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WHAT CAN DISABILITY STUDIES LEARN FROM THE CULTURE WARS?

Tobin Siebers

My concern in this essay is threefold. First, I will be arguing that disability is a significant register in the many and various disputes that have come to be known as the “culture wars.” The culture wars are not only about what culture will mean in the future but also about who deserves to be included in our culture, and the determining factor in these political decisions often depends on being able to display a healthy body and mind. Statements that label cultural attitudes, minority groups, lifestyles, and works of art as “healthy” or “sick” are not metaphors but aesthetic judgments about the physical and mental condition of citizens. My general purpose is to rethink the culture wars from the point of view of disability studies, a revision that entails a critique of the reliance of cultural and aesthetic ideals on the healthy and able body as well as an appreciation of alternative forms of value and beauty based on disability.

Second, I want to suggest that a political unconscious represses the role of disability in cultural and aesthetic representation. This issue is by necessity related to my first concern. Fredric Jameson argues that the experience of human community functions as a “political unconscious” that represents the “absolute horizon” of all interpretation (1981, 17).¹ The political unconscious, he concludes, determines the symbolism by which the forms of aesthetic objects are given as representations of community, but what has not been considered is whether the political unconscious may also regulate aesthetic forms, excluding those suggestive of broken communities and approving those evocative of ideal ones. My specific test case here is the controversial *Sensation* exhibition shown at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in

1999, but my main point will be that the inclusion of disability changes the definition of the political unconscious in surprising ways.

Third, I claim that aesthetics is pertinent to the struggle to create a built environment accessible to people with disabilities. The debate in architecture has so far focused more on the fundamental problem of whether buildings and landscapes should be universally accessible than on the aesthetic symbolism by which the built environment mirrors its potential inhabitants. While universal access must remain the ambition of the disability community, a broad understanding of disability aesthetics reveals the hidden inhibitions and defense mechanisms that work against advances in universal design and undercut the political and social participation of people with disabilities. It also shows that aesthetic disgust with disability extends beyond individual disabled bodies to the symbolic presence of disability in the built environment. In short, we see again the influence of a political unconscious. My particular goal is to give some idea of the group psychology that lies beneath the rejection of disability and accessible architecture from the public sphere. This part of my argument requires as a jumping-off point a brief consideration of the Heidelberg Project in Detroit.

In 1990 conservative politicians attacked the ranting profanity and feral behavior of performance artist Karen Finley to make their case to close down the National Endowment for the Arts. The “talented toiletmouth,” whom the NEA has funded on three occasions, fills the stage with shrieks and spit, sometimes stripping off her clothes and smearing chocolate, alfalfa sprouts, and yams over her buttocks. Her wild orations about excrement and menstruation rattled the shock-proof veterans of the New York City downtown art scene in the late 1980s—and outraged the enemies of the NEA who could not grasp the critical element in her performances. “I use certain language,” Finley explains, “that is a symptom of the violence in the culture” (Lacayo 1990, 48). For the conservatives, Finley and other controversial artists are obscene and un-American, one more sign, as Newt Gingrich put it, of “the cancer eating away at our civilization.”²

In 1996 a Michigan Farmer Jack store fired Karl Petzold, a courtesy clerk who bagged groceries for ten months, after shocked customers complained about his verbal outbursts of profanity and racial

epithets. Petzold is one of two hundred thousand Americans with Tourette's syndrome, a neurological condition sometimes characterized by wild orations, often of a profane or offensive nature. The Michigan Court of Appeals heard the case to determine whether Tourette's syndrome is a disability worthy of protection under the Michigan Disabled Civil Rights Act. Farmer Jack attorneys made the argument that Petzold's verbal outbursts clearly violated the company's rules barring abusive language or rudeness to customers. Petzold's attorney argued that his client never said the words at issue, only fragments of them, and that workplace accommodations should be granted for his disability, including allowing him to wear a surgical mask to muffle his outbursts or to carry a card to explain his condition to customers. In the end, the court found in favor of Farmer Jack, ruling that the plaintiff's disability affected his performance on the job. About the lawsuit Petzold commented, "I just want to do what's right and help other people who have my disorder so they don't have to go through what I've gone through."³

These two episodes may seem worlds apart, their resemblance superficial. The first turns on questions of aesthetic taste. The second is about political inclusion. But they express with equal power the current struggles in this country about the ideal of a common culture. Do certain kinds of bodies have greater civil rights than others? Which is more important, the baby's body or the mother's body? Who should bear the cost to make public buildings accessible to people with disabilities? Who gets to have sex with whom? Whose bloodlines will Americans claim as their birthright? These are political questions for the simple reason that they determine who gains membership, and who does not, in the body politic, but the apparent oddity of the culture wars consists in the fact that the debates over these questions have used aesthetic rather than political arguments. The flash points in the battle are not on the Senate floor or in the chambers of the powerful but in classrooms, museums, theaters, concert halls, and other places of culture. Opposing sides tend not to debate political problems directly, focusing instead on the value of reading certain books; the decency of photographs, paintings, and statues; the offensiveness of performances and gestures; the bounds of pornography; the limits of good taste. The culture wars are supposed to be more about who has culture than who gets into

the culture, and yet it is difficult to raise one issue without raising the other.

Aesthetics tracks the emotions that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies, but aesthetic feelings of pleasure and disgust are difficult to separate from political feelings of acceptance and rejection. The oppression of women, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, blacks, and other ethnic groups often takes the form of an aesthetic judgment, though a warped one, about their bodies and the emotions elicited by them. Their actions are called sick, their appearance judged obscene or disgusting, their minds depraved, their influence likened to a cancer attacking the healthy body of society. Such metaphors not only bring the idea of the disabled body to mind but also represent the rejected political body as disabled in some way. The culture wars appear to be as much about the mental competence to render judgment, the capacity to taste, and the physical ability to experience sensations as about a variety of controversial judgments, tastes, and feelings. They are as much about the shapes of the individual bodies accepted or rejected by the body politic as about the imagination of a common culture.

The status of disability, then, is not just one problem among others in the culture wars. Disability is in one way or another the key concept by which the major controversies at the heart of the culture wars are presented to the public sphere and through which the voting public will eventually render its decisions on matters both political and aesthetic. For to listen to opposing sides, the culture wars are about nothing more or less than the collective health of our country.

The culture wars not only represent minority groups as mentally and physically disabled—and demand their exclusion from the public sphere as a result—they reject works of art that present alternatives to the able body. Only by understanding that health is the underlying theme of the culture wars may we understand that these two trends are related. The most scandalous artists in recent controversies about arts funding, for example, give their works an organic dimension that alludes to bodies gone awry, and these allusions are largely responsible for their shock value. They summon an aesthetic revulsion equivalent to the disgust felt by many persons in face-to-face encounters with people with disabilities, thereby challenging the ideal of a hygienic and homogeneous community.⁴ Karen Finley's

avant-garde performances confront the audience with a spectacle of errant body fluids: spermatozoic alfalfa sprouts and excremental chocolate ooze over her body. In one performance, *Lamb of God Hotel*, she plays Aggie, a wheelchair-using woman having her diaper changed. Andres Serrano's notorious *Piss Christ* immerses a day-glow crucifix in a vat of the artist's urine, capturing the startling contradiction of Christianity's all-too-human son of God defiled by a mortal body and its waste fluids. Other photographs by Serrano present abstract expressionist patterns composed of blood and semen, still lifes arranged with human and animal cadavers, and mug shots of the homeless, criminal, and aged. Robert Mapplethorpe's most memorable photographs capture the homoerotic body and serve it up to a largely heterosexual population. Perhaps his most outrageous work is a self-portrait revealing a bullwhip stuck up his rectum. It summons ideas of the devil as well as S/M practices, of course, but it also presents the image of a man who has grown a tail, invoking a body whose deformed shape is less or more than human.

These stunning works make a contribution to the history of art by assaulting aesthetic dictates that ally beauty to harmonious form, balance, hygiene, fluidity of expression, and genius. But their shock value owes less to their quibbling with certain aesthetic principles than to the bodies and organic materials presented by them. They represent flash points in the culture wars because they both challenge how aesthetic culture should be defined and attack the body images used to determine who has the right to live in society. People with disabilities elicit feelings of discomfort, confusion, and resentment because their bodies refuse cure, defy normalization, and threaten to contaminate the rest of society. We display bodies objectionable to the body politic, disrupting the longstanding association between instances of aesthetic form and what Fredric Jameson calls the political unconscious. The political unconscious, I want to argue, enforces a mutual identification between forms of appearance, whether organic, aesthetic, or architectural, and ideal images of the body politic. It accounts for the visceral and defensive response to any body found to disturb society's established image of itself.

Jameson, of course, defines the political unconscious as a collective impulse that situates the experience of the human group as the absolute horizon of all interpretation. In fact, the existence of the

group is for him so much a part of human experience that he considers the consciousness of individuality itself to be a symptom of estrangement from collective life. Notice, however, that the political unconscious has no content other than its ability to reference human community as a formal totality. It exists to ponder social totality, but what it refuses to ponder is a vision of community as less than perfect, for to conceive social totality at the level of form envisions both objects of human production and bodies as symbols of wholeness. The political unconscious establishes the principle of totality as the methodological standard of all human interpretation. It installs the image of an unbroken community as the horizon of thought, requiring that ideas of incompetent, diseased, defective, or incomplete community be viewed as signs of alienation. This means that the very idea of disability signals the triumph of fallen or defective consciousness, despite the fact that there are no real, existing communities of human beings unaffected by the presence of injury, disease, defect, and incompleteness. In short, the political unconscious is a social imaginary designed to eradicate disability.

The political unconscious upholds a delicious ideal of social perfection by insisting that any public body be flawless. It also displaces manifestations of disability from collective consciousness, we will see, through concealment, cosmetic action, motivated forgetting, and rituals of sympathy and pity. Advertisements, media images, buildings, and habitats work to assert the coherence and integrity of society, while public actions like telethons and media representations of heroic cripples mollify the influence of disability. Bodies that cannot be subsumed by ritual and other public action represent a blemish on the face of society, and they must be eliminated, apparently whatever the cost.

Diane DeVries provides a familiar account, unfortunately, of the political unconscious at work, of the visceral disgust and accompanying violence often directed at people with disabilities. She reveals that observers of the disabled body often feel compelled to fly into action, to cure or kill the ungainly sight before their eyes. DeVries was born with short arms, no hands, and no legs:

[O]nce when I was a kid, I was in a wagon and we were in this trailer park, and some kid came up to me with a knife. He said, "Aw, you ain't got no arms, you ain't got no legs, and now you're not gonna have no

head." He held me right there, by the neck, and had a little knife. It was one of those bratty kids that do weird things.⁵

DeVries's testimony recounts in part a childish prank, but its force as a political lesson derives from its underlying association with a series of familiar reactions and institutions, all of which reverberate with the compulsive requirement, anchored by the political unconscious, to manufacture ideal images of the body politic. The bratty kid is part assassin who would kill off what displeases him and his society, part cosmetic surgeon whose aesthetic sense imagines cleaner lines for the disabled body, part architect who hates unaesthetic designs, part budget cutter who would eliminate waste and partition resources more economically.⁶

The brouhaha over *Sensation*, the 1999 exhibition of young British artists at the Brooklyn Museum, showed that the culture wars are far from over. It also showed how predictable and ferocious are public, official sentiments about bodies seen to be less fit, hygienic, and healthy than the ideal.⁷ The Saatchi Collection presented the public with a spectacle of bodies sufficiently scandalous to rival the uproars created by Finley, Serrano, and Mapplethorpe. Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's first reaction was to reach for his budget knife. He attacked the show and tried to cut off city funds to the Brooklyn Museum, although the courts eventually stopped him. "The city shouldn't have to pay for sick stuff," he declared (Blumenthal and Vogel 1999, B1). The "sick stuff" in the exhibit included Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*, an icon of the Virgin Mother decorated with elephant dung; Marc Quinn's *Self*, a bust of the artist carved in nine pints of his own frozen blood (Figure 1); and Damien Hirst's *This Little Piggy Went to Market, This Little Piggy Stayed Home*, a pig sliced in half lengthwise and suspended in formaldehyde (Figure 2). What these artworks have in common, of course, is their organic nature. They use real bodies, body parts, and body products as their medium, transforming the museum into a shadow world of the mortuary or hospital and exhibiting without mercy the organic foundation of human life and death.

If aesthetic form always imagines a body politic, the young British artists seem to say, then art objects should invoke more dramatically and truthfully the different kinds of bodies that join together to

constitute political collectivities. The *Sensation* collection incorporates a political body, filling the museum space with individual corporeal objects that magically come together, like citizens, to form a community of bodies, but the artists choose not to represent the bodies normally accepted by modern society. Rather, they focus on the fringes, imagining corporeal forms usually rejected by the public and



Figure 1. Marc Quinn, *Self*, 1991. Blood, stainless steel, Perspex, and refrigeration equipment, $81\frac{7}{8} \times 24\frac{13}{16} \times 24\frac{13}{16}$ in. ($208 \times 63 \times 63$ cm), copyright by the artist. Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

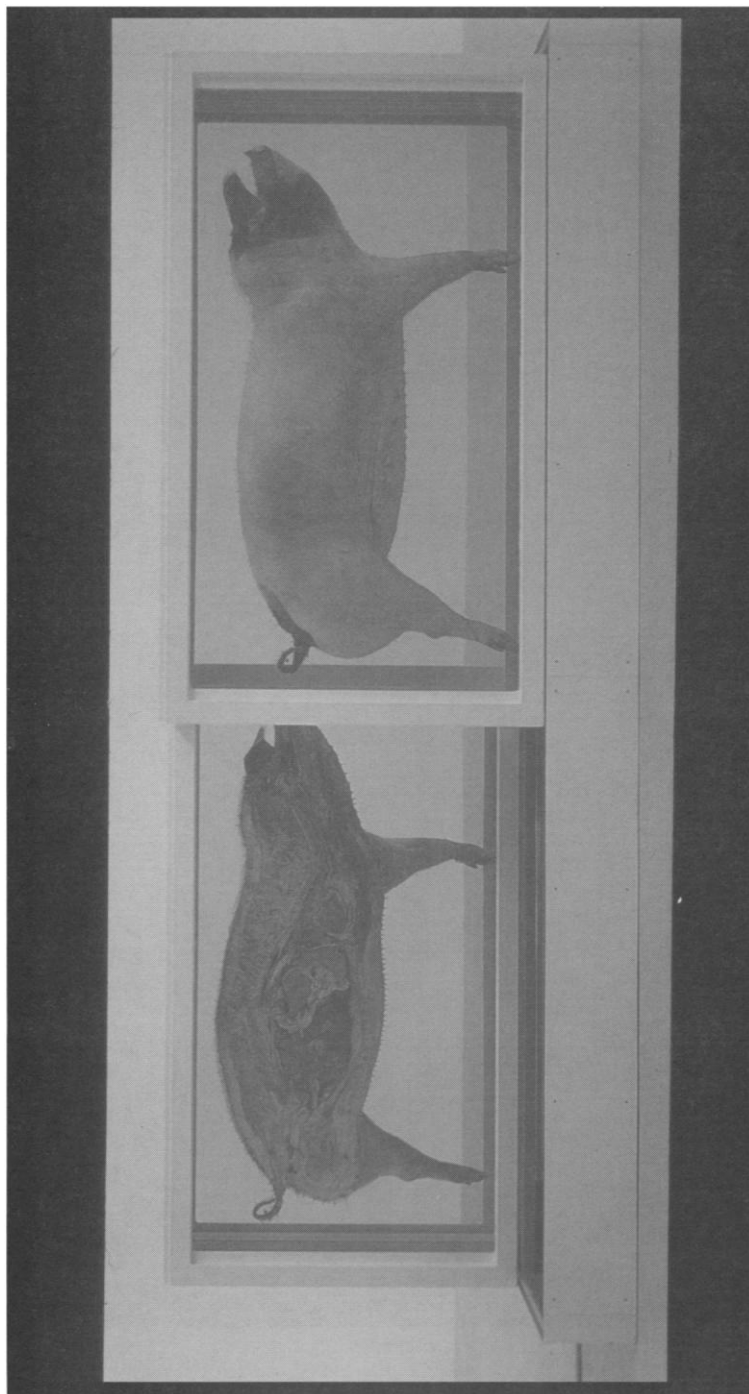


Figure 2. Damien Hirst, *This Little Piggy Went to Market, This Little Piggy Stayed Home*, 1996, steel, GRP composites, glass, pig, formaldehyde solution, electric motor; two tanks, 47 x 83 x 24 in. (120 x 210 x 60 cm). Courtesy the Saatchi Gallery, London.

challenging their audience to rethink its image of bodies both individual and collective. More specifically, the artworks are all in one way or another suggestive of disability, whether they immediately excite thoughts of the disabled body or merely imply it by meditating on hygiene, reimagining physical coordinates, or turning able bodies into curiosities. The show made political enemies and shocked the public for this reason, and this reason alone. *Sensation* upset popular expectations about the beauty of art and confronted its audience with a different aesthetic economy—an aesthetic economy based on the otherness of disability and increasingly difficult to find in a world obsessed with fashion, uniform beauty, health, hygiene, and the consumer products that make fetishes of them.

Most obviously, the *Sensation* exhibition exposed its audience to the influence of disability by giving the institution of the freak show a place within the walls of the museum. Allusions to the freak show decorated everything, from the entrance to the *Sensation* exhibition, to its advertising, program, and admission tickets. All included prominently the dramatic and exaggerated “health warning”: “The contents of this exhibition may cause shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria, and anxiety. If you suffer from high blood pressure, a nervous disorder, or palpitations, you should consult your doctor before viewing this exhibition.” Even the phone number for ticket reservations promised injury, alluding to Hirst’s fourteen-foot tiger shark floating in a glass tank of formaldehyde solution: “Call 1-877-SHARKBITE for tickets!” The freak show traditionally provides a channel for the expression of public disgust toward extraordinary bodies, but this venting does not necessarily make these bodies more threatening or hateful. It sometimes has the opposite effect, inspiring spectators threatened by mass society with vivid examples of unique bodies and minds. Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s theory of the freakish body elucidates this double effect.⁸ On the one hand, she explains, the “bodies of the severely congenitally disabled have always functioned as icons upon which people discharge their anxieties, convictions, and fantasies” (56). On the other hand, in societies where the “standardization wrought by mass culture” threatens democratic ideas of freedom and independence, the “freakish body” may function “as a kind of egalitarian shrine” (69). This dichotomy accounts for the fundamental ambiguity of the *Sensation* exhibition—what

might be seen as the choice presented by it to the audience. The exhibition became an event attractive to crowds because it promised, like the freak show, to astound with examples of outrageous human bodies and behavior, but its inclusion of disability also transformed the increasingly predictable experience of the museum, asking spectators, in effect, to accept or reject the bodies before them.

Rather than having the usual aesthetic experience, then, visitors to the Brooklyn Museum were confronted by a class of objects that refuse conventional human measure, for they prefer to be understood only in their own terms, according to ideas representative of their particular autonomy. These artworks strive to free themselves from convention, shining forth as only themselves and asserting their own unique form and integrity as presences dwelling both with us and apart.⁹ Pale young men and women dressed in black who rarely venture outside before dark and never leave Soho made the journey in broad daylight to Brooklyn. Many Brooklynites visited their home institution for the first time. None of them would have considered going to a circus freak show, but they stood in line to admire Jake and Dinos Chapman's mutant conjoined twins, sometimes connected to mimic sexual positions, their genital organs transposed to their faces (Figure 3), and Hirst's *A Thousand Years*, featuring maggots crawling out of the ears of a mock cow's head and fruit flies going up in smoke in a nearby bug zapper. Some visitors rejected what they saw with a gasp. Many witnessed an appearance of beauty that asserted itself as an undeniable part of their world.

Mostly, thanks to Mayor Giuliani's negative publicity, the crowds came to see the exhibition's own "elephant lady," Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*. The work is on the surface among the least related to disability contained in the show, but the controversy surrounding it reveals that the painting provokes an aesthetic response to rejected bodies and body products. Ofili painted his hip-hop version of the Madonna as a black woman with one breast missing and the other composed of a ball of shellacked elephant dung. The work decorates the Virgin with sparkling glitter and cutouts of women's buttocks from pornographic magazines, an allusion to naked putti in Old Master paintings, but a closer look reveals that the elephant dung and floating female posteriors are not the only corporeal objects inscribed in the "Afrobiotic" painting. The lip line of the Virgin's

Mona Lisa smile is an icon of a sperm, and the folds of her dress mimic eleven subtle vaginal openings. None of these features presents as overtly sexual, but the total effect recalls the sexual receptivity of the Virgin in the traditional story. The fact is that Ofili's Mary, for all of her sexual undertones, remains as tranquil, reassuring, and dignified as conventional icons of the Virgin, and for this reason the adverse public reaction to her seems a mystery, until one focuses on hygiene and health as political ideals. Giuliani (who never actually viewed the work) and the press imagined the painting as splattered or stained with excrement, as did its would-be vandal, Dennis Heiner, who tried to "clean it" by smearing white paint over its surface.¹⁰ It is as if the detractors of the painting experienced a collective hallucination of noxious bodies and body parts before its shimmering surface. What they apparently saw there was a woman with ethnic features and one breast, splattered with excrement and surrounded by pornographic images, who in no way, shape, or form fit their vision of an ideal human being, let alone the mother of God.

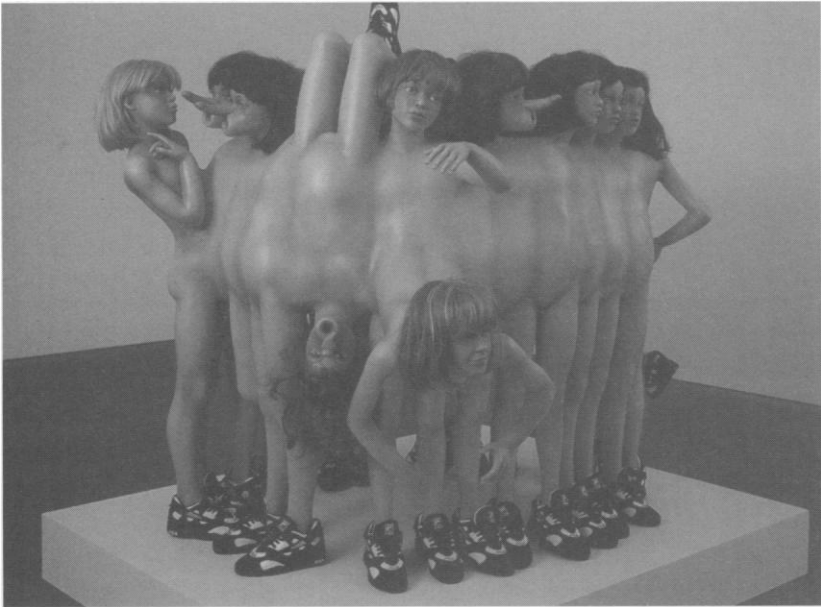


Figure 3. Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Zygotic Acceleration, Biogenetic, De-sublimated Libidinal Model* (enlarged 1,000 times), 1995. Mixed media, 59 × 71 × 55 in. (150 × 180 × 140 cm), copyright the artists. Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

Their response to her was immediate, visceral, and violent, displaying the inability not only to understand Ofili's witty commentary on the underlying abnormality of the woman called both virgin and mother but to free themselves from a political unconscious that works to obscure or eliminate any public experience of deformed or disabled bodies.

The works surrounding Ofili's Madonna represented disabled bodies and organic otherness with equal and sometimes greater power. In addition to Jake and Dinos Chapman's *Tragic Anatomies* and other biogenetic libidinal Siamese-twin statuary was their *Übermensch*, a resin and fiberglass sculpture of Stephen Hawking perched in his wheelchair atop a rock promontory (Figure 4); Gillian Wearring's video *10-16*, which features a naked dwarf; Glenn Brown's reinterpretations of Dali's melting bodies; Mat Collishaw's *Bullet-Hole*, a massive photograph of a gunshot wound in a skull (Figure 5); *Dead Dad* by Ron Meuck, a silicon and acrylic reproduction of his father's corpse; and Marc Quinn's *No Visible Means of Support* and *The Morphology of Specifics*, two works that display the anguish of human beings as they dissolve into nothingness or wilt away into bags of dried skin. Even Jenny Saville's classical studies of gigantic female nudes seem to chart the transformation of flesh into landscapes that are segmented and resegmented by arbitrary forces, while Cerith Wyn Evans's *Inverse Reverse Perverse*, a huge concave mirror accessible to spectators nostalgic for the house of mirrors of their youth, leaves no question about the exhibition's own understanding of its relation to the circus midway and freak show. There was hardly an example of an artwork in the *Sensation* exhibition that pictures what most people would consider a normal human body or behavior, and yet the total effect of the show was to challenge these very people to see in the representation of disabled bodies a reflection of their own body and behavior.

The *Sensation* exhibition offers proof of an aesthetic commitment to a different body politic, one that struggles against the soft-pedaling of beauty, fashion, health, and hygiene as essential features of works of art or political communities.¹¹ Rather, *Sensation* committed to a vision of beauty as disability, manifesting it in physical form and insisting that it has the greatest political value when it confronts human beings, on a human scale, as part of their world. This idea of

beauty may inspire a new vision of democratic political community in two ways. First, the work of art makes individual subjects aware of the fact that things exist beyond their control, challenging political ideals that imagine mental competence, physical health, consensus, economic efficiency, and the prevention of accidents, disease, and death as easily achievable goals. Second, the beauty of disability



Figure 4. Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Übermensch*, 1995. Fiberglass, resin, and paint. Approx. 12 ft. x 6 ft. x 6 ft., copyright the artists. Courtesy Jay Jopling/White Cube (London).

compels the imagination of political community on the basis of accessibility rather than exclusion. It tutors individual subjects in new affective responses, asking them to incorporate rather than reject unfamiliar ideas and physical forms, to tolerate mixtures of greater varieties and kinds, and to broaden their understanding of human beings and their behavior.

The imagination of different political communities, however, is hardly a simple process, as the public reaction to the *Sensation* exhibition demonstrated. Artworks have the power to influence the political unconscious, especially when they attack its reliance on symbols of the able body, since these symbols, too, are given by everyday experience. But aesthetic objects metamorphose rather easily into curiosities when they represent the disabled body, and the artistic commitment to educate, please, and observe different forms of life may lose its original inspiration, if indeed it ever possessed it, veering toward voyeurism or the desire to shock. Spectators, too, may succumb to routine emotions, gawking at the strange beauty, complaining

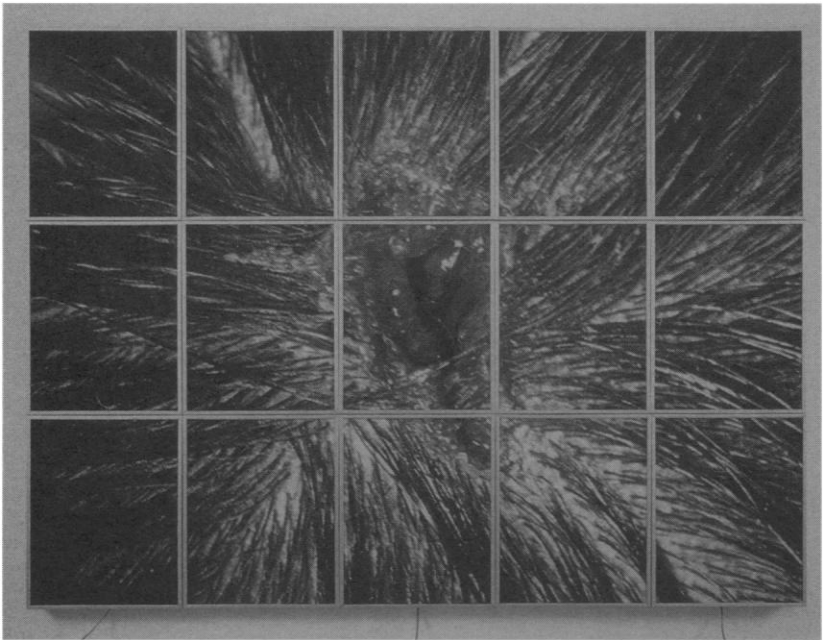


Figure 5. Mat Collishaw, *Bullet Hole*, 1988–93. Cibachrome mounted on fifteen light boxes, 90 × 122 in. (229 × 310 cm). Courtesy the Saatchi Gallery, London.

of its weirdness, stifling the gag reflex. The brilliance of the *Sensation* exhibition—and the reason that it became part of the culture wars—was to make the imagination of a new democratic community the subject of public controversy. Each individual who visited the Brooklyn Museum had to decide in public about the kind of community he or she desired to inhabit, had to make the choice whether to accept or reject disability as part of the integrity and future of American society. Neither choice would have been possible, however, if not for the political unconscious determining any observation of a body, if not for its insistence that any viewing of a body is a judgment about the shape of the body politic and the rules governing exclusion from it.

Poverty and crime assault the east side of Detroit. The houses decay, factories close, buildings are abandoned to drug dealers, prostitutes, and gangs. In 1986 Tyree Guyton sparked another episode in the culture wars by transforming two blocks on Heidelberg Street into a work of art. He seized a crack house and decorated it with brightly colored polka dots and the plastic body parts of children's dolls, christening it *Baby Doll House*. Then he seized another crack house and another, festooning them with an array of colors and discarded objects: shoes, pots and pans, pieces of found art, toys, broken appliances, stuffed animals, license plates, numbers and decals, and more and more polka dots. He tossed hundreds of shoes into the street in front of his house as a statement about the homeless. As the cars drove over them, the character of the collage kept changing. He began to hang shoes by the dozens from the trees in the neighborhood, inspired by his grandfather's memories of Southern lynchings, where only the soles of the victims' shoes were visible to the people below. The crack dealers and prostitutes fled, as more and more tourists flocked to Heidelberg Street to view the surprising forms and colors of Tyree Guyton's art. *Newsweek* and *People* magazines ran feature articles.

But the "Heidelberg Project" also attracted the attention of the Detroit city government. Some neighbors complained to the city council that Guyton's artworks were "eyesores." Mayor Coleman Young inspected the site, declared it was not art, and targeted the urban assemblages for special demolition. Mayor Dennis Archer, after a

brief respite, continued the attack. Despite the fact that Detroit has more than fifteen thousand abandoned buildings, at least one on nearly one-half of its twenty-three hundred streets, city administrators have sent bulldozers repeatedly to Heidelberg Street over the years.¹² Guyton has fought the demolition in the courts, wrestling with the city in an on-again, off-again battle intensified after each assault by the bulldozers. *Baby Doll House* (Figure 6) went first and without warning in August 1989. The city destroyed four more houses in an early morning raid in 1991 and completed demolition of the parts of the project on city-owned land in 1999. Guyton believes that *Baby Doll House* attracted such violence because its images were so strong: the broken, naked dolls hanging out of windows and off the roof addressed too directly the issues of child abuse, abortion, and prostitution plaguing the urban poor in Detroit neighborhoods.¹³ *Baby Doll House* cast into the open, for all to see, the destruction of bodies and minds formerly hidden deep within its walls. It made the secret connection between urban decay and the diseased and disabled body an explicit theme of its form and content, awakening the defensive forces of the body politic and stirring them to busyness, like antibodies pursuing an infection. The city felt compelled, on this site alone, to clean up its waste, stop the decay, heal the blight, hide its blemishes, and soothe its wounds.¹⁴

Human communities come into being and maintain their coherence by imagining their ideal forms on the basis of other bodies. It is no accident, then, that descriptions of communities in disarray summon images of the disabled body and that, conversely, the appearance of disabled bodies in public provokes fears that the community is itself under attack or coming apart. The political unconscious accounts for this mutual identification between instances of form and perfect images of the body politic. It also accounts for the existence of so-called ugly laws—municipal ordinances that bar people from public spaces on the grounds that their appearance is offensive and poses undue legal liabilities. “Ugly laws” were found routinely in American city statutes until the 1960s and still exist in Columbus, Ohio; Omaha, Nebraska; and other municipalities. This typical example, no longer on the books in Chicago, demonstrates that the compulsion to maintain instances of ideal form in public buildings and streets echoes a primordial obsession with perfect, public bodies:

No person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object or improper person to be allowed in or on the public ways or other public places in this city, shall therein or thereon expose himself to public view.¹⁵



Figure 6: Tyree Guyton, *Baby Doll House*, 1986–89. Courtesy Heidelberg Project, Detroit.

The Detroit city administration could not outlaw the Heidelberg Project by the authority of ugly laws, which apply only to “unsightly” human beings, but it did classify the installation as an illegal dump site, and Guyton lost the battle in the courts to stop the demolition of all artworks on public land. Public aversion to disability may begin with individual human bodies, but it escalates rapidly to form a network of wider symbolism that includes nonhuman bodies, buildings, and many other structures found in the built environment. The Heidelberg Project makes this process visible for all to see because its portrayal of disability combines dilapidation and trash as well as the display of disarticulated bodies. It exposes the conceptual transition from the public aversion to some individual human bodies to public fears about any example of dilapidation or disrepair found in the built environment. Finally, it uncovers the fact that city codes about property maintenance enforce an architectural version of ugly laws. City statutes and ordinances about building upkeep are designed to eliminate “eyesores”—the quaint but not so innocent name for the painful sensation accompanying the perception of ugliness, disunity, or dilapidation in the built environment. But the notion of an eyesore would make no sense if not for its dependence on the underlying symbolism of the disabled body. The public imagines diseased and disabled bodies as a hazard—obviously—but its fear of disability also contaminates its vision of cityscapes, confusing bodies, buildings, and skylines according to the ratio of some mysterious human geography.

Culture is not merely a web of symbols. It is a web of body symbols. Disability activists have focused so far on negative representations of the human body, on how the desire to represent perfect, individual bodies denigrates or excludes the experience of disability. If culture is really composed of body symbols, however, it means that the struggle by disability activists against negative body images must extend far beyond physical images of the individual human body to its symbolic resonance in other bodies. Beauty, order, and cleanliness in the built environment occupy a special position among the requirements of society because they apply to artificial bodies our preoccupation with our own body, including its health, integrity, and hygiene. Only an analysis of this powerful symbolic connection will explain why prejudices against the disabled body persist in the built

environment, and only then will disability activists be able to shift emphasis from the individual human body to the imaginary bodies undergirding architectural theory, employment law, and conceptions of citizenship.

A man extending a cane before himself and a three-bedroom colonial home stretching a wheelchair ramp into the street are equally disconcerting to the public eye. Both ignite a vigorous, defensive impulse to cure or fix the offending body. Conversely, beautiful, harmonious constructions automatically summon ideas of elegant, graceful people, as in this description of the John Hancock building in Boston, designed by I. M. Pei: "Pei and his principal designer, Henry Cobb, devised a sixty-two-story tower proportioned as slimly as a fashion model, sequined in reflective glass panels."¹⁶ Other examples of the imaginary connection between body and building may be found throughout architectural theory both because the political unconscious exerts a stranglehold on the kinds of bodies acceptable in the built environment, and because modern architectural theories define the form and function of buildings with explicit reference to a politics of the body. Lewis Mumford claimed that the state of building at any period represents a "legible script" detailing the complicated processes and changes taking place in the body politic itself, while Louis Sullivan insisted that pure design in architecture maximizes utility by reproducing the essence of the human being.¹⁷ Of course, this essence represents human beings in normative terms, both physically and mentally. These and other aesthetic dictates represent architecture itself as providing a transcendental expression of human perfection, situating in the crafting of concrete, wood, plastic, and steel the ability to overcome limitations of the human body and mind, but they also use the built environment to maintain a spatial caste system at the expense of people with disabilities. This caste system not only targets individual disabled bodies for exclusion but also rejects any form of appearance that symbolizes disability.

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 (Figure 7). 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.¹⁸ 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.

Successful methods of fending off what is painful or distressing choose appropriate courses of action by recognizing the threat, considering it, and making a judgment about it. Between these methods and unconscious, defensive inhibitions lies a range of pathological behaviors and mental operations. They are observable in actions by individuals and the public, but they are obviously much more difficult to identify and analyze in the case of groups, since social pressure makes discovering them less probable, and the sheer number of people and the absence of anything approaching a genuine theory of group psychology make treatment impossible. “Mass hysteria” and “group delusion” are, after all, rather sad theories and do not take analysis far beyond the sensationalism implied in the phrases themselves. Nevertheless, some form of group psychology appears to be at the origin of public reactions to disability, for the defensive measures are too consistent to be merely coincidental. It is as if the phobias, inhibitions, defensive reactions, and avoidance patterns that spring up to meet any formal instance of disability, whether organic, aesthetic, or architectural, represent collective versions of what are normally thought to be individual defense mechanisms.¹⁹ These group inhibitions preserve the self-image of the community, its ego function as it were, by striving to banish distressing emotional impulses, visceral signs of anxiety, and threats of injury or pain,

amounting to the equivalent of a collective flight reflex in the presence of painful stimuli.²⁰

The culture wars were bound to display a panorama of phobias, inhibitions, censorship, and avoidance of bodies imagined as diseased or defective because they make the metaphoric connection between able bodies and healthy societies an explicit theme of public controversy and because their posture is defensive in nature. In effect, the culture wars amount to a striking episode of collective inhibition in action: they represent a critical moment when the existing

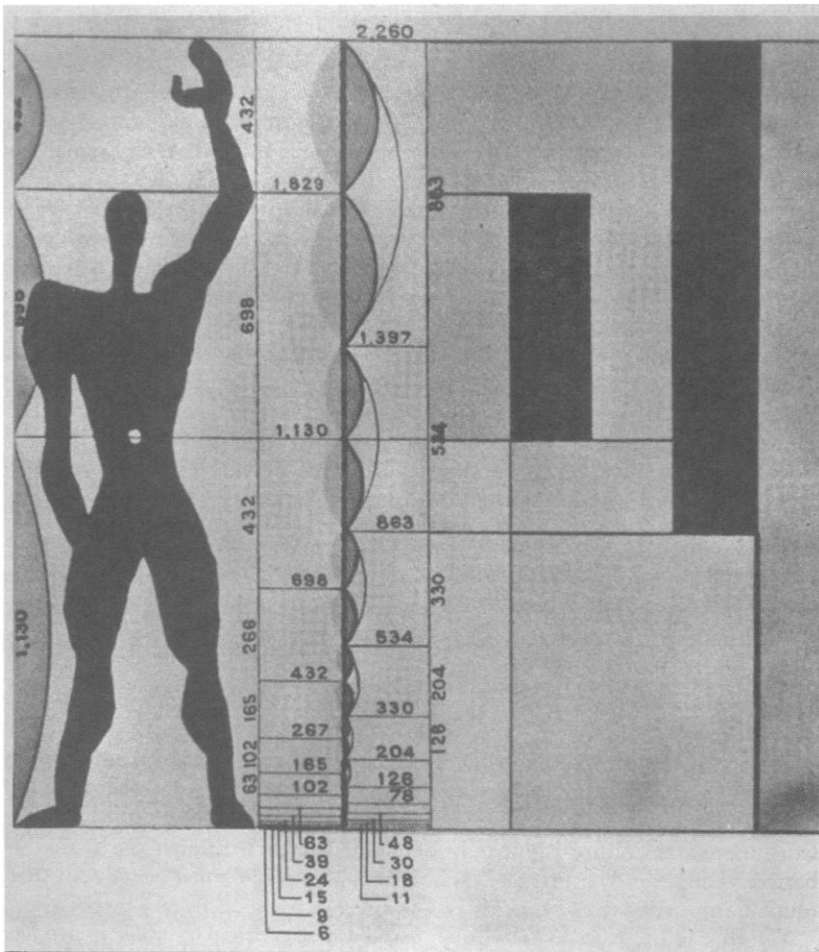


Figure 7. Le Corbusier, *Modular*, 1925.

culture is trying to defend its ideal image against forces that would transform it. The NEA controversy, *Sensation*, the Heidelberg Project, and the official responses to them provide only a few samples of possible case studies exposing collective defense mechanisms at work. But the same defensive ideas, reactions, and behaviors appear even where explicit public controversy has no place, the most surprising and unsettling being design projects friendly to the disability community. Here mechanisms of defense are not easy to explain without further consideration of the ways in which mental behaviors buttress the political unconscious. I refer to the bungled actions, instances of counter will, and disturbances in memory readable in the most amiable efforts to make the built environment accessible to people with disabilities. These phenomena might be collected, following Freud, under the heading of “hysterical architecture,” since they encompass plans and design implementations contrived to provide access but burdened by a symptomatic inhibition against disability. The reference to psychoanalysis makes sense both because defensive measures against disability often mimic hysterical symptomatology, and because Freud illustrates the exchange of symptoms in hysteria with the analogy of a disabled woman carrying too many packages.²¹ The feeble woman, her arms overflowing with packages, tries to walk down the street, but she inevitably drops a package, and when she bends down to pick it up, she drops a second package just as she recovers the first, and on and on, to the point where progress is futile. Freud claims that each package represents a symptom, one of many external signs of the same underlying problem. The analogy is especially pertinent to defensive measures in the built environment because the disabled woman is marked by a series of external signs that signal the presence of her disability, and yet the exchange of external signs works like a shell game to hide her disability or at least to displace attention from it.

In the case of the built environment, of course, the shuffling of external signs of disability cannot be blamed on the psychology of people with disabilities, as in the example of Freud’s hysteric. The architecture is itself “hysterical” in its desire to ward off signs of disability, for each attempt to make the building accessible produces another attempt either to block accessibility or to conceal the marker of disability tattooed by accessible features on the skin of the building.

The end result is a zero-sum game in favor of phobia, inhibition, and discrimination.

Each person with a disability can recount experiences with defensive inhibitions against accessible architecture in the public environment. Local examples in Ann Arbor are numerous, some of which reflect trends in building and landscaping evident at the national level. Designers of parking lots for shopping malls in Ann Arbor suffer from a bizarre counter will when it comes to handicapped parking. Often they fill the median—separating the parking lot from the store entrances and next to which handicapped spaces are always found—with large decorative rocks that are extremely difficult to walk over and impossible to cross with a wheelchair. The practice effectively places a rocky barrier reef between the handicapped spaces and the destination of the wheelchair users. The four handicapped spaces for the graduate library at the University of Michigan are buttressed by a three-foot high retaining wall, decorated with flowers and inconveniently located between the parking places and the rear entrance of the library (Figure 8). The sidewalks leading to that entrance are also strategically blocked by an obstacle course of concrete planters, approximately three feet square and brimming with colorful pansies.

An example of motivated forgetting in accessible architecture at the national level is found in the government lawsuit against Ellerbe Becket of Minneapolis, one of the largest architectural firms in the country (Dunlap 1997). Ellerbe Becket has designed over a half-dozen sport stadiums, and each one demonstrates a “pattern or practice of discrimination” in its placement of wheelchair locations, according to the government. The law requires that wheelchair locations have “lines of sight comparable to those for members of the general public.” But Ellerbe Becket arranges wheelchair locations so that their users cannot see when the crowd stands. The firm has tried to argue that government guidelines and laws do not require that people in wheelchairs be able to see over standing spectators.

Jim Knipfel details two extraordinary instances of bungled actions toward disability in his comic memoir *Slack Jaw*. Knipfel is one of one hundred thousand Americans with retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic condition that attacks the photoreceptor cells in the retina, eventually producing blindness. One of his many adventures includes spending

the better part of one morning trying to locate the New York State Department of Social Services Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped at 270 Broadway in New York City. After roaming up and down the even-numbered side of Broadway between the 100 and 400 blocks for several hours, he finally asks a homeless man where to find the address and then describes the “nasty tendency” found inside the front doors:

“Excuse me?” I inquired without getting too close. I didn’t want to startle him. “Do you know where Two-seventy Broadway is?”

Without a word he raised a finger and pointed across the street.

As it happens, 270 Broadway is the anomaly, an even-numbered building on the west side of the street.

Once I got through the front doors, I was in near-total darkness. This is a nasty tendency I’ve discovered in places that are designed to “help” the blind. Willis Eye Hospital in Philadelphia was the worst in this respect. The reception area is a cavernous, unlit room scattered with floor-to-ceiling concrete pillars. You could sit there all day and be entertained by the zany antics of blind people walking headlong into post after post, like a giant pinball machine. Here at 270 Broadway, at least, there was only a long unlit hallway.

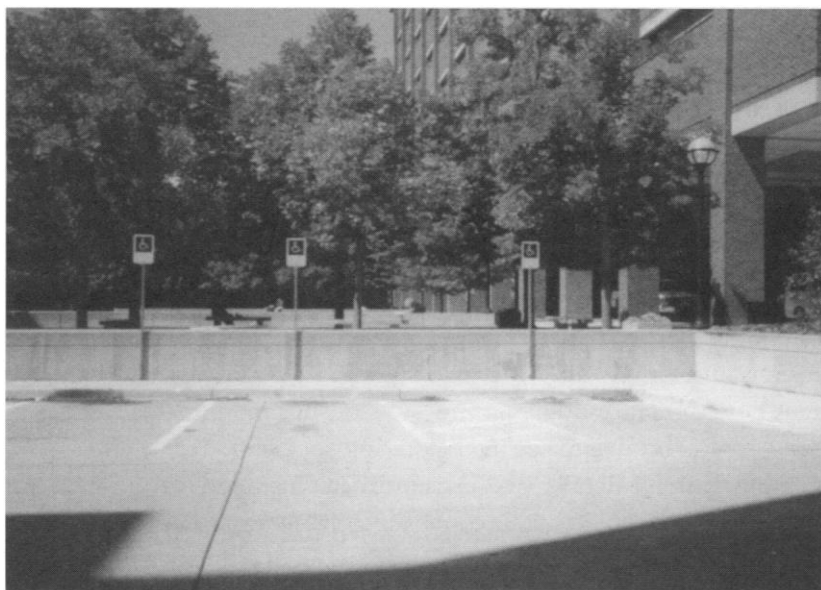


Figure 8. Handicapped spaces, Graduate Library, University of Michigan .

I asked a man where the elevators were, and he said, "Right over there," which, of course, helped me not at all. Once I did feel my way to the elevators, I found a man down on his hands and knees inside, banging away with a hammer at a piece of metal that had come loose. (1999, 184)

Finally, misdirection may also indicate defensive inhibitions at work. Handicapped signage is sometimes unclear, using the same icons to mark where handicapped entrances are and are not, and often signs disappear abruptly en route, leaving people wondering at every fork in the road. In old construction, designers trying to meet accessibility requirements plotted courses with more curves than a cobra, but new construction is just as likely to lead people with disabilities into buildings along a snaky course. Following handicapped signage often gives one the impression of being caught in a labyrinth. The shortest distance between two points is rarely a straight line when people with disabilities are involved—"a crooked path for crooked people" appears to be the motto behind some attempts to open buildings to accessibility.

Defensive countermeasures, as these examples show, work to conceal the blemish on society represented by disability. The personal fear and shame that have led historically to the institutionalization of people with disabilities by their own families is a common trope in this pattern of avoidance. But defensive avoidance extends well beyond individual bodies and personal actions to encompass the behavior, ideas, and physical appearance of society itself. Ugly laws and less official sanctions against people with disabilities strive to decrease their presence and lessen their influence in the community. Architecture and landscape design attempt not only to project a sense of beauty but also to exclude people deemed ugly or defective by making their access to society difficult or impossible. City codes about building upkeep guarantee a sense of harmony for the eye and maintain a uniformity unaffected by any sign of dilapidation or defect. More significant, friendly attempts to provide access for people with disabilities are sometimes disrupted by countermeasures that undo the process of accessibility itself. It is as if the public interprets ramps, accessible doors, and signage for the disabled as symbols of disability that require a mustering of defense mechanisms. In

no time, plants and flowers clutter wheelchair ramps, handicap signs are tucked away, and decorative rocks and wood chips block accessible walkways. Nature abhors a vacuum, and society treats handicapped parking places and accessible pathways as empty spaces to fill: locales marked by accessibility inevitably become handy collecting points for trash, building materials, or delivery trucks (Figures 9–11).

My purpose has been to explore, under the pressure of the culture wars, how the aesthetic representation of bodies—individual and collective, organic and artificial—leads to the oppression of people with disabilities. The culture wars are not just about different political factions in conflict (conservative versus liberal) or about a historical backlash against the 1960s (the usual argument), but about the incorporation of different physical and mental types into the American body politic. On the one hand, civic beauty, political consensus, social harmony, and economic vitality summon images of the healthy body. On the other hand, whenever sickness, dirt, political disagreement, social chaos, or economic depression appears, society responds by generating images of the disabled or diseased body. Nevertheless, most commentators, including those with disabilities, have not registered the relevance of disability to the culture wars, and only the disability community recognizes the cultural meaning of fights about employment law, citizenship, and accessibility. This is obviously the case, as Jameson has argued, because the political operates at a deeply unconscious level. The political unconscious cements the secret connection between beauty, health, and social totality through innumerable images and representations, some generated by art, commerce, and the media, others embedded in the bodies of leaders and the shapes of buildings, city streets, tools, furniture, automobiles, and other instances of form.

The culture wars have used aesthetic rather than political arguments to influence public policy because concepts such as health, well-being, and beauty—so important to ideals of social perfection—often rely on appearance, and appearance is inevitably a matter of aesthetic form. Now it is generally accepted that works of art call for aesthetic judgments, but we rarely consider that manifestations of



Figure 9. UPS truck, handicapped spaces, Mason Hall loading dock, University of Michigan.



Figure 10. Grass clippings, handicapped spaces, Mason Hall loading dock, University of Michigan.

sickness and health also elicit judgments of this kind. In fact, judgments about art objects are widely thought to be different from judgments about the abilities of human beings, especially with regard to physical appearance, health, and mental competence. Moreover, it is now possible to question the use of aesthetic standards to judge artworks—most art critics today would object if a show or museum excluded an art object because it was deemed ugly. This self-conscious and critical attitude does not arise when it comes to the exclusion of people of disabilities from the built environment. My point is that aversion to and hatred of disability are also aesthetic reactions, but that objections to aesthetic standards and tastes are rarely raised when it comes to the inclusion of people with disabilities. In fact, aesthetic judgments about the built environment remain unquestioned when architects make the case against accessible designs on the grounds that access produces ugly buildings, despite the fact that those buildings called beautiful are fashioned to suppress the disabled body from public view. Obviously, people with disabilities suffer because their individual appearance is thought by others to be aesthetically displeasing, but this truth tells only half the



Figure 11. Trash, handicapped spaces, Mason Hall loading dock, University of Michigan.

story. The sense of rejection felt by people with disabilities, over and above personal humiliations and individual affronts, is doubled when one considers how profound is the symbolic exclusion of disability by society.

Ideal versions of human appearance are preserved through aesthetic representations that bridge the gap between individual and collective existence. Indeed, aesthetics may be the most effective means of bridging this gap, for in the absence of aesthetic representation, it is not clear that human beings would be able to imagine what political community is, let alone understand their place in it.²² Disability studies cannot avoid a similar conflation between aesthetic and political form, since it must invent its own imaginary communities, but we might take advantage of the confusion in a number of ways. First, the study of cultural representations of the disabled body and mind needs to continue, including stereotypes elaborated by art, literature, the sciences and social sciences, medicine, the media, law, commerce, and politics. Second, the study of the disabled body must be extended to its symbolization by other bodies and the vast array of cultural forms, such as objects of art, buildings, environments, and consumer products. This step will help disability activists to determine the extent to which defensive trends organize public spaces; to offer theories about the psychology motivating the collective fears, inhibitions, and patterns of avoidance that censor disability; and to tackle prejudices against disability operating beyond the representation of the individual body. Finally, the disability community should continue to intervene vigorously in the culture wars, creating artworks, performances, theater, and political spectacle; imprinting disabled bodies and minds on the public landscape; and inventing new modes of beauty that attack aesthetic and political standards that insist on uniformity, balance, hygiene, and formal integrity.

Although we all have a stake in the healthiness of our country, it is time to understand health differently. The artists at the center of the culture wars—Finley, Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Guyton, the young British artists, and others—might be thought of as a first wave in the struggle to make our communities more accessible and democratic. They provide a powerful formula for questioning contemporary conceptions of beauty as well as suggesting an arena for future political intervention. The current battles about culture and political self-image

are being waged over the definition of health, and they are ripe for aggressive political action. Indeed, the culture wars may have greater potential for political engagement than other phenomena on the scene today. The political unconscious will always be in force, influencing conceptions of identities and bodies, both individual and collective, but because it is constantly shifting, social change is possible.

Notes

1. See also Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx* (1984), who provides a concise reading of the "primitive communism" important to Jameson's theories.
2. These are Newt Gingrich's words, describing controversial artists funded by the NEA, Andres Serrano in particular.
3. See Suhr 2000; and "Petzold vs. Borman's, Inc." (2000).
4. On the psychology of face-to-face encounters, see Fichten and Amsel 1988; Kleck, Ono, and Hastorf 1966; and Stiller 1984.
5. Cited in Fine and Asch 1988, 48.
6. A corollary to DeVries's experience appears in the account of a man born with one thumb. Surgeons removed the thumb to give his hands symmetry. Cited by Deborah Marks 1999, 67.
7. Lawrence Rothfield (2001) collects reactions and interpretations of *Sensation* from a broad group of cultural commentators. It is worth noting, however, that the volume never mentions disability as a factor in the controversy over the exhibition.
8. References are to Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997). Notice that the freak show is also one of the last sites where ordinary citizens are granted the "authority to interpret the natural world" (70).
9. See my discussion of the relation between beauty and otherness in "Kant and the Politics of Beauty" (1998).
10. A number of newspaper articles describe the painting as stained with elephant dung or feces: Barry and Vogel, "Giuliani Vows to Cut Subsidy over Art He Calls Offensive" (1999); and Goodnough, "Giuliani Threatens to Evict Museum over Art Exhibit" (1999). Giuliani himself exaggerated the amount of elephant dung and its impact on the painting further, while making some rather embarrassing admissions about his own creativity: "Anything that I can do isn't art. . . . You know, if you want to throw dung at something, I could figure out how to do that" (Goodnough); and "having a city-subsidized building have so-called works of art in which people are throwing elephant dung at a picture of the Virgin Mary is sick" (Blumenthal and Vogel). Dennis Heiner launched his attack under the mistaken impression that the painting was "covered in human feces." See Rayman and Gardiner 1999. The confusion continues two years later in an attack by Will: "The Brooklyn Museum of Art, like an infant squalling for adult

attention, specializes in the naughtiness of the untalented. Two years ago it put on 'Sensation,' an exhibition of the works of young British artists—average age, 35—including the portrait of the Virgin Mary splattered with elephant dung" (2001, A11). On the attempted vandalism, see McFadden 1999. On the relation between art vandalism and disability see my "Broken Beauty: Disability and Art Vandalism" (2002).

11. The cover story, "The Familiar Face of Fascism," in *Utne Reader* (Golsan 1995), exposes many striking connections between the fashion and beauty industries and the rejection of "degenerate" bodies by the Nazis and fascists. See also Eco, "Eternal Fascism" (1995); and my "Hitler and the Tyranny of the Aesthetic" (2000).

12. Carducci (1990, 64). See also Whitfield (2000–2001).

13. Cited by Yolles (1989, 27).

14. Many commentators have remarked, with irony, the special priority granted to protests by Heidelberg residents. Although complaints about abandoned buildings are widespread in Detroit, the city cannot respond to them because it lacks the funding to clean up neighborhoods. Action on complaints against the Heidelberg Project is the rare exception. See Carducci 1990; Hurt 1998; and Newman 1998.

15. See Burgdorf and Burgdorf 1976, 863, whose account of ugly laws I follow. See also Lifchez 1987, 2 n2; and Imrie 1996, 15, 62.

16. In this particular case, however, the illusion of health proved disastrous, since hundreds of the glass panels cracked before the building was occupied and had to be replaced with stronger glass at a cost of \$8.2 million. The building also shifted in the wind, requiring further construction, costing \$17.5 million, to stabilize its thin frame and to install two three-hundred-ton adjustable counterweights near its top to resist wind pressure. Cited by Knox 1987, 358.

17. See Mumford 1983, 403; and Sullivan 1979, who discusses everywhere the connection between bodies and design imperatives. For an illuminating discussion of modern architecture, focusing on Sullivan and Le Corbusier, see Imrie 1996, chapter 4.

18. Designers and architects learn to design buildings, environments, and products for "average" people, and, of course, the "average" person is always able-bodied. The incarnation of the "average" in the built environment excludes bodies that do not fit the norm and embeds in the flesh of that environment the desire to preserve the able body over all other forms and shapes. But the average person does not really exist, for someone who is average at one point in life fails to be average earlier or later on. Children and the elderly, for example, do not have average bodies. Averageness is a ratio used to reject human variation, and of these variations the disabled body is the easiest to exclude. See Imrie 1996, 19, 81–87, whose discussion of Le Corbusier and architectural standards is invaluable.

19. Freud, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, initially defines mechanisms of defense with reference to hysteria and, appropriately for my argument, in language ripe with architectural metaphors: "We are forced to regard as one of

the main pillars of the mechanism supporting hysterical symptoms an *elementary endeavour* of this kind to fend off ideas that can arouse feelings of unpleasure . . . to banish distressing affective impulses like remorse and the pangs of conscience. . . . It may be surmised that *the architectonic principle of the mental apparatus lies in a stratification—a building up of superimposed agencies*" (6: 147; Freud's emphases). He then abandons the idea of defensive processes for the theory of repression, only to revert to a theory of defense in his later work. He uses the concept of defense "explicitly as a general designation for all the techniques which the ego makes use of in conflicts which may lead to neurosis" ("Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety," 20: 163).

20. I find the connection between the ego and the self-image of political bodies suggestive for thinking about the defensive posture of public reactions to disability but cannot assert it rigorously, given the undeveloped state of group psychology as a discipline. Some thinkers using a Lacanian orientation, however, have pursued this line of thinking productively, most obviously Žižek 1989.

21. A caution: the analogy between hysteria and the disabled woman maintains the superficial demand for balance, coordination, posture, and outward appearance of perfection as the measure against which the disabled body and mind must compete. I apply it, as well as the term "hysterical architecture," with this caution, to insist on the importance of the superficial in the workings of the political unconscious. One can literally read the defensive reactions against disability in the commotion agitating the external skin of accessible buildings and their approaches. As I will enumerate, the commotion around disability and its symbols is sometimes cosmetic, obscuring markers of disability with decoration, and sometimes dissembling, complicating accessible entrances with erroneous signage or complicated distribution points. In most cases, the impression of superficiality dominates. See Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (11: 21–22).

22. My *The Subject and Other Subjects* (1998), especially chapters 1 and 6, elaborates at great length on the necessary supplementation of the political by the aesthetic.

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