See the Person (Not the Disability):
Deconstructing the Politics of Visibility and
the Performance of "Positive" Images
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Introduction

"Whenever we study disability we have to look to those in charge - whether self-appointed or officially - of telling us who deviants are and what they are like. Their versions of reality are presentations, people filtered through stories and world views." (Bogdan 1996: 35)

In Western society we have historically come to regard sight as providing our immediate access to the 'reality' of the external world. But beyond this, and perhaps because of this belief, seeing has become conflated with knowing - we daily experience and perpetuate this conflation in conversation through the commonplace linguistic appendages 'do you see?' or 'see what I mean?' to utterances that seem to require confirmation, or, when seeking opinion, by enquiring after people's 'views.' The naturalism employed is part of a project that attempts to construct a belief on the part of viewers in the illusion of objectivity - the belief that the realist image is somehow less susceptible to cognitive manipulation. Indeed, it could be argued that the 'linguistic turn,' which has been saddled with much of the blame for post-modern uncertainty, has provoked an increasing interest and reliance on the naturalism of the visual. And, as Diana Fuss (1989: 5) notes, the 'text' of the body, as the epitome of materiality and reality in essentialist accounts, is pre-eminently visual. It ` occupies a pure, pre-social, pre-discursive space. The body is "real," accessible, and transparent; it is always there and directly interpretable through the senses.'

However, in spite of Wittgenstein's (1961: 15) insistence that 'a picture is a fact,' and that we begin from visual forms, and talk and theorise and achieve understanding of those forms through mental constructs, Mitchell (1994: 13 and 16) reminds us that 'we still do not know exactly what visual images are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them the [visual image] is a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, bodies and figurality.'

These concepts are important and it is worth explaining them here. Visuality refers to the visual register in which the image and visual meaning operate; apparatus describes the means or 'media' by which images are produced and circulated; institutions are the organized social relations of image-making and circulation; bodies reminds us not only of one of the image's privileged subjects, but of the presence of the viewer, spectator, observer as the necessary `other' in the circuits of visual meaning; and figurality reminds us of the image's privileged position in relation to representing or 'figuring' the world to us in pictorial form. Mitchell (1994: 16) continues by showing how the study of the visual field is transformed by the 'realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the practices of observation, surveillance, visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or visual literacy may not be fully explicable on the model of textuality.'

What Mitchell is suggesting is that in order to resolve the 'paradox of perception' - 'the perceived thing exists only insofar as someone can perceive it' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 16) - vision should be realigned with interpretation, rather than with mere perception, and where the viewer is located as a `necessary other' in the process of interpretation. This is potentially more attuned to a constructionist perspective of the body, one which suggests that 'the body is never simply there, rather it is composed of a network of effects continually subject to sociopolitical determination the body is "always already" culturally mapped; it never exists in a pure or uncoded state' (Fuss 1989: 6).

Judith Butler takes up the story of the body, and also of the visual image, from this perspective. Writing about gender, for example, Butler (1990:140) says that gender is 'a construction that

conceals its genesis, the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions.' She argues that identity is the effect of performance and not vice versa, and that forms of self -identification are sustained through complex incorporations - identity is 'citational.' Though Butler's work has been premised in part on linguistic theories of performativity, it has now become widely discussed in terms of the politics of visuality. Like Mitchell, she questions the ease with which the visual is understood as 'read' in the same way that written texts are. Indeed, in a recent interview with Vikki Bell (1999: 169), and referring to a film of police officers beating Rodney King in Los Angeles, Butler argues that

> there is a performativity to the gaze that is *not simply the transposition of a textual model onto a visual one*; that when we see [the film] we are also reading and we are also constituting, and the reading is a certain conjuring and a certain construction. How do we describe it? It seems to me that it is a *modality of performativity*, that it is racialization, that the kind of visual reading practice that goes into viewing is part of what I would mean by racialization, and part of what I would understand as the performativity of what it is 'to race something' or to be 'raced by it.' (italics, mine)

In this essay, I want to explore some of these ideas further through discussion of the visual/textual representation of disability, particularly with respect to the politics of visibility, 'positive' images, inclusion and exclusion, and the notion of performativity.

In particular I will address 'people first' language and imagery, which, I argue, represents a discursive shift in the way that we both talk about and 'see' the disabled person, a shift that has been appropriated in a number of contested ways that perform disability differently. To illustrate this point, I will focus on a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992) of the 'See the person' poster campaign, recently launched by the UK Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to widespread criticism from the UK disability movement. I conclude that though the DfEE posters have successfully deployed a combination of visual/textual strategies that reinforce the hegemonic understanding of disabled people as 'second class citizens' and disability as an 'individual problem,' disability studies' own 'reading' of visual/textual representations of disability, in its retention of an essentialist perspective of the visual, or visualism, does not always have significantly different outcomes.

The politics of visibility, 'positive' images and visualism

Judith Butler's work emphasises that vision and knowledge are not simply causally related, in either direction, but are entangled with each other in the frameworks and complexities of specific histories and specific events. Modes of making 'visible' have to be placed within a critical and intertextual framework for interpretation (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Kristeva 1986), that treats them as forms of knowledge-making existing in particular social contexts, rather than as simply political uncoverings, which they may or may not be. There are a number of ways in which this might be particularly relevant for disability studies, but here I want to focus on disability politics and the visual representation of disabled people.

In the sphere of disability politics, a politic of visibility depends heavily on the doctrine of visualism - a visualism that itself, I would argue, has grown from some disability scholars' focus on particular inscriptions and reinscriptions of bodily representation. A politic of visibility was originally promoted by the disability movement in order to counteract the enforced, 'invisible' existence that many disabled people had led historically. This existence was, and in many ways still is a direct outcome of institutionalisation and other barriers that render disabled people silent, through the promotion of a totalising concept of 'negative' identity. The disability movement believes that the primary way that negativity can be challenged is through the production of 'positive' images, that is images that re-present disabled people in a 'positive' light and/or those which employ the vocabulary

of disability pride (Morris 1991) - images that aim to replace disability with ability. Such images give considerable impetus to the political campaigns of the disability movement in their employment of overt 'in your face' forms of 'talk,' both verbal and visual, as Simi Linton writes (1998: 3):

> We have come out not with brown woollen lap robes over our withered legs or dark glasses over our pale eyes but in shorts and sandals, in overalls and business suits, dressed for play and work - straightforward, unmasked, and unapologetic.

We are, as Crosby, Stills and Nash told their Woodstock audience, letting our "freak flag fly." And we are not only the high-toned wheelchair athletes seen in recent television ads but the gangly, pudgy, lumpy, and bumpy of us, declaring that shame will no longer structure our wardrobe or our discourse.

It is important to recognise that in relation to disability, both 'positive' and 'negative' images are constructed, evaluative, primarily cognitive images. They represent mental models of social events manipulated through the use of specific discourse structures. Within these structures the excluding, othering discourses of freakery and scientific objectification occupy a hegemonic status that is continuously resisted by a counter current of 'new' disability discourses (Corker 1999a, b), which encourage and promote the inclusion of disabled people by breaking down the artificial boundaries between disability and 'normality.'

In some quarters, this discursive shift from 'negativity' to 'positivity' is manifested in the drive towards representations that employ 'people first' language. However, I would suggest that 'new' discursive/visual strategies of resistance have been less successful in undermining similar artificial boundaries between 'positivity' and 'negativity,' for they depend upon the privileging of the 'positive' image. I will return to the specific issue of 'people first' language in the following section, but for the moment I want to concentrate on some of the dominant discourses of resistance in visual representation.

In discourses of freakery and scientific objectivism, the impaired body is placed outside the realms of an unproblematised 'normality.' As a physical form the impaired body lends itself to empirical objectification or social construction through medical, scientific, educational, legal and media discourses. In order to challenge such perspectives, disability scholars, particularly those in the USA, have attempted to reframe this particular representation in terms of the 'extraordinary' or the 'exotic' (Hevey 1992; Thomson 1996; Mitchell and Snyder 1997). This approach aims to capitalise on the strengths of the constructionist position's attention to "the body" as a social category and its systems of representation, by employing a liberal arts paradigm.

I have suggested elsewhere (Corker 1998, 1999a) that this way of 'making visible' is at the root of Deaf people's political campaigns. Deaf people's use of metaphors such as 'pictures in the air' or 'language in motion' to describe sign language has been remarkably successful in capturing Todorov's (1993) notion of 'exoticism" Exoticism is the main exception to the historical tendency to regard difference - or that which is Other to the Self - as something fearful or 'negative.' Difference, though it remains misunderstood, is considered to be strange but beautiful, sometimes even superior (Todorov, 1993).

However, when exoticism is exploited by the Other or the different within a politic of visibility, it can forge a powerful alliance with visuality as hegemonic practice. Deaf people's way of 'making visible' aims for the eyes of the viewer to dance to the image of 'strange but beautiful,' which is then transposed in the practice of viewing to the notion that Deaf people are different but 'normal.' This transposition is achieved because Deaf people simultaneously distance themselves from notions of impairment or illness that are the source of stereotypes and stigma (see Christiansen and Barnartt, 1995, for a detailed analysis of these issues in relation to Deaf people's political campaigns). Another similar example of the promotion of 'the exotic' can be observed in fashion photography, as highlighted in Rosemarie Garland Thomson's recent analysis (Thomson 1999).

Thomson describes a number of photographs appearing in the style magazine Dazed and

Confused and the fashion section of WE magazine, of 'double amputee covergirl' Aimee Mullins, who is portrayed as a kind of 'high-tech bionic mannequin.' Thomson says, for example, that 'no attempt is made to disguise' her streamlined, ergonomic prosthetic legs, and she suggests that 'the entire photo [therefore] thematically echoes her prostheses in a way that renders the whole image chic.' The images, she argues, 'produce a fresh, attention-grabbing brand of exotic radical chic that redefines disabled identity for the disabled consumer.'

However, it is worth remembering that Todorov does not view exoticism in a positive light, however, believing that it ranks with racism and nationalism in acting as a barrier to the acceptance of human diversity. The exotic is 'not free of value judgements' - it simply 'valorizes' that which 'does not belong" (Todorov 1993: 173).

If Mitchell's conceptualisation of the visual image as 'a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, bodies and figurality,' together with his notion of 'spectatorship' are applied to 'exotic' representations, such an application tends to yield a range of interpretations. For example, we might consider Fraser's (1999) analysis of the 'politics of visuality' in the queer movement, which focuses on the ways in which the 'making visible' of certain identities may appear to challenge the construction of hegemony, while simultaneously encouraging a form of complicity with a commercial capitalism that appeals to differentiated identities as 'markets.'

Returning to the example of Deaf people, this can be observed in the 'marketing' of sign language as an important skill that is increasingly visible in the media, in particular in the advertising of products linked to communication. In short, sign language has become a commodity, though one that is represented in a way that appears to distract from the 'reality' of linguistic oppression and the oppression of people with hearing impairments. But if we are watching a film that includes sign language, how far, in Butler's words, are we 'conjuring a certain construction' of Deaf people? In the act of viewing do we reinforce the discourse that only sign language using deaf people represent a 'positive' image of visibility and therefore, perhaps that all deaf people can sign? In other words how far do we 'positivise' and 'normalise' Deaf people in the act of viewing?

Similarly, an intertextual reading based on Fraser's comments about 'the politics of visuality', especially a reading which takes a view of power that derives from Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci 1971), might yield a number of different interpretations that contest Thomson's analysis. For example, we could re-examine Thomson's juxtaposition of 'high fashion' exoticism with what she calls 'the rhetoric of the ordinary,' where there is no attempt to conceal or hide impairment, but rather to place it among the ordinary and the everyday. The images of Aimee Mullins 'in her jock outfit and prosthetic legs' seem to have been read in their 'pure' form - as representations of impair-ment - uncluttered by the 'pollution' of sex and gender. In other words, in the context of a different viewer's gaze, the images of Aimee Mullins could be interpreted as having a similar effect to adver-tisements that play upon women's 'fear of aging' in order to sell anti-aging cosmetic products. As Hoechsmann (1997:192) writes, 'whereas citizens are responsive to nationalism, consumers are re-sponsive to brand awareness. In this new context, the ability of advertisers to associate their brand names with marginal or "exotic" cultural formations increases their likelihood of success.'

But what 'success' is at the heart of these images of Aimee Mullins, or more importantly, whose success? As Thomson writes, the image 'proudly mocks the very idea of the perfect body that has been the mark of fashion up until now.' We therefore need to ask why these images feature a 'beautiful' disabled woman, because though Aimee Mullins may be 'unique' she is not 'ordinary' - and she is certainly not 'the gangly, pudgy, lumpy, and bumpy of us' that Linton (1998) describes. She remains, in this viewing, 'amazing' and 'exotic.'

The prostheses, through the 'beauty' of their wearer, may well come across to the disabled consumer who is themself an amputee, as effecting a transformation in identity. But when the images are viewed as advertising products, they are clearly targeted at a particular disabled consumer - the 'extraordinary' few of us - who can successfully undergo this transformation. When viewed in terms of disability politics, however, what seems to be represented is the possibility of the 'beautiful cripple'

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only when she is presented within the framework of the exotic. The attempt to redefine disabled identity as 'exotic' therefore backfires in its dependence on the 'positive' beauty myth, even when located in 'the rhetoric of the ordinary.'

It therefore seems that the success of the 'exotic' has hidden costs. Indeed, it could be said that approaches to the representation of disability that play on these kinds of 'visibility' are not entirely satisfactory in any reading of the political or the social. The body appears reductive in such a way that it is often rendered inconsistent with the social category 'disability.' In fact, I would suggest that analysis of bodily representations, whereas they might contribute a great deal to the sociology and cultural representation of impairment, have more limited applications for the study of disability. Our understanding of both impairment and disability is weakened by the privileging of the 'extraordinary,' 'exotic' body in the realms of the 'visual' and the 'positive,' in a way that relegates the impaired mind or the impaired sense, as immaterial or quasi-material forms, along with those who choose not to be 'made' seeable, to the bottom of the hierarchy of hegemonic representations, and to the role of the ('ordinary') body of evidence.

Further, as Walker (1993:888) has suggested, where visibility and authenticity are conjoined, 'members of a given population who do not bear that signifier of difference or who bear visible signs of another identity are rendered invisible and are marginalized within an already marginalized community.' Walker describes this in terms of 'a cultural politics of looking like what you are' (1993: 866), but this of course assumes that what people 'are' can only be perceived in terms of essentialist notions of 'identity.' 'Positive' notions of identity play upon the widespread cultural denial of the inevitability and necessity of suffering and of messy or 'negative' feelings as part of 'normal' life (Craib 1994). They increase the tendency to make particular groups responsible for carrying their associations for everyone else through the strategy of scapegoating.

More importantly perhaps, in the context of visualism, the 'positive, proud' cognitive images portrayed by some new disability discourses are contested by the visuality of flying of 'the freak flag.' This marks a dual performative, or what Homi Bhabha (1983: 22) has described as a 'double articulation' - 'the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and in the economy of discourse, domination and power.' This is particularly important to the visual domain because of the inscription of impairment on the body of the subject through a variety of different 'visible' signifiers. Impairment differences, along with racial and sexual difference, 'differ' in some ways from other forms of difference because of the centrality of 'vision' - of what can be seen - to the 'truth' and 'legitimacy of differences' which these discourses produce. (Hall, 1999: 314) When the exotic is employed to valorize one part of this dual performative, it performs a contradictory message through the eyes of the spectator - one of 'sensuality, promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, [and] intense energy,' to draw upon the words of Edward Said (1978: 118) writing about the depiction of 'exotic' Muslims in art and film.

In a world where, on the one hand, vision is privileged among the senses and treated as wholly autonomous, free and even pure, and on the other hand, where visual symbols are experienced as mundane and necessarily embedded, and their interpretation is regarded as utterly contingent (Jenks 1995), the more readily accessible and taken-for-granted visual image of the impaired body silences 'new' disability discourses. The dual performative jars the audience already brainwashed by the media and by medical, legal, political, bureaucratic and scholarly text and talk - the 'screening' mechanisms by which disability is covered over, layered with meaning and rendered invisible. We are seen to 'disrupt the social order.' (Linton 1998: 7, 3). The conservatism of the 'extraordinary' or 'exotic' aesthetic or representation therefore seems to be just another re-writing of the old modernist tactic of 'shock the bourgeois' which continues in the pursuit of perfection in photographic technique, and which ultimately re-creates disability in the hegemonic sense. Further, in the context of disability politics, analyses that focus on 'positive' representations appear to make assumptions about the identity of the viewer and about the social context of viewing in a way that 'reads' the image as if the eye were 'a neutral corridor' (Jenks 1995). In other words, when the audience is referred to by the collec-

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tive 'we', who is 'we'? Everyone? Disabled people? Non-disabled people? Or disability scholars perhaps? This question provides an important framework for the following section.

See the person
When discourse is studied historically and dynamically and in terms of shifting configurations of discourse types, the term 'people with disabilities' is highly contested. What it actually means depends on the communicative context and location in which it is used. There are at least three main current usages that may, in practice, be combined:

> * in 'people first' language, such as that employed by the organisation of people with learning difficulties, People First, in order to project 'positive' images;

> * as a marker of distance from the political and social ideology of the disability movement, in particular from the movement's notion of institutionalised oppression;

> * as a means of dichotomising concepts of personhood and disability, often privileging (particular understandings of) the former through a denial of disability (and often impairment) and the impact it has on the life of the person.

The important thing to note about these concurrent meanings is how shifts between them reflect and constitute wider processes of social change. These different formations clearly imply different power relations and power struggles that have differing abilities to shape and transform the discourse practices of society and its institutions relating to disability. Although the second and third usages may seem similar, they are actually very different discursive formations in that the second focuses on a rejection of collective notions of disability and of the disability movement, whereas the third rests on an individual linguistic denial of disability and/or impairment which may be part of the strategy of 'passing.'
It is also true that the term 'disabilities' is itself highly metaphoric and metonymic. 'Disabilities' can refer both to the different kinds of barriers that are faced by disabled people and to the individual model of disability. In other words, at times it means disability in the social model sense and at other times, it means impairment in the social model sense. The most significant aspect of these varied meanings, however, is that they can signify both allegiance to disabled people and oppression of disabled people, and as such the term 'people with disabilities' is itself a dual performative. This means we have to be alert for shifts in meaning, for how the term is being used, who is using it and why, and who its use is targeted at.
The dual performance of the term 'people with disabilities' is of particular relevance to the new UK Department of Education and Employment's (DfEE) See the Person poster campaign. The DfEE states that this campaign is designed to provide 'positive images' of disabled people and to promote their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), thus suggesting that the government is adopting 'people first' language. However, The British Council of Disabled People (BCODP) clearly has suspicions that this is not the case, since it believes that 'this campaign misrepresents disability issues and undermines the position of disabled people in society today.' Bob Williams-Findlay, Acting Chair of the BCODP argues (italics added):

> The government's view seems to be that *if only society understood the person (and presumably forgets about disability) then disability discrimination would disappear.* Clearly, we have not moved on from 10 years ago when the previous government was talking about educate and persuade. However, the facts are clear, disabled people are not equal citizens due to the institutionalised discrimination we face. Tackling this discrimination cannot be done through asking people to change their attitudes (BCODP Website, July/August 1999).

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The disparity between these two 'statements of intent' is reflected in the mainstream disability press (for a range of views, though not necessarily representative, see *Disability Now*, August 1999, p. 16).

What I want to try to do now is to try to arrive at some intertextual understanding of the DfEE's message through the medium of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the application of Mitchell's five dimensions of image described in the introduction, and Butler's notion of performativity.

The See the person campaign, so far, has been distributed through the 'apparatus' of strategically placed bill-boards at public advertising sites, and posters in bus shelters. The DfEE Website contains only the rationale behind the campaign and does not show the images themselves and, so far as I am aware, the posters were not published in national newspapers. The choice of apparatus may in itself amount to a semiotic regulation of the identity of the viewer or spectator. For example, bill-boards can potentially be seen by a viewer on foot or passing in a car. However, bill-boards are commonly situated well above eye-level, when it is more likely that a viewer on the ground will be preoccupied with visual events at eye-level. Driving past in a car limits the time available for viewing which is necessary when the image conveys a subtle or complex message. What can be seen is therefore that which is most striking. Similarly, people waiting in a bus queue may have their line of vision obstructed to different degrees depending on where they are positioned in the queue.

All the posters so far released to public advertising sites have a similar format that operates through a combination of text and image. The first thing we notice is that the posters are in full colour, which marks a break with the 'realism' of black-and-white imagery in the 'social documentary' tradition, which has been widely used by charities, for example (Evans 1998). The photograph occupies about 70% of the total area of the poster - a privileged position that reminds us of Mitchell's notion of 'figurality.' Each photograph depicts a couple, one with visible impairment on the right, and one (apparently) not disabled on the left. In one photograph, the disabled woman (who is also black) is dressed in leather, and in another, the disabled man holds a pint of beer. In the top left hand corner, and occupying another 20% of the total space, is the headline in bold lettering, which draws upon the individual model of disability with statements like 'It's tragic,' 'He's got a problem with sex' or 'Kathy's hard to handle,' to quote three examples. In the top right hand corner, in much smaller lettering, the disabled person tells us why 'it's tragic' - 'my family supports Manchester United' (a UK football club); why 'he has a problem with sex' - his girlfriend's 'a real screamer;' and why Kathy 'is hard to handle' - 'If it's leather, I've got to have it!' And in the bottom right hand corner is the slogan 'See the person ..', though without the other half 'not the disability,' and the DfEE's logo.

How the images perform at the symbolic level depends on where the eye first enters the image, and also, as has been suggested, on the identity of the spectator. From the point of view of this observer, who is focused on the visual, there are two main possibilities that result from the juxtaposition of visible impairment and visible headline. Firstly, the gaze may move straight to the photograph and this immediately invites the viewer to consider the disabled/not-disabled dichotomy - to make a comparison between the disabled person and the non-disabled person. The eye is also given the immediate option of straying to the 'easier' image - in other words, the viewer is encouraged to literally see the (non-disabled) person and not the impairment in its personification as the disabled person - whereupon movement of the gaze a fraction to the left leads into the 'tragic' headline. The headline appears to affirm that the shift to the 'easier' image has been correctly negotiated. Once here, it is moreover difficult to make the shift to the top right hand corner because the size of the headline distracts from the disabled person's explanation of their 'unfortunate plight.' Secondly, for the more textually oriented viewer, and also one who 'sees' only the 'tragedy' of disability, the gaze may travel straight to the headline and then to the photograph, but this has a similar outcome in respect of where the eyes look next.

Thus far, I am suggesting that 'seeing' the posters in particular ways actively mitigates against our attention being drawn to the main point of the campaign, which lies in the disabled person's comment in the top right hand corner. These quotes are designed to show that disabled people are just like everyone else. But do they? Again the identity of the viewer yields different answers. Black

disabled feminist Nasa Begum (1999: 16) argues that the 'Kathy's hard to handle' poster 'feeds racist stereotypes that Black people, particularly African Caribbean people, are aggressive and hard to manage.' The reference to 'leather' feeds into this 'hard' image. Similarly, I would suggest that both the 'football' and the 'sex' posters perform gender in such a way that stereotypical 'macho' images of disabled men are projected, and in the case of the 'sex' poster, this is at the expense of the woman, who is projected as a sex object. All in all, then the posters are unable to get to grips with an approach that 'recognises all aspects of disabled people's identity and experiences in a positive way' (Begum 1999: 16). They simply succeed in pitting one aspect of identity against another.

Fairclough (1992: 12) adopts the view that 'critical approaches to discourse analysis differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies, and the constructive effects discourse has on social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants.' Because the 'author' of this campaign is an advertising company instructed by a government department - the DfEE, in a critical framework we must assume that the poster campaign will reflect a structurally necessary relationship between the portrayal of disability and the function of supporting and promoting government policy on disability. On one level, it certainly appears as if the campaign is focused on 'society. That is, disabled people are not the client group for this campaign (the government is) nor are we the intended audience or customers (employers and the non-disabled public are). However, it is significant in this respect that the DfEE appear to play down their role in getting rid of disability oppression by the discrete placement of their logo and byline See the person. This positioning encourages the viewer to focus on the 'main event' - the images themselves - giving out the message that disability is the viewers' problem, not the government's. It is hard to see, therefore, how disabled people can be the ultimate beneficiary of the campaign.

In summary, then, the DfEE's slogan invites us to 'See the person,' and as such is indicative of visual performance. But it is confounded by the message delivered through the clever interplay of text and photograph, I would suggest because the DfEE has successfully inverted the disability movement's narrow politics of visibility thereby highlighting its limitations. In assessing whether what we 'see,' itself dependent on how we 'see,' supports the intended message, it is clear that the text anchors the meaning of the visual image in a way that makes the intended audience - the 'necessary other' - 'see' and then ignore the impairment. However, it is not successful in making us 'See the person.' Though these images, unlike those explored by Thomson, locate 'disability' in the realm of the 'ordinary,' 'everyday' rather than making use of enfreakment, the exotic or the exceptional, this focus, by virtue of silence, suggests that we view disabled people as 'average' - itself one of the common stereotypes in circulation. Given that the campaign is in part targeted at employers who might otherwise refuse to employ disabled people, the message performed might as well be 'disabled people only have a right to "average" employment.'

Concluding remarks

As Bogdan (1996: 35) suggests, 'The concept of 'freak' no longer sustains careers. Human differences are now framed in other modes and by different institutions In the hands of professional organisations, the images created will be designed to reach the organisation's aim most effectively. To understand the presentations, to become dislodged from their hold on our reality, we have to trace their origins and understand their place in the world as it is presently constructed.' In this essay, I have emphasised the key error of positivism that the world consists of finished, static things, through highlighting the danger of a disembodied, monocular and ultimately hegemonic gaze, which surveys the world from a lofty position and reduces the multiplicity of visuality to some quantifiable 'realism.' In order to contest this gaze, I have substituted Bogdan's notion of 'presentation' with Butler's concept of 'performance,' thus evoking the 'necessary other' of Mitchell's spectator. I suggest that understanding interpretations of visual and textual representations of disabled people in terms of socially constituted performatives can only be achieved by a citizenry that has acquired a critical facility with

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visual and verbal communication, an awareness of the increasing interdependency of word and image, and of the important differences between reading and interpreting text and images. Such a critical facility, in my view can be more effective in the service of a political strategy aimed at breaking down the structures of disability oppression than the concentrated promotion of 'positive' images, themselves steeped in socially constructed evaluations, which perform particularistic disabled 'realities,' and which have so far failed to achieve manifest social change.

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