BODIES IN CHAINS: CONSUMER CULTURE AS BLACK PEDAGOGY AND BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG FINNISH, SWEDISH AND NORWEGIAN CHILDREN

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In love with beauty, bored by virtue still
Entranced by mystery, where will it all lead
Too much drama, no need to fake it
The tragedies are, they’re all just, too real
In our cruelty games, our cruelty dreams,
Our cruelty scenes, our cruelty, cruelty
In vicious circles, vicious circles, when will
The patterns break, when will you break again
Forever searching, but no end in site
We throw it all away, as each illusion dies
We’re always doomed, to repeat history
Creating trials, that form our destiny

In 1973, the German author Michael Ende wrote in his novel Momo how children are being deprived of imagination and time. Ende’s worst vision is a world bursting with commercial goods and people lacking time and each other’s company. Children are seduced by toys that demand more toys; yet they are bored and the final fantasy is to be an adult. Ende’s book anticipates the end of the childhood discussion of the 80’s that was put forward by researchers such as Neil Postman (1982) and Joshua Meyrowich (1984, 1985) who criticized cultural trends including technologization, mediatization, and commercialization. According to those authors the dividing line between the adult and the child has become blurred. As in Momo, there is no place solely for children. Children have to act like adults.

In this article, I shall address the ways in which 8–13-year-old Nordic children relate to themselves as bodily subjects and how they situate themselves in terms of questions dealing with their outward appearance and body. With the help of the nomadic thinking of the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, feminist theory and childhood studies I shall analyze quantitative data that was gathered by the project Unequal Childhood: a Comparative Study of Children’s Life Chances
and Well-being in the Nordic Welfare States on 1,173 children aged 8–13 in Tampere (Finland, n=473), Trondheim (Norway, n=339) and Upsala (Sweden, n=361). Six different kinds of questionnaires for children and one questionnaire for the teachers were used to gather the data. The questionnaires relate to children’s wellbeing, their social worlds, their daily activities and their relationship with their parents.\textsuperscript{1} Here, empirical data and theory are put into dialogue. Instead of merely reporting data, my article abductively searches for theoretical openings.

The quantitative data collected from the Nordic countries enriches debates over the end of childhood or even over what happens after the death of childhood. The Finnish model of information society has been seen as a potential to combine social welfare and high technology (Castells and Himanen 2003). According to the \textit{Pisa} study, Finnish children have the best reading skills in the OECD countries. At the same time their emotional and psychological state is weaker than the emotional and psychological state of their peers in Norway and Sweden (Järventie 2003; Oksanen 2004, forthcoming). I shall try to explore why this happens in Finland, which in other respects is seen as belonging to the avant-garde of technological development and being capable of producing children who are adept in the active use of technology.

Like feminist research, childhood research has found it difficult to reduce subjects to mere outcomes of social reality. Researchers are sharply divided into those who only see children as passive victims of social reality and those who over-optimistically claim that children cope even better with the changing world than adults (Buckingham 2002). Here, the aim is to overcome the binary opposition of passive and active that is manifest in the current sociology of childhood, that often highlights children as active and independent human beings (see James and Prout 1997; James et al. 1998; Qvortrup et al. 1994). The problem of the sociology of childhood is that it sometimes tends to close its eyes to the uncertainties of life. On the whole, human life in late modern societies is full of ‘becomings’ rather than fixed points of ‘beings’ (Lee 2001: 71, 81–85). ‘Being’ is indeed an Atlantis that has been sunk by a social world that puts the subject into a recurrent trial of obsessive self-construction.

Therefore, research dealing with body dissatisfaction and children should go beyond a mere promotion of identity politics. It is problematic if research starts to mask social problems by celebrating cultural consumption as productive activity (cf. Currie 1997: 459). The subjects depicted in this article are seen as socially and culturally situated and embodied. A global culture that celebrates beauty and visual bodies is not only subjecting individuals, but is also offering them a way to express themselves through their bodies. This Janus-face of body dissatisfaction should be taken for granted. As Gail Weiss (1999: 170) writes, research should become more aware of both the creative as well the destructive potential of our bodies to be able to enact lasting social and political change. I start the article with methodological issues and proceed through empirical results to theoretical issues relating to subjectivities in late modern societies.
Transformations, metamorphoses, mutations and processes of change have in fact become familiar in the lives of most contemporary subjects. If the only constant at the dawn of the third millennium is change, then the challenge lies in thinking about processes, rather than concepts. (Braidotti 2002: 1.)

In *Metamorphosis* (2002: 10), Rosi Braidotti has replaced the figure of the acrobat walker of *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991: 14) with the figure of a bungee-jumper. Both try to challenge the postmodern void, but their strategies are in the shadow of the subtle breath of failure, it is a matter of a thin line. Therefore, I present the bridge-builder as a figure representing the researcher (cf. Oksanen 2001). Building bridges involves the capability to relate things in unusual ways, but essentially the researcher as bridge-builder assembles bits and pieces and is not just walking a on a tightrope or falling free. The bridge-builder is a heretic, because he/she is apt to break boundaries that are usually marked by different fields of research. He/she has to cross borders and fill in gaps and use theory and concepts in inventive ways to ask questions and formulate problems (Deleuze 1966: 4; Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 22–24).

Bridge building does not involve the totalization or relativism that Donna Haraway (1991: 191) calls ‘god-tricks’. Rather, a bridge-builder tries to sketch maps of the social world. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980) maps do not trace the social world, nor do they dissolve it. Maps are tools for finding out how reality functions without reducing it to one single and universal viewpoint. Map-making is always oriented towards experimentation. Braidotti (2002: 9) emphasizes that in the cartographic approach, reason is not separated from imagination. The god-tricks of western ‘universal’ knowledge have always tended to render especially marginalized imaginations invisible (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002: 327). Thus, cartographic research should pay attention to the ways in which knowledge is situated when building imaginative bridges.

The first bridge crosses the gap between quantitative and qualitative research. Methodological talk often acclaims qualitative research for being more profound than quantitative research, which is seen as something superficial (Töttö 2000: 10–12). What seems to be sometimes forgotten in these methodological fights is that methods are routes and not the final outcomes of research. Although qualitative researchers since the mid-1980s have probably been more aware of the rhetorical character of fieldwork than their counterparts in quantitative research (Bryman 1998: 149), both quantitative and qualitative data can be used to make strong truth-claims that don’t recognize the situatedness of knowledge.

I use Umberto Eco’s (1975) semiotic theory to underline the qualitative nature of quantitative research and to situate knowledge produced by that research. Eco writes about three types of recognition: 1) imprints (impronte), 2) symptoms (sintomi), and 3) clues (indici). These ways of recognition are immanent to every single line
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of the map I draw in this article. Neither theory nor data is pure.

When Eco (1975: 289–291) uses the term imprint, he refers, for example, to marks left by animals. The form and size of an animal directly cause imprints. Analogically, it is simply impossible to conduct social scientific research without leaving imprints. The different contextual factors affected how children answered the questionnaires. Imprints are not errors, but they have to be taken into account. The research process of the Unequal Childhood Project includes much ethnographic information that cannot be exhaustively discussed here. The researchers read and explained the questions to the children. They imprinted the data. The school classroom climate affected the ways in which the children were able to ask questions about the questionnaires, how active and motivated they were to answer the questions etc. Quantitative data is not neutral. It is only claimed in terms of the western ideal of science that methods should operationalize neutrality (Harding 1986: 228, 1998: 134).

One can talk about symptoms when, for example, red spots on the face indicate measles. Symptoms function as acts of reference that function metonymically (Eco 1975: 291–292). Symptomatic recognition is used in psychological testing. An example of the diagnostic testing of children is the Children’s Depression Inventory (CDI), one of the questionnaires used in data gathering. It is one of the most widely used self-report measure for the diagnosis of children’s depression (Kovacs 1980/1981, 1992; Kovacs and Beck 1977). It is important to keep in mind that symptoms are also prone to mislead and that they can be falsified (Eco 1975: 291). Red spots on skin are not necessarily caused by measles; they may also be caused by a rash. The reading of sociocultural symptoms is a lot more problematic than the reading of strictly medical symptoms. In my reading of the CDI, the answers given by the children do not lead to a diagnosis of depression in an unambiguous way. Completing questionnaires is a performative act and hence those completed questionnaires should be approached as narratives that the children have decided to tell the researcher.

Eco (1975: 292) uses the analogy of detective stories when describing clues. Their recognition works differently than the recognition of symptoms; it involves imagination. While symptoms are largely coded and formed by deduction, clues entail abduction. Clues springing from different sources lead to inference. However, finding the clues should not be confused with hypothesis testing. Making maps involves experiments with data and theory, and not settling for a Sherlock Holmes style resolution like that ironized by Jorge Luis Borges (1967) in the short story Death and the Compass. Detective Lönnrot was trying to solve the murders of a serial killer, but his destiny was to die as the last victim of his enemy. Inference should not be the end of the research; it is just a starting point. Maps are always open and detachable; bridges lead to other bridges (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 20, 1991: 28). Quantitative cartography follows the ‘logic of and’ that is not seeking for the origin or the ultimate meaning, but is always connecting and relating (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 37; Deleuze and Parnet 1977/1996: 71).
The first signs of body crisis

The starting point of this article is the outward appearance question of the CDI that has three simple options for children to choose from: 1) ‘I look O.K.’, 2) ‘there are some bad things about my looks’, 3) ‘I look ugly’. The question is quite straightforward, but effective, like all 40 CDI-type questions of the Unequal Childhood Project in three different questionnaires. It is so simple that even the 8-year-old children can understand the meaning of the questions (Kovacs 1992).

According to Allison James (1993: 118–132) children are well aware of the cultural stereotypes concerning what one should look like. For example, size and weight are used among children to label one another. Furthermore even children who are neither too short nor too fat may be stigmatized. “Any part of anybody’s body may be used as a significant representation of and for the social self” (James 1993: 125). There is growing evidence that girls as young as 8–9 years of age are dissatisfied with their bodies. Girls wish to be thin now and when they grew up and boys wish to be muscular (Grogan and Weinwright 1996; Grogan 1999: 117–123). The influence of the media on body dissatisfaction has been noted already to be significant in children aged 8–11, and stronger among girls than boys (Cusumano and Thompson 2001).

Table 1 shows that in the data of the Unequal Childhood Project, Finnish children especially express body dissatisfaction. 53% of the Finnish children from 9 to 12 years old report that they are dissatisfied with their outward appearance: 62% of girls (n=138) and 46% of boys (n=170). In Norway and Sweden body dissatisfaction is much rarer: 19% of the Norwegian children and 16% of the Swedish children say that they have problems with their looks. The difference between girls and boys is not significant in Norway and Sweden. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 indicate that while Norwegian and Swedish children at the age of 12 still report that they are happy with their looks, Finnish children already start to mention serious body dissatisfaction at the age of 10. The tendency is towards the negative for both Finnish girls and boys, but in the case of the girls it is more dramatic. Only 11% of the approximately 13-year-old Finnish girls (6th grade) are content with their outward appearance. 43% of the Finnish girls in this age group think that they look ugly.
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TABLE 1: BODY DISSATISFACTION AMONG FINNISH, NORWEGIAN AND SWEDISH CHILDREN AGED 9–12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finland (%)</th>
<th>Norway (%)</th>
<th>Sweden (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O.K.</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some bad things</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugly</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=309)</td>
<td>(n=256)</td>
<td>(n=346)</td>
<td>(n=911)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table is statistically significant ($\chi^2=130.7$; df=4; $p<0.001$).

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGES OF FINNISH, NORWEGIAN AND SWEDISH CHILDREN REPORTING THAT THEY LOOK O.K.

Differences between ages are statistically significant in the case of Finnish girls ($p<0.001$), Finnish boys ($p=0.012$), Norwegian girls ($p<0.001$), Norwegian boys ($p=0.005$), and Swedish boys ($p=0.017$).
### Table 3: Outward appearance problems among Finnish girls and boys (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>8 (n=40)</th>
<th>9 (n=36)</th>
<th>10 (n=51)</th>
<th>11 (n=44)</th>
<th>12 (n=39)</th>
<th>13 (n=52)</th>
<th>8 (n=29)</th>
<th>9 (n=29)</th>
<th>10 (n=26)</th>
<th>11 (n=39)</th>
<th>12 (n=44)</th>
<th>13 (n=37)</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with looks</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Outward appearance problems among Norwegian girls and boys (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>9 (n=22)</th>
<th>10 (n=26)</th>
<th>11 (n=43)</th>
<th>12 (n=35)</th>
<th>13 (n=35)</th>
<th>9 (n=33)</th>
<th>10 (n=28)</th>
<th>11 (n=35)</th>
<th>12 (n=33)</th>
<th>13 (n=24)</th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with looks</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Outward appearance problems among Swedish girls and boys (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 (n=38)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (n=51)</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (n=38)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (n=42)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (n=36)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (n=51)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (n=49)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 (n=41)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linguistic differences in questionnaires partly explain why Finnish children report more body dissatisfaction. The second answering option to the question “there are some bad things about my looks” was translated as “jag ser inte bra ut” into Swedish and “jag ser ikke bra ut” into Norwegian by local research groups; i.e. “I don’t look good”. It is more drastic than the original English version and the Finnish translation, which puts emphasis on some bad things about outward appearance (’ulkonäössäni on joitain vikoja”). These ‘imprints’ clarify partly why Finnish children answered to the body-image question more negatively than Norwegian and Swedish children. However, when looking at only the answers providing the worst, “I am ugly” option, which is linguistically close to the original version in each language (in Finnish ‘olen ruma’, in Swedish “jag är ful” and in Norwegian “jeg er stygg”), Finnish children answer still more negatively (see Table 1). The body dissatisfaction that Finnish children start to express at the age of 10 also indicates that differences between countries are not solely a matter of linguistic differences (see Tables 2 and 3). In the case of Norwegian children, the same kind of trend occurs between ages of 12 and 13, i.e. three years later than in Finland (see tables 2 and 4).

At least in the case of the Finnish children body dissatisfaction seems to persist over time, which is shown in the data of the School Health Study, which is gathered annually. It includes the Finnish version of the Beck Depression Inventory questionnaire that resembles CDI (see Kaltiala-Heino et al. 1999). Its outward appearance question has 5 options, but they can be classified to match the scale of the CDI. The concern of the girls about their bodies is really common. Out of
23,028 girls approximately 14–16 years old (8th and 9th grade pupils), 44% have concerns about their outward appearance. The situation of the boys is better: 20% of them state the same kind of concern (n=23,866). (http://www.stakes.fi/kouluterveys/taulukot/2003/mieli03.htm). Body dissatisfaction has become a generic experience for Finnish children and young people.

Bodyscapes – intermediation between agency and visual power

The figures presented above are impressive enough to state that, at least in Finland, body dissatisfaction has become a cultural syndrome that also concerns young children. Body dissatisfaction has been widely seen as ‘an ethnic disorder’ (cf. Gordon 1990: 10–11). Feminist researchers in past decades have pointed out the negative effects of western body ideals. Naomi Wolf (1991: 17) has compared them to a medieval instrument of torture, the iron maiden. Susie Orbach (1993/2001: 3–10) sees anorexia as a ‘metaphor for our time’ and Susan Bordo (1993: 139–164) writes about ‘the crystallization of culture’.

The cultural pessimism of Bordo and others has been criticized by Abigail Bray and Claire Colebrook (1998). They argue that so much feminist thinking is coerced into repressive ethics where body is ‘subjected to’ a certain image of thought. Bray and Colebrook forcefully state that these representational approaches reduce the body to a mere locus of textual practices. They want to replace this weak and passive body with the Deleuzean body as a mechanical assemblage with which a diet regimen, for example, becomes a form of positive self-production. I generally sympathize with the Deleuzean ideas evinced by Bray and Colebrook, yet I found it difficult to understand why the affirmative ethics that they propose are so reluctant to take into account the social level that after all played a crucial part in the theories of Deleuze and Guattari.

The anorectic body may be productive, but it is certainly also destructive. Colebrook and Bray have only borrowed the romantic and transgressive side of the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, and yet they have ignored the constant warnings that Deleuze and Guattari make. The transgressive body is at its best figured in ‘the body without organs’ (le corps sans organs). It is bodily base level without any individual meanings attached to it, the body without fantasy, projections and representations (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 185–204). Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 186–187, 1973: 21) mention the schizophrenic body, the drugged body and the masochistic body as examples of bodies without organs. They warn that subjectivity based on such a direct flow of the body without organs, indeed, easily becomes destructive. Being and identity are after all not such bad ideas, if the other options involve constant drifting without any protective anchors (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 199, 628; cf. Deleuze and Parnet 1977/1996: 50).
The Deleuzean formulation of the body as an assemblage can be useful in the attempt to understand the relationship between mediated representations and bodies. Although, Susan Bordo (1993: 165), for example, tends to posit the body as text, I think that some of her ideas are enlightening and that they should not be disregarded as some Deleuzean feminists do. We need cultural theories, like Bordo’s to outline the effects of the social plane. It is important to ask what kinds of bodies are actualized in our culture and how socio-cultural power is subjecting them (cf. Currier 2003: 335). Of course, the body as an assemblage is not a constructivist subordination of parts to whole (Currier 2003: 327–328). In the Deleuze-Guattarian vision of body, there is no inner and coherent representation of the bodily self. A body without organs cannot be reduced to any single signifier (Bray and Colebrook 1998: 56). Body dissatisfaction should not be considered to be internalization of the wrong ideals. Body dissatisfaction is not solely about seeing the self in a wrong way. It also involves active and affirmative agency, no matter how problematic it might be.

With the body as assemblage, it is possible to avoid the ‘ocular-centrism’ that according to Josephine Brain (2002: 152) is the problem of many feminist theories of the body. Many theories favored by feminists also take visualness as an ontological concept. Merleau-Ponty (1964: 176–182) writes in his last work about the ‘flesh’ that it is a borderline concept that clarifies the fundamental paradox of the body as subject and object: the body perceives and is perceived. Flesh is seen by Merleau-Ponty as an ontological concept. Like Jacques Lacan with the concept of ‘mirror stage,’ he is reducing bodies to the field of vision. Vision is everywhere and expressed as universal. This easily leads to cultural pessimism. If only vision makes us what we are, we cannot fight against its over-determination – its god-tricks. This is why the body as an assemblage becomes a micro-political concept. It is not based solely on the visual representation of the self.

I want to replace the concept of body image with the more socially grounded concept of ‘bodyscape’ (cf. Canevacci 1999: 172; cf. Mirzoeff 1995: 3, 19). Bodyscapes are not inner and coherent representations of the bodily self, but rather constantly changing dialogical zones between individual will and visual power. Vision is preferred above other senses in our culture (Braidotti 2002: 246). It is precisely this productivity of the social plane that should be taken into account when writing about body dissatisfaction. In the excess of visual plane the body turns out to be a bodyscape, which connects itself to other scapes of late modern societies. We have mediascapes that configure our reality (Appadurai 1996: 35); we have cities full of global billboards, music videos, and other visual scapes (Canevacci 1993: 44–52, 1995: 226–229); we have fashionscapes turning subjects into fetishes (cf. Giroux 1997: 21–22). Bodyscapes are the logical conclusion of all this – they function as screens of the self that change about as often as the camera angles in the music videos. The body becomes virtual – a matter of constantly changing wishes and fantasies (Näre and Oksanen, forthcoming).

Bodyscapes are apt to modify the bodily being of flesh and blood into an armored body. When subjects are constantly bombarded with changes, the body becomes a

In consumer culture continual body maintenance indicates that bodies are pushed to maximum efficiency, like machines (Featherstone 1982/1991: 182). Bodyscapes are part of the technologization of bodies. The body becomes mechanized. (cf. Theweleit 1978/2000: 162). This kind of beauty machinery has been forcefully gendered. The male spectacle that is manifest in popular culture celebrates machine men with power and physical force over others. Women are also machines in the popular fantasies. Consumer culture seems to promote erotic female bodies and create representations such as gynoids, female robots – women with exchangeable parts (Stratton 2001: 151–157, 196–200, 208–210). In the same way bodyscapes are fragmented and transforming like collages. The individual is given no rest, since he/she has to constantly construct a new body for him/herself.

Mechanized bodies are even portrayed in children’s games. Bronwen Davies (1993: 96) notes that boys are obsessed with their bodies and they want to harden and strengthen them. Davies compares the way in which boys talk about their bodies to the transformer toys they play with. Toys, like bodies, are constantly changing under the command of the conscious mind. Even the play culture of girls could be read in this way. It also involves continual transformation of the bodies of toys following trends. Toys serve as extensions of the body.

In the adult (or teen) world bodies are manipulated and extended by getting tattoos and piercings, and by re-forming body in gyms and plastic surgery clinics. The body has become a project (Shilling 1993). Ian Burkitt (in this volume) states that the changed nature of work tells a lot about bodies. Quickly changing and flexible labor markets are also seen at the level of physical bodies that are expected to be fit, flexible and vigorous as signifiers of an employee’s suitability and worthiness of employment. Even originally sub-cultural phenomena like tattooing seem to portray a flexible re-working of the body. Tattooed middle-class subjects trim and tune their bodies as their visual biographies, and want to express their identities through their bodies (Oksanen and Turtiainen 2005).
Black pedagogy – the outlines of visual conversion

Joseph L. Zornado (2001: 214–215) claims that consumer culture is the ideology of black pedagogy renewed. So-called black pedagogy was traditionally practiced in Germany in the 18th and 19th centuries. The adult’s task was to punish the child from an early age in order to root out harmful weeds of disobedience. Corporal punishment was seen as a firm way to toughen children for the adult world. The message of an adult to a child after an act of cruelty was: it was for your own good (Miller 1980/1983; Rutschky 1967/1997; Zornado 2001: 77–79).

Late-twentieth-century consumer culture, like fascism, exploits the emotional needs of the child by offering a seeming plethora of culturally sanctioned substitutes for the child’s basic physical and emotional needs while at the same time suggesting to the child that happiness and satisfaction lie in the acceptance of adult culture and adult ideology. This is the ideology born of the ‘black pedagogy’ made new. Unlike overt fascism, consumer culture fragments the voice of culture so that it seems to come from every quarter, and so the voice of dominant culture’s ubiquitous presence implicitly represents its obvious and inevitable reality (Zornado 2001: 214–215).

Zornado (2001: 214) takes the marketing strategies of Disney and McDonald’s as an example. He argues that the best propaganda is always addictive. He refers to how Disney is able to appeal to the unconscious needs of the victim and then substitute these needs with commercial products. Zornado’s points might sound a rather straightforward, but he manages to grasp the main issue. Like fascism, consumer culture is based on the fact that it makes subjects act (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 261–262). The active consumer is always the best consumer. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1973: 34) desire is productive. It is desiring-production that produces lack, not lack causing desire. In the case of children’s consumption, this has meant suggestive methods where the adult point of view has been rejected (Kline 1993: 171). Ellen Seiter (1993: 117) notes that advertising agencies have borrowed themes from the children’s own play culture and then redefined them for their own purposes. The best marketing strategies always involve taking into account children in relation to their peer-groups (Kline 1993: 165–167). According to Juliet B. Schor (2004: 20, 69–78), peer-to-peer marketing is growing rapidly in US companies and even involves companies recruiting young children as their agents.

The theme of consumerism relates strongly to the theme of body dissatisfaction, since bodies are mainly represented in relation to the consumer goods (Featherstone 1982/1991). The mediascapes of consumer society absorb bodily subjection in a rather schizophrenic way. Referring to the ideas of Elias Canetti (1960/2003), Deleuze and Guattari state that unconsciousness functions as a series of masses and pacts that often interweave with each other. Masses are large in quantity, collective and concentrated. They force the subject towards the center in order to identify with the ideals of the masses. Pacts function in a completely different way; they are
small, dispersed and constantly transforming, which makes identification impossible. Each member is alone and prone to find him/herself at the border (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 46–48). The cunning of consumer culture is based on the fact that we are constantly in masses and pacts. We have norms and ideals for our actions, but also a great variety alternative options that scatter any single norm or ideal.

Consumer culture is following the famous principle of *divide et impera*. What is lacking is the critical distance. In a study by Dawn H. Currie (1997) teen magazine readers from various backgrounds give stereotypical definitions of femininity an ontological status. Henry A. Giroux (1996: 99–104) criticizes Disney films for being patriarchal and enforcing a subordinate representation of women. Disney represents beautiful women who are subordinated to men, and women who deviate from the stereotypical representation of beautiful women are evil. The same kind of pattern can be read from the classical stories of the brothers Grimm. Those Grimm fairytales that put emphasis on women’s beauty have been the most successful over the years (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003). Bronwyn Davies (1993: 173–174) states that children do not necessarily take a critical stance in relation to traditional narratives: girls want to be beautiful and perfect, the boys want to be strong and heroic. “[Readers] understand the text as telling a fiction; but it is a fiction of what they experience as the real world.”
### Chapter I – Youth & Body

**Table 6: The relation between outward appearance problems and mental, social and physical problems among 10–13-year-old Nordic children.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finnish girls</th>
<th>Finnish boys</th>
<th>Norwegian girl</th>
<th>Norwegian boy</th>
<th>Swedish girl</th>
<th>Swedish boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.181</td>
<td>0.282</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimism</td>
<td>0.286 **</td>
<td>0.293 **</td>
<td>0.242 **</td>
<td>0.371 **</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.442 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Failure</td>
<td>0.371 **</td>
<td>0.172 *</td>
<td>0.193 *</td>
<td>0.542 **</td>
<td>0.251 **</td>
<td>0.402 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anhedonia</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>0.161 *</td>
<td>0.381 **</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.258 **</td>
<td>0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misbehavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.263 **</td>
<td>0.350 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic worrying</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.160 *</td>
<td>0.199 *</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.231 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-hate</td>
<td>0.464 **</td>
<td>0.442 **</td>
<td>0.742 **</td>
<td>0.388 **</td>
<td>0.437 **</td>
<td>0.550 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>0.241 **</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.190 *</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying spells</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.175 *</td>
<td>0.307 **</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.327 **</td>
<td>0.279 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things bothering</td>
<td>0.310 **</td>
<td>0.344 **</td>
<td>0.255 **</td>
<td>0.255 **</td>
<td>0.273 **</td>
<td>0.516 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced social interest</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.190 **</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.180 *</td>
<td>0.215 **</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death wish</td>
<td>0.279 **</td>
<td>0.310 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indecisiveness</td>
<td>0.193 *</td>
<td>0.201 **</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.216 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-work difficulties</td>
<td>0.263 **</td>
<td>0.295 **</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.256 **</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep disturbance</td>
<td>0.271 **</td>
<td>0.189 **</td>
<td>0.212 *</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>0.225 **</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>0.228 **</td>
<td>0.372 **</td>
<td>0.410 **</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>0.175 *</td>
<td>0.192 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired appetite</td>
<td>0.193 *</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.235 **</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.275 **</td>
<td>0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries about bodily pain</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.236 **</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.215 *</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>0.338 **</td>
<td>0.368 **</td>
<td>0.473 **</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.406 **</td>
<td>0.349 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of school</td>
<td>0.322 **</td>
<td>0.219 **</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.198 *</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.322 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of friends</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>0.343 **</td>
<td>0.301 **</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.403 **</td>
<td>0.268 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School performance decrement</td>
<td>0.191 *</td>
<td>0.306 **</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>0.300 **</td>
<td>0.166 *</td>
<td>0.365 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>0.203 *</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.268 **</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of inferiority</td>
<td>0.338 **</td>
<td>0.251 **</td>
<td>0.343 **</td>
<td>0.461 **</td>
<td>0.353 **</td>
<td>0.183 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling unloved</td>
<td>0.244 **</td>
<td>0.165 *</td>
<td>0.465 **</td>
<td>0.395 **</td>
<td>0.350 **</td>
<td>0.282 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>0.177 *</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.179 *</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.234 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being bullied</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.187 *</td>
<td>0.249 **</td>
<td>0.184 *</td>
<td>0.216 **</td>
<td>0.336 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.291 **</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.207 **</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach ache</td>
<td>0.191 *</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.271 **</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.248 **</td>
<td>0.259 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other bodily pains</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.242 **</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.239 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea and vomiting</td>
<td>0.270 **</td>
<td>0.211 **</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears outdoors</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>0.209 *</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>0.171 *</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>0.255 **</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-inflicted aggression</td>
<td>0.193 *</td>
<td>0.227 **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatred</td>
<td>0.224 **</td>
<td>0.153 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; ** the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

The grey colour indicates a correlation that is above 0.3 and significant at the 0.01 level.
The same kind of almost ontological status accorded to beauty emerges from the Unequal Childhood Project data when analyzing the correlations of the outward appearance question to the other CDI-type questions. Table 6 shows how outward appearance problems relate to mental, social and physical well-being. Children reporting body dissatisfaction show that they are pessimistic, that they are failing, that they hate themselves, that they have things bothering them, that they are lonely, that they feel a sense of inferiority and that they are unloved. For example, Table 7 shows that of all the children in the data only 11% of those reporting that they do not like themselves think that they look O.K., but 75% of those children who like themselves think of themselves looking O.K.

**Table 7: Self-hate and body-dissatisfaction among Nordic children (%).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body-dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Self-hate</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No (%)</td>
<td>Yes (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>74,8</td>
<td>10,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25,2</td>
<td>89,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100,0</td>
<td>100,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The table is statistically significant ($\chi^2=239.1; \text{df}=1; p<0.001$).

The correlations indicating the connection between body dissatisfaction and mental, physical and social problems are high in every country, but Finland especially stands out when it comes to gender and age differences. Finnish girls from 8 to 9 years of age are still happy with their selves, but the age of 10 becomes a turning point. For example, self-hate, a sense of failure, death wish and self-inflicted aggression increase at this point. In another article, I have described the year of passage from age 10 to age 11 as a ‘fold-age’ where the self-assurance of boys and especially girls drops heavily when looking at 14 of the CDI-type questions in the Unequal Childhood Project that address the psychological self-confidence (Oksanen, forthcoming). This turn, which can also be seen in the way Finnish children judge their outward appearance at the age of 10–11 is curious (see Tables 2 and 3). In previous studies a similar split in the CDI scores has been observed between the ages of 12 and 13, i.e. two years later than in Finland, and it has been related to puberty (see Kovacs 1992: 29).

A similar turning point can be seen in the Finnish Children’s relationships to their parents. Finnish children say that they cannot talk to their mothers and fathers when they are 11 years of age. In comparison with the younger children in the data, 11-year-old children also report that they have problems getting support from their
mother's and father's and that they do not feel trusted. 89% of the Finnish girls at the age of 10 (n=26) say that they talk to their parents about the joys and sorrows of their lives, whereas only 69% of the 11-year-old girls (n=39) and only 43% of the 13-year-old girls (n=37) do. Boys tend to judge their mothers and fathers more critically the older they get when it comes to talking about the joys and sorrows of their lives with them. However, they continue to talk with them. 68% of boys 13 years of age (n=53) talk with their parents. Swedish and Norwegian children do not start to distrust their parents as dramatically as do Finnish girls especially. They talk with their parents about the joys and sorrows of their lives more than Finnish children at the age of 12–13. For example, 71% of the 13-year-old Norwegian girls (n=24) report talking with their parents.

According to Ellen Seiter (1993: 157; cf. 167, 194) a gulf has opened between children and their parents in consumer culture. Middle class adults complain about their children’s videos for being escapist, repetitive and trivial. Schor (2004) states that marketers use this gap that has opened between parents and their children. Children have become increasingly brand-conscious, they bond to brands and form partnerships with marketers against their parents. Self-defined spaces are sought through consumption. Daniel Thomas Cook (2000: 114–116) states that consumer culture tends to promote pseudo-autonomy which may subsequently lead to frustration. The gulf between adults and children might not be as huge in Nordic countries as it is in the USA where the politics of fear have recently put children under constant monitoring and surveillance (Giroux 2003: 107), but Finnish children do at least seem to grow apart from adults.

Children aged 12–13 form a kind of sphere of their own in Finland. They do not think that adults are important for their lives. At the same time both Finnish girls and boys report that they are ceasing to play. The same kind of gradual reduction of play can be observed in the case of both Norwegian and Swedish girls, but not in the case of the boys. However, the changes are not as dramatic as in Finland. 50% of 11-year-old Finnish girls report that they play at least every second day, but only 14 % continue with this at 12 years old and none at age 13. By 13 years old, 63% of Finnish girls and 45% of Finnish boys have stopped playing completely, whereas only 15% of the Norwegian girls and 9% of the Norwegian boys report the same.

Finnish childhood researcher Kirs Lallukka (2003: 116) reports a similar trend; children told her that one of the reasons why they are no longer children is that they have stopped playing. Finnish children seem to perform adulthood (cf. Cook 2000: 115).

There is reason enough to suspect that they still need the advice and support of adults. Finnish children aged 12–13, who report having ceased to play, have more psychological problems than children who report that they are still playing. Girls report having more body dissatisfaction and feelings that no one loves them. Boys report that they do not care about pain caused to others (Oksanen 2004). Finnish children who still talk with their parents report less body dissatisfaction than others: 81% of Finnish girls and 84% of Finnish boys aged 12–13 who think that they look O.K. (n=16, n=38) talk with their parents. Although Finnish girls in the data of the
Unequal Childhood Project talk increasingly with their friends as they get older, talking with friends does not have the same kind of positive impact. Finnish girls at least are basically facing consumer culture on their own. This is the black pedagogy réchauffé.

Brave new dividual

The results mentioned above would suffice to blame Finnish adults for the body dissatisfaction of their children. After all, Norwegian and Swedish children have to face a similar commercial and global world. Finnish children from 9 to 12 years of age judge their parents more critically than their peers in Norway and Sweden. 26% of them give top marks to their mothers; 21% to their fathers in Finland – the corresponding figures being 35% and 29% respectively in Norway; and 41% and 36% in Sweden. However, relationships to parents do not explain everything. Even when controlled for strength of relationship with parents, there is a statistically significant (p<0.001) positive correlation (0.313) between age and body dissatisfaction among Finnish girls.

It was in the context of the theatrical society that we were allowed to claim that parents had ruined the lives of their children. In consumer culture subjectivity is multiplied so that it cannot be reduced to the equation of mother, father and child (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1973: 115–116). I want to set aside theater as an emblematic topos of late modern consumer societies (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1973: 33). It was based on a centralized idea of an individual ready to judge him- or herself. Life was a matter of different (masculine) identification points from the Oedipus complex of early childhood to the patricide of adolescence. The most central ‘who am I’ question was put through the whole drama of life. The individual was, after all, an outcome or crystallization of life.

In the late modern societies life is too fast for drama. Because of a lack of narratives, we only get fragments of information; our lives become more detached and ‘lifted out’ (Lash 2001: 21). Life has started to resemble music videos with rapidly changing camera angles or hectic IT offices. In the excess of information, possibilities and representation there is simply no time to stop. Late modern societies are able to produce so many virtualities for life that different options begin to suffocate (Näre and Oksanen forthcoming). The ‘who am I’ question is replaced by the ‘who could I become’ question (Eerikäinen 2002: 64). There is no fixed identification point, but rather constant change. The activity of the subject is constantly promoted to find suitable life strategies or identity politics, but the other side of the coin is that individuality is receding. Instead of the individual, we have a dividual that can be represented as a flowing being lacking a stable core or a fixed identity (cf. Deleuze 1990). It can be divided and multiplied by media, technology and markets. This dividuality is based on a certain kind of fragility and instability, comparable with
what can be witnessed on the stock markets (cf. Virilio 1995: 139).

It is certainly worth thinking about why in Finland – in Mobile Valley (see Castells and Himanen 2003) – children are dissatisfied with their bodies, cease to play and distance themselves from the adult world. Finnish children also suffer from bullying a lot more than Norwegian or Swedish children. Bullies among Finnish children tend to be boys, but victims of bullying are of both genders, with boys falling prey just slightly more than girls. Another national specialty seems to be that Finnish girls and boys do not care so much for being who they want to be and doing what they want to do. Neither do they believe that they will be who they want to be and that they will do what they want to do in the future. There seems to be no time left even for dreams and hopes.

According to Sari Näre, Finnish young people nowadays have to constantly negotiate in a continuum of risks and trusts: there is a thin line between confidence and lack of confidence, or a feeling of security and insecurity. Risks overlap freedoms so that individuality has also started to vanish (Näre 2005; see also Levä et al. 2003). Friendships and relationships with other people are becoming fragmented and resemble the on-off relations of Internet chats that can end as quickly as they started (Näre 2002; Oksanen 2004: 94–95). There is not much left of the romantic individualism put forward by Angela McRobbie (1991: 131–132). According to Näre, girls have started to avoid and to mask their feelings and they have started to act in masculine ways (Näre 2005). The dividual is paying a high price for his/her freedoms. Once individualism has collapsed there will be only a continuing battle without an end (cf. Oksanen 2002: 10).

Finland has a long cultural tradition in the ethos of individual survival, where failing is considered to be shameful, as the Finnish psycho-historian Juha Siltala (1994, 1996) has pointed out. The late modern obsession with the constant construction of self may have taken a stronger hold in Finland since, for historical reasons, the social sphere is perhaps more traumatic than in Sweden and Norway. Social relations and practices that could support children may turn out to be places where bodily shame is enforced. According to Hannele Harjunen (2002), even some school health practices, including weight measuring and physical education, are embarrassing for girls who do not fit the body ideals. In Table 6 Finnish girls relate body dissatisfaction strongly to difficulties with school work, dislike of school and school performance decrement. It may even be that the ‘youth = beauty = health’ formula practiced in consumer culture (Featherstone 1982/1991: 179) has a stronger hold in Finland.

Recent historical events, such as the economic depression of the early 1990’s, have also left their mark on the mental map of Finland. The relative child poverty rates here in 1991 were the lowest in the world (see Corsaro 1997: 218) and inequality was decreasing (Sauli and Kainulainen 2001: 52). The recession of the early 1990s, however, affected children markedly. Social benefits for children were cut down (Bardy et al. 2001). After 1994, child poverty rates increased heavily (Bardy et al. 2001: 36–37). The depression was soon followed by a period of technological Utopia.
Inventions in the field of information and communication technology have been targeted heavily at children, but we can always suspect a wider logic. The social plane of Finnish children seems to be less dialogic and more age-segregated than in Norway and Sweden. Distant and cold social relationships may not be the best thing when combined with high technology that may accentuate distance within social relationships.

Children should not be seen as passive victims of consumer culture but rather as an operating part of it. They are active, but their activity is related to constant self-defense. Finnish boys create a superior ego for themselves by the age of 13. What in terms of symptomatic reading could be only good self-esteem can also be seen as a form of arrogance. In the case of 13-year-old boys (n=52), positive CDI-rates do not exclude aggression towards others. 63% of these boys report that they sometimes want to hurt others (Oksanen, forthcoming). However, when it comes to aggression, Finnish girls who do not think that they are good looking have a stronger tendency to bully other children or have a stronger desire to hurt them (see Table 6). In this sense the ‘fight for existence’ type of subjectivity involves girls. Striving for beauty becomes not only a fight against oneself but also against others.

The obsessive construction of the self in current consumer society even seems to reflect some archaic-sounding religious meanings of transcendence. The subjective body becomes part of the larger marketing machine – wanting desperately to be an authentic individual no matter what kind of war it has to wage. Richard A. Gordon (1990: 98–99) writes insightfully of the war against fat that seems to have a strong biblical sense. Dieters and obsessive runners portray themselves as saints pursuing the Holy Grail of transcendence. If this battle against the ‘slimy desires of the flesh’ in the sense of St. Augustine was previously restricted to a selected few, either aristocrats or clerics, after the late 19th century it started to involve middle-class people (Bordo 1993: 145, 185), and now in the beginning of the 21st century it has started to play a role in the lives of children.

The search for transcendence tells a lot about today’s society. Problems of agency merge into bodies. The body is approached as a temple – a method by which to re-unify self (Hewitt 1997: 27–39). It is not surprising that anorexia, for example, can be seen as a form of nostalgia (Brain 2002: 160) or that a self-mutilator described her actions as a ‘temporary way of controlling my universe’ (cited in McLane 1996: 113). The dividual is seeking a space and time of his/her own. Like Freikorps-soldiers, they form fantasies of wholeness (cf. Theweleit 1978/2000: 162). There is a cry for agency at the core of the whole phenomenon of body modification. When the social world cannot be changed, one’s subjectivity and one’s own body are something that can be reworked no matter what it takes. The maxim of being in the consumer culture, ‘desidero ergo sum’17, can be also read as ‘doleo ergo sum’ – I suffer therefore I am. The paths of pleasure, desire and suffering are bound to intersect.
Future bodies – beyond dissatisfaction?

My reading of the empirical data of the Unequal Childhood Project has been quite dystopic. The body dissatisfaction that Finnish children face is a serious problem reminiscent of a constant identity crisis. Children’s concern about their bodies cannot be downplayed. They relate to several social, mental and physical problems. Finnish girls especially seem to move early on towards the adult world without any kind of adult assistance. Children are left alone. This is why consumer culture can be called a new form of black pedagogy, at least in the case of Finland. There is no adult punishing a child. Rather part of the (self-)punishment is delegated to children themselves. In other words, there seems to be too little sense of community to protect individuals and produce health (see Hoikkala and Hakkarainen in this volume).

Rosi Braidotti (2002: 244) has aptly stated that the iron-pumping mutants are here to stay. There is no return to the world prior to body modification, and indeed there is no need for nostalgia. In the field of childhood research David Buckingham (2000: 166–167) raises a similar point: cultural conservatism is not a solution. Rather than just protecting or prohibiting, Buckingham sees the education and preparation of children as keys to the challenges of consumer culture. Burkitt (in this volume) states that eventually new generations of children will develop their own sense of health that is different from that of their parents. Optimistically thinking, this might even lead to a critical distance from the most drastic forms of consumerism.

According to Braidotti (2002: 258), one of the main risks nowadays is that the cyber culture will try to recreate a new hardcore vision of the subject under the veil of pluralistic fragmentation. If society and culture are increasingly fragmented and multiplied, the envisioning of a centralized ego is indeed problematic. Still, subjects are not fragmented in the postmodern sense; they try to stand out as active beings in the terms that are given to them. In the current era this means increasingly an activity through one’s body, which I have tried to illustrate using the concept of the bodyscape. Subjectivity is written on the skin. The bodyscape has nothing to do with the representational body image. It is rather a battlefield; an armor which tries to deal with the chaos that the subject has to face.

Elizabeth Grosz (2000: 230–231) emphasizes that feminist theory should be inventive in terms of its own concept and potential for the change. Research as bridge-building is always micro-political and it is always also arguing for future bodies. If we show how present bodies work, we can certainly have at least some hope of overcoming body dissatisfaction. Bridge-building is always a risky business – joints between bricks are seen when empirical data, middle range theories and high theory are put together. But if we do not at least try to build a bridge between theory and data, our chances of building a framework for the future perish. We need new openings, bridges and dialogue.
Notes

1 Questionnaires included 1) The Children’s Depression Inventory (CDI), 2) The Daily Activities Questionnaire which children filled in every morning, 3) The Social Integration Questionnaire designed by the Norwegian research group, 4) five additional questions designed by Ewald Peter Nilsen inserted into the CDI questionnaire, 5) The Purpose in Life Questionnaire designed by Päivi Tyni, 6) The Violence Questionnaire that I designed and 7) The Teachers Questionnaire. The Violence Questionnaire could not be implemented in Norway and Sweden.

2 Deleuze and Guattari have taken the concept of map from Michel Foucault (1975/1994: 725) who calls himself a cartographer (see also Deleuze 1986: 51).

3 The difference between Finnish girls and boys is statistically significant ($\chi^2=7.0; df=2; p=0.030$). I use the statistical chi-square test throughout the article. They serve as a compass, since the empirical data collected by the Unequal Childhood Project is relatively large, consisting of almost 300 variables.

4 13-year-old Swedish girls and boys are absent from the data, since the Swedish data was collected at the beginning of the school year in September 2002. Therefore children going into the sixth grade in Sweden were approximately 12 (or turning 12 by the end of the year 2002) in Sweden and approximately 13 (or turning 13 by the end of the year 2002) in Finland and Norway (7th grade in Norway, since children start school in Norway one year earlier than in Finland and Sweden).

5 The five options are 1) I am fairly satisfied with my appearance, 2) I don’t feel that I look any worse than I used to, 3) I am worried that I am looking old or unattractive, 4) I feel that there are permanent changes in my appearance and they make me look unattractive and 5) I feel that I am ugly or repulsive. I have classified those who selected the last three as children who have body dissatisfaction.

6 The relation between age and self-hate is statistically significant ($\chi^2=336.1; df=10; p<0.001$), likewise the relation between age and sense of failure ($\chi^2=18.5; df=10; p=0.047$) and the relation between age and death wish ($\chi^2=27.1; df=10; p=0.003$).

7 The result is based on the Purpose in Life questionnaire. The number of Finnish girls who give their mothers and fathers top grades falls the older they are. This is valid for the variables ‘I can talk with my mother’ ($\chi^2=21.99; df=5; p=0.001$), ‘my mother trusts me’ ($\chi^2=15.45; df=5; p=0.009$), ‘my mother stands up for me’ ($\chi^2=20.22; df=5; p=0.001$), ‘I can talk with my father’ ($\chi^2=33.4; df=5; p<0.001$), ‘my father trusts me’ ($\chi^2=18.1; df=5; p=0.003$) and ‘my father stands up for me’ ($\chi^2=12.6; df=5; p=0.027$). The same kind of drop does not occur in the questions relating to mother and father loving and taking care of the child. Neither is there statistically significant reduction in the way the Finnish girls answer the question addressing the importance of mother and father in the Social Integration Questionnaire.

8 The question was asked in the Social Integration Questionnaire with simple yes/no options. Differences between ages are statistically significant ($\chi^2=20.7; df=5; p=0.001$).

9 Differences between ages are statistically significant in the variables ‘I can talk with my mother’ ($\chi^2=12.1; df=5; p=0.021$) and ‘I can talk with my father’ ($\chi^2=4.462; df=1; p=0.035$).

10 The difference between Finnish and Norwegian 13-year-old girls is statistically significant ($\chi^2=56.99; df=5; p<0.001$).

11 Differences between Finnish and Norwegian children are statistically significant in the case of both girls ($\chi^2=14.3; df=6; p=0.026$) and boys ($\chi^2=16; df=6; p=0.014$).

12 The result is statistically significant in the case of both girls ($\chi^2=10.1; df=2; p=0.006$) and boys ($\chi^2=9.7; df=2; p=0.008$).

13 The result is based on ten questions from the Purpose in Life questionnaire addressing the role of
mother and father, and two questions from the social integration questionnaire addressing the importance of mother and father. Differences between countries are statistically significant in the case of the relation to both mother ($\chi^2=16.2; \text{df}=2; p<0.001$) and father ($\chi^2=15.6; \text{df}=2; p<0.001$).

15 Differences between countries are statistically significant ($\text{df}=4, p<0.001$).

16 Differences between countries are statistically significant in the case of all four of the questions ($\text{df}=4, p<0.001$).

17 “Desidero ergo sum”: I desire therefore I am, is a phrase from Braidotti (1991: 16–45, 2002: 20), who uses it to refer to the change brought forth by psychoanalysis. Subjects could no longer be reduced to consciousness, and the Cartesian “cogito ergo sum” was thus replaced.

References


CHAPTER I – YOUTH & BODY


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