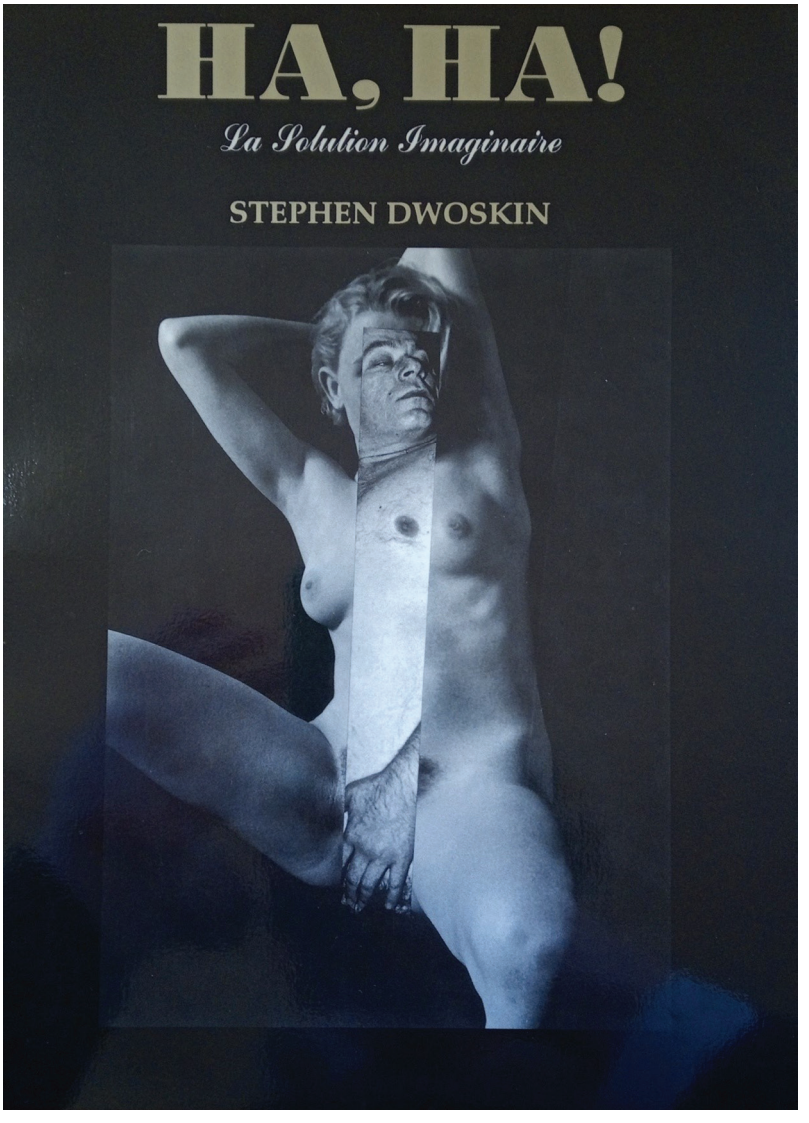
'A long meandering slide': feminist critique, genderqueerness, sexual agency and Crip subjectivity in Stephen Dwoskin's late works



Stephen Dwoskin, front cover image of *Ha, Ha! La Solution Imaginaire*, 1993. Dwoskin Archive at University of Reading Special Collections. Courtesy of the Dwoskin Archive.

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'A long meandering slide': Feminist critique, genderqueerness, sexual agency and Crip subjectivity in Stephen Dwoskin's late works

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ABSTRACT

Stephen Dwoskin was a prolific experimental filmmaker from the mid-1960s until his death in 2012. Commonly associated with the New York underground film scene and the London Filmmakers' Co-Op, which he co-founded in 1966, Jewish-American Dwoskin was also a childhood survivor of polio and a disability rights activist. Though an enduring oral legacy of feminist criticism of Dwoskin's work remains since the 1980s, Dwoskin's later work from the 1990s and 2000s is acutely understudied. In this article, I recontextualize earlier feminist positions in light of the 'cripping' of sexuality and gender proposed by recent critical disability studies, applied to two of Dwoskin's later works. Adopting archival evidence of feminist critique, feminist art histories and Crip approaches to sexuality, I examine androgyny and genderqueerness in Dwoskin's photomontages from Ha, Ha! La Solution Imaginaire *(1993) and conflations of critical medical and BDSM-structured care in the film* Intoxicated by My Illness *(2001). I conclude that Dwoskin's work invites rich epistemological re-evaluation of both feminist critique and entrenched sociocultural conceptions of gendered subjectivity, intimacy and sexual agency.*

KEYWORDS

Dwoskin
gaze
sexuality
feminism
disability studies
experimental film
photomontage
BDSM

> Am I feminine? Maybe I meant: 'What am I, a girl, a boy, something else entirely?' Maybe I meant: 'Can I be a girl *like this*?'
>
> (Clare 2015: 144, original emphasis)

In his essay and memoir of complexly embodied life, 'Stones in my pockets, stones in my heart', Eli Clare writes:

> When I look around me in disability community, I see an amazing range of gender expression, running the gamut from feminine to androgynous to masculine, mixed and swirled in many patterns. Clearly we respond in a myriad of ways to the ableist construction of gender.
>
> (2015: 152)

For Clare, disabled gender expression is full of delight, and disability is a source of expressive abundance and many-gendered joy. Clare also goes on to detail the ways that his sexuality – first as a gender non-conforming, disabled girl, then as a young butch lesbian and later as a queer disabled trans man – was deformed and suppressed by heteronormative and ableist social codes, practices and behaviours, which expected him to be sexually undesiring and undesirable as disabled, and yet sexualized as a person assigned female at birth. Could he be a girl *like this*, both damaged by and surviving in a world where discourses about gender and bodies battle violently to remain binary: girl/boy, non-disabled/disabled? In his foreword to the 2009 re-edition of *Exile and Pride*, Clare describes his shift across gender lines, from butch lesbian to trans man, as 'a long meandering slide' (2015: xxvii) and his accompanying desire for 'all the many gendered possibilities in the world to be, not normal, but rather profoundly ordinary and familiar' (2015: xxviii). This desire for a *banality* of many-genderedness, for its possibilities to be so thoroughly embedded in a culture that they are no longer remarkable, might still seem utopian. And yet, it is in the arts that these possibilities set seed and multiply. And, I argue, some of these seeds take root in the late photographs and films of Stephen Dwoskin.

This article uses Clare's utopian notion of the 'long meandering slide' to discuss disability, gender and sexuality in the late photomontages and films by Dwoskin (1939–2012), the Jewish-American artist and filmmaker from Brooklyn, New York, who in 1964 arrived in London on a Fulbright fellowship, where he remained for the rest of his life. Dwoskin was an intermedial artist, a filmmaker as well as a photographer and painter, and co-founder of the London Filmmakers' Co-Op in 1966, from its first site in the basement of Better Books, then a calling ground for British and American avant-garde writers and artists. I adopt Clare's concept of the 'long meandering slide' as a critical tool, since its ambivalence and temporal stretch offers poetic precision while, at the same time, enabling me to synthesize complex issues at play in relation to gender, disability and sexuality. This facilitates the article's negotiation of the complexities of feminist film and art histories, on the one hand, and the gendered gaze, desire, agency and sexuality in Dwoskin's work, on the other.

Numerous scholars in disability studies have already deployed the term intersectionality to discuss the confluences of oppression related to gender, disability and race (Erevelles and Minear 2010: 127; Hirschmann 2012: 396; Moodley and Graham 2015: 24). However, it is not my claim in this article to focus on models of loss, trauma or oppression, which in its original incarnation was how legal critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw theorized the intersecting oppressions of Black women (1991: 1241). As an alternative to intersectionality's focus on intersecting oppressions, I instead make the case for a utopian fluidity of genderqueerness, disability and sexuality in Dwoskin's works, using established concepts from critical disability studies that reclaim the term 'crip' in analogous ways to queer theory's reclamation of the term 'queer', to form *crip theory*. Building on the early formations of disability studies and sexuality, such as Tom Shakespeare, Kath Gillespie-Sells and

Dominic Davies, and the foundational work of Crip theorists Robert McRuer and Alison Kafer (Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006), I follow the utopian directions of Clare's 'meandering slide'. In so doing, I examine how Dwoskin's works not only subvert conceptualizations of disabled sexuality and gender, amplifying the power and polyvalence of desire both heterosexual and queer, but also expose and critique binary and/or oppositional conceptualizations of gender, sexual intimacy, agency and care.

As a result, my article is also an ambivalent engagement with and expansion beyond the existing intangible heritage of feminist criticism of Dwoskin's work.[1] Although not always explicitly documented in the archive, my research on the AHRC-funded project 'The Legacies of Stephen Dwoskin's Personal Cinema' has frequently encountered comments about Dwoskin from prominent feminist film scholars and artists, which at best display ambivalence about engaging with or promoting Dwoskin's work, and at worst imply accusations of masculine impropriety on Dwoskin's part. Feminist codes of ethics do not permit the disclosure of these sources, not least because of the signal importance of protecting the whisper network to preserve feminist communities (see Babel 2018: 67; Peters 2020). Nonetheless, it is the intangible and embodied heritage of these feminist critiques which have led me to examine both the historical and archival records on Dwoskin's filmmaking and to consider possible origins or motivations for these critiques.

It should also be acknowledged that Dwoskin's films do not make for 'easy' viewing: like many filmmakers in both experimental and mainstream theatrical distribution networks, many of Dwoskin's films invoke sensations of discomfort, confusion, vulnerability, rage and bad feeling.[2] Dwoskin's films, which are indeed often sexually explicit, erotic and exploratory, undoubtedly and often depict women in states of emotionally raw vulnerability – conventionally beautiful women, often naked and sexually alluring, a small number of whom were also Dwoskin's lovers and life partners as well as collaborators. Scholars such as Rachel Garfield have already made the case that the gaze of Dwoskin's camera renegotiates relationships between seer and seen, beyond the male/female, active/passive dynamics of earlier feminist theories of spectatorship. For Garfield, Dwoskin's camera, which is often turned upon himself, creates new modes of spectatorial engagement, affective and embodied involvement and intersubjectivity, such as in his film *Behindert* (1974), which stages the emergence and dissolution of a disabled man and non-disabled woman's intimate relationship, performed by Dwoskin and his former lover, collaborator and lifelong friend Carola Regnier (Garfield 2017). I build upon Garfield's argument that Dwoskin's camera and gaze renegotiate binary dynamics of the gaze, and of self-representation. Working against currents of academic practice which demand clarification, taxonomization, documentation and classification, I want to make the case that reappraising Dwoskin's later work, in the light of those earlier feminist criticisms, requires tactics of ambivalence – explicitly acknowledging the 'long meandering slide' of gender, sexuality, vulnerability and intimacy across the historical sweep of Dwoskin's oeuvre.

Dwoskin's artworks encourage new meandering slides between social and cultural conceptualizations of the gendered gaze, as well as care, sexuality and intimacy. This is aided by the intimate nature of Dwoskin's creative practice and vision as an artist, but is not exclusively tied to his identity as a disabled, Jewish, ostensibly heterosexual man. It is the embodied complexity of disability, and disabled sexuality especially, which facilitates in Dwoskin's works a meandering slide beyond binarized gendered and sexual oppositions: male/female, girl/boy, man/woman, abled/disabled, active/passive, desiring/desired, carer/cared for, pleasure/pain, sickness/health. In Dwoskin's work, it is less a case of *either/or*, but *both/and*. I consider this ambivalent approach, beyond binarization, to be the key contribution of Dwoskin's work to feminist models of critique, which, I argue, still retain a historic

1. 'Intangible heritage' is a term more commonly used in heritage studies and was ratified by UNESCO's General Conference in 2003, defined as 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – in other words heritage that is embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects' (Logan 2007: 33).

2. Nikolaj Lübecker has previously theorized the 'feel bad' film in relation to a wider corpus of European cinema (Lübecker 2015).

connection to the heteronormatively able body as the standard of engagement for theorizations of the gaze. As I have argued elsewhere, it behoves feminist theorizations of embodiment and phenomenology in film to account for disability and ableism in their future engagements (Chamarette 2018). Not only is there a 'gap' in the archive where one might hope written documentation of feminist critique would support the intangible heritage of that critique; the emergence of critical disability studies as a field only began in the 1990s. 'Crip' theory and the ways that it names and troubles ableist heteronormative models of subjectivity and agency are relatively new concepts in the field, certainly when compared to more established feminist models. While I consider myself an intersectional feminist theorist and scholar, I am also a scholar of disability and aware of historic limitations in the scope of earlier feminist models in the United Kingdom: not just about race, or the historical emergence of sex-worker exclusionary feminisms in the 1980s and 1990s, but also about disability.

To focus my analysis, I discuss the book and photographic series *Ha, Ha! La Solution Imaginaire* (1993) and Dwoskin's late film *Intoxicated by My Illness* (2002). I argue that these (re)presentations of disabled sexuality challenge the ableist, heterosexist matrix of desire, which often denies sexuality to non-heterosexual and/or disabled bodies. Dwoskin's works present a different way of looking, which disrupts the ableist logics of who and what should and should not be seen, desired, gendered, cared for – and how. Earlier feminist critiques have had a lasting impact on the reception of Dwoskin's works, without necessarily accounting for the powerful interventions that disability stages on operations of sexuality, eroticism, labour and desire. I therefore make this case not to place Dwoskin's work above critique, but rather to demonstrate the integrative potential that lies in exploring sexual bodies and embodied sexuality in selected works. And, furthermore, to argue that disabled sexuality has the capacity to regenerate gender as a joyful, swirling pattern of genderqueerness. Crip sexuality exceeds heteronormative frameworks joyfully, brutally, exuberantly, playfully, painfully, pleasurably: genderqueerness comes to the fore, confusing and estranging non-disabled conceptualizations of binary gender and heteronormativity. This means that the embodied gaze – central to any engagement with Dwoskin's work – needs to be reconfigured in the light of Crip sexuality and inclusive models of sexual practice. I suggest that we reconsider Dwoskin's embodied gaze in his works not as heteronormative, non-disabled and 'male' but rather as sexually non-normative, disruptive, Crip and genderqueer.

Man/woman, erotics and feminist critique: *Ha, Ha! La Solution Imaginaire* (1993)

Clare's descriptions of genderqueerness and the 'long meandering slide' resonate with my encounters with the series of black-and-white photographic collages or cut-ups that Dwoskin made for his artist's book *Ha, Ha! La Solution Imaginaire*. *Ha, Ha!* contains around 30 images, predominantly of nudes or semi-clothed women in positions of repose, sitting, lying or standing – women of colour and white women, women aged between 20 and 40 and one image of a pregnant woman – each of which appears on the recto side of each double spread. The text occupying the verso side pertains to the book's title: a story of an elderly man looking back on his life, trying to uncover the identity of his first lover, and letters from his mother and sister, while encountering a swirling array of women, ghostly feminine figures and laughing quasi-mythic female spirits with whom he has varying degrees of sexual intimacy.

Darragh O' Donoghue describes the narrative form and content of *Ha, Ha!* as a reworking of proto-surrealist writing by absurdist playwright Alfred Jarry (*Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*) and alt-surrealist Georges Bataille (*Ma Mère*, *Story of the Eye*) (Bataille 1966, 1978; Jarry 1996; O'Donoghue et al. forthcoming 2022). 'La solution imaginaire' is a reference to Jarry's 'pataphysics', which Dwoskin glosses briefly in his introduction. Jarry claimed to develop metaphysics beyond itself, to create a set of 'solutions' to metaphysical problems, conceived entirely within the imaginary or imaginal realm. 'Pataphysics is', according to Jarry scholar Christian Bök, 'a supplement to metaphysics, accenting it, then replacing it, in order to create a philosophic alternative to rationalism', and 'an oneiric science aware of its own status as a dream' (2002: 3, 4). *Ha, Ha!*'s text itself seems loosely inspired by Jarry's pataphysics, rather than attempting to reproduce it: there also is an evident relationship to André Breton's key surrealist text, *Nadja* (whose failure to consider female subjectivity at all was documented by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*), as well as other photo-roman texts of the interwar period (Beauvoir 1953: 246; Breton 2013).

The photographic prints for *Ha, Ha!* were posthumously exhibited several times – at the Horse Hospital in London in 2014 and at the now-defunct Vilma Gold Gallery in 2015. Dwoskin later used a similar set of cut-up techniques for a project called 'Under Movie Stars', published in the Dutch film journal *Skrien* in 1995, featuring images of, among others, Ava Gardner and Marlene Dietrich (Dwoskin 1995: 40). The *Ha, Ha!* photomontages are striking, beautifully executed, both erotic and destabilizing. Simon Smith, a contemporaneous reviewer of the book for *Disability Arts Magazine*, for which Dwoskin was also contributing editor at one point, mentions familiarity with the surreal lived experience of disability: 'We, the disabled, are the unfamiliar, in an able-bodied concept of the familiar. When the two worlds meet one could say that the situation has a surreal quality about it' (Smith 1993). At the same time, Smith expresses discomfort and resistance to the series of photographic nudes, disturbed by the implied violence of the images, where photographic presentations of young, beautiful women have been cut up and rearranged as photomontage:

> With a long history of women being exploited by male photographer's [*sic*] many viewers are going to be put on edge. Add to this the fact that Dwoskin has edited the images in such a way that the women have essentially been 'cut up', and it is not surprising that many people are going to be angered by the images content before they think about it's [*sic*] form.
>
> (Smith 1993)

Significantly, the review overlooks the one male body included in these photomontages: that of Dwoskin himself. The front cover image of *Ha, Ha!* is also the most well known, and perhaps the most striking of the entire collection. The portrait depicts a reclining nude, legs akimbo, arms raised in butterfly formation behind her head. Dark blond hair frames the nude's face in a short, wavy bob. The crease of her eye socket is visible, and the beginning of one eyebrow. Her body looks slim, flexible, at ease in this wide-legged, sexually inviting pose. The traces of her ribs fan gently beneath her rounded breasts. Her body exudes youthfulness: she is perhaps in her twenties or early thirties. Her armpits are shaved and her pubic hair trimmed in a neat V-shape. One leg is raised, open, revealing the tender skin of her inner thigh. The other leg faces the camera, faint bruises visible on the front of her bent knee, cast partly in shadow. She is the epitome of white, heterosexual, non-disabled, conventionally desirable femininity.

The woman's slim, young, light-skinned body is bisected with another photographic insert, obscuring her face, the centre of her torso and her genitals. This off-vertical insertion/montage is a nude portrait of Dwoskin himself: a low-angle shot of his face, neck, chest, including one naked nipple, stomach and genital region. His hand reaches down to his own pubic area and, by inference, covers the female nude's pubis too. His pale skin reveals a scattering of body hair, thin creases in the skinfolds of his neck and a soft, clean-shaven jawline. He looks to his left, away from the camera, light gleaming off the half-profile of his nose, chin and the upper ridges of his eye socket between eyelid and eyebrow. By contrast to the gentle, studio side-lighting of the female nude, the frontal flash lighting of the male nude flattens the surface textures of his skin. There are few visible contours on his torso, though there is a gentle curve where his neck and sternum meet in the upper left of the insert. Compared to the female nude, Dwoskin's musculature is less pronounced within the frame. The length of his torso, depicted from a lower angle, is longer than the torso of the woman who frames him. The skin of hand and forearm that covers, protects or cups his pubic region is much darker in tone than his pale, exposed torso. These are hands frequently exposed to daylight, while the torso is sheltered. His left hand is larger than the insert's frame: thumb and forefinger are cut off. Third and fourth finger are pressed together, as if probing the mass of dark, curly pubic hair just visible beneath.

The image touches without touching, intimating without establishing erotic contact between the male-presenting and female-presenting bodies, simultaneously implying mutual masturbation and auto-eroticism. Within the insert is framed, suggested and invited the purpose of both erotic and pornographic images. The vertical bisections and rule-of-thirds composition of the image invite enmeshment at the intersection of masculine and feminine sex organs. My eye is drawn not up to the face, but down to the probing, covering, caressing, investigating, protecting, caring, querying hand above and upon a genital region that is both feminine and masculine. Covered by a masculine-presenting hand, surrounded by a feminine-presenting body.

There are at least two oppositional interpretations of this image. The first is a feminist critique that condemns Dwoskin's work for its deployment of the female nude as erotica (aligned with Smith's questioning review above), thus perpetuating cycles of objectification and mystification that Lacanian-informed feminisms of the 1980s were at pains to critique, as I will outline below. The second is a more expansive appreciation of Dwoskin's own situated body within the photographic montages of *Ha, Ha!*'s text, its citational debt to feminist art histories of montage and collage, and combinations of self-representation and self-implication in processes of looking. The former interpretation deserves consideration in the light of the feminist formations that underpin it; the latter queries gendered and sexual binaries in the light of Dwoskin's disabled body and the non-normative sexualities and subjectivities constructed through this mode of self-representation.

In the former interpretation, Dwoskin, the male artist, has interceded in the frame of the nude – that classical source of art historical inspiration – inserting a part self-portrait that subsumes or overlays female representation and slices her into body parts that engulf his image. The artist, in representing himself, takes over her face and her ability to look: denying visibility to the primary agent of her own desire. This act is at the same time protective (subjecting his body to the gaze of the spectator while covering over hers) and delimiting: the nude has no face nor expression of desire but his own. His desire is aligned through the harshness of a straight-cut line onto this faceless or defaced female body, in a phallic vertical extension that covers over her desire and thus makes most prominently visible his own. Touch becomes ownership: the hand that covers the genitals is a hand that grabs the genitals to possess them.

This type of feminist critique supports claims that Dwoskin's work reproduces models of structural patriarchal oppression and is implicitly and explicitly sexist or misogynist, but it also belies the more complex feminist art historical underpinnings of photomontage and collage as an art form, particularly as they respond to the paradoxes of contemporary cultures and their relationships to the near and distant past (in the work of feminist art historians like Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer, Gwen Raaberg, and Maud Lavin). Consequently, a feminist historiography of sorts is necessary to contextualize both this typology of feminist critique of Dwoskin's work and feminist and genderqueer art histories of collage.

The historical record on feminist criticism of Dwoskin's art and filmmaking is indeed more complex than might at first be imagined. 1970s feminist critics such as Ros Spain were distinctly impressed by Dwoskin's film *Dyn Amo* (1972), which depicts the suffering of women working in a strip club. Spain states:

> Dwoskin inadvertently shows more about the condition of women than most directors in any films now or in the past: inadvertently, because women are not his prime concern – his themes are general and concerned with loneliness, oppression and above all vulnerability.
>
> (1972: 35)[3]

This positive feminist assessment is not unusual: an anonymous, personal response to *Dyn Amo* in feminist journal *Shrew* in 1972 describes the author's conflicting emotions while watching the film, praising Dwoskin for depicting the female characters' suffering and, by implication, the society that exploits them (Women's Liberation Workshop 1972: 6).[4] In fact, the most vociferous criticisms of Dwoskin's films of the 1970s, particularly *Dyn Amo*, seem to have been countered by feminist critics, rather than originating from them. This is affirmed in an interview with Dwoskin published in French newspaper *La Libération* in 2006, where Dwoskin says: 'Gender Studies feminists rehabilitated the film, which they considered to be an attack on a certain form of machismo' (Azoury 2006, translation added). Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey speaks supportively of Dwoskin's works in *The Cinema of Stephen Dwoskin*, the 1984 documentary directed by Anna Ambrose. Nonetheless, in a 2005 interview with François Bovier, Dwoskin describes how his work influenced Mulvey's reflections on her foundational essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', albeit that 'she found my films "difficult" for her (from a feminist point of view) at first' (Bovier 2006; Mulvey [1975] 1989). To confirm this claim, in her obituary piece on Dwoskin, Mulvey mentions that her first draft of her famous article included a section on Dwoskin's early films (Mulvey 2012). This nuanced range of responses speaks both to 'difficult' viewing encounters with Dwoskin's films from the 1960s and 1970s and to the significance of his work for feminist film theorists in the development of their own analyses.

The historiographical placement of Dwoskin's films in the context of British experimental films from the 1960s onward also plays an important role in the broader reception of his work. Many of these historical accounts, such as those of A. L. Rees and David Curtis, place Dwoskin in a specific configuration in relation to experimental film in Britain. Rees praises Dwoskin's work as 'highly iconic […] blend[ing] neo-structural film with underground vision which expanded vision through an erotics of the eye' (Rees [1999] 2019: 90). Curtis's *History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain* refers to Dwoskin principally as an underground filmmaker akin to Andy Warhol, elaborating mainly on his films of the 1960s and early 1970s (Curtis 2007: 249–50). Caught up in the historical sweep of Rees's and Curtis's accounts, the range and breadth of autobiographical and essayistic modes in Dwoskin's work are inevitably condensed. If historiographies of experimental films

3. With sincere thanks to Henry K. Miller for obtaining a copy of this for me.

4. Full thanks and acknowledgement to Darragh O'Donoghue for his research assistance, summaries of difficult-to-access journals and very thorough cataloguing of feminist ambivalence towards Dwoskin's films.

and videos in Britain tend to restrain their purview of Dwoskin to his film production in the 1960s and 1970s, Paul Willemen's 1976 essay 'Voyeurism, the look, and Dwoskin' has no doubt sedimented perspectives on Dwoskin and his gaze as a filmmaker. The significance of this essay to film studies, in particular the formation of a 'fourth look' invested in the spectator's own voyeurism or exhibitionism, has resulted in its regular reproduction in anthologies of film criticism and theory. This means that Willemen's text is also the most highly cited work of scholarship on Dwoskin. These intersecting and influential writings on experimental cinema and the gaze leave limited room on the record for feminist film reception and feminist film critique. Nonetheless, this does not prevent a feminist history of critique to powerfully shape contemporary readings of Dwoskin's work.

While it is more difficult to track down explicit written critique of Dwoskin's films, there is nonetheless a legacy of feminist responses of anger and attempts to dismiss or prevent screenings of Dwoskin's works: crucial aspects of the films' historiography. There is at least one documented account in the archive of organized walkouts from and attempts to suppress Dwoskin's films, with the implication that these were feminist actions. In 1982, Dwoskin wrote to the journal *Films on Screen and Video* describing some of these events:

> [S]ix feminist students, impassioned by the BFI's preoccupation with sexism in film, tried to persuade the Student's Union to forbid all showings of all my films on College premises – even though they were attending my courses and tutorials! The angry divisions thus introduced into the student body were mild, however, compared to earlier attempts at the ideological takeover of film studies here.
>
> The same kind of terrorism was fostered in Bristol, where a well-known film theorist tried very hard to persuade the Arnolfini Gallery to withdraw my film *Behindert*, a West German TV production, because of her Lacan-inspired theories about the attitudes in it. In the Open Forum after the screening, a SEFT-inspired clacque succeeded in sabotaging any discussion of its subject, the intimate problems of the disabled, a central theme of the Year of the Disabled.
>
> (1982: n.pag.)[5]

In this letter, Dwoskin names three occasions during which he experienced feminist direct action in relation to screenings and discussions of his work: one at the Royal College of Art, where he taught; one in the distribution and exhibition of his film *Behindert* at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol; and one during the post-screening discussion, where he blames the Society for Education in Film and Television, the original publishers of pioneering film journal *Screen*. Archival material cannot identify the 'Lacanian-inspired' film theorist who tried to halt the screening of *Behindert*. Nonetheless, this letter appears to allude to a cultural and academic phenomenon in emerging film theory of this period. In her foundational edited volume, *Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, E. Anne Kaplan usefully identifies from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s the emergence in film scholarship of a

> complex paradigm that included psychoanalysis but that was not limited to this method. A complicated mixture of various kinds of thought – semiotics, post-structuralism, Russian Formalism, feminism, a Brechtian 'politics of modernism', Althusserian Marxism, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis – produced a set of approaches within a circumscribed frame in the influential British film journal, Screen […] This complex intellectual paradigm is often referred to as 'Lacanian Film Theory', a

5. Again my thanks to Henry K. Miller for unearthing this material from the Dwoskin Archive.

> label which in no way captures the many-sided and complex set of theoretical tools that were in fact involved.
>
> (2013: 8–9)

This 'Lacanian film theory' identified by Kaplan and the 'Lacanian-inspired film theorist' and 'SELFT-inspired claque' identified by Dwoskin all speak to this confluence of Lacanian, (post)structuralist and feminist psychoanalytic approaches in British film scholarship and university teaching, at a fertile moment in the evolution of disciplinary thinking in film studies. Indeed, feminist film theorists between 1975 and 1985 both in the United Kingdom and the Unites States systematically analysed representations of women on screen as implicitly endorsing patriarchal violence: Molly Haskell's evaluation of the changing forms of female representation in Hollywood – *From Reverence to Rape* (Haskell and Dargis 2016) – being a pivotal example. The (post)structuralist and psychoanalytic focus of British feminist film theory on concepts of the look, the Lacanian gaze and Christian Metz's concept of suture in spectatorship by scholars like Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston are now canonical to studies of film theory.[6] This deeper feminist context surfaces, I suggest, in Dwoskin's account of feminist resistance to his work. However, Lacanian feminist film theory is not the only informing dimension for the emergence of feminist critique of Dwoskin's works, since lively debates on iconoclasm and the female form in art history also contribute to this wider picture. In *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, feminist art historian Lynda Nead examines the polemical claim of artist-filmmaker and contemporary of Dwoskin – Peter Gidal – that 'I do not see how […] there is any possibility of using the image of a naked woman […] other than in an absolutely sexist and politically repressive patriarchal way in this conjuncture' (Nead cites Gidal from Wolff 1990: 120). Nead suggests that Gidal's claim effectively places a prohibition on female representation, 'an assertion that within patriarchy the female body is beyond representation; that it is […] "obscene"' (1992: 76). Via Janet Wolff's pivotal essay, 'Reinstating corporeality: Feminism and body politics', Nead also considers artist and theorist Mary Kelly's modification of Gidal's proscriptive statement, that 'to use the body of the woman, her image or her person, is not impossible but problematic for feminism' (Kelly cited in Nead 1992: 76).

Thus, in a cultural climate of pronounced conversations about the female form, which highlighted the unresolved tensions of any kind of feminine representation, *Ha, Ha!*'s arresting photomontage of a young female nude interspliced with Dwoskin's middle-aged body is undoubtedly controversial. In its frontal presentation of nudity, desire and masturbation, the photo-collage actively courts that controversy. In Gidal and Kelly's terms, the *Ha, Ha!* image presents masculine control (of the image and of the direction of the gaze in the image/in the subject of the image) that countermands feminine desire, co-opts it, erases it, objectifies it. In this context, the image embodies masculine-presenting, heterosexual-presenting, auto-erotic desire. The 1993 *Ha, Ha!* cover image, therefore, has the potential to fulfil a certain critical destiny: of feminist excoriation, accusations of masculine voyeurism and activist proscription of the female nude.

However, just as *Ha, Ha!* is more complex than a straightforward eroticization of the female body, so too are activist undercurrents of feminist resistance and critique. For one, a feminist reading of Dwoskin's work does not end with iconoclastic prohibitions of the female form from the 1980s and 1990s. And second, this ignores two key contextual elements that posit the feminist art historical lineage of *Ha, Ha!*: its intertextual references to experimental writing and the intermedial relationships of photomontage to feminist and women's artmaking in the twentieth century, which specifically incorporate an appeal to androgyny as a constituent

6. Please note that these influences refer to structuralist and post-structuralist theories of the kind produced by French scholars such as Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan and Christian Metz, and *not* the British American experimental film movement 'structural film' of which Peter Gidal and Malcolm Le Grice were key proponents.

part of their history. These heritages trouble more straightforward assumptions about male and female representation and the straightforwardly patriarchal interpretation of the image that had been the mainstay of feminist film critique in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although Dwoskin describes his photographic work in the book's acknowledgements as 'photo-collages', the visual relationships to art histories of photomontage seem quite clear. So too are *Ha, Ha!*'s textual relationships to and influences from women writers. Indeed, the extended prose poem that accompanies the images in *Ha, Ha!* deploys a kaleidoscopic range of intertextual references, ranging from Angela Carter's *The Passion of the New Eve* (whose main protagonist is a transgender woman) and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman*, to the sexually frank, intertextual-autofictional writing collage practices of Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations*.[7] The explicitly sexual and often gender-shifting nature of these women writers' works resonates with *Ha, Ha!*'s textual frameworks. And, rather than fixate on the image of one woman, as is the case in the obsessional time-travelling narrative arc of a comparable work – Chris Marker's *photo-roman* and photogrammatic film *La Jetée* (1962) – Dwoskin's text instead dedicates itself to 'all the women', shifting narratorially between the elderly protagonist's past and present encounters with his lovers, mother and sister. Whereas the accompanying text explicitly and implicitly draws upon material from Dwoskin's life – snatches of quotations, objects, experiences and memories – the photomontage images are unannotated and unreferenced. And while the eroticism that runs between the photomontages and the text is clear, the images themselves confine themselves to frontal nudity and depict physical poses, rather than the sexual acts more explicitly discussed in the text, which range from female masturbation to assorted metaphors, metonyms and euphemisms for erections, frottage, vaginal penetration and cunnilingus. Across the entirety of the book's 120 pages, the text revels in descriptions of women and their various forms: all beautiful, sexually alluring, commanding or otherwise mastering the body of the elderly protagonist, who himself shape-shifts and takes on different, sometimes geometrical forms in acts of erotic encounter with a shifting and metamorphosing cast of women figures. The text itself enacts a kind of ekphraistic collage of female and feminine bodies, while the images alongside create assemblages of women, clothed and unclothed, dolls, masks and other surrealist paraphernalia.

Collages of the eroticized female nude cannot help but connote a pre-existing relationship to feminist and non-dominant art histories. In the late 1970s, feminist artists Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer coined the term *femmage* to describe the abundant domestic collage techniques used by women to create art. While Schapiro and Meyer describe work made by women as the first defining criterion for *femmage*, they also outline a heritage of collage that owes itself to cultural outsiders (Schapiro and Meyer 1977: 66). In the late 1990s, feminist art historian Gwen Raaberg revisited this question, suggesting that 'artists who are culturally marginal may find certain strategies particularly useful in representing that position' and emphasizing that fragmentation and discontinuity are political tactics for collage (1998: 153). After Raaberg, I suggest that *Ha! Ha!* is better understood as a recollection of references to already fragmented, marginalized works, including textual collages of women's erotic writing and histories of feminist and non-dominant photomontage practices. This facilitates a reading that also understands photomontage's relationship to androgyny and gender-crossing through the work of avant-garde artists such as Hannah Höch, Claude Cahun, Dora Maar and HD, co-founder of the film journal *Close-Up* and an artist who Dwoskin admired.

The appropriation of the eroticized image is well established in avant-garde photography and photomontage practices, as Rosalind Krauss has discussed

7. Dwoskin's notebooks in the archive reveal preliminary sketches for a film based on Carter's writings:

> The New Eve […] the confrontation of this woman's body with a man's mind (and his motives) thrown into the contradictory social landscape provides the near bizaar [*sic*] alteration of roles, image and thoughts rock about the film until the NEW EVE is born.
>
> (Dwoskin n.d.: n.pag.)

extensively (1981: 3). But Hannah Höch's composites of masculine- and feminine-presenting bodies seem particularly relevant to the *Ha, Ha!* images – not least because both Höch and Dwoskin share an object of fascination in the androgynous and queer figure of Marlene Dietrich (the subject of one of Dwoskin's photomontages for Dutch journal *Skrien*). Höch scholar Maud Lavin draws extensively on Weimar popular and political cultures to discuss the polyvalent gender ambivalence that manifests structurally in Höch's photomontages, which collide but do not deny conflicting structures of normative and non-normative desire, binary and more-than-binary gender. Lavin makes the case that

> [t]he fragmented nature of photomontage can encourage – if not an escape from fetishism – an awareness of fetishistic operations, of the viewing mechanism itself, and therefore the position of the viewer vis-à-vis the gender identities portrayed. With the representation of androgyny in photomontage as opposed to 'straight' photography, the viewer's dialectical assimilation of montage fragments whose connotations are binary opposites can lead to a rethinking of gender identity.
>
> (1990: 86, 62)

Gender-bending, transitional genders and gender neutrality are subjects explored with regularity in the work of Höch and Cahun. To follow Lavin's suggestion, the art histories of photomontage itself insist upon a blending and rethinking of gender identities. Viewed in these contexts, feminist critiques of the masculine coded gaze that might arise in film, and feminist critiques of female representation in the nude, also run alongside a deeper and more complex art history of craft, outsiderism, feminist and genderqueer art praxis, which shifts the *Ha, Ha!* images from unambivalent misogyny to ambivalent homage and critical revision. Dwoskin was a graphic designer and a fine artist, as well as a filmmaker: these confluences of art historical tropes are not surprising, though they do complexify straightforward narratives of the male, heterosexual-presenting (and thus implicitly patriarchal) gaze. Examined via these more complex confluences, the images of *Ha, Ha!* do not present a narrowed, heterosexual, male-presenting gaze that co-opts the feminine form. Rather, they offer a self-reflexive blending of masculine and feminine erotics, paying close attention to the art histories produced by historical 'others' (women especially), revealing, even revelling in fetishism (of flesh, dolls, clothing, masks and yonic form) as a structure of sexual desire – a coruscating modality very much present in *Ha, Ha!*'s text.

There is an additional, more dynamic reading of this image – one read through the words of Eli Clare, and others, returning to the potential of the disabled body, to disrupt and elide binaries of gender and normative desire through the medium of androgynous photomontage. A reading which considers gender, desire and sexuality not as binary configurations but as 'mixed and swirled in many patterns'. When we let go of normative constructions of the body as emphasized through photomontage practices, gender, sexuality and desire can and must be thought differently.

Feminist critiques of the male gaze, masculine voyeurism and female nude in art and filmmaking in the 1980s were implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, structural critiques of the non-disabled, physically unencumbered, heteronormative male gaze. Subsequent to Mulvey's pivotal work on the male gaze, feminist scholarship developed ever more complex responses to the gaze's relationships to spectatorship, protagonists and filmmaking, particularly on gender identification and cross-identification (Creed 1993; Mayne 1993; Modleski 2016; Mulvey [1981] 1989; Studlar 1984: 267). What they did not incorporate at that time was a theorization of

the structural ableisms that govern normative systems of thinking. Indeed, it was not until the 1990s that the foundational work of disability theorists such as Mike Oliver and Tom Shakespeare began to unwork these structural assumptions (Oliver 1990; Shakespeare et al. 1996). It was later still that the Crip theory and feminist disability studies began to have a substantial impact on how gender, sexuality and disability are considered as mutually influencing concepts and identities (Garland-Thomson 2005: 1557; McRuer 2006). And Dwoskin was a disabled, Jewish man, inhabiting the complexities of this interpersonal, structural and situational position while making work deeply inflected with his embodied way of viewing the world. What is instigated in *Ha, Ha!* is, I suggest, a swirling reassociation and disassociation of auto-eroticism and fetish, imbricated in feminist and otherwise othered art histories and practices. *Ha, Ha!* therefore tests, if not dissolves, assertions about a heteronormative male gaze, from either a structural or interpersonal perspective. The photo-collage on the front cover of *Ha, Ha!* is not a manifestation of male dominance over the female nude, but rather a deeply ambivalent and potentially far more disruptive construction of a synthesized, broken, erotic and gender-plural figure: the man-woman. A *both, and* chimera that disability studies has largely embraced in its 'cripping' of gender and sexuality.

As McRuer writes in his pivotal volume *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness*, what comes about through a disparate variety of disability cultures, including film, poetry, performance and activism, among others, is a 'non-individual crip subjectivity', which 'has very little to do with individuality as it is traditionally conceived' and where 'the birth of the crip comes at the expense of the (individualized, able-bodied) author' (2006: 52–53). What is fractured in the *Ha, Ha!* photomontage between female abled body and male disabled body thus also becomes deindividualized, producing a willingly broken composite. Once viewed through a crip lens, the conventional and heteronormative structures of binary desire, looking and power are ruptured. What remains is a more spacious, less restrictive interpretation of sexual desire. Instead of an actively desiring male gaze exerting control over a passive and fetishized female object, there is a shift towards a more intersubjective mode of questioning: who is supine and who is engulfing, who is caressing and who is responding, and what pleasure is being made in between? And, as I argue next, the intersubjective encounters between masculine and feminine, between giver and receiver, between care and caress, collaborator and contributor in *Ha, Ha!* are substantially intensified in one of Dwoskin's late films, *Intoxicated by My Illness*.

A crip erotics of care: BDSM, intimacy and *Intoxicated by My Illness* (2001)

Dwoskin's films and artworks are about an undoing and redoing of the self in the company of others. As Adrian Martin has identified, the unpredictable and volatile dynamics of collaborative encounter are constitutive of Dwoskin's cinema, the 'moment-to-moment "performance of the self" by the person framed that is met with an ever-shifting, observing, *reframing* response from Dwoskin' (2016: 74). *Intoxicated by My Illness: Parts One and Two (Intensive Care)* epitomizes this un-selfing praxis, pursuing strategies of non-individual crip subjectivity closely aligned with McRuer's models in *Crip Theory*. Furthermore, *Intoxicated* extends the principles of montage and collage used in *Ha, Ha!* to produce meandering slides that transgress some of the most firmly held boundaries in non-disabled thought: not only gender but also the taboos of sex and death and the concomitant divides between care-giving (and receiving) and sexual intimacy.

Intoxicated opens with the image of an older white man, his thatch of grey hair lit by a reading light, which reflects off his spectacles. He is reading an Ian Rankin paperback and judders in and out of frame, with the typical register of a digital zoom lens used without Steadicam. After a few seconds, there is a cut to a sequence of another hospital bed, this time along the horizontal plane of the bed itself. Bodies and trolleys pass across the frame, blotting out then revealing the bed again. A quick zoom out reveals most of the hospital bed and the soles of two feet, relaxed and at angles to one another, to the centre and right of the frame. This frame is disrupted by another, smaller one, filled with the face of a blonde woman with a fringe and red lipstick, gazing down slightly into the camera lens. Next, this smaller frame with the woman's face disappears, swiftly interposed with another superimposition of a larger frame in the top left of a nurse, filmed from behind, attending to a patient. As the nurse turns side-on to the camera, the frame with the reading man returns to the screen in a third superimposition, as does the frame containing the blonde woman, whose black bodice and fetish gloves become visible in mid-shot, before a quick zoom closes in on her face and she lowers her eyes to what she is doing off-screen. The full frame of the hospital bed disappears a few seconds later, leaving behind three different frames, nestled inside one another, depicting three different actions: one of reading and resting, one of medical care, the last of erotic encounter not yet made visible.

A few seconds more, and the frame of the nurse disappears, leaving one larger frame (the man reading) and the smaller one (the woman performing off-screen acts of sexual intimacy). These two frames cut abruptly to a beautifully lit portrait of Dwoskin's supine face, held in the hands of an older woman, who gently massages her fingers in circular motions around his temples. The camera zooms out quickly and up to the woman's face, who gazes down gently on Dwoskin. The music switches, too, to a fragment of Sibelius: the Symphony No. 5 in E Flat, Op.82. There is another abrupt cut to the wheeling of a hospital trolley bed around a corner, the face of a young Black woman in the bed resting against its pillows.

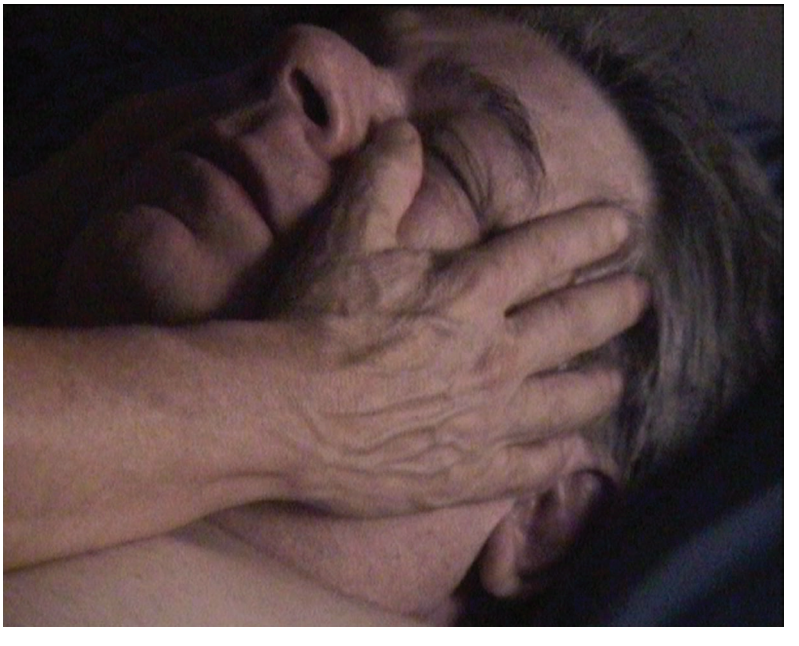
Part 1 of *Intoxicated by My Illness* was screened in the shorts programme at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR) in 2001. The full film (subtitled *Parts 1 and 2 Intensive Care*) was premiered there in 2002. The 42-minute-long film borrows its title from an autofictional essay collection by *New York Times* editor, literary critic and essayist Anatole Broyard, written in the fourteen months between Broyard's diagnosis with metastatic prostate cancer and his death in 1990. This is deeply resonant, since the making of *Intoxicated* at the turn of the millennium coincided with a period of serious illness, when Dwoskin spent a significant period hospitalized in an intensive care unit with pneumonia and respiratory failure. As Martin points out,

> there were things [Dwoskin] was physically unable to film and things he believed he would likely never film, because he expected to die. Cameras, therefore, were placed in the hands of others – students and friends – in order to accumulate the footage.
>
> (2016: 75)

Illness and mortality, and the borderlands between care and crisis, sexual abandon and illness-induced delirium, are therefore as much a part of the fabric of Dwoskin's *Intoxicated*, as models of collective action, sexuality, eroticism and care.

It would be easy to describe the film as impressionistic, in the sense that it is mainly composed of multiple superimpositions, frames within frames, reframing or enlargements of segments from earlier films, and fades into and out of white. Dwoskin had recently acquired the digital editing suite Final Cut Pro and sought

Opening sequence, Stephen Dwoskin (dir.), *Intoxicated by My Illness*, 2001. Courtesy of the LUX/Dwoskin Archive.



Sequence of soothing touch, Stephen Dwoskin (dir.), *Intoxicated by My Illness*, 2001. Courtesy of the LUX/Dwoskin Archive.

to maximize its potential in the resulting film. Few frames contain one unambiguously delineated image: rather ambiguity is a central strategy, as frames and image sequences appear, fade and disappear. The rare sequences modelled through a single frame are typically hospital scenes (often filmed by Dwoskin's then partner Frances Turner), which might include images of well-lit hallways or curtains around a hospital bed in an open ward. Some images show other patients of all ages, reading, lying down, often depicted with head tilted back and mouth open or, else, still and quiet on a hospital trolley. These images are emotionally moving, gentle portraits of other patients, unobtrusive despite the health crises they depict, and often accompanied by naturalistic noise, or else silence. The more ambiguous images, which are over- and underlaid around the hospital images, are supplied with a swirling operatic soundtrack, combined with sequences of explicit sexual activity: bondage, dominance, sadomasochism, sensual touch and post-coital care and cleansing rituals. *Intoxicated* blends these hospital sequences – some repeated several times – with touch, sensual contact and BDSM[8] sex play between Dwoskin and several unnamed women, variously friends, lovers and sex-workers, both feminine-presenting and androgynous.

Touch – soothing (hand to cheek, hand against chest), caring (cleaning, tending), medicating (administering injections, changing catheters or colostomy bags) and sexually pleasuring (masturbation, whipping, constraint and bondage) – is an elaborately recurring motif throughout. The editing of frames within frames is complex and orchestral in its rhythmic and compositional manifestation. The alternations and superimpositions of scenes of sexual care and hospital care, including injections and invasive medical procedures, are conducted towards a moment of erotic frenzy, midway through the film at the end of Part 1, which does indeed conclude with a sequence explicitly depicting ejaculation from an erect penis, bound tightly by black leather straps.

The central, ambivalent and contentious theme of *Intoxicated* is thus the erotics of care: care-giving as intrinsically bound up with eroticism, and eroticism as a means of modelling the fine boundaries between pain and pleasure, control and release, agency and interdependency. Disability, illness, mortality, morbidity and erotic charge are all contained within *Intoxicated*, which consequently interrogates the borderlands of two of the most significant extant social taboos: sex and death.

Indeed, disabled sexuality continues to be a significantly stigmatized area of social life. In 2021, British charity Enhance the UK launched its global campaign 'Undressing Disability' 'to raise standards in sexual health and sexual awareness for disabled people', celebrating a sex-positive and inclusive approach to disability and sexuality and seeking to challenge public perceptions and discourses around the sexual rights of disabled people (Enhance the UK 2021: n.pag.). Socially normative claims about who has the right to sexual agency are long-running issues in critical disability studies. As mentioned in the first part of this article, in 1996, scholars Tom Shakespeare, Kath Gillespie-Sells and Dominic Davies published a landmark study of British disabled people's experiences of sexual life, identity and sexuality (Shakespeare et al. 1996). However, as Shakespeare and Sarah Richardson's 2018 reflections later identify, scholarship on the subject has since been relatively sparse, while policy developments regarding disability and sexuality have flourished. They identify 'a distinction between what disabled people do, and what other people think they do', in terms of their sexuality (Shakespeare and Richardson 2018: 82). Countering scholar Liz Emmens's claim that 'normative desexualisation is about utter exclusion of disabled people from the intimate realm', Shakespeare and Richardson demonstrate the United Kingdom's statistical counter-evidence to show that 'a significant proportion – 50% or more – of disabled people are enjoying access to sex and relationships, which should dispel the asexual myth' (Emmens cited in

8. BDSM is 'an overlapping acronym referring to the [sexual] practices of Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, and Sadism and Masochism' (Dunkley and Brotto 2020: 657).

Shakespeare and Richardson 2018: 82). In the United States, disability activists and artists such as Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, the Sins Invalid collective and Joanna Hedva have explored sexuality and eroticism with and for the members of the disability community (Hedva 2016; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Sins Invalid 2021). Nonetheless, disability, desire and sexuality continue to be stereotyped by narratives of asexuality, or non-sexual being. This is consonant with what Eli Clare identifies in early experiences of his own denied sexuality while growing up as a disabled child. Paradoxically, presumptions about his sexless or asexual body left room for him to nurture his emerging genderqueerness: 'The same lies that cast me as genderless, asexual, and undesirable also framed a space in which I was left alone to be my quiet, bookish, tomboy self, neither girl nor boy' (2015: 151). But the space for genderqueerness does not only coexist with the negation of sexuality, as *Intoxicated* and more recent work in disability justice amply show.

With its depictions of bondage and whipping, the prowess of dominatrixes and explicit depictions of sexual pleasuring, including masturbation and ejaculation, *Intoxicated* viscerally demonstrates how closely sexuality and sexual expression are linked to care, connectedness and community, particularly for Dwoskin's disabled body. As Dawn Reynolds identifies, there is a longstanding relationship between alternative sexualities – 'so-called kink or fetish practices, which lie outside of mainstream sexuality, include bondage, dominance, sadism, and masochism (BDSM); polyamory; fetishism; amputee devotion; body modification; and sexual surrogacy' – and disabled sexualities (2007: 40); the 'relationship between disability and BDSM offers […] a key collaboration that models alternative sexual options for people with disabilities' (2007: 40). Numerous scholars have identified how some disabled people have developed BSDM practices in concert with their experiences of chronic pain, and how this can become a source of corporeal agency and sexual pleasure (Sheppard 2018: 54; Tellier 2017: 485). And there are plentiful precedents for the expression of these alternative sexualities in the arts, particularly at the intersections of performance and film, queer and alternative sexualities, disability and illness, from the performances of Bob Flanagan (Reynolds 2007) to the body and pain-based performances of Franko B or Ron Athey. In *Intoxicated*, Dwoskin's filming of BDSM practices with his sexual partners – and his partners' filming of their BDSM practices with him and others – present collectivity, not singularity, both in terms of the film's reliance upon collaborative filming networks and its intermedial relationships to contemporary art by disabled, chronically ill and/or queer performance artists.

Intoxicated also partly reused or refashioned material from earlier works, including Dwoskin's earlier project about experiences of pain, *Pain Is…* (1997), which includes found footage from Dwoskin's invited participants. Dwoskin's archive indicates that some of the women who featured in *Pain Is* or who were consulted on its production were established sex-workers – for example, Tuppy Owens, a former pornographic film actor and sex therapist who has been widely recognized for her services to the disability community in supporting disabled people's sexual fulfilment and romantic partnering. Dominatrix Tota Volpe-Landi appears in *Pain Is…*, and Dwoskin's research for the film included acquiring the first six issues of the Lady O Society newsletter (1993–95), a group founded by disabled BDSM practitioner Deborah Ryder.[9] It is therefore reasonable to assume that at least some of the sexual partners represented in *Intoxicated* were also sex-workers. And activism and legislation supporting sex work has long held reciprocal affinities with activism in disability communities, particularly where the care work of supporting sexual citizenship overlaps with sex work with, for and by disabled people (Fritsch et al. 2016: 84; Garofalo Geymonat 2019: 214; Sanders 2007: 439). In its form as well as its representations, *Intoxicated* thus blows apart meaningful

9. My profound thanks to Darragh O'Donoghue for providing these details, based on his research in the Dwoskin Archive at the University of Reading.

distinctions between intimacy in acts of medical care and the intimacy of care in sexual acts: both performances of remunerated labour. Particularly controversially, it highlights the erotic potential of both the professional care work of the ICU nurses and that of the sex-workers, who are also Dwoskin's creative collaborators and who also care for his body. This is a radical and inclusive re-envisioning of care and sexuality, which also forces a revised understanding of ways that the film 'looks' at its participants.

If the first part of *Intoxicated* is erotically charged, structured to result in climax, the second part is elegiac, devoted to cleaning, support and aftercare, whether palliative, pain-relieving or releasing. Direct superimpositions of acts of medical care performed by nurses: elevating the head position of a hospital bed, providing a towel bath are combined with acts of sexual care: untying a wrist, removing a piece of bondage. The two frequently share formal features, indeed the same frame, despite their clear differences in *mise en scène*. Slowed-down footage, repetitions of sequences and a consistently low-to-high camera angles place carers, medical or sexual, above the camera/cameraperson. And throughout the film there are repetitions of hospital sequences where nurses are filmed from behind, in a low point-of-view shot that crops their heads out of the frame. Sometimes the shot is reversed, with the image of a nurse's chest, waist and hips in view. In each case, if there is a pan up to a face, it is usually segmented by the pan itself: torso, buttocks and head rarely occupy the same frame at the same time. Understanding the embodied positioning of Dwoskin's camera is both essential and confusing: the likelihood is that filming took place from the level of a hospital bed, not more than 1–1.5 metres off floor level, that is, torso height. From that viewing perspective, a landscape camera frame cannot hold a face and a torso simultaneously. Framing the torso is not only a desiring, fetishizing, intentional act but also constrained by the physical limitations of a supine position and the physiological limitations of Dwoskin's consciousness and strength to hold and sustain filming.

This is an important intersection between the voyeuristic gaze that assumes the structural position of a male, non-disabled viewing subject/creative agent and the ways of looking expressed in *Intoxicated*, where the camera is sometimes held by Dwoskin, sometimes by others. There is at least a risk, and at most an open acknowledgement of a fetishizing, desiring gaze that focuses on bodies without heads: breasts, buttocks, the dark spaces of the pubis and the navel in-between. However, in *Intoxicated* this fetish is literally laid bare.

In the second section of *Intoxicated*, 'Part Two (Intensive Care)', a brief series of superimpositions combines in a confusing moving-image collage. Slowed-down footage of two women, backs to the camera, face a prone, naked Dwoskin on his bed. A close-up of Dwoskin's face at home, where he is wearing a ball gag that is then pulled from his mouth. A torso shot from below of a sex-worker, bare breasted beneath a nurse's button-down dress, her hands out of shot but bent low, tending to the prostrate body of Dwoskin beneath her, wiping with a tissue around an erect penis, barely visible beneath the superimpositions in the bottom left corner of the screen. Slowed-down footage of Dwoskin in the ICU, with a nasal drip fixed with plasters at the end of his nose, breathing tube kept in place at the corner of his mouth by elastic bands that press against his chin and cheek.

There is no subtlety at play, save the transparency of the images superimposed upon one another. The fetishizing transformation of hospital breathing tube into ball gag is completed within a few seconds, and yet, even slowed down, the confusing superimpositions break down temporal cause and effect, containing multitudes within the frame. In these superimpositions, the woman's torso is actively sexualized and sexualizing at the service of sexual appetite, an eroticism framed through a viewing subject caught up in the position of Dwoskin's own prostrate body. The

Sexual care, Stephen Dwoskin (dir.), *Intoxicated by My Illness*, 2001. Courtesy of the LUX/Dwoskin Archive.

Sexual care and medical care, Stephen Dwoskin (dir.), *Intoxicated by My Illness*, 2001. Courtesy of the LUX/Dwoskin Archive.

point-of-view shot, looking upwards, does not pinion the sex-worker to the bed, but rather makes her body the subject of action, movement, care and play.

This head-or-torso framing of bodies is also a collage-montage approach, resonating as *Ha, Ha!* did with the gendered ambiguities in photomontage's art historical heritage. In a sex/domestic sequence focusing largely on the face of an unknown non-binary–presenting person, perhaps a woman, with short cropped hair and young, androgynous features, and without identifying the source of their reactions, the camera is trained upon their face in low- to high-angle close-up. Their face shifts in emotional response from glazed, faraway distraction to a sudden, surprised, alarmed or aroused response that could be pain, erotic pleasure or a combination of the two. They are subsequently shown kissing a femme or feminine-presenting woman, implicating structures of eroticism without necessarily delineating boundaries of gender, sexuality or sexual pleasuring. The multiplication of montage effects, superimposed and tightly framed (Figure 5), confining rather than revealing, demonstrates ambiguous slides between acts of sexual care and mutual pain/pleasure in a domestic setting, and acts of medical care that involve pain as well as soothing. The framing and focus either on a face or on body parts – legs, buttocks, breasts or darkened regions of genitals – clouds designations of whose buttock, whose face, whose breast. And this consequently also produces ambivalence in the determination of whose body is whose, which gender is which, what pain is pleasure, what pleasure is pain. This more dynamic rendering of subject and object positions is more labile, and more troubling, than conventional designations of the gaze can necessarily account for. Indeed, the positioning of Dwoskin's body as a masochistic subject within *Intoxicated*'s expressive exuberance invites perverse cinematic pleasures more closely aligned with Gaylyn Studlar's formulation of the masochistic gaze/spectator, aspiring towards 'a true erotic reciprocity of equality in mutual tenderness', rather than Lacanian binary oppositions of desire (Studlar 1984: 267, 1987: 51).

To conclude, I return again to Eli Clare's 'long meandering slide'. *Intoxicated* destabilizes the grounds that separate medical care from sexual intimacy, medical intimacy from sexual care, desiring bodies from desired bodies. Troubling sociocultural divisions that regulate and separate gendered and sexual bodies, clinical care work and domestic sex work, *Intoxicated* and *Ha, Ha!* also disrupt sites of sexual agency and subjectivity. These slides and slippages across frames, cuts and superimpositions unsurprisingly provoke difficult feelings and complex responses, not to mention controversy. Debates continue to rage in feminist activist and women's rights communities about sex-positivity, support for sex-workers and BDSM practices.[10] Unwittingly, these debates can also reinforce separations in care models that exclude sexual care as labour, or condemn sexual images for their fetishization of the female form, without recognizing how these images might coexist with the intimacies of mutual pleasure and pain, particularly for disabled people. These intimacies, highly refined in BDSM cultures, develop responsive models of intimate consent, negotiated in partnership on a moment-to-moment basis, rather than articulated as a singular non-verbal contract (Bauer 2014; Dunkley and Brotto 2020: 657; Kattari 2015: 882; Reynolds 2007: 40). In this respect, they respond not only to more fluid, cripped conceptions of the gendered and erotic gaze and crip subjectivity but also to disability activists' recent visions of access intimacy and current research on sexual citizenship as an access issue (Mingus 2011; Bahner 2020).

Clare's 'long meandering slide' is more than a vehicle for Dwoskin's unique styles of collaborative and distributed filmmaking and intermedial editing methods of montage, collage and superimposition. *Ha, Ha!* and *Intoxicated* invoke meandering slides across many of the binaristic oppositions that remain culturally and

10. See, for instance, Fox (2018), Stabile (2020) and Morrison (2021).

socially significant to gender, desire, sexuality and intimacy. They also transgress form: neither pertaining solely to the realm of cinematic pleasure, nor to the often-misogynistic gaze of surrealisms like André Breton's, nor to the histories of craft, androgyny and genderqueerness embodied in collage and cut-ups. It is not surprising that these transgressions of desire are also confrontational, particularly to older models of feminist critique that had not yet considered the structural intersections of oppression, particularly in relation to disability. By deregulating individuated subjectivity and agency, particularly across models of binary gender, heteronormative desire and normative sexual practice, the photomontages of *Ha, Ha!* and moving image montages of *Intoxicated* present a vision of Crip subjectivity, neither singular nor structural, but interdependent with others in relationships of agency and care. Disabled sexualities become constellations of connection in Dwoskin's work: neither comfortable nor stable, but simultaneously pleasurable, painful, erotic and unsettling. In the interplay of bodies, relationships, intimacy and vulnerability, sexuality becomes the site of genderqueer intersubjectivity, enabling the subject positions and gazes of Dwoskin's art, like Clare's writing, to become girl, boy *and* something else entirely.

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Data access statement

No new data were created in this study, however, the underlying archival material can be accessed via the Dwoskin Archive, with a digital catalogue available here: https://www.reading.ac.uk/adlib/Details/archiveSpecial/110438699

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