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Play the Facts and the Truth: Disability in Documentary Film

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Abstract

This paper explores how film viewers, especially documentary film viewers, attribute a kind of “truth” to a subject’s body. Sam Sullivan’s body, throughout the film *Citizen Sam*, reinforces a certain cultural assumption about what a disabled body *means*. Sam Sullivan is not only the *subject* of the documentary, but is the *fact* of it. When one examines the very notion of a fact (scientific, poetic, artistic, etc.), the *act* of fact-making begs the question of what, in fact, is a *fact*? And how do “facts” inform a viewer’s acceptance of filmic authenticity and veracity? At times, the facticity of this documentary film lies in the depiction of a disabled man struggling through various political and personal minefields and conquests. The film projects an underlying conventional view that corporeality does, still, verify. Much of the film concentrates on personal and intimate details of Sullivan’s daily operations, often focussing on how a mayoral candidate campaigning from a wheelchair involves added exertions. Diary techniques intimate that Sam is alone, that no one around him will view these “private” confessions: not his wife, not his opponents, not the voters, not the camera operator, not even the director; only the viewers. The fiction of such access creates intimacy and extends a titillating aura of illicit revelation. These personal “entries”—interjected into a fairly straightforward documentary film narrative—convince viewers they are getting the “inside scoop.” *Citizen Sam*’s filmic construction is that Sam’s body (and any private moments deemed particular to that body) inherently belongs in the public eye.

Key Words

Documentary film; 2005 Vancouver mayoral election; partisan politics; wheelchair candidate; mobility; the body as truth; voyeuristic able-bodied gaze; Giambattista Vico; Descartes; Mary Poovey; Lady Gaga; Ludwik Fleck.

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Play the Facts and the Truth: Disability in Documentary Film¹

Truth To You

The North American television show, *Lie To Me*, features a psychologist who exposes deception by recognizing what he calls “universal” body signals. The premise of this detective drama is that all facial expressions and corporeal reactions to emotional stress are not only equal across cultures, but are identifiable signals that hide an inner “truth.” In one episode, “Beyond Belief,” an ex-member of a new-age cult constantly averts her eyes and lets her hair fall in front of her face, which apparently demonstrates her obvious shame.² Regardless of racial, gendered, sexual, or linguistic backgrounds, characters on the show display “lies” on their faces and in their gestures, in a manner demonstrating what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder call the physical “anomalies” that represent the normal gone awry. Despite what the ex-cult member tells them, her facial expressions and body language demonstrate to the psychologist and other scientists on the show that what she truly thinks and feels contradict her outward claims and demeanour. By ignoring or dismissing any gender, race, class, or cultural imprints, the premise of *Lie To Me* is that the human body can, indeed, tell the “truth” – primarily through its outward ability to represent inner turmoil.

I shall explore, in this paper, how film viewers, especially documentary film viewers, attribute a similar kind of “truth” to a subject’s body. The film I will examine is the Canadian

¹ I would like to thank Louis Cabri and Eunjung Kim for fabulous editing as I made my way through drafts of this paper. Also, thanks to Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki, who organized the Health Embodiment and Visual Culture conference (McMaster, November 2010), where I first presented a version of this paper, and to Sally Chivers, Mike Gill, Robert McRuer, and Rosemary Nixon for conversations and input.

² Contrast this “universal” response and interpretation to Rupert Ross’s example, in his book *Dancing with a Ghost*, of First Nations defendants in Canadian sentencing hearings, who avert their eyes, because “sustaining direct eye contact was frequently considered rude” (4). Ross speaks not only of cultural differences, but about how assumptions of sameness create divides. In the northern Ontario communities he writes about, “[t]he proper way to send someone a signal of respect was to look down or to the side (3). Whereas “the messages received by non-Native court personnel were exactly the opposite ones. Their inclination was to interpret such respectful glances as evasive, and often even indicative of an admission of guilt (4).

documentary, *Citizen Sam*. My aim, in raising these examples from popular culture, is to redirect arguments about the “truth” of the body, examining the visual representation of “facts,” a representation that underlies a somatic (and symbolic) filmic truth that interests me here. What, in fact, is a *fact*? And how do “facts” inform a viewer’s acceptance of filmic authenticity and veracity?

James McEnteer observes in his book that explores the political evolution of USA documentary films over the second half of the 20th century: “Documentary makers use actual people, settings, and situations, rather than inventing their own” (xv).³ This typical characterization of documentary distinguishes non-fiction films from “fiction” movies. But McEnteer goes on to caution against a too-simple definition when he says, following Erik Barnouw, that “any claim to objectivity by nonfiction filmmakers is ‘meaningless’ because of the ‘endless choices’ they have to make—from the topic, to individual shots, to the final order of edited sequences” (xv). The range these choices cover, exemplifies how much artistry goes into any documentary film. These are basic points; viewers are not unsophisticated about how to read fashioned objectivity in visual form. Nevertheless, critic Jim Lane argues that when filmmakers who are invested in the autobiographical mode turn the cameras on themselves, the projection of supposedly candid subjectivity convinces viewers of the authenticity of the onscreen protagonist (4); “By repositioning the filmmaker at the foreground of the film, the new autobiographical documentary disrupted the detached, objective ideal of direct cinema, which excluded the presence of the filmmaker, and the cinematic apparatus” (12). A similar elision of filmic construction occurs for viewers of *Citizen Sam*.

³ Setting up documentaries in this way invites the viewer into the role similar to that of the psychologist in *Lie to Me*. Like the protagonist Dr. Lightman, viewers, throughout a film, search characters’ facial expressions and other physical features as a way to observe the manifested truths the films explore.

In *Citizen Sam*, the projected points-of-view alternate between an “along for the ride” camera-witness and a series of autobiographical personal addresses by “citizen” Sam, usually depicted as alone in his apartment. Sam Sullivan is a political hopeful who at times appears as the only subject in front of *or* behind the camera.⁴ *Citizen Sam*, a Canadian 2006 National Film Board documentary, was made by director Joe Moulins. The film follows the 2005 Vancouver mayoral election, choosing as its protagonist candidate Sam Sullivan, who ultimately wins the race. *Citizen Sam* offers almost entirely what one expects from a film that “documents” a political race: *in camera* meetings with campaign strategists, meet-and-greets with potential voters, debates with the opposition, and the obligatory “personal” scenes with wife or girlfriend. In addition, there are intimate scenes where it appears that no one is in the room with Sam as he speaks directly to the camera. Part confessional diary, these scenes offer to viewers the possibility of hearing – and seeing – the “real” behind the real. By speaking directly to the camera, with no one to overhear except viewers, the film suggests that Sam will reveal himself, strip away the public authorized version and get to the private “truth” of who he is, what he represents.

There is a play on the title of the film, with *Citizen Kane*. Both films present aggressive A-type personalities and promote and celebrate capitalist-minded individualists. Yet the notion of “citizenship” is problematic in *Citizen Sam*. Sam makes light of how there is a public perception of his candidacy as aligned with marginal groups including the homeless. “People are shocked when they hear that, you know, I’m not some left-wing whiner that just wants everything given to me.” On the way to an early-morning interview, Sam laughs at a wave he

⁴ Although the filmmaker is Joe Moulins and Sam Sullivan is entirely subject and not credited with co-directing or co-producing, at times he addresses the audience as if he is alone. This autobiographical effect may emerge from the confessional technique I discuss in the following paragraph, but is just as likely a dramatic technique that Moulins creates by setting up the equipment so that Sullivan can, at times, video himself without the presence of film technicians.

gets from a homeless man. Viewers are led to interpret Sam's laughter to mean that the homeless man wrongly assumed a body wheeling across the pavement in a wheelchair inherently signals a socially-progressive politics. Sam's body and wheelchair, then, "campaign" for a certain position, while his words reject exactly that platform. Sam Sullivan's body, at this moment in his campaign, projects a particular message about disability, while he literally whisks away without talking to anyone but the camera. The scene thus challenges the broader epistemological assumption that the body is a "fixed and static" (Fleck 50) fact, while Sullivan powers through the moment of failed social connection.

The (Un)Real Inside (Non)Fiction

In a 2010 article in the UK's *The Sunday Times*, Camille Paglia presents a vitriolic diatribe against singer Lady Gaga. Among her complaints is that the singer's lack of facial expression in her videos promotes in her fans personal fragmentation and "atrophied" voices, in which they "communicate mutely via a constant stream of atomized, telegraphic text messages" (Paglia). In a short online article in support of Paglia's opinion, blogger David Boles writes: "We read faces and bodies to receive unspoken clues about how people are feeling and what they're really thinking. The body does not lie – only the mind does – and removing access to our comprehension of the effective warning clues found in the physical realm wounds our ability to be seen, understood, appreciated, protected and preternaturally valued." Ironically, Boles cites Paglia in order to get at difficulties he experiences in teaching American Sign Language to undergraduate students. In an effort to celebrate the expressiveness of ASL, he aligns himself with a suspect argument: that the body needs to mirror the mind, that *not* projecting particular facial expressions associated with particular emotions leaves "kids today" with atrophied spirits

(Boles). Not only does Boles reject, with Paglia, what she disparages as “mute” communication, but he also perpetuates European superstitions that emerged in the Middle Ages, and persist in today’s age of technology, about inalienable “truths” of the body: that its flaws and imperfections divulge higher meaning; in effect, that *the body cannot lie*. Boles’s argument, like Paglia’s, devolves into a worn “kids today” diatribe, lamenting days of yore before “technocracy” mediated bodily interactions. Boles attacks “kids” for experiencing the world via technology “through their hands and eyes,” presumably a focus he should value as an ASL instructor!⁵

When discussing the definition of documentary film with his students, film critic and teacher Henrik Juel admits that his students do “talk a lot about ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ as a necessary condition for non-fiction film.” To revitalize the discussion, Juel says, he asks if his cousin “can be justified in claiming that he is working on documentary films, when in fact what he does for a living is to install surveillance cameras at gas-stations and supermarkets. After all, this does seem to meet the criteria of representing reality, of filming without the use of actors, and recording as truthfully as possible what is actually there.” At this point in the discussion, his students argue that they require from a film “some artistic point of view, a message of some sort.” The facts, then, are not enough; the film – steered by the director – needs to navigate the facts in order to present a deliberate moral or ideological truth, or at the very least some demonstrable artistry beyond a 24-hour static recording. “Recording reality,” Juel notes, is “too vague a criterion” for what documentary films strive to achieve. A documentary film “is not a mere representation, but

⁵ For more discussion on the contemporary evaluations of the body that – through technoculture – convey legal certainties, see Katja Franko Aas’s article about new technologies that investigate, and also come to conclusions about, somatic identity. Speaking of the example of UN surveillance of Afghan refugee border crossings, Aas writes, “Bodies, fused with the latest technologies, are proving to be vital to contemporary governance” (144). The article focuses on the body as a source of information and identification, and asks important questions about how the body has been wrested from its social context, yet still – and perhaps even more – able to discharge forensic information.

a willed presentation” he maintains. And that “willed presentation” – that director’s cut of deliberate manipulations – is the artistic medium in which viewers trust to view stylized fictional facts.⁶

Emerging around 1958, direct cinema (soon aligned with *cinéma vérité*) grew out of Québec and USA documentary techniques (such as the hand-held camera, and synched sound and sight recordings outside the studios) that adopted the stance of an unbiased observer. By foregrounding the filmmaker, direct cinema autobiographies proposed a sense of “reality” wherein the principal filmmaker was not invisible, but was in fact the subject of the film. As Julie Rak points out in *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions*, filmic autobiography is inherently an interdisciplinary form. Rak wishes to emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of stories that rely on non-fiction “facts” and narrative strategies. Autobiography, Rak says, may draw from diaries and letters, sociology, photography, education, and anthropology (18-19). In film, the visual impetus is to observe – with an observing eye that constructs itself as scientific, or at the very least objective – the body as functional device of the viewing gaze. Audiences participate in the interdisciplinary evaluation of film in that the body is the subject, not simply the narrative surrounding the body. Mitchell and Snyder point out that disabled subjectivities exist in canonical narratives – from Aristotle to *X-Men*. Such portrayals of the body – as able to outwardly represent inner turmoil or dis/order – is an ongoing narrative strategy of truth-disclosure, especially in the cultural media of dramatic movies and documentary films. The fictions that may supplement the facts do not convince viewers that the subject being filmed is as

⁶ Juel’s students seem unwilling to recognize or allow for the possibility that surveillance cameras may also be constructed, deliberate, and willed. Indeed, the very circumstances of a public that accepts permanent cameras capturing moments of their existence shopping or driving or going to school or taking money from a bank machine, puts pressure on the idea of an impartial recording.

constructed as protagonists in other movies; rather, the documentary focus on one particular body serves to aim a seemingly irrefutable and authentic factual story at the camera.

There may be no better example of manipulation than that found in a partisan political campaign, and films that document such events often strive to reveal or expose the various layers of political manoeuvring. *Citizen Sam* offers an insider's view of a mayoral campaign in Vancouver, one that contested a number of political and social issues, including: the growing homeless and addict population, a sleazy history in previous mayoral races of partisan politics (Vancouver is one of the few cities in Canada – certainly the largest – to conduct city elections by party, rather than by ward; one doesn't vote for a representative of one's community, but rather for one party over another), and – of course – the physical reality that a forerunning candidate moves about in a wheelchair, with a significant amount of footage spent on how that candidate appears to have trouble completing everyday tasks smoothly and without assistance. As the promotional material puts it, the film covers “from war room to bedroom,” a catchy phrase that juxtaposes war and love, at the same time as it promises titillating glimpses into not only the public battle, but also the clandestine privacy of a would-be mayor. Thus Sam Sullivan's disabled body serve as “evidence” for certain policies during his run for election. Throughout *Citizen Sam*, the absence of camera crew, of any interviewer or director asking questions or leading conversations, allows viewers to focus entirely on Sullivan as the film's core, and on his body as the essential evidence that his physical reality is – in so many ways – his campaign.

Shortly after the opening credits, the film scrolls “Day 67” across the screen. At several points throughout the film, days continue to count down until the film ends four days after election day. For most of the film, the camera is set up, in direct cinema fashion, to act as an

invisible recorder, there to “witness” the mayoral candidate’s speeches, relentless campaigning, and political strategizing. In addition, Moulins’s choice to shoot and package the film as a count-down suggests (albeit reverse) linearity, a way of seemingly accurately depicting the Vancouver election through the day-to-day campaign, the details that drive the narrative to its ultimate conclusion (victory or defeat, vindication or condemnation, etc.). In maintaining this count-down strategy, Moulins’s “invisible recorder” asserts objective reality but also purports to capture the subjective reality of Sam. Depictions of Sam Sullivan’s private physical adjustments (traversing the city in his wheelchair, getting in and out of the bathtub, turning over in bed), allow viewers to glimpse “the unusual” body in action, at the same time as Sam’s interspersed direct addresses to the camera invite an intimate acquaintanceship between subject and object of the film, by relying on a filmic change-up that, ultimately, perpetuates normative narrative.⁷

In this way, much of the film concentrates on personal and intimate details of Sullivan’s daily operations, often focussing on how a mayoral candidate campaigning from a wheelchair involves added exertions. His personal “entries” interjected into a fairly straightforward documentary film narrative, convince viewers they are getting the “inside scoop.” *Citizen Sam*’s filmic construction is that Sam’s body (and any private moments deemed particular to that body) belongs in the public eye. As the documentary was only released after the election (indeed, the final full scene in the film covers the night of election results), questions arise around who has access to those intimate video late-night entries. Further, the diary technique intimates that Sam is alone, that no one around him will view these “private” confessions: not his wife, not his opponents, not the voters, not the camera operator, not even the director; only the viewers. The

⁷ Aas, in his article on how bodies are become “unique tokens of identification” (145), asserts that “the human body is always treated as an image of society” (155), in that the “rituals of bodily control” (whether they be habits of eliminating dirt, or official methods of preventing unwanted outsiders from joining a particular membership) determine who belongs on which side of the “us/them” divide.

fiction of such access does more than create intimacy, it extends a titillating aura of illicit revelation. Sam declares in one of his private entries: “I was on welfare, living in social housing, and I was just so disconnected from the community, from the world, from things that were happening.”

Ah, the viewer might assume, now comes the core of his confession, as the dark lighting and quiet apartment suggest. But, instead, citizen Sam turns from his personal life back to politician-speak: “This is an amazing system that we have: capitalism, democracy, the western world. I wanted to be part of that system; I wanted to serve it in a way.” Then, as Sullivan waxes on about his tie choices, viewers understand his homily to be more of a “how I came to public service” announcement than the private and the confidential, he inadvertently divulged. By speaking intimately with the camera in between more official campaign moments, Sam Sullivan sets viewers up to think that only “we” will hear the decisive truth about this overly-honest political candidate. Exposing his non-public moments convey a truthful and frank man, one willing to speak to a viewing audience outside the context of an electoral race. For Sam Sullivan, his private moments enticingly become public confession not only because he is running for public office, but because the body he constantly displays as a part of his campaign is a disabled one. So when Sam, within a moment of seeming intimacy, starts to speak his public agenda, viewers’ expectations that this moment of confession, in which the private disability may disclose the truth of the public figure, are thwarted. To return to the homeless man who reads the mayoral candidate’s body as offering a possible social alignment: Sam Sullivan’s body, in this scene, both reinforces a certain cultural assumption about what a disabled body *means*, at the same time as, for viewers at least, Sullivan’s mind (expressed via his spoken words) thwarts that assumption.

By dividing the film into segments where the candidate speaks directly to the camera, as if in a video diary, the director projects Sam Sullivan as not only the *subject* of the documentary, but as the *fact* of it: subject become fact. Giambattista Vico in 1725 contradicts Descartes's stance that truth is absolute, observable, and separate from social construct. Vico suggests that truth emerges out of a form of creation, rather than from neutral observation. "For while the mind perceives itself," Vico says, "it does not make itself" (55), suggesting that there is no human truth prior to experience. According to Mary Poovey "modern facts are assumed to reflect things that actually exist, and they are recorded in a language that seems transparent" (29). But what does such transparency communicate? As Sullivan "confesses" to the camera his fears over how he will run the campaign, and his glee at many of his once-enemies reluctantly shuffling to his side, viewers are reminded – again and again – that the political is personal, that Sullivan's efforts to stay a forerunner depend on (as he puts it), him learning to become a better "tap-dancer." He himself articulates corporeal metaphors that both invest in cliché and perpetuate normative images of the body and its physical movements.

About this film, director Joe Moulins declares: "Citizen Sam grew out of a long-time interest in disability politics and rights of the disabled" (Myspace comment). Does the facticity of the documentary film, then, lie less in the depiction of a race to become mayor and more in the depiction of a disabled man struggling through various political and personal minefields and conquests? Various of these appear in the film: Sullivan's insensitive lead opponent, his ways of dressing himself in the morning, his disclosure (prior to the election) that he gave crack and

heroine to street people, and his final triumphant waving of the Olympic flag, by weaving his wheelchair around eight times in Turin.⁸

Like the plethora of disabled supporting characters in dramatic films, documentaries display disabled characters in various roles and narratives. In their often quoted *Narrative Prosthesis*, Mitchell and Snyder argue that disability has been traditionally represented in film and literature as a “surface manifestation of internal symptomatology,” a “surface manifestation” that predicts that the disabled individual in question has an “equally irregular subjectivity” (59). In plain words: a “twisted” body conveys a twisted mind, a “pure” body a pure mind. In a way, this film offers what Eunjung Kim calls a “new physiognomy of documentary.” Its “newness” lies in how it attempts to *normalize* the character, rather than *enfreak* disability. The film projects (and perpetuates) an underlying conventional view that corporeality does, still, verify. In normalizing disability, *Citizen Sam* does not work against typical documentary conventions, but in fact affirms them.

But what distinguishes *Citizen Sam* from other documentary profiles of public figures is the occasional scene in which viewers observe Sam performing evening ablutions in the bathroom, or morning scenes in which we see him bathing and dressing himself. These scenes are presented without voiceover commentary and serve no obvious purpose in depicting stages of a mayoral race. *Citizen Sam* lacks an omnipotent and omnipresent male narrator, external to the subject.⁹ In his place audiences see only “Sam,” a “regular” guy, performing “regular” activities albeit with an “irregular” body. Visually, these telling scenes, that foreground not only his body,

⁸ Such a scene overlaps with viewers’ memories of news coverage from the time, adding to the truth value of the film by invoking this particular historic moment as supporting reference.

⁹ In writing about John Grierson, whom many consider to be the founder of documentary film, Jim Leach and Jeanette Sloniowski write that even though the process of “arranging (editing) the images itself provides a kind of commentary on their meaning, the Griersonian documentary employed a (male) commentator whose omniscience and invisibility gave him the authority of ‘the voice of God’. The commentary was usually prescribed and the images filmed (or selected from stock footage) and arranged to support the argument” (5).

but his daily manipulation of that body, function as truths or further confessionals about who Sam Sullivan really is. At times, the film seems to present Sullivan's body as object of a voyeuristic able-bodied gaze, constructing the viewer as safely situated within a domestic "normal." Charmaine Eddy lightly quips that *Citizen Sam* takes a "banal, then fetish / banal, then fetish" approach to its subject matter, offering a fairly conventional narrative of a political campaign, then interspersing those scenes with shots of Sullivan speaking directly to the camera about the "truth" of his body. Its fact is part of his campaign, garnering support from many disenfranchised members of the fractured Vancouver communities in a divisive mayoral race that sees an unravelling of Vancouver party politics.¹⁰

Sullivan's anti-government policies (he does not wish to maintain most social programs) was tempered by the constant display of his body – in and of itself – as representative of a marginalized group.¹¹ The film acknowledges, emphasizes, and constructs the "truth" of his body as needing the kind of attention not usually associated with victorious, commanding political leaders (Sullivan did end up winning the mayoral race). Yet Sam Sullivan manipulates not only his own physical vulnerability, but the vulnerable and proscribed bodies of disadvantaged constituents.¹² The film positions viewers as recipients of the "real" facts that preoccupy a disabled candidate.

There are Facts and There are FACTS

¹⁰ Sullivan's win is arguably tied to the subsequent loss of a political party, the Non-Partisan Association.

¹¹ Indeed, the "fact" that Sam Sullivan bought drugs for street people comes up as a repeated political blunder that he must constantly address, and yet he also uses it to successful political ends.

¹² During the campaign, Sullivan often exposes his own physical abilities in order to align himself with the vulnerability of particular constituents, all the while offering his "suicidal-to-triumphant" accomplishments as political fodder.

Simi Linton, in her memoir, *My Body Politic*, speaks about the transition into disability and its world. She became, she says, “an assemblage of body parts, notable only if they worked or not” (6). How the body does and does not “work” becomes the focus of many narratives about non-disabled young bodies, like Linton’s, that shift into disability. Disability documentaries often centre on one or more characters whose lives have become newly-defined by disability, zooming in on the difficulty of manoeuvring an unwieldy body, admiring the courage and determination such characters display. What non-disabled audiences believe to be the most important feature within any narrative about disability, according to Linton, is its genesis, that moment of transition, that irretrievable event that changed the character “forever” (110). In speaking of his own skiing accident (when he was 19), the now-mayoral candidate Sam Sullivan tells the camera: “Really, I never did become Sam Sullivan again. The way I thought it through was I killed Sam. I figure, what would it be like if I *did* commit suicide? I imagined – graphically – ending it all, and that this is now a new person, with a new life.” Citizen Sam, then, is the figure who emerged from the metaphoric death of his former body. Of this film, Eunjung Kim has noted the following, through email correspondence:

A troubling notion in *Citizen Sam* is the fixation on independence (i.e., the camera’s focus on Sam doing everything by himself regardless of how long and how much energy it takes) to establish the fact that he is an “able” citizen. This focus highlights how society values a certain “do it by myself” attitude, which assumes that able-bodied people do everything by themselves (especially those tasks of care labor, self-hygiene, and grooming). This test of independence is only given to disabled individuals, while many able-bodied citizens can pass without doing everyday body-sustaining labor by themselves.

The “test” is as much about Sullivan’s integrity as it is about his corporeal abilities. The positive focus the film takes in portraying Sullivan’s physical movements testifies to his unwillingness to receive assistance from others, which distinguishes him from the image of weakness and neediness often imposed on disabled individuals who receive help. So how does the concentration on these scenes belie or sustain the idea of a film that offers audiences a behind-the-scenes truth about this one particular political candidate?

How do the “facts” of health, fitness, disease, disability, gender, or economic position bear upon Sam Sullivan’s mayoral campaign? What are the “facts” about this particular citizen that drew Moulins to this project? (and is it only Sullivan’s role as disabled private figure that makes him so intriguing as public “citizen”?) And finally, how is it that the physical body is a datum constant, no matter what the enquiry?

In a 1935 treatise written in order to examine the development of progressive scientific research, Ludwik Fleck says that while philosophers “construe facts as something fixed and human thought as relative,” facts are “changeable, if only because changes in thinking manifest themselves in changed facts” (50). As his editors put it, for Fleck, facts “are not objectively given but collectively created” (157). To Fleck, facts are collectively created, relational concepts, “which can be investigated from the point of view of history and from that of psychology, both individual and collective” (83). So what happens to a scientific reading of the body, when every body does not conform to visual projections of normal? What is the “truth” of what viewers collectively accept as “fact”? How, indeed, does the notion of the factual inform and control the viewing of documentary film? Audiences leap from the specific scenes of body visualization in the film to visualizing (and revising) the facts. Such leaps are especially useful in tv forensic

shows, making the body an unequivocal carrier of what happens to it.¹³ Facts are called upon because, as Fleck puts it, “thinking is a supremely social activity” (98), and bodies appear fixed and static, and so too, then, does the thinking appear fixed and solid, when associated with bodies.

In his Foreword to Fleck’s book, Thomas Kuhn quotes a colleague’s reaction to the book’s title, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*: “A fact is a fact. It has neither genesis nor development” (viii). Peter Quartermain makes a similar point in his essay, “Poetic Fact.” Upon asking his brother, what is a fact, the brother replies: “Don’t be daft! A fact is a fact! Trees are green! You’re talking to me on the phone!” Quartermain tongue-in-cheek concedes that “**A fact**, that is to say, **is true**. And yet of course my brother was mistaken – as he was telling me trees are green I was looking at a yellow one.” When one examines the very notion of a fact (scientific, poetic, artistic, etc.), the word transforms from green to yellow and back to translucent: the real made tangible with words. The *act* of fact-making cannot be taken out of *fact*. What facts about disability say about disability is similar to what *Citizen Sam* claims: that certain bodies reveal a truth more true than any statement a political candidate (or character, or reality show contender) can ever make.

¹³ One example is the USA television program, *Bones*, in which crime evidence is inscribed onto the bones of the victim.

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