Disability and its affective affordances: deformity, decay, disruption, distortion

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CHAPTER 2

Deformity

1. Disability and the Affordances of Deformity

In 1754, the British author and politician William Hay, who described himself as a hunchback, published *Deformity: an Essay*. Hay was a long-standing Member of Parliament (MP) for Seaford in the House of Commons.[1] Hay wrote in that essay that "My Subject however will be my apology; and I am sure it will draw no Envy upon me. Bodily Deformity is visible to every Eye; but the Effects of it are known to very few; intimately known to none but those, who feel them; and they generally are not inclined to reveal them" (24). Hay posits deformity as something that is unavoidable to see, yet simultaneously maintains that the affective effects of deformity are a lot more difficult to know, since that is a matter of feeling, and subsequently, of revealing by those who are affected by such feelings. Simultaneously, however, Hay also connects bodily deformity as a matter of apology, as something that should be apologized for, and what could consequently not be the topic of envy; no one would want to have a deformed body.

From Hay's text, we may delineate three elements that could be understood as affordances of deformity, namely seeing, feeling, and revealing. Deformity is something that needs to be perceived; feeling, in Hay's words, primarily involves the feelings of the people whose bodies are considered deformed; revealing, meanwhile, involves the revealing of such feelings. In this chapter, however, I rearrange this triad of terms and their relationships based on the reading of the case studies. Seeing becomes a concern of revealing to *be seen*, where the seeing of a deformed body necessarily involves the *showing* of that body, wherein the act of revealing that body elicits affective responses as a dramatic, performative act. Deformity, posited as a matter of performative showing, complicates and dramatizes the agency of the disabled subject whose deformed body is involved, since to be shown and displayed concurrently turns the disabled subject into an aesthetic object.

In this chapter, I explore these affordances of deformity through a reading of two case studies: Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (2006 [1845]) and David Lynch's film *The*

1 See Kathleen James-Cavan's article *"[A]ll in Me is Nature": The values of deformity in William Hay's Deformity: An Essay* (2005).

Elephant Man (1980). Both novel and film share a concern with the performative display of the deformed body. *Jane Eyre* is a text that has been studied extensively in literary studies, including through various approaches aligned with disability studies.[2] My own engagement with the novel will focus on some of the novel's final scenes, in which Jane, the titular protagonist, reunites with Rochester, who was her love interest. Rochester was caught in a housefire without Jane's knowing, and when the two lovers reunite Rochester is anxious with how Jane might respond to his now deformed body. My reading of these scenes will focus on the way in which seeing, revealing, and affect are intertwined through the performativity of the aesthetic judgement afforded through the presentation of the deformed body. Since revealing suggests a gesture of performatively showing a body, what matters is *how* this body is shown and subsequently appraised. Through William Reddy's theory of emotives, wherein he posits emotional states as what can be performatively attributed to other parties, I argue that such attribution of emotional states can have a prosthetic function aimed to alleviate the anxiety around the revelation of the deformed body.

My reading of *The Elephant Man* continues this reading of the performativity of revelation. The film explores the life of John Merrick, a deformed man who is exhibited in freak shows before being taken into a hospital. Merrick is *made* to be seen in a variety of cultural locations: the freak show, the hospital, and the home, amongst others. Each setting affords different ways in which Merrick's body comes to be aesthetically appraised, showing how appraisal itself is subject to the setting through which the deformed body is made to appear and designates the agency the revealed body itself may have in that setting. While the presentation of Merrick's body affects those who are witness to it, this performative presentation also calls into question the distribution of agency of the involved parties and how agency can be a matter of sensibility. Because Merrick's body affects other bodies he comes into contact with, the degree of agency of these latter bodies often decreases, while Merrick's agency gradually increases throughout the film. Yet, this increase is then problematized in the film, thereby calling into question the fairness of this distribution of agency. Through a reading of Elaine Scarry's work on fairness in tandem with the film, I delineate the way in which ethical fairness and aesthetic fairness are intricately intertwined in considering how the deformed body is made to appear.

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2 A collection of essays entitled *The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jane Eyre, Discourse, Disability* (2012) was published which examined various aspects of *Jane Eyre* that engage with disability, both explicitly as well as implicitly.

Heather Laine Talley, in her sociological study *Saving Face: Disfigurement and the Politics of Appearance* (2014), argues that "Diagnostic criteria for 'disfigurement' do not live in any medical text. Nor is there a shared collective understanding of what kinds of appearances might be deemed disfigured and what might simply be called unusual. Like "normal," which shifts historically and culturally, 'disfigured' is also rife with multiple meanings. Yet despite the term's ambiguity and elasticity, it has a very definite, deeply felt social reality" (15). Talley connects disfigurement and deformity with semantic ambiguity. The fact that the appearance of deformity exists on a spectrum of possible aesthetic judgements ranging from "disfigured" to "unusual" implies that this appearance elicits aesthetic appraisal. Talley refers to this as "deeply felt social reality"—how and when a deformed body is made to appear necessarily carries an affective charge for other bodies. There thus exists a gap between the language to describe or diagnose deformity and the need to relate to deformity *via* language, where the way in which these bodies affect other bodies often exhaust the reach of such descriptions.

What is deformed presents itself (or is presented) for aesthetic appraisal, thereby reiterating that it falls outside a perceived "norm" in some way. The gesture of appraisal does not necessarily suggest what that norm is then supposed to be, however, which would be a deliberately affirmative gesture towards establishing a norm. The affirmative gesture here is one that signals the necessity of the event of aesthetic appraisal itself as a way of relating to the deformed body. The privation of the normative in the appearance of the deformed body opens up a not yet fully designated, but already affectively charged, semantic space. As literary and disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson has stated: "Bodily forms deemed to be ugly, deformed, fat, grotesque, ambiguous, disproportionate, or marked by scarring or so-called birthmarks constitute what can be called appearance impairments that qualify as severe social disabilities" (2005: 1579). This act of "deeming" has two aspects. It is a speech act that seeks to constitute a semantic separation between the deformed body and other bodies. And it is performative in the sense that this separation is strengthened through the use of emotive speech acts that, for example, signify disgust or abhorrence. This chapter consequently examines how emotive language is employed to negotiate the affects aroused through deformity's appearance, as well as how this act of "deeming" can severely impair disabled subjects in the way in which their agency is acknowledged and distributed through the use of aesthetic judgement by other agents.

2. Deformity and the Act of Aesthetic Appraisal[3]

In *Jane Eyre*, about halfway through the novel, the titular protagonist meets and eventually falls in love with Mr. Rochester, to whom she is employed as a servant and dependent. Although Rochester and Jane intend to marry, it is revealed that Rochester is already married to a "mad woman" whom he keeps locked away in his residence, which prohibits the lovers from matrimony. Jane subsequently flees from Rochester's estate, unable to live as Rochester's lover out of wedlock. Later in the novel, and far away from Rochester, Jane believes she can hear her name being called by him and decides to go back with the intention of finding out how Rochester is doing. Due to a fire at the Rochester estate caused by Rochester's wife, who perished in the process, Rochester becomes blind, disabled, and disfigured. In my analysis I will focus on the episodes that detail the reunion of the two lovers after these events and examine the complex relationship between the expressed emotions and the generated affects between them.

After Jane discloses to Rochester that she has inherited a small fortune, the following dialogue and events ensue:

> 'But as you are rich, Jane, you have now, no doubt, friends who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lameter like me?'
>
> 'I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich; I am my own mistress.'
>
> 'And you will stay with me?'
>
> 'Certainly—unless you object. I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely; I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.'
>
> He replied not; he seemed serious—abstracted; he sighed; he half opened his lips as if to speak; he closed them again. I felt a little embarrassed. Perhaps I had been too officious in my offers of companionship

3 Sections of paragraphs 2 and 3 of this chapter are based on my article 'Prosthetic performatives: Reading disability's discomfort through emotives and affect patterns in Jane Eyre', which appeared in *Textual Practice 35(12): 1941–1956* (2021). These paragraphs have been adapted from the original publication to fit within the context of this study.

> and aid; perhaps I had too rashly overleaped conventionalities; and he, like St. John, saw impropriety in my inconsiderateness. I had, indeed, made my proposal from the idea that he wished and would ask me to be his wife; an expectation, not the less certain because unexpressed, had buoyed me up, that he would claim me at once as his own. But no hint to that effect escaping him, and his countenance becoming more overcast, I suddenly remembered that I might have been all wrong, and was perhaps playing the fool unwittingly; and I began gently to withdraw myself from his arms—but he eagerly snatched me closer.
>
> 'No—no—Jane; you must not go. No—I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence—the sweetness of your consolation; I cannot give up these joys. I have little left in myself—I must have you. The world may laugh—may call me absurd, selfish—but it does not signify. My very soul demands you; it will be satisfied; or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.' (440)

Jane, encountering Rochester, emotes a particular attitude towards him, designating him as lonely, which she aims to solve through particular forms of companionship. Cultural historian William Reddy (2001) has defined the emotive as a (first-person) speech act that is performative in that it has the appearance of a description (e.g., "I feel angry"), that, through designating the emotional state as such, the utterance changes the specific emotional state through the descriptive act, dejecting others; "Emotives are influenced directly by, and alter, what they 'refer' to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives (and differ from constatives) in that emotives do things to the world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions, instruments that may be more or less successful" (105). The instrumental nature of emotives espoused by Reddy shows their relational nature, as seen here in Jane's projection of loneliness on Rochester, which asks for a response in turn from the person on whom the emotion is projected.

The forms of companionship Jane proposes relate a series of actions—reading, walking, sitting, waiting, and being hands and eyes to him—that have a complex relationship with Rochester's disability. These actions are all perlocutionary in the way that J.L. Austin has defined them, that is, to bring about an effect in the world through the speech act itself (101–102). The perlocutionary force of Jane's list lies in its power to alter the present by imagining a particular future, in which their companionship will take on a specific form through the aforementioned activities. Of the various activities, walking and sitting are seemingly trivial in relation to any

physical impairments caused by Rochester's disability. But as Rochester lost one of his hands and his sight in the fire, both reading to him and being eyes and hands to him follow a prosthetic logic where Jane can be his hands and eyes, thereby putting herself in the position of a prosthetic companion. This is further emphasized by Jane's suggestion to wait on Rochester, suggesting her willingness to be of his service. Jane's perlocutionary act succeeds because the suggested future relates a future of possible prostheses. Through relating this series of possible actions through which she could serve Rochester, this also suggests a reversed relationship of dependency, as these suggestions emphasize Rochester's inability to do these things himself. Although Jane tells us she felt a "little embarrassed," she does not connect this embarrassment to her own prosthetic suggestions but rather to her overleaping conventionalities.

Isobel Armstrong, in an article that carefully delineates the idea of a so-called perlocutionary poetics, argues that such a poetics is in part founded on how we may consider what different verbs do in reading literary texts: "Perlocutionary verbs seem to me to appear in chains or as compounds with other verbs, persuading us to make careful distinctions between them" (2016: 200). Armstrong argues that the perlocutionary force of verbs, when chained together, changes because they may signify differently than when verbs are not presented together. It presses us to examine the particular signification of the series of verbs that are placed together. Going back to the list of verbs Jane presented to Rochester, it is when these verbs are formed into a series that the illocutionary act, the locution, and the perlocutionary force of these verbs compounded into a series can be explicated. Of all the verbs listed, reading to, walking with, and sitting with are all conveyed in their literal usage. "To be eyes and hands," however, suggests a relationship of metonymy. Rochester's sight and hands have been damaged in a house fire, and subsequently Jane sees the possibility of placing herself in the role of filling the loss of ability of Rochester's own sight and hand. To wait on Rochester, finally, suggests a relationship of servitude that has also become prosthetic in nature due to Jane's suggestion of her ability to replace the functions of his sight and hand.

While the locution of the first verbs can be interpreted literally and creates no distance between the illocutionary and locutionary acts, as a series, the verbs carry a different perlocutionary force, offering prosthetic companionship to Rochester. Stanley Cavell explicates that the force of the perlocutionary make for "imagination and virtuosity," relying on insinuation and persuasion (173), even without speaking: "Further, that perlocutionary-like effects—for example, stopping you in your tracks, embarrassing or humiliating you—are readily, sometimes more effectively, achievable without saying anything, indicates that the urgency of passion is expressed before and after words" (173).

Whereas Jane's action resonates with Cavell's suggestion that imagination (by her use of perlocutionary verbs) and virtuosity (which will be displayed by her wit, as we shall see) rely on persuasion, persuasive acts necessarily try to manifest a particular future outcome. In Jane's case, she tries to persuade Rochester by "playing the fool unwittingly." Yet, after concluding that this does not have the desired result, she slowly draws away, which in turn evokes a response in Rochester. Cavell's argument, relevant to Rochester's reaction to Jane, highlights that perlocutionary effects can occur even without words, implying that a response can still be present.

The perlocutionary effect Jane's suggestion has on Rochester is that Rochester in turn initially only offers the suggestion of a response through a series of three other verbs: sighing, opening his mouth, and closing it again. In performative terms, the sigh, and the opening and closing of the mouth do not have a clear illocutionary intent. They may signify fatigue or discontent, for example. The perlocutionary force, however, is much clearer, as it causes Jane's embarrassment. What causes this gap between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary in this instance is the lack of accompanying emotive statements. Rochester's initial response signifies not one possible interpretation but a myriad of them. The open-endedness of Rochester's response (or rather its lack of clarity) has Jane considering several possible motivations and that she had been wrong to think Rochester would want her for his wife. Rochester does not offer a response other than Jane observing him half-opening his lips only to close them.

Following Armstrong's suggestion made in the previous chapter that we need to read for both the prosody of the gap and the body, it is in this response that the two coalesce. Rochester's gesture is itself a response given through his body, but there is a gap between this response and one that would be articulated, thus creating room for suggestion. It is only as Jane withdraws her body from his that he pulls her closer, and the caesura between suggested response and uttered response comes into being. Here Rochester combines both sensuous experience ("I have touched you, heard you") with how it moves him affectively ("felt the comfort of your presence—the sweetness of your consolation"), concluding that these are the joys he cannot do without, as he has little left in himself. Here, Rochester (inversely) mirrors Jane in several ways. First, there is the repetition of relating a series of acts, but in Rochester's case they are not activities related to companionship but rather relate personal sensuous experience. Secondly, whereas Jane's list was a projection of the recent future, Rochester's list is an account of the recent past; both of the lists derive their perlocutionary force in part from their relationship with temporality, but Rochester's perlocutionary force lies more in line with Reddy's account of the effect that the designation of an emotional

state of being can have. Rochester here appears to mirror Jane's emotive projection (in his suggestion of consolation), but rather than projecting this on her attitude, as Jane did with him, he finds her to be the source of the emotional state of joy that is lost in himself.

The suggestion that Jane's relationship to him is one of dependability is here emphasized by Rochester himself, as without Jane, Rochester's soul would "take deadly vengeance on its frame," which simultaneously removes the possibility of a life apart from Jane without seemingly resulting in lethal consequence. Jane, rather than being disparaged by Rochester's words, discovers that rather than a lack of attraction towards her, it is his disability that cautions him:

> 'I will think what you like, sir; I am content to be only your nurse, if you think it better.'
>
> 'But you cannot always be my nurse, Janet; you are young, and must marry one day.'
>
> 'I don't care about being married.'
>
> 'You should care, Janet; if I were what I once was I would try to make you care—but—a sightless block!'
>
> He relapsed again into gloom. I, on the contrary, became more cheerful, and took fresh courage. (441)

Here we find another gap, as Rochester's exclaims: "I would try to make you care—but—a sightless block!". I read the em-dashes as a form of aposiopesis, which, similar to Rochester opening and closing his mouth without saying something, creates a space to imagine what is not said. The use of "but," however, suggests that because of the sightless block he cannot make her care, but due to the use of aposiopesis it remains unclear what the function of "a sightless block" is to Rochester. Identification as one, or the presence of one (or both), for example. If we would follow the second possibility, we may then read "a sightless block" as metalepsis, a block as something that is in the way—a contrast to a prosthesis—as blocking Rochester from making Jane care. As such, the identification as a block and the presence of one become not separate options but rather are simultaneously possible.

The focus of what the source of Rochester's countenance is in Jane's focalization shifts from herself towards Rochester's disability. Concurrently, there is a change in their described emotional states. Rochester falls back into gloom, whereas Jane becomes increasingly cheerful. This then gives way to Rochester presenting his deformed arm to Jane in the following scene:

> 'On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails,' he said, drawing the mutilated limb from his breast, and showing it to me. 'It is a mere stump—a ghastly sight! Don't you think so, Jane?'
>
> 'It is a pity to see it; and a pity to see your eyes—and the scar of fire on your forehead; and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this, and making too much of you.'
>
> 'I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm and my cicatrized visage.'
>
> 'Did you? Don't tell me so—lest I should say something disparaging to your judgment.' (441)

Rochester shows his mutilated limb not initially for Jane's original aesthetic judgement, but rather to agree with his own emotional appraisal, expecting her to be revolted. Jane swiftly transitions from expressing pity to love, addressing each of Rochester's disfigurements and acknowledging the risk of loving him too much due to his deformity. Ridiculing the pity she expressed previously, she suggests that the pity she emoted may itself be a potential source for an excessive and even dangerous love, a love that would be "too much"—that is, dangerous because of its excessiveness and what that might imply (which remains undisclosed). Rochester again asks for Jane's appraisal ("Am I hideous, Jane?" "Very, sir: you always were, you know." (443)), showing Jane's attempt to use irony in order to alleviate any insecurities Rochester might possess about his appearance being too gruesome for him to imagine Jane still desiring him.

At this point, Jane's initial reluctance has been replaced by confidence. Although never explicitly related to the reader by Jane, her use of irony implies that she perceives a shift in that, rather than Rochester having an issue with her as his partner, he finds himself an unfit partner due to his disfigurement and disability. Although Jane's use of humor seemingly alleviates the tension between the two characters present in the earlier scene, this does not mean that the entire issue has been resolved. As the following scene shows, Jane has difficult feelings regarding Rochester's disability, as we are offered the thoughts of Jane as she perceives Rochester sitting in a room:

> I came down as soon as I thought there was a prospect of breakfast. Entering the room very softly, I had a view of him before he discovered my presence. It was mournful, indeed, to witness the subjugation of that vigorous spirit to a corporeal infirmity. He sat in his chair, still, but not at rest; expectant evidently, the lines of now habitual sadness

> marking his strong features. His countenance reminded one of a lamp quenched, waiting to be relighted, and, alas! it was not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression; he was dependent on another for that office! I had meant to be gay and careless, but the powerlessness of the strong man touched my heart to the quick; still I accosted him with what vivacity I could. (444)

In this encounter between Jane and Rochester, we are offered only her focalized thoughts, not the words between them, and instead of Rochester presenting his body to Jane for aesthetic appraisal, this situation has markedly shifted from the previous scenes. Here, Jane reads Rochester both as image and mood. Habitual sadness is expressed through lines on his features; his countenance is metaphorically compared to a quenched lamp, "waiting to be relighted," that is, altered. She narrates her emotion not as pity to be erased by the danger of an excessive love, but rather the opposite. Here, it is a mournfulness for his "corporeal infirmity" which she is captivated by, and the way Jane narrates her own relation to him once again follows a prosthetic logic, exclaiming that it is "not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression", but with a more careful tone than she did previously, accosting him with "what vivacity" she could.

As Jane feels mournful for Rochester's bodily condition, this is different and distinct from the feelings she disclosed to him earlier, where she maneuvered rhetorically, starting at pity but ending decisively at love, in which she did not recount the inner emotional turmoil that this passage discloses. In this sense, we could read this scene as Jane saying one thing and meaning another. What I argue, however, is that Jane is saying one thing and feeling something else. That is, her discourse with Rochester and her emotional inner life are indeed not the same, but this also allows one to read this differently than Jane intentionally concealing part of her feelings for Rochester. This reading is made possible because of the differences in the set-up of the scenes themselves. In her exchange with Rochester, I showed how there was a quick exchange and succession of emotions either displayed or designated between the two lovers through the use of emotives. In this last scene, however, the form of engagement is marked by the distance that allows Jane to read Rochester's deformity allegorically, thereby not engaging him in a direct way.

3. Prosthetic Performatives: Emotives as Prosthetic Language

The various scenes I have close read follow a rapid succession of different emotional states both felt and projected by the two characters in relation to Rochester's disability. First it is Jane who feels uncertain, doubting whether Rochester wants her for his wife while simultaneously projecting loneliness on him as part of an argument to open the way for the possibility of Rochester making her his companion. She simultaneously casts this companionship as a form of prosthesis, offering to not only become his sight and hands but also the companion who is willing to wait on him, foregrounding Rochester's disability, and consequently giving her the insight that it is not her, but rather Rochester's disability that arouses—or strengthens—the feeling of uncertainty in Rochester. For his part, Rochester's disability complicates how he expresses himself, creating various gaps whenever he attempts to reply to Jane.

Following Reddy's theory emotives, the act of naming an emotional state is itself understood as being a locutionary act that requires a response. In this, I follow Rei Terada's reading of how emotions function in relation to textuality: "Unrepresentable by any individual sign, emotion is represented by traces in a differential network. Textuality offers an alternative to expression and indication. Textuality plays in post-structuralist theory the double role that expression plays in philosophy, being both a means of representing emotion and an explanatory scheme of the operation of emotion" (2003: 45). This double role thus involves that emotions necessarily gain expression through their articulation in language, while language simultaneously functions as the means through which we create an understanding via explanatory schemes of emotion, such as Reddy's theory of emotives.

Scholars working at the intersection of literary and disability studies have expounded the relationship between prosthesis and language. Mitchell and Snyder define the concept of prosthesis as follows: "In a literal sense a prosthesis seeks to accomplish an illusion. A body deemed lacking, dysfunctional, or inappropriately functional needs compensation, and prosthesis helps to effect this end. Yet the prosthetisizing of a body or a rhetorical figure carries with it ideological assumptions about what is aberrant. The judgement that a mechanism is faulty is always profoundly social" (2000: 6). The prosthetic logic I have alluded to both follows and deviates from the definition that Mitchell and Snyder propose. For Jane, Rochester's disability is an imaginative space made possible through their exchange, where she can occupy through various forms of prosthetic companionship. Yet rather than a lack, it is *because* of Rochester's disability that Jane can imagine a role for herself.

Rochester's disability consequently affords that it functions as a prosthetic for Jane, through which she comes to understand that she can still become his wife.

My use of the term prosthesis, then, is closely related to how Mitchell and Snyder define the twofold function of their concept of narrative prosthesis; "disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization, and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (47). Although it is true that the anxiety evoked by Rochester's deformity in both characters propels the narrative forward, my argument is that, while emotional language evoked through disability can perform alleviation of those emotions through language, this performative use of language does not entail a full resolution of feelings (in this case pity) towards disability. This is what I call *prosthetic performativity*: those emotions related to discomfort and anxiety raised by and through disability that may then be attempted to be "worked through" by the performative exchange of emotive utterances. Following Mitchell and Snyder's argument that rhetorical figures may too serve as prosthetic functions in narratives involving disability, these exchanges themselves become affective in that the perlocutionary force that is generated through the use of emotives not only affects the intended recipient but also works back on the speaker, who then needs to readjust their position in relation to the situation accordingly.

Mitchell and Snyder cite David Wills, who, in a study on the concept of prosthesis, espouses four different relationships between body and word that allow us further insight into the relationship between prosthetic and affect at play here:

> The word that issues from a body is often believed to glean a corporeal aura from its material host.
>
> ...
>
> The word always augments a prosthetic relation to an exterior material that it cannot possess or embody.
>
> ...
>
> A word returns to the body a sense of possession of the external world that it cannot possess.
>
> ...
>
> The body's need to comprehend a materiality external to it is answered via the ruse of language—that is, the word provides the body with the necessary illusion of its successful entrance into the space of the Other. (137–141)[4]

4 Wills uses the term here in the phenomenological sense, as constituting what is different from the Self.

Wills' relationships point not just to the semantic content of language but also to its affective charge. What Wills refers to as "the ruse of language," the entrance into the Other's space provided by words, is further complicated by Rochester's "corporeal aura," conveyed not only through spoken words but also through incomplete ones or silences, creating room for suggestion and interpretation. In the scenes I have close read, Rochester constantly sought affirmation of his deformity through asking for Jane's judgement ("It is a mere stump—a ghastly sight! Don't you think so, Jane?"), but through asking for Jane to agree with his own aesthetic judgement, this also sets up the possibility for Jane to disagree and fall into pity—something Jane appears well aware of by replying "one is in danger of loving you too well for all this, and making too much of you."

What is telling in the four prosthetic relationships delineated by Wills is that the use of words "return a sense of possession" of something—a world or a body—that it cannot possess. In my reading, this could be read as Rochester asking for Jane's agreement regarding his own negative aesthetic appraisal, as confirming the negation of the possibility of a shared world between him and Jane. But Rochester's initial inability to speak, and the gaps in his speech, can also be interpreted as a distance between word and body. Earlier, I read Rochester's seemingly referring to himself as a "sightless block" as metonymy, as something that is blocking Rochester from having a sense of possession of his own body. Jane, by contrast, uses languages to articulate her desire to become a prosthetic companion for Rochester. Jane's relation between body and word, then, is the opposite of Rochester's. Whereas Rochester's dependency on Jane lies in her acceptance of his visage, and disagreement, or at least the complication with his own aesthetic judgement of his own body, Jane in turn uses her words—prosthetically—to imagine and offer a future to Rochester where she could place her own body in a prosthetic relation to Rochester's deformity.

The two positions delineated above regarding the relationships between word and body—Rochester's seeming sense of a lack of possession of his body and Jane offering hers to him in service through specific bodily functions—need to be elucidated further in terms of their respective prosthetic natures, as these are simultaneously congenial to as well as dependent on one another. Wills writes that

> the body can only be named thanks to the word, and the word can only take form thanks to the idea of the body. The struggle here is therefore with a reciprocity of body and word that cannot be reduced to reference, that continues beyond any hope of unity, and that on the contrary installs divisibility as the principle of any enunciation

> whatsoever. There is no body that is not also an articulation, and no articulation that does not imply a radical notion of divisibility (141).

In Wills' writing we find that neither body nor word is originary to the other, but rather that they coincide. The possibility of simply referencing the body through speech is in Will's estimation a reduction of the relationship between body and word, because when one speaks of the body, this is not only a reference to it but an *articulation* of that body. As such, language is the primary prosthesis of the body in that through one's means of articulating it, one offers a division of the body and how it may be experienced and/or imagined. The divisibility of the body through the word consequently means that the body is a body of parts. The notion of prosthesis itself is therefore reimagined. Rather than understanding prosthesis as a recuperation of a supposed originary lack or deficit of the body, Wills argues that "It is therefore the figure of the chiasmus, that between body and word—or indeed a chasm, that into which the words of prosthesis fall locked in a corporal embrace—that structures or at least regulates the words that follow, marking the time of the prosthetic condition" (141).[5] The prosthetic condition thereby involves the way in which the divisibility of the body—itself conditioned because words necessarily articulate this divisibility—is also simultaneously prosthetisized, i.e. put together again, through the use of words.

To mark the prosthetic condition for both Rochester and Jane leads us not only to two different relationships that are imagined between word and body but also to the ability of establishing a third relationship between their own relationships to the body. Rochester's body becomes divided as the aposiopetic gaps in his utterances express what he finds inarticulable about his body. Meanwhile, the very same troubled articulation of Rochester's body allows for Jane to imagine dividing her own body into the functions that could be of service to Rochester. Therefore, what the logic of prosthesis offers is not only to make legible the relationship between word and body of the individual but also the creation of a new, third relationship in and through the generation of prosthetic language between and through different bodies.

In my reading of these scenes of *Jane Eyre*, there are different aspects that we can distill as specific affordances of deformity. Given Rochester's presentation of his mutilated limb for Jane's aesthetic appraisal, we can read this as a performative act in that, through the gesture of presenting it, it becomes a matter of how the deformity

5 The chiasmus is a rhetorical figure in which words or grammatical constructions are repeated in reversed order. Wills uses it here to elucidate how body and word oscillate.

comes to appear. Rochester specifically presents his mutilated limb to Jane, asking her if she agrees with him in his judgement that it is a "ghastly sight." Through presenting his own limb as a gesture for aesthetic appraisal, Jane's judgement gains the character of something that requires either approval or negation, a situation that she's aware of and consequently tries to downplay by saying one could make too much out of Rochester. In Jane's allegorical reading of Rochester sitting near the fireplace, the appearance of his deformity is again at stake, but this time noticeably through the absence of interaction on Rochester's side. Here Jane's reading of Rochester's body also turns Rochester's body into an object that can be read, making him not a subject in the interactive process of reading but its object.

My reading of *Jane Eyre* argues how the performative use of language functions prosthetically to afford a mode of relationality to the appearance of the deformed body in which the affective tension aroused by this appearance finds its uneasy and complicated articulation. But what is concurrently at stake in how aesthetic judgements regarding deformed bodies are made is how these deformed bodies are made to appear and the nature of the judgement of the appearance itself. How does the potential objectification of the deformed body through performing an aesthetic judgement relate to how disabled subjects can exercise their own agency?

4. Games of Make-Believe: Performativity and Appearance

My analysis of scenes from *Jane Eyre* argues that the appearance of deformity affords a specific kind of negotiation concerning emotional stations evoked through deformity, namely the way in which emotives are exchanged between the involved parties to imagine a specific social and prosthetic role for themselves wherever deformity appears. In what follows, I will read David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man*, which allows me to pursue how deformity casts the trio of terms that this chapter opened with—seeing, revealing, and affect—as complicating the relationship between deformity and agency. This is because Lynch's film follows the eponymous character across various socio-cultural contexts, primarily the freak show, the home, the hospital, and the theater. In each of these contexts, what is at stake is how the revealing of the deformed body is employed to affect the bodies witnessing the revealing, and the way in which being affected subsequently shapes and influences agency.

Based on the texts *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* (1971) by anthropologist Ashley Montagu and *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (2012 [1923])

by the surgeon Frederick Treves, Lynch's film offers a portrayal of the life of Joseph Merrick (called John Merrick in the film), a man with severe facial and bodily deformities. The film follows Merrick from his captivity in a Victorian freak show to being noticed by Treves and taken into the London Hospital for study and treatment. The film explicitly thematizes the presentation of the deformed body, which could best be explained through a scene that takes place halfway through the film. After Treves has taken Merrick from the freak show into the London Hospital, word gets out to the aristocracy of London society of Merrick's residency there, who subsequently wish to visit him. Mrs. Motherhead, the head nurse at the hospital, confronts Treves about this and argues that these new visitors do not "hide their disgust" for Merrick. Afterwards, Treves' wife finds him sitting in a chair in his home, staring aimlessly out in front of him. When she asks him what's the matter, Treves explains that he has made Merrick into a "curiosity" again by allowing people to visit Merrick in the hospital. This culminates in Treves asking himself, "What was it all for? Why did I do it?" followed by "Am I good man, or am I a bad man?".

Although I will return to this scene later to examine it more closely, for now this scene makes evident the fact that the way Merrick is put on display is itself discussed in the film and, furthermore, is explicitly tied to ethical concerns as shown by Treves' question. *The Elephant Man* explores the ways in which the appearance and revelation of the deformed body afford the explicit positing and framing of such questions, thereby setting a distribution of agency between the film's characters and their affective responses. Since these questions are intrinsically concerned with the way in which Merrick's body is made to appear and how this affects those who are witness to these appearances, the way in which these appearances and their subsequent responses are performed and represented must be taken into account as well.

The first encounter both the viewer and Treves have of Merrick is when Treves attends a Victorian-style carnival which includes a freak show in London. Treves appears to be looking for something specific and follows a policeman who enters a backstage area of the "FREAKS" section, with a "NO ENTRY" sign prohibiting the general audience from entering. Treves follows the policeman through the backstage area, encountering several "stock" freaks, such as the strong man and dwarves. Treves eventually stumbles on a conversation between two men, a London official and one Mr. Bytes, the self-proclaimed owner of the freak show, in front of an exhibition entitled "ELEPHANT MAN" with a cardboard wall that has an elephant drawing, prohibiting both the viewer and the audience in the film from viewing what lies behind it. The official intends to close the freak show down in the following dialogue:

LONDON OFFICIAL: This exhibit degrades everybody who sees it, as well as the poor creature himself.
BYTES: He is a freak. How else will he live?
LONDON OFFICIAL: Freaks are one thing, there's no objection to freaks. But this is entirely different. This is monstrous and should not be allowed![6]

The official states that in fact, the creature referred to is not a freak but something "entirely different," namely monstrous. Through this argument, the official effectively displaces the creature from the other freaks exhibited at the freak show, who are already there *because* of their status as freaks. The argument to separate the monstrous from the freak given by the official is that, if freaks have entertainment value, the monstrous "creature" would *degrade* anyone who sees it. What is at stake is not the fact that the creature itself is judged as degraded, but rather that merely beholding it would be enough to degrade the audience. The fact that Merrick is not mentioned by name in discussing this scene prohibits the evocation of Merrick as a person to the audience who attend their discussion and instead further evokes the connotation of Merrick as an animal, as supported by his stage name seen on the sign: the Elephant Man.

The first time Merrick actually appears in the film is preluded by a scene in which Treves, after discovering the new location of the freak show, negotiates a private viewing with Bytes, as well as their respective roles in this showing:

TREVES: Are you the proprietor?
BYTES: And who might you be, sir?
TREVES: Just one of the curious. I'd like to see it.
BYTES: I don't think so. No sir, we're … closed.
TREVES: Now, I'm paying handsomely for a private showing!
BYTES: Handsomely? Who sent you?
[*Treves hands coins to Bytes*]
TREVES: Beg your pardon?
BYTES: Never mind … I'm the … owner.

In this exchange, Treves and Bytes fill in their respective roles of the curious viewer and the "owner" of the body about to be exhibited. This exchange is important because it

6 This and all further transcripts are based on my own rendition of dialogues of the film, as well as a rendition of the script found at IMSDB: https://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Elephant-Man,-The .html.

sets up a theatrical model: that of the exploiter of the theater and the body (or bodies) to be displayed, and that of the anticipating spectator. But the model is disrupted by Bytes' subtle shift from "proprietor" to "owner"; the first term is commonly used to describe the owner of establishments, the second, however, also connotes ownership over a body—in this case Merrick's. Treves is subsequently led down a dimly lit corridor, in which Bytes spectacularly introduces Merrick as though he is addressing a full audience, accompanied by the following lines:

> BYTES: Life … is full of surprises. Consider the fate of this creature's poor mother. Struck down in the fourth month of her maternal condition by an elephant, a wild elephant. Struck down on an uncharted African isle. The result … is plain to see. Ladies and gentlemen, the terrible Elephant Man!

As the curtain that conceals Merrick is shifted, Merrick initially appears still concealed, by a large robe he is wearing (fig. 1), and then ordered by Bytes to turn around, after which Merrick is briefly shown (fig. 2), an order echoed by a boy that acts as a stagehand for Bytes. This is followed by a considerably longer medium-wide shot of approximately 27 seconds that zooms in on an (extreme) close-up of Treves's face with his mouth agape as he looks upon Merrick's body, seemingly captivated, resulting in a single tear rolling down his left cheek (fig. 3). During Merrick's first appearance, his body did not appear at all; it was only hinted at, concealed behind the decorated cardboard poster, thereby evoking suspense in both Treves and the viewer in regard to this body absent from the scene. In this second appearance, however, Merrick's body *is* shown, but the combined time of the two shots in which Merrick's body is shown in this scene is approximately six seconds. Meanwhile, the slow zoom-in on Treves' face lasts 27 seconds before there is a fade-out.

The gradual increase in the actual presence of Merrick's body—first visually absent but hinted at, then present but covered up, and finally briefly visible—follows a schema in which the tension is built up both for the viewer and Treves. In what sense can this scene be thought of as performative? Judith Butler has offered the following understanding of performativity:

> Performativity is … not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical;

(Figure 1)

(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)

> indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (1993: 12–13)

In light of Butler's theory, the theatricality of performativity is not as foregrounded as the initial presentation of this scene may suggest, namely a man with a deformed body who is hidden by a curtain that is being revealed after another man introduces him through a supposed origin story. If the nature of performativity is based on what set of norms is reiterated, one performative aspect of this scene is clear: a body designated as "abnormal" or "monstrous" is being put on display in front of an audience and ordered to perform certain acts ("stand up!" "turn around!"). But as William Egginton notes, this reiteration is not something fully under the control of the participants involved: "Performativity, as a mode of imposition of bodily forms … does not, for the most part, describe an agency-rich method of creating one's self and body to one's own specifications" (16). Egginton's comment ties into Butler's notion of performativity in that an instance of performative theatricality is connected to the historicity it reiterates but cannot be fully under the control of the performers. Even as they actively name and designate their own roles, this does not grant them full control over how these roles are acted out. They become part of the make-believe they have set up for themselves in the execution of a performance. Thus, if Merrick is *made* to perform by Bytes, Bytes' theatrical introduction is itself warranted by the historicity of the theatrical introduction of the freak in a freakshow to evoke suspense in the audience, even if, in the case of this scene, the power of this performance is limited due to the fact that Bytes is performing in front of a meager audience of one, namely Treves.

This performance is dissimulated when Merrick's body is revealed to Treves. Treves, who sought access to a private viewing under the ulterior motive of being "one of the curious," is captivated by Merrick's body, as the 27-second zoom-in on his facial expression emphasizes. The limited time we initially get to look at Merrick ourselves, as opposed to the time we spend looking at Treves, who himself is looking at Merrick, begs the question of how to read this look. Susan Sontag (1966) has noted how the *stare*, in contrast to the look or the gaze, is characterized by its compulsive nature; the person who is staring cannot divert their look elsewhere. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson offers four qualities that set the stare apart from the look and the gaze. Like Sontag, Garland-Thomson argues that staring is a physical response characterized by astonishment. Secondly, she argues that staring "has a history sedimented over time and across space that is specific to each culture, which in turn shapes its meaning and

practice" (2009: 13). Thirdly, staring "establishes a social relationship between starer and 'staree'" (13). It is an interpersonal action through which we act out who we imagine ourselves and others to be. The fourth quality, according to Garland-Thomson, is that staring can become a vehicle for the production of knowledge when the stare becomes a quest to know and render what is stared is into something legible (14).

The revelation of a deformed body is closely tied to the imagination—what we expect this body to look like—and the actualization of its appearance. This is reaffirmed in the third point made by Garland-Thomson, suggesting that staring affords us the opportunity to consider how we come to appear in the eyes of the other person. The form of imagining done by Treves is, however, a specific form of imagining, what Kendall Walton calls imagining *de se*, "a form of self-imagining characteristically described as imagining *doing* or *experiencing* something (or *being* a certain way), as opposed to imagining merely *that* one does or experiences something or possesses a certain property" (29). This form of imagining is relevant here because, in assuming the role of "one of the curious," Treves is also willingly playing what Walton calls a game of make-believe, the imaginative act of acting out certain roles in a shared game (12), or in this instance, a performance. The fact that this is a shared performance means that the kind of imagining taking place cannot solely be an imagining *de se*, since Treves and Bytes *both* partake in this performance, making it what Walton refers to as a social imagining. Social imagining involves an act of imagining that relies on the notion that not only can one imagine oneself to fulfill a certain role or act a certain way, but that it is also possible for us to agree upon what is collectively imagined; being in a performance, for example (18). This requires that each participant is not only actively aware of the role others play but also of the shared conviction that everyone is playing a role. However, it often remains unclear what the other is imagining exactly, and because of this lack of clarity in the conviction of the other, the negotiations of these agreements become themselves incorporated into the game of make-believe that is being acted out.

Even if the agreement of what game of make-believe is being acted out between Bytes and Treves may be unclear, what *is* clear is that Merrick plays a different role in this performance because it is questionable to what extent he has an active or participatory role in the first place. While Merrick's body is being displayed for Treves in this performance, he is being ordered around; he does not speak or act on his own accord. The actualization of the appearance of Merrick's body shows a specific way in which the deformed body is made to appear—specific because it is made to be without agency. Treves' imagination is initially fed through what Walton calls prompters: objects that speak to the imagination and allow us to imagine them to be something that they are

not (for example, clouds in animal shapes) (22). For Treves, these prompters included the cardboard wall with the poster of a menacing elephant and the drape prohibiting the audience from seeing Merrick's body, thus feeding into his imagination. But imagining *de se* goes further, in that in imagining *de se*, we do not only imagine a specific object but rather also the way in which we imagine ourselves to be, feel, or act in relation to that object. Thus, the activation of the imagination through prompters sets up a specific form of suspense. Whatever is lurking behind the cardboard wall and drape *becomes* worth seeing because it is simultaneously covered up and hinted at.

As viewers, our access to Treves' imagination has become blocked because we *have* seen what Treves has seen, however briefly, yet we cannot collectively imagine *with* Treves whatever it is he is imagining, since instead of the camera either following him or his line of sight, it is Treves' own face, affectively marked by the tear rolling down his face, that has now become the site of what we are invited to imagine ourselves. The tear, Roland Barthes has remarked, is a way to "address myself to someone … By weeping, I want to impress someone, to bring pressure to bear upon someone" (1978: 181). Treves' tear here presses on the performance itself once Merrick's deformed body is revealed. For the tear pressures what Treves imagined *de se*, to be "one of the curious" as part of a game of make-believe, giving him a clear role. But the actual revelation of Merrick's body overwhelms Treves so that it leaves him to stare in what Garland-Thomson called astonishment. Astonishment finds its etymological roots in the Old French *estoner* (to stun, daze, deafen), and the Latin *extonare* (a compound of *ex*, out of, and *tonare*, thunder, implying being thunderstruck). Astonishment, as the translation of the tear's affective pressure, makes legible how affect cannot only drive bodies but also paralyze them. The 27-second zoom-in shows how the revelation of the deformed body holds the power to not only stun the staree but may also freeze and astonish the starer, if the deformed body manages to surpass what the starer had imagined *de se*. Thus, it is not only Merrick whose agency is diminished through the display of his body. Rather, my reading of the scene shows how the revelation of an appearance, as an affordance of deformity, can diminish the agency of the people who witness that body, pressured into staring through this very appearance.

Treves brings Merrick back to London Hospital, where he presents Merrick to other physicians in a lecture hall. Merrick is presented in a mobile installation with curtains, prohibiting the audience from seeing him. As Treves requests his assistants to pull the curtains away, there is a cut, and instead the camera is positioned behind Merrick (fig. 4). Although the viewer has seen Merrick's body briefly in the previously discussed scene, the camera angle again focuses on the response of the audience to Merrick. This time, however, the shadow of Merrick's body is visible through the cur-

tain, but only to further distort the form of Merrick's body. Concurrently, Treves' role has now shifted, moving from "one of the curious" to that of a physician exhibiting a case study to his colleagues. Treves introduces Merrick as follows:

> TREVES: Gentlemen, in the course of my profession I have come upon many lamentable deformities of the face due to injury or disease as well as mutilations and contortions of the body depending on like causes. But at no time have I met with such a perverted or degraded version of a human being as this man. I wish to draw your attention to the insidious conditions affecting this patient … [*addressing an audience member*] Can you see over there? Note, if you will, the extreme enlargement of the skull, the right upper limb which is totally useless, the alarming curvature of the spine. Would you turn around please?
>
> TREVES' ASSISTANT [*addressing* Merrick]: Turn around please!
>
> TREVES: The looseness of the skin, and the varying fibrous tumors that cover ninety percent of the body. And there is every indication that these afflictions have been in existence, and have progressed rapidly, since birth. The patient also suffers from chronic bronchitis. As an interesting side note, in spite of the aforementioned anomalies, the patient's genitals remain entirely intact and unaffected. [*Addressing his assistant*] Thank you.
>
> [*Treves' assistant removes Merrick's loincloth, exposing his genitals to Treves' audience*]
>
> TREVES: And his left arm is perfectly normal, as you see. So then, gentlemen, owing to this series of conditions, the congenital exostosis of the skull, extensive papillomatous growth, large pendulous masses and connection of the skin, the great enlargement of the right upper limb, involving all the bones, the massive distortion of the head, and the extensive area, covered by papillomatous growth, the patient has been called the 'Elephant Man'. Thank you.
>
> [*Audience applauds enthusiastically*]

This scene differentiates from the one previously discussed in that, similar to my reading of *Jane Eyre*, it connects the presentation of deformity to aesthetic judgement that was absent in the previous scene. It is noticeable that Treves starts by explicitly passing judgement on Merrick by stating that he has never met "with such a perverted or degraded version of a human being." He describes Merrick's condition as "insidious,"

his deformities "lamentable," and the curvature of his spine as "alarming." It is only as the speech progresses that his use of medical terminology increases with terms such as "papillomatous growth" and "chronic bronchitis." There are also, however, several descriptions and terms that intertwine medical and aesthetic terminology ("the looseness of the skin," "the massive distortion of the head," "fibrous tumors").

It is not my aim here to argue for a strict separation between medical and aesthetic terminology, but rather that it displays the intertwinement of aesthetic judgement in a professional, scientific presentation. Jean-Marie Schaeffer argues similarly that "the distinction between pure and impure aesthetic judgement seems to me to be pointless. The cogent distinction is rather that between judgements based on aesthetic appreciation and judgements based on other criteria … it being understood that the same object can at the same moment, or at different moments, be judged according to several kinds of criteria, that it can be the object of a composite judgement" (2015: 96). Thus, several of the terms and descriptions used here by Treves are part of a passing of judgement, but it is the wrong question to ask whether this is either medical or aesthetic. Gérard Genette (1999: 70) has noted how the attribution of predicates that themselves possess an aesthetic quality infers that the determined aesthetic quality resides in the object discussed, lending it the appearance of an objective evaluation. It is precisely the lack of ability to clearly differentiate between the medical and aesthetic aspects of judgement, and moreover, the simultaneity of aesthetic terminology within a medical presentation, that lends the aesthetic aspect of the judgement here its rhetorical efficacy.

The relevance of the use of aesthetic judgement is also in part due to its absence in the previously discussed scene, even though many aspects are clearly mirrored. Now, Treves has become the one to put Merrick on display rather than being "one of the curious." The audience, as seen in fig. 4, is a specialized scientific one (consisting of other doctors), diverging from the mixed variety of attendees of freak shows. Concurrently, like Bytes before him, Treves initially veiled Merrick's body from the attending audience, consequently creating theatrical suspension by invoking the audience to imagine what is behind it through this concealed, deformed body he eventually reveals. Treves' affirmative aesthetic judgement about Merrick's body is performative in the sense that, even if the audience members should be as astonished as Treves was in the previous scene, the act of judging (both medically and aesthetically) reiterates the norms that are associated with the medical presentation read as a theatrical situation. Treves' speech starts with asserting that Merrick is both perverted and degraded; these are not just moral judgements, but aesthetic ones in that they refer not to Merrick's actions but rather his deformed appearance. Perversion has

its etymological roots in the Latin *pervertere*; that which has been turned the wrong way. A deformed body is here cast, from the outset, as what is intrinsically turned out wrong. Treves subsequently supports this judgement by explaining what the medical conditions of Merrick's body supposedly are. Rhetorically, this powerfully demarcates the distinction between presenter and presented: between Treves' agency affirming him to be in control of the situation (emphasized by making sure the audience can actually see Merrick's body), and Merrick's total lack of response and action.

As Butler maintained, performativity is not primarily theatrical, since, according to them, theatricality is produced insofar as the historicity of a situation remains dissimulated in the face of performativity's apparent theatricality. In effect, this implies that a performative situation always asks us to be sensitive toward what remains dissimulated in the scene. In this case, the dissimulation of the theatrical revelation of the deformed body remains dissimulated due to the fact that the boundaries of the theatrical situation established remain largely intact through the clarity of the roles of the actors. Treves as the presenter, Merrick as the man (or medical object) presented, and the audience to witness. Furthermore, the formal construction of the scene to the viewer enhances this further, for the camera angle used in this scene, as shown in Fig. 4 displays how the shadow highlights and even further distorts Merrick's deformities. Thus, while Merrick's body is revealed to the audience addressed to Treves, the body does remain concealed from the viewer, but the silhouette cast by the shadow through the scene's formal arrangement allows for the evocation of further curiosity from the viewer precisely because this silhouette is further deformed through the camera angle and presentation. Even though we have previously briefly seen Merrick, the viewer becomes implicated in the theatrical situation, as the angle invites us to imagine *de se* what it would be like to be a part of Treves' audience in beholding Merrick in the light, facing him directly.

(Figure 4)

When Merrick is put in the isolation ward of London Hospital, he catches the eye of Dr. Carr-Gomm, the hospital's governor. Since Merrick's deformity is deemed "incurable" by Carr-Gomm, he initially presses Treves to get rid of Merrick, but Treves convinces Carr-Gomm to meet with Merrick instead. In order to convince Carr-Gomm to keep Merrick at the hospital, Treves trains Merrick in preparation for the interview with Carr-Gomm. The interview initially goes well, as Merrick was taught to say "Hello, my name is John Merrick" by Treves, as well as a few other simple sentences. But as Carr-Gomm presses Merrick further, it becomes increasingly clear to him that Merrick's answers are not spontaneous but rather scripted:

> CARR-GOMM: How do you find Mr. Treves, as a teacher I mean?
> MERRICK: [*mumbling*] … Very kind.
> CARR-GOMM: How long did you and Mr. Treves prepare for this interview?
> MERRICK: … Very kind?
> CARR-GOMM: Yes, of course, I understand. Well, it's been a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Merrick.

As Carr-Gomm leaves, convinced Merrick does not belong in the hospital and would require being constantly looked after, Merrick starts to recite the 23rd psalm. Although parts of the psalm were taught by Treves for the interview, Merrick continues the psalm beyond what was originally taught. Treves calls Carr-Gomm back, and Merrick explains he has read the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. In terms of it involving a performance, the scene takes the form of a test: it is only after Merrick has shown himself capable of autonomous speech, as well as being literate rather than only being capable of recitation, that Carr-Gomm changes his mind to keep him. This display of Merrick's agency, however, does not mean he breaks out of the performances in which he is placed; the difference Merrick is given is a matter of degree rather than one of category, precisely because this agency is attributed *to* him. He is still subjected to the situations others place him in, and while what is appreciated is his ability to act on his own accord, this is done within the boundaries of a setting controlled by others.

Carr-Gomm asks Treves to see him in his office, during which Carr-Gomm asks Treves whether he can "imagine the kind of life he must have had?" Treves answers assertively that he can. But Carr-Gomm refutes this by answering: "I don't believe so. No one could possibly imagine it, I don't believe any of us can!" Carr-Gomm, suggesting that the life Merrick has led is not for another person to imagine, sharply contrasts the way in which imagination was used earlier: by evoking what Merrick's

body may look like, by presenting it through theatrical means, and by imagining whether or not he is a person capable of acting autonomously. These situations were concurrently conceived in performative settings: either through a game of theatrical make-believe, a medical presentation, or an examination interview. The tension created by Carr-Gomm's rebuttal thus lies at the intersection between the impossibility of imagining the life Merrick has lived on the one hand and the applied ability to direct that life through performances on the other. Even though Treves has seemingly "rescued" Merrick from being exhibited at freak shows, he has not rescued him from continuing to be placed in performative settings but, contrarily, has only redirected this exhibiting through a change of setting.

5. "Stand up!" / "Turn around!": The Affective Sensibility of Agency

Merrick is allowed to stay in London Hospital, and Treves invites him over to his house for tea, where Merrick meets Treves' wife, Ann. Merrick is brought to tears by the kindness Ann shows him, exclaiming that no woman so beautiful has ever treated him so well. As they take tea, Merrick apologizes to the couple for having made a "spectacle of himself" earlier. Although not intended as irony, we might read this statement as such. Linda Hutcheon explains irony as follows: "From the point of view of the interpreter, irony is an interpretive and intentional move: it is the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and the unsaid. The move is usually triggered (and then directed) by conflictual textual or contextual evidence or by markers which are socially agreed upon" (1994: 11). Interpreting Merrick's statement as ironic is possible because the film has already shown how Merrick was made into a spectacle by others as I've argued in my readings of the previous scenes, thus making his own display of emotion not much of a "spectacle" by comparison. Simultaneously, however, Merrick's apology also further perpetuates Merrick's newfound agency, as it is also a display of taking responsibility for and interpreting his own actions. Merrick then notices family pictures posited on top of the fireplace, and after examining them, he offers the Treves couple a picture of his own mother, which he keeps in a small medallion:

> ANN: Oh, but she's … Mr. Merrick, she's beautiful!
> MERRICK: Oh, she has … she has the face of an angel! … I must … must have been a great disappointment to her.

ANN: No, Mr. Merrick. No, no. No son as loving as you could ever be a disappointment.

MERRICK: If only I could find her! If she could see me with such lovely friends here now. Perhaps she could love me as I am? I've tried so hard to be good.

ANN: [*starts crying*] I'm so … Oh, I'm so sorry!

The scene marks Merrick's behavior (and, by extension, his character) with a quality of innocence. Earlier, when Treves showed Merrick pictures of their children, Merrick believed the (apparent) lie that their children were out with friends rather than sent away so as to avoid seeing him. In the conversation with Ann, Merrick's own appearance ("a great disappointment") is initially contrasted with that of his beautiful mother ("the face of an angel"), only to then be further juxtaposed with Merrick's attempts to "be good"–this sequence moves Ann to tears (fig. 5). As with Treves before her, I do not propose to read Ann's affect in terms of the emotions we might attribute to her. Here, Merrick's display of innocence (not realizing the children are hid from him, his own statement that he tried "so hard to be good"), suggests a *saturation* of affect, as Ann is affectively moved by Merrick to such a degree that she flees the room. In her study on the transmission of affect, Teresa Brennan argues the following:

> The only other point that needs to be stressed at the outset is that affects have an energetic dimension. This is why they can enhance or deplete. They enhance when they are projected outward, when one is relieved of them; in popular parlance, this is called "dumping." Frequently, affects deplete when they are introjected, when one carries the affective burden of another, either by a straightforward transfer or because the other's anger becomes your depression … All this means, indeed the transmission of affect means, that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the "individual" and the "environment." (*6*)

Brennan's use of the terms "individual" and "environment" points to her argument that projected affects from one body may be impressed on others: the body's social environment. Whereas Brennan talks of enhancement and depletion, saturation here involves Ann becoming overwhelmed, driving her out of the scene. As such, a reading of Ann's reaction here in terms of either enhancement or depletion would be too

(Figure 5)

limiting. To saturate affect here refers to the point by which bodies that are initially propelled and driven by affect towards an object, while simultaneously or consequently being driven away by that same object cause a situation in which neither affective drive dominates. This causes affective saturation and produces a new, often immobilizing affective reaction in the receiving subject (as in this scene). Merrick's condition, determined to be incurable, affirms his status as a deformed character who strives to "do good," while never being able to rid himself of his deformity. This incurability, coupled with his appearance, creates a seemingly paradoxical effect that evokes affective saturation: on the one hand, Ann is *driven* towards him (attracted by her curiosity to know what he, and Merrick's mother, looks like). Yet, when Merrick exclaims that he has "tried so hard to be good," Ann, in the knowledge that his condition will never change, is then affectively compelled, following Merrick's statement, to draw away from him.

This scene is followed by Merrick receiving Madge Kendal in his room at the hospital, a prominent actress who brings him a picture of herself and a book containing plays by Shakespeare. After relating that she is a stage actress, Kendal and Merrick exchange lines from the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*, creating another performative setting. Only this time, Merrick has become an active participant in the performance. As the scene unfolds, Romeo and Juliet kiss, but Merrick, upon encountering this passage, simply states, "and then it says they kiss," putting the book away. Kendal, however, continues enacting the scene and kisses Merrick on his cheek, telling Merrick that he is "not an elephant man at all," but rather Romeo. Merrick then sheds a single tear (fig. 6), seemingly mirroring Treves' tear earlier. In the scene where Treves first saw Merrick, I interpreted his stare as one of astonishment and his tear as a pressure on the performance he took part in. But Barthes posed that

the tear may also be read as a form of address. Merrick, by putting the text away, initially breaks the theatrical mode of address between him and Kendal. Through continuing with the scene, however, Kendal draws Merrick back in. Merrick, like Treves before him, seems astonished as well, but this time the tear is an address to Kendal (and seemingly the viewer), rather than a pressure that is brought to bear on the performance. It is the *continuation* of the enactment of the scene that moves Merrick.

(Figure 6)

Meanwhile, during the evenings, Merrick is visited by Jim, the hospital's night porter, who arranges visits for Londoners that want to see Merrick. Merrick, who has just received a dressing case from Treves and Carr-Gomm, is combing his hair and addressing Kendal's picture in an exaggerating manner, attempting to emulate a posh accent while doing so. Jim barges in on Merrick's private performance to show him off to a number of drunk men and women from a local pub. The men force one of the women to kiss Merrick (fig. 7), who is visibly distressed, and then push the woman and Merrick on his bed. As the men pour liquor on Merrick, they show him his own visage in a mirror, to which Merrick screams in terror. The men, laughing, then parade Merrick around in his room.

The scene I have described shows multiple points of contact with Merrick's body, but these are all brief: the forced kiss is broken as the woman tries to push herself away; the men parading Merrick's body only hold it briefly as they try to pass him on to the next man. Earlier, I made the argument for what I called affective saturation, building on Brennan's theory of affective transmission: the way in which, once people are driven to something, they can be driven away from it once this point of saturation of this affective drive is reached in a certain body. Merrick's deformed body,

thus comes to function as the nexus around which other bodies organize themselves, are affectively drawn but driven away once they are put in actual physical contact with the body. The point of affective saturation is thus tied to the physical proximity certain bodies have to Merrick's deformed body.

In relation to the previous scene, another bifurcation now appears. Initially, Merrick was presented in Bytes' freak show. This was then followed by Treves showcasing Merrick for his colleagues, which in turn was followed by Merrick finally receiving guests from London society, of which one of its most prominent members stated that Merrick was "not an elephant man at all." If this sequence were to be interpreted as an ascending line (which the film itself complicates, as we shall see), in which Merrick increasingly gains agency, the night-time visits undermine this ascent, as Merrick is manhandled by Jim and his visitors, depriving him of any agency he enjoys during the daytime. Merrick's degree of autonomous use of his body in these performances is intrinsically tied to the interaction others have with that body, whether he is showcased, a relatively active participant in the performance, or manhandled and abused. This distinction in the nature of the interaction gains importance in relation to the argument I make concerning deformity's relationship to performativity. The way in which deformed bodies come to be displayed or perform their own appearance is dissimulated differently from non-disabled bodies. As Butler maintained, performativity concerns the "act-like", or what is not necessarily explicated *as* an act—recognized as such. The deformed body's appearance consequently both emphasizes its appearance *as* act in that it affectively moves and compels other bodies, yet simultaneously the affective effects evoked through deformity's appearance become dissimulated through the cultural locations that mediate these appearances, disallowing the full address of appearance *as* act.

(Figure 7)

Merrick, taken away by Bytes, who had joined Jim's group, is reinstalled in the freak show, but then subsequently released by the freak show's other members and returns to London. Arriving at London station, Merrick attracts the attention of a boy who follows him while blowing props against him and asking, "Why is your head so big?" Merrick starts to walk faster and faster (made difficult by a limp right leg), runs over a girl, and attracts the attention of an increasing number of people who eventually corner him. Merrick then exclaims, "No! I am not an elephant! I am not an animal! I am a human being! I am … a man," before collapsing.

As I have traced the development of Merrick's agency, this is the first time we see Merrick not *complying* with the performative situations to which other people submit him but rather confronting the mob that chases him like an animal. Merrick's willful defiance of being chased is a slide from being apprehended as an aesthetic object to becoming a political subject. Sara Ahmed notes the following on agentive defiance: "There is agency in this becoming; *there is life*. The attribution of wilfulness shows us how objects (and objects can includes [sic] those we would ordinarily call subjects, those who we bequeath with a "who," a bequeathing that thus far has been restricted) have lives other than the ones we give them" (2014: 47). If I attribute Merrick's resistance here to a willful act, this willful act is then also a resistance to the lives other people have given him; recall the discussion and disagreement between Treves and Carr-Gomm about whether the life of Merrick was imaginable—a discussion that excluded Merrick. But this resistance is feasible only through acting willfully, which Ahmed notes is often in discord with complying with the will of others (95). Merrick's statement thus has a double function: by speaking out against the mob that corners him, Merrick also affirms his own autonomy, while the actual content of the exclamation itself creates a split between man and animal, where the former, we may derive from Merrick's words, should not be chased up like the latter.

After Merrick is recovered by Treves, it is related that Merrick is dying (although it remains uncertain whether Merrick himself knows), and Treves takes him to the theater. At the end of the theatrical performance (which consists of a series of fade-ins and fade outs with overlapping images rather than clear narrative content), Kendal comes out on stage and dedicates the performance to Merrick. She states: "Ladies and gentlemen, tonight's performance was very special to me, because it was very special to someone else. A man who knows the theatre, and who loves the theatre. And yet this is the first time he's ever been here. I wish to dedicate the whole company's wishes, who dedicate with all their hearts, tonight's performance to Mr. John Merrick, my very dear friend." As the members in the audience start to applaud Merrick, the following dialogue ensues between Treves and Merrick:

TREVES: Go on, John, they want to see you.
MERRICK: I can't!
TREVES: It's alright, stand up! They want to see you.

Merrick stands up to receive a standing ovation and members of the audience shouting "Bravo!" (fig. 8). Treves' addressing Merrick to "stand up!", however, echoes earlier scenes in the film, where Merrick was put on display in Bytes' freak show, and told the same words, just as Treves also told Merrick to "turn around!" during the presentation at the hospital. These imperative formulations sharply direct the agency of the deformed body, functioning as a command. Despite the crowd's cheerful reactions, Merrick is again put on display, whereby the agency gained in the previous scene is again diminished. If Merrick was at first an object of shock, wonder, and awe, then a medical anomaly, then a literate and intelligent man with a deformed body, what are we to make of this final showing? After returning from the theater, Merrick places the finishing touch on a miniature cathedral replica he is building and goes to bed. Merrick has two pictures hanging in his room: one of a child praying at his bed and the other of a child lying in bed asleep. He looks at these paintings and, as he normally sleeps sitting up supported by several pillows due to his chronic bronchitis, removes them in order to be able to sleep lying down, but this also causes him to die through asphyxiation.

(Figure 8)

The scene depicts a crowd cheering for Merrick, and by being presented once again, the scene suggests both an inexplicable and sudden change in attitude from the perceiving audience (one of appreciation), while at the same time showing a diminishing of agency in Merrick through his compliance. Recall Kendal's statement that Merrick

both knows and loves the theater while it his first time present in one. This may again be read ironically. As I have shown in my reading, Merrick is instead subjected to nearly nothing but theatrical, performative settings. This scene also perpetuates the film's interior/exterior analogy of Merrick's fair character and deformed body, respectively, as being designated a "lover of the theatre" by a prominent member of the stage further enhances his earlier status as a literate and intelligent person, while the fact that he is a lover of the theater seems to (ironically) point us back to Merrick's own past of being exhibited in the freak show.

Given this perpetuation of the interior/exterior analogy through the use of performances, this allows one to question whether such an analogy implies that disabled subjects *should* do good *because* of their disability, or rather, *can be* active subjects. In the first case, disability becomes something for which one should seek atonement, yet in the case of the second option, the relation to disability is a lot less clear. Recalling Merrick's last scene, his choice to go to sleep lying down rather than sleeping sitting up creates a split. On the one hand, we may read this gesture as Merrick's final act of conformity—to adapt to normal behavior, even at the cost of his own life. Yet simultaneously, the fact that Merrick *chooses* how to sleep, even at the cost of his own life, reaffirms his agency as an autonomous human being. It is not my aim to resolve the scene's duality, but, as my use of the term in this section's title, *sensibility of agency*, suggests, to probe it further.

The fact that Merrick dies through asphyxia links Merrick's deformity to his demise. Yet, during his lifetime, the film continuously emphasizes that Merrick "tried to be good," while simultaneously being unable to escape the disabling condition of his own deformed body. Thus, the film sets up a strong contrast between different kinds of *fairness*—that of Merrick's body and his character. Fairness, Elaine Scarry explains, "is used both in referring to loveliness of countenance and in referring to the ethical requirements of 'being fair,' 'playing fair,' and 'fair distribution'" (1999: 91). A sense of an apparent *lack of fairness* arises throughout the film in the way Merrick is treated. Merrick, whose countenance is considered to be the opposite of fair, is treated accordingly; what is unfair gets treated unfairly. But a change occurs when Merrick's character is judged to be morally fair, and a lack of fair treatment then creates a desire for justice when Treves consequently confronts Jim upon finding out he has been exhibiting Merrick in the hospital.

Scarry notes how symmetry has been a longtime conceptual companion to beauty, but also argues that symmetry in the sphere of justice "remains key, particularly in accounts of distributive justice and fairness," and that "in periods when a human community is too young to have yet had the time to create justice, as well as in times

when justice has been taken away, beautiful things (which do not rely on us to create them but come on their own and have never been absent from a human community) hold steadily visible the manifest good of equality and balance" (97).

I want to place Scarry's connection between ethical and aesthetic fairness adjacent to my reading, as the fact that Merrick inspires others around him to demand justice (by not allowing him to be exhibited further) and do good (by taking Merrick to the theatre and giving him gifts, for example), thus shows the fairness that they perceive in, or project on, his character, even when they doubt their own—as when Treves wonders whether he is a good man or a bad man for allowing London society to visit Merrick.

An initial key difference between aesthetic and ethical fairness, however, is that we tend to conceive of the first as something tangible, perceivable through our senses, that accompanies subjective taste and cognitive judgement, whereas we do not consider ethical fairness to be in the domain of sensibility. Scarry argues: "It is the very exigencies of materiality, the susceptibility of the world to injury, that require justice, yet justice itself is outside the compass of our sensory powers" (102). But she goes on to say that "it may happen on occasion that the fair political arrangement itself (not just the laws prescribing to or guaranteeing it) *will* be condensed into a time and space where it becomes available to the senses, and then … its beauty is visible" (103). This turn of phrase is close to what Jacques Rancière would come to call the distribution of the sensible, which he defined as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions with it" (2004a: 7). Rancière's definition points to the fact that, while what is given in aesthetic sensibility may present itself as "self-evident facts," the use of "distribution" here refers to the way in which different parties also sense from their respective positions, implying that different positions afford different ways of sensing what we believe to be "in common."

Thus, if fairness is tied to the exigencies of materiality and its susceptibility to injury, this helps elucidate our understanding of Merrick's deformed body as it is placed in different aesthetic-political distributions, open to the senses. Merrick's body itself becomes placed in such a distribution due to the concomitance of his deformed, aesthetically unfair body, a body that due to its disabilities is "susceptible to injury," combined with an ethically fair character, thereby highlighting its frailty and lack of symmetry. This body moves other bodies it is placed into arrangement with through affecting them—Treves' astonishment upon seeing him for the first time, Ann becoming overwhelmed when taking tea with Merrick, Mrs. Kendal's

renunciation of Merrick as the Elephant Man, and as such, in its frailty, becomes a body worth caring for, even when some of the political consequences tied to that caring—the continuation of Merrick being exhibited—might not be judged as fair to the body in question; a deformed fairness.

6. Conclusion

What emerges from my reading of deformity as affordance is the apparent disjunction between different kinds of fairness in relation to the deformed body. Even when we are driven away from what may initially appear as aesthetically unpleasing, we can be driven back towards it due to the beauty of its frailty, as something worth caring for. Scarry subsequently argues that aesthetic objects, whether animate or inanimate, confer on the beholder a "surfeit of aliveness" (89). This surfeit of aliveness afforded by aesthetic objects thereby heightens one's sensibility to aliveness rather than raising the level of aliveness itself.

Scarry's emphasis on aliveness begs the question of how this relates to disability, given my reading of *The Elephant Man* above. Can disability heighten our awareness—or in Scarry's terms—our access to the already existing level of aliveness present? Scarry points to an asymmetrical relation, that of the aliveness present in all persons and the aliveness with which we credit them (90). As I have suggested in my reading of *The Elephant Man*, the deformed body can metonymically extend and raise the sensibility concerning the frailty of all human bodies, thus making other bodies that encounter it begin to care for it. One affordance of disabled subjects, then, is that they can become *both* productive and active political subjects by not negating this aliveness present in all persons but raising one's awareness of it and the collective sensibility of the frailty of the deformed human body as something worth protecting and caring for.

My use of the terms *productive* and *active* is motivated by Agamben's reading of these terms. Agamben argues production is aligned with the term *poiesis*, in the sense of unveiling something: "The essential character of *poiesis* was not its aspect as a practical and voluntary process but its being a mode of truth understood as unveiling" (1999: 69). Acting, meanwhile, is connected to *praxis*: "central to *praxis* was the idea of the will that finds its immediate expression in an act" (1999: 68).

It is provocative that Agamben understands *poiesis* as a form of unveiling and production into presence, given the emphasis on revealing in this chapter. In light of my own discussion, the performativity of deformity showed how a deformed body can

be made to appear in a performative setting, can be unveiled to a receiving audience, but that the bringing into presence of a deformed body can *act* on that audience in unforeseen ways, by driving them to and away from that body or by raising their sense of aliveness in the other, which is therefore an important affordance of deformity. Simultaneously, the deformed body itself can *act* within the performative setting it finds itself placed in by refusing to be *acted on* in a certain way (such as being unveiled), as with Merrick being chased down.

The animated tension that arises from this distinction between unveiling and acting now becomes increasingly lucid. On the one hand, the performativity of bringing a deformed body into appearance may heighten our increased awareness of aliveness. Consequently, what is brought into presence through the unveiling of the deformed body is an increase in sensitivity towards the sense of aliveness of all bodies involved. On the other hand, this bringing into appearance can also *act* upon us affectively and drive us both *to* and *away* from that body. This last gesture complicates agency in the sense that, as my readings of *Jane Eyre* and *The Elephant Man* show, being affectively driven by another body is not a manner of intentional agency in that I decide to be driven toward or away from it, but rather because I *am* affected by it.

In *The Elephant Man*, we saw how Treves, initially describing Merrick as the most "perverted or degraded version of a human being" he had ever encountered in front of his colleagues, eventually came to care for Merrick and to *take* care of him. Scarry notes how the more we recognize the level of aliveness in others, the more we perceive the fragility of this aliveness and consequently seek to protect it (90). Thus, we may read Treves' efforts to take care of Merrick as willful effort—to preserve and promote what affects him as a fragile fairness—even if this, at times, is against the will of the man of whom he wants to take care. As aliveness and fragility become bound together in the deformed body, the perceived and sensed waning of aliveness—to decay—is produced into presence. This waning of aliveness, as we have seen, is intimately bound up to questions concerning who or what this quality is ascribed to, who, as an aesthetic object, becomes worth caring for, and who can become willful political subjects. In the next chapter, I will explore what the uses of decay are.