Social Justice, Artistic Practice and New Technologies: Gender and Disability Activisms and Identities in Film and Digital Video

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Abstract

Contemporary disability cultural production is under-researched in feminist and cultural theory. Focusing on the film and digital video trilogy, *Whole: A Trinity of Being*, by South African visual poet Shelley Barry, this paper examines how her work theorizes disability and gender and critically interrogates possibilities for social justice.

Résumé

La culture de la production de l'incapacité contemporaine est sous-recherchée dans la théorie culturelle féministe. En se concentrant sur le film et la trilogie vidéo digitale, *Whole: A Trinity of Being*, par la poète visuelle sudafricaine Shelley Barry, cet article étudie la façon dont son oeuvre théorise l'handicap et le sexe, et interroge de façon critique les possibilities pour la justice sociale.

Speaking is not an option.
Then, again, neither is silence.
Shelley Barry, *voice/over*, 2004

Artistic Practice and the Potential of Disability Film and Video

Disability has been neglected in contemporary research in media, digital, and film studies. Bringing together recent theory in disability studies and media studies with feminist perspectives, this paper investigates how identities and activisms are produced in digital representational practices. In examining particular film and video work, I explore how social justice projects are made imaginable and possible and how disability is engaged as a disturbance to normative constructions of embodiment and the gendered body, in relation to able-bodied normalcy. The cultural work discussed in this paper can be described as "alternative" to dominant practices in that it is produced outside of mainstream, dominant institutions and for non-commercial exhibition and distribution. Contemporary disability film and video does have the potential to produce what McRuer calls "radical crip images" (2006, 177) and to trouble normative representational and reception practices. It can embed a complex understanding of disability: as socially organized difference, as intersected with other identity positions and as constituted in multiple languages and experiences.

Alternative and digital media in relation to disability studies is under-researched and disability is under-addressed in feminist scholarship on digital technology. The work of disability theorists Snyder and Mitchell (2005; 2006) is

significant for the focus on disability representational practice other than popular film, particularly contemporary artistic documentary, and for the emphasis on the significance of "alternative" film and video for disability studies. Snyder and Mitchell argue that this cultural work "constitutes an avant-garde in contemporary disability depictions" and produces "the meaningful influence of disability upon one's subjectivity" (2006, 170).

In this paper, I engage these intersecting concerns regarding technology and disability - the potential of artistic work, the importance of social difference and the emphasis on activism and social justice - by providing a close critical reading of film and digital video work by disability activist and "visual poet" Shelley Barry. I pursue an analysis of three components of her digital media work, *Whole: A Trinity of Being* (2004; 15 min.), as a problematization of dominant cultural norms and the representation of digital identities. *Whole* is comprised of three works: two digital videos, *pin pricks* (2004) and *voice/over* (2004), and one 16mm film, *entry* (2003). On the jacket for the DVD of *Whole*, Barry describes the works as follows. *pin pricks* "revisits the moments when the fabric of a woman's life is torn and the revelations that take her beyond loss." *voice/over* is "a short experimental video focusing on notions of voice, language, and disability. It explores silence/spoken word/speech/the ability to speak, and the importance of speaking out about violence, trauma, love, and life." *entry* is "a re-insertion of images into a media that does not reflect people with disabilities as passionate and sensual beings....The film works on the level of visual metaphor."

Barry's trilogy provides a productive interrogation of representations of gender and disability and offers ways to think about activist practices in relation to social justice. The strategies of *Whole* demonstrate the potential of new technologies to transform normative images in visual culture. The work theorizes the regulation and categorization of the disabled woman's body and invites the spectator to imagine and understand embodiment differently. Barry intersects gender and disability in her poetic and metaphoric artistic practice, particularly in terms of issues of medicalization and the denial of self-expression, as practices of oppression. Digital identities are understood as not forming essences of individuals but, rather, subjects who are shaped by material conditions and discursive formations. *Whole* contests the normative constitution of the gendered and disabled "other," whereby she "becomes pathologized, demonized, criminalized, and made the legitimate personal and institutionalized target of objectification, silencing, scorn, shame, incarceration, elimination, marginalization, and social control" (Morgan 2005, 310).

Activisms: "Leaving Words and Tracks Behind"

I met Shelley Barry in 2006 at the film festival, "Screening Disability: The Chicago Festival of Deaf and Disability Cinema," but I had heard about her work the previous year when I attended the London Disability Arts Forum Disability Film Festival in London, England. Barry's work has been screened at a number of festivals, in workshops and in University contexts. *Whole* is Barry's first film, and it has won awards as a "disability film" and as a "narrative short." Barry refers to her work as "short film" or "experimental shorts." She is a digital media artist based in South Africa, a member of a South African writing group for Black women and has been an artist-in-residence at Temple University (Liebenberg 2007).

Barry's activism with media technologies - that is, with her innovative arts practice in digital video and film - is connected to her history as a disability rights activist in South Africa. Barry politicizes disability in relation to the South African context when she begins the trilogy with a reference to the history of gun violence during the "Taxi Wars" in 1996 (Liebenberg 2007). The on-screen text reads: "Countless South Africans have been injured or killed by taxi violence - the ongoing war over transport routes." The "Taxi

Wars" refers to the feuds, over routes and profits, between taxi associations and to the resulting deaths and injuries that occurred in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa (Dugard 2001). Barry was one of the commuter victims of post-apartheid gun violence between the taxi associations. Since the trilogy opens with this statement, it references the effects of struggles over social justice and the history of resistance to apartheid in South Africa. However, Barry is not named as one of the injured, such that the spectator is unclear how this dedication relates directly to her and to what follows in the trilogy. Barry deliberately does not articulate her positioning within the terms of violence or justice struggles at this beginning moment of *Whole* and she does not name herself as "disabled" by her experience of the taxi violence. Thus, a reception practice of thoughtfulness, attention and openness is encouraged and the spectator has to enter the work with a sense of learning and to discover how body, identity and social justice gradually emerge within what follows in the videos/film. The constitution of gendered, racialized, sexualized, disabled identity comes into being not as a prefacing announcement to the work but as lived experience - for both the subject of the trilogy and the spectator. Since much is unsaid at the beginning of *Whole*, the work does not normalize either speech/voice or hearing as necessary embodiments for the expression of self, history and identity. As a result, the work problematizes the idea of disability as deficit, a convention that, in McRuer's words, "depends on identifying and containing - on disciplining - disability" (2006, 176). Moreover, in terms of the reception and learning that the trilogy encourages, the spectator cannot simply check off a simplistic, encompassing understanding of the subject through reading the print-text announcement, but, rather, s/he must live and work through Barry's narrative to move towards "recognition, responsibility, and learning" (Simon 2005, 82).

At the end of *Whole*, Barry repeats the device of on-screen text to highlight another activism: a dedication of her film to Maria Rantho, a health and disability activist. Barry's text reads: "Dedicated to the spirit of South African activist Maria Rantho and to all comrades who still wheel the earth continuing their fight for our liberation." This dedication invokes advocacy, coalition, social justice and the necessity of shared labour in liberation struggles. In addition, the naming of Rantho and South African activism makes evident the racialized politics and links Barry to the social justice struggles of Black South Africans against systemic oppression. Barry constructs an "our"/we in this text, but rather than appealing to a universal subject, Barry seeks the spectator's connection to, and understanding of, a particular politic of the body, in terms of race and disability, and to a particular individual located in a specific geography and history. The spectator is called to participate in liberatory projects and to become part of a collective of "comrades" through a recognition that the projects and the collective are both globally interconnected, in that they "wheel the earth." Simultaneously, however, in the particularity of referencing the South African context and naming the disability rights activist, Barry indicates that the "fight" of social justice must be locally organized in response to specific contexts and conditions. Barry recognizes Rantho by linking gender, disability and race in her web-zine announcement of Rantho's death: "As the country prepares to celebrate Women's Day with the aim of honouring the strides our women have made, one of our leading female activists passed away on July 12....Her name was Maria Rantho and she was a warrior who dedicated her life to promoting equality for people with disabilities" (Barry 2002). Barry also notes that Rantho was crucial to the formation of the Disabled Women's Development Programme, "which aimed to address the specific discrimination that women with disabilities faced" (2002).

The opening and closing statements of Barry's work frame the trilogy and they invite a spectator who is politically aware and supports ideas of social justice. In addition to producing a political and activist contextualization for the work, the framing

dedications also surface the significance of spectator relations to gendered and disabled bodies in terms of communication, writing and composition. The print statements on the screen enmesh spectators in a relationship to writing rather than images. In introducing *Whole* with text, Barry asks the spectator to relate to the work through the written word, and the concluding text also urges the spectator to move forward through language. Barry's practices as a writer and poet suggest that an emphasis on written text would not be unusual in her filmic production and communication. Nevertheless, I argue that there is more at stake here than Barry's attachment to writing. As McRuer posits, normative writing "is a highly monitored cultural practice, and those doing the monitoring...are intent on...forgetting the messy composing process and the composing bodies that experience it" (2006, 152). Barry's strategy with writing underlines the idea that bodies are written into (and out of) existence; selves and others are composed. Barry is also emphasizing the idea that identity formation is linked to the organization of writing, that such formation is "messy" and complex and that bodies are constituted through social differences.

The written word as framing device also offers a comment on technology. In terms of the technological production of *Whole*, the word is low-tech. Barry's emphasis on text to frame her film and digital video work serves to interrogate a low-tech/high-tech dichotomy. In terms of modes of communication, the written word and the contemporary creation of the digital would seem to be separated by a technical and temporal gulf. However, the artist's strategy around these "old" and "new" media, that is, interrogating the dichotomy and shifting the spectator's focus from one to the other, from writing to digital video and film, underlines a shared technological temporality and problematizes ideas about technological progress. Barry's strategy signals normative understandings of technological progress, whereby the latest invention is seen to be better than, and separate from, anything previous. This discourse is shaped by "gendered power relations that construct Western scientific knowledge and progress as masculine domains" (Hladki 2006, 60). Following from Barry's strategy, spectators are reminded of the interlinked histories of technology and the gendered organization of technological development. In addition, spectators may recall the agricultural and domestic technologies that women have developed - technologies that are often forgotten in the rush to acclaim the new and that are positioned as features of private rather than public domains. Spectators may also recognize the racialized organization of discourses of technological development and the ways that science and technology are central to gendered and racialized constructs of cultural superiority (Millar 1998). Scenes in the individual works of the trilogy support my argument about the significance of Barry's framing device with respect to technology. In *voice/over*, for example, Barry emphasizes the intersection of writing, technology, progress and social difference in the scenes where her hand caresses a typewriter. In *pin pricks*, she calls up the relation of gender to technology through images of sewing and textile production which are practices of domestic technology. Pins, pincushions, needles, spools of thread, silk and fabric printing are seen through shots that linger on these objects.

Identities: "I Have to Speak, You See."

pin pricks might be described as "experimental" in construction in that it does not build a linear narrative with a trajectory towards a resolution. The voiceover is a poetic exploration of Barry's path from a diagnosis of paralysis and the idea of loss to a recognition of presence ("I am STILL here."). A range of images of the body and domestic objects accompanies the voiceover: Barry's torso, the stroking of her torso, red cloth and fingers stitching it, spools of thread, fabric being printed and candles. The images of Barry's hands, very slowly caressing her torso, and the red cloth are repeated throughout. The hands and fabric appear to

calm the damage to her body. The metaphor of pins and pin pricks takes on a number of dimensions. There are the pins used by the doctor to prick Barry's flesh, as he asks, "Can you feel this?," and those used by Barry to re-stitch new "patterns" for her life and body. At the beginning of *pin pricks*, Barry's voiceover asks, "How much can a pin prick hurt?" She describes the doctor's invasive ritual to determine paralysis, and there are a series of close-up images: a sewing needle and bright red cloth, a hand with a needle pricking the belly and a hand slowly stroking the chest. As Barry's hands then lower the red cloth from over her chest, the body is bared from beneath the breasts to the navel and Barry draws black lines across her skin. In her audio and captioned voiceover, Barry says:

> I couldn't say yes anymore as he moved from my breasts.
> The feeling had gone, dissipated, like a song that slowly fades until it is heard no more.
> My body had become marked by a line.
> Beyond which border there was silence and numbness.
> He continued pricking and asking, "Can you feel this?"
> He finally reached my feet and could conclude "Paralyzed at the fourth thoracic vertebrae."

Barry's voiceover maps the way that the doctor's pricking of her skin is related to loss of expression, autonomy and agency under medical, disciplinary authority. Trying to determine what Barry feels or doesn't feel at points on her body, the doctor produces a corporeality defined only by medical discourse that classifies and governs according to norms that individualize and separate bodies. However, the disabled subject is represented as mobilized rather than immobilized by numbness. By lowering the cloth with her own hands, she bares herself rather than being exposed by the medical practitioner. Later, she stitches the red fabric, thereby representing herself as participating in a sensory world of touch and colour and in an activity of assemblage, a construction of the self. *pin pricks* suggests this world is neither concealed nor denied by numbness. The disabled subject is understood as "whole" and as constituted in a vibrant and expressive experience.

Barry questions how power is directed at the individual and social body to produce what Foucault calls the "docile body" (Foucault 1977, 136). Her body is made docile by its compartmentalization, which the video makes evident through the editing from close-up to close-up, the focus on the torso and hand and the lines drawn on the skin. Medicalization, which defines and controls her body through testing, capacity and diagnosis, also seeks to produce the docile body. Barry interrogates the gendered and able-bodied norms, organized through apparatuses such as medicine and medical technologies, that position a woman's body and a disabled body as defined by their parts: in terms of beauty, efficiency and object of scrutiny. Such bodies are "compared, differentiated, hierarchized, diagnosed" and "achieved through disciplinary practices that divide the body into units and, in turn, subject those units to precise and calculated training" (Sullivan 2005, 29). The training for a disabled woman is defined by the regulatory mechanisms that must make her fit into cultural norms. Once the disabled woman's body is apprehended "through classification and mastery" (Garland-Thomson 2001, 137) and is made silent and numb, this subject can be known, contained and disciplined according to cultural norms. The doctor's practices of "pricking" also surface histories of violence directed at women by men. The voiceover statement, "as he moved from my breasts," underlines this interpretation. Through a form of objectification, that is, the pricking of her flesh, Barry is literally being brought to points of pain in order to determine how she fits or transgresses the tightly regulated, technological and medical boundaries of disability and gender. Barry speaks of the "border" that marks her body. She recognizes how it produces gender binaries and the

normalizations attached to them as well as the classification and separation of disabled and non-disabled bodies (Morgan 2005).

However, in a simultaneous resistance practice, Barry recuperates her body from the authoritative discursive regimes (media, medicine, technology) that would position her as a specimen of pathology, a site for mastery and commodification and a subject who must be contained, objectified and violenced. Importantly, although Barry speaks disability, she does not provide a visual marker in *pin pricks*. Thus, disability and ability are made complicated: in terms of what is "visible " or "invisible" about them and how a subject may be recognized and understood as disabled/able-bodied. The images of Barry's hands and her torso neither reveal disability nor make explicit a woman's body. Barry denies the spectator normative spectatorship by not gratifying a desire to definitively "know" her gender and disability in a visual field. Barry does not offer herself up for a pathologizing and consuming gaze, thereby "confounding her audiences interpretive systems" (Garland-Thomson 2001, 131). Barry makes clear that "bodies that depart from social expectations have always been the objects of intense visual interest rooted in a drive to explain and contain the extraordinary" (Garland-Thomson 2001, 131). Barry reconstitutes herself as a site of self-authorization, felt experience and personal account. The repetition of stroking movements on her torso throughout the video represents this construction. Her hands caress her skin as if they are "speaking" to and with her body and claiming its agentic substantiality. Flesh is made material and concrete such that as a disabled woman, she claims space. Furthermore, as the video progresses, we see close-up images of her fingers stitching the red silk. With this gendered domestic practice, Barry suggests that she achieves another form of expression/voice in challenge to medical and institutional disciplining and denial. The labour of women's sewing and stitching produces a body that communicates outside of the normative disciplinary practices that would restrain it. During the images of caressed skin, stitching, and sewing items, the following voiceover is heard and captioned:

> I discovered that touch is much deeper than being able to feel.
> To touch by knowing touch and not by feeling...
> Was such painful beauty.
> So I've chosen not to wear that garment of bitterness, so easily fitted to the wounded body.
> I chose to cut other patterns.
> To sew garments and stitch and thread a place of my own.

The video stitches a critique of the fabricated narrative of "normal" bodies. "Touch" is more than what is felt at the skin in the present and what is understood as touch and feeling under terms of able-bodiedness. In suggesting that her knowledge of touch is what matters rather than the feeling of it, Barry interrogates normative understandings of the body. This discovery is not trouble-free; it is "painful." However, it opens up the possibility of "other patterns" and "a place of [her] own."

In the second digital video, *voice/over*, Barry continues an exploration of gendered and disabled identity. Once again, she utilizes the tropes of medicalization and technology and the denial of self-expression. However, this video shapes the images and voiceover quite differently from *pin pricks*. Much of the video is rendered in sepia tones and even at the end of the video when colours are evident, they are not the sharp colour contrast and red colour saturation that dominate *pin pricks*. In the second video, Barry explores how identity may be theorized as struggle: as provisional and temporal negotiation. She uses a number of strategies to surface this struggle: the blurring of imagery, muted sepia tones and the sounds of a wheezing breath. Importantly, imagery in this second digital video is deliberately out of focus and Barry works with the expressive potential of the blurred image to explore the affects of obscurity and non-recognition and

the struggle for presence, self-authorization and activism.

voice/over begins with an image of a hole in Barry's throat. An edited sequence follows in which a shot of Barry's fingers stroking a typewriter's keys alternates with an image of her fingers stroking the hole in her throat. The next part of the video focuses on the preparation of a mechanical speaking valve and its insertion through a tracheotomy tube in her throat. The video continues with close-ups of Barry wearing elaborate throat jewelry, images of a typewriter and pages of script that fall into the frame. The imagery then returns to the speaking device and the close-up detail of the valve that opens and closes as she breathes. The visual script of *voice/over* is composed entirely of close-ups; of constant editing; and transitions between technologies of voice and speech, the typewriter and the speaking valve.

Barry provides rich and lingering visual detail of her position in medical practice, as she slowly attends to the various steps for the insertion of her speaking valve. Although she might be understood as part of a medical discourse through these images, she clearly contends any objectifying representation and challenges the disciplinary institutional control of medical power. She handles the stages of insertion in a lingering and caressing manner. Her direct gaze at the spectator challenges any dismissal of this corporeal self. By imaging the detailed progress of the insertion of the speaking valve, she presents an anatomy of everyday disabled practice, typically absent from normative visual culture. Her caressing touch of the typewriter keys replicates the sensual relationship to the speaking valve. As with her resistance to any totalizing construction of the disabled body, so, too, does Barry produce a subject who will not be contained by a normative relation to communication technologies. The stroking of the typewriter keys intersects with the stroking of the hole in her throat such that *voice/over* interrogates the means and possibilities for communication for different bodies. The typewriter and the speaking valve are "old" technologies. Barry offers a counter view to that which sees "communications technologies as wonderful new tools...that will promote an open flow of information and exchange of ideas" (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 168). The video could also be understood as questioning the separation of technologies and positing a potential for democratic developments: "Not only does the contemporary media environment mean that the distinctions among media are less definable, it also means that there are opportunities for media to be less monolithic and centralized" (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 185). In my view, Barry deliberately offers a contestation: both interrogating medical and communication technologies and also underlining their potential to offer different subjects different modalities for expression.

The image at the beginning of *voice/over* is impossible to decipher. Gradually, a hole in Barry's throat comes into view followed by an image of her mouth vocalizing. As the image becomes recognizable, we hear and read:

> I have to speak you see.
> Speak because I almost can't.
> Speak because so many haven't.
> Speak in whatever language I know and not fear walking on my own fire.
> Speak I must because I was almost silenced.
> I speak because I-AM-HERE.

Although Barry uses the word "speak" repeatedly, neither a speech act nor a privileging of vocal articulation organize the possibility and impossibility of expression. Each "speak" is followed by a context of necessity such that the repetition underlines Barry's insistence on producing identity and social justice rather than the faculty of speaking itself. The final emphasis, "I-AM-HERE," which is articulated through pauses and with strong volume and declaration, suggests that what matters is the presence of an embodied self rather than a particular ability of expression.

Barry combines this coming to verbalization and declaration of presence and politics with visuals that gradually come into presence and focus such that the formation of identity is understood as a process. The voiceover text underlines the connection of self to other, the individual to the community: the "I" and the "many." Identity on these grounds is not only about Barry's own individual positioning, but it is constituted through social relations. There is both *a* body and the *social* body. In terms of the latter, when Barry says, "speak because so many haven't," I understand her statement to refer to disability activism as well as to social justice generally: to reference different bodies and identities that may not "speak"; that may be silenced, disadvantaged, or marginalized through social difference, including, but not limited to, disability. The next line, "Speak in whatever language I know and not fear walking on my own fire," in which she refers to the struggle and negotiation of identity, supports this analysis. Marginalized subjects use whatever form of communication and social justice practice that is available and possible. They tread carefully, and painfully, through the "fire" of their own conditions and contexts. Barry suggests something quite similar in a later section: "Too many of us have bullet wounds and hidden scars and words that fall down the well in our throats." The specifics of Barry's embodied site, with the gun wound, paralysis, and hole in her throat, are translated into the resonance of wounding and loss of expression for multiple subjects, the "our" of her address. Thus, Barry is exploring how alliance and activism are made possible across social differences, through scars and struggle, and she is theorizing how identity positions are individual and collective and operate as both distinct and intersected. Thus, *Whole* takes up the challenge of generating understandings of identity and social relations of power in terms of how differences of gender, race, sexuality and disability are inseparable from each other while at the same time working as distinct sites of social formation. This approach emphasizes how identities become consequential through the specific conditions of material and discursive formations, rather than using gender, disability, and other markers of difference as fixed categories (Ang 1997; Brah 1992; Mohanty 2004).

It is significant that Barry does not produce a discourse of impairment in *pin pricks*. Only the medical authority articulates the condition of paralysis. *Whole* joins other new disability media works to "insist on recognition of a more complex human constellation of experiences that inform medical categories" (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 176). Similarly, in *voice/over* and *entry*, Barry's sexuality leaks into the narrative rather than being explicitly declared. Nevertheless, Barry's self-representation as a lesbian and the politics of sexuality and disability are conjoined. However, Barry does not speak identity as a truth claim and does not position sexuality as a fixed classification. In *voice/over*, sexuality is part of the audio narrative and does not enter the visual landscape. With a few sentences in *voice/over*, Barry underlines sexuality in relation to gender and disability: "I knew my lover was still alive. Bullet flew right through me. Got stuck inside her. It's still there, linking us for always." In *entry*, the filmmaker reverses the audio/visual strategy: There are two images of Barry embraced by her lover, with the women partially nude and lying down, but there are no spoken words about sexuality. In one image, the women are speaking to each other, but the spectator does not hear their voices. The women are entwined in bodily pleasure, sexual desire and communication, in the same way that a linking is produced in *voice/over*'s narrative about the shared experience of gun violence, the damage to both women's bodies and the ongoing relationship. Barry puts into play a multifaceted message about her identity, bringing a non-heteronormative representation to gender and disability. *Whole* can be understood as "critically queer and radically crip" (McRuer 2006, 183) and as proposing that activisms and identities are constituted in multiple intersecting ways. Barry's trilogy suggests that a subject

occupies "any number of subject positions, and can resist normalization from mobile and transitory identity standpoints" (Sullivan 2005, 31).

Although the film *entry* was produced in 2003, a year earlier than the two digital video works, Barry places it last in the trilogy. It is a longer work, and it is both similar to, and quite different from, the videos. *entry* has little voiceover narration, but it has a strong audio presence through a persistent musical soundtrack of drumming. It reads as a more traditional documentary style of filmmaking than the digital videos, but, like them, it explores disability and gender with a richness of texture and sensory presence. This film includes images of an exterior landscape of streets, buildings, trees, wheelchair road signs, "do not enter" signs and murals as well as interior spaces of a kitchen and bathroom. Barry is represented in the exterior and interior locations. For the first time, we see her wheelchair, which is depicted both as a space to be inhabited by Barry and as a figure unto itself, since it occupies various locations without her. It sits on a sidewalk, rests in a tree and moves down a road.

entry does not begin with the sound of drumming but, rather, with the sound of gunshots. With a black screen of no images, the spectator encounters the following voiceover narration:

> Seven years ago, I was shot by a young man, who laughed with a gun in his hand.
> I promised myself that he would not take away my laughter...
> and that even though his bullet stopped me from ever being able to walk again...
> I will never forget how to dance.

With this narrative that proceeds any visual, Barry insists that the spectator pay close attention to a story that maps out how she was violenced, the nature of her disability and the practices of laughter and dance that mark her survivorship. In what follows, there are images of the social contexts that Barry negotiates and experiences: streets and street corners; stairs and paths; and the colours and textures of food, leaves and sky. *entry* is marked by energy, exhilaration and delight. This tonality is evident in such strategies as the continuous drumming sound, the repeated shot of Barry joyously drumming and snapping her fingers, the moments sitting with her lover and the laughter that accompanies her cooking. The form of survivorship that Barry produces does not equate with victimization, but, rather, calls up responsibility and recognition of inequalities and difference - for both herself and the spectator.

The film is also shaped by a politics of disability regarding an emphasis on fracturing the regimes that regulate disabled bodies. Barry produces this focus through a range of representations of the social conditions of disability: her wheelchair mobility, the wheelchair street signs and murals, the wheelchair parking meter and the coins that are tossed onto her wheelchair seat. In this way, *entry* centres "disabled bodies while interrogating contemporary social management systems that seek to survey, manage, and control nearly every aspect of their existence" (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 181). Since *entry* is the last work in the trilogy, its title might be considered ironic. However, Barry is surfacing a point with which she wishes to leave the spectator: The "entry" of disabled bodies into the able-bodied landscape disrupts normalizing regimes. The repeated shot of a "do not enter" sign along with images of her wheelchair where it is not supposed to be, such as hanging in a tree, emphasize the challenge to normative mobility. Barry asks whose bodies are allowed to occupy space and she interrogates normative assumptions of able-bodiedness. A number of shots show Barry playing a drum and the intense rhythmic drumming of the soundtrack throughout the film also permeates and disrupts the social sphere. The "paralyzed" body seizes visual and audio space and inserts its practices and modes of knowledge counter to the disciplinary institutions that are invested in producing a

governable body (Sullivan 2005). Thus, Barry concludes the film and the trilogy with a critical interrogation of able-bodied norms and with possibilities for resisting subjugation. The closing voiceover recognition, of her "dance of living," the dance "with the heart," the dance that calls to her, underlines this activism.

Conclusion: "The Dance Calls. It Always Calls"

While Barry's self-representation in the trilogy produces a counterdiscourse to normative constructions of the body and to its regulations, *Whole* does not reinscribe the idea that people with disabilities must demonstrate the ability to overcome disability. Like many Disability Studies theorists (Longmore 2001; Markotic 2001; McRuer 2006; Snyder and Mitchell 2006), Barry actually challenges the "common notion that with the proper attitude one can cope with and conquer any situation or condition, turning it into a positive growth experience" (Longmore 2001, 9). Barry's self-representation positions the gendered and disabled body as part of a cultural system whereby gender and disability are understood as discursive and material and as located in structures of control, marginalization and denial of expression.

In her theorizing of disability and gender identities, Barry uses film and digital video "to bring issues of identity much closer to the spectator, and to address the spectator in intimate ways" (Kuppers 2005, 157). Throughout the trilogy, this intimate address is realized in multiple strategies in a sensory field made possible through the video and film technologies. The sound of Barry's voice has a rich texture and is clearly recorded to produce warmth of tone and connection to the spectator. The strategic use of quiet sound or omission of sound also draws the spectator into Barry's narrative. Colour range and intensity are found throughout the trilogy, including the rich sepia tones of *voice/over*, the intense redness of *pin pricks* and the detailed images of textiles and food in *entry*. Digital video (*pin pricks* and *voice/over*) produces particularly vivid colouration, and the 16mm film (*entry*) offers colour contrast and heightened colour tones. It is through tactility, however, that *Whole* most keenly uses intimate address to theorize issues of identity. Barry represents her skin as "an organ of communication" (Shildrick 2002, 109) through the strategy of tactility. Throughout the trilogy, there are close-ups of engaging with tactile activities, such as sewing, cutting food, and playing a drum; close-ups of parts of Barry's body; and movements of touching her skin. In emphasizing these forms of touch, the originary sense, Barry refers to the materiality of the body, discourages spectator detachment and separation and dissuades the viewing subject from "the objectifying and disciplinary operation of the gaze" (Shildrick 2002, 103) in relation to the representation of a woman's disabled body. This practice of tactility and materiality, along with the specificity of Barry's visuals and voiceover in relation to her specific history, context and conditions, theorizes identities as constituted and grounded in social locations.

Barry also employs other filmic techniques throughout *Whole* in order to mobilize intimate address to the spectator and to conceptualize identity as something other than a narrow classificatory system. These devices include unusual camera angles, visceral proximity to images of disability, direct gaze to the spectator, non-formulaic editing and repetition of audio and visual text. Intimate address is an important feature of new disability film and the devices that operationalize it "refuse to allow audiences to take up distance, or distaste, from the presence of disabled bodies" (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 172).

Shelley Barry works with new technologies to reconfigure normative representations of gender and disability. She reworks gendered disability to suggest, "the categories 'disabled,' 'handicapped,' and 'impaired' are products of a society invested in denying the variability of the body" (Markotic 2001, 70). Barry's work underlines that one is not born into an identity. Her theorization imbricates with feminist scholars who discuss identity as dynamic, partial, multiple and

contradictory (Brah 1992; Butler and Scott 1992; Harding 2006; Mohanty 2004). In addition, she conceptualizes the ways that individual and collective identities intersect and offer possibilities for activist practices. Barry is a digital media artist who has created a critical cultural work that interrogates social hierarchies of difference and systemic regulatory regimes. *Whole* is a transformative project concerned with social justice: It takes up the challenge of problematizing the disciplinary practices that maintain and legitimate oppressive relations of power.

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