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"Something in Your Belly" - Fantasy, Disability
and Desire in *My One-Legged Dream Lover*

Kath Duncan, BA (Hons)
School of Humanities, Media and Cultural Studies
Southern Cross University, Australia
Gerard Goggin, PhD
Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies
University of Queensland, Australia

Abstract

In this article we explore fantasy, disability and desire in the groundbreaking 1998 Australian TV documentary *My One-Legged Dream Lover*. Based upon self-reflexive documentary conventions, the video uncovers journalist-cum-freak raconteur Kath Duncan's explorations into the world of amputee fetish. Duncan is a double congenital amputee. She says, "I've tried most things - men, women, sex toys, unusual locations, dominance and submission games - but I wanted to know what it was like to be desired because of my impairments." Gerard Goggin is a temporarily able-bodied (or TAB) academic with his own history of queer desire and a personal investment in exploring issues of difference. Duncan's and Goggin's collaboration includes accessing each other's edgier fantasies, aiming to give voice to some of the negotiations, anxieties, pleasures, and risks we have taken, speaking across the chasm of our personal histories, different genders and respective bodies.

As I work my way down from your earlobes, to the nape of your neck, along the surface of your arm, I'd probably kiss and caress the end of your stump, feeling the shape, texture and subcutaneous structure. I'd probably work my way down from your hips along your right stump, and nibble on the end (I have a thing for kneecaps - I find them erotic). I'd want to grasp each of your stumps firmly in my hands to find out what they felt like. I'd probably fondle them, ride them, caress or kiss them. I've never had one I could touch, and learn about. Every woman is wired differently, so I'd find out what

touch you like and pursue that. So are you hot and bothered now?" (Devotee, private email to Kath)

Yes, says Kath Duncan, star, writer, and researcher, of the ground breaking 1998 Australian TV documentary *My One-Legged Dream Lover*. *Dream Lover* uncovers the world of amputee fetish from the vantage point of Kath, a double congenital amputee and a media practitioner, teacher and performer. Since the documentary's release worldwide, Kath has enjoyed email and real-life seductions, been fascinated and disenchanted, and lives to tell the inside story of life post-*Dream Lover*.

Based on self-reflexive documentary conventions, the video reveals in intimate detail some most contradictory feelings about disability and desire. It traces Kath's search for lovers of her stumps as a reflection of her profound desire to belong in a society that sees her largely as "other". It also maps Kath's quest for new sexual adventure. As she reflects on it now: "I've tried most things - men, women, sex toys, unusual locations, dominance and submission games - but I wanted to know what it was like to be desired because of my impairments." *Dream Lover* positions itself at the complex intersections of intimate pleasures and desiring exchanges between those who identify, and are identified, as disabled people and those who are designated (temporarily) able-bodied (or TAB). Fantasy is central to its theme: Kath's fantasy of being a Love Goddess, to be appreciated for all of her unique body and mind; the fetishists' fantasies of their "dream lovers" - people without limbs; plus society's desires to police bodies and desires.

Gerard Goggin is a TAB academic who wants to push the envelope, a post-modern wannabe professor. Working with the disability movement on communications and new media policy activism, most recently a forthcoming study with Christopher Newell entitled *Digital Disability* (Goggin & Newell 2002), has resulted in relationship with disabled people and a developing awareness of the politics of knowledge around disability not least with the new formations of disability studies and movements. He has his own history of queer desire, a journey across the rough contours of contemporary and historical masculinities, and a personal investment in exploring issues of difference. Gerard has a fascination for *Dream Lover*, which he set for his "Media, Culture and Ideology" course in an Australian university. Working together has been a process of negotiations, anxieties, pleasures, and risks we have taken, speaking across the chasm of our personal histories (Morris 1995), different genders and respective bodies. We wanted to be equal partners, where interests and motivation for each of us gained disclosure. We wanted to be accessible to each other.

In doing so we wished to connect our discussions with more public ones about access. The sort of access exhibited in *Dream Lover* and in this article is not about ramps and legislation, but about accessing the right to be sexual in the

broadest senses imaginable. George Taleporos puts it simply: "Disability does not abolish the need and potential for sexual expression" (Taleporos 2001). Australian ACCSEX member Katie Ball writes:

I've had a gutful of being treated like some ugly lump of rotting flesh. And the worst thing is, I'm not alone. I have long argued that people with disabilities should focus our attention on sexual emancipation. Physical barriers are born of attitudinal ones. When the community can finally accept us as whole human beings, we will be granted automatic access to such things as public transport, education and open employment (Ball 2001).

While we appreciate the appeal of this utopian vision, here we open up the documentary *Dream Lover* as an investigation of what sexual access may be and not just for disabled people. In analysing *Dream Lover* we also felt compelled to analyse each other. This article seeks to explore the still unanswered questions the documentary poses. It is a collaborative piece written in an effort to open circuits of exchange across and among disabled and TAB cultures (Drake 1997; Branfield 1998), bodies, identities, and desires, questions touched upon by Crutchfield & Epstein's notion of "points of contact" (Crutchfield & Epstein 2000: 12).

Dream Lover explicitly interrogates this contact between the cultures - TAB and amputee - and its power. Similarly, writing this article has provoked an analysis of power between Gerard and Kath. And some fun strategies. We took this problem of power - the academic and the freak, say - and played with it. Rather than the inquiry, like the lens, focussing solely on Kath, Gerard too declared what was at stake for him personally in this collaboration which revealed his interests in fantasy, in sexualities, in bodies, in exploring edges. We found common ground in our fascinations. We did not want to get too serious - creating this article appealed to both of us because we could see that unlike a standard academic or even journalistic investigative piece about other people, we could make this piece about us just as much as about *Dream Lover*.

In negotiations over the terms of our collaboration, Kath's concerns stemmed from her experience of being analysed as "the other". Kath pointed out to Gerard that she has been the subject of a barrage of medical, academic, educational, and "well-meaning" surveys, interviews and repetitious questionings all her life. The prospect of theorising her body, her body of work and herself post-*Dream Lover* only interested her if she were co-writing and sharing as equal scrutiny of her body and her secrets as Gerard was prepared to do with his. Gerard also expressed his own fears and vulnerabilities and so we sought ways to develop respect and equal exchange in order to work a dialogue around bodies and sexualities.

We were inspired by this approach where the congenital

amputee perspective comes from another place than being "less than" or "the examined" which *Dream Lover* also foregrounds, where Kath's perspective as narrator forms the "norm" against which the TAB world is judged. The documentary utilises voice-over and direct address, positioning the viewer, perhaps even seducing the viewer into identifying with Kath's point of view. While negotiating how we would work together, we realised on a fundamental level each of us felt as weird in a bodily sense, placed as the other to the other. In exploring such discursive positioning and the structure of "othering" it may entail, amplifying the contradictions and discomforts we felt, we structured writing workshops where we exposed ourselves to the other in dialogue and performance exercises interrogating the traditional privileging of the TAB position.

Kath: Don't you think it's in some way interesting, even if you can just perceive it in an intellectual kind of fashion, to let the "freak" investigate the TAB theory expert? I find it intriguing that you reacted so strongly against the idea of doing "confronting, in your face" activities with me... This is fabulous - are you scared of or embarrassed by showing your physicality to me?
(Kath, private e-mail to Gerard)

Gerard: My reaction came out of my general fear of doing confronting things when I'm not in control. Showing my physicality is part of this - sure. Nonetheless, as I said before, I am up for trying something different. Taking risks is crucial, so I'll stay open... For my part, opening up and interrogating the ground & body of academic expertise (to the extent that I aspire to or represent this) is a crucial move. (Gerard, private e-mail to Kath)

Kath: ...I feel a bit uncomfortable that I described this tension merely as "the freak investigating the T.A.B. theory expert"... As you probably already realise I am a fairly savvy media producer and very well used to coming up with strategies to get the story that I want... I have to say I'm glad that you suffer anxiety about how I see YOU - what's come out of these posts for me is how similar our risk-taking is from each to each. (Kath, private email to Gerard)

We decided to negotiate trust agreeing to keep our discoveries confidential and agreeing to have equal say over what ended up in this article. We pushed our games as far as we were prepared to go over a weekend residential. In such play, we used fantasy as a vehicle - revealing our desires as openly to each other as we could. Of all the material we played with and developed, we decided this fantasy material was most compelling. In this process we deliberately kept the fantasies as non-gender, non-body specific as possible. (Kath

has given many talks on sexuality and disability to college groups and has become rather weary of participants asking her how she does "it" feeling that her short limbs do not turn her sexual expression into some alien articulation. She usually tells her audience to close their eyes, imagine themselves having sex with a favourite person then to take away half an arm and half a leg. "Is it any different?" she asks them. Most are surprised to report that desire still feels like desire, no matter your limb count, perceived "difference", or "classified disability" (Baldwin 2000).

We wrote the fantasy material here together wanting to thrash, tease, tickle and taste the differences between us. While we present this material here as suggestion for what might be taken as a route through the troubled terrain that divides one body from another, one life from another, a gender, a culture, from others, we will not tell you everything we did. Some may consider the fantasy material here to be gratuitous, perhaps it is. For us, though, the fantasy material stands as moments of revelation of ourselves to each other taking the divisions that would discriminate us into the much more fluid soup of desire.

We have chosen to interleave some of these fantasies (in italics) with the other material in this text as a trace of this inter-subjective activity, but also to toy with the divides between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" desires, the fetishist and the "normal" person, the academic and the freak. In doing so, we also wish to critique the assumption of such a set of easily demarcated oppositions between the perverse and the norm especially as it appears in some of the literature on amputee fetishists, or devotees, as they are generally called.

Bruno, for instance, finds devotees troubling and repellent. According to his 1997 study devotees have 'a preference for a disabled or disfigured, and therefore less threatening, more attainable or more easily attainable "love object,"' stressing that "attraction to disabled persons has also been related to homosexuality, sadism and bondage" (Bruno 1997). Bruno's position is that devotees are way out of the "norm" and this emphasis on the importance of devotee desire being returned to the field of "normal" relationships is shared by other writers on the subject working within biomedical discourses, for instance, quite sympathetic treatments (Dixon 1983, Money & Simcoe 1984-86, Nattress 1996).

We wish to go further than such studies and suggest that everyone has this "out of the norm" potential in fantasy, something well established in psychoanalytic theory, if routinely foreclosed upon or overlooked in analyses of attraction to disabled people. *Dream Lover* and this article, unlike Bruno's work, do not attempt to stand outside of the fetish spectrum and judge desire, but rather seek to access our inner landscapes, the embarrassing and revealing movements of our secret longings.

Working him open with sweat and oil, I can tell he's a bit scared. I like that fear and move another couple of fingers in, twisting in circles. Soon, soon, I croon and when I have all my fingers inside and am twisting up to my knuckles, he is ready. I put the cock in his mouth and tell him to make it wet and slippery; he slurps a while until I take it and attach it to my harness. At his opening, moist and hot I press. I love you, I say and push in. He cries out; I slide and drive his song to me.

How Dream Lover Goes Down

Until I saw your film, I never realised how much I desired to be accepted totally, for who I am and for all my non-conventional thoughts...even in a reasonably conventional bod. (TAB woman, private email to Kath)

A fifty-two-minute documentary, *Dream Lover* is constructed from twenty-six hours of footage shot on a journey through amputee and fetishist gatherings in the United States which Kath attended as one of a four-person crew. The action reaches a climax in Chicago where two gatherings are on at once - the biggest meeting of amputees and the biggest meeting of fetishists. Audiences follow the tensions between the amputees and devotees, navigated through Kath's text and body, which she flaunts readily. Kath asserts her right to be a sexual adventurer by her engagement with the fetishists including scenes in bed with them. Her conflict is about to which group she "belongs", the backdrop against which the narrative plays itself out.

Dream Lover has created a stir wherever it is screened. It has been nominated for awards, screened at Amsterdam, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Toronto, Estonia and London film festivals, an international conference on sexuality and disability in San Francisco as well as multiple transmissions on its Australian commissioning network, SBS-TV. Audience responses have been generally colourful with some critics and viewers claiming disgust at the amputee fetish phenomenon. Others, including disabled people, being baffled by it while yet others again argue the fetish seems just another microcosm of the attraction-repulsion continuum universal to all sexual relations.

I found the devotees pretty creepy, but it was interesting nevertheless. ... I prefer not to be the object of someone's fetish, and to be loved for myself, so I'd tend to steer clear of the devotees (not that I find them so scary, it's just not what I'm looking for....(Disabled woman, private e-mail)

In another e-mail to Kath a TAB devotee wrote that media coverage of the "program highlighted the ignorance that exists regarding devotee issues." This devotee referred to a TV

reviewer in the Australian newspaper who opined that: "The devotees appear in the main, to comprise sleazy, mostly middle-aged men, made all the creepier by their veneer of sweet reason." The devotee strongly disagreed:

It is clear that these guys aren't sleazy, yet most people can't help themselves quickly labelling anything they don't understand. Even SBS put in the "Some viewers may find material in the following program disturbing" bit. No nudity, just amputees on national television. Now IT IS creepy, if people find that disturbing.

Indeed one viewer was so offended by both a promotional short for the video and the video itself that she protested to the national regulatory body, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA). (The ABA regulates voluntary codes of practices on broadcasting content which Australian television networks have developed and agree to abide by.) Responding to the complaint, the ABA found that *Dream Lover* did not breach relevant codes of practice regarding sex and nudity, although the promotional insert "containing images and verbal references unsuitable for children to watch" was upheld (ABA 1999). Possibly this viewer's and others' objections to the documentary stem from entrenched views of "appropriate" sexuality for disabled people.

At least part of the struggle for sexual access seems to lie in how disabled people are viewed, especially in the chase for sex, love and relationships. The charge that the sexually active disabled person is "acting out inappropriate behaviours" is a very common one from parents, friends, teachers, doctors, and workers in institutional care. Cultural representations, such as media and film, also do the work of policing the bounds of sexuality of disabled people (Duncan, Goggin, & Newell 2003). Recent studies of sexuality and disabled people question the way in which the accusation of "inappropriate behaviours" is often brought to bear against those who choose to express their sexual desires in any way whatsoever (Hindell 2000).

To many viewing *Dream Lover*, such as the disgruntled viewer above, amputee devotees may appear to be a "fringe" or "marginal" group, but the documentary questions this neat consignment of such desires to the status of a "fetish". Turning its gaze on TAB men in particular the documentary suggests the distance between fetish and love, weirdo and normal guy, may collapse quite radically when it comes to disabled bodies. For example, one TAB male post screening had this to say to Kath:

I am not a devotee, but you are terribly sexy. When I saw your show advertised I checked out the sites on the net. I now can relate to the sexual attraction of amputees. The attraction I see in you relates to your personality and body shape. In, there words if you were born with 4

limbs you would still be an attractive and erotic woman... I don't see stumps as sexy, what is sexy is the whole body. Like imagining your beautiful fanny in a setting that is different. It is a very erotic thought, the idea of licking your inner thighs and sucking your fanny without the leg getting in the way;-). (private e-mail to Kath)

Kath has found herself in the tricky position of being criticised by some members of the disability community for being seen as encouraging the exploitation and objectification of disabled people while also being commended for her "bravery" in presenting the documentary. Friends and colleagues who knew Kath was besotted with her girl friend Jill when she made the documentary were astonished at Kath's eager embrace of the devotees. Kath is unashamed to admit that she was not on a filmic search for love and happily-ever-after. Rather, she wanted to expand her sexual repertoire with amputee devotees of any gender, but no lesbian devotees would speak to camera. As given in the film, her response is:

If I told you there was a place you could be completely adored, just for who you are, wouldn't you wanna go there? If you had to cross oceans to get there, wouldn't you wanna try? If you could make your most secret fantasies come true, how could you resist?

They hire that video again, quiet Saturday night. Our guests retire early, tired from the journey north, and wishing to hold each other close. My housemate's shirt is unbuttoned, her breasts clearly showing. We watch the scene in the film where they fuck, while the video is on, play it back, and fuck some more. I lie on the floor, propped on my elbows with the warmth rising. She walks across, kneels and starts playing with my hair, kissing my neck. Her strong arm across my chest, she turns me over, and straddles me, moving on me, in me, while all the while not taking her eye off the screen. She takes in their climax, absorbing it, and falls, sharply suffused by her own.

The Love Goddess Fantasy

There is something uneasy in the amputee's wonderland in Chicago, some dilemma for Kath Duncan between her body and her mind. In the midst of this dilemma we witness Kath Duncan start to discover herself, her sexuality, and her corporeal difference. She is ready to explore the wonderland of desire of corporeal difference that is, more specifically, 'amputee bodies'. For the first time in her life she enters the wonderland in which she, congenital amputee, is looked upon as a sex object and her stumps are seen as a desirable part, like breast(s). (Inahara 1999)

A documentary can only ever tell part of a story, selecting a few moments of a subject's life and ordering them. A production team crafted *Dream Lover's* structure: the production credits reveal Kath's role as writer/researcher with producer, director and editor credits going to the team responsible for the video's narrative.

Kath has observed how many viewers imagine a nonexistent love-life for her prior to her discovery of amputee devotees as though she is, as suggested in the above quotation from Inahara's reading above, only "start(ing) to discover herself, her sexuality, and her corporeal difference" through their eyes. This point of view recurs so often in audiences that Kath sees it as one of the major flaws of the work while acknowledging that it appears to work as a hook for an audience who might otherwise be repelled by the notion of a disabled person accessing fetish for fun. The *Dream Lover* post-production team told Kath that her statements about her active bisexuality and hedonistic lifestyle "only complicated the story" and would be cut.

Indeed, TABs are not the only people who experience discomfort around disabled peoples' sexual desires. As a survey referred to in *The Sexual Politics of Disability* suggests, disabled people can find it difficult to talk about sexuality issues, even to each other. (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells & Davies 1996) And while the rights of a disabled person to access sexual pleasure through the sex industry, marry, or have babies are an ongoing site of activist struggle, access to sexual experiences like fetish, queersex, and dominance and submission games, for example, remains contested terrain both within and outside disability circles (for example, see Kafer 2000). If we take sexual access to mean that all disabled people should have the right to full expression of their sexualities, in whatever form they choose, then we indeed have a long way to go, both inside and outside of disability movements. *Dream Lover* is about refusing to accept the notion of "appropriate behaviours" which determines the most "appropriate" manifestation of disabled sexuality should be asexuality alone (Taleporos 2001). The quest outlined in the documentary is that of exploring desire to wherever it leads.

Two intrinsic fantasies lie at the core of Kath's purpose in making the documentary: her desire to have her stumps sensualised and the fantasy of locating people who would be into and actively engaged in issues around disability culture - her "people" who might recognise her as equal. In fact, it is a compelling search for a homeland. She fantasised a sort of spiritual and bodily communion with the devotees possibly because she has hung around amputees most of her life and never yet seen anyone with her configuration leaving her somewhat bodily detached from mainstream and amputee cultures. Possibly because sexuality has given Kath some of her most powerful insights, she dreamed that if no other one-legged, one-armed beings like her existed, then maybe those who desire

such a creature might be her "people".

What is at stake here for Kath is the dream of belonging, of entering into, or constructing a culture, a space, in which she no longer felt so far from home, so homeless (Naficy 1999). The space, which Kath inhabits, might be described as uncanny, appropriating a famous term from psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud's terms for the word uncanny is *unheimlich*. The uncanny is a space of the estranged curious, a long way from home. To anneal the uncanny may be to find a way of dealing with exile. In Kath's case, the exile is internal to the society which is supposed to be her home. She is putatively a member of a society and its body politic, yet the cultural imaginary of that society, the body upon which it is founded and imagined, is not a body which she is able to speculate upon (Le Doeuf 1989; Butler 1993).

Just as the dominant body has been a masculine one, so too has it been a body which seeks to abolish bodily differences, differences across different people and their subjectivities. Entering into such a society requires an identification with the embodiment of its cultural imaginary to achieve and sustain a recognisable identity. Desire is shaped on this model and to inhabit this land is not possible for many who are not turned on by this as their bodies and desires lie elsewhere - in another land. Their lack of fit with the cultural imaginary, their failure to shape up against the measure of bodily norms, marks their exile. To project an alternative cultural imaginary is a response to make sense of this: an opening for alterity, a space where other types of identity, and even other mechanisms of identification, may be predicable.

Stump sex was a revelation. Kath found it fascinating to have her stumps eroticised as she had not particularly seen them as erotic despite a number of women lovers realising the phallic potential of her arm stump. The sensation of rubbing her arm stump against a penis was a feast of the senses in texture as well as effect. On the other hand some devotees' excitement in humping her leg stump was to her remarkably unarousing producing instead an uncomfortable boredom also noted by one of researcher Ray Aguilera's interview subjects in his article on the devotee attraction (Aguilera 2000). The man who spoke to Aguilera described the attentions of the devotee to his stump as "twenty minutes of...nonsense," followed by "unexciting, mechanical sex" - a response with which Kath can identify confronted as she was by the response to her stumps. Despite Aguilera's use of this story, the balance of his article encourages disabled people to explore their desires with whomsoever they wish, consonant with the battle of disabled people for sexual access. In his reflections upon the devotee phenomenon Aguilera deconstructs Bruno's premise that disabled people are less desirable and only attractive to someone with some sort of "problem" disrupting Bruno's definition of devoteeism as deviance.

In her erotic games with six devotees, Kath found degrees

of stump fetishisation amusing and surprising her with its intensity. While relishing the lust factor, there was something about being the target of the devotees' gaze that mirrored her discomfort about being the target of the gaze in her regular life (Thomson 2001). She feels that she crossed the Pacific from Australia to play with devotees in the USA only to find herself examined under the same close scrutiny over there - "is she a freak I want or not?"

Such an experience reminded her of the dismal experiences she'd had with male and female doctors and male prosthetists: treating her like a problematic object rarely asking her feelings about what they were doing, let alone her permission, while engaging in very intrusive touching and questions. A stance which was not at such a distant remove from the rapists and abusers she has come across, mostly men so far. Similarly, most devotees appeared to be largely uninterested in her image of herself and concentrated their energies on her outline.

Despite this, Kath admits she also has devotee buddies she could have sex and even fall in love with. She feels that the fantasy of communion through fetish works better than the reality, but totally recommends the devotee experiment to any adventurers. She met many amputees as well who could have provided a place of belonging because they were far more interested in discussing difference than the devotees had they not had obvious difficulties with Kath's bohemian personality and wild wardrobe. This evoked for Kath a parallel discordance she has experienced with disability cultures.

Kath has worked in disability activism for the past twenty years in alternative, mainstream, and community-based radio, video and film making, in lecturing on disability issues, and in grass-roots organisations and performance groups. She has most of this time struggled with the rejection of her unconventional lifestyle choices within mainstream disability movements and their funding bodies and 'support' systems. Conversely, her belonging within queer communities is complicated by her impairments with a sense of "uncoolness" still lingering over disability though much less intensely so than before the HIV/AIDS rights movements' efforts (Jakubowicz & Meekhosha 2001; on Australian queer see Jackson & Sullivan 1999 and Offord 2001).

Kath's filmic itinerary in search of another place takes her to another continent, to the landscape that promises to be the other side of the land of the limb-makers - a locale in which she is the cynosure of desire. Yet the distance between the biomedical gaze and the adoring one, she suspects, is not so very far. The devotee gaze is enabled by dominant, powerful envisioning of different bodies. The structure of the cultural imaginary is dependent on the biomedical ordering and assignment of bodies. The excessive desire of devotees springs from a transgressive overturning of this ordained order of things. The trajectory from Australia's Rainbow Region (the far North Coast of the state of New South Wales where Kath lives) to mid-West Chicago allows the staging of a binary opposition between amputee bodies and TAB desire. Yet such

staging amounts to a performance in which detachment from mainstream society and cult status in minority group are both found to be ultimately not the places Kath wishes to be.

Her fingers grasp for my cock, and her hair flicks across my belly. She pulls me down, and I enter, a sharp intake of shared breath joining us, as she pushes hard against me. We kiss, and I am lost in the taste of her, while we move together, both seeping, both rubbing. As I plunge deepest, I am split open. She holds my buttocks apart, and guides his cock into my flesh. I can only feel, while he clenches hard inside me, and they both link hands over my head.

Adventures with Able-Bodied Men

Kath: When I mentioned that it was part of the *Dream Lover* fantasy to find able-bodied men with an interest in disability, and the failure of that fantasy to be realised, I wanted to go on to say that you could, in a strangely academic way, be the next step in the process. That is, my fantasy figure of the TAB bloke trying to relate/understand/exchange. This is not meant to freak you out, but possibly explain another entry point....
(Kath, private email to Gerard)

We take Kath's disappointed desires around *Dream Lover* to be an important sign which requires interpretation, something which signifies that a yearned for space and experience has not yet been reached - a common experience too with TAB desires. One dimension of this space is its capacity to sustain relationships among disabled people and TAB including satisfying, rich, exciting, non-exploitative exchanges across sexual divides of all sorts, not least between disabled women and TAB men. Our wager here was to try a "strangely academic" turn whereby Gerard might occupy for a short time the fantasy figure of sympathetic TAB bloke.

One of Gerard's own interests in dialogue with disabled people, and in fashioning new sorts of relationships, is in continuing an interrogation and exploration of his own identity, body and sexuality. The emerging insights and concepts of disability studies for him extend ideas learnt from feminism, masculinity studies, queer theory, and also from other social movements. One of the difficulties, and also joys, in thinking about *Dream Lover* is that, like all good post-modern video, it anticipates and prefigures subsequent commentary and critique. Kath's asides to camera, and her voiceovers, provide a running guerrilla gloss on the breathtaking complexities of human desire as it unfolds in near real-time around her and with her.

Gerard first watched *Dream Lover* when he invited Kath to screen it for his class. He found it contradictory, entertaining, and profoundly disturbing. He appreciated Kath's incisive on-screen commentary to camera on the developing events. He felt particularly queasy at the scenes in which

Kath sat down with a couple of devotees to review erotic videos starring amputees. Tacky porn can simultaneously attract and repel, but there was something disturbing about the excerpts from these specimens of the genre, something which made him feel like the women depicted were being subjected to a process of abjection. There was something else beside this dis-ease: not having an intense fascination for stumps himself, Gerard is uncertain about them. He suspects that this too may raise deep emotions related to fears of bodily difference; difference that he would project, and is normally projected, as the difference between his body and others. Yet this is likely to be difference that is quite internal, fears of his own body's difference with itself, as well as his own body's difference with dominant bodies, bodies that are desired and that are to be desired.

One fear is that of bodily loss and disintegration, the fear occasioned when one imagines one's own body to be damaged, the cluster of concepts around embodiment, sexuality, gender, morphology and identity that in psychoanalysis has long and controversially been called the "castration complex". A corollary fear is a TAB perception that one's own power might be curtailed: a culturally dominant assumption about the lack of power, resources or capacity that disabled people might have, but predicated on an almost complete lack of knowledge about disability. In general, it could be argued, most TABs labour under a phantasm of disability (Stiker 1999). And as well a self-deluding myth about the power per se and the invulnerability and immutability of the TAB body (see O'Connor 2002: 11-12). Fundamentally, the differences among bodies are too varied and too great to be consigned to either side of a binary between disabled and non-disabled bodies, yet such a distinction is still routinely installed and creates and polices a force field which renders illegible other sorts of affiliations and commonalities (Mitchell & Synder 2000).

For Gerard, what is particularly challenging and useful in *Dream Lover* is the thoroughgoing interrogation Kath makes of devotee desire. Like Kath, Gerard too can see the allure in a fantasy of finding oneself totally loved and adored, of following the thread of desire to a land of plenitude, of being able to render accessible new forms of personal and sexual expression. Part of Gerard's fascination is Kath's ability to track this fantasy to where it may lead and then to be able to articulate her feelings as it vanishes before her eyes. Kath is comfortable in listening to people express their desires to her, even if she finds it unsettling as she does ultimately with some of the devotees. What is exemplary, Gerard imagines, is this openness to others' desires and what one learns from that about one's own desires. This evokes an ethical stance that seeks to stay open for the other, and the experience of otherness, and to make sense of the unsettling feelings aroused when the relation between self and other(s) short circuits.

It is here that the video most acutely questions

heteronormativity and the inscription of Gerard's own desires as a TAB male (something with which he acquiesces and resists). In *Dream Lover* an economy of watcher and watched can already be found in the video creating positions into which those watching itself can place themselves. There is a sense in which, as a viewer, Gerard's own desiring gaze and desire to know are already inscribed in this play of observers and those observed, cameras and subjects, watchers and watched, seduction on-camera and one-can-only-guess-what-happens-off-camera (Mulvey 1989, Kaplan 1997). It is easy to represent the devotees as a peculiar, perverse group and it is easy to understand why the Amputee Coalition of America, attending a conference in the same city - Chicago - as the devotee group, also views the devotees in this way.

A distancing response from the position of devotee on the part of other, male viewers, such as Gerard himself, can be genuine and appropriate too. Yet it may also be too easy a reaction serving to seal the boundaries between inappropriate and appropriate gazes, perverse and normal viewing, lecher and lecturer. Here Gerard recalls the ironic title of Canadian director Atom Egoyan's film *Family Viewing* (1987), a text which tracks the operation of social and individual desire at a much more profound level than other stereotypically voyeuristic films such as Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989). Disturbing the propriety of the filmic spectator, deranging what is proper, a film such as *Dream Lover* may in this way reveal a great deal more about the social shaping of disability and sexuality than keeping one's proper distance.

Questioning the ease with which perverse devotee, or amputee, desires may be scorned is surely an important step here. In any case, Gerard finds it difficult to obtain easy repose in the embodiment of the TAB gaze when contemplating *Dream Lover*, or discussing it with Kath, or his students. He finds that the emotions it raises unsettle himself and other viewers leaving them no choice but to precipitate themselves into interpretation and so to take a risk. With *Dream Lover*, the body of the TAB viewer as much as the fractious bodies on screen - Kath's, devotees, amputees, passers-by - are put into question and socially ordained forms of bodies and desires disrupted time and time again.

Dark fur has a musky scent - his teeth are enormous. Gripped by arms and legs heavy with muscle, he is inside me and we are rolling around, a ball of flesh and pelt. Which way is up? I can't tell anymore because what I feel is the fur's thickness, his cock throbbing, the speed at which we're tumbling matting my hair into his chest. The ape and I are not speaking, we're grunting and I have no control...

Utopias Have a Certain Attraction

For Kath the *Dream Lover* journey remains a truly self-

indulgent and unforgettable experience which has also opened up unexpected insights on her self and her body. On the downside, she did not locate her long-sought homeland and the power of the TAB gaze continues to hit her over-exposed skin. However, one important payoff from the documentary has been realising how deeply her dialogue with TAB men has been haunted by the doctors, rapists, abusers and limb-makers.

To explore the messy, open-ended issues *Dream Lover* raises, we made an agreement in July 2001 to be available, and vulnerable, for our own experiment: not just to listen and respond, but to give each other access, to share our bodily experience, our secrets, our ideas and fantasies. This reciprocity made no new laws, did not advise on public policy, did not release a government report, staged no protest rallies and built no ramps, but did make this story come together. The style, content and process are a departure from Gerard's usual academic repertoire. For Kath, working in close collaboration with one TAB male on such intimate issues is shockingly new. We invented what sexual access might be for us. For Kath and Gerard this article is one moment where it has been possible to trust and to exchange safely with the "other", to recognise and work with the fraught politics of utopia. We've created something together which moves us and hopefully also makes a contribution to the possibilities of exchanges traversing the centres and margins of disability and sexuality - a utopia with a certain attraction.

Gerard has found that the encounter around *Dream Lover*, not least the collaborative writing with Kath, has opened him to new ways to figure his own bodies and desires and ways of unlearning and relearning his inherited and devised notions of people and disability. It's also reminded him of the importance of travelling to other places, and the power, as well as politics, of fantasies.

In the wake of *Dream Lover* Kath now more than ever appreciates her family and the community she has built up around common interests and politics. In the last few years Kath has accessed queer disability movements. In a bent twist of fate it appears there might be room here for all her identities. She has also embarked on a new adventure - she's learning circus skills. Inspired by disabled performers and TAB colleagues, Kath is strengthening her muscles and the flexibility of her entire body. She's off to join her fellow freaks where having an unusual body is an asset.

There is no end to our fantasies...

Fantasy of a world of absolute freedom, a paradise beyond poverty, coercion, torture, bodily stereotypes, sexual repression, nastiness. Socialism plus - socialism plus all the exotic, delicious things of life. Revolution: political, sexual, emotional, intellectual - complete transformation. Community that actually works.

#Learn to paint; make web-sites; have a child; make every day an artistic and creative happening, even cleaning the

bathroom or making a sandwich. To meet cripples with hot stories; media producers from any side of the mic/camera/screen; engaging artistic types of any gender/culture/ability; sexy queer guys and butchy queer girls.

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