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Dwoskin: disability, diaspora, dysphoria

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Dwoskin: disability, diaspora, dysphoria

Author:

Jenny Chamarette, Senior Research Fellow in Art, Reading School of Art, School of Arts Communication and Design, University of Reading

Abstract:

In this article, I argue that looking and staring, which are typical aspects of Stephen Dwoskin's experimental, highly personal approach to cinema, contribute to a broader sensory enquiry into conditions of diasporic and disabled (gender) dysphoria. I explore the intersecting relationships between these four d's – Dwoskin, diaspora, disability, dysphoria, understanding how in recent years trans studies, diaspora studies and disability studies have become interested especially in conditions of dysphoria as strategies that negotiate complex embodiment and ethnicity. In doing so, I adopt a hybrid approach to aesthetic modes of self-estrangement and radical interruptions of normative embodiment in Dwoskin's late films. Adopting what Elliot Evans has described via Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick and Paul B Preciado as a 'universalising' orientation of cutting edge trans theory,[1] and earlier work by historians of disability and masculinity such as David Serlin,[2] I read across these concepts to suggest that the formal and aesthetic structures and contexts of Dwoskin's late films trouble the borders between embodied conceptualisations of diaspora, disability and dysphoria. This has consequences for Dwoskin's positioning in wider discourses of experimental filmmaking, both within and beyond Britain where he spent the majority of his adult life, and helps to connect the relationships between his diasporic Jewishness and disability. Thinking expansively, this article examines how expressions of dysphoria, discussed in trans, disabled and diasporic communities, have the potential to offer, not recuperation or rehabilitation of Dwoskin's work, but a space to think from that is resistant to the binarist, normative and exclusionary logics prevailing in British culture at this moment in the 21st century.

Article:

The experience of looking at oneself and seeing an other runs deep in Stephen Dwoskin's filmmaking. His earliest short films made in New York and London, such as *Asleep* (1961) *Alone* (1963) and *Me, Myself and I* (1967/8), *Take me* (1968), *Soliloquy* (1969), and *Times For* (1970), explored themes of confinement, sexual violence, boredom, anxiety, voyeurism and vulnerability; leitmotifs which continued throughout his lifetime of experimental film and video practice. The predominant focus of Dwoskin's camera, and its subject material, was the female and often nude body, in order to examine at close range gendered vulnerability and self-estrangement. This did not prevent him from being the subject of the camera's gaze too: many of his works, particularly those concerned with relationships such as *Behindert* (1974) and *Outside In* (1981), also place his disabled body within the frame. According to historians of experimental film such as AL Rees and David Curtis,[3] Dwoskin's approach to visually intense, sexually provocative filmmaking placed him within the category of underground cinema in his early career,[4] as well as receiving scrutiny and ambivalence from feminist scholars from the late 1970s onward.[5] Nonetheless, in order to understand Dwoskin's body of work beyond the confines of film historical categories – while simultaneously reappraising his lived experiences as a Jewish diasporic, disabled artist – some critical re-evaluation of this historical positioning is required.

While Dwoskin's earlier films were preoccupied with female vulnerability, his late films examine his relationship to his own body as much as they also draw upon mythological iconographies of the female form. Reflecting on Dwoskin's identity as a desiring disabled man, a member of the Jewish diaspora and distanced from the country of his birth, a composite model of alterity emerges in these films. Not simply a fractalisation of self that one might associate with modes of crip subjectivity[6] but also one that continuously examines the looker and the looked-upon, through refilming and restaging. In *The Sun and the Moon* (2007), kaballistic mythologies of the divine feminine and gender-crossing become part of the flow of the film's distorted, slowed-down narrative, which, as I argue later, stages staring and misrecognition as correlative exteriorizations of dysphoria. Dysphoria and misrecognition are recurring structures of form as well as representation in Dwoskin's filmmaking, particularly in the light of his final, posthumously released film *Age Is*

(2012*)*, which offers as challenging and audio-visually intense a viewing experience as Dwoskin's early work, but deploys significantly different technological and formal modes.

In this article, I explore the intersecting relationships between four d's – Dwoskin, diaspora, disability, dysphoria, acknowledging how in recent years trans studies, diaspora studies and disability studies have become interested especially in conditions of dysphoria as strategies that negotiate complex embodiment and ethnicity. I draw attention to these aesthetic modes of self-estrangement and radical interruptions of normative embodiment, which, I argue, contribute to a broader sensory exploration of conditions of diasporic and disabled (gender) dysphoria. Through close readings of Dwoskin's late films – *The Sun and the Moon*, and *Age Is*, I examine the films' capacities (and limits to that capacity) to represent the liminal, dysphoric conditions that invite estrangement from oneself as a key cinematic principle. Dysphoria is, I suggest, a means of addressing incommensurable but nonetheless interlinked and complex identities, which cannot always be housed within a single body, and instead spill out beyond their borders. Adopting what Elliot Evans has described via Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick and Paul B Preciado as a 'universalising' orientation of cutting edge trans theory,[7] and earlier work by historians of disability and masculinity such as David Serlin,[8] I suggest that the formal and aesthetic structures of Dwoskin's late films, including the contexts of their development, trouble the borders between embodied conceptualisations of (Jewish) diaspora, disability (and disabled masculinity) and dysphoria. This has consequences for the ways in which his work is positioned in wider discourses of experimental filmmaking, both within and beyond Britain.

Why should this matter, particularly in a journal of Jewish media and visual culture? For one, current trends in queer theory, studies of diaspora, critical disability studies and trans studies all seek to destabilise the normative models established by European Enlightenment thought, from the histories of race and sexuality to the construction of the able body, whose consequences include antisemitism, eugenics, and racialized science.[9] Though I am not a Jewish studies scholar per se, my extended conversations with Rachel Garfield on the work and life of Dwoskin have revealed a tender model of Jewish masculinity that exceeds the frames of Euro-Christian colonial white manhood (see Rachel Garfield's article in this issue, *'Dwoskin and Post War Anglophone Jewish Masculinity*'). Marginalized positions – such as

Jewish, queer, trans, disabled and diasporic – have the latent capacity demonstrate the mutability of those categories assigned to the normative. What they all do, to a greater or lesser extent, is loosen the purchase of binary gender, heteronormative desire and bodily integrity as socially normative constructs. At a time when "identity politics" and "cultural Marxism" are adopted as disinformative slurs by right-wing press and UK government alike,[10] it is especially important to amplify the work of artists like Dwoskin. Not because "identity politics" can be read into his films post-fact, but because the gender/queer and dysphoric potential within Dwoskin's work was already present from the outset, delineated by, among other things, his marginalized lived experiences as Jewish diasporic, and disabled. Thinking expansively, the key question for this article is whether expressions of dysphoria, discussed in trans, disabled and diasporic communities, have the potential to offer, not recuperation or rehabilitation of Dwoskin's work, but a space to think from that is resistant to the binarist, normative and exclusionary logics prevailing in British culture at this moment in the 21st century.

While biography is not the central methodology of this article, Dwoskin's concerns with gender, vulnerability and sexual and cultural dysphoria nonetheless also pertain to wider historical constructions of masculinity in the militarised environments of 1940s and 1950s America in which he grew up; more particularly the ways in which militarised institutional constructions of able-bodied, white, heterosexual masculinity were dominant models for his own maturing sexuality. At the age of 7, Dwoskin was sent to military school in Tarrytown, 20 miles north of New York City, apparently to control his unruly behaviour. There – or close by – he contracted polio in summer 1948, and was hospitalised from the ages of 9 to 15 in a rehabilitative military hospital also inhabited by army veterans. Although his attendance at military school was arguably responsible for his contracting polio in the first place, it was also potentially what saved his life, providing his family with advanced medical care for him that they would not otherwise have been able to access. The period of hospitalisation which followed the life-changing paralysis in his legs that Dwoskin experienced as a result of polio infection, had a significant effect on his formative understanding of sexuality and gender, particularly governed by the institutional structures of the military and the hospital.

In transcribed interviews for the German television channel ZDF, Dwoskin describes his early experiences of sexuality, which were largely shaped by the young disabled men with whom he shared a substantial part of his childhood. In particular he refers to the sex-play between single-sex ward mates as "the more homosexual type of masculine games with sexuality"[11]: competitions involving masturbation and self-fellatio. In this interview he also describes extensively his desire for, and separation from, women; how his early sexualised fantasies about women were linked to the gender segregation he experienced in hospital, and how this contributed to a vision of women as distant objects, rather than as subjects that he found underlined in the military contexts of the hospital. This may, in part, account for the persistent methods of close looking, scrutiny and indeed 'staring' that manifest across his body of film work.

Dwoskin's accounts of homosocial sexualisation in military hospital resonate significantly with what historian David Serlin has described as 'Crippling Masculinity' in the framework of the US military, from the mid-18th century to the 1940s and 1950s. Serlin's historical overview identifies how military discourses of physical, intellectual and moral fitness were also used as tools to reinforce the body politic of the emerging nation, therefore governing who should be considered as a body fit for military service under the conditions of transformative political and social change, including Civil War, post-abolition racialisation discourses, eugenics in relation to socio-economic status, sexuality and race, and patterns of global immigration to the United States. However, he also identifies those spaces within the military-political complex where homosocial, queer cultures were socially approved, if not sanctified. Serlin identifies this particularly in the crossover of military *un*fitness (the maimed war veteran) and genderqueer performance (for example, drag) which draws attention to disability, and in doing so, remakes transgressive, and yet socially approved visions of sexuality, gender and physical prowess.[12] This combination of gendered and sexual transgression and social approval resonates powerfully for Dwoskin's work, which sits ambivalently in histories of experimental film, partly due to the evident discomfort that his films provoke.

To be clear, the objective in this article is not to reduce Dwoskin to a series of overlapping identities or external markers of biographical marginalisation: Jewish, diasporic, disabled.

Nor do I intend to claim that these social and cultural indicators are immutable identities that identically reproduce dysphoric effects as a result of wider social exclusion. Each aspect of embodied life retains its own cultural specificities. My aim is not to reduce each one to a plane of same difference. I embrace a combination of medical and social models of disability, understanding that lived experiences of impairment are unique and distinctive, and that they operate in conjunction with wider social factors designed to provide structural advantages to normatively able-bodied individuals, and thus exclude or marginalize those designated as disabled. In discussing dysphoria as a critical concept, I attempt to make sense of the complexity of lived experience and socially constructed positioning together – particularly lived experience of Dwoskin's ageing, disabled, chronically ill body in later life – through the frame of the experimental filmmaking practices which he maintained until the end of his life. In doing so, I resist rehabilitative claims that seek to reinsert Dwoskin unproblematically into a canon of experimental film history. I recognize that marginalized artists themselves often contest the principles of canon formation, much as they may also desire wider recognition and appraisal of their work. And I recognize too the particular valence of rehabilitation in the context of acquired disability, which Henri-Jacques Stiker identifies aptly: "rehabilitation marks the appearance of a culture that attempts to complete the act of identification, of making identical. This act will cause the disabled to disappear and with them all that is lacking, in order to assimilate them, drown them, dissolve them in the greater and single social whole."[13]

Supplementing Stiker's rejection of rehabilitation as an act of assimilation, I wish neither to assimilate nor dissolve the distinctive qualities of Dwoskin's work; though I do place them within wider contexts and cultures of embodiment and looking, particularly the work of Rosemarie Garland Thomson on staring (Garland Thomson 2009). There is nothing easy, palatable, or comfortable about Dwoskin's filmmaking, its perceived failures to 'fit' dominant trends in British experimental filmmaking, or its consistent fascination with sexuality to apprehend and access models of the self that diverge from Cartesian Enlightenment cognitivism or Romantic individuation. The seamless rehabilitation of Dwoskin's work without a fuller understanding of the embodied contexts of his life and filmmaking is not my desired outcome. By emphasizing dysphoria over and above wholeness or integration, my analysis echoes the 'falling apart' that Edward Saïd discussed

as a constitutive element of an artist's late work.[14] I acknowledge the conjunctions of ageing and late style, disability and diaspora, in the dissolutions of body integrity that manifest in Dwoskin's late works.

I have made the case elsewhere that work by disabled artists such as Dwoskin disrupt the gender binaries implicit in early feminist theorisations of the gaze.[15] I have also proposed that a number of Dwoskin's works depict not only heterosexually-presenting desire that locks the women represented into structures of the male gaze, but also a crip and genderqueer orientation that seeks, in some cases, hesitant blending, fumbling intimacy and attempted and failed proximity that shifts from a desire *for* another to a desire *to be or become another.* In this article, I take this understanding of Dwoskin's cinematic looking one step further, by engaging with critical concepts of dysphoria, drawn from studies of disability, diaspora and transgender, in order to evaluate two of Dwoskin's late works that sustain uncomfortable looking as a primary mode of expression.

I should clarify also that this article is not a re-appraisal Dwoskin as a trans artist, nor a gender dysphoric one. Rather than confining dysphoria exclusively to a medically pathologized psychiatric condition, I adopt the term transformatively and in line with recent trans theorists. I do this as a means of better articulating the formal aesthetics of Dwoskin's late filmmaking, as well as the operations of desire, care, intimacy and vulnerability revealed in them. This approach is inevitably also tied to Dwoskin's lived experience in the late 2000s and early 2010s as an ageing, Jewish diasporic, disabled artist, experiencing serious deteriorations in his health and a crisis of care precipitated by the austerity politics of a coalition conservative government in the UK. In articulating dysphoria as a material and aesthetic condition, my analysis draws on phenomenologies of film that I have developed over the past decade, *thinking with* the broader experiential, historical and embodied contexts of these moving image works in conjunction with more detailed close analysis.[16]

In subsequent sections of this article, I turn first to a synthesis of critical perspectives on dysphoria in addition to the work of Evans, Serlin and Said articulated above. I compile theorisations of diasporic dysphoria by Ly Thuy Nguyen and Alisa Lebow together with models of 'productive' dysphoria through experiences of disability by Vicki Crowley, and

Eliza Steinbock and Cáel Keegan's recent scholarship on trans aesthetics, in order to better articulate the principles of dysphoria and dissolution I apply to Dwoskin's works.[17] Next, I move to a close analysis of the experimental fiction film *The Sun and the Moon*, focusing particularly on the relationships of morphology (in the sense of embodied form), staring and witnessing to the broader contexts of diaspora, disability and dysphoria outlined earlier. As my second case study, I then shift to formal analysis of Dwoskin's last film, the experimental documentary *Age Is…*, particularly in relation to its use of 'braided' editing, digital found footage and collective models of portraiture that invite both misrecognition and, in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's terms, beholding.[18] In particular I highlight where ageing is represented as a material condition and lived experience which a) challenges normative models of body integrity through dysphoric self-refusal and b) challenges frameworks of gender through emphasis on gendered ambivalence and misrecognition, manifested in lived experience of both disability and ageing. Finally, in the conclusion to this article, I suggest that the power of this entwined, complex network of marginalization in Dwoskin's work lies in its capacity to demonstrate the porosity and paucity of conventional assignations of gender, ability and film historical constructions of masculine creative agency.

Dysphoria, diaspora, disability (and gender technologies)

Dysphoria is an interstitial state of being, relating to conditions within the body, and conditions experiences outside the body. Derived from ancient Greek words pertaining to malaise, discomfort and what is difficult to bear, it refers to consistent and persistent feelings of distress. Its terminological currency is most commonly valorised within psycho-medical models of mental health diagnosis, broadly including mixed state emotions in anxiety and depression, dysphoric mood in bipolar disorder, personality disorder and delusional disorders, pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) and gender dysphoria.[19] It is also sometimes mistakenly assumed that gender dysphoria is a term interchangeable with transgender, or that all transgender people experience gender dysphoria, but this has been substantively disproven.[20] Numerous studies have highlighted that it is essential for transgender people to have access to healthcare which does not further stigmatise already marginalised and vulnerable individuals.[21] The term's pathologisation thus already maps its border crossings between gender studies, trans studies and disability studies, particularly in

the relationship between medical pathology and wider social stigma. Moreover, the range of psychiatric conditions to which dysphoria refers bears witness to the difficulty of definition, as well as its stigmatizing potential (both as a source of social stigma, and a response to it). Dysphoria therefore occupies uneasy ground both within and outside the body. And while feeling bad – and feeling unremittingly bad – is a looser term, this fails to capture both the embodied and affective dimensions of dysphoria, and dysphoria's productive and counter-productive capacities as a creative strategy. The critical difficulty of deploying the term consistently has in fact become useful, especially as a strategy for marginalised and diasporic artists to engage intimate, relational forms of lived experience that address questions of embodiment, gender, sexuality, trauma, health, disability and kinship in direct relation to forces of social stigmatization.

Vietnamese American poet Chrysanthemum Tran, for example, writes at the "intersection of diaspora and dysphoria" to develop a model of "queer dis/inheritance—a simultaneous embodiment and refusal of the refugee baggage."[22] This, scholar Ly Thuy Nguyen argues, becomes a means of navigating complex and intimate constellations of refugee and migrant lived experience "with special commitment to feminized concerns about gender, sexuality, and affects—intricate matters likely to be overlooked and sometimes unnameable."[23] Dysphoria's unnameable, transitional or mutable qualities appear to find resonance most commonly in auto-ethnographic creative practice, especially in relation to intimate matters often co-extending with experiences of diasporic life. For example, Tina Hernandez' creative non-fiction essay 'Legacy Dysphoria' discusses intergenerational body dysmorphia, sexualisation, and health crisis in the women of her extended Cuban-American family through frameworks of domestic space.[24] Questions of home and displacement are of course essential components of diasporic experience more broadly. Elsewhere, in relation to first person documentary, Alisa Lebow has identified the "cultural dysphoria" of technological and audio-visual disconnection, "revealed in the interval between aural and visual register" in her analysis of Sandhya Suri's film, *I for India* (2005).[25] The interconnectedness of aesthetic form with dysphoria that Lebow identifies is particularly resonant as an analytical device for Dwoskin's filmmaking, which regularly shifts registers between first person documentary, auto-ethnography and experimental fiction, often with disruptive soundtrack patterns that shift the auditory assumptions of diegetic sound.

Dysphoria and diasporic lived experience clearly occupy related constellations to one another, but their relationship is not necessarily causal or direct. It is, however, likely to be related to subtle, intergenerational lived experiences of marginalisation – including Jewish diasporic identity.

In his book *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* Daniel Boyarin resolves the tensions of his soft, feminine-presenting masculinity, "a story of inexplicable gender dysphoria" into a "happy ending" through his diasporic Jewish identity: "I didn't think of myself so much as girlish, but rather as Jewish."[26] Boyarin is not the only scholar to identify diasporic Jewishness as a form of embodiment and lived experience that provides a joyful home for dysphoria. In her analysis of contemporary comedian Sandra Bernhard, Milla Rosenberg has suggested that "Bernhard's films and writings express bisexual desires […] and extend a "dysphoric" critique of dominant Christian norms. Bernhard performs maleness in ways that both extend a feminist sensibility and call into question the category of 'woman.'"[27] In a less joyful sense, Britta Kallin persuasively identifies the latent body dysphoria of Franz Kafka's writing as pertaining both to Jewish shame and deep, dysphoric relationships with gender and sexuality.[28] There is a particular inflection of gendered dysphoria, both joyful and despairing, that emerges in relation to sexuality and Jewish embodiment, and this resonates usefully with my later analysis of Dwoskin's *The Sun and the Moon*.

The resolution of dysphoria is not always a desirable outcome, and this is also the case in accounts of creative practice which centre the experience of the disabled artist-writer. Vicki Crowley, in her analysis of her practice-based research on her experience of becoming deaf as an academic, articulates dysphoria productively "as a form of critique."[29] Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's oft-used models of the rhizome, she stages dysphoria as "a form of vertigo – a conscious connectedness to the incorporeal psychic knowing that is 'line of flight' – the simultaneous apprehension of territorialisation, deterritorialization and reterritorialization."[30] Dysphoria is, for Crowley, concomitantly an affective state, a political strategy and an experience of social stigmatisation – the latter which might otherwise be described as the disabling effects of normative culture. And although Crowley does not explicitly discuss *gender* dysphoria in her auto-ethnographic experimental writing, gender

nonetheless appears in the form of intergenerational knowledge: the deterioration of her hearing is hereditary, passed down through the women in her family. For Crowley, 'productive' dysphoria becomes a means through which to negotiate the embodied social and cultural incursions of disability, alongside the complex constellations of lived experience that make up her world as a deaf creative practitioner and academic: "It might help us to pose and to love difficult questions, without effacement, without erasure and to immerse ourselves amid the enduring mystery that is body, affect, becoming."[31]

Conceptualising dysphoria as a counter-strategy consequently has precedents in Jewish, wider diasporic and disabled creative practice and scholarship. It offers the potential for articulating difficulty, distress, malaise, dispossession and discomfort, without attempting to erase or assimilate these issues into dominant narratives about, for example, how women's bodies should look and feel, how queer/trans bodies should construct themselves, how Jewish masculine or feminine bodies should act, how a becoming-deaf body should understand her own narratives of becoming. In all of these considerations, gender becomes an implicit, background concern, with the normative values of gender upheld through intergenerational histories of trauma. This latter issue is particularly relevant to Dwoskin's filmmaking – especially and specifically in the context of the early life-changing event where he contracted polio at the age of 9, and the inherited trauma of his grandparents, having escaped from Odessa during the pogroms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Dwoskin's grandfather, a former dancer who did not speak English well, is a particular source of joy and sadness for Dwoskin, and re-appears regularly in his later films – especially his autobiographical essay film *Trying To Kiss the Moon* (1994).

Thus far in this account, I have not directly established relationships between dysphoria and filmmaking. This is where recent trans studies of film and cinema become useful contexts for discussing Dwoskin's work. Transgender's important historical relationships to dysphoria – particularly gender dysphoria as a tool of medical assessment to confirm gender reassignment and related medical interventions – mean that dysphoria becomes of necessity an important area of discussion in trans theorisations of cinema. From an experimental film perspective, dysphoria has already been taken up in the work of contemporary artist filmmakers such as p staff, who has consistently described dysphoria

and delirium as experiential sites of interrogation for their work.[32] One of the signal areas of growth in trans cinema studies is in relation to cinematic spectatorship. In other words, attempts to understand and frame why and how film and cinema have the capacity to affect human subjectivity in the powerful ways that they do have become primary sites of critical analysis for scholars of trans cinema.

One of the key contributions of trans theory in recent years has been, as Eliot Evans describes it, to "reimagin[e] transgender experience not through a minoritizing logic whereupon trans individuals figure as the object of study, diagnosed by sexology or psychiatry, but through a universalizing logic which asks what lessons trans experience may hold more widely."[33] This shift from minoritizing to universalizing logic allows for trans theory to migrate across disciplinary fields, and thus to find relevance to studies of film, sexuality and dysphoria elsewhere. For example, in their recent book, *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change*, Eliza Steinbock argues for the transgender potential of psychoanalytic examinations of *suture*, the Lacanian principle elaborated on initially by structuralist film theorists such as Christian Metz and later examined through feminist deconstruction in the writing of Kaja Silverman. Steinbock proposes that feminist readings of suture like Silverman's already recognize the idealized form of Lacanian suture. In other words, the "click, or the zip, of the subject experiencing concurrence between the mirror's reflected sense of me-ness with the Symbolic's terms of identity (man or woman)" is an idealized concept when it comes to cinema and cinematic encounters, difficult to actualise in practical living.[34] In reality, there is, more often than not, a disjuncture between how the cinematic spectator sees themselves, and how they feel recognized in gendered terms on screen; this disjuncture is often *not* smoothed over or made whole by cinematic viewing, but instead is messy, laborious and as uncomfortable as it is pleasurable, and 'productively' dysphoric. Drawing on ethnographic studies of white dyke and trans BSDM communities, Steinbock goes on to suggest that the sexualized body, both on- and off-screen, can enable "sex and its affects [to] function as a gender technology."[35]

Steinbock's description of sex and the sexualized body as a gender technology also aligns powerfully with Caél Keegan's modelling of dysphoria as a means through which to better

understand the filmmaking of the Wachowski sisters, including *The Matrix* (1999). Taking as its launch point earlier feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis' framing of cinema as a 'technology of gender,' Keegan's analysis of one of the most popular Hollywood films of the last 25 years considers the entire premise of the Matrix as a condition of dysphoria.[36] Keegan argues that the cinematic technologies that the film represents and the narratives it adopts reveal the inherently dysphoric potential of cinema and gendered life under the conditions of late capitalism: *The Matrix* "harness[es] dysphoria as a cinematic technology, thereby altering what it is possible to sense."[37] While the extremely low-budget experimental film works of Stephen Dwoskin ostensibly have very little to offer in comparison to the big-budget, cult-status of films like *The Matrix,* what they nonetheless share is the technological medium (or media, if one considers post-production as a different format to digital film recording) of digital film. If dysphoria can be thought of as a cinematic technology, this is what I bring next to my subsequent analyses of *The Sun and the Moon,* and *Age Is…*, where I interrogate both the technologies of form, and the positions of uncomfortable, even distressing looking, which both films invite.

Witnessing dysphoria: mythologising and medicalising in *The Sun and the Moon* (2007)

Stephen Dwoskin's digital feature film *The Sun and the Moon* provides the first case study for this article, which seeks to conjoin the threads of (Jewish) diaspora, disability and dysphoria as a framework through which to analyse Dwoskin's late cinematic style. The film has been most commonly described as an experimental adaptation of the fable Beauty and the Beast [38]. It is certainly impressionistic: entirely wordless, unified in time and place (which paradoxically gives the film a free-floating durational quality), and rooted in the dynamic of the experience between three main characters: the young 'beauty' – performed by then twenty-year old actor Helga Wretman; the older 'mediator' – performed by Dwoskin's former lover and collaborator Beatrice "Trixi" Cordua; and the malformed 'beast' – performed by Dwoskin himself. Dwoskin scholar Darragh O'Donoghue has associated the relationship of *The Sun and the Moon* to Jewish and specifically kaballistic mythology pertaining to masculine and feminine divine energies (see O'Donoghue in this issue, 'Whatever it is, I'm Against it: Comedy and Jewishness in the Work of Stephen Dwoskin'). Though not exclusive to Jewish mythology, the traditional associations of masculinity and

femininity to the sun and the moon clearly play a role in the models of gendered looking that are central to the film. *The Sun and the Moon* is also, I argue, a film about witnessing, experiencing and communicating dysphoria, without resolving or diminishing it, as a tactic of empathetic connection. This is a film that is all about patchy, disjointed, semi-failing suture of the dysphoric kind that Steinbock intimates is also a foundational structure for trans cinema.

Centring Dwoskin's own ageing body, distorted by weight gain following steroid medication to mitigate the effects of post-polio syndrome, and prosthetically supported by an oxygen tank and nasal respirator, *The Sun and the Moon* demands that his disabled, ageing, soft body be looked at, stared at. Not narcissistically (as might be the case in the representation of the film's 'beauty'), but in a complex intertwining of empathy, voyeurism and medicalisation. As is common in diasporic and disabled art-making practices, the scenes of the film are confined to the domestic environs of a series of rooms in a house (Dwoskin's home in Brixton). This was partly a result of pragmatism, since Dwoskin was experiencing significant impairments to his mobility as his increasing care needs and deteriorating health made it more difficult to shoot on location, or indeed to hold a camera – combined with funding restrictions in both the arts and healthcare that limited the financial scope of his creative projects. Within the structures of the film, the gaze is turned back upon Dwoskin: it is the unnamed women protagonists who gaze upon the unnamed male protagonist, whose physical deformity is emphasised by his nudity in the slowed down footage – a signature editing style and aesthetic technique of Dwoskin's. The solemnified performances of Wretman and Trixie arguably depict a journey of emotional transformation from horror and fear of the naked 'beast' beyond, to curiosity, to acceptance. This journey mimics and reverses models of binary gendered looking: the protagonists coded broadly as able-bodied and female are the agents of looking; while the protagonist loosely coded as disabled and male is the abject figure there to be consumed by their gaze.

Nonetheless, the inclusion of medical prosthesis and identifiably domestic setting provokes a judder in the mythological matrix of the film: this is both timeless fairy-tale *and* contemporary essay film. The beast does not solely dwell in the realm of fantasy: he also has a breathing apparatus which is neither disguised nor hidden. Sometimes he is clothed;

other times he lies on the bed, naked, arms cupped around his full, rounded abdomen similar in shape to a pregnant torso, leading to dark obscured genitalia beneath, around which his two etiolated legs splay out. His respirator tube forms an erect protrusion from the middle of his face. Medicalisation is a tool of dehumanisation in *The Sun and the Moon*, which becomes a complementary dysphoric technology of gender to the film medium itself.

In interview, Dwoskin discussed frequently the emergence of his love of cinema from his earliest childhood experiences – both the home movie-making of his father (whose footage he adapted into the short experimental film *Dad* in 2003) and in the weekly film screenings for in-patients at the military hospital where he spent a large part of his adolescence. It is not difficult therefore to build an understanding of the embodied relationships between Dwoskin's experience of medical scrutiny (and life-saving medical intervention) and moving image technologies. This becomes especially apparent in his later filmmaking, where he again began to spend very extended periods of time in hospital in the late 1990s and early 2000s – some while fighting for his life. His powerful experimental essay film, *Intoxicated By My Illness: Intensive Care Parts 1 and 2* (2001), entwines these two positions – that of the filmmaker, and that of the scrutinised, cared-for and documented in-patient. As Adrian Martin has noted, this embodied transformation was accompanied by a transformation of the technologies and labour of Dwoskin's filmmaking: "Cameras, therefore, were placed in the hands of others – students and friends – in order to accumulate the footage. A similar collective process occurred for his final, posthumously completed work, *Age Is . . .* (2012)."[39] The end credits of *The Sun and the Moon* suggest something similar, with Véronique Goël, Maggie Jennings, Keja Ho Kramer and Tatia Shaburishvili all attributed image credits alongside Dwoskin.

There is a queer resonance to the unrepentant gaze of the camera in *The Sun and the Moon* however – not so much from the perspective of gendered looking, but from the perspective of masculine desire. In his analysis of disability in the US military and its queer potential, David Serlin identifies how, in military medical photography of the time of the US Civil War "the male body is often regarded both as disabled spectacle and as erotic object."[40] Serlin argues that the medicalised gaze of the photographic camera was in some senses a neutralising device that mitigated the dominant, militarised emasculation of the male body

that had been maimed by warfare: “those forced to undergo the humiliating rituals of medical photography did so with the implicit understanding that such objective techniques of surveillance might neutralize the emasculating potential of such cold penetrations into the intimate spaces of the male body.”[41] In essence, lens-based technologies simultaneously invite medical scrutiny with its attendant humiliations, and claim objectivity, thus neutralising homosocial desire on the part of a disembodied medical agency. It is important to identify, against Serlin’s discussions of military queer crip masculinity, that Dwoskin was not injured in combat: he was instead a survivor of polio induced at the hands of a military education. In this his body becomes a site of two intersecting discourses on disability: one, the disabled veteran male body (which Dwoskin is linked to but not representative of, via the disciplinary systems of military education and hospitalisation) and two, the male body disabled through the social and physiological effects of illness and ageing. Serlin identifies that the latter “marks one’s rejection from competent service to society: it confirms that the disabled body is hopelessly queer and inimical to patriotic value or normative manly competence and productivity.”[42] This vision of a queer, non-competent body also creates an opportunity to interrogate *The Sun and the Moon* through frameworks of dysphoria.

The interplay between these poles of invasive scrutiny and neutralising objectivity through the mechanics of desire present themselves within *The Sun and the Moon*, and seem intimately tied to the film’s potential for productive dysphoria. Dwoskin’s/the protagonist’s body is repeatedly subjected to intimate examination by the female protagonists, surveilled extensively as a naked, queerly abject entity – or so it is intimated through the dynamics of montage, switching between shots of Dwoskin’s body, and the faces of the female protagonists, looking onward. At the same time, for the first half of the film, Dwoskin’s body is presented at a distance from the camera, obscured by mirrors, or made small at the centre of a fish-eye lens, or cut off by the flat plane of the bed on which he lies or sits. His respirator and oxygen tank emphasise the pathologisation of his body; this equipment is a supplementary technology to the film, but it is crucial to Dwoskin’s survival. When his unmasked face and upper chest are revealed in intimate close-up, in each instance he rarely returns the gaze of the camera. He is being looked at, rather than looking – though perhaps the closing of his eyes indicates a retreat into an interior world. The conjunction of medical

technology and cinematic technology therefore produces an unusually complex combination of looking and hypervisibility: the film invites intimate examination of Dwoskin's body, implying ambivalent desire and curiosity, intimates a failure to perceive his body as a whole, implying fetishization, and enacts a cold distanciation, emphasised through the near-exclusive use of reciprocal shot-reverse shots throughout the film where the female protagonists look and the male protagonist, until one of the penultimate sequences, does not.

The entwinement of dysphoria, medical scrutiny, looking, masculinity and the film medium, are particularly fascinating in the latter half *The Sun and The Moon*, where the intentional focus is upon Dwoskin's naked, scrutinisable body, and the plane of the camera opens out to reveal, rather than hide him. As in much of the film, footage is slowed down, so that rolls of Dwoskin's flesh, muscle wastage and body hair in prostrate and seated postures are all clearly visible. However, the subversion of the film comes not from the scrutiny of Dwoskin's body, which parodies the long history of lens-based media in pathologising non-conforming bodies, but, following Serlin, from the queer mythologisation of his disabled body as ageing, hypervisible, non-recuperable, anti-competent. By transforming the status of the film into mythology, *The Sun and the Moon* subversively elevates Dwoskin's body to a position where deep, uncompromising looking is a requirement placed upon the spectator. And yet, by retaining the contexts of domestic mise-en-scène – doorways, staircases, bare lightbulbs hanging from the centre of a ceiling, this mythology is regularly punctured. Dwoskin's body in the film is *there to be looked at* from within a private milieu, and thus tacitly acknowledges the conjoined discomfort and desire that this provokes. At the same time, his body cannot be fully non-productive. Since Dwoskin is both performer and filmmaker, the film itself is evidence of the productivity of his filmmaking craft; his body the evidence of technologies of gender invoked by cinema, medical intervention, and the histories of the military-medical gaze.

The softness of Dwoskin's body, with its curves and folds, stands in sharp relief both to the medical prosthesis of the nasal respirator he wears for the majority of the film, and to the firm, muscular flesh of the young female protagonist. His masculinity is also soft, fluid, non-penetrative, non-invasive – more resonant with the Jewish and crip masculinities

emphasised by Boyarin and Serlin, than a cinematic depiction of monstrosity or beastliness. Even the brief close-up sequences of his penis, both erect and flaccid, are dimly lit, difficult to discern, and in an entirely separate frame from the female bodies who observe him, and whose genitalia is never exposed or revealed in the film. In *The Sun and the Moon*, the morphology of masculinity is softened, deformed and made passive. And yet, despite the mythological binaries of the film's title, the positioning of a triangle rather than a duo, together with the very different body morphologies of the protagonists across conventional scales of beauty and able-bodiedness, disrupt the binary positionings of beauty/beast, female/male. The older female protagonist is only ever visible in portrait: her body's flesh is not scrutinised, though her face, and her gaze reveal extended, ambivalent emotions. In the depictions of a prolonged scream, an extended gasp of surprise, or possibly pleasure, fear, ecstasy, her reactions could imply masturbation (not unlikely given that a key element of Trixi's avant-garde dance performances in the 1960s and 1970s was masturbation on stage), voyeurism, or impressionistic intensity. Meanwhile, the younger protagonist is comparatively undemonstrative in her emotional repertoire of facial expression: instead, her naked body is often filmed from below, walking, dancing, or gazing at herself longingly in a mirror. These three perspectives of the film disturb binary logics of Beauty/Beast, while also actively disrupting the 'suturing' processes of cinematic spectatorship. It is not at all clear in the film who the spectator is invited to look 'with', and who they are invited to look 'at'. All approaches are uncomfortable, discomfiting. In this interstitial dysphoric position, there is scope for critical transformation.

Dwoskin's prostrate body only once enters into the frame with another: the last few minutes of the film reveal a delicate, tender sequence of torso and hand shots of the beauty and the beast, hands barely brushing against one another, while from a third shot perspective the mediator figure looks on sleepily. This delicate rapprochement in the penultimate sequence (the very last sequence is a brief landscape shot of winter treetops at sunset, a crow swooping across the skies above) intimately connects beauty with bestiality. The sequence suggests that looking with discomfort, and being permitted to look, can reveal a transformative kind of intimacy that may come close to Elaine Scarry's vision of beauty and social justice in *On Beauty and Being Just.*[43] In Scarry's formulation of engaging with beauty, the epiphanic qualities of beauty are not an objective reality, but a subjective

encounter – in her terms, and following philosophers Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch, "beauty prepares us for justice."[44] Regarding beauty, in its many forms (and Scarry makes no ontological or objective assertions about what is or is not beautiful) requires sustained human attention, of the kind that may transform into acts of social justice. Consequently, the envisioning of dysphoria – the discomfort of witnessing disability without finding spectatorial suture, the discomfort of living as a visibly othered body through opposing conventions of beauty, the discomfort of myth recontextualised in a situated domestic environment, the discomfort of the medicalising, voyeuristic, intimate gaze – plays a significant role in undoing binary or rationalised claims to normative embodiment in *The Sun and the Moon*. This juddering shift from normative to non-normative embodiment is what I move on to analyse in the next section, on Dwoskin's last film, *Age Is…* Reflecting on collective age-related dysphoria via misrecognition, staring and beholding, I continue to examine the cinematic technologies of dysphoria that I argue are present within the film.

Age Is… dysphoria, staring, and collective misrecognition

Age Is…, Dwoskin's last, elegiac film, was released posthumously and screened at Tate Modern, London in November 2012. Though the affective qualities of *Age Is…* are substantively different to *The Sun and the Moon*, they nonetheless share related traits. Not least in the qualities of slowed-down digital video with which Dwoskin experiments in both, and in a concern with those made less visible or alternatively, made monstrous, by social constructions of debility. However, instead of focussing primarily on his own ageing, unwell, disabled body as a vehicle of engagement, in *Age Is…* Dwoskin turns to a wider cast of elderly participants, shifting from a mode of mythology one of elegy. The melancholic mode of the film carries with it the potential to shift into one of mourning the dead – not least because, as Dwoskin's last film, a film completed on the day he died According to film critic Raymond Bellour's account of *Age Is…* the film was collectively planned by Dwoskin and his then partner, Véronique Goël, with Rachel Benitah and French producer Antoine Barraud of House on Fire productions, and partially financed by the Centre national des arts plastiques (National Centre for the Fine Arts) in Paris as well as Arts Council England.[45] Bellour also identifies that the title, *Age Is*, resembles two of Dwoskin's previous works: *Film Is…* Dwoskin's book on the history of experimental film published in 1975, and *Pain Is…*,

Dwoskin's unusual documentary on experiences of pain, chronic illness, disability and sexuality (including BDSM practices), co-funded by the German television channel ZDF and the French Arte.[46]

Age Is is better described as an essay film, which braids together sequences of distinctive form and theme to create a mode of moving image poetry, enhanced by the soundtrack specifically composed for the film by the Balanescu Quartet, led by Alexander Balanescu. The film's end credits list 16 contributors – the subjects of the film itself, friends and acquaintances of Dwoskin, to which he adds his own self-portraits. The film is a study in the portraiture of ageing, and throughout it deploys extreme close-ups (a signature style of Dwoskin's from the outset of his filmmaking life) of its elder protagonists. These slowed down close-up portraits reveal the luminous beauty of the film's collaborators, all of whom display extraordinary grace and radiance before the camera, whether asleep or awake, in good or poor health, with or without mobility aids. In this there is a call to action: to invest human dignity and agency in figures whose significant age would tend to stigmatise and exclude them from social agency. The depictions of *Age Is…* do in fact evidence, rather than deny social agency: couples kissing, groups dancing, celebrating, drinking together, acts of familial care, care for animals and domestic environments. The invitation is to recognise the agency of the elderly that already is, not to pity their exclusion. Nonetheless, if the film were simply an exercise in portraiture, this would not make it a likely candidate with which to explore conditions of dysphoria, which requires some degree of disconnection, malaise or misrecognition. For the most part, Dwoskin's collaborators in *Age Is…* return the gaze of the camera. They look, recognising camera and cameraperson as they do so, in a mode and method not dissimilar to Dwoskin's earlier film, *Some Friends (Apart)* (2002). What disrupts this process of looking back is the editing and montage style, which combines other 'braids' of sequences that disrupt the slow, singular focus upon ageing and agèd faces, and invite a dysphoric relationship between younger visions of self, and older embodiments.

In a departure from the close-up focus on the face, the second editorial 'braid' of *Age Is…*, features elderly figures, backs often turned towards the camera, who undertake those everyday (and less everyday) activities – descending a staircase, walking unaided with canes or frames or wheelchairs, sitting in a bar with a glass of wine, bringing a memory box of

photographs into a kitchen, falling asleep on a train, folding bedding, walking through the park or across the street with a cane, practising a yoga pose, dancing, working the earth in an allotment, taking a rest with a heavy shopping bag on a quiet London street, drinking a cup of tea, feeding a small infant in a pram while seated on a park bench, feeding chickens in a henhouse with grandchildren. In the third 'braid,' shots of nature segment the vignettes of human labour – water, rocks and plants, bamboo leaves shaking in a strong breeze, white water rushing between rocks, faintly shimmering waters interrupted by the outward ripples of rocks hurled into them, gently undulating bodies of water, and winter trees with golden light thrown across them at sunset. These depictions of nature complement representations of art in the latter half of the film, where the camera pans slowly over paintings and sculpture depicting ageing bodies – whether in initial conception, or defaced via the gradual erosion of stone over time. The fourth 'braid' of the film incorporates visions of confinement, depicting window and door frames which clearly position the cameraperson within a domestic environment: the loosely woven fabric of curtains, blue skies visible behind; a rain-soaked window with accompanying patter on the soundtrack; a grey lacklustre sky revealed behind sash window frames; the edges of a door with bright outdoor light outlined, but inaccessible, behind it. These braids of the film are woven between portrait sequences, shifting emphasis from the face as a prominent site of empathy (or indeed pity) to elderly bodies, situated in time and space, often smaller than and engulfed by their environment.

Collections of photographs, which appear to feature the film's protagonists at earlier stages in their lives, also appear prominently in several sections of *Age Is*. Bellour identifies this too in his lengthy account, describing them as "archival black and white that the trembling movements of the camera seem incapable of truly securing, since the contrast is too full – for the photos handled by their observers as well as the photographs captured directly by the camera – between the time of now and that of before, such a long time ago."[47] In the centre of the film's 72-minute length is found footage of a baby, seated in a cot or on the floor, whose face noticeably resembles that of Stephen Dwoskin. Grainy and black and white, with lens shifts in and out of focus, this home movie footage shows Dwoskin as an infant before he learned to walk — and before he contracted polio at the later age of 9. This inclusion of much earlier home movie footage, digitised and manipulated using digital

editing techniques, is typical of Dwoskin's later filmmaking, particularly the collection of short experimental films about his family, which include *Dad* (2003), *Grandpère's Pear* (2003) and *Mom* (2008). While the subject matter of this segment of the film seems incongruous with the collective portraits of the elderly that make up the majority of the film, its form does not: the aesthetic of black and white, grainy footage, particularly when digitised, slowed down and edited via high-definition digital video, has come to signify both distance from and advantageous access to a past that has otherwise been closed over. As Patricia Zimmerman has identified, home movies give rare access to popular memory practices "emerging out of dispersed, localized, and often minoritized cultures", producing "artifacts that can be remobilized, recontextualized, and reanimated."[48]

Not only this: in *Age Is*, the home movie footage appears to present itself as both nostalgic memory and misrecognition. The infant Dwoskin is multiply distanced from the older Dwoskin who features elsewhere in the film, by factors of time, technology, age and, of course, the situational gulf between Dwoskin's experiences of childhood able-bodiedness on the one hand, and on the other, polio-induced paralysis and subsequent social stigma of living as disabled in an able-bodied world. The unlabelled home movie footage wordlessly situates Dwoskin's infant body in the contexts of the Jewish Brooklyn home in which he grew up, seated but not yet walking, clearly close to an adult carer whose arms reach out to hold him or catch him when he falls. While the infant Dwoskin stares impassively into the camera's lens, its footage reveals the proximity of others – caregivers, parents – who are no longer there. The home movie footage – and the photographs which some participants share with the camera of their younger selves – are memory work embedded within the film, revealing a teasing gulf between the faces and figures represented in digital colour, and the digitised analogue materials of earlier lens media. This is a key dynamic of (mis)recognition that reveals the relationships between disability, ageing, and the prevailing cultural dysphoria of Dwoskin's diasporic filmmaking, particularly through the prism of being seen and misrecognised, and misrecognising oneself – as I explain next.

In her ground-breaking book *Staring: How We Look*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson takes apart commonly held assumptions about staring through her analysis of visual representations of visible disability, undertaking in her terms a "vivisection that reveals

what hides in a seemingly obvious visual gesture."[49] It seems inevitable that, by focussing on visibility, visuality and appearance, Thomson's analysis develops a phenomenology of staring, observing its cultural situatedness and its particular orientation to out-of-the-ordinary and extraordinary bodies. On the face, Garland Thomson writes "we wear our years, habits, and locations on our faces. Vestiges of age, drink, sun, diet, stress, illness, and hard looking brand our noses, cheeks, foreheads, teeth, or eyes."[50] This is certainly true of the elderly faces presented in *Age Is…*, who reveal laughter lines, crow's feet, inflamed eyelids, soft jawlines, age spots, thinning hair, and equally disclose a remarkable diversity of age's physical expressions upon the face – from expressions of joy and querying, to eating, to speaking. The montage of faces, braided with situational extracts of aged bodies in space, and decontextualised images of nature and confinement, reveal and fail to fully reveal the pasts written on the faces of the aged. The invitation of *Age Is*… is to linger on these ageing and elderly faces of people held close to the camera lens, whose image is often slowed down to amplify each micro-expression, while also making sense of their wider implication in situated social life, natural environments and situations of confinement. But this lingering gaze, as I explain next, also carries with it the potential for misrecognition and a dysphoric flattening of social difference.

Garland Thomson identifies how misrecognition is a component structure of staring. Not simply a dysphoric self-misrecognition, as one might describe the sequences of photographs and found footage juxtaposed with the elder portraits, depicting younger visions of the elder participants likely to provoke a cognitive dissonance between the younger selves and the older faces and figures. But a misrecognition between starer and staree. She writes: "all too often we see each other not as we are, but as we are expected to be. This misrecognition disparages or ignores a person's 'distinctive characteristics,' according to Fraser, which 'prevent[s] one from participating as a peer in social life' (2003, 29). What's wrong about misrecognition is that it is unjust."[51] This unjust misrecognition seems to be what *Age Is.. also* seeks to engage, without necessarily reversing or challenging it. The misrecognition would be to assume that all the participants in *Age Is…* are simply representatives of the same condition – ageing. This implicit recognition of collective difference is also a flattening of distinctiveness; a dismissal of the particular and specific life journeys of survival that have brought each protagonist to the stage of being visible in the

film. Age is represented not simply through one person (though Dwoskin's own self-portraiture is significant in the film, particularly his upturned face, in daylight or in concealed darkness), but through 17 or more elderly participant-contributors – friends and contacts who held significant roles in Dwoskin's wider life. Nonetheless, there is still the latent capacity for misrecognition in these images, which slow down movements and reactions, offering the time for scrutiny and attentive regard to the unique beauty of each face, while also increasing the potential for dysphoric or dissociative witnessing of ageing bodies.

There is a risk in the film that, by focussing on many faces of ageing, those faces become age itself, rather than the many complex stories and histories that underlie lives well-lived. And yet, there is also a possibility that the faces of *Age Is…* are there to be looked at, to be, in Garland Thomson's terms, *beheld*. She writes: "The work of a beholding encounter would be to create a sense of beholdenness, of human obligation that inheres in the productive discomfort mutual visual presence can generate."[52] This ethical compulsion to look uncomfortably is also part of the complex matrix of *Age Is…* I interpret this ambivalence as an intentional position on the part of Dwoskin as a filmmaker, and not an error: the twin pulls of impressionistic, painterly depiction, and politically-motivated individuation (and de-individuation) seem powerfully alive in the film. As does a recognition that the visualisation of age in a cinematic medium also carries a deindividualizing, disempowering and dysphoric charge.

In *Age Is*… the specific challenge to visualising and reconceptualising ageing is neither rehabilitative (following Stiker's rejection of rehabilitation), nor it is quite justly recuperative (following Garland-Thomson and Fraser's appraisal of recognition and misrecognition). The film is most certainly elegiac, melancholic in tone, and while it appears to recognise the distinctiveness of each face, each body, it also leaves each individual literally voiceless. There are close-up sequences of faces whose lips clearly move, whose eye contact with the camera or beyond the camera reveal an interlocutor. Nonetheless the viewer of the film is not part of that conversation, nor are they party to it. When diegetic sound does emerge, it appears to come from actions: tasting a spoonful of food from a pot; wrapping peonies in strips of newspaper; the crunch of leaves underfoot and the repetitive sound of a cane

meeting the earth in the last, extended sequence focussed on the back of an elderly man as he climbs the gently sloping path of a forest. The gestures of ordinary life are given voice in the film, not the testimonies of the protagonists. Shifting the grounds of sensation from voice and testimony, to misrecognition and gesture, through combinations of digital and analogue film technologies, *Age Is…* returns, somewhat uncannily, to Keegan's argument about dysphoria as a cinematic technology.[53] Dysphoria is not incidental to the technological framing of ageing faces, with their memory boxes, home movies and everyday gestures: dysphoria – and the concomitant sensations of discomfort, unease, misrecognition – are the cinematic technologies upon which the film depends.

Conclusion

Dysphoria is not so much an integrative condition as it is revealing of what already is: a fundamental disconnection which signals a desire to connect – to oneself, one's embodiment, one's gender and, of course, to others. Framing dysphoria across gender, diaspora and disability gives space to acknowledge discomfort in viewing Dwoskin's late films in addition to the films' own aesthetics of discomfort, recognising the specific biographical and embodied dimensions of Dwoskin's filmmaking and on-screen presence. As I have discussed earlier, dysphoria across planes of gender and embodiment also offers the potential for joyful celebration. It becomes a 'home' in the diasporic contexts of Jewishness, a space of being in recent trans theory, or a celebration of softness, deformity, and a tender (but not always gentle) witnessing of non-normative embodied ways of being. *The Sun and The Moon* and *Age Is…* invite 'productive' dysphoria through their respective adaptations of the diasporic focus on the domestic, of gender and Jewish mythology, and of softness, staring and unusual, uncomfortable beauty in relation to disability and ageing.

In my discussion of Dwoskin's late films – including his very last, posthumously released one, *Age Is…* – I have aimed to reveal some of the ambivalence and resistance in his filmmaking practices. These practices work against the grain of rehabilitating or reintegrating discourses which appear to be the soft partners to current political structures in the UK that underpin ableism, anti-immigrant racism, antisemitism, and transphobia. If the overweening expectation of contemporary culture is to fit appropriately within what David T Mitchell and

Sharon L Snyder have termed 'able-nationalism' then Dwoskin's films have consistently refuted this, reclaiming the unnerving, even distressing space of dysphoria as a critical tool to undo some of these assimilating tendencies.[54] The nascent austerity politics which gave rise to both significant harm and death to disabled people in Britain, and a newly invigorated disability rights movement, as Robert McRuer investigated in *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*,[55] were also part of the complex conditions that Dwoskin experienced. He had been battling for rights to access adequate care for many years before he died of heart failure in 2012. The rigidity of care patterns significantly restricted his ability to make work, which nevertheless he mitigated by, for instance, working from his iPad late at night after his carers had put him to bed on a timetable that did not meet his needs. Dwoskin's refusal to assimilate to timetables of care, or to the expectations of an ageing body with increasingly precarious health, resonates with my analysis of his late work; namely that these late films deploy dysphoria critically as a phenomenological, emotional and embodied condition facilitates direct engagement with the discomfort of living, working and surviving otherwise than required by state and public care provision. Nostalgia for the past, particularly in archival and memory images as demonstrated in *Age Is…*, has a counterpart in dysphoria, which is spacious enough to accommodate the misrecognition of the present self with the past one. Likewise, mythological form in *The Sun and the Moon* offers space to reconsider gendered looking and attentiveness to desire and military-medical scrutiny, through the productive discomfort of dysphoric looking and being looked at.

Before I close, I would like to clarify again that the productive dysphoria for which I make the case in Dwoskin's late films, and which aligns with the work of other disabled, Jewish and diasporic artists, should not be understood to undermine the distinctiveness of Dwoskin's Jewish Brooklyn diasporic identity, nor his experience as a migrant living in the UK. I want instead to recognise how these lived experiences might also become phenomenological tools of discovery that share relationships with other forms of diasporic and disabled practice. The visibility of Dwoskin's medical respirator in *The Sun and The Moon,* for instance, resonates with the self-presentation of disability rights activist Alice Wong, founder and director of the Disability Visibility Project, whose work intersects with models of activist, creative and ethnographic practice.[56] The concept of 'productive'

dysphoria should be considered with cautious optimism – it is not a claim to return bodies to capitalist formations of maximum productivity, nor does it intend to flatten the distinctive, tacit and explicit forms of Jewishness and Jewish masculinity in Dwoskin's work. Rather, I aim to open out Dwoskin's work, to reveal its multiple connectedness with wider notions of dysphoria at work in contemporary creative practice, including other Jewish artists. In this effort, my intention is to extend a universalizing, rather than a minoritizing approach to the questions that dysphoria raises, across studies of Jewishness, disability, trans and queer aesthetics, and diaspora, without losing an appreciation of the distinctive combinations of difference that each element draws out in Dwoskin's specific cinematic approach.

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Data Access statement

No new data were created in this study; however, the underlying archival material can be accessed via the Dwoskin Archive, with a digital catalogue available here: https://www.reading.ac.uk/adlib/Details/archiveSpecial/110438699

Author's biographical note:

Jenny Chamarette is Senior Research Fellow at Reading School of Art in the UK. From 2018-22 she was Co-Investigator on the interdisciplinary AHRC-funded project, *The Legacies of Stephen Dwoskin's Personal Cinema*, working on the digital archive, disability activism, and cultural legacy of the artist-filmmaker Stephen Dwoskin. She has published widely on

embodiment, gender, disability, intermediality and intercultural moving images in installation, multi-channel and theatrical formats. Her next monograph, *Museums and the Moving Image: Cinemuseology, Cultural Politics, Film* is forthcoming with Bloomsbury in 2023. She sits on the editorial boards of the Film Section for *Modern Languages Open*, *MAI: Journal of Feminism and Visual Culture*, and the MAI publishing imprint of Punctum Books.

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[4] I discuss the historiography of Dwoskin's positioning in narratives of experimental film history in my forthcoming article, 'A Long Meandering Slide: feminist critique, genderqueerness, sexual agency and Crip subjectivity in Stephen Dwoskin's late works' Jenny Chamarette, '"'A Long Meandering Slide': Feminist Critique, Genderqueerness, Sexual Agency and Crip Subjectivity in Stephen Dwoskin's Late Works"', *MIRAJ: Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 11, no. 1 (forthcoming 2022), https://doi.org/10.1386/miraj.

[5] For example, see Dwoskin's 2005 interview with François Bovier, where he describes how his work influenced Mulvey's reflections on her foundational essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' albeit that "she found my films 'difficult' for her (from a feminist point of view) at first"François Bovier, 'Interview with Stephen Dwoskin: Filmography Commented by the Author', *Décadrages: Cinéma, à Travers Champs*, no. 7 (January 2006), http://www.decadrages.ch/interview-stephen-dwoskin n. pag.

[6] Cf. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, Cultural Front (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[7] Evans, 'Transforming Theory', 258–59.

[8] Serlin, 'Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in US Military Culture, 1800-1945'.

[9] There are numerous critics of the Enlightenment who have engaged with its shadows, including Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's discussion of antisemitism in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Paul Gilroy's examination of Slavery and the Enlightenment project in *The Black Atlantic*, and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's discussions of eugenics, slavery and Enlightenment projects claiming racial deviance Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, 'Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noeri (Stanford University Press, 2020), 137–72, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804788090-008; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 8. print (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003); David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, 'The Eugenic Atlantic: Race, Disability, and the Making of an International Eugenic Science, 1800–1945', *Disability & Society* 18, no. 7 (December 2003): 843–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759032000127281.

[10] Right-wing conspiracy theories about "Cultural Marxism" have been circulating for some time in global internet-based media sources such as Breitbart, and have become a cornerstone for right-wing pundits such as Jordan Peterson; the usage of the term as a pejorative derives from antisemitic Nazi propaganda, describing left-wing intellectual thought as "Kulturbolschevismus." In November 2020, two conservative MPs, Sally-Anne Hart and Lee Anderson, already under investigation for antisemitism, were warned by the All-Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism over the use of the term in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* that they had both co-signed Lee Harpin, 'Tory MPs and Peers Warned over Use of the Term "Cultural Marxism"', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 24 November 2020, https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/tory-mps-and-peers-warned-over-use-of-the-term-cultural-marxism-1.508974. For deeper analysis of Cultural Marxism as conspiracy theory, see Jérôme Jamin, 'Cultural Marxism: A Survey', *Religion Compass* 12, no. 1–2 (January 2018): e12258, https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12258; Rachel Busbridge, Benjamin Moffitt, and Joshua Thorburn, 'Cultural Marxism: Far-Right Conspiracy Theory in Australia's Culture Wars', *Social Identities* 26, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 722–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2020.1787822..

[11] Stephen Dwoskin and Antoinelle, 'An Interview between ST (Presumably Stephen Dwoskin) and Antoinelle' (Transcript of recorded interview about ZDF 3/Outside In, n.d.), 97, DWO A1/17/1 (1 of 2), Dwoskin Archive, Special Collections of the University of Reading.

[12] Serlin, 'Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in US Military Culture, 1800-1945'.

[13] Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. William Sayers, Corporealities (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 128; cited in Serlin, 'Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in US Military Culture, 1800-1945', 154.

[14] Edward Saïd, 'Edward Said · Thoughts on Late Style · LRB 5 August 2004', *London Review of Books* 26, no. 15 (2004).

[15] Chamarette, '"'A Long Meandering Slide': Feminist Critique, Genderqueerness, Sexual Agency and Crip Subjectivity in Stephen Dwoskin's Late Works"'.

[16] Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3–4.

[17] Serlin, 'Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in US Military Culture, 1800-1945'; Evans, 'Transforming Theory'; Saïd, 'Edward Said · Thoughts on Late Style · LRB 5 August 2004'; Alisa Lebow, 'The Camera as Peripatetic Migration Machine', in *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary*, ed. Alisa Lebow (London: Wallflower Press, 2012), 219–32; Ly Thuy Nguyen, 'Queer Dis/Inheritance and Refugee Futures', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1–2 (2020): 218–35, https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2020.0026; Vicki Crowley, 'A Rhizomatics of Hearing: Becoming Deaf in the

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[18] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 185–96.
[19] Vladan Starcevic, 'Dysphoric About Dysphoria: Towards a Greater Conceptual Clarity of the Term', *Australasian Psychiatry* 15, no. 1 (February 2007): 9–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560601083035.
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[21] Ashley, 'The Misuse of Gender Dysphoria', 1159.
[22] Nguyen, 'Queer Dis/Inheritance and Refugee Futures', 219.
[23] Nguyen, 233.
[24] Tina Hernandez, 'Legacy Dysphoria', *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 18, no. 1 (2019): 152–60, https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-7297180.
[25] Lebow, 'The Camera as Peripatetic Migration Machine', 227.
[26] Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xiii, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=9405.
[27] Milla Rosenberg, 'Trans/Positioning the (Drag?) King of Comedy: Bisexuality and Queer Jewish Space in the Works of Sandra Bernhard', *Journal of Bisexuality* 3, no. 3–4 (12 April 2003): 173, https://doi.org/10.1300/J159v03n03_12.
[28] Britta Kallin, 'From the Body in Pain to the Body Transformed: Feminist and Trans Readings of Franz Kafka', *Journal of Austrian Studies* 53, no. 4 (2020): 51–73, https://doi.org/10.1353/oas.2020.0062.
[29] Crowley, 'A Rhizomatics of Hearing', 544.
[30] Crowley, 544; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[31] Crowley, 'A Rhizomatics of Hearing', 555.
[32] Johanna Hedva, 'LUX: New Artist Focus: Johanna Hedva on P. Staff.', *What Can Be Seen Farther than Any Color on Earth* (blog), 1 September 2020, https://lux.org.uk/johanna-hedva-on-patrick-staff/.
[33] Evans, 'Transforming Theory', 259.
[34] Steinbock, *Shimmering Images*, 101.
[35] Steinbock, 102.
[36] Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Indiana University Press, 1987), http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzmbr.
[37] Keegan, *Lana and Lilly Wachowski*, 34.
[38] Lux Online, 'The Sun and the Moon (Stephen Dwoskin, 2007. 60 Minutes. Video)', Database, Luxonline, 2009 2004, https://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists//stephen_dwoskin/the_sun_and_the_moon.html-2009.
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[40] Serlin, 'Crippling Masculinity: Queerness and Disability in US Military Culture, 1800-1945', 161.
[41] Serlin, 161.
[42] Serlin, 162.
[43] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, 5th ed., Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J. Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010); cited in Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 187–88.
[44] Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, 78.
[45] Raymond Bellour, 'Souffles de vie: Age Is... de Stephen Dwoskin', *Trafic* 81 (Spring 2012): 12.
[46] Bellour, 13.
[47] Bellour, 15 translation mine.
[48] Patricia Rodden Zimmermann, 'Introduction: The Home Movie Movement: Excavations, Artifacts, Minings', in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*, ed. Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia Rodden Zimmermann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

[49] Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 9.
[50] Garland-Thomson, 98.
[51] Garland-Thomson, 158; citing Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 29.
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[54] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2015).
[55] Robert McRuer, *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*, New Directions in Disability Studies (New York: New York University Press, 2018).
[56] See for example Alice Wong's *Disability Visibility Project* website: https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com, her recent edited collection of disability experience, *Disability Visibility*, and her forthcoming memoir, *Year of the Tiger* Alice Wong, 'Disability Visibility Project', Disability Visibility Project, present 2014, https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com; Alice Wong, ed., *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century*, First Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2020); Alice Wong, *YEAR OF THE TIGER: An Activist's Life.* (S.l.: VINTAGE, 2022).