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ACA-
DEMIC
ABLE-
ISM

DISABILITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic Ableism

Disability and Higher Education

JAY TIMOTHY DOLMAGE

Cover description for accessibility: The cover features bold colors and bold,
oversize typography. Against a black background the word ACADEMIC is
written in white and the word ABLEISM in red. The cover is not wide enough
to accommodate the size of these words, so the words are intentionally
broken: ACA-, then below this DEMIC, then below this ABLE- and then ISM
(suggesting among other things that something in academia is broken). To the
left is a small photograph of the sculpture *Untitled* (Spiral Staircase) by Peter
Coffin. The sculpture consists of metal stairs that go nowhere, but instead
curve back into themselves in one continuous tangle. The author's name, Jay
Timothy Dolmage, appears in the top left corner; at the bottom of the page is
the subtitle of the book, DISABILITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

The Retrofit

Poet, scholar, and activist Stephen Kuusisto, from his blog *Planet of the Blind*:

"Higher education administrators tend to imagine that 'someone else' will 'take care' of 'those people' who have disabilities. American higher education still imagines that the Victorian approach to disability is acceptable–that the disabled are taken care of by people who will read to them in the dark." ("Higher Education," n.p.)

As mentioned, this book is organized around three spatial metaphors. Now that we have discussed steep steps our first metaphor, we'll move on to explore and analyze a second one, the retrofit, characterized by structures like ramps and curb cuts.

This chapter begins on the White House lawn, where the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George Herbert Walker Bush over 25 years ago, in 1990. There is a famous image that shows Bush signing the Act into being. He is flanked on either side by disability rights activists Evan Kemp and Harold Wilke to his right, and Sandra Parrino and Justin Dart on his left. This image takes a prominent place at the Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. In fact, the ADA and the Clean Air Act are two of the most celebrated accomplishments memorialized in this library. Both can be seen as totally emblematic of the retrofit. Not just because, quite technically, the Clean

Air Act and the ADA have created a huge industry out of retrofitting. But also because something like the ADA might be seen to activate the late-capitalist, neoliberal co-optation of progressive values within a token and minimalistic framework. In simpler terms, the ADA gets talked about as a huge leap in human rights, but it delivers very little. In fact, this is how it does most of its damage: it ensures that only very little gets done. Thousands of very little things like ramps get created, and this may in fact stall progress on much bigger issues.

Lennard Davis has argued that, "certainly, an ADA could not pass today" (*Enabling Acts* 8). And as historian of disability activism Mary Johnson has shown, the ADA was a "highly compromised piece of legislation," and almost immediately took "a beating in both the court of law and the court of public opinion" (127). In her words, "critics of the ADA have successfully cast people who use the law as malcontents who hurt the rest of us. Many Americans have fallen for the argument that there are 'disabled people' and 'the rest of us'—the former divided into the truly disabled (read: deserving but few) and the fakers" (Johnson, 150).[1] The ADA has followed similar patterns of "progress and retrenchment" to laws meant to promote racial equity and equality. There is progress, then there is backlash, laws are diluted or not enforced, and exclusions are maintained.

Take for example the earlier image of a young black woman crawling backward up the Capitol steps. In other pictures from this protest, a much younger girl was pictured. This young woman was Jennifer Kee-lan, and she was just eight years old when she got out of her wheelchair to climb the steps and take part in this protest—and had her picture taken. Jennifer was actually consulted when the ADA was written not long after the protest, and she wanted to ensure that she would be able to ride on the same bus with her sister, thus ensuring that public transit was covered. She earned an award for her contributions in 1990, when the law was passed. But when she was interviewed in 2015, 25 years later, she was struggling to find accessible housing in Colorado, and had experienced periods of homelessness. One of the authors of the ADA, Jennifer said that in reality, currently, the law was altogether too easy to avoid and ignore, adding that she was still climbing steep steps (access "The Little Girl").

For instance, although laws like the ADA are supposed to have created a much more accessible Internet, research has shown that "the way that the disability rights law currently stands allows the practices of private, non-profit, and public entities to undermine the overarching

goals of the law in terms of accessible technology" (Wentz et al., n.p.). In fact, "the law encourages the creation of inaccessible information and communication technologies that may eventually become accessible, but often do not. The current state of the law allows for separate but equal, but usually results in simply unequal" (Wentz et al., n.p.). This separation brings us a long way from the promise of the ADA, and reveals that in fact disability law can often be placed directly in the way of disability justice.

In Canada, there is similar legislation, such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). While the AODA is relatively new, and is relatively untested legally, it is already invoked as a sort of specter of punishment—it is rarely mentioned without also discussing the fines that will be incurred if it is violated (up to $100,000 a day) or the "lawsuits waiting to happen." Yet there are no formal mechanisms for reporting violations—and so it continues to exist purely as a threat—while it also divides the population between disabled and nondisabled, thus constructing disabled bodies as part of this threat.

This threat seems only to be increasing (as threats generally do). As Hua Hsu wrote in the *New Yorker*, 2015 was the "year of the imaginary college student." In mainstream publications and higher educational periodicals alike "there were tales of students seeking 'trigger warnings' before being exposed to potentially upsetting class materials" among other grievances and "every week seemed to bring additional evidence for the emerging archetype of the hypersensitive college student" (n.p.). Hsu critiques these students, but also more generously suggests that "perhaps it goes both ways, and the reason that college stories have garnered so much attention this year is our general suspicion, within the real world, that the system no longer works" (n.p.). It would be worthwhile to try and apply this same suggestion, at the very least, to students with disabilities seeking accommodations, because to seek an accommodation or a trigger warning is not to ask for a special advantage within a world in which your needs are centered—rather, it is to identify your needs within a framework in which everyone (from teachers to administrators to pundits) seems to know what college students need, and who they are, better than they do themselves; a world in which any small, real adjustment can be quickly inflated into a "state of the kids these days" fictionalization; a realm in which asking for help is immediately stigmatized. It should not be difficult to imagine that accommodations for students with disabilities not only exist in a learning environment that no longer works but also that these accommodations can often increase what's broken.

The picture on the White House lawn has become canonical—but it also centers Bush Sr.'s role in this civil rights breakthrough, and White (House)-washes or Bushwhacks the actual activist history. So the memorials in the Bush Library should serve to remind us of the ways that the retrofit can be used to subsume and overwrite movements toward diversity and inclusion. Retrofits address inequities and inaccessibility, but do so in ways that reinforce ableism, turning disabled people into charity cases or villains, while situating teachers, administrators—and even presidents—as heroes.

So my second spatial metaphor—and the concept organizing this second chapter—is the retrofit. Retrofits like ramps "fix" space, but retrofits also have a chronicity—a timing and a time logic—that renders them highly temporary yet also relatively unimportant. Thus the experience of seeking a retrofit usually reveals that they are slow to come and fast to expire. Anyone who has waited for a wheelchair bus, or the key to an accessible elevator, or waited around while either of these things broke down and needed to be repaired, can identify this chronicity or timing.[2]

In my approach, I mentioned that disablism can never be fully disconnected from ableism. Academia powerfully mandates able-bodiedness and able-mindedness, as well as other forms of social and communicative hyperability, and this can best be defined as ableism. But what we also learn from higher education is that disablism is almost always wrapped into, and sometimes hidden within, ableism. Retrofits help us to understand this relationship. That is, when the accommodations that students with disabilities have access to, over and over again, are intended to simply temporarily even the playing field for them in a single class or activity, it is clear that these retrofits are not designed for people to live and thrive with a disability, but rather to temporarily make the disability go away. The aspiration here is not to empower students to achieve with disability, but to achieve around disability or against it, or in spite of it. The disablism built into that overarching desire for able-bodiedness and able-mindedness comes from the belief that disability should not and cannot be something that is positively claimed and lived-within. There is a structural ableism to the university: a way of repeatedly rewarding bodies and minds and forms of communication and sociality that are the right (constrained) shape. But there is also an explicit disablism that denigrates specific bodies and minds and forms of communication and sociality. The retrofit is one way in which we address structural ableism (for instance an inaccessible space) with means that simply highlight and accentuate and invite disablism—for instance, singling out the body that needs to ask for access.

Fig. 4. The iBot Climbing Wheelchair. Toyota Corporation.

Take for example the notion (from a recent Vice article) that we should "Repair Disabilities, Not Sidewalks," or this image of the iBot Climbing Wheelchair:

The image depicts a modern black, electric wheelchair with six wheels. The four large wheels on the chair can rest on two separate steps of a set of stairs, though (very notably) there is no one in the chair. The smaller front set of swiveling wheels on the chair is up in

the air. The chair appears to have a cantilevering system that would allow the individual sitting in the chair to remain upright as the chair goes down the stairs, though one would have to imagine that there would be a substantial bump each time the wheels moved down a step (access Istvan).

Inventions such as this, and the accompanying argument that it would be better to create stair-climbing wheelchairs than build ramps or elevators, or simply create level entrances to more buildings, actually distill what happens when disability is "accommodated" in higher education more clearly than the metaphor of the ramp does. A ramp, even when it is mainly used by disabled people, exists in the public sphere. But a primary message around accommodation is that disability is isolating and individuating, something located within a single and singular body. The demand is that that one body be adapted to a curriculum (or structure or terrain) that is otherwise unwelcoming, inaccessible, inhospitable to that body and mind. The climbing wheelchair may not even be very good at driving on anything but stairs; it may not be particularly safe to use on most stairs anyhow; it may be big and ugly; it likely is tremendously expensive. It is estimated that the iBot costs $25,000 US. But these are all expected outcomes and seem like reasonable problems or burdens for the individual disabled body to deal with in an ableist culture.

Moving from purely physical examples to a broader view of access, a trigger warning can also be seen as a kind of retrofit. For much more on the backlash against trigger warnings from a disability studies perspective, readers should access Angela Carter's excellent "Teaching with Trauma: Trigger Warnings, Feminism, and Disability Pedagogy." As Carter writes, "An accurate understanding of trauma and triggers situates trauma in the context of disability, not discomfort, and it illustrates the persistent misconceptions surrounding disability and mental illness" (n.p.). Further: "when faculty position themselves against trigger warnings because of justifiable fears of increased work load, expanded emotional labor, or risks of retribution, they create a false binary between one group experiencing institutional exploitation and another. The needs of faculty and staff need not be positioned against the needs of students" (n.p.). In "Weepy Rhetoric, Trigger Warnings, and the Work of Making Mental Illness Visible in the Writing Classroom," Sarah Orem and Neil Simpkins also write that "because they call attention to the emotional pain of students, trigger warnings tap into longstanding assumptions about mental illness—namely, that mentally ill persons are merely malingering, dwelling unnecessarily with emotional pain, and in need

to toughening up" (n.p.). At its most simple, a trigger warning is a way to admit that abuse happens at universities. Thus, when professors and universities ban them, what they are banning is the mention of their own complicity in violence—this is an easy and a natural thing for universities to want to do. They neither want to admit that they have students in pain nor to admit that they could be the cause of that pain. Instead, professors and universities want to position themselves as working with whole students who they improve. Refusing to use trigger warnings, or using them purely as a thoughtless preface or add-on, prevents us from having a real conversation about trauma. The steep steps approach to teaching refuses the idea of trigger warnings. The retrofitted approach uses trigger warnings carelessly, simply throwing a TW on a syllabus, refusing to recognize that, as Orem and Simpkins argue, "trigger warnings frequently mark pain that is explicitly gendered or racialized, like rape or police violence[;] they perform the kind of work that . . . is forbidden by dominant systems of oppression" (n.p.). A trigger warning can save a student (or a reader of a book) from being, metaphorically, thrown down a set of stairs. But trigger warnings also need to incite a larger discussion about structural ableism and systemic violence.

All of this said, in an educational context, we will likely continue to have to work with and through the logic of the retrofit. The previous chapter on the "steep steps" should help us to recognize this. But we also need to allow for an environment in which students can claim difference without fear of discrimination and in which this claiming doesn't simply result in the student assuming all of the risk. Disability also can't be seen as something frozen in time and frozen in othered bodies—it has to be embraced as an always-everywhere, as a material but always changing reality. But we need retrofits that alter the negative impact of disability for the better, rather than preserving the stigma, the delay, and the conditional and temporary nature of access. In the classroom, we can't simply expect disabled students to strap into the ideological, pedagogical equivalent of a climbing wheelchair.

Defeat Devices

A recent controversy about Volkswagen car engines highlights the negative nature of so many retrofits and offers us a perhaps-better term: the "defeat device." These are defined as technologies that respond to or monitor engines and then regulate the emission control system to

reduce its effectiveness. The devices could basically trick the emission control system so that the car might be able to pass emissions inspections, but would still, in practice, be able to emit noxious chemicals. These devices had little purpose beyond confounding the purpose of emissions controls. Likewise, many accommodations are actually designed only to meet the legal standard and actually serve to mask other forms of discrimination, prevent positive and ongoing change, and encourage teachers and administrators in their game of make-believe.

Allow me to match this with a recent anecdote. A colleague recently posted on social media that disabled students had come to them with institutional accommodation forms, but said, "Actually the way you've designed this course, there's nothing I need changed to accommodate me." Ostensibly, they had seen the syllabus and decided that the class was going to meet their needs. It sounds like a nice, feel-good story. But it actually may be evidence of the syllabus as defeat device. The relatively new practice of turning the "ask" for accommodations into in-person exchanges between students and teachers lends itself to the kind of huge power imbalance that could make a student say something like this even when it isn't true, especially if this is the type of student who wants to make a good first impression.[3] Further, just as we now know that emissions can't be effectively monitored in a single test, teaching takes place over the course of a semester and every class offers new opportunities for accommodation and for exclusion.

In a *Chronicle of Higher Education* essay published in March 2017, Gail A. Hornstein recounts a similar exchange, albeit lamenting "Why I Dread the Accommodations Talk." Her argument is that she actually knows much better than students do, or offices of Disability Services do, what accommodations a student who experiences panic attacks needs.

The major "defeat device" in teaching, then, may be our own magical thinking, or self-congratulation, or willingness to insert ourselves as more expert than students or disability officers. And I say our here intentionally: the teacher in the first scenario could easily have been me or might be me in the future. And certainly, there are readers who perhaps see themselves as the teacher in one or both of the above scenarios. But the students in the first anecdote seem to have closed off the possibility of asking for more later. They have endorsed the accessibility of the class before it has really even begun—and that assumes that we know exactly in what ways a course will be or become inaccessible before it begins. In the second scenario, the teacher moves from a perhaps-reasonable critique of the accommodations process into a move that strips the student of agency, and bypasses her rights.

In these instances, we can find many possible defeat devices in our pedagogy—and we must. But we also must interrogate the contractual moment of asking for accommodations, as well as the legalistic framework within which this exchange is governed. Sticking with the bare minimum accommodations can be dangerous, and so can assuming that we know better. Both of these responses work as defeat devices.

Dale Katherine Ireland identifies defeat devices that work as "uncanny accommodations": they seem like they should work (perhaps to the office of disability services, perhaps to the student, perhaps to the teacher), and they just don't (n.p.). [4] For instance, the single most-applied accommodation at universities is extended time to take tests and exams. Yet Laura Sokal and others have shown that there is little research showing the efficacy of this adjustment. This doesn't mean the accommodation doesn't work for some students, sometimes—it just shows that offices of disability services generally offer a very narrow range of possibilities to students, with little engineering for difference. In this climate, accommodations can be much more about being seen to do something rather than searching for the right thing. And, on the other hand, we cannot assume that teachers know best. Hornstein, for example, convinces herself that it is best for the student not to really receive any accommodations at all, and assumes that the student succeeded in her class because of this tough-love attitude, not in spite of it.

Cover Your Ass

As Jeffrey Willett and Mary Jo Deegan write, many retrofits are "far too limited in number or implementation," or are simply absurd (146). Their list of examples nicely illustrates the ways that retrofitting can preserve exclusion:

> The number of [accessible] hotel rooms and parking spaces cannot meet demands . . . accessible rooms [are provided] in largely inaccessible buildings . . . the person with a disability [may have to] travel two or three times farther to enter a building than the distance needed to use the able-bodied entrance. Ramps leading to these entrances may be the last cleared of ice and snow. Elevators may be poorly situated, slow, or too small. Many large lecture halls and movie theatres force people in wheelchairs to sit at the back. (146)

Fig. 5. "Katie Lalley's Access Ramp." Courtesy of SWNS.com.

As with the example of the "defeat device," altogether too many retrofits preserve or perpetuate exclusion rather than address it. They are about covering your ass, legally—not about creating anything like real access.

Take, for instance, this "retrofitted" ramp added to the front of public housing in Clydebank, Scotland, and think about how the retrofit physically slows the young person who requested that ramp, while foregrounding their status as a "misfit" in capitalist society, both as someone who lives in subsidized housing, and as someone subject to a disingenuous and perhaps even dangerous nod to inclusion.

The image shows a view of the concrete ramp from the sidewalk in front of a small, red-brick, semidetached house. The ramp has 10 levels—it runs diagonally from side to side 10 times. The entire ramp is enclosed on both sides by heavy gauge steel railings. Imagine: How long does it take to get up or down this ramp? How does the ramp stigmatize the family, as every other home has a small grass lawn in front, but this house has thousands of kilograms of steel and concrete? This image distills the chronology (or the timing) and the absurdity of accommodation. The idea of offering an accessible entrance to this young woman is a good one; the implementation destroys or reverses this sentiment.

This is the house of a seven-year old girl who uses a wheelchair. Her mom petitioned the council of the public housing estate for access to

their house, and the response, after two years of lobbying, was this, taking up their entire yard and costing almost US$100,000. That all the articles about it mention this dollar value also helps to construct disability as a drain. But it is a terrifically depressing and perfect encapsulation of the logic of the retrofit: it took two years to get a terrible solution, one that marks their house out as a spectacle, one that will probably mean that seven year old has to spend about 30 minutes to get to her front door. The ramp makes an aesthetic statement, it is an ideology in steel—an object that has the wasting of time and the depletion of energies built into its bolts. The ramp also makes a plain statement about the ways that disability is built into the spaces and times of contemporary society. Retrofits like this are passive aggressive. In fact, passive aggression might describe the affect (or emotional life) of most retrofits. Passivity and aggression also seem to describe the timing of retrofits, as they so often aggressively delay access.

In relegating disability to the margins, retrofits serve as what might be called abeyance structures—perhaps allowing for access, but disallowing the possibility of action for change. Abeyance means to hold back, and this wheelchair ramp holds back and delays as much as it provides access. Retooling the gas engine, for example, might save gas, but it also might delay research into renewable fuel sources, or alternatives to the cult of the car.

That said, the retrofit, because it reveals what might be called an essential "supplementarity" in any culture or structure, is not wholly a bad thing. More simply, even the presence of ramps clues us in to the fact that buildings were planned and built poorly in the beginning. I am not, in fact, arguing against such accommodations. Instead, I hope to show how the presence of such temporary additions—limited in their time of effectiveness and in their space of implementation—will always point up the lack, the partiality of social and architectural structures. This lack shouldn't be either lamented or ignored, but rather addressed. The presence of retrofits cannot be seen as completing this lack, or filling in the holes.

Since the passage of the ADA in 1990, the public has begun to understand disability as an issue of space. This issue is constructed as a matter of compliance, as the dominant terminology of the act is the idea of reasonable accommodation. The "reason" of the medical and legal establishment, then, finally decides upon which accommodations are to be made. What this means in practice is that, in higher education, we witness a large industry of lawyers and HR managers and administrators

paid to determine what exactly can be gotten away with under the rubric of "undue hardship" or the "undue burden" of accommodations. For instance, as Stuart Selber has shown, schools like Cornell have determined that a university website does not need to be made accessible until it is read by a certain number of people (n.p.).[5] Shockingly, when the U.S Department of Education determined that thousands of hours of video teaching materials – 20,000 course videos – hosted by U.C Berkeley were not accessible, Berkeley simply yanked down the videos from public-facing sites rather than captioning them. The clear message is that accessibility is simply not worth it. An implicit message is that the mandate for accessibility 'spoils things' for everyone else (access "Erasing"). Making all sites accessible immediately, or when they are being built, is somehow an "undue burden" and not a "reasonable accommodation"; it is also rarely, rarely done.

Yet since the ADA, at the very least, people with disabilities have been given space. The construction of elevators or ramps instead of steep steps, these are well-intentioned ideas; they speak to our desire for equality. Yet, as Patricia Sullivan has written, this democratic ideal of equality, when faced with "a broad and diverse cross-section of American culture . . . in college classrooms" can also lead the university to respond with "a humane disregard for difference under an egalitarian ethic" (39). This egalitarian ethic might be labeled fairness. As Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel point out, however, fairness is an incredibly underdefined term. They argue that fairness is spatialized, metaphorized, as the "level playing field" (512). The retrofit—in my mind the contemporary even playing field response to disability—is a sort of cure, but halfhearted, and so it begins by negating disability and ends up only partially succeeding, thus leaving many people with disabilities in difficult positions.

The fact is, too often, we react to diversity instead of planning for it. We acknowledge that our students come from different places, and that they are headed in different directions, yet this does little to alter the vectors of our own pedagogy or teaching. Most often, the only time disability is spoken or written about in class is in the final line of the syllabus, when students are referred to Disability Services should they desire assistance.[6] The message to students is that disability is a supplementary concern—and then that it is not the teacher's concern, not really a part of the course; it's at the back door of the syllabus. The sentence about Disability Services gets the syllabus up to spec. Teachers deal with disability via the ideological equivalent of a ramp—disability as an identity category can come in the side or the back entrance, if it is to be included at all.

Like the saying "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," the retrofit also ensures that whatever accommodation happens in a single class stays in that class only. That is, we are encouraged, by the logic of the retrofit, to only change slightly for one student at one time, not to alter our teaching for all students in more permanent ways. Also, teachers are encouraged to view disability as something to be addressed only when it arises, never to let it extend beyond the classroom and into scholarship and service. The student must also ask for the same accommodations, chosen from a limited menu, again and again and again.

Of course, the intellectual implications of the retrofit are many. When we analyze the buildings of our universities and cities, we can understand how thought about disability has almost always been a side-thought or an afterthought: count the appended ramps, the painted-in parking spots, the stair-lifts. Their presence should not make us feel satisfied; they should call up the repeated, layered, nearly overwhelming presence of exclusive structures. To repeat myself: this should always remind us that, if rhetoric is the circulation of discourse through the body, then spaces and institutions cannot be disconnected from the bodies within them, the bodies they selectively exclude, and the bodies that actively intervene to reshape them.

So it would be useful—in society as a whole and within higher education in particular, to make clear distinctions between retrofits and defeat devices. Too many retrofits do not actually increase access. Further, we must work to decouple the presence of accommodations from the notion of access. Accommodations are accommodations: they cannot promise anything like actual, real access. Finally, when accommodations are present, we need to better understand their true emotional and physical and temporal costs.

The Affect of Accommodation

Accommodations are carried out, or otherwise anchored, by the actions of university offices of learning assistance or disability services—or more recently and more euphemistically, by AccessAbility services.[7] These offices are, first and foremost, concerned with enforcing the reasonable accommodations mandated by the ADA or other laws. The following message, used by Southern Mississippi University ODA, or Office of Disability Accommodations, describes this process:

> Students wanting to receive accommodations for a disability must complete an ODA application and provide documentation of the disability. Documentation must include a statement explaining how the disability, with or without mitigating circumstances, limits a major life area, thus impacting a student's participation in courses, programs, services, activities, and facilities. ODA does not assist students in obtaining appropriate documentation, nor does ODA refer students for eligibility evaluations. Students who do not have current documentation of a disability and who request referrals for such evaluations will be provided a resource directory of appropriate community agencies and professionals. All fees associated with procuring documentation are the responsibility of the student. (n.p.)

Clearly, another entailment of the accommodation model is the idea that it is the student him or herself who must prove that they need accommodations, and argue for them reasonably.[8] As Joe Stramondo has pointed out, in an article entitled "The Medicalization of Reasonable Accommodation," "using medical experts as the gatekeepers" is a way to avoid "fraud"—but this amounts to a "disincentive for an already marginalized group to claim what is theirs. In effect, through their medicalization, the reasonable accommodations of the ADA have, at least partially, become barriers to the inclusion of disabled people in the academy" (n.p.).

There is a clear rhetoric in this accommodation discourse as well, an attitude of indifference toward the individual, and a refusal to provide support until this support is legally mandated. Following this process, the accommodations offered still demand that the student must accommodate him or herself to the dominant logic of classroom pedagogy. Once we begin to go down the road of accommodating disability, we are also admitting that dominant pedagogies privilege those who can most easily ignore their bodies, and those whose minds work the most like the minds of their teachers (likely meaning, as well, those who look much like their teachers). And yet the keyword of the retrofit is compliance. Despite the fact that we certainly hope none of our students is holding up "compliance" as one of their key goals for their education—we hope that graduates won't just be writing "I am highly compliant" on their job letters or personal profiles postgraduation—compliance continues to be the key goal for accommodation and accessibility.

What this focus on compliance does, in the words of Stephen Kuusisto, is to turn the request for accommodation into an invitation for "gestural violence":

[P]redicated by inconvenience—a blind graduate student needs multiple streams of accessible information if she's to succeed. The Dean or Associate Dean finds this request threatening for she knows nothing about the ways and means of delivering accessible information. It's vexatious, the request, the ignoble "ask" because the system is incommodious. . . . It works by deflection. It works by assumptions. If you were a better disabled person you wouldn't be bothering me. If you were less blind you'd be easier to deal with. If only you had a better attitude about life. Gestural violence is automatic. It is invariably disgraceful, shockingly unacceptable, and yet, tied to dominance, it is widespread within higher education. ("Disability," n.p.)

Another response comes from teachers who "[find] or, if necessary [invent] an extreme example of [a disabled] student's 'demands'" ("Becoming Visible," 378). The validity or veracity of a student's claim to disability is debated by the teacher, rather than defined by the student or even by the legal and medical paradigm. Students with learning disabilities come to be seen as "jumping the queue, cutting the line, pushing patient, suffering 'average' kids out of the way and into the shadows while they, waving their label, rush to the front to grab an oversized piece of the shrinking pie" (Brueggemann et al., 378).[9]

On the other extreme, accommodation is often seen as an act of charity. Really good teachers and administrators, who really care about "them," help them to overcome themselves. Accommodation requests thus also get the "tone police" treatment—where students are encouraged to perform the role of gracious, thankful subject, to praise good professors and administrators and never complain. There is no feedback loop: if an accommodation is given, the student is expected to be fully thankful and happy, regardless of the fit of the accommodation or its efficacy. The affect of accommodation is just as tightly prescribed and prescripted as are its pedagogical or classroom parameters. Or, more simply said: students have to feel and act fully accommodated at all times, even when they are not.

So, a student becomes the object of the medical gaze, and hence the object of therapeutic and corrective pedagogy. Or the student evades this process and remains invisible. Or the student is seen as flouting disability instead of pulling herself up by the bootstraps. Or their needs are deflected and defeated. Or the academy makes (a limited range of) accommodations its moral mission, making students with disabilities objects of pity. With only these possibilities, and with these possibilities

reinforcing one another, students with disabilities face a difficult terrain.

Disability support office employees and researchers Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel have examined the rhetoric of accommodation at length. Their work is of interest as it sorts through a history of disciplinary attitudes toward learning disability. They advocate for what they call "underground" accommodations, through a program of Alternative Assistance. Such a program allows students to access accommodations somewhat secretly, in concert with teachers and disability services offices, and this mitigates some of the stigma an individual student might face in coming out in class. The program also extends across a student's university career, so that accommodations aren't just temporary patches over pedagogy. But, of course, nothing is done to confront stigmatization as a cultural problem. The message is that disability should be secret—disability must sink below the mainstream; surface pedagogy-as-usual is not disturbed. Disability is alternative to classroom culture. What the authors don't mention in their article is that the program they refer to and advocate for, through the Strategic Alternative Learning Technologies center at the University of Arizona, costs students $2,100 per semester, on top of the cost of securing documentation of their disability, and of course normal tuition. The price tag reveals another problem: being non-normal costs the individual. Across North America, the cost of disability is a controversial issue—many schools want to dissuade students with disabilities from applying and enrolling, because it is believed that their needs cost more. As Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchkosky point out, "the presence of disabled students at a university represents, for some, the requirement of additional expense . . . a drain upon university resources" ("Putting Disability in Its Place," 219). Illegal and unconscionable as it is, this market is allowed to discipline the student body, effecting restraints and implanting normative self-regulations in student, teacher, and institution, concurrently implementing or sustaining, or both, the same logics in society. More simply, all other students cost money to educate as well, of course—and most of them also pay tuition. But students with disabilities are (in general) the only ones who are uniquely constructed economically—they cost too much. Other students are seen as investments to be protected. Yet campus policies are generally designed to protect the university from disabled students—as physical threats, as threats to the intellectual freedom of educators, as lawsuit threats, as always-already cheating the system.

For example, recently disgraced Mount St. Mary's University (Mary-

land) president Simon Newman publicly discussed a plan to find out which first-year students might be suffering from depression and kick these students out before they could impact the university's retention rates. Infamously, he likened these students to bunnies that didn't need to be cuddled. Instead, he told faculty, "You just have to drown the bunnies . . . put a Glock to their heads" (Young Lee). Newman, however, felt he was just running the university like a good business. If funding relied on having better retention numbers, and he estimated that forcing 20–25 students out immediately would increase these numbers by 4–5 percent, then that was what needed to be done. As rhetoric and writing scholar Pegeen Reichert Powell argues, citing earlier work on retrofitting, "retention efforts are a kind of retrofit that, like basic-writing courses or ramps for people with physical disabilities, treat failure as the problem of the individual rather than that of the institution" (98). This is just one of the by-products of the "good business" of academic administration.

This managerial rhetoric is unsurprising. It is part of a well-noticed, well-understood trend. More and more often, we see chief executive officers (like Newman) hired away from the private sector to run colleges and universities, even large research schools. This replaces the general trend of having academia "self-governed" by academics, even at the presidential level. Of course, in analyzing *The Emergence of the American University* at the turn of the 20th century, Laurence Veysey pointed out that even at that time there were two types of academics: those who insulated themselves from the public and even from students in order to perform research, and those "administrators who might almost as easily have promoted any other sort of American enterprise," and knew how to run and talk about higher education as a business with American values (443). More recently, we would suggest that academics have what Donna Strickland calls a "managerial unconscious"—one that syncs up with the demand for white collar workers. So, whether unconsciously implanted in the minds of academic administrators, or overt in the words and deeds of the chief executive officer administrators imported into academia, this business model has specifically dangerous ways to respond to and to construct disability.

As more colleges and universities are run like businesses, and as governments continue to defund schools so that they need to rely more and more on private funding, which increases this orientation to a business model, we can expect that disability will continue to be constructed as a drain, a threat, something to be eradicated or erased—not worth retaining.

From Eradication to Negotiation

The normative demand in academia is that disability must disappear. Accommodation rhetoric echoes this demand in slightly less loud, but equally insistent, tones. A disability studies perspective asks us to think about how what we do enables and disables, once we allow that disability exists. Inclusion should mean the presence of significant difference— difference that rhetorically reconstructs—though often people with disabilities have such change-agency qualified or revoked. Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell interrogate the rhetoric of inclusion as it frames technological issues for people with disabilities:

> People with disabilities are expected to cut their cloth to fit the temporarily able-bodied world, and its new media technologies. Paradoxically, in its desire for the same, inclusion always requires the "other" to stay in its niche as it is pressed into the mold of the normal, rather than engaging with the real alterity and difference in an "us" relationship. (149)

Inclusion can be used as a panacea, a word that might register the presence of difference, while keeping its participation delayed. Patricia Dunn has also argued that, "total immersion in the mainstream [for students with disabilities], while not altering the mainstream, will not work" (115). Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson has suggested that people with disabilities often find themselves "arguing, or being pushed towards the argument, 'we just want to be treated like everyone else,' thereby diluting the transformative potential of their participation in the public forum" ("Re-Thinking," 159). The perspective of disability, then, shouldn't just be included in the classroom, shouldn't just be reflected in the design of our teaching practices and technologies; it must change what we do.

I want to suggest that, in some cases, a retrofitting can be useful, can aid students in their navigation of this space—just as an elevator or a ramp might enable mobility. But we need a more sophisticated form of negotiation in order to retrofit structures and practices in the best possible way. We need to think through the academic spaces that we inhabit and build and the bodies that are written and ruled by—and that rewrite—these spaces. With the above-mentioned attitudes toward disability, negotiation is rarely evident. Instead, people with and (supposedly) without dis-

abilities are forced to work around an inaccessible environment, never cooperating because too often their concerns are perceived as divergent (or in competition). We need to allow for an environment in which students can claim difference without fear of discrimination. This environment must include disability—currently, it rarely does. Further, disability cannot be seen as something one person diagnoses in another. Disability must be seen as socially negotiated; people with disabilities must be seen as the moderators, the agents of this negotiation.

In "Disability Geography," Deborah Metzel and Pamela Walker emphasize the importance of negotiative roles for people with disabilities. The authors write that "in deliberate contrast to traditional service models [for people with disabilities] . . . individualized approaches are designed to enhance community presence and participation" (127). This individualized negotiation would expand "social-spatial lives of people with disabilities and [promote] increased control and spatial choice" (127). John Dewey, in *Experience and Education*, quite clearly emphasizes the importance of negotiation. He writes that "the principle of interaction makes it clear that failure of adaptation of material to needs and capacities of individuals may cause an experience to be non-educative quite as much as a failure of an individual to adapt himself to the material" (47). For Dewey, this represents "a failure in education, a failure to learn one of the most important lessons of life, that of mutual accommodation and adaptation" (68). For Dewey, this adaptation was to be ongoing—he united interaction and situation as his key concepts of education when he wrote about this topic back in the 1930s (41). Simply, there could be no set materials and methods—instead of viewing set approaches to set groups of students as intentional and rational, he foregrounded the role of changing environments, the context of a community, the wide diversity of learners, and argued that "lack of mutual accommodation [makes] the process of teaching and learning accidental" (45). Dewey's is a difficult position to argue for in an era of standardized testing and "no child left behind" curriculum. The position that intentional, clinical, standardized education would be only accidentally successful, and that only co-intentional and situated education could be malleable enough for success is hard to make nowadays. Yet without something like this shift, we will continue to have accidental success for some students, anchored in the structural exclusion of others. This structural exclusion will be abetted and allowed by forms of temporary, tokenized, and tenuous inclusion.

Digital Curb Cuts (to Nowhere)

One of the most prominent examples of the retrofit has always been the curb cut—dips incorporated or cut into the sidewalk so that wheelchairs can roll up rather than needing to be lifted over this lip. These cuts eventually allowed others to more easily move around—with strollers, on skateboards and bikes, and so on. Back in 1999, Steve Jacobs wrote about the "Electronic Curb-Cut Effect," showing that "unusual things happen when products are designed to be accessible to people with disabilities. It wasn't long after sidewalks were redesigned to accommodate wheelchair users that the benefits of curb cuts began to be realized by everyone" (n.p.). His argument was that Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 could and should be used to create digital or electronic curb cuts for all. As Cynthia Waddell has written, Section 255 "was the first product design law to attempt to drive the market to create accessible products. It is not a traditional civil rights law since it is an accessible design law that does not depend on the filing of a complaint for its requirements to be enforced" (342). Jacobs created a long list, with links, of the technologies that were originally developed for people with disabilities but now benefit all: from the first typewriter, created in 1808 for a blind woman, to 1972 when Julia Child's cooking show became the first nationally broadcast open-captioned program and Vinton Cerf developed e-mail within ARPANET, in part because he was hard of hearing and used a kind of early e-mail to communicate with his Deaf wife. We could add recent examples like Optical Character Recognition, revolutionized by Ray Kurzweil to create a reading machine for blind people. This progress then quickly led to scanners, online research databases from *Lexis Nexis* to *Google Books*, and now a million smartphone apps allowing people to translate foreign-language signs, solve equations by taking pictures of them, and on and on. Put together speech recognition and OCR, and smart phones can be seen as terrific assistive devices for people with disabilities—but we also start to view these "assistive" features as the keys to almost everything a smart phone does. Goggin and Newell have looked at the history of cell phones, suggesting that "disability has played a crucial yet overlooked role" in the development of the technology" (155). As Sara Hendren and Caitlyn Lynch argue, "all technology is assistive technology" (n.p.). Or, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson puts it, the smartphone

> will read messages and information out loud to you whether you are blind or sighted. It will produce words on the screen from your voice whether you can use a keyboard or not. It will show you pictures of

people communicating through voices or with sign language. It will allow you to adjust the size of your text regardless of your eyesight. It will allow you to swipe a variety of touch commands with a single finger no matter how many fingers you have. . . . while smart technologies such as Siri might seem like just a lot of fun to some people, they contribute to a more democratic society—something of enormous value to us all. ("Siri," n.p.)

As Graham Pullin writes, "this challenges the so-called trickle-down effect whereby advances in mainstream design are expected to find their way into specialist products for people with disabilities, smaller markets that could not have supported their development" (xiii). Instead, things created for these smaller markets become useful—terrifically, unforeseeably useful—for all. For Pullin, or Garland-Thomson, or Hendren and Lynch, all of this provides evidence of the value of disability in design. Katie Ellis and Gerard Goggin also write about even more recent developments such as locative media technologies designed by and for people with disabilities—and how what begins as an accommodation broadly shapes social practices (272).

But, there are other trickle-down or trickle-in effects. Once many of these technologies are championed as being good for all, or once the advocacy and the politicized arguments that drove the creation of many of these technologies have drifted away, these same innovations can lose their efficacy. For instance, Sean Zdenek shows how most captions are based on a "correspondence model" wherein they "merely duplicate the soundtrack" yet miss much of the rhetorical richness of the action on screen (232). This incomplete model may be fine for those who like to have captions sometimes when they watch sports in a noisy bar, for instance. But it doesn't cut it for those who truly rely on captioning every day.

This idea of an accommodation "not cutting it" might lead us to memes of "curb cuts to nowhere"—images, posted online, of ramps and curb cuts that literally lead nowhere. There are Facebook groups devoted to images of these redundant or useless ramps and curb cuts and a Google image search returns hundreds of results. One such example comes from Massey University in New Zealand, posted by an organization called Accessibility New Zealand. Here I will reproduce not the image, but their description of the image and commentary on it:

The road is significantly lower than the building's level—nearly 2 meters. There is a lawn area around the building, with a sharp incline leading down to the road. A path was built from the building to the

road, with steps. A few months ago, the steps area was redone, with a cement brick retaining wall on each side of the steps, and a curb cut onto the road. There are no sidewalks by the road on either side of the stairs. While sidewalks would be safer for pedestrians currently forced to use the road, because of the retaining walls, putting sidewalks would be difficult at best. So we end up with a curb cut leading to steps. Completely useless. It almost seems to me to be a case of "let's put a curb cut because the regulations call for them." Mindless application of the standards, with little or no thinking. (n.p.)

As an example of an outcome of a (perhaps well-meaning) interest convergence, here we have a curb cut that very well may be nice for ambulatory pedestrians, but those folks can also likely (for now) walk up that set of stairs and navigate the path through the grass at the top of them. These are a physical manifestation of a poorly written caption, a podcast without a transcript (another of Zdenek's areas of research), or a website for a disability services office that also has no alt text for the images it uses.

Consider, alongside this physical structure, another digital analogue: as Melissa Helquist has powerfully shown (and demonstrated), the ways that a screen reader moves through an inaccessible webpage can be terrifically frustrating for a user—and terrifically time consuming, with the user needing to jump back and forth through an audio file to get the information they need. Likewise, alt text for key information like charts and graphs within scientific articles very rarely offer anything but a basic title for the table, but no description at all (Helquist). So, blind or low-vision readers either do not have access to the information others are given, or they have to take very roundabout routes to get it, on a page-by-page basis.

The same rule generally applies for things like audio descriptions of films (when someone is describing the visual action on the screen). As Catherine Kudlick and Susan Schweik argue, "like the captions provided for deaf and hard-of-hearing people, the usual 'service' approach to audio description takes an existing production and overdubs a description for blind people. Most typically think of it as an access practice, an access aid that discreetly inserts information so that a blind person can enjoy visual media along with sighted family and friends" (n.p.). But it also isolates "all blind people in an audience in a group" and "this almost clinical approach to description may have come from the history of rehab and other services for the blind; if description helps blind

people get schooled, get jobs, good. But if it is about having fun or blind people questioning what is being presented to them or taking a lead . . ." (n.p.). In the classroom, the law dictates that we need to describe visual content on slides or video; but we also take a clinical approach to this practice (or we outsource it) instead of recognizing that careful, thick description of visual content would be great teaching for all students; or that if we shared this work or made it more responsive to the questions and needs of students, it would become even better teaching.

As mentioned, the "curb cut to nowhere" images have commonly been posted as a form of backlash against accommodations. The message is: Hey, look at how silly this fad of "architectural correctness" is. Yet the images also accurately reflect an absurdist critique of the late capitalist industry of retrofitting, or they show how most accessible design is facile, or so long as it begins addressing an inequity, or looks as though it is addressing an inequity, that is enough. The accessibility "fix" is unsatisfactory, clashes with the other messages of the space, and in fact ruins or invalidates the architectural character of the building. Disability itself is clearly "misfit" by the ableist or "normate template" that the campus was built upon (access Hamraie, n.p.). The same thing happens with alt text and with visual description in the examples above. We create digital curb cuts and ramps that lead nowhere just as readily as we create concrete ones.

#AcademicAbleism

This said, curb cuts to nowhere, and other memes of accessibility-gone-wrong, themselves can become a way to circulate antiableist critique. Thus, the curb cuts and the absurd ramps could be added to other recent online movements intended to call out colleges and universities for their inaccessibility or for the ways that their existing accommodation processes are insufficient or absurd retrofits.

Curb cuts to nowhere often depict incompletely or absurdly retrofitted academic spaces—as in the example discussed above from Clydebank University. So let me end this section by suggesting that the retrofits, curb cuts, interest convergences, and other forces and structures that make the world an ableist landscape digitally and concretely also provide us opportunities to mobilize and connect (often using digital tools). For example, the #academicableism hashtag was originally created by @zaranosaur on March 20, 2014, as a way to protest

the *Guardian* (UK) newspaper's coverage of the mental health "survival strategies" of graduate students—implying that individual students needed to work harder to accommodate themselves to academic life. The hashtag has had a terrifically long life, and has created a network and community of students and faculty, exposing much of the hypocrisy around, discrimination toward, and debasement of disability within higher education.

For most students who seek accommodations for our classes, they aren't allowed to know what the actual range of accommodations might be. Instead, they have to go in to Disability Services, offer up their diagnosis, and have that diagnosis matched with a stock set of accommodations. This foregrounding of diagnosis gets at what Ellen Samuels calls the "biocertification" of disability—a "fantasy of identification" that follows from a belief that something like disability is fixed and verifiable and scientifically visible (9). The fantasy also entails that disability is not verifiable in any other way—it is a purely biological fact and viewed best (or perhaps only) by a medical professional. Yet the fantasy also allows the scientific basis of disability to be bent toward other, more subjective language and processes. As long as the biocertification is foregrounded, the process can then devolve into something much less rigid. So, in other exchanges, students might be asked by disability services to "tell us what you need"—and again students have to guess.

A student once summarized the accommodation process as being like the game *Battleship*—you can't perceive what's on the other side of the board, because there is a barrier there, and so you have to just keep trying to guess where the other player's ships are—or where the relevant accommodations are, if they exist. You throw your diagnosis over, and hope that it will land on something that will actually help you. But you cannot sense the full range of what may be on the other side, and thus you cannot directly ask for what you need.

The war metaphor may be overwrought, but at the very least students are put in the position of moving across metaphorical borders, borders that may often feel hostile. So students tell horror stories of a professor ripping up an accommodation letter, or we read of teachers citing academic freedom in refusing to provide them. When Memorial University professor Ranee Panjabi refused to wear an FM transmitter for a hard-of-hearing student, the story made national news in Canada. But other students then came out to say that Panjabi had similarly refused their accommodations requests up to 20 years previously, and the Uni-

versity had continued to protect the teacher while failing to enforce the accommodations ("Hard-of-Hearing"). Other teachers, in banning laptop use in their classes, force students for whom the use of a laptop is an accommodation to be clearly singled out. We have a long way to go when the very simplest of classroom accommodations become standoffs with professors pitting their own academic freedom against the needs of their students, as though the two things cannot both be safeguarded and respected.

From another angle, at times, in making the game of *Battleship* almost comically simple, offices of disability services offer a very narrow range of accommodations. As Laura Sokal recently showed, "extended testing time accommodation (ETTA) is the most common accommodation assigned to post-secondary students with disabilities," offering "150% of the standard testing time provided to other students . . . was typically assigned in over 70% of cases—despite there being no valid empirical evidence to support this practice . . . and in over 40% of these institutions there were no procedures in place for monitoring and modifying ETTA allowances once assigned" (28). What we get, then, are blanket or rubber-stamp accommodations, one size fits all—and yet even these accommodations must be asked for, over and over again, by students who are forced to hold their hand out for something that we cannot even prove helps them. As teachers, one way to defuse this "game" is to work to expand the repertoire of accommodations—every time we get an accommodation request, honor that request but also implement another appropriate one not just for that student, but for any student in a class like yours. If the accommodation that gets suggested for a student in your class doesn't fit your pedagogy, as when extended testing time is suggested but you don't give any tests, suggest something else. For example, access the accommodation "addendum" example created by Tara Wood, Melissa Helquist, and myself (Wood et al.)

Another way to think about the retrofitted accommodation is to picture the game Whack-a-Mole. Whack-a-Mole is a carnival game in which the player has a hammer. In front of the player, there is a table full of holes. The object of the game is to literally whack the small furry animatronic moles that pop up in the holes in front of us. Well, disability has become the Whack-a-Mole of higher education. When disability pops up, we slap it with a quick accommodation, and we just hope it doesn't pop up again. The nature of the "retrofitted" accommodation requires that we make no lasting changes to our pedagogy or to the culture of the university. Just whack it whenever it pops up.

For instance, walk into any faculty mailroom in the beginning of a semester, and look for the envelopes from "disability services." It is like a lottery of sorts—not having a letter in the mailbox signals that disability will not be a concern that semester. You win! The envelope encloses disability, not just in the template of the letter inside it, but also within the performative or contractual act of even opening the envelope (perhaps that's why many teachers put off taking the envelopes out of their boxes for so long, as though to delay the fact that they have a student with a disability in their class—look for this and you will notice faculty removing all other mail and delaying taking the envelopes out). Further, not having an envelope in your mailbox encourages you to not import or carry-forward past strategies you may have developed for accommodating students, and not to develop new ones. The teacher imagines a(n immediate) future without disability, and I would suggest that this (distressingly) most often feels like a relief.

At many schools now, the process of distributing the letters to teachers has been outsourced to the student themselves, as a gesture to a kind of "self-efficacy" that seems pedagogical and intentional. It's a paternalistic message to the student that they need to take control of their own accommodations, but the power differential between students and teachers is huge. If approximately two-thirds of U.S. college students with disabilities won't disclose these disabilities to seek help, they certainly won't do so if this disclosure now gets forced and repeated at the beginning of every class.

In an autoethnography (or a careful personal story, framed within cultural factors) of the collaboration between students and teachers to find accommodations, a student wrote that such

self-advocacy is easy to preach but is another barrier in practice. Professors, who may have a bias or just indifference toward accommodations, can be a challenge for any person. I'm constantly aware that asking for an accommodation is asking professors to make an extra effort when preparing their lessons. If a professor doesn't do the accommodation, or the accommodation doesn't work, I'm timid to go back unless the lines of communication are open. I feel like Oliver Twist asking, "Please, Sir, may I have some more?" I don't want to get out of an assignment, or to have an added advantage. I've been afraid to go back to a professor because I worried my grade could be affected. (Aguirre and Duncan, 535)

The affective or emotional cost of this repeated process is obvious, as are the tangible risks.

As Laurence Veysey wrote in his canonical *The Emergence of the American University*, the patriarchal character of mid-19th-century schools created a "phenomenon known to authoritarian regimes: constant desire for a confession of guilt, and the resulting submission of will by one's inferiors" (35). There is certainly a hint of this desire in the rigid choreography of the current accommodation process, even if this strict control (perhaps) no longer effectively describes the university as a whole. And yet in the evolution of the university away from regimes of strict moral and religious control, the moments in which the school handles its students paternalistically come into sharper contrast. Confession and submission become more of a spectacle.

The envelopes involved in this process of seeking accommodations also envelop the student within them—foreclosing and sealing off other potentials and possibilities not related to the legalistic and medical discourse of the letter. This doesn't have to be a bad thing: disability identity should be an asset in many ways. Yet I would argue that it often actually is a bad thing. In locations steeped in academic ableism, accommodations are much more likely to isolate demands for change with individual students, take the form of defeat devices, and most notably to stigmatize the student and the disability. Thus it is likely true that retrofits, in other contexts, can be much more useful and powerful than they can be in higher education, mainly because of the persistence of academic ableism.

I have mentioned the "wearing out" of the experience of seeking accommodations, something Annika Konrad calls "access fatigue." In opposition to this, Konrad urges us to think through what Mia Mingus calls "access intimacy": "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs. . . . access intimacy is also the intimacy I feel with many other disabled and sick people who have an automatic understanding of access needs out of our shared similar lived experience of the many different ways ableism manifests in our lives" (n.p.). Unfortunately, such moments of connection are hard to come by for students, and are often fleeting or created only under ideal circumstances.

When disability is seen as something "suffered" by a very few, and otherwise invisible and nonpresent, then disability can never change the culture of higher education, and higher education will continue to wear out students with disabilities, to hold disability itself in abeyance, and to create access fatigue. So, here is a provocative and pessimistic ques-

tion: What if the college or university is the key space, the key economic mechanism, where disability is delayed, discouraged, and diverted from changing the world?

As Jennifer Doyle has written about Title IX, the U.S. legislation that mandates gender equality, it "shapes the university's experience of its own vulnerability. A university that obeys the law is 'compliant'; a university that does not is 'non-compliant.' . . . Title IX is the administrative structure through which the university knows what exposure feels like, what vulnerability is" (Doyle, 24). I would suggest that the AODA and the ADA function in a very similar but very different way, laying the university's commitments and philosophies bare to litigation just as much as its practices and processes and structures. Doyle goes on to suggest that "the idea of Title IX has intense rhetorical effects: it gives body to an affective economy" (Doyle, 31). So do the ADA and the AODA and other legalistic, managed, administration-facing laws: but the big problem comes when we realize that "these processes introduce to us another layer of [vulnerability and possible] betrayal—one hard-wired and systemic, one in which we are betrayed by our own affective investments in an ideological apparatus like 'school'" (Doyle, 35). In this arrangement, the professor is rendered complicit in the project of ableism and betrayed by that complicity; and on the other hand impacted by this academic ableism in all of the ways they are least able to defuse its impacts. Ableism is the process by which academia reaches the pinnacle of its investments by eating itself. "Good teaching" is never as simple as choosing what educational values you hold or convey; the system is far too big for agentive choice to cancel the impact of ableism. And the processes by which students and teachers hold on within the system are very rarely the processes by which the system might be dismantled. "University resources—time, energy, thought and compassion—are absorbed by a managerial world averse to the interpersonal, to the lateral and dynamic work of education." The latter is full of risk, Doyle argues, before succinctly stating that "the classroom is the university's soft flesh" (Doyle, 112). In contrast, the logic of the retrofit is efficient and hard and angular and edged; it is gleaming metal in a neat package. Much more simply: battling academic ableism will be as difficult, messy, ongoing, bottom-up, and unpredictable as retrofitting is limited, bordered, constrained, top-down, and rubber-stamped. This said, while retrofits are something given to students to close down other possibilities, addressing academic ableism might be most effectively done by following students.

"A Rights-Demanding Bunch"

The #academicableism movement is just one sign of the growing power of student protest. A York University (Canada) student, Navi Dhanota, recently filed a human rights complaint against the school. In 2015, the Ontario Human Rights Commission intervened and the sides settled, with York agreeing to rewrite their guidelines for academic accommodation. Basically, Dhanota argued that while students might still be forced to provide medical documentation of disability, this documentation should not need to include a diagnosis. That part of the documentation can be removed—or at least students should have the right to choose to have the actual diagnosis removed. In particular, some psychological diagnoses that are highly stigmatizing would likely lead to bias and mistreatment on college campuses. As I will explore later in the book, this protection from forced disclosure can matter especially for students of color. Dhanota won the case, as mentioned, and this ruling has led to a ripple effect, at least in Canada.

In a *Toronto Star* article following this news, columnist Heather Mallick responded to these new documentation guidelines for accommodating students with mental health disabilities in Ontario's universities and colleges, kicking off the backlash. Mallick argued that these students should not only have to deal with ableism, with inaccessible physical spaces, with the lack of counseling and the surplus of stress inherent on campus, but also should be responsible for changing this culture by wearing their labeled diagnoses proudly, that they should somehow all become advocates. You won't be stigmatized, she argued; you won't have your diagnosis questioned or belittled; you won't be accused of asking for special privileges. Yet her article went on to belittle and question these diagnoses, providing perfect evidence that stigma still exists in society and that this stigma is particularly pronounced on our campuses.

She was, however, correct about one thing: "students are a rights-demanding bunch" (n.p.).

As mentioned, the new guidelines in Ontario only mean that students will no longer have to disclose their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) diagnosis to register for mental health accommodations and supports. They still have to provide proof of disability, verified by a doctor. This means that although "biocertification" is challenged, it isn't replaced (access Samuels). Students also have the choice to disclose more specifically if they want to. But in some cases a specific diagnosis

is simply not needed. The focus can be on the accommodations rather than on labels.

Yet Mallick alluded to a "rising tide" of students with disabilities on campus. The statistics paint a very different picture, as I have already noted. Twenty-seven percent of all Canadians have university degrees. But only 17.6 percent of Canadians with "mild or moderate" disabilities have postsecondary degrees (Statistics Canada). Mallick wrote that York University had only a handful of students with mental health disabilities in the past, but had 1,200 such students registered with Counselling and Disability Services last year, alluding to some sort of a fad. York has more than 40,000 students. In the general population, 13.7 percent of Canadians have a disability, and 4.4 percent of people between 15 and 24 years old have disabilities (Statistics Canada). Moreover, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association, one in five Canadians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime. At one point, Mallick used the word "scam" to suggest that students might fake a disability. But it is more realistic to assume that many disabled students are not seeking any accommodations at all. Just 1,200 students at one very large school is not a "rising tide." Instead, it might be evidence of a big hole. According to the numbers I've listed in this book, somewhere between 500 and 6,000 students at York have disabilities and are not seeking accommodations at all. Hopefully, Dhanota's case makes it possible for more of these students to seek help, and to be protected when doing so.

So what prevents disabled students from getting the supports they need and to which they have a right? There is the very stigma that Mallick reinforces in her article. This begins with the idea that the university is the space for society's most able, physically, mentally, and otherwise—not a place to admit to any weakness or challenge. There is also the quite reasonable feeling that you will be accused of faking it, even though the financial cost and labor involved in faking a disability would vastly outweigh any benefits. And the benefits are negligible—note-taking and extra time or space for tests or exams can help, but the accommodations model too often assumes that learning only happens in lectures and high-stakes tests, and hasn't kept up with the modern classroom. If, as Mallick suggests, students and teachers are on an "intellectual mission" together, then students with disabilities are being given very few provisions for this journey. As mentioned, in Canada, there are barely more than 200 professionals employed to provide disability accommodations at colleges and universities (Fichten et al.). We can assume that the stigma increases and the provisions diminish even further for Canada's

nearly 200,000 graduate students. For instance, recent research shows that half of Ontario universities do not even have an accommodation policy for these students (Rose). Schools don't want more students who need accommodations, because then they would need to properly invest in support.

Yes, Mallick is quite correct in that "students are a rights-demanding bunch." Students like Navi Dhanota (or @zaranosaur) know exactly what they are asking for: privacy and equal access to education. Students often have to disclose disability in dozens of ways every day—they deserve some control over the power imbalance this involves. They are asking for these things because stigmatization is very much alive on college and university campuses; because funding for supports for students with disabilities are scarce; because reporters like Mallick continue to question their rights and suggests they are "scamming;" because postsecondary educational environments are often disabling. Students like Navi Dhanota know all of this because they also understand academic fields like Disability Studies and the history of the disability rights movement, and because they are pushing its next frontier. Dhanota is now pursuing a graduate degree in disability studies. These students are not saying "me, me, me"—they are instead very aware that those in power, like Mallick, will attempt to divide disabled students as they also doubt and downplay disability rights. As a society, we should feel that an increase in students with disabilities, and an increase in resources for these students, would be cause for celebration; that this would signal real progress.

Progress is possible, after all. Read the marketing materials of my school, or your own, and you'll read a lot about entrepreneurship, innovation, a rapidly changing "knowledge economy." Schools are reconstructing themselves, rhetorically, as nimble and responsive and disruptive. So we know that at least on the surface, they value change. In the next chapter, I will examine some of the ways higher education seeks to change its pedagogical or teaching commitments, and how disability gets figured into this innovation and progress.