

DIS/ABLING PRACTICES: RETHINKING DISABILITY

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Abstract: The paper discusses how ordinary acts of everyday life make up the complex and contingent scenarios of disabilities that create enabling *and* disabling (dis/abling) practices. Drawing on qualitative empirical data the societal visibility and relevance of dis/abling practices are analyzed by connecting disability studies and sociological ideas with insights from Science and Technology Studies (STS). The essay explores how (visual) dis/ability is the outcome of human and non-human configurations and suggests that dis/ability can be understood neither as an individual bodily impairment nor as a socially attributed disability. Rather, dis/ability refers to complex sets of heterogeneous practices that (re-)associate bodies, material objects, and technologies with sensory practices. These practices, the paper concludes, draw attention to the multiple processes that (re-)concatenate the conduct of human affairs.

Keywords: dis/ability, sensory practices, vision, blindness, money.

Introduction: Sensory practices of calculation

This paper explores, with reference to blindness, how disability is the outcome of highly specific human and non-human configurations. It suggests that disability can be understood neither exclusively as an individual bodily impairment *nor* solely as a socially attributed disability. Rather, as our investigation of blind practices will show, disabilities are the effect of complex sets of heterogeneous relations that link bodies, material objects, and technologies with sensory and other practices. These associations not only draw attention to the open and multiple societal fabrication of disability, they also make up complex and contingent scenarios of disability that manufacture enabling *and* disabling (dis/abling) practices of human affairs.

To specify my argument, I will illustrate some of the different ways money and money technologies make up highly dis/abling practices in the life of blind people. As Simmel (1989; 1991a, b) has argued, money appears to be the most visible and concrete tool of rationalizing and standardizing relations that conduct the velocity of modern life. The circulation of money constitutes (calculating) subjects and (calculable) objects. Money is the most suitable substratum for private and personal property (Simmel 1989, 473). It addresses and confirms the individual as a bearer of value in the stream of monetary conduct, and it translates interpersonal relations into functional/factual ones. Money, however, also fosters social processes of individualization through which the individual gains social mobility. S/he is enabled to change from traditional, local, and

highly standardized relationships with others to heterogeneous and translocal individual relations with them.

Simmel has argued that although money is the purest form of tool, a most mobile technology or medium of translation (Simmel 1989, 263-4), it—like any other “immutable mobile” (Latour 1990)—requires readability in order to circulate between, translate, and connect other mediators (e.g. people) (Simmel 1989, 205ff). Linking these arguments with the topic of dis/ability, one can say that whenever readability is achieved, money enables one to act and to do different things. Whenever, however, the readability of money inscriptions becomes problematic, this not only generates disabling scenarios but also makes individual people the bearers of disability. Ordinary acts of dealing with money make visible a *personal* bearer of disability who is disabled as a calculator as s/he is disabled from gaining social or cultural profit from money relations.

We can see how money practices and technologies generate dis/abling practices in modern everyday life if we look not only at economic, calculative practices but also at the *sensory practices* that enable calculation in the first place.¹ Concentrating on sensory practices is a rather unusual move within academic discourse on money. However, attending to sensory practices, brings to the fore practices other than merely economic ones. It not only reveals the importance of the senses in everyday life, which is dominated by visual practices, technologies, and infrastructures; the focus on sensory practices also questions the common idea that money is a neutral and de-materialised tool. Throughout its history, money has changed from shells, gold, and silver currencies to paper money, plastic cards, and electronic money and subsequently lost material value. All these different material and de-materialised forms of money nevertheless require a certain materiality in order to be sensed and read as money.

The conceptual spotlight on sensory practices and the materiality of money will show how (1) money remains material at every moment of its circulation and (2) affects typical scenarios of dis/ability when sensory practices become problematic. Drawing on visual disability, money practices often make people visible as blind, generating complex sets of dis/abling practices.

From disability to dis/abling practices

Obviously, money can be seen as a prominent mediator that is a prerequisite of standardized relations in both capitalist and visual cultures. Money is also a perfect means of showing how technologies individualize and reconfigure conduct in modern everyday life. Such a reading resonates with the very idea that disability is not a given individual impairment but the effect of social structures and processes that make people disabled (Oliver 1996; Barnes & Mercer 2003; Barnes, Oliver & Barton 2003; Corker & French 1999; Corker & Shakespeare 2002): Money is a good example for that inasmuch as different coins, notes, plastic cards, Automatic Teller Machines etc. are standardized materialities and technologies that are highly problematic for people with visual

¹ Simmel’s “sociology of the senses” gives a remarkable reading of the social importance of the senses (Simmel 1997).

impairment to access and use properly in everyday life. In effect, failing to use money and money technologies makes people with low or no vision disabled in their social interactions, makes them feel vulnerable, restricted in their mobility, dependent on others etc.

Such an understanding of disability focuses on structurally enforced and thus socially induced disabilities. It advocates a shift in perspective away from a medical or technoscientific model that would treat visual disability primarily as an individual tragedy that results from an abnormal sensory capacity effecting social and cultural restrictions in everyday life (cf. ICF 2001). Whereas a social model differentiates between historically specific socio-cultural structures, processes, and relations that *disable* human beings in their social life, the medical model advocates a universal and ahistorical technoscientific model that diagnoses, treats, and cures “anormal” bodily or mental *individual impairments* that prevent human beings from being, acting and performing “normal”.

Interestingly though, beyond their crucial differences, both models divide “culture” from “nature” to frame its object of research. Whereas for the social model only societal affairs are the primary causes for disabling people, the technoscientific model only addresses “natural” causes and their complications for individuals as the primary effects that constitute disability. To be sure, neither perspective fails to acknowledge or incorporate the other. The social/cultural perspective has intensively discussed the importance of individual impairment, just as the medical model (*ibid.*) tries to recognize and integrate the social and cultural dimension of disability. However, for each perspective the perspective of the other gains importance only after the origin (social or individual, society or nature) of disability has been specified. According to each perspective, then, disability issues only become *compatible* when they are *comparable* societal or natural issues.

Focusing on sensory practices, however, allows us to outline a concept of (visual) dis/ability that (1) does not separate off *a priori* socially attributed *disabilities* from individual physiological or mental *impairments* and (2) explores how (visual) dis/ability is the outcome of social and non-social, human and non-human configurations. Bearing this in mind, (visual) disability can be understood neither merely as an individual bodily impairment *nor* as a socially attributed disability. Rather, (visual) disability refers to complex sets of heterogeneous practices that

(re-)associate bodies, material objects, and technologies with sensory and other practices. These practices bring to the fore how ordinary acts (re-)assemble social orderings by linking the material configurations of human (culture) and non-human (nature) relations.

The focus on money practices will show not only that the use of money and money technologies individualizes people into having a disabled vision that diverges from “normal” sight but also that money practices bring to the fore the ways (sensory) practices other than normal vision question, disrupt, and alter the prerequisites and standards of (visual) social orderings.

Such a reading not only rethinks the culture/nature divide of disability. It also questions the standard definition of money since Adam Smith as a neutral medium of exchange. Money indeed is a perfect medium of exchange of and for rational, clever, and

calculative agents, but only if it is readable as money. Money not only realises a specific (i.e. capitalist) mode of production with its ability to commodify abstract labour power (Marx 1963); it also stabilizes specific everyday forms of action within visual cultures. Thus, on the one hand, the value of money that does not derive from the physical properties of the commodity keeps alive the mode of production and capitalist power relationships. On the other hand, blind practices make clear that the materiality of capitalist production cannot be thought without the sensory (visual) practices linked to money and money technologies. Thus, through money practices the hegemony of capitalism is allied with the hegemony of visual culture. Money, then, does not “signify nothing” (Rotman 1987); it is not a total blank medium. Rather, it makes visible power relations of societal production *and* hegemonies of sensory practices.

Money is not just essentially a *symbolic* phenomenon whose analysis requires “a frame of reference closer to that of linguistics than of technology” (Parsons 1967, 345-6; cf. Luhmann 1997). Money is more than a “highly specialized language” (Dodd 1994, 60) functioning as an abstract and multifunctional medium with no “value in use” but only “in exchange” (Parsons 1967, 306). It is more than an ambivalent symbol with no intrinsic usefulness (Habermas 1981, 397). Rather, it mediates material dis/abilities: economical and non-economical alike.

It is true that money, as Simmel (1989; 1992a, b) and Bruno Latour (1990) have pointed out, can be seen as an “*unbewegter Beweger*” (Simmel 1989, 204), an “immutable mobile that links goods and places” (Latour 1990, 58): it “is mobile (once it is coined), combinable, and can circulate through different cultures, it is immutable (once in metal), countable (once it is coined), combinable, and can circulate from the things valued to the centre that evaluates and back” (*ibid*; cf. Callon, 1991). Money extends as a swarm of immutable mobiles (coin and paper-money, cash- and debit-cards, checks, electronic money, Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs)) that make up a “cascade of mobile inscriptions” (Latour 1990, 58) translatable into and compatible with other inscriptions. In order to function as such a highly immutable mobile, money must be materially visible (Hutter 1993, 159f) and ideally possess five physical properties—portability, indestructibility, homogeneity, divisibility, and cognizability (cf. Burns & de Ville, 2003)—that connect it to systems of inscriptions like writing (book-keeping, calculation) (Rotman 1987). Calculus with money, then, is dependent on these compatibilities and translations that make up what Latour (1991) calls “centres of calculation”. For the visually disabled, however, these centres of calculation constitute possible *centres of disability* whenever the compatibility and translatability of money fail (Schillmeier 2007a).

This is the point I want to make with the shift from the parlance of disability to that of dis/abling practices: It highlights the very enabling and/or disabling practices of human affairs as a set of highly specific mediations. Dis/abling practices do not sum up as socio-structural modes of oppression *or* as mere individual tragedies suffering an a-normal bodily or mental condition. Disability cannot be exclusively divided into the duality of social and cultural *or* individual and natural matters of fact (Schillmeier 2007a, b, c). Rather, dis/abling practices are mediated cultural/natural relations and make apparent that human affairs extend into the non-human, reconfiguring the spatialities and temporalities of societal relations. They depend on third elements, i.e. mediators, which in our case are

money and money technologies. By circulating, money constitutes and reconstitutes relations, for instance relations of dis/abled subjects and dis/abling objects (Callon, 1991; Schillmeier 2007a). “Money”, as Michel Serres has put it, “does not circulate for exchange first of all, but for locating and fixing relations” (Serres 1991, 36).

To specify this argument let us have a look at the money practices of blind people. The paper draws on empirical work that I conducted in the North-West of England between 1997-1999, which was concerned with blind people and the use of technologies in their everyday life. I conducted 30 qualitative, semi-structured and narrative interviews, and I made non-participatory observations.

Beforehand I plan how much I will use. Well, I only use five and ten pound notes. That’s how I manage it. If in the shop they know you, they are usually very friendly. They say that’s a ten pound note, and I say “that’s a ten pound note yes, I know”. I cannot tell the difference from the size. I use a plastic template to measure. I fold them too, half and half again. (...) You give a note and you get coins as change and you are not sure what it is because there are a lot of people queuing around you. People tend to push. It’s a vicious circle. I don’t want coins as change but I always get it.

(Elizabeth, 50 years old, totally blind)

The problem is that people don’t count out the change to you, do they? That’s the problem. They hand it to you unless you have someone who is there to check it for you. You can’t have someone around all the time, can you? Well, then you take it home. So say when there are a lot of people. People are in a rush; there you are, in a queue. You are stuck. You cannot do anything; you give the note, say a twenty pound note. You cannot check what you get back; you have to trust, trusting, yes.

(Margaret, 62 years old, age related macular degeneration)

Money cannot be understood as a neutral tool. It situates and is situated, mends and is mended by highly specific sensory practices that enable or disable the societal power of artifactual mediation. Money comes in different forms, sizes, shapes, and textures of currencies, in letters such as bills or bank accounts—sometimes in Braille, sometimes in normal fonts; money comes in plastic cards, through ATMs, and it is shuffled to and fro electronically worldwide. It is evident that money practices enable the modern individual to connect with heterogeneous extensions and networks worldwide. At the same time the possibility of “global” extension is dependent on “local” practices that demand the readability of the inscriptions involved.

We may ask accordingly: If, through the power of money and money technology, agency can be portrayed as emergent in translating networks of dependency (e.g. networks of readability) rather than as an *a priori* possession of individuals, what does this imply for dis/abled people “caught up in a network of relations, in a flow of intermediaries which circulate, connect, link, and reconstitute” (Callon 1998, 17; cf. Callon 1991) dis/abling practices?

Dealing blindly with money involves time consuming practices of touching and comparing differences in size, shape, and texture, of asking and involving others. Assistive technologies such as templates and coin holders are used to measure, manage, and translate the vague inscriptions of money into calculable forms. In order to recognise money, many blind people (alone or with the help of others) need to sort out

coins and notes, fold them, and separate them in different pockets and compartments before they conduct everyday transactions. They have to “earmark” (Zelizer 1994; 1998) different monies according to what or where they intend to buy. Exact amounts of money will do in non-familiar and non-trustworthy environments (e.g. one-pound coins for small products are often used in cities and unknown places), inexact amounts in familiar places. Blind money becomes comparable, countable, calculable, and “visible” through practices that give money a recognizable location “outside” the very coin or note itself. Good blind money, for instance, is a one pound coin as left or right pocket money; a five pound note turns into a one-side folded paper, a ten pound note into a two-sided folded paper, and so forth. These are blind practices that translate bad money (money for good vision) into good money (money for the blind) that counts as calculable money. Blind money practices multiply the materialities of money precisely since blind mediations do not follow the normative visual inscriptions. Good blind money is “left pocket money”, “folded money”, “one pound only” storage money, “single coin” payments, money counted by trustworthy people, etc.

Hence, allocating and translating different currencies and their vague inscriptions into unique appearances make them distinguishable and accountable as material of calculation. Money practices are more or less problematic depending on *where* blind people deal with money and *who* or *what* underwrites the blind person’s skills of translating visual money into blind money. The velocity of “town practices” often makes it impossible to turn bad blind money into good blind money. If one can feel, sort out, and mark money at home, sitting peacefully in one’s living room, bad money may be successfully translated into good money. If, by contrast, one is in front of a counter in a queue, it is rather difficult to do so. Good money (say a 10-pound left-pocket note) becomes bad money when a bunch of unknown coins is returned; it is too difficult to sort out directly. In the hands of the blind, money often works as money did in the past: only travelling locally and for rather limited purposes. Needless to say, blind people are prone to be cheated, and money practices demand a lot of trust.

As we have seen, these acts of sensory practices play a crucial role in supporting ordinary socio-cultural practices, generating in/dependencies, producing locations of non/knowledge, agency, vulnerability, etc. (Schillmeier 2007a, c). We see clearly how the complexities of “blind” money and “seen” money interfere; they rarely converge in taken-for-granted ordinary acts. In order to pay cash, money is made good blind money (folded notes, exact amounts, with the help of others and assistive technologies, etc.), but the change comes in visual inscriptions: bad money for the blind, nothing but a handful of unmarked coins or papers. In urban spaces people lack the proper time and space to translate visual money into blind money. Accordingly, as Elizabeth and Margaret (as well as many others) tell: they never know what they will get back.

What Elizabeth called the “vicious circle” is what renders blindness visible and stable due to the visual relations of money practices. The blind person is made visible since visually attuned systems cannot deal with blind money as blind money and *vice versa*. What one can learn from the focus on sensory everyday practices with money and money technologies is that disability is neither a mere given individual impairment nor a purely social phenomenon that abstracts from such individual sensory and physiological concerns. Rather people go through moments where embodied practices

enable or disable. In our case, practices in which a person knows what s/he is counting, paying and receiving, others in which s/he is stuck within visual inscriptions, swallowed by uncertainty and vulnerabilities. Thus, to describe people's agencies, skills, disabilities, and vulnerabilities means to describe contexts of hybrid acts. The latter link different sensory regimes, human and non-human configurations and make up highly specific spatio-temporal relations. These hybrid acts enact dis/abling "actor-networks" that converge into abilities or diverge into disabilities (Callon, 1991, 2004; Latour 2005; Schillmeier 2007a,b).

Opening the *caisse noire* or "Can you take what I owe you"?

When blind people are paying cash, they add complexity to the supposed "normality" of everyday money transactions. Richard (70 years old, glaucoma, short-sighted, blurred vision) says:

Sometimes I even hold a handful of change and I say "take what you need".

When Richard does not know how much money he has in his purse or pocket, he just offers the bunch of coins and notes to the other person who is meant to take the required amount. Richard does not pay with good blind money—calculable money—but offers bad blind money, incalculable cash. Richard's practice is rather unusual: one does not let others fiddle with one's money, but Richard is compelled to trust others to translate bad- into good-money-in practice. For blind people such a situation is very common. Like elderly people and children blind people often ask: *Can you take what I owe you?* This last part of the paper illustrates and analyses such a situation to which I accidentally became a witness. This is the story:

The "Uni Sprint" bus is approaching "Lancaster Market Hall" bus station. It is a sunny summer day around noon. Lancaster is busy: cars, people, business, and noise—the everyday action of lively towns. There is a constant coming and going of buses, buses that connect different people with different places. I am sitting in one of these buses (Bus Nr. 1) on my way to Lancaster University, waiting to depart. It is a public bus used by non-students as well. A woman (probably in her thirties) approaches the bus stop where the bus I am sitting in is waiting. Encumbered with shopping bags and a leather handbag, she walks with a black dog in a yellow harness on her side. The dog is a retriever, a guide dog. It is the dog with the yellow harness that make visible that the woman presumably is blind. It seems that the blind woman and her dog are familiar with the bus station. The guide dog is relaxed walking next to her, and the two of them approach the bus station quickly. Several people get off the bus and others would like to go on the bus. People queue up in front of the bus's door. The blind woman asks a man who is queuing if this bus is bus number 1. The man confirms with a friendly voice. Now she and her dog are part of the queue, in the middle of the queue.

While she waits, I have time to reflect. I have not met the woman and her dog before. I do not know her. All I know is what I see and what she makes me see: she grabs my attention, I am brought to realise that she is blind since she walks with a guide dog. I am aware of the visual imbalance: I remain unseen and unknown to her, whilst she is exposed to my gaze.

Queuing, the woman and the dog are rather calm and much focused to keep the right distance to the others. After a short period of queuing, the woman and the dog enter the bus. The pole which divides the entrance of the bus in two sides—one for entering and another for leaving—makes it quite difficult for the woman to enter the bus simultaneously with the dog since the dog tries to enter where people are leaving the bus. After a while they have sorted out the problem, the dog stops in front of the driver and the woman asks for “Greaves” bus stop. This is the moment where she enters the situation of buying a ticket. The bus driver (who is sitting) has problems in understanding what the woman (who is standing) is asking for since she is not facing the driver when asking. There is no eye contact, no face-to-face interaction, and it is still noisy and all this seems to disturb this ordinary interaction. She repeats the question and the bus driver finally understands. “The ticket is 70p” the bus driver answers. The blind woman puts down her plastic bags and lays down the guide dog’s harness in order to search for the purse in her leather bag. The retriever remains very calm; the dog does not seem distracted at all. While searching for the purse, the ticket machine confirms the little contract by printing the receipt with a rattling sound. The woman opens her purse and feels for the 70p. The search for the 70p is complicated; it takes more time than usual. For the blind woman different coins mean different textures, shapes and forms that have to be felt, compared and identified. The situation is highly demanding, over-demanding.

But what does “more time than usual” mean in such a situation? To buy a ticket in buses is a fast interaction. Otherwise it possibly endangers the time-schedule of the buses, for example. Money-for-ticket practices are not designed for long stops. Buses, like all public transport, must follow timetables so that arrivals and departures can be planned, foreseen, relied upon. They order mobility. Since buses must be “on time”, the money/ticket exchange is designed to consume as little time as possible. Thus, the more invisible, the more standardised, and the less time-consuming this exchange appears, the better the flow of exchanges and connections. Exchange practices a certain set of normative, standard packages and measures that, precisely because they are standard, exclude those who are indifferent to the standards and norms involved (Callon 1991; Star 1991).

In buses one tends to pay with coins and not with notes. People want to keep the buses running, and coins work better for that purpose: notes detain the driver longer. Good-ticket-money is the exact amount, or one gives slightly more and normally receives change immediately. Bad-ticket-money is to pay with a 100-pound note. Big notes and credit cards are out of the question. Money practices in buses differ from those in shopping centres, for example: they change depending on the context and the products brought. Money-for-ticket practices exemplify rather routine practices of exchange, practices that enable movement from place to place with public transport in order to buy things or meet friends, for instance.

The woman is looking for the right coins. People are queuing behind and she attracts people’s attention. The people queuing behind her are friendly; they do not push, although queue situations are latently pushy, fragile orderings, as we all know. The more so for the blind woman; she seems rather nervous. (I assume that she is aware of being beyond the supposed time limit reserved for paying the ticket). Looking stressed, the blind woman cannot find the right coins and finally hands over her purse to the bus driver by asking: “Can you please take what I owe you?” Conspicuously, the bus driver is irritated by the situation. After some moments of hesitation, he searches for the 70p. He immediately

finds the exact amount and gives the purse back to the woman. Reaching out for the harness, the woman reconnects to the dog, and with the harness back in her hand, they search for a seat.

Disturbing the “structural silence” of visual practices

What does this story tell us about dis/abling practices? This scene shows that we are constantly engaged in connecting, moving, and being moved by complex spatial and temporal human/non-human material configurations. All these practices enable and disable different actions locally. For the woman and her dog this meant the handling, mediation, and also disruption of the “stream of conduct” that “bus action” affords. Paying blindly makes visible the powerful “structural silence” (Seremetakis 1994) imposed by the normativity of a specific socio-cultural and physical ordering which, in the Western world, is primarily a visual ordering (Levin 1993; Cooper 1993, 1997).² Visual orderings configure inclusive practices that connect heterogeneous elements but also exclusive practices where the circulation of these elements gets stuck. In our case people become visible as blind to the rules and routines of the visual conduct stream of money practices.

These standard settings are not flexible enough to include blind practices in a “silent” and “invisible” way. Blindness produces noise and visibility that attract people’s attention. Blind practices falter; they skip the rhythm of the practices involved. Blind money practices curdle the liquidity of visual money relations. They introduce a different form of action and question the routines of common knowledge practices. The question “*Can you take what I owe you?*” is an unexpected and violating disruption of taken-for-granted practices. The flow of exchange routines builds upon the quality of money as an intermediary, i.e. an *immutable mobile* and not a *mutable immobile* (Schillmeier 2007a). The agreement about the costs—so wonderfully standardized by our immutable objects of money, the rattling machine, and the ticket—becomes utterly unclear: the agreement stabilized and safely transported by immutable mobiles is interrupted by the mutability of money inscriptions. For the woman the money in her purse remains ontologically vague and foggy. Unable to draw the line between good and bad money, she cannot pay and is forced to hand over her purse.

The woman cannot be sure of what will happen with her money; her bad and foggy money becomes risky money. With Goffman one can say that she is forced to open up personal territories in a public relation and is *enacted* to trust. She knows neither what she is paying nor what she will get back. Money is difficult for the blind, indeed. As

² For Goffman (1971, 278) sightedness is part of ““personal” standards of conduct” that have to be maintained in public relations to act out the “normalcy show” (ibid., 282). “[T]he ease he attains in his Umwelt presumes that he constantly sustains certain “personal” standards of conduct, for example, aliveness to the scene around him, mental agility, access to memory, sightedness, locomotor competency, literacy, cleanliness, rein or passion, appropriate age and sex behaviour. And local contingencies and occurrences can suddenly bring his embodiment of these standards into question. Persons with concealable stigmas are likely, of course, to have still further cause for alarm within themselves” (ibid., 278). The “individual’s ease within his Umwelt depends upon his knowing how this division is to be drawn at any particular moment” (ibid., 312).

Seligman (1997) has shown, trust emerges at the limits of systems of highly uncertain role expectations. In our story the need of trust emerges where two sets of sensory practices clash: visual and blind ones. The bus driver shows visible discomfort paying with the purse of a blind stranger in his hand. Is he allowed to do this? Is he violating the contract's premises that fix who pays and who receives the money? In any event, the expected locus of agency—the one who is meant to pay—has changed.

For the woman who hands over her purse the world around her becomes “hot”, as Erving Goffman would say. Money scripts are not written for handing over one's purse in public relationships. Rather the purse is a highly “egocentric preserve” (Goffman 1971, 29) that strictly belongs to the territories of the self, kept separated and often hidden from the gaze of non-familiar others: the “inside of pockets and purses (...) are not ordinarily freely accessible to other than the possessor” (*ibid.*, 294). Handing over the purse is like public expropriation of the personal territory, the passing of territories of the self into public affairs (*ibid.*, 289). Thus, the “structural silence” of the visual order is broken when the boundaries between the private and public territories become permeable. The immediate environment around her is

transformed into something [s]he must suspect, the suspicion falling on persons present, objects present, sounds and movements, and finally, on places not directly gazed at. When this suspicion occurs, (...) then the individual may become anxious indeed, and what [s]he becomes anxious for is not merely his safety but his situations: [s]he ceases to be able to take for granted and discount and disattend the background features of the world around h[er]. Normal appearance becomes as it is, a broad cover under which persons and agencies may try to monitor h[er], approach h[er] for attack, conceal things vital to h[er], attempt to make secret contact with h[er], and the like. His *Umwelt* becomes hot for h[er] (Goffman 1971, 328).

This hot, disruptive encounter where nothing seems secure not only actualises and makes blindness visible, but also alters the commonality of visual practices involved. The smooth flow of exchange business is interrupted, timetables may be mixed up, people are forced to wait, and the bus driver has to pay. Routines, which usually work “blindly”, are visibly disturbed and the woman with the dog appears as Other excluded from the related expectations and practicalities of these routines. Her money practices make clear the limits of ordinary acts taken for granted “blindly”. The situation has woken up the social “somnambulism” (Tarde 1921) of well and highly normatively ordered “invisible” practices.

“*Can you take what I owe you?*” also makes problematic the very idea of discretionary and calculative agency enacted by money practices. The woman nevertheless acts without knowing how to calculate and how to pay. She defers her blind money practices by delegating the act of paying, her sensing and knowing, to the bus driver. This deferral/delegation creates a conflict between roles and conflates role expectancies: who is paying, who is calculating? The moment the blind woman hands over the purse to a stranger, she turns into an agent with “bad” calculative skills who cannot cope with money issues on her own. She is turned into a highly vulnerable person who must trust the other. Still, she achieves discretionary power by making the bus driver look for the money and pay. She delegates and distributes her expected

calculative agency to others and so gains discretion. Handing over the purse is quite a radical move: at the same time that it reveals the woman as dependent on others (who are not thought to pay) it shows her discretion and agency. The woman has achieved discretionary power by enrolling the bus driver at the very moment that she was constituted by her indecision how and how much to pay. She has affirmed her indecision by passing on a highly valued personal item to a stranger, an action whose result cannot be predicted. It disentangles the frame of action from a dyadic economic relation of exchange with fixed calculating subjects and calculated objects and brings to the fore insecure and fragile practices as a collective act of mediation that demand trust in others.

What strikes me as extremely important is that the woman establishes a friendly relation with others (the bus driver). It is a highly risky one, though, since—as the saying goes—friendship ends with money. Under pressure, uncertain, and without many possibilities of redefining the situation, the blind woman does not solve the problem in her own terms: she does not close or frame the problem on her own. On the contrary, she increases uncertainty and heterogeneity by unsettling the borders of personal preserves and linking to the unknown. She permits the other to have a voice, a say in solving her problem. So she is able to redefine the situation by an act of friendship enacted by uncertainty and based on differences. Friendship practices are “opaque act[s] which cannot be classified as safe acts through perception” (Goffman 1971, 305). Practices of friendship come in different forms and shapes. Her retriever dog is also part of her heterogeneous practices of friendship (cf. Michalko 1999; Seremetakis 1994, 13–4). Such a friendship does not refer to social practices where humans expect, perform and relate similar and known frames of action but denotes an emergent quality of differences and materially heterogeneous configurations. Practices of friendship are *motile* practices. Motility, as Munro has argued, is “the facility to bring the material of social spaces near or far and make matters appear present or absent” (Munro 1997, 223) as well as the capacity to withdraw from common divisions and question their operational modes of action. Practices of friendship with the o(O)ther, then, reveal the heterogeneity and precariousness of societal orderings.

Conclusion

In this paper I have introduced a methodological and conceptual shift of understanding that does not exclusively describe disability from either social perspective that abstracts from physiological impairments or a medical perspective that individualizes disability as the effect of an embodied impairment. With reference to visual disabilities and money practices I have highlighted that the very question when, why, and how people are able or disabled are relational matters of sensory and other practices that link heterogeneous entities (bodies, technologies, objects) (Moser, Law, 1999, Schillmeier 2007a,b,c). The interference of different sets of (sensory) practices discloses specific power relations that (re)compose the modes of ordering involved. I have tried to illustrate how the clash of different sensory practices constitutes multiple scenarios of dis/abling spaces where third elements (e.g. money) circulate and mediate heterogeneous relations. These practices also multiply the types of money—money for

the sighted, money for the blind—that emerge as risky, good money that enables (trans-)actions or/and bad money that disables (trans-)actions in ordinary everyday acts.

Disability, therefore, cannot be described merely as an individual impairment or a socially attributed disability. Rather, dis/abilities gain their societal relevance by the processes of mediating social and non-social, human and non-human configurations. Focusing on sensory practices and money, I have described how the interferences of different sensory regimes of practice disrupt the normativity of taken-for-granted (knowledge) networks and often effect exclusive practices. However, these practices open the possibility of becoming discretionary in the ways they delegate and redistribute agency to others. Becoming a discretionary subject cannot, then, be thought as a property of independent beings, but becomes visible as a relational matter, a matter of dependency emerging from temporary solutions within specific locations. I have also made a first and highly provisional attempt to show that such uncertain, insecure and highly risky practices make visible friendship practices that rely not so much on the shared, known and the similar but on the unknown, different and heterogeneous.

The dis/abling practices of money multiply the realities of money while blindness brings to the fore the multiple, often highly provisional and fragile becomings of societal reality (cf. Mol, 2002). The practice of dis/abling bodies refer to a complex series of translations and movements that enact the “ontological choreography” (Cussins 1996) of societal realities making up the dramaturgy and multiplicity of human affairs.

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