Chapter 7

Prosthetic Performativity: Deleuzian Connections and Queer Corporealities

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What could be more seductive – to a collectivity of binary breaking neo-materialist academics – than a book organised, to quote the editors, around minoritarian thinking/practices, a (con)text that promises to interpose DeleuzoGuattarian theory with queer becomings to enhance the productivity of both? Of course I shall join the project: I read and respect the work of my co-authors, regret missing the originating conference, and welcome the opportunity to explore my own emerging lines of flight. And yet . . . perhaps I have understood the proposal all the wrong way round. I do indeed work extensively in the field of minoritarian thinking/practices, more specifically in the field of Critical Disability Studies, where I am developing a Deleuzian approach, and yet there seems to be limited overlap between my material concerns and those of others whether they are Deleuzian scholars and theorists of disability. What *is* by now well established and growing, however, is a turn by many of the latter to the possibilities and insights of queer theory as an effective methodology for opening up understanding of the relation between bodies and of the constitution of corporeality in general. The binary of disabled and non-disabled undoubtedly lingers within that approach, but it is increasingly destabilised by the intimation that all forms of embodiment are subject to reconstruction, extension and transformation, regardless of the conventionally identified vectors of change and decay. And there is scope too for a further productive move: the strong take-up of queer theory within disability studies will lead, I suggest, to a reappraisal of the significance of notions like 'desiring-machine' 'assemblage' and 'body without organs', all terms that have the potential to radically disrupt the devaluation of the disabled body. It is not my claim, however, that either queer or Deleuzian theory will come to dominate critical disability studies, but rather that, vis-à-vis the academy, disability studies itself has a theoretical significance which, by

working at the intersection of both, will be capable of taking on the role of critique that queer and Deleuzian theory now occupy.

In this chapter I want to take some initial steps in that direction by addressing the question of what it means to be an embodied subject, and more specifically a sexual subject, primarily as a matter of theory, but always keeping in mind the implications of that project for the material parameters that mark out which bodies are to matter.[1] Given that for any postmodernist analysis the complex issue of sexual subjectivity is always open to question and uncertainty, then to read the problematic, as I intend, through the field of disability, where sexuality has scarcely been theorised at all, is even more troubling. The widespread western uneasiness in acknowledging or even recognising erotic desire – an uneasiness that can be seen at play in the attempted effacement of childhood sexuality, or in the consignment of older people to a sexual limbo – is most clearly mobilised where the form of embodiment itself contests, either deliberatively or accidentally, the standards of normative corporeality. Whether the body in question has been intentionally transformed as in transsexual surgery or enhanced by body-building drug regimes, or has suffered severe trauma such as amputation or spinal injury, then the attributions of sexual desire and practice are likely to invoke discomfort and confusion. Even more disturbing, however, to the point of denial of any sexuality at all, are those modes of embodiment that are both radically anomalous *and* resistant – either projectively or retrospectively – to normative recuperation. The category of congenital or early onset disability is surely paradigmatic in that its exclusion from the very notion of sexual subjectivity is so underproblematised that it is taken almost as a natural fact. It is not necessary to re-essentialise sexuality, however, in order to contest the exclusionary violence of such a view. One option – which I shall go on to distort in a more productive Deleuzian manner – is to follow the phenomenological path taken by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler which makes clear that what is at stake lies in the performativity of sexuality, not as a potentially pleasurable bonus, but as a core element of self-becoming that infuses all aspects of the materiality of living in the world. As Merleau-Ponty (1963) suggests, sexuality is, quite simply, a modality of existence.

That this insight has profound implications for those who are differently embodied, for whom sexuality is both devalued and denied, is beyond question, for it suggests that to silence or strip sexuality of significance is to damage the very possibility of human becoming. What is at stake is an ethical matter[2] that devolves on the necessarily ambiguous nature of sameness and difference that cannot be encompassed by any

facile appeal to equality, not least insofar as that concept is fatally compromised by its implicit reference to a system of values that is both reliant on and hostile to the non-normative. The issue, at heart, concerns the meanings and representations through which an embodied sexuality is constructed as a positive property of the normative subject, yet viewed as deviant, degraded or simply not acknowledged at all in the non-normative subject. Although my ultimate aim is to demonstrate the efficacy of a Deleuzian analysis in pursuit of an affirmative – indeed flourishing – account of disability and sexuality, we cannot yet quite forget Foucault. As with most major postconventional theorists, Foucault largely overlooked the significance of disability,[3] but it is necessary, nonetheless, to start with his work on uncovering the mechanisms in play in the construction and maintenance of the socio-cultural order. Despite some substantial signals of where 'bodies and pleasures' might subvert normative stability, Foucault is clearest in setting out the impressive array of disciplinary techniques that are aimed at the singular body in all its aspects, but above all in its sexual pleasures (Foucault 1979, 1980). As he shows, far from originating in an instinctual, biological ground, sexuality is always in a state of dynamic process that is neither predetermined nor fully open to intentional possibilities. Instead, sexuality is 'organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures' (Foucault 1979: 155). And, indeed, within Foucault's schema, those bodies themselves are equally constructed, and thus open to endless transformation, rather than given entities. Nonetheless his thinking of how those bodies materialise has some curious omissions.

What Foucault notoriously fails to address – as Butler's powerful setting out and take-up of the notion of performativity (1990) makes all too apparent – is the sense in which corporeality as sexed might be differentially constituted along the designated lines of male and female morphology. But that is only the most obvious omission. What, we might ask, of the enactment of other significant, and indeed intersectional, differences, not least that which constitutes the binary between able-bodied and disabled? It is not my suggestion that that particular division can ever be as clearly articulated as the one separating male from female – although both conventional distinctions call for a deconstructive analysis – but that there are similar urgent reasons to interrogate the initial occlusion that covers over difference. In short, and with due regard to the dangers of universalism, should we not conclude that the phenomenology of disability – with its potential absences, displacements and prosthetic additions to the body – generates its own specific sets of sexual possibilities that may both

limit and extend the performativity of self-identity? If the normative standard against which the acceptability of sexual practice is judged is male-dominant, heterosexual intercourse between two adults ideally acting without overt external intervention, then in addition to an extensive range of familiar refusals mobilised by preference, or at least some form of subjective decision, there are also certain morphological constraints that quite simply preclude normative compliance. To have more or fewer limbs than the norm, to be unable to hear or see in the same way as the majority, to have a prostheticised body, or to be conjoined,[4] are all conditions that necessarily disrupt expectations of the 'proper' conduct of sexuality. It is not that any one of us – however we are embodied – can entirely fulfil normative demands, and yet some forms of non-compliance evoke not simply disapproval, but feelings of disgust, albeit a disgust that is threaded through with a certain fascination. Why is it that things of which the body is capable and incapable should generate such negative concern?

At least part of the reason emerges if the socio-cultural description of sexual normativity is underpinned by a more philosophical analysis. What confers value in the modernist western conception of the sexual subject are those familiar categories that constitute autonomy, that comprise notions of self-determination, separation and distinction, and corporeal wholeness. And those are precisely the categories both that will be contested by a Deleuzian approach, and in which the disabled body is deemed to be lacking. In contradistinction, then, to the example of homosexuality, which may offend against specific social mores around sexuality by failing primarily to perform appropriate models of masculinity or femininity, disability touches on a far more entrenched understanding of what it is to be a subject at all. Given that connotations of dependency and vulnerability – regardless of whether they are operative or not – are understood to be antithetical to the attribution of full subjectivity in general, then the anxieties provoked by those qualities are all the more acute when their embodiment appears in a context that is already beset by all manner of putative threats to the autonomous subject. What I mean is that most sexuality is inherently about intercorporeality, about a potential merging of bodies, wills and intentions, about a transmission of matter, and about an intrinsic vulnerability in which the embodied subject is not only open to the other in an abstract way, but is likely to be in a physical contact that is neither wholly predictable nor decidable. That the subject is never settled or simply present as a sovereign self, but intricately interwoven with the other in a dynamic process of self-becoming, is of course the basis of the phenomenological model of embodiment in a more general sense. But it is in the sexual

relation, above all, that Merleau-Ponty's notion of the reversibility of touch (1968), with its implicit confusion of the boundaries between one body and another, and its potential for contamination, takes on a concrete materiality.[5] It is precisely because of the inherent risk of losing self-control and self-definition that the domain of sexuality is so highly disciplined and regulated, so saturated with performative constraints.[6] And where the body of the other is already uncertain and resistant to the demands of normative comportment and expression – as it is paradigmatically in disability – then touch figures a moment of real threat, a troubling of the subject's illusion of purity and self-sufficiency.

The implication is not that the corporeality of people with disabilities is uniquely unstable, vulnerable or interdependent, but rather that the nexus signals overtly what is more easily repressed in those whose embodiment satisfies the normative standards of western modernity. As Henri-Jacques Stiker puts it, disability is 'the tear in our being' (1999: 10), a corporeal mode that in the context of sexuality in particular reveals the incompletion and lack of cohesion of the embodied subject. But if the disabled body refuses recuperation to the project of selfsameness – not simply an-other, not like me, but deeply disruptive of the very parameters that constitute selfhood – then its fate is to be refused any recognition in terms of sexual subjectivity. The response is not so much punitive, as it is with so many forms of sexual otherness, but more typically takes the form of a silencing that intends a denial, and yet reveals precisely the complicity that it seeks to cover over. As Foucault notes:

> Silence itself – the things one declines to say or is forbidden to name . . . is less the absolute limit of discourse . . . than an element that functions alongside the things said . . . [silences] are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (1979: 27)

For Foucault, silence is an element of discursive power, but does it not suggest also a psychic dimension to performativity that he leaves aside? Despite their explanatory power, then, it seems to me that neither the wider phenomenological approach nor the model of exterior governmentality is adequate to the theorisation of sexuality. Although Foucault convincingly charts the operations of a transformatory power over and through the body – albeit one that is interiorised by each individual – he fails to take on the psychic significances of irreducible differences in embodiment. Similarly, despite developing elsewhere a sophisticated understanding of the unconscious processes at work in sexuality (Butler 1993), Butler's account of performativity per se, though non-volitional, remains a largely surface event.

My point is that if body image – and especially internalised body image – is never simply a material reality but a complex and fluid mix of corporeal, psychic and social components, then there is need for a more nuanced understanding, not simply of the *operation* of normative constructions of sexuality, but of the reasons for their emergence. In my attempts to theorise the question of disability and sexuality around such a problematic, I initially moved towards an analytic derived from psychoanalysis, particularly as deployed postconventionally. Despite its efficacy in uncovering the roots of the normative anxiety that grips that troubling conjunction, however, the paradigm seems to provide no way of unsettling a cultural imaginary that is closed to a more positive model of corporeally anomalous sexual relationality. In other words, psychoanalysis critiques but does not fully queer the parameters of what is to count and what is to be occluded. Like women's sexuality, or more specific categories like lesbian desire, that have suffered a certain erasure in which the unsaid indicates an unthinkable anxiety, the conjunction of disability and sexuality is referred back to an explanatory model that implicitly privileges active phallic desire and the illusory quest for the restoration of an originary corporeal unity. I am not claiming that either the psychic or performative operations of gender and disability are directly comparable, but that both pose the question of whether any model based on the normative performance of male-dominant forms of genital sexuality has the capacity to encompass its excluded others. Having explored the seductive lure of the psychoanalytic approach and its inherent shortcomings more fully elsewhere (2007), I will pass swiftly over that trajectory here and move on to open up an alternative that retains a sense of psychic underpinnings, but owes more to Deleuze and Guattari than to Freud or Lacan.

As I understand it, the psychoanalytic model, which offers an explanation of the mechanisms by which the emerging subject moves from infantile to adult sexuality and is recognised as a sexual being, gives no real consideration to what difference morphological diversity would make. Aside from the supposedly inescapable biological sex of male or female organised around the materiality of the penis, other differences play minimal part in the relevant theory. For both Freud and Lacan the acquisition and stabilisation of self-image is dependent on a certain corporeal introjection, not directly of the infant's own bodily boundaries and sensations, but of an ideal body image representing, as Elizabeth Grosz puts it, 'a map of the body's surface and a reflection of the image of the other's body' (1994: 38). In place of the maternal-infant dyad, the infant experiences a split which mobilises an endlessly substituted desire

for that irrecoverable originary but undifferentiated wholeness. But if, as Lacan implies, the putative unity of the self relies on the reflective unity of the specular other – indeed on jubilantly casting aside the infant's actual 'motor incapacity and nursling dependency' (1977: 2) – then subsequently would not that new-found sense of self be radically shaken by any mark of dis-unity in the external image? The disabled body, then, could be read as both insufficient as an object of desire, and an unwelcome intimation of the *corps morcelé* that the emergent subject must disavow or abject. It is not that the disabled infant would fail to negotiate the mirror stage – for in the psychic register all self-identity is based on mis-recognition. Rather, in its apparent lack of wholeness, the infant becomes other, its self-positioning as a subject of desire – like that of women – denied recognition. In such an account, the potential of difference to queer the terms of reference is effectively closed down. To escape the Lacanian impasse, perhaps it is necessary to look elsewhere, and turn to a DeleuzoGuattarian alternative.

In decisively rejecting the Freudian/Lacanian model of desire as representative of, and mobilised by, lack, and by an implicit and impossible promise of completion and unity in a return to the mother, Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1987) rewrite desire as productive, excessive to the embodied self, and unfixed. Rather than being goal-driven and singular, sexuality becomes, then, a network of flows, energies and capacities that are always open to transformation, and so cannot be determined in advance. Where for Lacan, the *corps morcélé* of early infancy – and arguably the persistence of that body as a figure of disability – is seen as that which must be covered over in order to bring into being the unified self who will become a sexed and gendered subject in the Symbolic, Deleuze and Guattari celebrate precisely corporeal dis-organisation. The fragmented body is reconceived as the body-without-organs, the body in a process of corporeal becoming, that mobilises desire as a fluid indeterminacy that has no fixed aim or object, and which could always be otherwise. Instead of figuring the conventional ideal of autonomous action, separation and distinction, Deleuzian embodiment persists *only* through the capacity to make connections, both organic and inorganic, and to enter into new assemblages – which in turn are disassembled. Clearly the meaning of the body-without-organs is not intended as a denial of corporeality as such, but is rather a way of rewriting it that avoids the Lacanian narrative of a move from fragmentation to – at very least the illusion of – a temporally and spatially stable unity that grounds the subject. It is, then, the normative organisation of the body that is at stake here, an organism

and organisation that closes down and fixes its possibilities rather than operating as 'a body populated by multiplicities' (1984: 30). What Deleuze and Guattari want to promote is not a return to the staging of the pre-subjectival infant body, but a deconstruction, a queering, of *all* bodies that entails both 'taking apart egos and their presuppositions' and 'liberating the prepersonal singularities they enclose and repress' (1984: 362).

To think specifically of the disabled body in this context is not to single it out as different, still less as inadequate. Rather it is a material site of possibility where de-formations, 'missing' parts and prostheses are enablers of new channels of desiring production unconstrained by predetermined – or at least normative – organisation. Although the risk of stalling around an assumption of lack is always present, as it is with any body, the anomalous nature of disability holds out the promise of an immanent desire that embraces the strange and opens up to new linkages and provisional incorporations. As Katherine Ott (2002) points out, the term 'prosthesis' has acquired rich abstract meaning in both psychoanalysis and cultural studies as a metaphor signalling some kind of mediation between an artificial device and the supposedly natural body, but it has also a complex material history mapping the literal interface between flesh and machine. I use the term in both senses, but want to stress the way in which people with disabilities may materialise some of the issues that underlie my concern with the performativity of the sexual self. On the one hand, prosthetic devices are intended to replace or enhance normative function and appearance, figuring, in other words, a Foucauldian sense of the technological disciplining and regulation of the body, but on the other, their use may be radically subverted.[7] The intercorporeality – or rather the concorporeality – of the organic and inorganic, the assembly and disassembly of surprising connections, the capacity to innovate, and the productive troubling of intentionality are all experienced by disabled people who are prepared to explore the uncharted potential of prostheses. As with other minoritarian thought and practices, like the feminine, the breaking through of the expected limits and constraints of the resources to hand can both intensify the decomposition of binaries – body/machine; active/passive; biology/technology; interior/exterior – and multiply non-repressive forms of passionate vitality. As Deleuze and Guattari note: '[d]esire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow' (1984: 5).

Interestingly, this freeing up of desire, both in its object and its aim, may remind us not of the Lacanian infant who after all greets its mirror

stage escape from disorganisation with – as Lacan puts it – 'jubilation', but of the polymorphous perversity of the Freudian infant, who finds undifferentiated sexual pleasure not only in every aspect of its own body, but in a variety of external objects.[8] As Freud points out, such perversity in the trajectory of desire persists in adulthood even in such everyday practices as kissing (insofar as it has no genital aim), but for the most part, it must be abandoned – repressed that is – not for the sake of psychic health, but in the interests of socio-political organisation. Nonetheless, despite the potentially productive tension that is set up by Freud's recognition that the price of such repression is neurosis (1962: 104), his reluctant turn away from polymorphous perversity shuts down precisely the queer reading of desire that Deleuze and Guattari are to reopen. It is sometimes tempting to think of Freud as the first – albeit thwarted – queer theorist, but Elizabeth Grosz, in her own turn to a Deleuzian analytic, offers a less charitable view of polymorphous perversity. She warns against 'adopting the psychoanalytic position, which takes erotogenic zones as nostalgic reminiscences of a preoedipal, infantile bodily organization' or 'seeing the multiplicity of libidinal sites in terms of regression' (1995: 199). And it is precisely in the refusal to see alternative sexual pleasures as regressive that Foucault prefigures the queering of desire that is associated with Deleuze. Foucault's interest is both in what bodies can do, in how they are productive, rather than in how they respond to unconscious impulses, and in how the erotic can be redistributed to non-genital sites. In regard to S/M practice, for example, he is adamant that, '[t]hese practices are insisting that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on' (Halperin 1996: 320 quoting Foucault). People with disabilities who wish to assert an active sexuality might well find resonances in Foucault's words, not because they would necessarily identify with the celebration of fetishism as such, but because the dis-unified or prosthetic body demands a degree of innovation and inventiveness that most of us rarely experience. For Deleuze and Guattari, that sexual creativity is surely at the heart of their anti-Oedipal project.

The conventional psychoanalytic approach that supports the normative post-Enlightenment paradigm of a closed and invulnerable subject whose sexuality is organised around the presence or absence of the phallus, and whose sexual aim is to replace lack with plenitude, is supplanted, then, by a model whose potential positivity is unconstrained. In place of prohibition, repression and disavowal, Deleuzian desire is expansive, fluid and connective, grounding sexuality itself as highly

plastic and as no longer reliant on the terms of any binary opposition such as those of male/female, active/passive or human/animal. And because the emphasis shifts from the integrity of the whole organism to focus instead on the material and momentary event of the coming together of disparate parts, bodies need no longer be thought of as either whole or broken, able-bodied or disabled, but simply in a process of becoming through the unmapped circulation of desire. At the same time, desire itself takes on a wider meaning that liberates it not simply from the bounds of genital sexuality per se, but more generally from the restricted parameters of what is usually defined as *sexual* relationality, whether that is accepting of, or challenging to, the conventions. Skin on skin in the bedroom is no more privileged than the sensation of fine sand running through my toes, or the sweet taste of a juicy peach on my tongue. In an essay that is explicitly concerned to rethink lesbian desire, but which might equally open up the arena to the erotics of disability, Elizabeth Grosz takes her cue from Deleuze and Guattari. She writes:

> there is not, as psychoanalysis suggests, a predesignated erotogenic zone, a site always ready and able to function as erotic: rather, the coming together of two surfaces produces a trading that imbues eros or libido to both of them, making bits of bodies, its parts or particular surfaces throb, intensify, for their own sake and not for the benefit of the entity or organism as a whole. They come to have a life of their own, functioning according to their own rhythms, intensities, pulsations, movements. Their value is always provisional and temporary, ephemeral and fleeting: they may fire the organism, infiltrate other zones and surfaces with their intensity but are unsustainable. (1995: 182)

Above all, what mobilises or stalls the rhizomatic proliferations of desire is the extent to which the connective nodules escape organised patterns of operation.

Desire is not an element of any singular subject; it is not pregiven; it is neither possessed nor controlled; it represents nothing; and nor does it flow directly from one individual to another. Instead it comes into being through what Deleuze and Guattari (1984) call 'desiring-machines', assemblages that cannot be said to exist outside of their linkages and interconnections, and which may encompass both the animate and inanimate, the organic and the inorganic. A desiring-machine expresses no necessary cohesion, continuity or unity, and nor do its part-objects seek a return to an originary wholeness, or find completion in an absent other.[9] What mobilises desire are not the endless substitutes for psychic loss, but the surface energies and intensities that move in

and out of multiple conjunctions that belie categorical distinctions and hierarchical organisation. For Deleuze and Guattari, such conjunctions always engage the entire social and environmental field, centring not on the capacities of a unique individual, but on the scope and range of nomadic flows of energy – lines of flight – so that embodiment itself extends beyond the merely human. It is not that there is no distinction to be made between one corporeal element and the next, or indeed between the human and animal, or human and machine, but rather that becoming entails an inherent transgression of boundaries that turns the pleasures – sexual or otherwise – of the embodied person away from dominant notions of human subjectivity. As Tamsin Lorraine puts it: 'The self, rather than having a perspective upon and apart from the world of temporal becoming, is part of a process of dynamic differentiation' (2000: 185). This is not to deny that the interaction of bodies in time and space continues to produce subject effects, but it is only when those effects begin to coalesce and settle that the familiar sovereign individual of the post-Enlightenment could be said to appear. The performative repetition of particular patterns and modes of organisation serve to construct an illusion of stability and permanence which is, nevertheless, undermined not only by what Butler (1993) sees as the inherent slow-motion slippage of all reiterative processes, but by the unruliness of the leaky bodies whose fluidity, energies and contingencies are engaged in mutual transformations. These are bodies that come together – and break apart – in multifarious ways, always frustrating the anticipated outcome of performativity in consistent sexual identities. And where the stress is on the multiple possibilities of connection rather than on the putative dangers of contiguity and the risk of touch, then anomalous bodies are no longer a source of anxiety, but hold out the promise of productive new becomings.[10]

The stage is set, then, for a potential reclamation of disability and desire that is a very long way from the medium of an Oedipalised sexuality centred on the familial drama of 'mommy, daddy and me'. Like the female body, the corporeality of disability has widely figured in the western imaginary as disordered and uncontrollable, both seductive and repulsive, as threatening contamination of those who come too close, linked to disease, and so lacking in boundaries as to overwhelm normative subjectivity (Shildrick 2002). The link with sexuality is either disavowed or seen as overdetermined and abased, a matter of dangerous encounter that cannot but trouble the stability and self-presence of the unwary subject. That none of this reflects the reality of the lives of people with disabilities, or would be articulated as such, is of little consequence.

What matters is the power of the cultural imaginary to effectively exclude – in representative terms at least – a whole category of people from an important element in the socially normative process of self-identity. In contrast, what is offered by Deleuze and Guattari opens up a positive model of productive desire, the take-up of which is limited neither to those who already fulfil certain corporeal criteria, nor to the sedimentation of a characteristically modernist form of autonomous subjectivity. In place of the limits that the ideal of independence imposes on desire, the emphasis is on connectivity and linkage. It is not that people with disabilities are unique in relying on a profound interconnectivity, but that where for the normative majority such a need may be covered over in the interests of self-sovereignty, it has come to figure a deficiency that ostensibly devalues those unable to make such choices. The disabled woman who needs an assistant or carer to help her prepare for a sexual encounter – be it in terms of dressing appropriately, negotiating toilet facilities or requiring direct physical support to achieve a comfortable sexual position – is not different in kind from other women, but only engaged more overtly in just those networks that Deleuze and Guattari might characterise as desiring production. Similarly, a reliance on prosthetic devices – the linkages between human and machine – would figure not as limitations but as transformative possibilities of becoming other along multiple lines of flight.

We should caution, nonetheless, against taking an overly romanticised view of disability in which desire is always able to operate as an unchallenged positivity. There are clearly some constraints, some morphological differences and discontinuities, that continue to impede the flow of energies, particularly if that flow has been mapped in advance. But the model I propose here is not about unrestricted choice, or about a freedom that opens up all and every possibility. Like Butler's original exposition of performativity (1990), which was widely misunderstood to offer unbounded access to self-stylisation, the notion of desiring production must always be contextualised. The rewriting of performativity as intensely connective, and the slippage of reiteration as a more radical discontinuity, highlights precisely a lack of control that may exacerbate the frustration of intentionality for some people with disabilities. But rather than offering a route to sexual identity, the model proposes something rather different: a break with the putative emergence of a coherent sexual subject from the practices of embodiment, and a turn to the libidinal intensities which play not across unified and integrated bodies, but at points of connection between disparate surfaces or entities that may or may not be organic. The desire produced in and over the dis-organised

body owes little to genital sexuality or the goal of self-completion in sexual satisfaction. As Elizabeth Grosz notes:

> desire is an actualisation, a series of practices, bringing things together or separating them, making machines, making reality. Desire does not take for itself a particular object whose attainment it requires; rather it aims at nothing above its own proliferation or self-expansion (1994: 165)

and elsewhere she characterises the appeal and power of such desire as 'its capacity to shake up, rearrange, reorganize the body's forms and sensations, to make the subject and body as such dissolve into something else' (1995: 204–5). It is not that Deleuze and Guattari allow no place for subject effects – 'you have to keep small rations of subjectivity . . . to enable you to respond to the dominant reality' (1987: 160) – but that they are unsustainable in fixed form, beyond the temporary or provisional. The molar politics of identity and subjectivity are never entirely dismissed, but are constantly confronted and displaced by the molecular politics of flows and intensities. What matters to Deleuze is the transformative potential of the process of becoming. In being excluded from full sexual subjectivity, then, those with disabilities have lost nothing of permanent value.

What this all indicates is that were the western privileging of autonomous individuality and integrated identity less rigid, the performativity of (sexual) subjectivity could be radically transformed. Despite its commitment to the productive instabilities of discursive construction, the notion of performativity remains focused on a form of individual agency that might be more radically queered by taking account of the emergence of the self precisely through an erotics of connection. Indeed, Deleuze himself goes further in his deconstruction of the relationship between a willing agent and desire: 'Far from pre-supposing a subject, desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of their power to say "I"' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 89). As more and more theorists are beginning to acknowledge, the corporeality of disability is not that of an other fixed in a binary relation to the normatively embodied self, but is already queer in its contestation of the very separation of self and other.[11] The so-easily silenced whisper of a kinship that would be denied – for it unsettles the foundations of western subjectivity – is growing into a roar that marks a new understanding of embodiment which owes much to Deleuze. Having now entered 'the next century' of which Foucault (1977) claimed Deleuze as the philosopher, I should like to offer the equally bold speculation that the Deleuzian project will be realised at least in part through the medium of rethinking disability.[12] Once again, it is not that

disability is a unique case, but only that its forms of embodiment, and its embrace of prosthetic enhancement, seem to overdetermine the fragility and instability of corporeality in general. The postmodernist acknowledgement that all bodies – normative and non-normative alike – are in a constant process of construction and transformation, brought about not least through interactions in the spatio-temporal dimensions of the social world, means that all are potentially hybrid, nomadic, machinic assemblages. Moreover, in the specific differences of its capacities – particularly with regard to its libidinal investments – the disabled body exposes the queerness of all sexuality.

That disability should be perceived as dangerous, and that its erotic capacities should be disavowed, speaks to the threat that it is able to unsettle the normative constraints that attempt to limit adult sexuality to a highly regulated set of impulses that cover over the rhizomatic operation of desiring-machines. For the most part, the libidinal possibilities of surprising, unpredictable, non-respectable, even dangerous conjunctions, which are in principle open to all of us, are kept in check by the rigid and repetitive structures of a normative sexuality that cannot easily countenance unauthorised variation or experimentation. To limit the erotic to the law of desire as it operates within the hegemony of the Symbolic is to assent to a system that can give no adequate account of corporeal difference nor of an alternative sexual imaginary, yet to be realised. It is to close down on fluidity, on connection and on intercorporeality, and to impose prohibition or denial on those who are assigned to positions of social marginality. For people outside the mainstream, then, those who are transgendered, HIV positive or people with disabilities, the choice may be between an apparent asexuality that comforts normative expectations in its very powerlessness to mount a challenge, or an expression of desire that will be necessarily exploratory and transformative. It is not of course that all disabled people are sexual radicals or have any urgent wish to liberate their desire from the constraints of normative thought and practice; as for all members of regulatory societies, it is impossible to stand outside the networks of disciplinary power/knowledge by any simple act of will. Nonetheless, as comparative outsiders, many such minoritarian figures are already engaged in a queer performativity that takes off from the innovative and intimate connections that are often a necessary part of life with a disability. I am thinking here both of the many forms of personal assistance that are available in the west, and which inevitably entail an embodied relationality that goes beyond normative encounters between putatively autonomous selves, and also of the enormous range of prosthetic devices that already may be incorporated into the experiential field

of a person with a disability. For others, it is not so much a matter of describing present practice but of thinking otherwise about the promise of connectivity, and about what would follow from attending not to the being of a subject, but to the becoming and doing that constitutes a provisional and contingent subjectivity.

The substantive specificity of disabled bodies nonetheless poses something of a conundrum for those willing to deploy a Deleuzian rather than more generalised queer approach to the problematic of bodies that matter. Where queer theory explicitly intervenes in the parameters of social exclusion – and to an extent must always reiterate binary thinking in order to contest it – it readily lends itself to the critique of mainstream socio-cultural values and regulatory norms that people with disabilities engage with. The idea of assimilation is thoroughly rejected, and as Foucault recognised: 'It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate' (1997: 153). As such the lure of identity politics lingers on, bolstered by queer theory's oppositional take on normativity that has broadened out to include differences in race, ethnicity and potentially embodiment, as well as sex and sexuality. The embrace of multiple and diverse minorities undoubtedly casts the dominant standards in an ambiguous light that troubles the centre, but it also appears to gesture towards the reappearance of a stable subject. In contrast, when Deleuze and Guattari refer to minoritarian practices, they are not ontologising any given category as an identity; instead 'all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian' (1987: 291). Moreover, their notions of becoming-woman, becoming-animal or becoming-minoritarian are not simply conceptually unattached to the groupings named and open to all, but refer to processes that operate only through the assemblages temporarily brought about by radically disparate machinic connections. Where, then, does this leave the substantive minorities, like people with disabilities? From a DeleuzoGuattarian perspective, they too must enter into the process of becoming, a process that entails both contesting the relations of power that structure every fixed subject position and leaving behind any existing modes of identification. It is risky and uncomfortable, but necessary insofar as the disabled body, however well adapted or accommodated, is – like the figure of 'woman' to whom Deleuze and Guattari consistently refer – always constituted by the repressive organisation of modernist principles.

So long as all fixed and unified identities rely on the performative exclusion of an abject domain of the unthinkable (Butler 1993), then certain bodies will never matter. If, on the other hand, our mutual and irreducible connectivity were recognised as quite simply a condition of

becoming, and as the ground for the positivity and productive play of desire, then the notions of independent agency and self-containment that mark the normative subject might lose their exclusionary power. In place of the liberal demand for rights, choice and self-determination that presently shape the dominant discourse of disability activism, a more open and productive model that celebrates the qualities of those already living at the margins might be proposed. It is their very dis-organisation, and their necessarily overt contiguities with an array of others, that better enables such figures to breach the boundaries and explore what lies beyond the normative limits. An open-ended and ambiguous yet more positive Deleuzian mode of becoming has significant implications, not only for the hitherto disavowed conjunction of disability and sexuality but for everyone. The point is move away from the notion that desire represents or substitutes for an originary loss that codes all bodies in the same way; instead it maps the multiplicity of becoming. And once the plasticity of the erotic is acknowledged rather than repressed, then the circulation of desire and the partial satisfactions of pleasure would be a matter of differential exploration and experimentation, rather than the site of silence and shame. There are of course dangers – not all lines of flight will soar – but the possibilities of reconstruction and transformation, in sexuality as elsewhere, speak to the hope of personal and social flourishing. That term is deeply unfashionable within postconventional discourse, but it is precisely what I mean.

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Notes

1. The material in this chapter is a reworked and expanded version of my article 'Queering Performativity: Disability after Deleuze' in the e-journal *SCAN: J. of the Media Arts* 2004, 1.3.
2. To speak of ethics in a postconventional sense is to move beyond the parameters of rights and duties or of harms and benefits in order to engage with the nature of encounter, and the relation between self and other.
3. His text *Abnormal* (Foucault 2003), which focuses on the monstrous, comes closest to exploring disability.
4. See Shildrick (2004) for an extended discussion of the sexed/sexuate performitivity of conjoined twins.
5. It is perhaps somewhat unusual to move towards a DeleuzoGuattarian perspective through phenomenology, but while Deleuze eschews phenomenology as such, he clearly takes up the notion of reversibility, and other aspects of Merleau-Ponty's work. As Dorothea Olkowski remarks: 'desire turns upon Deleuze's conception of the body, so that when the connections between flesh, feeling, and desire are examined in terms of the body, the relationship between Merleau-Ponty, Bergson and Deleuze begins to reveal itself to be as deep as it is broad (2002: 11).
6. Sexuality is the paradigmatic site in which it is clear that corporeal performitivity is inherently socially inscribed, always engaged with the other and never singular as Butler sometimes seems to imply. As Rosalyn Diprose (2002) points out, my meanings are never constituted personally.
7. I have been particularly impressed by the work of two Masters students at York University, Toronto. Loree Erickson (2005) has very effectively used photographic material to exhibit her own sexual inventiveness that highlights her bodily difference and long-term wheelchair use, while Jennifer Paterson (2007) has made a preliminary study of the participation of disabled people in the Toronto BDSM community.
8. It is unlikely, however, that even this polymorphous pleasure would fully appeal to Deleuze and Guattari. As Parisi explains, their understanding is that the economy of pleasure 'represses all divergent flows from the cycle of accumulation and discharge, the imperative of the climax: the channelling of all relations towards the aim of self-satisfaction' (2004: 198–9). See also Deleuze (1994) for his disagreements with Foucault over the concept of pleasure.
9. Deleuze and Guattari pose the question of 'how to think about fragments whose sole relationship is sheer difference . . . without having recourse to any sort of original totality . . . or to a subsequent totality that may not yet have come about' (1984: 42).
10. It is worth noting that where the ideas developed by Deleuze and Guattari with regard to the connectivity and implications of desiring-machines have struggled for understanding, the similar and almost contemporaneous – albeit partially ironic – imaginings of Donna Haraway in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' – originally a 1983 conference paper – have become, for feminist and queer theorists at least, seminal fare. Of the 'illegitimate fusions of animal and machine' she writes: 'These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of "Western"

identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind' (1991: 176).

11. Disability theorists have approached the notion of queer in both more and less radical ways, but most would concur with Michael Warner that queer is defined 'against the normal rather than the heterosexual' (1993: xxvi). See in particular work by Shelley Tremain (2000), Robert McRuer (2003), McRuer and Abby Wilkerson (2003), as well as several other articles focusing on the intersections between disability and queer in a recent issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9.1–2 (2003). Many of the papers from the seminal 2002 *Queer-Disability Conference* in San Francisco are available online at http://www.disabilityhistory.org/dwa/queer/paper_bell.html
12. Although to date I know of few other disability theorists working directly on and around Deleuzian insights, this is, I hope, no mere rhetoric. In critical disability studies at least, the limits of liberal notions of equity and justice have already mobilised a willingness to explore alternative paradigms, and specifically queer theory. Given the material concerns at stake, the step into a more fully committed Deleuzian approach seems inevitable. To make the move in the reverse direction, to recognise that the field of disability might serve as an exemplar of many of the key concepts – not only linked to desire but to the notion of becoming-minoritarian – may take longer, but I take it that it is as apposite to Deleuzian theory as gay sex once was to the emergence of queer theory.