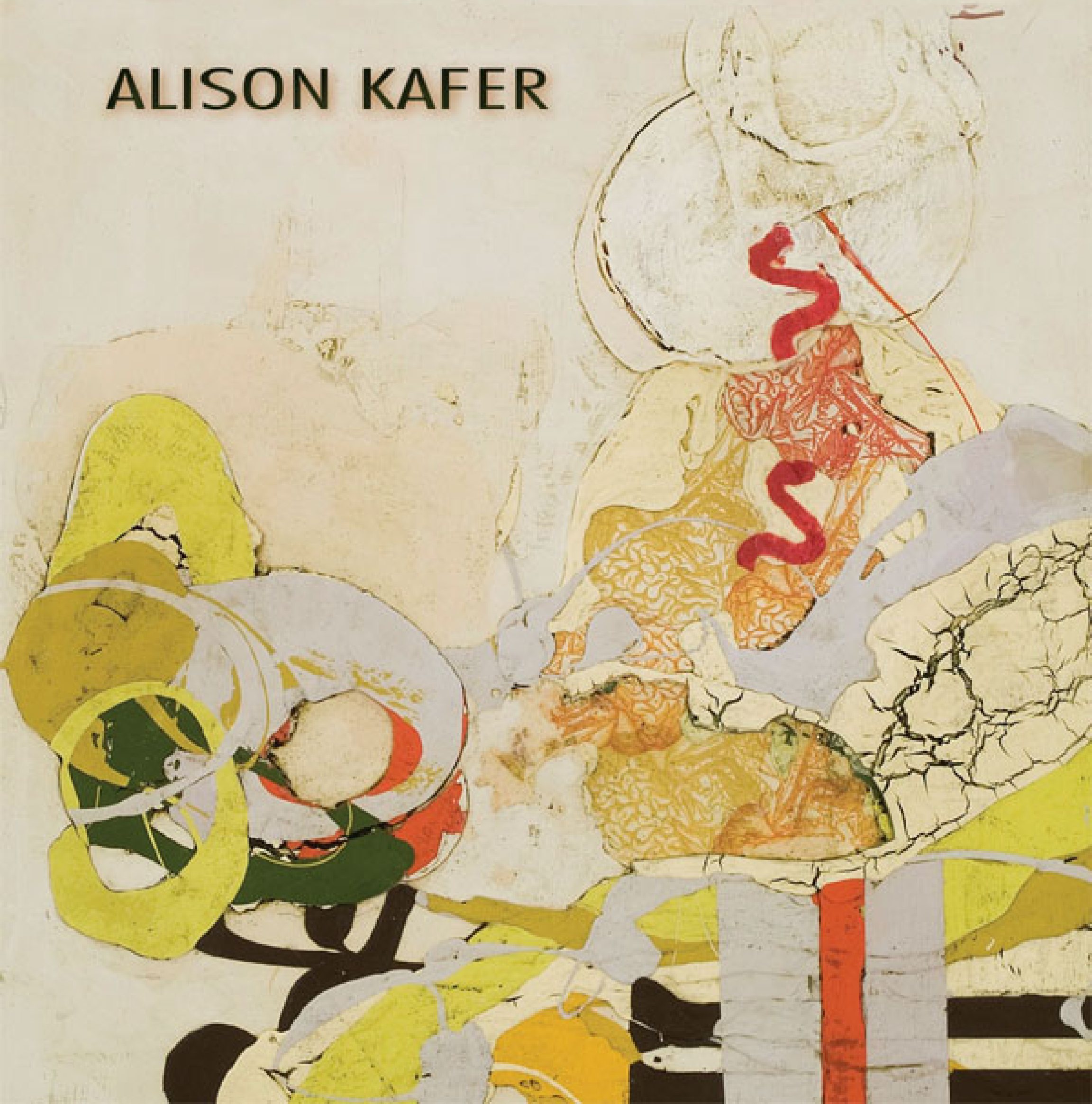
FEMINIST QUEER CRIP

ALISON KAFER



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Indiana University Press

Bloomington and Indianapolis

This book is a publication of

Indiana University Press
601 North Morton Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47404-3797 USA

iupress.indiana.edu

Telephone orders 800-842-6796
Fax orders 812-855-7931

A shorter version of chapter 3 was published as "Debating Feminist Futures: Slippery Slopes, Cultural Anxiety, and the Case of the Deaf Lesbians," in *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 218–41, and is reprinted with permission. Portions of chapter 6 appeared in much earlier form as "Hiking Boots and Wheelchairs: Ecofeminism, the Body, and Physical Disability," in *Feminist Interventions in Ethics and Politics*, ed. Barbara Andrew, Jean Keller, and Lisa H. Schwartzman (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 131–50, and are also reprinted with permission.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available
from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-0-253-00922-7 (cloth)
ISBN: 978-0-253-00934-0 (paper)
ISBN: 978-0-253-00941-8 (ebook)

1 2 3 4 5 18 17 16 15 14 13

7 Accessible Futures, Future Coalitions

A vital moment in coalitional political rhetoric is its ability to construct connections among struggles that may be not only diverse, but opposed to one another in many respects.

—Catriona Sandilands, *The Good-Natured Feminist*

When describing disability studies to my students, I often draw on Douglas Baynton's insight that "disability is everywhere in history once you begin looking for it."[1] For Baynton, "looking for it" entails not only recovering the stories of disabled people or tracing histories of disability discrimination but also exploring how notions of disability and able-mindedness/able-bodiedness have functioned in different contexts. Baynton issues his provocation to historians, but disability studies scholars in other fields have extended its reach, pushing their own colleagues to recognize disability as a category of analysis. Deeply influenced by and indebted to this work, I use this final chapter to read Baynton's assertion differently. Rather than direct his insight outward, to those not currently working in disability studies, I turn inward, directing it to the field itself. If "disability is everywhere . . . once you begin looking for it," where do we, as disability studies scholars and activists, continue *not* to look? Where do we find disability and where do we miss it? In which theories and in which movements do we recognize ourselves, or recognize disability, and which theories and movements do we continue to see as separate from or tangential to disability studies?

These questions, and potential answers to them, have surfaced in previous chapters, but in this final chapter I address them more directly. In imagining what accessible futures might look like or might include, I find myself thinking about the possibilities of cross-movement work, both intellectually and politically. If disability is everywhere once we start looking for it, then why not look for it in the other social justice movements at work in contemporary culture? My understanding of disability rights, justice, politics, culture, and scholarship has always been informed by my investments in feminist and queer theories and practices. Reading disability into and alongside those investments is one way to imagine disability differently. In other words, looking within disability studies for the traces of other movements while simultaneously looking for disability in places it has gone unmarked is one way of moving us toward accessible futures.

I begin "looking for disability" in a canonical feminist studies text—Bernice Johnson Reagon's influential essay on coalition politics—that is not widely recognized as being "about" disability. Reading disability into it not only allows for an expansion of feminist and disability studies genealogies but also offers a framework for imagining future work. I then move outward from Reagon's text to explore three potential areas of growth for feminist, queer, crip theory and activism: bathroom politics and contestations over public space; environmental justice; and reproductive justice. Zeroing in on each of these sites allows us to think through how different formulations of disability encourage (and discourage) unexpected but generative alliances. I close by invoking still more connections and coalitions, making clear the multiple and overlapping possibilities for feminist, queer, crip futures.

Reagon's text serves as an apt introduction to this chapter because of her frank acknowledgment of and engagement with practices of dissent and strife. Throughout the essay, she encourages us to recognize that the *benefits* of coalition politics are bound up in the *difficulties* of such politics. Disagreement pushes us to recognize and acknowledge our own assumptions and the boundaries we draw around our own work; without such disagreement, and the ways it compels us to reexamine our positions, we can too easily skim over our own exclusions and their effects. I have chosen each of the sites I highlight here—trans/disability bathroom politics, environmental justice movements, and reproductive justice movements—in large part because they, too, are contentious. They force our attention to the formation of the identities, positions, and practices we name as feminist and/or as queer and/or as crip. They also offer contradictions that are not easily resolvable, contradictions that make difficult any facile claims to "unity" or sameness.

I am influenced here by the work of feminist theorists such as Audre Lorde, Chantal Mouffe, and Ranu Samantrai, each of whom argues for the value, and necessity, of dissent. Samantrai explains that "dissenters draw attention to the border zones where . . . norms are negotiated," subjecting "the terms of membership" in a political community to "continual revision."[2] Indeed, rather than "expelling conflicts and suppressing their annoying reminders," a coalition politics that embraces dissent can begin to ask "how we can take advantage" of such conflicts.[3] Thus, in using the language of "coalition," I am less interested in imagining coalition politics "as a process of dealing with already-constituted interests and identities"—women as discrete group working with disabled people as discrete group—than in thinking through coalitions as a process in which the interests and identities themselves are always open to contestation and debate.[4] How does "disabled" shift, expand, or contract in these various movements and theories? In other words, part of what excites me about the coalitions I examine here is that they often trouble the boundaries of the constituencies involved. Thinking through trans/disability bathroom politics, then, means not only accounting for "disabled people" working alongside "trans- people," or even people who are both trans and disabled, but also questioning the very categories of "disabled people" and "trans- people."

Finding Disability: Feminist Texts, Disability Theory

I teach in a feminist studies program at a small liberal arts college, and my courses are marked "feminist studies" far more often than "disability studies." The productive overlaps between the two fields, however, allow me to insert disability studies insights and analyses into conversations that are not marked as such; disability often surfaces in our conversations even though we were not explicitly looking for it. In that spirit, I want to offer here a rereading of a text familiar, even canonical, to feminist studies audiences, but one that is not widely recognized as a "disability studies text." Reading it again, through the lens of disability, opens up additional possibilities for overlap and critique between disability and feminist studies. As my understandings of crip futurity and feminist cross-movement work have been deeply influenced by this essay, it feels fitting to explore it in this final chapter.

"Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," by Bernice Johnson Reagon, was published in Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* in 1983.[5] Reagon reflects on the process of coalition building, asserting that forming coalitions across difference is both necessary and terrifying: necessary, in that in order to create political change we need to recognize the interrelations among different issues and identities; terrifying, in that we often are working with people unlike us, people who might frame the issues in different ways or to different effects, people who come from different perspectives or with different histories, people who might challenge our founding assumptions.

Reagon's essay is based on a presentation she gave at the 1981 West Coast Women's Music Festival in California's Yosemite National Forest. As many scholars have noted, her piece bears the traces of this location; her focus on coalitions, and on the limitations of monolithic constructions of "woman," was clearly based on contemporary conversations about racism and classism within the women's movement and the role (and composition) of women-only spaces.[6] I want to highlight, however, the ways in which her essay bears the traces not only of the women's music festival but also of the Yosemite National Forest.

Reagon begins the essay with this paragraph:

> I've never been this high before. I'm talking about the altitude. There is a lesson in bringing people together where they can't get enough oxygen, then having them try

> to figure out what they're going to do when they can't think properly. I'm serious about that. There probably are some people here who can breathe, because you were born in high altitudes and you have big lung cavities. But when you bring people in who have not had the environmental conditioning, you got one group of people who are in a strain—and the group of people who are feeling fine are trying to figure out why you're staggering around, and that's what this workshop is about this morning.[7]

Reagon is undoubtedly speaking metaphorically here. She uses this story of being out of breath as a way of talking about how coalitions are hard, uncomfortable, stressful places where we can never fully let go and relax; in coalition, as on the mountain, we can never fully catch our breath. As she explains in the next paragraph, "I feel as if I'm gonna keel over any minute and die. That is often what it feels like if you're *really* doing coalition work. Most of the time you feel threatened to the core and if you don't, you're not really doing no coalescing."[8] Coalition politics, for Reagon, entails working beyond the limits of one's comfort zone, being pushed into dangerous territory, engaging with people or practices or principles that frighten because of their difference.

But to read this anecdote solely as metaphor is to erase the specificities of Reagon's experience.[9] Immediately before stating that she feels like keeling over, Reagon explains that she "belong[s] to the group of people who are having a very difficult time being here" because of the high altitude; she is *literally* having a difficult time catching her breath.[10] Thus, for Reagon, "coalition politics," both the eponymous essay and the practice, begin with a focus on the body. And not just any body, but a limited body, an impaired body. Reagon is theorizing from the disabled body, using her embodied experience of disability—having a physical limitation in a sociopolitical setting that acts as if that limitation were nonexistent, or at least irrelevant—as a springboard for thinking about difference, relation, and politics. She illustrates the ways in which experiences of disability can be useful not only in informing our understandings about bodies but also our understandings of ethical relations and political practice.

Part of this analysis, on both the literal and metaphorical level, means reckoning with the bodies that cannot survive, let alone thrive, in particular settings. Reagon's breathing difficulties at this altitude, combined with her reflections on whose bodies are absent from this "women's" space, raises questions about the assumptions that undergird feminist practice. Whose bodies, whose experiences, whose desires, and whose identities shape the issues that get framed as feminist, and who does the framing? How accessible—financially, culturally, intellectually, physically—are feminist spaces, spaces in and through which feminist futures are imagined? In other words, Reagon calls feminism to task for creating spaces, both literally and metaphorically, in which certain bodies/minds play no role, or can participate only at great personal risk. She offers a powerful illustration of how the kinds of spaces we imagine often determine the kinds of bodies/minds that can inhabit those spaces. As a result, the conversations that occur in those spaces are dramatically—and all too often invisibly—diminished by the absence of those folks who, for reasons of inaccessibility or exclusion or ignorance, cannot participate.

Reagon explicitly directs her critique to feminism and the women's movement, but we can read her text as offering a challenge to disability studies and disability movements as well. Although the word "disability" appears only in passing in Reagon's text, and she does not identify herself as disabled or describe her breathing difficulties in those terms, we can easily read her essay as a narrative of inaccessibility or as an illustration of the insights to be gained from disability.[11] Recognizing this text as a crip text then allows for a whole set of necessary questions: In focusing so intently on disability identity, how have disability studies and disability rights movements overlooked the crip insights of people like Reagon? How might her formulation of coalition politics, of the need for feminism to acknowledge and grapple with racialized differences, inform a disability studies marked by whiteness, or disability rights movements slow to deal with issues of race and ethnicity? Or how might her focus on breathing difficulties inspire disability analyses of asthma, perhaps even prompting the field to recognize itself in or ally with environmental studies and environmental justice movements? In other words, what can disability studies and disability movements learn from our own exclusions?

Reading Reagon as a crip theorist is one way to begin answering these questions. Such a reading, and the expansive approach to disability politics it entails, means locating the subject of disability studies not just in bodies identified as disabled but in minds and bodies surviving inaccessible spaces, with both "access" and "spaces" defined broadly. It means recognizing contestations over whiteness, or economic disparity, or heteronormativity as part of disability studies and disability activism, not merely side projects or subdisciplines. It means challenging the homophobia and transphobia that lurk within the disability rights movement, marginalizing the experiences of queer- and trans-identified people with disabilities. It requires a continued examination of the whiteness and ethnocentrism of disability studies and disability activism in the United States, as well as committed engagement with the work of disability rights, antiglobalization, and antipoverty activists around the globe.

Like Reagon, however, we can pair our internal criticisms of our own positions and movements with engaged critiques of our partners and allies. Thinking through accessible spaces and accessible futures means addressing the exclusions of feminist and queer political visions of the future, highlighting these theories' reliance on ideologies of wholeness, complicity in compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, and marginalization of disabled people. What is needed, then, is not only a trenchant critique of ableism but also a desire to think disability otherwise.

This kind of robust combination of future dreams and present critique is essential to politics, and it requires leaving open the parameters of our political visions. Our animating questions could then include the following: Who is included or excluded in our political imaginaries? How are "disability" and "disabled person" (or "woman" or "queer" or "race" or . . .) being defined in these dreams of the future? Who has access to these imaginaries, and how is access being described? Which issues are being marked as feminist or queer or crip? And, to return to my earlier questions, where are disability studies or disability movements going to look for disability? Where does disability studies see or recognize itself?

The rest of this chapter profiles sites where answers to these kinds of questions are happening. Each of the following sections offers a snapshot of coalitions in progress, and I include them here as stories of disability told, or being told, otherwise. These stories are necessarily incomplete, but in their incompleteness they provide examples of how to imagine disability differently: finding it in unexpected places, using it to make connections to other social justice movements, and recognizing in it the possibilities of desire. These are, potentially, more accessible futures.

"Calling All Restroom Revolutionaries!" Coalescing around Bodies in Space

Reagon's text bridges feminist and disability concerns by drawing our attention to the political implications of space, and questions of access and inaccessibility continue to be productive points of overlap across multiple movements for social justice.[12] Public toilets, in particular, have long been sites of exclusion and activism; as Judith Plaskow explains, because "access to toilets is a prerequisite for full public participation and citizenship . . . almost all the social justice movements of the last century in the United States have included struggles for adequate toilet facilities."[13] Women moving into traditionally male spaces often discover the bathroom, or lack thereof, to be a key site of sexual harassment and discrimination; the toilet serves as an indicator of the kinds of gendered bodies expected in particular spaces.[14] In response, women have turned public restrooms into sites of political agitation and activism, challenging the architectural and political assumption of the male body as the ideal citizen.[15] Of course, this ideal citizen is not only male but white, and bathrooms have created not only gender dyads but racial ones: for much of the twentieth century, "urinary segregation" taught users powerful lessons about the intertwining of gender and race in public spaces, particularly in the south. There, too, public restrooms were made into contentious sites of struggle and citizenship, and Elizabeth Abel notes that African American men living under Jim Crow were violently punished for refusing to use restrooms marked "colored."[16] Public toilets continue to be heavily policed for inappropriate behavior or inappropriate users. Homeless people are frequent targets of attempts to "clean up" public restrooms, as are those practicing public sex, with cities doing everything from locking "public" facilities to refusing to build or install new public restrooms. Private businesses and restaurants typically designate their restrooms as "for customers only," a restriction that affects not only the homeless but also people who enter public spaces for reasons other than shopping or consumption.[17]

Given these practices of exclusion and resistance, it is not surprising that the toilet has also been a site of intellectual exploration and scholarly engagement, and there has been a vast expansion of toilet talk in the past few years.[18] This work clearly supports Plaskow's observation that toilets are sites of intersectional study and activism, but gender is heavily foregrounded here; histories of gender segregation, policy analyses of "potty parity," and speculations about nonsexist bathrooms dominate these discussions. This focus on gender, especially on gender presentation and identity, often feels absolutely necessary given that using the "wrong" bathroom for one's perceived gender can lead to harassment, arrest, and violence; moves to create unisex or gender-neutral restrooms continue to meet ridicule and hostility, even as more and more groups lobby for their creation.[19]

Two clear exceptions to the strict gender segregation of toilets (and to the hostility greeting attempts to desegregate such toilets) are the "family" restrooms increasingly popular in airports and the single-stall restrooms marked with a wheelchair.[20] The notion that people of one gender might need to assist a child or elder of another gender is much more readily accepted and accommodated than the notion that people with different gender presentations or identities might use the same restroom (even if, as in the case of single-stall toilets, at different times).[21] Similarly, we are more willing to accept people of all gender identities and sexes using the same space if those people are already seen as separate from the body politic because of their disabilities.[22] Simply put, unisex/gender-neutral bathrooms are neither threatening nor ridiculous as long as gender nonconformity is not the main reason for their use or creation.

Once they are created, however, such bathrooms are easily taken up for other purposes. In a queer expansion of the meanings of both "family" and "accessible," these spaces are increasingly recognized as options for genderqueer and trans users. Women's rooms, Sally Munt explains, are sites of uncomfortable and often threatening exchanges with those who cast her butch body as dangerously out of place. In this context, the third space of the accessible stall offers a much-needed "stress-free location, a queer space in which I can momentarily procure an interval from the gendered public environment, and psychically replenish."[23] Munt's pleasure is tempered, however, by her feelings of trespass; she sees herself as "treading on another borderline, not worthily disabled."[24] Yet cripping her account—not to mention cripping the disabled stall itself—leads to the recognition that gender-segregated spaces are not any more accessible to her than narrow doorways are to me, although the forms such inaccessibility takes are different.[25] The solution to this issue is not to assign more "worthiness" to my use than Munt's (or vice versa) but rather to recognize the possibility for queercrip alliances in the space of the toilet. If, as Munt suggests, the disabled toilet is a "room set aside for the disjunctive, ungendered and strange," then we can use the potential openness of those terms as grounds for coalition.[26]

PISSAR (People in Search of Safe and Accessible Restrooms) offers one example of this kind of collaboration. Founded at the University of California–Santa Barbara in 2003, PISSAR explicitly linked disability access with gender access, creating a bathroom checklist that assessed a restroom's disability-accessibility (e.g., door width, dispenser heights, Braille signage) right alongside its genderqueer-accessibility (e.g., functioning door locks, gender-specific signage, location) (see Appendix A).[27] "PISSAR

Patrols," which featured activists carrying clipboards and wearing "free 2 pee" shirts, used the checklist to rate and map campus restrooms. In so doing, they brought people together around the issue of access, regardless of whether or how they identified in terms of disability and gender. More recently, TransBrandeis, part of the GLBT/Queer Alliance at Brandeis University, expanded their mapping and survey project to include attention to disability access, and disability activists at the University of Washington have included attention to trans and genderqueer needs in their own access activism.[28]

It remains rare, however, for issues of disability access and trans access to be raised concurrently on GLBTQ organizational websites or in the (often sensationalized) news coverage about trans campus activism.[29] The frequency with which activists, administrations, and reporters use the language of "gender-blind," as opposed to "gender-neutral," "unisex," or "nongendered," suggests that critical disability perspectives are not at play here.[30] By the same token, my own experiences with PISSAR suggest reluctance on the part of some disability activists to engage with trans and genderqueer issues: one of the disabled students initially opposed forming PISSAR for fear that addressing trans access would dilute the struggle for disability access. The annual conference of the Society for Disability Studies has yet to consistently include gender-neutral restrooms as a required component of access, and too few disability studies scholars include attention to the relationship between trans and disability in our work on access, sexuality, stigma, or medicalization, only a few potential areas of overlap.[31] Trans essayist and activist Eli Clare is widely cited in disability studies, but scholars usually treat his writings on transphobia or on transgender experiences in general as an aside to his work on disability (as if the two were not intimately, and often explicitly, intertwined).

In his introduction to *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing*, Harvey Molotch points to the political dilemma facing disability communities as we look to the loo: "Should disabled people demand to be part of the convention [of gender segregated bathrooms]? Or should they be the leaders of a movement to combat it?"[32] One could certainly make the argument that, given the link between access to public spaces and access to the body politic, not to mention the link between hegemonic gender identities and cultural intelligibility, we should lean toward the former. Disabled people should have access to gendered restrooms just as nondisabled people do. The problem with that answer, though, is that it fixes—in both senses of the word—the problem of access too narrowly; rather than transform existing structures, both physical and political, it merely argues for including more people within them (by excluding others). Not only does it overlook the reality that some disabled people are also, simultaneously, trans and genderqueer people (a possibility similarly erased in Molotch's framing of the question), it also forecloses on the possibility that disability studies and activism could ally with other movements.

Thus, I argue for the latter response, with disabled people and disability movements working to undo the gendered conventions of the toilet as part of our larger struggles for access to public space. Such a move feels all the more necessary given that transgender and transsexual people were explicitly excluded from coverage under the ADA.[33] We can treat the public toilet as a site for undoing this exclusion, recognizing public inaccessibility as a problem that connects both those authorized to claim disability and those who are not. Thinking through access can then become a way of thinking through questions of disability identity, analyzing when it is deployed, and by whom, and to what effects. As Tanya Titchkosky argues, "[A]ccess [is] not . . . a synonym for justice but a beginning place for critical questioning."[34]

Recognizing bathroom access as a site for coalition building can potentially move us beyond the physical space of bathrooms, turning our critical attention to the acts of elimination that occur *beyond* the socially sanctioned space of the toilet, public or private. As Carrie Sandahl explains, "Our society cannot tolerate incontinence; once beyond infancy, incontinence divides the human from the non-human."[35] Not only is there profound shame and disgust directed toward those who "cannot control themselves," as the common colloquialism puts it, but the inability to control oneself is often what drives elderly or disabled people into nursing homes and other institutions. Indeed, this link between continence and full citizenship is too often written into policy and practice: Sandahl condemns the fact that often "Medicare and Medicaid will pay for these products [adult diapers and other incontinence products] if you're in a nursing home, but not if you're living at home."[36] Coalitions of feminists, queers, and crips lobbying not only for broadly accessible toilets but also affordable and accessible diapers may not yet be familiar, but I hope it is starting to sound necessary. We should not limit the "restroom revolution" to the four walls of the restroom.

Indeed, part of the pleasure and possibility of restroom revolutions is that they offer the opportunity to expand the terms of our movements and our theories. As Lisa Duggan notes in her praise of *Toilet*, "Peeing is political"—and so are the places where peeing happens (or doesn't) and the bodies doing the peeing. Attending to the space of the toilet not only makes room for coalitions between trans and disability concerns, it continues the crip theory move of keeping the meanings and parameters of disability, access, and disability studies open for debate and dissent.

Finding Disability in Environmental Justice

Typing "environmentalism" or "environmental justice" into databases alongside "illness" or "disability" brings up hundreds of hits, but the majority of them are public health articles describing conditions linked to environmental exposure (e.g., asthma, cancers, and skin rashes). These pieces map disease clusters, detail specific exposures, record pollutant levels, and/or track chemicals and other pollutants suspected of being carcinogenic or teratogenic ("teratogenic" is from *terata*, or monster, and refers to birth "defects" or "malformations").[37] Finding illness or disability in these texts means finding stories of error and aberration; illness and disability appear almost exclusively as tragic mistakes caused by unnatural incursions into or disruptions of the natural body and the natural environment. These were not the kind of pieces I had in mind when I began researching links between disability and environmentalism.

These were not the kind of pieces I had in mind, but that is not to say that they play no role in this book or in disability studies more broadly. On the contrary, such questions of body/environment interaction belong squarely within the purview of disability studies, as do public health analyses of toxic neighborhoods and sick buildings. We need a disability studies and disability activism that can challenge the siting of power plants or waste dumps in neighborhoods already overburdened by toxic industries; we need disability analyses that condemn the poisoning of bodies (human and otherwise) by both catastrophic spills and explosions as well as the "everyday" pollution of dry cleaners, contaminated water, and landfills. Disability and environmental movements can find common cause in their concern with the built environment; lead paint and cracked or missing sidewalks create disabling environments for everyone living around them.[38]

The essays I tracked down, then, are essential *to* disability studies, but most of them have yet to be influenced *by* disability studies (much as disability studies has yet to engage fully with this literature). What is needed, then, are analyses that recognize and refuse the intertwined exploitation of bodies and environments without demonizing the illnesses and disabilities, and especially the ill and disabled bodies, that result from such exploitation. As Valerie Ann Johnson argues in "Bringing Together Feminist Disability Studies and Environmental Justice," one of the few essays explicitly doing this kind of bridge work, "We [in the environmental justice movement] tend to conflate disability, disease and environmental injustice. What is needed is to disaggregate the possible results of environmental injustice (i.e., exposure to toxic substances emanating from landfills or hog operations that injure the body) from the *person*, however they are embodied."[39]

This kind of disaggregation requires a more complex and interconnected understanding of disability than is currently circulating in both disability studies and environmental studies. In terms of disability studies, the continued reliance on the social model (and its corollary assumption that there can be no room for medical approaches) makes it difficult to engage with antitoxics movements that work to eliminate or at least decrease disability. My own reluctance to recognize articles warning of birth defects and deformities as part of my project is an example of this difficulty. Yet, as Stacy Alaimo argues, disability studies and activism would "be enriched by attending not only to the ways in which built environments constitute or exacerbate 'disability,' but to how materiality, at a less perceptible level—that of pharmaceuticals, xenobiotic chemicals, air pollution, etc.—affects human health and ability."[40] Similarly, environmental studies and activism could benefit from a more critical approach to disability, one that recognizes disability as a cultural, historical, and political category, rather than simply a medical one. We need environmental analyses that do more than cast disability and disabled bodies/minds as tragedies or aberrations, in part because focusing exclusively on disabled people as the signs of environmental injustice effaces the ways in which we are all affected by toxic pollution and contamination, not just those of us with visible or diagnosed "abnormalities."

Moreover, by relying on the specter of disability to motivate public response, environmental movements rely on what Giovanna Di Chiro calls "eco(hetero)normativity."[41] Making connections across disability, environmental, and queer studies, Di Chiro offers a model for the kind of coalitional thinking that can lead to more accessible futures. She documents how environmentalists "mobilize socially sanctioned heterosexism and queer-fear" by creating and circulating sensationalized accounts of "sexual abnormalities" in fish, animals, and humans. In so doing, mainstream environmentalists reify hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality, thereby foreclosing on the possibility of cross-movement work. Rather than relying on uncritical concepts of "normal" bodies and orientations, Di Chiro argues that antitoxics activists should focus on more "serious health problems associated with POPs [persistent organic pollutants]," such as "breast, ovarian, prostate, and testicular cancers, neurological and neurobehavioral problems, immune system breakdown, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity."[42]

We can extend Di Chiro's concern about the normalizing strains of antitoxic environmentalism by questioning not only the queer fear embedded within these discourses but also the disability fear.[43] How can we continue the absolutely necessary task of challenging toxic pollution and its effects without perpetuating cultural assumptions about the unmitigated tragedy of disability? How can we attend to "serious health problems" while also deconstructing the stigma attached to those problems or even historicizing the very construction of such conditions as problems? One way is to challenge environmental representations of disability that are completely removed from the experiences of people living with those very disabilities. Or, to put it differently, disability scholars and activists can work to ensure that descriptions of the possible impairments linked to toxic exposures do not replicate ableist language and assumptions. Surely we can find ways to protest lead and mercury poisoning without resorting to warnings about how "developmental delays, learning disabilities, ADHD, and behavioral disorders extract a terrible toll from children, families, and society. . . . The costs associated with caring for these children can be high for families and society. Special education programs and psychological and medical services drain resources."[44] These statements, posted on the website of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment, not only perpetuate long-standing fears about the economic burden of disabled people but, more disturbingly, imply that disabled people—*rather than polluting industries*—are the ones responsible for draining resources. Disability studies and activism can be a resource here, helping environmental movements avoid this kind of misdirection and create broader coalitions against pollution.

Breast cancer lends itself to these kinds of complex, tangled, and ambiguous reckonings, and feminist theorists and activists continue to produce rich work analyzing its connections. Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* has found a home in disability studies, with scholars pointing to Lorde's searing indictment of prosthetics and passing; Lorde's refusals to become a compliant patient and, relatedly, to hide her mastectomy behind puffs of wool have been a welcome resource for disability movements searching for models of how to refuse medicalized silence. Environmental studies has found the book useful as well for "its insistence on the interconnections between body and environment, which poses cancer as a feminist, antiracist, and environmental justice issue."[45] As Alaimo's reading of the text makes clear, the book serves as a bridge between these various movements. Lorde refuses breast prosthetics in order to transform silence not only about illness and the body but also about the environmental causes of illness. "Lorde displays her scars against the cancer establishment," explains Alaimo, challenging its denial of "the environmental causes of cancer."[46]

Environmental and disability studies and activisms can find common cause in critically examining the medical industrial complex and its current approach to cancer. Organizations such as Breast Cancer Action (BCA) can be understood as simultaneously deploying disability and environmental analyses. Breast Cancer Action offers a strong challenge to cancer rhetorics that present breast cancer as primarily a problem of individual bodies, a challenge that echoes critiques of the medical model of disability. In insisting that we attend to both voluntary and involuntary exposures to carcinogens, BCA moves away from individualized models of cancer to more structural ones; similarly, in arguing that it is "not just genes, but social injustices—political, economic, and racial inequities—that lead to disparities in breast cancer outcomes," BCA argues for a more political/relational model of illness and, by extension, disability.[47]

The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) is one of the pioneers in this work, laying the groundwork for environmental justice projects informed by disability rights. Silvia Yee, one of the staff attorneys at DREDF, is positioning the organization as a resource for people living in communities overburdened by toxic industries and emissions. The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund understands that those living in such communities may not have accurate information about the availability of disability protection laws and social services; even though many of the people living in overburdened communities are already ill or disabled, or may become so because of their exposure to toxins, they may not identify themselves as disabled or recognize themselves within disability rights movements. Yet, as Yee explains, federal and state disability laws could potentially be used to

> reduce environmental hazards for the entire community. For instance, children with respiratory disabilities in a public school using chemical pesticides could potentially bring a cause of action that will reduce pesticide exposure for all their classmates as well as the surrounding community. These litigation ideas have been largely unexplored, both theoretically and in practice.[48]

Recognizing the links between disability and environmental justice opens the door to such explorations. Yee and DREDF position disability laws as a way to protect entire communities; "disability rights" thus becomes a tool used not only on behalf of disabled people, and affecting not only disabled people, but for all people.

Activism by and on behalf of people with multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) provides another example of deploying categories of disability to do environmental justice work. As with trans and genderqueer folks using the language of access to disrupt gender segregation, MCS activists discuss their need for scent- and chemical-free spaces as a component of accessibility. "How and Why to Be Scent-Free," a flyer distributed to attendees of the Queer Disability Conference (held in San Francisco in 2002), offers one such example (see Appendix C); the flyer first details the physical and cognitive effects of toxic exposure in order to testify to the necessity of safer spaces:

> Symptoms of chemical exposure include dizziness, nausea, slurred speech, drowsiness, irritation to mouth, throat, skin, eyes, and lungs, headache, convulsions, fatigue, confusion, and liver and kidney damage. As you can imagine, these symptoms constitute serious barriers for people with chemical sensitivities in work, life, and of course, conference attendance. Promoting scent-free environments is very much like adding ramps and curb-cuts in terms of the profound difference in accessibility it can produce.[49]

Reading the work of scholars and activists with MCS makes this point abundantly clear, as they describe feeling trapped in their homes, or forced out of their homes, or made ill by their encounters with other bodies and environments.[50] Disability studies scholars and activists, with their experience linking *access to spaces* with *access to the body politic*, can serve as useful allies here; these stories of chemically disabling environments are also stories of inaccessibility. Both disability studies and environmental justice disrupt what Mel Chen calls "the fiction of independence and of uninterruptability"; we can see in this shared disruption the possibility for coalition.[51]

Meet Reproductive Justice

Women of color have been at the forefront of struggles to shift the focus of reproductive rights movements and public discourses about reproduction away from a single-issue focus on abortion.[52] Without denying the importance of legal abortion (and especially *access* to legal abortion), activists have long argued for a much broader approach, one that takes into account the widespread social and economic disparities among women. Andrea Smith explains that "the pro-life versus pro-choice paradigm reifies and masks the structures of white supremacy and capitalism that undergird the reproductive choices that women make."[53] As Smith and other activists and scholars detail, the language of choice presents women more as consumers than citizens, opening the door for some women to be cast as bad decision makers and for some choices to be deemed bad or inappropriate. Moreover, the language of choice fails to take into account how different women have different access to different choices; it removes from analysis the conditions under which women and families make decisions about reproduction. Indeed, choice rhetoric can easily be deployed to cover over sterilization abuses:

informed consent policies, which would seem to support women's "choices," have often been compromised by racism, classism, ableism, and xenophobia.[54] As a result of these histories and practices, many activists within these movements use the language of "reproductive justice" to "emphasize the relationship of reproductive rights to human rights and economic justice."[55]

I offer this brief overview of reproductive justice for three reasons. First, I want to highlight that both reproductive justice activists and disability activists interrogate the rhetoric of choice found in reproductive rights movements. Much as the experiences of women of color, immigrant women, poor women, and indigenous women exceed the notion of "free choice," the language of choice fails to account for the ableist context in which women make decisions about pregnancy, abortion, and reproduction in general. As Marsha Saxton notes, only certain choices are recognized as valid choices, and only certain choices are socially supported; "Our society profoundly limits the 'choice' to love and care for a baby with a disability."[56] Shelley Tremain echoes Saxton, warning that ableist notions of "prenatal impairment" "increasingly limit the field of possible conduct in response to pregnancy."[57] Disability studies scholars and activists also argue that the continued commodification of pregnancy, a process enabled and perpetuated by the framework of choice, facilitates ableist rhetoric of fetuses, babies, and children as "defective"; positioning women as consumers and babies as products makes possible conversations about and practices toward "selecting" the baby one wants (and deselecting or terminating the babies one doesn't want). A critique of choice, then, bridges both movements.

Second, I want to encourage a greater familiarity with, and support of, reproductive justice movements and frameworks on the part of disability studies and activism. As the definitions above suggest, reproductive justice insists upon a cross-movement approach to reproductive issues, recognizing that questions of reproduction cannot be disentangled from those of race, class, and sexuality, not to mention poverty, welfare, health care, social services, environmental justice, and so on. Disability is an essential piece of this assemblage, and reproductive concerns about disability cannot be untangled from these other factors. Thinking about disability and reproduction requires the kind of cross-movement analysis promised by reproductive justice. Even if reproductive justice movements do not always live up to this promise in terms of disability (as when a major reproductive justice text relegates disability to a single footnote), the possibilities remain.[58] In fact, I think reproductive justice frameworks offer the possibility not only of cross-movement analyses that fully integrate disability but also of fuller *cross-disability* analyses. Physical disabilities and intellectual disabilities are often construed differently in debates about prenatal testing and selective abortion, and disability movements need to acknowledge (even as we interrogate) those distinctions.

Third, thinking about reproductive politics only in terms of abortion and the pro-choice/pro-life binary makes coalition building among disability and reproductive rights and justice activists more difficult. As Smith argues, the pro/anti binary fosters "simplistic analyses of who our political friends and enemies are," which can lead us to "lose opportunities to work with people with whom we . . . have sharp disagreements, but who may, with different political framings and organizing strategies, shift their positions."[59] Smith's warning strikes me as especially salient for the disability and reproductive rights relationship. Within the logic of the pro/anti abortion binary, anyone who expresses concern about particular abortion practices or rhetorics can too easily appear as an enemy of feminism and an opponent of reproductive rights. Reproductive rights activists are then wary of engaging with disability critiques of prenatal testing and selective abortion; within this context, to take up these critiques, seriously wrestling with the ableist implications of prenatal testing, feels dangerously close to dismantling abortion rights. Similarly, disability rights activists are wary of engaging with reproductive rights groups who continue to use disability as a justification for abortion; it can be hard to find common ground with organizations that take for granted the undesirability of disability. Reproductive justice approaches, which insist as much on the right to continue a pregnancy (and be supported in doing so) as the right to terminate one, offer one possible means of connection.[60]

This kind of connective work is necessary as antireproductive rights activists increasingly use progressive rhetoric for their own purposes.[61] Capitalizing on the eugenic and ableist histories of the reproductive rights movement, opponents of abortion are moving steadily to present themselves as the better ally to disability movements. Feminists for Life (FFL), for example, explicitly defines abortion as a form of discrimination against disabled people, appropriating the rhetoric of disability movements in their campaign against abortion.[62] This deployment of disability rights is evident in their poster series, "It's time to *question abortion*," which includes a poster equating abortion to eugenics. The black-and-white poster features a photograph of an unsmiling dark-skinned man sitting in his manual wheelchair; he has his arms crossed and a defiant expression. "Would you say that to my face?" appears in handwritten script across the photograph, while the following text appears below the picture: "Would you tell me that I never should have been born? That is the message sent when people talk about aborting 'gross fetal anomalies.' People who overcome adversity inspire, challenge and enrich our world." I have often heard disability activists respond to ableist abortion rhetoric with that very question: "Would you tell me that I never should have been born?" Debates about the proliferation of prenatal testing often draw similar responses, with disabled people wondering aloud whether they would have been aborted if their mothers had had the chance.[63] In making space for this line of thinking, the FFL presents itself as more aligned with the interests of disability communities than the pro-choice movement is; according to this logic, advocates for abortion and other reproductive rights are too closely tied to eugenic practices and histories to support disabled people.

Yet working with reproductive rights and justice organizations can be a way for disability movements to make progress on long-held goals, as seen with the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act of 2008 (also known as the Kennedy Brownback Act). The legislation requires doctors, genetic counselors, and other medical professionals to provide current, accurate, and comprehensive information about disability when they consult with women about their pregnancies. Its purpose is to ensure that women are adequately informed before they make any decisions about continuing or terminating their pregnancies; covered information includes available social services, support groups, and the experiences of disabled people and families with similarly-disabled children. Although it is still too early to evaluate the law's efficacy in terms of the quality of information parents receive, the very passage of the law is significant. By stressing parents' need for information prior to decision making, the Kennedy Brownback Act underscores the fact that there is a decision to be made; it begins to unravel the assumption that abortion is the only viable, rational response to a positive test. Indeed, by focusing on the right to true informed consent, the act acknowledges that women have typically been given inaccurate or incomplete information about disability, information that both reflected and perpetuated cultural fears and stereotypes about disability.[64]

The law is also significant in that it was supported by both disability and reproductive rights and justice organizations. Generations Ahead, recognizing in the bill the potential for cross-movement collaboration, fostered a partnership among the World Institute on Disability, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, the National Women's Health Network, and the Reproductive Health Technologies Project. Together the five organizations disseminated an information sheet about the bill, urging their allies to support the legislation.[65] It was, admittedly, an easier sell for disability rights groups. Reproductive rights organizations were wary of the bill, worried that it was another sideways attempt to restrict women's access to abortion; then Senator Sam Brownback's cosponsorship of the bill fueled these fears because of his longstanding and vocal opposition to reproductive rights. The coalition of disability and reproductive rights groups eventually convinced their allies not to oppose the bill, making the argument that everyone would benefit from more and improved information about disability. They posed the problem not in terms of abortion per se, thereby sidestepping the entrenched pro-choice/pro-life binary, but rather in terms of eliminating the ableist bias in genetic counseling and improving the information and supports given to women expecting a disabled baby.

Two seemingly disparate events in early October 2010 set the stage for another moment of coalition building between disability and reproductive rights and justice movements: Robert Edwards was awarded the Nobel Prize in medicine for his work developing in vitro fertilization; and Virginia Ironside, a British advice columnist, generated controversy over her comments about the alleged suffering of disabled children. Both figures publicly promoted the use of reproductive technologies to select against disability. Edwards argued that it would be a "sin of parents to have a child that carries the heavy burden of genetic disease. We are entering a world where we have to consider the quality of our children."[66] Several pro-life and antiabortion groups seized upon this quote in their condemnation of Edwards's award, but his position on disability was otherwise ignored in the media coverage; it was unremarkable.[67] Ironside's position on disability, on the other hand, is precisely what generated media coverage, but there, too, the assumption that disability is best met with abortion went largely unchallenged. In a televised debate about abortion, Ironside described the abortion of "a baby [that] is going to be born severely disabled" as the "act of a loving mother"; she then offered that, faced with such "a deeply suffering child," she would not hesitate to "put a pillow over its face," as would "any good mother."[68] Although Ironside's comments about infanticide were quickly condemned, her assumption that abortion was the best response to disability generated little discussion.[69] More to the point, her decision to use the specter of disability as a justification for abortion continued a long pattern of pitting disability rights against reproductive rights.

In response to these events, which happened within a couple of days of each other, a group of six scholars and activists (including myself) drafted a statement articulating a disability and reproductive rights and justice position; it currently has over 150 signatories, both organizations and individuals (see Appendix D).[70] Titled "Robert Edwards, Virginia Ironside, and the Unnecessary Opposition of Rights," the statement presents reproductive rights and justice as fully intertwined with the rights of and justice for people with disabilities:

> As people committed to both disability rights and reproductive rights, we believe that respecting women and families in their reproductive decisions requires simultaneously challenging discriminatory attitudes toward people with disabilities. We refuse to accept the bifurcation of women's rights from disability rights, or the belief that protecting reproductive rights requires accepting ableist assumptions about the supposed tragedy of disability. On the contrary, we assert that reproductive rights includes attention to disability rights, and that disability rights requires attention to human rights, including reproductive rights.

In drafting the statement, we rehearsed familiar debates over terminology and affiliation: Were we discussing human rights or women's rights? Did we want to refer to ourselves as feminists or leave such identifications more open? Should we use the language of disability rights or disability justice? Would it be accurate to describe current practices as eugenic or would that be too inflammatory? On each count, we opted to use the broadest and most familiar terms and frames possible; although some of us might individually make different decisions, we wanted a critical mass of "people committed to both disability rights and reproductive rights" to recognize themselves in our call. Indeed, it is these kinds of questions that can, we hope, lead to further articulations, coalitions, and conversations.

What seemed key to any document was a refusal of the bifurcation of disability rights and justice from reproductive rights and justice. We knew that disability activists, particularly those less directly engaged with reproductive justice movements and frameworks, desperately needed a clear statement from reproductive rights activists and organizations that they would not accept "the rhetorical use of disability as an argument for abortion rights."[71] Similarly, reproductive rights groups needed a signal that a significant number of disability activists and scholars were willing to articulate their support for women's reproductive rights. As with the Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act, the statement in no way condemns or limits individual women's choices but rather speaks to the widespread cultural disparagement of disability and disabled people. In identifying shared values between disability and reproductive movements, the statement explicitly calls for continued collaboration:

> We hope, with this statement, to support other activists and scholars who are equally committed to both reproductive rights and disability rights. We hope that as advocates in movements that share similar values around civil and human rights we can continue to speak out against the use of reproductive rights to undermine disability rights and the use of disability rights to undermine reproductive rights.

This statement was made possible by the work of feminist and disability studies scholars who have been steadfastly refusing the bifurcation of reproductive rights and disability rights for decades.[72] Adrienne Asch, Anne Finger, Rayna Rapp, Dorothy Roberts, Marsha Saxton: all demonstrate that challenging ableism, even within the context of reproductive politics, is not necessarily the same as challenging or limiting women's access to abortion.[73] Perhaps to make that point clear, especially in a context in which disability is being deployed to undermine abortion rights, those trying to bridge the two movements have often been very explicit about their allegiances. In "Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Who Should Not Inhabit the World?" Ruth Hubbard states four separate times that she supports a woman's right to abortion, whatever her reasons.[74] The fact that she felt compelled to repeat this belief over and over again testifies to the difficulty facing those who want to question the ableist underpinnings of the system of prenatal testing without questioning access to abortion. Yet these very scholars, as well as those involved in the actions I describe here, argue that having to make decisions about reproduction in the face of ableist representations of disability and in a culture "that promises much grief to parents of children it deems unfit" harms everyone.[75] To put it plainly: critically examining the reasons why women choose to terminate pregnancies based on disability, challenging reproductive rights movements for using disability as a justification for legal abortion, and deconstructing the assumptions about disability built into prenatal testing policies and practices—none of these necessarily translate into denying women's access to abortion.

In fact, failing to do these things may in fact undermine women's access; at the very least, it makes it more difficult for reproductive rights and justice movements to support and be supported by disability rights and justice movements. I close this section with a provocation, one that also appears in one of the founding texts of feminist disability studies. In their contribution to their anthology *Women with Disabilities: Essays in Psychology, Culture, and Politics*, Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine argue for the right to abortion "for any reason [women] deem appropriate."[76] Following Asch and Fine, rather than "presume or prescribe any reason (for example, 'the tragedy of the defective fetus')," we should defend women's right to make their own decisions about reproduction, fully supporting them in having or not having a child.[77] Abortion for any reason and under any circumstance must then be accompanied by accessible and affordable prenatal care for all women, as well as reliable and affordable child care, access to social services, and the kind of information about and supports for disability mandated in the Kennedy Brownback Act.

I know that I am arguing for an impossibility, at least in the current political climate. We are moving farther and father away from the radical feminist call of "abortion on demand," seeing more and more burdens on abortion as acceptable rather than unduly prohibitive. Yet when we force women (and reproductive rights, health, and justice movements) living in an ableist culture to prove that their abortions are "justifiable," disability remains a convenient and effective justification for preserving at least a minimal right to abortion. Even those who are uncomfortable with seeing disability as the grounds for abortion may find themselves in the untenable situation of deciding which conditions are grounds for abortion and which are not. When the legality of abortion hinges on some pregnancies being seen as "abortable," drawing lines between impairments becomes inevitable: it is acceptable to abort for blindness but not deafness; it is permissible to abort for Down syndrome but not for an atypically-formed hand; this condition is too severe but that one is not. Disability movements cannot win in these conversations; I agree with Adrienne Asch and others who argue that casting some impairments as justification for abortion harms those currently living with those impairments.[78] Making disability do the work of defending abortion may be effective in securing abortion rights in the short term, but it does so by trafficking in discriminatory stereotypes about disability. Moreover, its long-term effectiveness is doubtful, as it opens the door to a continued interrogation of individual women's reasons and decisions.

It is still true that "neither the pro-choice nor the disability rights movement has consolidated around a position on 'choice' and disability," and neither have reproductive rights and justice movements more broadly.[79] Even in arguing for unrestricted access to abortion, I am not calling for such consolidation, at least not consolidation around a single position. I offer this provocation, one that has been offered many times before by others, in order to continue the process of articulating feminist disability positions on reproduction. We need to expand the terrain of dialogue, moving away from such a limited focus on suffering, quality of life, and unlivable disabilities—notions that often perpetuate ableist assumptions—and toward creating opportunities to support reproductive justice for all, including for and by disabled people. Continuing to accept disability as the reason to keep abortion legal, and casting abortion as the only reasonable choice when dealing with disability, is a narrowing of both abortion rights and the terms of debate. So, too, is the assumption that the meaning of "suffering" or "quality of life" is self-evident and monolithic; rather than using these concepts as if they "obviously" led us to only one conclusion, we could attend instead to their shifts in meanings across different registers, contexts, or bodies/minds. As Sujatha Jesudason argues in her description of Generations Ahead's methodology, coalitions around genetic and reproductive technologies require a willingness to take risks and have frank dialogue about the issues that divide us. Having these kinds of difficult conversations can help different movements discover and articulate their shared values while also laying the groundwork for future conversations as values, identifications, and goals change.[80]

Accessible Futures

In presenting these three possibilities of crip coalition as accessible futures, or as feminist/queer/crip futures, I have focused on only a few possibilities out of many. I could have discussed antiwar protests, for example, and the need to speak out against the disabling effects of the US war on terror. The military-industrial complex causes illness, disability, and death on a global scale, and there is much work to be done in theorizing how to oppose war violence and its effects without denigrating disability and disabled people in the process. (We can see still further links here with environmental justice movements, as the US military is one of the world's worst polluters.)

Or what of potential links between the prison abolition movement and deinstitutionalization movements? There certainly is much to be gained in critically examining the prisons, nursing homes, and asylums of the past and present. The prison industrial complex serves as the primary source of (inadequate) health care for increasing numbers of poor people and people of color, notes Dorothy Roberts, who offers as an example the fact that the psychiatric wing of the Los Angeles County Jail "is the largest mental health facility in the country."[81] Prisons, moreover, not only house disabled people but *produce* them: violence, isolation, and inadequate and inconsistent access to medicine and health care have a disabling effect on the bodies and minds of inmates and prisoners.[82] How might probing these links allow us to recognize the problem Liat Ben-Moshe describes as "trans-incarceration" or "the move from one carceral edifice such as a psychiatric hospital to another such as a jail"?[83]

Or I could have explored connections between disability movements and movements for the rights of domestic workers. At a 2009 protest in Oakland challenging state budget cuts to health care, I watched a group of disabled people and union workers not trade but share chants: "We are the union, the mighty, mighty union!" they all shouted, followed by "We're out, we're loud, we're disabled, and we're proud!" As I watched these interactions, and participated in both sets of chants, I kept thinking about Robert McRuer's concept of "the nondisabled claim to be crip" and his reminder that it is often useful, "for the purposes of solidarity, to come out as something you are—at least in some ways—not."[84] Yet we can also see these union workers' claiming of disability not only as an act of solidarity or affiliation but also as a recognition of what McRuer calls "the disability to come." Some of these women (and they were mostly women) are themselves sick or disabled, and many more will become so through this hard work.[85] In other words, not only are there overlaps between those communities (many care workers are disabled or will become so), there are also overlaps between their needs: both groups will benefit in a system that values attendant care and the workers who provide it.[86]

Or, to turn a critical eye on my own coalitional imaginings, we can trace how each of the issues and movements I have discussed separately in this chapter are themselves intertwined. These imaginings are, in Donna Haraway's framing, "partial": I have selected moments that I myself am involved in and partial to, and they are necessarily incomplete. Not only could we add still other coalitions to this list, we could also complicate, extend, critique, refute, and enrich the cases I have included here.

Indeed, these coalitional moments will be known to many of you; my provocations may feel more familiar than provocative. Yet that possibility is part of my motivation for including them here. Not only am I interested in pushing the parameters of disability studies to include these not-really-so-disparate sites, I am also invested in making clear that this work is happening. In other words, I mention these various coalitional moments not because they currently are absent but because they are present, vibrant, and ongoing. There is rich disability (and feminist, and queer, and environmental, and racial justice, and reproductive, and . . .) work happening in each of these locations; alternative political imaginaries are being debated and discussed in and through these various political practices. Disabled people have more than a dream of accessible futures: we continue to define and demand our place in political discourses, political visions, and political practice, even as we challenge those very questions and demands. More accessible futures depend on it.

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