1-1-2007

Bodily poetics: The rhetorical politics of the self

Allison Renee Kaminsky
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

BODILY POETICS: THE RHETORICAL POLITICS OF THE SELF

by

Allison Renée Kaminsky

Bachelor of Arts
New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM
2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies
Department of Communication Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2007

UNLV
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS

Thesis Approval

The Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 12, 2007

The Thesis prepared by

Allison R. Kaminsky

Entitled

BODILY POETICS: THE RHETORICAL POLITICS OF THE SELF

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Examination Committee ~~Chair~~

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative

ABSTRACT

Bodily Poetics: The Rhetorical Politics of the Self

by

Allison Renée Kaminsky

Dr. Donovan Conley, Examination Committee Chair
Assistant Professor of Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This thesis will examine different ways people consciously manipulate their bodies in order to express selfhood, articulate identities, fulfill desires, and signal social and political commitments. The major premise of this research is that bodies are rhetorically constructed through a series of fundamental assumptions about selfhood, social ideals and acceptability, and political struggle. This paper argues that there are no *a priori* distinctions between the various practices and meanings of body modification. The way we think about body modification is based on a series of assumptions that define each practice. This project will look at three different groupings of modification organized around the subjective desires they express: Those articulating desires about 1) Interiority; 2) Acceptability; and 3) Struggle. I problematize the assumptions underlying these practices in order to gain insight into the sheer rhetoricity of the body, and to exemplify the central role rhetoric has in framing the uses and functions of our bodies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the help of many people. First, I would especially like to thank Dr. Donovan Conley, my Committee Chair, who provided me invaluable knowledge, guidance, and support throughout the long process involved with the completion of this thesis. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Tara Emmers-Sommer, Dr. Kate Hausbeck, and Dr. David Henry. Your feedback and advice has been most appreciated. Beyond my committee, I would also like to extend my thanks to all of the faculty and staff of the Communications Department who have been there for me whenever I had questions or concerns.

I also wish to thank my family and friends for listening to me talk about these topics in general, and my thesis specifically, for hours on end. Mom, Dad, Aaron, Carol, Andrea, Tina, Kris, Lior, Joe, and Tom—thank you for always being on call, providing me with words of encouragement when needed, and believing in me from start to finish.

I dedicate this thesis to several people. First, to my mom for being the main reason why I have my own fascination with human bodies. I have always teased you that you have warped my mind, but it is also your influence that has taught me to question the mundane and never take anything at face value, and because of that I was able to conceive of this project. This thesis is also dedicated to both of my parents for their endless support and for teaching me to value my education above all else. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for you. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to body modifiers of all

shapes and sizes—mainstream or marginal, commonplace or "extreme." Our bodies exist in this world, and the world exists in our bodies.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Western culture articulates the human body in strange ways. Classic children's stories signify characters' inner selves with outward appearances, joining the aesthetic quality of the human form with an ethic of inner worth. It is no coincidence that Glenda, the "good" witch in "The Wizard of Oz," is a young, beautiful woman, whereas the Wicked Witch of the West—who does not even merit a real name—possesses gnarled, inhuman-like physical features. Other tales, such as "The Ugly Duckling," link attractiveness with happiness and social acceptance. Children who are told this story understand that while the duckling was never inherently bad or evil, it was not until his transformation into a beautiful swan that he was treated fairly and accepted among his peers. The widely known myth of the fountain of youth tells a story of a mystical spring that flows with the "water of life." Drinking this water will not just ensure longevity, but will restore the "desirable" physical qualities of youthfulness, situating these qualities as ideal. Then, of course, there's Barbie, the world's most well-known and best selling doll. The original model is a tall, slender, Caucasian woman with blonde hair, large breasts, wide hips, and a tiny waist. Presenting an unattainable and unrealistic body type to young children—it has been said that if Barbie were made to scale, she would be 7'2" at 115

pounds—the doll has sparked controversy among critics arguing that the doll encourages poor body image and promotes stereotyping.

These narratives and images are common in American culture, and when pieced together they provide a picture of how our society understands and values the human body. Popular representations of the body equate beauty with happiness, sexual appeal with power, thinness with health, and youthfulness with success and magnetism. As individuals have come to understand the physical condition through these socially constructed narratives, it is clear that the human form has become a central medium in the construction and dissemination of social and political meaning. Individuals have come to subjectively evaluate their bodies and routinely use them to craft and project a desired self to achieve personal, social and political goals. The body may thus be envisioned as a dynamic text that both alters and is altered by its cultural context, making the body a site of personal, social, and political struggle where cultural meaning-making takes place.

According to Mike Featherstone, the term "body modification" is used to refer to "a long list of practices ... to alter the appearance and form of the body" ("Body Modification: An Introduction" 1). This general definition posits that any practice that physically or aesthetically alters the human form may be construed as body modification. However, if this is the case, why is it that some practices are considered acceptable, productive, or even necessary practices of everyday life, while others are considered unacceptable, unproductive, recreational, or even self-destructive? If one distances him/herself from previous experiences and personal biases regarding body modification, it becomes apparent that all methods of corporeal alteration fall on a singular continuum of bodily practices. If the cultural connotations of the term "body modification" are

stripped away, acts socially understood as self-maintenance—such as bleaching teeth, coloring, shaving or cutting hair, and even dieting and weight training—may be placed alongside practices that are socially regarded as body modification—such as cosmetic surgery, tattooing or piercing the skin—or even body mutilation—such as self-flagellation or "cutting." The ways in which we generally understand the body and its modification are cultural myths that are rhetorically produced and perpetuated.

There are many ways people manipulate their physical appearance in order to attain a desired projection of themselves. Pop singers like Madonna and David Bowie have made their careers on the "reinvention" of their images to coincide with the release of a new album. Roche Pharmaceuticals develops products like Acutane that clear facial blemishes, yet have the potential to cause birth defects and traumatize the liver. Dennis Rodman became famous more for his bizarre and sudden changes of appearance—constantly adding new piercings, tattoos, and hair colors—than for his athletic prowess. *Cheers* and *Look Who's Talking* star Kirstie Alley drew heavy media attention when her weight peaked at over 200 pounds in 2005, and has achieved her greatest fame for her dramatic weight loss. As the spokeswoman for Jenny Craig, television advertisements actually document her weight loss. And of course Oprah Winfrey's infamous weight gains and losses have continuously gained the attention of the national media.

Body modification has also become one of the central obsessions of the reality television phenomenon. Programs like "Inked," "Miami Ink," "Dr. 90210," "Extreme Makeover," "The Biggest Loser," and "I Want a Famous Face," for instance, follow the everyday dramas of subjects engaging heavily in spectacular forms of body modification. These programs fixate on the physical self "improvement" or enhancement of everyday

people, equating the very act of transformation with success, happiness, and prosperity. The industry of cosmetic and reconstructive surgery has capitalized on this articulation, presenting a slimmer waist, clearer skin, bigger breasts, and tighter skin as the paths to beauty, luxury, inner happiness, and even love.

Because of the growing accessibility and affordability of plastic surgery, as well as the increased visibility of such practices through celebrity participation and endorsement, Americans have become more willing to participate in spectacular forms of body modification and have become more accepting of pioneering self-modifiers. It is no wonder that, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, American spending on plastic surgery has grown 38 percent over the past five years to reach $9.4 billion in 2005.[1] Many Americans have incorporated intense self-maintenance strategies into their everyday lives, bleaching their teeth, coloring their hair, removing unwanted body hair, and wearing colored contacts to attain a desired projection of their physical self. Recent technological developments have even made it possible for individuals to be sexually "reassigned" to match their identified gender. The voluntary participation in these processes can come from any number of motivations, but one fact is undeniably clear: Americans are obsessed with their bodies. More to the point, Americans have become obsessed with *changing* their bodies. Our society has become fixated on transforming our physical selves in order to attain some ideal conception of what we think we should look like, feel like, and be like, constantly developing and employing new technologies and practices to "improve" our corporeal form.

With such emphasis put on the image, on attractiveness, on sexual appeal, on individuality—in short, on the aesthetic pliability of the self—"the body" has in recent

decades drawn the attention of academics. As I demonstrate below, in recent years the pool of research on the embodied self has grown substantially across the social sciences and the humanities. Research on the body has become routine in fields like sociology, cultural studies, gender studies, philosophy, and literary theory.

Yet, while the interest in the body has peaked in recent decent, there has only been a limited discussion on its significance to the field of rhetoric. Further, though other disciplines have begun to delve into the analysis of body modification, rhetoricians have thus far only acknowledged its presence as a marginal social activity and political resource. There has been some argument for the admission of the corporeal form into analytic thought, but rhetorical scholarship is generally far more interested in questions about "the subject" or "ethos" than on the materiality or agency of the self. For example, Bradford Vivian discusses the historicity of the subject at length in his essay "The Threshold of the Self." Though his essay clearly addresses issues of both materiality and subjectification, his discussion of the "continual becoming of the self" (304) omits any discussion of the body itself.

This project will examine different ways people consciously manipulate their bodies in order to express selfhood, articulate identities, fulfill desires, and achieve social and political outcomes. The major premise of this research is that bodies are rhetorically constructed through a series of fundamental assumptions about selfhood, social ideals and acceptability, and political reform. In other words, practices of body modification are the products of two interrelated forces: social norms and subjective desires, both of which are discursively negotiated. Practices of body modification are normatively thought of as healthful or harmful, acquiescent or resistant, productive or destructive, acceptable or

unacceptable, meaningful or trivial; they are socially categorized as functioning in any number of ways based on the individual's intention and how that practice relates to a larger set of cultural norms. It is my aim in this project to interrogate these basic assumptions about the body in order to open up space for the potential for the body to be meaningful in new ways.

Clearly, additional questions centering on the human body are necessary to provide a more complete understanding of how rhetoric operates as a material force, and also how the physical can be seen as discursive in its own respect. The following section will illuminate the need to acknowledge the rhetoricity of bodily practices and call attention to the immediacy that issues of the body raise to the field of rhetoric.

Rationale

Analyzing the rhetoricity of the body will provide insight into how individuals use alterations of their physical form as the raw material of socialization, persuasion, identification, and resistance, as well as a site for the negotiation of meaning and action. For example, in some cases, tattoos and piercings have qualities of socialization and identification that signal membership into spectacular subcultures. Since it is commonly understood that the expression of difference is the primary communicative function of spectacular subcultures (Hebdige 1979), the practice of adorning one's body in a particular style can be understood to indicate commonalities among members of corresponding ideologies (Sweet 2005). Another example is the use of plastic surgery to keep or advance to a desirable career. According to Christine Rosen, many "executives—male and female—are turning to cosmetic surgery to help them stay competitive" ("The

Democratization of Beauty" 23). These professionals are using their bodies as persuasive media, convincing their employers that they are still motivated, vigorous and capable enough to secure or maintain a fast paced or high profile job. Modifying one's own physical condition with the intention of personal, social, or political mobility can thus be seen as a strategic rhetorical act of the self.

A closer look at how issues of the body are culturally featured and articulated will provide deeper insight into how discourse situates the body's importance in society and how this status is preserved. Further, rhetoricians may gain a deeper understanding of the materiality of discourse. Consideration as such will contribute to discussions of what Carole Blair has called "extra linguistic rhetorics" ("Reflections on Criticism and Bodies" 273), the rhetorical dimensions of the human body, and the corporeal dimensions of rhetorical acts. Ultimately, through the investigation of these body modification practices, this project seeks to gauge the significance of the body as a site of analysis in rhetorical studies.

This thesis argues that there are no *a priori* distinctions between the various practices and meanings of body modification. The way we think about body modification is based on a series of assumptions that partially determine each practice. Whereas shaving our legs, trimming our beards, clipping our nails, and styling our hair are thought of as practices of good hygiene, there is no fundamental difference between these practices and those that are thought of socially as self-mutilation, such as facial piercing, scarification, and suspension tactics. These distinctions are rhetorical constructions. If we do not presume that these practices have presupposed categorical differences, we may then understand these physical manipulations as existing on a sliding continuum of body

modification practices, all of which are fundamentally similar, distinct only in the meanings we attach to them.

In order to make this argument, the project will look at three different groupings of modification organized around the subjective desires—the intentions and motivations—they express: Those articulating desires about 1) Interiority; 2) Acceptability; and 3) Struggle. Intentionality, an inherently problematic term, is used here to the extent that we have an awareness of our own choices and actions.[2] This project is based on the assumption that cultural practices shape and are shaped by their social and political realities, thus linking materiality with subjectivity. I envision the two to be mutually co-constitutive, each influencing and constraining the other. The project will deconstruct the assumptions and beliefs underwriting these practices of modification in order to reveal how these practices are assigned meaning. I problematize the assumptions underlying these practices in order to gain new insight into the rhetorical politics of the body. In deconstructing the assumptions driving the various practices of modification, my goal is not to trivialize or discount them. Rather, I want to argue that how these practices matter is often misrepresented and/or misunderstood by both the modifier and spectator. It is only after we have critically examined the underlying cultural norms and beliefs of the body and its practices of modification that we can salvage alternative meanings and inventional tactics.

For the purpose of analysis, this project will focus only on the subject of voluntary and intentional body modification. Because of the dynamic nature of the human body, this focus makes the distinction between the "*natural*" evolution and transformation of the body through time and space, on the one hand, and the "*intentional*"

practice of altering one's own physical form on the other. In other words, my conceptualization of body modification separates the natural development of the human form from infancy to adulthood from those cultural practices that aesthetically transform the body through imposed or external means. This focus also rules out alterations made to the body that are not carried out by the will of the individual him/herself. For example, this separation distinguishes between the scars of a burn victim and scars that result from a conscious decision to brand the skin.

Beginning at the level of intentionality, then, I will examine practices as they are believed to function within these categories, and then discuss how these practices meet up with effects. In other words, I will juxtapose intention with effectivity and propose a nuanced way of thinking about the potential uses and significations of these practices. In doing so, I aim to provide a new understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of the body, as well as exemplify the central role rhetoric has in framing the uses and functions of our bodies. Only after this has been done can the body's potential for cultural and political signification be realized.

The next section briefly outlines relevant scholarship that assists a discussion of the rhetoricity of the body. Further, it provides key theories that aid my conceptualization of bodies, body modification, and the ways in which the body can be rhetorically considered.

Literature Review

Rhetorical interest in the category of subjectivity has inevitable, if often ignored, ties to the body, as it is concerned with how individuals exist within and understand the

world. Kenneth Burke's famous definition of man is careful to point out, we are not just symbol users, we are symbol-using *animals.* Burke's discussion of mortification, too, directly deals with embodied symbolic processes, as the deliberate acts of "penance, abstinence or painful severities inflicted on the body" (*The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* 289) are enacted as a form of purification or self-governance. In her essay "Language as Sensuous Action," Debra Hawhee discusses how bodies and physical expression are inherently linked. In this essay, Hawhee argues for a conceptualization of discourse of bodily formation, as opposed to the body as discursive formation. These are but a few examples of how issues of the body have figured into recent rhetorical theory. However, as Gerard Hauser observes, scholars have only recently begun to explicitly focus on the body as a uniquely discursive vehicle, and feminist scholars have lead the way (136).

While feminist scholars have studied the female body as a locus of meaning and experience, the discussion of generalized bodies and the male body has been a common topic for philosophers such as Nietzche and Foucault. Such philosophers are considered as theorists of corporeal inscription, and are attributed with "freeing the body from the subordination to the mind" (Grosz 12). For example, Michael Foucault conceptualizes the generalized body in relation to power structures.[3] He states: "the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they must invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (*Discipline and Punish* 173). Providing a notion of power to which the body plays a central role, and arguing for a rhetorical situation in which knowledge, discourse, and power are indefinitely interconnected, Foucault's discussion implicityly links the

body to rhetoric. Also, his discussion of "docile bodies" as the site of subjectification through discipline is heavily cited in academic works regarding the body. His work set the stage for the more recent studies on the body.

Judith Butler is the foremost player in feminist literature regarding the reading of the body. Butler posits that there is no "real" gender, but that gender is a set of strategically manipulated signs and codes imposed on the mind and body ("Gender Trouble" 1990). This approach views gender, and thus the gendered body, as a cultural construct. In her later work, Butler complicates traditional conceptions of the body, stating that sex is "an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time" ("Bodies that Matter" 1). She argues that the body cannot be seen as extra-discursive, and that it and the body and the ways in which we understand the body are constrained by discourse. This argument is comparable with theories of innovative rhetorical thinkers, such as Maurice Charland, who conceptualizes the audience as constituted by discourse. Both of these works are paramount in the consideration of the body as it exists within a discursive context. These studies, though helpful in envisioning the body as a site of political struggle, are limited in their focus on the female gendered body, steering the conversation away from men's bodies, or perhaps the generalized or un-gendered body.

In another feminist text, Susan Bordo's discussion of the body is threefold: as a medium of culture, as a symbolic form, and as a metaphor (1989). She considers the body to be both a text of culture as well as a "practical, direct locus of social control" (91). Her conceptualization of how the body constitutes culture through everyday practices illuminates the constitutive rhetorical power of embodied performance. Further, she discusses the preoccupation with the discipline and modification of the female body to

attain the aesthetic ideal of femininity as "the maintenance and reproduction of existing power relations" (93). This perspective envisions these practices as occurring within a context of patriarchal hegemony, requiring that women enact and reinforce their own submissiveness to a dominating male authority.

Scholars in cultural studies have also reconsidered traditional understandings of human body. According to Mike Featherstone, the body and its image are traditionally conceived in such a way that perpetuates the mind/body split. Featherstone argues that this understanding of the body falls short of the need to envision the body's "potential to vary, to be inventive, to be always in motion" (233) and is "open to 'colonization' and reconstitution through a range of technologies and body projects such as plastic surgery, body maintenance, health fitness and diet regimes." (234). The approach to an understanding of the body as a project is important for the consideration of body modification as rhetorical action, as it situates the body as a malleable social process that is acted upon by the subject. Further, Featherstone's perspective on body image reinforces the sentiment that "body texts" must be understood in social action. Featherstone breaks down modern concepts of the body into two different categories: "body image," which is the static image of the body where its physical appearance is "based upon the body as an object" (234), and "the body without and image," where the body is envisioned through an oscillation between subject and object, resulting in an accumulation of perspectives. Thus, in this line of thought, the body is thought of as both an extension of the psychological self and as a social object to be acted upon.

Featherstone calls for a further examination of the "unmediated participation of the flesh in the image." (235). He also argues that the presence of new media enhances

the role of the body in the "crucial creative filter of images" and focuses on the body as "a framer of information." (235). He calls for a conceptualization of the body without image that brings the study of affect into the center of our understanding of embodied knowledge. Clearly, Featherstone's vision of the body as a project calls for further investigation into these projects as they are acted out and on how this is affected by how the media frames such practices. According to Featherstone's perspective, the body plays a central role in framing information, thus interactively linking the mind and the body. This allows for a dynamic conceptualization of the body that cannot be studied in a single instance. Instead, this approach requires that we understand the body as an ongoing project. Also, Featherstone's call for an affective understanding of body projects prompts this study's investigation into actual practices and how these practices are framed by the media. In doing so, this project seeks to understand body modification projects from within a contextual relationship to the self and its private and social existence within a cultural environment.

Hawhee's discussion of the body in ancient Greece is a helpful reference point to illustrate the intersection between the human body and rhetorical studies. According to Hawhee, the body and rhetoric "came together as bodily arts that reinforced and perpetuated the lively culture of contact, movement, and sound so markedly Athenian" (191). She sees the body as playing a major role in the cultivation of public knowledge, and when combined with language as having a constitutive effect on Greek society. Hawhee, among several others, advocates that the mind and the body should not be polarized, and that an understanding of one requires the incorporation of the other. Her approach presents a useful model for considering the rhetorical roles the human body

plays in the creation of social and political meaning. Though a helpful integration of the worlds of rhetorical, cultural, and literary studies, Hawhee's discussion provides limited resources for an understanding of how the body functions in contemporary rhetorical theory. Because of the increased availability of information, the public sphere is bombarded with messages and images through which we construct our social realities, resulting in the constant shifting of the state of public knowledge. This condition makes representations of the human body widely accessible to the masses, potentially altering how the public consumes these images and how meaning is assigned to them. Clearly, any assessment of how the body functions in contemporary meaning making processes must make these considerations.

Carole Blair suggests that though the "material" has traditionally been understood as a characteristic of rhetorical context, a "rethinking of rhetoric as itself material" is a necessary move in rhetorical theory. In her essay "Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric's Materiality," Blair posits two complications to a consideration of rhetoric as such. First, she claims that theorists have discussed rhetorical acts as defined by their symbolicity instead of their materiality in traditional rhetorical studies, thus limiting the debates in rhetoric to the level of the discussion of symbols. This reliance on a model of rhetoric as symbolic, she argues, is inadequate for critics "who have advanced other 'units' of analysis to describe rhetorical formulations" (19). Another obstacle that Blair discusses is the view of rhetorical practice as goal oriented and under the control of the rhetor, which produces "an exceptionally narrow understanding of effect" (21). This traditional understanding does not account for effects that are not contained within the goal-orientation of a rhetorical text or within the perceptual field of

a rhetor. The negligence of traditional scholars to consider "that rhetoric is not exclusively about production" and that it "has consequences that exceed goal fulfillment" (22) is characterized by Blair as an "anxiety" about rhetoric's materiality. Ultimately, Blair argues that it is the responsibility of contemporary rhetoricians to acknowledge and understand the material forces operating beyond what is traditionally conceptualized as "effect," and to recognize the importance of asking what a text *does* as opposed to what it *means*. Since Blair observes that different "degrees, kinds, and consequences of materiality seem to differ significantly, but rather unpredictably" (17), she suggests that rhetoricians should attend to "instances of rhetoric and what they can tell us about their own materiality" (23). In other words, she advocates an analysis that is unique to the study of the cultural object and favors effectivity over contextually-oriented emphasis on *effectivity* over effect.

Though Blair suggests that "rhetoric of all kinds acts on the whole person—body as well as mind" (46), she offers little direct analysis of the body itself. However, her work provides a useful "way in" for the study of the human body as rhetoric. Blair offers a series of questions that prove to be useful in the consideration of the material as rhetoric.[4] In addition, she centralizes the notion of effectivity, as opposed to effect, in the study of material rhetoric, thus offering a way to talk about the rhetorical properties of cultural meanings.

Gerard Hauser's discussion of bodily pain presents a useful argument for the incorporation of the human body into the consideration of rhetorical discourse. In his essay "Body Rhetoric: Conflicted Reporting of Bodies in Pain," Hauser explains that the body in pain has rhetorical power when combined with language. He argues that the

"body itself is an ambiguous form of signification" (138), that when combined with context and words can be viewed as a site of rhetorical activity. He uses examples of the body as site of political resistance to illustrate this. He then turns to the topic of publicity and asserts that how the body is framed in the public sphere alters the body's rhetorical functions.

Also calling for a reconceptualization of how rhetorical studies approaches the materiality of discursive acts, Raymie McKerrow posits that traditional approaches to rhetorical theory are unfit for a culturally diverse world, as rhetoric privileges "specific 'sides' of dichotomous binaries" (315). Of the many binaries described in his article "Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric: A Site for Rhetoric's future" is the mind/body split. McKerrow asserts that traditional rhetorical theorists favor the mind over the body and argues that the general exclusion of the body from the discussion of the public sphere is a hindrance to achieving a critical rhetoric of alternative discourse styles. He proposes that the definition of rhetoric should be broadened to include what he terms "corporeal rhetoric" that collapses the binary of mind and body and "encompasses affective as well as purely cognitive dimensions of the human person" (323). Once again calling for a focus on the material dimensions of rhetoric, McKerrow is a key player in bringing the physical to the center of rhetorical study. Like Hawhee, his perspective collapses the dualism between the body and the mind that is perpetuated by traditional rhetorical theory, making the physical dimensions of rhetorical activity as important as its linguistic functions. Adopting the approach to corporeal rhetoric advocated by McKerrow would involve tracking the effectivity of rhetorical discourse, considering the performance of

the embodied self as an important variable in the formulation and transmission of meaning.

Finally, building on Michael McGee's fragmentation thesis, Ronald Walter Greene seeks to replace "traditional" rhetoric's logic of representation with a logic of articulation in regards to the mass media.[5] Because McGee's thesis leaves the task of text construction to the critic, Greene suggests that the meanings of social texts do not lie in how their fragments represent reality, but rather in the articulation of these fragments into "a structure of signification." (34). In other words, this approach posits that a text's meaning is determined by where it is located and how it moves within networks of power and usage. Greene suggests, then, that in order to discover a text's significance, criticism should be concerned with the mapping of power relations. This perspective emphasizes a text's relation to a larger cultural discourse, and suggests that the meaning of a text is determined by where and how it is articulated within this larger context. Meaning, he argues, is a rhetorical effect of this articulation, which "generates the possibility of rematerializing the political, economic, cultural and affective structures of public deliberation as sites of rhetorical effectivity" (35). Greene suggests that critics should turn their attention to "how rhetorical practices create the conditions of possibility ... to judge and program reality" (22). In other words, Greene's call for a new materialist rhetoric weighs the importance of rhetorical effectivity in a broad range of social institutions. The materiality of rhetorical practices lies in how texts function politically and aesthetically to figure the process of subjectivity. Greene's perspective is important as it addresses the problem of accessibility in the meaning-making process. Rhetoric functions, then, as a method of making resources available for new articulations. In this

sense, the representations of the body in mass media texts do not have a direct causal relationship to how the public feels about the body, but instead create the social conditions through which we understand and can impact our world. Further, this conceptualization allows for the consideration of the intertextual relationship of physical bodies. Though assumptions about the body shape and constrain the body, this perspective accounts for the ways in which our bodies can be envisioned as providing new resources for the articulation of bodies within culture. Also, Greene's approach focuses the attention of the critic on a larger cultural discourse, thus emphasizing an analysis of rhetorical function over meaning.

This literature review is meant to illustrate some key concepts and major players that will facilitate my study of the human body, as well as feature ways the human body has been discussed in the academic world. The list is not a complete survey of scholarly theories and perspectives. Because the research is both ongoing, and interest in bodily issues spans several academic fields, such a list would be unmanageable. The book *Rhetorical Bodies* is but one source that attempts to bring a representative collection of analyses that deal with bodies in the field of rhetoric. This book features over a dozen essays that each link the study of bodies and rhetoric in different ways. By tracing the research of these essays, the editors of this book compile a list of over 100 sources for a selected bibliography to aid the discussion on material rhetoric alone. Clearly, an exhaustive account of such literature is unrealistic and unnecessary for this paper.

Further, the interest in body modification is also on the rise, with a growing pool of literature that was not included in this literature review. For example, in 1997 the Theory, Culture, and Society Centre hosted a conference on body modification that

featured papers on transsexualism, cyborgs, body building, and cosmetics. Also, a 1999 issue of *Body & Society* was dedicated solely to issues of body modification. Essays in this journal included topics on self-mutilation, tattooing, and modern primitivism. These are just a few examples of the growing academic interest in body modification. Though these topics and issues are not discussed here, key players and concepts in this research area will be featured within the chapters of this project.

In addition to a review of recent scholarship on the body as it is understood to exist within the field of rhetoric, this project relies on some key methodological assumptions that guide my analysis. The next section outlines and details these assumptions.

Methodology

Taking my cue from Carole Blair, I will rely on the instances of rhetoric themselves to reveal the most appropriate method of analysis. In other words, this analysis is designed to include an "organic" approach to the application of theoretical perspectives to the study of the selected textual objects and practices. However, as suggested in the last section, I work from certain critical assumptions that will guide this project in its discussion of the body as rhetorical.

The first assumption is the notion of what a "text" consists of, and how it is discussed here. This project is based on the assumption that the term "text" can be applied to objects and activities that extend beyond the literal written/spoken word. According to Carole Blair, the domain of rhetoric can be expanded to "include cultural practices and artifacts beyond the spoken or written word" ("Reflections on Criticism and

Bodies" 273). This approach extends the breadth of rhetoric to include any cultural object "including the full range of media (visual, aural, and corporeal), ritual spectacles and social activities ... commodities, and spaces" (Bennett, Grossberg, & Morris 346). Understanding of a text as such allows for the consideration of human bodies and their practices as rhetorical and cultural instances appropriate for critical analysis.

In "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," Michael Calvin McGee posits that the fragmentation of contemporary culture has resulted in a shift in responsibilities for critics, from the interpretation of a text to text construction from a larger, uncompleted discourse. In this understanding, there are no concrete, static, unified, and completed texts; instead there are only textual fragments that are "assembled" by critics and situated for analysis. Though the fragmentation thesis allows for the isolation of incomplete fragments for analysis, McGee's perspective suspends the idea of the object, arguing that "there are as many nuances of rhetorical experience as there are points in a line" ("A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric" 30-31), establishing a model of rhetorical effectivity that is virtually unlimited.

However, for the purposes of this project, incorporation of a more grounded method of analysis is needed to allow for the study of the body as it is understood to function in contemporary society. To achieve an adequate picture of how the body is culturally conceptualized, the "texts" featured in this study were chosen for the potential representative relationship between the style and content of the text to the material practices it represents. This relationship, termed iconicity by Michael Leff and Andrew Sachs, is the principle of form enacting meaning, or of the "imitative relationship" between a sign and what it represents. Iconicity posits that "discursive form often enacts

representational content" (Leff and Sachs 258). According to Leff and Sachs, "form and meaning [of a text] are imbricated at every level ... to produce a structure of meaning" (pp. 268-269). This approach envisions specific, self-contained rhetorical instances as they "blend form and meaning into local unities that 'textualize' the public world and invite audiences to experience that world as the text represents it" (270). This principle allows for the discussion of the texts chosen for analysis in this project as representative of the material practices they depict as they occur and are understood in society. However, this approach flirts with reductionism as it suggests that the essence of a larger cultural context is condensed within an isolated fragment.

In other words, since the world is ever changing and the dynamics of effectivity are ongoing and multidirectional, I cannot assume that a cultural object, whether it is considered as a textual fragment or a complete text, is iconically representative of the reality from which it is extracted. Because of this, my project attempts to meld the two approaches of McGee and Leff. Since a studied text has at once the potential to be exemplary of a larger cultural discourse and/or to become something entirely different, this project oscillates between perspectives that look at representative texts (Leff) and unfinished textual fragments that exist within a larger cultural discourse (McGee). Following the lead of McGee, this project rejects the conceptualization of text as a "finished discourse anticipated in consequence of an essentially homogenous culture" and assumes that "changing cultural conditions have made it virtually impossible to construct a whole and harmonious text" (287). However, by adopting the principle of iconicity as forwarded by Leff and Sach, this project assumes that fragments of a larger, unfinished text can be envisioned as iconic, and thus contain important dimensions of the larger

discourse within the analyzed object. In other words, though text and context are not assumed to be one and the same, this project considers the cultural object (or process in this case) as an artifact that simultaneously determines and is determined by the reality in which it exists.

This conceptualization allows for the consideration of the body as a dynamic medium of constantly changing movements, practices, and significations. The human body is understood to be an incomplete text, an ongoing process of identity construction and meaning-making that exists in an "intertextual" relation with a multiplicity of other objects, mediums, and cultural practices. Practices of body modification, then, are considered as they exist within a larger cultural context, and can thus be understood as "fragments" of the textual process of the body as it exists within contemporary discourse. These "fragments," or rhetorical instances, though not considered to be wholly emblematic of this discourse, are understood to relate to a larger cultural "whole."

Related to effectivity and intertextuality, this project approaches critical analysis using a logic of articulation, rather than a logic of influence. Articulation is used here as it refers to arrangement and historical emergence, a linking together of elements in the creation of order and meaning. Nathan Stormer discusses articulation as "transformational and emergent, creating new possibilities through the mutual interaction of elements where none existed before, augmenting by factors rather than by linear accretion, or diminishing possibilities in ways that defy rudimentary calculation" (264). Articulation, then, is the process by which discursive elements historically emerge in new arrangements of meaning and practice. In her essay "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of *Différance*," Barbara Biesecker challenges the traditional

presumption of direct causality, and calls for a rethinking of the rhetorical situation "on a trajectory of becoming rather than Being" (127). This approach posits that, instead of being characterized by causality, rhetorical events should be defined by their indeterminate *possibilities*. In other words, Biesecker envisions the rhetorical situation as a set of articulations that contain the possibility of new thoughts, expressions, and behaviors.

When assuming a logic of articulation, a rhetorical text is understood as existing within ongoing networks of effectivity. This perspective understands the material practices of body modification as producing and being produced by material effects within an "unequally and unstably organized field of tendential forces and struggles" (Grossberg, "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics" 383). Building on this, Greene's discussion of a logic of articulation in materialist rhetoric focuses on "how rhetorical practices create the conditions of possibility" (22). In adopting a logic of articulation in my critical analysis, this project does not assume a direct causal influence between media texts and the body, but instead views both as sites of articulation between the interaction and intersection of material effects. The task, then, becomes locating the rhetorical instance and determining how it functions in relation to other instances and to larger structures of power.

Finally, this project is framed through a philosophy of materialism that is based on the assumption that cultural practices shape and are shaped by their social and political realities, thus linking materiality with subjectivity. The two principles, however, are assumed to be mutually supportive and co-constitutive. This project embraces a view of materiality that "addresses the world of people in social, cultural, political, technological,

and economic relations; it talks about people with ideas, desires, pleasures, and emotions, all of which are defined by the forms and organizations of practices that are available to transform these dimensions of reality" (Grossberg, as cited in Blair 289). I want to examine the ways that subjectivity and materiality are mutually constitutive. This paper is based on the assumption that individual "agency is communal, social, cooperative, and participatory and, simultaneously, constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of context and culture" (Campbell, "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean" 3). In other words, I view materiality and subjectivity as playing equal roles in the constitution and constraint of agency. In this conceptualization, while an individual is subjectified to exist and understand the world in a certain way, his/her material practices have the equal capacity to effectively shape our social realities, and thus subjectivity. We are, in short, both the subjects and the authors of our histories.

The physical body and practices of the subject, then, are constrained by ideological processes of subjectification, but as the individual performs his/her subjectivity new resources become available for future articulations, thus influencing the larger cultural discourse. Though subjects do not exist in a history of their own making, their material practices are inventive in the sense that they create material effects that allow for new possibilities for future meaning-making activities. This is how I approach the problem of agency and invention. Greene discusses the rhetorical canon of invention as it "points to how different rhetorical practices make visible a host of behaviors and populations" (31) that make social change possible. Consideration of body modification as material practice can thus be considered inventive as it exists within networks of effectivity. As each practice engenders a multiplicity of effects, body modification can be

envisioned as a rhetorical instance—rather than a "situation"—that negotiates, constructs, and disseminates meanings that have the potential to alter future realities.

Thesis Organization

The following represents the organization and preliminary table of contents for this project.

Chapter 2

This chapter argues that the body discursively is constrained by a cultural commitment to *interiority*. Interiority describes the rhetorical scene of self-hood. It refers to a set of culturally shared beliefs about the authentic inner-self: one's soul, stable being, or "true identity." It specifies, in other words, an essential belief in one's authentic inner being, whether spiritual, romantic, or social. Leading the discussion of how people articulate practices of body modification based on assumptions about interiority will be a discussion of the movie Modify. This is an award winning documentary about varying practices of body modification ranging from the socially acceptable to the socially extreme. The directors of this movie travel the country asking these modifiers "why?" This film provides, in the modifiers' own words, subjective answers, illuminating that many of the practices in this film rely heavily on the assumption that human bodies are a physical manifestation of some sort of essential inner-being.

Chapter 3

The third chapter argues that the body is believed to relate directly to social acceptability as a result of the assumptions in chapter two. This chapter discusses an understanding of the body as it is used as a vehicle of socialization and acceptance in the

ongoing quest for a rhetorically constructed ideal of beauty, success, and worldly happiness. Organizing this discussion will be the personal narrative of Cindy Jackson, the woman who has set the world record for having had the most plastic surgeries of anyone in the world. After undergoing a reconstruction of her entire form, Jackson moved on to write books about her choices, practices, and experiences. Revealed in her memoirs is a desire to be socially accepted and valued. Her subjective desires and motivations to change her physical form are fueled by an ideology that holds and values the human body in a certain way. However, because of her extreme "commitment" to achieving the goal of social acceptance, she has inadvertently set herself apart from what is viewed as socially acceptable, though her body mirrors her interpretation of the ideal female form.

Chapter 4

The fourth chapter argues that the assumptions outlined in chapters three and four can be used to manipulate the body for political effect. This chapter follows attempts of individuals who manipulate their physical condition as the expression of their political beliefs and desires. Leading this analysis is an examination of Morgan Spurlock's award-winning documentary "Super-Size Me." In this text, Spurlock transforms his once healthy, trim body into a spectacle of obesity in order to provoke political and social reform. His conscious intent in this film is to exhibit his body as a protest to corporate fast food culture and to make a statement on the epidemic of obesity. After only 30 days, Spurlock had completed his "experiment" and had the materials, including the image of his grotesquely changed physical being, to make his statement. However, in this time, he had also caused irreversible damage to his body. Because of his intent, however, his

practice is not framed as self-mutilation, but instead a noble quest with social utility in mind.

Chapter 5

This final section summarizes and synthesizes the conclusions found in each individual chapter. Additionally, this chapter addresses the contributions this project makes to the rhetorical investigation of the body and bodily practices. I detail the usefulness of the assumptions outlined in these chapters, as well as make recommendations for their reconsideration.

Notes

[1] *The American Society of Plastic Surgeons.* Accessed on 13 August 2006 www.plasticsurgery.org

[2] "Intent" is an inherently problematic term in rhetorical studies, and is used here to the extent that we have an awareness of our own choices and actions. A further discussion of ideology and agency as it is understood in the scope of this project is featured in the methodology portion of this paper.

[3] *Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality, and Power/Knowledge* are just a few works of Michel Foucault that discuss the body in relation to power.

[4] Adaptations of a number of these questions appear in the Rationale portion of this chapter.

[5] I explain McGee's fragmentation thesis in the methodology section of this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

NO BODY KNOWS THE REAL ME:
INTERIORIZING THE BODY

I approach the topic of body modification with the assumption that all body projects have the potential to be rich with both individual and social meaning. However, because of the nature of this potential, I argue that body modification projects have no *inherent* significance, and only become meaningful as they occur in specific personal and cultural contexts. I will demonstrate that body modification projects exist on several levels of rhetoricity (personal, social, cultural, etc.), making the body a site of conflict and struggle over intended and perceived meaning. There is no fixed denotative meaning to any act of body modification; rather, the way in which these practices are understood to function both on an individual and on a social level depends on specific contexts that are comprised of personal feelings, individual experiences, and fundamental cultural assumptions about the self and the body.

In this chapter I focus on different ways in which people consciously manipulate their bodies in order to express a sense of internal "selfhood." Throughout the course of this chapter, I will illuminate the ways in which bodies are rhetorically constructed through an assumption about the fundamental link between notions of the inner and outer self. The aim of this chapter is two-fold: First, I will examine how the human body has

been culturally upheld as a publication device used to transmit feelings of internal selfhood and essential identity. In so doing, I will illustrate how cultural understandings of the body are rhetorically produced and reproduced and, in turn, contextualize human bodies and limit their signification. In order to accomplish this, I will combine several "texts" to be observed and analyzed. First, I will include the testimony of body modifiers as they are presented in Modify, a 2005 documentary that follows various practices of body modification. Additional statements were collected via e-mail exchanges with several individuals discussing the desires and intentions behind their modification practices. The voices of these modifiers provide a vivid depiction of the role that assumptions about the inner-self and identity play in these practices. In so doing, I hope to illustrate the general cultural tendency to link body modification to feelings of "true selfhood," and provide a nuanced way to understand body modification projects. Ultimately, I will argue that practices of body modification must be disarticulated from their dominant meanings in order to "free up" their potential to be meaningful and productive in new ways. The goal here is not to make moral judgments about these practices, but rather to de-essentialize the significations of body projects. The unveiling of the body and its modification as rhetorical productions contributes to the overarching argument of this project that such practices can become rhetorically inventive only when their underlying cultural assumptions are exposed and re-evaluated.

Who am I? Questions of the Authentic Self and the Body

As the human body is commonly understood to be a site and vehicle of personal expression, it has become natural to link the physical form with "interior" feelings of

subjective being. "I didn't feel like everyone else," a young man who goes by "Johnny Angry Johnny" explained via e-mail, "So I began to find ways to change the way I looked and make it visually apparent that I wasn't the same as everyone else. Now I feel more like myself than I ever did before."[1] "Johnny Angry Johnny" is only one body modifier, but his words are indicative of a cultural epidemic. Millions of people today have expressed a similar interest in communicating a sense of self to the world through their bodies. Because of the cultural tendency to link the exterior to the interior, body modification projects are often understood to be the physical expression and/or representation of one's "true" subjectivity or "core" self. This perspective assumes that selfness exists prior to corporeality. This notion not only influences how body texts are read within the social, but also encourages personal body projects that perpetuate a cultural understanding of the body as such. The meanings attached to practices of body modification are culturally bound by fundamental assumptions and presuppositions regarding the corporeal form and notions of the "authentic self." Until these assumptions have been acknowledged, evaluated, and ultimately, deconstructed, the intended and potential significations of body modification projects are discursively limited by these cultural "knowledges." Once these "truths" are acknowledged as cultural fictions, and the extent to which bodies are rhetorically produced is fully realized, the practices that consciously aim to alter the physical form can be freed to take on individual, unique, and truly inventive meaning.

As explained by Drema Albin, "whether inscribed, pushed through, or bound, our skins are used as textual boundaries that are reacted to by viewers" (Albin 20). Personally and socially, body projects are treated as textual expressions or representations of

subjectivity. The methods through which we physically "express" our subjectivity, however, are shaped by both internal and external forces. According to Albin, "modifications of the body appear to incorporate at an individual level internal processes and choices influenced by cultural representations" (20). The body as a dynamic text, then, is subject to (mis)interpretation, contestation, and negotiation as it exists within a larger rhetorical environment. As I will argue, the intentions of personal body projects are fueled by both visible and invisible cultural forces that both shape and constrain the potential significations of body modification practices.

According to Russ Castronovo, the American public is fixated on the immaterial. In his book *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, Castronovo argues that the nation's preoccupation with issues of the soul and interiority distract the public from the material conditions of social and political existence, casting our gaze "inward" to constitute ideal models of citizenship and democracy. "Interiority" in this sense is the rhetorical scene of self-hood. It refers to a set of culturally shared beliefs about the authentic inner-self: one's soul, stable being, or "true identity." It specifies, in other words, an essential belief in one's authentic inner being, whether spiritual, romantic, or social. It is thought to be composed of "feelings, fantasy, desire, and affect" that can only be "reached through the mediation of language and representation" (*Early American Literature* pp. 1-2). Interiority, then, is only accessible to others as it is featured in our strategic use of language and other symbols.

Castronovo's general claim is that the American public understands "who we essentially are" to be completely separate from our historically produced bodies, as well

as the historical conditions that surround us. In his discussion of occult rhetoric, Castronovo demonstrates the hegemonic functions that physical bodies can have in perpetuating a model of citizenship that is pristine, passive, and unconflicted. It is through an articulation with the body and "soul" that historically untouched bodies function in this manner, presenting the unmarked and ahistorical body as the optimal model. Castronovo argues that the "little girl" was the ideal model of citizenship in the 1830's because her body had not yet been marred by her surrounding materiality, thus privileging the immaterial over the material and presenting an unobtainable model as ideal. This same privileging can be seen in contemporary society, as Berlant argues that the "little girl" is central in structuring "adult culture." She claims that "legitimate US citizenship" is structured around the "psychological and political vulnerability" ("Live Sex Acts" 279) that the little girl figure is said to represent. This, in turn, results in the fixation on the figurative little girl's "morals, mind, acts, body, and identity" (Berlant 286) in the structuring of social and political logics. The use of immaterial bodies as a model, however, is problematic because bodies are "historical rather than biological or purely physical" (McKerrow, "Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric" 318). Human bodies inevitably are shaped and marked by material conditions, such as natural wear and tear throughout time, physical labor, race, gender, and illness.

However, although citizenship, or what Castronovo would call the cultural fiction of legitimate citizenship, privileges issues of the "soul" over the body, it has become a common association in society to understand the two to be inextricably linked. Though the "soul" is understood to have priority over, and even independence from the physical body, the human form has come to be understood as a medium through which the

intangible "authentic self" can become socially accessible. This can be seen in the express intentions of body modifiers. For example, Steve Haworth, recognized as the father of 3D body art, states: "Some people want to express their soul to the world around them. One of the ways they can do that is body modification." Haworth, a certified tattoo artist who is practiced in the "art" of subdermal implementation, makes this assessment based on his interaction with several clients a day that seek his expertise.[2] Haworth clearly subscribes to the notion that the body and the soul are directly linked to one another. Further, because of the common understanding of body modification as an expression of "selfness" amongst his clientele, he recognizes this claim as a justifiable and reasonable motivation to participate in such acts. Because of the tendency to assume an automatic relationship between the body and the soul, the American public has become obsessed with issues of the body as the physical manifestation of selfhood. The material becomes an echo of the immaterial, the physical becomes a pathway to the metaphysical, and hence the body matters to the extent it relates to the soul.

Magrit Shildrick argues that the question that plagues the Western imagination is that of "Who am I?" She claims the conventional answer to that question refers to a sense of self that assumes "a transcendent detachment from the material business of the world, or at least an effective, and indeed affective, autonomy within it" (79). The American fantasy is one of transcendent autonomy over the physical self, fueling the need to feel unique and individual within and ultimately through our bodies. This fantasy is what drives the American public to articulate acts of body modification with expressions of individuality. Though we consider ourselves to be unique and distinct from the "mere"

materiality of the world, we desire to be recognized as individuals and for the flesh boundaries of our "core" self to reflect our affective understanding of who we are.

The performance and pursuit of this American fantasy are clearly demonstrated in the documentary film, Modify. The film hosts interviews with people who participate in a wide variety of body modification practices, ranging from the conventional to those normatively considered to be "extreme." In this film, the directors of Modify, Greg Jacobson and Jason Gary, travel the country and ask these modifiers, simply, "why?" Why do they participate in such practices? What are their aims? This film provides the modifiers' own words in response to these questions. One respondent, a tattoo artist named "Bear," proudly answers the question of "why" with: "Everyone modifies their body in one form or another to help show on the outside how they feel on the inside." The subjects in this film thus largely confirm the cultural tendency to project feelings of interiority onto their physical bodies. This film illuminates the point that many of the body modification practices featured rely heavily on the assumption that human bodies are a physical manifestation or representation of some sort of inner-being. The significations of these acts, then, are limited insofar as they are presumed to be directly related to issues of the "soul" or essential self.

Shildrick further argues that "selfhood" can be addressed in one of two ways. First, the corporeal form can be "bracketed out, as though it were of no concern" (78). In this line of thought, the body and the mind bear no necessary relation to one another, and the self exists solely in the immaterial realm. This perspective clearly privileges feelings of interiority, as worldliness does not seem to bear any significance in the becoming of subjectivity. This worldview seems to maintain that "who we are" has nothing to do with

either our material conditions or our physical bodies. We exist prior to our experiences, outside of history.

The other approach sees subjectivity as being "inseparable from material being-in-the-world" (78). This point of view envisions subjectivity as being comprised of both body and soul, allowing the material to bear some level of importance in the composition of selfhood. This perspective, however, still assigns the material a secondary role in the construction and shaping of the self. Shildrick argues that "to be a self is above all to be distinguished from the other, to be ordered and discrete, secure *within* the well-defined boundaries of the body rather than actually being the body" (79). This common understanding of selfhood as it relates to the body implies that there is an autonomous inner being that is enclosed and protected from the material world by the corporeal from. Clearly, though the body is thought of as being cooperative with the core "essence" of the self, it continues to be considered as an instrument of the self, rather than a constituent part.

Because it posits a mind/body dualism, this conceptualization envisions the "self" and the body as separate entities. However, though it is often considered that the interior, "true" self exists on a separate plane of existence from our material bodies, the common assumption is that the two bear an important relationship to one another. This widespread belief understands the human body to function as a buffer between the interiorized self and the material world, assuming a dialectic relationship between corporeality and interiority. This assumption is problematic because it presumes that all body modification projects are inextricably linked with issues of selfhood and identity. This, however, is clearly not the case. Jen Davis, a professional tattoo artist, demonstrates this point. After

adorning her body with six tattoos and dedicating her life to the profession, she proclaims that she is done with tattooing simply because, as she states in the film, "it hurts." Further, she argues that the incessant question of what her tattoos means is vexing because "it doesn't even always have to mean anything. It doesn't always have to have meaning behind it ... sometimes people just think something is pretty." Clearly, though Davis holds this viewpoint, the continual querying into the significance of her body art by spectators illustrates a pervasive assumption about the potential meanings of body modification practices.

Now that we have discussed the fundamental assumptions surrounding issues of the body and the soul and how they are presumed to relate to one another, we can move on to investigate how this assumption fuels practices of body modification as projects of selfhood.

Body Modification as Projects of the "Core" Self

The same practice of body modification can be articulated in any number of ways that assume a connection between the essential inner-being and corporeality. According to Pitts, "human bodies are always shaped and transformed through cultural practices" and "body modifications have been interpreted as challenges to the naturalized status of Western body norms, and as forms of self-fashioning and self-narration in postmodern culture" (*In the Flesh* 23). For example, in the movie Modify, Jesse Jarrell argues that his choice to participate in new and innovative body modification practices started with his discontentment with the human body. He argues that the human form is unsatisfactory and seems as if it is "not finished." His response was to be the creator of a new form of

body modification. Jarrell is recognized as the inventor of the first "soft" subdermal implants, and wears rows of them over each of his biceps.

Other forms of body modification practices can be linked to "unconventional sexuality and gender" (Pitts 24). For example, one of the prominent body modifiers featured in Modify is Las Vegas' Frank Marino, the leading act at the Riviera's "An Evening at La Cage." Marino is a transvestite and has been working for over 20 years as a Joan Rivers impersonator. Marino admits that he has undergone several plastic surgery operations to make himself look younger and more feminine. His drive to alter his physical appearance is rooted in his understanding of how the self relates to the body, as well as his knowledge of social roles and gender conventions. However, though a display of unconventionalized gender and identity, his actions are actually subscribing to normative understandings of beauty and gender. His self-identification as a woman has driven him to alter his physical form to mimic his perceived interiority.

Paul Sweetman discusses permanent body modification techniques as an attempt to fix and anchor the "self." Sweetman's research indicated that individuals tend to use body projects to demonstrate a strong "commitment to oneself" ("Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self?" 53). Sweetman claims to see an abundant tendency for individuals to conceptualize their practices as "an attempt to lend corporeal solidarity to expressions of individuality" (53), further linking these practices with interiority. For example, Zulu, a professional body piercer, discusses the importance of his work and his own personal modifications in Modify. Zulu states: "I wouldn't feel complete. I wouldn't even feel like me. I wouldn't feel human if I didn't have this tattoo on my face." Zulu's statement illustrates an intense perceived connection between his "true" inner-identity and his facial

tattooing. Further, he feels that his identity was fragmented and partial until his modifications perceivably completed him.

Belief in an "inner-essence" combined with a desire to be socially identified with that essence results in the individual's strategic manipulation of verbal and visual symbols to transmit that wholly private experience to the public. Interiority can be thought of as being concealed exclusively in the private realm because notions of the "inner-self" are conceptualized as intangible to others and as "unique" to the individual. A subject's understanding of his/her true identity, then, is best described as what Albin calls a "translinguistic movement that is experienced" (23) and has "preverbal elements that accompany affect, and thus need expression" (22). In other words, interiority is *experienced* and, thus, requires modes other than the spoken word to make that experience tangible. One must use several discursive and non-discursive forms to transmit this intangible "movement." This movement is best understood through Debra Hawhee's discussion of "how bodies and language come together" ("Language as Sensuous Action" 333). According to Hawhee, often overlooked is the fact that physical gesture as communication precedes the spoken word. More, her assessment of Sir Richard Paget's gesture-speech theory encourages a worldview that "turns on its head the relatively recent commonplace of 'the body as discursive formation,' offering instead discourse as bodily formation" (332). As previously discussed, interiority is assumed to exist in a state prior to the formation of language. If Hawhee's approach is accepted, then it is assumed that all linguistic forms of expression are accompanied by some originating form of bodily gesture, and that some expressions may be made without any verbal expression at all. If this is the case, a linguistic mode of expression is necessarily

accompanied by a physical mode of expression in the communication of an affective state. Cultural practices that articulate the body with interiority, then, utilize several modes of "self-expression" to communicate a unique sense of self to others.

These methods of self-expression can be understood as a publication of interiority that rely on an individual's conscious behaviors and/or manipulation of linguistic and visual symbols. The proposal that these behaviors are "conscious" and intended plays an important role in the material publication of interiority. The claim of conscious intent is inherently problematic, since who we are and how we behave is the product external and internal conditions frequently not of our own making, and that many of these conditions are not or cannot be known to the subject. For example, some theorizations on how "the self" is constructed and shaped posit that "invisible forces such as unconscious desire" (Pitts 28) play an important role in the creation and maintenance of the self. In this mind set, individuals cannot have complete control over the shaping of their subjectivity, and thus do not have power over who they essentially "are." This approach renders subjects "zombies," as Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treat would put it, that are oriented as social subjects by ideology that "animates bodies and robs them of agency" ("Zombie Trouble" 160). The formation of their being is out of their hands, and the complexity of the self is beyond the grasp of the human consciousness. However, the social expression of who one truly thinks he or she "is" requires a conscious understanding of an inner-essence and the desire to actively represent that self through verbal and visual symbols and through material practice. A publication of interiority, whether through visual or verbal representation (or both), requires 1) intention/desire to bring the "interior" to the

"exterior", 2) an understanding of an interior state, and 3) the understanding and use of various symbol systems.

It is important to remember that our realities are mediated through symbols, signs and codes. Whether or not one believes an objective, unmediated reality actually exists, an individual's access to it is virtually impossible. There is a natural propensity to forget or ignore the great extent to which our personal and social realities are constructed and understood through symbol use. Kenneth Burke argues that "though man is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of naive verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality [*sic*]" (*Language as Symbolic Action* 5). Further, he posits that humans can only experience a "tiny sliver of reality" and the rest of what we know is "a construct of our symbol systems" (5). French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan would agree, as his theory of psychic structure posits that "The Real" is the world as it exists prior to mediation by language, the ego, and the other. Lacan claims that though "The Real" exists, we cannot fully grasp or engage it because of our reliance on symbols and mediated forms. If this is taken to be true, then both our understandings of ourselves and our material surroundings are rhetorically produced, maintained, and modified. How we understand our realities is filtered through a rhetorical lens that is mediated by language, context, and culture. The things we understand to be "true" are rhetorical effects, and that which we consider to be "real" is always mediated by discourse and culture. Albin concurs as he states that "a view of reality may in fact be a based on ideology that is mediated by media and culture [*sic*]" (22). The urge to express ourselves through our bodies, then, is a product of how the body is prefigured discursively and culturally. In turn, the ways in which our bodies are used to express

ourselves (the methods of interior publication) are determined by (and limited by) our understanding of the uses and functions of our physical form. Finally, textual readings of other bodies occur within a context—a rhetorical environment that is at once restrictive and ever-changing.

Clearly, the cultural assumptions that link the body to a transcendent self help to shape the ways in which we understand the human body and how it should function. This premise leads to acts of body modification that are understood to function as publication devices that transmit subjective feelings of selfhood so that they are accessible to others. Nikki Sullivan agrees when she argues that the body is "one that 'does I' or performs its identity in and through relations with others, and that both marks and is marked—*ad infinitum*—in and through these affective dramatizations of (inter)subjectivity and (inter)textuality" (*Tattooed Bodies* 8). She explains that the body is a "map" that reproduces interiority, but also performs connections and disconnections with other textual bodies. This understanding, however, places the body in limbo—a wavering zone of private publicity, or public privacy. The body, in this sense, is a buffer, a boundary, more specifically, a bridge between the realms of privacy and publicity, immaterial and material. It is thought of as fully belonging to neither realm, but as existing in relation to both.

As previously mentioned, visions of the transcendent inner-self contribute to theories that subscribe to a mind/body dualism that privilege the mind (soul) over the body. In this view, the "self" exists separate from, or more precisely prior to, its physical form, and issues of the mind are viewed to be superior to issues of the body. Rhetorical theorist Raymie McKerrow notes that people assume their subjectivity exists prior to

their corporeality; he posits further that this is a "misrecognition" and that people have a tendency of "forgetting or repressing their own corporeal genealogies and processes of production" (318). However, because of the social value placed on issues of the soul, the "self" must act upon the body to exhibit its essence to others. Anxiety over misrepresenting interiority fuels body modification practices that assume a connection between the body and interiority. For example, when asked why he began participating in modification acts such as body piercing, tattooing, scarification, and branding, one individual responded: "I wanted something that showed who I was and that I've never seen anybody have."[3] This statement reveals this young man's drive to demonstrate his feelings of interiority and independence through body modification practices. His understanding of his "true" identity is that it exists separate from and prior to his material being, and thus his acts of body modification bridge his affective feelings of subjectivity with the material world. Without these actions, he assumes that his true essence will be lost and remain undetected.

Clearly, the corporeal form is positioned as a site for "establishing identity that is read by the self and others" and as "an ever-emerging, unfinished materiality that gains meaning through various forms of symbolic representation and material practice" (Pitts, *In the Flesh* 29). The body, then, is treated as an ongoing project of "becoming." The subject continually manipulates and transforms his/her physical shape as an attempt to stylistically construct, maintain, or alter a perceived but fragmented and fluid identity. For example, a body modifier may get a tattoo as a "rite of passage" ritual, indicating to that individual a self that is autonomous, independent, and self-sufficient. Though rites of passage are, by definition, social practices, they are culturally ingrained as symbolically

transformative rituals indicating some fundamental growth or progression of the individual's internal self. For example, in the United States, one must be 18 years of age in order legally to obtain a tattoo or piercing without a parent or a guardian's consent. This age is socially (and legally) understood to be a marker from adolescence to adulthood. Once an individual reaches this age, he or she enjoys the many privileges and also becomes susceptible to the many responsibilities of what the government considers to be an autonomous and legitimate citizen. This is the age at which a young adult may vote, sign up for the military, buy pornographic materials, buy diet pills, participate in psychological and sociological experiments, and sign the educated consent for required for most to obtain a tattoo, piercing, brand, etc. Many youths engage in these spectacular forms of body modification in order to physically signify a point of transformation and independence in their own self narratives. This physical transformation of the body alludes to an immaterial transformation of the individual's inner-self. The modifier, society, and the state recognize this transition into adulthood as a transformation of maturity, independence, and awareness. These feelings of autonomy are transposed to the act of modification, thus charging the body with symbolic meaning. It is in this way that body modification can be viewed as symbolic action.

A more socially "extreme" case of an individual modifying their physical form to agree with an abstract feeling of interiority is the story of a man who goes by the name of "Stalking Cat." Dennis Avner, or Stalking Cat, has undergone extensive tattooing and other body modification practices to alter his physical form to resemble that of a tiger. In a testimonial given in the movie Modify he states: "The modifications that I'm doing are part of a very old Huron tradition, and it's getting me closer to where I want to be and

getting me closer to my totem." Stalking Cat has completely changed his physical body to project what he feels is an essential part of his Native American spirituality. Though it may be hard at first to equate the total body transformation of Avner with the practices of partial body modifiers, it must be acknowledged that the same underlying principle of interiority applies. In Avner's case, he feels he is a man who is making an affective feeling "real" through his material transformation. He feels strong ties with his Huron heritage, and even stronger ties with his totem animal. His practices of modification are attempts at making inner feelings of identification, dedication, and selfness both express and substantially real to himself and others.

Though Stalking Cat is a unique case, a more common form of whole body modification that is articulated with an inner, intangible notion of self can also be seen in the practices of transsexual or transgendered subjects. An individual of the male sex who self-identifies with the female gender undergoes several cosmetic and reconstructive surgeries in order to have "his" physical form mirror that of the socially accepted depiction of the female sex. He (she) undergoes this physical transformation to seek a balance between his (her) understanding of their inner-self and the socialized self that another "reads." The previously mentioned Frank Marino has not undergone the extensive sexual reassignment surgery, but has gone great lengths to "feminize" himself. Though he was born with the anatomy of the male sex, he identifies with the female gender, and has since taken action to reflect this internal self-identification physically, as well as behaviorally. In this view, the essential self is viewed as existing prior to the physical body, which is used as an apparatus to be manipulated and utilized to represent inner feelings of identity, desire, or affectivity.

Intentions of such practices assume that body modification is either a reflection of who an individual genuinely "is," or a bridging of the gap between materiality and spirituality. Experts in mental health scrutinize this impulse, degrading physical expression in the face of "higher" levels of self-expression. One psychologist states: "If you have to resort to using your body to express things, you haven't got much to draw on" (as cited in Pitts, "Body Modification, Self-Mutilation, and Agency" 299). From this perspective, the body is seen as a poor substitute for "true self-hood." The material is regarded as second-rate and inconsequential to one's "true being." Either way, the express subjective desires of many body modifiers and their critics refer back to attachments to an authentic inner-self, and continue to make material practices of body modification subservient to the immaterial qualities of the self.

It is this notion that makes the practices of transgendered subjects and subjects such as "Stalking Cat" fundamentally the same. Although I do not discount the clear differences between cases such as Avner and Marino, the point that I am trying to make here is that the two practices have more in common than the normative logic would be able to admit. Both cases are examples of the impulse to bring that which is interior to the exterior. Both change the shape of their material being to bring balance between their corporeality and their feelings of inner subjectivity. Most importantly, both assume that verbal declaration of identity falls short of the communicative effects rendered by a physical declaration of selfness. It is as Albin states: "The subject knows but does not know who he is for he cannot see this on his body" (31). These subjects are thus compelled to make physical otherwise immaterial feelings of selfness and affectivity. Body modification as such is a project of the self that aims to bring the interior to the

exterior. Without the social presupposition that the shape and state of the physical body is somehow related to the quality and condition of the mental or spiritual self, individuals would not feel compelled to make such material proclamations of selfness.

Clearly, body projects are personally and socially thought of as projects of the "self." The fundamental assumption that is responsible for the routine articulation of the body to interiority fuels practices of body modification that attempt to bridge or seek balance between a notion of "selfness" and a physical being in the world. As body modification projects are thought of as practices that attempt to bring the interior state of an individual into tangible existence, these projects must be considered as they materially occur within a cultural context.

Modification or Mutilation? The Rhetorical Categorization of Body Projects

It cannot be denied that social power relations favor certain forms of modification while others are inevitably marginalized. Although some practices of body modification that were previously considered "extreme" have been conventionalized and adopted by the mainstream society, many of these practices have been stigmatized and are often interpreted as forms of "self-mutilation." In the mental health use of the term, self-mutilation describes "a corporeal expression of a suffering self" (Pitts, *In the Flesh* 25). In other words, practices of body modification that are not normatively accepted are rejected as signs of mental illness or self-destruction. Because of assumptions linking corporeality with interiority, the practice of voluntarily inflicting pain on one's self for whatever articulated reason is normatively understood to be an expression of disturbed human depth—a crying out (conscious or not) of a suffering or disabled inner-self. It is

based on this assumption that acts of body modification are tantamount to self-mutilation, and that modified bodies are understood as an expression of "an imperfect, out of control and suffering self which might need to be treated" (Pitts, "Body Modification, Self-Mutilation and Agency" 295). Nikki Sullivan agrees as she argues that body marking is generally read as a message of harm that reveals the essence of the individual self.

The concept of self-mutilation, then, relies heavily on the articulation of the corporeal form to a separate but connected essential self. Without an understanding of the body that links the corporeal with immaterial subjectivity, the cultural category of "self-mutilation" would not exist. Further, it must be acknowledged that practices that constitute "self-mutilation" in one worldview can also be articulated as an expression of autonomy, identification, or spirituality in another. Pitts argues that "body modifiers' knowledge about body modification is not only affective, but expresses new, alternative and recirculated attitudes toward technology, pleasure, sexuality, cultural membership, gender, spirituality, aesthetics, and beauty" (293). For instance, certain practices of mortification are criticized and understood by some as indications of pathological disorders, while these same acts are embraced and understood to serve productive secular or spiritual purposes by others. Mortification of the flesh is understood religiously to be reminiscent of the suffering of Jesus, and is used by some religious subcultures to strengthen faith or to overcome weakness. For example, members of Opus Dei—an organization within the Roman Catholic Church dedicated to the "universal call to holiness" or, in other words, the belief that everyone should aspire to be a saint—partake in what they term "corporeal mortification" which consists of acts such as self-denial or self-flagellation to attest their spiritual devotion. Opus Dei founder Josemaria Escriva

writes: "What has been lost through the flesh, the flesh should pay back: be generous in your penance."[4] Members of this organization are encouraged to engage in various forms of corporeal mortification to self-punish and cleans themselves of daily sins. These self-inflicted acts of punishment serve as a reminder of the suffering of Jesus and symbolically act as a rededication of body and soul to Christ. Though these acts can permanently scar or "disfigure" the practitioner's body, because of the meanings attached to these actions, they are thought of as being not only acceptable, but necessary within the subculture. The same practice that would be (and is) considered to be "self-destructive" in one context has spiritual meaning in another.

Another example is the use of mortification in sadomasochistic contexts. Participants in the BDSM (Bondage Discipline Sadomasochism) subculture engage in practices of mortification in both sexual and non-sexual contexts to signify a subcultural identity, to configure and represent power dynamics, and to enhance experiences of sexuality, desire, pleasure (as pain), and pain (as pleasure). As I have just demonstrated, body modification acts that are normatively stigmatized as "self-mutilation" in mainstream culture can be embraced and utilized by subcultural groups to serve different purposes, provide distinctive pleasures, and thus assume new meanings. These subcultural rearticulations, however, continue to assume that the physical manipulations of the body are external indications of a privileged internal self. Both religious and secular acts of mortification have been pathologized (made deviant and marginal) by the mainstream culture, thus deeming certain material practices of interiority unacceptable and even dangerous according by normative standards.

Pitts concurs as she states "body modifiers are depicted as more psychopathological than other groups" (*In the Flesh* 25). According to Pitts, the social framing of body modification as self-mutilation "makes the prospect of agency dubious or theoretically impossible" ("Body Modification, Self-Mutilation, and Agency" 296). She argues that discourses equating body modification with mental illness have socially problematized such practices and inevitably deny its subjects agency. This mind set holds that attempts to fashion the physical form are not the choice of the individual, but rather "a desire, addiction, need, or urge" (296), suggesting that body modifiers are not agents, but, instead, victims. Body modifiers themselves attempt to complicate this account, arguing that body modification is a state of complete agency. For example, women body modifiers claim that their practices "redefine beauty" and are acts of reclaiming their bodies from patriarchal culture. The Suicide Girls, for example, are a subculture of alternatively styled soft-core pornographers who base their entire existence on this platform. Their mission statement is "to change your idea about what makes women beautiful," thus challenging normative attitudes and values.[5] However, because of the methods used by the Suicide Girls to express beauty and selfness, their interests are necessarily trumped by heteronormative culture. For example, traditional feminists discredit the overlying message that the Suicide Girls claim to stand behind, arguing that the women participating in the website are reaffirming normative power dynamics that marginalize and objectify women. Pitts agrees as she states: "unofficial or marginalized knowledges like these are already less likely to be 'read' in public discourse as discernible or legitimate positions" ("Body Modification, Self-Mutilation, and Agency"

299). Clearly, context, desire, manner of publication, and effect play central roles in the rhetorical categorization of corporeal practices.

Because of how body modification practices are culturally understood to function—as a rhetorical transmission device that makes visible an individual's most private pleasures, desires, and interests—the human body can only be understood through a grid of intertextuality and intersubjectivity. According to Albin, no text exists alone, and text can only be understood within a given cultural context and historical placement. Albin continues: "Body modifications must be understood in the broader context of culture in addition to individual meanings" (Albin 24). Though a useful claim, this perspective suggests that cultural context and the individual meanings that people give to their practices are separate entities. Although cultural and individual meanings are not necessarily congruent, it is inevitable that the personal meanings and interpretations of texts will be influenced in one way or another by the material and historical conditions surrounding both the reader and the text itself. It is just as McKerrow states: "bodies are trapped inside cultures, and exhibit those acts promoted within the culture" (319).

Bodies as texts, then, exist only in relation to other bodies (as texts). These bodies are upheld and understood socially through a fluid network of power relations that favors certain manners of production, maintenance, and manipulation. Because of their intertextual nature, bodies and their modification necessarily exist within a cultural context that understands what a body *is* and how it *should* function. The cultural context in which we live upholds the body as a device through which our internal identity is able to become socially recognized, "creating a culture of individuals wearing their psyches on their skin" (Albin 26). Clearly, then, because of how our culture understands the body

in relation to the self, modifications made to the body are socially read as personal expressions of one's inner-being, even if this is not the express intent of the modifier him/herself. Because of this, subjects are encouraged to supplement their verbal expressions of identity with physical representations of affective feelings and experiences. However, because there is no structured, agreed upon way societies may read the body, the social reading of these corporeal texts rely on both personal and culturally constituted associations and judgments. Relying on their own subjective feelings and experiences, individuals read other bodies in the same way they understand their own, as well as through the same ideological lens discursively constructed by their cultural environment. This necessarily results in the possibility of multiple readings and interpretations of the same practice of body modification. Albin agrees as he argues that practices of body modification carry several levels of meaning that "blur across the boundaries both imposed by the self and society, resulting in distorted conveyance of meanings" (27). However, though distorted, these readings continue to be conditioned in powerful ways by our commitment to an authentic self, as well as the understood articulation of this notion to our physical existence. We want our physical bodies to be individual and unique and the modifications of our bodies to be meaningful and inventive, but until we can nuance and demystify the assumptions outlined in this chapter, the potentiality of such practices will be limited.

Conclusions

Not all body modification projects are created equal. I do not deny that there is much dissimilarity amongst different methods of body modification and the extent to

which individuals participate in them. However, the same underlying assumptions and goals fuel practices of body modification, as well as fostering the social reading of them. Because of the assumptions linking acts of body modification to interiority, many practices that should not be associated are likened to one another, while other fundamentally similar practices are dissociated. On one hand, two different bodies adorned with tattoos for very different reasons should not be read in the same way. One instance may be an intended expression of a perceived "core" self, while the other may be a thoughtless result of peer pressure. Though the practice of tattooing is the same, the meanings are not. On the other hand, such as in the case of Avner and Marino, two completely different sets of practices—whole body tattooing and surgical alteration to liken the body to the form of a tiger, and a series of plastic surgeries, make-up, costumes, and wigs to liken the male form to that of a female—serve the same fundamental purpose. The practices are substantially different, but the driving force is the same need to seek congruency between self-identification and physical form. The main claim I am forwarding here, then, is that practices of body modification bear no *necessary* relation to a codified set of meanings. The understanding of the body as ongoing project of selfhood must be recognized as a cultural practice that is produced by and in turn reproduces its own materiality. In this perspective, social categories, such as body modification, self-mutilation, and self-maintenance, are rhetorical designations. These designations enable certain readings of cultural practices, while thwarting others. In other words, by assuming *a priori* that acts of body modification are indefinitely linked to a "core" self or "true" identity, we are limiting the potential meanings of these practices. In order to provide a nuanced way of understanding the intended, perceived, and effectual significations of

body projects, we must first disarticulate the body from the privileges of interiority, and sever the assumed relation between meaning and practice.

The presupposed connection between the corporeal form and the intangible and internal self is ideologically reaffirmed through our cultural practices. Body modification projects can either be explicitly used by individuals to express who they "are" or are socially read as expressions of selfhood. Both cases automatically consider the human body a tool used by the authentic self to project its essence, thus reaffirming the cultural assumptions that there *is* an essential self, and that it necessarily acts itself out onto and through the body. Both the methods we use and the articulations we make between various practices of body modification and our ideas about the authentic self are made possible by previous articulations and understandings of both the body and the self. The inclination to relate body modification to the self, as well as the tendency to consciously and intentionally manipulate the physical form to communicate our perceptions of our self and identity are products of the rhetorical environments in which we live. The social understanding and acceptance of body projects is determined by how each instance is rhetorically framed both by the individual and by its surrounding culture.

Clearly, though our cultural knowledge fosters the interpretation that the corporeal form reflects the state of our internal self, this understanding brings forth several complicated and widely debated issues of the methods, intentions, perceptions, relativity, context, and effects of body modification projects. Such body projects exist on several levels of rhetoricity. The first level is a transparent one. The self-exercising cultural assumption that links the body to interiority is often considered to be mere fact. Many do not question this relationship because it is thought to be a cultural truth. But

where did this articulation come from? Even amidst cultural arguments of religion, spirituality, and the soul, most cling to a belief that somewhere, deep inside our bodies, lies the real us. Whether or not we believe this entity to be our soul, our spirit, or our mind, we are attached to the idea that the answer to the "Who am I?" question lies deep within, but separate from, our physical bodies. This attachment to an autonomous self, however, does not keep us from assuming that the body is (or should be) a physical manifestation of our "core" selves. As a direct result of this assumption, subjects consciously manipulate their bodies to reflect this sense of "inner depth." Because matters of interiority are expressly private, as the ways we understand and experience our "essential self" belong only to our cognitive and affective states, the expression of this perceived internal state requires a strategic crafting and displaying of both linguistic and non-linguistic symbols. In other words, the publication of interiority is the rhetorical process of making a wholly private individual public. Material practices used to transmit an affective understanding of selfhood makes accessible to others a previously concealed personal experience of selfness.

Because individuals are conditioned to treat their bodies as ongoing projects of interior subjectivity, the body is disregarded as a fragmented material mass that is used to commemorate a personal narrative, capitalize aspects of perceived identity, and ultimately used to express who someone "is." This approach views the body "as a garment, a veil or mask, as something which should be changed and modified to become congruent with the changes in the self" (Featherstone 10). The fact that our bodies are needed to sustain life, and are, at the very least, vehicles through which we are able to actually have subjective experience is generally disregarded. The mere conception of

interiority suggests that materiality has no, or at least very little, bearing on issues of the self and identity. It is vital that we stop assuming that our bodily form is an automatic screening of our interior conditions. Though all of the aforementioned acts can be construed as acts of "publicity," as all are intended or are read as making subjective feelings of interiority available to be socially read and interpreted, if we recognize that action and meaning share no inevitable connection, the assumed relation between the body and the self melts away. The notion of interiority automatically privileges the immaterial, while assigning the human body a secondary role in the formation of the self. Once we stop likening our bodies to surface indicators of a deeper and more "real" subjectivity the body may be freed up to function in more inventive ways.

Notes

[1] The statements provided in this chapter, as well as in subsequent chapters, are the result of informal correspondence via e-mail with several individuals who consider themselves to be "body modifiers." These individuals range from the socially "moderate" to the socially "extreme" in the manners in which they consciously choose to alter their bodies. There were no lists of questions prompting their responses, but rather, I let the modifiers guide the conversation, discussing matters that they felt were central to their choices to modify their bodies. These conversations took place over several months between the dates of August 30, 2006 and February 23, 2007.

[2] According to BMEZine.com, subdermal implementation is the insertion of three-dimensional objects under the skin. An implant is "any object implanted fully under the skin for the purpose of affecting a sculptural change of the surface."

[4] As cited on the Opus Dei Awareness website at www.odan.org/corporeal_modification.htm

[5] As cited on the SuicideGirls website at www.suicidegirls.com

CHAPTER THREE

MODIFYING SOCIETY: INTERIORITY AND CORPOREAL SOCIALITY

On February 17, 2007, America's pop music princess Britney Spears did the unthinkable: She shaved her head bald and got two new tattoos on her once idolized physique. These acts of body modification attracted the attention of broadcast and print media, with reporters and fans immediately condemning her acts and speculating on the reasons why she chose to change her look. While a few fans think the new look is a provocative statement or hold the view that Britney Spears can do with her body what she pleases, most speculate on her recent modifications as indications of an identity crisis, a nervous breakdown, drug addiction, and/or mental illness. For example, one ABC headline reads "Shaving off Her Hair and Tattooing Her Body May Be Spears' Way of Finding A Fresh Start,"[1] while an article from CNN.com postulates that Britney's recent actions may be due to postpartum depression.[2] This recent occurrence illustrates how body modification is perceived in normative society. While some modifications, such as the numerous hair extensions Spears has sported over the years, are welcomed and even encouraged in the popular realm, others are rejected and/or scandalized in the critical eye of normative. Whether she shaved her head out of protest to standardized gender norms, as the result of a mental breakdown, or merely out of sheer boredom and attention

seeking behavior, Britney Spears physically acted upon her body and the action is now being "read" and reacted to by millions. The "event" is being reported by credible news authorities and treated as legitimate headline news, and for one resounding reason: The general populace is fascinated.

A similar headline in current news is the story of a former *Playboy* Playmate's untimely demise. Anna Nicole Smith died suddenly at the age of 39 on February 8, 2007. Though the former Playmate is no stranger to obsessive news coverage, recent media attention has been paying close attention to the testing and treatment of her dead body. Rewind back to 1991 and we will recall that Anna Nicole's original claim to fame was her live body gracing the cover of the March issue of *Playboy*. Sixteen years later the public is still obsessing over her body. The media frenzy surrounding Britney Spears' recent body modifications and the posthumous treatment of Anna Nicole's body are prime cases of normatively idolized bodies gone spectacularly wrong. Both are prominent examples of our cultural infatuation with bodies, the cultural pressures to normalize bodies, and the social reaction to perceptively "un-natural" bodies. Further, the ways in which the public reads these bodies and gives them meaning continue to rely on the habitual articulation of bodies with an internal sense of self.

In chapter two I examined the body as a publication device used to transmit feelings of interiority. This chapter focuses on the body as it is used as a *socialization* device in the self's idealized quest for acceptance, desirability, normalcy, and perfection. Organized by the routine articulation of the body with interiority, use of the human form as a medium of social commerce is based on the assumed relationship of an individual's physical appearance and his or her character, competence, and social worth. These

fundamental assumptions are joined by rhetorically constructed and upheld cultural ideals of physicality, sexuality, and selfness to create a culture driven by fantasies of corporeal sociability, or the body as a locus of social value.

Throughout the course of this chapter, I will investigate body modification projects that are enacted in order to fulfill goals of sociality. In so doing, I will illuminate how the assumptions bolstering the cultural understanding and use of the body as a social bartering tool are a rhetorical outgrowth of the underlying assumptions articulated in chapter one. First, I will examine the cultural ideals that organize, foster, and maintain social networks and power relations, and thus, the role of the self as it exists within a particular cultural context. Then, I will illustrate how these contextualized ideals prompt a sense of corporeality that strives to attain social adherence and acceptance. In other words, how these rhetorically constructed fantasies frame the body as social capital. In order to accomplish this, I combine observation and analysis of several practices and narratives of body modifiers. Organizing the discussion are the personal narratives of public figures, such as "extreme makeover" cases Cindy Jackson and Miles Kendall, as reported in interviews and memoirs outlining the choices, practices, and experiences that have made them into the bodies they are today.

Jackson has set the record for having the most plastic surgeries of anyone in the world in her quest to attain her ideal Barbie-like form. Following Jackson's lead, Kendall is recognized as the first male to undergo an "extreme makeover" through plastic surgery. These highly visible cases are supplemented with statements collected via personal e-mail exchanges with several body modifiers expressing the desires and intentions behind their practices. Together, the voices included in this analysis indicate a cultural economy

where the human body as a commodity that transmits social value and can be manipulated to achieve desired social aims. As a collective, their statements demonstrate the cultural assumptions about corporeal sociality discussed in this chapter, as well as illustrate the central role the body has assumed in the carrying out of social hierarchies.

In short, the aim of this chapter is to illustrate how inherent in Western ideology is a rhetorical vision of corporeality that links body projects that aim to establish and communicate a sense of identity, create identification with others, conform to group standards, and indicate a sense of self and social worth. My aim, as in chapter one, is to deconstruct and demystify this vision of corporeal sociability. In no longer assuming an automatic relationship between a specific kind of corporeality and social worth, human bodies as they exist in culture can be thought of differently in regards to social currency. Instead of presupposing a necessary relationship between the body and social value, this approach extricates the body and the modification thereof from dominant social meanings, thus expanding the conceptual framework through which we understand such practices. This disarticulation will allow for a de-essentialized vision of body projects, thus untethering practices of body modification from their presumed meanings. In so doing, this chapter contributes to the overlying thesis of this project that the Western conceptualization of human bodies is a rhetorical construction that encloses and restricts the potential meanings of body modification projects. This revision works instead toward an understanding of human bodies and modification projects that realizes their full rhetorical potential.

Interiority and Sociality: The Corporeal Socialization of the Self

Beginning in early childhood, the national culture industry rhetorically creates and reinforces the standards by which we judge the human form. These standards and expectations are then constantly reinforced as we, our bodies, are socialized. For example, psychological metaresearch emphasizes the importance society plays on the categorical construction of what is deemed "attractive" or not. As Urdy and Eckland point out: "Folklore tells us that beautiful girls marry handsome princes and live happily ever after. Heroes are handsome and villains are ugly" ("Benefits of Being Attractive" 47). The ever-popular children's fairytale *Cinderella* tells a story of a young woman who is persecuted by her evil step-mother and step-sisters. Though Cinderella is repeatedly victimized and taken advantage of by her family, she continues to have a pure, kind, and loving nature. Cinderella is also a young, thin, Caucasian girl with soft features and big eyes. Her evil step-mother and sisters, however, are not. They all have twisted, pointy features and narrow eyes to indicate their inner malevolence. The lesson here is obvious: popular representations link certain modes of physicality with happiness and success based on the assumption that physical nature is indicative of internal nature.

The use of the human body as a socialization device is a rhetorical outgrowth of the underlying cultural assumptions that assume a direct relationship between the body and the soul. As discussed previously, Western society conceptualizes the body as a publication device that acts as a buffer between the essential, intangible self and the material world. Because of this presupposition, bodies are socially read as markers of

interiority, thus charging the physical form with meaning only insofar as it relates to issues of the self. This cultural understanding of the body as a publication device encourages the individual to intentionally act upon his or her own physical form in ways that seek a socially desired projection of the self.

This rhetorical performance of selfness, however, does not occur in a vacuum. The perceived need to materialize feelings of "selfness" depends on the presupposition that our bodies will be socially scrutinized as such. Further, we assume that there are material social rewards or repercussions for having certain types of physicality. This brings to light a new set of assumptions regarding the body as it is presumed to function in Western society. Because of their rhetorical nature, bodies are necessarily "read" intertextually relative to other bodies. But somewhere along the way, Western culture has come to value certain sizes, shapes, colors, and forms of bodies over others, bringing issues of normativity and power to the forefront. The material effectivity of this social valuing of certain modes of physicality has created a hierarchy of bodies in our society, resulting in cultural mandates that order and categorize bodies.

The social categorizing of bodies is not a new phenomenon. Bodies have historically been used as markers of difference, resulting in the social reading and evaluating of difference through physicality. However, when reading bodies as texts, individuals "come to a system of discourse with an ideological grid already in place and participate in terms of that grid's determinative nature" (McKerrow 102). In other words, the social reading of bodies is filtered through an ideology that has a hierarchy of social values rhetorically built into it. This inevitably leads to the ordering and ranking of the texts (bodies) according to this hierarchy, causing certain texts (bodies) to be viewed as

having more innate "worth" than others. For example, the ideology of the Nazi party fostered a rhetorical environment in the Third Reich that marginalized certain individuals with "Jewish bodies," classifying individuals that had certain "Jewish features" to be of inferior character and social worth. According to Jeffrey Herf, "the Jewish body implied a Jewish character associated with cowardice, sexual rapacity, crime, murderous attacks on women and children, economic exploitation, communist and capitalism, lack of patriotism and subversion of the nation" ("Ideologies in Comparative Perspective" 4). To those who identified with the Nazi ideology, the Jewish body signified characteristics that were contrary to what the Nazis valued. The Jewish body, then, was positioned as "other" in relation to the Aryan body which was exalted and said to be emblematic of Nazi values. In Western culture, contemporary Neo-Nazis continue to order and rank bodies according to this same hierarchy of values contained within the Nazi ideology. This social reading, evaluating, and discriminating of bodies continues to rely on the articulation of physical bodies to internal character, envisioning the human form as the embodiment of ideological values. Thus, the social recognition of corporeality as the materialization of the self is a rhetorical effect that, when coupled with a hierarchy of values contained within an ideology, places the body at the center of judgments that distinguish between selves that are socially valued and those that are not.

Clearly, the socialization of human bodies is directly influenced by how cultures condition individuals to understand how the human form relates to the inner self. Further, cultures condition individuals to favor certain modes of corporeality over others, infusing the physical body with presumed social value. That value is transferred in social relations, perpetuating the cultural fascination with bodies as well as the myth that our

soul—our internal worth—is accessible to others via corporeal representation. In the next section, the social construction of the "ideal" body is investigated with the intent of further illuminating how bodies are used in Western culture as a tool of socialization. This will further demonstrate the reliance of this process on fundamental assumptions regarding the body, the interior self, and social value.

Idealizing Society: Constructing a World of Corporeal Fantasy

The manner in which we socialize our own bodies and read the bodies of others is contingent on an understanding of some "ideal" form of corporeality. Western culture consistently values certain types of bodies. Specific characteristics vary according to gender, but popular representations of the human form present certain physical attributes regarding skin color, stature, age, size, shape, and symmetry as ideal. But what are the Western ideals of attractiveness and where do they come from? Some perspectives maintain that the physical attributes that we consider to be "beautiful" are rooted in our primitive instincts. Christine Rosen, for example, argues "there is a deeply human intuition about beauty" ("The Democratization of Beauty" 2). This outlook views "beauty" as something that is "natural" and exists separate from cultural constructions of physical attractiveness. This viewpoint, however, is widely debated. Richmond and McCroskey define attractiveness as a "perception" that "does not exist on its own" ("Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations" 16). Instead, beauty is bound up in our personal and social experiences. This definition implies that attractiveness is not an inherent trait but rather is culturally constructed, and is dependent on superficial attributes. Though this school of thought is widely supported, differing perspectives have

been offered up to explain how attractiveness is socially constructed and gauged. Different scholars forward different arguments, but the more fundamental point is how the debate itself reveals the hegemonic status the body holds in social relations.

"To be beautiful in America," one individual proclaims, "you need to be young, thin, and follow the beauty trends forwarded by the mass media."[3] This individual is one of many who, when asked what the ideal body is, indicated that beauty is something to be desired, strived for, and, most importantly, requires constant pursuit. "The fight for physical perfection is an uphill battle," another individual explained. "You need to constantly be dieting, working out, coloring your hair, moisturizing, tanning—and for what? So that someone can still always be younger than you, thinner than you, or have a better complexion than you, or something minute like having better eyebrows than you do." When questioned what the "perfect" body looks like, everyone has an answer, and largely, the answers gathered bear some resemblance to one another.

Others who describe a physical attraction to something that seemingly does not fit the normative model of ideal attractiveness often qualify their statements of desire. One individual explains: "I'm really strange when it comes to fat. On myself I can't stand it. On the girls that I date ... well, let's just say I don't mind heavy girls. It's weird, I know, but I don't want my partner to look like me naked." This young man qualifies his attraction to "heavy" girls with the words "strange" and "weird," acknowledging that the model of beauty he values is distinct from normative society's ideals. He does not feel the need, however, to qualify his hate for fat on himself, because he perceives this to be a socially acceptable sentiment. Another respondent shows a similar response. When asked what the perfect male physique looked like, she replies: "The male models are usually fit

but not overly muscular, handsome without being overly pretty. I guess my idea of a 'perfect' guy is a little odd in comparison. I like guys who are a little chubbier, a little more rugged looking." This respondent also casts her gaze at mainstream representations of male bodies in order to structure her own model of desire. She qualifies her preference with the word "odd," and consistently compares her standards to what she views as the normative preference for male bodies. Clearly, it is not to say that "mainstream" standards of attractiveness necessarily dictate individual desires, as deviations from the norm clearly exist, but rather that these desires exist in contrast to and are shaped by the normative ideal.

Though it is true that certain groups, specifically spectacular countercultures and enclaves, have stylistically "different" ideals of physicality, they too must cast their gaze at normative conceptions of the body in order to reject them. One organization, for instance, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) may value human bodies that are larger than "average," but there has to be an acknowledged "average" for such a position to exist. The mere existence of this group shines light on a larger issue—body fat is largely not socially accepted. In fact, the average weight for an American female is actually heavier than the "ideal" weight. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the average American woman is 5'4" and weighs 163 pounds, though the "healthy weight" for this height peaks at 144 pounds.[4] USA Today reports, however, that the average female model is 5'11" and weighs around 120 pounds, which would be drastically "underweight" by the United States Department of Health and Human Services' standards.[5] Because of the idealized status these models are perceived to have, however, many women are left feeling that they are drastically heavier and, thus,

less attractive, than the average female. Without the need to forward "fat acceptance" NAAFA would have no purpose. Its mere existence, then, is organized by dominant mainstream ideals of corporeality, and it is precisely in this manner that the body is hegemonic in social relations.

Though considered a very prominent issue for women, men do not escape this perceived necessity to lose weight. You may be familiar with Jared Fogle, the public face of Subway Restaurants. Fogle "earned" his celebrity for losing 245 pounds on "the Subway Diet" and is now a recognized pop culture icon and called a "hero" by some. Fogle's fame, however, is dependent on his shrinking frame. The sole reason for public interest in his story is because he "chose" not to continue to be obese. "If people didn't give a damn, I wouldn't be in the position I'm in," Fogle said in an interview with CNN.[6] Fogle's story drew large media attention because of his "fight" against fat. Fogle's newfound celebrity status further enforces the assumption that fatness is unacceptable. Further, his story tells Americans that the only people to "blame" for fat are ourselves.

An accurate representation of what is considered to be "ideal" in American culture can be seen in magazines, on billboards, on television, and at the movies. Images of actresses like Scarlett Johansen and fashion models like Heidi Klum recruit men and women alike, informing them with assumptions of what it means to be beautiful, feminine, and sexually desirable. Men and women view bodies in the likeness of Brad Pitt's and Mark Whalberg's as ideal representations of desirability, masculinity, and strength. Further, these representations tell the general public that these are gender specific qualities that should be strived for. It is through the use of these bodies and their societal prominence that normative gender ideals are perpetuated, thus ensuring the

hegemonic polarization of the sexes. These bodies and the ways in which they are culturally upheld tell us that women should be docile and men strong, women should be beautiful and delicate and men striking and rugged, women to look like sex and men to look like industry. Though performative deviations from these dichotomous gender-roles exist, they are quickly labeled by the culture industry, qualified as trend, and ultimately distanced from the "true" ideal man.

The metrosexual, for example, was supposed to be the new ideal model for American men. "Metrosexual" is used to describe a straight man that practices what normative society describes as "homosexual" male traits, mainly an interest in fashion and physical appearance. By labeling a man who explicitly cares about how he outwardly appears to others "metrosexual," the culture industry automatically distinguishes him from the normative American male. Qualifying these traits as stereotypically homosexual only further enforces the normative perception that straight male should be indifferent to fashion labels and skin products. Finally, after much attention was spent on the "new" metrosexual American man, stories like "Metrosexual is out, Macho is in" began to circulate in the mass media, proclaiming the "death" of the metrosexual.[7] Though there are still men labeled as such by the media and by society, they are no longer thought to possess traits true to the normative standards of ideal masculinity.

Human bodies are all around us, and the culture industry tells the American public what they should look like. Media representations of the ideal body tell women that they are expected to be forever frozen in their twenties, narrow-hipped, thin but voluptuous, have big eyes, with light, clear skin, long flowing hair, no body hair, and should be "perfectly" made-up all the time. The perceived ideal shape for men is to be a tall, broad-

shouldered, twenty-something with a chiseled abdomen, clear skin, and a seemingly effortless "I just fell out of bed looking this good" look. How an individual is subjectified, however, determines how he or she will approach, read, and react to a text. A subject position is "a stance, role, or perspective one takes in relationship to a text so as to read or engage the text" (Brummet and Bowers 118). The texts in this case are the culture industry's widely available representations of the ideal body, as well as the material bodies a subject comes into contact with. Depending on how an individual is discursively positioned, he/she will engage the text (body) differently. An individual who inhabits an identified subject position, for instance, will find "characters, themes or images in the text with which he or she identifies, or desires to identify" (118). The beauty industry tells identified subjects that they want whiter teeth (but not too white), tanned skin (but not too tan), bigger boobs and muscles (but not too big), a flatter stomach (free of stretch marks, scars, and cellulite), line-free skin, and on the list goes. These somewhat dynamic guidelines are fixed in rhetorically constituted cultural values that cherish certain gender specific characteristics such as youth, attractiveness, and whiteness, while condemning physical differences. A subversive subject position, however, will be "at odds with, and often directly opposed to, the call of the text" (119). The texts produced by the culture industry still call to these subjects, but their subject positions encourage a different reading and/or reaction that rejects the message (normative standards) but still continues to constitute them as subjects. The normative guidelines communicated through these texts cause individuals to act upon their bodies to either adhere to or explicitly reject cultural mandates. These actions, then, are rhetorical effects that are shaped by the normative ideal.

Assuming that certain physical characteristics are inherently "better" than others, individuals are pressured to conform to normative standards of "normalcy" to be socially accepted and even privileged. The cultural desire for "perfection" propels individuals to discipline their bodies and to intentionally manipulate their physical features as rhetorical symbols of social status and worth. Cindy Jackson is a prime example of the actions taken in order to attain a cultural ideal. Jackson has undergone 46 operations in the past 16 years to completely transform her physical form. "It was to look better. It was to get a different life" she explains in an interview with *The Independent*.[8] Her actions demonstrate a cultural belief that corporeality is directly linked to lifestyle, and that the ideal she pursued would socially benefit her. And she is not wrong: Jackson enjoys a lucrative lifestyle of fame and fortune based solely on the visibility she has gotten for her Barbie-like near perfection.

In a CBS News interview Jackson muses over her upbringing: "I wasn't that good looking. And my sister was really, really a pretty girl. She was breathtaking. And everyone used to talk to her more and smile at her more and notice her first."[9] Jackson's experience is not uncommon. A large body of research in the social sciences has been dedicated to the investigation of the role physical attractiveness plays in social situations. According to Debra Gimlin "the body is arguably the location from which all social life begins" (*Body Work* 8). Because of the intangibility of the self and the cultural assumptions regarding how the body and the self are related, individuals are initially read and socialized based on their physical appearances. Research conducted by William Goldman and Philip Lewis investigated the "physical attractiveness stereotype" in which society tends "to attribute ipso facto to the physically attractive such qualities as

intelligence, warmth, and capability" ("What is Beautiful is Good" 126). The mere presence of this stereotype indicates the cultural trend to articulate physical appearance with social worth, and more so, positively correlating such attributes with one another. Further, this stereotype demonstrates the assumptions outlined in the first chapter that articulate the human form with interiority. Though the study did find that physical attractiveness and social skillfulness were significantly correlated, the researchers also acknowledged differential socialization as a potential cause of this. This theory assumes that children regarded as "attractive" receive positive reactions growing up and, thus, become more comfortable in social situations. If this is the case, the cultural ingrained inclination to treat the physically "attractive" more favorably is already at work. This is the materialization of rhetorically constructed values.

Research regarding any correlation between the physical appearance of an individual and his/her character or social prowess frequently assess findings as a result of how individuals are socialized. Social scientists largely agree that individuals who are deemed "physically attractive" time "receive more opportunities for social interaction which provides them with a larger social repertoire than unattractive people" (Zakahi and Duran 55). Goldman and Lewis agree as they claim that there is evidence that "more-physically-attractive subjects are more generally liked than the more unattractive subjects" (129). It is possible that findings such as these can be explained using the "halo effect," meaning that individuals are perceived as being more proficient in certain areas "simply because they are attractive" (Zakahi and Duran 56). This trend illustrates a cyclical social logic that treats individuals in a certain way because of the way they physically look. This treatment is justified by the presumption of positive personality

traits that are generally developed as a result of the nature of their very socialization. Clearly, because of the ways we are socialized, the shape and form of the human body has bearings on matters that fundamentally have no "real" association. Because of this, bodies inevitably play a role in unequal power distribution in stratified societies.

The "ideal" body is not a real entity, but a rhetorical construction. Even the fashion models depicted in New York's Times Square have been airbrushed and digitally "doctored" to symbolize what the advertiser wishes/desires/perceives to be the "perfect" woman or man. To be socially viewed as normatively acceptable or attractive one must constantly engage in "positive" body projects. No matter how hard one works to transform their physical form, there is always something that can be tweaked—there is always at least one "imperfection" an individual can improve upon. A short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, entitled "The Birthmark," calls such perceived imperfections "mark[s] of mortality" (21); an indication of our very humanity. Hawthorne tells the story of the insatiable professor Aylmer who becomes obsessed with ridding his almost perfectly beautiful wife of a small birthmark on her cheek. Aylmer cannot enjoy the immense beauty of his wife's body and soul because he is fixated on perfecting her complexion. The birthmark begins to take on deeper meaning to Aylmer as "the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death" (12). At one moment within the story, Aylmer's wife, Georgiana, recognizes that Aylmer will not remain satisfied if he is to succeed. Hawthorne writes: "Longer than one moment she well knew it could not be; for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending, and each instant required something that was beyond the scope of the instant before" (21). Georgiana's recognition of her husband's never-ending pursuit of progress, however, does not keep her from risking

permanent disfigurement or even death because the birthmark becomes all the couple can focus on. Death, indeed, is the price the poor woman pays for her bodily perfection.

The stories of Cindy Jackson and Miles Kendall, though less tragic, demonstrate a similar insatiable thirst for bodily perfection. In 2003, Cindy Jackson had spent approximately $100,000 on 47 different cosmetic surgery procedures in her quest for Barbie-like beauty. In several interviews that year she was quoted as saying that her "dreams had finally come true."[10] On the contrary, as of 2006 Jackson's 47 procedures had become 62. Her "dreams" of feminine perfection have still not been reached. Jackson's male protégé, former website designer Miles Kendall, has had only two operations and nine procedures, but has entirely reconstructed the appearance of his face over the past six years. Now working in the world of celebrity, however, Kendall feels more pressure than ever to "keep up with [his] appearances."[11]The Western ideology of beauty seems to forward an unattainable ideal, but it is more than that. Built into the notion of the ideal body is an idea of product as progress: the ideal body is a never-ending process that can never actually be attained by anyone. There is no finished product. Culturally, we understand the body as a project that requires constant attention and diligence to maintain social acceptability. Inherent in the notion of the ideal male or female body is its modification, which is usually thought of as "improvement." Ironically, an unmodified body, then, is socially viewed as unnatural.

Normalcy is clearly framed by representations of beauty ideals that can be seen in the rhetorical artifacts of popular media. Women's magazines especially encourage the constant modification of the female body in order to be viewed as beautiful, desirable, and socially accepted. Headlines on the cover of these magazines scream: "10 Steps to

the Perfect Butt," "Lose 10 Pounds by Swimsuit Season," or "Get the Body You've Always Dreamed Of." These magazines are setting the Western women's agenda, prompting her to constantly be thinking about ways to improve upon her physicality. One individual describes her quest for the ideal female body: "Though I know these girls are airbrushed and have a team of stylists who work for hours to make them look perfect, I still use them as sort of a standard, a way to see how much further I have to go. So until Cosmo[politan Magazine] starts showcasing girls who look like me, I'll continue to hit the gym, buy the 'Lean Cuisines,' and spend too much of my paycheck in the cosmetics department." This young woman's cultural experience indicates that routine daily rituals of bodily discipline are a "natural" part of female corporeality. The failure to comply with society's expectations, then, would result in a socially abject "unnatural" female body.

Thus, innate in the ideal model are the characteristics of *fragmentation* (the body is a series of parts instead of one functional whole) and *process* (the ideal body is never finished). The cultural machine uses this rhetorically constructed ideal to situate corporeality at the center of social transactions. The next section illuminates how the assumptions linking physicality and interiority in combination with socially enforced standards of acceptable or desirable physicality result in the attachment of social value to the human body (and its parts).

The Business of Bodies: Ideal Bodies and Corporeal Socialization

Because of the Western fixation on physicality and interiority, we are constantly aware of our bodies and the bodies of others. According to Sharon Crowley, women's

social worth is measured "through and by their bodies" forcing women "to become highly conscious of their bodies—the space they occupy in a room, on the street, in a crowd" ("Afterward" 358). A constant awareness of our own bodies inadvertently results in the awareness and evaluation of other bodies in comparison to own. Crowley argues that women's bodies are constantly under scrutiny, socially evaluated as to whether or not they are virginal, impregnable, or attractive. Yet, while the male gaze is a pressing issue for women, men do not escape the social scrutiny of others based on their appearance. The social stigmatism of fat, for example, is gender blind. Wanting to avoid the harsh criticism of others and feeding the need to be socially accepted, men and women alike go to the gym, go on crash diets, and even develop eating disorders.

The material social rewards for having the "right" type of body are undeniable. It is just as Rosen postulates: "beauty is a valuable commodity" (1). Leora Farber agrees as she suggests that "skin holds particular currency for Westernized women and (increasingly) men" ("Skin Aesthetics" 247). This can explicitly be seen in the United State's historical struggle with racism. The Jim Crow Laws enacted and enforced in the early 1900's physically separated and socially marked the status and worth of humans based on the color of their skin. Bodies with black skin were read intertextually with other bodies, especially in relation to white bodies, resulting in the social devaluation of black skin. Though mandating that facilities and treatment for individuals with dark skin be separate-but-equal, the Jim Crow Era marked individuals with an "undesirable" skin color with an inferior status. This is a prime example of hegemonic transference of power and social worth based on mere physicality.

Our bodies are rhetorically charged with cultural value, and our bodies are figuratively and literally used in social exchange to transmit a desired good or service. The language surrounding bodies treats corporeality as commerce, thus indicating the presumed intrinsic social value placed on certain forms of corporeality that can be used in social bartering. Certain forms of corporeality can be used as currency, a sort of "bargaining chip" to gain desired social responses and reach particular outcomes in social situations. In an interview with CBS news, Miles Kendall explains that his ability to open his new bar is due, in large part, to his new looks. Using his body to enhance his business, Kendall relies on society's largely held assumption that outward appearance signals social worth. "People call me shallow. But I call society shallow, because they treat me differently now." Cindy Jackson shares a similar sentiment when she states, "there are so many people who are being held back by their looks, and if that can give them a better quality of life and make them happier—what else is more important in life?" ("Becoming Barbie," 2). When they were "ordinary" people, Kendall and Jackson strived for a better quality of life and the route to success was mapped out on the body. Jackson's lifetime quest is to look like a Barbie doll to live a "glamorous life." Kendall embarks on a similar quest for Ken doll-like perfection. Both cases demonstrate a cultural assumption that successful, self-content people must embody social ideals. Giving new meaning to the term "dress for success" the two "extreme makeover" cases assumed that to have success, you must first look like it.

Physical attractiveness, then, acts as a social commodity—a social freight that is in high demand. On one hand, there is the literal exchange of bodies for money, such as in the practices of human trafficking and in prostitution. Human bodies in these types of

transactions carry a specific dollar value. In other situations, individuals are socially rewarded for physically "fitting-in" or adhering to "mainstream" standards of physicality. For instance, some research shows that in cases of workplace sexual harassment, attractive victims were more likely to be believed than unattractive victims (Seiter and Dunn 2000), while other research shows that attractive defendants in court room proceedings received, on average, lower bail or fine amounts than less-attractive defendants (Downs and Lyons 1991). Though these societal situations are seemingly untouched by issues of corporeality, the size, shape, and form of the human body clearly plays a significant role in the organization and distribution of power.

The business of bodies is made explicit in the industry of cosmetic surgery. The innovation has placed a dollar amount on bodies, as the industry promises the transformation of certain body parts for a set price. The power of the industry has maximized the capacity with which one can attain cultural ideals of "normalcy" or "perfection." This, however, contributes to the social marking of status on physicality. Because it is socially known that "perfect" noses, breasts, foreheads, eyes, waistlines and the like can be purchased, there is less social tolerance for the less-than-perfect physique. If the "right" type of body is made increasingly available through cosmetic surgery, individuals are held personally responsible for deviations from the norm. Further, if one does not participate in the systematic maintenance and modification of the body to meet societal standards, it is socially read as a marker of inferior socio-economic status or mental health. "Imperfect" bodies are largely read as signifiers of laziness, lower economic status, depression/mental instability, and/or subversion. For example, the stigma of fat is, to a certain extent, a cultural fiction. With the exception of cases of

obesity, which can lead to the failure of vital organs and arteries, body fat is not intrinsically harmful to the human body and is actually *used* by the body in useful ways. Obese, overweight, and even individuals who do not fall into the "thin" category, however, are often criticized for their physique because it is allegedly so easily countered. An individual has many practices from which to choose to alter the size of his/her body such as diet, exercise, liposuction, or even gastric bypass surgery. The failure to participate in any of the aforementioned practices for whatever reason is thus regarded as negligence. The mass production of normative bodies is made possible by this industry, further widening the perceived gap between "normative" bodies and "marginal" bodies.

Using cosmetic surgery as a springboard, another realm of the culture industry that has capitalized on the urgency for "normalized" bodies is reality television. As previously discussed, it is not a new phenomenon to equate a change in physical appearance with a change of selfness. Traditional fairytales often center on this theme. "Beauty and the Beast," for example, tells the story of a man who is transformed into a beast as retribution for his cruel, greedy, and selfish demeanor. It is only after the Beast learns to be kind, generous, and falls in love that he is transformed into a handsome nobleman. His change in appearance signifies a change of heart. With the advent of television, this representation has been made more explicit and abundant in contemporary society. New television program formats and plotlines extend this articulation. Daytime talk shows often offer a makeover to compliment a new outlook on life. Guests who come in to talk about low self-esteem, divorces, and discontentment are offered a new hairstyle, wardrobe and makeup to aid the transition to a new way of life. For example, a

current call to "The Ricki Lake Show" on the official website prompts visitors to apply to be on the show if they have lost 100 pounds and "need a makeover to show off [their] new look. The new physical appearance is meant to signify an internal change, as well as be used as a catalyst toward starting a new life. The recent explosion of reality television, however, has taken the articulation of bodies, selfness, and lifestyle to a whole new level. The television series "Extreme Makeover" is emblematic of this phenomenon. On the show, men and women alike undergo entire body transformations with the help of plastic surgeons, eye surgeons, cosmetic dentists, hair stylists, and makeup artists. The show is framed as providing contestants with "a real life fairy tale in which their wishes come true, not just by changing their looks, but their lives and destinies."[12] The marriage of cosmetic surgery and reality television explicitly makes the connection between physical appearance and the lives we live, as well as making numerous procedures visible, and thus accessible, to the general public. Following the lead of "Extreme Makeover," many reality television shows center on this theme, including "Dr. 90210," "Celebrity Look-Alikes," "10 Years Younger," "The Biggest Loser," and "I Want a Famous Face." These displays normalize extreme makeovers and assist in removing social stigma from many cosmetic surgery procedures.

Cultural trends such as these perpetuate the business of bodies. They provide resources necessary for the conceptualization of the body as a fragmented project of the self that is used both literally and figuratively for the social ordering and advancement of the self. The assumptions linking the body to interiority are amplified here, assuming that bodies should be indicative of character and social worth. This causes the social reading of bodies as such, perpetuating the cycle. According to Robert Hariman, "status is a

concomitant of socializing" and "attributing status is a social act" ("Status, Marginality, and Rhetorical Theory" 43). Texts, and therefore bodies as texts, do not have any inherent status, but only that which we grant them. Rhetorically constructed ideals of bodies encourage Western society to favor one mode of physicality over others, linking different forms of corporeality with different internal states of being and worth. This allows for the social stratification of bodies oriented by a hegemonic hierarchy of power that determines what is "normal" or "acceptable" and what is not. This inevitably leads us to marginalize certain types of bodies, thus leading to negative social projection and the assumption of inferior social worth.

The cultural ideals imposed on "normative bodies" influence and constrict "marginal bodies." The final section deals with the relationship between normativity and marginality, and interrogates non-normative body projects as they are used and understood in marginal culture.

Normative Ideals and Peripheral Corporeality

As previously discussed, the normative conception of "ideal" Western bodies has the notion of body modification built into it. However, commonplace everyday rituals that "normalize" the body are often not consciously thought of body modification, but rather, as personal hygiene, grooming, or self-maintenance. As discussed in the first chapter, distinctions between what is considered to be self-maintenance, body modification, and self-mutilation are made through social narratives. Body modification acts must be considered in regards to their larger cultural context as well as the framing of such acts by the communities and individuals that engage in them. Though one group

may consider an act to be a declaration of "self" and of spirituality, if normative culture does not share this sentiment the act in question is inevitably trivialized as "trend" or marginalized as "mutilation."

This can be seen as happening with highly visible body modification practices such as tattooing. Tattooing is becoming increasingly normalized, gaining the visibility and endorsement of popular culture. For instance, former *Playboy* Playmate Bunny of the Year Pamela Anderson—a popular sex symbol that represents feminine sexuality and beauty to many—sports several tattoos. Her participation in the act allows for certain types of tattooing to be viewed as sexy or feminine. Though not considered to be emblematic of the natural, ideal body, moderate tattooing has become widely accepted and incorporated into dominant models of attractiveness and desirability. What society deems to be "excessive" tattooing, however, continues to be stigmatized. Eric Sprague, better known as "The Lizardman," has participated in approximately 650 hours of tattooing that now cover his entire body, including his scalp and eyelids.[13] This type of tattooing continues to be socially rejected, and is read by others as signs of mental illness or instability. To avoid this type of social castigation, individuals are forced take a certain level of care in the selection of body modification practices they choose to partake in and in the ways in which they frame them. The way practices are understood to function and personal motives and significations attached to them, then, exist within and are inevitably shaped by this larger rhetorical environment. This environment invariably provides resources for body modification projects while limiting their potential meanings.

There are various ways body modification projects are used to socialize the self. As previously discussed, many instances of body modification are used to "normalize"

the self and to fit into mainstream culture. Cindy Jackson and Miles Kendall, for example, may have used methods that are socially deemed to be "extreme" to mold and shape their bodies, but their results adhere to social standards of acceptability and beauty. The social results for their actions, then, have been positive, granting both subjects fame and fortune based on their physical transformation. Other "extreme" body modifiers, such as Stalking Cat, who was discussed in the first chapter, and the Lizardman, have not been given the same social reception. Because of the types of bodies these men have come to possess, society has responded by criticizing, marginalizing, and even fearing the two subjects. Though Cindy Jackson and Stalking Cat both had an ideal in mind and went to great lengths to achieve it, because of the normalized standards imposed on bodies, the end result plays a large role in the social acceptance of the process of transformation. The process, however, is empirically equivalent.

Though not culturally considered as "normative bodies," individuals who use their bodies to socialize within marginal society continue to do so based on the fundamental assumptions called on by "mainstream" culture. Countercultures and spectacular subcultures, though aiming for different forms of corporeality, still understand the body to be functioning both as a publication device of the essential "self" and as a socialization device, relating that "self" to the "other." Marginal body modification projects, then, continue to function in the same way as normative body projects. Because the body is culturally assumed to be directly related to the intangible, essential self, the potential signification of body projects is constrained to the nature of this self and how that is socially valued. This encourages body modification projects that

aim to establish and communicate a sense of identity, create identification with others, conform to group standards, and indicate a desired sense of self and social worth.

Different practices of body modification, however, can mean very different things. Tattooing, for example, can serve any number of personal or social purposes. For instance, a particular symbol etched into the skin can signal membership into a spectacular subculture. A "skinhead" may get a swastika tattoo and shave his/her head to be initiated into that group. He or she could also be receiving that same tattoo to create identification with others who view participate and adhere to the neo-Nazi ideology as a fundamental part of his/her inner-being. He or she could also be conforming to group standards, altering his or her physical appearance to suit the norm of the social group. All of these practices, however, are carried out based on the assumption that the body is used as a socialization tool of the self. All are intended to signal some notion of self, whether it be an embodied identity or merely gesturing at the identification with an ideology, thus linking character to physical presence. Whether or not modes of physical adornment have pronounced social intent, the intentional changing of one's physical form to correspond with a system of beliefs or and induction into a subculture signals a perceived notion of selfhood. Though the act of modification may serve solely social purposes at a conscious level, the need to physically signal an adherence to a given ideology is driven by the same assumption that links the interior of one's being to their physical form. The acts of modification in both of these cases are using the body as a tool to make internal feelings of self and identity tangible and subject to be read and interpreted by others. These modifications are an attempt by the individual to describe him/herself as a specific type of person. Through use of the body, a modifier can make an internal notion of self both

external and palpable in order to be recognized and understood in a manner that is congruent to an affective identity. An individual can just as easily verbally express to another person that he or she *is* a skinhead, but the physical act of modification personally and socially codifies that identification, as well as allowing the individual and those "reading" his or her body to visualize an otherwise immaterial feeling of transformation and/or identity.

Conclusions

As soon as an individual begins to understand the body to function in a certain way, he or she reads bodies according to a set of assumptions, as well as in relation to other bodies, creating an intertextual rhetorical environment within which our bodies circulate. Our understandings of selfness, of corporeality, and of sociality, and how the three relate to one another are contingent on this environment and the underlying ideological assumptions it generates. Providing the resources for interpretation and meaning-making activites, these self-exercising assumptions have a hegemonic function, constraining and limiting our perceptions of "reality." The "realities" of bodies, then, depend on the interplay of rhetoric, hierarchy, and power creating certain societal guidelines through which we "read" and favor certain modes of physicality and methods of production, maintenance, and manipulation of the human form.

Only when we recognize the extent to which our bodies are rhetorically constrained can we begin to envision the body and its modification to function in different ways. The first chapter illuminated how Western culture has been conditioned to understand the body to act as a publication device. Based on this articulation, society has

come to charge the body with social significance that allows for certain bodies to be privileged over others. As American ideology is built on certain fundamental themes that decidedly determine what is culturally honored and valued, bodies that seemingly materialize these themes are charged with higher social worth. The material transference of this presumed worth only perpetuates this myth, resulting in a social consciousness of human bodies.

This consciousness of the body inadvertently pressures individuals to either strive to meet societal standards of physicality, or to consciously reject them. Rejection of these standards, however, is performed in such a fashion that continues to meet the cultural expectation corporeal socialization. In other words, the situating of the body at the center of sociality is a rhetorical effect that can be seen both in the mainstream and on the margins of contemporary society. Once the body is disarticulated from the "soul," the socialization of the human body will be at once complicated and simplified. In not assuming an automatic relationship between selfness and corporeality, the rhetorical charging of certain modes of physicality will be problematized. This will allow for the body and its modification to be understood in new inventive ways.

Notes

[1] Sheila Marikar. "Bald and Broken: Inside Britney's Shaved Head. Shaving off Her Hair and Tattooing Her Body May Be Spears' Way of Finding a Fresh Start." 19 February 2007. www.abcnews.com

[2] Associated Press. "Being 25 in the Fast Lane Lands Spears in Rehab" 21 February 2007 www.cnn.com

[3] The statements provided in this chapter are the result of informal correspondence via e-mail with several individuals who consider themselves to be "body modifiers." These individuals range from the socially "moderate" to the socially "extreme" in the manners in which they consciously choose to alter their bodies. There were no lists of questions prompting their responses, but rather, I let the modifiers guide the conversation, discussing matters that they felt were central to their choices to modify their bodies. These conversations took place over several months between the dates of August 30, 2006 and February 23, 2007.

[4] "Vital and Health Statistics." 30 August 2006 *National Center for Health Statistics.* www.cdc.gov/nchs

[5] Nanci Hellmich. "Do Thin Models Warp Girls' Body Image?" *USA Today.* 26 September 2006

[6] "Jared the Subway Guy, Superstar." *CNN.* 17 November 2003

[7] Stephen Perrine. "Metrosexual is out, Macho is In." *ABC News.* 19 June 2006

[8] John Walsh. "Cindy Jackson: 'Britain's most surgically enhanced woman'" *The Independent* 25 January 2006.

[9] "Becoming Barbie: Living Dolls" *CBS News.* Aug 6, 2004.

[10] Cindy Jackson. *The Living Doll.* Great Britain: Metro Publishing, Ltd, 2002.

[11] "Miles' Ramblings." 20 February 2007. *The Official Website of Miles Kendall* www.mileskendall.com

[12] "Extreme Makeover" 20 February 2007 www.tv.com

[13] This information was gathered from Eric Sprague's official homepage at www.thelizardman.com

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL SELVES, POLITICAL BODIES: MODIFIYING THE BODY POLITIC

The second chapter of this project examined cultural assumptions that promote an understanding of the body as a publication device of the self. Chapter three extended this analysis in its illustration of how the assumed relationship between the body and the interior self fosters a rhetorical vision of corporeality that understands the body as a socialization device. These chapters, then, deal with the human body as a site of the struggle over personal and social meaning. This chapter, by extension, deals with the body as a site of political struggle and signification. Because of the assumptions dealt with previously, bodies have become thoroughly politicized. The use of the physical body as a locus for political action and signification is largely intertwined with the human form's assumed relationship with selfness, subjectivity, sociality, and citizenship. Throughout the course of this chapter, I will demonstrate the ways in which these associations lend political agency to the body while simultaneously restricting the body's signifying potential.

Although bodies are commonly integrated into larger rhetorical strategies to accomplish political aims, this chapter focuses on body projects that consciously alter the human form with the express intent of modifying a surrounding environment. In other words, I will investigate acts of modification that envision the body as instrumental in

accomplishing political aims. In so doing, I will demonstrate the ways in which the presumed relation between the external self, the essential self, and the social self lend meaning to the body as a political device. Further, I will illuminate how bodily practices that are framed or read as seeking political goals gain cultural urgency from the assumptions outlined in the first two chapters, thus reaffirming a cultural belief in the politicized body.

In short, the aim of this chapter is to interrogate the intentions and perceptions of "political" practices of body modification with the goal of illustrating the reliance of these practices on a rhetorically constructed vision of corporeality. Thus, this chapter contributes to the overarching thesis of this project that the Western conceptualization of human bodies is a rhetorical construction that encloses and restricts the potential meanings of body modification projects. My aim, then, is to demystify the vision of political bodies in order to open up new avenues for the consideration of a personally, socially, and politically meaningful corpus. Leading this analysis is Morgan Spurlock's rhetorical use of fatness in his award-winning documentary Super-Size Me in order to make a social and political statement against fast food corporations and the growing epidemic of obesity. Through the unique framing of voluntary fatness, Spurlock uses his body as a springboard to make an argument against fast food culture. He combines the social stigma of fatness with a politically framed body project to stimulate cultural anxieties about bodies, selves, and health in order to use his body to modify his environment. The analysis of this documentary will be combined with discussion and analysis of other instances of explicitly "political" body modification—specifically the hunger strikes of student activists and the self-immolation of anti-war protesters. These

practices will be juxtaposed with similar acts of body modification that are not individually or socially framed as signaling political commitments or interests. This comparison will assist my previous claims regarding the rhetorical construction of categories of body projects, as well as the social valuing of particular types of bodies in relation to the self and other bodies.

Ultimately, this chapter acts as a culmination of the previous two. I intend to further demonstrate the aforementioned assumptions at work within political body projects, while using this category of body modification to demonstrate their usefulness. Finally, I will demonstrate how the successfulness of such body projects depends on the individual's ability to *use* the cultural assumptions outlined in chapters two and three of this project while simultaneously disarticulating them.

Political Body Projects: Modifying the Self, Modifying the Environment

The use of the body as a resource for political action is not a new concept. Precisely because of the assumptions discussed in earlier chapters, in one way or another, human bodies have long been at the center of political struggle. For example, raced bodies and sexed bodies were used as primary resources for the marginalization of certain citizens, thus limiting their capacity to participate in public deliberation and the political process. The women's suffrage movement, for example, was formed to extend the right to vote to women who had historically been left out of public deliberation and the political process. This political marginalization occurred largely at the site of the body, as the female sexed body presumably marked a politically incompetent or inept citizen. For example, before the Women's Rights Movement, women were largely kept out of politics

by physically not allowing them to participate in political activity. One instance of this occurred in 1840, when Lucretia Coffin Mott was not allowed to participate in the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London because of her sex. She was physically kept out of the convention, and her exclusion ultimately sparked the organization of the first women's rights convention (Wood, *Gendered Lives*). Her female anatomy somehow signified her political competency (or lack thereof) resulting in her formal exclusion from participation. The same types of conflicts can be seen historically in America's social and political race struggles. Before the abolition of slavery, raced bodies were legally recognized to be indicators of inferior beings, marking certain bodies as property and others as citizens. Even after abolition, raced bodies struggled for political rights and social status. These struggles continue today.

Human bodies are also used both as a hegemonic rhetorical tool to perpetuate gender norms and expectations and as a subversive rhetorical tool to refute them. For example, stereotypical senses of femininity typically physical and are thus carried out on the body. Because of this, some feminists choose to consciously de-feminize the sexed body to make a "statement" against conventional conceptions of womanhood and beauty. A famous example of women refusing to conform to beauty standards was at the 1968 Miss America pageant. In a demonstration against the pageant, women protested "by throwing false eyelashes, bras, and girdles into what they called the Freedom Trash Can" (Wood 64). This demonstration was enacted to give voice to women by rejecting "the view of women as sex objects" (Wood 65). This political and social protest was clearly focused on issues of the normative feminine body.

Bodies have also been positioned at the center of policy building, as is the case with attempts to legislate and regulate human bodies in regards to issues such as slavery, prostitution, reproduction/abortion, and suicide. The legal battle of the practice of abortion is a prime example of this. Even since the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in all 50 states, pro-life and pro-choice activists clash over the issue of pregnant bodies and unborn bodies. Pro-life activists desire legislation to be passed to regulate pregnant bodies, arguing that the unborn bodies inside constitute living beings. Pro-choice activists use the slogan "My Body, My Choice" to refuse the legal regulation of pregnant and unborn bodies. Many of the debates focus on the issue of "when life begins," centering on the interior issues of selfness and the spirit. Women have similarly struggled over reproductive rights and the right to birth control. Margaret Sanger, one of the most visible advocates for "voluntary motherhood," insisted that "a woman's body belongs to herself alone. It is her body. It does not belong to the Church. It does not belong to the United States of America or any other government on the face of the earth . . . . Enforced motherhood is the most complete denial of a woman's right to life and liberty" (as cited in Wood 62). Clearly, central to the issue at hand is the governance of the female body.

Another example of the state's attempt to legislate bodies is the continuing debate over the topic of assisted suicide. The highly publicized 12-year court battle over the life and death (and body) of Terri Schiavo is a key instance of this. Michael Schiavo, Terri's husband, asserted that his wife had no desire to live in a vegetative state. The Florida woman's family, however, fought to keep her alive. Despite the passing of the case through the Florida court system and the rulings of nine judges on the matter over the

years, on March 21, 2005 congress passed a bill which was immediately signed into law "that could trigger a federal court review and a quick restoration of feeding tubes needed to keep the brain-injured Florida woman alive."[1] The federal courts, however, turned down the motion, and the patient died just over a week later. This is but one example of legislation that has been introduced to attempt to regulate the body and outlaw suicide and euthanasia. The same issues of ownership and governance apply.

Bodies have also been used in social movements to attract attention, create physical barricades, and to signify opposing ideologies. Kevin Michael DeLuca, for example, describes the body rhetoric of activist groups such as "Earth First!," "Act Up," and "Queer Nation." He maintains that such groups rely on the dissemination of images of "vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies" to constitute "a nascent body rhetoric that deploys bodies as a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation" ("Unruly Arguments" 10). Such activist groups, he argues, use their bodies as both "flags to attract attention for the argument" and as "the site and substance of the argument itself" (10). The Human Shield movement uses bodies in a similar fashion. In January of 2003, hundreds of "Western anti-war activists" traveled to Iraq to act as human shields "to try and stop the rush to war."[2] The action assumed that the presence of socially valued Western (mostly white) bodies would act as a physical deterrent for the invasion of Iraq and the bombing and killing of (presumably) less valuable bodies. Clearly, then, the body functions as both a locus of political contestation and a useful resource for political argumentation. This chapter, however, focuses on spectacular body modification projects that are used to influence or modify a surrounding environment.

Body projects have thus far been discussed as projects of the self carried out to reach personal and social goals. As illustrated in chapter two, because of the articulation of selves and corporeality, bodies are located at the center of social relations and have been culturally situated as a form of currency valued by the self and other. If human bodies are the material gateways to inner subjectivity—indications of our inner quality, character, and social worth—then it is an easy move to claim that bodies should be preserved, maintained, and thought of as our most prized possessions. Actions that are read as intentionally trying to harm this cherished entity or as detracting from its perceived value, then, automatically gain public concern and even legislative attention.

The consequence is twofold. First, because of the sheer amount of attention paid to bodies and the manner in which Western society revels in its idealized form, individuals are compelled to *use* the body to reach personal, social, and political aims. Without the presumed connection between selfness and corporeality, individuals would not feel the need to express their identities, adhere to social standards, create identification with others, or signal political commitments on and through their bodies. Through this rhetorically constructed and upheld vision of corporeality, the human body has become, at once, a fixation and a distraction. The cultural obsession with bodies is evident upon first glance at a billboard, magazine, television program or commercial, or upon the first step into the classroom, workplace, or gym. More—we have *become* our bodies. Our happiness is our shrinking waistline, our contentment is our flawless skin, and our success is the adherence of our physique to cultural standards. In short, our sense of self and our health is not in how we feel, but how we look. If the two do not match up,

we do the best we can to use our bodies to mask our inner turmoil or shortcomings because it is that "self" that is most readily available to the other.

It is in this sense that bodies have become a distraction. Even when the connection between selves and bodies is acknowledged as rhetorical fantasy, an individual must exist in this world and a subject's constant "becoming" is dependent on the resources available to him/her. Whether or not one believes that the human body is, in fact, connected to their authentic inner self, he or she either devotes time and attention to their bodies to socially "pass" as a desired version of him/her self or consciously uses their bodies as a tool to reject this notion. The physical body is more easily modified than an individual's conception of his or her inner essence is. Likewise, a social and/or political condition is more easily modified than an ideological commitment to selfness and corporeality.

It is within this contour that political body projects occur, modifying bodies not to meet socially accepted versions of corporeality, but instead *using* the articulation of selves and bodies in order to modify social and political environments. Gerard Hauser writes, for example, of "the body's capacity to evoke responses to their peril and cause from a witnessing public, to bring pressure to bear on a disciplining authority, and sometimes even to overturn the plans of their oppressors" ("Body Rhetoric" 137). In this context Hauser discusses "rhetorical and political dimensions to pain" as bodies in pain have the power to "form deep and powerful identification among an audience that feels empathy for the sufferer's anguish" (135). In other words, because of the cultural infatuation with bodies, peculiar or shocking treatment or formation of bodies attracts attention which can be leveraged into political action.

The rest of this chapter is devoted to the description and analysis of body projects that are politically charged as a result of the assumptions outlined in the first two chapters. These practices rely on society's inclination to articulate bodies with selves and capitalize on the social valuing of bodies in order to affect social and political conditions. An analysis of these practices will further demonstrate how the meaningfulness of bodies is rhetorically constituted and constrained. Once the Western vision of corporeality is recognized as rhetorical construction, the ability for bodies to be more politically meaningful and useful is expanded and the rhetorical power of human bodies can be maximized.

The next section presents a rhetorical analysis of the documentary of a man who voluntarily makes himself fat as a statement of protest against the fast food industry. This discussion will illustrate the reliance of his political body modification project on strategic rhetorical framing, a cultural fascination with bodies and valuing of specific types of bodies, and an articulation of the human form with the intangible essence of the self.

The Politics of Fatness: Intentional Obesity and Fast Food Culture

In 2004, a documentary attacking the United State's obsession with fast food premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Soon after, the movie gained momentum with audiences and media alike, sparking public interest, controversy, and ultimately provoking change in major fast food corporations, social programs, and school systems. The documentary, Morgan Spurlock's Super Size Me, did not provide Americans with information that was not already available to them. The rhetorical

manner in which the information was presented, however, is what marked the documentary as note-worthy, framing the issues and arguments forwarded by Spurlock as urgent, compelling, and fascinating. Morgan Spurlock's claim is mundane and simple: fast food is harmful to your health. His method, however, capitalizes on Western culture's fascination with bodies and stigma of fatness to command attention and demand change.

"America has now become the fattest nation in the world," Spurlock states ominously at the beginning of the film. Spurlock and his audience understand that fatness is commonly viewed as a negative physical attribute and is thereby scolding Americans their socially disgraceful bodies. According to the film, "37 percent of American children and adolescents are carrying too much fat and two out of every three adults are overweight or obese." He immediately frames fatness as a problem which he later calls a "crisis" and "a national epidemic." The issues addressed by the documentary are highly visible in the society in which we live, especially since they deal with the presence of big corporations, advertisements, physical buildings, and bodies. These "problems" are material and we are surrounded by them every day. Spurlock's notion is that fast food corporations and fast food "culture" are to blame for America's problematic growing waistline. This perspective gives most responsibility to the major fast food distributors and views them as the reason for the cultural conditions that foster fatness. This framing, then, gives less responsibility to the individual who makes "poor" lifestyle choices, while continuing to condemn fatness on bodies.

To stage an outcry against the "obesity epidemic," Spurlock decides to take matters onto his own body. In response to a legal case in which a McDonald's plaintiff

argues that no direct causality can be established between their food and the health problems of those who have begun to sue the company, Spurlock concocted his plan. In the documentary, Spurlock wages a 30-day battle against the most prominent fast food chain, McDonald's, using his body as his primary weapon. His experiment is to "sacrifice" his own body to fast food culture in order to illuminate the dangers of fast food to the American consumer. "What would happen if I ate nothing but McDonald's for 30 days straight," he asks. "Would I suddenly be on the fast track to becoming an obese American? Would it be unreasonably dangerous? Let's find out. I'm ready. Super Size me." He clearly makes it clear at the offset that his primary tool of argumentation is the modification of his body. As previously mentioned, Spurlock's argument is not a new one, so the mere presentation of data supporting his claims is not enough to lend cultural urgency to his cause. To appeal to the seemingly apathetic public, then, he submits his body to a spectacular experiment that will explicitly alter his physical form. His body, then, is used as "a source of evidence and argument, an exemplification or what Aristotle would have called argument by *paradigma,* or example" (Hauser 138). He relies on the manipulation of his once socially desirable form into one that is on the "fast track" to being socially grotesque to jar his audience and as "proof" of his claims.

To make his point, Spurlock confines his diet to only McDonald's products for thirty days with four rules: 1) He must eat three square meals a day, no exceptions; 2) He can only eat what is available over the counter at McDonald's for those three meals; 3) He must "Super Size" his meal when asked; and 4) He must eat every item on the menu at least once. The documentary follows his "progress" for the month, as well as follows him around the country while he visits the "fattest" cities in the nation and interviews

experts in various fields pertaining to health, fast food, and obesity. The modification of his body becomes a particular case through which he will show causality between fast food and fatness, as well as an attention grabbing device through which to lure media and public interest.

Spurlock began his 30-day trial with a body that can be likened to ideal: white, male, and thin. Before he begins his diet of only fast food, he goes to three separate doctors, a nutritionist, and a fitness expert to assess the preliminary state of his body. These scenes proudly display his body as it is being poked, analyzed, and evaluated by these experts. All specialists agree that he is in "good," "great," "perfect," and even "outstanding" health and is "above average fitness for his age group." Spurlock's body at the beginning of the movie is offered as a symbol of the epitome of health. His weight is considered to be healthy, his cholesterol levels are low, his kidney and liver functions are optimal, and his diet is balanced. This is supplemented by his discussion of all of the vices he has given up and the conscious effort made by Spurlock to attain this somewhat ideal physique. He explains that he has given up drugs and smoking, completely abstains from alcohol, walks every day, and eats organic foods. This portion of the movie clearly functions on the premises that human bodies are socially valuable and that continual "maintenance" is required to keep them as such. Spurlock has done this throughout his life, dedicating himself to a lifestyle that would discipline his body in accordance to society's standards.

Spurlock's body modification is clearly political in nature as he offers up this symbol of desired healthfulness—his own body—in order to influence his cultural environment.[3] Spurlock creates a spectacle of his body modification and supplements this

exhibition with data that justify his actions both personally and socially in order to gain a desired response from his audience. Without the availability of images of Spurlock's body, the public would not be interested. Because we live in a media culture, the American public is bombarded with thousands of images and persuasive messages a day attempting to persuade and influence us. Spurlock creates a spectacle to separate his political message from others and capitalizes on the public interest in bodies to lend urgency to his cause. His spectacle of obesity, however, must be rhetorically framed to lend political significance to his body project in order to differentiate his practices from other displays of fatness.

The public, in turn, cannot validate Spurlock's intentional "self-harm" without his explicit political framing of his modification. Not only does he explicitly give meaning to his actions by describing the conditions of his "protest" and the intentions of his experiment, but also through the framing of the act of modification through his discussion of the physical and mental anguish experienced as a result of his "McDiet." Spurlock needs to make clear that the conditions resulting from his body modification are negatively affecting his body and his mind in order to provoke a desired response from his audience. Further, his voluntary subjection to such conditions for the "greater good" exalts his practices while condemning the practices he is mimicking.

For example, the second day of his experiment he attempts to eat a Super-Sized quarter pound cheeseburger, Super-Sized French fries, and a Super-Sized Coca-cola. After 20 minutes of struggling to finally finish the meal he describes his discomfort, sweating, nausea, and bloating and eventually vomits through the open window of his car. He has intentionally made himself sick to prove a point, and his condition only gets

worse as the experiment continues. Before the end of his session, several doctors and his girlfriend (a vegan chef) beg him to quit his experiment and warn him that he could be causing irreversible damage to his body that could have fatal results. On day 22 Spurlock gives a testimonial at 2:00 a.m. describing trouble sleeping and breathing and explains that he is worried to continue his project because he is experiencing chest pain. The next morning his general practitioner warns Spurlock that he is pickling his liver and the results could be life threatening. He advises Spurlock to abandon his efforts because he is explicitly making himself sick and can easily stop the process by stopping the experiment. Spurlock ignores his doctor's pleas and even refuses his advice to take an aspirin a day to avoid coronary problems. Under any other condition, his acts would be read as self-destructive and potentially symptomatic of mental illness. He voluntarily subjects himself to pain and discomfort and modifies his body contrary to normative standards, but his actions are not read as self-mutilation but rather as political protest. His self-harm is framed instead as acts of near-martyrdom, as he is "sacrificing" his body and health for the public good.

Another doctor tells him that he is developing physiological signs of addiction to the fast food. The framing of Spurlock's body as becoming dependent of the fast food makes him (through his body) seem vulnerable and docile. As his body becomes dependent on the food, so does his mind, constructing both as being weak and "at risk." Though seemingly intended to be in defense of those dependent on fast food, this actually contributes to the social stigmatization of fat. This move pathologizes the drive for fast food, and thus, the physical state of fatness. This pathologization of fatness further enhances the stigma placed on the physical trait while Spurlock voluntarily subjects

himself to this shame. This move frames "regular" fatness as a signifier of lack of self-restraint, laziness, and even addiction while further framing his own practices as acts of heroism and martyrdom. Further, Spurlock's girlfriend discusses the negative impact the experiment is having on their sex life. She notes fatigue, loss in stamina, and eventually, a decrease in libido as a result of the physical changes he is undergoing. This allows the persuasiveness of his body to capitalize on Western culture's sanctification of male heterosexuality. According to authors Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, Western culture is characterized by heteronormativity.[4] According to Lauren Berlant, heteronormativity is a "fixed sign in the national language" ("Live Sex Acts" 297) and is inherent in our national identity. Heteronormativity, then, is thought of as both a trait of a legitimate citizen and a liberty to be exercised by legitimate citizens. The fact that Spurlock's deliberate fatness has detracted from his ability to exhibit this prized trait of maleness further frames his acts of modification as sacrificial for the greater good, as it indefinitely detracts from his legitimacy as a citizen.

Spurlock's body, once a symbol of normative health, is intentionally modified inside and out in order to, in turn, modify his environment. The process of this modification is charted and made highly visible to his audience and sensationalized through the use of media in order to demand attention. By the end of the 30-day experiment, Spurlock has added 25 pounds to his once "normal" physique, as well increasing his body fat by 7 percent, and adding 65 points to his cholesterol level. He has also experienced "severe damage" to his liver and kidneys and doubled his risk of heart disease. In short, he has taken a socially desirable body and transformed it into one that is socially undesirable. This "undesirable" body (his end result, though overweight for his

height, is still below the average body mass index for his age group) is prominently displayed on a scale in a skin-tight American flag imprinted Speedo for all to see. This vision links the symbol of the American flag, which normally connotes positive values, with the negative symbol of fatness. His exhibition suggests that fast food culture is tarnishing America's dominant mythology, and that we can reject this negative association through our own bodily performances.

Spurlock's spectacle of obesity, in fact, succeeded. Though Spurlock did not definitively put an end to the "obesity epidemic," put McDonald's out of business, or keep customers away from the golden arches forever, he was able to gain visibility and influence fast food culture. Soon after the film gained national attention, McDonald's removed the "Super Size" option from its menu and added the "Go Active" adult Happy Meal. McDonald's also developed a new strategic advertising campaign that emphasized their healthier menu options. Spurlock's spectacle also engaged audiences, raising awareness about fast food corporations and their products while persuading audience members to make healthier lifestyle choices and encouraging them to, if not abandon fast food all together, seek alternatives whenever possible.

Spurlock's use of his body to enact a political cause is clearly founded in the assumption that bodies are to be used to achieve desired social aims. The success of his spectacle is dependent on the public fixation on physicality and the dominant reading of bodies as tangible selves. Though functioning within these cultural assumptions, Spurlock used them to further a political agenda. Spurlock's case, however, does not stand alone. Similarly, other body modification projects utilize these same assumptions to manipulate and influence environments. The next section will interrogate other body

modification projects that manipulate bodies to manipulate environments. Specifically, the following analysis focuses on two explicitly political practices of body modification—hunger strikes and acts of self immolation. Discussion of these practices will further illustrate the reliance of political body projects on cultural assumptions that link corporeality with interiority, and treat the body as a malleable apparatus to be used in social transactions.

The Rhetoric of Mortality: The Politics of Bodily Sacrifice

Based on the major premises of this project, I argue that any act of body modification has the potential to become political in nature. For the purposes of demonstration and analysis of such body projects, however, I will focus on two other practices of body modification that are explicitly political in nature through the framing of their intent, the social reading of their practice, and through social and political effect. These body projects are hunger strikes and self-immolation.

Like Spurlock's spectacle of obesity, the hunger strike is an intentional act of body modification that uses the manipulation of weight and the threat of illness or death to seek social and/or political change. According to Gerard Hauser, "the hunger strike is an attempt at subverting a superior power by becoming helpless before it" ("Body Rhetoric" 139). Hauser asserts that self-starvation is a rhetorical technique that produces a type of body "that can capture our attention by the sheer spectacle of its wasting away" (139). The hunger strike has been a form of non-violent protest for hundreds of years. The most famous cases of non-violent protest through self-starvation were those of Mahatma Gandhi who engaged in several hunger strikes to struggle for justice and

independence in India. According to Code Pink, a social organization of "women for peace," the influence of a hunger strike "rests on the seriousness of the issue, and the gravity of putting one's body on the line."[5] The seriousness of an issue, however, is relative. Hunger strikes *use* the spectacle of a physically deteriorating body to make an otherwise overlooked issue important to society through an exploited cultural interest in corporeality. Incidentally, Code Pink has mobilized "Troops Home Fast!" a collective of women in opposition to the Iraq war. These women have camped out on the White House lawn in staged fasts in an attempt to "end this illegal, unjust, and deadly war." Though the message of Code Pink does not differ from that of many other anti-war campaigns, the manner through which they communicate this message is much different. By putting their bodies "on the line," these women are not only demanding public attention and demonstrating the importance of this issue to the interest group, but are also lending urgency to the issue through the imminent threat of bodily harm and death.

The attention demanded by a spectacle of starvation depends on the predefined premise that the physical state of bodies is indicative of the metaphysical state of the self. This presupposition frames the deteriorating body as a deteriorating self, powerless and in the hands of the higher authority. This strategy "poses a moral dilemma to the authorities: either yield to save [a] life or, by refusing to fold, stand publicly condemned for [their] moral intransigence" (Hauser 139). Clearly, the logic behind the enacting and interpretation of hunger striking rests on basic assumptions about the body as it is assumed to function in relation to the self and to the other. The striker envisions his/her body as a political tool that can be manipulated to achieve desired social responses and assumes that the body will be an effective rhetorical device through which he/she can

influence the environment. Further, the efficacy of the body in provoking social and political change depends on the underlying articulation of corporeality with selfness which places the body at the center for social relations.

One underlying necessity for the hunger strike to be successful in the modification of one's environment, however, is a witnessing public to interpret the act. This interpretation is underscored by cultural assumptions of the uses and functions of the body in personal, social, and political situations. Because of the dependency on a sympathetic witnessing public, the hunger striker must frame the body in such a way that provokes a desired response from that public. This framing should provide adequate signification for the practice, indicate the subject of protest and the conditions under which it is to occur, and create identification with the witnessing public. This is what lends the act of body modification its political signification as opposed to a stigmatized association of mental illness or disease.

For example, in 1995 a group of students went on a hunger strike to garner public interest and support in the development of a new program at Northwestern University. Before the students resorted to the bodily spectacle of self-starvation, the efforts of the Asian American Advisory Board (AAAB), a student organization at Northwestern University, to establish an Asian American Studies Program at the university were continuously thwarted despite President Henry S. Bienen's assertion that he had "an open mind about [the program]."[6] After several months of the university administration considering the proposal and making excuses for the stalling of the program, the AAAB and other concerned students embarked on a hunger strike to attract attention to the issue and add urgency and momentum to their requests. The hunger strikers camped outside of

a campus landmark, gave press interviews, and even made a documentary noting their cause and their progress. The president responded in a letter: "I am concerned about you and the means of dissent you have chosen to support your proposal for an Asian American Studies program, and particularly so because it puts you at risk. Your safety and welfare are important to us."[7] He concludes the letter urging the students once again to abandon their strike and to "make a commitment to us, by working with us, to bring the Asian American experience and culture to the curriculum in a permanent, meaningful way." The hunger strike lasted 21 days and attracted much student, faculty, and media attention. Though the program was not officially created until 1999, by the end of the strike the university had committed to developing the program and began discussing timelines and funds.

The progress made by the AAAB was not due to the urgency of the establishment of their desired program. Rather, it was the public's arousal of interest in the manner of protest that built the momentum of the AAAB's cause. The students who embarked on the hunger strike worked within the public fixation on physicality and envisioned their bodies as political tools that can be used and manipulated to reach specific ends. Clearly, the hunger striking of the Northwestern students functions in a similar capacity to the spectacle of obesity enacted by Spurlock in his documentary. Both acts of body modification depend on a normative conception of "valued" bodies and how they function in relation to the self and to the other. This conception is *used* by the modifier in order to exploit this value to gain attention and concern from an audience. The practice of modification is contrary to cultural logic and the spectacle of an intentionally obese or starved body confuses and alarms the interpreter of the act. Though the cultural

fascination with bodies is what makes this method of rhetorical performance enticing and effective, it is the framing of the act that lends the body political agency. An anorexic body is altered in the same fashion as a hunger striker's body, but the framing of the practice is what differentiates the two acts of self-starvation. In light of this framing, one starved body signifies a disturbed self while the other signifies an emancipated political self.

These same premises are at the heart of other politically charged yet socially outrageous spectacles of bodily sacrifice. Self-immolation, the act of surrendering one's mortality through bodily sacrifice, is often carried out by setting one's own body on fire. This act is alleged to have commenced with Thich Quang Duc, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, in a public protest against political oppression in Saigon. Since this symbolic act, American activists have mimicked this practice in anti-war protesting of the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the Iraq War.[8] The practice of self-immolation has its roots in Buddhism. The *Lotus Sutra,* a Buddhist holy text, is said to "provide the doctrinal basis" for self-immolation as it describes a key figure offering his own body to the Buddha through "various acts of self-mutilation, including burning his body" (Slosberg, "A Question of Violence" 25). The origins of this practice alone, then, illustrate the practice's dependency on an assumed linkage between spirituality and the human form.

The most notable American act of self-immolation was carried out by Norman Morrison on November 2, 1965 in protest to the Vietnam War. Though it was the second American self-immolation to occur in protest to the Vietnam War (Alice Herz was the first), Morrison's display generated more attention and had greater impact. Morrison's self-inflicted death took place at the Pentagon, where, accompanied by his one-year-old

daughter Emily, he doused himself with gasoline and set him self on fire. This spectacle of political suicide occurred within 100 feet of the office of a man instrumental in the continued U.S. involvement in the war—Secretary of Defense Robert McNamera. Though eye-witness accounts of the event contradict each other and Morrison did not leave a suicide note explicitly outlining the meanings of his acts, the spectacle of Morrison's body engulfed in flames drew international attention, and friends, family, and media alike described the event as "a deeply personal action against the Vietnam War."[9] The day after his political suicide, Morrison's wife received a letter from her husband postmarked from Washington D.C. which read: "Know that I love thee but must act for the children in the priest's village."[10] Anne Morrison, Norman's wife, later recalled her husband's increasing concern about the U.S involvement in the war and his belief that "if the war continued it would take a heavy toll on the conscience of America."[11] Morrison died for his cause, but his baby daughter survived.

Morrison's self-immolation did not end the United State's involvement in the war, but his protest was recognized by the North Vietnamese government and the people of Vietnam "were profoundly moved by his sacrifice" (Biggs, "The Transnational Diffusion of Protest by Self-Immolation" 26). The government has even gone so far as to issue a stamp in his honor, name a street after him, and his practice "became an inspiration for further immolations in South Vietnam" (Biggs 26). To this day, Quakers, students, and anti-war activists in America commemorate the day he took his life and consider his act of suicide a heroic display of anti-war activism.

The honor Morrison received from the Vietnamese, as well as the continued recognition Morrison receives all over the world as a hero and an advocate for peace,

could not have been achieved without his spectacular rhetoric of dissent. Morrison's actions captured worldwide attention and made the violence and tragedy "more immediate for the American public" (Biggs 30). The implicit link between self-immolation and spirituality fosters a public reading of Morrison's suicide as an action of a spiritually sound self, lending credibility to his cause and vindicating him from a normatively condemned act. The understanding of a spiritually sound self is central to the public's exalting of a practice that is generally thought of as "sinful." Further, the routine articulation of selfness with physicality contributes to the horror of the spectacle—instead of merely watching the destruction of a material entity, this assumption leads the watching public to believe they are witnessing the ruin of a soul—a grieving, pained soul. The death of his body (spirit) is interpreted as a great sacrifice, as Morrison has given up his most valuable commodity to a political cause. His selfness (body) has been destroyed in public view, making the object of the practice's perceived signification—those annihilated in the Vietnam War—have greater meaning to the reader of the act.

Clearly, the acts performed by the students at Northwestern University and byNorman Morrison at the pentagon go about very different ways to affect very different environments. The body, however, is the locus of political agency in both cases. Further, both cases use spectacular forms of body modification to draw public attention and to conduct political action. These practices parallel the spectacle of obesity enacted by Morgan Spurlock in his documentary. As demonstrated in all three of these cases, the ability to use the body as a political tool rests within the cultural assumptions discussed in chapters two and three of this project. The success of political body projects relies on the use of these assumptions, while the enactor simultaneously deconstructs them.

Conclusions

Whether or not these practices are perceived as positive or negative, their effectiveness cannot be denied. All of the aforementioned cases describe acts of body modification that somehow modify or influence the practitioner's surrounding environment. The understanding of the body as a political device stems from culturally upheld beliefs about how the body functions in relation to the self and to the other. Because of the assumed relationship between selfness and corporeality, bodies are used as tools of the self to reach desired aims. These presumed relations are cultural fictions that ultimately constrain the body's potential uses, functions, and significations within certain contexts.

The politicized body, however, cannot exist extra-culturally. The ability for a body to have political significance depends on its social reading within a cultural context. The effectiveness of political body modification projects, then, depends on an ability to work within these confines while simultaneously rethinking these fundamental assumptions about selfness and corporeality. Spurlock's experiment, the students at Northwestern, and Norman Morrison, for instance, would not have captured the attention of the media and the general public without the public's fascination with bodies. The exposure these spectacles received is a result of this national fixation on physicality and the social valuing of certain types of bodies. Fueled by an ideology that assumes that bodies publicize our inner worth, these projects encourage the normative social reading of these practices—an intentional modification of a valuable body into one that is "worthless"—in order to startle the audience and provoke confusion and awe. These

"protests" are sensationalized because their methods are to intentionally depreciate the value of a socially precious asset. In so doing, however, they actually cash in on this value—they *use* the assumptions discussed in the first two chapters to influence their environments.

The social fixation on physicality is linked to an assumed relationship with the essential self, but the individual embarking on a politically charged body project does not necessarily see it this way. In order to effectively carry out the practice to achieve specific aims, the modifier disarticulates selfness from physicality in order to *use* the body in its full political capacity. Though unhealthy, frail, and/or deformed bodies pull at the public's conscience and remind the spectator of deficiency (mental, physical, social, political) and even death, to become a political act the modifier must disarticulate self from body to consciously perform the act and gain authority in the public eye. If the political modifier's "self" is socially perceived as ill or unsound then the act of body modification loses public significance. In order for political body projects to be effective, the public must be concerned for the state of the modifier's self and body while convinced of the soundness of the practices being carried out. The enactor of the practice, then, must simultaneously separate his/her "self" from physical form in order to sacrifice the body for a perceived greater good, while capitalizing on the assumption that the two are inextricably linked for rhetorical effect. The effectiveness of such spectacles depends on the public's inclination to mystify acts of modification that are seemingly incongruous with cultural assumptions while continuing to function within them.

Notes

[1] "Congress: Let feds hear Terri's case: House votes overwhelmingly to make Schiavo case federal" 21 March 2005 *World Net Daily* 21 March 2007 www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=43406

[2] Stefan Simanowitz. "The Human Shield Movement." *Z Magazine Online,* 16.11 (2003):1-5.

[3] It is important to note here that "health" and "healthfulness" are loaded terms that are culturally constructed and are not necessarily indicative of optimal bodily functions.

[4] For more on heteronormativity, see Warner (1991); Berlant (1997); Berlant and Warner (1998).

[5] "Troops Home Fast!" Code Pink. 14 March 2007. www.codepinkalert.org

[6] As cited in a letter to Robert Yap, president of the Asian American Advisory Board, from Henry S. Bienen, president of Northwestern University on February 14, 1995. The letter was a response to a series of proposals, suggestions, timelines, and deadlines in the development of the proposed program. Bienen claimed that he was not against the program, but cited issues such as faculty resources, cost, and priorities as reasons for the lack of advancement for the program.

[7] As cited in a letter addressed to "Our Students Participating in the Hunger Strike" on April 17, 1995.

[8] Andrew Lam. "The Extreme Dissent—Self Immolation" *New America Media.* 30 November 2006 http://news.newamericamedia.org

[9] "A Day Without the Pentagon: Historic Pentagon Actions" 15 March 2007*War Resisters.* 08 November 1998. www.warresisters.org/history.htm.

[10] Published in "Winds of Peace: Newsletter for Madison Friends' Projects in Veit Nam" 2 (2000): 4.

[11] "Winds of Peace," 4.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The substantive chapters of this thesis provide an in-depth look at several practices of body modification that illustrate how the body is understood to function personally, socially, and politically in Western culture. The cases of Dennis Avner, Frank Marino, Cindy Jackson, Mike Kendall, Morgan Spurlock, the AAAB, Norman Morrison, and the like are all very different instances of body modification that, when analyzed together, demonstrate a set of cultural assumptions that animate how the body will be conceptualized, used, and socially read. These assumptions have situated the body to function as a publication, socialization, and political device. The purpose of this thesis, then, has been to demystify and complicate normative conceptions of the body and its modification as it is presumed to function in contemporary society in order to "free up" the body's potential to be rhetorically meaningful in new ways.

Chapter two, "No Body Knows the Real Me: Interiorizing the Body," discussed the routine articulation of the body with interiority, or the rhetorical scene of selfhood. Throughout the analysis, I demonstrated how this articulation can be used to collapse the continuum of body modification practices. I have demonstrated how very dissimilar acts, at least at some level, utilize this conceptualization of the body. Further, I reveal how this association equates many practices that, at the level of intentionality, should not be likened. It is in this way that assumptions about how the body relates to the essential self

constrict potential rhetorical uses of the body because of the limits it places on personal and social readings of the human form. Bodily practices of selfhood are cultural practices that produce and are produced by their own materiality. Different types of body projects, then, are social categories that are rhetorically constructed and thus can be rhetorically deconstructed.

In other words, this chapter examines and problematizes the presumed connection between the physical and the metaphysical in order to explore the rhetorical potentiality of the body. My argument is that there is no necessary relation between meaning and practice. This familiar connection between the two fuels practices that ideologically reaffirm a fantasy of corporeality that is necessarily related to a "core" self. This fantasy presupposes that there *is* an essential self, it can be realized, and that it is (or should be) accessible to others through the exterior physical form. The cases discussed in this chapter illustrated these assumptions at work, as well as began to show ruptures between these associations.

Though it is not the purpose of this project to measure the existence of an essential interior self, I do wish to recognize that a cultural attachment to this entity is rhetorically perpetuated through our bodily practices. The inclination to relate one's physical condition to the condition of the self is the result of an ideological assumption about how the body can and should function. This articulation promotes the conscious and intentional manipulation of the physical form to communicate our perceptions of our self and identity. Clearly, these effects are the products of the rhetorical environments in which we live. The social understanding (or misunderstanding) and acceptance (or

rejection) of body projects is determined by how each instance is rhetorically framed both by the individual and their cultural context.

These self-perpetuating cultural assumptions give rise to issues of sociality. As a direct result of the assumed link between the inner self and the body, public subjects consciously manipulate the states of their bodies to reflect feelings of interiority. Based on these assumptions, body modification becomes socially valued as an expression of selfhood—a material practice that is symptomatic of the transcendental state within. Once bodies are envisioned as having certain properties and associations, they are read intertextually with other bodies according to a certain set of standards. Thus, the third chapter, "Modifying Society: Interiority and Corporeal Sociality," interrogated the use of the body as a social device based on this intertextual relation. This chapter argued that the social "realities" of bodies are cultural constructions that depend on the interplay of rhetoric, hierarchy, and power. Bodies exist, I argue, within a rhetorical hierarchy of corporeality that favors certain modes of physicality and methods of its production, maintenance, and manipulation.

In other words, chapter three illuminates how the routine articulation of bodies with selfness has charged bodies with social significance and value. The cases described in this chapter demonstrate a belief that the body either *is* a manifestation of the interior self, or that it will be socially read as such. Because of this belief, bodies have been articulated with qualities of competence, character, and inner worth. This association situates bodies as the materialization of dominant themes in American ideology, determining what is culturally honored and valued (and what is not). The material transference of such worth perpetuates this myth, which in turn pressures individuals to

be conscious of societal standards of physicality. In short, within the cultural "reality" of the human body lies a rhetorical vision of corporeal socialization. The shape, form, and manner of production of a body, then, determine how bodies, and thus, selves, are socialized.

The issues discussed in chapters two and three culminate in a discussion of political body projects in chapter four, "Political Selves, Political Bodies: Modifying the Body Politic." This chapter provided a discussion of the body as a locus of political action and signification, and illustrates how such agency is drawn from assumptions linking the body with selfness, sociality, and citizenship. The discussion of political body projects in this chapter worked toward opening up new avenues for conceptualizing the body within the confines of the aforementioned assumptions. Political body projects begin to demonstrate how routine articulations between the essential self, the external self, and the social self can be rhetorically productive and politically useful. Though these practices rely on the dominant associations I have argued to deconstruct, their ability to modify conditions and environments depends both on the use of these assumptions and their disarticulation.

The purpose of chapter four, then, was to illustrate a "way in" to a nuanced vision of rhetorical body projects. Though I have argued for a disarticulation of the body from the essential self and social worth—in short, meaning from practice—it is impossible to understand the body aculturally. As previously stated, bodies exist intertextually with other bodies within a larger cultural context of status and power. It is unreasonable, then, to ask for a complete cultural reconceptualization of the uses and functions of the body. My recommendation would be no better, as I to am bound by my own ideology, and thus,

so are my notions about how the body can and should function personally, socially, and politically. I do argue, however, for a rethinking of the social categorization of body projects as a cultural fiction, and forward a more "radically empirical" way to look at the uses of bodies and the meanings of body modification projects.

I have, to this point, argued that the distinctions between self-maintenance, body modification, and self-mutilation are rhetorical designations. That is not to say that particular body projects are not productive or destructive. As I illustrated in chapter four, acts that are socially read as "destructive," "harmful," or "unhealthy" can actually be used to achieve aims that are socially acknowledged as being "productive," "useful," or "industrious." The point I have made, then, is that the rhetorical significance of a body project cannot be determined *a priori.* For example, Anorexia is socially frowned upon while hunger strikes are viewed as being executed to achieve a dignified goal. Both practices are the same, but their meanings, and more specifically, their effects, are very different. Both projects are read as harmful, but one is *using* that assumption while disarticulating self from body in order to achieve a desired aim. As I previously argued, the effectiveness of political body modification projects depends on an ability to capitalize on cultural assumptions—in effect, rhetorically *use* them while simultaneously rethinking their roles in the body modification process.

The ability for these projects to have a social or political effect, though, depends on a cultural fixation on bodies that is perpetuated by the assumptions discussed in this project. The rhetorical vision of the body that our society holds simultaneously restricts its potential uses, while allowing for these projects to produce effects. Fueled by an ideology that assumes that bodies publicize our inner worth, political projects encourage

the normative social reading of these practices in order to startle the audience and arouse confusion and awe. Without this sensationalization of bodies, these projects would not provoke the response necessary to influence cultural environments.

So the conclusion of this project rests at a paradox. On one hand, it is necessary to recognize cultural myths about the body in order to move beyond them. Assuming that the physical state of the body is reminiscent of an essential inner being binds body modification projects that could otherwise be rhetorically useful and effective in other ways. Further, assuming that a particular act of body modification is "destructive" or "trivial" before examining practice, intention, and effect would be negligent.

Bodies and body modification certainly deserve further analysis and criticism from rhetoricians. The body is bound up in discourse, ideology, power, and effect. This project has begun to shed light on the sheer rhetoricity of the body, but further investigation is required to unveil and unleash the human body's potential to be rhetorically significant in new ways.

WORKS CITED

"A Day Without the Pentagon: Historic Pentagon Actions" 15 March 2007*War Resisters.* 08 November 1998. www.warresisters.org/history.htm.

Associated Press. "Being 25 in the Fast Lane Lands Spears in Rehab" 21 February 2007 www.cnn.com

Albin, Drema Dial. "Making the Body (W)hole: A Semiotic Exploration of Body Modifications." *Psychodynamic Practice*, 12(2006): 19-35.

Berlant, Lauren. "Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory: Explicit Material)." In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship,* pp. 277-301. North Carolina: Duke UP, 1997.

Berlant, Lauren & Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry,* 24.2 (1998): 547-566.

Biesecker, Barbara A. "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Différance." *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 22(1989): 110-130.

Biggs, Michael. "The Transnational Diffusion of Protest by Self-Immolation." Presented at the International Colloquium Crossing Borders. On the Road toward Transnational Social Movement Analysis, Social Science Research Center, Berlin. 6 October 2006.

Blair, Carole. "Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric's Materiality" In Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Eds.) *Rhetorical Bodies.* Madison: the University of Madison Press, 1999.

---. "Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places." *Western Journal of Communication,* 65(2001): 271-294.

Brummett, Barry and Detine L. Bowers. "Subject Positions as a Site of Rhetorical Struggle: Representing African Americans." In Thomas Rosteck (Ed.) *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies.* New York: Guilford Press, 1999: 117-136.

Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

---. *The Rhetoric of Religion; Studies in Logology.* Berkely: University of California Press, 1970.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

---. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies,* 2 (2005): 1-19.

Castronovo, Russ. *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

"Congress: Let Feds Hear Terri's Case: House Votes Overwhelmingly to Make Schiavo Case Federal." 21 March 2005 *World Net Daily* 21 March 2007 www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=43406

Crowley, Sharon. "Afterward." In Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Eds.) *Rhetorical Bodies.* Madison: the University of Madison Press, 1999.

Deluca, Kevin Michael. "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation." *Argumentation and Advocacy,* 36(1999): 9-21.

Downs, A.C. & Lyons, P.M. "Natural Observations of the Links Between Attractiveness and Initial Legal Judgments." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 17(1991): 541-547.

"Extreme Makeover" TV.com. 20 February 2007. http://www.tv.com/extreme-makeover/show/18722/summary.html

Farber, Leora. "Skin Aesthetics." *Theory, Culture, and Society,* 23(2006): 247-250

Featherstone, Mike. "Body Modification: An Introduction." *Body & Society,* 5.2 (1999): 1-13.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Random House, Inc.: New York, 1977.*

Gimlin, Debra L. *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

Goldman, William and Philip Lewis. "Beautiful is Good: Evidence that the Physically Attractive are More Socially Skillful." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 13(1977): 125-130.

Greene, Ronald Walter. "Another Materialist Rhetoric." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication,* 15(1998):21-41.

Grossberg, Lawrence. "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics." *Cultural Studies,* 12(1988): 377-391.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994.

Gunn, Joshua and Shaun Treat. "Zombie Trouble: A Propaedeutic on Ideological Subjectification and the Unconscious," *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 91.2 (2005): 144-174.

Hariman, Robert. "Status, Marginality, and Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 72 (1986): 38-54.

Hauser, Gerard. "Body Rhetoric: Conflicted Reporting of Bodies in Pain. In S. Chambers & A. Costain (Eds.) *Deliberation, Democracy, and the Media* (pp. 135-153). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Hawhee, Debra. "Language as Sensuous Action: Sir Richard Paget, Kenneth Burke, and Gesture-Speech Theory." *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 92.4 (2006): *331-354.*

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Birthmark" pp. 10-23 in *Young Goodman Brown and Other Short Stories.* Dover Publications, Inc.: New York, 1992.

Hellmich, Nanci. "Do Thin Models Warp Girls' Body Image?" *USA Today.* 26 September 2006

Herf, Jeffrey. "Ideologies in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on Nazi Germany and the Pro-Slavery South." Presented at the Yale Gilder-Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance and Abolition at Yale. 18 September 2006.

"Introduction." *Early American Literature,* 36.1(2001): 1-7.

Jackson, Cindy. *The Living Doll.* Great Britain: Metro Publishing, Ltd, 2002.

"Jared the Subway Guy, Superstar." *CNN.* 17 November 2003

Kendall, Miles. "Miles' Ramblings." 20 February 2007. *The Official Website of Miles Kendall* www.mileskendall.com

Lam, Andrew. "The Extreme Dissent—Self Immolation" *New America Media.* 30 November 2006. http://news.newamericamedia.org.

Leff, Michael and Andrew Sachs. "Words the Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text." *Western Journal of Speech Communication,* 15(1990): 252-273.

Marikar, Sheila. "Bald and Broken: Inside Britney's Shaved Head. Shaving off Her Hair and Tattooing Her Body May Be Spears' Way of Finding a Fresh Start." 19 February 2007. www.abcnews.com

McKerrow, Raymie E. "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis." *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 91-111.

---. "Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric: A Site for Rhetoric's Future." TheSouthern Communication Journal, 63(1998): 315-328.

"Modify!" 2006. Committed Films LLC 12 October 2006. www.modifythemovie.com

Modify. Dir. Greg Jacobson and Jason Gary. Committed Films, LLC, 2005.

Morrison, Anne. "Winds of Peace: Newsletter for Madison Friends' Projects in Veit Nam" 2 (2000): 4.

ODAN: Opus Dei Awareness Network. 2002. ODAN 25 January, 2007. www.odan.org/corporeal_mortification.htm

Perrine, Stephen. "Metrosexual is out, Macho is In." *ABC News.* 19 June 2006 http://abcnews.go.com

Pitts, Victoria. "Body Modification, Self-Mutilation, and Agency in Media Accounts of Subculture." *Body & Society,* 5.2 (1999): 291-303.

---. *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification.* New York: Palgrave, 2003.

Richmond, V.P. and McCroskey, J.P. *Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2004.

Rosen, Christine. "The Democratization of Beauty." *The New Atlantis,* 5(2004): 19-35

Schlesinger, Richard. "Becoming Barbie: Living Dolls" *CBS News.* Aug 6, 2004. www.cbsnews.com/stories

Seiter, J.S. & Dunn, D. "Beauty and Believability in Sexual Harassment Cases: Does Physical Attractiveness Affect Perceptions of Veracity and the Likelihood of Being Harassed?" *Communication Research Reports,* 17(2000): 203-209.

Shildrick, Magrit. "This Body Which is Not One: Dealing with Differences." *Body & Society,* 5.2 (1999): 77-92

Simanowitz, Stefan. "The Human Shield Movement." *Z Magazine Online,* 16.11 (2003): 1-5.

Slossberg, Aaron Romero. "A Question of Violence: Buddhism and Acts of Self-Immolation During the Vietnam War." *Quaestio,* (2004): 25-30.

SuicideGirls. 2006. SuicideGirls.com. 25 July 2006. http://www.suicidegirls.com

Stormer, Nathan. "Articulation: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and Taxis." *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 90*(2004): 257-284.

Sullivan, Nikki. *Tattooed Bodies: Subjectivity, Textuality, Ethics, and Pleasure.* Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001.

Super Size Me: A Film of Epic Proportions. Dir. Morgan Spurlock. Hart Sharp Video, LLC, 2004.

Sweet, Derek. "More than Goth: The Rhetorical Reclamation of the Subcultural Self." *Popular Communication*, 3(2005): 219-264.

Sweetman, Paul. "Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self? Body Modification, Fashion, and Identity." *Body & Society,* 5.2-3 (1999): 51-76.

"Troops Home Fast!" Code Pink. 14 March 2007. www.codepinkalert.org

Urdy, J.R. and Eckland, B.K. "Benefits of Being Attractive: Differential Payoffs for Men and Women." *Psychological Reports,* 54(1977): 47-56.

"Vital and Health Statistics." 30 August 2006 *National Center for Health Statistics.* www.cdc.gov/nchs

Vivian, Bradford. "The Threshold of the Self." *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 33(2000): 303-318.

Walsh, John. "Cindy Jackson: 'Britain's most surgically enhanced woman'" *The Independent,* 25 January 2006.

Warner, Michael. "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet." *Social Text,* 4(1991): 3-17.

Zakahi, W.R. & Duran, R.L. "Attraction, Communicative Competence and Communication Satisfaction." *Communication Research Reports,* 1(1984): 1-4.

Wood, Julia. *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, & Culture.* Thompson Wadsworth: Australia, 2005.

VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Allison Renée Kaminsky

Local Address:
1724 Anzio Street
Las Vegas, Nevada 89108

Home Address
P.O. Box 600
Mesilla, New Mexico 88046

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, Journalism and Mass Communications, 2005
New Mexico State University

Special Honors and Awards:
Second Place in the Humanities Platform Session at the Graduate and Professional Student Association Research Forum, UNLV, March 31, 2007.

Grant Recipient, research travel award. Funded by the Graduate and Professional Student Association, UNLV, Spring 2006.

Graduate Assistantship, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (August 2005—May 2007).

Stanislaus-Bielski-Larry Graham Academic Scholarship, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2006 – Spring 2007).

Thesis Title: Bodily Poetics: The Rhetorical Politics of the Self

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairman, Dr. Donovan Conley, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Tara Emmers-Sommer, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. David Henry, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Kate Hausbeck, Ph. D.