

**FEMINISTS AND CYBERPUNKS: RECLAIMING THE
BODY FROM THE POLYMORPHOUS TECHNIQUES OF
POWER**

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**İSTANBUL BİLGİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
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Abstract

This project is done for the exploration of the role of the body in power relations. Taking Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary mechanisms of power and their implication in everyday life, this study tries to focus on the standardized beauty ideals of the West. The study also presents the ideas of two different groups that are interested in using the body as a medium for expression. The common belief, hold by these two groups, feminists and cyberpunks, is that body has always been and still is used as a space for controlling and shaping subjects. The main concern of these two groups is to reclaim their bodies from the micro-practices of disciplinary power. The main aim of this study is to discuss the possibility of a *resistance* in the embodied practices of these groups.

Özet

Bu calismanin amaci bedeninin iktidar iliskilerindeki rolunu incelemektir. Michel Foucault'nun iktidar mekanizmalari perspektifinden Batinin guzellik standartlari ele alinacaktır. Bu calisma bedeninin bir iletisim araci oldugunu ongoren iki farkli grubun yaklasimlarina yer vermektedir. Bu iki grup, feministler ve cyberpunklar, bedeninin iktidar tarafından ozneleri sekillendirmek ve kontrol etmek icin kullanildigini ortaya koyarlar. Bu iki grubun temel amaci bedeni iktidardan geri talep etmek ve bedenleri uzerinde kontrol sahibi olmaktır. Bu calismanin amaci feministler ve cyberpunklarin bedeni iktidardan

talep etme cabalarinin bir sosyal direnis olusturup, olusturamayacagini tartismaktir.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OBOS: Our Bodies Ourselves

BME: Body Modification Ezine

BIID: Body Integrity Identity Disorder

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Rings for navels, ears, eyebrows, and nipples; piercings for all parts of the body including corset piercings; hooks and pulleys; dermal anchors and sub-dermal implants; plugs, tunnels and ear weights; tattoos; splitters; scars and brands...ornaments for the human canvas...Loving your body in your own skin, or altering it for the sake of reaching the body you always wanted. Being not among the crowd who conform to the beauty standards imposed on their body by the disciplinary mechanisms of the society. Being aware of the micropolitics of power and its discourses. To be not in need of hiding yourself and your desires...

The rising intellectual interest in the body has been an issue since 1970's and still remains as one. The body mostly has been neglected by classical sociology, but finally gained the place it deserves in the eye of the sociologists. Since women are aware of the fact that their bodies are used as a site on which power of patriarchy is exercised, they were always among the pioneers of the body movement. Not only women but men, who hold the belief that body is a site of identity exploration and a site of self-making, put emphasis on the role of the body in social relations. The second wave of feminism with its special attention to fertility and abortion rights, the rise of consumer culture in the modern capitalism; and the crisis in our certainty about what bodies could be considered as the most important factor in the rising interest in the body. According to

Chris Shilling, body is considered to be ‘constitutive of the self’ (Shilling 2003, 2). Instead of being an object of social control by patriarchy, Victoria Pitts argued that the body should be seen ‘as a space for exploring identity, experiencing pleasure, and establishing bonds to others’ (Pitts 2003, 7). As stated by Pitts, “by imposing standards of sexual normality, health, intelligence, and fitness, medical-scientific discourses circulate ideologies through which bodies, identities, and desires are shaped” (Pitts 2003, 38). Being aware of the ‘polymorphous techniques of power’ (Foucault 1998, 11), this work will be looking at the embodiment approach. Two main groups that will be taken under consideration are feminist authors and cyberpunks. While discussing the ideas of several feminist authors and activists fell under the category of cyberpunks, the main question I have in mind is “whether the feminist understanding of the body and extreme body modification are likely to constitute a point of resistance through their attitudes toward the body or not”. Throughout this work, I will try to find an answer to this question under the light of Michel Foucault’s ideas about the micropolitics of power that is influential on the body. Besides looking at the understanding of the body in the book by Boston Women Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies Ourselves*, this work will also focus attention on extreme body modification practices of cyberpunks. Although I am aware of the fact that there is quite a number of different body modifiers and body modification groups such as radical queers, radical feminists, modern primitives and people with Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID); I will concentrate on cyberpunks since their idea of redefining the body as a form of

social rebellion fits in to my research question the resistance against the beauty standards and set of rules regarding people's bodies and appearances. It has been argued that an embodied approach should be taken by social scientists since body has been seen as a site of self-formation and identity formation. The body is continuously controlled and tamed by the authority. Disciplinary mechanisms and discourses of power have chosen body as the area on which it is exercised.

Before writing this work, I have been wandering and talking about the topic I am interested in and had an urge to discuss. Every single person, I have discussed the topic with, has declared that what I am talking about, extreme body modification and resisting against the language of patriarchy through reclaiming sexual and other rights, is pathological rather than reasonable and understandable with a sane mind. Most of the people argued that these topics are not even worth discussing in a sociological arena since it is a concern of psychiatry. The language of mental sciences was the most common language used in discussing body modification. Since my research question is whether looking at the body from a nonmainstream point of view could resist authority according to Foucault's theories on the body, I kept a distance from the language of pathology since it leaves no space for resistance. One of the most common reactions I have come across the forums against the subject is that "A person who is doing such a thing to his/her own body can not be in his true state of mind. You cannot talk about this subject as something precious to discuss

since they are nothing but a group of insane, pervert people”¹. These critiques have given me the impulse for conducting further research on the subject. By taking into account and being aware of the previous literature on the body by Max Weber, Erving Goffman, Mike Featherstone, Susan Bordo, Chris Shilling, Judith Butler, Tobin Siebers, Kathy Davis, Bryan Turner, Michel Foucault and many others, this work will cover the ideas of feminists and cyberpunks, their reaction and attempts for struggle against the disciplinary mechanisms of power and beauty ideals promoted in the West. The research of my own which recruits data from the web pages, forums and visual materials dedicated to cyberpunks and feminists, is in search of a discussion about the possibility of a resistance against authority through the very same device used by the authority, the body. By modifying or trying to look at it closely and with their own loving eyes, these groups are trying to alter the body and meanings attributed to it as done by the disciplinary practices of the authority.

Chapter 1 in this work focuses on the previous literature on the body. Starting from the rising interest in the body, I will concentrate on the contemporary literature concerning the feminist body movement, extreme body modification and Michel Foucault. There are a number of reasons that lie behind the rising

¹ The data concerning the mainstream point of view on the subject is taken from forums on body modification. Some of the websites used are <http://justsickshit.com/2008/photos/sick-tattoo-and-way-bizzare-bod-mod/> and <http://listverse.com/bizarre/top-10-bizarre-body-modifications/>

interest in the body. Some of them are (1) erosion of traditional authority such as that of religion over bodies and sexuality; (2) the shift of interest from class struggle to identity politics in terms of social movements; (3) public controversies over bodily issues such as AIDS, pollution, health care access, and alternative medicine; (4) medical advances that have resulted in increased technological intervention and longevity (Pitts 2003, 30). The body which used to be controlled by workings of disciplinary power gained a chance to be a site for self-making and taking a part in the identity formation. First, through the discourse of healthy life, the body started to be used as a tool for disciplining modern subjects by promoting beauty and health ideals. Fitness, healthy diets, skinny yet muscular bodies, wardrobes full of fashionable clothes, and cosmetic products and plastic surgery that are at people's service are among the ideas promoted by the West. The discourses produced around this described a prototype woman and a prototype man. Woman being beautiful, athletic (but not engaged in body building activities), elegant, full of youth, and having the perfect body with a smooth and young skin; and man on the other hand being powerful, muscular, fashionable and healthy. The identities that are separated as being desirable and undesirable put constraints on people about conforming to the standards of the desirable identity in order not to be driven away. Michel Foucault is interested in breaking away from these constraints and the exercises of disciplinary power by coming up with a new type of subjectivity. As stated by Ferda Keskin, "for Foucault 'subjectivity' means a relation of consciousness one maintains with an experience as one's own experience (Keskin 2002, 6).

Thus, the only way to create embodied identities is to create new subjectivities. Despite the fact that Foucault has been criticized by feminists for ignoring gender differences in his theory, they make use of his ideas concerning the disciplinary mechanisms and discourses of power. This literature on the body will be a starting point for my studies on the possibility of resistance through body movements.

Chapter 2, will consider the ideas of feminists on the subject. As argued earlier, this work will concentrate on the feminist authors and activists gathered around Boston Women Health Book Collective. The body has always been and is still very important in understanding the cultural and historical constructions of the female body in various contexts of social life. As indicated by Michel Foucault, power is exercised over human beings by a vast variety of means through the separation, confinement and categorization of the body (Benjamin Smith, BME web site, comment posted on April 20, 2008). The female body in all its materiality was regarded as the primary object through which the masculinist power operates (Davis 1997, 10). The feminist literature on the body emphasizes the role of patriarchy in the suppression on the female body. They argue that patriarchy through disciplinary mechanisms keep the body under strict control and surveillance. Bodies as being culturally constructed, is used as a tool for identity formation. Conforming as much as you can to the beauty ideals imposed on you, you will be able to achieve a desirable identity. After setting forth the everyday practices of power in people's lives, a great emphasis

put on the recognition of one's own beauty rather than conform to the beauty standards set by the society.

As a political standing, The Boston Women's Health Book Collective's promotes the idea of women exploring their own bodies and doing whatever they want to do except shaping them according to the beauty ideals imposed by the media or other devices. To love one's own body became an important political statement and an important ongoing struggle (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2005, 16).

In chapter 3, cyberpunks and their extreme body modifications will be explored. Besides leaning on the ideas produced around the body modification movement, this chapter will also include personal experiences of body modifiers and art works of Orlan. Using plastic surgery as a tool for achieving beauty ideals is a common practice in the modern era. The cosmetic surgery done besides health purposes is on the track of becoming a fashionable application in different parts of the world. About the American case, it has been reported that:

Approximately 5 percent of the American population (200000 individuals each year) has submitted to cosmetic reconstructions of the body to erase signs of aging, remove unwanted fatty tissue, increase or decrease breast size, or otherwise move the recipient into the currently approved range of physical beauty (Sanders 1989, 7).

As argued by Sander L. Gilman, people who are ashamed of their racial features (presenting the example of Jewish as being essentially obsessed by the nature of their bodies) choose to have plastic surgery in order to belong to the majority (Gilman 2000, 199-217). According to the plastic surgeons, she argues, by plastic surgery people ease their unhappiness about their appearances since people's physiognomy is important in their identity formation; their Thersites complex should be alleviated (Gilman 2000, 199-217). By the plastic surgery, belonging to a certain group and carrying its special features are not a destiny but something that can be altered in order to conform to what is acceptable. As opposed to the plastic surgery which has provided people with the opportunity for a radical and direct way of reconstructing their bodies, body modifiers engage in anti-aesthetic aesthetic surgeries. Scarification, tattooing, branding, piercing are the most common practices among the body modifiers in internet forums of my interest. The explosion of "styles and performances of body modification, the rise of studios catering to the interest in nonmainstream forms of body art, and the advent of a whole host of magazines, websites, exhibitions, and books celebrating and debating the practices" culminated in what is known as the body modification movement (Pitts 2003, 4). In addition to all the factors listed above, another component of body modification is the TV shows on the subject. *Miami Ink* and *Tattoo Wars* being among the most popular ones, these body art TV shows assist the acceleration of the movement. According to cyberpunks, performance art provides them with a public arena

within which to re-claim and re-present their bodies (Garoian and Gaudelius 2001, 335).

It is important to note that the body modifiers in the forums that will be taken into consideration are against the piercings or tattoos done for the sake of fashion. They believe that some forms of piercings and tattoos have become commercial commodities and are done by too many people. According to the body modifiers, it is crucial to have a nonmainstream body modification in order to struggle against the disciplinary mechanisms of power since mainstream tattooing or piercing is the way discourses internalize marginal practices. Steve Haworth who is a pioneer and expert in the art of 3-D body modification, in an interview with BME about what motivates people to get sub dermal implants, argued that it is "Extreme individualism. Ten years ago if you had a piercing or a tattoo you stood alone, and today, even though piercing and tattooing are still a wonderful form of self-expression, you stand in a group." (Faze Magazine, comment posted on June 15, 2008).

At this point, I would like to discuss borders and limitations of this work. First of all, besides keeping mainstream body modification out of this work, I will also ignore the works of body mutilators with BIID and modern primitives. The reason for the elimination of people with BIID is the way they feel about their bodies. As manifested by a body modifier called Skinnybones, "The major difference between mutilation and modification is the light in which the process is done. Often mutilators feel an intense hate towards their body, and strike at themselves, usually in private, keeping it secret, while at the same

time, trying to gain attention through passive-aggressiveness. Modifiers (on average) seek to improve their body, either aesthetically, spiritually, or physically” (Grayson Smith, BME website, comment posted on April 27, 2008). Second of all, the reason for leaving out the modern primitives is the fact that the body modifications of modern primitives are done for demonstrating symbolic control over their bodies through the ways ‘prohibited’ by Western culture (Pitts 2003, 8). They use traditional forms of body art as a way to rescue the body and self from problems of the modern world (Pitts 2003, 3). Although they have ideas in common with cyberpunks, for practical purposes I will keep them out of this work. Lastly, I will take into consideration the tattoos done as a form of extreme body modification rather than the ones done by working class in America. The tattoos that are now considered old school were operated ‘as signs of class-specific, masculine group status’. Apart from the tattoos of extreme body modifiers, these tattoos primarily used ‘Westernized, masculinist, and patriotic symbols such as eagles and flags and commemorations of war battles’ (Pitts 2003, 5). The limitations of this research are basically the lack of questionnaires, focus group studies and face-to-face interviews with feminists or body modifiers. One reason for this is that extreme body modification is not a common practice in Turkey although there are a lot of people interested in tattooing or piercing. Besides, the accessibility to the group I have chosen is low. In order to overcome these limitations, I will use forums, internet journals, and websites dedicated to body modification and feminist body movement.

In chapter 3 on Cyberpunks, I will discuss the art work of Orlan, a French performative artist who considers herself as being a part of cyberpunks. As Kathy Davis states, her work destabilizes many of our preconceived notions about beauty, identity and the female body. Her work provides a glimpse of how women might engage with their bodies in empowering ways (Davis 1997, 178).

In addition to this, in this chapter, the standpoint of mainstream media towards extreme body modification will be discussed.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the critiques that these two movements face in the mainstream media and the literature. This discussion session questions whether these critiques can be influential in the success of these movements. Most common critiques are about the fashionization problem, the presence of pain in most of the body modifications, physical limitations and the problem of visibility, body modifiers belief about self being a fixed and unchanging entity, resemblance of body modification movement with the God Complex of Modernism.

The significance of this work is the appliance of Michel Foucault's theory on the body studies of feminist groups and cyberpunks. In this work, I will aim to discuss the previous literature on the subject, feminist understanding of the body and their struggle against patriarchy, the ideas and body modification practices of cyberpunks, the normalizing process of scientific discourses and pathology, and the criticism about feminist studies and cyberpunks. Through the use of materials retrieved from the websites, forums and interviews about

personal experiences of extreme body modifiers, my research question is that whether a social resistance could be generated as a consequence of embodied practices of feminists and cyberpunks.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE STUDIES ON SOCIOLOGY OF THE BODY

The Rising Interest in the Body

In December 2003, after a period of depression, I no longer felt the need to conform to anyone else's standards but my own. I am lucky that I no longer feel I have to hide myself, my desires, and that I can be who I want to be. I find body modification beautiful and I feel more beautiful each time I add something new.

Christina²

It wasn't until twentieth century that sociology, academia in general, and popular culture became interested in the body. "To be who exactly you want to be" has been a starting point of an upsurge of bodily resistance against authority. Both academic interest in the body and body modifications provided a base for discussions on identity construction. Following the time of the discussions on mind and body dualism, sociology could be considered having an embodied approach towards the society. In the embodiment, the body is conceptualized simultaneously both as a natural, physical entity and as produced through cultural, discursive practices. Kathy Davis argues that, as stated by Chris Shilling, the body wasn't entirely absent from the social science

² This quotation is taken from the body modification forum BME (Body Modification Ezine) which is an internet source that brought together the body modifiers all around the world, and their personal experiences.

arena but rather what we see was its 'absent presence' in social sciences (Davis 1997, 3). A general belief hold in the literature on the sociology of the body is that who we are is inscribed on our bodies by culture. This idea of cultural inscription led to the concept of socially constructed bodies. As a consequence of the interest in the body, human beings began to be portrayed as living, breathing, and flesh-and-blood organisms rather than disembodied actors (Davis 1997, 3). These embodied actors regarded their body as a site for identity formation. It is believed that power is exerted over the human body through separation, confinement, and categorization of the body as in the case of prisons, schools, and mental institutions studied by Michel Foucault. Quoting his words:

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, and its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A "political anatomy", which was also a "mechanics of power", was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies (Foucault 1991, 138).

The body -which is believed to be controlled by workings of disciplinary power-, gained a chance for self-expression by taking a part in the construction of the identity. Rather than being a symbol for nature, desire or biology the body became an important component of a new form of social rebellion. Kathy Davis asserts that: “Bodies no longer present how we fit into the social order, but are the means for self-expression, for becoming who we would most like to be. In an era where the individual has become responsible for his or her own fate, the body is just one more feature in a person’s identity project” (Davis 1997, 2). As opposed to the mind – body dualism that promoted the idea of mind and body being separated entities, this new form of social rebellion re-interpreted self’s relation to the body. According to Chris Shilling, the rising interest in the body is associated with the increasing role of the body in the identity formation (Shilling 2003, 6). Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, Erving Goffman, and Michel Foucault became influential in the current explosion of post-essentialist theoretical interest in the body. Among other contributions, these theorists challenged rational and fixed notions of the self, and thus disrupted established views of the self’s relation to the body (Pitts 2003, 27).

Foucauldian Point of View in the Literature on the Body

We are born as a basic model... and one of our first urges is to change that, yet as we grow up, we are told time and time again that it's wrong. It takes a certain

kind of strength to go against these things [...] All I knew was that it didn't feel wrong to me, [...] something in all of this was building the person I was to become. All I have is an urge to be myself that exceeds the propaganda that it is wrong. All I know is that if I don't do these things I can never be happy.

Skinnybones³

In the modern era, as argued by Michel Foucault, body became a site of social control through exercises of productive power. He argues that body as the ‘major target of penal repression’ left its place to body as an instrument or intermediary through which authority intervenes with the doings of the people (Foucault 1991, 8). This new form of power by being visible and unverifiable (meaning being before the eyes of the inspector but not being sure when he/she is looking at you) guarantees the order since it makes the individual an ‘object of information never a subject in communication’. People, by being objects of knowledge, controlled by the authority through the body as an intermediary. Foucault characterizes early modern Europe as governed by juridical power which, in order to preserve life against death- impose limits, restrictions, and prohibitions. As Judith Butler states, once the threat of death ceased, “power

³ This personal experience is uttered by a girl nicknamed Skinnybones.

turns its idle attention to the construction of objects to control” (Butler 1996, 60). Foucault explains the structure of the contemporary society as:

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth [...] it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies (Foucault 1991, 217).

Body as a ‘political force’, is used by the authority in order to create a discourse that can be internalized by the subject. By this discourse, which was used as the means of the exercise of power, subjects were administered rather than judged or punished physically. A new way to interact with the body has appeared in modernity. Foucault, in his attempt to create a history of different modes by which human beings become subjects in Western cultures, claims that subjectivity and subject are historically constructed. In the History of Sexuality Foucault by discussing the discourse on sex, shed light on the issue of the exercise of the newly established disciplinary power that helps us in creating an identity. In his words:

Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms which, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and

justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize the sexual discourse” (Foucault 1998, 33).

The body, rather than being under control of the top-down and repressive form of power became the primary site for the operation of modern form of power, which is productive, subtle, and elusive (Davis 1997, 3). People, in order to get out of constraints drawn by the modern form of power try to question the relationship between their body and the self. One of the body modifiers declared that personal modifications are very important in his life and he wouldn't allow social norms to affect how he chooses to live his life. He also says that society doesn't have the right to and also shouldn't have to dictate how a person chooses to live⁴. As will be discussed later on, body became a site for exploring the different subjectivities. So, body modifiers – cyberpunks in this case – and feminists try to form different subjectivities using the body as a means.

In the mainstream culture and media, body modifications are considered as pathology rather than taken into account as a form of maintaining control over your own body. Delinquency, pathology, perversion, sickness are among the names attributed to body modification. In this regard, Foucault's explanation about how subjects become object of knowledge and how they can fell into the category of 'delinquent' in the normality – delinquency duality is an important starting point for understanding body modification movement. As

⁴ This statement is taken from the entry by John Demanko in Body Modification Ezine which is an online journal about the body modification types and personal experiences and discussions of body modifiers.

stated by Foucault, since identities are separated into desirable and undesirable identities, subjects constrain themselves from extremities that define the undesirable identity. Foucault's main concern is how can we attain freedom by getting rid of or avoid these constraints. Since subjectivity is related to the way we represent our ways of acting, thinking, and feeling; we have to come up with a new type of subjectivity in order to free ourselves from the exercises of disciplinary power. Besides cyberpunks who try to create new type of subjectivities in order to reclaim power over their own bodies, feminists found Foucault's writings useful in their struggle against patriarchy. Although feminists criticize Foucault for his androcentric gender blindness, they make use of Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power. Jana Sawicki states "His analytic of power/knowledge could be used to further feminist interpretations into the dynamics of patriarchal power at the most intimate levels of experience in the institutions of marriage, motherhood, and compulsory heterosexuality and in the *everyday rituals and regimens that govern women's relationships to themselves and their bodies*" (Sawicki 1996, 160).

Although body modifiers and feminists take different paths in creating subjectivities, in both cases Foucault's theory of the dynamics of authority; how it constitute new fields of knowledge; how it builds the connection between them and types of normativity; and how it creates subjectivities could be useful for their purpose. Both groups would agree with Foucault's idea of subjectivity being a relationship of consciousness we maintain with ourselves, so they hold the belief that creating new subjectivities

is the only way to create new embodied identities. Both cyberpunks and feminists claim that Foucault's approach would be useful in detailing how people are subjected through the body. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby in their book *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* asserted that

In rejecting the idea that power functions only through 'Thou shalt nots' or forms of restrictive commandments and laws, Foucault brings to our attention the complex network of disciplinary systems and prescriptive technologies through which power operates in the modern era, particularly since the normalizing disciplines of medicine, education, and psychology have gained ascendancy (Diamond and Quinby 1988, xi).

This work will analyze the operation of power on its subjects and will look at whether the feminist understanding of the body, and, the body modifications of cyberpunks, place them on a path that is heading toward a social resistance where the body is owned by the individual, rather than society.

FEMINISM AND THE BODY

‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?’ No matter how much the evil queen tries the answer is always the same: ‘Snow White’. Fairy tales, being among one of the most important educative tools of a society reinforce the ideal woman or man of its age. As in the story Snow White, the ideal woman of the era was the beautiful, young and innocent one rather than the mature, old, and experienced queen. Not only Snow White but also Cinderella, Rapunzel, and many other fairy tale heroines achieved a happily-ever-after thanks to their legendary beauty. Their snow like white skin, rose like cheeks and long beautiful hair got them into trouble in the first place but later on provided them with unending happiness and joy. Although Cinderella’s step-sisters made a great effort for being ‘beautiful’, they weren’t beautiful enough to be recognized by the prince. Naïve and beautiful heroines of the fairy tales on the other hand, can do whatever they want to do since they have the power to do so. It is not only fairy tales but also contemporary media reinforces the power of beauty. By saying that girls have power to be anything they want, they intend to say that girls are capable of understanding the beauty norms of their era and the sacrifices they have to make to achieve them. The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective in their book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (OBOS), underlines this fact and asserts that the power that is claimed to be possessed by girls in the advertisements has nothing to do with character or achievement but is instead the result of having the perfect body and having the courage too show

it off (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2005, 15). As a result of being exposed to these fairy tales and advertisements over and over again throughout their childhood and their youth, contemporary women are surrounded with this idea of beauty being the key to success and ever lasting happiness. The most striking question following this is 'What is beautiful and what is not?', 'Who set the rules of this beauty game?' These questions are out of the scope of this ongoing work but what is important is that the image of the ideal woman has an important role in the relation between women and their bodies. These topics are also among the most debated topics in the feminist literature. Feminism has always been interested in the body and had an embodied approach. Kathy Davis explains the feminist interest in the body and argues that feminists, in their search for a social theory of the body, try to come up with a theory that takes gender and also power into account. They are aware of the fact that bodies are not generic but on the contrary they bear the markers of culturally-constructed difference. They believe that science has a disembodied approach and by bringing the body back in the studies, it is possible to address and redress the fear of femininity (Davis 1997, 5).

The body has been an important issue in the feminist literature especially after 1970's. A body movement has accelerated among feminist groups and quickly they brought the body back in the social research since they believe it is important to have an embodied approach in order to put forward the everyday practices of power. They came to understand that body is prominent in the notions of women of self and community, in cultural politics, and in

social control and power relations (Pitts 2003, 3). Since women realized that body is an important political tool that is used by the authority in controlling its' subjects, women put a great emphasis on the recognition of their own beauty rather than conform to the beauty standards set by the society. As a reaction to the modern feminist body movement, the pressure on women to control the shape of their bodies increased; premenstrual and postmenopausal women started to be considered ill; and the anti-abortion and fetal rights movements gained power (Weitz 1998, 9). Although modern feminist movement has faced a backlash that reinforces traditional ideals against the women's attempt for embracing their own beauty and recognizing it, they continued to reclaim their bodies from patriarchy which considers woman's body as a 'property'. Patriarchy, besides holding the right to make every kind of decision about woman's body, has the right to control every feature of it. Kathryn Pauly Morgan indicates that "a woman's makeup, dress, gestures, voice, degree of cleanliness, degree of muscularity, odors, degree of hirsuteness, vocabulary, hands, feet, skin, hair, and vulva can all be evaluated, regulated, and disciplined in the light of the hypothetical often-white male viewer present in the assessing gaze of other women" (Morgan 1998, 155).

Women in addressing their right to have control over their own bodies apply Michel Foucault's ideas to their theory since they find his studies useful in explaining the micro-workings of power in the society. According to them, body is a (1) site for establishing identity; (2) a space for social control and social investment; (3) an unfinished, ever-emerging materiality important in

symbolic representations and material practice. Although they refer to Foucault while resisting against being a subject of knowledge and against disciplinary power of the state and the society, they criticize Foucault for suffering from 'androcentric gender blindness'. Feminist authors argue that the docile body that Foucault talks about is a gendered body, actually a man's body. Despite the fact that Foucault's writings on productive power can be quite contributive to the contemporary feminist politics; most of the feminists believe that Foucault ignores discourses generated by women while he recognizes the ones generated by other marginalized groups.

As stated earlier, women, in order to recognize their own bodies and to claim them from patriarchy came to believe that to love themselves in their bodies is an important political statement and an important on going struggle. OBOS is important in this process of reclaiming women's bodies since it holds the belief that women need to love their bodies and feel comfortable in their own skin. In addition to this, by embracing their own beauty and recognizing it they will be able to have the right to make decisions regarding their bodies (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective 2005, 322). Pioneers of OBOS movement are against the beauty myth persistently promoted by mass media devices. They believe that there could not be any pre-determined standards concerning what is considered to be 'appropriate' and 'beautiful' by the society. By historically determining what is beautiful and what is not, patriarchy controls the way women should be. In order not to be considered docile or

controlled, in order to be a subject, they believe that they have to discuss what is left out as being 'abnormal' such as fatness and physical disabilities.

In this chapter I would like to concentrate on the relationship between body and feminism. First, how feminist authors got interested in the subject and how the subject discussed in the feminist literature. Second of all, while discussing the standardized beauty, I will talk about how The Boston Women's Health Book Collective and OBOS movement is influential in reclaiming the body of the subject from the disciplinary power of the authority.

Last but not least, the role of the patriarchy in the construction of female body will be examined. Lastly, Foucault's part in the feminist struggle against bodily constraints will be discussed. Not only positive but also negative attitudes towards Foucault's ideas will be included in the discussion on the role of Foucault and his embodied approach.

Body of Our Own

In opposition to the '(dis)embodied, objective, male scientist' who is in control of the female body, feminists struggled to gain control over their own bodies. As stated by Kathy Davis, "the body has always been – and continues to be – of central importance for understanding experiences and practices and cultural and historical constructions of the female body in the various contexts of social life" (Davis 1997, 7). Feminist perspective on the body introduced an embodied approach. Since 1970's, women have approached this topic from different aspects. Their sole aim was not to criticize Western beauty image but

also they believe that body should be examined in multiple ways in order to fully understand the function of body in social theory. Some of these ways are examining the body as a site for (1) construction of racial, cultural, and social identity, (2) displaying Western beauty image through advertisements and media, (3) trafficking (organ or human) and sex trade - by which it is being bought and sold or exchanged, and (4) examining sexual freedom.

They link women's embodied experiences with practices of power and hold the belief that in order for women to reclaim their bodies from the authority, they need to be aware of the workings of power on their own body. They mainly argue that:

From the sexualization of the female body in advertising to the mass rape of women in wartime, women's bodies have been subjected to processes of *exploitation, inferiorization, exclusion, control and violence* (Davis 1997, 10 emphasis added).

By the disciplining and normalizing processes of cultural representations, women are taken under control by the power. Women, being aware of these processes, turned body into a political issue and claimed control over their fertility and right to abortion. Since they are aware of the fact that cultural representations stay on the way of women's relationship to their bodies, they have to have a critical standing against beauty ideals of the society. Victoria Pitts argues that, as stated by Susan Bordo,

Standards of beauty describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body....*They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom....*In our culture, not one part of a women's body is left untouched, unaltered. No feature or extremity is spared the art, or pain, of improvement....From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification, alteration (Pitts 2003, 52 emphasis in original).

How it is possible to attain control over this highly controlled and altered body? Most of the feminist authors considering body as a site for resistance argue that it is possible to have alternative body politics by representing the body in a different way.

Our Bodies, Ourselves – ‘It’s yours! Just love it!’

OBOS is a leading movement teaching women how to represent their own bodies in a way different than the mainstream ideology. They believe that just by loving and knowing your own body, you will be able to resist against the repression of the female body under the rule of patriarchy. I will mainly concentrate on one book from United States.

Authors of OBOS hold the belief that women should learn to love their own bodies and they state that “Cultural forces have encouraged us to hate our bodies. By examining these external pressures, we can begin to love ourselves and feel comfortable in our own skin. One of the most radical things a woman can do is to love her body” (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective

2005, 5). Then, a question rises in the minds of the people, what is so important about loving your own body? Could it be a form of resistance? According to the authors of OBOS, to love ourselves in our own bodies is an important ongoing struggle and a political statement. To love ourselves in our own bodies is just a starting point of struggle that will lead to a struggle of reclaiming our bodies. Most of the feminist thinkers believe that women have a right to control every aspect of their body ranging from the right to control their physical appearance to birth control or sexual freedom. Women have to have the right to make decisions regarding what is going to be done to their own body including how they want to look, if and when they want to have children.

‘Loving our own bodies as the way it is’ is the first step of the resistance against authority. In order to understand the way, which your body is taken under control and being modified, it is crucial to deconstruct the imposed bodily images. Besides looking at their body with their loving eyes, women try to have more concrete power over their own bodies. Body art including tattoos, piercings, scarring, and anti-aesthetic aesthetic surgery is a way to show this precise power of women on their own bodies. In her book *In the Flesh* Victoria Pitts talks to nonmainstream body modifiers in order to understand the way they see their bodies. She asserts that “Some women have described their body art as a way to rebel against male dominance and to ‘reclaim’ power over their own bodies. In creating scarred, branded, pierced, and heavily tattooed bodies, they aim to reject the pressures of beauty norm and roles of ‘proper’ femininity”. She claims that body has to be seen as a space for ‘exploring

identity, experiencing pleasure, and establishing bonds to others' rather than being seen as an 'object of social control by patriarchy, medicine, or religion' (Pitts 2003, 7). As stated earlier, nonmainstream body modifiers perform body modification in order to criticize the beauty norms, take over the control of their own bodies. One of the main aims of these body modifications is to criticize the cosmetic surgery done for the sake of reaching beauty ideals. Accordingly, Kathryn Pauly Morgan questions the rising interest in cosmetic surgery and claims that cosmetic surgery is a tool used for conforming to beauty norms of the era. Women who have been seen as a property throughout history believe that the only way to be beautiful and accepted is to achieve proper appearance. Hence, they go through a series of cosmetic surgery operations in order to feel 'happy' and 'conformable'. Morgan holds the belief that "Women have traditionally regarded their bodies, particularly if they are young, beautiful, and fertile, as a locus of power to be enhanced through artifice and, now, through artifact" (Morgan 1998, 153). According to her, in the case of cosmetic surgery, what appears to be an instance of choice at first sight turns out to be conformity. The women who undergo cosmetic surgery are clearly choosing to conform to the predetermined beauty ideals of the society they live in. Before going too far it is important to look at the role of patriarchy in controlling the women's bodies. As discussed earlier, both men and women are taken into account regarding the way authority has control over people's bodies. But for the sake of this chapter's argument I would like to discuss solely how women

perceive the control operated by the authority over their bodies under the name of patriarchy.

Docile Bodies of Women

The disciplinary techniques through which the 'docile bodies' of women are constructed aim at a regulation that is perpetual and exhaustive – a regulation of the body's size and contours, its appetite, posture, gestures and general comportment in space, and the appearance of each of its visible parts (Bartky 1998, 41).

Women's body, under the control of authority, has been and still is controlled strictly. Society, not only determines what is the proper way of being a woman but it also determines how a proper woman looks. This control extends from hair style to body hair, from veil to fashion and from cosmetic products to cosmetic surgery. It is stated that the medicalization of women's bodies, the physical and sexual abuse of them, and the mutilation of their bodies for the sake of beauty are just some of the ways feminists have identified women's bodies as the locus of masculinist power. They are aware of the fact power is not top-down but rather runs through the social body as a whole and based on this fact they should be trying to understand the workings of disciplinary mechanisms in the given era (Foucault 1998, 11). Despite the fact that OBOS discusses several topics such as fertility/birth control, transsexuality, eating disorders, etc., this work will concentrate on the parts dedicated to the issue of plastic surgery. It has been asserted that: "The growing popularity of

techniques that sculpt and style our vulvas and vaginas makes it clear that no part of our bodies – no matter how intimate – can escape society’s critical eye” (The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 2005, 4). OBOS, while discussing the issue of gender alteration, talks about the memory of a woman about this: “After my last suicide attempt, I found my soul... At the age of 45 I declared myself female, and in a sane and sober state, worked on matching my body, soul, and spirit into one complete female. It took me five years. Today my body is mine... My birth certificate reads ‘female’” (The Boston Women’s Health Book Collective 2005, 149). One of the areas controlled by the authority is the way women get their hair done and take care of bodily hair. First the family – especially the mother – and then the husband bear the right to decide on the hair style and hirsuteness of the female body. In order to clarify the effect of the control over women’s bodies by the authority, I would like to present the examples of eating disorders. Bulimia and anorexia are diseases well known and widely seen among women rather than men. The main reason of women suffering from these diseases more often is the pressure they feel on themselves about conforming to the beauty norms of the society they live in. As a consequence of the ideas promoted in the media those women encounter over and over again in their daily lives, women try to beautify themselves and ease their regret about not looking like models. By leaning on these different parts of the body that is controlled in different ways by the authority in general made feminists believe that women are objects of knowledge and they are locus of male dominance. In order to discuss this, feminist authors include Michel

Foucault's micropower analysis to their studies since Foucault's theory on workings of power could be useful in generating struggle against patriarchy.

The Complex Network of Disciplinary Power and Feminism

Throughout 1970's, women tried to analyze how woman's body became "the terrain on which patriarchy is erected" (Thornham 2000, 159). As stated by Diamond and Quinby "... Foucault brings to our attention the complex network of disciplinary systems and prescriptive technologies through which power operates in the modern era, particularly since the normalizing disciplines of medicine, education and psychology have gained ascendancy" (Diamond and Quinby 1988, xi). Through the disciplinary power of the state and patriarchy women's body has been an object of knowledge. Koc and Demir utter that women's sexuality has been determined and alienated by medicine, pornography, art, mass media devices, religion, and social sciences (Koc and Demir 2006, 5). As argued by Michel Foucault, fields of knowledge generate knowledge about the subjects and by them new set of rules are established in relation to new and traditional institutions such as law, medicine or religion. As a consequence of all these, people change the value they assign to their own behaviors, sensations, dreams and emotions. This relationship of consciousness the women maintain with themselves is the result of fields of knowledge and sets of rules depend on them determined by the authority. They argue that in order to at least be legally equal to men in the society, women should generate

knowledge by themselves about their own bodies. Since Foucault is interested in the micro-politics of private life, his theories served to the feminist belief of everything being political. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby in their work *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* argue that Foucault's work can be useful in number of different ways. They come up with commonalities that make Feminist theory and Foucault's cooperation applicable. According to Diamond and Quinby, both feminism and Foucault "identify the body as the site of power, that is, as the locus of domination through which docility is accomplished and subjectivity constituted" (Diamond and Quinby 1988, x). Feminist authors assume that they can make use of Foucault's theories in their struggle against patriarchy since he sheds light on the unrecognized modes of authority. As stated in Sawicki, according to Foucault what makes disciplinary power so effective is "its ability to grasp the individual at the level of its self-understanding – of its very identity and the norms that govern its practices of self-constitution" (Sawicki 1996, 161). Based on this grasping power of the authority, feminist authors tried to grow a new bond between women and their body. Foucault, in his book *Discipline and Punish*, argues that through the use of closed spaces and time schedules subjects in Panopticon have been held under continuous control of the authority. He states that this control of body's time and space is not only restricted to Panopticon but also applied in classrooms, prisons, and the army. Feminist authors agree with Foucault and claim that the body's time and its space are rigidly controlled. S. L. Bartky introduces the work of Iris Young on the subject and quotes that

... a space seems to surround women in imagination that they are hesitant to move beyond: this manifests itself both in a reluctance to reach, stretch, and extend the body to meet resistances of matter in motion...and in a typically constricted posture and general style of movement. Woman's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure... by which she is confined (Bartky 1998, 29).

Although they believe that Foucault's theory serves to their aim to reclaim their bodies from patriarchy, they criticize several ideas of his and also accuse him for woman's body. One of the main critiques by feminist authors is that Foucault suffers from 'androcentric gender blindness'. Despite the fact that Foucault's writings are used as a reference point in feminist literature, as stated by Sue Thornham, the body Foucault is discussing about – the 'neutral body' – is implicitly male like that of earlier philosophers (Thornham 2000, 167). This idea of ignoring the different experiences of man and woman is supported by Nancy Hartsock, and she claims that Foucault's analysis of power fails feminism since his theory was not developed for women. As quoted in Sawicki, Hartsock argues that "It is the theory of a colonizer who rejects and resists the colonizers, but who, because he doesn't think from the perspective of the colonized, fails to provide an epistemology which is usable for the task of revolutionizing, creating and constructing" (Sawicki 1996, 162). According to Diamond and Quinby, women's bodies as being the locus of masculinist power should be taken into account differently than men's bodies since they go

through different experiences. They hold the belief that they need women-specific theories rather than macro ones in order to reclaim their bodies from the authority and author their own identity. Although feminists use Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power in order to address the micro-politics of gender, they always state that they are critical of Foucault's 'implicitly male' discourse. At this point I would like to quote the critique done by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby concerning Foucault's attitude towards leaving women out of his theory. They proclaim that "although Foucault points to the ways in which rationalizing discourses suppress discourses of marginalized groups, and claims that such discourses are sites of resistance, his work only rarely attends to such discourses and virtually ignores those by women. His almost exclusive focus on male authors pushes women's discourses of resistance to the margins of his text (Diamond and Quinby 1988, xvi). Although his work has been criticized for ignoring the women's perspective, it is still influential and essential to introduce his work to the attempt for understanding the everyday practices of power.

CYBERPUNKS AND THE BODY MODIFICATION MOVEMENT

Once upon a time there was an evil step-mother. Her step-daughter Snow White has suffered a lot from her endless attempts for stealing her beauty and youth. Today, the step-mother is long gone and a group of people are trying to struggle against all the beauty norms she believed in and try to ‘free’ themselves from them. The mirror is no longer occupied with the questions concerning who is the most beautiful but busy with finding an answer to this question: “Mirror, mirror on the wall who is the freest of them all?”

Cyberpunks are a marginal segment of the body modification movement who believe that body is a limitless frontier for technological innovations. Their aim is to author their own norm-free identity through the use of anti-fashion cosmetic surgery, self-surgeries, and other highly unconventional body alterations. The modifications they experience range from tattooing, the piercing of almost every conceivable body part, scarification of various body parts, 3-dimensional sub- and trans-dermal implants to binding of the waist through corsetry to achieve an extremely thin appearance, the stretching of earlobes and various forms of surgical modifications⁵. Cyberpunks’ enthusiasm for technology is one of the main things distinguishing them from feminists and modern primitives. Throughout this chapter I am going to talk about different

⁵ This article by Benjamin Smith describes the different forms of body modification and the beliefs of body modifiers about engaging in body modification. As argued earlier, while I mention surgical body modification I leave out amputation either by a health professional or self-done.

performance artists who fall under the category of cyberpunks such as Orlan, Stelarc, Eduardo Kac etc.⁶ I am aware of the fact that these different artists' ideas and their attitudes toward body modification using technology do not correspond to each other. While talking about a group called cyberpunks which seems to embrace all these artists under one title, I do not disregard their differences. Rather, I take into account the recurrent themes and ideas in the workings of these artists. Despite the fact that modern primitives are important actors in the body modification movement, I'm not going to include their ideology and their work to this chapter. As stated earlier, modern primitives are mainly interested in turning back to the natural state of the body in order to free themselves from the pressures of the modern era. Their arguments about the natural state of the body, and primitive life being the best of all are outside of the scope of this paper. Although their aim to demonstrate symbolic control over their bodies by experiencing them in ways prohibited by Western culture worth mentioning, modern primitive movement will not be included to this discussion. In the previous chapters, the feminist movement towards the body has been discussed but the women who are engaged in body modification have

⁶ I am aware of the fact that the workings of Stelarc, Eduardo Kac, and Orlan differ from each other and also from the artwork of Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Tim Miller, and Robbie McCauley. For instance, Stelarc through kinetic body attachments, Internet-body connectivity, and computer chip-sculpture implants, Stelarc has set out to redefine the nature of the human body and "up-date" it to our current level of our ever-increasing technological advancement. His intent is to challenge culturally constructed ethical and moral codes. On the other hand Eduardo Kac with the help of transgenetic art which can be explained as a new art form based on the use of genetic engineering techniques to transfer synthetic genes to an organism, or to transfer natural genetic material from one species into another, he tries to change what is considered as normal and acceptable. As opposed to these differences we are able to find an omnipresent idea of rebelling against the predetermined societal norms on the body. This information is retrieved from the website <http://www.digibodies.org/online/Stelarc.htm> and <http://www.digibodies.org/online/kac.htm> on 15/06/2008.

been left out. Though I am aware of the fact that the feminist movement does not only consist education of the women about their own bodies, in order to discuss it in depth, I preferred to study women in OBOS movement and women engaged in body modification in different sections. In this chapter, I would like to present women (and men as well) who are interested in modifying their bodies in order to change their borders and to reclaim them from the patriarchy. My study is not restricted to woman's body but interested in man's as well. As discussed earlier, the feminist movement's main target was to inform women about their own bodies and make them love their bodies. While doing that, body should be seen as a space for exploring identity, experiencing pleasure, and establishing bonds to others, instead of being an object of social control mechanisms such as patriarchy, medicine, or religion. The liberation idea of cosmetic surgery done for the sake of reaching beauty ideals is nothing but a false interpretation as Kathryn Pauly Morgan claims (Morgan 1998, 156). They believe that cosmetic surgery is creating conforming subjects who continuously go under surgical operations in order to be young and beautiful enough. Especially for the case of women having cosmetic surgeries, I would like to quote Kathryn Pauly Morgan who believes that considering cosmetic surgery as liberatory is nothing but a false interpretation. She claims that

...that the rhetoric is that of liberation and care, of "making the most of yourself," but the reality is often the transformation of oneself as a woman for the eye, the hand, and the approval of the other... And the

other is almost always affected by the dominant culture, which is male-supremacist, racist, ageist, heterosexist, anti-semitic, ableist and class-biased (Morgan 1998, 156).

Although both feminists and cyberpunks share the belief that body should be defined by people themselves rather than social control mechanisms, the means to this aim differ in each group. Feminists and OBOS movement prefer to redefine the female body by studying on it, generating knowledge about it. On the other hand, what cyberpunks are trying to do is to modify the body in order to redefine the meanings and symbols attributed to it. The cyberpunks utter that they want to “reclaim” their bodies and make them “freed” from the authority. Freedom and reclaim are among the most common statements used by cyberpunks while referring to their body modifications. Cyberpunks argue that the individual can author his/her identity through altering the body and through symbolically changing its meanings and significance (Pitts 2003, 16). Body as a site for exploration and technological innovation is a tool for cyberpunks for rebelling against the authority. Through body alteration, one can take control of what one otherwise could not. In her book *In the Flesh*, Victoria Pitts interviews a body modifier called Andrew and he asserts that he attempts to customize his body in ways “previously imagined only in science fiction”. In doing so, he believes that he raises “the issue of who owns and controls medical and other high technologies”.

Body modifiers claim that body modification can create new forms of social rebellion through the body. Female body modifiers specifically struggle against the disciplinary workings of patriarchy and they describe their body art as a way to rebel against male dominance, ‘reclaim’ power over their own bodies and to reject the pressures of beauty norms and roles of proper femininity (Pitts 2003, 49). In this chapter, I would like to discuss the cyberpunk movement, its ideology and workings, and also the personal experiences of cyberpunks. Second of all, I would like to, as being an extreme example of cyberpunk experience⁷, introduce French performative artist Orlan and her ideas about ideal beauty and her extreme use of cosmetic surgery as a means of social rebellion. Orlan’s work is an intersection of feminist and cyberpunk movement because of her struggle against male determined beauty standards and because of the techniques she uses in her surgeries. Last but not least, I would like to discuss the comments on cyberpunk movement in mainstream media under the light of Foucault’s discussion on how normal and abnormal is defined. According to him, what is normal and what is abnormal is described by fields of knowledge and based on these categories people are pushed to conform to the standards of normality. In the case of cyberpunk movement, it falls under the category of pathology and psychological disorder.

⁷ Orlan is categorized as a cyberpunk based on the Kate Ince’s definition in her book *Orlan: The Millennial Female* (Ince 2003, 73).

To Conform the Standards of Your Own

“I have this lifetime of messages that I received from other people that said that I was *not attractive*.” [Jane asserts that by body modification she is able to resist against the normative “*lifetime of message*” that pressure her to reach the beauty ideal] (Pitts 2003, 66 emphasis added).

Since a person’s physical appearance affects his/her self-definition, identity, and interaction with others, the discussion on appearance and attractiveness are among the main reasons for alteration of the body. People, in order to conform to the standards of their own rather than the ones of the society, alter their bodily appearance. It is stated that body is seen as a project which should be worked out and accomplished as part of an individual’s self identity (Pitts 2003, 31). And also, it is a tool which people have control over as stated by a body modifier, Elaine: “the only thing I have true control over in this lifetime....is my body. And how it looks” (Pitts 2003, 62). Cyberpunks, a ‘subcultural’ group who are taking the body as a project that needs to be accomplished in order to create a self-identity, are interested in introducing technological innovations to the body modification movement. They take the body as a primary site where social relations operate. Body is on the one hand a target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint; but on the other hand it is (its energies and capacities) also an uncontrollable, unpredictable

threat to regular, systematic mode of organization. As Elizabeth Grosz indicates “As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus also a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counter-strategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways” (Pitts 2003, 40). According to Clinton R. Sanders, choosing to be ‘physically deviant’ symbolically demonstrates one’s disregard for the prevailing norms (Sanders 1989, 2). The idea of showing the disaffection from the societal beauty norms lead cyberpunks to scar, brand, pierce, and paint their bodies in order to take control of their own bodies. Cyberpunks and feminists as well, think that you have to “celebrate the most precious thing you'll ever own...your BODY!”⁸ As argued by cyberpunks, to be in charge of your own body is a way to challenge the mainstream idea of self being a fixed, unchanging entity. The self is described as a closed envelope whose borders are marked sharply by the society. As discussed by the feminists, women display this constraint upon their body more through their posture. As a common example, we can look at the way women and men sit on a bank or a couch: as opposed to the relaxed posture of men with his legs staying apart from each other, women feel obliged to sit in a more disclosed posture in order to fit into the standards of ‘proper’ femininity. Both by feminist groups and cyberpunks, it is believed that there is a relation between body and the self that lead to the idea of altering the body in order to make a change in the latter. According to Victoria Pitts, “In this body-self relationship, body

⁸ This comment is taken from The Body Modification Forum.

marking is used to create a coherent and viable sense of self-identity through attention to the body” (Pitts 2003, 32). The opening of the borders of the body is a tool for arousing critical viewpoints against the mainstream. It is believed that performative display of the anomalous body could be a kind of struggle against the societal beauty norms, patriarchy, and overall, against the disciplinary mechanisms of power. Since tattoos, piercings, sub-dermal implants, scars and all ‘unconventional’ body modifications violate Western beauty norms; they are believed to be important areas of social rebellion. By the use of all these different techniques, women and men try to reclaim their body by achieving a transformation of the relationship between self, body, and culture (Pitts 2003, 56). They believe that by extreme body modification they are able “to push the boundaries of what’s possible and what’s socially acceptable” (A Bunch of Wordz Word Press website, comment posted on June 22, 2008). This reworking of the body’s envelope is considered to be a freeing activity among body modifiers.

The main aim of having scars, piercings, tattoos etc. is that they are capable of destabilizing the norms of beauty, identity, and the body. What distinguishes the cyberpunks is the fact that they represent a political act in the digital age by using cyborg metaphor⁹. The cyborg metaphor is used as a means

⁹ Cyborg pedagogy serves as a complex metaphor that represents the body/technology hybrid while it exposes the cyborg’s dialectical pedagogy of inscription and resistance. As cyborg pedagogues, these artists perform informational technologies to examine and critique their pedagogical machinations on the body. For further information, Garoian, C. R. And Gaudelius, Y. (2001) “Cyborg Pedagogy: Performing Resistance in the Digital Age,” *Studies in Art Education*, 42 (4) Summer: 333-347.

through which a resistance and new ideas about body can be generated in a technological world (Garoian et al. 2001). Cyberpunks by creating scarred, branded, pierced, and tattooed bodies try to tell new stories to themselves and others about the meanings of their embodiment. By telling new stories about themselves, and reshaping the relationship between the self and the body; body modifiers in general, and cyberpunks in particular are trying to reject pressures of beauty norms and roles of proper femininity and masculinity. As Benjamin Smith states “Just as power exerts its influence on the body in order to create subjectivity for the object of that power, so too does permanent modification create meaningful signification for the owner of the body in relation to the rest of the society” (Benjamin Smith, BME website, comment posted April 20, 2008).

By using the latest available technology, cyberpunk artists try to construct identities away from the oppressive cultural stereotypes. Two important examples could be performance artists Stelarc and Eduardo Kac who try to construct hybrid identities that are outside the meta-narratives presented through traditional systems of technology (Garoian et al. 2001). Besides changing the borders of the body, cyberpunks try to dehomogenize the societal norms about gender roles and the gendered body. They argue that by changing the envelope of the disclosed self, it is possible to make a difference in the images of male and female body norms implicated in power relations. Another

example of this is Orlan, a French performative artist who is in search of disrupting socially accepted borders and appearances of the female body.

Orlan and The Fetishistic Fragmentation of the Female Body

Orlan engages in several different types of artworks within which she tries to show how unattainable Western beauty norms are. According to Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius, Orlan, by using medical technology on her own body is trying to present a body both as a vehicle and a medium, simultaneously questioning and inscribing cultural codes that function to determine our understandings of corporeality (Garoian et al. 2001). For Orlan,

plastic surgery is a path towards self-determination – a way for women to regain control over their bodies. Plastic surgery is one of the primary arenas where ‘man’s power can be most powerfully asserted on women’s bodies, ‘where the dictates of the dominant ideology ... become ... more deeply embedded in female ... flesh’ (Davis, 1997).

Her performances are among the most striking ones since she is most of the time under partial anesthesia rather than being asleep and looking at and commenting on doctors about their work. Although she starts her performances by apologizing from her audience for the things they are going to witness, a general belief is that revoking and terrifying the audience is her general aim. Alyda Faber asserts that her aim is to evoke pain in the spectator and to force them for questioning about the body in contemporary capitalist society (Faber

2002, 90). She also argues that “Orlan’s performances command attention because she puts her own body at risk in order to create awareness of the extent to which we all discipline our own bodies, in more or less painful ways, to conform to current social norms” (Faber 2002, 90). Orlan’s performances consist of nine plastic surgery sessions in which she reconstructs her face and the body. Since May 30th 1990 she has become a part of official installments. According to Kate Ince “She undergoes a series of operations to totally remodel her face and body, and thus her identity” (Ince 2000, 1). In order to display how the cultural messages are imprinted on our flesh, she takes a number of plastic surgeries. Her performances named ‘Carnal Art’ (this is the name she has chosen for her performance sessions) show her intention to use her body as her canvas. Her use of cosmetic surgery as a medium for her expression amplifies the social pressures on women to conform to narrowly defined patriarchal standards of beauty (Faber 2002, 85). She argues that her performances are an attempt of drawing a self-portrait of herself as it is used to be done, only with the difference of the introduction of high technology. It is argued that her intention is not to become "beautiful" but rather to suggest that the "objective (beauty) is unattainable and the process horrifying” (Jeremy Drummond, Orlan website, comment posted on June 15, 2008). The classical portraits of beautiful women such as Mona Lisa or Venus inspire most of her surgeries. Putting together different aspects of their facial appearance, the result turns out to be something monstrous, which, according to her, proves that the physical perfection the West promoted, is something unattainable. According to Kate

Ince “There was no one model for Orlan’s self-remodeling; each feature is surgically resculpted to match a specific feature of a different great icon in the history of Western art:, the forehead of Leonardo’s Mona Lisa, the chin of Botticelli’s Venus and the eyes of Gerars’s Psyche” (Ince 2000, 6). The result of this mixture is far from being beautiful. The result is described as ‘monstrous and repulsive’ most of the time. Although Orlan is discussed harshly for being a public figure and media presenter, I hold the belief that her work is very influential and worth to be taken into account. Besides being criticized for becoming a popular culture figure, her performances and performances of all the other cyberpunks are considered pathological by the mainstream culture.

Body Modification: A Type of Social Resistance or a Sign of a Psychological Disorder?

As argued earlier, Michel Foucault argues that fields of knowledge that provide information about the subjects of the authority, defines the set of rules, which should be obeyed by the subjects. In a case of disobedience, the subject will be considered to be moving away from the territory of being normal. The definition of ‘normal’ casts out a number of people and accuses them for being ‘abnormal’ or ‘pathological’. This is the way the disciplinary mechanisms promote the normality and confine ‘the others’ for not being normal. Cyberpunks and other body modifiers are among the group of people who are deprived from recognition and suffer from being outcasted as a result of body

modification. The mainstream media, which considers extreme body modification as a social problem since 1990's, attributes different names to this phenomenon. Shortly, I would like to share a few terms used in referring to cyberpunks and extreme body modification in the mainstream media. Some of them are: 'delinquency', 'pathology', 'perversion', 'defiance', 'self-hating', 'sickness', 'out-of-control', 'dangerously unconventional' and so on. By attributing adjectives such as pervert, sick, pathological, or delinquent society marginalize the body modification movement and leaves no space for them to struggle against the disciplinary mechanisms of the state or patriarchy. This mental health perspective, which I'm trying to move myself away from, destroys all the possibilities of cyberpunks' attempt for reclaiming their bodies from the authority. As stated by Victoria Pitts in an article in the book *Bodies in the Making: Transgressions and Transformations*, pathologizing discourses interpret the surgically transformed body as a record of symptoms of inner psychological disorder (Pitts, 2006). Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius claim that there is a difference between people's attitudes toward body implants. They argue that if the implant is put in order to restore health then the people do not resist the idea of the use of the implant. On the contrary, if the body with the implants is healthy it is considered 'monstrous' (Garoian et al. 2001). These extreme examples of body modification are also an area of interest for psychiatry and medicine. In a report about a body modifier shows the usage of the language of science and medicine. The report declares that

As a part of her current life style a 28-year-old Caucasian woman routinely injures and allows subsequent healing of her skin and other tissues.....Her body modifications include a 'split tongue'...large scarification patterns produced by branding and cutting. The patient had a normal childhood, is currently employed full-time as an office manager, and is psychologically stable. (This is the only case of auto destructive behavior) However, this may not be the case in the future as an increasing number of young individuals have become interested in body modifications (Benecke 1999, 281).

As can be seen in the report, medical language identifies body modification with personality disorder, depression, or other psychological problems. It has been argued that it is uncritical and dangerous to use the language of pathology since it hinders the possibility of cyberpunks achieving a new identity through the use of body modification.

Being considered as pathological is not the only critique cyberpunks and other body modifiers encounter with. Cyberpunks in their attempt to explore subjectivity face with criticism which has to be taken into consideration in order to find an answer to the question whether movement of OBOS or cyberpunk movement could compose a struggle against micropolitics of power.

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapters, the attitudes of feminists (gathered around the Boston Women's Health Book Collective) and the attitudes of cyberpunks towards the body have been discussed. We have argued that each group claims that body is a site of power and a site of resistance as well. Thus, they use body as a site of exploration of new subjectivities. As discussed by Michel Foucault, in order to resist against the disciplinary and normalizing mechanisms of power, the things defined by them should be re-defined as in the case of the body. The main aim of both these groups is to re-define and reclaim what they think belongs to them. In order to achieve this goal, they try to change the borders of the body by bodily modification or try to be aware of the discourses generated by power mechanisms around the issue of the body. Up to this point, the main concern of this work was to examine the ideas of these groups under the light of Foucault's work on the body. In this chapter, the criticism these groups encounter will be discussed. First of all, the main critique targets both groups is the fashionalization problem. It refers to the fact that most of the ideas and works of people from these groups have turned into commercial commodity in the mainstream culture. Second of all, one of the most important critiques, especially concerning cyberpunks, is the feasibility of the resistance techniques cyberpunks use. The presence of the pain in most of the body modifications seems problematic to most of the people. It has been argued that the presence of the pain keeps this movement from being a mass scale

resistance. Although I agree with this claim, I believe that it is worth questioning whether a resistance should be a mass scaled one or not in order to make a difference in the social arena. Thirdly, the physical limitations of the modifications and the problem of visibility are among the critiques about cyberpunks. Fourth, the self and the body are seen as fixed entities by the feminist groups and cyberpunks. Last but not least, I hold the belief that the idea of being in control of the body reproduces the modernist belief of being in charge of the nature. By arguing to be the master of the nature, modernist thinkers put themselves in God's shoes and it is arguable whether this is the case for body modifiers.

First of all, the fashionization problem is seen as an embodying technique of power since by including so called 'marginal' items in to the mainstream culture it normalizes them and eradicate its power for resistance. This has been the case for the main statement of the feminists in the OBOS movement. Feminists argue that women have the power to be anything they want if only they can use their ideas and voices. This message has been reinterpreted by the advertisers and started to be used as a campaign slogan. This message has been in use by media for promoting the idea that women can wear and be anything they want. The nuance between these two messages that share the common statement of 'being what one wants' is that the former is talking about nothing but loving and knowing your own body, but the latter is talking about having not the body one wants but rather achieve the perfect body he/she has been asked for. A common practice is that body modification videos

are put on the market as sex tapes by the media. It has been argued that by engaging in such practices, which are put up for sale, the body modification invites ‘surveillance, fetishization, and the colonialist appetite for consumption’ (Pitts 2003, 81). In addition to the body modification videos most of the extreme piercings and splitters (used in splitting tongue and penis) are sold as sex toys in online shopping websites. All these accessories believed to be hardcore and highly deviant undergo changes in meaning as the broader culture adapts to their presence on the cultural landscape (Pitts 2003, 80). One of the concerns of cyberpunks is that as a result of accessories such as nose, navel, and eyebrow piercings, and small tattoos being apparent throughout popular culture will reduce the effect of extreme body modifications. Most of the cyberpunks believe that the body modification practices will be taken less seriously as they become fashionable.

Orlan is one of the cyberpunks who is accused of turning herself into a commercial commodity. Jeremy Drummond on his website argues that all aspects of Orlan’s performances including photos, videos, costumes and even ‘vials of liquid flesh drained from her operations’ are sold to high-paying collectors (Jeremy Drummond, Orlan website, comment posted on June 15, 2008). Orlan is also criticized for charging money to be interviewed and be on talk shows, fashion magazines etc.

Second of all, all kind of body modifications are criticized for causing pain to the modifiers. The presence of the pain in the body modifications are among the most popular critiques about extreme body modification. Most of the

people when being asked about the issue state that it is ‘meaningless’ to hurt yourself as a form of expression. Besides being repulsive for the audience, it is painful for the applier. The main problems about the presence of the pain are (1) the body modification movement is restricted to be influential among a small group of people and can never procreate a mass scale rebellion; (2) it makes people question the fact that whether it is too extreme to have body alterations or not in order to raise a point. As an example to this critique a woman when asked what she thinks about extreme body modification she asserted that: “Having oneself surgically mutilated in order to prove a point? Isn’t this going too far?” (Morgan 1998, 161).

Thirdly, it is important to talk about the physical limitations and the problem of visibility concerning the body modification movement. By physical limitations I intend to talk about body being a limited resource. The body alteration can not last forever since the ‘canvas’ of the body modification artist is made out of an irreplaceable material, the body. It is argued that body modifiers must stop at some point since otherwise ‘the physical effect would be, even by the standards of body modifiers, harmful and not reclaimative’ (Pitts 2003, 78). The limitations are not only about the physical capacity of the body but also about the visibility of the body modifications done on the body. The body modification movement is criticized for being confined to the private sphere rather than being visible in the public sphere. It has been argued that since most of the scarring, tattoos, and piercings are done to the places that are hard to be displayed in the public arena; the movement is obliged to stay in the

private sphere. As a matter of fact, cyberpunks do not display their body art in the social gatherings where they think inappropriate for such a display. Body modifiers who do not want to lose their jobs or considered 'abnormal' prefer to hide their tattoos or other body modifications in public. Even the body modifiers living in sub-cultural communities feel the need to disguise them in public life. It is claimed that to the extent that these marks are hidden, their 'communicative and symbolic powers' are muted (Pitts 2003, 79). Although visibility can not ensure the transmittance of political messages, it is a valuable critique in terms of questioning the nature of resistance. Being practiced only in the private sphere raises another criticism about being restricted to a small group of people. It has been argued that body modification is nothing but a way of belonging to a group. The body modifications are considered as the group rituals of an undersized group of people.

Lastly, one of the critiques concerning the body modification is that, body modifiers consider body and self as fixed and unchanging entities. The argument of opening the envelope of the self exemplifies the belief of body modifiers. By stating that their aim is to open up the envelope of the body, they claim that body and self are separated entities. As stated by Victoria Pitts, body modifiers rely on a "classical ideal of the skin as a pristine, smooth, closed envelope for the self, and a notion of the body and self as fixed and unchanging" (Pitts 2003, 25).

Last but not least, I would like to talk about the God Complex of Modernism. One of the basic assumptions of modernity is that human beings

are capable of controlling, changing, and dominating the nature. Being the sole ruler of the nature resembles the idea of having total control over the way your body looks. For the sake of speculation, it is possible to raise a question: “If body modifiers share the belief of modernists which they strongly struggle against, could their resistance be an outstander or is it just a variation of classical modern reasoning?”

CONCLUSION

For the past 20 years (early 1980s to present), the body has had an important place in the literature of sociology. It has been seen as a site for exploring and constructing identity. This site is also a site within which the disciplinary mechanisms of power are at work. Through the new fields of knowledge, new discourses, new set of rules, the disciplinary techniques of power are executing a normalizing process. The binary opposition of normal and the other – abnormal, delinquent, insane, pathological; impose on people the importance of conforming to the societal norms. A common binary opposition in the Western society is the opposition of being physically acceptable or not. The body, which is a site for the operation of modern forms of power, has been shaped and controlled by the authority constantly. The desired and acceptable form of physical appearance has been promoted through multiple discourses. These discourses were leaving out a lot of people from the realm of the ‘normal’.

Feminists’ first reaction against this project of using the body as a tool for control is that these norms cast out people with disabilities and overweight. Taking this as a starting point, feminists started to question how difficult Western beauty ideals are to attain. The female body has been kept under control by the subtle, pervasive, and ambiguous processes of discipline and normalization through cultural representations (Davis 1997, 11). Being aware of the cultural norms of beauty, feminists have formed Boston Women’s Health

Book Collective which has the aim to publish books that will educate women about their own bodies. The movement emerged around this series of book has the slogan of 'Our Bodies, Ourselves'. The main intention was to show women that the most precious thing is to love your body in the way it is rather than trying to shape it according to the societal norms. The changes done on your body should be your choice, not for the society's critical eye. Feminist authors hold the belief that by being aware of the disciplinary mechanisms of power and discourses they have generated, it is possible to rebel against the authority and reclaim their bodies from it.

On the other hand, the body modification movement is taking another position which includes extreme body modification. The body modification movement aims to reclaim their body from the authority as feminists, but their strategy for achieving it differs from the feminists'. The group I have interested was cyberpunks who claim that through the nonmainstream body modification it is possible to create not only spectacle but also new forms of social rebellion. Cyberpunk body modifiers, in order to reclaim power over their bodies, alter their body and customize their bodies in a way differ from the societal norms of beauty. As stated earlier, they believe that body should be seen as a space for exploring identity. This subcultural group through the use of extreme body modification such as tattoo, piercings, scarring, branding and surgical modifications; try to free themselves from the disciplinary mechanisms of modern power. Orlan who is one of the most important cyberpunk body modifiers uses plastic surgery as a means to criticize the societal norms of

beauty. By using her body as a canvas, she remodels her body in order to amplify the social pressures on women to conform to narrowly defined patriarchal standards of beauty (Faber 2002, 85).

As stated earlier, cyberpunks and all of the extreme body modifiers are considered to be pathological for engaging into extreme body alterations which is unacceptable by the society. It has been argued that there is no difference between going under the knife for attaining beauty ideals or to rebel against the authority. Although this is the case, the plastic surgery done for achieving an ideal beauty is considered as 'normal' by the majority of people.

The feminists and cyberpunks have been criticized for many reasons. One of the main critiques about the practices of feminists and cyberpunks was the fashionization of them. Their accessories or messages have been converted into commercial commodities of the mainstream culture. Secondly, since most of the extreme body modifications contain a lot of pain, this movement has been criticized for addressing only to a small group of people. Although the necessity for a resistance to be in a mass scale is questionable, the presence of pain is among the most important critiques which support the idea of extreme body modification being pathological. Thirdly, using the body as a medium for expression is criticized since it is a limited entity. Since the body modifier has to stop at some point, the body modification hasn't been regarded as an influential type of resistance. Fourth, the feminists and cyberpunks are criticized for taking the body as fixed and unchanging. It has been argued that, feminists and cyberpunks believe that the body has always been an unchanged

entity until now. Last of all, the body modifiers are accused of mimicking the modern idea of keeping the body under control.

Throughout this work, I have tried to formulate the ideas of feminists and cyberpunks about the workings of power on the body. Both groups are trying to reclaim power over their bodies. Further research can be conducted about the groups like modern primitives and radical queers that weren't able to be discussed in this work.

To sum up, it is important to note that although the body movement of feminists and cyberpunks face a lot of criticism I believe that their aim to reclaim their body from the authority worth exploring further since it might have a chance to be a starting point for a resistance.

APPENDIX A

Figure A.1

3-D implants (Star implants by Steve Haworth)



Figure A.2

3-D implants (cross tattoos)



Figure A.3

3-D implants



Figure A.4

Scarring



Figure A.5

Scarring (Tree figure)

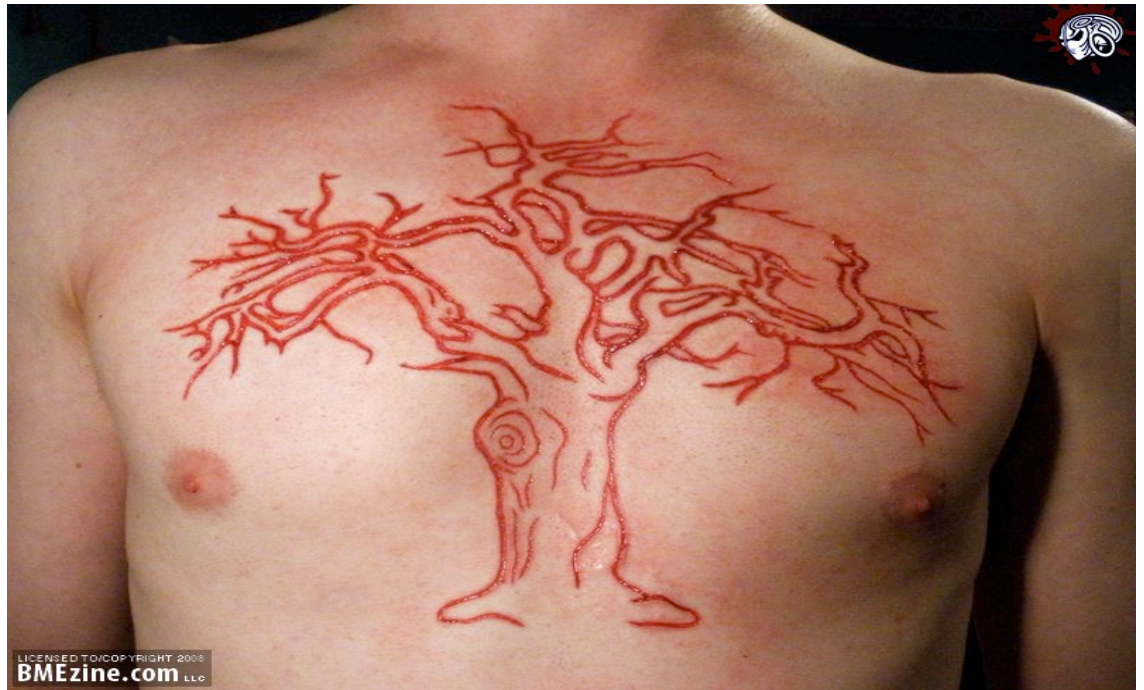


Figure A.6

Tongue splitting

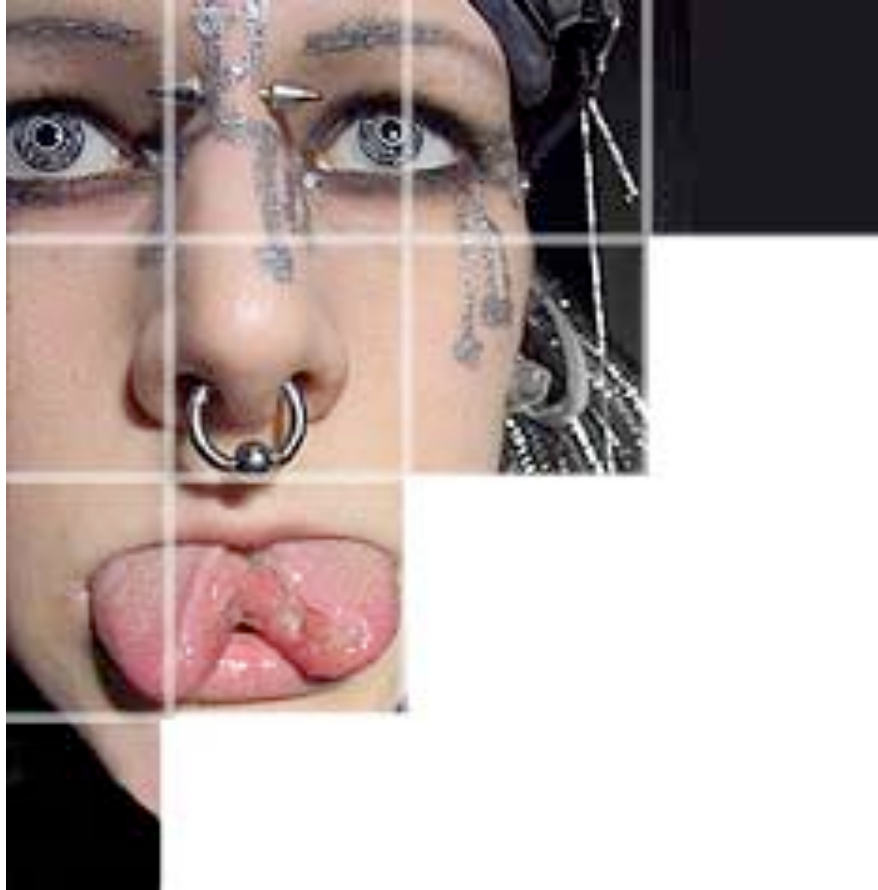


Figure A.7

Tongue splitting



Figure A.8

Pincushion by Jeremy VanWert



Figure A.9

Branding

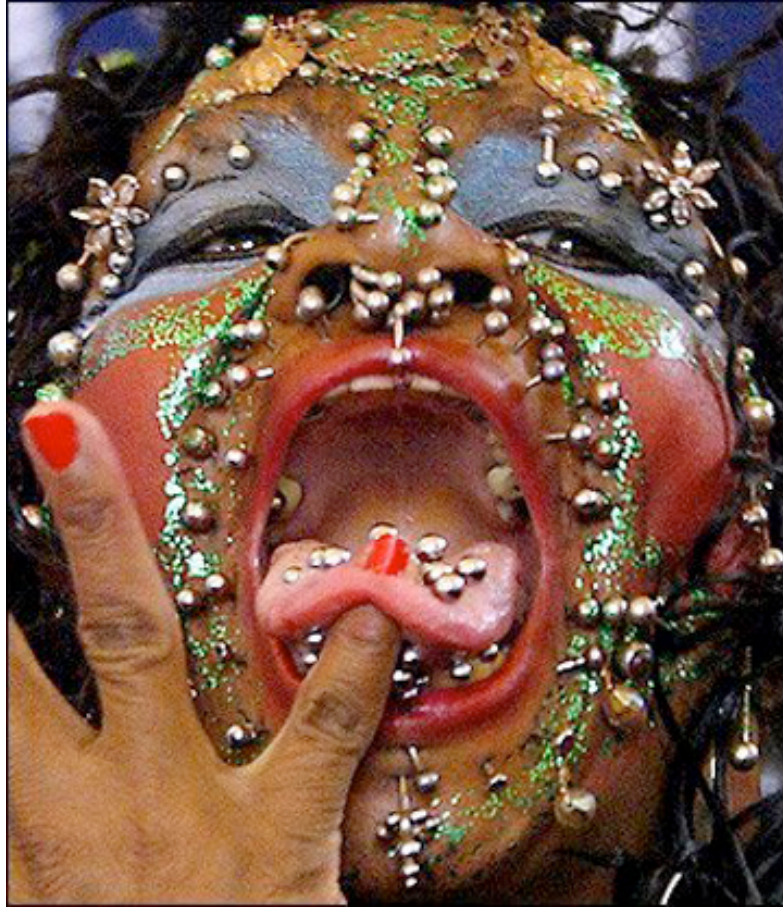


Figure A.10

A still image of Orlan



Figure A.11

A still image from Orlan's surgeries



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