity are dependent on what the subject is experiencing in life. If, for instance, a person is emotionally under stimulated during childhood or exposed to harmful experiences in life, the (re)construction of the communicating networks in his/her brain could be disrupted or even cease altogether (Kim et al., 2006; Konishi, 2004; Fuchs et al., 2004; Brunson et al., 2001; Glaser 2000). Studies of adults exposed to protracted harmful experiences such as torture or other severe trauma show that they can lead to more or less total neural loss in local areas of the brain (Lee et al., 2002; Wasserman, 2000). The process of cell division can slow down or even cease already during gestation, if the mother is exposed to traumatic situations or other forms of stress, which could, according to Barker, be the source of health problems later in life (Barker, 1994, 1992). There is thus a growing number of studies indicating that the human brain not only has a genetically inherited disposition to open itself to the world outside, but actually requires life-long interaction to grow, develop and mature; in short, to exist at all. Though the rough outline of the brain is coded into our DNA, “... the fine organisation of the brain is literally sculptured by the environment”, according to neuro-psychologists Solms & Turnbull (2002:11). In the past two to three decades there has been a growing number of studies in neuroscience focusing on how social interaction in the form of learning and training social activities such as reading, writing, music and sport (re)constructs and reshapes the detailed structure of the brain (Bengtsson et al., 2005; Johansson 2004; Konishi, 2004; Johnston et al., 2001, Maguire
et al., 2000; Castro-Caldas et al., 1998; Schrott 1997; Karni et al., 1995; Schlaug et al., 1995). Current studies of the human brain in vivo also show that such detailed and subtle structures as the number and the quality of signals, synapses, dendrites and network of neurons are remodelled or physically (re)constructed as a result of social learning and interaction¹⁹ (Bruel-Jungerman et al., 2007; Kim et al. 2006, Tyc and Boyadjian, 2006; Bayona et al. 2005; Johansson, 2004, Hickmott & Ethell 2000).

Recent neuro-biological studies of the brain seem thus to indicate that a new paradigm is emerging showing that the growth, development and total existence of the brain are the result not only of an inherited set of genes but also of the way the human subject experiences and interacts with the environment. This new view of the brain as a simultaneously physical and social organ indicates that the way the subject interacts actually influences how the networks of neurons and biological functions in the brain are physically structured, remodelled and (re)constructed (Bruel-Jungerman et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2006; Bayona et al., 2005; Zhuo, 2005; Fuchs et al., 2004; Knudsen, 2004; Johnston, 2001, Schlaug et al. 1995). For example, in summarizing that “...the way our neurons connect up with each other depends on what happens to us”, Solms & Turnbull imply that the way a subject experiences and perceives the world influences how the communicating network of neurons is physically organized, reshaped or (re)constructed (2002:11).

¹⁹ For example, Schrott notes at the end of 1990s that “...environmental stimulation has been found to increase brain weight..., cortical thickness, the number of gliacells, the glia to neuron ratio, neuronal cell body and nucleus size, and to alter synaptic profiles by increasing dendritic branching, dendritic spine density, and the number of discontinuous synapses” (Schrott, 1997).
Social interaction contributes to shape other corporal structures/processes.

Before elaborating how meaning and matter can be understood as two sides or manifestations of the same reality, we should briefly mention what is going on in the bio-medical field and the rest of the body in relation to what the human subject meets, senses and experiences in daily life. Though neurobiology focuses on the activities in the brain, it is observed that the physical construction (and reconstruction) of the brain is closely related to how the subject and especially the body reacts – both consciously and unconsciously – when acting and interacting in the world (Damasio 2001). In the traditional bio-medical model, the body is perceived primarily as a socially independent homeostatic system, which still has a prevailing position in bio-medical research20 (Währborg 2002). However, “In the past two decades bio-medical research has changed our understanding of the body”, write Wisneski & Anderson (2005). A new wave of interdisciplinary-oriented studies seem to have developed during the past two to three decades, following in the footsteps of the psycho-somatic tradition recognizing the impact of social influences on the biological body. Under such labels as MindBody medicine, Integrative medicine, Psycho-neuro-immunology (PNI), neuro psychoanalysis, socio-physiology and affective and social neuroscience, researchers from different fields examine the influence of social activities and experiences on physical structures, systems and functions of the body (Rotin & Ospina-Kammerer, 2007; Karren et al., 2006; Cozolino, 2006, Dekeyser, 2003, Adler 2002, Panksepp 1998, Gardener, 1997).

20 In the traditional bio-medical model the body is considered to be a predominantly independent system with an inherent strive for equilibrium, a notion Walter Cannon called homeostasis in the 1940s (Währborg 2002).
This rapidly growing interdisciplinary field concerned with how social and physical factors operate in an integrative way has become a substantial area of research that is beginning to challenge the traditional bio-medical model. For practical reasons, only one subject area will be presented here as an example of how the interaction of the social and physical factors, activities and processes is conceptualized. Psycho-neuro-immunology (PNI), today a fairly well established field of study, focuses on how central structures in the human body like the nerve, hormone and immune systems are influenced and shaped by the daily actions and interactions of the subject.21 Responses and interactions in such activity patterns and functions as blood pressure, pulse or transpiration in the neuro-endocrinal-immune system are examined in relation to how the subject reacts to what he/she – consciously and unconsciously – perceives or experiences.22 One main objective in PNI is to study how the subject registers and interprets changes in the physical processes and activities by converting the sensation he/she perceives into a meaningful message that enables him/her to re-evaluate a situation and consider whether new actions are required (DeKeyser 2003). Changing physical activities in the body are “…experienced as a change of our emotions…”, as pointed out by Solms and Turnbull, constituting the cognitive base of knowledge

21 The term PNI was coined around 1975 by Adler and has since become an established field of research for the study of the interaction between what have traditionally been conceptualized as separate systems: “It is now known that there is a complex network of feed-back, mediation and modulation among the central and autonomic nervous systems and the stress system. These systems, which were previously considered pristinely independent, in fact, interact on myriad levels” (Wisneski and Anderson, 2005).

22 Most cognitive researchers of today agree on the notion that conscious thoughts and senses play a very moderate function in the mental life of human beings. The majority of mental operations take place on an unconscious level without at all reaching the conscious level (Turnball & Solms 2002; For a short overview see Bargh & Chartrand 1999).
for further action (Turnball & Solms 2002:47). Emotions as ‘carriers of meaning’ have become central objects of study the past three to four decades not only in humanist and social scientific research and discourses but also in the natural scientific ones (Crawford et al. 2005, Damasio 2001, Harre & Parrot 1996, Stern 1990, Rorty 1980). Emotions have become an essential factor in neuroscience, especially since it was observed that the brain operates as a link between vital functions in the body and the outside world (Solms & Turnball 2002, Damasio 2001).

How does meaning become flesh and vice versa?

To discuss how and where the process of the integration of meaning and matter takes place, the concept of information will be elaborated. Communication is the very essence of the brain’s existence, establish Solms & Turnball: “In a profound sense, the principal task of the brain is to... mediate between the vital requirements of the internal milieu of the body (the vegetative functions) and the ever changing world around us...” (2002:19). Our bodies receive information from the outside world in two ways, they write: through the

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23 Already Sigmund Freud tried to develop the notion that physical activities within the body are the object of interpretation. At the end of the 19th century he wrote a theoretical outline he called a psycho-neurological theory. He never published it, however, as he maintained that he – being a neurologist – and neurology did not have enough knowledge of the detailed structure of the brain at that time (It was published only after his death). The intention of The Project – as it is generally called in psychological literature – is to conceptualize the connection Freud believed to exist between perceived sensations and neurological processes in the human brain. Briefly described, the theoretical model is based on the assumption that the brain consists of two systems: an organic and a psychic one. The physical activities in the brain are described as quantitative flows of energy, while human sensation and perception are defined as qualitative. The basic idea is that changes in energy/matter flows are assumed to be registered and interpreted as feelings of either pleasure or displeasure. What is most interesting in Freud’s psycho-neurological model is the attempt to connect two ontological perspectives, the material/quantitative and the immaterial/qualitative, which today seems remarkably up to date (Freud, 1956; 283 ff, Gay 1991, Kollind 1986).
sensory organs (vision, hearing, feeling, smell and taste) and the motor apparatus (muscles, skeleton) regulating body movements. One of the central functions of the human body and brain is to regulate, organize and transform the sensory information from the outside world into a cognitive message that can be understood and transformed to words and actions. The incoming information from the outside world is perceived by the subject via the specialized cells constituting the five senses (eyesight, hearing, etc.), which convert it to nerve impulses transferring the information straight to the brain, they emphasize: “From the external environment information arrives through the sense organs and is directed to the posterior parts of the cerebral hemisphere. Information derived from each class of sensory receptor is projected onto the primary cortex...where after it is linked with other bits of information ...Integrated with traces of previous experience, this knowledge of the outside world is transmitted to the frontal association cortex, where it guides action programs” (2002:30–31) (Types made bold by the author).

But what are Solms & Turnbull referring to when they talk about information and knowledge? What kind of information makes this complex journey from the outside world into the human body, causing the subject to react, and what is converted, directed, linked and transmitted to different parts of the body and networks of neurons in the brain? In natural science, information is in general a mathematical concept referring to some kind of physical matter that can be measured and perceived by woman (with or without technical assistance). Information in biology and neurology is often described as ‘waves’, ‘signals’ or other kinds of physical ‘stimuli’ transmitted in or emitted from the environment (Hoffmeyer1997). The discussion above of how the visual cells in the brain have to be exposed to light to be able to physi-
cally construct a network of communicating cells necessary for
vision provides an illustration of the way ‘information’ is under-
stood in natural science. The study of biological information (for
example in DNA or RNA) and communication is one of the most
flourishing specialities in present-day biology, claims the Danish
biochemist Hoffmeyer. Though information in general is made up
of physical entities (matter) in biology, biologists also – and un-
intentionally – use the term in another sense, he comments (1977).
That is, in a sense, that primarily humanists and social scientists
use it. The concept information is namely used in different ways
in the natural and the social sciences/humanities. While informa-
tion in natural science (matter) normally has no connection with
values, purpose or meaning, meaning is the very essence of the
concept in the social sciences/humanities.

In The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neu-
roscience of Subjective Experience, quoted above, Solms & Turn-
ball obviously assume that information in the mathematical sense
(matter) is transferred via electrical or chemical impulses from
the body up to the brain. At the same time it seems that “this
knowledge from the outside world” -perceived through the sense or-
gans which is converted, “transmitted and “integrated with traces of
previous experience” and brought up to the frontal cortex is loaded
with some kind of meaning communicated and interpreted in the
brain at a molecular level (2005 p 49). If the ‘information from the
outside world’ is the base for human thinking, acting and interact-
ing in the neurobiological discourses, which Solms and Turnbull
adhere to – it means that communication and interpretation take
place not only between people or organisms but inside organisms.
Most biological research is actually based on the assumption that
communication – defined as the transfer of some kind of message
takes place at all levels of animate nature, asserts Hoffmeyer, stretching from the organism/individual down to the molecule level. The concept information in Solms' & Turnbull’s work is thus not only used in a mathematical sense referring to matter but also in a linguistic sense referring to a message carrying a meaning. A signal substance, for example, can in this way be described as matter carrying a meaning – a structure constructed of both meaning and matter. The process of interpretation of the message transferred by a signal substance (=matter) seems thus to take place at both a biological non-human level in the form of (what is here called) non-verbal signs or codes and an organism/individual/human level (meaning).

Though the concept information is not defined in terms of meaning it seems that biologists/neurologists unintentionally assume that information from the outside world consists not only of matter but meaning carrying messages which are transferred and communicated in an almost innumerable number of locations and levels – from the molecular, neuron, cell, hormone and muscle levels – to finally be (communicated to), sensed, perceived, interpreted by the organism/subject itself (1977).

To further specify and illustrate the way meaning and matter

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24 The term code is used here to distinguish it from meaning/s constructed by humans in the linguistic sense. Code is defined here as the meaning perceived by ‘non-human’ entities in the human body. These parts or entities are not defined as ‘human’ until they are perceived together as constituting a whole body. Biologist and philosopher Jacob Von Uexküll developed an interesting framework connecting natural and social sciences called a Theory of Meaning already at the beginning of the 20th century. Umwelt is a central concept in his theoretical work, referring to the circumstances that all living organisms – from the cell to the individual level – perceive the world through their own special sensory organs, ascribing their own ‘meaning’ to the world from their perspective (Von Uexküll, 1982b). See Jesper Hoffmeyer for a more developed elaboration of Von Uexküll’s model that semiosis (the interpretation of signs) is central in nature (which includes the cell level in the human body). Hoffmeyer has developed a theoretical framework called bio-semiotics, based on Von Uexküll’s work – among that of others – where he defines life itself as a semiotic process (Hoffmeyer 2005, 1997, 1996, 1995).
can be understood as being co-constitutive, let us go back to one of the builders – here called Ingmar – who constructed the *Annex of the Law Court* in the city of Gothenburg, designed by Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund (See Note 11). Let us freeze the moment when Ingmar is lifting his hammer to hit a nail going into one of the walls in the *Annex of the Law Court*-to-be. To be able to hit a nail and, furthermore, to organize how this and all the other nails are to be hit in agreement with the intentions of the architect’s drawing requires much knowledge, skill and tacit assumptions about the world and how it is perceived in the culture he lives in. Ingmar does not only have to intentionally grasp the specific task assigned to him, the detailed instructions from his foreman and other supervisors to understand what the building means to him, to his work team, to the local people and the authorities of the city of Gothenburg. To fulfil his task, all the tacit assumptions connected to it – from the unwritten social codes regulating relations at work, at home and in society as a whole, to such elementary knowledge as what is a hammer, a nail or a wall and how to use it – have to be communicated to (by transforming his intention into non-verbal codes that can be interpreted by) the huge number of sophisticated muscles, motor functions, nerve and hormone systems, substances, cells, etc., that constitute Ingmar as a subject.\(^{25}\)

In this conceptual frame or context it is suggested that the semiotic (\(= \text{meaning}\)) and literal (\(= \text{matter}\)) construction of the world takes place not only outside but also inside the human body when the subject acts and interacts in the world. The semiotic

\(^{25}\) "The number of cells in a human body is immense (the order of magnitude is 10^13, i.e. 10,000 billion) and each of these cells is a highly structured universe of its own containing not only many millions of protein molecules but also a multitude of internal structures, organelles..." (Hoffmeyer 1995).
(=meaning) and physical components (=matter) are assumed to be linguistically and physically constructed in such an integrative way when people are interacting, that they – in a similar way as matter and energy in natural science – can be understood as two manifestations of the same reality. It is therefore suggested that it could be rewarding to conceptualize wo/man as a social construction of meaning and matter.

Summary
The criticism both within and outside the social constructivist stream of thought that the biological body in general is excluded or made irrelevant in social constructivist discourses has been the starting point of this paper. Setting out from a social constructivist epistemology, the overall intention of the paper has been to outline a framework that goes beyond the deeply rooted notion that organizes body and mind into two epistemologically and ontologically separate categories and that can be acknowledged by and applied to both traditions. The concepts ‘construction’ and ‘information’ in the natural and social sciences/humanities have been problematized to show how current studies in neuroscience and bio-medicine indicate that the human subject does not only ascribe or construct a meaning for their own bodies and the world around them in the linguistic sense of the word. They are also literally contributing to the construction of the detailed physiological structure of the communicating systems in body and brain (=matter) when acting and interacting. The continuously changing phenomena we call meaning and matter have been discussed suggesting that they are integrated in such an inseparable way that meaning and matter – like matter and energy in natural science – can be understood as two manifestations of the same reality. In
this framework the human subject should be understood as both a linguistic and literal (re)constructor of the world when acting and interacting. This process of (both linguistic and literal) construction is assumed to take place inside the human body in such an integrative way that it would be rewarding to conceptualize the human being as a social construction of meaning and matter.

Why an ecological framework integrating human body and mind?
Although it is generally acknowledged that the human body and mind are connected in one way or another, there have obviously not yet emerged tools or a framework connecting these human realms, which have gained general acceptance in the scientific world. The additative notion of man has without doubt been very prosperous and rewarding – particularly in the medical and biological fields. At the same time, this very success seems to have averted or at least hampered the emergence and establishment of new concepts and intellectual tools going beyond the epistemology dividing wo/man and the world into two separate realms. The questioning of the body-mind, nature-culture duality has long been a challenge in Western society, giving rise to many creative models and lively discourses in both natural and the social sciences/humanities, but the dual thinking seems to be embodied in Western thinking, as Leder points out: “…we are all to a certain extent cartesian in this culture, either willingly or struggling to be free” (1990).\(^{26}\) The overall aim of this paper is to contribute to integrative ways of under-

\(^{26}\) It should be emphasized, however, that the additative notion of man is perceived as legitimate in social constructivist thinking. Theories and models—if sufficiently coherent and adequate—are generally understood as justifiable representations of ‘reality’ as long as it is recognized that knowledge is situated to use Haraway’s words, i.e. produced by someone from a social and political position (Haraway 1988).
standing the human being and the world, by presenting some steps toward an ecological framework of concepts using an interdisciplinary approach that can be acknowledged by and applied to both traditions.

But what advantages, however, could the proposed ecological framework have over the traditional additive concept of wo/man, considering the fact that the traditional additive notion of man is still very successful and is reproduced from a rather established position? An ecological framework integrating the social and biological – which here are conceptualized in terms of meaning and matter – will, firstly (if considered), be valuable to many schools and traditions, especially those in which the study of human beings is in focus. To mention only a few areas: the idea that the meaning is inscribed in or constructed as biological structures and processes in the human body could contribute to a general revitalization and reassessment of the classical “nature-nurture” question and the fact that genetic and social inheritance is studied and understood in separate terms. The idea of human being as a social construction of meaning and matter could, moreover, contribute to the contesting of traditional models in both the social and natural sciences, explaining, for example, the origins and causes of individual behaviour, character and state of health. This could be of importance in areas of bio-medically defined disorders such as fibromyalgia, anorexia, ADHD, asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure, which have been contested and elaborated in bio-medical as well as in social discourses. The main idea presented in this framework – that the way the subject perceives the world (=meaning) is installed, incorporated not merely as immaterial mental structures but as basic biological processes and systems (=matter) in their bodies – could further be of vital interest for action theory
and feminist studies. It would, for instance, provide new arguments for the question- ing and reappraisal of such questions as why people do not act ‘rationally’ or why many of the differences in character, behaviour and social position between men and women that are recognized as having a social and cultural origin change very slowly. Such an ecological framework could thus contribute to explaining why our deepest non-verbal convictions, patterns of behaviour and thinking are so difficult to change, especially considering the rapid ongoing social, economic and technical changes taking place in modern society.

References


“…looking at myself as in a movie…”
Reflections on normative and pathological self-objectification

LISA FOLKMARSON KÄLL

When I realized this condition of looking at myself as in a movie was per-
manent, I understood it would eventually destroy the core of my life.
(Patient quoted in Sass & Parnas 2001: 347)

One must not eye oneself while having an experience; else the eye beco-
mes “an evil eye”.
(Nietzsche 1976: 517, § 7)

Woman, like man, is her body; but her body is something other than her.
(de Beauvoir 1997: 61)

While working on my dissertation a few years ago I was reading
research on distortions of bodily self-experience in the early stages
of schizophrenia. As I came across vivid descriptions and testimo-
nies of distancing and dissociation, I continuously found myself
reminded of Simone de Beauvoir’s descriptions of bodily aliena-
tion in the development of feminine subjectivity. Although I could
clearly recognize essential differences between the descriptions
of how people suffering from incipient schizophrenia experience
their bodies and those of women’s bodily self-objectification, I still
had an eerie sense that there were quite obvious parallels to be
drawn between these different forms. The pathological distancing
and objectifying attitude toward one’s own body that are charac-
teristic of the early stages of schizophrenia seemed to share strik-
ing similarities with the normative self-objectification of women’s bodies. In both cases there seemed to be a pronounced experiential distance between the self and its own body, enforcing a dualistic self-understanding and the experience of the body as an external object alien from the self. The thought was rather chilling: that a heightened tendency to objectify and alienate oneself from one’s body is in one case an early symptom of perhaps the most fierce and gruesome of mental disorders and in another case a normative ideal encouraged and enforced through disciplining practices.

In this essay I will bring to light these two different, but in some respects strikingly similar, forms of bodily alienation and self-objectification. I will not carry out any comprehensive comparison or present any conclusive evidence. My attempt is rather only to put the two different forms of self-objectification on display, let them speak to one another and thereby hopefully trigger questions – without necessarily providing any answers – about the boundaries between the normal and the abnormal and about the relationship between normativity and normality.

**Schizophrenic Distortions of Bodily Self-Experience: Hyperreflexivity and Diminished Self-Affection**

Schizophrenia remains one of the most perplexing and incomprehensible of mental disorders. According to a phenomenological account developed by Louis Sass and Joseph Parnas, schizophrenia is best understood as a two-faceted disturbance of self-experience involving the two interrelated phenomena of *hyperreflexivity* and *diminished self-affection* (Sass & Parnas 2001; Parnas & Sass 2002; Sass 1987; 1994; 2003). Hyperreflexivity refers to an “exaggerated, reflexive awareness of aspects of experience that are normally tacit” (Sass & Parnas 2001: 348). In hyperreflection, phenomena that
are in normal cases inhabited and experienced as part of the self become the focus of objectifying awareness and are available to an introspective gaze (Parnas 2003: 233). Hyperreflection is characterized by a detached attitude toward one’s own body, actions and thoughts. On the one hand, this heightened form of self-monitoring entails the externalization or objectification of parts of one’s own self in outer space; on the other hand, it can bring about the internalization or subjectivization of what is usually external and objective. There is thus a distortion of borders between self and non-self that interferes with the very structure of experience (Sass 1987: 13). According to Sass and Parnas, hyperreflexivity goes hand in hand with another alteration in self-experience, what they term diminished self-affection. This experiential state, characterized by an attitude of indifference and detachment, refers to a weakening of a fundamental sense of existing as a subject of awareness and action, as a first-person perspective and presence for oneself and for the world.

Together, the two interrelated phenomena of hyperreflexivity and diminished self-affection imply a disturbance of ipseity, i.e. of the basic sense of existing as a first-person perspective on the world, as a vital core in control of one’s own experiences and actions. The experience of disturbed ipseity in which the sense of self no longer saturates experience and in which a first-person perspective on the world seems to be slipping away is the most prominent feature of altered presence in the early stages of

1 The confused boundary between self and world and the externalization of parts of the self in the world are clearly illustrated by the experiences of Renee described in Sechehaye, Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl. Renee’s loss of subjective self-awareness is accompanied by an increasing localization of her feelings in things. Her therapist writes, “The boundaries separating the inner world of thinking from the outer world of reality shade off, then fade out. Objects are alive, they become threatening, they sneer; they torment her; they are invested with her own aggression harbored against the world” (Sechehaye 1994: 146).
schizophrenia. This experience is described as a diminishing sense of being conscious or fully there. As Parnas puts it, the “patient senses an inner void, a lack of an indefinable inner nucleus, which is normally constitutive of his field of awareness and crucial to its very subsistence”. Patients may describe a feeling of having no consciousness, of their consciousness being fragmented or not “as whole as it should be”, of having a diminished “I-feeling” or a disappearing I (Parnas 2003: 225).

The split within the self that is characteristic of incipient schizophrenia, prior to its full development, is articulated in different ways. There is an emergence of an experiential gap between the self and its contents, in terms both of the experience of thought processes and of the experience of embodiment. These two aspects of self-experience, mental and bodily, are not completely separate from one another and schizophrenic distortions of both serve to illustrate their close interrelation. Hyperreflexive objectification of thought processes in schizotypal disorders and early, pre-psychotic stages of schizophrenia is paralleled by distortions in bodily self-experience that take a number of different forms with different degrees of perplexity and strangeness. What is characteristic throughout the diverse forms, however, is the tendency, mentioned above, to experience one’s own body mainly as an object that is distanced from the self in significant ways. Parnas writes that the most frequently occurring early alteration in bodily self-experience is a feeling of “being detached, disconnected from one’s body, which feels somehow alien or not fitting the sub-
ject” (Parnas 2003: 227). He makes reference to patients saying that “it feels as if my body does not belong to me” or as if it is “too small to be inhabited”. The use of the conditional as if indicates that while there is an experiential distance between the self and her body, there is in equal measure a distance between the self and her altered experience (Parnas 2003: 219, 227).

The sense of detachment and the alienating objectification of one’s own body can also become manifest in experiences of loss of bodily coherence, whereby it is not primarily the body as a whole that is disconnected from the self but, rather, separate body parts that are experienced as isolated from one another. According to Parnas, such experiential loss “may take on an alarming intensity” as the disintegration of bodily unity and feeling of fragmentation are “accompanied by a (pre)psychotic panic of literal dissolution” (Parnas 2003: 227). Sass quotes a patient giving vivid expression to this experience of falling into pieces:

When I am melting I have no hands, I go into a doorway in order not to be trampled on. Everything is flying away from me. In the doorway I can gather together the pieces of my body. It is as if something is thrown in me, bursts me asunder. Why do I divide myself in different pieces? I feel that I am without poise, that my personality is melting and that my ego disappears and that I do not exist anymore. Everything pulls me apart…. The skin is the only possible means of keeping the different pieces together.

There is no connection between the different parts of my body (Sass 1987: 1; cf. 1987: 17).

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2 Sass writes, “One’s arms or legs, one’s face, the feelings in the mouth or throat, the orbital housing of the eyes, even one’s speaking, thinking or feeling can come to seem objectified, alien and apart, perhaps even like the possessions of some foreign being” (Sass 2003: 252).
What is quite striking in this testimony is not only the sense of an increasing disconnection between different body parts, but also the struggle to resist this process of falling apart. The patient attempts to gather together the different parts of the body, and thereby to salvage a sense of self, by finding support in confined spaces with clear limits, such as the doorway and the skin of the body. What also comes to expression here is a wavering and ambiguity concerning what is causing the experiential loss of bodily continuity. On the one hand, there is the experience of being struck by an undefined outside force that bursts the self asunder; on the other hand, there is the sense that this division is in fact caused by the self itself. It might be said that this ambiguity reflects a growing experience of indistinct borders between self and non-self, which in normal cases is an inevitable aspect of experience, but it might also be said that it reflects the experience of still being a self struggling to keep itself together by dividing itself into controllable parts.

Another distortion in bodily self-experience is “a feeling of morphological change” such that “the body or its parts feel heavier/lighter/smaller/larger/longer/shorter” (Parnas 2003: 227). This experiential alteration in weight or size may, as Parnas writes, find its affirmation in optical illusions that provide the visual experience of bodily change. These optical illusions can result in, for instance, difficulty recognizing oneself in photographs. They may also manifest themselves in different forms of the mirror phenomenon, whereby the patient either becomes obsessed with inspecting her face in the mirror because of the feelings of morphological change, or comes to avoid her mirror image as it is experienced as threatening or provoking to the self.

Distortions of embodied subjectivity in schizotypal disorders
and incipient schizophrenia may also involve significant alterations of motor performance. The body may take on an overwhelmingly strong will of its own that the subject cannot control and that interferes with her own actions. According to Parnas, this interference is initially not experienced as being caused by external forces, but may well develop into full blown delusions involving the experience of being controlled from the outside. Also, patients may experience a so-called *deautomatization* of motor action in which habitual, everyday movements are arrested and require conscious attention. Parnas recounts the case of a library assistant who reported that she was alarmed by a frequently recurring experience of having to think about each movement when performing the everyday habitual task of replacing returned books from a trailer onto the library shelves. She had to reflect and pay attention to how she was to lift her arm, grasp a book with her hand and turn herself to the shelf (Parnas 2003: 228). Another patient describes the experience of a significant distance between himself and his body while at the same time knowing well that this experientially alien body is his own. He has the experience of no longer being in his body and he senses it as being distant from him. When walking, he experiences himself as walking “like a machine”. He says, “it seems to me that it is not me who is walking, talking or writing with this pencil. When I am walking, I look at my legs which are moving forward; I fear to fall by not moving them correctly” (Parnas 2003: 227; cf. Parnas & Sass 2002: 106).

This shift of focal awareness from the aim of habitual movements to the bodily movements themselves, and often in isolation from one another, is a form of hyperreflexivity that clearly shows the disruption of the experience of both self and world. In being experientially disconnected from its own embodiment,
the self also loses its natural connection to the world in which it is embedded. The distraction of a flow of movements and the alienation of self and world involved in shifting focus from the aim of the movements to the movements themselves can easily be recognized as a hindrance in everyday life. Running down a flight of stairs, navigating a bike in cross-country terrain, or flipping a crêpe in a pan are tasks that are equally difficult to carry out if one’s own bodily movements are thematized and objectified in the process. Perhaps this recognition also sheds some light on the suffering involved in the onset of schizophrenia in which this type of self-objectification characterizes the predominant way of being in the world and intensifies throughout the development of the illness.

What is apparent in all these distortions of bodily self-experience is a lack of the very foundation of existing as a self in the world. There is a clear disturbance of presence, which according to Sass and Parnas is foundational for other and more explicit anomalies of selfhood, such as severe bodily dissociations, thought insertion or delusions (Parnas & Sass 2002: 106). The tacit medium of being that is provided by embodiment becomes problematic and disturbed to such an extent that a basic self-presence is significantly diminished or even lost. The loss of a normally unreflected immersion in the world occurs fairly early on in the development of schizophrenia and is made manifest in an experience of not quite being oneself, of slipping away as an experiencing pole in relation to the surrounding world, and of experiencing the world as a hostile environment deprived of the affectivity and fullness of first-person embodied involvement (Parnas & Sass 2002: 116).
Parnas and Sass describe the case of a patient who complained of a distressing and pervasive feeling of disengagement and isolation from the world, accompanied by an exaggerated self-monitoring. He had the sense that his first-personal life had been lost and replaced by a third-person perspective, which made him experience the very process of his own experiencing rather than simply living through it (Parnas & Sass 2002: 105; cf. Parnas 2003: 223).

Hyperreflexivity and diminished self-affection are implicated in one another and are thereby closely interrelated as different aspects of the same phenomenon. Parnas writes that hyperreflexivity may come to have a compensatory function as the loss of natural evidence of the self is accentuated (Parnas 2003: 230; cf. Parnas & Sass 2002: 108). This form of compensation is, however, not likely to restore a sense of immediate self-presence but is rather bound to further increase the gap within the self, causing an even stronger sense of groundlessness and alienation under the pretense of taking control of the self and its functions. As Sass points out, people suffering from schizophrenic symptoms often seem to be caught in the insoluble dilemma of being “driven to search for the self [and] yet liable to destroy the self in the act of searching” (Sass 1987: 23). He recounts a patient who was overwhelmed by an enormous fear of forgetting herself the moment she realized she had not been thinking about herself. The coun-

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3 In testimonies of patients experiencing the loss of self-presence there is, however, at the same time a clear and acute presence of self brought to the fore. While, as Sass argues, the experiential gap within the self, which is brought about by the exaggerated self-monitoring of hyperreflection, seems to destroy the self, there is nevertheless still a self there that experiences and expresses its own splitting and its desperate attempt to find grounding and unity of experience. What is more striking in the testimonies is not immediately the lack of selfhood but, rather, the urgent presence of selfhood.

4 As Sass writes with reference to William James, earlier in the same article, “acute self-consciousness has the effect actually of effacing the self, while simultaneously obscuring its own role in this effacement” (1987: 8, italics in original).
terproductivity of the search for the self is illustrated further by the testimony of another patient who desperately aimed to find the experiential core of her own consciousness but only found, to her puzzlement and confusion, that it escaped being grasped. As a result of this inability to grasp the core of her consciousness, she became unsure about whether or not her thoughts really belonged to her. Here, the desperate attempt to locate the self as something solid and graspable, the inability to simply live through the ambiguity of selfhood, leads to the feeling of having no self (Sass 1987: 24). The disastrous interrelation between hyperreflexivity and diminished self-affection is expressed clearly in the testimony from yet another patient suffering from developing schizophrenia: “When I realized this condition of looking at myself as in a movie was permanent, I understood it would eventually destroy the core of my life” (Sass & Parnas 2001: 347).

Many of these alterations in bodily self-experience stand out clearly in their morbidity and strange abnormality. Experiences of bodily dissolution, interference in bodily actions or delusions of being controlled by external forces testify to different stages and forms of agonizing insanity. But many of the alterations do not seem to necessarily indicate any particular strangeness at all. Rather, they are heightened forms of normal everyday self-objectification. They are exaggerations of self-reflection, which by itself is an essential feature of human selfhood. These cases display how a normal ability to objectify oneself can be blown out of proportion and come to dominate one’s way of being in the world and relating to oneself (Sass 2003: 246). As can be seen with clarity in the accounts and testimonies above, these heightened forms of self-objectification, before the onset of more severe anomalies or of psychosis, have quite serious implications for the sense of
self-presence and agency. They demonstrate the observation Sass makes, with reference to William James: “how loss of self may develop not from a weakening of the observing ego or a lowering of the level of consciousness but, to the contrary, from a hypertrophy of attentive, self-reflexive awareness” (Sass 1987: 10). The close interrelation between a hyperreflexive tendency and a diminished sense of self-presence must motivate us to bring to light cases of heightened self-objectification and self-alienation that take place within the bounds of normality and further ask what the implications of such self-objectification may be.

Bodily Alienation

Drawing (explicitly or implicitly) on Simone de Beauvoir’s descriptions of bodily alienation and her analysis of woman as Other in The Second Sex, many feminist thinkers have demonstrated different ways in which women live their bodies as objects distanced from and alien to themselves. In her now classic essay “Throwing Like a Girl”, Iris Marion Young, for instance, argues that the feminine body is treated by the woman as an object that exists separate from and often in opposition to the aims of the woman as subject. Young writes, “feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing – a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into

5 Perhaps needless to say, I am not making the claim that all women experience themselves and their surroundings in the same way simply because they are women. However, as Iris Marion Young writes, despite great individual variation in each woman’s experience, there is within a given sociohistorical set of circumstances a unity in women’s situation that can be described and made intelligible (Young 2005: 29). Regardless of its fluidity, contingency and heterogeneity, the category “woman” is a category that no actual woman can entirely escape. Julien Murphy puts it fittingly: “We must claim we are ‘women,’ not because any of us really is a ‘woman,’ but rather because we all are immersed within a historical situation of being seen as ‘women’” (Murphy 1989: 106).
movement, a thing that exists as looked at and acted upon” (2005: 39). In the second book of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir shows how girls and women are socialized into a dualistic self-understanding; woman becomes an object for herself and begins to identify her body as herself but external to herself. The “increasing experiential distance between subjectivity and corporeality” characterizing the early stages of schizophrenia (Parnas 2003: 227) is a distance that Simone de Beauvoir describes as normalized and encouraged in the development of feminine subjectivity.

The idea of bodily alienation is closely connected with de Beauvoir’s well-known analysis of woman as Other. As Arp argues, it is the real material presence of the female body that becomes the very articulation of woman’s otherness (1995: 172). Woman’s condition as Other in relation to a masculine norm is captured clearly in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, where de Beauvoir writes,

She is determined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute; she is the Other (1997: 16).

Woman may appear in a number of various ways but, according to de Beauvoir, she always “appears as the privileged Other, through whom the subject fulfills himself: one of the measures of man”

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6 This is not to say that the female body represents a feminine essence or feminine nature. Throughout her writings, Simone de Beauvoir quite to the contrary forcefully argues against the very idea that there is such a thing as a feminine nature. de Beauvoir’s writings on bodily alienation have often wrongfully been read to refer only to biological aspects and her harsh descriptions of female biological functions have been brought out to demonstrate her view of the body as unconstructive and even harmful for feminist thinking. However, as has been well established by now, de Beauvoir conceives of the body in terms of its existential situatedness. She describes bodily alienation as a social and cultural phenomenon and understands feminine bodily experience to be constructed in great part through social and cultural means (Arp 1995: 162).
What de Beauvoir’s diagnosis of woman’s otherness displays is how woman is to a great extent culturally and socially deprived of the unquestioned position of being a subject that has been accorded man. In being determined as Other to man, who stands as the norm for the human being, woman has in essential ways been denied being defined fully in terms of her humanity. At the same time, however, as Young points out, woman is undeniably also human and thereby knows herself to also be a subject (Young 2005: 31). Attempting to articulate subjectivity from a condition of being posited as an object, de Beauvoir demonstrates, through that very articulation, that any “pure” object-position of the Other is an ontological impossibility.

Despite the impossibility of any “pure” object-position, it is nevertheless so that woman’s condition as Other to the norm informs women’s dualistic self-understanding and significantly contributes to the self-objectification of the female body. This self-objectification is furthermore often framed in disparaging terms of harsh and unforgiving judgment. To speak with Young, woman “often lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along and at the same time protected” (Young 2005: 36). It is well-charted that a great majority of women and girls in the West, encouraged by both the beauty and health industries, have a close to impossible relationship with their bodies. To have a battle with one’s body is almost a defining feature of what it means to be a woman. As Diane Elam puts it,
A woman’s body is never the right shape, and supposedly always needs to be refigured through dieting and surgical interventions. Nine-year-old girls regularly go on diets; cases of anorexia and bulimia amongst women are almost as frequent as the common cold; breast implants, liposuction, and face-lifts are not just exotic operations for those women who can afford them (Elam 1994: 62f).

In the striving to approximate normative ideals of beauty and perfection, women’s bodies are transformed into hostile entities that demand constant surveillance, monitoring and control. Media images forcefully display the imperfections of the female body: it has bad breath and yellow teeth, it leaks once a month, it is hairy in all the wrong places, it is overweight and plagued by cellulite, and it ages and gets wrinkles. Hand in hand with these images are provided solutions, well-meaning advice and useful products to help remedy the problems of the body (not to mention help sustain a multi-billion dollar industry) (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Hirdman 2002). Through disciplined maintenance, the imperfect body can come to approximate an ideal that, regardless of the measures taken to reach it, will nevertheless always remain unreachable. The female body is thus vilified and disempowered all in one stroke (Bartky 1990; Beauvoir 1995; Bordo 1993; Young 1990).

The vilification and disempowerment of women’s bodies made manifest in relation to prevailing beauty ideals can also be seen in relation to the threat of rape and sexual violence present in the constitution of women’s subjectivity. In both cases a dualistic self-understanding is encouraged and women are advised to view, judge and regulate their bodies and themselves as fragile objects constantly at risk and in need of maintenance and protection. The constitution of feminine subjectivity is thus characterized by a
split between on the one hand woman as a controlling subject burdened by responsibility and on the other hand woman as an imperfect, exposed and vulnerable object in need of strict discipline, control and measures for improvement. The dualistic self-perception and self-experience that shape the way women relate to themselves, their bodies and their cultural, social and physical surroundings have to a great extent been normalized. The process of normalization makes it possible for the split within the self to be maintained and advanced through cultural ideals that are brought out in the media and sedimented in our collective consciousness and moral norms.

**Threat of Rape and Risk Management**

Albeit perhaps controversial, it has been convincingly claimed and fairly well established that a pervasive threat of becoming a victim of rape or sexual violence contributes significantly to the constitution of the specifically feminine body and to women’s subjectivity (Cahill 2001; Brison 2002; Hall 2004). According to several studies, women of all ages carry a fear of being raped that serves to limit their movements in public space by, for instance, their completely avoiding certain places or not going out by themselves after dark (Lundgren et al. 2001; SCB 2004). The threat of the risk of

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It is of course the case that men also can be and are victims of rape and sexual violence. However, I would argue, with Cahill, that men are not subjected to the pervasive threat of rape that faces women in contemporary culture (2001: 145). Rape is often portrayed as inevitably the worst violation that can happen to a woman and as a fate equally or more frightening than death. (Cahill 2001; Gavey 1999; Hall 2004; Warr 1984). The threat of the violation takes on mythical proportions and shapes the way women live their lives in relation to their social, cultural and physical surroundings. There are of course problems with upholding this understanding of rape as the ultimate violation. Even though rape is without a shred of doubt one of the worst ways of violating a human self, it is nevertheless the case that the threat of the violation takes on a life of its own that, prior to being actualized, exerts an oppressive force upon those bodies constituted as potential victims.
rape renders much public space off limits and fosters women into creating a safety zone around their bodies, which, in the words of Ann Cahill, “rarely exceeds the limits of their own limbs and quite often falls far short of that radius” (2001: 161). Even if women would perhaps not always describe themselves in terms of being afraid, they still express how they calculate the constant risk of becoming victims of sexualized violence. Research on the constitution of the female body in relation to its surrounding physical environment demonstrates how a multitude of different risk management strategies inform and determine how women move and comport themselves in public space (Andersson 2001; 2005; Cahill 2001; Hall 2004; Listerborn 2000; 2002; Valentin 1989). The experience of being at risk creates limitations in the daily lives of women and has far-reaching implications for how women experience their safety and sense of belonging from a broader societal perspective.

Drawing on Robert Castel’s analysis of a “new space of risk”, which has come to frame almost all aspects of modern life, Rachel Hall offers a critical analysis of rape prevention discourse and challenges the habitual reinforcement of the idea that fear is a woman’s best line of defense against the threat of rape. Rather than preventing sexual violence, such discourse creates a culture of fear in which women are encouraged to accept their own bodies and sexual anatomy as constituting a major risk factor and as posing a threat to themselves. As a practice of risk assessment, rape prevention, writes Hall, “encourages the metonymic treatment of women as ‘rape space’” (Hall 2004:2). Hall’s analysis demonstrates how the issue of rape and rape prevention is primarily addressed through the bodies of women as potential victims rather than through a focus on potential offenders. As a result, writes Hall,
each ‘fact about sexual violence’ we hear is located at the site of the woman-as-victim’s body after rape; this is true even when we speak of the prevention of future rapes. As we circle around her wounded body to discuss ‘violence against women,’ she becomes the highly visible, prototypical victim and the rapist fades into thin air (Hall 2004: 8).

Allowing the rapist to fade into thin air locates measures of intervention at the site of women as potential victims of rape and sexual assault. The responsibility to eliminate crimes of rape and sexual violence is removed from the offenders and the legal system and seems instead to rest entirely upon individual women. Fear and vigilance are prescribed to women as the model for good citizenship.

Risk management is thus part of how women constitute their identities in relation to their physical, social, and cultural surroundings; to be a woman is to embody the silent knowledge of one’s own body as an exposed object. The female body is socially and culturally constituted as a potential rape victim and as carrying the responsibility and blame for its own exposure. She must carefully follow a wide variety of avoidance strategies informed by fear and by statistics presenting her with more or less credible and contradictory “facts” about the risks to which her body is (by seeming necessity) subjected. With reference to Young and Bartky, Cahill describes the socially produced feminine body as that of a guilty pre-victim. She writes,
If [the feminine body] attempts something beyond its highly limited capacities, if it wanders beyond its safety zone, it can expect to be hurt. [...] In the specific moments and movements of this body are written the defense of the sexual offender: she was somewhere she should not have been, moving her body in ways that she should not have, carrying on in a manner so free and easy as to convey an utter abdication of her responsibilities of self-protection and self-surveillance (Cahill 2001: 157, 160).

The threat of rape and sexual violence is thus not located as originating from any external force. Rather, the source of this threat is to be found in the facticity of the lived body of each individual woman. If this body is violated, the blame must therefore fall on the individual woman’s failure to sufficiently limit its movements. This view and production of women’s bodies as hostile and unruly objects that are constantly at risk uphold, as Cahill writes, “a status quo that refuses, in the particular case of sexual assault, to consider the victim innocent until proven guilty” (2001: 161). Instead, the opposite is assumed and women’s bodies are constituted as culpable of making danger possible.

Paradoxically enough, women are encouraged and expected not only to consent to their a priori status as victims but also to

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8 Cahill continues a few pages later: “On a bodily level, a woman will be likely to experience a rape in some important sense as a threat fulfilled. The typical reactions of a rape victim, marked by overwhelming guilt and self-loathing, are the reactions of a person who should have known but temporarily forgot that she was constantly at risk. To have believed for even a moment that she was not in danger, for whatever reason, is felt to be the cause of the attack. Those assumptions which were prevalent in the production of her bodily comportment have been confirmed, and the attack itself may well be considered as a reminder for the need of increased self-surveillance” (2001: 164).
act so as to avoid the inevitable threat constitutive of this status.\(^9\) As Hall writes, woman is constituted as a re-action hero and her only possibility of agency is through avoidance (2004: 6). What is brought out with clarity in Hall’s analysis is not simply how rape prevention discourse treats women’s bodies as vulnerable and violable objects but also how women are encouraged to assume a dualistic self-understanding. Woman is hailed as a modern subject and is encouraged to objectify herself in order to make herself a tough target. She must have expert awareness of her own vulnerabilities to always be able to stay one step ahead and avoid being violated. To prevent herself from being victimized by someone else (and to prevent that someone from becoming an offender) she must accept her status as an object while at the same time as a subject take every measure necessary to protect herself.

The distance between women’s subjectivity and their bodies is upheld through the constitution of the body as an alien, vile force standing in separation from the wishes of the subject. There is, as Cahill points out, a double self-sustaining movement of alienation and vilification: The body’s alien status reinforces it as a burden and “source of impending danger” that in turn contributes to its “degree of ontological alienation” (2001: 158). Both Cahill and Hall demonstrate how, in the specific case of sexual violence, women’s bodily alienation and dualistic self-experience are framed in terms

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9 Hall quotes an advertisement for a sexual assault prevention workshop that makes obvious how women are assigned a pre-victim status and are encouraged to develop strategies to reduce their risk of being raped: “‘A woman is raped every five minutes in this country. Three out of four American women will be violently, physically, or sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. These statistics speak to the need for women to learn how to lead safer and more secure lives. This informative and participatory workshop will discuss sexual issues as well as include tips on how to be safer at home, in your car, and in public. This workshop is designed for women. This is not a self-defense class’” (2004: 6).
of safety and responsibility. Exaggerated self-objectification and self-surveillance occur in response to imperatives of safety and risk prevention rather than as a response to normative standards of beauty. While the former incentive for self-objectification may on the surface seem nobler than the latter, I would argue that it is much more vicious and damaging. Resisting prevailing beauty ideals can be difficult, but it can also be viewed with respect and admiration as a sign of strength and integrity. It is quite different to resist compelling arguments about staying safe and avoiding dangerous risks. Whereas it may be considered foolish – albeit difficult to resist – to objectify oneself in compliance with the beauty and fashion industry, it is considered unwise and dangerous not to engage in heightened self-objectification and self-surveillance to avoid the supposedly inevitable threat of rape and sexual violence.

Concluding Remarks
The objectification and self-objectification of women’s bodies has long been one of the most central topics within feminist theory and politics. In spite of (or perhaps because of) its centrality, discussions regarding women’s bodily objectification are often infected and can appear as both quite controversial and hopelessly outdated. In feminist discussions, as well as in contemporary culture in general, objectification is often considered something of a “dirty word” and an act of degradation. What is frequently overlooked is that objectification is an essential part of what it means to be a self. Rather than being something we can escape or rid ourselves of, objectification is a fact of subjectivity. It is only by virtue of being a visible and tangible object in the world, that is, existing as an embodied being, that I am a subject with the ability to interact with the world and others. And, vice versa, it is only as a subject
with a perspective on the world that I am able to objectify myself (as well as others and the world around me). Although there is certainly a limit to the extent to which a person can be known in an objectifying way from an outside perspective, the fact remains that she can be objectified (and she can objectify herself) without being deprived of her subjectivity. Recognizing sedimented meanings inscribed upon her by culture, society and history is a way of recognizing her as a subject as well. Moreover, in order for a person to be known at all, she must also be known by her objective properties. The crux here is of course to avoid objectification in terms of being reductive and degrading.

While the ability to reflect upon and objectify oneself is indeed a necessary feature of selfhood, self-objectification is likely to have an alienating and stifling effect when it becomes the dominant way of relating to oneself, as it often does in cases of incipient schizophrenia. Having focal or objectifying awareness of one's own body, writes Sass, “disrupts the experience of both self and world” (Sass 2003, 247). There is an important qualitative shift of experience when tacit dimensions of existence become explicitly thematized and made into objects for reflection. Such a tacit dimension of existence is the fact of embodiment. A qualitative shift occurs when the lived body that forms the ground and condition of all experience becomes an object body; when the lived body is no longer allowed to efface itself and disappear into the background in the act of experience but rather becomes the very object of that experience. Processes of self-reflection and self-monitoring are, as Sass reminds us, “likely to have the effect of alienating or dividing the self” (2003: 251). To direct explicit focal attention on that which is normally tacit in experience implies a distancing from that phenomenon and, with that distancing, an objectification and
alienation. The paradoxical movement involved in objectification is that the focal awareness bringing one closer to the thematized object is also a distal awareness detaching oneself and taking oneself further away from the object. The moment something is taken as an object for reflection it can no longer be fully inhabited by the reflecting self.

I want to suggest that the intimate interdependence between a detached hyperreflexive attitude toward oneself and one’s body and the sometimes rather drastic alterations in the very sense of being a self that can be seen already in the very early stages of schizophrenia before the onset of psychotic stages should motivate us to consider and carefully examine different ways in which self-objectification occurs and is encouraged within the spectrum of normality. Here I have only pointed to one manifestation of how heightened self-objectification and a distanced attitude toward one’s own body is normalized, namely the normative self-objectification of women’s bodies and particularly as this occurs in light of a pervasive threat of the risk of being raped. The ways patients in the initial stages of schizophrenia describe their experience of their own embodiment in terms of dissociation and alienation come very close to the ways women are socialized into approaching their bodies. What women are encouraged to do in relation both to normative ideals of beauty and femininity and to imperatives of safety and risk prevention is precisely to engage in exaggerated self-objectification and self-monitoring. Women are encouraged to live and relate to their bodies as objects dissociated from themselves and in need of being both constantly controlled and perfected.

We may of course ask whether there really is any comparison between these two different forms of bodily alienation and self-
objectification to be made here. Perhaps the qualitative differences between them are simply too great to compare. The experiences of schizophrenic self-disturbances may after all, as Sass points out, be impossible for the normal person to even imagine in so far as they contradict our deep-rooted conception of a person as a unified and unifying whole with a unique perspective on the world (Sass 1987: 1). By placing these two forms of self-objectification next to one another I am not suggesting that there are no differences between them. My attempt is not in any way to downplay the radical strangeness and morbidity of schizophrenic alterations in self-experience or to diminish the horrifying agony these alterations bring about. Further, I am obviously not suggesting that all women will develop full-blown schizophrenia because of the way they are socialized to objectify and alienate their bodies. Such a suggestion would be both preposterous and quite disrespectful.

However, even though there are undeniably quite significant qualitative differences between the hyperreflexive tendency that constitutes an integral part of the pathology in schizotypal disorders and incipient schizophrenia and the tendency to bodily alienation and heightened self-monitoring that characterizes women's subjectivity in Western culture (and elsewhere), there are nevertheless also striking similarities. The sense of one's own body as not quite fitting oneself and as distant or alien from oneself and the need to consciously attend to and monitor everyday movements are alterations in bodily self-experience that frequently occur to varying degrees of strangeness in the early stages of schizophrenia but that we can also recognize as falling within the bounds of normality. I would like to suggest that the insights of the phenomenologically oriented model of hyperreflection and diminished self-affection used to understand schizophrenic self-disturbances can
function as something of a beacon, casting light on the normative self-objectification of women’s bodies and compelling us to consider this from a new perspective. Rather than letting established categories of normality and abnormality guide how we understand and classify these different forms of self-objectification and bodily alienation, we may be forced to re-evaluate how the very categories of understanding are constituted and how the distinction between them is drawn.

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HILDE BONDEVIK is an intellectual historian and associate professor at the Centre for Gender Research, University of Oslo, Norway. Her most recent publications include Hysteri i Norge. Et sykdomsportrett (2007) (Hysteria in Norway: A Picture of an Illness); Tenkepauser. Filosofi og vitenskapsteori (2003) (Pause for Thought: Philosophy and the Theory of Science); Kjønnsperspektiver i filosofihistorien (1999) (Gender Perspectives in Philosophical History) and “I vitenskaplighetens navn – om feministisk vitenskapsteori” (2004) (“In the Name of Science - A Feminist Theory of Science”).

GUNN ENGELSRUD is Head of the Department of Physical education, Norwegian School of Sport Science and Professor II at the Section for Nurse and Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine at the University of Oslo, Norway. Her research interests concern health and illness in contemporary times and represent inte-
resting, critical and vital channels to basic cultural preconceptions, institutional schemes and discourses, as well as subjective experiences and living conditions. In a recent research project; “The body’s culture, culture’s body. A comparative study of how the body is staged and interpreted in three social arenas” she examines peoples experience from T’ai Chi, Aerobics and Modern Dance.

**Jens Eriksson** is a Ph.D.-student in History of Science at Uppsala University, Sweden. His forthcoming dissertation will examine how, in eighteenth-century Germany, the relationship between experimental events and textual representations of them forced the ‘manly’ (männliche) experimenter and the book-learned university philosopher to uphold a contradictory stance towards texts as both exchangeable with, and defective copies of, actual events and situations.

**Jessika Graham** is a Ph.D.-student in the Human Ecology School of Global studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Starting from a social constructionist perspective she is questioning the traditional epistemology organizing human being and the world in two ontologically separate realms and categories. She is particularly interested in contesting the deeply rooted *additive notion* in Western Culture conceptualizing wo/man and the world around in pairs of opposite concepts such as body-mind, nature-culture and biology-sociology. The aim of her thesis is to contribute to integrative ways of understanding human being that could be acknowledged and made applicable to the natural sciences as well as the humanities and social sciences.
INGVIL HELLSTRAND is a Ph.D.-student with the Network for Gender Research at the University of Stavanger, Norway. Her research interests are feminisms, cultural theory, posthuman bodies, normality and “passing” as human, and science-fiction. Her dissertation project “Passing as Human” will investigate how representations of non-human beings in popular culture inform, reproduce and negotiate cultural discourses of body normativity.

MARIA JÖNSSON holds a Ph.D. in Literature (2006) and works as a teacher and researcher at Umeå Centre for Gender Studies at Umeå University, Sweden. In her doctoral thesis she examined the writings of Swedish author Agneta Klingspor from the 1970’s to 2006. The focus of the thesis is the gendered struggle for authority and authorship that characterizes Klingspor’s experimental autobiographical writings. Jönsson’s current project “Vem är tanten?” (“What about the old lady/aunt?”) deals with the intersections of age and gender, both theoretically and more specifically in relation to Swedish author Kerstin Thorvall’s writings. Jönsson is particularly interested in the motif “menopause” and the way it connects gender to age and corporeal subjectivity.

LISA FOLKMARSON KÄLL holds a Ph.D. from the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark (2007) and a Ph.D. in Women’s Studies from Clark University, USA (2004). Currently she works as a researcher at the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University, Sweden. She specializes in contemporary continental philosophy and especially the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Her main research
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Varpu Löytyniemi graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Tampere, Finland in 1994. She has also studied social psychology and women’s studies. In 1996 she became a researcher at the School of Public Health, University of Tampere. In her doctoral thesis (2004) she inquired into physicians’ narratives and topics of narrative identity, the dialogics of narrating, and gender. In her postdoctoral study *Professional Identity, Career, and the Implications of Sexual Difference* an embodied, difference-friendly, and gender-sensitive framework of professional identity was developed. Further, her recent interests include the bodily nature of both narrating and studying narrative
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NORMALITY/NORMATIVITY brings together essays from a number of different fields that challenge the self-evidence of normality and bring to light its normative dimensions. Exploring how normative boundaries of normality are established, reinforced and disrupted in various ways, the essays demonstrate the co-dependence and intimate intermingling of normality and normativity and show how lines of demarcation between the normal and deviant are not always clear cut but often characterized by ambiguity.