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# Disability and Social Theory

## New Developments and Directions

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## Nomadology and Subjectivity: Deleuze, Guattari and Critical Disability Studies

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### Introduction

Over the last two decades, impairment has become a tricky issue and remains under-theorised in disability studies (see Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Corker, 2001; Tremain, 2002). In the UK the social model of disability has dominated disability theory. In this frame of reference, a distinction is made between 'impairment' and 'disability'. In the social model of disability, impairment is conceptualised as *the lack or defect of a limb, organ or mechanism of the body*, and analyses focus on the ways in which 'disability' is created through the historical, social, economic, political, cultural and relational exclusion of people with 'impairments' (UPIAS, 1976; Oliver, 1990, 1996). For many disability theorists and activists, impairment refers to an individualised phenomenon and implies negativities, including pathology, pathos, social death, inertia, lack, limitation, loss, deficit and/or tragedy (Goodley and Roets, 2008). Even quite recently it is argued that, after all, impairment is a tragic, biological reality (Shakespeare, 2006). Our question consequently becomes: can we return impaired bodies to their maternal roots, which means adopting a unified vision of bodies and minds as pre-social, biological essences and unchanging phenomena without discrediting the social and political project of disability studies?

Therefore, in this chapter we theorise the impaired subject as social, embodied and non-dualistic. This shift of perspective implies the rejection of framing subjectivity in terms of reproducing the existing political order, and refutes the negative or lack-based definition of bodies that are constituted differently. In this vein, we criticise the politics of mourning and melancholia and the extent to which they dominate social theory, leaving limited scope for alternative theoretical approaches (Braidotti, 2010). In our view, also the disciplinary identity of disability studies has failed to dissociate from the collective mourning and melancholia, from the dominant understanding of impairment as loss, deficit, lack, tragedy and so on. Nevertheless, as soon as we attempt to theorise impairment as

social, we encounter another tricky snake in the grass. Contemporary social theory still seems dominated by a socially constructivist vision of human embodiment which reduces the body to inert matter shaped by social, cultural and symbolic codes (Braidotti, 2010). It also assumes the primacy of a master code – be it a symbolic signifier, or a linguistically encoded grid of subjectification – which would somehow constitute the ultimate location of power. We oppose this binary and static view of mind–body interaction and propose instead a more dynamic process ontology of embodiment that assumes a vitalist vision. As an alternative to a politics of mourning and melancholia, we argue the case for a politics of affirmation inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's vitalist materialism, which could also redefine the terms of the debate about impairment and disability. In what follows, we look at the meaning of disability studies as a project of affirmative politics. This implies an exploration of (i) *alternative notions of ontology and epistemology*, (ii) *an expansion of our understanding of subjectivity as embodied, non-dualistic and nomadic*, and (iii) *a methodology* that makes our praxis nomadic and involves another way of forming subjectivity as transversal connections or assemblages with multiple others. Throughout the chapter, we illustrate how we engendered subjectivity as nomadic through engaging with the lives of people labeled as having 'intellectual disabilities'.

### Alternative notions of ontology and epistemology

In the light of the disciplinary dilemma in disability studies over the nature of impairment, the *continental philosophy of bodily materialism* enables the establishment of alternative ontological and epistemological grounds. This approach inspires an affirmative politics of impairment. The politics of affirmation challenges disability theorists and activists to transcend biological determinism and essentialism, but also challenges social constructivism, in the narrow sense of the term, to rethink its dualistic opposition of self to society, of bodies to social norms and selves to others. To recapture impaired bodies and minds from the lost social space of pre-social ontology, a new balance needs to be struck. We argue that a political process ontology – or a version of the nature of being always in political process – is required. In search of such a balance we explore some particularly relevant concepts in Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic philosophy that were inspired by the work of Foucault and Canguilhem.

Deleuze and Guattari call for a radical shift from an essentialist to anti-essentialist ontology by returning matter to a vitalist mode. The focus in this line of thought is on 'the politics of life itself as a relentlessly generative force' (Braidotti, 2010: 142). Matter is taken as intelligent, vital and self-organising. Important for disability studies is their analysis, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), of Foucault's notion of power over life ('bio-power') and of Canguilhem's notion of 'anomaly'. In that

work, in chapter 10 'Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible', they clarify the very different origin and meaning of the Latin word *a-normal* and of the Greek word *anomalous*.

It has been noted that the origin of the word *anomal* ('anomalous'), an adjective that has fallen into disuse in French, is very different from that of *anormal* ('abnormal'): *a-normal*, a Latin adjective lacking a noun in French, refers to that which is outside rules or goes against the rules, whereas *an-omiale*, a Greek noun that has lost its adjective, designates the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of de-territorialization. The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 269–70)

The Latin *a-normal* ('abnormal') draws us to a conceptualisation of ontology as biological essentialism and determinism that is radically challenged by Foucault when he introduces the notion of bio-power. Michel Foucault (1961, 1978) introduced the concept 'regimes of bio-power' to challenge the binary marking and disciplining of bodies and minds as ab/normal. According to Foucault, the body is a central player in the negotiation of power and the politics of bio-power is a rather brutal regime (Braidotti, 2006). Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality*:

*Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it ... did merit a hearing. It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation – whether in acts or in words. [As such] ... modern puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, non-existence, and silence.*

(Foucault, 1978: 4, italics added)

Foucault stresses that difference and 'otherness' – anything that is not ordered along the norm – is seen as inferiority; and bodies that are branded as 'other' are silently reduced to a disposable status (Braidotti, 2006). Also in the present, regimes of bio-power operate as ways of 'disciplining the body, normalizing behaviour, administering the life of populations' (Rajchman, 1985, quoted in Lather, 1991: 110). This means that particular bodies and subjects are categorised and excluded, and their respective ontology or nature of being acquires essentialist connotations which are assumed to be pre-given, universal and unchanging (Parker, 2003; Grosz, 2005).

Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 270) adopt Foucault's theorising when they affirm that 'the abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic'. Moreover, Foucault was particularly interested in the

ways in which regimes of bio-power fed upon social and cultural discourses that, as key mechanisms in the process of social control, socially construct particular versions of self, personhood and subjectivity (Goodley et al., 2004). Ever since modernity, a vision of the subject as a unitary and rational self is pursued in knowledge production and the aim has been to control, govern and discipline the individual according to this norm. In this universalistic frame of reference, a binary logic of self–other reduces ‘difference’ to a pejorative and disqualified phenomenon (Braidotti, 2010). It can be argued that these politics of bio-power have invalidated in particular the impaired body and subject, making it ontologically deviant (Hughes, 1999). For example, McClimens (2003) traces a eugenicist discourse established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which suggested that the agency of impaired human beings should be socially controlled for the purpose of improving the human race. The discourse was based on a vision of biologically ‘pure’ populations.

In our work, we observe that these sort of insights into the nature of impairment – illustrated sharply in the case of ‘intellectual disabilities’ – may be reflected in the growth of interventionist social sciences over the past century and, indeed, have influenced current practice (Roets, 2008). People with ‘intellectual disabilities’ were categorised as abnormal, deviant from the abstract standard of ‘normal man’, and their supposed intellectual inferiority was an important factor in the drive to remove them from the public sphere and ‘treat’ them in total institutions (Smith, 1999). Their culture was easily defined for them as a professional construct rooted in the eugenic movement, used to justify institutionalisation, sterilisation, and other repressive policies (Taylor, 1996). The policy of institutional segregation was reinforced by extreme measures, such as sterilisation, to control disabled people’s fertility, and their supposed rampant and dangerous sexuality and to prevent marriage, sex and parenthood (May and Simpson, 2003). Those policies and practices depended in many senses upon eugenic and biological essentialism and determinism (Baroff, 2000; Kerr and Shakespeare, 2002) and were motivated by a desire to remove from society people with ‘intellectual disabilities’ who were thought to be a threat to the social order (Marks, 1999; Park and Redford, 1998). Moreover the ways in which contemporary ideas about women and men with ‘intellectual disabilities’ operate as taken-for-granted ‘truths’ suggest that it is important to trace back and reflect upon social and ideological influences that culminate in contemporary practices (Tremain, 2005; Roets, Adams and Van Hove, 2006).

Our position consists in using disability studies to challenge the politics of bio-power in the present. It situates the discursive field of disability studies as ‘a discourse that has a great ability to circulate, a great aptitude for metamorphoses, a sort of strategic polyvalence’. Here Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic philosophy of life inspires ‘a practice of pragmatics where ontology is overthrown, foundations are done away with and endings and beginnings

are nullified’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 28). They refer, in this context, to Cangulihelm’s notion of *the anomalous*.

Georges Cangulihelm (a philosopher and historian of medical science and Michel Foucault’s dissertation advisor, see Snyder and Mitchell, 2001: 373) situated the body and its hard, essentialist existence as a historically contingent phenomenon. In his work *The Normal and the Pathological* (translated in English in 1989), he emphasised adaptation over deviation. Cangulihelm asserted that bodies were not the product of averages and submissive to norms. They were interdependent vessels, not fixed essences that shaped and were shaped by their environments. The modernist myth of the norm of ‘bodily perfection’ thus becomes little more than a hostile imposition upon necessarily fluctuating organisms: ‘a norm, or rule is what can be used to right, to square, to straighten. To set a norm (*normen*), to normalize, is to impose a requirement on an existence, a given whose variety, disparity – with regard to the requirement – present themselves as a hostile indeterminacy’ (Cangulihelm, 1989: 239, quoted in Snyder and Mitchell, 2001: 373). As such, a norm functions to surrender every notion of deviance to the violence of devaluation. In contrast to the *ab/normal*, Cangulihelm argued for a notion of *anomaly*, which offered medicine (his own discipline as a medical historian) a more appropriate gauge than dysfunction and abnormality: ‘rather than interpret *bodily and cognitive differences* in terms of their degree of deviation from a standardized norm, *anomaly recognized difference as the ... expression of a biologically diverse species adapting to the pressures of environmental and internal forces*’ (Snyder and Mitchell, 2001: 373, italics added). As such, Cangulihelm argues for bio-diversity, for the self-generative, affirmative power of living matter at the core of a collective and anti-essentialist becoming (Braidotti, 2006: 53). The Greek concept *an-omalia* symbolises a version of political process ontology, which expresses a version of *being* that is *simultaneously becoming* in alliance with related beings (see Braidotti, 2006).

Also Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of *becomings-animal* when they argue that ‘the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 270). Interestingly, Biesta (2011) reveals that the way in which societies are made operational is related to how we understand the status of the borders of the democratic order. It can be argued that a disabling society defines disabled people as outsiders: as ‘those on the outside of this order are there either because they are unable to act rationally and/or morally ... or because they explicitly reject the standards of rationality and morality that characterize the political order’ (Biesta, 2011: 145–46). This translates as an appeal for a re-conceptualisation of the nature of impaired bodies-and-minds as always in process, always in becoming and in relation to the collective: ‘For the whole question is: what is exactly the nature of the anomalous? What function does it have in relation to the band, or the pack? [...] It is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering ... there is a borderline for each multiplicity’ (Deleuze

and Guattari, 1980: 269–70). The way how this 'borderline' for each multiplicity – or say collective, society – is constructed can be seen as a very powerful resource for valuing the notion of diversity *within* human kinds. Approaching impairment as one of these borderlines can push disability studies into surprising new horizons. Impaired bodies and minds can be recast as driving forces that constitute a network of interconnection with others (Braidotti, 2010). This implies not an us/them politics but one in which human beings border/cluster in the collective. This point of view also expands our understanding of subjectivity.

### An expansion of our understanding of subjectivity: Nomadic subjects

I am rooted, but I flow.

(Virginia Woolf, quoted in Braidotti, 2002: 1)

In Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the subject, bodies and subjects are socially created in the affirmative actualisation of the encounter between subjects, entities and forces which mutually affect and exchange parts of each other. Collective life is an engine for an affirmative becoming (Braidotti, 2002). This is what is at stake in Deleuze and Guattari's nomadic theory of the subject as becoming:

A kind of order or apparent progressions can be established for the segments of becoming in which we find ourselves; becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal, -vegetable, or mineral; becomings molecular of all kinds, *becoming-particles*. Fibres lead us from one to the other, transform one into the other as they pass through doors and across thresholds.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 300)

Gilles Deleuze, in his influential oeuvre *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and later with Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), perceives the raw materials of existence as a nomadic distribution of being(s) constantly in flux:

then there is a completely other distribution which must be called nomadic, a nomad *nomios*, without property, enclosure, or measure. Here, there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute *themselves* in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits.

(Deleuze, 1968: 45–6, italics in original)

We adopt this strand of Deleuze and Guattari's work because, as we have argued, we need a social and political ontology at the centre of epistemologies and social practices in which the "real", "the body", "being", "materiality",

"nature", those terms themselves are opened up to their becoming, to the temporal forces of endless change' (Grosz, 2005: 5).

Braidotti (1994, 2002, 2006) argues for the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology and provides an alternative for the theoretical elimination of the materiality of the body by cross-reading it with the late psychoanalytic work of Luce Irigaray. As a feminist late psychoanalytic approach, Luce Irigaray challenges biological or psychic determinism and she introduces the body and mind as a social construction and creation in process (Grosz, 1994):

It is indeterminate and indeterminable outside its social constitution as a body of a particular type. This implies that the body which it presumes and helps to explain is an open-ended, pliable set of significations, capable of being re-written, reconstituted, in quite other terms than those which mark it, and consequently capable of re-inscribing the forms of sexed identity and psychical subjectivity at work today.

(Grosz, 1994: 61)

Bodies and minds are interrelated, in reconstructing and creating the self and relationships with others. Irigaray (1999) brings the body and mind back into play as a mobile set of differences, and her unstable 'I's' and 'you's' avoid fixed subject positions and can be used to complement Deleuze and Guattari's becoming:

You are moving. You never stay still. You never stay. You never 'are'. How can I say 'you', when you are always other? How can I speak to you? You remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. What will make that current flow into words? It is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities. Yet it cannot be decomposed. These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end. These rivers flow into no single, definitive sea. These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility. This life.

As such, Irigaray challenges the old dream of symmetry' (Irigaray, 1985, quoted in Coker, 1999: 635) which requires a stable and oppositional category of 'normalcy' and binary thought in disability studies and allows us to deconstruct the idea of a foundational character of impairment.

Here the affirmative nature of Deleuzian-inspired theory intrigues as well as explains, because a logic of desire as a force of production and a fundamental flow of energy is introduced: 'You *must* produce the unconscious ... The unconscious is a substance which must be created, placed, made to flow, it is a social and political space which must be won' (Deleuze, 1975–95: 81, italics in original). In *Two Regimes of Madness*, Deleuze (1975–95) challenges traditional psychoanalytic practices which 'reduce and destroy the assemblage

of the unconscious and its desire as lack' (ibid.: 79). Classic psychoanalysis, for example, is contaminated by an ontology of lack and guilt (Braidotti, 2002: 97–101). Desire, instead, is productive: desire creates desire, through multiplicities of desires. As such, the impaired subject is no longer impaired for it has lost its engagement with lack as an ontological premise in the logic of desire as a force of production, an intense, productive and fundamental flow of energy (Gibson, 2006: 189). It is a subject ever moving and becoming (Goodley, 2007).

We argue for the need to fold these philosophical frameworks together and develop a new nomadic scenario for disability studies. We suggest a new figuration of layered, embodied subjectivity of nomadic existence; this is central to the concepts of *becoming* that lie at the heart of Irigaray's and Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concerns (Braidotti, 2002). Nomadic subjectivity is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities, as 'there is a need to re-name the subject as a multiple, open-ended and interconnected identity that occupies a variety of possible subject positions, at different places (spatially) and at different times (temporally), across a multiplicity of constructions of self (relationality)' (Braidotti, 1994: 158). Nomadology is a political project in which a new subjectivity is created which blurs boundaries and consists in erasing and recomposing the former boundaries between self and others (Braidotti, 2002: 119). This notion of subjectivity brings the impaired subject back into play as a moving set of differences, that capitalises on the energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature, of a multiple and nomadic subject with bodily, rupturing roots that transforms and reconfigures the self in a politicised and anti-essentialist way (see Goodley and Roets, 2008).

Interestingly, to understand subjectivity as nomadic requires methodological creativity and innovation. In what follows, we illustrate some particular methodological implications for disability studies research.

### Methodology

The aim in nomadic methodology is that of affirmative differences or creative repetitions, which means *retelling, reconfiguring, and revisiting a concept, phenomenon, event, or location from different angles* (Braidotti, 2010). This is not merely a quantitative multiplication of options, but rather a qualitative leap of perspective that can generate a hybrid mixture of interpretations of the phenomenon in question. This is a situated method of tracking the qualitative, ontological shifts from generative chaos or indeterminate forms to actualised and determined forms, while avoiding the pitfall of essentialism. This method respects the visible and hidden complexities and uncertainties of the real-life world in which we are living. Further, these qualitative shifts call for an intensive form of interdisciplinarity and boundary-crossings among a range of discourses.

This nomadic methodology as proposed by Braidotti (2010) seems very relevant for disability studies. In the light of recent research activities (see Roets, 2008), inspired by this nomadic methodology, we have suggested a research methodology designed to produce and create detailed cartographies of the present in the lives of disabled people and in their becoming in relation with multiple others (Roets et al., 2009). We explored Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *drawing cartographies of the present* as a potentially innovative methodological and analytical approach to disrupt and destabilise the monolithic master narrative typically told about people with 'intellectual disabilities'. In the main, Deleuze and Guattari stimulate us in a creative experiment with a nomadic and vitalist version of reality and human nature (Braidotti, 2002: 73). 'Reality' can be approached and constructed through the interplay of different territories of knowing (Gergen, 1994). Deleuze and Guattari's perception of the map is a useful metaphor:

The map fosters connections between fields ... The map is open and connectable to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as political action.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 13–14, our italics)

Moreover, a map has multiple entry points and embodies many dimensions and meanings: 'Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of ... [a] map [is that it] has multiple entryways as opposed to the tracing, which always goes back 'to the same'. The map has to do with *performance*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 13–14, our italics). Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti (2002) proposes the drawing of cartographies of the present as a powerful analytic resource to display the multiple ways in which a culture constructs subject positions (Parker, 2003; Grosz, 2005). Creating cartographies of the present seizes the opportunity to depict and include a multiplicity of meanings, perspectives and realities. Haraway (1991) points out that there is no single standpoint since every subject is embodied and embedded within sense-making processes and has access to multiple versions of socially created realities. This renewal of conceptual creativity is a project that needs real-life people in positions of discursive subjectivity (Braidotti, 1994), and its methodological requirement is to map and engender diverse accounts of the subjectivity of research subjects. As an illustration, we introduce an experiment with nomadology while doing research in the context of the self-advocacy network in Flanders (Belgium) (see Roets, 2008). We argue that making cartographies of disability activism in micro-political contexts might enable disability research to question and challenge the essentialist interpretation of impairment, and in particular of 'intellectual disabilities'.

In the particular context of doing disability research, the drawing of cartographies of the present prioritises both the discovery, in a disabling society, of contextual counter-narratives, and the documentation of lost glimpses of the humanity of disabled people (see Roets, Goodley and Van Hove, 2007). During our research, we used *life story research* and *ethnography* as relevant and complementary research techniques to map the storied and enacted self-advocacy of people with 'intellectual disabilities'. *Life story research* is recognised as a useful technique to foreground 'hidden' and activist lives and the voices of self-advocates (Booth and Booth, 1996). Doing life story research can explicate cultural, pluralist meanings and create new ones in a dialogue at a deep level of signification where the motive is to philosophise across difference. Such research is inspired by 'awe, awe at the mystery and complexity of human existence' (Corker, 2001: 42). As documented life stories deserve to be contextualised in actions and events and require reflection, we argue that this can be achieved by ethnographic accounts and field notes (Denzin, 1996). *Ethnography* is defined by Mutua and Swadener (2004: 16) as a form of narrative in which multiple identities and nomadic subjectivities can be explored. Reflexive and dynamic accounts of researchers might be very useful when they include the storied and enacted versions of the self-advocacy of people with 'intellectual disabilities' (Goodley and Van Hove, 2005).

We illustrate such an analysis in what follows. The storied and enacted self-advocacy of Robert, the president of the self-advocacy network in Flanders, is at the heart of the analysis that is composed by Griet, who worked as an advisor for self-advocates while doing research. We attempt to unveil Robert's subjectivity and his activism through our detailed ethnographic field notes.

At the big meeting Robert shows up, right under my nose, beaming, and his enormous square glasses (which almost cover his entire face) crooked on his nose, his cheeks red and his hair wild and spiky. I distinctly remember that Robert was the first core member I met when I started giving support to the self-advocacy group ten years ago and I was amazed by the immense wisdom that lay in his words and that suited his impressive wrinkled forehead. He wishes me good morning in his customary nose-to-nose way. I've learned to appreciate his special way of greeting: out of sheer happiness, when he first squeezes me with his strong bear-like hug, his penetrating green eyes full of interest fathoming the bottom of my soul: 'How are you?' I reply in a good mood: 'Hello Mr. President, fine, and how are you?'

This time Robert looks at me with surprise, attentively eyeing my new pair of small round glasses. 'Hey, where did you get those?' he wonders, burning with curiosity. 'Ehm ... just bought them at the optician's!' I reply,

'do you like them?' Robert nods. He takes off his huge old-fashioned pair of glasses, puts them on my nose and then tries on my new pair. 'How is that?' he asks seriously. I tell him, I think he's really cool now. All of a sudden he seems 36 again, his real age, instead of 45 or older ... Later that day there is a coffee break. Robert pulls my sleeve and wants to tell his story: 'I've got a story, about my old glasses. I got them from my uncle. I couldn't choose. My uncle had fabricated them himself. I got those glasses when I left school. I was 18 then. They destroyed my glasses at school. Those guys. My glasses had to be cheap. My uncle gave me those old glasses. Those guys at school were pestering me. They were making fun out of me. They called me punk, because my hair always looked so wild. They said I looked like a clown in a circus. This is why I had to have a very short haircut. I still have those glasses now.'

I feel touched by Robert's story. When the coffee break is over, I tell Robert that if he wants to buy a new pair of glasses, I wouldn't mind joining him on a trip to the opticians. 'Would you like to buy a new pair of glasses, Robert? Just like the ones I have?' I ask. He looks at me indignantly. 'That won't be possible! My caregivers won't be able to manage.' An awkward silence falls.

At the time, I did not understand why he said this. These events, and more significant ones hidden in the complexity of his life and uncovered later, raised uncomfortable doubts on my part. Did I miss the point? Though I could not see through his glasses, the snippets and glimpses of his life world amazed me and his social spaces of resistance confused me. As the ethnographic extracts of his life story further unravelled, it was as if Robert's limited sense of agency did not frustrate him. In the analysis, three subject positions were identified, as 'grey mouse', 'big dreamer' and 'Mr. President'. This was Robert's own way to frame his life in his booklet *The Journey of Our Lives* that was spread in the self-advocacy network (see Schoeters with support of De Winne and Roets, 2007)

#### Grey mouse

At work in the sheltered workshop, Robert – clothed in the dustcoat of the worker ant – presents as a passive figure. He is *the grey mouse*, afraid to upset his supervisors.

While collecting core members' life stories and photos for one of the self-advocacy group's projects, a fellow advisor and I had travelled to the other side of the country to take some photos of Robert at work, in the sheltered workshop where he works fulltime. Strangely enough, at the very moment we arrived there, he was waiting for us in his dustcoat. He

said: 'WE can't allow photos to be taken of the production process at the work floor.'

Later he reveals his insider perspective. At home I am another man than at work in the sheltered workshop. We have supervisors and team leaders. They supervise us. The only thing they notice is the work. They don't see us as human beings. We have to keep quiet and shut up, just as little kids. If we talk, they scold us. We do have breaks. We're allowed to talk then. Forty minutes of break for the entire day. I cannot change that, for I have to shut up. And even if I say something, they don't listen. They think I'm stupid. But I'm having my own thoughts about it. I keep working in my thoughts. I talk to myself. That makes me wiser. They boss us around. We are trifled with. That's a horse of another colour! It's a big mess there. Chaos. I have never been able to show my colleagues my talent. I can think very well.

So I remained puzzled. Whose voice did we actually hear? Robert's or the one of his work leaders in the sheltered workshop? Robert seemed to feel pressure to behave 'properly' in response to the expectations of the non-disabled supervisors at work. On a more symbolic level, he consciously marks this outlaw culture by wearing enormous square glasses that hide his subject position of being a self-advocate at other moments in his life. Robert shows that he is very well aware of the 'rules of the game' in this disabled community, and that he knows how to resist. Almost ironically, he performs this 'role' in line with the stereotypical and essentialist view of being a person having 'intellectual disabilities'. But what did Robert really (want to) gain from his involvement with self-advocacy and support? After all, he paid the price for this? Did I need to encourage him to address his habits, his life world/s? Did I have to empower him? Perhaps I needed to respect him as a 'split subject'? Perhaps he really did embody the generally accepted stereotype that people with 'intellectual disabilities' were passive? Perhaps as an outsider/researcher the fault was mine?

### Big dreamer

Robert marks his residence in a predominantly oppressive disability culture by wearing his enormous square glasses. In his room, however, he takes off his glasses, and dreams of a smooth disability culture and of travelling to Ghent as Mr President. Hidden between the story-lines of his everyday life, Robert articulates and enacts his resistance, his activist knowledge, his desire to make sense of his life. This is mirrored in Robert's invention of his subculture at home, where he isolates himself in his 'kingdom' and becomes the big dreamer.

*Every day I make a trip around the world. My home is my place to think things over. There is my world of thoughts, my kingdom. It is my study room. Thinking*

is dreaming. I am a big dreamer. I think about what I want to do. I want to realize projects. I want to lead my movement in Ghent. Open other people's eyes. Look at me. I don't live in a home, I live at home. I feel at home in my house. My safe nest. But I'm alone there. Most people don't really care about me. The caregivers have no time. They only have time for groups. They have only a small amount of time for each guest. Each of us four disabled men living there gets the same amount of time. They don't make time for us either. We cannot build a relationship. I sometimes want to get out and explore the world outside. Get away from my house for a while. Alone. Off to Ghent, where I am Mr. President! It makes me feel like a world traveller. And that's where I want a new pair of glasses!

### Mr President

The vitality of Robert's sense of agency appears to arise from his self-empowerment and resilience. If people do not support or listen to him, he invents creative strategies of resistance in order to regain a sense of control over his life.

About a year later Robert and I are taking a stroll through the city, getting some fresh air after a busy self-advocacy meeting with the core members. We often do that. He always loves to talk things over after meetings with someone and dot the i's and cross the t's. In fact, I've already completely forgotten the story about his glasses. All of a sudden, Robert grabs my arm and drags me along, I don't know what to make of it. Pearl Vision Optician's. With mischievous twinkles in his eyes, he says: *I'm going to buy a new pair of glasses here! I've been thinking about it really hard at home.*

That day I join him at the optician's where he is helped by a female shop assistant who tests his eyesight and checks his glasses. Meanwhile Robert and I spend an hour in the shop trying on all kinds of frames. We split our sides with laughter. At last he finds a round frame that suits him perfectly and makes him look mature and special. When he pays the deposit, the shop assistant frowns: *'Do you realize that your current glasses are very bad for your eyes, sir?'* she asks, eyeing me meaningfully and almost accusingly. He shakes his head and tells her the story of his uncle making those glasses when he was 18.

However, Robert only wanted to wear his old pair of glasses at work and home. He only used his new, trendy pair of glasses in Ghent, when he was Mr President.

One week later Robert and André (the Vice-President of the group) come to Ghent. 'Ah, there you are, Mr. President and Mr. Vice-President!' I greet



them at the railway station. I am already looking forward to see him show off his new pair of glasses. I get almost in shock when he greets me in his customary way and I notice that he is still wearing those old glasses that almost fall off his nose. 'Where are your new...?' I ask him stupefied. I haven't finished my sentence yet when, as proud as a peacock, he takes his new pair of glasses out of the pocket of his jacket while telling the story to his friend André: 'I've chosen and bought my new pair of glasses all by myself. That is completely different. Those new glasses make me different. I look different, don't I? I am different. I look like a wise professor now.'

When I ask him why he isn't actually wearing his new pair of glasses, he again explains – a little irritated by my continuous questions – that he's still using his old glasses at work and at home. Patiently, he points out that he doesn't want to upset his caregivers who might be shocked to find out that he bought a new pair of glasses with the money from his savings account: *In Ghent I do care what other people say or think. I don't care about people that trouble me. But in Ghent other people are concerned about me. They open my world. That makes a world of difference. They help me to get going. If I don't understand, they tell me the whole story.*

The analysis shows that *being* an impaired subject is not an all-encompassing identity. In that light, Biesta (2011: 145) differentiates between identity and subjectivity. Achieving an identity refers to the belief that 'only a stable and positive identity [can be] obtained through identification with an existing socio-political order'. Subjectivity, in contrast, refers to 'a process of subjectification – a process in and through which political subjectivity is established and comes into existence or, to be more precise, a process through which new ways of doing and being come into existence' (Biesta, 2001: 150). The analysis pressures us to discover and respect Robert's subjectivity, as the moments at which he interrupts the existing social order in a nomadic way have political significance. The cartographic analysis of his subject positions disrupts and destabilises the monolithic master narrative typically told about people with 'intellectual disabilities', and about Robert as one of 'them'. We can, all too easily, bury Robert's territories of activist knowledge under the blanket of a modernist grand narrative about 'intellectual disabilities'. Nevertheless, manifest in his socially created realities as *grey mouse*, *big dreamer* and *Mr President* are the ways in which Robert radically deconstructs and reconfigures the essentialist master narrative of 'intellectual disabilities'. He clearly resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour (Braidotti, 1994) and is at his most powerful when he creates a nomadic subculture when for example he travels to Ghent to become Mr President of the self-advocacy network. As a complex subject, Robert creatively invents and reconfigures a multiplicity of nomadic selves to travel, to cross borders

between the 'us' and 'them', and to move pragmatically, sometimes quietly, in the webs of power, knowledge and social relations that constitute disabling society.

### Concluding reflections

In conclusion, we argue for disability studies as a project of affirmative politics that celebrates embodied diversity, and we propose an epistemology in which the possibility of relational interconnection between self and others are both central, dynamic and productive (Haraway, 1991). This produces a significant shift from a notion of an oppositional and split disabled/non-disabled dichotomy to an open-ended, relational vision of interdependent subjects. Following Deleuze and Guattari, we want to radically challenge essentialist perspectives on impairment and support their proposal for a multi-layered, dynamic and nomadic subject, that is embodied but dynamic, corporeal and in-process, one and multiple, that has to be built up over and over again. Therefore we situate our work in critical disability studies (see Garland-Thomson, 2005; Goodley, 2010). In this emerging interdisciplinary field, dynamic interplays between impaired bodies and minds and various aspects of contemporary politics, culture and society are theorised in order to de-naturalise pathological and essentialist understandings of impairment (see Corker and Shakespeare, 2002; Snyder, Brueggemann and Garland-Thomson, 2002; Snyder and Mitchell, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Price, 2007). We have recently argued that critical disability studies should not ignore 'impairment' as a pre-social, biological essence and unchanging phenomenon, but should theorise it in order to open up unexplored territories of our collective subjectivity (Goodley and Roets, 2008). From this perspective, we need more (ad)ventures in disability studies in which impaired bodies-and-minds are theorised as both complex and vitalist.

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# 11

## Jacques Lacan + Paul Hunt = Psychoanalytic Disability Studies

Dan Goodley

### Introduction

This chapter explores the potential of drawing on psychoanalytic ideas to analyse disabling culture, to make sense of the influence of culture on subjectivities and to unleash possibilities for individual and collective resistance on the part of non/disabled people. The chapter introduces psychoanalysis as an enlightenment project that has informed cultural understandings of the psyche and subjectivity. To analyse psychoanalytic culture we will explore the approach of Lacanian psychoanalysis with a view to understanding the imaginary and symbolic elements of culture. Our intentions will become more specific as we analyse the precarious cultural foundations of ableist society and consider the ways in which disabled people come to occupy a prominent position of disavowal through which the processes of ableism can seep into everyday subjectivities. Simultaneously, possibilities for resistance will be identified, to challenge the cultural violence of ableism. We will then consider the chapter by the renowned British disability activist Paul Hunt, 'A Critical Condition', in the acclaimed book that he edited entitled *Sigma* (1966), and suggest that while this text has been held up as an exemplary critique of the sociopolitical conditions of disability, it also bears the marks of a piece of critical psychoanalytic analysis, which identifies lack and possibility.

### Psychoanalytic culture

Psychoanalysis is engaged with subjectivity: who we are, where we came from and where we might go. Psychoanalysis therefore has much to say about ontology. For Scott Lash (2001: 107), ontology is *the focal point of contemporary society*:

We are obsessed with ... experiencing things, through being in the life-world with them, can open up knowledge of things-in-themselves. To