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Whilst my collarbone was broken I couldn't make sculpture but I was able to draw, therefore, travelling to generate visual research was the most productive use of my time. *Whilst at the Imperial palace on my first day in Kyoto, Japan, I saw a tree that had crutches supporting heavy branches that were growing out to the side almost horizontally. A few days later at Ryoan-ji I found trees that had reacted to their supports, growing vertically where they were supported so forming kinks in the branches. I doubted the intention of the gardeners was purely to support since by the third support they must have been aware of the distortion occurring.* In a similar way, in *Broken Arm* Ann Oakley variously describes the splints used on her arm as 'gruesome', 'inflexible', 'rigid' and 'tortuous' (Oakley 2007: 29, 81). At this point, however, the bone in her arm has already healed; the purpose of the splints is corrective, not supportive.

When my arm was in plaster I initially found that the plaster felt supporting because it restricted movement which had been painful. It took over the job on the outside that the bone would have done on the inside, forming an exoskeleton, and by doing so gave the bone the opportunity to heal itself. By the second week the pain had died down and I wanted to be able to move my wrist and thumb but couldn't. As well as being supported I now felt contained in the plaster; restricted and uncomfortable. After six weeks of not moving my hand it began to ache and I really felt the restriction of not being able to clench my fist. The bones in the hand move in so many directions all of which had been immobilised in the plaster except wiggling my fingers to keep circulation. When the plaster was taken off after nine weeks my hand was rigid and completely immobile, my wrist was locked solid and all my muscles had completely wasted away leaving a bony, shrivelled, scaly, distorted object. I had been looking forward to being able to move it again but the combination of being so stiff and feeling so fragile meant that much of the restriction remained even after the plaster was removed.

Whether the cast on my arm felt supportive or restricting was dependant on the condition of the arm. When the wrist was most injured and needed support then it was a positive experience. Once healed well enough the plaster served as protection from knocks for the new soft bone but also became restrictive. Whilst the plaster supports the bones it also causes the muscle to waste and this creates a conflict between doctors and physiotherapists. The doctor is concerned with the bone rather than the movement and so can be tempted to leave the plaster on too long causing irreversible damage to movement. There is a fine line between providing support and causing damage through restriction. What I find interesting in the tension between the physiotherapist and doctors is that the latter seeks to secure a static structure in repairing the bone whereas the physiotherapist's purpose is to help restore movement in freeing the joints and rebuilding muscle.

Sylvia Plath's poem 'In plaster' (1981: 158-160) describes the experience of being in a body cast. She was in plaster herself when she broke her leg during a ski accident and she uses the physical experience of a cast as a metaphor for, and to explore, a fragmented sense of self. As Drew Leder observes,

> Surfacing in phenomena of illness, dysfunction, or threatened death, the body may emerge as an alien thing, a painful prison or tomb in which one is trapped...the experienced self is rent in two as one's own corporality exhibits a foreign will (Leder 1990: 87).

It could be that the cast forms a physical representation of the feeling of being entombed within the body. Plath states of the plaster that, 'Living with her was like living with my own coffin' (1981: 160). She refers to the two parts of her as a new white outside person and a yellow inside person (1981: 158). The poem is written from the perspective of the one 'inside'. There is constant tension between the two revolving around power and the inner self's desire to be supported or to escape from imprisonment. The outer cast operates in an ambiguous position; it is part of the self but not a true, original self and resonates with Norbert Elias's (2000) concept of internalised self-constraint in the civilising process.

In 'Homo Clausus and the civilising process' Norbert Elias questions our typical view of self; 'Is the body the vessel which holds the true self locked within it? Is the skin the frontier between 'inside' and 'outside'?' (2000: 286). Plath's poem also contains this sense of a true self locked within, the containment apparent even in her opening line; 'I shall never get out of this!' (1981: 158). For Elias scientific thought created a structural change where, in order to prioritise objectivity, restraints were placed on our affects and impulses. This restraint is what is experienced as an encapsulating wall in self- perception. He elaborates,

> The firmer, more comprehensive and uniform restraint of affects characteristic of this civilizational shift, together with the increased internal compulsions that, more implacably than before, prevent all spontaneous impulses from manifesting themselves directly and motorically in action, without the intervention of control mechanisms – these are what is experienced as the capsule, the invisible wall dividing the 'inner world' of the individual from the 'external world' or, in different versions, the subject of cognition from its object, the 'ego' from the 'other,' the 'individual' from 'society.' What is encapsulated are the restrained instinctual and affective impulses denied direct access to the motor apparatus. They appear in self-perception as what is hidden from all others, and often as the true self, the core of individuality (Elias 2000: 293).

Sylvia Plath's exploration of the plaster cast is a good metaphor for visualising Norbert Elias's concept. The plaster emphasises restriction and occupies an ambiguous position between the self and the outside world; it resembles the body in form but is not perceived as the 'true' self. Henri Michaux notes ambiguity between feeling the plaster as alien to the body and it appearing as completely natural,

> So I will have lived for two days in my bed with, instead of a forearm and a wrist, a piece of furniture on my arm, attached to my body: acting as if it were natural, absent-mindedly listening to conversations.....(1994: 246)

There is a sinister quality to the naturalness with which the cast quietly covers the limb. In *A Leg to Stand On* Oliver Sacks writes about the disquieting idea of a cast (1990: 120). He dreams that the casting room in the hospital is actually for casting new limbs and disposing of the old ones. He views the sepulchre whiteness and smooth featurelessness of the cast as a vague and obscene parody of his leg that inspires him with horror.

Power relations between the 'interior' self and plaster self are at the forefront of Sylvia Plath's poem. The plaster is referred to as 'superior' (1981: 159) but the interior self feels restricted and wants to gain the strength to challenge this domination. There is a shift in the poem from the plaster supporting and 'holding my bones in place so they would mend properly' (1981: 159) to realisation that the plaster, 'stopped fitting me so closely' and 'let in drafts' (1981: 159). She perceives that the plaster wishes the inner self dead and wants to cover her up entirely. The inner self observes, 'Yet I still depended on her, though I did it regretfully' (1981: 160). The cast gives support but also fosters unwanted dependence; increasing dependence and so powerlessness is hidden behind the mirage of support.

Deborah Lupton observes that positive representations of risk taking include discourses that 'portray too tight a control over the body as a source of stress, illness and loss of self-authenticity' (2013: 207). In Sylvia Plath's poem escape from the restricting and controlling plaster is seen as an aspiration.

After several months of working with the bone china, and as my studio became progressively taken over by it, I started to feel annoyed with the way it restricted my movement. Not only did I have to be continually gentle, slow and supportive in handling the unfired china but I had to constantly watch every step I made so that I didn't tread on any pieces. One wrong move and I could obliterate several days' work. I was forced into a passive role which created pent up aggression. There were points where the china's restriction on my movement aggravated me so much that I wanted to smash it. This feeling of restriction and pent up aggression in response to the unfired china was very similar to my experience of injury as every move from getting out of bed in the morning had to be thought about for the further damage it could cause. My first bone china installation, *fragility* 2007, made from tall walls of bone china twigs was inspired by this. The increasing tension of manoeuvring through the space was released as sections of the wall fell down attended by the uncomfortable loud crash of bone china.

Sylvia Plath observes how the inner self loses strength due to being supported, so reflecting my experience of my hand withering in plaster with lack of function and exercise. 'She'd supported me for so long I was quite limp' (1981: 159). James C. Scott observes that women's use of language and their self-presentation are risk-averse, hyper-polite or request reassurance. He suggests this is the behaviour of the powerless in attuning to the mood and requirements of the power holder (2007: 205). The inner self in Plath's poem also notes, 'I was careful not to upset her in any way' (1981: 160). This passiveness before a dominating power is a negative experience and it leaves Plath's inner self fixed and restrained but still considering the risk of escape.

Sylvia Plath achieves her escape through a skiing escapade described in *The Bell Jar* 2008 and based on a real experience (the one that led to her being in plaster!). Whilst learning to ski she pushes herself from the top of a slope careering down, 'I felt my lungs inflate with the rush of scenery - air, mountains, trees, people. I thought, "This is what it is to be happy" ' (Plath 2008: 1175). When she crashes at the bottom she immediately wants to get up and do it again but is unable due to a broken leg.

Edgework is about renegotiating boundaries of life/death, sanity/insanity, ordered self/disordered self (Lupton 2013: 214). Deborah Lupton (2013: 226) proposes that where men might risk-take to escape the mundane world of work and for a sense of authenticity, women use risk-taking to seek a sense of control in a world where they are disempowered. The ability to exert mastery over fear can lead to heightened feelings of control (Lupton 2013: 215). On top of this women may find that the positive emotions experienced in risk-taking can block out feelings of grief or rage experienced in life from being in a disempowered position. Risk-taking is viewed as a masculine trait so Lupton points out that when men risk-take they are conforming to dominant forms of masculinity whereas for women it forms a counter-cultural notion of femininity (2013: 223-4). Due to this some women use risk-taking as a political activity to deliberately counter gendered associations with risk. At the time Sylvia Plath was skiing it would have been far less common for women to take physical risks in recreational sports than it is now. She was suffering from poor mental health so the above reasons provide a plausible explanation for her daredevil skiing stunt.

I frequently meet disapproval over my risk-taking antics although men riding with me do not. Often whilst in mid-air on jumps I hear 'that was a woman!' commented from onlookers. I love breaking their expectations as it means my approach to biking could be renegotiating boundaries of gender. When I bought my current bike I requested the manufacturer to paint it 'in yer face pink', it wasn't on their colour list but they kindly obliged and painted it fluorescent pink. When riding this bike I go out of my way to bait men into taking bigger risks than they intended by acting overtly femininely whilst telling them how easy the jump is. I find it amusing to play with their sense of masculinity and for once it places me in control.

breaking the body