

Beauty Marks: Counter-hegemonic Power of the Body?

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## **Abstract**

My dissertation furthers a conversation about beauty and the body in communication studies by considering how beauty standards, norms and practices operate within techniques and tactics of power in diverse modes of communication. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the dissertation re-figures 'beauty' as a meaningful concept, considering it not just as an instrument of (patriarchal) domination but also as part of techniques and tactics of resistance to domination. The claim of my dissertation is that beauty should be re-conceptualized in ways that counter the generally accepted notion of the term, particularly in the field of communication studies (Smith, 1990; Marvin, 2006), where media practices are held mainly to reproduce unattainable body ideals that are designed to keep women in positions of subordination (Bordo, 1993/2003; Brand, 2000; Kilbourne, 2000; Wolfe, 1991). It also brings some nuances to cultural studies scholarship that suggests that the body is not only a natural entity but is often culturally produced in line with patriarchal, capitalist and racist interests (Collins, 1990; Hall, 1997; Phillips, 2004).

Through an analysis of diverse practices of communication situated in different contexts, I investigate the ways in which beauty standardisation and normalisation practices can operate in processes of counter-hegemony. Operating from the starting point that beauty is a social construct and tied to communication and media practices, I examine its operation in different types and techniques of power and resistance using three case studies: 1) propaganda posters and face-to-face communication under German Fascism; 2) fashion blogging and social media practices; and 3) neo-burlesque theatre.

I use the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony developed by Gramsci and Milliband and introduced to the areas of communication and culture by Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Martin-Barbero to extend beyond a top down model of power. To complement this approach, I borrow from a Foucauldian model of power and resistance, using the notions of governmentality, subjectification, bio-power, and technologies of the self to flesh out a non-hierarchical type of power that targets the body. This conceptual framework finally uses Butler's notion of gender performativity and de Certeau's concept of tactics to go more deeply into some aspects of my three case studies.

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I dedicate this thesis to my two grandmothers, Elsie Rubenstein and Henryka (Nusia) Klein, who taught me about the power of beauty inside and out. And to Wren Eloïse, my daughter, who teaches me about the beauty of passion, devotion and accomplishment. This is for you.

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## Introduction

‘Beauty’ is often occluded as an area of inquiry in the field of communication studies (Smith, 1990; Marvin, 2006).<sup>1</sup> When beauty in terms of its relation to the body is discussed in communication scholarship, it is usually explored through a feminist lens in which representational and media practices reproduce unattainable body ideals that are designed to keep women in positions of subordination (Bordo, 1993/2003; Brand, 2000; Kilbourne, 2000; Wolfe, 1991). Cultural studies scholars further suggest that beauty and the body is not only a natural entity but is culturally produced in line with patriarchal, capitalist and racist interests (Collins, 1990; Hall, 1997; Phillips, 2004). Using an interdisciplinary approach, the general objective of my dissertation is to re-figure ‘beauty’ as a meaningful concept in communication studies, not just as an instrument of (patriarchal) domination but also as part of techniques and tactics of resistance. The claim of my dissertation is that beauty should be re-conceptualized as countering the generally accepted notion of the term.

Beauty is often associated with the body. Some scholars have concentrated on how the body has operated more generally as a means of resistance (E.g. Butler, 1990; Doyle, 2001; Hebdige, 1987), while others have explored more specifically how beauty can be used as a tool of resistance (for example, Phillips, 2004). My

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<sup>1</sup> Its marginalization is due to the Cartesian mind/body dualism and its tendency to privilege rationality and consider embodied aspects of communication as non-rational. For instance, Dorothy Smith (1990) discusses how embodiment has largely been excluded from knowledge production more generally, which she argues has worked as a means of reinforcing masculinist forms of knowledge and domination. Specifically, she critiques a rational empirical epistemology as rooted in a dichotomy between the mind and body that is premised on the conception of subjects as disembodied –a trouble that extends to the procedures of systematizing what counts as knowledge; which she argues privileges a detached and disinterested vantage point. The exclusion of embodiment from knowledge production more broadly has been critiqued as foundational to the rational legitimation of racist and sexist relations. Loraine Code (1991) adopts a similar discourse in *What can she know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*.

research explores how beauty and practices of embodiment (i.e. different ways we construct and use the body) operate in processes of counter-hegemony, a particular type of resistance where subordinate groups forge alliances through cultural leadership to pose a threat to the existing hegemonic relations of power (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Miliband, 1990; Pratt, 2004). By using beauty and practices of embodiment as an analytic framework, my dissertation examines how the body can operate within counter-hegemonic resistances<sup>2</sup> within three specified contexts, which represent different forms of communication: 1) propaganda posters in German Fascism and interpersonal communication within the Nazi Holocaust; 2) social network sites in the form of fashion blogs; and, 3) neo-burlesque theatre performance.

This area of inquiry stems from my own experiences growing up as a young woman in Montreal where it was not uncommon to be cat-called by strangers. I was categorized as a ‘beautiful’ woman—whether I saw myself that way or not—and I needed to learn how to cope with this stereotype. As a consequence, for my dissertation, I wanted to unbundle the complex relationship of beauty, the body and power, and the ways it can be used in different types and degrees of resistance. Nonetheless, upon closer investigation, it quickly became apparent that a definition of beauty in relation to the body is hard to pin down, let alone in terms of its use as a technique and tactic of power and resistance that could lead to counter-hegemonic practices. To proceed, a few definitions are in order.

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<sup>2</sup> Counter-hegemonic processes do not only imply revolutionizing social relations but can also refer to processes that work in socio-cultural fields such as the fashion industry or theatre, which will be explored in more detail within upcoming chapters.

## **Definitional Terms: Beauty**

The concept of beauty has a long, complex and contested history with varying and often contradictory meanings and connotations, calling into question whether beauty exists and, if so, how it is related to socio-political conditions. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines beauty as: the quality or aggregation of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleurably exalts the mind or spirit. This definition brings to light some of the historical meanings and contentions surrounding the question 'what is beauty?' On the one hand, this definition highlights that beauty is a quality or essence inherent within the object itself—a view exemplified by Plato's forms (Sartwell, 2014) in which 'Beauty' exists *a priori*, and can be objectively measured and subjected to universal standards as well as Kant's aesthetics (1790) where subjects are transformed by an object's beauty. On the other hand, it foregrounds that beauty has a subjective component that stems from the subject's sentiments and experiences (see Burke, 1757; Hume, 1757). This tension between the objective universal essence of beauty inherently existing within the object and a subjective foundation wherein 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' has made it a difficult concept to define. Specifically, if beauty is completely subjective and cannot be measured by any standards can scholars, or anyone for that matter, say anything about it at all? As mentioned above, many feminist scholars have discredited a universal concept of beauty by arguing that beauty ideals reproduce patriarchal relations of domination by keeping women in subordinate positions (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Wolfe, 1991). These scholars assert that physical beauty

is socially constructed often within an oppressive patriarchal framework, which further calls into question whether 'beauty' exists at all or whether it should be completely rejected as a meaningful concept.

My research takes, as its starting point, that beauty is not an innate or essentialist category but, rather, is socially and culturally constructed, and tied to practices of communication that create shared meaning that shifts within different socio- historical and politico-economic contexts. Moreover, my work focuses on the way beauty is correlated to the body, and therefore, departs from a Kantian framework that defines it in terms of nature (such as a sunset) or art. Similarly it brackets the approach of Adorno and the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1977/2007), which locates beauty within the art object itself as a means for critical engagement and liberation. Instead, my research focuses on a bodily-based conception of beauty as culturally constructed through communication discourses and practices that are grounded in particular contexts; it is, therefore, part of a historical process in which political, economic and socio-cultural factors set limits on its meanings and uses.

Dominique Paquet (1991/2009) outlines the ways in which a Western conception of beauty dating back to Ancient Egypt is highly constructed and embodies ideals and practices that shift within different contexts. She demonstrates that although beauty often appears natural and biologically based, it involves various practices concerned with altering the body in order to adhere to the ideals of the day, such as: the use of white powder to make the skin look paler and kohl to highlight the eyes during the Roman empire; a bustle and corset to draw attention to a more pronounced breast and buttocks, which were popular during the Baroque era; or the

practices of drinking vinegar to conform to the skinny and ghastly 'look' at the beginning of the 1800s (Paquet, 1991/2009). Some of these beauty ideals and practices have been carried over into our contemporary context, such as the veneration of pale skin, where whiteness acts as the normative benchmark of beauty, or the thin, waif-like look presently perpetuated by the fashion industry. Moreover, these ideals are constantly changing so that they are usually unattainable; they women and, increasingly, men feel inadequate in order to buy more products to reach the new ideal. As such, beauty ideals are closely tied to capitalist and patriarchal systems. From this perspective, fashion, stylizations and presentations of the body are elements that contribute to beauty ideals, aspects that will be attended to in more detail in my chapters on fashion blogging and neo-burlesque theatre performance.

### **Beauty Norms, Standards and Practices**

I argue that beauty is constructed through different standardisation and normalisation practices specific to divergent Western contexts. To be clear, beauty standards come from external sources such as the "beauty-fashion complex"<sup>3</sup> (Bartky, 1990) and are diffused through media channels often in line with the interests of dominant groups. Beauty norms are regulatory practices adopted by men and women who conform to standards that lead them to dieting and exercising, body hair removal or hair straightening practices, and so on. Beauty practices is a more general term used to refer to practices that may or may not comply with the dominant culture's

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<sup>3</sup> According to Bartky (1990, p.39) the fashion-beauty complex refers to a "vast system of corporations--some of which manufacture products, others services, others still information, images, and ideologies--of emblematic public personages and of sets of techniques and procedures" that regulate women's appearance and bodies.

standards and norms, and may or may not conform to popular conceptualizations of beauty.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, beauty is a site of contention whose standards, norms and practices shift within different contexts in which dominant and popular groups attempt to influence and 'fix' its meaning and uses. My dissertation is, therefore, concerned with analyzing the ways that standardisation and normalisation practices operate within strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance.

### **Beauty and Power**

Feminist scholars particularly emphasize the ways the body operates as a site of control and exercise of power (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993/2003; McNay, 1992). These scholars tend to discuss beauty standards, norms and practices through the lens of patriarchal oppression, as techniques in the formation of "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1984) that keep women in positions of subordination. For example, they emphasize that high heels and tight skirts literally keep women physically constrained (Bartky, 1990), and that standards of thinness force women to focus on diet and exercise that can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, leaving women too hungry and weak to concentrate on other more productive aspects of their lives (Wolfe, 1991). These feminist scholars further challenge a sensibility where beauty practices are synonymous with individual choice and girl power, by arguing that self-presentation is tied to neo-liberal consumerist and objectification practices masquerading as forms of empowerment (McRobbie, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, they

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<sup>4</sup> Whereas dominant culture refers to the culture of the elite classes, popular culture stands in opposition to the dominant culture, comprised of the practices, values and ideas of dominated groups (Martin, 1997, p.70-74).

underscore that beauty standards and norms no longer target women's bodies exclusively, as men's bodies have come under increased scrutiny with more pressure to conform to external standards. From their point of view, beauty norms, standards and practices operate as techniques of domination designed to normalize bodies towards particular objectives.

As a counterpoint, my research situates beauty and the body as neither a site of oppression exclusively, nor as a form of empowerment, but rather, enmeshed in a complex negotiation of power relations, including different types of resistance to dominant standardisation and normalisation practices. Thus, my research moves beyond a top-down model of power where subordinate groups are coerced into accepting the practices of dominant groups, to one in which the body operates as a site of contestation. It borrows from a Gramscian approach, extended by Raymond Williams (1980) and Stuart Hall (1985, 1997). Through a conceptualization of cultural hegemony, power operates as a dynamic process exercised at the cultural level where dominant groups lead, not just through coercion, but by forging alliances and winning the consent of popular groups. From this perspective, beauty standards and norms are not only used in techniques of oppression insofar as dominant groups must take into account and incorporate beauty practices from popular groups as part of the hegemonic process.

My dissertation complements this hegemonic theoretical approach with a Foucauldian approach to power and the body that further sheds light on the ways in which beauty can operate as strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance within the existing social structures. Foucault's model is based on a productive type of

power at the social level that targets the body and is concerned with guiding the conduct of oneself and/or others. In this way, beauty standards and norms can be used in strategies, techniques and tactics<sup>5</sup> to "conduct the conduct" (1979) of individuals and groups towards particular outcomes. At the same time, individuals can escape this form of power and use their bodies in new ways to create new subjectivities that resist external standardisation and normalisation processes from external sources.

Although scholars have traced irreconcilable differences between Gramscian and Foucauldian frameworks in terms of their approaches to power, (see Grossberg, 1995; Hall, 1997; Smart, 1983)<sup>6</sup> their differences are not insurmountable (Hunt, 2004) and can be used as complementary approaches for considering how beauty standards, norms and practices can operate within different types of power and resistance. Other scholars have argued that Gramscian and Foucauldian approaches are compatible (Daldal, 2014; Koopman and Matza, 2013; Hall, 1997; Hunt, 2004; Martin, 1991; Smart, 1983). For instance, Hunt (2004) demonstrates that a Marxist framework (from which Gramsci's concept of hegemony is derivative) does not

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<sup>5</sup>To be clear, techniques correspond to practices and refer to a method or way of doing things in order to reach a goal or objective to conduct oneself or others. Strategies imply an elaborate coordinated action by those in positions of domination whereas tactics are more spontaneous practices where individuals take opportunities in the cracks and fissures of an existing power structure.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Smart (1983) argues that the concept of hegemony stems from a Marxist approach where all forms of power can ultimately be deduced from the economic base in that those who control the means of production (i.e., the ruling class) have control over ideological production. From this perspective power is class-based and is seen as belonging to the ruling group and can be overthrown by subordinate classes. A Foucauldian approach advances that power is not possessed by a particular group or class, but operates within localized micro-practices that take shape in different circumstances. In this, sense power can never be overthrown, but rather one set of power relations can replace another. His approach, thereby, challenges the Marxist binary of bourgeois domination and proletariat subordination. In other words, Foucault's basic difference from Gramsci is that the latter saw power relations in terms of binary oppositions (such as the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, etc.). For Foucault power, as well as the resistance it generates, are diffused and not localized in some points (Daldal, 2014).

necessarily place power exclusively in the hands of the ruling class (i.e., those who control the means of production and communication) but emphasizes a need for historical specificity and the concrete, empirical analysis of each politico-economic and socio-cultural circumstance. Hunt, therefore, argues that, from a Marxist perspective, inquiry does not start from the conclusion that the economy determines social and political outcomes but, rather, that economic relations should be considered as an appropriate place to initiate an analysis of power. From this perspective, a Marxist approach is not incongruent with a Foucauldian model that suggests that power does not originate from a specific source or is necessarily in the hands of the ruling class but stems from micro-practices and techniques within the social sphere that crystalize in different circumstances, practices and political and cultural institutions. Both approaches, therefore, contend that power relations must be examined within grounded and specific contexts, while a Marxist framework offers a focus on economic relations of power as an important instance in which power relations emerge.

Smart (1983) further identifies Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a bridge between Marxist and Foucauldian approaches. He argues that Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony moves beyond a conception of power that is exclusively determined by the economic base by refiguring power at the level of the superstructure and exercised at all levels of civil society and culture. Thus, Smart contends that from a Gramscian perspective, hegemony is not a top-down model of power, as located exclusively in the hands of the ruling class and exercised through coercive force but is based on a dynamic process comprised of coercion as well as

leadership, consent and opposition. From this viewpoint, for hegemony to be an effective process, it must make concessions and take the practices and ideas of subordinate groups into account. In the same vein, Smart argues that a Foucauldian approach rejects a top-down model of power for one in which power operates at the social level through micro-practices as well as wider strategies, where dominated groups exert influence. Thus, both approaches posit that power is diffused and exercised within all levels of society (Daldal, 2014). In this way, power is not based purely on domination or considered in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion (with one group simply radiating power downward on a subordinate one) but, rather, it is a process that includes the dominant and the dominated in its circuits. In this sense, from both perspectives, power cannot be thought of as something that can be captured or completely overthrown but rather as an unstable and dynamic process comprised of elements of domination and resistance. Likewise, Hall (1986) argues that for Gramsci, relations of power are not universal (his approach was designed to operate at the lower levels of historical concreteness to make sense of the conditions in Fascist Italy) and need to be examined in their situated contexts to elucidate different permutations of coercion, consent and opposition.

Although Hall (1997) discusses some differences between the two approaches to power, he also argues that Gramscian and Foucauldian frameworks are congruent particularly in terms of questions concerning culture, symbolic power and representation. He argues that both approaches understand power in broader symbolic terms that operate at the cultural level. Specifically, both types of power operate within representational practices to make meaning in a specific way where certain

cultural forms predominate over others through cultural leadership. From this perspective, power cannot be captured by thinking in terms of coercion and repression but has productive elements in that it also seduces, solicits, induces and wins consent. According to Hall, these productive elements shape new kinds of knowledge, discourses, and practices, suggesting that both dominant and dominated groups are caught in the circularity of power, albeit not on equal terms. While dominant groups attempt to fix meaning in a certain way, cultural symbols can never be fully fixed insofar as words and images carry connotations over which no one has complete control and, thus, dominant regimes of representations can be challenged, contested and changed by subordinated groups.

As will be discussed in further detail in my theoretical framework, these two compatible approaches to power can highlight the ways in which beauty and the body are conceptualized as cultural practices that can operate within different permutations of power and resistance in grounded contexts.

### **Beauty and Resistance**

These approaches to power will further help to elucidate the ways that beauty standards, norms and practices can be mobilized in different types and degrees of resistance to dominant discourses and practices on beauty. As my dissertation title suggests, I am particularly interested in the body's capacity to act as a site of counter-hegemony. Specifically, this type of resistance refers to the "creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for political change" (Pratt, 2004). Cohn (2004) further stipulates that counter-hegemony is an alternative ethical

view of society that poses a challenge to the hegemonic power. This type of resistance involves forging alliances through cultural leadership in order to put pressure on the ideas and practices of dominant groups. Counter-hegemony points to a strong degree of resistance that involves the coordination of people, groups and interests with the intention of shifting hegemonic power relations. Although conceptualized as a dynamic and unstable process, I am interested in the ways that the body can operate as a 'site of counter-hegemony.' By considering the body as a 'site', I am concerned with the ways in which individuals use their bodies through cultural and communication practices to mobilize individuals across diverse networks to influence the hegemonic process. I am also interested in the ways that the body is used in specific communication practices and as 'potential' and 'actual' sites of counter-hegemonies. This distinction insinuates that some means of communication have the technological capacity to foster potential counter-hegemonic endeavors, but does not necessarily guarantee actualized counter-hegemonic movements.

A Foucauldian framework further fleshes out other forms of resistances that can take shape within communication and cultural practices and can bring to bear insights in relation to beauty, the body and counter-hegemony. Although Foucault's conceptualization of resistance has been critiqued as underdeveloped (for example, see McNay, 1992, for a discussion in relation to feminism), through various concepts including governmentality (1979), bio-power (1978) subjectification (1982) and technologies of the self (1997), he configures the body as a site for the enactment of different types of resistance. Specifically, governmentality is a productive type of power concerned with steering the conduct of oneself and others and is predicated on

a condition of freedom where individuals can choose alternative forms of conduct than those advocated by external sources. Likewise, bio-power (1978) operates as a productive type of state regulation concerned with the health and wellbeing of bodies in the management of the population. Historically, at times, beauty standards and norms have been synonymous with health and hygiene in the management of the population through body control. Yet, insofar as it is a non-repressive type of power that operates at the social level, bio-power inherently includes an element of resistance wherein individuals may use beauty practices on their bodies in ways other than those intended by the ruling elite. This type of power can involve individuals or groups who use beauty practices to subvert dominant correlations between beauty and wellness. The process of subjectification, where individuals are turned into 'subjects' through classifying and objectifying the body, similarly includes an element of resistance where individuals can choose not to internalize these processes from external sources. Closely linked, technologies of the self (1997) operate as another type of resistance that involves performing operations on the body in order to transform the self from imposed subjectivities. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Michel de Certeau (1984) further flesh out a Foucauldian framework in terms of the ways in which the body can act as a means of resistance, the former through her concept of gender performativity in which stylizations of the body can be re-assembled in new ways to create new subjectivities and the latter through his concept of tactics which are spontaneous and involve taking opportunities within the cracks and fissures of an existing hegemonic order.

These approaches to power and resistance indicate that there is not a unifying principle that explains the subordination of women by beauty practices but, rather, there are divergent interplays of power and resistance within different contexts. It presupposes that relations of domination and resistance must be analysed within their specific and grounded, historical contexts where women as well as men can be implicated in various sites of oppression and opposition. Consequently, my research is situated within a social-constructionist feminist approach which advocates that women (and men) are not universal, unified subjects, subjected to the same conditions of power; rather there are, in fact, various sites of oppression not reducible to patriarchy or class (Hennessey, 1993; Riley, 1988; Scott, 1988; Shane, 1990; Smith, 1990). Building on a Foucauldian framework, some social-constructionist feminism takes the standpoint that the social is an ensemble of unstable relations and that power does not uniquely originate from a privileged position (such as the ruling class or the state). Thus, power relations must be examined, not simply in terms of the larger whole, but in particular contexts as practices that may oppose and challenge one another (Hennessey, 1993). Dorothy Smith's standpoint theory calls for recognizing and making visible one's own position within the power structure to highlight the ways in which the resistances of women are varied and sometimes opposed to one another, due to their plurality of locations within the crisscrossing apparatus of a society (Riley, 1988; Scott, 1988). In this way, beauty is not inherently affiliated with women, as suggested by the aforementioned definition by the Merriam Webster dictionary, but has been socially constructed as such in order to objectify women in bodily terms (Hall, 1997; Wolfe, 1991). From this feminist perspective, women as

well as men can be in positions of oppression and have the capacity to enact resistances. I focus on the ways in which women and men are situated within different contexts and within specific networks of power relations that exert pressure on the types and degrees of resistances that can take shape.. For instance, in situations of strong domination, such as fascist regimes, there is less capacity for coordinated resistances amongst groups, and the utilization of the body at the individual level seemingly becomes the only means available for action.

### **Beauty, Communication and Culture**

Communication and media practices are central to the strategies, techniques and tactics discussed above. Siegelau (1979) evinces that communication between people is an essential element of social organization. As a bond between real people in real time and real space, communication can never be an abstract phenomenon and is historically constructed and grounded in social relations. From Siegelau's perspective (1979), communication connotes exchanges and is not simply the transmission of information, but also includes the movement of people (transportation), of goods, as well as the circulation of capital. Given this context, the decision to choose one means of communication over another is made in response to certain practices that have arisen in history and is the confluence of social interests of various groups. It is, therefore, important to examine the various means of communicating, not just in terms of technological factors, but how they have developed within grounded historical contexts, and are, thereby, influenced by the social, economic, political and cultural conditions in which they are developed.

This perspective allows me to consider the body as a means of communication. As a historically situated social and cultural construction, the body can be viewed as a site of contention in which different groups attempt to secure its meaning and uses. Martin (1997) distinguishes between two fundamental forms of communication: the so-called 'natural' forms, which include oral and non-verbal communication and those produced by technological means, including the media, further help to position the body in the field of communication. The body can operate as a non-verbal exchange between people but also as a text and a site of inscription where the body itself can act as a message (Dutton, 1995; Marvin, 2006; Skeggs, 2005). This approach moves beyond communication as a rational means to include embodiment wherein the body operates as a discursive text through which power relations are created and reinforced (Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1977, 1978). Through beauty standards and norms, the body can act as a normative marker of gender, race, class, age, and disability but also as a site of struggle where different groups vie for meaning.

My approach further overlaps with a cultural studies approach where the body is tied to cultural practices. Defined as a way of life and a system of practices guided by values and ideas (Williams, 1980), the body is not only a natural phenomenon but is constructed through culture, where representations of beauty are central in creating shared meaning (Hall, 1997). By considering beauty and embodiment within the context of communication and culture one of the objectives of my thesis is to provide a corrective lens to the field of communication to reconsider how the body is tied to communication and cultural practices that create meanings within three grounded

contexts: German fascism and the Nazi Holocaust, online social network sites through fashion blogging, and neo-burlesque theatre.

At the same time, techniques and tactics of beauty are also considered within the field of communication because they are tied to different modes, practices and means of communication within these aforementioned contexts. Specifically, a mode of communication refers to the manner or way of communicating and in the context of my research includes propaganda posters, interpersonal communication, blogs and theatre. Moreover, different communication practices—which are pragmatically oriented and involve activities that are related to different aspects of communication—make use of these modes. For example, the mode of blogging can include different communication practices such as news blogs, cultural blogs, personal blogs and, as will be discussed later, fashion blogs. Likewise, the mode of interpersonal communication can include different practices, such as face-to-face, letter writing or email. In this way, modes and practices of communication also make use of different means of communication: technological tools such as radio, television and film as well as digital technologies. As a way of further explanation, Williams (1976) defines the mass media as those which allow for a broad transmission or diffusion of content to an audience that is not necessarily gathered together or assembled in one location (Martin, 1997). Lorimer, Gasher and Skinner (2008) define the mass media in terms of their distinction from new media: Whereas the mass media are technologies, practices and institutions that make possible information and entertainment, production and dissemination through newspapers, magazines, cinema, television, radio, advertising, book publishing, recording and performances, new

media do not focus on centralized institutional production and mass dissemination. Rather, according to these scholars, new media provide public access to opportunities to create content and, thus, encourage wider participation; and, in some cases, facilitate ongoing participation in the production and exchange of meaning on a mass scale, a point that will be attended to later both in my chapter on fashion blogging and in my conclusion. The term new media is problematic particularly within our contemporary context, with the continual advancement and production of media technologies. Instead, I prefer the term digital communication media to refer specifically to means of communication through digital networks, which facilitate popular participation in cultural production with the capacity to reach mass audiences. All of these modes, means and practices of communication overlap and intersect where each can influence the development and uses of the other.

### **Case Studies**

I examine three specific case studies to analyse the ways that practices of embodiment can be used as strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance across different modes of communication. I include different historical and contemporary contexts with an emphasis on political, social and cultural aspects, respectively providing a broad field for testing the ways beauty and the body can be utilised within processes of counter-hegemony. My case study in the political context of the Third Reich, presents an instance of high levels of domination and coercion, where there was only a small space for resistance. In this chapter, I argue that the body in this context acted as a terrain of power where beauty was used within

strategies and techniques of domination through mass media (in the use of propaganda posters, leaflets dumped from airplanes and pamphlets) whose purpose was to establish the Aryan as the legitimate race and demarcate the Jew as ‘other.’ Although the Nazis had control over the mass media, some Jewish men and women incarcerated in concentration camps engaged in some forms of interpersonal communication using beauty and bodily practices as tactics of survival.

My second case study examines beauty and the body through the mode of social media and particularly the ways in which the practice of fashion blogging and online presentations of the self have the potential to exert some influence over dominant and elite culture’s beauty standards, norms and practices. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social media as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, and to share a connection with other users within the system. From this perspective, social media operates as a mode of online communication, which allows web users to share content within a public forum with their network of friends or acquaintances. Although social media sites like Facebook and Twitter emerged slightly later than blogging, the latter can be defined as a social media in that it involves a public profile where the users act as cultural producers and can engage in interactions with followers. Through Tavi Gevinson’s popular fashion blog “[thestylerookie.com](http://thestylerookie.com)”, this case study explores whether social media sites can have the potential to create a counter-hegemonic movement by gaining public exposure and showcasing alternate and even oppositional beauty practices to those of the dominant culture. At the same time, I argue that these social media practices must be analysed within grounded economic and political contexts, to

show the limits of their scope and influence.

My final case study considers beauty in the cultural context through neo-burlesque theatre as a site of potential counter-hegemony in which performers challenge dominant standards of beauty within the cultural sphere and in society at large. Although not a mass medium, and no longer the central mode of communication in contemporary culture, this case explores how theatre can exert some influence on hegemonic culture by acting as cultural leaders who build and strengthen alliances with different groups.

These three different case studies are useful for looking at the myriad of ways in which beauty and the body are centrally linked with various modes and practices of communication and are used in techniques of power and resistance by diverse social groups with particular objectives. As Siegelau (1979) explains, communication is a confluence of social interests of dominant and popular groups and through beauty practices the body becomes a site of discursive struggle. I use a discourse analysis, which involves the study of texts to understand the structures of power that produce those texts and the structures of power that they produce. Hennessey (1993) underscores that discourses have a materiality and are, thus, linked to non-discursive practices insofar as they cannot be conceptualized outside institutional systems of material relations that structure and constitute them. As such, a discourse analysis helps to excavate the ways in which the body is a discursive site of struggle where different individuals and groups compete for control and meaning through norms, standards and practices of beauty.

## Chapter Breakdown

My dissertation is organized into six chapters. In chapter one, I look at the existing literature on beauty and the body across various disciplines, with a focus on feminist communication scholarship. I first question the universal, essentialist and evolutionary psychology definitions of beauty in favour of feminist social-constructionist approaches, which, I demonstrate, nonetheless have a tendency to focus on beauty as an instrument of patriarchal, race and class oppression. My second chapter provides my theoretical approach, with a framework that helps to consider how beauty and the body can operate within more complex power relations. As discussed, without collapsing their differences, I draw on conceptions of hegemony and counter-hegemony, Foucault's concepts of governmentality (1979), bio-power (1978), subjectification (1982), technologies and the self (1997) as well as Butler's concept of gender performativity (1990, 1993) and De Certeau's notion of tactics (1984) to assert that beauty can be deployed as strategies and techniques of power but also within different types of resistance. This chapter also outlines the discourse analysis approach I am applying to examine the way in which power operates within various discourses and practices. The following chapters (3,4,5) include my case studies on the Nazi Holocaust, fashion blogging and neo-burlesque theatre. Each of these looks at the different strategies, tactics and techniques of beauty and the body utilised by three different groups within diverse communication practices for particular purposes. My conclusion then provides a comparative analysis of power and resistance across the various contexts, practices and modes of communication. I am concerned with re-positioning beauty and the body in the field of communication

and culture to highlight the ways in which beauty is situated within grounded practices of communication and works within strategies, techniques and strategies of power across different political, economic, social and cultural contexts.

## **Chapter 1**

### **What is Beauty? Cross-Disciplinary Approaches**

Discourses, practices, standards and definitions of Western beauty in relation to the body cut across a variety of disciplines ranging from philosophy, art, mathematics, biology, psychology, economics, feminism, sociology, cultural studies, and most pertinently for this thesis, communication studies. Generally speaking, conceptualizations of beauty have tended to fall along a spectrum oscillating between a quality or essence within the object/subject itself, which can be objectively measured and subjected to universal standards and a social construct, often with patriarchal and capitalist objectives. My review of existing literature traces these historical and contemporary approaches to beauty and the body with a particular emphasis on feminist, communication and cultural studies scholarship. Generally, these scholars discredit universal and essentialist approaches to beauty and the body, highlighting how beauty ideals and standards have been historically constructed through cultural and communication practices often in line with the interests of dominant groups (Bordo, 2003; Hall, 1997; Phillips, 2004; McRobbie, 2007). From this perspective, the body is a means of communication which can be produced and read as a text, and beauty practices act as a site of inscription for normative standards and prescriptive behaviours (Foucault, 1978). Furthermore, these communication and cultural studies scholars tend to concentrate on the ways in which media representations, such as advertisements, women's magazines and more recently makeover reality shows construct beauty ideals, which keep women (and increasingly men) in positions of subordination through a focus on bodily display and

objectification (Franco, 2008; McRobbie, 2007, 2009). Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated below through an interdisciplinary survey of beauty and the body, few studies examine the ways in which beauty is more concretely tied to grounded communication practices linked to political, social and cultural processes that are involved in a complex dynamic of power relations. Thus, this literature review will act as a springboard for my own area of inquiry and research questions.

### **Universal vs. Subjective Approaches**

Universalist approaches to beauty—as an innate quality inherent within an object or person, which can be measured according to objective criteria—can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy in which Plato locates beauty in the realm of the Forms in which it exists in an idealized and perfected state along with Goodness, Truth and Justice (Plato, 1980, Sartwell, 2014). From this classical perspective, beauty takes on a certain ontological priority that exists prior to, and separate from, the response of the beholder. According to philosophers, from a Platonic perspective, the quality of beauty is further correlated to the 'True' and the 'Good' insofar as it can exalt the philosopher onto a path of knowledge and righteousness--correlations that persist within both historical and contemporary definitions (Brand, 2000) where through universalist conceptions of beauty individuals can engage in the sublime (Kant, 1951) and/or potentially achieve liberation from capitalist domination (Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht & Lukács 2007).

The classical Greek conception further configures beauty as objectively measurable and quantifiable through mathematical formulas, ratios and proportions

and the relations between parts to the whole. For instance, the Greek mathematician Euclid believed that beauty was determined through the 'golden ratio': a mathematical formula based on the principles of symmetry that suggests the ideal distance between two points and lines intersecting is 1:1.618, known as *phi* (Livio, 2002). More specifically, the ratio between the whole and one of its parts is equal to the ratio between the larger quantity and the smaller one thereby acting as a universal and calculable proportion for determining 'beautiful' faces and bodies. The 'golden ratio' has been employed by Phidias in his sculptures for the Parthenon and later re-appropriated during the Renaissance in Leonardo da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man.'<sup>7</sup> This conceptualization of beauty as mathematically quantifiable continues in the contemporary context wherein a plastic surgeon in South California, Dr. Stephen Marquardt, uses the golden ratio to construct 'beautiful' perfectly proportioned faces (Maddox, 2007).

As far back as Plato and the ancient Greeks, and even within these universalist accounts, gender played a significant role in discussions of beauty. Specifically, classical conceptions of beauty tended to focus on male bodies (Brand, 2000; Savacool, 2009) where perfectly proportioned muscles represented the beautiful ideal (Paquet, 1991/2009). By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, philosophers shifted beauty ideals to women and primarily used descriptions of women's bodies in their conceptualizations of beauty, exemplified in this quote by Burke:

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible

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<sup>7</sup>The Vitruvian Man is the famous sepia sketch of a nude, spread-eagled male body, which is meant to represent the perfectly proportioned male body of Vitruvius Pollio who upheld that the classical ideal of beauty derived from symmetry and a modular relationship of the parts to a whole.

swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried (1757/1968, p.115).

Not only is beauty encoded in gender and the production of femininity in which women are conceived as passive objects to be looked at, but women's beauty is called a 'deceitful maze', thereby, uncoupling the articulation between beauty, truth and morality—a point that will be explored in more detail below.

The universality of a feminine beauty standard is further invoked in a range of more contemporary pseudo-scientific discourses. According to some evolutionary psychologists, ideals about feminine beauty are linked with health and reproductive capabilities and derive from a Darwinian evolutionary biology (Buss, 1989; Singh & Singh, 2011).<sup>8</sup> This pseudo-scientific approach considers women with hourglass figures (i.e. large breasts, a small waist, full hips and thighs) to act as a signal for reproductive fertility. They suggest that men are programmed to be attracted to such a body type in order to propagate the species. Some evolutionary psychologists quantify the ideal waist-hip ratio as 0.7—a waist circumference that is 70 per cent the hip circumference. Other social psychologists have suggested that individuals determine beauty through familiarity in which repeatedly seen faces are considered more attractive (Rhodes & Tremewan, 1996). Still further studies demonstrate that

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<sup>8</sup> These evolutionary psychologist approaches have been largely discredited (See Dawkins, 1976; Gould, 1981/1996; Rose & Rose, 2012) as a form of 'junk science'. For example, Dawkins (1976) advances a gene-centred view of evolution thereby rejecting the school of thought that evolution operates on the level of organisms or in the interests of the social group. It can be deduced that evolution of organisms is not purposive and, therefore, that biological measurements do not determine or lead to reproductive success. Similarly, Gould (1996) critiques cultural motivations as underlying processes of evolution, natural selection and biological determinism. He argues that the belief that the social and economic differences between human groups (primarily races, classes and sexes) arise from inherited inborn distinction is an inaccurate reflection of evolutionary processes with no validity in Darwinist thought (Lewontin, Kamin & Rose, 1984).

individuals find beauty in averages (Etoff, 1999; Langlois, Roggman & Musselman, 1994). These scholars have purported to show that individuals find mathematical averages of composite faces and bodies more beautiful than pre-existing faces. Specifically, in one study, participants were asked to choose the most attractive faces and bodies from among hundreds of images, some of which were created by computer technology that merged and blended thousands of different faces and body images. Participants consistently selected the composite images as more attractive than any one individual unaltered photograph (Langlois, Roggman & Musselman, 1994). These pseudo-scientific approaches suggest that average faces and bodies are beautiful because they signify normalized health. Thus, generally speaking, evolutionary psychologists propose that beauty is an essentialized and universal category that can be objectively measured to signify optimal reproductive capability. As will be demonstrated below, feminist scholars debunk these universalist pseudo-scientific approaches, arguing that these definitions are historically constructed to suit particular racialised, hetero-normative and patriarchal interests.

Other scholars have also challenged the notion that beauty exists *a priori* in an object or person. They reject that beautiful qualities can be measured according to universal standards suggesting instead subjective definitions where beauty is ‘in the eye of the beholder.’ For instance, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a person's sense of taste came into play as the foundational factor in determining beauty. Subjective theories came to occupy centre stage as more emphasis was placed on the pleasure produced in the perceiver and less on the features of the object. For instance, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher David Hume (1757) argued that beauty is not a real property of things but

rather stems from subjective experiences and sentiments where aesthetic judgments are refined through a set of standards on taste, often in line with morality. Hume nicely summarizes the subjectivist view:

Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his [sic] own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others (Hume 1757, p.136).

Kant (1790) attempted to reconcile the dichotomy between universal and subjective conceptions of beauty, suggesting that if beauty was exclusively in the eye of the beholder, it would become a meaningless category. He asserts that judgments of beauty are based on subjective feeling and universal claims to validity through his concept of “disinterested pleasure”, an approach shared in different permutations by other 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers (Santayana 1896; Schopenhauer, 1818/1958; Wittgenstein, 1980). Through these judgments on beauty, individuals could connect to nature and the structures of the universe. Kant thereby underscored a correlation between beauty and morality wherein aesthetic judgments play a role in cultivating moral feelings in human beings (Brand, 2000).

These articulations between beauty, morality and truth are entrenched in Western conceptions of beauty whether in the writing of 19<sup>th</sup> century author Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1869/1955) who wrote that 'beauty will save the world' or the 19<sup>th</sup> century poet John Keats (1819) who proclaimed in the poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”—a point that will be explicitly interrogated in my case study on the Nazi Holocaust where the Aryan beauty ideal and its adherence to universal standards of beauty disrupt correlations between beauty, truth and the good.

The conflation of beauty, truth and goodness persists within many contemporary pseudo-scientific approaches to beauty. Several recent psychological studies have tested the 'what is beautiful is good' hypothesis and found that humans continue to make the correlation that those who are beautiful are also good (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972). For instance, Langlois et al. (2002) found that children are more likely to attribute positive social behaviours and traits to attractive children and negative social behaviours and traits to unattractive ones. Further studies suggest that babies show visual preferences for symmetrical faces within the first three to six months and reciprocally that parents are more likely to pay physical attention to 'beautiful' babies than unattractive ones (see Friday, 1993, p.10-24). Other studies suggests that one- year-old children will more likely approach and play with an attractive female stranger than an 'unattractive' one (Langlois et al., 1990) and that 'beautiful' children and adults are judged and treated more positively than their 'unattractive' counterparts. These findings are based on the presupposition that those who are beautiful are associated with positive qualities such as goodness whilst humans associate non-attractive faces with negative qualities, such as laziness and unkindness. A relatively recent article in the *New York Times* reported that women who wear makeup are perceived as healthier, more confident, successful and trustworthy than those who do not wear makeup, further underscoring the continued correlation that what is beautiful is good (Saint Louis, 2011).

Furthermore, other scholars argue that the conflation of 'those who are beautiful are good' implies that beauty is a categorical marker of social privilege and empowerment. For instance, several scholars claim that beautiful people are better

liked, have increased self-esteem, professional success, more notable partners, make more money and thus have more social capital than unattractive people (Etkoff, 1999; Hakim, 2011; Hamermesh, 2011). Economic scholars, in particular, have suggested that there is a 'beauty premium' insofar as attractive people have greater access to successes and earn a higher income (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Hamermesh, 2011). In his recent book, Hamermesh (2011) demonstrates that beautiful people earn five percent more than average looking people who, in turn, earn ten percent more than ugly people. He upholds the notion that beauty is objective, unchangeable and universal and that people all agree on standards of beauty. He thus proposes that beauty is a category of social privilege, whilst unattractive people are socially and economically disadvantaged and vulnerable to discrimination. Similarly, other scholars contend that 'lookism' is a prejudice towards people based on their appearance (Rhodes, 2010; Tietje & Cresap, 2005). Rhodes (2010) argues that 'beauty bias' is as insidious and pervasive as discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion or disability, in that unattractive individuals are afforded less opportunities and are associated with laziness and incompetence. She goes as far as to argue that the law should intervene to prohibit discrimination based on appearance. Undergirding these studies is an unexamined axiom that beauty is universal, natural, objective, measurable and irrefutable. Generally speaking these scholars uphold that beauty is inherent within a person who reaps social and economic access and rewards thereby conceptualizing beauty as a form of privilege and empowerment.

## **Feminist Communication and Cultural Approaches: Beauty as Oppression**

Feminist scholars reject these universal claims to beauty and their link to empowerment by arguing that beauty ideals are socially constructed and operate as a type of oppression in line with capitalist and patriarchal interests. Wolfe's groundbreaking book (1991) encapsulates this view where she asserts that the 'beauty myth' propagates the idea that beauty is driven by biology, fertility and evolution while it in fact functions as a currency system to control and constrict women's behaviour. She demonstrates that, as women entered the workforce and gained increased political and economic freedoms, the beauty industry launched a backlash against these new-formed liberties by using media representations of female beauty as a political weapon to reinstate patriarchal and capitalist control. Wolfe, along with other feminist and media scholars, thus, examines the ways in which the mass media represent beauty ideals in ways that keep women in positions of subordination. From a feminist perspective, beauty ideals are not universal but rather are socially constructed and reinforced through communication and media practices where the body operates as a site of discipline and for social control. Here the body becomes a site for the (re)inscription of relations of domination and subordination, where prescriptive behaviours are learned via the body, as Bordo explicates:

We are no longer given verbal descriptions of exemplars of what a lady is or of what femininity consists. Rather, we learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expressions, movements and behaviours are required (1993/2003, p.170).

Feminist, communication and cultural studies scholars argue that women are often defined via communication practices and the mass media in bodily terms through a focus on bodily display and objectification (Berger, 1972; Bordo,

1993/2003; Franco, 2008; Hall, 1997; Skeggs, 2005; McRobbie, 2007, 2009; Mulvey, 1989). These scholars hold that mass media representations of beauty represent women as commodified sex objects wherein women's worth is measured through the male gaze. In his classic text, Berger emphasized that "men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (1972, p.47). In this unequal relationship between men and women, women learn to consider themselves as an item, a commodity and a sex object. Similarly, Mulvey argues in the context of narrative cinema that women are turned into objects of display upon which men project their own fantasies, or what she calls 'looked-at-ness' (1989, p.19). According to many feminist scholars, a woman's sense of self and her self-worth has been conflated and reduced to her body wherein 'the body has become the visible carrier of the self' (Featherstone, 1991, p.172). In other words, women are defined through their beauty and their bodies where bodily displays, objectification, and practices of beautification along patriarchal lines become the means through which they legitimate themselves. Feminist communication and cultural studies scholars argue that beauty advertisements tend to fragment women's bodies into a 'pair of legs', 'full lips' or 'tits and ass' as a further strategy to reduce a woman's body/self to her parts (Harlow, 2008; Kilbourne, 2000; Tincknell, 2011).

Other feminist scholars demonstrate how media representations of beauty ideals are oppressive towards women through their construction of normative and traditional standards of femininity (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003; Callaghan, 1994; Jeffreys, 2005; Wolfe, 1991). Specifically, media representations of women's bodies put forth by the beauty industry have been targeted for upholding narrow and

restrictive definitions of beauty, for reinforcing the burden that women are constantly being judged on how they look and for promoting unhealthy body image obsessions and potentially harmful beauty procedures. For example Wolfe (1991) notes that airbrushed (and more recently 'photo-shopped') representations of thin women promote an impossible ideal that makes women feel inherently deficient and flawed. She argues that images and representations of beauty are produced by the beauty industry, which attempts to create insecurities and anxieties about women's bodies in order to sell products, thereby underscoring an economic motivation behind beauty ideals and standards. Bordo (2003) similarly states that images of beauty ideals and practices are oppressive and harmful towards women's bodies. She notes “that through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity...we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel of never being good enough” (2003: 254). As such, women need constant vigilance in their self-assessment, continually searching for methods of correction, including dieting exercise, beauty salons and cosmetic surgery. For example, both Bordo (2003) and Gimlin (2001) link eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia to the barrage of media images that idealize feminine thinness. Jeffreys (2005) further argues that beauty practices such as high heels and makeup are physically harmful to women and keep women restricted according to patriarchal standards. Thus, the message of beauty norms and the construction of femininity suggests that there is something innately wrong with a woman's natural appearance and that she is in constant need of self-improvement through the consumption of products that are physically and psychologically damaging. Many feminist communication scholars further discuss the

ways in which reality television makeover shows that focus on cosmetic surgery reinforce unattainable standards of youthfulness as the ideal of feminine beauty (Bartky, 1990; Tincknell, 2011; Wolfe, 1991). For instance, Tincknell (2011) foregrounds the ways in which the contemporary reality television show *Ten Years Young* continues to naturalize youthfulness with beauty ideals by constructing aged bodies as "abject" (Kristeva, 1982) waiting to be renewed and redeemed through cosmetic surgery. Feminist scholars further argue that women submit to potentially dangerous procedures in order to meet the contemporary requirements of feminine appearance perpetuated by the mass media (Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1995; Gimlin, 2001).

Drawing on a Foucauldian framework, Bartky (1990) highlights the ways in which patriarchal defined beauty standards and practices produce a feminine subject in order to keep women in positions of subordination. Specifically, Bartky draws on a Foucauldian framework to examine how the construction of a normative femininity through beauty practices works to produce "docile bodies" that are disciplined and controlled (Foucault, 1984). She argues that these disciplinary techniques fall into three categories: one that intends to produce a body of a certain size and proportion through dieting and exercise; one that intends to discipline women's physical movements, gestures and postures that are constrictive, graceful and modestly erotic; and one that disciplines a woman's body to be an ornamented surface. According to Bartky, these practices are not based on sexual differences but, rather, are part of a process through which the ideal body of femininity is constructed. In doing this, these disciplinary techniques produce a "practised and subjected" body on which an inferior status has been inscribed. In other words, she examines the ways in which

practices of beauty on the body produce feminine subordination. She further emphasizes how feminine subjects have largely internalized these standards and norms such that they have become "self-policing subjects" who monitor and self-discipline against any deviation from acceptable standards of appearance. In Bartky's own words:

The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked, or her mascara has run, who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at her ankle, or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self-committed to a relentless self-surveillance" (Bartky, 1990, p.80).

Bartky asserts that women's oppression in this context does not operate through coercion but, rather, through the conscious internalization of the patriarchal male gaze where women feel like they are being watched and consequently self-monitor, self-regulate and self-discipline—a point that will be elaborated upon in more detail in my theoretical framework.

From this perspective, the body becomes a site for the (re)inscription of power relations. Not only do idealized representations and practices of beauty construct femininity such that women are defined via their bodies in contrast with men who are often constructed as autonomous and rational, but it further emphasizes that some bodies—those imbued with beautiful qualities—count more than others (Bordo, 2003; Skeggs, 2005; Franco, 2008). Many scholars demonstrate that beauty is linked with young, financially privileged heterosexual bodies while old, working-class, queer and ethnically marginalized bodies are particularly 'othered' through an overemphasis on body characteristics and binary oppositions (Collins, 1990; Hall, 1997; Phillips, 2004).

Some communication and media scholars particularly focus on the ways in which media representations of feminine beauty play an integral role in reproducing class relations. Specifically, these scholars pay particular attention to the ways in which the reality television makeover format links beauty and femininity with the elite class values (Franco, 2008; Heinricy, 2008; Press, 2011; Scott, 2007). For example, Scott (2007) argues that *America's Next Top Model* reinforces elite socioeconomic standards of beauty by grooming contestants according to these norms in which privilege is veiled as the universal criteria for being a beautiful and successful model. In the same vein, Heinricy (2008) discusses how TLC's reality show *What Not to Wear* reproduces class relations through a particular adherence to a 'middle' class look as the normative marker of what is appropriate and beautiful while erasing the structural inequalities underlying contestants fashion choices. Similarly, Franco (2008) argues that the reality show *Extreme Makeover* articulates ideals of beauty with elite class values and hetero-normativity by suggesting that these new found beauty ideals will lead to hetero-normative love, romance and marriage.

Bourdieu discusses the way in which beauty practices on the body act as a purveyor of class distinction (1979). He challenges a Kantian framework of beauty in which tastes are not based on universal or objective criteria but rather, judgments about beauty are based on class position and are a form of differentiation from working classes (Bird, 2003). According to Bourdieu (1979), the body is the most “indisputable materialization of class tastes” insofar as elite groups generate visible embodied markers to distinguish themselves from other classes through hairstyle,

clothing, diet and even gait which function as signs and class markers within a larger system of social positions.

Bourdieu (1977) conceives of body maintenance and modification as generating a form of what some scholars, following Bourdieu, call physical or bodily capital (Hakim, 2011; Mears, 2008; Wacquant, 1995) whereby individuals invest in their bodies with the expectation that they can convert it into other forms of capital.<sup>9</sup> According to Bourdieu writing in the 1970s, labour upon the body is more common among women than men; women work upon their bodies in order to make themselves attractive and secure a man in the marriage market. The assumption here is that women are at a disadvantage in the labour market and as such need to marry in order to achieve material comfort and security, and that their chief bargaining power resides in their bodies and appearance. Bourdieu further contends that investment in the body has a class dimension where middle class women must sustain their bodywork beyond marriage because their occupational advancement is dependent upon it, whereas working class women lose much of their investment when they marry since they have effectively cashed in their physical capital (Crossley, 2006).

Sociologist Hakim updates Bourdieu's gendered analysis of capital through her concept of "erotic capital" which she defines as "a nebulous but crucial combination of beauty, sex appeal, skills of self-presentation and social skills" (2011,

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<sup>9</sup> According to Bourdieu (1986) capital refers to accumulated labour, which enables an individual to exercise and resist domination in the social order or to maintain a position in the status hierarchy. Bourdieu emphasizes that there are different forms of capital which take different permutations within a given moment of time including: 1) Economic capital which refers to that which can be directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights, factories and shares; 2) Cultural capital which refers to educational qualifications, training and work experience that is convertible under certain conditions into economic capital; and 3) Social capital which includes connections and networking which can also be converted into economic capital in certain conditions (Bourdieu, 1986).

p.3) to demonstrate that physically and socially beautiful women can convert this type of capital into economic reward. She argues that women possess more erotic capital than men because of “a male sex deficit”, and can and should use their beauty and sexuality to get ahead socially and professionally. Hakim claims that a major reason why Bourdieu has overlooked erotic capital is that the elite cannot monopolize it insofar as members of any class can use their beauty to gain leverage, and so it is in their interest to marginalize it.<sup>10</sup> Although she considers beauty as a meaningful category and a marker of privilege, her study is limited insofar as it is steeped within hetero-normative, essentialized and universalist assumptions about gender and beauty.

Mears (2011) further applies Bourdieu’s treatment of bodily capital to the sphere of the modeling industry, highlighting how beauty is a highly constructed enterprise where ideals are produced through the beauty industry and where fashion and beauty models promote, prescribe and disseminate ideas about how women and men should look. However, she discerns between beauty and a model’s look: whereas beauty is the transformation of the whole person through a team of experts comprised of hairstylists, makeup artists and fashion designers for corporate and economic ends, a model’s look describes a fixed set of physical attributes and operates as a type of body capital that models can convert into monies, through sellable looks. At the same time she underscores that these looks are not universally agreed upon as having value. Rather, bookers and clients act as gatekeepers in disseminating aesthetic values by

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<sup>10</sup> Her position in relation to Bourdieu can be critiqued in that Bourdieu was not concerned with exclusively explaining how elite power is reinforced through different forms of capital but also with the ways other classes could use these different forms of capital to resist domination in the social order or to maintain a position in the status hierarchy.

virtue of determining which looks are selected. Mears highlights how uncertain markets and institutional constraints pressure agencies to rely on existing conventions, imitation and stereotypes to guide their choices. In other words, bookers' everyday understanding of femininity shapes beauty ideals that they, in turn, think will resonate with imagined consumer audiences. Consequently, she highlights how through the selection of models by bookers, the elite beauty and fashion industries reproduce beauty ideals in line with existing standards, norms and practices of race, class and femininity.

Skeggs (2005) examines the ways in which beauty ideals re-inscribe existing class-based power relations. She turns to Bakhtin's (1941/1993) analysis of the grotesque body in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where representations of beauty were affiliated with the elite classes' classical smooth and virtuous body in contrast to the popular classes' 'grotesque' body, which is rough, uneven, unfinished, ugly, licentious and full of apertures. Thus, she argues that beauty is historically situated and has been correlated to dominant class values and tastes. Savacool (2009) demonstrates that women's bodies are mechanisms through which status and class are made visible and that their shape and size become the marker of financial and social status. According to Savacool, a beautiful body is a rarefied commodity, which requires economic capital and access to money to achieve and, thus, beauty is correlated with wealthy classes. For example, she demonstrates that in a North American context of overabundance, the ideal body is thin insofar as it requires stylists, personal trainers, nutritionists and expensive procedures such as plastic surgery. In contrast, in South Africa, a country where thinness can indicate illness—especially HIV/AIDS and

where the disease disproportionately affects the poorest population—a fleshy figure is a sign of beauty and a marker of wealth. Similarly, as mentioned above, Wolfe (1991) asserts that unattainable definitions of beauty standards are set by the beauty industry in order to sell products, thereby, positioning beauty in the context of capitalist consumption and middle class standards. In order to fit the beauty ideal, women must spend money and consume various expensive products. Thus, these scholars underscore the various ways in which beauty operates within capitalist and patriarchal frameworks in which 'upper' class women can meet its standards and requirements and achieve its social privileges.

Other feminist, communication and cultural studies scholars focus on the ways in which representations of beauty standards reproduce whiteness as the normative yardstick wherein whiteness is interwoven, conflated and articulated with standards of femininity (Bordo, 1993; Collins, 1990; Craig, 2002; Deliovsky, 2010; Dyer, 1997; Hall, 1997; hooks, 1981; Phillips, 2004). These scholars contend that normative beauty is never signified outside a process of racial domination. In particular, they assert that idealized representations of white femininity tend to be constructed in contrast to black bodies, particularly within the context of European colonialism and imperialism. Hall (1997) further evinces that cultural meanings are often based on marking difference that are reaffirmed through hierarchical binary oppositions as reductionist and stereotypic forms of representation such as us/them, white/black, good/bad, culture/nature, and mind/body. Likewise, Collins (1990) contends that 'white as beautiful' is often constructed in contrast to 'black as ugly'. More specifically, she suggests that externally defined standards of beauty were long

applied to African-American women so that the white woman could not be considered beautiful without the other black woman with classical African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips and kinky hair. Other scholars further demonstrate the instatement of binary oppositions where white women are represented as portrayed as permeated in light, virtuous and pure—akin to the Virgin Mary, in direct contrast to black women who are constructed as unlawful, sinful, sexual and erotic (Dyer, 1997; hooks, 1981). Hall contends that these representations are based on stereotypes where black people are further reduced through an emphasis on bodily attributes and the caricaturing of physical features to mark difference such as thick lips, fuzzy hair, broad face, nose and so on. Moreover, he argues that stereotypical representations of minorities are often split into two extreme oppositions at the same time: such as ugly/excessively attractive or repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange and exotic. Using the example of the Hottentot Venus as a black woman who was brought to England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, he explains that the fetishization of her body worked to turn her into an object of pleasure and desire, as a way of exoticizing her as ‘Other’. Not only was she put on display as a spectacle for the general public, scientists “scrutinized also every detail of her anatomy dead and alive” with a focus on her sexual organs (particularly her protruding buttocks and labia), where she was literally cut up and preserved into a set of separate sexual parts. Other scholars also demonstrate that representations of minorities are often cut up into body parts as a way of further figuring groups as others. Specifically hooks (2006) describes that there have been repeated emphasis on black women's 'booties'—as a means of sexualizing and eroticising black bodies as 'other.' She explains, “in a white

supremacist sexist society, all women's bodies are devalued, but white women's bodies are more valued than women of colour” (1990, p.62). Collins further underscores that defining people of colour as less human or more animalistic with more of a focus on their bodies supports a political economy of domination which always includes an element of objectification of subordinate groups. She notes:

Judging white women by their physical appearance and attractiveness to men objectifies them. But their white skin and straight hair privileges them in a system in which part of the basic definition of whiteness is its superiority to blackness. Black men’s blackness penalizes them. But because they are men, their self-definitions are not heavily dependent on their physical attractiveness as those of all women. But African-American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to externally defined standards of beauty... (1990: 80-81)

Bordo (2003) further argues that media representations normalize and naturalize the "whitified feminine beauty," which functions as the model against which women continually measure, judge, discipline and correct themselves. When races and ethnic backgrounds other than white are included and represented as beautiful, they often have features that conform to the white aesthetic and to normative standards of beauty. Gillespie writes: “black but not really black: café-au-lait, not black coffee, pouty rather than full-lipped; a big butt but not too much” (Gillespie, 1998, p.185). At the same time, as discussed, they are often contextualized within their respective racial frames and tend to signify the token woman of colour or the exotic and erotic (Collins, 1990; Deliovsky, 2010, Mears & Finlay, 2005; Mears, 2008). Similarly, Collins (1990) evinces that black women internalize these white beauty standards and police themselves and each other. For example, she notes that

mothers tell children not to play outside so that their skin does not darken under the sun.<sup>11</sup>

Feminists have further analysed the ways in which cosmetic surgery is used as a tool for the erasure of particular raced and ethnic body parts in order to achieve the white ideal. For instance, Davis (2003) points out that cosmetic surgery is predicated on definitions of physical normality rooted in whiteness in such a way that other races are marginalized and found wanting. In her study on cosmetic surgery and Asian American women, Kaw (1997) found that Asian American women desired eyelifts in order to eradicate the negative racial connotations associated with their physical characteristics. Cosmetic surgery is used to obtain beautiful faces, as these are culturally defined according to white standards. As well, Morgan (1991) demonstrates that Jewish women often underwent nose reductions in order to conform to white standards of beauty. Furthermore, Bordo (2003) notes that the uniformity of weaves and straight hair amongst black women is not just a matter of individual preference but suggests that whiteness is a normative marker of what is considered beautiful.

Due to the historical denigration of minority and particularly black women's bodies in North America, scholars have also traced the ways in which racially marginalized groups have used beauty practices as means of resistance in an attempt to elevate their bodies (Craig, 2002; Phillips, 2004). Notably, Phillips (2004) chronicles the way in which Annie Malone used PORO, an African inspired franchised system of beauty culture to elevate the status of black women's bodies in the white public sphere during the 1890s that deemed black bodies ugly, filthy and

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<sup>11</sup> The use of bleaching products is popular among the African American population. Michael Jackson was an iconic example.

threatening. Annie Malone particularly focused on celebrating black looks with an emphasis on cleanliness as a means of reclaiming the black body as worthy and offering redress to those women who had been devalued by a white beauty standard. Furthermore, as a business franchise, PORO allowed black women to work for themselves in their own communities and thus attain greater economic security and independence. Craig (2002) records the ways in which beauty was again mobilized in the 1960s black power movement and the gaining of civil rights in the “black is beautiful” campaign where women embraced the beauty of blackness by sporting black hairstyles such as Afros or Naturals and upholding a standard of beauty that favoured dark skin, thereby utilizing the body and self-presentation to defy a pejorative connotation and reclaim a sense of self worth. Collins (1990) likewise calls for the development of a redefinition of beauty, which would involve learning to see African-American women who have classical African features as being capable of being beautiful. However, she cautions that proclaiming black women as beautiful and white women as ugly merely replaces one set of contradictory images with another and fails to challenge Eurocentric masculinist beauty ideals fostering an ideology of domination. She asserts that creating an alternative feminist aesthetic involves deconstructing and rejecting existing standards of ornamental beauty that objectify women and judge them on their physical appearance. In the same vein, Hall (1997) critiques the ‘black is beautiful’ response as a strategic essentialism that ends up reproducing an inverted racism. Furthermore, he suggests that, even though adding positive images of black women as beautiful increases the diversity of the way in which ‘being black’ is represented, it does not necessarily displace the largely

negative repertoire of stereotypical images circulating in the dominant regime of representation that frame the way these images are read.

Although the aforementioned scholarship tends to focus on the ways in which media representations, norms and practices of beauty have largely been oppressive for women, some scholars have begun to turn their attention on the media's colonization and normalisation of male bodies (Barber, 2008; Bordo, 1999, Salzman, Matathia & O'Reilly, 2005). Bordo (1999) suggests that the mass media now positions men as sexualized objects of the gaze as it has done for women and claims that women, for the first time in recent history, are now encouraged to consume the beautified male body form. As a result, Bordo and others (see Salzman, Matathia & O'Reilly, 2005) contend that the sexualisation of men in the media and their participation in appearance-enhancing practices destabilize traditional gender dichotomies. These scholars demonstrate that men's magazines have proliferated in recent times and are increasingly filled with body-centric advertising and editorial content (Saul, 2003). This seeming subversion leads Bordo to exclaim "I never dreamed that 'equality' would move in the direction of men worrying *more* about their looks rather than women worrying less" (1999: 217). Likewise, Barber (2008) explores how men internalize these representations by analyzing how male hair salon clients make sense of their participation in beauty culture by emptying the practice of beauty work of its association with feminized aesthetics and instead construct it as a practice necessary for them to embody a class-based masculinity. Still other scholars caution that it is necessary to situate a discussion on masculine constructions of beauty in a larger

context where women have been historically defined in relation to their bodies while men have been figured in rational terms (Skeggs, 2005).

Despite the documentation of the ways in which media representations of beauty have contributed to the disciplining and normalisation of women and increasingly men's bodies, some scholars challenge the notion that beauty is always a form of oppression. As briefly discussed above in the context of gender, race and beauty some scholars have shown how beauty standards and practices have been utilized to elevate and reclaim bodies that had been deemed as abject (Collins, 1990; Craig, 2002; Phillips, 2004). Hebdige (1987) in his treatment of youth subcultures in England in the 1980s portrays the ways in which youth used their bodies and appearance as a means of communication and resistance—as the only means available to make themselves visible and their grievances taken seriously:

Youth culture as a sign system centres on the body—on appearance, posture and dress—If teenagers possess little else, they at least can own their bodies. If power can be exercised nowhere else, it can at least be exercised here (1987, p.31).

Youth use their appearance by dressing strangely as a response to the voyeuristic gaze, which has been historically foisted upon them. He demonstrates that punk girls have learned to play with the male gaze by taking charge of the ways in which they are being looked at and turning it into an aggressive act. Hebdige (1987) further argues that enhancing and adorning the body in certain ways is an act of insubordination by translating the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched and, as he calls it, “hiding in the light”. At the same time, he underscores that the use of the body as the only means available is also a confrontation of the fact of powerlessness.

Some feminists also discuss the ways in which beauty practices on the body are not simply acts of oppression but rather exercises of agency and individual choice. For instance, these studies present women's individual decisions to have cosmetic surgery as rational decisions wherein they weigh the financial, emotional, physical and political costs of surgery with social and economic benefits (Davis, 1995; Gimlin, 2000, Saul, 2003). Bordo (2003) explains that women's choice to embody beauty norms is a rational decision in which women must appeal to men to gain affection or esteem. In discussing women who have dangerous silicone breast implants, she explains:

These women take the risk, not because they have been passively taken in by media norms of the beautiful breast (almost always silicone enhanced), but because they have correctly discerned that the norms shape the perceptions and desires of potential lover and employers (1993, p.20).

From this perspective, women are conceived as “savvy cultural negotiators” “making do” with structural inequalities and constraints rather than “cultural dupes” blindly accepting or imitating media representations and normative standards (Gimlin, 2000, p.96). Nonetheless, for these scholars, empowerment remains couched within an oppressive patriarchal framework, wherein women conform to the male gaze. Thus, they tend to re-inscribe women's agency within a patriarchal framework. My research departs from this position by focusing on the ways in which beauty and the body can be utilized in processes of counter-hegemony in order to shift power relations.

More recently, feminists scholars are repositioning beauty within a framework of oppression in response to a post-feminist backlash against feminism in which

beauty practices are conceived as individual choice, agency and empowerment<sup>12</sup> (Brook, 2008; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Levy, 2005; McRobbie, 2007, 2009). Feminist, communication and cultural studies scholars argue that a post-feminist sensibility includes a notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways in which women are represented; an emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked re-sexualisation of women's bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Thus, feminist interventions charge that in a post-feminist context, beauty masquerades under the guise of women's rights to freedom and liberation and has been re-branded and packaged as empowerment while it re-establishes normative patriarchal standards of femininity and gender inequality (McRobbie, 2007, 2009). This strain of scholars further argue that 'new femininities' are being constructed in order to reassert women's positions of subordination and suggest that practices of beautification are positioned within a neoliberal sensibility wherein projects of individual self-improvement and empowerment are intimately linked with consumption practices.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, they analyse how media representations and particularly the makeover reality television genres as well as social media practices conflate post-feminism with neoliberal interests (Budgeon, 2011; Franco,

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<sup>12</sup>According to Gill and Scharff (2011), post-feminism signals (1) an epistemological break with feminism; (2) an historical shift after the height of Second Wave feminism and is thereby often synonymous with Third Wave feminism; (3) a backlash against feminism and the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; (4) a sensibility; and (5) an object of critical analysis rather than a theoretical orientation (p.3-4).

<sup>13</sup> Broadly speaking, neoliberalism is understood as a mode of political and economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation structured by individual entrepreneurial freedom.

2008; Press, 2011). Furthermore, they uphold that these themes coexist with and are structured by continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexuality wherein young, white, middle-upper class beauty standards are normalized.

### **Scholastic Lacunae and Research Questions**

Based on this literature review that draws from diverse scholastic backgrounds, an aporia becomes manifest within these treatments of the interrelationship between beauty, the body and power. On the one hand, those who conceive of beauty in relation to the body as natural, objective, quantifiable and universal uphold that beauty is a marker of social and economic privilege. These universalist approaches tend to overlook the ways in which standards of beauty are constructed through practices of communication and culture as well as overstate beauty as inherently empowering. On the other hand, feminists and communication scholars concede that beauty is a social construct perpetuated by the beauty industry through a barrage of media representations that reproduce relations of domination and subordination through the disciplining and normalizing of women's and men's bodies. Furthermore, beauty ideals are doubly oppressive insofar as they articulate normative beauty and femininity with young, white, 'upper'-classed, hetero-normative bodies—'othering' those that fall outside these parameters. Although a feminist approach moves beyond universal conceptions of beauty, it generally views beauty practices operating exclusively within a framework of domination and in so doing completely dismiss beauty as a complex category of meaning. Thus, the framework of

empowerment/oppression that characterizes scholarship on beauty tends to obscure ways in which beauty is a constructed process that is a continual and dynamic negotiation of power. Although some exceptions have been noted where beauty and the body function as sites of resistance, these acts of subversion are seen as being couched within or reaffirming existing relations of power. Moreover, communication scholars tend to discuss beauty primarily within the context of media representation. Few studies examine the ways that beauty moves beyond the level of representation and is implicated in other grounded communication practices and its correspondence to social organization.

These shortcomings in scholarship on beauty and the body have led me to ask a research question that is three-fold: (1) How can beauty function as a meaningful category without dismissing it as oppression or conflating it with Pollyanna-ish notions of empowerment, individual choice and agency?; (2) how are beauty and the body utilized within grounded practices of communication, specifically, as techniques and tactics for the deployment of a complex interplay of domination and resistances, consent and opposition?; and (3) can beauty and the body be deployed as instruments in counter-hegemonic resistance? The following chapter outlines a theoretical approach for considering how beauty and the body are implicated in techniques, tactics and practices of power and resistance in relation to politico-economic and socio-cultural contexts.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Beauty Matters: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches**

My theoretical framework extends the communication and cultural studies literature where beauty has been largely conceptualised as a form of oppression tied to representational practices. By building on scholarship that advances different yet complementary approaches to power, this chapter lays a foundation for considering how beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment can operate within strategies, techniques and tactics of power as well as within different types of resistance. My approach operates from the starting point that the body is not simply a natural entity but is also socially and culturally constructed and tied to communication practices that are grounded within a particular set of historical, politico-economic and socio-cultural conditions that influence its meanings and uses (Crossley, 2006). As will be discussed, the body is not exclusively a target of power, and a site of inscription by dominant groups, in that subordinate groups can also use practices of beauty and embodiment in different types of resistance.

I am particularly concerned with the ways that the body operates in processes of hegemony and, to varying degrees, counter-hegemony. To do so, I first draw on scholarship that outlines the historical materialist process of hegemony (Gramsci, 1927/1971; Hall, 1986, 1997; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Williams, 1980, 1981) as a dynamic type of power in order to consider the ways that beauty standards, norms and practices are used by dominant groups to win consent and forge alliances with popular classes through leadership practices via the cultural and ideological spheres.

Processes of counter-hegemony, (Carroll, 2006; Chalcraft & Noorani, 2007; Cohn, 2004; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Pratt, 2004) are linked to this dynamic type of power wherein subordinate groups forge alliances around an alternative politico-ethical view in order to challenge the dominant culture. I am interested in the ways in which the body can be used in counter-hegemonic processes in the sense that individuals ally their bodies together within the cultural sphere to shift existing hegemonic relations of power. I also use a Foucauldian approach as a different but complementary framework of power to help elucidate how the body can be utilized in processes of power and resistance, and to help reveal the ways in which power targets, and is invested within, the body. Drawing on Foucault's concepts of governmentality (1979/1991), bio-power (1978) subjectification (1982a) and technologies of the self (1997), I examine the ways that beauty and the body work in techniques of normalisation and standardisation that guide the conduct of oneself and others towards particular objectives. At the same time, power is conceptualized as productive and, thus, there is at least some degree of autonomy where individuals can elect to use their bodies in ways not intended by external sources such as the state, the media and/or beauty industry. A Foucauldian approach, therefore, helps to shed light on the ways that beauty standards, norms and practices can operate in techniques of resistance identified within the processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

Some scholars (Bartky, 1990; Butler, 1990,1993; de Certeau, 1984; Hennessey, 1993; McNay, 1993) have critiqued Foucault for his emphasis on the body as primarily a site of domination and for his underdeveloped treatment of resistance. These criticisms are largely overstated, but some of their approaches help

to further consider beauty and the body in terms of strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistances. Butler's conception of gender performativity (1990, 1993) advances the notion that gender and the body are not *a priori* categories but rather are performed through repeated stylizations of the body that congeal into normative codes of masculinity and femininity. These performances also include an element of resistance at the bodily level in that beauty practices can be re-assembled to create new stylizations of the body. Butler's approach has been critiqued (e.g. Fraser, 1997) as an individual, bodily-based intervention that lacks a class dimension as well as an ability to shift structural relations of power, a point that will be attended to in more detail below. De Certeau further fleshes out a Foucauldian notion of resistance through his concept of tactics (1984), which are spontaneous responses to opportunities emerging from cracks and fissures that are always part of hegemonic relations. In this type of resistance, beauty and the body can operate as everyday tactics where some individuals can gain social or physical mobility within an existing set of power relations without overturning them.

Despite their differences, I argue that these scholastic approaches (which I will address in further detail shortly) can be used together and form an effective theoretical framework for examining how beauty and the body operate within different types of power and, thereby, help to shed light on how the body may operate in processes of counter-hegemonic resistances.

This chapter is organized into three parts: first, I lay out these aforementioned theoretical approaches particularly in terms of their implications for beauty and the body; second, I integrate these discussions into my own theoretical framework for

considering norms, standards and practices of beauty and the body as implicated within different forms of power and types of resistance; and lastly I outline my case studies and methodological approach.

### **Beauty and the Body in Processes of Hegemony**

The process of hegemony is a dynamic type of power based on ruling classes winning the consent of subordinate groups through leadership practices via the cultural and ideological spheres (Gramsci, 1927/1971; Hall, 1986; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Williams, 1980, 1981). As culturally and socially constructed practices, beauty and the body can be used in techniques by elite groups to secure enduring relations of power. At the same time, this type of power does not guarantee the full domination of ruling groups, rather it is a dynamic and unstable process that continually must be “renewed, recreated and defended and by the same token continually challenged and modified” (Williams, 1980: 38). From this perspective, hegemony is not based on domination alone but is comprised of an interplay between coercion, leadership, consent and opposition that take on different permutations within specific contexts. By examining scholarship on hegemony, I set the stage for considering the ways that beauty and the body are used in these processes in three specific contexts: German Fascism, fashion blogging and neo-burlesque theatre.

Gramsci’s contributions act as a crucial starting point of my thesis. His concept of hegemony stems from a Marxist tradition and extends the locus of power mainly from the economic base to the cultural and ideological institutions of the superstructure. Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony remains entrenched within a

historical materialist framework in that the historical conditions and the economic base are crucial factors in social formation (Gramsci, 1971). His approach, therefore, lays the groundwork for considering how cultural and communication practices of beauty and the body are situated within specified historical conditions and are influenced by politico-economic structures that set limits on their development, meanings and uses.

Gramsci argues that Western liberal democracies, with their complex and robust civil societies, provide the necessary foundations for processes of hegemony. He distinguishes between the military metaphors of "war of manoeuvre" and "war of position" where the former refers to a quick frontal shift of power through coercive techniques, and the latter is enacted via the whole organization and complex structures of institutions of civil society. While Gramsci suggests that both techniques are used, he argues that Western liberal democracies tend to favour a war of position, where the dominant classes create and maintain a system of class alliances with subordinate groups. Through the forging of class alliances, a "historical bloc" can be formed (though it is not guaranteed) where the ruling classes "lead" through the coordination of at least some of their interests in line with the subordinate classes. Therefore, dominant groups must take into account subordinate class interests in an attempt to gain legitimacy and popularity (Gramsci, 1927/1971, p.182). In this way, Gramsci argues that hegemony is a dynamic and unstable process that has to be actively constructed and positively maintained.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gramsci's consideration of hegemony stems from the examination of the specific social formation of the Italian political situation in the 1930s and what basis could be found in the complex system of alliances and relations between different social strata for the foundation of a specifically modern state in the face of fascism.

Hall (1977) summarizes Gramsci's concept of hegemony:

Hegemony exists when a ruling class (or rather an alliance of ruling class factions, a historical bloc) is able not only to coerce a subordinate class to conform to its interests but exert a 'total social authority' over those classes and the social formation as a whole. Hegemony is in operation when the dominant class factions not only dominate by direct force—but lead: when they not only possess the power to coerce but actively organize so as to command and win the consent of the subordinate classes to their continuing sway (Hall, 1977, p.332, my underline).

Since Hall, like Gramsci, recognises that hegemony utilizes leadership qualities, his use of the term "total social authority" is overstated. I argue that, insofar as hegemony is a dynamic process, it does not involve the total incorporation of subordinate groups into dominant ones but points to a continual struggle between competing interests where concessions and compromises have to be enacted in order to secure alliances with popular classes. As such, hegemony diverges from domination: while the latter concept involves ruling groups' control and authority through coercive measures, the former is based on a type of power where ruling groups lead through the coordination of class alliances amongst different groups. Consequently, hegemony is not seemingly based on the elite classes' domination alone, but it is a complex process where dominant groups must take into account some ideas and practices of subordinate groups.

The coordination of class alliances is enacted with the aid of the "organic intellectuals": the leaders of subordinate classes who liaise between their own class interests and those of dominant classes (Gramsci, 1927/1971, p.5-23). Gramsci discerns between "traditional intellectuals" who are defined by their profession and "organic intellectuals" who perform a mediating function in the struggle for solidifying class alliances. These organic intellectuals, on the one hand, act as the

dominant classes' deputies, often exercising the subaltern aspects of hegemony and, on the other hand, simultaneously put forward their own class aspirations and, as such, can exert some influence on the ruling groups. They often use communication and cultural practices and can be writers, journalists and performers hired to carry out the interests of the dominant groups, which they do to secure their position. This gives them some capacity to use their influence to defend their own group's interests (Gitlin, 1980). In my analysis, the organic intellectuals are the cultural leaders who mediate between their own group interests and those of dominant culture in order to insert their own ideas into cultural, communication and media practices and influence the hegemonic formation, a point that I will expand on later when I discuss my case studies.

Cultural studies scholars (Hall, 1986, 1997; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Williams, 1980, 1981) further extend Gramsci's contributions to hegemony into the sphere of communication and culture. Defined as a "whole and distinct way of life" and a "system of practices guided by values and ideas" (Martin, 1997, p.71), the domain of culture is conceived as a central sphere for the processes of hegemony. Hall (1997) conceptualises culture as a set of shared meanings, which enable individuals to understand and communicate with one another. In his view, meanings are not static but are produced and exchanged and rely on representational practices. Hall argues that representations are central in processes of hegemony where dominant groups attempt to fix meaning but where signs and language can never be fully controlled, so that other groups can influence their practices at the level of production (1997) and reception (1980).

Williams argues that hegemony is exercised at the level of culture via a "whole body of practices" that are embodied and organized. He particularly incorporates the term "culture" (1967, 1981) in his analysis of the processes of hegemony, demonstrating that it came to adopt the aforementioned connotations throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century alongside the transformations and new prominence of other terms including "industry", "democracy", "class", and "art". He argues: "the development of the word *culture* is a record of a number of important and continuing changes in our social, economic and political life and may be a special kind of map by means of which the nature of these changes can be explored" (Williams, 1967, p.xvi). Thus, culture becomes a new and central area of study linked with material and political forces, including communication and media practices.

Williams' conceptualization of cultural hegemony, like Gramsci's ideological hegemony, remains entrenched within a historical materialist framework insofar as the material base still plays a fundamental role in cultural processes. He also complexifies an economically reductionist base/superstructure model by first asserting that rather than conceptualizing the base as a fixed state, it must be conceived in terms of specific activities of individuals in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental and various contradictions (Williams, 1980, p.34). Furthermore, he expands the Marxist conception of "determination" from that in which the economy completely prefigures or directly controls the superstructure to one in which it exerts pressure or sets limits on cultural practices and their uses (Williams, 1980, p.32). From his perspective, and that of Hall, while the ruling classes do have marked influence on cultural production and content, they do not

have complete or direct control over these processes. Williams argues that in any particular period there is a central system of practices, meanings and values that can be called dominant and effective and that penetrate the practices of subordinate groups. According to Williams, hegemony involves a more dynamic process within the cultural sphere as it entails "...a whole body of practices and expectations...It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (Williams, 1980, p.38).

In practical terms, hegemony is exercised via the cultural sphere within communication practices through the production of dominant ideologies that penetrate into the everyday practices of subordinate groups. Ideology is defined by Williams as the "world-view or general perspective" of a class or other social group, including formal and conscious beliefs but also less conscious, less formulated attitudes, habits and feelings and even unconscious assumptions, bearings and commitments (Williams, 1981, p.26). Dominant classes manufacture popular consent through representational practices of dominant ideologies, which are adopted by subordinate groups who incorporate them into beliefs, assumptions and practical activities and, in doing so, transform dominant viewpoints into "common sense". Gramsci represents common sense as 'traditional wisdom' or 'truth of the ages', but also part of a deeply selective and historical process in which dominant meanings are foregrounded while others are downplayed or sometimes completely occluded. Hall (1986) explains that common sense is the already formed and taken-for-granted terrain which other ideologies and conventions must take into account, contest and

transform in order to shift hegemonic relations of power, a point that will be elaborated on shortly in my discussion of counter-hegemony.

Cultural studies scholars further explain the production of cultural hegemony through the two mechanisms of "acculturation/enculturation" (Martin-Barbero, 1993) and "naturalization" (Hall,1997). Specifically, Martin-Barbero (1993) asserts that acculturation/enculturation are two aspects of a process for assimilating parts of a particular culture into the hegemonic one. Whereas the mechanism of acculturation involves subduing or even destroying some forces through repressive measures in order to integrate them into the hegemonic culture, that of enculturation involves the introduction of elements of the elite culture into the regional, subordinate cultures to make them fit into the hegemonic one. This domestication of oppositional forces occurs through various overt and subtle techniques and tactics that will be made apparent throughout my case studies. Hall (1997) further proposes another mechanism, that of naturalization, wherein dominant cultural practices are made to appear natural. Specifically, dominant ideas and practices are naturalized insofar as they are made to seem permanent and fixed, and therefore unchangeable and legitimate even though they are issued from constructed and selective processes. From this perspective, common sense is the ultimate outcome of a naturalization process where the dominant ideologies are made to appear as the stable, taken-for-granted reality of all groups within the hegemonic culture.

These mechanisms accentuate how cultural hegemony is not achieved by replacing one formed conception of the world with another, but is based on processes of "incorporation", (Williams, 1980, p.39). These processes involve the assimilation

of dominant ideas and practices into the practices and forms of consciousness of popular groups. In order for incorporation to be effective, some meanings and practices are emphasized but, even more crucially, some must be reinterpreted, diluted or put into forms which support, or at least do not contradict, other elements of the dominant culture (Williams, 1980, p.39). Furthermore, as a lived and dynamic process, hegemony must constantly be renegotiated and modified to accommodate new, alternative or oppositional ideologies and practices in order to maintain alliances. Williams uses the terms alternative—as different ways of living than the dominant culture—and oppositional—as a direct challenge to the dominant culture—to signify various degrees of viewpoints and practices that may be tolerated by dominant culture to secure a hegemonic formation. Some social formations allow for alternative meanings insofar as they do not pose a direct threat to the dominant culture, and even some oppositional perspectives that do not go beyond the limits of dominant ideas and practices. However, their degrees of tolerance are a matter of constant historical variation based on the particular contexts in which they are situated.

Williams differentiates between residual and emergent cultures to demonstrate ways in which alternative and oppositional voices are included within processes of hegemony (Williams, 1980, p.40-42). The former suggests that some subaltern ideologies, meanings and values left over from a previous social formation that have not been entirely subsumed under the new hegemonic relations of power, may persist. Similarly, the latter implies that new ideologies, meanings and practices are continually being created outside the dominant culture, which have yet to be

effectively incorporated into the hegemonic process. However, not all elements from the residual and emergent culture will be oppositional and different or alternative ways of living may be permitted, as they are not a direct challenge to the dominant culture.

This discussion suggests that while hegemony has some components of a top-down model of power, it is not based exclusively on coercion or manipulation of the ruling classes where those who control the means of production and communication have direct control over subordinate groups. Rather, to secure alliances with, and obtain consent from, subordinate groups, cultural hegemonic processes necessarily include a capacity for integrating alternative and even oppositional ideas and practices.

As a cultural construction, the body becomes a means for the exercise of processes of hegemony. Communication and representational practices of beauty standards and norms can operate as part of a dynamic process in which cultural meanings can never be completely fixed. Therefore, sometimes, alternative and oppositional meanings and practices of beauty are incorporated into dominant beauty standards and norms as a means to forge alliances with subordinate groups. The different degrees and permutations of incorporating oppositional meanings into dominant ideologies are related to the specific contexts in which the cultural and communication practices are grounded. This will be analysed through my three case studies: with propaganda posters of the Third Reich and face to face communication of Nazi Holocaust survivors with their jailors, in fashion blogs, and in neo-burlesque theatre. The two latter case studies will particularly examine how members of popular

groups operate as "organic intellectuals" that used communication practices to insert their own interests while mediating those of the dominant culture. Furthermore, by extending the role of organic intellectuals from *intellectual* leadership at the level of *ideas*, to include individuals that engage in a mediating role at the level of *practices*, this concept can also be applied to the case study on Jewish Holocaust survivors. Specifically, the concentration camps and ghettos were based on a social hierarchy where some (mostly male) prisoners were placed in positions of authority and used to carry out SS officers' commands. They also used their dominant positions to advance their own groups' concerns and improve the conditions of some prisoners, in some instances.

Although Gramsci's notions of the processes of hegemony are associated with Western liberal democracies, I argue that these processes could occur under other political systems, including fascist ones, a point that will be developed in the following chapter. After all, Gramsci conceptualized the processes of hegemony within the context of fascist Italy and even managed to express dissent while in an Italian prison in the *Prison Notebooks*, suggesting that even in a Fascist context, there was some capacity for opposition. As will be explored through my three case studies, each politico-economic context had a different set of power relations where German Fascism had the strongest degree of coercion. Within a context of extreme domination, there exists only a slight margin for oppositional practices; within democratic conditions there is more space for alternative and oppositional ideologies and practices.

## **Counter-hegemonic Aspects of the Body**

Counter-hegemony refers to a type of resistance that operates at the level of civil society via the ideological and cultural spheres, including communication practices to incite political change (Carroll, 2006; Cohn, 2004; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Miliband, 1990; Pratt, 2004; Schein, forthcoming). Counter-hegemony is not necessarily in direct opposition to the hegemonic process; it can be part of it and can, at times, use similar techniques to resist the social relations created by dominant groups (Chalcraft & Noorani, 2007). In this type of resistance, subordinate groups attempt to win the consent of other groups and forge alliances through leadership practices in order to create alternative political and/or socio-cultural movements that pose a challenge to hegemonic practices (Carroll, 2006; Chalcraft and Noorani, 2007; Cohn, 2004, Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Miliband, 1990). In contrast to revolutions, counter-hegemony is a gradual process contesting the common sense of the dominant culture in order to shift relations of power. In fact, counter-hegemonic and hegemonic processes are in a dialectical and dynamic relationship. In his classic piece, *Counter-hegemonic Struggles*, Miliband (1990) argues that hegemony can never be totally won insofar as there exists a vast discrepancy between the messages that hegemonic endeavours seek to disseminate and the lived realities of subordinate groups. He suggests that this discrepancy provides a large terrain for counter-hegemonic endeavours, which is sometimes more favourable and sometimes less, but never altogether barren.

In *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (1985), Mouffe and Laclau argue that in order for subaltern groups to build a strong network of alliances to shift hegemonic relations of power, they must move beyond their exclusive class outlook and take into account the broader demands of other groups. From their perspective, a viable counter-hegemony draws together subaltern social forces around an alternative ethico-political conception of the world, constituting a common interest that transcends the narrower interests of various individual groups. They suggest that, through a series of "dis-articulations and re-articulations" that re-conjoin ideological elements in new ways, subordinate groups can counter hegemonic endeavours. They contend that through these re-articulations, groups can forge alliances through a "logic of equivalence" where class antagonisms are downplayed in favour of common interests reinforced in a bid for social power. These scholarly versions of counter-hegemony focus on class as well as on the re-articulation of groups at the level of discourse obscuring the historical materialist practices in which hegemony is grounded.

Miliband (1990) argues that counter-hegemonic endeavours are not just class-based but come from diverse sources, including the contributions of feminist, ecological, anti-racist and other "new social movements", which have challenged the "common sense" reality, thereby moving beyond working class, and more specifically labour movements as the leaders in counter-hegemonic processes. As a 'new' social movement, feminism is an interesting site to analyse counter-hegemonic processes, particularly in relation to my dissertation. Several scholars argue that feminism's counter-hegemonic aspects have been coopted by neo-liberal and capitalist

imperatives that have made use of (liberal) feminist ideals for their own ends through a focalization on individualism and liberty (Eisentein, 2010; Fraser, 2013). Schein (forthcoming) critiques these scholars' account by distinguishing between cooptation and (counter)hegemony as a way to understand the causes of social movements' demobilisation or decline. Whereas the former considers feminism as a static entity that could be protected against forms of domination, the latter understands the ebb and flow of social movements' rise and decline as a dynamic, unstable, constantly changing process wherein failures and successes are always partial. Thus, Schein argues that hegemony offers a more complete repertoire for understanding the complexity of movements' temporal trajectories over the long term. From this perspective, feminism was not coopted by neo-liberal and dominant classes, but is part of a more dynamic and complex process where liberal elements succeeded and radical elements were suppressed. It follows that feminism is not intrinsically counter-hegemonic but operates as a "site" through which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes can operate. From this perspective, one can argue that counter-hegemony is a dynamic process that moves in and through sites through which shared perspectives and solidarities are forged to craft collectivities that counteract hegemonic relations of power through practical activities.

In the same way, I argue that the body can operate as a "site of counter-hegemony" in instances where it is used in politico-economic or socio-cultural practices to mobilize individuals and groups together across a network of sites to challenge hegemonic relations. Counter-hegemonic resistance moves beyond individually based resistances by harnessing people together to change power

relations. I am particularly interested in how the body can be used as sites for counter-hegemonic resistance across three contexts – German Fascism, fashion blogging and neo-burlesque theatre – within which, the body is a potential and actual site of counter-hegemonic processes. Specifically, whereas some contexts might foster the necessary conditions for counter-hegemonic conditions to take shape, they do not always flourish into a counter-hegemonic resistance that succeeds in shifting existing relations of power – a rare occurrence, according to Gramsci. It should be noted that in my case studies, I am not concerned with the ways the body can revolutionize social relations, but rather the way it can shift power relations within a limited specified field in the socio-cultural sphere, such as within the ghettos or concentration camps under German Fascism, in the fashion industry or in a theatrical context. In short, I explore the counter-hegemonic power of the body and its limitation within three very different situations of power. Indeed, in my case studies, I examine how subaltern individuals or groups can sometimes act as "organic intellectuals" that use communication and cultural practices of beauty norms, standards and practices of embodiment to challenge hegemonic power relations. Specifically, my first case study aims at discovering whether Jewish survivors could use their bodies in processes of counter-hegemonic resistance in a case of extreme coercion and domination under German Fascism. My second case study examines how a fashion blogger could use the widespread reach of social media to create alliances across a network of sites to challenge beauty norms, standards and practices by the elite fashion industry. My final case study on neo-burlesque theatre analyses how performers could use their bodies in these performances to challenge beauty norms and standards in their own

cultural sphere. The following section provides a complementary approach to power for considering more deeply the body in different types of resistance.

### **Gramsci vis-à-vis Foucault**

I choose to complement a Gramscian approach with Foucault's conceptualization of power because it allows a more meticulous and refined analysis of the mechanisms that are revealed in the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic aspects of the standards, norms and practices related to beauty and the body. It provides supplementary analytical elements for considering the ways beauty norms, standards and practices can be used in strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance.

"Getting Marx and Foucault into bed together", to use Hunt's words, is not a novel intellectual association. These approaches have been used in complementary ways (Curtis, 2014; Daldal, 2014; Koopman and Matza, 2013; Hunt, 2004; Martin, 1991; Moore, 2005; Nader, 1999; Smart, 1983) to examine how power is diffused and exercised at all levels of society and, particularly, within cultural and communication practices (Hall, 1997). Already in the 1980s, Said (1978) used a combination of these approaches in his fundamental work on Orientalism and, as he explained in an interview published in *Relocating Post-Colonialism* (2002), he found this association – of what some scholars call incompatible approaches – very productive for the analysis of diverse and sometimes entangled forms of power. In 1991, in her influential book *'Hello Central?'*, Martin (1991) reconciled Gramsci's and Foucault's approaches to analyse the hegemonic process sustaining the expansion of the telephone system in central Canada. While she used Gramsci's concepts to

understand the dynamic between the different classes involved in the hegemonic process entailed in the telephone's development, she turned to Foucault's conceptualisation of power to uncover specific techniques and mechanisms of resistance emerging from operators' and subscribers' practices used to influence that process.

Although some scholars (e.g. Grossberg, 1999; Hall, 1997; Smart, 1983) have, in early works, traced irreconcilable differences between Gramscian and Foucauldian models of power<sup>15</sup>, Hunt (2004) most explicitly argues that they are not incompatible:

My contention is that although Foucault's views were often articulated in terms different from Marx they are by no means incompatible; Foucault's views are much closer to Marx than he was ever prepared to concede... (p.604).

Although Hunt recognizes that Marx's and Foucault's approaches have "rough edges" that create some tensions and differences, he claims that it is "precisely out of those tensions and differences that the stimulus to thought arises (2004: 608)." Yet, Hunt contends that Marx's and Foucault's approaches have similarities and complementarities. They are both concerned with social relations and share a commitment to historical specificity. Further, while Marx's approach provides the means of addressing the forms of aggregation or condensation of social, economic, and other forms of power that are a typical feature of mechanisms of domination; Foucault's approach helps to flesh out the ways that power does not have one locus (such as the state) but operates in local, semi-official and other exercises of governance, regulation and disciplinary practices.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, although Hall (1997, p.261) argues that Gramscian and Foucauldian approaches to power are compatible, he claims that Gramsci stresses the way that power operates between classes whereas Foucault refused to identify any specific individual, group or class as the source of power.

Other scholars have more specifically discussed the ways in which Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony acts as a bridge between Marxist and Foucauldian approaches (Daldal, 2014; Moore 2005, Nader 1989, Smart 1983). Nader (1989), citing Smart (1986), asserts that Foucault and Gramsci would agree that “a hegemonic relationship is established ‘not through force or coercion, nor necessarily through consent, but most effectively by way of practices, techniques and methods which infiltrate minds, bodies, tastes, desires and needs’ (1989, p.325).”

Some cultural studies scholars also put Gramscian and Foucauldian approaches together. Hall (1997) argues that both Gramsci and Foucault move beyond top-down models to other options not determined by the political or the economic spheres, and based on practices of cultural leadership. Cultural and communication practices are central to both models of power which include productive aspects based on soliciting, inducing, producing pleasure and winning consent to guide the conduct of individuals towards particular objectives. Moreover, in both approaches power is not limited to one group, but is part of a dynamic process where subordinate groups can resist. Cultural studies emerged from Gramsci's approach of hegemony, which some scholars like Williams extended to include cultural and communication practices. Later, Stuart Hall (1997) used Foucault's conception of power to help explain the dynamism of cultural representations and meanings.

Although influenced by these works, my analytical framework adopts its own conceptual approach to examine situations and contexts specific to my dissertation and different from those explored in the works discussed above. I argue that, together,

Gramsci's and Foucault's approaches provide a complementary framework for examining the ways in which cultural and communication practices on beauty and the body operate within strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance, thereby casting light on how the body can be mobilized in processes of counter-hegemony. The next section is particularly concerned with the Foucauldian aspects of my theoretical approach.

### **A Foucauldian Approach**

Starting with Foucault's concept of docile bodies (1977, 1984), I discuss the ways in which he positions the body as a central target and site of inscription for power relations. I then turn to his concepts of governmentality (1979/1991), subjectification (1982), bio-power (1978) and technologies of the self (1997), to further conceptualize the ways beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment not only "conduct the conduct" of oneself and others towards external objectives set by the media and the fashion-beauty complex (Bartky, 1990), but are also used for the development of different types of resistance. This links Foucault's approach to the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

#### Docile Bodies

Foucault (1977, 1984) characterizes the body as an object and target of domination by turning subjects into "docile bodies" that are disciplined, surveyed and controlled. In his own words, the body is directly involved in the political field: "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (1984,

p.25-26). Foucault claims that the disciplining of bodies is simultaneously enacted by external sources as well as by the individual who participates in his<sup>16</sup> own self-disciplining through various physical trainings. Foucault invokes Bentham's panoptic prison as a metaphor for this second aspect of controlling bodies. The panopticon is described as a model of an 18<sup>th</sup> century prison, which has a circular design with a watchtower at its centre and rows of cells around the circumference facing inward towards the tower. In such a structure, inmates know that they may be observed by guards at any time, but since they cannot determine when, they engage in practices of self-surveillance where they self-discipline and self-monitor in order to avoid punishment. Foucault associates the panopticon model with modern techniques of power, which make the subjects visible. Individuals become 'self-policing subjects' who discipline their own behaviours once they have internalised these external relations of observation and surveillance.

As mentioned in the literature review, some feminist scholars (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003) extend Foucault's notion of docile bodies to the construction of the feminine subject, in the sense that beauty norms and standards work as a panoptic gaze that transform women into self-policing subjects where they learn self monitoring, self-discipline and self-surveillance through the systematic scrutiny of their own bodies. From this perspective, women internalize the male gaze in such a way that they spend their energy and money in order not to deviate from men's acceptable standards of appearance and, in doing so, turn themselves into docile

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<sup>16</sup> The use of the pronoun 'himself' is intentional in this instance. As feminist scholars have charged (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Hennessey, 1993; McNay, 1992), Foucault privileged a universal male subject and thereby occluded gendered dimensions of the subjectification process.

bodies: passive objects that are trained, regulated and utilized in the service of particular interests. Specifically, beauty norms and standards applied to the body transform women's bodies into currencies for the production of huge profits made by the beauty industries. Nonetheless, other feminist scholars critique a Foucauldian framework for over-emphasizing the body as a site of domination (Hennessey, 1993; McNay, 1992). Without altogether dismissing the ways in which beauty standards and norms operate in techniques aimed at disciplining the body, Foucault's later works open up a capacity for figuring the body in different types of resistances.

### Governmentality and Normalizing Techniques

I use Foucault's concept of governmentality (1979/1991) to develop a more complex understanding of beauty norms as a productive technique of power concerned with normalizing individuals and the population that also includes a resistive dimension. This concept suggests a form of government based on a new technique of power concerned with the management and regulation of the population through practices and techniques of normalisation. Walters (2012) identifies three distinct meanings that Foucault associates with the term governmentality. First, in its broadest sense, governmentality is conceived as "the conduct of conduct" in that it is concerned with guiding, directing and structuring the behaviour of individuals and the population towards particular objectives. From this viewpoint, governmentality is a productive type of power and refers to practices, techniques and rationalities that are employed when individuals and groups seek to shape the conduct of others and/or oneself. It encompasses a broad field of sites including households, families, schools and the media, as well as the ways in which individuals govern themselves. Second,

Foucault also concentrates on governmentalization of the modern state in which he examines the various strategies and techniques used to regulate the population.<sup>17</sup>

Third, in certain instances, he discusses governmentality as synonymous with liberalism, which first emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and has “as its primary target the population, as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security and political economy as its principle form of knowledge” (Foucault, 1979/1991, p.102). These three meanings of governmentality are intertwined in my examination of beauty and the body.

Foucault elaborates his concept of governmentality using the historical specificities of various governments, in which he traced the confluence of new knowledges and techniques of rule, which emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and were developed as practices of government throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He tracks a categorical distinction between the old model of power—that of sovereignty (i.e. the prince) – and a new government rationality—the art of government (i.e. governmentality). Whereas sovereign rule such as a prince stood in a relation of singularity, externality and transcendence to his principality, there appeared a plurality of other kinds of governments internal to the state and the social sphere (such as the government of souls and lives, of children and of households and of the state). Furthermore, with sovereignty (sometimes also referred to as a juridical view of power) power is conceptualized as a possession, a privilege, or a right to be

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<sup>17</sup> According to Walters (2012), the concept of 'raison d'état' is especially important for Foucault because it marks the point at which an art of government specific to the state first emerged, and in which the art of governing comes to be expressed in terms of an object and language of the state. Walters points to the elaboration of certain practices that correlate to various emergent knowledges including the military diplomatic technology, the technology of the police, which focused on the internal order of the state as well as the development of statistics, which will be discussed in more detail in the text.

maintained through the enactment of repression, prohibition and denial enforced through coercion and/or laws.<sup>18</sup> With governmentality, power is *exercised* through techniques, tactics, manoeuvres or functions in which even the laws themselves become tactics “to arrange things in such a way through a certain number of means, such and such ends can be achieved” [sic] (Foucault, 1979/1991, p.95).

Foucault argues that this modern mechanism of government is formed around the problem of “population” as a new object of knowledge. In particular, the emergence of population was coterminous with the development of a new science and knowledge of the state—statistics—which allow the determination of norms and averages by measuring regularities, birth, death, disease and crime rates, cycles of scarcity, and risks etc. As a consequence, the population becomes a datum to be mined and utilized for particular ends. Foucault argues that governmentality, in contrast to sovereignty, is concerned with the welfare of the population, the improvement of its conditions, the increase of its wealth, longevity and health (Foucault, 1979/199, p.100). He further underscores that these normalizing practices of government have not replaced sovereignty and disciplinary practices, both outlined above, rather there exists a triangle: sovereignty-discipline-government with different permutations of each working together, that need to be examined within their specific contexts.

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<sup>18</sup> Smart (1983, p.81) draws parallels between juridico and Marxist concepts of power arguing that they both have an underlying economic foundation to power. He argues that in the juridico conception, power is taken to be a right, a possession and is treated like a commodity that can be held, transferred or alienated. Similarly, in Marxism, power stems from the economic base insofar as conceived principally as the role it plays in the relations of production and class domination. Therefore both the juridical and Marxist conceptions of power have been described as economic insofar as power has been conceptualized as a commodity, a possession or as subordinate to or in the service of the economy.

Foucault suggests that liberalism paved the way for these techniques of governmentality. Specifically, the liberal art of government is predicated on presupposing and cultivating freedom (freedom of markets, trade, individuals). In this way, freedom is not the opposite of government but rather one of its key inventions and most significant resources used to steer the comportment of individuals and the population to the benefit of the state. This regulation of the population is made possible by practices of security and risk management as a specific mode of governing that calculates patterns of groups or segments of the population in order to assess probabilities, risks and variations (Rose, 1999; Walters, 2012). Liberal democratic contexts, which are based on the principles of liberty, individuality and the pursuit of happiness, (Held, 1987/2006), therefore, provide the necessary conditions for techniques of governmentality. This type of power is, therefore, predicated on a degree of freedom, however limited, on the side of those who wish to govern and those whose conduct is the target of that governance. Consequently, governmentality necessarily includes a capacity for resistance where individuals can choose alternate or oppositional ways of conducting oneself or others. This approach to power, therefore, correlated to the processes of hegemony in that both types of power have some space for oppositional and resistive measures to occur in varying degrees. However, whereas the process of hegemony includes the coordination of oppositional forces that sometimes lead to counter-hegemonic movements, this type of resistance involves electing different forms of behaviours than those intended by the state.

Although Foucault largely considers governmentality as mechanisms used by the state, a point that will be explored in the case study on German fascism, Walters (2012) upholds that in the broadest sense of the term, these techniques can occur in other instances in which individuals or groups guide the conduct of themselves and/or others. This corrective lens helps to explicate the ways that beauty standards and norms set by the beauty industry also work to regulate individuals' appearances and behaviours in line with capitalist and patriarchal objectives. Beauty standards are often established by the beauty industry via cultural norms and pseudo-scientific approaches that use statistical analysis to calculate averages, ratios and proportions, an approach adopted by the evolutionary biologists' treatment of beauty as discussed in my literature review.<sup>19</sup> These beauty standards set by the beauty industry are increasingly adopted by women who engage in normalizing practices, such as grooming their bodies, implementing exercise and diet regimes or purchasing beauty products to improve their complexion in order to fit conventional beauty standards. These normalizing techniques are also increasingly adopted by men who undergo painful and expensive beauty practices such as plastic surgery, waxing, manicures and so on, in order to conform to beauty standards. Thus, techniques of normalisation are linked to processes of standardisation where individuals adopt standards set by external sources, thereby also governing themselves.

Similar to processes of hegemony (that largely operate within democratic contexts), Foucault's techniques of governmentality exist within a context of liberal governance. Nonetheless, Walters (2012, p.39) asserts that liberal and neo-liberal

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<sup>19</sup> The use of statistics in normalizing techniques is taken to the extreme in eugenic movements (such as the case of the Nazis).

forms of government do not exhaust the different ways that the state has been governmentalized and calls for increased academic examination of non-liberal and a-liberal forms of governmentality. By extension, the techniques of governmentality can be operational under different types of governments, including fascist regimes. As I will demonstrate, the Nazis used beauty standards and norms as techniques of governmentality to guide the German population towards Nazi objectives. Even Fascist Germany was not a case of total domination, repression and coercion<sup>20</sup> as the Nazis used some productive techniques of power to conduct the conduct of the population. The case study in the following chapter examines the ways in which the Nazi regime imposed specific beauty standards and norms through the use of statistics to classify, hierarchize and normalize the population in order to legitimate the superiority of the Aryan master race. At the same time, the Nazis' use of beauty as a technique of governmentality suggests at least some potential for beauty standards, norms and practices to operate as forms of resistance where individuals could use their bodies in different ways than the state intended. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that in fascist regimes individuals have a very limited degree of freedom; consequently, their transgressions may have severe consequences ranging from punishment, imprisonment or even death in some instances. This case of extreme domination suggests that beauty has a more limited potential for resistance, a point that will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>20</sup> Some World War II historians (Evans, 2005; Housden, 1997; Kershaw, 2008) document instances of dissent and opposition ranging from verbal complaints, protests, the distribution of leaflets to disobeying laws, hiding Jews and assassination attempts, thereby demonstrating at least a small degree of freedom.

Within liberal democratic contexts, (which are the settings of my other two case studies), some individuals and groups can resist normalisation techniques by conducting themselves and leading the conduct of others in alternative or oppositional ways to those intended by state or capitalist objectives. The case study on fashion blogging will investigate whether or not a young tastemaker used her online activities to present her body in ways that challenged beauty norms and standards to influence the conduct of her readers and the elite fashion industry. Similarly, the case study on neo-burlesque theatre will analyse the ways performers may have adopted beauty standards and norms as well as used their bodies to resist normalisation practices from the dominant culture.

### Subjectification and the Body

I suggest that Foucault's concept of subjectification (1982), which operates as a technique of governmentality that involves turning individuals into objects in order to conduct their conduct, can further be extended to beauty and the body. Foucault explains that this process targets the body and "...categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him, which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" [sic] (1982, p.81). He argues that there are two meanings to the word "subject": 1) subject to someone else by control and dependence; and 2) as tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. This dual definition suggests that this type of power is comprised of two interrelated processes: subjugating individuals to others as well as participating in one's own domination through self-discipline.

Martin (1991) extends Foucault's process of subjectification into the context of hierarchized labour processes and relations, where she identifies three different but correlative components: the objectification of the body through: 1) training, drilling and the application of rules; 2) the creation of categories based on dividing and classification mechanisms; and 3) the (un)conscious integration or self integration of these processes by the individual (Martin, 1991, p.61-62). While in the first two processes, control over the body of individuals comes from external sources, in the third, subjects self-discipline as objects through the internalization of these rules and regulations as well as the development of self-conscience. Even though this third dimension underscores the ways in which individuals participate in the domination of their own bodies, it simultaneously opens up a capacity to reject the subjectivities imposed by external sources. Specifically, there is no guarantee that individuals will necessarily internalize and consent to the first two processes, as Martin clearly shows in her work. In such cases, resistance involves the rejection of objectification, training and categorization practices, and entails the creation of new subjectivities that circumvent these forms of domination.

These processes of subjectification are not limited to formal contexts such as labour relations but can also occur within socio-cultural practices. The beauty industry is implicated in subjectification processes insofar as it is concerned with turning women's, and increasingly men's, bodies into objects of display. Specifically, through standardisation and normalisation practices, bodies are objectified and categorized through procedures of comparison, classification and hierarchization, where certain bodies are afforded particular privileges. (For instance, the

classification and hierarchization of bodies was used by the Third Reich to demarcate superiority and inferiority, based on physical attributes). Representations of bodies in the media further reinforce these objectification practices as techniques to guide individuals' appearance and conduct in line with the state, capitalist and/or patriarchal interests. However, whereas Foucault places the training of bodies as a first component of the subjectification process, in the context of beauty, body training is generally transferred to the third stage, namely (un)conscious integration. On the one hand, individuals internalize objectification practices, by electing to work on their bodies to fit external beauty standards and, in so doing, individuals believe they can improve their social status. In this case, beauty practices can be conceptualized as a type of labour on the body where men and women train the body (for example through diet, exercise or the application of beauty products, cosmetic procedures and so on) in order to fit external beauty standards and ameliorate their social position.<sup>21</sup> As such, these aspects of the processes of subjectification operate as a technique of governmentality that guides the conduct and appearance of individuals through training, classification and self-disciplining practices. On the other hand, individuals can also resist these objectification practices by electing to train their bodies in new or unintended ways (for example by using beauty products or cosmetic procedures in new ways or not using them at all, or by choosing not to train their bodies in any way), thereby rejecting the dominant standards and objectification practices and create new objectivities.

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<sup>21</sup> Conceptualizing beauty as a type of labour power draws a parallel between a Foucauldian framework and Bourdieu's notion of capital (1986) insofar as beauty can be converted into economic capital.

## Bio-power, Beauty and Healthy Bodies

Foucault's concept of bio-power (1978) constitutes another type of productive power that operates as a form of governmentality, through the regulation of the health and well being of the population. According to Foucault, bio-power emerged as a type of power in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when there was a shift from a power concerned with a "right of death" (a right of seizure of things, times, bodies and ultimately life itself) to "power over life" (i.e. bio-power). The latter involves taking charge of bodies to ensure their good health, wellbeing, and optimal longevity. Bio-power is productive as it is concerned with generating forces, but also has some repressive aspects such as "containing" bodies for their own good. Starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this power over the administration of life evolved in two basic poles: an "anatomy-politics" of the human body and a "bio-politics" of the population (Foucault, 1978, p.139). The former is centred on the body through disciplinary practices and the optimization of its capacity in the service of the state or capitalist objectives; the latter is concerned with the "species body" or the population<sup>22</sup> through its regulation via the stimulation and management of birthrates, health and life expectancy and so on. Bio-power, as discussed by Foucault and applied by the state or public institutions, makes use of statistical data in the administration of bodies and the calculated management over life for particular objectives.

Beauty norms and standards operate as techniques of bio-power in that they intersect with managing the health and welfare of individuals. In many instances, beauty norms have become conflated with health practices such washing,

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<sup>22</sup> In both of these aspects, the body (the human body and the species body) is the target of this type of power over life.

moisturizing and pampering the body as practices of cleanliness, hair removal such as shaving and waxing and the application of talc and deodorants as hygienic practices. Rather than operating exclusively as techniques of the state, they are mostly related to capitalist interests, except in the instance of Nazism where beauty norms were conflated with health to signify the overall health of the nation. Similarly, in different contexts, beauty standards often further symbolize a sense of health and wellbeing. For example, in the Fascist Germany context, rosy cheeks, pale skin and strong sturdy bodies symbolized good health; in others, opposite standards have been lauded as the ultimate picture of health such as slim bodies, tanned skin which connotes leisure and wellbeing (Paquet, 1991/2009). These fluctuating beauty standards work as techniques of bio-power by convincing individuals that they have to adopt these practices based on state or capitalist objectives for their well being. Yet, sometimes, the beauty industry pushes beauty standards to such extremes in advertisements and magazines that they produce an opposite 'unhealthy' effect. For example, the hyper thin standard disseminated by fashion, beauty and modeling industries personified in the heroine chic and waif-like looks in the late 1990s, can sometimes lead to unhealthy and unsafe practices such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia; or electing to undergo dangerous procedures and surgeries. In the same vein, the corseted body as a standard of femininity in the Victorian era (Paquet, 1991/2009) often threatened women's health by encouraging them to tie the corset so tight that they would sometimes faint from lack of oxygen and even break their ribs in some occasions. As a result, women were considered as weak and unable to assume positions of decision-

making and influence! These more negative, repressive aspects of bio-power were often downplayed throughout the Victorian era.

Alternatively, although Phillips (2004) does not use the term *per se*, she demonstrates how beauty was used as a technique of bio-power in the context of race relations. She shows that the Annie Malone Poro beauty care system purposely conflated beauty with cleanliness and good health practices in order to elevate the status of the Black female body especially in the white public spheres where they were deemed filthy and threatening. This last example highlights that bio-power is not always negative but can also intend to produce 'positive' effects for the wellbeing of individuals.

Although Foucault largely focused on bio-power as an instrument of the state and its institutions, its techniques can be extended to the beauty industry and inherently include an element of resistance. Insofar as bio-power is a productive type of power that targets the body, there is no guarantee that individuals will sculpt their bodies according to the intended outcomes. For instance, individuals or groups can choose not to conform to the dominant correlation between beauty and health, or they may display unhealthy bodies as beautiful. As will be further evidenced through the case study on the Nazi Holocaust, some Jewish survivors used beauty standards and norms as techniques of bio-power to signify a healthy body as a survival practice. My second case study explores how fashion bloggers, such as Tavi Gevinson, can potentially use their online presence to counter unhealthy standards and practices, perpetuated by the beauty and fashion industries, by representing a different model than the thin ideal. My final case study on neo-burlesque performances examines how

performers may showcase and celebrate bodies of different shapes and sizes, or accentuate particular body parts on stage to challenge the conventional thin ideal in order to reclaim some alternatives. These cases will show how beauty and the body can operate as techniques of bio-power to resist various forms of domination where standards, norms and practices are appropriated in ways to counter or redirect conventional correlations between beauty and health. These types of resistances will be examined in terms of their service in the mobilisation of counter-hegemonic practices, in each of my case studies.

### Beauty Practices as a Technology of the Self

Foucault's concept of technologies of the self (1997) provides my analysis with another avenue for considering beauty and the body in techniques of power and resistance. Although Foucault's larger body of work focused primarily on *technologies of government*, in his later works and interviews, he shifted his focus to *technologies of the self* (sometimes also referred to as techniques of the self and care for the self),<sup>23</sup> which concentrate on the ways in which individuals govern themselves. These technologies are not antithetical to techniques of governmentality but, as I discussed above, are, rather, part of its processes, emphasizing the ways in which individuals participate in their own domination (Walters, 2012). More specifically, technologies of the self imply the various modes of action through which individuals at different points of history have elected to work upon their bodies,

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault (1984) defines the Greek word *techne* as "a practical rationality governed by a conscious aim". Foucault generally prefers the word "technology", which he uses to encompass the broader meanings of *techne*. Foucault often uses the words techniques and technologies interchangeably, although sometimes techniques tend to be specific and localized and technologies more general collections of specific technique.

behaviours, thoughts and appetites with the effect of fashioning themselves in particular ways. In Foucault's terms, they:

...permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (1997, p.225).

I argue that practices of beauty and embodiment operate as technologies of the self in instances in which individuals elect to work on their bodies through diet, exercise and cosmetic surgeries, as well as through fashion and the application of beauty products in order to transform the self. In some cases these embodiment practices are endured in order to attain a state of 'perfection' as set by external beauty standards. For example a Ukrainian woman, Valeria Lukyanova, represents an extreme example: she underwent a series of surgeries and procedures, including having her eye lids sliced in order to enhance her wide-eyed look, and an extreme diet of "liquid and sunlight" to construct her body into a 'real life Barbie' in order to achieve what she considered to be a state of perfection.<sup>24</sup> In other cases, technologies of the self permit individuals to sculpt and experiment with their bodies in new ways and act as self-creating subjects. Specifically, in terms of the processes of subjectification and bio-power, individuals may decide to self-apply transformations to their bodies that were not suggested by external sources and that counteract dominant standards. In this sense, individuals choose to work on their bodies in ways that subvert conventional beauty standards. For instance, the French performance artist, Orlan, utilizes beauty practices on the body to challenge dominant feminine subjectivities. She publically displays a series of plastic surgeries with limited

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the "Real Life Barbie" see (Vice, July 29, 2013).

anaesthesia, which transformed her body according to historical beauty standards taken from elements in classical paintings and sculptures including the Mona Lisa (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2001). She, thus, utilizes beauty practices to draw attention to the constructed nature of the body and the harmful procedures women undergo to create idealized standards, and, in so doing, turns herself into what she considers to be a work of art. As will be demonstrated in the upcoming chapters, through the application of makeup and use of costumes (perhaps more available to populations of lower income classes than plastic surgery), individuals can operate as self-creating subjects by altering their bodies to resist forms of domination. Beauty practices can be utilized in experimental ways as a type of resistance to subvert ways in which femininity and masculinity have been naturalized, a type of resistance that will be further fleshed out through Butler's theory of gender performativity.

### **Beauty, Gender Performativity and Stylizations of the Body**

Butler's concept of gender performativity (1990, 1993) complements Foucault's approach by figuring the body as a central locus for power relations. At the same time, she critiques Foucault for his underdeveloped notion of resistance, for his assumption (in some instances of his work) that the body is an *a priori* and passive surface, and for his occlusion of the female subject. Through a genealogy of the body where she disrupts taken-for-granted assumptions of the body as a pre-given, Butler complexifies a Foucauldian framework. She argues that the sexed body is "naturalized" as a fixed and stable entity through gender performances. These performances are constructed through a set of "repeated acts, gestures and postures"

that can include beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment. Butler (1990, 1993) argues that the body is the product of regulatory frameworks, including media representations that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a natural sex that reaffirms sex and gender inequalities. She contends that the contours of the body are established through cultural markings that serve the purpose of instating the appropriate limits of masculinity and femininity. In this way, gender performances operate through exclusionary means where the 'normal woman' is produced over and against the deviant to reaffirm the appropriate limits, postures and modes of exchange that define what constitutes being feminine. Repeated use of beauty norms is instrumental in "naturalizing" conventional femininity and masculinity. In so doing, other types of performances are downplayed or radically obscured (Butler, 1990). I suggest that by invoking the mechanism of naturalization, Butler lays the groundwork for positioning gender performativity within hegemonic processes where beauty norms and standards play a role in making the body appear as a natural, fixed entity, where these performances can work to sustain dominant constructions of sex and gender. However, as mentioned earlier, scholars such as Fraser (1993) have criticized Butler's conceptual framework as individual and body-based, lacking class differentiation and the ability to address collaborative forms of resistance and structural transformation. In correlating Butler's concept of performativity and the processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony, my research fills a void in Butler's approach, linking performances and stylizations of the body to the structures of power relations.

Still, by conceptualising gender as a performance, Butler reveals that regulatory gender frames can be resisted through new performances and stylizations of the body. Butler's concept of gender performativity can play a role in resisting hegemonic processes. Butler turns to the examples of drag, cross-dressing and the sexual stylizations of butch/femme identities to reveal the imitative structure of gender as well as its contingency. Through parody and imitation and the repetition of acts on/of the body assembled in new and different ways individuals can de-naturalize and subvert dominant gender norms and practices. In her own words, she explains:

The critical task is...to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and therefore present the immanent possibility of contesting them"(1990, p.201.)

Through the outright rejection or parodying of beauty norms and practices or their repetition in new ways, individuals and groups can de-naturalize ways that gender and the body have been congealed by the beauty industry and social norms. For instance, women and men can use costumes or apply makeup in ways that subvert conventional norms of masculinity and femininity. These new stylizations of the body as a type of resistance can be seen in various case studies where beauty standards and norms can be outright rejected, parodied, or repeated in new ways in order to challenge conventional beauty norms and normative codes of gender and sexuality. For example, men and women can apply makeup or use costumes in ways that subvert conventional norms of masculinity and femininity. With the corrective lens to Butler's approach discussed above, my analysis of the case studies will show how body performances were used in different contexts and whether they can operate as counter-hegemonic practices.

## **Beauty as Everyday “Tactics”**

De Certeau’s (1984) concept of tactic, as a type of resistance at the individual level, completes my theoretical framework for the analysis of beauty and the body. His notion of tactic, an extension of a Foucauldian approach to resistance, conceives of individuals as never outside power relations.

De Certeau differentiates between “strategies” and “tactics” as modes for exercising power.<sup>25</sup> According to de Certeau, a strategy is based on an elaborate process that involves coordinated planning and is used by those in positions of authority (such as a proprietor, an enterprise, a government, a city, a scientific institution) who can fix an isolated and proper locus that serves as a space from which targets and threats can be managed. In short, the term strategy involves a “mastery of space” marked by a panoptic structure that entails practices of observance and surveillance as a form of control. By contrast, a tactic is a rather spontaneous action characterised by the absence of a proper locus, and that implies the clever utilization of “time over space” (1984, p.34-39). In other words, it is an “art of the weak” used by those in positions of subordination who make use of the opportunities in the cracks and fissures that arise in an enemy’s territory or field of vision. De Certeau suggests that through various ways of operating, individuals can find ways of using the constraining order to their advantage without overthrowing the power structures. Thus, a tactical intervention is a simple and individualistic way of “making do” within the existing power relations.

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<sup>25</sup> De Certeau’s treatment of tactics differs from Foucault’s. Whereas de Certeau suggests that strategies are reserved for those in positions of authority and tactics are deployed by those in positions of subordination, Foucault makes no such distinction and rather suggests that both are exercised from above and below. For the purposes of this dissertation, I adopt de Certeau’s definition.

Tactics involve everyday practices, such as walking in the city, reading or cooking where, through makeshift creativity, individuals can deflect the functions of the technocratic structures: by walking in the city in new ways through the use of detours or unmarked routes and alleyways or by window-shopping, individuals can deviate prescribed paths, a tactic, as will be demonstrated later, that was sometimes used by Jewish survivors during the Holocaust. By inference, beauty standards and norms can also operate as tactics for individuals to gain some social or physical mobility within a confining order. Individuals can use beauty practices to subvert existing relations of power without shifting existing structures of power, a tactic of survival that was also used by some Jewish women and men in the ghettos and the concentration camps, where they were only afforded individual resistances in an extreme case of domination.

### **Beauty, Power and Types of Resistance**

My conceptual approach, comprising complementary theoretical frameworks, provides the necessary concepts to examine beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment as operational in hegemonic processes. Dominant groups such as the beauty and the fashion industries and, sometimes, the state, set the beauty standards through cultural, communication and media practices, whose practitioners act as the “organic intellectuals” that mitigate between dominant and popular practices.

Through communication practices, dominant beauty standards are naturalized as biologically determined common sense even though they are a highly constructed set of ideals. Beauty standards are measured through the objectification, hierarchization

and classification of individuals, using statistics and ratios to determine what is considered 'normal' and 'average', thereby linking standardisation and normalisation practices. These standards are further adopted into the cultural practices of popular groups and converted into beauty norms — regulatory and normalizing practices designed to guide the appearance and conduct of individuals and groups towards particular capitalist and/or state objectives. By linking beauty norms with health and hygiene practices, individuals learn to adopt these practices for their own wellbeing. At the same time, individuals participate in these normalizing practices through the conscious integration of external pressures; they train and discipline their bodies to fit these norms.

Nonetheless, these are not top-down processes; they are, rather, part of a hegemonic process through which dominant groups must take into account some beauty practices coming from subaltern groups, if these groups are to adopt dominant practices. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that individuals and groups will adopt the standards, norms and practices set by state and capitalist agendas. Organic intellectuals can use their access to communication technologies and media to influence individuals and groups to adopt different beauty standards and practices. These leaders can use their bodies in new ways that could - or not - lead to mobilizing counter-hegemonic movements by applying beauty products and assembling their bodies in ways that challenge dominant constructions. They can re-arrange elements, postures and gestures in new ways and create new subjectivities that resist imposed norms and standards. They can also choose not to self-discipline or train and sculpt their bodies in ways that are different than those intended by external sources. My

case studies will explore the ways in which new forms of bodily conduct, and performances concerned with the inscription of opposition or defiance can operate in the constitution of the body as a 'site of counter-hegemony'.

The degree to which beauty practices can operate as resistance depends on their political economic contexts, which set limits on their uses and meanings and must be examined within their grounded set of power relations. Each of the above approaches includes a capacity for different degrees and types of resistances via the body. A counter-hegemonic conceptualization of the body is an attempt to mobilise alliances across different subaltern groups in order to exert pressure on, pose a challenge to, and shift, the hegemonic order. This type of resistance includes structural modifications by exerting pressure on the hegemonic order through the insertion of ideologies and practices of popular groups, and can even include working class revolutions, revolts, the use of force, takeovers or the breaking of communication machinery (Williams, 1980). A Foucauldian approach suggests that power and resistance are not mutually exclusive and that the body is a site of struggle for domination as well as a type of resistance based on choosing forms of alternative bodily conduct through the creation of new subjectivities or new correlations between beauty and health that subvert those imposed by external sources. Butler's notion of gender performativity advances the notion of the body as a site for resistance where beauty practices can be re-assembled in ways that create new stylizations of the body and new gender performances which, as mentioned, has been critiqued as an individual and bodily based resistance. De Certeau's concept of tactic conceives the body as part of every day practices that can be harnessed to gain some leverage at the

individual level without toppling existing power structures, an approach which also occludes class differentiation. My insertion of these concepts into processes of hegemony helps to better understand the relationships between beauty, body performativity and relations of power. These distinctions will help in considering how different strategies, techniques, and tactics of beauty were used in different forms of power and resistance in my three case studies. The following section outlines these case studies and my methodological approach in more details.

### **Case Studies and Methodological Approach**

My dissertation covers three very diverse contexts that are grounded in different practices of communication: The Nazi Holocaust, fashion blogging and neo-burlesque theatre. These case studies were selected because they each relate to different spheres —political, social and cultural — respectively, and thus provide a broad and diverse spectrum to apply beauty as an analytical framework. These case studies are by no means exhaustive and other examples could also be examined in future research, but they have been selected because they include diverse means of communication that cut across different contexts and will, thus, allow for a comparative analysis. Moreover, I chose to cover examples that involved different degrees of hegemonic relations of power to ascertain how beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment could operate in divergent types of resistance in terms of their relationship to counter-hegemonic endeavours. These case studies have further been selected because they extend the definition of beauty beyond how it has been conventionally defined in hegemonic culture to include stylizations,

presentations of the body and performances that can be used to challenge beauty standards and norms defined by the dominant culture.

The inclusion of the case study on beauty standards, norms and practices in the context of German Fascism presents an instance of an extreme form of domination to investigate how beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment operate in the political sphere, through various means of communication such as propaganda posters used by the Nazis as well as in face-to-face communication that I discovered through interviews with Jewish Holocaust survivors presently living in Canada and in written testimonials. I first analyse propaganda posters from the American Holocaust Museum's special exhibit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* because the museum has compiled the most extensive collection of Nazi propaganda, including popular representations of bodies during the Third Reich. In this context, I examine the ways in which the Nazis represented beauty standards and norms as techniques of power to delimit national belonging and win consent for Nazi policies and practices. To my knowledge these aspects, particularly in terms of how they are grounded in communication practices, have not yet been studied together, and could shed light on state uses of beauty norms and standards to wield power in an instance of extreme domination that left little spaces for resistance. As such, I conducted interviews with Canadian Jewish Holocaust survivors (which were approved through Carleton's Research Ethics Board) to shed light on how this oppressed group may have used beauty as a tactic of resistance. This idea stems from stories told by my Jewish grandmother who survived the war by using her 'beauty' to hide in plain sight. I want to examine whether and how other Jewish women and men

used beauty and their body as tactics of survival in their potential influence on counter-hegemonic resistance.

Insofar as the Nazis had a stronghold over media representation practices, the use of beauty by subordinate groups cannot be gathered through documented representational practices. Thus, interviews become a crucial way to gather information from subordinate groups to study whether beauty and the body were used in tactics of resistance. Participants were identified through the Holocaust group at the *Cummings Jewish Centre for Seniors* in Montreal as well as through local newspapers in the Ottawa area.<sup>26</sup> In total, I conducted eight private interviews, with six women and two men. I interviewed more women than men because I wanted to primarily examine the ways that beauty practices influenced the activities of female survivors, as a corrective lens to dominant masculine narratives of aesthetics in the Third Reich and the Nazi Holocaust. However, I also included male participants to contrast conventions that affiliate beauty exclusively with women, to examine the ways in which Jewish men might also have used beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment to survive the war.

My second case study examines the growing phenomenon of fashion blogging as a relatively new social media practice within the social sphere.<sup>27</sup> This online communication practice has been selected as it has the potential to reach a large readership and, therefore, could provide a potential site for counter-hegemonic resistance. Specifically, this case examines how fashion and online presentations of

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<sup>26</sup> This identification method was selected because it includes survivors who publically shared their experiences within the media and thus might be willing to discuss their difficult experiences throughout the war, in the context of my dissertation research. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, interviewees identities remain anonymous in my research.

<sup>27</sup> See *La Presse's* discussion on this (Nicoud, 2014, June 27).

the self can be used to mobilize alliances in order to challenge the beauty standards and norms perpetuated by the elite fashion industry. I select Tavi Gevinson's blog [thestylerookie.com](http://thestylerookie.com) due to its popularity and widespread attention from fashion magazines and mainstream media outlets as well as among the fashion and beauty industries. Gevinson, who was an 11 year old girl living in a suburb of Chicago when she started her blog, was invited to sit in the front row of fashion shows in New York and Paris as well as collaborate with international designers, suggesting at least a degree of visibility and success that could have potentially operated as a counter-hegemonic site. Indeed, Gevinson reached a large readership and number of followers, which suggests that she could have used her online presence to build a network of alliances to have some influence over beauty practices. I examined blog posts from 2008, when Gevinson's blog was created, until 2011, when she founded an online magazine, paying attention to common themes and patterns.

My final case study is concerned with the ways in which a more local means of communication, neo-burlesque theatre, could potentially act as a site of counter-hegemony to challenge socio-cultural practices and ideologies on beauty within the cultural sphere. The Ottawa based neo-burlesque troupe the *Sexual Overtones* have been selected for my corpus of analysis because at the time of this research they were the largest neo-burlesque group in Ottawa performing to audiences of over 600 people, and, therefore, had some potential to influence hegemonic ideologies and practices on beauty. Located in the nation's capital, according to the performers, the troupe's spectators include parliament members and other members of the social elite, and thus provide a site to examine neo-burlesque theatre's potential impact on

hegemonic relations beyond the cultural level to society at large. The *Sexual Overtones* particularly combine striptease and satire with a feminist, queer positive mandate of all inclusivity, and thereby potentially offer alternative — if not oppositional — ideologies and practices to the hegemonic culture. Data were gathered through observation as a spectator of their most recent performance at the time of this research, “Winternude,” performed at St. Brigid’s Centre for the Arts on January 19, 2013 to shed light on how their performances used beauty standards, norms and body language as techniques of power and resistance. Interviews with the artists were also done as supplementary information about the performance in order to provide background on their organization, structure, intentions and practices. I also interviewed the founder of the troupe to obtain more data about the group's intentions and practices, and used the snowball sampling method (Goodman, 1961) to interview other troupe members (in total four women and two men) about the role of beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment in their performances. Insofar as the troupe is mostly comprised of women, they made up the majority of my interviewees. However, I also included some male participants to see if beauty was a factor in their performances.

To analyse these diverse case studies, I use a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which is concerned with the relationship between meaning and power particularly in terms of the ways that power operates in texts and the institutions that produce them. According to Foucault (1982), discourse refers to the arrangement of words, concepts and notions in a certain way that produces signification in the service of power. In short, discourses set the parameters of what is knowable, thinkable and ‘sayable’ in a

particular historical context. At the same time, Foucault argues that discourses are inextricably linked to, and stem from, social practices, institutions and structures that produce and set limits on them. Consequently, discourse analysis is concerned with how discourses and texts are linked to wider practices, and thus it will be useful for examining the ways in which power operates within the various communication practices outlined above.

From a practical perspective, I use techniques laid out by Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA), which offers a concrete methodological approach for investigating how power operates within discourses, language and language use (Fairclough, 1995; Garrett & Bell, 1997; Van Dijk, 1988). CDA is consistent with a Foucauldian approach in that it is concerned with how power is diffused through a series of semantic and linguistic moves within communication practices and how these techniques correspond to the practices in which they are embedded.

(Fairclough, 1995; Garrett & Bell, 1997). Taking up a Foucauldian approach, Fairclough (1992, 1995) asserts that there are three dimensions to discourse analysis: language analysis within the text, the processes of textual production and interpretation, and the institutional circumstances that shape both. He explains:

CDA aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1995, p.132-3).

From this perspective, discourse analysis moves beyond the content analysis of texts in terms of language word selection, rather it emphasizes relations of power based on

gender and class, manifest within language itself and its relationship to wider discursive practices.

Broadly speaking, CDA has several main characteristics: an interest in naturally occurring language use; a focus on larger units than isolated words and sentences to include texts, discourses, conversations and communicative events; the extension of non-verbal (semiotic, multi-modal, visual) aspects of interactions and communications such as gestures, images, films, new and multimedia; the focus on dynamic socio-cognitive or interactional moves and strategies; the study of the functions of (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) contexts of language use; and an analysis of a vast number of phenomena of text grammar and language use such as coherence, macrostructures and rhetoric (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.2). Thus, not only does CDA move beyond texts to highlight how these discourses are situated within structures and how audiences receive these texts (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1996), it is not limited to written-based texts but also include non-verbal aspects such as visual images comprised of gestures and performances (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) as well as conversations and interviews (Abell & Meyer, 2009).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provide specific criteria for investigating how images communicate meaning through the structures of grammar of visual design including colour, perspective, framing and composition. In addition, they demonstrate how CDA can be applied to other visual texts including online social media sites by analyzing how various visual and verbal elements are organized as well as the role of inter-textuality. Furthermore, performances, gestures and displays can further be conceptualized as visual images that are used in the overall construction of meaning.

These visual images are often supplanted with written or oral texts that need to be analyzed in correlation to one another. Particularly, Martin (2003, 2006) demonstrates that the text-image relationship is complex. She explains that certain images do little but illustrate the text that they accompany, while others complement the information provided in a text. Finally and less frequently, some images can contradict the text.

A discourses analysis of the text-image relationship will be helpful for considering my three case studies in terms of how representations of the body in Nazi propaganda posters, fashion blogs and neo-burlesque theatre intersect with language based discourses including oral and written texts. For instance, I look at Nazi propaganda posters, which contain visual body representations as well as written texts to support an overall meaning in the service of Nazi domination. In Gevinson's blog, I examine written texts, including comments as well as images, videos and intertextual links to ascertain the ways in which beauty and the body are used in different techniques of power and types of resistance. This text-image relationship will also be useful for considering the visual aspects of neo-burlesque theatre in terms of bodily display, gestures and costumes and how they support or contradict oral texts.

Interviews will similarly be approached through a discourse analysis. Abell and Meyers (2009) identify at least three levels of interview analysis that encounter both inter-textual and extra-textual dimensions to interviews: (1) co-text (the sequence and location of themes – the ways comments are collocated in an interview, what precedes and follows certain comments, links between themes or objects throughout the interview, repertoires of knowledge referred to, internal tensions); (2) inter-text (other voices brought into the interview – sayings, external authorities,

common knowledges or common sense, assumptions about shared knowledge or meanings); (3) context (the context of the interview itself - location and time, references to the surroundings in the interview, understandings of the purpose of the interview, informality/formality of the exchange, rules of exchange). A discourses analytic approach to interviews seeks to understand what the questions and answers mean for the interviewee and the researcher, how expressions are used to link to other talk and discourses and how participants are constructing the interview event itself and their role in it.

A discourse analysis of interviews will be particularly effective for examining conversations with neo-burlesque performers as well as Holocaust survivors due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Reading (2002) points out that memory work of Holocaust survivors is often fragmentary where “traces of telling” can be gleaned through the ellipses, synapses, what is marginalized or completely occluded. For instance, when asked directly about beauty, interviewees were almost always silent, the two terms—beauty and the Holocaust—seeming almost contradictory in the same sentence as one woman responded: “What beauty in the Holocaust?” (personal communication, May 9, 2012). As a consequence I ask each Holocaust survivor to tell me about their experiences and their survival stories and almost all included some aspect of beauty and the body in their practices. In this case, a discourse analysis will help manifest traces of meaning in what is foregrounded but also in the silences, pauses and linguistic ambiguities. The following chapter turns to this first case study on the use of beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment as techniques of power and resistance under the regime of the Third Reich.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Beautiful Survivors: Techniques and Tactics of Beauty and the Body under the Nazi Regime**

This case study examines the use of beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment in strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance in the context of German Fascism. As a regime of power headed by a dictator and based on severe social regimentation and forcible suppression of opposition, fascism represents an instance of extreme domination. Nonetheless, I argue that, even in the context of Nazi Germany, there was still a small degree of freedom to oppose Nazi policies and practices (Evans, 2005; Housden, 1997; Kershaw, 2008), where some beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment were used as tactics of resistance.

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which communication practices on beauty and the body were used in processes of hegemony: as techniques of coercion, leadership and consent, as well as in oppositions. Drawing on some of the concepts developed in my conceptual framework, including the notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony, governmentality, bio-power, technologies of the self and tactics, this chapter shows how strategies, techniques and tactics of power and resistance were used in an attempt to influence hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes.

The first part of the chapter examines the ways that beauty and the body were used by the Nazis in propaganda posters, policies and practices to win consent of the German public to support Nazi policies and practices by delimiting which bodies belonged to the Aryan nation and which were denigrated as 'other'. It particularly

investigates the ways beauty standards and norms were used by the Nazi power to "conduct the conduct" of the population through standardisation and normalisation practices that prescribed appearances and available forms of conduct to specified groups. I am particularly concerned with the ways in which beauty was utilised through political strategies and techniques of power where the individual body acted as a public site upon which political ideals were mapped (Gordon, 2005). These strategies and techniques set limits on the ways in which those in positions of subordination, specifically Jewish women, could use beauty and their bodies as means of resistance, in terms of their relation (or lack thereof) to counter-hegemonic endeavours. My analysis sheds light on the role of beauty and the body in hegemonic processes where so far the role of Nazi aesthetics have mainly been discussed in masculinist terms and generally in the context of art and architecture (Herzog, 2005). My research fills a lacuna by complexifying the gendered dimensions of the Holocaust, where a mostly male centric analysis has become ascendant in terms of its victims (Heineman, 2005; Herzog, 2005; Ringelheim, 1990; Shik, 2009). At the same time, I do not simply focus on women's representations and communication practices, but I analyse the ways in which men and women are situated within specific relations of power. Tracing the ways that beauty operated as 1) biological constructs; 2) bio-power; 3) objects of policy; 4) practices of domination; 5) mobility/navigation; and 6) economy/exchange, I argue that while beauty did offer some potential for resistance against Nazi policies and practices – sometimes in terms of a matter as crucial as life or death – the extreme degree of domination did not allow these interventions to mobilise coordinated action and shift hegemonic relations of power.

## **German Fascism, Hegemony and Power**

As discussed in my previous chapter, although Gramsci argues that democratic contexts are fertile grounds for processes of hegemony, these processes can be extended to fascist contexts, where the state does not only use coercive measure to secure control (a point Gramsci himself underscores in his analysis of power in Fascist Italy). In Germany, a democratic system was in place when the National Socialist party was elected to power, suggesting that they had to win consent through the institutions of civil society, including representational practices of the body in the mass media, in order to win the support of the German public.<sup>28</sup> Historians have noted that even after Hitler began to impose increased domination, there was still some latitude for oppositional practices by the German public (Evans, 2005; Housden, 1996; Kershaw, 2008). For instance, Kershaw (2008) records different degrees of opposition prevalent during the Nazi regime, ranging from verbal complaints, the distribution of leaflets, disobeying laws, hiding Jews and even assassination attempts of Nazi leaders. These oppositional practices suggest that although the degree of domination was extremely high, there existed a dynamic interplay where subordinate groups could try to influence relations of power.

Similarly, although governmentality is based on a precondition of freedom to choose different forms of conduct, its techniques can be used within fascist contexts (Walters, 2012). Even under the Nazi regime, individuals had at least some freedom

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<sup>28</sup> Housden (1996) notes that in 1930 the Nazis grew from 12 to 107 parliamentary seats and in the 1932 election, the Nazis became Germany's largest party where almost 40 % of the population voted for Hitler of their own accord. Furthermore, the Nazis did well at the polls in the last free elections of March 5, 1933 winning more than 17 million votes and 44% of the total cast enabling the party to maintain its coalition government with the ultra conservative German National People's Party. Moreover, once the Third Reich was established, millions joined the party and its affiliated organizations.

to resist Nazi policies and practices. As Foucault explained, in instances of extreme domination, there exists a limited capacity of freedom where alternate or even oppositional conducts can occur:

Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can truly be claimed that one side has 'total power' over the other, a power can be exercised over the other insofar as the other still has the option of killing oneself, leaping out of the window or of killing the other person (1997, p.292).

Under German Fascism, the asymmetrical power relations created by the Nazi regime (particularly for subordinate groups) nevertheless allowed a very limited margin for resistance. I argue that, in the context of Nazi Fascism, techniques of governmentality (which encompasses techniques of bio-power, subjectification and technologies of the self), operated as part of the hegemonic process to win public consent. They were based on a productive type of power that guided the conduct of the population through normalisation and standardisation practices. At the same time, these techniques of power still allowed a small margin for resistance, where some Jewish women could use beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment to resist the Nazis. De Certeau's notion of tactics is particularly helpful in explaining how Jewish Holocaust survivors could use beauty by taking opportunities of the fissures in the oppressive system to gain some social or physical mobility in a context of such a high degree of domination.

## **Method**

This chapter takes as its starting point a conception of the body as a means of communication, upon which power relations are inscribed and (re)negotiated. As such, I draw on Nazi media representations of the body in Nazi propaganda posters,

which acted as a public record for how the Nazis constructed beauty standards and norms. This corpus has been selected from the U.S. Holocaust Museum's special exhibit *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* because it is an extensive collection of Nazi propaganda. I also include artifacts from the *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* exhibit, which focuses on eugenic policies and 'racial hygiene' practices of the Third Reich and, therefore, sheds light on the ways in which the Nazis used quasi-scientific conceptions of beauty and the body to demarcate national membership and advance their own objectives. To examine the ways that beauty and the body affected the practices of Jews during the war, I draw on private interviews with eight Canadian Jewish Holocaust survivors (six women and two men) who all remain anonymous sources due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter. In light of the small sample, these interviews are supported with archival interviews conducted by other scholars; the distinction between these sources will be clearly marked. I utilise a discourse analysis of these images, texts and interviews to investigate how beauty and the body were used in techniques and tactics of power and resistance.

### **Beauty as Biological Construct**

I first examine how the Nazis used the notions of beauty and the body to win consent from, and the complicity of, the German public. Specifically they developed strategies of biological construct to legitimate the 'Aryan' superiority, and the inferiority of subordinate groups in order to determine who could claim national membership, thereby prescribing paths of conduct for dominant and subordinate

groups. The Nazi construction of beauty as biologically determined worked as a technique of governmentality by regulating the population through standardisation and normalisation practices. The Nazis invoked quasi-medicalised social Darwinist and eugenic discourses (that were popularised during the Weimar period), and used race theory to manage the general makeup of the population through the regulation of human breeding that encouraged 'valuable' hereditary traits and avoided 'undesirable' ones (Ehrenreich, 2007; Kelves, 1985). Physical features provided objective, universal and measurable external criteria for racial differentiation and hierarchization used to legitimate the inherent superiority of an Aryan master race. During the late 1920s, members of the German medical community began an extensive survey of the German population, taking a myriad of physical measurements of individuals to record family genealogies according to hereditary traits, and to classify and rank individuals based on these physical attributes. Scientists used a variety of tools to measure head circumferences [Figure 1], size of nose and eye colour charts [Figure 2].



Fig. 1. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

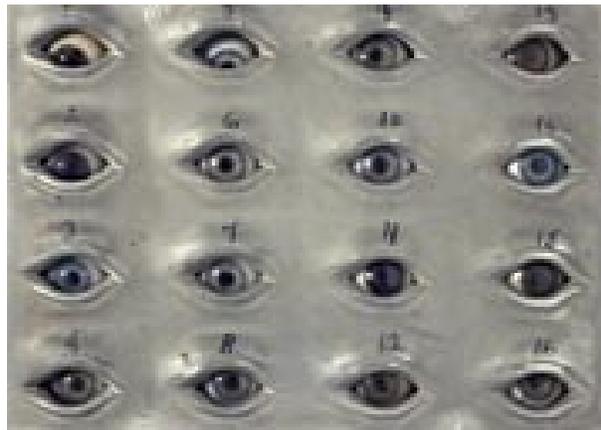


Fig. 2. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The Nazis made use of statistics of physical measurements to determine norms that served to classify and hierarchize different bodies and groups. As discussed in my theoretical framework, techniques of governmentality were conjoined with the development of statistics through which the population became a datum that could be utilized in particular ways. Those with particular physical traits such as blonde hair, blue eyes, long heads and broad shoulders were deemed to be racially pure, genetically advantageous and 'superior', while those who lacked those physical features were labeled innately impure and 'inferior' (Mosse, 1999). The medical community further used the biological definition of beauty to legitimate "race mixing" as a source of biological degeneration. As a result, hereditary health cards were issued at some medical institutions, which kept records of family history and racial lineage.<sup>29</sup> The Nazis used these 'medical' discourses and practices to legitimate the innate commonality of the *volk*; the idea of a common ancestry with pure German blood. Biologically based constructions of beauty thereby provided the necessary visible criteria for differentiating and hierarchizing races, and delimiting national boundaries. These biologically constructed beauty standards were further re-inscribed in representational practices to prescribe behaviours about how these different groups should act.

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<sup>29</sup> For instance Ehrenreich (2007) demonstrates that in 1929 the National Socialist Physicians League was founded whose main interest and research focused on purifying Germany of Jewish Bolshevism. By 1933 6 % of the medical profession had joined before Hitler came to power and 50% joined by 1944. By 1932, 20 institutes of 'race science' were established at universities in Germany that focused on tracing blood lineages and race as a biologically determined category.

## Beauty as Bio-power

The media representations of beauty standards, particularly propaganda posters, guided the conduct of the German public through techniques of bio-power: a productive type of power that targets the body in order to regulate the health and well-being of the population. Specifically, representations of Aryan beauty standards and norms, acted as visual markers of the overall health of the national body, and subordinate groups were constructed as biological threats to the wellbeing of the nation that needed to be expunged from German society (Savage, 2007).

During their consolidation of power, the Nazis used representations of the healthy body as symbolising the National Socialist party's rejuvenation of the German social body. The Nazis constructed the ideal German body through visual propaganda to reinforce the myth of *Volksgemeinschaft*—a national community based on the racial union of 'Aryan' Germans (Gordon, 2005). Propaganda posters idealized the Aryan body as masculine and strong, with chiselled features and prominent muscles. Representations of these bodies operated as a technique to shore up support for the National Socialist Party, which would bolster the wellbeing and superiority of the German nation. Mosse (1996) underscores that the nude male body reflecting the perfectly proportioned ancient Greek classical ideal became an important National Socialist symbol. For example, the poster for *Olympia* [Figure 3], the well-known documentary filmmaker Leni Riefensthal's two part documentary of the 1936 summer Olympics in Berlin, features a naked male German disc thrower boasting a muscular build, positioned in a similar stance to a Classical Greek statue.<sup>30</sup> The written text

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<sup>30</sup> Gordon (2005) further notes the Nazis body politics is clearly exemplified in the Riefensthal's documentary *Olympia*, which operated as visual propaganda through the celebration and

stating "the gods of the stadium," coupled with the heavenly sky in the background, reinforces the idea of the masculine Aryan ideal as a Greek god. By tracing a direct lineage to Greek ideals—which, as discussed in a previous chapter, lauded a masculinist ideal of the body and subscribed to universal and objective definitions of beauty--these representations worked as a technique of bio-power by generating healthy bodies in order to establish the superiority of the German nation. In this context, there is an uncoupling of women as the inherent holders of beauty where masculine bodies are associated with strength and perfection. These representations of beautiful male bodies acted as a microcosm of the national social body and signified its regeneration and strength under the National Socialist Party.

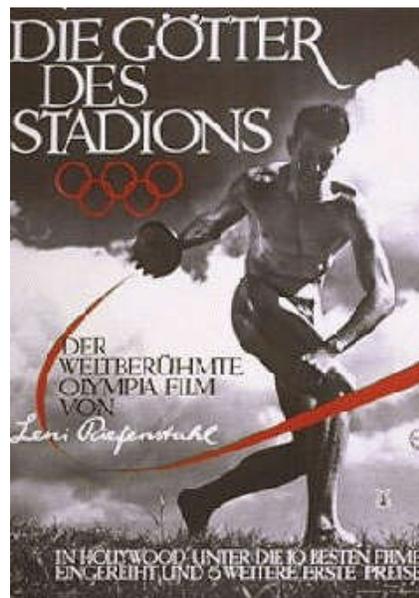


Fig. 3. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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romanticization of the ideal German body (Bach, 2007; Gordon, 2005). As the name of the second part of the documentary suggests *Fest der Schönheit* (Festival of Beauty), the entire film is "a sustained hymn to the body beautiful" (Gordon, 2005: 194) where construction of Aryan beauty ideals are conflated with youthful, healthy and strong bodies.

The Nazis continued to use masculine beauty standards as a technique of bio-power to demarcate national membership from other social groups and amass support for the Nazi Party. For example, the propaganda poster "Reich Vocational Competition for Youth" [Figure 4] used representations of Aryans as strong masculine bodies in order to gain youth support for the Nazi Party. A bare-chested youthful male with tanned skin and blonde hair, with a broad straight posture, combined beauty and strength as a technique to incite young people to join the youth Nazi movement, a key group in solidifying sustained power. Another Nazi poster conflated the Aryan individual body with national health in order to "conduct the conduct" of German workers to support the National Socialist Party in the 1932 election [Figure 5]. Specifically, the beautiful and strong individual body stood in for the regeneration of national economic health and security in contrast with the representation of stereotypes of Jew whispering into the ear of a communist as "unhealthy bodies," a point that will be explored in more detail shortly. These media representations of masculinity were used as a technique to carve out national membership and build alliances with these groups.

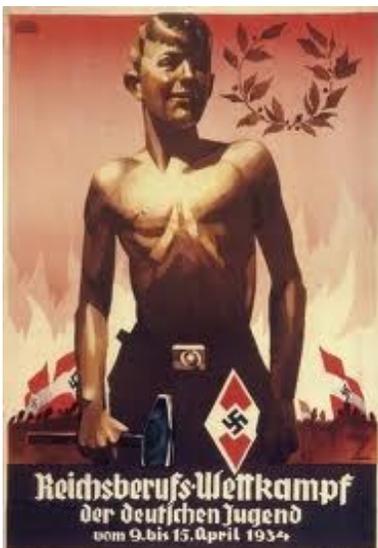


Fig. 4. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



Fig. 5. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The Nazis continued to use representations of the body in techniques of bio-power in order to gain support for the war effort. The conflation of beauty and wellbeing within media representations worked as techniques used to prescribe criteria that German men needed to embody for the war effort. For example, the film poster for *S.A. Mann Brand* [Figure 6] represents a tall strong Aryan man in a crisp uniform, army cap, sleek silver belt and a swastika armband holding up a flag with a swastika.<sup>31</sup> Wilson (1990) argues that the uniform worked as a visual marker of sexuality and domination, a strategy previously used in other wars such as the Franco-Prussian war (Martin, 2006). Wilson explains:

Fascism did after all eroticize the uniform, creating the fetishized idealization of the masculine body, a whole philosophy of domination, cruelty and irrationalism made visible in the shape of the blonde Aryan, a male Valkyrie in gleaming black leather and knife-edged silhouette (Wilson, 1990, p.36).



Fig. 6. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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<sup>31</sup> S.A. Mann Brand is a Nazi propaganda film that tells the story of a young truck driver who is having trouble making ends meet, until he is exposed to the teachings of Hitler and he joins the S.A and manages to recruit his father, a former soldier with Marxist leanings, and his girlfriend to the Nazi cause.

Thus the Nazis used a combination of fashion (the Nazi uniforms were designed by Hugo Boss) and strong masculine bodies as techniques of bio-power to signify the strength and wellbeing of the German population. These representations were used to shore up support for the war effort and prescribe the necessary strong bodies men needed to fight and win the war.

Nazi propaganda further conflated female beauty standards with health as a technique of bio-power that assigned to German women the role of mother whose task was to propagate the hereditary valuable species. Representations of women were channelled in the service of the state where those deemed genetically fit were guided to fulfill their national duty as wives and mothers. Gordon (2005) demonstrates that healthy individual female bodies stood in for the regeneration of the national body. These representations of the sacred wife and mother, officially sanctioned by the state, worked as part of a campaign to enjoin women to lend their bodies to the state for the vitality of the Aryan race. In this way, representations of beauty standards worked to delimit those who were regarded as genetically valuable to reproduce. These representations typically figured women as blond haired, blue eyed and fair skinned with rosy cheeks and a sturdy frame, often described as "Nordic types," "the best of German blood" and "the picture of health" (Guenther, 2004, p.109)--the necessary components to be a good mother. For example, one poster [Figure 7] depicts a woman embodying these standards with a baby in her arms, reinforcing her national duty as devoted wife and mother.<sup>32</sup> Another propaganda

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<sup>32</sup> The Nazis also founded the *Lebensborn* or 'Fountain of Life' programme where women did not have to be married but were assigned a 'beautiful' male to procreate and produce a 'perfect' baby. Specifically, special clinics were set up in which SS soldiers were encouraged to mate with blue-eyed, blonde Nordic girls who had no Jewish ancestry, in order to produce 'racially pure' German offspring.

image [Figure 8] represents an Aryan woman in the archetype of a farmer's wife, often surrounded by children with their light hair pinned in a bun or braided around their heads in crowns with a 'natural' glow. In these representations, women are often dressed in a *drindle*: a German folk costume used to connote the pure woman of Germany's past before they had been soiled by international fashion influences and practices.



Fig. 7. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



Fig. 8. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

These representations are based on a 'natural look' (Guenther, 2004), the condemnation of makeup, cosmetics and cigarettes and alcohol, which, according to the *NS Frauen Warte* (a Nazi illustrated magazine for women), tarnished the pure blooded German women. In this context, beauty standards and norms intersected with health practices in order to promote the healthy bodies the Nazis thought necessary

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The resultant babies were then brought up in the foster care of dedicated Nazi couples or reared in special orphanages. These babies are known as "Hitler's babies" (Smee, November 6, 2006)

for the reproduction of the German nation. Guenther (2004) underscores that the 'natural look' was in fact highly constructed: women used hair products to lighten their hair, and cosmetics for tanned, youthful, wrinkle-free skin to adhere to these standards in order to convey beauty, health and national belonging. These representations of beauty, therefore, worked as techniques of bio-power to guide the conduct of 'Aryan' women in line with Nazi policies on motherhood where the individual body was used to stimulate birth rates and propagate a healthy population.

Beautiful Aryan bodies were often constructed in contrast to 'ugly' bodies in order to reaffirm binaries of 'us/them' (Hall, 1997) and define the Jewish enemy as a diseased biological threat to the overall health of the German population (Savage, 2007). These constructions of binary oppositions were used as techniques to gain tacit consent for Nazi practices and policies against Jews and the 'final solution'. Mosse (1999) argues that Nazi propaganda of bodily stereotypes acted as a catalyst for the compliance of the German nation in the mass murder of Jews. Although Mosse overstates the direct effect of media representation on the German population's complicity in murder, the public was not altogether unaware of mass extermination practices and did hear rumours of the death camps, particularly from those who lived near the concentration camps, suggesting at least a degree of consent (Evans, 2009). Herf (2006) argues that these bodily stereotypes of Jews rather contributed to the Nazi effort to construct 'the Jew' as part of a cohesive group united on a global scale by racial bonds and physical features that transcended allegiance to nation-state. Accordingly, the Nazis ordained a 'public enlightenment' campaign to expose the internal Jewish enemy who, they upheld, was an expert at camouflage (Herf, 2006;

Herzog, 2005). Consequently, the Nazis invoked stereotypical images that naturalized physical characteristics such as a hooked nose and pointy beards in order to reinforce visual makers of 'otherness' by reducing them to their bodily attributes. These stereotypes were not born under the Nazis but were based on general anti-Semitism that had been prevalent in European history (Herzog, 2005; Lipton, 2014).<sup>33</sup> The naturalization of these features worked to vilify the Jew as 'other' and provided a broadly acceptable rationalization for Nazi racist policies and practices.

Nazi propaganda posters often targeted male bodies<sup>34</sup> in which they conflated ugliness with disease as a contrast to the youthful, healthy male Aryan bodies as a technique of bio-power to justify that they were a threat to the overall health of the national body. For example, an anti-Semitic propaganda poster [Figure 9] represents a stereotypical old Jewish male whose body is hunched over and cloaked under heavy black material. There are insects all over his body and the caption stated “Beware of Typhus...Avoid Jews.” In this poster, the Jew is naturalized as ugly, old, diseased and cloaked (as though he has something to hide), in stark contrast to the beautiful youthful, bare-chested Aryan bodies. The conflation of these physical traits with illness works to construct Jews as biologically inferior and subhuman, threatening the health and strength of Germany and its allies, thereby setting the stage for the public's

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<sup>33</sup> Lipton (2014) particularly traces these physical attributes to the end of the thirteenth century in which a move toward realism in art and an increased interest in physiognomy spurred artists to devise visual signs of ethnicity. The range of features that had previously been assigned to Jews consolidated into one fairly narrowly construed, simultaneously grotesque and naturalistic face, and the hook-nosed, pointy-bearded Jewish caricature was born.

<sup>34</sup> It is important to state that Jewish women's bodies are almost never represented in Nazi visual propaganda posters and the U.S Holocaust museum's *State of Deception* exhibit does not even include one representation of women's bodies. The occlusion of women's bodies worked as a technique in itself to remove their bodies from public life where as Herzog (2005) argues Jewish women's bodies operated as a sexual threat due to their reproductive capacities.

adoption of Nazi racial and eugenic policies, which suggested that Europe should be 'cleansed' of all Jews.<sup>35</sup>

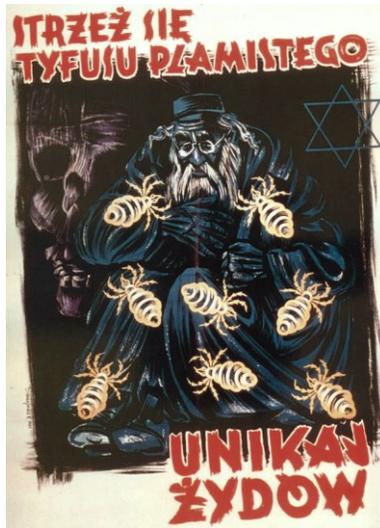


Fig. 9. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Similarly the anti-Semitic children's book *Der Giftpilz* 'The Poisonous Mushroom' (distributed by *Der Strumer's* publishing house in 1938) [Figure 10] uses physical traits to characterize Jews as a threat to the health of the nation, where the Jewish body is literally shaped as a poisonous mushroom. This example positions Jews as internal parasites feeding off the host nation to poison its culture, thereby exemplifying how beauty and health were intertwined as techniques of bio-power to reaffirm Jews as physical threats. For instance, an image in the book [Figure 11] portrays a German teacher telling an Aryan child "how to tell a Jew" through the physical characteristics of a hooked Jewish nose that looks like the number six. The text accompanying the image, "the Jewish nose is crooked at the tip. It looks like the

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<sup>35</sup> This poster was geared at indoctrinating a Polish audience in 1940 after Hitler had invaded Poland in 1939 to gain support for the ghettoization of Jews.

number 6", acts as an anchor to secure the meaning of the image. These stereotypes were used to demonize the Jew as an enemy, operating as techniques of bio-power to conduct the conduct of the German public to adopt Nazi racial and eugenic policies and practices towards Jews.

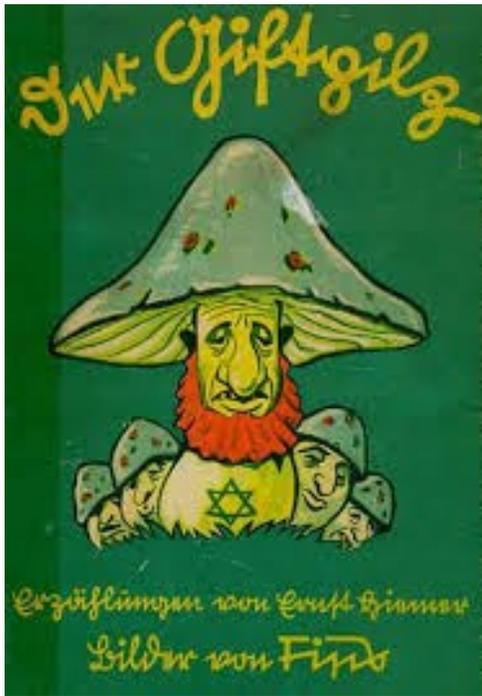


Fig. 10. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

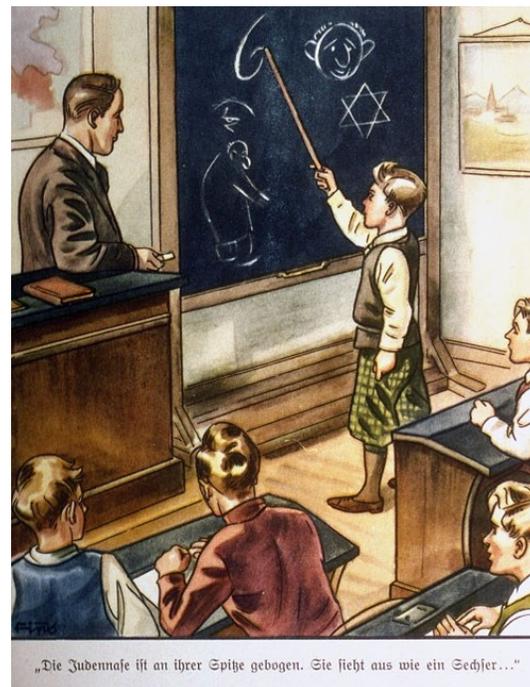


Fig. 11. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

### **Beauty as Object of Policy**

Beauty standards operated as objects of various state 'racial hygiene' and eugenic policies, through both productive and repressive measures, to reproduce a hereditary valuable population. Beauty standards underpinned these policies and were used to steer marriage and reproduction towards an Aryan ideal that excluded anyone deemed less valuable or 'racially foreign'. The Nazis imposed a motherhood campaign as a productive policy to encourage 'beautiful' mothers to reproduce racially valuable

children. They proposed 'positive' policies and incentives such as tax credits, awards and medals to foster large families that subscribed to the Aryan beauty ideal (Gordon, 2005). In this case, beauty and sexuality operated as techniques of bio-power that targeted bodies in the service of the state to stimulate birthrates of those with valuable hereditary traits.<sup>36</sup>

The Nazis also implemented repressive eugenic and racial hygiene policies of *Rassenchande*: laws prohibiting sexual relations and intermarriage with Jews and other hereditary 'unvaluable' groups.<sup>37</sup> As Foucault argues, bio-power has some repressive aspects where bodies are constrained for the interest of the wellbeing of the population. The 1935 Nuremberg laws are a good example as they coded the eugenic policy in "the Law of Protection of German Blood and Honour" that forbade mixed marriages and sexual relationships between a "full Jew" and persons of "German or related blood"<sup>38</sup>, upholding that Jews would taint the purity of German blood (Ehrenreich, 2007; Szobar, 2005). According to the logic of Nazi racial hygiene, intimate relations between German men and ethnically alien women would endanger national health and vitality. As such, members of the SS were encouraged to pursue sexual encounters only with women deemed worthy of being the mother of a German child.

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Gordon (2005) notes that the Nazi regime awarded a bronze 'honour cross of German motherhood' to German women who had 4-5 children, silver for 6-7 and gold for eight or more.

<sup>37</sup> The laws of *Rassenchande*, mostly targeted Jewish women's bodies who were particularly characterized as sexual threats through their reproductive capabilities and who could use their beauty to 'trick' German men, a point that will be explored in more detail below.

<sup>38</sup> A full Jew was defined as a person with at least three Jewish grandparents who adhered to the Jewish religion whereas those defined as German were contrasted as those without Jewish blood. As numerous scholars have pointed out, this definition of Jewish as resting on religion made a mockery of the Nazis' proposition that Jewishness was a biological category.

Enforcement of *Rassenchande* and the Nuremberg laws relied on the cooperation of large segments of the population since it would have been impossible to enforce laws that infringed upon the most intimate aspects of private life (Szobar, 2005). As a consequence, beauty standards worked as techniques of governmentality to guide the conduct of the population to enforce these laws. Szobar (2005) demonstrates that the police and the court instructed the German population on methods of racial identification including through a 'typical Jewish appearance.' She demonstrates that, in a number of trials, the court lectured the accused on ways to distinguish an Aryan from a Jew. She writes:

One judge instructed a defendant on the clues to a woman's non-Aryan descent, highlighting her typical Jewish appearance—although another judge conceded that the uneducated might have difficulty making such fine distinctions: "The witness has blue eyes and blond hair." These features obscure her Jewish racial characteristics so strongly that the layperson will have some difficulty recognizing her as Jewish (Szobar, 2005, p.146).

At the same time, the encoding of these laws did not guarantee total acquiescence of the German public. Housden (1999), citing a protest by German wives married to Jewish men, notes that some individuals and groups resisted them to varying degrees, continued affairs and remained silent about their relationships, demonstrating some oppositional ideas and practices, in an otherwise very repressive regime.

Beauty standards and norms also acted as an object of policy in the Nazis compulsory sterilization programme that worked to guide the genetic makeup of the population. In July 1933, the Nazis enacted the law for the prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring that called for compulsory sterilization for those suffering from

these nine conditions: feeble-mindedness<sup>39</sup>, schizophrenia, genetic blindness, genetic deafness, severe deformity and chronic alcoholism, all believed to be hereditary (Ehrenreich, 2007). The inclusion of 'severe deformity,' in particular, draws attention to the ways in which beauty standards were conflated with health conditions and tied to eugenic policies to control the genetic makeup of the population.

The Nazis also used practices of embodiment in their policies, such as the implementation of the compulsory wearing of the yellow Star of David (by a decree issued on September 19, 1941) to stigmatize the Jew as a racially foreign 'other.' The yellow Jewish star forced Jews into the open where their physical appearance may have concealed their Jewish identity. These various policies directed at the body worked to vilify the Jews and gain popular support for their ghettoization and deportation in forced labour and concentration camps, culminating in the near annihilation of European Jewry.

### **Beauty as a Practice of Domination**

Beauty was further integral to practices of domination inside the concentration camps. The erasure of prisoners' beauty was part of a "process of dehumanization" (Shik, 2009; Sommer, 2009) that facilitated the implementation of policies and practices of torture and mass murder. Shik (2009) points to the gendered dimension of the dehumanization process, through procedures of de-feminization and de-sexualization as means of making Jewish women unappealing to SS officers so they would not be tempted to commit crimes of *Rassenhande*. Thus, the eradication of

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<sup>39</sup> The condition of feeble-mindedness, in particular, was largely used to target women who were deemed unfit (Szobar, 2005).

beauty standards and norms operated as a practice of domination by stripping women of their femininity and, by extension, their humanity. As all prisoners arrived in the concentration camps, they were confiscated of all personal belongings including precious items of beauty and adornment such as jewellery, clothing, makeup and combs. Moreover, in the process of selection and inspection, women (and men) were forced to strip naked and their hair on their heads and bodies were shaved completely. The removal of hair had the function of controlling lice and other diseases in the camps, but it also functioned as a means of expunging women's identities. Flascka (2010) records a survivor's testimony where the seizure of beauty items and the shaving of her head during the inspection process had a particular gendered component:

The floor was littered with dresses, coats, underwear and many lovely things so essential to true femininity...A moment later we felt the heavy blunt shears in our hair, and when we looked up we hardly knew one another any longer...There lay the crown of our female beauty, our hair (2010, p.83).

The survivor further reinforces the ways in which the removal of external beauty attributes operated as a practice of domination when she refers to the area where women were showered and stripped as “the beauty parlour” whose purpose was in fact the exact opposite: to deprive women of their last remnants of beauty, freshness and human appearance.

The removal of hair, in particular, highlights how beauty acted as a practice of domination through the outward elimination of beauty and femininity.<sup>40</sup> Flascka

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<sup>40</sup> The removal of hair was also used as a political technique of humiliation at the end of WWII in the context of "les femmes Tondues" in France, where women targeted as Nazi collaborators had their heads shaven in rituals of public disgrace (Moore, 2005).

(2010) further records another survivor who notes that the elimination of hair worked as a practice to strip women of their feminine identity:

Auschwitz left a mark outside, too, after all what is a woman without her glory on her head, without her hair...We had lost our dignity in Auschwitz. We had no clothes that looked feminine and no desire to act like ladies (p.83).

In a private interview, one survivor likewise expressed that the external marker of hair symbolized a woman's beauty and identity: "How could we be beautiful, how could we be considered women? We had no hair" (personal communication, May 9, 2012). In Fascist Germany, hair thus played a crucial political role, not only evidenced in representations of the blonde Aryan ideal and the dark or red-headed Jews with long beards, but as an item of beauty that needed to be removed in order to erase people's humanity.

Feminist historians further evidence that external beauty standards that had been set by the Nazis were instrumental in practices of domination inside the concentration camps, in that those that met these standards were often the targets of sexual violence (Flascka, 2010; Shik, 2009; Sommer, 2009). According to these scholars, sexual violence often occurred during the inspection of women's bodies when they first arrived in the camps. Although the Nazis attempted to strip Jewish women of their beauty, as one survivor that I interviewed notes, many Jewish women who arrived in Auschwitz were transferred there only after a few weeks in ghettos and many of these women were still relatively robust and attractive (personal communication, September 2, 2012). These women were often the targets of physical and sexual exploitation by the SS and prisoners in positions of authority as they passed through inspection and particularly in the showers where women had to undress in front of men who sometimes fondled their nipples and genitalia. Shik

(2009) reveals a survivor's testimony about the ways in which beautiful women's bodies were targets for these practices of domination and violence:

From time to time, SS officers came in, walked around the room and jeered at the sight of our naked bodies. It amused them to pinch the buttocks of women that were young and pretty. Then one of the men passed beside me and pinched my buttocks and I felt really humiliated (Shik, 2009, p.230).

Sommer (2009) demonstrates that women who adhered to Nazi beauty standards were often selected to work as prostitutes in camp brothels. Although these women were often spared from backbreaking work and/or the gas chambers, he underscores that they were forced into these positions and it, thus, operated as an instance of sexual coercion and domination.<sup>41</sup>

These examples demonstrate the ways in which beauty standards were operative in various techniques, policies and practices of domination and coercion exercised from above. Nonetheless, meanings and uses of beauty by those in positions of domination are never completely fixed (Hall, 1997). The utilization of beauty in productive techniques of power that target the body to designate different avenues of conduct for different members of the German population implies that individuals can use their bodies in ways unintended by the state. I argue that targeting the body as a locus of state power uncovers the capacity for the body to act as a means of resistance against state domination. Just as not all members of the 'Aryan' public consented to Nazi policies and practice, subordinate groups could also oppose dominant practices of standardisation and normalisation by using their bodies to subvert prescribed paths. The following sections explore the various ways in which beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment offered some means for resistances and their relation to

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<sup>41</sup> It is important to highlight that Jewish women were almost never selected as prostitutes as it would mean committing crimes of Rassenchande.

counter-hegemonic processes, primarily for Jewish women during their ghettoization and deportation to concentration camps.

### **Beauty as Navigation/Mobility**

Some Jewish women were able to use beauty standards and practices as 'tactics' in order to gain increased physical or social mobility to navigate within the confines of the repressive regime. Beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment operate as "tactics" when individuals in positions of subordinations can use their bodies to procure a favourable outcome for themselves without changing the relations of power. De Certeau argues that tactics involve everyday practices where individuals find opportunities in the fissures of a system, such as walking in urban spaces in ways that circumvent transcribed paths.<sup>42</sup> Even in such a repressive regime such as the Third Reich, individuals could use external beauty standards and norms, set by the Nazis, as a form of "racial passing"<sup>43</sup> (Harper, 1998; Kelby, 2013) where Jews with fair hair and blue eyes 'passed' as Aryan, a tactic that gained manoeuvrability outside prescribed routes for Jews. While the Nazis constricted the movement of Jewish people through curfews, their ghettoization as well as border controls, special passports and identification papers; adherence to external Aryan beauty standards functioned as a tactic, to navigate outside these boundaries. These tactics were used by individuals who conformed to Aryan beauty standards, which

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<sup>42</sup> Scott (1998) asserts that cities and roads in and of themselves are increasingly arranged by urban planners to facilitate population flows and panoptic control.

<sup>43</sup> Simply put, "racial passing" refers to socially presenting oneself as belonging to a different race. The term is especially used in the US context, where it tends to connote a legally designated black person who passes as white and is assimilated into the white majority during times when the racial minority is subject to discrimination. The analysis of passing utilizes and challenges traditional moral understandings of identity falsification, complicating our understandings of moral obligations under systemic oppression (Kelby, 2013).

allowed them to get false papers, hide with "righteous gentiles" or even in plain sight. The use of beauty standards was, for the most part, a tactic only available to women; one man I interviewed noted: "For men, there was no beauty, only hard work" (personal communication, May 9, 2012). He explained that, whereas both he and his father were brought to a work camp, his mother and his sister, because they adhered to Aryan beauty standards, were able to escape from the ghetto in Budapest and hide outside the city, at a nearby farm that was owned by non-Jews:

My mother and sister didn't look Jewish and with the help of our factory workers they were able to go to a farm about 200 km or so from Budapest. The farmer knew my mother and sister were Jewish but nobody asked because they didn't look Jewish. The farmers were happy to have some workers because all of the men were in the war, so they needed people to work and pay nothing. It is this way that my mother and sister both survived the war (personal communication, May 9, 2012).

This quote shows that some members of the German public (and their allies) opposed Nazi policies by hiding Jews in instances where it was profitable for them. At the same time, dominant beauty standards were often an integral component to consenting to adopt these oppositional practices as they lowered the risks of getting caught. Waxman (2009) further notes that racial passing was more possible for women because, at that time in Eastern Europe, only Jewish men had the mark of circumcision. It is important to emphasize that beauty operated as a tactic of mobility for only some women who were "under the right circumstances", as another survivor aptly stated (personal communication, October 4, 2012). De Certeau's description of tactics suggests that these women made clever use of time by taking opportunities in the circumstances that arose.

Another survivor explains that conforming to Aryan beauty standards gave Jewish women an increased chance of physical mobility, although she made a distinction between "beauty" and "the look":

I don't say beauty—but their 'look' is what gave them a chance to survive. A Jewish woman who looks 'Jewish' can be 'beautiful' but because she has distinct [Jewish] characteristics that didn't give her a chance to hide. But someone who had 'the look'—who fit the Nazis' racial standards—at least had a chance for survival (personal communication, January 21, 2012).

The interviewee is hesitant to use the word beauty, a characteristic that was common to all of my female interview participants, who may have internalized feminine conventions of denying their beauty, particularly in the case of the Holocaust where using tactics of the body to survive could be considered a source of shame (Chatwood 2010; Shik, 2009). Even though she uses the term "the look", the concept insinuates that the dominant standardisation practices imposed by the Nazis set the terms on the ways Jewish women could use their bodies in tactics of survival.

The interviewee further explains that her 'Aryan look' helped her gain mobility in her encounters with the Nazis after Kristallnacht.<sup>44</sup> As a result of embodying Aryan beauty standards<sup>45</sup>, she was able to navigate through the city and gain access to areas that were off limits to Jews. She recalls that, after her father was taken by two Gestapo men to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, her mother instructed her daughter to use her looks to help free her father: “I will never forget my mother saying ‘go see the commandant and smile nicely at him, no one will be able to resist your beauty and charm’”(personal communication, January 21, 2012). Although she resented her mother for objectifying her in bodily terms, she subsequently traversed the city streets without being caught and arrived at the concentration camp. Her 'look' acted as an everyday tactic to manoeuvre outside prescribed routes and curfews that

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<sup>44</sup> A pogrom that took place in cities across Germany and Austria on November 9-10, 1938 in which the Nazis burned Jewish businesses, synagogues and books, signaling the increase of violent measures against the Jews.

<sup>45</sup> During her *Rassenkunde* (race theory) class, a mandatory education programme implemented by the Nazis, an SS officer singled her out as an example of the quintessential Aryan ideal. (personal communication, January 21, 2012).

had been imposed on Jews. When she arrived at the work camp, she encountered a young SS officer standing at the entrance with a rifle and requested to speak to the commandant, an act of defiance that could have resulted in imprisonment or even death. Instead:

The SS officer looked at me and I will never forget what he said: 'Are you crazy? You stupid goose, would you like to be raped or shot dead? Run, run, quickly, get away from here, but quickly. Don't let me see them talking to you or there is nothing I can do (personal communication, January 21, 2012).

This woman told me that she is still convinced that her Aryan look saved her:

Had I been ugly and had a big Jewish nose and a Jewish look, he wouldn't have let me go. He would have brought me into the concentration camp absolutely. I have no doubt about that. He would not have pity on someone who looked very Jewish (personal communication, January 21, 2012).

Jewish women also used dominant beauty standards as tactics to alter their prescribed paths thereby saving themselves from the death camps. For example, another women's testimony demonstrates the ways in which she used her embodiment of Aryan beauty standards to manoeuvre through the railway system,<sup>46</sup> which, for the most part, played a crucial role in transporting Jews from the ghettos to the concentration camps. The interviewee describes that she was able to escape from a train raid in Poland because of her 'look', which allowed her to assimilate with Russian nurses on board. From there she was able to flee to Russia, get false papers and work in a factory where she 'passed' as a non-Jew. After she became ill under the harsh working conditions, she explains that her beauty allowed her to cross border checkpoints on a train to Cyprus, a train that passed through German territory! She

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<sup>46</sup> De Certeau underscores the ways in which trains function as a closed system that pigeonhole travellers onto predefined routes, he nonetheless, points out that they have some capacity for resistances: "only the restrooms offer an escape from the closed system. They are the lovers' phantasm, a way out for the ill, an escape for children..." (1984, p.111)

recounts that she and another Jewish friend befriended Russian soldiers who said they would accompany them on their travels because “we were young and beautiful, even though they knew we were Jewish” (personal communication, March 19, 2012).

Nonetheless, their beauty only got them so far; as soon as they arrived in Cyprus, the Russian soldiers abandoned the women: “they didn't want to have anything to do with us outside [the train] because we were Jewish” (personal communication, March 19, 2012). This example illustrates that Jewish women could use their ‘look’, namely Aryan beauty standards, as tactics to traverse illegal and dangerous routes and thereby save their own lives from the fate of the Nazis. Nonetheless, these individual practices did nothing to change relations of power where Jews remained in positions of subordination and where anti-Semitic sentiments persisted throughout Europe.

Beauty norms were further used as a type of bio-power where Jewish women used normalisation practices on their bodies as tactics to survive. I mentioned earlier that bio-power is generally conceptualized as a technique of the state that targets bodies in order to regulate the wellbeing of the population. I argue that targeting the body as a locus of state power opens up a capacity for those in positions of subordination to use practices of embodiment to connote health as a tactic to gain some mobility. For example, scholars have documented that women in the concentration camps would prick their fingers and use the blood as blush or lipstick in order to appear healthy to SS officers during roll call and inspection (Flascka, 2010). The application of beauty norms, thus, worked as a tactic of bio-power to appear healthy and spare Jewish women from the crematoriums. One survivor that I interviewed recounts how during the selection-inspection process at Auschwitz

(where Jews were forced to strip), she purposely draped her clothes on her right arm to cover her scar from her recent appendix surgery, whereas most of the other women held their clothes in front of their bodies to cover their intimate parts. She explained that she quickly realized that the Nazi inspectors were surveying bodies to find imperfections, and discovered that they would spare or at least delay death insofar as a body remained useful. By hiding her scar and displaying her body as 'perfect', she believes that she was spared from the gas chamber: "this action saved my life, as the Nazis only wanted perfectly beautiful bodies that could work hard" (personal communication, October 4, 2012). Her unit of able-bodied women was, shortly after, sent to a labour camp in Germany to pile bricks along the Rhine River. She underscores the crucial role that youth, beauty and health played in her survival, insofar as pregnant women and mothers were particular targets of the Nazis due to Jewish women's reproductive capabilities. The practice of embodiment to make a Jewish woman look 'perfect' further highlights the ways in which, for subordinate groups, beauty norms were linked with healthy bodies under German Fascism.

This survivor recalls another instance in which Nazi beauty standards also operated in tactics of bio-power that spared her from being separated from her sister inside the labour camps. She explained that one day, a delegation of well-dressed business men from Krupp Ammunitions Company came to the work camp to choose 520 women to make ammunition in Essen. At first her sister was chosen but she was instructed to stay, but then one of the German businessmen immediately looked her up and down and said "she's one of the best." and they changed their minds and selected her as well.

I believe it was my beauty that prevented me from being separated from my sister—which would have killed me [emotionally]. I wasn't a beauty queen but I wasn't ugly either. The way that you carry yourself has a lot to do with how others approach you. It is one of the key skills of survival (personal communication, October 4, 2012).

This survivor's quotation particularly highlights that beauty standards are not innate but are constructed and could be achieved through the application of beauty norms and practices of embodiment that transform the body in order to connote health and well-being.

Beauty norms and practices of embodiment sometimes operated as "technologies of the self" which involve performing a number of operations on the body in order to attain a certain state of happiness (Foucault, 1997). Through the application of beauty norms inside the concentration camps, some Jewish women could occasionally counter the dehumanization and defeminization processes implemented by the Nazis. For example, one survivor recalls that sometimes women would forgo an extra piece of bread in order to acquire beauty items such as combs or make-up. These beauty products would then be applied on the body as a tactic to reconnect with a feminine identity, thereby reclaiming their humanity as a means of survival. In this way beauty norms worked as technologies of the self in which women transformed themselves in order to reclaim their humanity, and transcend the dehumanization processes without shifting the extreme relations of domination inside the concentration camps. In a similar vein, Flascka (2010) records a testimony that highlights the importance of the regrowth of hair in Auschwitz as signifying the return of her identity as a woman:

Our hair has grown a bit, we can actually begin to use a comb. We have not had any use for one in nearly a year. It is an uncanny sensation. We stroll beside the

train displaying our short crowns of an inch of hair. With our newly found womanhood, we attract the attention of men of our world. We are our very attractive selves again (p.82).

Thus, through beauty norms-- operations on the body-- women could become self-creating subjects that transformed themselves in order to resist the Nazi's imposed subhuman subjectivities. As a technology of the self, beauty norms acted as tactics of survival at the psychological level.

All these examples demonstrate that Jewish women could use external beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment to gain some individual leverage and change the course of their lives dictated by the Nazis. However, they did not lead to coordinated actions that could challenge Nazi standardisation and normalisation practices. Rather, they were tactical in nature where some women made use of standards and norms coming from the dominant culture to their own advantage in instances where they could find a 'fissure' where they made use of their bodies in local, face-to-face encounters.

### **Beauty as Exchange/Economy**

Beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment further operated as part of a personal economy for some Jewish women within the ghettos and the concentration camps. Scholars have evidenced that women sometimes used their bodies for a chance of survival in exchange for the procurement of food, protection and other items of survival (Chatwood, 2010; Shik, 2009; Sommer, 2009). Specifically, Sommer (2009) demonstrates that the concentration camps were based on a hierarchical structure where some prisoners were placed in positions of authority to carry out the demands of the SS officers. Ghettos likewise had a similar set up

where a *Judenrat*--a council comprised of Jewish males--were appointed as responsible for managing the ghettos in terms of curfew, distribution of food, etc. These men who were in positions of authority functioned as "organic intellectuals" that led, through *practices*, by carrying out the Nazis' plans but who could also in turn advance their own groups' interests. In this instance of domination, these leaders mostly collaborated with the Nazis but sometimes managed to smuggle people past curfew (in the context of the ghettos) or distribute survival items to prisoners. In these circumstances, women could use beauty standards and norms to build closer relations with these leaders.

Sommers (2009) documents that these men often used their positions of authority to have sexual relations: a primal act that was largely not allowed in the concentration camps. As Shik (2009) evinces, male prisoners in positions of authority often used dominant beauty standards as a criteria to make their selection:

They chose their women among the youngest, the prettiest, the least emaciated prisoners and in a few seconds the deal was closed. Openly shamelessly, the dirty diseased bodies clung together...and the piece of bread, the little knife wandered from the pocket of the man into the greedy hands of the woman (p.236).

In the concentration camps, "some meat on our bones and some hair" were considered sources of attractiveness (personal communication, September 2, 2012). One woman I interviewed explained that she used beauty standards to forge relations with those in positions of authority in exchange for food. She explains the foreman in her labour camp repeatedly told her she was beautiful and she purposely led him on and in exchange:

The foreman would drop carrots, apples and biscuits from the crane giving us a little extra nourishment...Another time I distracted another foreman while the other women warmed their hands over a little round metal drum filled with

rubbish coal and pieces of wood. He told me he was aware of what I was doing but kept talking to me anyway... I know these foremen did these nice things because they thought I was beautiful and were attracted to me (personal communication, October 4, 2012).

Although the interviewee said that she refused to have sex with these men because she came from a Hasidic Jewish family, scholars have noted that female Holocaust survivors often stay silent about these sexual acts as they felt ashamed about what they did in order to survive (Dror and Linn, 2010). Chatwood (2010) underscores that sexual acts under these conditions must be understood in the context of sexual coercion where the conditions were such that women could not object to these practices. At the same time, she argues that these women were engaged in a form of resistance by actively choosing to engage with these sexual relations to increase their chances of survival. These women, therefore, used beauty standards as part of an exchange with these leaders, to collaborate and form alliances with other groups in order to survive. Nonetheless, these male leaders used coercive measures, underscoring how these networks were not based on coordinated action against dominant power relations. Beauty operated tactically at the individual level rather than through a planned collaboration.

Holocaust survivors also described how women sometimes used dominant beauty standards to be taken as 'lovers' by Nazi soldiers. An extreme example is the story of Edith Hahn Beer who 'passed' as 'Aryan' and survived the war by living with and marrying a Nazi officer (Hahn Beer, 2000). Other women used their beauty to trade their bodies inside the camps in order to become heads of the barracks with separate living quarters, extra food rations and increased protection (Sommer, 2009). One survivor that I interviewed recalls that "a beautiful Jewish woman in a white

linen pantsuit" saved the entire labour camp" after two women had escaped from the munitions factory, by engaging in sexual relations with an SS officer:

That night I had to get out of the basement because I could not bring myself to pee on the straw. There was no light outside, so I found my way by crawling through the snow and rubbish. I then saw a young Jewish woman and an SS officer. The woman was in her late 20s and she came from Sziget, the same town where my grandfather had lived. She was kneeling in front of him and giving him a blowjob. I believe this woman's sacrifice saved us from being shot that morning (personal communication, October 4, 2012).

This example presents an instance in which she used her body as a tactic of survival, not only for herself, (she would have most likely been punished if she did not perform this sexual act), but to aid the rest of the labour camp as well. Despite the impact of her action on the groups' survival, it remains an individual act, a tactic, based on an opportunity given to that woman; and had no impact on the existing power relations.

### **Tactics and Counter-Hegemonic Resistance**

In the context of German Fascism, beauty standards and norms were instrumental in processes of hegemony. Those in dominant positions had control over representational practices and used beauty to win consent through practices of normalisation and standardisation to delimit who belonged to the German nation and who posed a threat to national wellbeing. These techniques worked to win consent for the National Socialist Party and for Nazi racist policies and practices, once they had control. Through media representations and particularly propaganda posters the Nazis attempted to fix the cultural meanings of individuals and groups through bodily constructions that set the parameters for how different groups could act. However, even under these conditions, there were still some pockets of resistance within the German public, pointing to a complex interplay of power relations. At the same time

subordinate groups could not change the normalisation and standardisation practices that were naturalized by the Nazis. Jewish women and men did not have access to state controlled media representations and could not, therefore, challenge beauty standards and norms through representational practices. In these circumstances, their bodies and the use of external standards and norms set by the Nazis became one of the only available means of resistance against forms of domination. These means of resistance were more easily available to Jewish women, although their capacity to use beauty as a tactic was extremely marginal. They could only use beauty tactics in face-to-face communication at the individual level to gain some leverage in exchange for items that would help them to survive or to achieve some manoeuvrability. These tactics did not shift hegemonic power relations but, rather, point to the opening up of a limited capacity for resistances in some individual instances, that sometimes made a difference between life and death. At the same time, the use of beauty as a tactic of survival for some Jewish women suggests that they could use face-to-face communication practices to insert different meanings and uses of beauty than those intended by the Nazis. My research, therefore, extends beyond cultural studies emphasis on beauty at the level of representation where different groups can vie for meaning; rather, it suggests that even face-to-face communication practices at the individual level can impact on beauty's meanings and practices.

The Holocaust survivors' testimonials and interviews allow the renegotiation of the collective memory of the Holocaust by taking into account different gendered

experiences and understandings.<sup>47</sup> Rethinking their experiences in terms of beauty and the body gave the opportunity to some Jewish women survivors to reclaim a sense of humanity in the face of the Nazi's attempt to demonize, erase and eradicate their bodies. My research provides a new lens to the masculinist narratives of German Fascism and the Holocaust. In fact, these often overlooked aspects of beauty and the body still have traces today. Notably, in Israel there is a yearly Miss Holocaust Survivor Beauty Pageant where female Jewish survivors from around the world participate in a beauty pageant where they walk down the runway and tell their survival stories (Chabin, 2013, August 23). The contest showcases and celebrates Jewish beauty and the body as proof of Jewish women's survival, as one participant stated in an interview with the CBC: "I have the privilege to show the world that Hitler wanted to exterminate us and we are alive. We are also enjoying life. Thank God it's that way." ("Israel Hosts", 2012, June 29). Furthermore, there is also a Miss Hitler beauty pageant on a neo-Nazi social media website *Vkontakte* where women are encouraged to send in Nazi themed photos of themselves, alongside a caption that describes their love of Hitler and their contempt for Jewish people (Koren, 2014, October 20). The resurrection of these narratives of beauty and the body in the context of beauty pageants on neo-Nazism and the Holocaust would be an interesting area for future research about why these links persist within contemporary contexts.

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<sup>47</sup> This collective memory is not necessarily about 'truth' but invokes what James Carey (1989) calls a ritual view of communication, which is concerned with a sense of shared beliefs, community and a way of making sense of the trauma.

## Chapter 4

### **Fashionable Resistance: Tavi Gevinson's *thestylerookie.com* blog as Counter-hegemony?**

Whereas my first case study examined practices of beauty in hegemonic processes in a context of a high degree of coercion, this case study explores the 'counter-hegemonic power' of beauty and the body within the communication means of fashion blogging. New media scholars have often discussed the Internet in laudatory terms as having the technological infrastructure to increase democratic participation and collaboration by non-institutionally located professionals (for e.g. Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2011). These scholars argue that blogging was one of the first online innovations that opened access to amateurs to participate in cultural production and thereby offer alternative or oppositional viewpoints outside traditional mass media sources (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Levinson, 2009; Lowrey & Latta, 2008; Shirky, 2011). However, most of these discussions on blogging practices tend to focus on 'news blogs' even though this sub-genre of blogs makes up only a small percentage of the 'blogosphere' (Bortree, 2006; Herring et al., 2004).

Few studies have been done on fashion blogging, a growing subset of blogs largely predominated by girls and young women who post pictures of themselves in different outfits, swap fashion tips, review couture collections and add personal commentary (Marwick, 2011). This chapter extends the research on blogging by examining whether fashion bloggers' representations of their bodies can shift dominant beauty standards, norms and practices set by the beauty-fashion complex

(Bartky, 1990). Through an analysis of Tavi Gevinson's fashion blog thestylerookie.com, it considers the ways in which fashion blogging can operate as a means of communication in which young women can act as active cultural producers to offer alternative and oppositional representations to the style directives set by the elite beauty and fashion industries.<sup>48</sup> I am particularly concerned with the ways in which thestylerookie.com can act as a site of counter-hegemony, where online representations of stylizations of the body can be harnessed across a network of sites to shift elite standards, norms and practices of beauty that have been naturalized in dominant fashion media.

By extending the processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony into the context of fashion blogging, I examine the ways that Gevinson had the potential to use her cultural leadership to mobilise subordinate groups to shift dominant definitions of beauty. To develop my analysis, I first draw on Foucault's concepts of subjectification and technologies of the self, as well as Butler's notion of performativity in order to shed light on the ways in which Gevinson used her body to produce new forms of conduct and performances that could contribute to counter-hegemonic endeavours. I cluster Gevinson's blog around three central themes: 1) digitization of the body/self; 2) mastery of technology; and 3) (anti)consumerist discourses. I argue that while thestylerookie.com has the potential to become a counter-hegemonic site, this potential was never actualized because her online

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<sup>48</sup> As discussed previously, this research takes the viewpoint that beauty is not an innate feature but rather socially constructed based on cultural norms, standards and practices on the body. Through this lens, fashion and clothing are included as part of practices of beauty insofar as individuals can use clothing, costumes and style to transform or enhance their body to fit in with (or confound) existing beauty norms.

representations of the body did not succeed in gaining enough momentum to mobilise a network of alliances across various sites to shift dominant standards and norms of beauty. To proceed, I first outline existing scholarship on fashion blogging; I then provide background on Tavi Gevinson's fashion blog, *thestylerookie.com* before turning to a detailed analysis of the central themes.

### **Fashion Blogs as Resistance**

Fashion blogging practices are situated within wider debates on young women's online presence as a site of oppression or empowerment (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011). This presence is often characterized as 'risky behaviour' through the objectification and sexualisation of young women's bodies (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2007; Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011), as well as through discourses of stalking and cyber-bullying (Levinson, 2009). From these scholarly perspectives, fashion blogging is a form of oppression that masquerades as gender empowerment that is part of a post-feminist sensibility concerned with media representations of bodily display within a framework of consumerism (Harris, 2004; Hopkins, 2002; McRobbie, 2000, 2007).

Other scholars assert that fashion blogs have been dismissed as superficial and narcissistic when, in fact, they offer some empowering aspects to some young women (Chittenden, 2010; Connell, 2013; Herring et al., 2004; Pham, 2011; Stefanic, 2010). Specifically, they claim that fashion blogs provide young women with a public space to engage as active cultural producers against the style directives set by the fashion industry and disseminated through traditional media channels such as women's

magazines and specialty television fashion channels (Chittenden, 2010; Pham, 2011; Stefanic, 2010). These scholars demonstrate that digital publishing has increasingly become accessible to young women and, consequently, fashion blogging can become a means for these women to gain some degree of control over their bodily display and objectification, rather than as merely victims of media, advertising, consumers of fashion and beauty products (Stefanic, 2010). For example, Pham's (2011) analysis of fashion blogging created by Asian Americans argues that practices of blogging have the potential to disrupt racist hierarchies of beauty, authority and knowledge production, which can work to dilute the power of mainstream fashion tastemakers. Similarly, Connell (2013) examines how fashion blogs have a resistive capacity through the representation of alternate body types that are typically excluded from participating in mainstream fashion, namely fat, queer and femme. She argues that fashion blogging thereby offers users a respite and a place of belonging within the context of the exclusive, elitist and oppressive mainstream beauty and fashion standards. Chittenden (2010) further evinces that fashion blogs operate as "safe spaces" through the creation of a virtual community that can mitigate social isolation and build self-esteem, which can be carried over to physical encounters. She argues that fashion blogging, rather than increasing the objectification of young women, can undermine gender stereotypes and expectations. Similarly, van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt (2007) assert that blogging facilitates young women's capacity to play with dominant gender norms and expectations and to resist feminine stereotypes by acting more confidently than they might in face-to-face encounters, and by feeling less constrained by gender norms of appearance.

These latter studies draw attention to fashion blogging's resistive capacities through online (re)presentations of the self where young women can participate in cultural production outside dominant representations and stereotypes. They act as an anchor for my analysis of the ways online representations of the body might be used in dynamic processes of counter-hegemony where oppositional and resistive practices are mobilised across a network of sites to unite against elite cultural constructions and representations of beauty. My research, therefore, extends the debates on fashion blogging by considering how they are involved in complex and dynamic processes of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic power relations.

**Method: Tavi Gevinson's thestylerookie.com**

Tavi Gevinson's fashion blog thestylerookie.com has been selected as a corpus for analysis due to its notoriety and influence within popular culture as well as the attention she has received from the mass media and the fashion and beauty industries. It, therefore, offers a site to investigate the ways in which fashion blogging can exert some pressure over dominant beauty standards, norms and practices. Specifically, Gevinson's blog has been featured in various fashion magazines including *Pop*, *Teen Vogue*, *Love*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *Elle* and *Vogue Paris* as well as countless reputable newspapers including the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. Moreover, Gevinson became popular among fashion designers and was invited to New York, Paris and Milan fashion weeks, often being offered a seat in the front row next to famous and more established fashion magazine editors. She was also invited to collaborate on various fashion projects with major designers such as Rodarte for

their Target collection, Comme des Garçons and Miu Miu. According to an article in the *Seattle Times*, thestylrookie.com had a readership of almost 30,000 (Twohey, 2010), suggesting that she had some potential to influence beauty and fashion tastes within popular culture. However, a large readership does not guarantee a mobilising effect.

I performed a discourse analysis of the texts and the images of thestylrookie.com including all blogposts from its inception in 2008 until the end of 2011, after she had launched her own feminist online magazine for young girls: rookiemag.com.<sup>49</sup> To conduct my analysis, I examined the relationship between the text and the visual images, paying particular attention to the representations and performances of the body in terms of how they are situated and shaped by wider sociocultural practices. In total, I included 647 blog posts in my analysis comprised of written text, images, videos as well as user comments.<sup>50</sup> The latter have been incorporated because they demonstrate the ways in which fashion blogging provides elements of public participation, audience feedback, and an online communication, which, therefore, helps to shed light on the way these social media practices may foster counter-hegemonic endeavours. Commentators can also post anonymously, which allows for a range of diverse and oppositional viewpoints. At the same time, it is important to note that Tavi had control over the comments posted on her blog through monitoring and moderating them. These aspects are taken into consideration in terms of their impact on counter-hegemonic processes.

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<sup>49</sup> This research focuses exclusively on Gevinson's blog and not on her online magazine because it more explicitly deals with the themes of fashion and beauty.

<sup>50</sup> Although I include her entire blog, it is important to note that some texts, images, videos and comments have been altered, removed and/or are no longer available.

## Narrative of thestylerookie.com

Tavi Gevinson's blog thestylerookie.com features quirky musings about her adolescent life in middle school, popular culture references and their intersections with fashion.

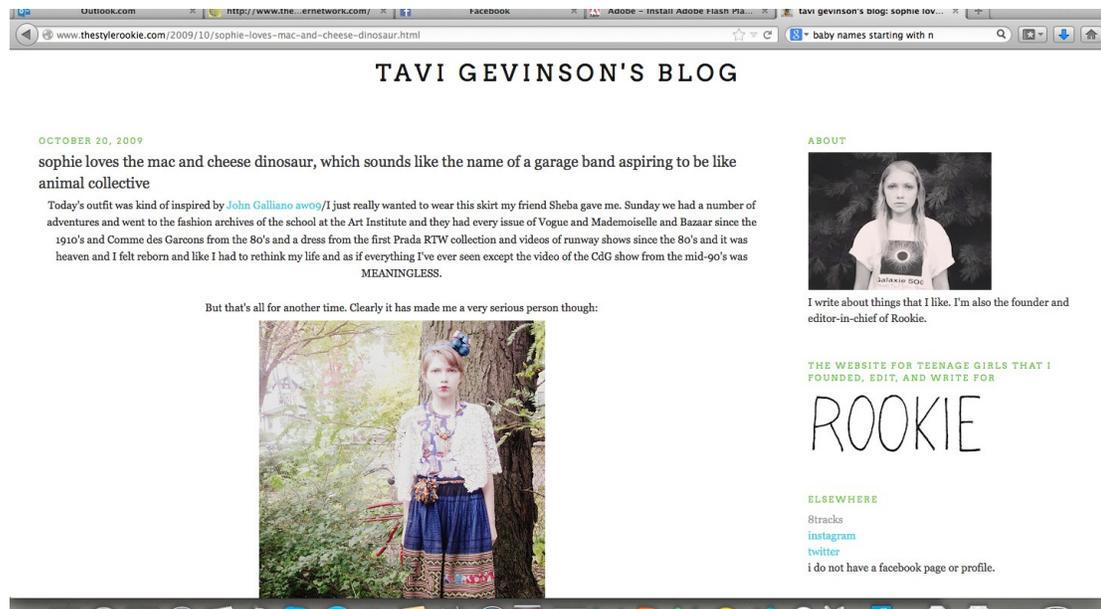


Fig. 12. Screenshot. www.thestylerookie.com

Gevinson started her blog at 11 years old and called herself a "style rookie": a new, young blogger interested in writing and sharing ideas and inspiration about fashion with an online fashion community (March 31, 2008). In her early posts, she tells readers that she is often ridiculed and bullied at school for her outfits that do not fit with the existing fashion trends for youth, and that her blog provides a safe space to express her style, connect with an online fashion community and gain some support for her looks (April 14, 2008).

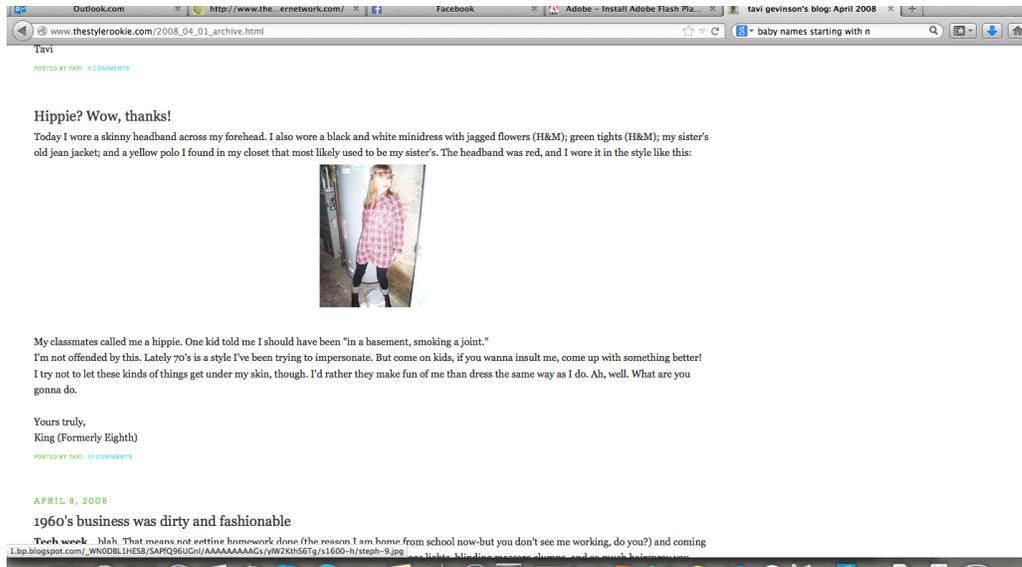


Fig. 13. Screenshot. www.thestylerookie.com

As a result, she gains more confidence to wear unusual outfits to school, calling her peers names such as “aberzombies”, for blindly following trends and wearing popular brands for youth such as Abercrombie & Fitch. She posts images of herself (and sometimes her friends) in different outfits as well as fashion collages, runway inspirations, magazine photo shoots, mixed in with her personal witty 'stream of consciousness' commentary. She styles, photographs and edits the images herself, for instance the one with a laundry basket attached to her coat (January 12, 2009).

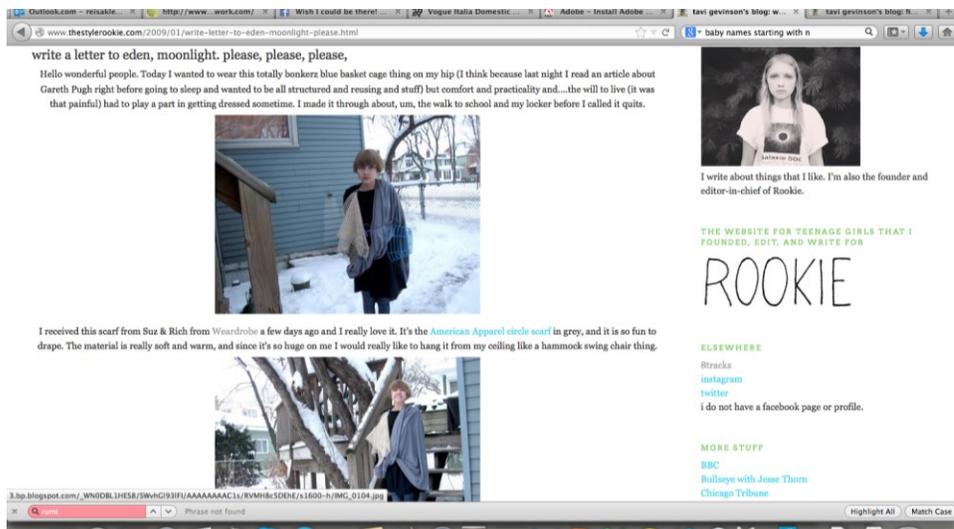


Fig. 14. Screenshot. www.thestylerookie.com

Gevinson also writes about her fashion inspirations including various female popular icons such as Twiggy, Marianne Faithfull, and Courtney Love. In this way, she combines her musings on fashion with various popular culture references from the 1960s including Bob Dylan and Woody Allen, the 1990s including Kurt Cobain, and television shows such as the Wonder Years and My So-called Life. Her eclectic references spanning different generations, coupled with her sophisticated vocabulary and her technological competency, led some readers and journalists to question her authenticity: is a young girl really responsible for the blog? Several (often anonymous) readers accused her of being a hoax using a persona of a young girl for fame, or as constructed by the fashion industry, as this comment exemplifies: “Can you guys say: ‘mom is actually behind this blog’ three times fast?” (December 5, 2008). As a result, Gevinson often defends her 'authenticity' and credibility in terms of her age and gender.

In 2009, thestylerookie.com began receiving media attention after Gevinson was featured in an article published in *Teen Vogue* and on the cover of *Pop Magazine*, which she chronicled on her blog. That same year, she was invited to cover New York Fashion Week where she was courted by the fashion industry, invited to elite parties filled with fashion designers and celebrities such as Marc Jacobs, Lady Gaga, James Franco, and Courtney Love, among others. Around the same time, she started receiving gifts from various upscale fashion designers beginning with a pair of handmade lace tights from Rodarte and then from Prada, Comme des Graçons, Miu Miu as well as more commercial brands such as American Apparel and Gap. In 2009, Tavi was also invited to collaborate with Rodarte's line for Target where she showcased a promotional video and advertised the pieces on her blog. Throughout this time, Gevinson amassed a large number of followers on an international scale, some calling her a fashion genius or prodigy and touting how blogging is replacing traditional fashion venues such as magazines.

In January 2010, Gevinson was criticised for wearing a large hat-like structure in the shape of a bow while sitting in the front row of the Dior show at Paris Fashion week, thereby blocking the view of other spectators. This *faux pas* heralded the beginning of a 'Tavi backlash.' Some commentators on her blog and journalists alike charged that a young girl with no professional training, figuring among the fashion elite, was a fad, and that she had 'sold-out' and become a mouthpiece for the fashion industry. Later in 2010, Gevinson began to challenge some of the shortcomings of the fashion industry in terms of its racism and sexism, its celebration and objectification of young and white girls. She also began exploring the intersection

between fashion and feminism, as she tells a journalist for *Jezebel*, an online popular cultural feminist website:

Sometimes I even still get embarrassed when people are like, 'You have that blog, right?' And I worry that they'll think I'm shallow because I write about fashion, or used to. I definitely think that fashion and feminism can be friends. I even think that fashion can be a tool of feminism and of self-expression and individuality and empowerment. But clearly there are flaws with the industry that still really grind my gears (Sauers, April 16, 2013).

As Gevinson continued writing her blog, she began to question her relationship to the fashion industry. In one blog post where she describes sitting next to the editor of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour, at a fashion event, Gevinson writes: "Fashion week is weird. It is very high school. Lately I've been looking to other places for creative outlet and inspiration (March 27, 2011)." Shortly after, in August 2011, she launched her online feminist magazine for young girls, *rookiemag.com*, and her fashion blog took a backseat. In the following sections, I examine the techniques of power and resistance entailed in the themes of mastery of technology, anti-consumerist discourses and digitization of the body/self, and the way in which they are implicated in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes.

### **Digitization of the body/self**

Gevinson used online representations of the body/self to construct beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment that are sometimes alternatives to the dominant culture. Fashion blogging allows for digitization of the body, a process in which bloggers can engage in digital photography, editing and sampling (Creeber & Martin, 2009) to re-craft the body in new ways that challenge dominant

conceptualizations of beauty. Using techniques of digitization (i.e. digital representation) of the body, Gevinson developed practices of embodiment to present new stylizations of the body. In fact, she used practices of bodily display to challenge the ways beauty standards, norms, and practices are promoted in the construction of normative femininity, where women are turned into sex objects for the male gaze. For Gevinson, practices of digitization of the body/self operate as technologies of the self that transform her own self, in order to "conduct the conduct" of herself as well as her followers beyond dominant definitions of beauty. These techniques have the potential to be harnessed within processes of counter-hegemony wherein alternative representations of the body exert enough pressure on readers to shift dominant normalisation and standardisation practices.

To construct digital representations other than those produced by dominant culture, she contends that the true goals of fashion are not about adopting elite beauty standards, but rather have to do with creativity and expression or, in other words, that fashion is a form of art: "I know it sounds corny, but to me, fashion is a form of art. I've said that on here before, but that's strictly what I find it: it's not necessarily about simply looking 'good' or 'chic'" (September 24, 2008). By conceptualizing fashion as a work of art, she further challenges the ways in which fashion has been linked to patriarchal objectifying practices for women. In the same post she explains:

...it really bothers me when silly ideas like "Fashion Do's and Don't's" and "Fashion Police" are established, because that takes all the fun out of putting together an outfit. In my opinion, the most interesting fashion is the Anti-Fashion. No rules, no restrictions, no normalcy, no *pleasing anyone*. ... It's not how cute an outfit is, it's what it seems to reflect: a personality, a story. When I posted the pictures in which I'm wearing a doily hat and doll lashes, a few people thought it was a little strange, as did some when I posted my inspiration

collage of dead-looking people and scary faces. These pictures are interesting, they make me want to know more about the person wearing it and they draw me in....I have no one to impress and I'm not concerned about wearing something flattering to my body. I will dress as ugly and crazy as I want as long as I'm still young enough to get away with it (September 24, 2008).

Gevinson, therefore, uses fashion as a form of experimentation and moves beyond dominant standards situated within a patriarchal framework where young women are turned into sex objects dressing for the male gaze. Through the digitization of the self, she uses practices of embodiment and fashion in ways that create alternative definitions of beauty beyond elite culture. Her use of fashion as a technology of the self that performs operations on the body to transform the self is directly related to the third component of Foucault's concept of subjectification, that of self-integration. While in the first two components of the subjectification process individuals are subject to external control through objectification practices directed at the body, within the third component, individuals can resist the ways they are turned into objects by choosing not to internalize these practices. In this sense, Gevinson rejects the subjectification process of the fashion industry which turns female bodies into objects, by not training her body according to dominant standardisation and normalisation practices and, in turn, creating new feminine subjectivities outside existing forms of patriarchal domination. Gevinson's online representations involve her signature looks where she features herself in layered printed pieces that resemble granny frocks, dyed grey hair and no make-up. These representations of the body thereby provide an alternative to the elite culture's beauty standards, norms and practices as a form of patriarchal oppression, and move beyond the literature that considers representations of feminine beauty within a framework of oppression. Gevinson's conception of fashion, therefore, critiques the ways in which the

dominant culture uses fashion and beauty as instruments of patriarchal oppression in which make-up, tight mini-skirts and high heels restrict movement, and thereby keep women in positions of subordination. Rather, she proposes that fashion and practices of embodiment can be used to construct a new feminine subject beyond patriarchal domination.

Gevinson included digitizations of the body/self that strung together disparate elements in new ways to create original forms of conduct and ways of being. In one post, she explains that she wore a coat hanger around her neck as a piece of jewellery with "a top my mom's friend gave me upside-down and as a skirt" (November 25, 2008).

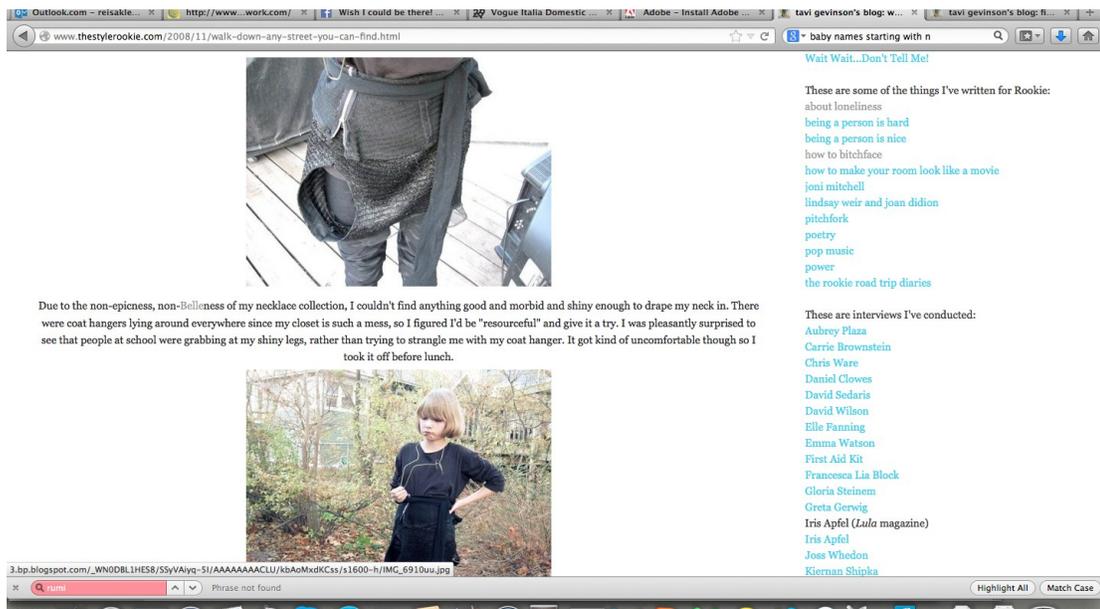


Fig. 15. Screenshot. www.thestylerookie.com

She adds: "I was pleasantly surprised to see that people at school were grabbing at my shiny legs, rather than trying to strangle me with the coat hanger." These digital

representations act as techniques of bio-power -- a type of power that targets the body and is concerned with the wellbeing of the population -- to help her followers be more 'comfortable' in particular styles than those previously deemed acceptable in hegemonic relations of power. One commentator writes:

This definitely brings back memories of being a middle school outcast because of the way I dressed (I knew who Comme des Garçons was in 7th grade). I'm 28 now so this was in the pre-triple-dub era, feeling totally isolated - I wonder if the Internet has made a difference in assuaging those harsh experiences for youngish people now days [sic] by having the opportunity to have even a virtual sense of community/solidarity with other folks up there in the style stratosphere? Then again maybe you're much cooler than I was, or go to a cooler school! Either way, I'm glad I stuck it out with my sense of style during those dark days. Now instead of overhearing a snarky "what is she *wearing?*", I overhear an intrigued "what is *she* wearing?" Keep it up y'all! (Artdiva, October 6, 2008).

Through representations and displays of her body within a digital context, Gevinson operated as a tastemaker and a cultural producer who used her body as a sphere of influence, a point that will be explored in more detail in relation to her mastery of technology.

Gevinson also used digitisations of the body/self to reassemble elements of beauty and femininity in order to create new gender performances. As discussed in my theoretical framework, gender performativity, as developed by Butler, argues that gender and sex are performed through regulatory frameworks in which they congeal through a repeated set of bodily "acts, gestures and postures" to produce the appearance of a natural gender. At the same time, the concept suggests that through re-assembling bodily acts in new ways and through new stylizations of the body, individuals can use beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment to subvert normative gender codes. Fashion blogging, through its various practices such as

dressing up, the use of postures and make-up as well as photography and editing, provides a new performance of the body that can resist dominant normalisation and standardisation practices. Tavi constructs herself in ways that have been conventionally constituted as male through clothing, make-up and posturing, as a strategy to subvert normative gender conventions and, by inference, challenge traditional correlations between beauty and femininity. For instance, in one post, she writes: "I once relished in an email I got saying I was an ugly boy because it felt like proof that I hadn't given in to societal pressure to be pretty that girls usually feel affected by" (July 1, 2011).

In an April Fools' Day post, she particularly dresses in drag to subvert regulatory gender expectations. By sporting a button down shirt and baseball cap with a moustache drawn on with eyeliner, she performs masculinity as a strategy to challenge accusations that she is not responsible for her blog. Her use of drag is unconvincing insofar as her moustache is drawn on with makeup and becomes a means for highlighting the ways in which gender is formed through constructed categories of meaning that are often naturalized according to stereotypical roles, thereby connoting that a young woman is fully capable of being behind this blog.

Her gender performances do not simply correspond to her use of drag as a form of resistance; she often engages with performances of femininity to challenge dominant gender roles and expectations. In one blog post, she explains that she utilizes beauty items that have traditionally been affiliated with femininity such as

pink, glitter and bows, and combines them in new ways to create a new feminine gender performance. She explains:

[I] am definitely going through a phase with vomit pink and Laura Palmer's Secret Diary and black swans and white swans and girls. It should be noted that I don't equate "girl" with pink and red and bows and dolls and babies, the entire aesthetic is more about mocking those connotations, though I would be lying if I said I never really just wanted to indulge in bows and glitter and sickening cheesiness....Obviously, there's much more to teenage girls and the thoughts of such than boys with noteworthy eyeballs, but I resent the idea that such thoughts are, in our culture, considered vapid because they're also considered specific to young females...The fact that "smart" and "girly" have to be mutually exclusive gets in the way for someone like me who would like to go to school wearing an outfit I obviously spent time on picking out or with my classmates knowing that I spend a lot of time writing and thinking about clothes -- since fashion too is considered a "girl" thing -- and still be taken seriously when it comes to class discussions. It's also worth noting that in all the times I've been accused of being an adult posing as someone younger and writing this blog, and considering that we live in a society in which women are not always judged solely based on merit and so criticisms towards women should be examined for sexist stereotypes, I'm going to take a wild guess that some suspicions stemmed from the idea that a teenage girl who likes fashion can't also do something that requires some very basic knowledge. Do you like how I passive aggressively added that in the end there? With all that said, let's indulge in some bows and glitter, yes? (May 29, 2011).

Gevinson's performance involves using conventional beauty norms in new ways to subvert the ways in which normative femininity is constructed to keep women in positions of subordination. Her new performances of femininity use fashion and stylizations of the body to highlight how femininity can be performed in new ways that subvert these meanings. Through her performances, she disrupts assumptions that "girl" and "smart" are diametrically opposed, thereby advancing that young women can be intelligent members who contribute to public culture through digital technologies. Gevinson thereby suggests that fashion can be used as a technique of resistance. In another post, she blends fashion and feminism by wearing a sweater with the word "feminist" on it (March 27, 2011).

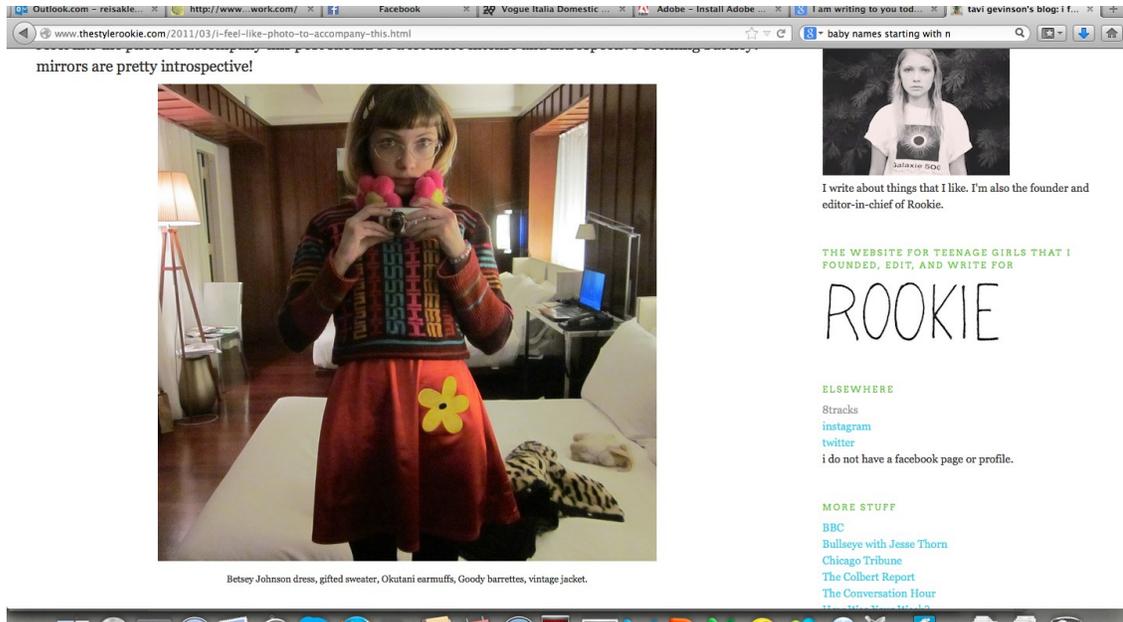


Fig. 16. Screenshot. www.thestylerookie.com

Through these stylizations of the body, she creates a new performance of femininity as not diametrically opposed to feminism. In this context, Gevinson constructs representations of playful dress-up and stylizations of the body as techniques of resistance to create new performances and new forms of conduct for herself and others. As Foucault explains "using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something very important. From this perspective, resistance is a creative process, "to create and recreate to change the situation" (Foucault, 1994, p. 165). These are the same elements that are used by the dominant classes, but re-assembled in new ways to create new and alternate forms of conduct. However, as will be demonstrated through the themes of mastery of technology and (anti)consumerist discourses, these new stylizations and representations of the body do not manifest into an actual site of counter-hegemony in mobilizing coordinated action across a

network of sites to shift dominant standards and norms of beauty set by the elite culture.

### **Mastery of Technology**

Social media, with their relative facility of access and their capability of reaching wide groups of people, could seemingly be viewed as ideal means of communication to mobilise a counter-hegemonic movement. Scholars have noted, for instance, that technological innovations of blogging enabled non-experts to participate in cultural production (Benkler, 2006; McQuarrie et al., 2012; Stefanic). Yet, fashion blogging still involves, in addition to writing skills, a degree of mastery of technology including: the embedding of photographs and videos within text; using photography and mastering photo editing software such as Photoshop, PhotoFiltre and Picnic; and inserting hypertext and constructing online collages with Polyvore. Many journalists and commentators have lauded Gevinson's sophisticated technological skills, witty writing, and astute analysis as factors that made her blog a success. Through a mastery of technology, Gevinson was able to gain the necessary exposure to become a cultural leader and influence members from both elite and popular cultures. As one anonymous commentator highlighted, blogging has a public aspect insofar as "someone who starts blogging wants to be noticed, otherwise he/she would write in his/her private journal without using the Internet" (February 10, 2009). Gevinson's mastery of technology suggests that she could act as an organic intellectual and her blog as a site of counter-hegemony, to mobilize a network of alliances across various sites and oppose dominant beauty standards, norms and practices and hegemonic relations of power.

Gevinson used the techniques of trading links and commenting on other fashion blogs in order to cultivate and maintain followers to increase her influence in popular and elite cultures:

Some people have been asking me about comments and readers and et cetera...I've sort of been putting this off for fear of sounding too patronizing, but to those who asked: The best way to get your blog out there is to comment when you see something you like on another blog. Interaction and communication, the wonders of the Internet, next to pointless videos of animals sniffing each others butts and illegal music downloads. Yes, it's very nice getting comments (good and bad, either way they're fun to read), but what I love *most most most* about blogging is just being able to speak my thoughts, take pictures, experiment with clothes, make fun of Belle in my charming and charismatic way, and express my Margiela love. With or without response, blogging is fun! And isn't having fun the point? I hope my sucky advice helps, or at least entertains. It doesn't? Well, pretend there's a vaudeville act rightttt....here. Yes, right there. ENJOY. [sic] (September 14, 2008).

Although she attempts to undermine their importance, which is a technique of performing authenticity (to be explored in more detail shortly), trading links and commenting on other blogs operate as a type of mastery of technology in order to intentionally accumulate influence. New media scholars demonstrate that practices of trading links work to form "clusters of communities" with common interests (Benkler, 2006; McQuarrie et al., 2012), which act as grounds for initial vetting and peer-like review. Specifically, blog posts which have been signalled as influential by other community members are more often hyperlinked in other blogs, which in turn eventually link with more established and popular websites with larger readerships. In this process, bloggers increase their visibility, establish a reputation and amass followers. Trading links and commenting on other blogs help to forge alliances across various sites with other fashion bloggers as well as more established mass media. The building of this network positions her blog as a potential site of counter-hegemony to shift beauty standards, norms and practices coming from the dominant culture. As

discussed in my conceptual framework, counter-hegemony does not occur at the level of one site alone; rather, it is part of a dynamic process that operates through multiple sites. From this perspective, concessions and compromises occur between individuals and groups in order to forge a historical bloc that can pose a threat to hegemonic relations of power. Whether Gevinson's blog actualizes into a counter-hegemonic site depends on how this technique works in consort with the ways her body is used to coordinate collaborative action amongst these networks.

Gevinson's online "presentations of the self" (Goffman, 1959)<sup>51</sup> worked as another type of mastery of technology to secure and renew her network of alliances. Granjon (2010) argues that, within the context of social media, presentations of the self involve managing representations of the body in order to guide the impression of one's followers. Although blogging is a precursor to social media, it includes similar elements such as a public profile in which the users act as cultural producers and can engage in interactions with followers (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Thus, blogging, especially the visual representations in fashion blogging, involves 'presentations of the self' that can be rehearsed, re-edited and re-written. In relation to the theme of mastery of technology, Gevinson's presentation of the self involved performing a persona of authenticity in order to build a network of alliances with young female readers, especially after gaining access to elite fashion circles. Scholars define authenticity as a representation of resistance to mainstream and dominant cultures that disguises the ways it perpetuates mainstream and dominant cultures (Holt, 1998; Thornton, 1996). Gevinson performed authenticity by referring to ordinary aspects of

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<sup>51</sup> Goffman uses a dramaturgical metaphor to argue that individuals do not show their 'authentic' selves but instead manage their face-to-face social interactions through "performances" of personas that guide the impressions of their audiences.

her offline self, as a young suburban Chicago teenager, as a technique to downplay the rarity of being a fashion insider with privileged access. For example, in the following post, Gevinson emphasises that she does not want to do interviews with journalists because she is not using her blog for celebrity status or fame:

I didn't start this blog to get a head start in a fashion career, so there's not really any purpose for press other than ego feeding, which is an awful reason to begin with. If it's something that allows me to contribute creatively, I'm more happy to do it, but what's the point of lots of exposure otherwise, yeah? I shouldn't feel obligated to take a bunch of press and offers just because other people would "kill" for it. I'm 12, I don't need to be in a bunch of magazines (February 9, 2009).

These presentations of the self work as a mastery of technology to retain her followers and establish alliances with young women who read her blog. By distinguishing herself as separate from the dominant culture, she positions herself as a member of popular culture who has the credibility to provide alternate and even oppositional perspectives to that of the fashion elite.

Gevinson uses her age as a technique of authenticity to align herself with her young female readers, in light of comments from readers and journalists that she could not be responsible for such a successful blog. She makes countless references to eating candy, drinking chocolate milk, watching film and television shows marketed to young girls in order to represent 'authentic girlhood'. These online presentations of the self work as techniques to secure and renew alliances with other young women, who often comment that Gevinson inspired them to start their own fashion blogs. This technique, therefore, worked to mobilise a network of young women to participate in public cultural production to shift dominant beauty standards, norms and practices. By building this network of young women online, this alliance could shift perceptions

that young women are merely "docile bodies" that passively accept beauty and style directives from the elite culture. Moreover, this network can come together to challenge dominant stereotypes about young women (who are interested in beauty and fashion) and technology as exemplified in this quote by a commentator on Gevinson's blog:

I don't understand why people would actually doubt [that] you [are responsible for your blog]. Obviously there are some people out there who underestimate a) non-adults and b) women. I'm glad you are standing your ground and not letting yourself be pushed around (My empty closet, December 3, 2008).

Gevinson's blog acts as a site to mobilise young women together to shift dominant understandings of beauty as a form of patriarchal oppression and docile femininity and conceptualize it as a space of coordinated alternative action.

Thestylerookie.com's counter-hegemonic endeavours are nonetheless curtailed through the technique of self-deprecation of Gevinson's technological skills. Her blog includes phrases and sentences that undermine her set of skills in which she identifies as a "Technologically Challenged Individual" (February 15, 2010). For example, she writes: "So I accidentally set my blog to private. Whoops! See I made another blog supposed to be a private diary for me and I accidently made Style Rookie private instead of that one. Garsh, I really need to get better at this technical stuffers [sic]" (September 15, 2008). On the one hand, Tavi uses this technique of self-deprecation to maintain alliances with other young women by not appearing too technologically savvy. On the other hand, she reproduces dominant definitions of femininity to advance her own interests rather than coordinate actions amongst subordinate groups. Thus, this technique diminishes her blog's influence as an actual site of counter-hegemony by disbanding its more radical elements. Despite her mastery of

technology's potential to act as a site of counter-hegemonic endeavours through building alliances with members of subordinate groups and elite groups, her blog did not actualize into a collaborated action to shift dominant constructions of beauty and femininity, a point that is further developed through the theme of anti-consumerist discourses.

### **(Anti)Consumerist Discourses**

As an emergent culture, especially in 2008 when Gevinson started her blog, fashion blogging had not yet been subsumed by the hegemonic culture as thoroughly as it is today; Tavi's use of anti-consumerist discourses and practices provided alternative, and sometimes even oppositional, representations of beauty and the body. However, these alternative representations of practices of embodiment did not shift dominant beauty standards advanced by the fashion-beauty complex, who redistributed her network of alliances through mechanisms of enculturation.

As discussed in my literature review, scholars have demonstrated that dominant beauty standards, norms and practices tend to construct femininity in line with elite objectives (e.g. Franco, 2008; Heinrich, 2008; Press, 2011; Scott, 2007). These scholars evince that the beauty-fashion complex has an economic imperative to represent dominant beauty standards and norms as markers of distinction so that women must purchase new and expensive items to fit these standards (e.g. Wolfe, 1991). Moreover, most women's magazines rely on advertising from beauty and fashion companies for a large part of their revenues, and fashion media often blur the distinction between context and advertising in order to sell products (Saul, 2003), in a

way similar to Williams' television flow culture (Williams, 1974). When Gevinson started her blog in 2008, it operated as a means of communication about beauty and fashion that did not yet succumb to the same market constraints, something that Gevinson underscored:

Obviously blogs are less mainstream and can be more honest because they are less dependent on advertisers. But magazines need advertisers to survive, and the labels they advertise need them. Even though most magazines act really happy about everything, as long as I know to still make my own opinions it isn't a big deal. A lot of them do lack in actual opinion, but that's where some blogs are good (October 15, 2009).

Thus fashion blogging can offer alternative and even oppositional representations that have the potential to be harnessed in counter-hegemonic endeavours.

New media scholars have emphasized that social media practices increased the capability of collaboration and sharing through non-market channels (Benkler, 2006). As a type of social media, fashion blogging engaged in practices of collaboration through peer sharing amongst bloggers where they could forge alliances to advance anti-consumerist beauty standards and norms. Through her blog and other social media sites, Gevinson started a 'gift economy' with other fashion bloggers in which they send each other clothing thereby circumventing the need to purchase new clothes in order to create new fashion and beauty 'looks'. Fashion bloggers swapped clothes through Weardrobe -- a now defunct online street fashion community designed to encourage networking between novice and established bloggers and to allow members to share outfits and comments on each other's photographs. A gift economy uses borrowing and collaboration to create a network with other fashion bloggers in order to bypass the consumerist objectives of the beauty-fashion complex.

In one blog post Tavi explains: "So awhile ago Rumi sent Stephanie a dress that was too small for her. It ended up being too small for Stephanie too, so she handed it over to muah: Look! We're like our own little blogger postal service" (December 12, 2008). Similarly, in another post, Gevinson describes how bloggers share a grey circle scarf from American Apparel through online channels:

Although I only have it in my hands for a few more days (will be sending it back soon...sisterhood of the traveling wardrobe project we've got going on...I don't know much but the results should be epic...) I will be taking full advantage and try to wear it every way possible. Today it was a sash only I pulled down the shoulder part and tied the hip part (January 12, 2009).

By engaging in a gift economy, Gevinson can create alternative representations of the body that challenge dominant correlations between beauty standards, norms and practices and elite tastes. Through borrowing and collaboration, fashion bloggers can forge alliances and use representations of the body in practices opposed to elite conceptualizations of beauty, by challenging the consumerist and capitalist motivations of the fashion industry.

Gevinson further engages in thrift shopping and Do It Yourself (DIY) fashion projects to challenge the dominant culture's consumerist objectives. These techniques worked to provide alternative representations of beauty and the body to those (re)produced by the fashion-beauty complex and that are not based on adopting new trends and the purchasing of expensive items. For example, in one of Gevinson's posts, she advocates 'thrifting' as an alternative to purchasing expensive designer items. In her post entitled "First hand guide to second hand shopping (lol punz omg)" (February 13, 2009), she describes the difference between three types of second hand stores: thrift, vintage and consignment/resale, and explicitly advocates buying second

hand clothing as an alternative to the looks of elite culture: "Thriftig is my personal favorite because it saves the most money, supports a good cause, and is most fun! Buying secondhand in general is also a nice choice because it helps the environment" (February 13, 2009). Tavi uses 'vintage' beauty standards from the dominant culture in order to challenge contemporary correlations between beauty and the purchasing elite markers of distinction in order to be considered beautiful. In doing so, she is paradoxically using elements of the dominant culture, which she criticizes in earlier blogs, and yet presents them here as subversive.

Gevinson further uses DIY fashion projects to challenge the fashion industry's link between dominant beauty standards and norms and consumerist objectives. For example, in her post *Sewing is the best medicine*, she explains how she made a t-shirt by cutting out the lip shape of a pink shirt and lining it with ribbon that was inspired by the Comme des Garçons line (January 5, 2009). While these practices of embodiment provide alternative representations of beauty by circumventing the purchasing of new clothes, again they are not oppositional in the sense that they reproduce the beauty standards of dominant culture. Another blog post highlights Tavi's reverence of fashion and beauty practices of elite culture:

I often look at overpriced designer clothing and think "I COULD MAKE THAT" only to remind myself that it's the design that makes the garment significant, not how easy it would be to make. With this [outfit] I feel that not only could I maybe DIY this, but the idea seems a little...easy, almost? I don't know why. I feel a little torn. Meh (March 7, 2009).

Thus Gevinson's reinforcement of the dominant culture's beauty standards curtails its oppositional impact to shift standardisation and normalisation practices of the beauty-

fashion complex. The elite culture uses the aspects of her blog that aligned with the standards and norms of dominant culture to subdue her blog's oppositional forces.

As Gevinson's blog received more widespread attention, by subordinate and dominant groups alike, the fashion-beauty complex began deploying mechanisms of enculturation -- the infiltration of elements of the elite culture into the practices of subordinate groups -- in order to break up her network of alliances and re-incorporate more radical elements of her blog into the hegemonic relations of power. In 2009, Tavi was invited to New York Fashion Week to sit amongst other fashion journalists to review designer shows on her blog. The fashion industry used aspects of her blog that dovetailed with dominant culture, particularly her reviews of haute couture fashion shows, and used mechanisms of enculturation to realign them with their own elite beauty standards. As a result of her privileged access to designer shows such as Miu Miu, Gevinson began to covet and buy expensive items such as those shown in Miu Miu's latest collection, and she de-activated her blog's original anti-consumerist practices as the following passage shows:

I have spent way too much time this morning/last night looking at clothes I know I shouldn't be tempting myself with. Unfortunately I really loved a lot of SS09 and now they're all available for purchase. But maybe when I'm older I can look back and instead of saying "man I was such a stupid teenager I spent all my money on makeup and drugs, I can say "Man I was such a stupid teenager, I spent all my money on awesome clothes and Pez dispensers (July 15, 2010).

Gevinson goes on retracting her more critical stance, for instance concerning Prada's designs after she was invited to the designer's show: "This was the collection I initially disliked but came around to. Maybe I came around a little too much, as these chandelier shoes have been in my dreams, and this is unhealthy" (May 6, 2010).

The fashion-beauty complex introduced elements of its own industry into her blog as she was invited to collaborate with designers and also received a collection of fashion and beauty gifts, including tights designed by the Rodarte sisters:

It was kind of (really) crazy receiving these [tights] considering how much I'd admired the Rodarte designs even prior to getting their email. I was speaking with Karl yesterday about how the most interesting and artistic designs have actual thought behind them. Having a natural eye for design is impressive but it's not the only thing that can be relied on for a collection. When there's more thought behind the concept and balance in a "look" it shows. Rodarte has for a long time been one of my favorite labels because so much thought is put into the collections. Some past inspirations include Japanese horror films, Star Wars, anime, nature and watercolors - seriously, how many other designers have such fascinating reference points?! (January 28, 2009).

The fashion elite thus appropriated elements of Gevinson's blog, at least the aspects that overlapped with the dominant culture, thereby involving her in a new network of alliances, where she began to make concessions and compromises to the content of her blog. For instance, Tavi showcased these gifts in photographs throughout her posts so that her blog was transformed into a site for the exposure of designers' clothes. Gevinson became even more involved in dominant fashion practices in collaborating with Rodarte for their Target line, making a video and featuring its clothing on her website. In one post, she promotes a giveaway contest and asks readers "to write in the comments what you're most excited about for the Rodarte for Target line", finally turning her blog into an advertising site for the company.

At the same time, dominant fashion journalists linked to, and made comments on her blog, making accusations that a 13 year-old girl had become a mouthpiece for the fashion industry. The fashion press charged that she was no longer separate from the elite culture, particularly in the context of the Dior couture show, which she

attended sporting a large pink bow that was a gift from the designer. The insertion of these links into Gevinson's blog by members of the dominant fashion industry worked to deactivate the network of alliances that she cultivated through anti-consumerist discourses. As a result, commentators gave her trouble for "selling out" and one of them wrote: "It breaks my heart a little to see how the fashion industry is harnessing you. I hope that at least you have reaped great benefits from selling your soul so easily" (Statement, April 6, 2010). Similarly, another commentator discussed the ways in which accepting gifts from designers had reduced her blog's resistive capacities: "There is a very slippery slope in the world and it slopes towards commercialism and money. There is a whole literature that clearly shows that even small gifts such as food or baubles influence decisions people make" (David Ansell, MD, MPH: February 11, 2010). Contrary to these commentators' suggestions, Gevinson's blog was not simply co-opted and repurposed to promote dominant beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment. Rather, these mechanisms of enculturation by the dominant culture are part of a more complex, unstable and dynamic process to incorporate fashion blogging into the hegemonic culture. Schein's (forthcoming) distinction between co-optation and (counter)hegemonic processes in her discussion of the decline of the feminist movement helps to elucidate how Gevinson's blog was not merely co-opted by the dominant culture; the fashion industry foregrounded specific aspects of her blog, but only those that aligned with their own culture, the effect being to subdue and marginalize its more radical elements. In so doing, they dispersed the alliances that she had cultivated with feminist groups and repurposed her blog for consumerist objectives. As a

consequence, her more oppositional representations of the body were downplayed and re-aligned with elite standardisation and normalisation practices. Gevinson responds to critics accusing her of being a sell-out and suggests that her blog remains a space of free-expression:

I am selective in saying yes to freebies, because I realize that if every post of mine was talking about something I got in the mail, my opinion wouldn't be valued or as pure. And if the freebie-offerer will only send it off if I say good things about it, I decline... Nobody else has ever depicted me in a way that I felt was accurate. People continue to have diarrhea of the pen, writing out all the possible ways they can somehow make me look like a bad guy. For accepting a gift. For sitting front row (no one mentions the shows where I've had less-than-stellar seats?) For giving a positive review of a show I genuinely liked. For saving some content for a magazine that funded my trip, nevermind that I still have 450 pictures for this blog, and did anyone bother to find that out? Of course not [sic] (February 7, 2010).

Nonetheless, due to the heavy pressure coming from the dominant culture, Gevinson could not re-secure her network of alliances, thereby repositioning her fashion blog within the hegemonic relations of power. Thus, while Gevinson's blog includes some alternative and even sometimes, oppositional representations of beauty and the body, the dominant culture used aspects that focused on the consumption and exchange of beauty and fashion goods to incorporate her blog into the hegemonic relations of power.

### **Conclusion: The Style Rookie as Counter-Hegemony?**

Fashion blogging is a form of communication that includes social media practices that could provide alternative and sometimes even oppositional representations of beauty standards constructed and reproduced in the dominant fashion-beauty complex. Through a mastery of technology, Gevinson could act as an

organic intellectual and use these alternate representations of the body to shift hegemonic relations of power. She used the digitization of her body/self to construct new representations of beauty and create new forms of conduct for herself and others. In his concept of "Gaga Feminism", Halberstam (2012) posits popular culture as a new site for feminist resistances. Using the metaphor of Lady Gaga, he argues that the use of pleasure and bodily displays in popular culture are new arenas for challenging regulatory normative frames of gender and sexuality by "wreaking representational mahem" and producing "funky forms of anarchy" through crazy costumes, characters and chaos. Nonetheless, Gevinson's blog, offering online representations and stylizations of the body, was incapable of gaining enough momentum to mobilise alliances across subordinate and dominant groups to shift dominant constructions of beauty or construct a solid alternative. The elite culture de-mobilised her site by using the very elements on her site that crossed over to dominant culture to deflate the more radical feminist elements of her blog. Gevinson recognizes her own "beauty privilege" afforded her access to the elite culture. She writes in a post:

I took this picture a couple months ago, going for some Heathers/Twin Peaks vibes, but started thinking too much about how I look in it and avoided posting it for a while. I wasn't insecure, quite the opposite -- I didn't want to post this photo because I look *good* in it. And, as someone whose "thing" for so long has been "Challenge beauty standards! Screw convention! Look like a grandmother on ecstasy at Fashion Week!", that somehow felt hypocritical. First, let's talk about beauty privilege real quick, just so we're all clear and so I don't sound like a jerk: When I say good or pretty or attractive, I mean by the standards that dictate our society, which usually start with being thin and white. I'm not saying *I* always like how I look, and you may look at the picture above and be like "what are you talking about you resemble an opossum," but through the very narrow lens of mainstream media, pop culture, etc., I possess some beauty privilege. People who are conventionally attractive have the privilege of going through life knowing their appearance will usually not act as a barrier in accomplishing what they want to accomplish (July 1, 2011).

The elite culture capitalised on aspects of her blog where she adhered to dominant standardisation and normalisation practices to re-shift alliances and disable its counter-hegemonic endeavours. Her resistances remained individually and bodily-based performances that could not challenge the pressure coming from the fashion industry, which is based on a class structure that Tavi was never able to overcome despite her performativity. In this context, representations of new stylizations of the body are not sufficient to challenge the dominant constructions of beauty in the fashion industry. The following case study examines how the use of bodily display in the context of neo-burlesque theatre can operate as a site of counter-hegemony where bodies can be mobilised to shift standards, norms and practices of beauty in the theatrical sphere.

## Chapter 5

### **Laughing It Off: Theatre, Striptease and the Case of the *Sexual Overtones***

#### **Introduction**

My final case study examines theatre as a means of communication based on collective performances that aim to shift the dominant standards, norms and practices of beauty within the cultural sphere. As we have seen earlier, beauty is at least partly constructed through practices of communication and culture and, thus, theatrical performances of the body can influence standardisation and normalisation practices. Neo-burlesque theatre, which entails verbal and non-verbal communication, or body language, uses practices of embodiment that include striptease, bodily display, flamboyant costumes and make-up, exaggerated gestures, and corporeal humour in order to challenge dominant beauty standards and the ways these standards have been conventionally used in the reproduction of normative femininity and hetero-normative sexuality. Similar to what we have seen in the discussion on fashion blogging, these theatrical performances provide alternative representations of beauty and the body by making use of dominant beauty standards and norms, and combining them in new ways to create new cultural meanings and practices. Yet, these representations go further than Gevinson's blog in that neo-burlesque performances use provocative public spectacles of the body to mobilise spectators and performers to coordinate a shift in hegemonic relations of power, at least within the theatrical sphere.

Foucault's concept of the mesh of power (*les mailles de pouvoir*, 1976)<sup>52</sup> is a useful metaphor for considering the ways in which these different contexts, namely theatre, fashion blogging, as well as the Nazi regime, allow for the use of beauty and the body in different capacities of domination and resistance. Specifically, the mesh of power uses the symbol of the size of the holes in a mesh net to signify that more or less resistance can 'pass through' within different politico-economic and socio-cultural contexts. At the same time, the mesh of power suggests that resistances are always entwined within power relations. A net with small holes will offer very limited space for resistance, such as in the Nazi concentration camps where there was only a small capacity for the body to be used in tactical resistance through face-to-face communication at the individual level; a net with bigger holes such as fashion blogging, within democratic contexts, would seemingly allow increased resistance through alternative representations. Still, dominant normalisation and standardisation practices are powerful and difficult to overcome. This chapter explores an instance in which the holes of the net are rather big, namely where the context of theatre provides a space for increased elements, processes, and forms of conduct that could penetrate the net. Although Foucault's concept of the mesh of power suggests that there is seemingly no way out of power relations, I argue that neo-burlesque theatre uses elements from the dominant culture in ways that could unsettle dominant beauty standards, norms and practices to shift relations of power within the cultural sphere.

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<sup>52</sup> Foucault's concept of 'les mailles de pouvoir' has not been included in any of the English-language editions of Foucault's collected works. Originally delivered in two installments at the Federal University of Bahia in Brazil in 1976, Foucault's words were recorded on cassette tapes, transcribed and published as a text, first appearing in Portuguese, and translated back into French for publication in *Dits et écrits*.

Utilizing the processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony as a frame, I also draw on Butler's notion of gender performativity and Foucault's concepts of bio-power, subjectification, and the use of pleasure (1976, 1978) to explore the ways Ottawa's popular neo-burlesque group the *Sexual Overtones* utilises the body as an actual site for processes of counter-hegemony. My research, therefore, moves beyond binary conceptions of beauty and the body as a form of oppression/empowerment; rather it points to a complex web of power relations that can lead to counter-hegemonic processes. To proceed, first I situate neo-burlesque theatre within a historical context of resistance; second, I provide an overview and methodological framework for my analysis of the *Sexual Overtones*; and lastly, I outline the various techniques of power and resistance in terms of how they are associated to processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony through the themes of cultural production, the use of pleasure, bio-power and the performance of new subjectivities.

### **Burlesque Theatre as Resistance**

Neo-burlesque recovers residual aspects of theatre as a culture of resistance for an emerging set of practices and politics. Historically, theatre has been used as a communication means of resistance (Dicenzo, 1996). Several scholars from a Marxist lineage assert that theatre can be used as a means of communication for resistance (Artaud, 1999; Boal, 1992; Brecht, 1964; Williams, 1952/68), and as a public and collaborative space to incite social and political change by calling audiences to action against their oppression. For example, Boal's (1992) notion of the "theatre of the oppressed" engages in interactive and dialogic techniques between the performer and

the audience, where the audience becomes "spect-actors" who participate in the production to provide a more accurate depiction of oppression (Boal, 1992).<sup>53</sup> In this way, he argues that theatre is a "rehearsal for revolution" through dialogue between "actors" and "spect-actors" to change outcomes and find solutions to forms of domination. Brecht (1964) similarly developed the concept of "epic theatre" to explore how theatre could be a forum for social change by adopting a critical view of the actions on stage to recognize social injustice and exploitation. Brecht uses techniques of alienation by jarring the audience out of the smoothness of reproduction of daily life through both the form of production and the script.<sup>54</sup> These scholars, therefore, argue that theatre can operate as collective space and a means of communication uniting performers and audience in a way that can be used to overcome class oppression.

Traditional burlesque of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Western Europe and North America also has roots in subversion, in that it extended the notion of theatre as resistance beyond an exclusive focus on (masculinist) class relations to include practices that challenged normative conventions of femininity, gender and sexuality (Buszek, 1999; Shteir, 2004; Dicenzo 1996). In the broadest sense of the term, 'burlesque' is a literary, dramatic or musical work intended to cause laughter by

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<sup>53</sup> In this process the actors or audience members could stop a performance after a short scene in which a character was being oppressed in some way and could propose a solution. If and when the oppression has been overthrown, the production changes and the spect-actors find new ways of challenging the oppressed characters. Boal (1992) argues that through dialogue between actors and spect-actors a more accurate depiction of oppression can be made by the audience who are often in positions of subordination (Boal, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> These techniques involve the use of harsh and bright stage lights, speaking directly to the audience, the use of song to interrupt action, rearranging the set in full view of the audience etc.

caricaturing serious works as well as their subject matter (Shteir, 2004).<sup>55</sup> Victorian burlesque, more specifically, which was popularized in London and Paris in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, took the form of a broad comic parody that mocked the theatrical conventions of original works. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, burlesque lost its appeal within European contexts but gained increased prominence in North America with a new focus on striptease and female nudity combined with satirical humour (Ferreday, 2008; Nally, 2009).<sup>56</sup> Burke (1937) differentiates between comedy and satire by arguing that the former uses a positive frame that accepts the prevailing notion of social hierarchy, which includes a fool or clown who embodies the problems of the social order and seeks to correct its failing. In contrast, satire has a more subversive edge by adopting a rejection frame, which requires the actor to disassociate at some level from the social order while trying to overcome it, thereby suggesting a shift in alliance away from the symbols of authority (Carlson, 1988). From this perspective, burlesque in its original form, used representations of the body as a form of satire, a discourse of resistance against dominant culture in order to mock elite cultural standards and social roles (i.e. of theatrical conventions, and tastes of the elite classes and so on).

As Douglas Gilbert (1968) observed in the European context, burlesque theatre abandoned social mores through its inclusion of the ‘grotesque body’ (Bakhtin, 1941/1993) that focused on the apertures of the human body offering a

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<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that the meaning of the term "burlesque" in English is different than in French, especially in Quebec where it in fact means "slapstick" as the reports on Gilles Latulippe have shown when he died on September 23, 2014. (Gilles Latulippe, 2013, September 23).

<sup>56</sup> The American counterpart of burlesque was popularized in the late 1860s by Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes, an all female cast who came over from Britain who performed stripteases and sometimes cross-dressed as men (Nally, 2009; Shteir, 2004).

counterpoint to the smooth surfaces of the classical Victorian ones. Traditionally, burlesque was concerned with the satirizing of Victorian bourgeois social mores and sensibilities wherein costumes of over-sized fans, comically large ruffles, bustles, corsets and bows were used to critique the elite-classes' fashion and beauty standards<sup>57</sup> (Allen, 1991; Ferreday, 2008; Nally, 2009). Performers further critiqued Victorian gender roles by destabilizing the existing binary of the 'bourgeois true woman' and the 'low class prostitute' by representing an alternative, unstable and powerful role for white women through transgressive identities that were made visible and celebrated in the theatre (Buszek, 1999).<sup>58</sup> As self-aware sexual beings and through public displays of humour and striptease, burlesque performers challenged the female subject within the patriarchal order by troubling conventions about how women were 'allowed' to act on stage and about how femininity and sexuality could be represented (Buszek, 1999). Furthermore, in the American context, burlesque performers often dressed in drag — cross-dressing as men — which further confounded normative expectations of gender roles and identities (Shteir, 2004). Burlesque also provided a route to stardom for female performers who were often responsible not only for their own acts, but also as writers and producers of their entire performances (Buszek, 1999). Consequently, through burlesque theatre, some women advanced to more prominent positions of power in the labour market, with increased economic and cultural agency and autonomy.

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<sup>57</sup> Although burlesque featured many of the same elements of vaudeville, it was differentiated in that it was aimed at working class men to satirize elite class tastes and markers of distinction.

<sup>58</sup> It is important to note that burlesque was tangled up with the economic, cultural and political privileges of a white body (Ross, 2000) and when white producers began to cast black women in burlesque performances, they were exoticized as 'other' in order to reassure white audiences of their own normalcy and cultural dominance.

These subversive elements within burlesque in its original forms were later subsumed under patriarchal market interests in which the female performer became merely an object of the male gaze (Friedman, 1996). In the 1930s, burlesque was increasingly associated with deviant and dangerous male sexuality, and by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, burlesque was largely co-opted and replaced by ‘exotic dancing’ where its satirical elements were abandoned and women shifted from active agents to objectified bodies (Friedman, 1996).<sup>59</sup>

Neo-burlesque theatre is an attempt to resurrect these residual practices of theatre as a means of resistance and orient them in new directions. Its revival originated in the mid 1990s in the nightclubs of New York and London and it continues to thrive in North America as evidenced by Tease-O-Rama, an annual festival of neo-burlesque retro-striptease and the popular Burlesque Museum in Helendale, California (Ferreday, 2008). Neo-burlesque performances involve a nostalgic homage to burlesque in order to re-appropriate the act of stripping from more patriarchal objectives through acts of striptease in conjunction with humorous body language, expressions of exaggerated femininity with costumes and make-up, and with a focus on pleasure and playfulness. Neo-burlesque theatre further tends to include a range of genders and sexual orientations by men and women who sometimes dress in drag, where performers striptease in front of largely female and queer audiences (Ferreday, 2008). The movement as a whole encourages individuality in size, shape, height and appearance and thus exemplifies a version of beauty as a dramatic counterpoint to the general look of thin, waif-like models that characterize

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<sup>59</sup> Although outside the scope of this chapter, it is important to highlight that some scholars argue that exotic dancers do have some degree of agency (see Wesley, 2003).

dominant beauty standards and norms foisted on the public via the mass media (Ferreday, 2008). Similar to Gevinson's blog, neo-burlesque is concerned with providing alternative representations of beauty and the body to broaden ways in which bodily display and objectification practices have been correlated with normative femininity and sexuality. Neo-burlesque performers also engage in practices of striptease and bodily objectification, elements that have been traditionally used to keep women in positions of subordination by the dominant culture. This calls into question whether their public theatrical representations (especially the use of striptease) can promote counter-hegemonic endeavours.

### ***The Sexual Overtones***

Ottawa is a leading national cultural centre for neo-burlesque with a well-established scene. As such, the city provides an appropriate context for analysing its impact on processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Ottawa boasts a yearly burlesque festival, and *The Sexual Overtones* are just one neo-burlesque amongst a myriad others in the capital including *Browncoats Burlesque*, *Rockabilly Burlesque*, *Ottawa Burlesque Collective* and *Capital Tease Burlesque*. *The Sexual Overtones* has been selected as a corpus for analysis because its mission is to “provide entertainment that is playful and fun and at the same time that is body, female and sex positive and all inclusive.” (Cream Puff, Personal Communication April 15, 2013). The troupe, therefore, has an explicit feminist and queer agenda and provides a suitable site to test the ways in which subordinate groups use neo-burlesque theatre to mobilise action against dominant standards of beauty through representations and practices of

embodiment.<sup>60</sup>

I also selected the *Sexual Overtones* because of the group's local influence and reputation. Founded in 2008, the neo-burlesque troupe is the largest, most diverse troupe in Ottawa, boasting thirty core members as well as various invited guests from other troupes for specific shows. The group has gained measurable popularity and prominence performing to audiences of over six hundred people, suggesting a potentiality to exert some influence over spectators and perhaps even create a counter hegemonic movement within theatrical venues. Since its inception, the group has participated in ten burlesque performances, including *Winternude* (2013), the *Big Top(less) Circus* (2010), *A Valentine Teaser* (2010), *Tales from the Strypt*,(2009), the *Great Indiscretion* (2009), and *Indecent Exposure* (2008) and *Get SprUNG* (2008) averaging approximately two productions per year. They have also received widespread local and national media attention including from more mainstream sources such as *the Ottawa Citizen*, *CBC Ottawa*, *The Ottawa Magazine*, as well as alternative sites such as *Capital Xtra Coverage*, a local queer newspaper, *Apt613*, an online source for local culture and entertainment, *24 Hours* and *Ottawa Xpress*.

As a method of analysis, I conducted participant observation as a spectator at their 'Winternude' show performed at St. Brigid's Centre for the Arts<sup>61</sup> on January 19, 2013, their most recent performance at the time of this research. I performed a discourse analysis of the performances, paying particular attention to practices of

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<sup>60</sup> The group includes both men and women, with an emphasis on queer content although most of the performers are female.

<sup>61</sup> St. Brigid's is an old church that has been converted into an art centre, which adds an element of satire with 'sexual deviants' performing at a holy institution.

embodiment in relation to beauty standards and norms. I complemented this method with interviews with six troupe members, including the founder of the troupe as well as other core members (in total 4 women and 2 men) about the ways in which discourses and practices of beauty and embodiment are used in their performances as techniques of power and resistance and their impact on constructions of gender and sexuality. In keeping with the troupe's mandate for anonymity, no real names are used; rather their stage names are included.<sup>62</sup>

As their name suggests, the group is concerned with “sexual overtones” through the presentation of over-the-top sexual acts, which seam between “burlesque striptease, sexual satire, corporal humour, dance routines, musical numbers and vaudeville entertainment” (Cream Puff, Personal Communication April 15, 2013). The acts are comprised of singular performers or groups, in which skits often take the shape of dance routines where performers lip sync and act out a storyline on stage, culminating in a striptease down to their underwear, often with pasties and tassels on their nipples. The skits are what the founder of the troupe, Cream Puff, calls “politics light”, namely through bodily performances blended with humour and playfulness in order to confound normative constructions of beauty, gender and sexuality. For example, in the opening skit of the Winternude show titled “In Flight Sexy,” two men and two women who do not conform to conventional standards of thinness, dress as airline stewards and act out the inflight safety features in a sexually suggestive

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<sup>62</sup> Cream Puff explained that many of the troupe members have professional careers as government workers and lawyers, and that by remaining anonymous they can have freedom of expression without jeopardizing their professional and institutional relationships. The desire for anonymity is at the very least suggestive of a fear of reprisal or sanction for participation in alternative cultural performances. Interviews were conducted with Cream Puff (the Founder of the troupe), the Brain, Kinky, Randy Enhancement, Xposé and Ambrosia and were approved by the Carleton Research Ethics Board.

manner. They do this with a queer twist where the men gesture at sex with each other. Another act features a heavy set woman dressed as a hyper-masculine lumberjack stripping to Bon Jovi's *Pour Some Sugar on Me* as she pours maple syrup on herself to blur dominant expectations around hetero-normativity, patriarchal definitions of beauty and stripping. I now examine how these cultural productions of the body use techniques of pleasure, bio-power and the performances of new subjectivities to cultivate processes of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

### **Spirals of Pleasure and Power between Performers and Audience**

As performers who reach several publics, the *Sexual Overtones* can use alternate representations of the body to act as organic intellectuals, in order to build alliances and, possibly, shift hegemonic relations of power. Just as Boal and Brecht suggest, the spectators are a crucial aspect in the formation of counter-hegemonic processes because they can collaborate and forge networks to shift dominant beauty standards, norms and practices. Thus, the interaction between performer and audience is integral to the neo-burlesque theatrical performance and to its counter-hegemonic impact, where there is a complex, reciprocal relationship between these two groups. In this relationship, the particular use and production of pleasure through performers' bodies particularly operates as a technique of power to create alliances with spectators. Foucault explains that there exist "spirals of power and pleasure" within a relationship between observer and observed (1978). From this perspective, power is not a form of repression but is, rather, a productive force that targets bodies and works by producing pleasure, and where individuals find pleasure in these techniques

of power. More specifically, he explains this relationship through the example of the “medicalization of sexuality” which involves increased scrutiny of bodies that draws observer and observed into intimate contact: the observer exercises power in examining and drawing out his subject's sexual pleasures; this, in turn, gives the observer a kind of pleasure. He describes this reciprocal relation between pleasure and power as such:

The pleasure that comes from exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it or travesty it (1978, p.45).

Thus, both observer and observed find power and pleasure intermingled in this intimate game of examination of bodies.

By inference, neo-burlesque spectators and performers—observers and observed—are engaged in “spirals of pleasure and power.” The *Sexual Overtones* performers engage in the production of pleasure as a technique of power in order to win the consent of their audience. By tantalizing their spectators through striptease, costumes, song and dance, the performers use techniques similar to those of the dominant culture—the display and objectification of bodies—to influence their audience while proposing alternate ideologies of beauty, gender and sexuality. For instance, queer men flaunt their bodies in shiny gold lamé shorts and women wearing nipple tassels walk around selling candy to the audience while performers on the scene throw sparkly confetti out of their underwear as they strip to arouse and titillate audience members. Performers, thus, use striptease and combine it with humorous body language in order to invoke laughter and amusement as a technique of pleasure to accept new beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment in theatre. The

skit “Wanna Taste My...” exemplifies the conjoining of striptease with corporeal humour as a technique of pleasure to build alliances with spectators. In the performance, troupe members Cream Puff and Powder Puff use Xposé’s body to make an ice cream sundae by covering it with ingredients such as chocolate sauce, banana and whipped cream. As they do this, they all slowly take off their clothing to the song “Popped my Cherry” by Fiona Apple. The simple storyline is all about pleasure, playfulness, decadence and indulgence with sweet candy dripping off of a queer, 40-year-old woman, who does not conform to dominant beauty standards. The use of pleasure, at first glance, reinforces existing tropes of women as sex objects to be consumed. Nonetheless, in this context, these performers flip the male gaze insofar as women are pleasing women, thereby challenging hetero-normative correlations between pleasure and whose women’s bodies are considered pleasurable and desirable. Throughout the skit, Cream Puff and Powder Puff engage in over-the-top gestures culminating in pulling chocolate syrup out of their panties, referring in a playful way, to the practice of “playing with poop” as a form of pleasure. This blurring of humour and pleasure with a sexually subversive act operates as a technique of power to push the boundaries of sexually appropriate and pleasurable behaviour. As Cream Puff explains:

We want to entertain our audience and make them laugh. By doing so, we want to use sexual satire, playfulness and humour to show how different body types and different sexual practices can be sexual and beautiful. People came up to me after the performance and said ‘I never thought I would find the act of playing with poop sexy—but you made it so fun, playful and erotic’. (Cream Puff, Personal Communication April 15, 2013).

Humorous body language operates as a technique to win the consent of diverse spectators to adopt alternative constructions of beauty, gender and sexuality.

In general, humour operates as a means for subordinate groups to create solidarity and build alliances through disguised and veiled metaphors, which are more palatable and therefore more easily tolerated and accommodated by the dominant culture (Payne, 1986; Scott, 1985). In his classic text, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Bergson (1911/1999) presents the body as an essential element of humour, arguing that there is a comic effect when our attention diverts from our minds to our physical limitations. More specifically, gestures, repetition, imitation, fashion, costumes and movements of the human body are subject to laughter in instances where people see the effect of the "automatization of the human body" as machine. As demonstrated in the example above, the *Sexual Overtones* engage in humorous body language through various techniques such as exaggerated gestures, parody, costuming, practices of clowning and playfulness to provoke laughter and pleasure in their audience. These techniques make oppositional ideologies and practices – such as the celebration of queer bodies, queer sexuality, old bodies and big bodies; as well as parodies of traditional forms of masculinity and heteronormativity – lighter and funnier, thereby softening their oppositional force and appearing more tolerable to the dominant culture. As mentioned above, the audience at these performances is often in the hundreds, suggesting that they have the capacity to reach a large number of people and forge alliances across different groups. Although there is no detailed information on the demographic breakdown of the audience, troupe members assert (and my own experience as a spectator also suggests) that the public is comprised of mostly women and supporters of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LBGTQ) community, along with members of the dominant culture. Many troupe

members invite their families and co-workers, who include members of parliament and lawyers, in order to have some capacity to influence elite members of the hegemonic culture, where the use of pleasure can work to forge alliances with these groups.

In this context, the *Sexual Overtones* are destabilising the practice of stripping from its use as a tool of oppression linked to patriarchal objectification, to a theatrical practice engaging different types of bodies based on alternative conceptions of beauty while still producing pleasure in audience members. The performer who uses the stage name The Brain argues that producing pleasure in the audience challenges conventional stripping practices by taking the act outside the pleasure of the male gaze:

Whereas stripping is mostly done for men's pleasure and for a profit, the *Sexual Overtones* are mainly stripping for women with troupe members having a very supportive community that cheers each other on. Women are strip teasing for the pleasure of mostly queer positive and female audiences (The Brain, Personal Communication, March 5, 2013).

This act of women stripping for a mostly female and queer audience becomes a technique to (re)establish alliances with other members of subordinate groups. Thus, there exists a complex two-way-flow of communication concerning pleasure between performers and spectators; spectators are not merely passive dupes injected with the performers' ideologies and practices, in the way Lazarsfeld's hypodermic theory described (1955). Rather, they have the capacity to influence the production of the performance by giving pleasure to the performers through practices such as cheering, clapping and laughter. In fact, every performer that I interviewed underscored that they gained pleasure through audience reactions to their playful acts of striptease. As

expressed by Randy Enhancement, “The thrill is taking off your clothes in front of people as they are fully clothed. You get such a surge of energy. You feel totally pumped!” (Personal Communication, June 5, 2013). In this way, the audience gives the performer the message that even bodies that do not conform to beauty standards of the dominant culture are invested with value. Troupe member, Xposé explains the ways in which stripping combined with humour and play is a technique that helps her to overcome her body shame:

As a woman in my forties and a mother of two children, I am not beautiful by conventional standards and my body is not typically the type of body that is celebrated publically. I didn’t even like standing in front of a mirror in the nude. The act of shedding my clothes coupled with entertaining an audience in a light-hearted manner is teaching me something I never thought I would be able to do—shed my inhibitions and take off my clothes in front of a crowd! Hearing that crowd cheer me on has taught me to accept my body and even see it as sexy and fun (Xposé, Personal Communication, March 21, 2013).

Taking her clothes off in front of audience members while making them laugh produces pleasure in the performer and operates as a technique of power that encourages her to publically accept and celebrate her own body, despite the fact that it does not conform to dominant beauty standards. As such, there is a complex interplay of power relations between spectator and performer, where the production of pleasure helps to strengthen alliances by creating, strengthening and reinforcing new cultural meanings. In this process, public displays of the body are used to foster collaboration between various groups in order to produce alternate beauty standards through practices of embodiment.

The spectators can also express displeasure as a feedback mechanism to exert some influence over the performance. For example, during the Winternude show, the host, Geoffo Marx dressed as Tony 5 Balls—an Ottawa comedian dressed as a snow

man with the carrot placed as genitals rather than a nose—engaged the audience in an interactive game which was meant to be a form of comedic relief during intermission. In that scene, the audience was encouraged to stand up while the host asked a series of personal questions about the spectators’ sexual orientation, experiences and practices such as: did we “ever had a threesome”, “ever engaged in same sex relations”, or “ever had sex with an animal”. Those who had not participated in these practices were asked to sit down, leaving members of the LGBTQ community very exposed if they accepted to play the game. Although many audience members laughed at this delivery, sense of timing and element of surprise of asking such intimate questions in a public venue, the game was not well received by all. As a result, some spectators used the troupe’s Facebook page to express their disapproval, and wrote they found it offensive to publicly reveal gender identities and sexual proclivities. Consequently, the *Sexual Overtones* issued an apology through their Facebook page and took the host off future performances. They wrote:

To all our fabulous fans who attended Winternude: We realize we didn’t deliver the funnies as best we could at Winternude—and in fact there were things said that made people feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. We regret this and will do our best to make sure it doesn’t happen again (February 4, 2013).

In this instance, the use of social media acted as a mechanism of enculturation through which the hegemonic culture could re-assert and re-integrate neo-burlesque theatre into its fold through setting the limits of what is deemed appropriate. These mechanisms of enculturation can work to marginalise more radical or subversive elements of the neo-burlesque group performances and realign alliances back into hegemonic relations of power.

Within these spirals of (dis)pleasure and power, there is a clear case of interactive communication here between performers and spectators. Through these techniques, performers have power to coordinate action among audience and spectators to shift the limits of dominant standards, norms and practices in the construction of normative femininity and sexuality. However, as we have seen, through the production of pleasure and humour, the spectators do have some capacity to influence the content through feedback mechanisms of pleasure and displeasure, pointing to a complex and dynamic struggle of hegemonic relations of power at play.

### **Burlesque Bodies as Bio-power**

The *Sexual Overtones* use body language as techniques of bio-power to challenge conventional correlations between healthy and beautiful bodies. As Foucault conceived it, bio-power is a productive technique of power deployed by the state that involves taking charge of bodies to help them (or if necessary contain them) to ensure their own good health, wellbeing and optimal longevity. For instance, the government may advocate and sponsor health and exercise programmes to regulate the body and keep the population in shape. As discussed in my theoretical framework, techniques of bio-power can also be extended to the beauty and fashion industries where beauty and health are often conflated and thin, sculpted bodies are considered the normative markers of ideal health towards which individuals should work. These bodies are often those put on a pedestal and the types that are publically displayed and celebrated through the mass media and in line with capitalist objectives where

individuals are encouraged to work on their bodies using beauty norms and products in order to attain a state of ‘perfection’.

Although Foucault conceptualizes bio-power as a technique of the state, as was evidenced through the Nazis' use of sculpted bodies, in democratic societies at least, bio-power includes a capacity for individuals to resist the use of beauty norms to achieve dominant standards. Insofar as bio-power is a productive type of power that targets bodies, individuals can utilize their bodies in ways that were not intended. For instance, by not sculpting their bodies, by exaggerating certain unusual features or by publicly showcasing ‘unhealthy’ bodies as beautiful, the *Sexual Overtones* subvert existing norms about beautiful bodies through ‘making fun’. For example the *Sexual Overtones* include the subgroup, the Muffin Tops (based on a culturally slang term that refers to ‘love handles’ and more specifically the bulge that forms above a pair of pants that are too tight) adopt the motto “shake what the bakery gave us” as a way of celebrating larger sized women. They particularly engage in techniques of playfulness and pleasure (further evinced by their names Ambrosia, Pound Cake and Cherry Pie) to convince audience members that larger women who are conventionally considered unhealthy and, therefore, deemed unworthy can be considered sexy, and invoke pleasure in their audience. Ambrosia further explains:

As a culture, we look at bodies everyday, but there is very little representation of heavier women as sexy. The Muffin Tops are all over 6 feet tall ranging from size 14 to 18 and we strip down to our panties. We want to show people that bodies of all different shapes and sizes are beautiful. So we get up there and we don’t take ourselves too seriously and we have a lot of fun. I cannot tell you how many times audience members have thanked me and told me how taking off my clothes has helped them accept their own bodies as healthy, beautiful and worthy (Ambrosia, Personal Communication April 1, 2013).

The Muffin Tops often use beauty norms to construct normative femininity to challenge the ways only certain bodies can embody beauty standards. Specifically, they use costumes, make-up and gestures of exaggerated femininity to represent themselves as 1950s housewives while strip teasing to doo-wop style songs. Through the application of dominant beauty norms they re-appropriate traditional femininity in order to subvert expectations around which types of bodies can be produced as 'feminine'. They simultaneously exaggerate areas of their bodies, which they are generally expected to cover up to celebrate their worth. Randy Enhancement further explicates how the Muffin Tops' combination of femininity, exaggeration and striptease challenges the audience's normative correlations between beauty and health:

They weren't just tattooed fat girls, they were sexy and knew how to titillate a crowd. It changed the way I thought about being big. Aggressively shaking their asses which are covered in cellulite challenges that being fit is the only way to be beautiful and sexy (Randy Enhancement, Personal Communication, June 5, 2013).

The dominant beauty norms are appropriated in order to subvert dominant beauty standards. In other words, the troupe is using bodily display and objectifications -- elements that have contributed to dominant, patriarchal beauty standards -- to challenge the standardisation process coming from the dominant culture, a necessary component in figuring the body as a site of counter-hegemony, a point that will be explored in more detail in my conclusion.

Other performances engage in techniques of bio-power to subvert conventions that some bodies count more than others. For example, the Vintage Vixens include guest performers Prairie Fire, Naughty Marlena, Insatiable Isabelle and Gypsy

Larose, who all range between the ages of 45 and 60 years old. In their performance, they stripped to Ruth Brown's "If I can't sell it, I'll sit on it," a satirical song that advocates women's sexual power and agency through prostitution. Attired in old-fashioned panties, bloomers, and corsets they re-appropriate elements of traditional burlesque including a can-can leg show to reclaim their older bodies as sexy. By adopting normative conceptions of beauty and stripping on stage, these women reaffirm the desirability of older women's bodies and push the limits of the types of bodies invested with value. Although this performance does not include any obvious humour, it is a nod to the radical origins of burlesque and the tradition in which their troupe is situated.

In some instances, troupe members go as far as adopting dominant beauty standards and norms in order to achieve a sense of health and wellbeing. For instance, Ambrosia adopts normalisation practices by "not eating salty things" and shaving and exfoliating beauty rituals before the show. Similarly Cream Puff picks costumes that flatter her body so she can look and feel her most beautiful on stage. Male performers also engage in techniques of bio-power. For example, Kinky goes to the gym every day for weeks leading up to the show, despite the troupe's emphasis on body acceptance and his own recognition that his body fits the dominant culture's standards. Kinky explains:

Sexuality is defined in our culture as shared between hyper fit people...I have the sort of body that is celebrated and I still want to look my best before a show. Taking my clothes off in front of a lot of people looking at me in my tiny boxer shorts is intimidating, so leading up to the show I go to the gym everyday. I want to look jacked! I want to look awesome (Kinky, Personal communication, January 19, 2013).

In some cases, the engagement in public objectification of bodies ends up reproducing dominant beauty standards (in this instance, by a man!). The adoption of normalisation practices to reproduce dominant standards does not undo neo-burlesque's use of the body as a site of counter-hegemony but rather points to the fragility and instability of its processes, even in the theatre context.

### **Performing New Subjectivities**

Through the use of bodily humour, the *Sexual Overtones* construct new feminine and masculine gender performances by using beauty norms and practices of embodiment in new ways to create new subjectivities of gender and sexuality. As previously discussed, Butler (1990, 1993) explains that gender is not an *a priori*, essentialised category but, rather, is performed through repeated gestures, postures and stylizations of the body that congeal around hetero-normative codes of masculinity and femininity. She considers drag as a subversive act that exposes the artifices of gender by playing upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. By re-stylizing the body in new ways, she argues, individuals can resist normative gender codes. Like drag, neo-burlesque also destabilizes dominant gender norms through the incorporation of parody, exaggeration and mimicking practices, further drawing attention to the constructed attributes of gender. Through re-stylizations of the body that make use of exaggerated gestures, costumes and make-up applied in new ways, neo-burlesque performers can construct new gender performances that move beyond normative constructions of masculinity and femininity. The use of humourous bodily language,

which also involves imitation, parody, bodily gestures and movements, further works as a technique of performativity to denaturalize normative gender and heterosexuality.

Some performers use dominant beauty norms to engage in tongue and cheek cross-dressing practices to denaturalize categories of male and female. For example, in the skit “ It’s gonna be me” a song by the boy band ‘N Sync, three performers (Randy Enhancement, Kinky and Ex Factor) participate in the performance, through gestures, posturing and costumes of heterosexual masculinity. As they strip, Ex Factor adds an element of playful surprise by revealing that her anatomy does not match her performance, thereby confounding audiences' gender expectations. In another act, Xposé and the Brain dressed as evil clowns with clown masks, also wearing suspenders, ties and sexy nylon tights. By dressing as "evil clowns" they construct a new stylization of the body to blur normative categories of masculine and feminine and who is considered "sexy":

Evil clowns are not often seen as sexy. They are more often aligned with something that we laugh at or are afraid of. Dressing as an evil clown while stripping plays with boundaries of what is considered feminine and who is considered sexy. But we are doing it through play and fun (The Brain, Personal Communication, March 5, 2013).

Foucault helps to elucidate the ways in which these performances guide the conduct of performers and audience members through the process of subjectification. As already discussed, this process guides individual conduct through three interrelated components involving the objectification of the body: through dividing and classification mechanisms by external sources and (un)conscious integration of these processes by the individuals through training the body to fit these standards. Yet, these processes involve a degree of agency wherein individuals can reject these

categorization and objectification processes and become "self-creating subjects" by rearranging these elements of domination in new ways. Through the application of beauty norms and practices of embodiment, performers create new gendered and sexualised subjects. By conducting their own conduct through public performances, they create and circulate new cultural meanings of beauty, gender and sexuality in the theatrical sphere.

Cream Puff explains that her characters are a “form of fun, play and an outlet for creativity and expression” where she uses normative constructions of femininity and masculinity to construct a new female subject. Through the use of costumes and makeup in funny ways, she highlights the artifices of gender and sex and obscures normative boundaries:

Cream Puff is someone I would never be in real life. It’s an alter ego. I never wear makeup in public and I identify as a butch dyke so wearing it on stage and being feminine becomes the transgressive act. I feel like I am in drag if I dress like a woman. But I like to make my makeup weird and smear it all over my face (Cream Puff, Personal Communication, April 15, 2013).

In her act “Much time for men”, she dresses up as a ballerina and dances to the lyrics “I like to have a man for breakfast each day.” Although she constructs herself in line with normative femininity, she also engages in “slapstick humour” by “too desperately and too eagerly running after the boys” as she clumsily falls. As such, she uses bodily humour to reorder the instruments of femininity in new ways that confound gender expectations. Her performance acts as a parody of ‘high culture’ and the fine arts of ballet where she subverts appropriate femininity as docile, disciplined and submissive.

Other performances use practices of embodiment to mimic and mock gender and class relations in the dominant culture, through the creation of alternate subjectivities. For instance, the skit “Va-Va-Va Broom” parodies a traditional office space where two performers dress as feminine cleaning staff and one character acts as a male boss, thereby reproducing subservient women working within a patriarchal, white hetero-normative structure. Throughout the skit, the maids use clownish gesturing such as prancing around the office, exaggerating the movements of their mops in a sexual motion, to provoke laughter in the audience. Through the expression of their queer sexuality, the boss is drawn out of the dominant space and brought into queer subversive pleasure, which escalates into a threesome. As the performance ensues and the three performers strip, the boss engages in the practices of mopping and the audience discovers that the male boss is wearing pink frilly panties, which further undoes the patriarchal expectations of dominant masculinity.

By re-assembling and re-stylization of elements of dominant beauty norms in new ways, the *Sexual Overtones* use gender performativity to create new subjectivities to "conduct the conduct" of themselves and audience members. Within the context of theatre, these performances are not merely confined to individual stylizations of the body but become collective where performers create collaborations with spectators. Performativity is part of this collaborative interplay within processes of counter-hegemony that seek to mobilize alliances between performer and audiences.

## **Conclusion: Pleasurable Counter-Hegemony?**

Through interactive communication between performers and spectators, the *Sexual Overtones* could act as organic intellectuals--members of subordinate groups that use leadership practices to insert their own representations of beauty and the body. By using their bodies collectively within a public space, they have the potential to build and secure alliances with different groups. By mobilising the body in collaborative endeavours between performers and spectators, which theatre makes possible, the body can act as a site of counter-hegemony. The *Sexual Overtones* made use of dominant beauty standards and norms in order to forge a counter-hegemonic movement to resist these standardisation and normalisation practices, demonstrating that an entanglement within a mesh of power can still work to shift hegemonic relations. Specifically through striptease and humorous body language, performers invoke pleasure in their audience to forge alliances across different groups, which fits within the troupe's eminently political agenda. For the most part, as discussed above, audience members that attend the show are supporters of feminist and queer politics and, therefore, have the same politics and ideologies as the performers. In this way, neo-burlesque theatre may tend to reconfirm existing viewpoints of groups and individuals to which the troupe are already allied. However, in instances where members of the dominant culture attend the show, such as in the case of invited members of the elite culture, the use of striptease and bodily humour worked as techniques to win their consent and forge alliances with members of dominant groups. Through bodily display and objectification and excessive femininity, these neo-burlesque performers use the same techniques utilized by the dominant culture,

but, through techniques of humour, they destabilise the way pleasure has been linked with certain bodies and practices. For instance, through these techniques conventionally overweight bodies are celebrated and gender inversions are normalized. In this way, performers used their bodies collectively to shift dominant standardisation practices by collaborating with spectators to celebrate different types of bodies as beautiful. Through the use of pleasure, the audience can also take delight in some oppositional representations, creating an impact of beauty standards in the theatrical sphere by allowing new cultural meanings and practices to circulate. Furthermore, through these techniques, neo-burlesque performers can widen their counter-hegemonic reach beyond the limitations of the theatre (which has a local reach), through a two-step flow process of communication where messages make impressions on opinion leaders who may then have some influence on other audiences (Brosius & Weimann 1996; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Nisbet & Kotcher 2009). As such, audience members who attend the performances can act as opinion leaders who are in a positions to influence a larger public in Ottawa, thereby helping to shift hegemonic relations of power, particularly in the theatrical sphere. At the same time, theatre involves a complex, reciprocal and sometimes contradictory relationship between performers and audience members. There is in fact no guarantee how audiences will react to such representations and so, the counter-hegemonic elements in this instance remain fragile.

## Chapter 6

### **Conclusion: Counter-hegemonic Power of the Body?**

My research set out to complexify a conversation about beauty and the body in the field of communication and media studies by considering how they operate through different strategies, techniques and tactics of power in various modes of communication that entail different practices. In contrast to traditional approaches in communication scholarship where beauty is characterised as a form of domination of women, my dissertation examines the ways in which beauty standards, norms and practices are sometimes utilized as resistance, varying in forms according to the various practices of communication in which they are situated. The particular contexts I was interested in were the following: propaganda posters and interpersonal communication in the Nazi Holocaust, social media and fashion blogging, and neo-burlesque theatre. While I used the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony to examine the more structural aspects of my study, namely to understand the relationship between domination and opposition between dominant and subordinated groups, Foucauldian concepts such as governmentality, subjectification, bio-power, and technologies of the self, helped me to flesh out a non top-down type of power based on a degree of freedom and autonomy, where individuals guide the conduct of others as well as their own. Each of my case studies also included an aspect of performativity with some contexts having more space from which to lead counter-hegemonic resistance than others, a variation directly related to de Certeau's concept of tactics (that I defined earlier). In this conclusion, I first situate the implications of my approach for cultural studies and communication, before turning to the themes of

standardisation, normalisation and performances in terms of their impact on the ways the body can operate as a site of counter-hegemony in different modes of communication.

### **Beauty, Representation and Communication**

My dissertation is situated within a framework that argues beauty is mainly constructed through communication and cultural practices. Cultural studies stem largely from Gramsci's conceptualization of cultural hegemony, which has been essential in helping me understand how beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment operate within relations of power. I particularly adopt Williams' approach to cultural hegemony, as a type of power exercised not only through symbolic meaning but within a whole set of social practices. The aim of my research was to complexify the tendency in cultural studies to focus on the construction of beauty at the level of representation, where media representations tend to reproduce interlocking oppressive systems of gender, class, sexuality and race. By adopting a broader definition of culture, my research includes other communication practices that can play a role in influencing cultural meanings and social outcomes, such as the use of beauty in face-to-face communication by some Jewish women during the Holocaust. In this scenario, the body itself operates as a means of communication where standards, norms and practices 'mark' the body in line with the interests of dominant groups, but where these marks can be used to gain some social or physical mobility. In terms of the cases on fashion blogging and neo-burlesque theatre, I examine the ways in which alternative representations produced by subordinate

groups may challenge hegemonic relations of power. As some cultural studies scholars have shown, dominant representations can never be absolutely fixed because meanings are slippery and can therefore be challenged. Nonetheless, while scholars such as Hall (1997) argue that increased positive and diversified representations do not necessarily counter the dominant regime of representation that frame the way these practices are read, I claim that representations of beauty can, in fact, shift hegemonic relations of power. This is evidenced through the case of neo-burlesque theatre where performers engaged spectators in practices of 'looking' through the objectification and display of the body "hoping by its very attention, to 'make it strange' -- that is to de-familiarize it..." (Hall, 1997, p.274). The *Sexual Overtones* use humour in order to de-familiarize the ways beauty has been linked with hetero-normative femininity and, in so doing, as we have seen, the body can operate as a site to coordinate counter-hegemonic processes in the theatrical sphere. In this way, I moved beyond Hall's suggestion that subversive representations can never succeed in shifting relations of power, exemplified in his statement "since meaning can never be fixed, there can never be any final victories" (1997, p.274). As discussed earlier, Hall's conceptualization of cultural hegemony over-emphasised the coercive aspects of the hegemonic process and, therefore, has correlations with a Foucauldian approach, where groups are caught in a mesh of power relations.

My approach, therefore, extends beyond the notion that beauty operates exclusively within a framework of oppression and challenges dominant definitions and meanings of beauty. At the same time, it has not adopted a laudatory conception of popular cultural expressions of beauty as a form of empowerment where practices

of bodily display and objectification are a matter of agency and individual choice. Rather, my dissertation has shown that beauty standards, norms and practices of embodiment can operate as strategies, techniques and tactics in complex and dynamic relations of power, even to the extent that dominant beauty standards can be used in processes of counter-hegemony. To develop an analysis of these complex relations, I used Foucault's different yet complementary approach to explain how beauty standards and norms can be used, reworked and rearranged to "conduct the conduct" of oneself and others, particularly in terms of their impact on (counter)hegemonic relations of power.

I also examined the ways the body was tied to different modes of communication in terms of the ways they influence counter-hegemonic processes. In fact, each mode of communication has a "technological valence", by which I mean a limited range of potential uses that sets parameters on its development and reach (Martin, 1991: 11)<sup>63</sup>, thereby influencing its counter-hegemonic scope. The case studies that I investigated looked at these modes of communication primarily at the level of production to examine the ways beauty standards, norms, and practices are produced and diffused. In some instances, I also analyzed reception practices such as the inclusion of comments by readers and responses by the elite fashion industry, in the case of fashion blogging, as well as the role of audience members in the case of neo-burlesque theatre in order to discuss the role of audiences in possible counter-hegemonic movements. The case study of the Third Reich did not entail an element of reception because Jewish Holocaust victims were only able to make face-to-face

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<sup>63</sup> To be clear, technological valence does not suggest a technological determinist approach insofar as it is concerned with the social, political, economic and historical conditions in which technologies can be developed and used.

interventions. Although the Third Reich used propaganda posters, a reception analysis of their impact is an undertaking that is outside the time frame of my study, but would be an interesting avenue for further research.

In this case, the Nazis had total control over media representations of beauty and the body insofar as the mass communication system was completely under state power, which allowed very little capacity for more coordinated resistance via the mass media. As such, the first part of the chapter on the Holocaust traced the ways in which the Nazis had a stronghold over representations of beauty standards through the use of propaganda posters that set limits on the types of resistance that could manifest for Jewish men and women. In this context, propaganda posters that figured alternate or oppositional bodily representations were next to impossible and would likely have been completely repressed and punishable by imprisonment or even death in some instances (Evans, 2005; Kershaw, 2008).

Still, according to Foucault, even when power relations are completely out of balance, as in this case of strong state domination, there remains a certain degree of autonomy. But within cases of acute asymmetrical power relations, there is only an extremely limited margin of freedom and capacity for resistance. In this context, the body became one of the only available means for Jewish individuals to resist. The uses of the body in these instances were tactical in that they were individually based, spontaneous, local and face-to-face, communication that did not have a wide scope or far reach and, therefore, could not involve the coordinated action of a group, especially inside the concentration camps. As such, this mode of communication had very little bearing, if any, on the hegemonic processes of the authoritarian regime. At

the same time, as brought to light by my sample of interviews with Jewish survivors, the use of tactics of beauty and the body in face-to-face encounters could, at least, provide an opening in some instances to influence something as crucial as life and death.

Contrary to face-to-face communication, it is generally believed that social media have a much wider reach and larger capacity for counter-hegemonic resistance by facilitating the participation of members of popular culture in cultural production and peer sharing (see Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2011). Benkler has argued that social media have the necessary infrastructure to contribute to a networked public sphere where its members can build alliances that can sidestep market and corporate imperatives. The practice of fashion blogging has been particularly lauded as an influential social media practice responsible for revolutionizing some aspects of the elite fashion industry. Advocates argue that fashion blogging allows young women to act as cultural producers that can provide alternative and oppositional representational practices that exert pressure on standards, norms and practices. This perspective on fashion blogs has been so embedded in common sense reality that, as we have seen, even mainstream newspapers such as *La Presse* have recognized fashion bloggers' contributions, calling fashion blogs the "new kings" of the "digital and social revolution [that] can make or break trends" and have become "indispensible partners for brands" (Nicoud, June 27, 2014).

My own research suggests otherwise. Despite the high profile and popularity of Gevinson's fashion blog, [thestylerookie.com](http://thestylerookie.com), it appeared to have very little impact

on the dominant culture. Although in the initial phase of the blog, her alternative representations of the body worked to mobilize a network of young women intent on challenging dominant beauty standards and norms, the fashion industry capitalised on the instances in which Gevinson adhered to dominant beauty standards to insert various mechanisms of enculturation in order to disengage the more radical aspects of her blog. My findings in this case demonstrate that pleasurable attachment to fashion, body display and new stylizations operated within the limits of the hegemonic culture and of capital. At the same time, my research challenges scholarship that figures young women's bodily displays as techniques of oppression masquerading as forms of empowerment where women reproduce their own patriarchal objectification (e.g. Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2007, 2009). My research demonstrates that these particular fashion stylizations did not reproduce sexual objectification and were involved in complex and dynamic processes of (counter)hegemonic relations of power where only particular elements that aligned with the fashion industry were used to reassert the fashion industry's domination.

In this context, the interactive component of social media operated as a way for the fashion industry to influence Gevinson's content. Even though Gevinson did have control over which comments were posted on her blog, social media do not operate in a vacuum; they include an intertextual component where critiques would often come from mass media sites, putting pressure on a young girl like Gevinson to alter her own messages. As such, a young woman who was a member of popular culture with no formal feminist training, did not have a chance to resist the large compression of forces coming from the dominant culture and from capitalist

industries. As a consequence, fashion blogging has some similarities to the asymmetrical power relations of the Third Reich. While the Nazis had almost total political control, the fashion industry is based on a class structure making it difficult to shift power relations in a context of such asymmetrical economic relations. Even though Gevinson had access to social media with their interactive components and capacity to allow alternative representations, these communication practices were not enough to move, or even make a dent in the fashion industry. Although these results are based on one example, Gevinson had one of the most successful blogs at the time; as such, it is representative of other social media practices. These preliminary findings should be taken up in a larger corpus by other researchers to examine whether these results will be confirmed or refuted.

Unlike social media, which have a much wider reach, theatre as a mode of communication has a more local scope concerned with targeting publics rather than a mass audience. Theatre casts a wider net of diffusion than one-on-one, face-to-face communication, but it reaches fewer people than mass media and is no longer a central mode of communication.<sup>64</sup> That said, my research suggests that theatre has the most counter-hegemonic potential of the three modes of communication studied here. The *Sexual Overtones* are producing theatre in a context where, arguably, there is not as high a degree of domination coming from a centralized force, as in the other two case studies. As such, there was more capacity for the neo-burlesque group to mobilise counter-hegemonic processes. Through public performances based on interactive communication practices between performers and audiences, the group

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<sup>64</sup> Classical theatre often featured the same plays all over Western European society, suggesting that historically theatre had a wider impact at one time. However, with the advent of the mass media, theatre has taken on a different cultural and social role.

could use representations of their bodies in order to shift beauty standards, norms and practices in the theatrical sphere. Specifically, the *Sexual Overtones* established a cultural spectacle and physical space where a threatened, persecuted and marginalized community can construct alternative subjectivities and experiences largely without fear of reprisal, stigmatization and physical assault. As already mentioned, performers used body objectification through practices of striptease and humour in an attempt to flip the ways public displays of the body have been correlated to certain bodies. Although for scholars such as Hall these acts of striptease are within the limits of hegemonic culture and can only subvert dominant meanings within existing relations of power, my findings suggests these techniques go further by using the body collectively to coordinate a shift of dominant beauty standards in the cultural sphere.

The counter-hegemonic aspects of theatre found in the performances of the *Sexual Overtones* can potentially be further increased beyond those in attendance through a two step flow model of communication (see Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955) where invited members of elite culture could act as opinion leaders and, therefore, extend the influence of ideas carried out by the performers. The audience attending the *Sexual Overtones*'s show was also comprised of supporters of feminist and queer politics, and members of the queer community, and, in this sense, the performances tended to re-confirm their existing viewpoints and attitudes.<sup>65</sup> In this instance, supporters of queer and feminist politics seek out neo-burlesque theatre as a type of

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<sup>65</sup> Indeed, according to the uses and gratification model of communication, developed mainly by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), media tend to reinforce already existing ideas and opinions. Simply put, this position asserts that individuals are not passively injected with media messages but rather play a more active role by seeking out media for particular gratifications where they tend to choose media sources that correspond to their own previously established ideologies and practices.

entertainment that renews their own ideologies and practices and reaffirms solidarity, a necessary component in renewing and strengthening existing alliances as part of the counter-hegemonic processes. In these ways, theatre's counter-hegemonic potential should be taken seriously, in spite of its more local reach and should be followed up with further research.

The way the body can operate as a site of counter-hegemony within these different modes of communication can be further fleshed out through Foucauldian and Butlerian conceptions of power. These aspects will be explored through the themes of standardisation, normalisation and performance, which cut across all three cases and have different implications for counter-hegemony processes.

### **Standardisation Practices**

As we have seen, standardisation practices come from those in positions of domination. Specifically, beauty standards come from external sources and are often set by the dominant culture and/or the state and conveyed through communication and media practices. These beauty standards often act as techniques of governmentality that work to guide the conduct of individuals according to particular government, capitalistic or patriarchal objectives. Moreover, they are often defined through processes of subjectification in which bodies are objectified and submitted to procedures of classification, categorisation and hierarchisation, where some bodies are considered more beautiful than others. Each of the case studies demonstrates various standardisation practices that have different implications for counter-hegemonic resistance.

In the case of the Third Reich, the state had complete control over the standardisation processes. Specifically, through quasi-medicalised discourses and eugenic practices, the Nazis objectified and classified certain groups and individuals as superior and inferior. Furthermore, the Nazis reinforced these standards through media representations, which worked to further hierarchise groups by naturalizing them according to reductionist and stereotypical features. We have seen that these representational practices produced positive stereotypes of German men as blond, blue-eyed, strong, healthy and muscular while German women were represented as rosy cheeked and in good health. In contrast, oppressed groups such as the Jews were vilified with negative features represented as old, diseased, cloaked and bearded with hooked noses and big ears. These representations of beauty standards worked to circumscribe who belonged to the Aryan nation and who was an outsider. These standardisation practices, thus, worked to justify the implementation of Nazis policies where certain bodies mattered while others were denigrated and vilified.

Jewish victims had no access to representational practices and control in shifting these external standards coming from the state where only men and women who adhered to them could use these standards in tactical resistance, without overthrowing them. For instance, as has been discovered through interviews, Jewish survivors who embodied the Aryan standards – such as blond hair and blue eyes – could use these beauty standards to gain false papers or hide in plain sight. Nonetheless, inside the concentration camps, these standardisation practices had little bearing on their survival, where the Nazis further reduced prisoners to objects by classifying them as subhuman in order to facilitate the implementation of their

imprisonment, torture and eventually murder. This new classificatory system was based on a hierarchy where, according to one interviewee, "some meat on the bones and rosy cheeks" was the new standard, most often featured on new prisoners arriving from the ghettos who had not yet been subjected to the conditions inside the camps. In a hierarchical system where some prisoners often carried out the SS guards' orders, those who fit these standards could use their beauty to barter for survival items such as food or clothing, where the most 'beautiful' women were often selected for such 'favours'. Although some Jewish prisoners were able to use these standardisation practices as tactics to survive, very few, if any, had capacity to have influence over the standardisation and classification system inside the camps where their interventions remained individually oriented.

Even in the context of social media which, as we have seen, has a much wider reach, and where Gevinson could provide alternative representations of the body, she was not able to directly challenge the standardisation practices. In this case, beauty standards were set by the fashion industry who categorized individuals and hierarchised them as suitable to showcase their clothing, such as through their selection of models that, as other scholars have already shown, embody standards of thinness, whiteness, youth and so on. Although social media include a capacity for cultural production by members of popular culture to provide alternative beauty representations other than those produced by dominant culture, Gevinson's popularity was at least partially due to what she calls her "beauty privilege"; as a thin, young, blonde, white woman, Tavi fits the standards of elite culture. Thus, her online presence did not challenge the standards set by the fashion elite; to the contrary, her

popularity and success is based on adhering to their standardisation practices. Specifically, as a result of embodying these standards, she was heralded as the "new darling of the fashion industry" and, as has already been discussed, the fashion industry used the aspects that reproduced their culture to reassert hegemonic relations of power. As a result, she was showered with exclusive gifts and invited to collaborate with top international designers, all of which she promoted on her blog. In so doing, she reproduced the beauty standards coming from the dominant culture. Thus, instead of thwarting elite standardisation practices through oppositional representations, she gradually integrated the ruling classes' beauty standard into her blogging practices and representations. Consequently, the few alternative representations she proposed were unable to shift beauty standards set by the fashion industry.

The case of neo-burlesque theatre is the only instance in which performers directly subverted standardisation practices carried on by the hegemonic culture at several levels. First, neo-burlesque, through its satirical elements, challenges classical standards of theatre within the cultural sphere through new forms and types of performances. Second, neo-burlesque theatre flips the ways that striptease manifests the hetero-normative male gaze (that has celebrated only certain types of bodies) by publicly creating the spectacle of the female body for queer pleasure. Third, neo-burlesque theatre challenges the beauty standards that permeate society at large by acting as a backdrop through billboards, advertisements and through the mass media, where the hegemonic culture's standards have been naturalized as common sense. By displaying different body types that are not usually publicly celebrated and portrayed

within cultural representations, such as heavy, overweight, tattooed and queer bodies, they reject the classification and hierarchisation practices from these external sources. Although they continue to objectify their bodies through striptease and public display and are, thus, engaged in processes of subjectification, by not self-disciplining or training their bodies to meet external requirements, the *Sexual Overtones* rejects hierarchisation processes where pleasure and objectification have been linked with certain types. It can be gleaned, then, that the third mechanism of the process of subjectification offers a space to reject standardisation practices by allowing the subject to consciously reject the beauty standards coming from external sources.

In general, these findings show that the standardisation practices are set by those in positions of power and reproduced in dominant representations, where groups use the processes of subjectification to objectify, classify and hierarchise individuals. Challenging these beauty standards through representational practices of the body is crucial to shifting hegemonic relations of power. This type of resistance involves the insertion of oppositional standards and practices in a way to mobilize alliances to directly challenge the hegemonic structure, through the third mechanism of subjectification.

### **Normalisation Practices**

Closely linked, but distinct from beauty standards, beauty norms refer to the ways individuals adopt certain practices of how they should look and/or behave. These normalisation practices operate as a type of governmentality concerned with guiding the conduct of individuals through their appearance. As we have already

seen, beauty norms are linked to the standardisation process in that they involve the integration of the standards coming from this process into the activities and practices of individuals and groups through practices of self-disciplining and training their bodies. In this way, they more specifically involve the third mechanism of the subjectification process where individuals can choose not to adopt or (un)consciously integrate beauty norms. From this perspective, each of the case studies involve different permutations of these normalisation practices comprised of leading the conduct of others as well as governing oneself.

In the case of the Nazi Holocaust, beauty norms were deployed as a technique of governmentality by the state at the social level to normalize and regulate the population. The Nazis made use of statistical data, through measuring head circumferences, eye charts, shoulder sizes and so on, to determine beauty norms which were then utilized to circumscribe who belonged to the Aryan nation and those deemed as 'other'. In this instance, beauty norms were turned into a biological construct to guide the conduct of the population through techniques of bio-power. People deemed 'healthy' were encouraged to strengthen their bodies to represent the overall German nation. Bodies deemed unhealthy were viewed as national threats, which worked to encourage Germans to support state policies and practices.

Although these normalizing practices were intended for 'Aryan bodies', an approach using bio-power and technologies of the self help to reveal how some Jewish prisoners also adopted beauty norms to transform their bodies in order to appear healthier, or by rejecting the ways in which their bodies had been defined and classified by the dominant culture. As several interviewees have recounted, Jewish

men and women adopted beauty norms to make their bodies appear healthy and therefore useful for the Nazis to show that they were capable of hard labour in the concentration camps. Interviewees have also underscored that Jewish women and men adopted normalisation practices by dressing according to particular conventions in order to pass as non-Jewish outside the concentration camps. Other survivors also engaged in beauty norms that existed prior to the war, such as through hair styling or the application of make-up, in order to escape Nazis standardisation practices that classified Jews as subhumans. Although the adoption of these beauty norms meant some chance of survival, they did not directly challenge standardisation practices, but rather allowed alternative conduct wherein some individuals could gain some leverage.

In the case of fashion blogging, Gevinson overtly rejected the normalisation practices coming from the elite culture. She did not adopt beauty norms dictated by the fashion industry, where women are often taught to engage in a myriad of grooming practices to achieve normative femininity by turning themselves into sexualized objects to be looked at. Although she continued to engage in practices of online self (re)presentation and display, she did not construct herself as docile, subordinate and sexualised, traits that are often perpetuated by the fashion industry. Specifically, by displaying herself in oversized granny frocks, artistic outfits and by choosing not to wear makeup, she rejected beauty norms of elite culture. Furthermore, she did not adopt normative practices where beauty is equated with consumption practices of the elite classes, expensive items, opting instead for thrift store items or DIY projects. In some instances, she engaged in displays of normative

femininity through a focalisation on pink, frills, bows, sparkles and so on. The adoption of these norms was meant to show the ways normative femininity is a highly artificial and constructed practice as well as to challenge assumptions that looking 'girly' and being 'smart' are diametrically opposed. All of these representations were not necessarily oppositional, but, rather, rearranged elements of femininity alternative to the hegemonic culture. In so doing, she used her online presence to provide another example to young women (other than those advocated by dominant culture), but without necessarily directly opposing elite norms and practices.

In the same vein, neo-burlesque theatre often used beauty norms to subvert normative codes of femininity and masculinity. Specifically, by wearing makeup in unconventional ways or through exaggerated costumes, they confounded the ways femininity and masculinity have been naturalised. By rejecting these normalisation practices, the *Sexual Overtones* challenged normative codes of beauty, sexuality and gender, through the presentation of alternative forms of conduct and appearances.

In all cases, normalisation practices involve techniques that govern the self through which individuals can choose to adopt forms of conduct offered by the dominant culture or choose alternate appearances and behaviours. Beauty norms can be used tactically when individuals from subordinate groups adopt them in order to gain mobility within an oppressive situation, but individuals or groups can also reject beauty norms by choosing alternative forms of conduct that do not conform to normative codes. It is important to underscore that the rejection of these normalisation practices differs from challenges to standardisation in that norms do not necessarily directly challenge the ideologies and practices of elite and/or hegemonic

culture. Alternative behaviours and appearances may be tolerated and accommodated in order to secure alliances and maintain hegemonic power relations.

### **Performance as Counter-hegemony?**

Each of the case studies includes aspects of bodily performativity where individuals and/or groups engaged in different stylisations to perform their bodies with different counter-hegemonic impacts. In the case of the Nazi Holocaust, Jewish victims engaged in performances to please their oppressors, including the SS guards or other prisoners inside the concentration camps. In these cases, survivors made use of bodily performance by stylising their bodies to pass as a non-Jew or to appear healthy in order to survive. These performances did not lead to coordinated action but were body centric, individually based and hence tactical in nature with no counter-hegemonic intervention to adjust the standardisation and normalisation practices. In this way, their performances allowed them to gain some personal leverage without shifting hegemonic relations of power.

In the case of fashion blogging, Gevinson's online (re)presentations of the self operated as a performance. Specifically, through digital technology, photography, editing and software programs, she could pastiche elements together and stylize her body outside of the ways she had been categorised at school as well as outside codes of normative femininity. However, for the most part, as discussed above, she engaged in performances of traditional femininity. Although the text of her blog claims that her more feminine performances were meant to challenge assumptions that being feminine was inherently antithetical to being a feminist, the visual elements often

acted as the primary markers, thereby couching the ways in which her performances were meant to mock normative femininity. Her performances thus made use of fashion and playful dress up to reproduce normative femininity, which, as we have seen, the dominant culture used to disengage her network of alliances. As a result, she also engaged in performances of authenticity in order to appear as a member of popular culture, distinct from the elite circles. In spite of her efforts, her performances did not go beyond individual and bodily based stylizations and thus, she could not use her body as a site for counter-hegemonic processes.

The neo-burlesque troupe most overtly used stage performances to challenge normative conventions of beauty, gender and sexuality. Specifically, they used their bodies in collaborative performances that could mobilise performers and audiences alike. By dressing in exaggerated over-the-top costumes and make-up, and by participating in over-the-top gestures, they used parody and imitation to highlight the artifices of gender and thereby challenged the ways in which normative codes of gender have been naturalised as common sense. By also dressing in drag, they blurred the distinctions between gender, confounding audience expectations about how men and women should look and behave. These performances were group based and collaborative in that they took place in a public space that influenced performers and spectators. As such, they made use of the body to mobilise alliances to shift the standards and norms from the dominant culture.

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the body can operate as a site of counter-hegemony mainly in cases that directly challenge the standardisation practices of the dominant culture. To do so, individuals or groups must coordinate

their bodies together so that processes of counter-hegemony can work through them in order to directly oppose the ideas and practices of ruling groups. These often involve access to a media platform as well as strategic planning through the coordinated action of subordinate groups from popular culture. Theatre particularly acted as a mode of communication that fostered the use of the body collectively through public performances that create an interaction between performers and spectators. Their collaborative bodily representations worked to make dominant cultural meanings strange and secure alliances to shift beauty standards. In contrast, challenging normalisation practices involves alternative practices by individuals or groups that are not necessarily oppositional. These practices are not counter-hegemonic insofar as they are more individually oriented and do not necessarily involve building alliances across different groups. Furthermore, these alternatives are often tolerated by the hegemonic culture because they do not necessarily pose a direct threat but represent diverse practices that are often tolerated in order to maintain hegemonic relations of power. Fashion blogging presents an instance where alternative representations of fashion stylizations of the body could not overcome the large compression from the fashion industry and its beauty standards. Thus, these public body display and fashion stylizations were inside the limits of hegemonic culture. The face-to-face communication of the Nazi Holocaust used dominant standards and norms to create some new cultural meanings and uses of beauty, which however remained tactical in nature and were unable to shift hegemonic relations of power. These findings are based on a small sample size and present a first step in considering how standardisation, normalisation and performance can have different

implications for counter-hegemonic resistance across different modes of communication. My hope is that this work will open up a more nuanced conversation about the role of beauty and the body in the production of power and resistance in the field of communication studies.

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