

4 Embodiment and Enmindment: Processes of Living

In this chapter, you will gain insights into these issues:

- Getting in touch with our bodymind in its environment
- What embodiment and enmindment are
- Finding complexity in body stories
- Performativity and disability
- Intersectionality and its effects on disability frameworks
- Disability in time and space, crip time
- Simulation exercises and their alternatives
- Public aesthetics
- Wellness as a disability value

In this chapter, we will look at what we bring to the classroom and the acts of making sense of living in this world: our own bodies and minds. Disability studies invites us to think about the discourses that determine appropriate objects of knowledge, and the power relations that shape knowledge generation and management. The field also makes us think about protocols, about the rules by which we live together. We can think about what is deemed public and what is deemed private, and why. We can reflect on norms of behavior as historically contingent, that is, related to their time and space, not absolute, or set in stone.

Feeling and Being

The upcoming exercises focus on feeling, experiencing, and analyzing some of these givens in relation to our own selves. This chapter invites you to link your own self, your own sense of being a bodymind, to what we are studying.

For this next exercise, if you are not doing this in a classroom with a group of people, find a place you find calming. I do this exercise in my undergraduate classroom once a week, and I repeat a particular sequence, so that we all get very used to it, and can easily and quickly sink into it. You'll most likely find it a bit weird at first, unless you've done relaxation exercises before – just go with it, for now, and repeat this over a number of days.

EXERCISE 4.1 **Relaxation**

This exercise will take about five minutes. Find a good place for your limbs: you might be sitting or lying down. Settle. And once you have done this, put this book down (having read ahead). I am offering two versions here: one that you can just read and then hopefully remember. And one that you can speak into your phone or other recording device, and play to yourself, for a longer relaxation journey.

In both cases, if you fall asleep, that's fine – you probably needed that. Close your eyes if you are comfortable with this, or keep them soft and open if you are not.

There is no immediate follow-up to this exercise: it's just something to do, with no embarrassing questions afterwards. Enjoy. And whoever is reading the lines, or making up similar ones, speak slowly, calmly, and get into a slow steady rhythm.

Version 1

Breathe. Breathe in and out, in your own rhythm. Feel your weight on your support surfaces. Feel yourself settle. Count 20 in breaths, and take your time.

Version 2

Breathe. Breathe in and out, in your own rhythm. Feel your weight on your support surfaces: feel your weight on the underside of your legs, your posterior, feel it in your arms. How does gravity flow through you? Pay attention to your weight flowing through you, running down toward the earth. Feel the earth rising up to support you, holding you through the surfaces of your chair.

Feel your breath flowing into you. Where do you expand? Where do you contract? Without a need to change anything, just trace where there's flow, where there is expansion. Feel your chest change shape, feel your back shifting with every breath you take.

For the next 10 breaths, just pay attention to the air flowing in and out of you, the rhythm of filling and emptying. Feel yourself shifting shape.

To remind you that it is OK – if your shopping list or to-do list begins to come into your mind, say hello to it, acknowledge it, and let it go. There is no right or wrong here. If you lose the thread of the exercises, just focus on your breathing, in and out, until you are tuned back to the voice guiding you.

And something to end with – slowly, it is time to come back to our shared space. Over the next 10 breaths or so, slowly open your eyes and stretch – and keep your eyes soft, so you are not intruding on someone else's privacy.

.....

Disruption is an experience we all have in many classrooms. There is always a lot going on: air-conditioners or heaters banging and groaning, voices in the corridors, doors banging. In one development of the relaxation exercises above, you can invite these noises into your space, and try to make peace with them as the signs of life that surround us.

Again, this is just a relaxation exercise – but in the context of a disability studies classroom, it is also a lived exploration of the ways we are connected to the world as sensing, breathing creatures, always responsive and alert, often overwhelmed, and with skills to manage ourselves.

EXERCISE 4.2 **Opening Awareness**

This segment can easily be added to or woven into the relaxation sequence above.

Breathe in and out, in your own rhythm. Now become aware of the sounds that surround you. What is happening in our shared space? Listen to the sounds of the corridor, the signs of life of a university, energies flowing through rooms and spaces. Listen to the sounds of the mechanical supports of our lives, to the heater, air-conditioners, lights, phones, laptops, cars.

Try to listen to the melodies and rhythms of these soundscapes, invite them into your consciousness, rather than pushing against them as distractions. What is the particular quality of the sounds? How is your bodymind responding to them? Hear them, listen to them, and then let them go. Examine another sensation that emerges for you. If there are windows in the space, can you feel light on your skin, coming from the sun? Or a draft from heating devices, or freshness from a window?

Chart how your environment touches your skin, how it interacts with your clothes, how you sense yourself in space. Get interested in what is around you, as you sit, eyes closed, breathing, safe and secure.

Development

After engaging in these exercises a few times, over a period of a few weeks, have a discussion in class about connections between disability arts and culture and these explorations of meditation and embodiment.

Embodiment and Enmindment

“Embodiment” is a term that is not easily graspable. It makes something very natural, very unremarked, suddenly remarkable, cultural, and specific: our own sense of how we live. You might notice that as soon as you read this, you are likely to become a bit more self-conscious, maybe feeling your seat on your chair, if you are sitting down, or becoming awkwardly aware of how you are holding this book or reading device. You might suddenly become aware of how you hold your head, and whether or not your shoulders are curved forward as you read. Sorry!

My aim here is not to make you deeply self-conscious, but to draw attention to the remarkable ability of our embodiment to make itself unnoticeable to our senses. Unless we are differently tuned to the world, live with pain, or a heightened sensitivity, we do not usually pay attention to all these things – unless our back is hurting from too many hours reading, or we

are overwhelmed with managing too many incoming sensations. So much of our embodiment, our ways of coming to be and live a body, is invisible to the majority of us, most of the time.

I am adding the term “enmindment” here: it is a similarly charged term, one that I use to draw attention to the non-naturalness of how we come to be enminded, or “have a mind.” We do not have a mind and a body: we are a bodymind. And there are many different states of enmindedness, too, not just one “right” way. That step of rethinking alone presents a significant departure from a cultural orientation that sees a division between body, mind, and self. Against this divisionary thinking – usually shorthanded by calling it Cartesian thought, derived from the philosopher Descartes – stands another Western philosophical tradition, shorthanded as Spinozian thought. Spinoza asked not “what is a body,” but “what does a body do” – shifting the emphasis from the body as object to embodiment as a process, as a way of doing things.

COMMUNICATE WITH ME: D.J. SAVARESE



In this quote from autistic author D.J. Savarese, he writes about sensory overwhelm and modes of regulating his sense input. Can you see the relationship between the relaxation and sensory exercises above, and Savarese’s interdependent management of self and environment?

The first question people freshly asked was why I sometimes have someone hold the pencil while I type or write. The answer is that the person fearlessly makes me feel safe by helping me regulate my nervous system. The adult helps me not to greet the kids directly. If I greet them directly, I get over-stimulated, and my feelings grow so strong that holding them inside is impossible. I desert reason, and my body repeatedly begins to flap or reach freshly toward them. I love greeting kids, but it can cause me to desert self-control temporarily. Another reason why I use a facilitator is to help me focus. The Frees (speaking people without autism) who understand me know how to hear my dear self. They greet my dear self and free me to respond. Treating me as free, they tell me what to do until my breathing feels deep and slow, and my fingers and eyes can once again communicate with each other, so I can type my thoughts. Years of inhaling voluntarily greet hope that I can regulate my own sensory input and hold myself in control. ...

Other kids who knew me in third and fourth grade asked if I can hear because my aide used to sign everything to me. Yes, I can hear, but getting nervous is ultimately deafening to me. What that means is that when I get fearful and desert the real world, I seem to detach my ears and hold my dear self hostage. At times like these, I cannot make sense of what you say, but most of the time I do hear and understand real voices. So talk to me, and I will hopefully respond. If you don’t know me very well, can you just start talking to me? Yes, but I might act like you’re not there at first. It takes dear, real self time to tell my breaking-the-barrier heart to quit pounding so loudly, so I can respond. In biology we studied the central and peripheral nervous systems. This helped me understand why there is a delay in my responses. Stress and excitement cause my sympathetic autonomic system to engage. My body then kicks on my parasympathetic response. Only after homeostasis is achieved can I give a voluntary motor response. (Savarese, 2010)

EXERCISE 4.3 Performing Body Histories



Image 4 Michael Williamson, Flayed (2010), denim, leather, brass, copper; 109" H x 42" W x 3" D

Flayed sprang from rip-stripping rituals, both private and semi-public, repurposing six pairs of my own well-worn thrift-store Levis. The hidden stories of previous wearers infuse the physical traces of my own HiV+ queer journey. With antecedents as diverse as ecclesiastical altarpieces and vestments, the Names Project, and public sexuality, the piece embodies remembrance, transformation, eroticism and celebration. (artist statement)

Describe this image to each other, with the help of the Observation Wheel. How does the sculpture address issues of embodiment, and how what happens to

dominant images of HIV+/AIDS in it? What are your associations, and how does the sculpture play with these associations?

Performativity

“Performativity” refers to performance, as echoed in the word itself: identity is performed, is not a set given, but is rehearsed, shaped, and enacted again and again. But performativity is not performance in the common art practice sense: it is not just a set of choices fully within conscious control. It is not just an issue of selecting the pink rather than blue color scheme, and putting on skirts instead of trousers, although these choices are part of gender performance.

Where performativity operates differently from common understandings of performance are the places where one’s rational engagement is not so easily apparent. What parts of gender performances are outside conscious control?

If we grew up in a language with gendered word endings, unthinking gender as a binary system is hard to do. At the same time, since we are at this point in an English-speaking classroom, all those who grew up or became bilingual have the great advantage of being able to think in different linguistic and cultural systems: a great help in understanding how language shapes ways of thinking.

Repeating, with differences, becomes a productive way of shifting certainties:

If the ground of gender is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (Butler, 1990: 271)

EXERCISE 4.4 Gender Performance

Get together with a colleague, and discuss how gender performance shapes your self-representations on this particular day. Try to be open to many different layers of unconscious choice versus conscious channel, internal versus external influence: styles of sitting and walking, of wearing one's hair, wardrobe choices and the stores we buy things in, parents' and peer approaches to gender performance and how that has influenced you, religious or other cultural influences on you, and whether you vary your gender presentation in different contexts. Take turns, and go back and forth more than twice to allow yourself time to ask new questions as you learn from each other.

Now switch partner, and discuss the same issue, but in relation to race, not gender. Are you aware of how you perform your race?

In all these "disclosure" exercises, you can construct fantasy identities, speak from the position of someone you know but do not identify, or find other ways to circumvent unwarranted or unsafe disclosure and discomfort.

So how does disability enter into these scenes of embodiment/enmindment and their meaning? What does disability studies have to do with issues of performativity? Read through this list of people and their ways of being. How do these scenarios link to your emerging understanding of disability studies?

- a young white woman with chronic stomachache who spends long times in the restroom
- an athlete with a torn meniscus
- a black woman with fibroids
- a survivor of domestic violence, a woman of color, being told by her abuser that she can take more pain than a white woman
- an older man who smells of urine
- a person who is not sure about which restroom he/she/ze can safely use.

To fully understand some of the context for this list, you might need to:

- use your Internet skills to find out about the incidence of fibroids in different racialized communities, and the effect fibroids have on women who experience them
- look up slavery medicine, and how historical ideas about the differential pain sensitivity of raced and gendered groups have developed
- look at access features for transgender people, and think about the effects of a binary gender world on transpeople's sense of belonging and location

- educate yourself about the politics of college sport, and the way physical prowess and financial support are linked together
- link issues of body image and expectations for beauty for young people with eating disorders and ways of medicalizing appearance.

As you can see, to fully understand disability embodiment connections, many different knowledges need to come together: race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability are constituted in relation to one another, they are not separate entities one can pick apart.

WHITE DISABILITY STUDIES

In a provocative polemic, Chris Bell, US disability and HIV/AIDS studies scholar, critiqued the disability field of study. As you read his words, track how they impact you emotionally, however you identify, and how they charge you to be aware of what might not be in your field of vision (to use a visualist metaphor):

White Disability Studies recognizes its tendency to whitewash disability history, ontology and phenomenology. White Disability Studies, while not wholeheartedly excluding people of color from its critique, by and large focuses on the work of white individuals and is itself largely produced by a corps of white scholars and activists. White Disability Studies envisions nothing ill-advised with its leaning because it is innocently done and far too difficult to remedy. (Bell, 2006: 275)

INTERSECTIONALITY

Kimberlé Cranshaw and Patricia Hill Collins are two US-based critical race theorists associated with the concept of “intersectionality,” a way of thinking about oppression and interlocking mechanisms. Here is a quote from Collins’ work that points to two areas of thought that are also deeply woven into contemporary disability theory:

Afrocentric feminist thought offers two significant contributions toward furthering our understanding of the important connections among knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. First, Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates in feminist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing ‘truth.’ Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications. (Collins, 1990: 222)

Disability studies introduces “disability” into this equation. Think about some of the implications of this way of thinking. How are race, gender, class, and disability intersecting? Find discussion points, and share them with the group.

In relation to Collins’ second point: Can embodiment exercises offer tools to redefine reality? Are we exploring new methods of knowing when we pay attention to lived experience? How?

EXERCISE 4.5 Transformation

How can a discussion of intersectionality inform your approach to this poem, by LA-based artist Lynn Manning (2009)?

“The Magic Wand” by Lynn Manning

Quick-change artist extraordinaire,
I whip out my folded cane
and change from black man to blind man
with a flick of my wrist.

It is a profound metamorphosis—
From God gifted wizard of roundball
dominating backboards across America,
To God-gifted idiot savant composer
pounding out chart-busters on a cockeyed whim;
From sociopathic gangbanger with death for eyes
to all-seeing soul with saintly spirit;
From rape deranged misogynist
to poor motherless child;
From welfare-rich pimp
to disability-rich gimp;
And from ‘white man’s burden’
to every man’s burden.

It is always a profound metamorphosis.
Whether from cursed by man to cursed by God;
or from scriptures condemned to God ordained,
My final form is never of my choosing;
I only wield the wand;
You are the magicians.

Development

Can you find a different poem or art work that is as explicit about intersectionality, but written from a different racialized perspective? Reflect on whether that is easy or hard to do, and why.

EXERCISE 4.6 Disability Justice

Research the emerging concept of disability justice, and pay attention to how intersectionality informs perspectives put forward by coalitions of people of color, disability activists, and people active in movements like reproductive justice, anti-police violence, and anti-poverty campaigns.

SPIRIT MURDER



In the quote below, Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear, two professors of education at the University of Alabama, speak to the importance of foregrounding disability in intersectional approaches to education and justice. They analyze connections between the disproportional segregation of students of color in so-called “special education classrooms,” and historical linkages between racialization and disability labeling.

Police brutality, false imprisonment, and educational negligence are commonplace in the lives of people of color – especially those who are located at the margins of multiple identity categories. So common are these practices that CRF [critical race feminist] scholar Patricia Williams has argued that these kinds of assaults should not be dismissed as the “odd mistake,” but should be given a name that associates them with criminality.

Her term for such assaults on an individual's personhood is “spirit murder,” which she describes as the equivalent of body murder:

One of the reasons I fear what I call spirit murder, or disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard, is that its product is a system of formalized distortions of thought. It produces social structures centered around fear and hate, it provides a timorous outlet for feelings elsewhere unexpressed ... We need to see it as a cultural cancer; we need to open our eyes to the spiritual genocide it is wreaking on blacks, whites, and the abandoned and abused of all races and ages. We need to eradicate its numbing pathology before it wipes out what precious little humanity we have left. (Williams, 1997: 234)

Clearly, in our educational institutions there are millions of students of color, mostly economically disadvantaged and disabled, for whom spirit murder is the most significant experience in their educational lives. In fact, it is this recognition of spirit murder in the everyday lives of disabled students of color that forges a critical link between disability studies and CRT/F [critical race theory/feminism] through the intercategory analysis of intersectionality. In other words, utilizing an intercategory analysis from the critical standpoint of disability studies will foreground the structural forces in place that constitute certain students as a surplus population that is of little value in both social and economic terms. That most of these students are poor, disabled, and of color is critical to recognize from within a CRT/F perspective. By failing to undertake such an analysis, we could miss several political opportunities for transformative action. (Erevelles and Minear, 2010: 142–3)

Time and Space Engagement

Let us destabilize and defamiliarize how we think about space and time. As you engage with these readings, think about your own sense of space and time, and how that might differ from other people's.

DEAFSPACE



In an essay in the magazine *Wired*, Liz Stinson reports on the concept of DeafSpace, a design principle that goes beyond provision for one particular user group and toward universal design principles. (If you are unfamiliar with universal design ideas, look it up.) Stinson reports on a new dorm at Gallaudet University in Washington DC, US, a university that focuses on Deaf provision:

[Architect Davis] Lewis points out that the ground floor's community room has a subtle amphitheater-like slope that when viewed through the wall of windows, is clearly in line with the natural incline of the campus' landscape. "Someone walking on the sidewalk on the outside is actually parallel to someone walking on the inside and can communicate across that glass through sign language in a way that literally makes the building transparent," he explains. ...

Similarly smart details like an open kitchen that gathers the sink, stove and other main appliances in the middle island structure, ensures that students never have their backs to each other. ...

The nuances of DeafSpace design extend to smaller design choices, too. Every color choice – the steely blue, red, yellow and bright green of the floors – was chosen to reduce the wash-out effect and enhance natural skin tones so facial expressions are more easily readable. ...

And though the floor-plan is open and airy, the acoustics of the space are tightly controlled thanks to a paneled ceiling and acoustic blanket that is pinned to the underside of the concrete floor. "You have to really control the reverberations going through the building," he says, noting that bad acoustics can mess with hearing aids. "You can be having a conversation with someone and feel like you're having an absolutely private conversation."

All of these clever choices may add up to a space specifically suited to deaf students, but Lewis is quick to point out that DeafSpace principles could (and perhaps should) be the basis for any architecture project. Oddly enough, it seems like having all senses intact has a way of dampening our expectations – we start to make excuses for clunky architecture and unintuitive design, mainly because we're capable of navigating those obstacles without too much trouble. (Stinson, 2013)

Using this excerpt as a guide, discuss with a partner: What would your ideal communication/study environment look like? Go into depth: What kind of aural space, for instance, is most suitable for particular kinds of student activities associated with studying? What would be an ideal talking space for you?

Take a large sheet of paper, and sketch out a floor in a building designed for studying, taking different spatial modalities into account: deaf people, Deaf people, blind people, people with cognitive differences, people who are sensitive to sound, toxically injured people who are sensitive to chemicals, wheelchair users, people who can only walk short distances, etc. (To make it easier, you can just focus on any two combinations of populations here.)

Compare your sketch with others in the room, and see if there are ways of combining the visual/verbal ideas that come up in this sketching brainstorm.

TOUCH/SOUND/IMAGE



Christine Sun Kim uses technology to investigate and rationalize her relationship with sound and spoken languages. Due to her deafness, figuring out what she actually 'owns' remains a long process. She gives workshops and talks on sound art, combines musical notations and several other information systems to produce visual scores and transcripts, conducts a choir that uses facial expressions to 'sing' and vocalizes through a set of piano wires and transducers. (artist statement)



In this image of a performance by Christine Sun Kim, people are watching as pigment vibrates on a loudspeaker, creating visual images out of audio waves. Research her work, and investigate how she plays across senses in her art making.

Image 5 Christine Sun Kim, Chromatic Re(chord), CineDeaf Festival, Rome, 2012

CRIP TIME



In this passage, Australian disability activist Anne McDonald talks about her relationship to time. How does McDonald characterize her experience of time and how time structures her relationship to other people? As you read this passage, can you pick out cues to a non-normate temporality in the form (not just the content)? Can you set up a class or social environment that would offer access to Anne McDonald?

I live by a different time to you.

I do not refer to the usual differences in the way we all experience time. We all know that time speeds by when you have nothing to do; time hangs heavy when you think you could have something to do if people re-ordered their timetables. So tempting is the long sleep in, so wearing the long afternoon left unattended. The time my caregivers spend loitering is negligible, the time I spend waiting is interminable. One's perception of time is dependant [sic] on one's dependency.

But my time is different from yours in a more important way. Imagine a world twenty times slower than this – a world where cars travelled at three miles an hour, lifesavers took an hour to chew, a glass of water half an hour to drink. Pissing would take quarter of an hour, lovemaking longer than it does now (which might be a good thing). A sitcom like Rosanne would run for ten hours, longer than Hamlet and Lear combined.

I live life in slow motion. The world I live in is one where my thoughts are as quick as anyone's, my movements are weak and erratic, and my talk is slower than a snail in quicksand. I have cerebral palsy, I can't walk or talk, I use an alphabet board, and I communicate at the rate of 450 words an hour compared to your 150 words in a minute – twenty times as slow. A slow world would be my heaven. I am forced to live in your world, a fast hard one. If slow rays flew from me I would be able to live in this world. I need to speed up, or you need to slow down.

For food, too, my time is slower than yours. I take an hour to eat lunch – not an hour to go to the restaurant, order, consume my meal, and chat, but an hour just to eat. I used to live in an institution, where I didn't have an hour. Meals for us were done in your time, or even faster, six

minutes per child. If you choked on a mouthful, they stopped your meal and moved on to the next child. Long lunches are now my frequent pleasure; they show me I am free.

Long speeches are another matter. They show me I am only in a larger prison. People will not enter my time to talk to me. Slow the conversation down to my speed, and everybody else wanders away; carry on talking while I finish my sentence, and the conversation has moved on. Too long sentences twenty times slowed try the patience and require better memories than my listeners possess. (McDonald, n.d.)

EXERCISE 4.7 **Spatial Patterns**

Take a large sheet of paper, and, ideally, some colored markers. Make a map of the spaces you inhabit and travel between in a typical week. If the set-up for this assignment is not accessible to all, form small groups, and facilitate the creation of these maps for each other.

Now go over this map and identify where (you think) you meet disabled people, in which venues, and along which routes (disabled people of all kinds):

- Do you gain a sense of segregated or integrated spaces?
- Who is out in public, in which way, in which positions?
- Who is invisible, does or does not pass?
- Which pathways allow access, and who uses them?

EXERCISE 4.8 **Good Kings Bad Kings**

This exercise is based on one particular text. If you read another disability culture fiction work, see how you can adapt this – using your own space exploration to think about the meanings of space and time for different disabled people.

The novel *Good Kings Bad Kings*, by Chicago-based writer Susan Nussbaum (2013), is set largely inside an institution, a facility for disabled juveniles. Nussbaum unfolds issues of the medical-industrial complex and “care” as a profit center, institutionalization and resilience, the complexities of voice, and disability culture and coalition building. It is also a novel that works through spatial arrangements, demarcating the intricacies of knowing an enclosed space versus the kinds of desires and spatial patterns that non-institutionalized people play out.

In a follow-up to the Spatial Patterns exercise above, you can analyze some of the novel’s working through visual-spatial analysis. Take another large sheet of paper and colored markers, and make a map of the characters’ spaces and movement patterns. Which spaces do they traverse and inhabit?

Discuss how the Illinois Learning and Life Skills Center map develops as the novel opens up its terrain. Pay attention to how you become more sensitive to the space within the institution itself, and how inside and outside space connect with each other. You can discuss characters like Joanne Madsen, and how her journey toward partnership emerges through city traversals, and how Yessina Lopez, an inmate of the institution, explores her sexuality through space patterns.

Simulation Exercises and their Weird Sisters

Simulation exercises are a significant component of many disability awareness events. Many disability activists do not like simulation exercises: being blind-folded, having ear muffs, using a wheelchair when not experienced in using it, etc. gives a good sense of being weird, but not a good sense of what it actually means to have a disability, to navigate space with more or less competently acquired skill.

Skill development or the mechanisms of stigma fall out of the picture – all that remains, usually, is a reinforcement of negative stereotypes of disability, and of pity for the poor afflicted. This particular sentiment is not really useful for most disabled people.

Having said that, once in a while, a judiciously used wheelchair race session with provosts or other decision makers might lead to an extra ramp or low-power door openers here and there, and of course, that's a good thing. Politics comes in many different forms.

One problem with simulation exercises and the general frowning upon them in disability studies circles is that they are just so much fun. For a class period, we leave the classroom, experience ourselves differently in space, and play – for that is another way of capturing what we are doing when we do weird and unfamiliar augmentations. So, in the following exercises, sourced from Canadian and US classrooms, the sense of play remains central, but without the notion that these are ways of getting close to non-normate forms of embodiment. These defamiliarizing exercises still focus on interaction with the environment, but with a slightly shifted attention.

EXERCISE 4.9 Buildings and Bodies

Here is a quote by US disability theorist Tobin Siebers, in which he explores links between aesthetic practices, what is considered beautiful, and an unconscious reliance on the “healthy” body:

Perhaps the most revealing example of the relation between the political unconscious and architectural theory exists in the work of Le Corbusier. In 1925 he conceived of a diagram, the Modular, that utilizes the proportions of the body to help architects design buildings and other human habitats. It was to provide a standard scale by which buildings and human beings could be connected. The modular presents the image of an upright male – six feet tall, muscular, powerful, and showing no evidence of either physical or mental disability. It pictures the human body as a universal type, with no consideration of physical variation. Ironically, Le Corbusier wanted to tie buildings to the human beings living in them, but his theories privilege form over function and establish one basis for what Rob Imrie has called the 'design apartheid' of modernist architectural practices. In fact, design apartheid describes with accuracy the exclusionary system apparent in many episodes of the culture wars. Works of art called ugly ignite public furor. Unaesthetic designs or dilapidated buildings are viewed as eyesores. Deformed bodies appear as public nuisances. Not only do these

phenomena confront the public with images of the disabled body, they expose the fact that the public's idea of health is itself based on unconscious operations designed to defend against the pain of disability. (Siebers, 2003: 215–16, citing Imrie, 1996)

Aesthetic Observation and Description (*exercise composed by Jay Dolmage*)

Invite students to creatively explore and test Siebers' claim that our ideas about "beautiful" buildings come from our ideas of "beautiful" bodies. Have them observe and describe the aesthetics of a particular building in close detail and then write about the building using a metaphor of the human body. Pushing the limits of this analogy a bit further, does a fully accessible, ADA-compliant building suggest a new or different kind of body? How might the body be described? (Lewiecki-Wilson et al., 2008: 267)

EXERCISE 4.10 **Accessible Date Assignment**

(Julie Passanante Elman, reproduced here with slight modifications)

Pair up. You must venture out into your surrounding area and plan an imaginary date for you and a wheelchair-using/a blind/Deaf/autistic companion. You MUST travel with your partner(s); do NOT venture out alone! For this assignment, you are required to use only public transportation to travel through New York City [or your own city, if public transport is an option. If it isn't, find out how someone in a power-wheelchair, for instance, gets from a to b], and your date must include the following: a meal, some kind of entertainment and plans for some privacy (Be creative! You're wooing someone!) You should chronicle your trip with a co-authored 2–3 page reflection on your journey. This narrative must also include a multimedia component to illustrate your trip. Multimedia might include digital or cell phone photography, video, screenshots of webpages, sound recordings, brochures or annotated city maps. Be sure to document, both in your essay and multimedia, inaccessible spaces as well as accessible ones as you explore your surroundings. (Elman, n.d. quoted with permission)

Discuss your findings in class:

- What does this exercise tell you about sexuality and space?
- About access and notions of public/private bodies?
- About disability, desirability and spectacle?
- Did you see familiar spaces in unfamiliar ways, and how?
- How did notions of self-presentation, and any differences between your fantasy date and yourself structure how you approached the exercise?

EXERCISE 4.11 **Wellness**

Engage in (at least) three wellness activities, over the span of three weeks, and each time, write a short (less than a page) report on what you did, how it made you feel, and the effects it has on your life.

Options:

- For free: Have a brainstorm. What options for free wellness activities exist on your campus/in your area? Are there free massage chairs, biofeedback programs, Seasonal Affective Disorder, light therapy lamps, ping-pong tables or Kinect game sessions available in your student center? If there is not, can you campaign for something like this? Is there an accessible Jacuzzi somewhere? Are there gardens you can visit?
- Maybe for free, maybe not: You can also choose three yoga classes, three massages, or three meditation sessions, spiritual activity, art session, or anything related.

Enjoy!

Discuss in class how this exercise relates to your wider learning experience:

- What are potential connections between wellbeing, health, illness and disability?
 - What kind of wellness activities are accessible, and are there some that are not?
 - In what way can wellbeing become a value of disability culture? Should it? Why?
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