The social model of disability as oppositional device.

Authors

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Abstract

This article engages with debates about the UK Disabled People's Movement's 'Big Idea' – the social model of disability - positioning this as an 'oppositional device'. This concept is adapted from the work of the art activist and theorist Brian Holmes, elaborated using insights from Foucault and others. The model's primary operation is introducing contingency into the present, facilitating disabled people's resistance-practices. We recognise, however, that the device can operate in a disciplinary manner when adopted by a machinery of government. Whilst our primary goal is to understand the character and operation of the social model, by providing a more general definition of an oppositional device as the concrete operation of technologies of power, we also propose a concept potentially useful for the analysis of the resistance-practices of activists involved in a wide variety of struggles. This concept may thus have implications for wider social and political analysis.

Keywords

social model of disability; oppositional device; technology; resistance; social movements; biopower.

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Points of Interest

- This article is a fresh intervention into debates about the 'Big Idea' of the UK Disabled People's Movement – the social model of disability.
- It considers the social model of disability as an 'oppositional device'.
- The concept of an 'oppositional device' is adapted from the work of the art activist and theorist Brian Holmes, elaborated using Michel Foucault's concepts of technology, resistance and bio-power.
- Whilst others have argued that the social model should be understood as a 'tool', we argue that the concept of an 'oppositional device' has greater relevance for sociological analysis when seeking to understand the *operations* of the model.
- The article describes the operations of oppositional devices in general and the specific operations of the social model as an oppositional device.

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Introduction

The social model of disability has been called 'the Big Idea' of the UK Disabled People's Movement (DPM) (Hasler 1993). The model has been highly influential. Whilst it possesses many loyal advocates, it has been hotly contested (Tregaskis 2002; Oliver 2013) with calls made for it to be 'reclaimed', 'revised', 'rectified' (Allan 2010) or even 'abandoned' (Shakespeare and Watson 2001). In what follows we employ the term 'social model' (all small-case) to refer to UPIAS' (1976) original interpretation of disability. According to this interpretation, society disables people who have impairments:

> 'Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.' (UPIAS 1976, 4)

We distinguish this interpretation from the later 'Social Model' (initial letters capitalised) formalised most notably by Oliver (1990). It is the former rather than the latter that concerns us here.

We seek to make a fresh intervention to the social model debates. Where our approach differs from previous interventions is that we do not seek to determine whether the model is 'right' or 'wrong' (i.e. in relation to its 'explanation' of/for disability), but rather to understand 'what it is' and 'how it operates'. To achieve this, we begin by adopting Hawes' (1975, 111) distinction between theory and model, understanding the former as providing *explanation* and the latter as a *representation* (description) of 'salient structural and/or functional features, properties, or characteristics of another object or process'. Debates about the social model's explanatory capacity are therefore problematic, since the social model is a 'model' *not* a theory and does not, therefore, provide explanation for the disablement process – it *describes* this process. Seeking to understand how the model operates is, however, more feasible according to this understanding of a model. To do this one must first understand the model's origins.

As most readers of this journal will know, the social model did not emerge from the academy. It was born of resistance on the part of disability activists – resistance instigated by Paul Hunt in 1972 (letter in the Guardian 20th September) and progressed by members of UPIAS, the organisation that Hunt played such an important role in founding. This resistance was able to 'identify its injuries and to articulate its grievances' (Hoy 2005, 6). The social model was the product of this resistance and enabled further resistance practices on the part of disabled people and their allies. For sure, the social model is not the only model or idea proposed by the DPM that could be said to have enabled resistance practices - in future articles we intend to apply the analytical framework proposed herein to examine other models/ideas e.g. the

affirmation model (Swain and French 2000) - but we argue that the social model has been particularly effective in this regard.

In our approach we are influenced by Foucault's theorisation of practices and technologies. Foucault not only illuminates the effects of *disciplinary* practices, allowing for an understanding of the ways in which the body becomes a docile target of power, his ontology of power also allows us to understand how such disciplinary practices are *resisted*, and how power not only produces *docile* bodies, but also *resistant* bodies. When, as has often been the case within Disability Studies, the principal or sole focus is upon Foucault's historical analyses, characterised as they are by a focus upon disciplinary practices, implications of his insistence that power is a productive and not repressive force, one that defines the boundaries of regimes of truth and produces objects, tend not to be given due emphasis.

Within Disability Studies, Foucauldian approaches (e.g. Titchkosky 2003; Tremain 2005a) have presented powerful description of the role of 'biopower's normalizing strategies' in the production and regulation of 'docile bodies', the host of practices and procedures that have 'created, classified, codified, managed, and controlled social anomalies through which some people have been divided from others and *objectivised* as (for instance) physically impaired, insane, handicapped, mentally retarded, and deaf' (Tremain 2005b, 5-6).

We suggest that Disability Studies needs to give due emphasis, however, to Foucault's proposition that resistance is ontologically *prior* to power. Revel (2008), following Foucault (1997a, b), makes it apparent that resistance should be understood as both *ontologically* and *chronologically* prior to power. We understand this to mean that to be able to state with certainty that what is present is a 'power relation' rather than domination, it is necessary to recognise the prior existence of the capacity to resist in a given situation. Resistance is a transgenerational, creative force, arising from the collective character of human existence, allowing for the present to be overcome and the world to be remade. Contrary to many interpretations, therefore, Foucault does not underestimate our capacity to resist. He did not intend his work to be interpreted as suggesting that 'we are always trapped', but instead 'that we are always free - well, anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing' (Foucault 1997a, 167). He seeks to augment resistance by providing us with a method – genealogy – that allows for description of that which needs to be resisted. His own work has been interpreted as his own act of resistance accordingly (Hoy 2005; Miller 1993).

We recognise a certain affinity between Foucault's genealogical approach understood as description of that which needs to be resisted and the social model understood as description of a process which needs to be resisted: *disablement*. Foucault was employing genealogy as a method of critique, aiming to destabilise the present, bringing history and the future into view. Disability activists have employed the social model in a similar vein. We seek to understand how, precisely, the social model has and does operate to make possible resistance-practices on the part of disabled people. In

answering this question we argue that the social model allows for the repetition of a particular style of practice and the amplification of particular goals.

Moving with and beyond Foucault, we argue that the social model can be understood as an 'oppositional device' - a concept we borrow from art activist and theorist Brian Holmes (2007). We are attracted to Holmes's work not least because of his dual status as academic and member of the activist association, Ne Pas Plier (Do Not Bend). His work on the intersections of artistic and political practice and the philosophy and politics of resistance is inspired by Foucault, but also by Guattari and Deleuze. He seeks critical and constructive paths towards emancipation and his work can be read as a 'call to action' on the part of readers. We adopt and elaborate his concept of the oppositional device by drawing upon the work of Hardt and Negri, Revel and Proust, who in their various (and not dissimilar) ways offer a useful 'analytic of resistance' (Proust 2000). Their work, we suggest, provides a framework for describing practices of invention, collaboration and resistance deployed by people against disciplining practices of subjectivation, to make themselves anew. Positioning the social model as an 'oppositional device' will allow us to consider how the model has made possible just such practices on the part of disabled people. In so doing we demonstrate the importance of the DPM as a case-study – one largely overlooked within the field of Social Movement Studies (Beckett 2006) - the analysis of which proves valuable in furthering our understanding of the resistance-practices of the governed.

Through positioning the social model as an oppositional device we are able to analyse the various operations that it performs in the movement, the distinct and unique questions that the social model allows us to ask and the specific fields of resistance that it opens up. We are seeking to establish an analytical framework that befits the creativity of activists within the DPM. We hope to offer activists within the DPM a new framework for analysing the effectiveness of particular strategies of resistance. The article is therefore both a celebration of the success and potency of the resistance practices of the DPM and an analysis of these practices that we hope will be of use to activists, allowing them to reflect upon their successes, consider the challenges ahead and identify strategies for over-coming these. We acknowledge that there are certain affinities between our objectives and those of Gabel and Peters (2004 and with Symenonideu 2009). We suggest that whilst we employ a different array of concepts as part of our analysis, our article might usefully be read alongside theirs.

This article reflects our wider concern with developing a 'cartography of power', understanding how subjects themselves are engaged in the production of subjectivity through resistance-practices (Proust 2000). In particular, we are interested in describing how social movement activists produce not 'ideas', but *counter-rationalities*, in so doing transforming themselves and the world in which we all live.

Analysts of biopolitics have long recognised the mutual conditioning of the discursive and the material and could even be said to have refused their separation. In Foucault, in particular, we see a refusal of all forms of transcendental analysis. Ideas, for Foucault,

are not ethereal - floating above society. Instead of talking about 'ideas', he describes the co-production of *knowledge* and processes of subjectivation in the material world. What Foucault provides is a way of exploring the logics that regulate ideas and a mode of analysis that understands ideas as discursive formations, interdependent upon non-discursive formations and relations of power; constituting a *dispositif*. A Foucauldian approach to understanding ideas in social movements would therefore necessarily entail the reframing of ideas produced through activism as *discursive formations* and the study of the 'heterogeneous amalgams of discursive and extradiscursive [non-discursive] practices and their technological accoutrements' (Faubion 1998, xxxiii) within movements. Further, we propose that a Foucauldian analytical framework would rest upon an understanding of knowledge as something practiced in mundane and specific situations and power as diffused throughout society, being *relational*, rather than centred *only* on the organs of the state. It would thus allow for description of how specific practices and procedures of activists are inserted into 'regimes of truth' - 'general politics of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133) - and how it becomes possible for these practices to be repeated as part of a process of social struggle. In what follows we present an analysis of how the social model as oppositional device allows for the proliferation of such practices.

Defining oppositional devices

A number of leading authors and defenders of the social model have described it as a 'tool' (Finkelstein 2001; Oliver 2004). We propose that when analysing the resistance-practices of disabled people, rather than deploying the term 'tool', the concept of an 'oppositional device' (Holmes 2007) provides greater analytical purchase. Holmes (2007, 36) begins his formulation of this concept by drawing upon Foucault's notion of the 'device', which Holmes describes as:

> 'the concrete operation of an abstract structure. It refers to the corporeal, technical and symbolic configuration of a particular social relation.'

Building on Holmes' definition, we propose that these 'abstract structures' be understood as 'technologies' – the term technology being employed here in a Foucauldian sense. Further, we understand technologies as 'technologies of *power*' in that they direct the flow of power onto specific sites, modulating its effects. Devices might therefore be understood as the concrete operation of technologies of power and *oppositional* devices, in particular, as concrete operations of technologies of power articulated as part of the resistance-practices of the governed.

Holmes (2007, 37) proceeds to elaborate this concept. Such devices, he argues, are 'deliberately abnormal' (i.e. they are disruptive of the 'norm') and proceed by inserting themselves and distorting:

> a corporeal, technical and symbolic configuration of normalized social relations, in such a way as to provoke dissenting public speech.

In devising this definition Holmes blends Foucault with ideas arising in the work of Guattari and Deleuze (the former in particular). He appears to be attracted by their celebration of creativity (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). He does this in an effort to address a critique often directed towards Foucault's historical studies (in particular 'Discipline and Punish'). As noted above, critics have argued that Foucault overemphasises the *coercive character* of technologies of power (see McLaren 2002 on this line of critique within feminism). It is on the basis of such critique that Hughes (2005) questions the utility of Foucault for analysis within Disability Studies. For Holmes (2007, 2), Guattari's work is helpful because it allows for a reversal of 'Foucault's coercive structures into processes of emancipation', so rescuing Foucault from an understanding of power as domination. Whilst we understand Holmes' desire to make this move, we believe Guattari and Deleuze *complement* rather than *correct* Foucault, because Foucault's (1996, 625) ontology of power makes clear that power is not 'omnipotent':

> If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations (…) it would simply be a matter of obedience (…) So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process.

Further, resistance is not simply about a refusal for Foucault, it is also a creative practice - it is *transformative*. Holmes might legitimately have based his definition of an oppositional device solely upon Foucault's writing, with no need to turn to Guattari. Employing Guattari's work in this way merely strengthens Foucault's own understanding of resistance.

That said, ours is an adaption rather than adoption of Holmes's concept, diverging from his definition in one key respect. Rather than understanding oppositional devices as patterns of behaviour, we suggest that they *allow* for the generation, reorganisation and proliferation of a type of behaviour: resistance-practices. In particular, they allow for the refusal of the forces of subjection – of the entwining relations of biopower and capital, that shape the contours of our flesh (Foucault 1977), producing bodies (individual and collective) that are hospitable to the accumulation of capital. They also make available an array of practices that can then be employed in subjectivation, allowing for the remaking of individual and collective bodies. What we are doing here is drawing upon Foucault's distinction between subjectivation that produces the subject

as object of knowledge, and that which produces the subject as object for him/herself (Foucault 1998). Oppositional devices, through insertion into and reanimation of specific 'corporeal, technical and symbolic configuration[s] of normalized social relations' (Holmes 2007, 37), distort the entwining relations of biopower and capital.

There is much to be gained analytically from positioning the 'Big Ideas' of social movements as oppositional devices that have a number of intersecting operations including:

a) allowing practices, programmes and rationalities to be identified as unjust;
b) harnessing and orientating practices of resistance towards such programmes, procedures and rationalities;
c) allowing formation of counter-rationalities and the dispersal, proliferation and repetition of practices and statements informed and promulgated by said counter-rationalities;
d) facilitating analysis - allowing statements, policies and institutions to be evaluated;
e) allowing establishment of a social movement's vocabulary and delineation of what can be said if an enunciation is to be associated with a movement and boundaries that once crossed result in a statement losing meaning for, and possibly approval of a movement;
f) providing a framework of agreed values allowing repetition of resistance-practices in sites different from those in which the oppositional device was formed and for those engaged in seemingly disconnected struggles to recognise their shared purpose;
g) allowing members of social movements to act strategically and as one.

In stating that oppositional devices are concrete operations of technologies of power, we draw upon Foucault's typology of four main technologies:

> (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect (…) a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves.

This typology is useful, but for our purposes we wish to re-classify Foucault's third type of technology as 'technologies of discipline'. We argue that in fact all of these technologies (1-4) are 'technologies of power' in that they permit the life of another to

be *directed* i.e. they are concerned with the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2000; Gordon 1991).

Inspired by Holmes, we argue that devices (of whatever type) are the concrete operation of any combination and number of these technologies. *Oppositional* devices, however, are most often the concrete operation of technologies 1, 2 and 4 (any one or combination thereof). Such devices oppose machineries of government that whilst not limited to, always involve technologies of discipline (technology 3). That said, oppositional devices may also be/become the concrete operation of a technology of discipline if/when they are employed by a machinery of government (inside/outside a movement). Machineries of government will find ways to deploy oppositional devices to achieve goals laid out by a rationality of government, or animate an oppositional device as a technology of discipline. This does not mean that the device in question ceases to be an oppositional device, but rather points to the way in which even technologies invented to extend the boundaries of human freedom can be repurposed against such goals. As Foucault (in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 231-2) reminds us, 'nothing' is 'either good or bad', rather 'everything is dangerous'. When an oppositional device is taken up by a machinery of government it will inevitably be employed 'to structure the possible field of action of others', since this is what it means to 'govern' (Foucault 1982, 790). This structuring of a possible field of action might not be negative, but it has the potential to be. We should therefore be alert to the dangers even of oppositional devices.

The 'social model' as an oppositional device

We argue that the social model operates as an oppositional device in all of the ways suggested above.

First, as the concrete operation of a technology of production the social model 'produces' two distinct concepts: 'impairment' and 'disability'. Similarly, it 'produces' the concepts of a disabling society, institutions and barriers. It 'produces' two types of person: the disabled and the non-disabled person. It 'produces' a collective body - 'disabled people' - a new 'we'. It is clear from the earliest documents produced by UPIAS (see for example the 'extract from UPIAS Circular 3', written by Finkelstein in 1972: http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/finkelstein-03-Extraction-from-UPIAS-Circular.pdf) that they recognised the importance of connecting the isolated struggles of individuals and establishing this new 'we' i.e. collective resistance. The message conveyed in this document is clear: *we* are oppressed, *we* must struggle to change society.

Second, as the concrete operation of a technology of sign systems, it has delineated the type of statement and practice that has come to be associated with the UK DPM. In this way, the social model has given statements and practices emanating from the movement coherency, allowing them to operate as a 'regime of truth' (a historically specific assemblage of rationalities that produces the limits of what can be considered

to be true, in a specific field and at a particular time). The formation of a regime of truth allows for the establishment of benchmarks against which other statements can be *judged* and connects practices made significant beyond their singular instantiation, allowing the activist agenda to be broadened as new sites for resistance become visible. For example, the social model operating as an oppositional device has allowed such statements as 'biology is destiny' and that the assigned role of disabled people is determined by 'natural' inferiority (Linton 1998) and connected practices such as segregated education, to be challenged here in the UK.

Third, as the concrete operation of a technology of the self it has allowed, and continues to allow users of the model to work upon themselves, primarily through the transformation of their bodies via the expulsion of the personal tragedy narrative. It provides activists with a framework for opposing the determination of their conduct, to be antagonistic to the forces of subjection and subjugation, and to gain some control of the process of subjectivation. The social model, as an oppositional device, allowed disability activists to re-direct relations of bio-power setting in motion a metamorphosis of subjectivities. As an oppositional device it has allowed those once categorised as 'handicapped', 'infirm', 'invalid', 'biological anomalies' and 'naturally inferior' to reject these categories, to make themselves anew as an oppressed group: disabled people.

Finally, like any oppositional device it has the capacity to be deployed as the concrete operation of a technology of discipline and there is little doubt that the model has been deployed in just such a manner over the course of its history. The model has been deployed in this way by forces exterior to the movement, and perhaps to some degree also by forces interior to the movement.

Starting with the latter, in a well-known article, Shakespeare and Watson (2001, 9) claimed that the social model had become the 'ideological litmus test' of the movement – by this they appear to mean that the model has been employed dogmatically. Peters et al (2009) make a similar argument. We agree to a point. The social model has allowed for the formation of a new 'regime of truth', one that opposes (intersecting/interacting) regimes of truth generated and sustained by medicine, psychology, education and capitalism. We would repeat our argument, however, that as such the model has operated to help distinguish, perhaps even determine, the statements and practices associated with the movement. As the movement's 'Big Idea' its operation in this regard has been highly significant. It has been structuring of a possible field of action of others. Where we diverge from Shakespeare and Watson is that we do not view this operation of the model in as negative terms. This operation of the model has in fact been productive. It has allowed for the creation of unity, establishment of a coherent political strategy and, arguably, has been key to the establishment of the movement itself.

That said, since all devices are dangerous, we must always remain sensitive to the risks associated with operating such instruments, including the unintended consequences of operation, user-error and intentional misuse. In our view, the most acute examples of

the latter have actually occurred when the model has been deployed by some parties *external* to the UK DPM. The social model has travelled far beyond the movement. It has been co-opted by the state. This co-option has proliferated a peculiar version of the device into unexpected sites and machineries of government where it appears to be functioning as part of disciplinary mechanisms. For example, the current Government's Office for Disability Issues claims to have adopted a social model understanding of disability, but in our view this is an impoverished version of the model that equates to an emphasis on the removal of barriers in order to increase independence/autonomy and reduce the 'risk' of dependency. This distinctly neo-liberal repurposing of the model fails to acknowledge the complex nature of oppression and arguably employs the model as part of a project of responsibilization and neo-liberal citizenship (Rose 2007) – a project not at all in keeping with principles and aspirations of the original architects of the model.

Nevertheless, despite this worrying co-option of the social model, all need not be lost. On the basis that where there is power there is resistance; the very presence of a version of the model in the machineries of government will provide opportunity for skilled activists to re-engage the oppositional qualities of this device. But to do so, they will need to rediscover those qualities and understand them fully.

When UPIAS positioned disability 'on top of impairment', they did so purposefully and strategically. Positioning disability on top of impairment illustrated that the bodies of disabled people had (at least in part) been formed by technologies of discipline employed by medical professionals, the architects of social policy and the traditional charities. The social model illustrated that the body disabled people had received from institutions and professions – the 'handicapped body' - was socially created; it was a body created to their blueprint. Where there had been stasis born of a lack of hope and a sense of individual failing, derived from the received notion of having a malfunctioning body, the social model prompted new ways of thinking. First, it introduced *contingency*. If the conditions of disablement were made socially, then they could be made differently. The social model was, however, more precise than this, because it positioned disability as *oppression* - in doing so disability not only became *contingent*, it also became *unjust*.

The social model constituted a 'we' – 'disabled people' – as an alternative to disciplining 'pscho-medical' categories, which acted to individualize responsibility for disablement. A political grouping was thus created against disciplining subjectivities. As the social model acted to tell people who they are (disabled people), and position the present (a disabling society) as unjust, it allowed people to recognise one another as members of the same struggle, with shared values, coming together to dismantle disabling barriers and to build an inclusive and enabling society. Impairment-specific campaigns were able to find commonality in their struggles as disabled people, whilst still affirming their difference through impairment. The 'we' that the social model made possible was thus based upon a common, but it also affirmed a singularity. It constituted interests and created passions across a newly formed collective body. In its most radical

instantiations the social model allowed for fundamental questions to be asked about the conditions of life in a disabling or *ableist* society (Campbell 2009).

The social model therefore encouraged and encourages the user to adopt and act according to a two pronged ontology: an ontology of ourselves (Foucault 1986a) that ask how the shifts, movements and modulations in subjectivities came to create people with impairments and a disabling/ableist society; and an ontology of the virtual (Deleuze 1994; May 2005) that considers how purposeful movements in subjectivity can counter the injustice of the disabling/ableist society, in short, that considers how alternative futures might be possible.

The style of resistance practice allowed for by the operation of the social model as oppositional device is biopolitical. Such practices resist the entwined processes of the production of a cultivated population, a 'normal individual' and the circulation of capital - the processes by which the body is acted upon by cultural, political and scientific categories. In the nineteenth century an array of disciplines coalesced in assemblage to produce a particular mechanism 'the modern soul' (Foucault 1977, 3) that fixed our subjectivities to a particular essence that we presumed to be a-historical: an essence that operated in assemblage with various norms, subjugating our bodies to continual assessments, judgments and classifications. This mechanism of the modern soul was able to act upon us from inside of us, as 'norms' that we internalized, allowing for domination to take place internally (e.g. internalized oppression). Foucault (1977, 3), in one of his most memorable turns of phrase, remarked that '(t)he soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body'. Disabled people through their frequent contact with those machineries of government that employ technologies of discipline have found themselves thus imprisoned.

The resistance-practices made possible by the social model, however, oppose these mechanisms that articulate relations of power onto us, that dominate us, that produce social conditions involving violent marginalisation and a de-valuation of lives; mechanisms that simultaneously segment and separate the 'useful' from the 'useless', the 'normal' from the 'abnormal', the 'worthy' from the 'undeserving'. By refusing the various impairment categories crafted onto bodies as their first means of identification by the 'psy'-sciences, medicine and capitalism, and uniting under the banner of their commonality as people disabled by society, the resistance-practices of the DPM re-call Hardt and Negri's (see also Negri and Revel 2009) discussion of the production of the common by South Africans:

> One remarkable element of the movement is its common basis. Black South Africans and South Africans of Indian descent march together saying 'We are not Indians, we are the poors! We are not Africans, we are the poors!'. (Hardt and Negri: 2006, 135)

This refusal of identities based on 'race', a socially created category supposedly based upon biological difference and the formation of a resistant subjectivity based upon shared economic marginalization, is analogous to disabled people's refusal of identities based upon socially mediated categories – those supposedly based upon biological difference - and the formation of a resistant subjectivity based upon shared experience of a disabling society. This maneuver on the part of the UK DPM was a re-articulation of the individual and collective body and constitutive in the sense that those engaged in this movement were engaged in (re)constituting their bodies (individual and collective).

For Hardt and Negri (2006, 159), '(t)he power of the flesh is the power to transform ourselves through historical action and create a new world'. The very *potential* of the flesh is then the basis of the productive character of the human. As Revel (2009, 53) has commented:

> Life innovates wherever power bends it to its will; it resists by putting in place strategies of resistance that are both ontological and political, aiming for a creation of more life.

She then quotes Foucault (1994 in Revel 2009, 53): 'We should not only defend ourselves, but affirm who we are, not just as identity, but as *creative force*'. For members of the DPM, affirming who they are has involved rejecting the categories derived from how others define and describe their biology. It has involved understanding that it is only because of the collective character of humanity that people can become individuals, come to be exploited as such and yet are also able to overcome this process of individuation. Affirming 'who they are' has involved the constitution of two new categories: disabled people and non-disabled people. These categories are not just 'free-floating sets of symbols', they are 'built into the fabric of everyday life, insofar as they are deployed and reproduced across a range of sites and practices' (Laffey and Weldes 1997, 220).

What this demonstrates is that it is the same trans-generational, trans-individual creative force resulting in the disciplining of individuals – subjectivation – that can also be harnessed via collective action, to produce a 'we'. The operation allowed for by the social model, the reformulation of disability as socially created rather than the result of 'biological deficiency', and the defining (production) of disabled people as an oppressed group, is an excellent example of a social movement harnessing the creative force of the collective (the 'we') against the individualizing forces of capital, the regulating mechanism of the norm (Campbell 2013; Ewald 1990) and the values of ableism.

Returning once more to Revel's (2009, 53) work, she states:

> it is precisely this 'we' which is part of the problematization of our present, as the slow invention of a commonality yet to come as the constantly reworked space for resistant subjectivation and ways of life.

The 'we' that is constituted by the social model might therefore be understood as a *becoming*. This 'we' is a resistant way of life. It allows for an array of resistance-practices directed towards the disabling society and the slow invention of a new commonality – an inclusive and enabling society.

Conclusion

In this article we have explored the operations of the social model of disability. To achieve this we have adopted a Foucauldian perspective, supplemented by ideas arising from a number of authors sympathetic to his work. We have introduced the concept of an 'oppositional device' and suggested that this concept allows for a description of the ways in which 'ideas' operate in social movements, in particular how they allow for the proliferation of resistance-practices. By defining the social model as an 'oppositional device' we have demonstrated how by introducing contingency into the present, the model facilitates resistance practices on the part of disabled people and allows for their repetition and proliferation. It does this in two ways. First, by making visible the barriers that exclude and restrict disabled people from receiving many of the benefits of full citizenship. Second, it operates *heterotopically* (Foucault 1986b), opening up a horizon, making visible a different, non-disabling world in the fabric of the present. The specific common that the social model opens up – an inclusive and enabling society - can be continually activated to relativize the present and therefore has practical import and impact in changing the present. Further, the 'we' that is generated by the social model - those who wish to resist disablement – is a *becoming* in the sense that 'we' will always need to begin anew, re-inventing ourselves contra tactics of power, to produce new ways of being with others, motivated not just by the injustice of the present, but the injustice that we do not yet realize is unjust – injustices that lie in front of us and which the model, as an oppositional device, helps us to 'see'.

As stated earlier, this paper has not been concerned with judging the social model's way of *describing* disability, nor with exploring the question of whether there are ideas 'out there' that might serve the DPM better, or differently. Instead the paper has proposed and utilised a concept – the oppositional device - to *understand* how the social model has been used politically, how the model has been operated by activists and to what ends.

Whilst we hope that our intervention will make legible to those outside disability studies the richness of disabled people's resistance practices, our primary goal has been to provide an analysis of use to members of the DPM, re-focusing discussion on the social model away from evaluating its description of disability towards considering its merits as a tool of struggle. It is widely acknowledged that now is a pivotal moment in the history of the UK DPM. In addition to on-going struggles against serious and systemic disability discrimination, the position of disabled people has recently become even more precarious as the result of cuts to benefits and services that have, for example, undermined independent living and inclusive education. Concerns have been expressed that the movement has lost its way in this struggle. Several leading figures in the movement - architects and/or leading advocates of the social model – for example Paul Hunt and Vic Finkelstein, have passed away and this has exacerbated anxieties

surrounding the movement's future. Now is a time for reflecting upon the history of the movement, in order to imagine its future and reinvigorate the struggle for an inclusive and enabling society. Understanding the movement's 'big idea' is an important part of this process. The social model may not always be the 'biggest' idea of the disabled people's movement, but for now it remains so and, as we hope this article demonstrates, for good reason. It has played, and continues to play, an important role in the production of the movement and the shaping of its character. In the absence of or until an alternative oppositional device, capable of as potent operations arises, abandoning the model is likely to destabilize the movement. We need to draw upon our knowledge, practical and theoretical to allow for the development of new ways of using the social model appropriate to our times - ways that will allow for the injustices that lie in front of us to be fought with the same ferocity as the injustices that Finkelstein, Hunt and others originally employed the model to identify and oppose.

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