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REPETITION, ALIGNMENT, and CURVATURE

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### Repetition, Alignment, and Curvature

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This project considers repetition as both individual action and accumulated force. Thinking of repetition in this way means finding ourselves, with each repeated action, between the force of what we have done and the potential of what we can yet do. From this position, the project will, first, explore how previous repetition creates inertia toward future action. Second, it will explore the possibility of ongoing negotiation of this inertia in a way that allows some indeterminacy to exist for our future actions (which is also to say our future identities).

The first chapter considers how it is that repetitions compress over time into habit and how this compression allows past actions to be made useful for present and future action. The chapter will challenge the understanding of habit as a static position, or place of stagnation, for the body and instead address it as a necessary process. It will account for the formation of habits as well as their effects (effects that include the creation of our identities and placement into categories).

That our actions, reactions, and repetitions occur in a context of prescriptive (if not coercive) forces is addressed in the second chapter, specifically through technique of

discipline and the effects of normalization. The second chapter addresses the disciplinary techniques employed to move bodies toward a particular, recognizable form and to value bodies relative to their distance from this form, and their distance from other bodies. Through Michel Foucault and Sara Ahmed, pressures of normalization are discussed in terms of pressure on the body to align with other bodies, and extended to the example of femininity.

Retaining the terms of straightness and alignment, the third chapter will consider curvature as a departure that may be painful and punishable but which has the potential to open new possibilities of action for the future. It provides a way of relating to our own inevitable repetitions and forces that seek to direct those repetitions.

This project considers repetition as both individual action and accumulated force. Each action that we repeat contains both the momentum of past continuity and the possibility for future difference. Thinking of repetition in this way means finding ourselves, with each repeated action, between the force of what we have done and the potential of what we can yet do. From this position, we will, first, explore how previous repetition creates inertia toward future action. Second, we will explore the possibility of ongoing negotiation of this inertia in a way that allows some indeterminacy to exist for our future actions (which is also to say our future identities).

To this end, we will begin with a focus on habits as the accumulation of past actions. Mundane as habits are often seen to be, their acquisition nonetheless directs our future actions through the development of our capacities and transformation of our bodies. The first chapter considers how it is that repetitions compress over time into habit and how this compression allows past actions to be made useful for present and future action. The chapter will challenge the understanding of habit as a static position, or place of stagnation, for the body and instead address it as a necessary process. In other words, it will see habit not as something we “just” do (although it is that, too) but as a force that directs what and who we can become. I use the writings of Henri Bergson and Félix Ravaisson to help account for the formation of habits as well as their effects. These effects include creation of our identities (and placement into categories) as our habits come to distinguish us, and our forgetting over time of those individual actions from which our habits were formed.

That our actions, reactions, and repetitions occur in a context of prescriptive (if not coercive) forces is addressed in the second chapter, which focuses on key elements of

repetition and time outlined in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, specifically the technique of discipline and the effects of normalization.

Following the first section's discussion of the ways in which bodies, and identities, are shaped through accumulated repetition, the second chapter addresses the disciplinary techniques employed to move bodies toward a particular, recognizable form and to value bodies relative to their distance from this form, and their distance from other bodies.

Foucault's description of correction, of correct training, of the body through disciplinary tactics is reinforced by a reading of the forces of alignment as described by Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology*. Through Foucault and Ahmed, pressures of normalization are discussed in terms of pressure on the body to align with other bodies. These forces are considered through the example of femininity.

Retaining the terms of straightness and alignment, distance starts to emerge in the third chapter as a departure through curvature, a departure that may be painful and punishable but which has the potential to open new possibilities of action for the future. Curvature becomes short-hand for one way to navigate from where we already find ourselves – amidst an ongoing relationship with others, and with the effects of compression, the forces of alignment, and the consciousness of our actions. It provides a way of relating to our own inevitable repetitions and forces that seek to direct those repetitions.

### ***Chapter One: Forces of Habit***

A body repeating an action over time becomes a different body – becomes a body shaped by its past. Our past repetitions accumulate into habits so that we do not have to think through each action every time and instead can perform that action with increasing efficiency. In this way, a habit is a technique formed in relation to a specific action – a technique that allows our thoughts to be elsewhere than on those things we do repeatedly and that are familiar to us.

The acquisition of a habit is not a stable position for the body but instead a dynamic process that shapes and directs it. This chapter will consider the changes that occur as our past repetitions accumulate into habits. These changes occur not only in our body's ability to perform that habit, but in our body itself, and in the ways we come to identity (and be identified) with that performance. As we will see, the more we repeat a habit, the less we can recall acquiring that habit, such that it can appear and come to be seen as an innate ability and defining characteristic.

## **Habit**

As a technique, a habit is how I do something, derived from the ways that I have done it in the past.<sup>1</sup> These techniques develop in the body over time; the way that I do something in the present is different from the way that I have done it in the past. My way of walking is, for example, quite different from my first steps, when one foot had to be carefully placed in front of the other. Nonetheless, my past steps are contained in my present ones – the habit has changed with the accumulation of repetitions. My body's

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<sup>1</sup> Ravaissou writes that "...habit remains for a change which is either no longer or is not yet; it remains for a possible change. This is its defining characteristic. Habit is not, therefore, merely a state, but a disposition, a virtue." Ravaissou, Félix. *Of Habit*. transl. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (New York, NY: Continuum, 2008) 25.

ability to perform the action has changed (now I can “just” walk) and so has my body itself; the musculature and joints have changed as a result of being a body which walks. (My body’s context, its interactions with and expectations from others, has also developed in response to its habit of walking.)

The change that results from repetition, that performing an action for the first time *feels different* than repeating it for the hundredth time is why, in *Of Habit*, Félix Ravaisson says that habit is not “merely a state” but is instead the “moving middle term” between will and nature, between consciously performing an action and automatically performing it.<sup>2</sup> So when he writes that “Habit transforms voluntary movements into instinctive movements,” I would emphasize “transform” to indicate not only the change in the movements themselves but also of the bodies themselves. In other words, we develop with (as) our habits. A dance becomes more fluid as the dancing body becomes better able to move through it.

How can we account for this body’s ability to acquire habits, to develop for itself a second nature? The compression of past action makes this change possible, and by compression I mean the accumulation of those actions into a composite mechanism in which the accumulated actions are present but not apparent. Through the work of Henri Bergson, we will see how essential memory is to this compression.

In addressing how actions compound over time, Bergson outlines the form of memory that serves as the vehicle for this accumulation. In *Matter and Memory* he provides a description of habit memory or ‘motor memory,’ which is the organization of

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<sup>2</sup> “...habit is the dividing line, or the middle term, between will and nature; but it is a moving middle term, a dividing line that is always moving, and which advances by an imperceptible progress from one extremity to the other.” Ravaisson, 59.



repeated movements into the “motor mechanisms” known as habits.<sup>3</sup> This form of memory is how our capacity to perform an action can compound with each performance of that action; how it becomes second nature. It is what makes possible the accumulation of the past, compression.

We can recognize habit memory, which Bergson writes “has retained from the past only the intelligently coordinated movements which represent the accumulated efforts of the past,” as the very premise of practice.<sup>4</sup> In practice we start out attempting something with the hope of doing it differently through repetition. This was the case when I began to play the cello. My teacher painted white dots on the fingerboard so that I could see where to press down in order to find each note. By the time the dots wore off, I could find the notes without turning my head to look for them. Not only were the notes produced through practice of different tonal quality, I could then look straight ahead while producing them, as an experienced knitter holds a conversation while stitching away. So when we say something is “just like riding a bike,” we are talking about motor memory – about the ability that *comes back* to us without having to be re-learned each time. Bergson’s articulation of habit memory gives us an understanding of what it is this ability *comes back through* (namely, the accumulation of our past repetitions in our present actions.) This is not to say that time without use does not alter the memory, as anyone who has wobbled around on a bike after a number of years can attest.

Bergson distinguishes habitual motor mechanisms from “independent recollections,” or what we typically think of as memory. This second form of memory

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<sup>3</sup> Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory*. transl. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Intelligence in this sense would entail a breaking down of each element of the movement for future coordination. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 82.

could be called ‘event memory.’ Event memory is the chronological record of our individual lives.<sup>5</sup> As opposed to motor memory, which is formed through accumulation, event memory remains singular, as in *the* memory of my twelfth birthday, or the first time I met my friend, or the last time the two of us spoke. Event memory is the recollection of something that happened in the past and cannot happen again. In this way, “time can add nothing to its image without disfiguring it,” as opposed the mechanisms of habit memory which continue to compound.<sup>6</sup>

Event and motor memory are described as two distinct forms, yet, for Bergson, they differ from one another “only as the less from the more” since a motor mechanism is simply the composite image of individual actions.<sup>7</sup> With repetition, these discreet actions “overlie” one another. As the actions pile up, individual actions of the past can become more difficult to distinguish but what develops is a new disposition toward future action.<sup>8</sup> With the compression of our past actions into this composite image, we can access this past with greater efficiency for future action, but we can see each past action less clearly.<sup>9</sup>

In order for past experience to be utilized in present action, the two forms of memory must “run side by side and lend to each other a mutual support”.<sup>10</sup> Individual recollections *represent* the past to us in order that we might make use of specific events; motor mechanisms *act* our past by bringing the “useful effects” of familiar actions into

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<sup>5</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Bergson writes “that the images successfully developed by each repetition over-lie each other, so that the lesson once learned is but the composite image in which all the readings are blended.” *Matter and Memory*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 82.

<sup>9</sup> “We become conscious of these mechanisms as they come into play; this consciousness of a whole past of efforts stored up in the present...” Bergson. *Matter and Memory*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 86.

the present.<sup>11</sup> As was said, the relationship between the two is that of less to more; the greater the frequency with which we perform an action, the greater the benefit of having an increased ability and efficiency to do so.<sup>12</sup>

Although actions can become second-nature through habit memory as the result of accumulated actions, this is not because each repetition is the same. Bergson asks: “We are right when we say that habit is formed by the repetition of an effort; but what would be the use of repeating it, if the result were always to reproduce the same thing?”<sup>13</sup> As in the earlier example of my first steps to my current stride, through repetition we develop the capacity to perform the action with more and more efficiency. Both the action and we are changed in this development.

For Bergson, this development occurs because we break down and reassemble an action (we “decompose” and “recompose” it) each time that we perform it, so that “a movement is learned when the body has been made to understand it.”<sup>14</sup> Understanding, as it is used here by Bergson, is then the organization of the mechanism as it has been learned by the body. Similar to Bergson’s presentation of understanding, Ravaisson writes that by “repeated or prolonged exercise, we learn to adjust the quantity of effort, and to choose its point of application, in relation to the end that we wish to attain; at the same time, the consciousness of effort is effaced.”<sup>15</sup> What remains is the composite image, the result of compression, and not individual recollection.

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<sup>11</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Bergson writes, “Sometimes [memory] lies in the action itself and in the automatic setting in motion of a mechanism adapted to the circumstances; at other times [memory] implies an effort of the mind which seeks in the past, in order to apply them to the present, those representations which are best able to enter into the present situation,” *Matter and Memory*, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 111-112.

<sup>14</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 111-112.

<sup>15</sup> Ravaisson, 59.

Understanding does not mean that mechanism will always be organized by the body in this same way; we may understand it differently in time. But this understanding does serve to direct the body's future performances. The future development of the mechanism, which is to say the body, will come from this understanding. That is why the development of an understanding by the body is so important to our purposes here.

By acquiring habits, we can make use of the past in our present actions. With each repetition, our bodies better know an action such that we can perform it again in the future more efficiently (and possibly with better quality). Developing this understanding shapes not only the action but our acting bodies. In the next section we will expand our understanding of habit as an ongoing development of the body and further address the effects of this process.

### **Compression of Memory**

The greater the number of individual recollections that make up a motor mechanism, the less each recollection is remembered. In other words, the greater the number of discrete actions that overlie one another, the less each action is legible in the composite image. This means that to develop a habit can, ironically, be to forget past performances of the actions that the habit is comprised of. "Indeed, this habit could not be called a remembrance," writes Bergson, "were it not that I remember that I have acquired it..."<sup>16</sup> While I can recall taking timed multiplication tests at my cold, metal, second-grade desk, my ability to multiply in the present does not rely on recollection. Once a habit has been formed, we could forget that there was time before we knew it; the

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<sup>16</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 83.

habit passes “out of time.”<sup>17, 18</sup> Bergson writes that “the lesson once learned bears upon it no mark which betrays its origin and classes it in the past,” and I would stress the bearing no mark.<sup>19</sup> Habit is felt as innate, although we can often remember the successive repetitions by which it was acquired. A mechanism (habit) developed by previous action is lived in the present *as if* it had always been there, *as if* it came naturally. It bears no mark.

Forgetting the previous actions that developed into a mechanism is possible because the effort necessary to perform that action decreases with each repetition. As Ravaisson writes, “Effort diminishes according to the continuity of repetition of movement.”<sup>20</sup> So what we invest the most effort into often becomes that which we can ultimately do with the least amount of effort. Or, said another way, past efforts make present effortlessness, which then allow us to forget those past efforts. Without the memory, without the mark of effort, as we said, habits pass “out of time.”

The order of execution, the succession, of a movement’s discrete parts also begins to adhere *in that order*. Succession is part of becoming understood by the body. Individual gestures become fused in the order with which they were learned. Once understood in that way, their succession is performed as a whole, as when “going through the motions.” Bergson compares this to how each note of a tune well-known “seems to lean over the next to watch its execution.”<sup>21</sup> The succession of actions then inheres in each of the actions themselves. To take a non-aural example, the habit of using a spoon is

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<sup>17</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> “...a learned recollection passes out of time in the measure that the lesson is better known; it becomes more and more impersonal...” Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> Ravaisson, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 94.

usually pick up food with the spoon, to bring it to one's mouth, to put the spoon in the mouth, to chew, to swallow, but many caregivers know that this succession is indeed an acquired one.

Sara Ahmed writes that “This paradox – with effort it becomes effortless – is precisely *what makes history disappear* in the moment of its enactment,” (my emphasis).<sup>22</sup> Through habit, we do not need to represent the past in order to perform an action, we can simply, instead, perform the action in its entirety. Often we retain the ability to remember events (though we do not always do so) – the recollections may not actually have disappeared – but neither are the representations present in the enactment. Previous efforts, and efforts at ordering, become an unconscious foundation for present and future performances.

Consciousness increases as the body's ability to act decreases, such as in moments of hesitation or choice. In deciding what to do, or what to do next, we sometimes have to “stop and think” and that is the occasion of consciousness. Bergson writes that:

“Where many equally possible actions are indicated without there being any real action [...] consciousness is intense. Where the action performed is the only action possible [...] consciousness is reduced to nothing.”<sup>23</sup>

So when we do not have to choose how to act, we do not have to be conscious of acting. The representation of the action becomes filled, “stopped up” in Bergson's words, by the action itself.<sup>24</sup> And when action encounters an obstacle (when it is “arrested or

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<sup>22</sup> Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) 56.

<sup>23</sup> Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. transl. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998) 144.

<sup>24</sup> “When we mechanically perform an habitual action, when the somnambulist automatically acts his dream, unconsciousness may be absolute; but this is merely due to the fact that the representation of the act is held in check by the performance of the act itself, which resembles the idea so perfectly, and fits it so

thwarted”), we become conscious of it at *that* point – again, we have to *stop* and think.<sup>25</sup>

For example, when we reach for something that is not there, or when we are navigating new pain (there is no mindlessly chewing with an aching tooth).<sup>26</sup>

Consciousness *is* effort, and our experience of place is further evidence of this. When moving through a new space one must be present in order to navigate it. Compare this to home, where navigation is effortless and possible even in the dark. In fact, we see the space less the more we are familiar with it.

By allowing our actions to be done unconsciously, habits free our consciousness for other things. This is why things occur to us in the shower or when driving, during actions we no longer have to consciously perform. Because we don’t have to expend the energy it takes to be present *in* the present for every action, our energy and thought can be elsewhere; we can be thinking about other things.

Bergson likens the consciousness that arises as a result of choice to “the light that plays around the zone of possible actions or potential activity which surrounds the action really performed in the living being.”<sup>27</sup> We are aware of the decision, and have a variety of responses at our disposal. Bergson discusses this area of possibility elsewhere as the “zone of indetermination.”<sup>28</sup> In both cases, he is describing the independence with which a living being can choose its actions (independence in the sense that the being can choose

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exactly, that consciousness is unable to find room between them. *Representation is stopped up by action.*” *Creative Evolution*, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 144.

<sup>26</sup> Maintaining mindfulness even in the absence of an obstacle is defended by Thich Nhat Hanh when he writes “When we have a toothache, we know that not having a toothache is a wonderful thing. But when we do not have a toothache, we are still not happy. A non-toothache is very pleasant. There are so many things that are enjoyable, but when we don’t practice mindfulness, we don’t appreciate them.” Thich Nhat Hanh. *Peace is Every Step: The Path to Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. Ed. Arnold Kotler (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1991) 38. And even pain we become less conscious of the more it becomes familiar.

<sup>27</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 144.

<sup>28</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 32.

how to interpret what it perceives and, subsequently, when and how it will respond). While the inorganic world must respond to forces acting on it immediately, living beings have the capacity to delay their response and chose the manner of the reaction. The greater the variety of responses that are available to a living being, the greater is that being's freedom and potential creativity. Ravaisson, in his articulation of the source of freedom, similarly points to this "capacity to measure and dispense force."<sup>29</sup> Through consciousness, or the zone of indetermination, living beings can overwrite their past habits in the formation of new ones (difficult though this change may be).

Moving into the next section, we can see how habit memory allows us to accumulate our past repetitions into a mechanism for performing action in the future with greater efficiency and less conscious effort. The development of this mechanism involves the compression of past repetition such that the individual recollections of them grow increasingly difficult to distinguish, even as the habit continues to direct our bodies toward becoming different than they are. Through consciousness, we have the ability to amend our actions to repeat differently in the future, but such an amendment means a return to conscious effort and a redirecting of the body.

### **Bodily Repetition**

Bergson writes, "...there is no perception which is not full of memories."<sup>30</sup> Either the perception will engage a choice of how to act, in which we consciously employ our past recollections to reach a decision, or it will engage a motor mechanism developed through repetition that allows us to proceed through an action unconsciously and entirely

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<sup>29</sup> "In this way the reign of knowledge, of foresight, seems to emerge in the realm of Nature, and thus the first light of Freedom seems to spring forth." Ravaisson, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 33.



(with individual recollection and discrete parts compressed therein). The benefit of the latter, of a motor mechanism, is having a relationship with what we perceive such that we need not be conscious of each part of each action in order to perform the action and, subsequently, can use that energy toward other ends.<sup>31</sup>

The compression of the past into an effortless and automatic performance can make it seem as if that capacity was innate to the body, that somehow it had “always been there,” intact and natural. What is taken as characteristic about us is often based on just such abilities. Sara Ahmed connects repetition to the creation of identity when she writes:

My neck gets sore, and I stretch to ease the discomfort. I pull my shoulders back every now and then as the posture I assume (a bad posture I am sure) is a huddle: I huddle over the table as I repeat the action (the banging of the keys with the tips of my fingers); the action shapes me and leaves its impression, [...]. I write, and in performing this work I might yet become my object – become a writer, with a writer’s body, and a writer’s tendencies...<sup>32</sup>

We become the shape of what we repeat, and become defined based both on that shape and on that action. Our habits are a large part of “who” we are, who we see ourselves to be, what we become, and what we see ourselves becoming.

To perform a habit is not to do the “same thing” over and over, but rather to move in a particular direction. Each repetition *is* different in that it *makes us* different and makes different our relationship to that action. Ravaissan describes how a person used to carrying out strong movements with their hands and fingers will write less firmly because fine strokes are not their hands’ habit. (I would add that penmanship is then sometimes used to assess something like gentility or maturity.) Of this Raviasson writes that “The principle of movement has thus made itself, without knowing it, a figure, and

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<sup>31</sup> Bergson writes “...perception is the master of space in the exact measure in which action is master of time.” *Matter and Memory*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmed, 57.

idea in action, from which it cannot be unbound, and it involuntarily, even convulsively, surpasses any end placed before its accustomed end.”<sup>33</sup> To return again to the earlier example of walking, the repetition of each step actually moves us from where it is we were. Even on a treadmill, walking in place, the body’s relationship to that habit still changes as it continues to become a walking body.

As Sara Ahmed describes in *Queer Phenomenology*, “The work of repetition is not neutral work; *it orients the body in some ways rather than others*.”<sup>34</sup> Ahmed’s use of “orientation” emphasizes that repetition *has direction*. Through action, and the repetition of action, we become reoriented to future possibilities for action.

Our repetitions have directionality, and our bodies change in order to continue in the direction of our actions. In the context of acting among others, these repetitions develop our identity as well. At this point of identity creation, habit is exactly what is *not* neutral. Instead, it is often instead explicitly prescriptive about what actions correspond to what identities. In other words, if people *like this* don’t *do that*, what one does matters for who one is (identified as).<sup>35</sup> When our reputations precede us, it is the direction of our past repetitions that is being named. The idea of a reputation relies on the premise that the accumulation of our past actions can be used to identify us in a certain way. This identification, which is usually a categorization, occurs obviously on the level of style and self-presentation but also on the levels of morality and politics – an indicator of values and world views. Of course these are all intertwined but they are also nonetheless built on assumptions of repeated actions. This is made additionally complicated when we

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<sup>33</sup> Ravaisson, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Ahmed, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Which touches on how we associate certain narratives with particular identities.

consider how identities inhere as assumptions about personal qualities rather than acquired trajectories.

## Conclusion

What we call the force of habit can be understood as a combination of mutual and simultaneous forces. Habit is an accumulated, automatic mechanism that comes to reside *in* the body *as* the body over time. So as I take a certain shape as a result of and in congruence with my way of performing a habit, it becomes increasingly difficult to perform the action in a different way (than the way I am used to). To do so is to act against what now comes as second nature to me, as Ravaissou pointed out with his example of writing. ...but also who I have come to be. To perform an action counter to my habit, then, is to act not “like” myself, or in a more moral valence, to act “out of character.” Habit becomes tied to the investment we have in our own style, our own identity, and other’s perceptions of who we “are.”<sup>36</sup>

The force(s) of habit are then inertia in a particular direction, toward a particular becoming. To act otherwise is to experience the pressure to proceed as before. As when taking a turn too fast, the force of the previous path exerts a pull on the deviating body. The difference between where you were going and where you are going now can be a felt difference. Given the identity categories, both chosen and applied, associated with certain habits, to change direction can be to feel the difference a great deal.

Habit, as the ability to complete an action from increasing distances of effort and consciousness, is a technique of necessity. We would otherwise have to think through

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<sup>36</sup> Certainly, this investment is also present in the conscious choices we make as a result of our individual recollections.

every action all the time. However, as we have seen, it is more than mere convenience. It is a movement toward automation that is also a movement of the body toward becoming a different body. It is the creation of capacity as well as a marker of identity.

*When someone whom I am afraid of orders me to continue the series, I act quickly, with perfect certainty, and the lack of reasons does not trouble me. – Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>37</sup>*

The second chapter shares with the first a focus on the effects of repetition over time. It extends our understanding of the movement and compression that come with the development of habit to address how *these same processes* are used by forces of alignment. These forces create pressure on the body through discipline, which directs the body toward certain ends, and through normalization, which directs bodies toward one another.

This chapter's question is not how I am made to repeat against my will, which would be a question of choice, because to deal with such a question we would have to account for 1) habits that were initiated prior to an ability to "choose" in a meaningful sense, and 2) the multiple moments and degrees of choice present in ongoing repetition. That is to say that people doubtlessly are coerced into repeating all manner of actions they would not choose (here I think of the many situations in which people have stood in lines/have been lined up). Here, however, I want to emphasize the force of the coerced actions itself, how it moves people (to become) by directing and constraining their repeated actions.

We've seen that repetition creates forces that shape and direct the body – and this is no less true of those repetitions prescribed for us. This chapter will address how prescriptive repetitions can become deployed as trajectories for the body, and how this trajectory can serve as to rank and group bodies based on their alignment with it. The challenge of negotiating these forces is explored both in terms of pressure and through the example of femininity.

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. transl. G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) §212.

## Constraint

We discussed how the body must repeatedly break down an action and reconstruct it in order to develop an understanding of that action and eventually to organize a mechanism for its performance. After the composite image of the action exists, the body is then able to perform the entire succession. The way in which a force outside of a body can create a *specific* understanding of an action for that body is what we will consider here as the process of discipline. Our understanding of this concept will follow from Michel Foucault's description of its use in *Discipline and Punish*.

By controlling each element of repetition (the movements of the body, but also the succession and duration of the movements), discipline is habit developed in the body by forces external to that body. Foucault describes it as “a web that constrains [gestures] or sustains them throughout their entire succession.”<sup>38</sup> The body is controlled “*at the level of the mechanism itself*,” which is to say at the level of developing the mechanism of a habit itself.<sup>39</sup> There is “an infinitesimal power over the active body” through discipline precisely because it operates on the incremental level of this development. A particular performance of a movement is prescribed (if not enforced), directing each part of the body in a specific succession and speed.

To ensure that the movement is developed as prescribed, discipline uses a progression of exercises. Bergson wrote that repetition would not build toward habit if each repetition was the same, and this is also true of the repetitions of exercise. Exercises

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<sup>38</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* transl. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995) 152.

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, 137.

are repetitions that continuously graduate *toward some end*.<sup>40</sup> They build on one another as repetitions where the end and progression of actions toward that end are both determined in advance. Foucault gives the example of a classroom, where students can only pass into the next grade by attaining successive levels of proficiency. Those who have made insufficient progress may have to repeat the class.

The connection between bodily movements and the order by which these movements are executed is highlighted in Foucault's description of discipline's "collective and obligatory rhythm."<sup>41, 42</sup> This rhythm is both the learned sequence and the ideal time of its completion; it is habit choreography.

As in the choreography of dance, this rhythm removes from movement the degree of freedom the body has to act in its own time, or more specifically its own duration. Duration is used by Bergson to describe a movement which is not measurable by time. He writes:

The duration lived by our consciousness is a duration with its own determined rhythm, a duration very different from the time of the physicist, which can store up, in a given interval, as great a number of phenomena as we please.<sup>43</sup>

So discipline takes the rhythm of our consciousness (which is the source of our ability to choose our own actions) and replaces it with an "obligatory and collective rhythm," a movement performed with others whose time is not our own. Discipline, in other words, takes the indeterminacy of duration and makes it into time so that it can be directed and measured.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Foucault, 161.

<sup>41</sup> Foucault, 152.

<sup>42</sup> Remember the fusion that occurred in Bergson's well-learned tune whereby each action bled into the next.

<sup>43</sup> Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 205.

<sup>44</sup> The measurement by individuals of their own bodies using new technologies in an effort to be more *self-disciplined* was the subject of a recent *Technology Review* article called "The Measured Life." "Do you

Foucault writes that “Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.”<sup>45</sup> In the process of discipline, time corresponds with a movement such that no part of it remains open for indeterminacy.

This ability of discipline to connect succession-of-actions to time-to-completion keeps bodies from wasting time (“time which was counted by God and paid for by men”), which is to say choosing their own duration.<sup>46</sup> “Free” time opens up space for indeterminacy, which *threatens the constancy of pressure* by which forces of alignment must operate. To demonstrate this, Foucault explores the creation of a time-table, which directs where the body is to be and what it is to have done by certain times, which reduces the indeterminacy of a body moving at its own duration. The time-table’s use is to protect against “the moral offence and economic dishonesty” that is lacking discipline.<sup>47</sup> It establishes criteria by which to determine degrees of success for the use of time and space.

## Reducing Gaps

Disciplinary exercises not only ensure the continuity necessary to develop a habit, they provide a progression by which to track the progress of the development. Having a terminal point (or series of points) toward which the body is directed allows for the

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know how much REM sleep you got last night?” the article asks in its lede. “New types of devices that monitor activity, sleep, diet, and even mood could make us healthier and more productive.” Continuing to use the terms of *Discipline and Punish*, I think of this degree of self-discipline as a becoming-panopticon where the individual is both the detained and the tower and equates the ability to see-watch-monitor oneself with the ability to enforce discipline. Such practices seem to have the potential to replace the paranoia of being watched at any/every moment with not trusting one’s own perceptions of the body and instead bringing in a device to aid in the monitoring and controlling of the body which is one’s own. Singer, Emily. “The Measured Life” *Technology Review* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, July/August 2011) 38.

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, 152.

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Foucault, 154.



demarcation of progress, including progress in relation to the progress of others. Thus, the body and its habits are developed in relation to a program or to other bodies and assessed so that the distance between the actual and the ideal can be measured at each stage. Foucault writes:

By bending behavior towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary.”<sup>48</sup>

Putting other bodies in relation to one another, and placing a higher value on the more disciplined bodies creates a system of normalization among the bodies. While discipline measures the negative – the distance yet to travel rather than the distance traversed – normalization at the same time measures the distance between bodies as they differ from the goal and establishes a hierarchy from that measurement. Discipline ensures that the gap between a body and what/where that body should be is measured such that the body can be corrected and made more valuable. Normalization ensures that those bodies closest to alignment with the ideal are more highly valued and exerts pressure on unaligned bodies to move toward, or be (straight) like the more valuable, more disciplined bodies.

The pressures created through a system of normalization will be discussed here as *forces of alignment*. This system “imposes homogeneity,” as Foucault describes, by making the members of a community more like one another, but it also highlights individuals by making apparent the gap between them and the norm from which they are deviant.<sup>49</sup> Normalization’s pressure on bodies would direct them to be similar to other bodies, which is to say in-line with other bodies, as much as possible. Alignment then is a

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<sup>48</sup> Foucault, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Foucault, 184.

measurement of non-conformity, with the distance between bodies as the degree of punishability or devaluation. Foucault writes:

This hierarchizing penalty had, therefore, a double effect: it distributed pupils according to their aptitudes and their conduct, that is, according to the use that could be made of them [...]; it exercised over them a constant pressure to conform to the same model[...] So that they might all be like one another.<sup>50</sup>

Forces of alignment create a system that rewards similarity and that conflates alignment (straightness) with correctness, producing pressure to be in-line with others. Those whose gaps remain are “out of line”, are deviant or “crooked,” and at risk of being “straightened out.”<sup>51</sup> As Ahmed writes:

Things seem ‘straight’ (on the vertical axis) when they are ‘in line’, which means when they are aligned with other lines. Rather than presuming the vertical line is simply given, *we would see the vertical line as an effect of this process of alignment.*<sup>52</sup>

Straight is what one becomes with others, as the prescribed repetition of discipline moves bodies toward one another by reducing their gaps (the gaps between them and would discipline would have them be). I think of this same process when I read from Wittgenstein “The word ‘agreement’ and the word ‘rule’ are *related* to one another, they are cousins. If I teach anyone the use of one word, he learns the use of the other with it.”<sup>53</sup> Agreement brings one in line with others, and when “following” a rule, one is in line with the rule, but behind it. Returning to our comparison of discipline to choreography, if we place the rule in front and bodies in line behind it who must move at the same (dictated) succession and speed, then all we would see is the rule and any

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<sup>50</sup> Foucault, 183.

<sup>51</sup> “Crooked” **b. colloq.** Dishonestly come by; made, obtained, or sold in a way that is not straightforward. Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1989; online version June 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Ahmed, 66.

<sup>53</sup> Wittgenstein, § 224.

undisciplined bodies. What I'm pointing to is an invisibility in alignment, which is also the case when we consider that that which is most familiar is that which we see the least.

Although some bodies can grow more and more alike, and act more and more alike, they nonetheless can never become the same body or act exactly the same.

Additionally, without continued use a body loses capacities it once had. In these ways, alignment and exercise move bodies toward an unattainable end; discipline is then *asymptotic*.<sup>54</sup> Foucault writes that exercise “does not culminate in a beyond, but tends towards a subjection that has never reached its limit,” so we can see how discipline has the function of *reducing* gaps without removing them.<sup>55,56</sup> There is always a way to be better disciplined, to be further aligned, and abilities to maintain.

The development of a habit gives the body a new ability but removes some of its indeterminacy. By developing a capacity in the body through exercise but then seeking to reverse any power that might be derived from that capacity, “[discipline] dissociates power from the body” writes Foucault.<sup>57</sup> What this produces is a body whose abilities have been increased (by the direction its repetitions have taken it) but who is nonetheless “subjected and practiced” by having those repetitions directed from the outside.<sup>58</sup>

Part this reversal of power is connected with the ways in which habits prescribed by discipline are as susceptible to the process of forgetting described in the first chapter where individual recollections grow less and less distinct. Forgetting the effort necessary

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<sup>54</sup> An asymptote is a curve that comes increasingly close to a line but, even if it were extended infinitely, will never reach that line (Appendix A).

<sup>55</sup> Foucault, 162.

<sup>56</sup> Wittgenstein provides an equally compelling image of this when he writes: “Whence comes the idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule.” Wittgenstein, §218.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, 138.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, 138.

to develop a habit can become also forgetting that it took force to elicit that effort in the first place. The pressure to develop a particular habit in a particular way can also pass “out of time.” When we consider what we’ve said about the role of habits in the formation of identity, we can begin to see how the prescription or enforcement of certain habits which makes certain bodies then gives those bodies certain *identities*. Through the process of forgetting and the development of identity, discipline can create habits in certain bodies and then categorize those bodies based on those habits in ways that can become naturalized as the system of normalization becomes internalized. Those whose gaps remain, who remain out of line, can then appear (sometimes even innately) of less value, or as less natural, and often more in need of correction.

## **Pressure**

*Discipline and Punish* includes the following illustration: a crooked tree and a wooden post are tied to one another with rope (Appendix B). But it would be more accurate to say a tree has been tied to a wooden post, because the post was placed there in order for the tree to be tied to it. The post and the rope are a device for the straightening of the tree. This still image is illustrating the ongoing process of orthopedics, a technique of straightening curves. The illustration is showing how the tree can be straightened by the ongoing pressure of the rope to its curves. The practice is similar whether it is being applied to a human body or an arboreal one; it applies continuous constraint over time. In the case of the human body, this process is often done through external back braces adjusting a scoliotic spine or devices surgically placed on the bone structure.

In this illustration we are shown the post – straight – and we are shown the tree – curved, as well as the distance between the two. We are shown the direction the tree must move in order to relieve the pressure upon it. This movement, for a lived body, is not an abstract direction but a ongoing situation of discomfort. What I mean by this is that, the pressure of alignment on living bodies is not an abstract pressure. The body’s experience to being reshaped is often, instead, a painful one. More plainly, alignment hurts. The reduction of gaps hurts, and so can the resistance of this reduction. This is in no small part because that alignment, as the process of applied pressure, makes that body bear weight differently – its own weight as well as the continued weight of the pressure to align.

### **Femininity**

*Where she’s narrow, she’s narrow as an arrow  
And she’s broad where a broad should be broad!*  
- “Honey Bun” lyrics from *South Pacific*

Barbara Johnson writes that “Femininity has always been an orthopedic notion (*orthopedic*: from *ortho* – “straight, correct, right”; and *paideia*, “education”).”<sup>59</sup> How can femininity be understood as orthopedic (the ongoing application of pressure to align the body) and in the context of what we’ve discussed in this chapter?

In a photograph by Carrie Mae Weems, a woman and a young girl (presumably a mother and her daughter) sit at a kitchen table, each applying lipstick in front of small mirrors (Appendix C). The position of their bodies is so similar that it invokes the mirrors themselves – the woman appears as the girl and the girl as the woman. For the woman,

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<sup>59</sup> Johnson, Barbara. *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) 102.

there is an assumed mastery and for the girl an assumed novelty. In fact, the woman is already perfecting her application while the girl is still attempting to apply. In this way, the different sides of the table are the two sides of Ravaisson's spectrum from will to nature, and certainly lipstick is an example of accumulated effort which often aims at appearing not only effortless, but also natural – as if it were the color of the lips.

The moment shown in this photograph is indicative of why choice is such a difficult part of discussing discipline, the choice(s) on the part of the mother as well as the daughter. Sara Ahmed writes:

We can recall here the different meanings of the word “pressure”: the social pressure to follow a certain course, to live a certain kind of life, and even to reproduce that life can feel like a physical “press” on the surface of the body, which creates its own impressions. We are pressed into lines, just as lines are the accumulation of such moments of pressure...<sup>60</sup>

The production and reproduction of a line, and the pressure to align, involves the making valuable of certain habits, and the bodies created by those habits, not just by devaluing those who have not, cannot, or will not acquire those habits.

The picture was taken in 1990, and we cannot say if the girl remembers the effort that was put into *this* lesson on the application of lipstick. We cannot say if, in the picture, the woman is recalling her first lessons. Present in the picture nonetheless is a learning-to-be-like. Sara Ahmed writes that “Following a line is not distinterested: to follow a line takes time, energy, and resources, which means that the ‘line’ one takes does not stay apart from the line of one’s life, as the very shape of how one moves through time and space.” The time, effort, and resources that go into the process of acquiring (if one can) a feminine presence are pointed to in Weems photograph.<sup>61</sup> (Certainly resources are available for this process. The shape of the feminine body is

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<sup>60</sup> Ahmed, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmed, 17.

worked toward through no end of prescribed exercises or approximated through a variety of supplemental devices – the resemblance between corsets/girdles/Spanx and orthopedic back braces is uncanny).

But femininity also evidences how pressures to align can cut across one another, if not outright contradict. Having no curves to one's body might disqualify a person from "being" feminine, but it is equally problematic to have curves in the wrong places (thus, corrective devices and exercises). If one does have curves in the "right" places, these curves can mark the body as, among other things, overtly sexual (and so unfeminine), as in the case of the feminine bodies used to caution against venereal diseases used in past propaganda posters (see Appendix D). The curvy figures of these posters embodied what/who men were to avoid and what women were to avoid becoming.

So femininity leaves the body dealing with two different pressures of alignment, because to be aligned with femininity is valuable in certain contexts but not in others. As Barbara Johnson writes "Femininity becomes, therefore, that from which women are always in danger of deviating. Unless of course femininity is judged a liability, in which case it is that into which women are always in danger of falling."<sup>62</sup> There is pressure to be and to not be feminine, or, said differently, in not all cases is being feminine to be straight.

## **Conclusion**

The technique of discipline allows forces outside a body to develop a habit within that body by controlling each aspect of an action (movement, succession, and speed) and by compelling a graduated series of repetitions (exercises) that shape the body toward

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<sup>62</sup> Johnson, 102.

some end. This end is not a particular outcome of the body, but a particular body itself. As Foucault describes, discipline is applied: “not only so that [bodies] may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, the efficiency that one determines.”<sup>63</sup> A disciplined body has the increasing capacity to perform the desired repetition as it was prescribed and in the time allotted. Through normalization, it becomes more similar to other bodies – becoming less visible as it aligns and grows familiar.

Neither discipline nor alignment culminates in the body moving beyond them; one’s body can never be aligned enough and must maintain its capacity through ongoing repetition. This gives the body an asymptotic relationship with these forces whereby it is further subjugated through the increase of its capacities (value) to align with other (valuable) bodies.

### ***Chapter Three: Convention, Curvature, and the Future***

*Our freedom, in its very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it. The word turns against the idea. – Bergson<sup>64</sup>*

We have the ability to convert our actions into convenient mechanisms for their performance. We also have a complementary ability, through consciousness, to select, evaluate, and revise those habits so that our indeterminacy is not destroyed by the acquisition of these mechanisms – as Bergson writes, we can “oppose new habits to the

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<sup>63</sup> Foucault, 138.

<sup>64</sup> Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 127.



old ones unceasingly.”<sup>65</sup> This means that while the development of habit moves from effort to effortlessness, the maintenance of our freedom does not. As the above epigraph indicates, it instead requires a constant engagement with our habits and the directions they are leading us; a constant engagement of the development of our habits as the development of ourselves and the foreclosure of our indeterminacy. One aspect of this engagement is the experience of difference.

Difference has the ability to expand what has become compressed by repetition. It can help us to recognize what has become familiar, acquired over time, and aligned. Being reminded that *we* used to be different is also a reminder that we *will be* different again, and, even more basically, that being difference is possible. As an indicator of the variety of responses we have to what we perceive, difference is a provocation of consciousness. In the final chapter we will explore possible uses of difference, first through the use of recognizability in convention and then through curvature.

In the first section we will look at convention as a way of understanding how recognizability can be useful in the process of curvature. This means we will explore how something that invokes but also in some way defies the familiar can 1) point back at what goes unseen in this familiarity or 2) use the familiar to perform a function it would otherwise have been unable to perform. In other words, the first section considers the potential in that which is semi-recognizable, or *has a relationship to* the straight. The second considers the possibilities for future action, as well as future becoming, that is opened up by curvature. To use the example of Foucault’s crooked tree, it will explore

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<sup>65</sup> “But man not only maintains his machine, he succeeds in using it as he pleases. Doubtless he owes to this the superiority of his brain, which enables him to build an unlimited number of motor mechanisms, to oppose new habits to the old ones unceasingly, and, by dividing automatism against itself, to rule it.” *Creative Evolution*, 265.

how the curve might bend the post, and how the relationship between the two can be utilized to make transformative that which is unaligned.

### **Semi-Recognizability**

*Importantly, when one thing is ‘out of line,’ then it is not just that thing that appears oblique but the world itself might appear on a slant, which disorientates the picture and even unseats the body.* – Sara Ahmed<sup>66</sup>

Something that is semi-recognizable has the ability to access a part of the authority or value or meaning of that to which it is referring. This ability to either assume some of that authority, value, or meaning, or to comment on it, has been used in efforts of satirical parody, dystopian fiction, and of détournement – the last being a technique of placing something new in direct contact with something familiar (for an example of détourned painting, see Appendix E). In describing détournement, the Situationist International wrote that it “has a peculiar power which obviously stems from the double meaning, from the enrichment of most of the terms by the coexistence within them of their old and new senses.”<sup>67</sup> The potential for creating new terms, and more specifically new forms of enacting conventions, will be considered in this section.

Convention, like habit, is a technique. Both are techniques of repetition enacted by bodies in order to do something. Both are examples of individual iterations of actions that acquire for through repetition, such that there are singular invocations of the larger, dynamic force. To be effective, however, convention, must be recognizable. This recognizability is required for the action to be, first, acknowledged, and second,

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<sup>66</sup> Ahmed, 67.

<sup>67</sup> Situationist International. “Détournement as Negation and Prelude.” *Internationale Situationniste* #3 1959. trans. Ken Knabb. accessed November 1, 2011. <<http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/315>>

understood. (The conventional greeting “How are you?” is usually recognized in the United States as a serving the phatic function of a greeting and not as an inquiry for information into the state of the person being greeted – though it may also be that.)

In the introduction to habit, I wrote that “habit is how I do something, derived from the way that I have done it in the past.” Convention, in contrast, is the way I must go about doing something, derived from the way others have done it in the past. (I say “must” here not because I am coerced into performing that action, though in some cases this may be true, but because that is the way it “must” be done in order to be acknowledged, understood, and successful.)

So the repetition of a convention relies on what the others have done in the past; the actions are inherited from previous bodies and are accepted (or not) by present ones. In *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin (who is specifically considering the performative utterance or speech act) posits that in order to use a convention successfully (to plead guilty or place a bet) a person must invoke a past convention with their body in the present. Austin writes: “There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.”<sup>68</sup> If the present iteration of the past action is acknowledged and recognized by others present then the invocation worked.

The development of conventions can be thought of here much like habit, as the composite image that has resulted from discreet events in the past. Yet, where in habit we often forget the effort it took to make an action effortless, in convention we often forget

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<sup>68</sup> Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) 26.

why the performance must be done in *this* way, what made this set of actions recognizable.

So in habit and convention, the present iteration becomes what is “just done,” based in the first case on the past actions of your own body and in the second on the past actions of others’ bodies.<sup>69</sup> Austin’s formula is not prescriptive (what you should do or how conventions should work); the correctness or incorrectness of any individual repetition of a convention depends on other people’s acceptance of it. If it “misfires,” using Austin’s term, this is “presumably because persons other than the speaker do not accept it...”<sup>70</sup> Austin writes that all attempts to invoke convention run the risk of failure.<sup>71</sup> But, and this is the point of this section, they also have the potential of success. This is true even of those things that have previously not been authorized as conventions but invoke some part of what is recognizable about that convention. This is what makes the individual iteration so powerful – it can access the recognizable convention while also being distinct from it. In other words, what is semi-recognizable may nonetheless go recognized. Austin writes: “...we have even the case of procedures which someone is initiating. Sometimes he may ‘get away with it’ like, in football, the man who first picked up the ball and ran. *Getting away with things is essential*, despite the suspicious terminology,” (my emphasis).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler describes Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus in a very similar way, writing that habitus is “a citational chain lived and believed at the level of the body. The *habitus* is not only a site for the reproduction of belief in the reality of a given social field – a belief by which that field is sustained – but it also generates *dispositions* which “incline” the social subject to act in relative conformity with the ostensibly objective demands of the field.” Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1997) 155.

<sup>70</sup> Austin, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Austin, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Austin, 30.

So taking something recognizable about a convention can be used to 1) seize the authority to be recognized when you otherwise do not have that authority or 2) to do something different with that convention than what is usually done. Possibilities like this are highlighted in Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performative* when she (using Austin, Jacques Derrida, and Pierre Bourdieu) emphasizes that conventions exist as the composite of past repetitions that have discreet invocations. With each invocation, there is the potential for a break with previous invocations that nonetheless use what is recognizable about them in order to do something. She is talking in this case about the speech acts potential to "take on a non-ordinary meaning" because its contexts "are never fully determined in advance."<sup>73</sup> Butler sees in this potential an insurrectionary power to change the meaning of language, but I would take her point more broadly in our thinking about convention, but also for habits. We have with each iteration the opportunity to enact the repetition differently, but, as we've said, such a decision requires consciousness and effort.

### **Space and Openness**

Sara Ahmed writes that "the 'straight line' is what shapes the very tendency to go astray. What is astray does not lead us back to the straight line, but shows us what is lost by following that line."<sup>74</sup> In this section, I want to consider the value of deviation for demonstrating what can be gained by departure, nonalignment, and curvature.

If we remember the space between the tree and the post it was tied to, we can see that an entire field of space lies between the line and the curve. I see this space as the

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<sup>73</sup> Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1997) 160.

<sup>74</sup> Ahmed, 79.

ongoing articulation of a new field of possibility. The tree shows that every degree of curvature between straightness and itself is possible. Forces of alignment would see this space only as a gap to be corrected instead of room for growth. There is only an increasing relationship of becoming-straight, and within straightness itself there is only one direction because a line, by definition, is all length; it has no lateral existence. Yet, the curve shows that continued difference is possible. It shows that movement can occur in other directions.

Foucault called the “domain of non-conforming” indefinite. So while alignment takes certain shapes, non-alignment has the potential to take any shape. Similarly, Sir Arthur Eddington writes “Explanation is needed for regularity, not for diversity.”<sup>75</sup> These two excerpts point to the possibilities for indeterminacy that can become foreclosed through discipline and normalization. While forces of alignment have a (recognizable) end in mind for the body, one cannot know in advance what shape departure will take. The curve, and it may be one of several over time, points out future unforeseeably – and to curve is not to know the shape one is assuming. This means a position that demands consciousness.

The shape will likely be read in relation to what is recognizable. In this way, to curve is often not to break from alignment but to develop an ongoing relationship between it and departure from it. To curve is to develop a form of navigation with one’s own repetition and with the forces of alignment. This incremental taking shape is articulated by Elizabeth Grosz when she writes of the generative power of difference/distance in the formation of identity:

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<sup>75</sup> Eddington, Sir Arthur. *The Nature of the Physical World*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1974).

It may be that these acts, and the immanent patterns they form and the bodily alignments they create, are as close to identity as we get. In this case, identity cannot be understood as what we are, the multiple, overlapping categories that make us into subjects; rather, we are what we do and what we make, we are what we generate, which may give us an identity, but always an identity that is directed to our next act, our next activity, rather than to the accretion of categories that may serve to describe us.<sup>76</sup>

I read the accretion of categories to include those categories we have made for ourselves through the accumulation of habit, and would reemphasize the role of consciousness in reorienting future action even in spite of the momentum those categories gain. We said that alignment makes bodies disappear, but in this way to curve is to risk a different form of disappearance. The ongoing taking-shape that is provoked by a departure can involve losing the moorings of one's own identity (categories) as well as any value or rank one has acquired as part of the system of normalization. Said differently, we can become unrecognizable in curvature – our reputation cannot precede us.

This is another way in which, as we've discussed, the reduction of gaps is often a painful process, and *so can be* the production of gaps through departure. Not only can curvature be disorienting, it may require the continuous distribution and redistribution of pressures of alignment. The body itself must re-determine how to bear weight as it grows and finds or creates new systems of support.

## Conclusion

We return in conclusion to effort. In the epigraph, Bergson wrote about the “constant effort” that is needed to maintain freedom. I have considered that effort here through the experience of nonalignment and curvature. As we have seen, there is a

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<sup>76</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) 98.

burden, a slowness, an openness, and unforeseeability to disrupting momentum of repetition. There may also be a struggle for articulation, for the ability to produce meaning, to be acknowledged and understood.

Curvature is not a state; it is an action. Like habit, discipline, and convention, curvature is a technique. I consider it a navigation or negotiation technique for forming a relationship with one's own actions, repetitions, and the forces of alignment. Curvature is first a departure from the trajectory of past repetition followed by an unpredictable movement into the future. It is both a reorientation with one's own body, and other bodies, and the claiming of new ground.

To curve is not to become unmarked by the pressure of alignment; in fact, these pressures must be renegotiated again and again as the curved body continues to take shape and be read through that which is recognizable. Wittgenstein writes that rules are followed blindly – they are enacted but unquestioned. But it is important to emphasize that to curve is not to assume a position of clarity. To question the prescribed repetitions is a process that changes the orientation to those repetitions, even if it is not to arrive at an answer. The consequences of amending repetitions cannot be seen in advance. And, in becoming unrecognizable, one becomes more vulnerable to going unseen.

It is not easy to redistribute the pressures of alignment or to become less familiar, if not unrecognizable, but it is to become something different what one could have been otherwise.

Curvature is willful, ongoing, and open.



### ***Thesis Conclusion***

This project asked how we can consider future action in relation to our own, inevitable, repetition, especially when these repetitions have been formed in a context of forces that would direct them as so as to direct our own capacities. This question involved two ongoing negotiations: 1) the maintenance of the indeterminacy of our actions with the necessity to develop habits, and 2) the open-ended orientation of curvature with the continuous pressure of alignment. In both of these negotiations, at stake was our ability to act from recognizable, valued positions while not foreclosing the possibilities for our future.

We first considered how repetition is compressed by the body into habits, which enables us to perform actions with growing efficiency but by which our recollections become indistinguishable parts of a composite image. Knowing the momentum that habits create for who we become, we considered how disciplinary forces seek to harness

that momentum by directing our repetitions in order to create a body with certain capacities – a body which is valued in relation to other bodies with whom it is brought into alignment through exercise and normalization (the reduction of its gaps). The forgetting we said was endemic to habit was extended to how we might also forget those forces which had acted to align and create a capacity (and possibly identity) as natural to us.

We then turned to difference as a way of remembering (or expanding) what had been compressed in memory by provoking consciousness. Through convention, we saw how we might be able to create difference through actions that were semi-recognizable, meaning that they used an aspect of the convention's recognizability in access its meaning. This led us finally to a consideration of curvature as the continuous negotiation/navigation of our actions with our repetition and forces of alignment.

What curvature allows is an ethics of bends instead of breaks. One can live, and live with others, in a way that accommodates places of alignment and formations of habit but can also accommodate departures from normalization and from the accumulation of our own past repetitions. We do not always have the energy for the constant effort of consciousness. We cannot always hold up under the pressure to align. These elements of the past should be able to be accounted for in forming future action. The ongoing negotiation of curvature is one possibility for this type of accounting. My past can become part of the (unforeseeable) shape I am (still in the process of making).

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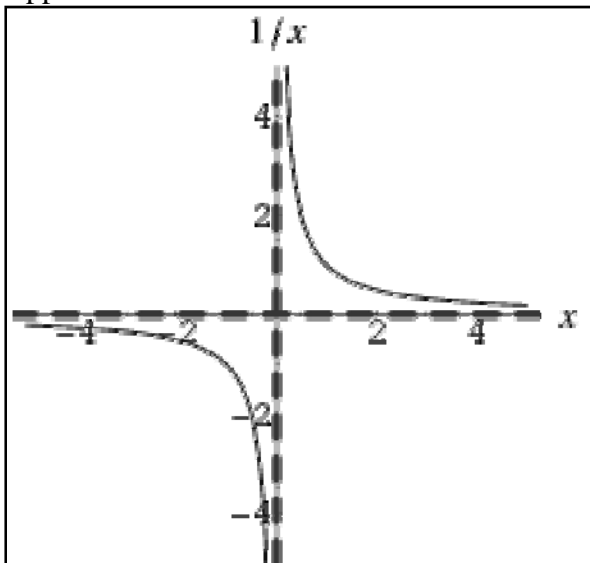
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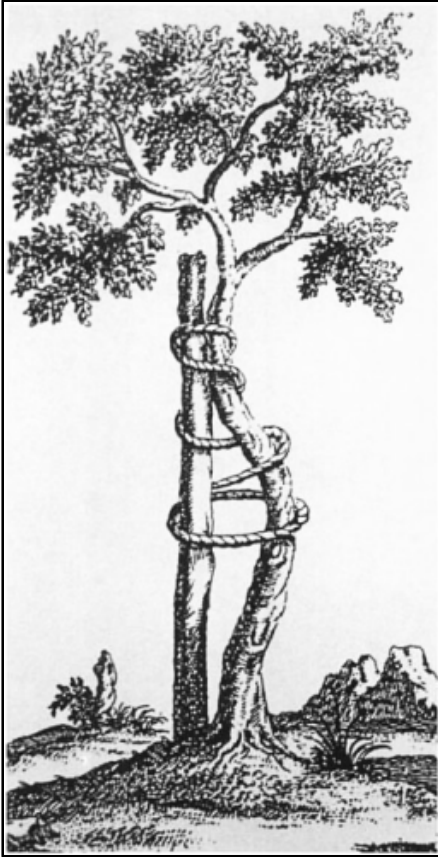
Appendix A<sup>77</sup>



Appendix B<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> “Asymptote” accessed Sept. 20, 2011. <[http://mathworld.wolfram.com/images/eps-gif/AsymptotesOneOverX\\_1000.gif](http://mathworld.wolfram.com/images/eps-gif/AsymptotesOneOverX_1000.gif)>

<sup>78</sup> “Aus unrhuigen Traumen” accessed Sept. 30, 2011.  
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Appendix C<sup>79</sup>



<sup>79</sup> Weems, Carrie Mae. "Kitchen Table Series" accessed Sept. 30, 2011. <<http://carriemaeweems.net/>>

Appendix D<sup>80</sup>Appendix E<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup>Murphy, Heather. "She May Look Clean – But..." *Slate*. Oct. 25, 2011.  
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