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ACADEMIC/CRITICAL ESSAYS

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‘Disabling’ the museum: Curator as infrastructural activist

ABSTRACT

This article will explore how I attempt to ‘disable’ the museum through my infrastructural curatorial practice, which is the basis for my scholarly research and writing. By infusing my curatorial projects with critical reflection and theoretical development, I hope to begin this process of building a new vocabulary and methodology around curating disability and access. Specifically, I will focus on the exhibitions and related projects I have initiated and organized in the past three years to demonstrate a number of critical issues surrounding ‘curating disability’. These issues include incorporating discursive programming, establishing access as a creative methodology, taking a sensitive approach towards curating complex attitudes about disability and language, and maintaining sustained engagement with the ethics and practicalities of curating disability-related subject matter. I argue that part of the decolonizing work of disability studies is for curators to start practicing these curatorial strategies in order to ‘crip’ art history and the mainstream contemporary art world.

KEYWORDS

disability exhibitions
curatorial practice
contemporary art
identity politics
infrastructural activist
museum access

INTRODUCTION

In her book *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, art historian, curator and critic Paula Marincola asked: 'Can we ever get beyond the essential conversation of displaying works of art in conventional, dedicated spaces?' (2006: 57). As a curator focused on situating representations of disability and creative conceptions of access as a critical component of art history, contemporary art practice and museum displays, Marincola's question struck me as exciting and full of potential. If curating an exhibition of disability-related content within a conventional exhibition complex has been historically absent, for the most part, what other kinds of spaces and places might offer more opportunities and an expanded definition of 'disability' and 'access' for the essential display of disability-themed art? Most critically, is there room for a revision of art history and entirely new representations and art experiences through the funnel of the ghettoized disability label within alternative spaces?

I've been curating contemporary art since 2001, with my exhibitions always focused on identity politics (such as feminism), social justice and other hard-hitting issues, ranging from war and violence to urban decay and environmental degradation. Since returning to graduate school in 2010, I've curated three exhibitions with disability-related content, with another scheduled for autumn 2014. These include 'Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells & Other Transfixed Positions' for Pro Arts Gallery in Oakland, California (13 September–20 October 2011), 'What Can a Body Do?' for Haverford College's Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery in Pennsylvania (26 October–16 December 2012) (http://exhibits.haverford.edu/whatcanabodydo), 'Cripping Cyberspace: A Contemporary Virtual Art Exhibition', co-sponsored and co-presented by the Common Pulse Intersecting Abilities Art Festival and the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* in 2013, and 'LOUD Silence', to be presented 6 September–6 December 2014 by the Grand Central Art Center at California State University in Santa Ana.

So why my turn to disability-related content? Apart from personally identifying as physically disabled, in my fifteen years as a curator working in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and now the United States, I noticed that conventional art history does not account for intellectually and physically disabled subjects and their accompanying atypical bodies through the art museum and their curated exhibitions, through commercial art galleries and biennials, or the entire exhibition complex structure. I rarely come across any substantial or critical engagement with disability and access in curated exhibitions at large-scale or medium-size museums and art galleries. Of course, a small number of patronizing and demeaning representations have appeared in art genre presentations such as 'outsider art' but these derogatory constructs have generally failed to be challenged by art historians, critics, curators and artists.[1] I argue that it is time to offer a revision to the negative constructs by addressing how contemporary art by both disabled and non-disabled artists can resonate with the complex embodiment of disabled corporeality. It is important to build a new vocabulary and methodology around curating disability and access in challenging and stimulating ways.

I have taken cues from several recent texts on contemporary curatorial practice, such as Australian art historian Terry Smith's *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, which posits that contemporary curating requires 'a flexible platform-building practice – tied to the specifics of place as well as appropriate international and regional factors[…]' (Smith 2012: 252). Compelling because it demands experimentation, this platform-building practice prompts curators as 'process shapers' and 'programme builders' to work within the resources

1. The term 'outsider art' was introduced in the early 1970s by British art critic Roger Cardinal, who promoted artists who were self-taught and socially marginalized or considered to be working outside the influence of mainstream contemporary art discourse. In his classic text, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (2000), Colin Rhodes says the definition of the artist outsider suggests that they are 'fundamentally different to their audience, often thought of as being dysfunctional in respect of the parameters for normality set by the dominant culture. What this means specifically is, of course, subject to changes dictated by history and geographical location'. The group is heterogeneous by virtue of the great assortment of people to which the category might ascribe, such as the dysfunctional through pathology, mental illness, criminality, or because of their gender or sexuality. The list goes on. But it is over-generalizing to equate artists with little formal academic training with those who have either a cognitive or physical impairment or disability. It seems the contemporary art world has a great dearth of critical thinking about, intellectualizing and viewing of the disabled body in its own right. 'Inside Outside: Martin Ramirez' in Peter Schjeldahl's book *Let's See: Writings on Art from The New Yorker* (2008), argues that 'outsider art' is a vapid label that 'comes from and

an institution offers yet also find freedom in public spaces, places, the virtual domain, and other institutional infrastructures not typically associated with art. Smith calls these types of curators 'infrastructural activists' (Smith 2012: 252).

Along parallel lines, museum studies scholars Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd write of an 'activist museum practice', intended to construct and elicit support amongst audiences (and other constituencies) for alternative, progressive ways of thinking about disability' (Sandell and Dodd 2010: 3). While Smith speaks rather broadly about radicalizing museums as institutions and their practices, Sandell and Dodd more specifically address disrupting museum practice for the benefit of the disabled community. What would happen if Smith's 'infrastructural activist' were to dovetail with Sandell and Dodd's 'activist museum practice'?

These authors' formulations of the contemporary curator as 'infrastructural activist' within an 'activist museum practice' work well for my agenda, which aims to 'disable' the limiting and pejorative practices of the art museum in a number of ways. I do this by offering exhibitions with non-reductive disability-related content, accompanied by programming that extends the exhibition's thesis, such as artist talks, performances, symposia, websites, publications and more. If the trend in curating is towards the infrastructural activist Smith describes, the community of disability curators and scholars who focus on the myriad political representations, communications and sensorial and phenomenological experiences of the disabled subject will surely find a resounding welcome within a traditionally disciplinary realm. To be an infrastructural activist in an art museum is to think beyond the 'main event' of the exhibition of objects, where discursive aspects of exhibition programming, such as artist talks, performances, film screenings, symposiums and roundtable conversations are given equal billing to the exhibition, rather than simply adjunct offshoots. Indeed, to curate a roundtable conversation, for example, might be considered an artwork in and of itself.[2]

I also challenge the museum to think about how access can move beyond a mere practical conundrum, often added as an afterthought once an exhibition has been installed, to use as a dynamic, critical and creative tool in art-making and curating. An exhibition can therefore attempt to reveal process in conjunction with final objects as outcome (Graham and Cook 2010: 159).[3] The curator might be challenged by access as the concept and/or content of artwork, by focusing on evocative questions, such as: Can an audio description or sequence of captioning accompanying a film also be a work of art? Is American Sign Language (ASL) a performance? How can touch be incorporated into curating and art-making, rather than just an interactive feature of a permanent collection tour in a museum? How can subtitles and audio descriptions work together to create an interesting 'dialogue' about access that renders a work of art or a film completely inaccessible for a 'normal' audience? In other words, how can the tables be turned on access, and access for whom or for what? What inherent ethical questions and issues of agency stem from these possibilities? I believe these alternative curatorial methodologies offer much scope for challenging deeply ingrained reductive attitudes towards disability.

This article will explore how I attempt to 'disable' the museum through my curatorial practice, which is the basis for my scholarly research and writing. By infusing my curatorial projects with critical reflection and theoretical development, I hope to begin this process of building a new vocabulary and methodology around curating disability and access. Specifically, I will focus on the exhibitions

goes nowhere in art history. […] It defeats normal criticism's tactics of context and comparison. It is barbaric. Can we […] regard Ramirez as an ordinary artist with extraordinary abilities?'

2. To learn more about my ideas on this subject, see my 2013 article entitled 'Talking blind: Museums, access and the discursive turn'.

3. Beryl Graham and Sara Cook also cite an exhibition entitled 'This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things' (Ghent, 1994–1995), which blurred exhibition practice boundaries such as ideas around storage, labels, studio, exhibition and improvised collaborations with audience and artists. Lectures, talks and performances became main events in the exhibition space.

and related projects I have initiated and organized in the past three years to demonstrate a number of critical issues surrounding 'curating disability'. These issues will be broken up into four distinct (but certainly not fixed) categories:

1. Disability as a critical theme
2. Disability agency: Exhibiting Attitudes and language towards the d-word
3. Disability in discursive programming
4. Access as a creative methodology

My practice offers a radically different model of curating because I'm talking about curatorial practice in a different way – an exploratory way that flows from a declared position of not-knowing rather than a fairly common curatorial position that originates in 'connoisseurship'. I argue that part of the decolonizing work of disability studies is for curators to start practicing these curatorial strategies to 'crip' art history and the mainstream contemporary art world. I'm stimulated by the possibilities several related avenues offer my curator/activist agenda in paving critical space for the disabled subject. These include incorporating discursive programming, establishing access as a creative methodology, taking a sensitive approach towards curating complex attitudes about disability and language, and maintaining sustained engagement with the ethics and practicalities of curating disability-related subject matter.[4] In returning to Marincola's quandary then, my curatorial, activist work in 'disabling' the museum aims to push against the conventional practices of exhibitions.

Disability as a critical theme

Otherwise ignored and marginalized, practices engaging with physical differences and disability must receive their due, as they counter retrograde images of the exceptional anatomy. Only a handful of exhibitions, organizations, curators, international festivals and scholars explore these themes. Such exhibitions and texts are important contributions to the field, but their arguments are limited to making a case for disability's visibility in traditional representational form. In other words, they are still fighting for recognition at a most fundamental level by rejecting the freak-show complex. Herein lies the tension in this historical moment: on the one hand, innovative artists are making progressive art imbued with complex, unique experiences of disability, while on the other hand, they are living in a time in which derogatory, representational frameworks around disability stubbornly persist. So how do we move forward?

Given the dearth of curatorial work that brings together the fields of disability studies, art history and/or visual culture to examine significant art practices exploring physical difference, I first draw critical frameworks from curators working in feminist studies, race studies and queer studies because these fields deeply interrogate embodiment.[5] Within experiential positions, curators have recognized the importance of intersectionality. As disabilities scholar Tobin Siebers says, 'analyses of social oppression [must] take account of overlapping identities based on race, gender, sexuality, class and disability' (2010: 317). Intersectionality replaces monocausal paradigms that considered, for example, only blackness at the expense of feminism or vice versa. Usually these paradigms implied a normalizing white female subject within feminism or a heterosexual black male subject within the discourse of race. Such normatives occluded subjects from accessing other modes of identity to which they may have also belonged (Muñoz 1999: 8). While Kimberlé Crenshaw initially

4. Other curators and scholars have offered approaches slightly different from mine in attempting to curate disability, including Heather Hollins. In 'Reciprocity, accountability, empowerment: Emancipatory principles and practices in the museum', Hollins discusses access as a three-tiered system: access to physical spaces of the exhibition; intellectual and sensory access to exhibition content and access to the representation of disabled people and disability-themed issues within the display narratives. In 'Shifting definitions of access: Disability and emancipatory curatorship in Canada', Elizabeth Sweeney suggests that the most effective ways to curate disability-themed exhibitions use an emancipatory approach that includes 'three key attributes: (1) the curatorial process was collaborative, including diverse cultural professionals, (2) content was both selected and often created by disabled people and (3) exhibit spaces and content were accessible'.

5. Significant exhibitions exploring identity politics that have influenced my curatorial thinking include 'Magiciens de la terre' (1989), exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, which aimed to look at art on a global scale on equal terms; 'Whitney Biennial of American Art' (1993), which brought identity politics to bear on the institutional critique and conceptual art presented; 'The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994' (2002),

conceived intersectionality by using a triad or matrix of identity categories – race, class and gender – today analyses of social oppression across the humanities incorporate many more categories, including disabilities (Crenshaw 1991: 1241–99). Artists with disabilities engage with an intersectional approach and similarly, viewers must consider their work from an intersectional perspective.

Second, I aim to situate disability-themed art in the larger categories of installation, film, video, photography, performance art and socially engaged art practices, and articulate how many of the goals and functions of these genres are analogous to those of disabled artists. For instance, qualities such as complex embodiment, de-centring and fragmentation that are characteristic of contemporary art practice in concert with identity politics also can be found in disability-themed art. I do this in an attempt to define a critical space for the work of artists with disabilities by laying out established theoretical, art historical parameters to situate their practices. As I grapple with how to articulate the process that is unfolding in the artists' work around me, it is also important for me to locate and sift through this work within the current fields of enquiry. Ultimately, I endeavour to carve a space for the difference of disability in the manner of other minority subjects.

Siebers speaks of how 'disability acquires aesthetic value because it represents for makers of art a critical resource for thinking about what a human being is' (2010: 3). Siebers attempts to theorize representations of disability in modern art from a historical framework, essentially arguing that a 'disability aesthetic' had always already been present as a type of 'guerilla' critical concept in aesthetic representations (2010: 2). I would like to extend Siebers' ideas by suggesting that today's generation of artists who use disability as a critical theme are expanding, altering and re-framing representations of disabled corporeality in the contemporary moment, moving towards definitions of complex embodiment as a type of 'disability aesthetic' that includes new opportunities for engaging in 'access'.[6] In other words, contemporary artists extend Siebers' ideas of 'disability aesthetics' as they fold digital practices, access, intersectional identity politics, complex embodiment, disabled phenomenology and more into their art-making, alongside disrupting sensory perceptions and ideas of access.

In line with Siebers' ideas on complex embodiment, art historian Amelia Jones has theorized at length about the relationship between feminist body-engaged art and how it explodes definitions of bodily norms and universality. Jones claims that body art has the potential to radically negotiate the structures that inform our current understandings of visual culture. Akin to the de-centring of the disabled subject within contemporary art, Jones talks about how the postmodernist characteristics of splitting, dislocation or fragmentation of the self have the potential to produce progressive and political effects, such as eradicating prejudice and discrimination towards the 'other'. Jones also emphasizes how such artists can reinforce the inexorable nature of embodiment. She stresses the importance of reconfirming and maintaining an embodied theory of postmodern art and subjectivity rather than suppressing or denying such bodily relationships in the world around us (Jones 1998: 10). This rehearses the dilemma of studying disability-themed art in my quest to find a space for it in contemporary art discourse, while at the same time trying to form a mobile, de-centred subjectivity.

What other frameworks might scholars, curators and artists employ to determine a new fate for the representation of disabled identity? In my mind, it is important to think about what disability *does* rather than simply what it *is*. This move breaks binary constructs as it focuses more on a type of concretized,

curated by Okwui Enwezor; 'WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution' (2007), curated by Connie Butler; and 'Cruising the Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles, 1945–1980' (2012) (http://cruisingthearchive.org (2012).

6. I've not included an extended discussion on identity politics as a historical moment in art history and visual culture because I see complex embodiment as the next iteration, moving beyond identity politics and pushing the frameworks further. However, Derek Conrad Murray and Soraya Murray provide a good overview of the main challenges and debates around identity politics in relationship to art history and visual culture in 'Uneasy bedfellows: Canonical art theory and the politics of identity' (Murray 2006: 22–39).

phenomenological being-in-the-world, of living *inside* a disabled body. As Jackie Leach Scully states, 'understanding the experience of disability from this inside is essential to inform ethical judgments about impairment' (2008: 84). History and society, rather than individual determinations, shape the cultural position of an artist with a disability. Theorists, curators and other viewers of their art are called to displace identity from its central location in interpreting it (Scully 2008: 84).

Darby English suggests that this trajectory by contemporary artists 'recommends a turn toward the subjective demands that artists place on the multiple categories they occupy, and that we grant this multiplicity right of place in our methodologies' (2007: 7). Viewers are therefore encouraged to look at the world from the vantage of the disabled experience. Admittedly though, the loose category 'disability art' can be limiting because it fails to place artists with disabilities within more general art discourse. English claims that work by black artists (or any token group) is seldom the subject of rigorous, object-based debate (2007: 6). British artist Aaron Williamson argues, for example, 'the idea that disability comes lowest in the pecking order of identity communities is reflected in disability art's standing as a critical category' (2011). Carmen Papalia blames this on some disability-arts-based organizations that have limited inward-looking vision statements driving their missions (2011: 9).[7] While such organizations were important in establishing support systems to allow participation in art-making activities by disabled artists, Papalia says they also 'fail in bringing artists with disabilities in dialogue with the world of mainstream contemporary art' (2011: 9). He indicates that due to these limiting frameworks in the discourse around specific identity groups, artists of their ilk have been unable to contribute much to the art world, or even to be taken seriously. Officially sanctioned 'disability art' then, is funded only for its uncritical, unchallenging nature, for its supposed empowering 'celebration' of a minority identity (Williamson 2011). 'Disability art' or 'outsider art' might also be employed by curators in an uncritical fashion to suggest a certain 'authenticity' in art practice, a certain mood, a trend or a style that might be considered fashionable or cutting edge, such as Massimiliano Gioni's 'The Encyclopedic Palace' exhibition in the Italian Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale.[8]

Unfortunately, key challenges also often impede the mainstream museum curator from turning to disability-related subject matter as their focus, given that institutional curators often have to deal with what Elizabeth Sweeney describes as 'resistance, backlash or the threat of backlash for displaying disability' from both within their own institutions and the general public (2012: 59). They also fear getting it wrong, as Sweeney talks of how often the rare curator who does approach disability as a subject matter is unaware of the history disability displays, its contested representations and how these stereotypes can skew interpretations and perceptions of work even when a project is not intended to reference any problematic past. Disabled artists also often lack agency within exhibitions representing their work, due to an issue around perceived abilities to communicate in a 'normal' manner by able-bodied curators (Kuppers 2012).[9] And while curators who do attempt to move into the foreign terrain of disability may be well-intentioned, Sweeney continues to say that good intentions are hardly the best basis from which to critically engage and understand disability art (2012: 66).

I argue that the theme of disability can become an important paradigm for curators of contemporary art and an empowering concept for all artists. Williamson sees a need for 'a cultural tradition of disability art that is complex and compelling enough to gain widespread and lasting critical worth […]. Disability

7. In 'Cutting the disability out of disability arts', his paper for his M.A. in Social Practice, Papalia writes, 'A quick glance at the structure and approach of support by arts organizations that came into being in the late 1970s will reveal why various Disability Arts movements and artists connected to what is understood as the Disability Arts have not been able to successfully (or productively) penetrate the sentinel that is mainstream Contemporary Art'. Some organizations, such as Creative Growth in Oakland, California, may fall susceptible to these problematic structures and approaches.

8. For more information, visit http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/news/13-03.html

9. For example, read Petra Kuppers' 'Nothing About Us Without Us: Mounting a Disability Arts Exhibit in Berkeley, California', her case of CREATE (2011) at the Berkeley Art Museum.

art needs to survive the ghetto' (2011). Why not bring these dilemmas into the exhibition space rather than trying to resolve them with re-enfranchisement? Curators can do this without having to rely on established artist names to safeguard against accusations of pigeonholing artists with disabilities. Likewise, to generalize notions of the body without getting into specifics of disability, such as blindness and what its experiences might look or feel like, maintains its invisibility. After all, some artists dynamically tackle the critical themes of dwarfism, blindness, deafness, etc. and their personal associations with their circumstances. Jennifer Gonzalez suggests that artists (and by default, curators), have tried to work around what she calls the 'double bind', by 'choosing to mix dominant and subaltern discourses of representation to draw our attention to the *sites of their intersection*, not as a simple celebration of cultural fusion, but rather as a carefully considered analysis of unequal power relations…' (2008: 31, original emphasis). The double bind is similar to the discourse generated by Williamson and Papalia, and can be described as the limiting framework artists are placed when they emphasize differences based on race, ethnicity, gender or ability, as a critical white audience will automatically label this as 'other'. On the other hand, the omission of otherness, while it might be accepted by the mainstream, will also be at risk of being 'emptied of social critique' (Gonzalez 2008: 31). It seems the challenge for curators and artists, then, is a push and pull: to generalize without minimizing and to specialize without ghettoizing. Like Gonzalez, I argue that it is possible to offer social critique whilst also offering other ideas within an artwork, so that any outcome will provide a multimodal experience that is neither conforming to 'other' or 'multiculturalism' nor to the 'mainstream imperative to assimilate' (Gonzalez 2008: 31).

Before turning to examine some of the disability-themed exhibitions I have curated as a means to prove that younger generations of artists interested in disability experience are producing dynamic work, to trace a contemporary discourse on the display of disability art I will first mention some major disability-themed exhibitions that have emerged in the past few years. In looking at these projects, I'm interested in learning whether curating disability art has special attributes and considerations that are unique from curating other types of subject matter.

In 2009, Ann Fox and Jessica Cooley curated two exhibitions: 'Re-Formations: Disability, Women and Sculpture' 2009', and 'STARING' 2009, both at Van Every/Smith Galleries, Davidson College, North Carolina.[10] 'Re-Formations' explored the intersection of disability and female identity through sculpture, while 'STARING' was dubbed a 'visual extension' of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's book *Staring: How We Look* (2009), questioning ideas around normal and how staring was often the common response to an atypical body. In 2009–2010, 'Niet Normaal: Difference on Display' (www.nietnormaal.nl) was curated by Ine Gevers for the Beurs van Berlage in Amsterdam, and then toured to Liverpool in 2012 as part of the DaDa Festival. Highlighting approximately 80 contemporary artists and with numerous contributors to the catalogue, this large exhibition centred on questions around the constructions of normality and split off into various themes and subheadings, such as the medical and social constructions of disability, the history of the freak, bio-politics, the nexus of humans and technology, intersectional identities and agency and global perspectives of disability. In 2012, the Wellcome Collection in London organized an exhibition entitled'Superhuman: Exploring Human Enhancement from 600 BCE to 2050', which extended the medical framework of disability in conjunction with the fusion of futurist human technology. Finally, in 2013, Jaroslav Andel and Katerina Kolarova,

10. For more information on Re/Formations, visit http://www2.davidson.edu/academics/acad_depts/galleries/reformations/index.html.

at the DOX Center for Contemporary Art in Prague, co-curated 'Disabled by Normality', which included 30 artists arranged according to familiar-sounding themes: Disability Stereotypes, Medicalization of Otherness, Historization of Disability: The Wurtz Collection, Transformations of an Institution: The Jedlicka Institute, Institutional Stories, Moral Risk and the last theme, The Body as Boundary: Fashion, Design, Prosthetics and the Cyborg.

Clearly all these exhibitions share strong activist undertones, given their interest in rupturing perceptions of 'normality' as a staple of identity.[11] While some of these projects featured more historical components than others, flipping between medical and social models of disability as their critical framework, the key discourse to emerge has much in common with other marginalized identity categories, and yet, disability also stands unique through the individual experiences of each artist.[12]

The first of my disability-related exhibitions was 'Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells & Other Transfixed Positions', held at Pro Arts Gallery in Oakland, California, from 13 September through 20 October 2011. Including eight disabled artists, the work challenged the gaze of the non-disabled subject, relying on the same philosophical formulation as the (Mulvey) gaze as the key thematic structure like the 'STARING' exhibition.

The exhibition also employed the Greek mythology of Medusa, who was viewed as a spell-binding monster. The legend claimed that gazing directly upon her would turn onlookers to stone. I argued that in many ways, the disabled subject shares similar stereotypical qualities with the monstrous Medusa – transfixing viewers with fear, curiosity or wonder. My agenda with the exhibition was to shift Medusa's position, and thus make unstable the disabled subject as agent and cause of fear, spells and transfixed positions. I wanted viewers to learn that the disabled body is anything but transfixed. The exhibition freed artists to make bold aesthetic statements about their bodies and their lives in various media. Artists included Joseph Grigely, Carmen Papalia, Neil Marcus, Katherine Sherwood, Laura Swanson, Sunaura Taylor, Sadie Wilcox and Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi.

The exhibition was well received, and from what I understand, many who visited were from the neighbouring Berkeley community – the birthplace of the US disability rights movement. While these visitors' likely familiarity with disability frameworks would have resulted in high-quality engagement with the work, I still sought an audience who were largely unfamiliar with disability politics in order to transform perceptions more effectively. I also wanted to move beyond the classic concept of the artist who is retaliating against society through the oppositional gaze as demonstrated by many of the works in 'Medusa's Mirror'.

'What Can a Body Do?' was my second attempt at curating an exhibition containing disability-related themes, and this time, a push against the social constructions of disability was the core driver. 'What Can a Body Do?' aimed to narrow the question originally posed by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze into: 'What can a *disabled* body do?' (emphasis added). In addition to Grigely, Papalia, Swanson and Yi, five other contemporary artists participated in the exhibition, including Christine Sun Kim, Park McArthur, Alison O'Daniel, Corban Walker and Artur Zmijewski. Most artists' physical impairments in relation to the art itself was discussed openly and honestly.

Although the artists each demonstrated new possibilities for the disabled body across a range of media by exploring bodily configurations in figurative and abstract forms, there were individual interpretations that got it completely wrong, surmising that 'What Can a Body Do?' was really about what the

11. Not all exhibitions containing work by disabled artists have overt political intent. For instance, in September 2013, I gave a guest lecture as part of the 'HERE & NOW 13' exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, which showcased contemporary work by eleven artists with disabilities .(http://www.dadaa.org.au/project/4/here-and-now-13/). The exhibition took an intersectional approach and avoided focusing solely on the disabled identities of the artists. While this stance is itself a type of political statement, is it the best one? Does it ignore the specificity of disability to the detriment of disability's invisibility in the art sector, or is such a politically correct, 'mainstream', sensitive approach successful in moving beyond problematic language?

12. VSA (formerly Very Special Arts) in Washington, DC (www.vsarts.org) has curated disability-related exhibits over the years, DaDaFest (www.dadahello.com/dadafest) has curated some for the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool, and Riva Lehrer has curated 'Humans Being and Humans Being' at the 'Bodies of Work' festival in Chicago (www.bodiesofworkchicago.org). In addition, Katherine Ott, a curator at the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, is one of the few curators I'm aware of dedicated to regularly researching and curating exhibitions pertaining to disability and its various histories. One of her recent online projects

Figure 1: 'Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells & Other Transfixed Positions', Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland, California, 13 September–20 October 2011. Photo: Amanda Cachia.

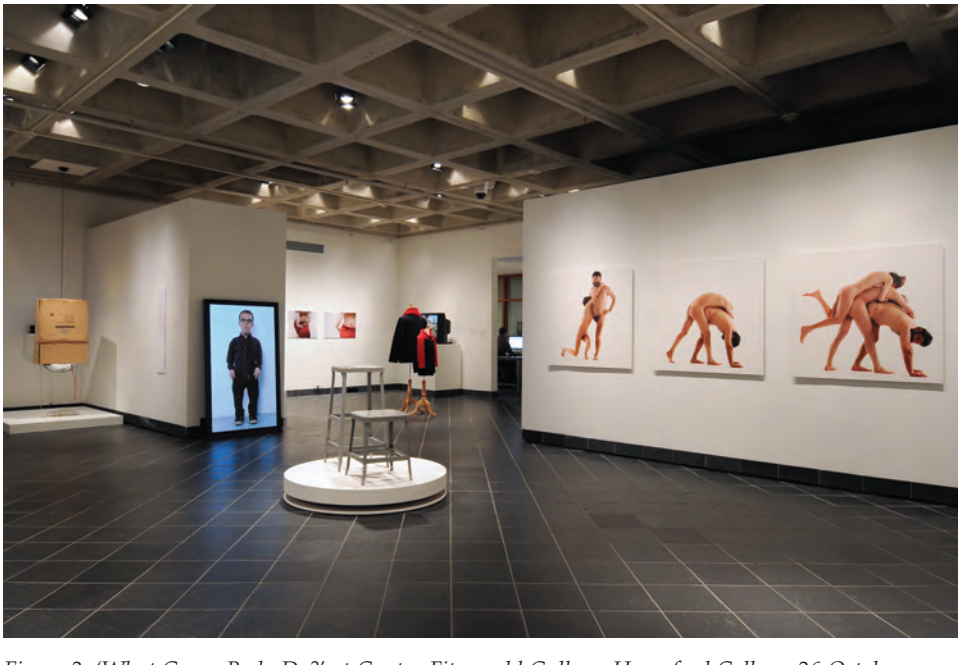

Figure 2: 'What Can a Body Do?' at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford College, 26 October–16 December 2012. Photo: Lisa Boughter.

includes 'EveryBody: An Artifact History of Disability in America' (http://everybody.si.edu).

disabled body *cannot* do – a framing I had intended to reject. In this show, I also was more interested in displaying work that straddled between what Sweeney calls the exploitative and the exploratory. While I agree with Sweeney's argument that curators must know whether a disability-themed work is exploitative or exploratory (as many look the same, especially given the history of displaying disabled people for entertainment via the freak show), this doesn't necessarily mean that the curator should steer clear of the exploitative because it implies a negative quality (Sweeney 2012: 49).

For instance, in 'What Can a Body Do?' I decided to include Artur Zmijewski's *An Eye for an Eye* video and series of photographs that depict complex bodily compositions of intersecting male and female amputee and non-amputee nude bodies. Zmijewski's work has historically created controversy around the manner in which he spectacularizes and so exploits various disabled communities, ranging from a deaf boys choir to a group of blind artists. It is never clear whether his subjects have agency or control over how Zmijewski depicts them, hence the question around exploitation.

In my view, it is important to put works that are both problematic and progressive in the same room together to stimulate the very conversation and critical analysis around how disabled bodies have been used historically for entertainment by non-disabled people, to identify boundaries and definitions that determine what counts as exploitative, and to even consider who decides. Where and what are the nuances, slippages and gaps in between? What other generative conversations might focus on instances in which challenging and safe art are juxtaposed within a disability-themed exhibition context?

Within my 'What Can a Body Do?' exhibition, I was also reminded about the constant challenge of access. Gallery staff made every effort to ensure the highest standards of accessibility, but most of the work could not be touched. The exhibit was predominantly experienced visually, and while several works contained sound, the format largely excluded audience members with hearing and visual impairments. For instance, a gallery intern told me about a mother who visited the exhibition with her blind son. While she considered the show important for offering inclusivity around differences, she complained about problems around its various exclusions to certain types of audiences. In this sense, both gallery and curator were caught in the conundrum of being simultaneously accessible and inaccessible. The gallery followed established Smithsonian Museum and ADA guidelines of what is considered acceptable and accessible for a wider range of audience members, but was inaccessible in its failure to entirely overcome entrenched museum/gallery bias towards 'visual culture' as the dominant mode of experiencing 'visual art'. In the future, I'd like to address accessibility more radically, putting ADA standards to one side in favour of a personalized, more de-colonizing, consistent and multisensorial approach to access across a wider spectrum.

An example of my attempt at moving closer towards this type of approach might be found in 'Cripping Cyberspace: A Contemporary Virtual Art Exhibition', my third exhibition containing disability-related themes, and my first online exhibition. The project offers four diverse, newly commissioned projects – a music video, three interactive websites and an audio piece – that focus on disability using the unique platform of cyberspace to distribute the artwork. The exhibition is hosted on the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* website, launched as a new issue with its own unique image and landing page for Volume 2, Number 4, Fall 2013 – http://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/issue/current.

This exhibition was hosted within the same CJDS format to be consistent with other issues, and to make viewers quickly aware that 'Cripping Cyberspace'

had a clear affiliation with the journal. The projects by artist Katherine Araniello, ethnographer Cassandra Hartblay, artist, writer and lecturer Sara Hendren and Montreal's In/Accessible collective (m.i.a.) also suggest that an online presence expands and equips their practices with new ethical and critical frameworks through which to funnel their ideas. With each artist working within specific cultural and political contexts, they all explore the limitations, possibilities and openings of social and physical architectures both real and imagined, and illustrate how cyberspace might come to offer an alternative. Their projects suggest that the crip movement in cyberspace looks, feels and sounds different from the everyday social realities of their movement in real time – a movement that is often littered with barriers in an urban environment designed for the so-called average person. The artists were asked to consider various questions: What are the alternative constraints or possibilities for disabled people in cyberspace? What kinds of crip artistic interpretations can fill out these spaces in order to make new meaning? What might the virtual realm offer disability aesthetics?

'Cripping Cyberspace' expanded and broadened my curatorial practice and responds most directly to my idea of curator as infrastructural activist, as virtual space became my unique exhibition platform and I was no longer limited by the constraints of gallery walls, lights, pedestals or expensive technological equipment such as projectors, flat-screen televisions and DVD players. Indeed, I was working within a 'museum without walls' that promised to be a living information space, with no worries about the normal practicalities (and costs) of shipping or insuring art. Instead, the Internet was my conduit to showcasing new work to a much more diverse, international audience, with no limits to visitation numbers and no official closing date. Furthermore, in cyberspace, notions of access for visiting and seeing an art exhibition change from considering elements such as physical geography, road maps and GPS availability to elements like free WiFi, a computer, proficiency with digital environments and so on. My role as curator was challenged within this realm, where I considered myself somewhat of a node, distributing not only the art but also the process (such as audio description, artist interviews, etc.).

Regarding next steps, even more challenging now, is if I begin to move beyond the common themes we have seen explored in disability-related exhibitions in the past few years, including my own, leaving behind any didactic, self-conscious nods to history, the medical and social models and post-structuralist dis-assemblages of normality, in favour of more abstract, conceptual, intersectional, specialized, multimodal and multi-sensorial approaches that may offer other paradigms for a discourse in curating disability.[13] The very nature of curating disability-themed exhibitions – its newness – means that experimentation (as opposed to connoisseurship) has to be embraced. Those of us who curate disability can now reach beyond the standard fare of how to approach disability as a critical theme – a desire that is shared by the artists with whom I have worked, who also identify as disabled or physically impaired. The political implications of such moves may well lead to the integration of disability discourse as a unique contributor to mainstream art criticism.

Disability agency: Exhibiting attitudes and language towards the d-word

All this rich territory re-surfaces the next set of necessary questions that I have already briefly touched on – questions to explore around curator and artist agency within disability-themed exhibitions. Bound up with this is

13. For example, 'LOUD Silence' will run at the Grand Central Art Center at California State University in Santa Ana 6 September–6 December 2014. The exhibition will feature works of Joseph Grigely, Darrin Martin, Alison O'Daniel and Christine Sun Kim, illustrating how notions of 'silence' might intersect or deviate from John Cage's seminal 4'33". This exhibition will focus more conceptually on deaf experience, similar to what the 2005 Blind at the Museum in Berkeley attempted to do (http://www.blindatthemuseum.com). Like Cage, these deaf artists use their compositions, scores and voices subversively and radically as guerilla tactics to reclaim sound or take ownership of it. Their 'sound trespass' offers a transformative yet uncomfortable politicized space in which not only do the performers/artists and composers purposefully lose control of sound, but use alternative 'aural violence' to help re-define the meaning of sound itself. This work also offers an avenue for developing new ways of listening.

the challenge of avoiding any use of the d-word while navigating through complex attitudes and reactions to it and creating a fresh discourse on disability politics and complex embodiment. I'd first like to take up the plethora of positions, fears, anxieties and concerns around the comfort with and identifications with 'disability' by artists that I've encountered in the past few years.

While I perceive the disability-related exhibitions that I've been curating as just the beginning of successful ventures into curatorial work involving disability, I have encountered resistance to the category by many artists, some of whom may and may not identify as disabled as I continue to push these ideas further. Given the unfortunate persistent, reductive perception of disability, many artists are unsure whether they wish to be associated with a theme or label that has traditionally been limiting for their practices. In a worst-case scenario, some just downright refuse my invitation to participate in an exhibition that involves the d-word.

However, I've found myself in a real battle of the words with other artists when I seek to challenge them or ask whether they might reconsider previous assumptions that are often based on years of struggle with an ableist art world. How do I convince them that my curatorial strategy differs from the do-gooder, well-meaning, non-disabled-curator-approach, and that I'm attempting to frame a new discourse around bodies and disability? In essence, I argue that we don't yet have a language for the types of embodied, affective relationships our diverse bodies have with the world, and certainly the d-word does no justice to definitions around complex embodiment.

To this end, I've engaged in lengthy e-mail conversations about how to tweak the d-word into language that all the artists can find comfortable. Of particular note is my ongoing exchange with Australian artist Mike Parr, who was born with one hand. He has been one of Australia's pioneers in the field of conceptual and performance art since the 1970s, particularly extreme body performance. For example, in 1977, Parr shocked an audience with a simulated 'arm chop' performance as he pretended to sever his left arm, stirring deep-rooted fears of mutilation and castration.

In his initial response to my invitation to be part of a major new exhibition I'm developing, Parr was excited and happy to be included in the project, but a day later, he sent another e-mail: 'I'd read your material too hastily. The exhibition proposal […] looked very interesting. Unfortunately I don't identify as "disabled" and the whole point of my work has been to resist that label and special contexts. I'm afraid I can't be part of your project' (Parr 10 May 2013 e-mail). I was deeply disappointed with what struck me as a knee-jerk reaction to the d-word that was mentioned only once in my exhibition proposal. I wrote back:

> I didn't select your work because I think you identify as disabled – I picked it for the very reason that you outline – as a means of resisting labels and special contexts. I picked ALL the artists in the show for this reason also – how to think of the body – ALL bodies – in new contexts and new discourses. That is the entire point of my Ph.D. research – to re-think and de-stabilize categories and labels. The word 'disability' comes with so much stigma that I am trying to untangle this.

To this, Parr replied, 'in my opinion and experience you can't "resist labels & special" contexts if you aggregate artists on the basis that they're impaired in some way' (Parr 10 May 2013 e-mail). After some more back and forth in our debate, during which I admitted that I identify as disabled, Parr said,

Figure 3: Cathartic Action: Social Gestus No. 5 *(the 'Armchop'), 1977, Sculpture Centre, The Rocks, NSW, Australia. Performer: Mike Parr. Photo: John Delacour.*

> I'm ready to concede that my battles with the art world in Australia over the last 40 years may have damaged me […] I wonder if it might have been possible to curate exhibitions that didn't mention the issue of disability while including artists that were.
>
> (Parr 13 May 2013 e-mail)

While it seems that I had pushed up against Parr's assumptions around my curatorial methodology, he had also posed a challenge to me – to try to curate exhibitions in which disability and impairment were part of my ideology and politics without reference to the language of disability as a means of avoiding the reductive categories and labels.

Near the opposite end of Parr's spectrum, artist and critical theorist Joseph Grigely finds that art has increasingly become 'about the presence of the artist, and this is where the body of the artist becomes part of the body of the work' (2011). Like it or not, Grigely says artists are 'constantly subject to the gravitational pull of rationalizing about [difference]' although some of them have been 'more or less successful at avoiding this, or at least forgetting their subject positions'.

This is henceforth the axis my curatorial work must straddle, a precarious but productive balance. On the one hand, I must engage artists working with intelligent critical themes around a collective, unified idea, whilst allowing each work to remain independent and unique in its own experience of complex embodiment, and on the other hand I must also, be strategic, realistic and progressive in my use of language around the d-word, to somehow convey the sense of 'moving beyond'.

Several artists with whom I have worked closely have expressed the desire to move beyond in their own art, purposefully setting the terms of their individual practices. For example, Swanson and Walker, both artists from 'What Can a Body Do?', attempt to de-stabilize reductive conceptions of height, size and scale by inscribing their experiences in the world as individuals with dwarfism. Swanson told me:

> I would say that my work is less about myself and my experiences and more about the way that people engage with me. So it is presenting my body and putting it out there and saying 'This is my height', or 'This is my height in relation to somebody else's'. But it's also really pointing at the fact and trying to engage the viewer into telling them that I know that these are their thoughts when encountering me or encountering difference, and what can we do to get *beyond* that?
>
> (Swanson 2011, original emphasis)

In her quest to get beyond, Swanson participated in an artist residency at Haverford College a year after the exhibition; her presentation there was aptly entitled 'Resisting Representations'.[14] I suggest that presentations such as Swanson's offer the artist an opportunity to talk with like-minded and engaged faculty and students as a means of finding generative solutions.

Walker, who told me, 'It's not so much about I'm trying to make a point or something', made a remark quite similar to Swanson's:

> My work is not so much categorized in that way [in terms of disability] […] it's kind of developing in a way that's *beyond* […] and it's releasing into other fields […] it isn't really about trying to break the ceiling. [The work] is very personal to me in terms of who I am and how I'm recognized and how or where […]. I perceive what's happening in this building or in or around me. But I don't necessarily just confine it to […] my disability. I like to keep it open […] this is really about showing a good piece of work.
>
> (Walker 2011, original emphasis)

Following on from what Swanson and Walker state, I maintain that fellow 'What Can a Body Do?' participating artist Christine Sun Kim also pushes beyond certain normative understandings of body experience without necessarily naming or identifying her practice within a specific category. In an

14. Swanson described this residency as 'one of the best experiences I've had as an artist', indicating that she had never previously

> encountered a group of more engaged, intellectual and thoughtful students and faculty. In a way, they were more open to my work than [other] art schools have been [perhaps] because Haverford instills the importance of social justice […] [and other schools] have difficulty talking about the ideas I present in my work [as] they feel uncomfortable […].
>
> (Swanson 2013)

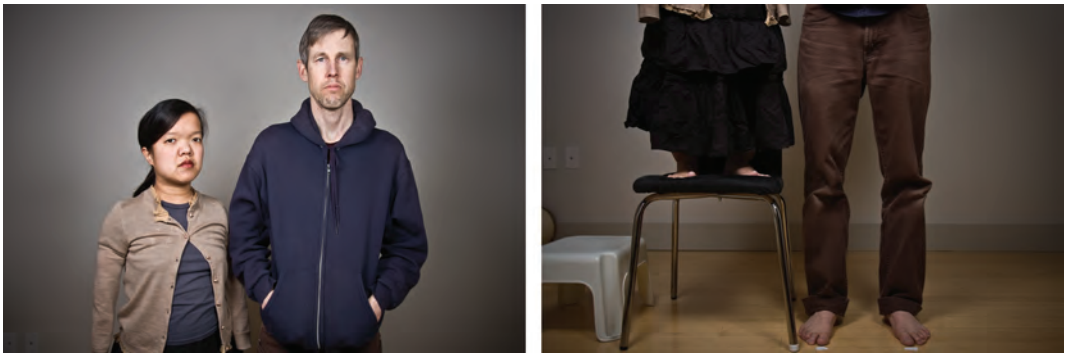

Figure 4: Laura Swanson, Revelation, *2009.*

Figure 5: Corban Walker, TV Man, *2011. © Corban Walker, courtesy Pace Gallery.*

October 2012 interview about her participation in the exhibition produced by Haverford College, the artist said,

> That idea of disability I was a little resistant to. I look at my work not as a disabled artist but just as an artist. The word disability carries a lot of stigma with it. But after I spoke with Amanda […] I liked how

> she wanted to go and push herself into a space […] kind of reframing people disabilities or disabled artists. I didn't want to be pigeon-holed but I felt willing after speaking with her, to go with her with this vision and to see where this went.[15]

15. Artist Christine Sun Kim at Haverford College on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ivcf2YC3dtE.

On the flip side of the inclusionary/exclusionary coin, artists sometimes question why I put work by artists who are clearly *not* disabled in my curatorial ventures. Every possible positioning has risen to the surface. As Fox articulates in 'Leaving Venus behind: The new intersections of disability, women and sculpture', her 2009 essay for the 'Re/Formations: Disability, Women and Sculpture exhibition', 'Who makes disability art? Is it anyone who critiques the enforcing of normalcy? Is it only disabled people? Disability activists? Given the history of disabled people being silenced, what is the place of the non-disabled artist in raising issues intimately connected to disability?' (Fox 2009). I ponder Fox's important questions every day in relation to the art I examine as part of my practice.

Such questioning naturally leads to similar ones in application to the curator and curatorial agency. For example, who gets to curate disability art and be in control of the message, so the 'message' is not silenced, but rather broadcast loud and clear? What is the place of the disabled curator (as opposed to the non-disabled one) in raising issues connected to disability? Sweeney concludes that curators and artists working with disability subject matter must question the nature of the power relations between them truthfully, and that good intentions must be especially questioned as a motive for curating a disability exhibition. Furthermore, she states that 'disabled artists and curators with substantial knowledge of disability art and disability history, working independently or in collaboration with other arts professionals, may be best suited to address these concerns and history of display' (Sweeney 2012: 56). In this way, informed curators can acknowledge the history of disability as medical curiosity without contributing to it.

I would add that my identification as a disabled person (and therefore disabled curator) corroborates Sweeney's suggestion, as my personal intimacy with disability and its stigmas has given me access to artists in ways that may not have been possible otherwise, as demonstrated through my encounters with a number of them. Sometimes in the past few years I have had the fortune (or misfortune?) of articulating my own position or relationship with disability to gain the respect and the trust of the artists with whom I've been working. I posit that if I am seen as a curator who understands disability because I identify, I am an insider who will prevent any patronizing tones from seeping into my projects.

I give the artists agency as much as I have my own agency as a disabled curator, in control of what and how work is contextualized and displayed. If the community of disability curators and scholars now inhabit this space of trust and disability knowledge, does it gives us more unconscious freedom to experiment as curators comfortable with curating disability-related content? Perhaps this is a prerequisite for a curator wishing to experiment with disability content in the times ahead. In any case, I am acutely aware that as a scholar and curator who identifies as disabled, I am particularly positioned to contribute to a re-imagining of disability's relationship to social and cultural frameworks within visual culture, alongside my curatorial peers. To this end, I aim to offer the academy:

- A more in-depth reading of work by contemporary disabled artists
- A re-reading of contemporary art by established disabled and non-disabled artists (those who are 'out' and those who are not) through a disability studies lens

- A critique of mainstream art that expropriates the language of disability in troubling ways in the hope of transgressing such practices.[16]

How these three areas may intersect fruitfully will be foremost in future enquiries. It is essential that my project incorporate all these components because I am attempting to strategically invigorate the discursive fields of visual culture, art history and contemporary art discourse from both insider and outsider perspectives. In other words, I would like to speak as one operating within the canon, while simultaneously injecting other views through an intertextual approach.[17] As I go forward with my work, I mean to position myself both within the centre and in the margins, echoing the theory I engage by de-stabilizing each position. I hope to apply a disability studies perspective to visual culture that reveals readings we did not even realize were missing.

Artists with 'disabilities' may question and re-define culture, environment and 'normative' practices through the lens of disability in their practice, but this is not just a means to an end. But now we might ask, 'How is it possible to move beyond disability, and yet feel empowered by it at the same time?' These goals may seem contradictory. For example, while I believe in how empowered it can be to embrace one's disability, I want to avoid any ghettoization of both myself as curator and my curated artists. As Simi Linton notes, our language is currently deficient in describing disability in any way other than as a problem, so the defining is simultaneously a challenge and a curse (1998: 11). However, like the problem of 'visual culture' that determines the very nature of a museum, what happens if we think of this challenge/curse as the opportunity to articulate a richer and more complex language or just think about an experience of disability or complex embodiment? Barbara Hillyer says, 'Instead of creating dichotomies between good and bad words, we can use accurate descriptors […] we can struggle with distinguishing our own definitions […] the process is awkward; it slows down talk; it is uncomfortable [but] it increases complexity' (2011).

Ultimately, as a curator who just happens to have dwarfism, who works with artists who may or may not have disabilities or identify with them, I must take great care to note the intersectional specifics of their gendered, cultural, racial and generational contexts and avoid the reduction that I work against in exhibitions such as 'What Can a Body Do?' Certainly these difficult issues point to the complexity of not only curating disability-themed exhibitions through structure, perceptions, language and artist attitudes and intentions, but also indicate the complex relationships between artists and curators – and often their very different identifications with disability. Despite these challenges, artists with disabilities command agency, and their work deserves to be placed within a general field of art practice so as to integrate the emergent discourse of complex embodiment with critical art and disability studies discourse. How might this happen? The artists and I are struggling to find a zone where our work can be recognized alongside that of our peers.

Disability in discursive programming

This section will explore how I aim to think beyond the 'main event' of the exhibition of objects, where discursive aspects of programming, such as artist talks, performances, film screenings, symposiums and roundtable conversations are given equal billing to the exhibition, rather than simply adjunct offshoots, as I mention in the Introduction. I will cite several examples of

16. For starters, contemporary disabled artists to be examined include Joseph Grigely, Christine Sun Kim, Park McArthur, Alison ØÐDaniel and Carmen Papalia. ÐMainstreamÐ artists include Pawel Althamer, Diane Arbus, Shary Boyle, Sophie Calle, Maurizio Cattelan, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Chuck Close, Ryan Gander, Tim Hawkinson, Mike Kelley, Katarzyna Kozyra, Paul McCarthy, Marc Quinn, Yinka Shonibare, Diego Velázquez, Artur Zmijewski and Robert Gober's disembodied limbs.

17. The intertextual approach also strikes me as essential. Intertextuality is the shaping of texts' meanings by other texts. It can include an author's borrowing and transforming a prior text or to a reader's referencing one text in reading another. The term 'intertextuality' itself has been borrowed and transformed many times since post-structuralist Julia Kristeva coined it in 1966. More information is available in Graham Allen's chapter in Roland Barthes.

programming that I argue inhabit the curatorial space while moving beyond an object's materiality. The first is a 2012 roundtable discussion entitled 'What Can A Body Do? Investigating Disability in Contemporary Art'. Next, after touching briefly on the traditional artist and/or curator talk, extending into artist performances and residencies, I discuss a series of Skype interviews I conducted in 2013 with the participating artists from 'Cripping Cyberspace'.

The 2012 roundtable discussion I organized, hosted by the California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco (see Figure 7), featured several renowned scholars in disability studies and artists, including Georgina Kleege, Carmen Papalia, Ann Millett-Gallant, Katherine Sherwood, Sunaura Taylor, Rosemarie Garland Thomson and (via Skype) Tobin Siebers. For the first time, CCA's Department of Visual & Critical Studies and the President's Diversity Steering Group presented this conversation to explore the dominant paradigms at the intersection of disability and contemporary art. Questions posed to the participants included: How can we de-stabilize the reductive representations of the disabled body seen in western artistic and curatorial discourses – the monster, the freak, the cripple, the deformed, the grotesque? How can the contemporary art world begin to shift these negative perceptions and meanings of the disabled body to make room for its more nuanced, complex representation across diverse artistic fields? What methodologies and strategies are today's artists employing to convey a new visual and textual language around the association between ocular representation and identity?

Prefacing the roundtable was a three-minute slide presentation of images of provocative contemporary works of art – some canonical, others emerging – selected to in some way shed light on the disability experience and challenge the audience to re-think their ideas on art that previously may not have been associated with disability. I provided a recorded audio description for the images in the slide show, and ASL interpreters were also present. The outcome of the two-hour session was a rich dialogue that revealed much room for further investigation and research – and of course left many questions unanswered. (To view the roundtable, which was held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on 17 February 2012, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtSTRj2s9H8 for Part I and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKwkawC-Zxw for Part II.)

As I argued in 'Talking Blind: Museums, Access and the Discursive Turn' (Cachia 2013), where I suggested that the two-day conference and symposium that accompanied 'Blind at the Museum' was as important as the exhibition itself for considering complex embodiment in critical new forms, I also believe that this roundtable conversation was an important lead-up to the 'What Can A Body Do?' exhibition, which opened at Haverford College eight months later. Forums that bring artists, curators and critics together to discuss the implications and challenges of enacting their roles as Smith's 'process shapers' and 'programme builders' within a context of curating disability and access are important slices of the curatorial pie.

During the course of 'Medusa's Mirror', I invited a number of the artists to give talks, namely Neil Marcus (by Skype), Sunaura Taylor and Sadie Wilcox, alongside Georgina Kleege, a scholar based at the University of California, Berkeley. As with the roundtable conversation at CCA, I felt it was important to include a well-established scholar in disability studies to share with the audience perspectives about complex embodiment that differed from the artists'.

'What Can a Body Do?' presented a wider range of discursive programming as a critical component of the exhibition. Given that the show was held at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, which is nestled within the Haverford College

Figure 6 (left): Sunaura Taylor during her artist talk for 'Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells & Other Transfixed Positions'.

Figure 7 (right): Georgina Kleege sharing experiences about disability art. Photos: Ryan Gambrell.

campus, the discursive programming inhabited an intimate, deeply felt impact on those in the academic and student communities. The first such discursive event was a sound performance by Christine Sun Kim at the reception on 26 October 2012. Sun Kim's spellbinding performance combined her voice box (screaming, blowing, whimpering and murmuring into a microphone) with sounds she created using various objects (alternately banging her fist on the wall and slapping her palm against it, swinging and sliding a microphone through the air and along the ground, recording the tick-tocks of a metronome).[18]

On the visual front, *Speaker drawings #1–#10* (2012) were created from ink- and powder-drenched quills, nails and cogs that danced across round wooden boards to the vibrations of subwoofers and speakers responding to Sun Kim's sounds. The gallery hung the ten *Speaker drawings* after Sun Kim's performance. Along with drumhead, subwoofers, paper, objects and wet materials, the end results were physical and visual records of sounds. Sun Kim combined these various media aggressively and forcefully in an attempt

18. To see (and hear) parts of Sun Kim's riveting performance in addition to her commentary, visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ivcf2YCedtE.

Figure 8 (left): Christine Sun Kim performing at the 'What Can a Body Do?' opening. Photo: Noelia Hobeika.

Figure 9 (right): A Speaker drawing *(2012). Photo: Lisa Boughter.*

to open up a new space of authority/ownership and rearrange hierarchies of information. As one observer to the performance commented:

> During her live performance there were many times the feedback got so loud, audience members covered their ears or made uncomfortable facial expressions […]. Sun Kim used her voice box to create a sound that, for me, sounded like something between anxious humming and screaming. The sound made me feel nervous; I could imagine hearing it from another room and wanting to run in and check if everyone was okay. I felt on edge at this point in the performance because the sounds that were being created evoked panicky feelings in me; as an audience member I was experiencing stress […] in using her own voice [as a deaf person] to create sound, Kim is defying social norms and stretching both herself and the audience outside of their comfort zones. One might perhaps describe her performance as deviant.
>
> (See http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/christine-sum-kim-silence-discipline-and-mediated-viewings-art.)

Sun Kim's piercing (and perhaps deviant) noise powerfully, radically and viscerally embodied actions engaged by the figure of a deaf person who uses sound to achieve her own objectives regarding authority and control.

Via the Mellon Tri-College Creative Residencies Programme, Kristin Lindgren from Haverford College also arranged several artist residencies that took Sun Kim and Papalia from Haverford to Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore during the months the exhibition was on display. As mentioned previously, a year later Haverford also hosted Swanson as part of the same residency and funding programme. During each of the residencies, the artists guest-lectured in several classes on topics related to their practices, engaged with students in groups and one-on-one, and developed numerous activities to collaborate on a product as an outcome of their time together. As curator, I too was able to lead several guided tours of the exhibition and participate in animated discussions with the students.

Papalia's residency, in particular, featured several iterations of his *Blind Field Shuttle*, a non-visual walking tour during which participants explore urban and rural spaces on foot. Forming a line behind Papalia, they grab the right shoulder of the person in front of them and shut their eyes for the duration of the walk. Papalia serves as a tour guide – passing useful information to the person behind him, who then passes it to the person behind him or her and so forth. The trip culminates in a group discussion about the experience. Their visual deprivation makes participants more keenly aware of alternative sensory perceptions such as smell, sound and touch – so as to consider how non-visual input may serve as a productive means of experiencing place. All of these lively discursive opportunities at Haverford enriched the exhibition, its thesis and its vision.

In my most recent curatorial project, 'Cripping Cyberspace', I conducted Skype interviews with each participating artist; which I consider a critical curatorial component of the exhibit's discursive programming. Each interview ranged from approximately twenty to 40 minutes, but the questions I asked each artist, varied only slightly, centring on their ideas about alternative constraints or possibilities for disabled people in cyberspace and whether those constraints or possibilities differed from those presented in physical space. I also explored the artists' goals and outcomes for their work using the online platform, learning how their own personal ideas of 'mobility' and 'access' may have evolved

Figure 10 (left): Amanda Cachia talking to students in a guided tour of 'What Can a Body Do?' at Haverford College. Photo: Lisa Boughter.

Figure 11 (right): Laura Swanson visiting John Muse's Visual Studies Class to discuss a portraiture project collaboration with Vita Litvak's Introduction to Photography class. Photo: John Muse.

through this project and their art-making process. Finally, I asked them about future directions for the intersection of disability and cyberspace. As one might expect, many of their answers were similar and many clearly diverged.

Of course, an encounter with a traditional, material exhibition often offers the opportunity to attend and listen to an artist talk, so the Skype artist interviews are 'exhibited' as an alternative to this, although they are also on display as a more accessible extension. By this I mean that the interviews were recorded and can be archived (for as long as the site is maintained), so they offer a multimodal access point much like the virtual exhibition itself. Visitors no longer need to be physically present in order to enjoy the art, or the interview, as the case may be. I was able to record both audio and visual components of the interviews through a free, downloadable programme entitled 'Callnote'. Further, the interviews were transcribed (by Alexandra Haasgaard), so those with hearing impairments also can follow the dialogue. The written transcripts, however, are not verbatim, given that at times the transcriptionist either could not hear the speaker or capture the exact vocabulary. The notion of 'lost in translation' is important to consider when thinking about pros and cons in our communication that stem from the media and technology; transferring the metaphor to curatorial practice speaks to the

Figure 12 (left): Carmen Papalia leading Blind Field Shuttle *at Haverford College, 2012, a walk with students on campus. Photo: Lisa Boughter.*

Figure 13 (right): Papalia leading a post-tour discussion in the gallery lounge. Photo: Matthew Seamus Callinan.

nature of 'miscommunication' or 'misinformation' in relation to disability stereotypes. This process adds to the central aspects of the exhibition, which I continue to maintain are integral components to the exhibition as form.

In summary, what is all this good work achieving and why is it important as part of my proposed strategy in 'curating disability'? These discursive aspects of exhibition programming, such as the artist talks, performances, audio recordings, film screenings, symposiums, roundtable conversations, etc., are critical in forming the discourse I propose, the new consciousness in curating disability I am working to develop, and the vocabulary we need – not only within the world of art but in the wider world as well. Working in a similar vein was the artist collective, Group Material, which radically overhauled curatorial thought. According to Maria Lind, Group Material advocated that through 'cultural displacement':

> art's potential can be propelled if the social conditions of art change, for example by remaking the context of the presentation of art […] this is a question of the curatorial. Social interaction, including art, can change the form of the world. Subjectivity can be rediscovered, even reshaped, by changing the social conditions of art itself.
>
> (2011: 11)

These collective members were interested in basic forms of inclusion through dialogic art practice that also pushed up against conventional exhibition-making. They shift the curator's role from that of 'exhibition maker' or 'exhibition auteur', as proposed by Robert Storr (2006: 14). If we understand curatorial praxis today as more open and experimental, thanks to Group Material's leadership, what repercussions does this have on 'exhibition maker' within a context of dialogic and social practices such as those that have been discussed here?

For example, Creative Time curator Nato Thompson challenges and questions the curator's role through his large-scale project, 'Living As Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991 to 2011', taking on the role of 'organizer' – which perhaps is the title best-suited to dialogic practices within disability-related projects.[19] Whatever the title, in the end, I agree with Marincola stating that practice makes perfect: 'Concepts surrounding curating are filtered through the lessons derived from repeated performance, from thinking *and* doing, or, perhaps more accurately, thinking based on doing' (Marincola 2006a: 10). The curatorial work that I repeatedly perform and practice, comprising both conceptual *and* discursive components, will provide important and telling clues and indicators for the way forward in the bid to de-stigmatize disability in the museum.

19. For more information on Living as Form, organized by Nato Thompson, visit http://www.creativetime.org/programs/archive/2011/livingasform/.

Access as a creative methodology

What would it mean for curators to think about curating access, a domain that has traditionally fallen within the mandate of a major museum's education department? As suggested in the Introduction, I challenge the curator to consider access as the creative concept and/or content of artwork by focusing on possibilities such as whether an audio description or a sequence of captioning accompanying a film can be a work of art and whether an interpreter using ASL is giving a performance. Or how can the prosaic museum wall label be approached strategically and creatively? If wall labels should never conform to a standard template, can audio descriptions, audio transcripts or ASL interpretations extend the parameters of the label? Can the

label be an artwork in itself? And how can touch be incorporated into curating and art-making, rather than just an interactive feature of a static permanent collection tour in a museum? (Candlin 2010: 114).[20]

The questions go on: How can subtitles and audio description work together to create an interesting 'dialogue' about access that renders a work of art or a film completely inaccessible for a non-disabled audience? In other words, how can the tables be turned on access, and access for whom or for what? What inherent ethical questions and issues of agency stem from these possibilities? Can or should access fall into the hands of curators and/or artists who haven't been exposed to the practicalities of access first and foremost? This is not to disparage the work of professional audio describers, nor to imply that curators and/or artists should use ASL for performance aspects only, undermining the fact that it is a serious language. Rather, these questions are meant to provoke creative ideas around traditional notions of access. I believe we can capitalize on the productive tensions between the very real need for traditional modes of access in a museum – such as the utilitarian ramp, the guided tour of the latest exhibition in ASL, the touch tour for blind visitors – and my notions of curating access creatively. The two separate but intertwined modes of physical and conceptual access can meld in generative ways within the art museum or gallery. Some examples will reveal how this has occurred within a number of my projects.

Figure 9 depicts the installation of two of Neil Marcus' calligraphic ink drawings for 'Medusa's Mirror'. He uses a wheelchair for his dystonia, a neurological movement disorder in which sustained muscle contractions cause twisting and

20. As Fiona Candlin says,

> The tactual study of objects can help reconfigure ocularcentric art histories, opening up new critical interpretations of artworks and acknowledging the different forms of sensory engagement that they potentially enable. Thus, while it remains important to question the presuppositions of connoisseurship, it may also be vitally important to retain the skills of tactual exploration that were previously correlated to it.

Figure 14: Installation of Neil Marcus drawing, from 'Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells and Other Transfixed Positions', 2011. Photo: Amanda Cachia.

repetitive movements or postures. As a writer, actor, dancer, philosopher and visual artist, Marcus constantly pushes the boundaries of dominant culture's stereotypes regarding the disabled figure in a wheelchair. Instead, he uses his wheelchair to dance, cavort and fly through space, as these untitled calligraphic drawings show. In an artist statement about these drawings, Marcus says,

> My 'calligraphy art style' was inspired by Fred Astaire who danced with a broom, Gene Kelly who danced with a mop, a wonderful taiko drummer from Japan who drew with a mop onstage, and from my understanding that life is a dance as the world is a stage.
>
> (Marcus 2011 artist statement)

I decided to install the drawings directly above the wheelchair ramp in the gallery, so viewers would make the connection with the physicality of access and movement and how a disabled artist thinks conceptually about mobility in unconventional, powerful ways. Many visitors noticed and commented on the fortuitous juxtaposition, saying that as they walked on the wheelchair ramp, they imagined dancing on wheels, like Marcus in his wheelchair, or being on rollerblades or a skateboard, gliding from one elevation to the next. In this phenomenological process, in their minds, the visitors' feet turned into other objects and forms that Marcus proved can have as much dexterity, skill and possibilities for movement. In this exchange of physical and conceptual imagining, viewers experienced another way of being and moving in the world without reducing it to simplistic stereotypes of Marcus' marginalized subjectivity as a disabled person and artist in a wheelchair.

In 'What Can a Body Do?' as mentioned, I complied with Smithsonian Museum and ADA standards for installing exhibitions, with the work hung lower on the walls to be more accessible to wheelchair users, little people and children. Figure 15 indicates how the speakers in Papalia's sound installation were creatively installed and yet had practical outcomes for users in the space. As the figure shows, a girl could press her ear right up against the sound installation as it is hung on her level, while an adult could engage ear-to-ear with a speaker at her height. The speakers were installed at the heights of the artist, myself as a 4'3" person, and the average heights of children and adults. Rather than complying rotely with the ADA standards, we created our own standards and non-standards infused with the personal and the political.

The process of developing audio descriptions for the last two exhibitions I curated has expanded ideas of what audio description can or should be. While industry templates or models exist for 'good' audio description, I also believe that audio description can become a collective process, with crowd sourcing, exchange, networking and multi-sensorial narratives commingling to produce a more participatory effect. To this end, in both 'What Can a Body Do?' and 'Cripping Cyberspace', I invited artists, students and other stakeholders involved to develop audio descriptions of the work. They used a free online voice recorder (www.vocaroo.com) to create flexible MP3 files of their descriptions. Incorporating the voices of curator, artists and students as part of audio description exercise ultimately led the audio description, and consequently the exhibit website, to begin functioning akin to a television, with various channels providing instantaneous access to multiple styles, techniques, opinions and sensibilities.[21]

I believe audio descriptions can be independent works of art in themselves, carrying their own weight and space and serving as extensions of the

21. Josh Miele passed this advice on to me during a University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) Residency hosted by the University of California (Irvine) in Summer 2012, entitled 'Art Inclusion: Disability, Design, Curation'. An associate scientist at The Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute's Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center in San Francisco, Miele researches the areas of tactile maps and auditory displays. His advice as a congenital blind person, along with direction from Georgina Kleege from my initial exhibition, fundamentally informed the direction I decided to take.

Figure 15: Papalia's Blind Field Shuttle *sound installation (2012) at Haverford College, demonstrating the creative ways in which access was implemented. Photo: Lisa Boughter.*

artists' work, with each party to the process increasing awareness of thinking critically about a fuller spectrum of audiences and how they might access their art beyond the ocular. This is especially true for artists who might identify with a particular disability, but who neglect to think beyond the implications and challenges of their own embodiment. One might mistakenly assume that artists with disabilities form one large, homogenized and unified group, but as with any other minority groups, silos and divisions occur within various disabilities too. Recording audio description also might offer the artist, student and curator a richer and more complex means of thinking about their art-making process, adding new dialogical layers to a work that is predominantly visual or aural.

On each occasion when I have invited artists to participate in audio descriptions of their own work, they react with anxiety or trepidation, even nervousness. They remained sceptical and hesitant, their reactions evidently bound up with worrying about the 'right' way to execute it. They might be asking themselves: How much description should I provide for each image or frame in a video? How do I describe colour? What are the most important pieces of information about an image that need to be conveyed verbally for a blind person? How should the temporal aspects of a video be communicated, if a video is collaged and cut up in a complicated form? Is there a right or wrong way of communicating with the pace of my voice?

For example, Katherine Araniello, who had never created an audio description before, initially expressed concern about developing one, but ended up

Figure 16: A student using the audio description developed for 'What Can a Body Do?' while engaging with the work in the exhibition. Photo: Thom Carroll Photography.

thoroughly engaged in the process.[22] She said she found it stimulating because it was different from describing her art in a conceptual way. From my sparse but powerful experiences in the audio description arena over the past two years, I have learned that translation is personal, subjective and performative and that information can be lost or gained within each step. For those reasons, I encourage the artists through this process and way of thinking. Whatever the inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies – which win or lose, fail or succeed are all part of the human experience – if audio description sheds light on the full spectrum of what it means to be human, then it is a transformative technology indeed.

Last but not least, websites have begun to play an important role in my curatorial output as critical adjunct to the exhibitions and the discursive components discussed. Websites remain integral to the visitor engagement with 'What Can a Body Do?' and of course, 'Cripping Cyberspace: A Virtual Art Exhibition' was displayed on a website as opposed to in a white cube, obviating the need for a physical display. Websites give flexibility for both traditional access (e.g. screen reader friendly) and creative forms of access (e.g. meta audio description and transcription) because they enable even more experimentation than is perhaps possible in a physical space. As Katherine Araniello quipped about 'Cripping Cyberspace', it is perhaps the most accessible exhibition one can find on the Internet right now, while Jay Dolmage surmised that the exhibition was groundbreaking for its attention to access. While neither website is perfect, over time and with more

22. I did offer each artist some online templates to use as a guide for creating audio descriptions, ranging from exhibit-specific examples (e.g. http://exhibits.haverford.edu/whatcanabodydo/media/ and http://www.blindatthemuseum.com) to industry standards generated by such non-profit organizations as Art Beyond Sight in New York City (e.g. http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbalsamples.shtml).

improvements, eventually the website will become an indispensable platform that offers a template for curators, scholars, critics and artists and gives them another way to implement best practices in their own independent or institutional output regarding disability-related projects.

To my mind, these projects only begin to touch on equal access in the physical sense of the word, in addition to how access can and must be incorporated as part of an artist and curator's artistic output. This notion is radical given I am not only attempting to push the world of access into a conceptual, creative domain, but I'm also expanding the idea of what constitutes a material art object. Most critically, in tandem with my proposal to expand our thinking about what kinds of forms an art object can embody, in line with new experimental curatorial practices, this notion also happens to follow in the footsteps of the disability rights movement itself, in its goal to expand our thinking of what constitutes 'normal'. Access as a creative methodology is therefore an important political and strategic goal to be implemented in art museums, just as the principles of complex embodiment aim to diffuse narrow limitations of 'normal' within mainstream society.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that part of the decolonizing work of disability studies is for curators to begin to practice experimental, inclusive curatorial strategies to 'crip' art history and the mainstream contemporary art world. By incorporating discursive programming, access as a creative methodology, a sensitive approach towards curating complex attitudes about disability and language, and sustained engagement with the ethics and practicalities of curating disability-related subject matter, these strategies offer a radical approach to paving critical space for the disabled subject in contemporary art. As this article has also demonstrated, artists with disabilities are already carving out this space for themselves, where their work contributes to a vital conversation on art about disability and how this art can be shaped. Despite the challenges around the word 'disability' and its negative associations, particularly in relationship to 'problem', Carrie Sandahl writes, 'disabilities are states of being that are in themselves *generative*, and, once de-stigmatized, allow us to envision an enormous range of human variety – in terms of bodily, spatial, and social configurations' (2002: 22). Disability-themed art can contribute to established art discourse without having to conform to it. Engaging Sandahl's consideration of disability as a condition, orientation and vantage point allows curators to articulate the very real ways in which bodies with disabilities can suggest a reconfiguration of their representation in contemporary art (2002: 22). As we expand our ideas of what constitutes a representable body, we also expand our idea of disability itself. As many of the writers referenced in this article indicate, definitions around 'the curatorial' are pliable and changing, just as the word 'disability' is. If 'the curatorial' is, for instance, as Lind describes it, a 'viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, that strives to create friction and push new ideas', then examining disability and access in the museum contributes another layer to this frictional mode of curating (Lind 2011: 20).

We also understand that museums and galleries always have played major roles in shaping cultural and social identity, and will continue to share a key stake in socio-political agendas, hence more reason for them to be responsive

and attentive to disability. In the great curatorial reveal of process and praxis, not only are definitions and misconceptions of both disability and curating labuored and refined, but the work of the curator as infrastructural activist can begin to be implemented. Within this curatorial cripistemology, the museum is being 'disabled' in every sense of that complex word.

NOTE

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IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Figure 1. 'Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells & Other Transfixed Positions.' This is a photograph. It depicts an art exhibit in the Pro Arts Gallery in Oakland, California shown September 13th through October 20th, 2011. In the distance, a series of mixed media art pieces and photographs, line the wall, including one that depicts a series of medical-style photos of children with black privacy bars over their eyes. On the floor, a small statue is featured.

Figure 2. 'What Can a Body Do?' This is a photograph. It depicts an art exhibit at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery at Haverford College that took place October 26th through December 2012. It depicts various multi-media exhibits. One appears to be a full-body life-size photograph of a small man. On the right side of the frame, there are three other large photographs of nude people with disabilities embracing each other in various wrestling-like positions.

Figure 3. 'Cathartic Action: Social Gestus No. 5 (the 'Armchop').' This is a photograph. It depicts a man wearing glasses sitting at a table with what appears to be a small ax in his hand about to swing down into his left arm. The realistic left arm is hacked open just below the elbow with large chunks of blood-covered flesh from it on the table.

Figure 4. 'Revelation.' This is a series of two photographs. The first depicts a women with long hair tied behind her head wearing a shirt and sweater. She is standing beside a taller man wearing a hoodie with his hands in his jacket pockets. The second image is the lower portion of the first photo: it reveals that the woman is a small woman standing on a chair. She is barefoot wearing a dress. The man is much taller than the first picture suggests. The right side of the frame in this photo is almost entirely his long legs in jeans. He is also barefooted.

Figure 5. 'Coran Walker, TV Man.' This is a framed photo. It depicts a small man wearing glasses with his hands at his hips.

Figure 6. 'Sunara Taylor during her artist talk for Medusa's Mirror: Fears, Spells & Other Transfixed Positions.' This is a photograph. It depicts Taylor seated in front of a wall of mixed media art in a gallery as at least a dozen people gather around her, mainly sitting on the floor.

Figure 7. 'Georgina Kleege sharing experiences about disability art.' This is a photograph. Kleege stands in a gallery next to her mixed-media art piece, addressing an audience gathered around her.

Figure 8. 'Christine Sun Kim performing at the "What Can a Body Do?" opening.' This is a photograph. With dozens of onlookers visible behind her, the artist is crouched down and appears to be placing small objects on two large drum heads in the center of the room.

Figure 9. 'A Speaker drawing.' This is a photograph. It depicts a wooden circular board with a random pattern of paint upon it.

Figure 10. 'Amanda Cachia talking to students in a guided tour of "What Can a Body Do?" at Haverford College.' This is a photograph. It depicts the artist surrounded by five people with whom she is in a discussion.

Figure 11. 'Laura Swanson visiting John Muse's Visual Studies Class to discuss a portraiture project collaboration with Vita Litvak's Introduction to Photography class.' This is a photograph. It depicts the artist seated at a large round table addressing several students gathered around her. There are several photographs on the table before her and she appears to be gesturing towards them as she speaks.

Figure 12. 'Carmen Papalia leading blind Field Shuttle at Haverford College, 2012, a walk with students on campus.' This is a photograph. It depicts a dozen or so students walking in a line, each with their hands on the shoulders of the person directly in front of them. Leading the chain is a man wearing a hat and holding a walking cane. He is turned back slightly to the woman wearing shorts behind him as she steps down from grass onto a curb to cross a paved street.

Figure 13. 'Papalia leading a post-tour discussion in the gallery lounge.' This is a photograph. A man in a hat is seated in a chair in the foreground, holding up a waving finger. He is facing right. In the background, four others are seated on a couch, faced towards the man.

Figure 14. 'Installation of Neil Marcus drawing, "Medusa's Mirror: Fear, Spells and Other Transfixed Positions."' This is a photograph. It depicts a series of abstract calligraphy drawings posted up on large paper directly behind a wheelchair ramp and guard rails.

Figure 15. 'Papalia's Blind Field Shuttle sound installation (2012) at Haverford College, demonstrating creative way in which access was implemented.' This is a photograph. It depicts a young girl on the left of the frame facing away from camera who appears to be listening to an audio device mounted to the wall. On the right side, closer to the foreground, a woman stands slightly bent over facing right, appearing to listen to another audio device.

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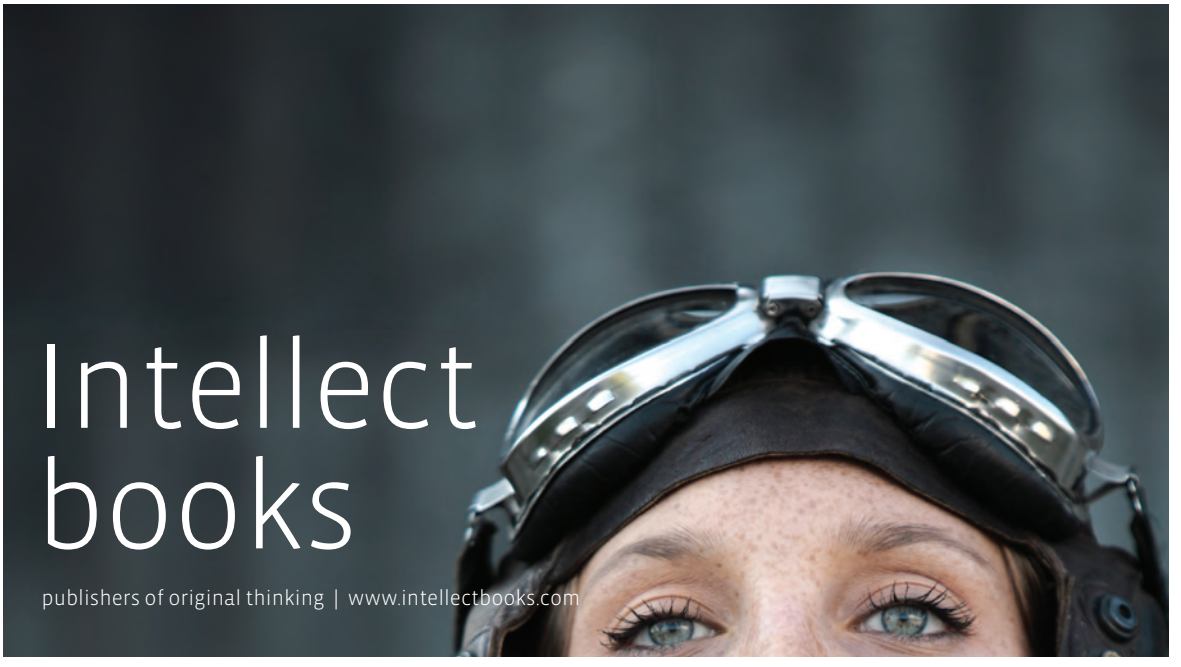

Fashion and War in Popular Culture

Edited by Denise N. Rall

Aside from the occasional nod to epaulettes or use of camouflage, war and fashion seem to be strange partners. Not so, argue the contributors to this book, who connect military industrial practices as well as military dress to textile and clothing in new ways. For instance, the book includes a series of commentaries on the impact of military dress in the airline industry, in illustrated wartime comics, and even considers today's muscled soldier's body as a new type of uniform. Elsewhere, the effects of conquest introduce a new set of postcolonial aesthetics as military and colonial regimes disrupt local textile production and garment making. In another chapter, it is argued that textiles and fashion are important because they reflect a core practice, one that bridges textile artists and designers in an expressive, creative and deeply physical way to matters of cultural significance. And the book concludes by calling the very mode of 'military chic' into ethical question.

The premier text to illustrate the impact of war on textiles, bodies, costume, art and design, *Fashion and War in Popular Culture* will be warmly welcomed by scholars of fashion design and theory, historians of fashion and those interested in theories of warfare and military science.

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