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Disability Art: 'Cripping' the Canon

A Thesis in Art History
by
Kayla Johnson

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Abstract

This paper examines works of disability art, a contemporary art movement that has developed as a response to the marked absence of disability from the art historical canon. Disability artists have developed a wide range of artistic techniques that work to protest this exclusion and to suggest that exclusion from the mainstream art world is symptomatic of the broader social marginalization of disabled individuals. This thesis investigates the ways that disability artists interact with and protest the art historical canon through the appropriation of visual language established by conventional art movements. Evoking intersections with queer theory and feminist methodologies, works of disability art transform past inquiries into the self by bringing issues of the body to the fore. By placing these in conversation with conventional practices, this paper explores the discursive potential of these contemporary reflections on the individual's relationship with society.

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Introduction

To commemorate the 2012 Paralympic games held in London, a sculpture was raised outside of the Channel 4 building, the headquarters of a prominent British broadcaster. Stretching across the building's façade, the 50-foot sculpture evokes the torso of a human figure with arms twisting and reaching in a pose reminiscent of the Greek sculptor Myron's famous Discobolus.[1] Below, a bold circular shape balances the figure's dynamic posture and suggests a wheelchair in motion. Not altogether dissimilar from the ubiquitous "handicap sign" we see day to day on accessible parking spaces and bathroom stalls, to passersby the sculpture would easily blend into expected modes of visually representing disability. As a monument to the athletes participating in the Paralympics there was little unexpected about the piece. The title, however, tells a different story.

The artist behind the sculpture, Tony Heaton, called the piece *Monument to the Unintended Performer* [Fig. 1], a title that shifts the focus from the athletes in the games to the 11.6 million disabled people living in the United Kingdom in 2012.[2] Heaton's title draws a connection between the spectacle of the Paralympic games and the ways that disabled people, who are often subject to stares while moving through public spaces, are made to perform their disability in daily life. In addition to his art practice Heaton is also the CEO of Shape Arts, an organization that advocates for disabled artists and works with cultural institutions to break down

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[1] "Channel 4 Unveils New 'Big 4' Paralympic Installation," Official Website of the Paralympic

[2] Office for Disability Issues, *Disability Prevalence Estimates 2011/12*, published January 16 2014, accessed December 21, 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/disability-prevalence-estimates-200203-to-201112-apr-to-mar.

stereotypes about disability and encourage more accessible, accommodating environments.[3] Heaton is not alone, disabled artists and their advocates are gaining traction across the United Kingdom and the United States as a part of the larger disability culture movement. Through the advocacy of organizations like Shape Arts and the perseverance of disabled artists, who are often readily dismissed as "outsider artists," the fledgling genre of disability art has begun to take shape. Although what we now are beginning to recognize as explicit disability art practice can scarcely trace its roots past the 1980s, disability artists actively engage with the canon of art history by pulling movements and techniques from the past and appropriating these in the service of telling disability related narratives. Just as nondisabled artists have done for centuries, disability art pioneers are engaging with and subverting past artistic practices to create tension between their intended meanings and their reconceptualization within disability culture.

The notion of a disability culture arose roughly contemporaneously with the growth of the field of disability studies, which has produced theory and methodology to critically analyze how meaning is constructed and applied to disabled bodies. The framework provided by disability studies gives insight into the sociological underpinnings of disability and how disability functions in a society that registers "normal" and "abnormal" at two ends of a hard dichotomy.[4] With the theory established through disability studies, disabled people around the world have developed the tools to conceptualize and express the sociological significance

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[3] "Shape at a Glance," Shape Arts, Accessed December 22, 2015, https://www.shapearts.org.uk/shape-at-a-glance.
[4] Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 2;6.

of their daily experiences with prejudice and oppression.

Crip theory is a critical framework that diagnoses the sociopolitical underpinnings of disability identity and the value (or negative value) assigned to it. Taking its name from the slur "cripple," crip theory appropriates language used to marginalize the disabled community and deploys it to expose and contest social injustices. The defiant reclamation of the term "crip" mirrors the adoption of the slur "queer" in the development of queer theory.[5] This linguistic connection between the two theories is deliberate and indicative of a larger intersection between their methodologies: crip theory posits that queerness and disability share a pathologized history that has resulted in their reduction to deviance.[6]

This argument is situated in the observation that both able-bodiedness and heterosexuality are masked by the conviction that these identities are not identities at all, but are "natural" or "normal" states of being. Under this prevailing conception, "homosexual" is seen as the deviant manifestation of natural "heterosexual" drives, just as "disability" is seen as the malfunctioning of a healthy, complete "able-body."[7] The crux of these dichotomous judgments can be represented as such:

Crip Theory		Queer Theory	
Able-Bodied	**Disabled**	**Heteronormative**	**Queer**
Healthy	Pathological	Healthy	Pathological
Natural	Malfunctioning	Natural	Malfunctioning
Normal	Deviant	Normal	Deviant

[5] Todd Ramlow, "Queering, Cripping," In Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke, eds., *Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2009), 129, ProQuest ebrary.

[6] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1.

[7] Robert McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2006), 89, PDF.

Applying poststructural analysis to these dichotomies reveals how, as Joan Scott wrote:

> Fixed oppositions conceal the extent to which things presented as oppositional are, in fact, interdependent—that is, they derive their meaning from a particularly established contrast rather than from some inherent or pure antithesis. Furthermore … the interdependence is hierarchical with one term dominant or prior, the opposite term subordinate and secondary.[8]

Bound up in these fixed dichotomies that privilege heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, queerness and disability find commonality in their social construction as "unnatural" and disavowal as deviance.

Queer theory has reacted against the pathologized history of queerness by developing a methodology to unpack how value is assigned to gender and sexual preference. Rather than continuing to inhabit these restrictive spaces, queer theory presents alternative modalities of self-exploration and expression outside of the heteronormative status quo. Queerness, as a means of interacting with the world, rejects binary oppositions in order to encourage a critical investigation of gender and sexuality without the creation of finite categories. In this way, queer theory creates room for constant redefinition, never restricting the possibilities of its theoretical applications.[9]

Robert McRuer suggests that reconciling the seemingly disparate concerns of queer theory and crip theory through an emphasis on the common source of their oppression produces a methodology that actively works to question and unpack the

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[8] Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 37, accessed August 22, 2012, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177997.

[9] Todd Ramlow, "Queering, Cripping," 131, ProQuest ebrary.

labels "normal" and "natural" to uncover the ideologies at work underneath. By exposing how these social forces shape the value we assign to certain bodies, a "queer/disabled perspective [resists] delimiting the kinds of bodies and abilities that are acceptable or that will bring about change." The goal of crip theory, then, is to dismantle the centrality of the able-body and to question the superiority of normative experiences and perspectives.

Contemporary art has proven to be a fertile ground for gathering these ideas and further exploring both the personal and societal implications of disability. Ann Millet-Gallant points out that the contemporary interest in exploring the limits of the body and identity through art, which developed largely through feminist art practice, is also naturally applicable to disability and therefore has been adopted into the burgeoning field of disability art.[10] For the purposes of this thesis my interest is in disability art is focused on the ways that disabled artists make reference to the art historical canon and adopt, reinvent, and subvert pre-existing artistic traditions. Grounding works of disability art in their art historical context and analyzing these through the lens of crip theory, I will demonstrate how disabled artists deploy their art practice to draw attention to unique elements of disability experience and to problematize and politicize ableist assumptions that have long gone unchallenged.

The intersection between feminist art and disability art can be traced to those larger similarities between queer theory and crip theory. Todd Ramlow elaborates on this connection by drawing out the similarities between the strategies

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[10] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6.

of "queering" and "cripping." In Ramlow's formulation, queering can be understood as "a practice of reading culture to resist heteronormativity […] in order to expose the normative logic, ideology, and injunctions at work underneath."[11] Similarly, he explains that cripping is a methodology that utilizes disability as a lens for analyzing cultural constructions of ability and wholeness. Employing disability in this way allows for critical analysis of how stigma and other assumptions about disability inform dominant cultural narratives about health and wellness. Cripping becomes a tool for disrupting these constructions and reassigning value to disabled people's perspectives and experiences. This methodology, like the practice of queering, has become an integral part of contemporary artistic exploration of the self.

Combining an art historical and disability studies approach, Ann Millett-Gallant wrote *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, an investigation of how artists have utilized media such as performance and photography to problematize the voyeuristic gaze that visibly disabled bodies often draw in public spaces. Millett-Gallant places these "strategic acts of self-exhibition"[12] in the context of art history and analyzes how disabled artists and artists who represent disabled subjects utilize the spectacle that is made of disability in public spaces to politicize disability and challenge latent cultural stereotypes. She argues that artists who make work centered around the disabled body, regardless of whether the artist themself is disabled or not, are raising important questions about the construction of "normality" as it relates to the body. Her interest is in why the disabled body so readily draws stares and how artists are able to manipulate stares to comment on

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[11] Todd Ramlow, "Queering, Cripping," 132, ProQuest ebrary.
[12] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 10.

the ways that daily interactions, like art, are informed by meanings assigned to the body.

Millet-Gallant contrasts her perspective on the gazes involved in the production of disability art against those of disability scholar and feminist theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, who wrote about staring in detail in her book *Staring: How We Look*. This investigation into the staring exchange clarifies the different functions of the stare as it relates to the disabled body, including staring as curiosity, communication, and dominance. She reviews works of art by disabled and nondisabled artists and argues that works featuring visibly disabled people provide an avenue to gaze voyeuristically at the disabled body without the guilt or fear of confrontation that accompanies staring interactions in daily life. Within the framework of staring, Garland-Thomson finds some of the gazes drawn by disability art to be humanizing, while she believes others only further encourage stigmatizing stares in broader social interactions.

In an earlier examination of disability performance art, Garland-Thomson described how disabled artists are able to successfully utilize their joint position as subject and art object to give humanizing autobiographical accounts of the body. Through this process, Garland-Thomson notes that a staring exchange develops and is mediated by the artist, who is able to guide the viewer through personal accounts of their body. Because inquiry into disability so often revolves around the question of "what happened" to the disabled person, the disabled body constantly demands an explanatory narrative. By performing this explanation artistically, Garland-Thomson believes that artists are able to address and diffuse these concerns,

allowing for a deeper understanding of the artist as a humanized subject. "In addition to allowing individual expression," she writes, "this artistic engagement with self-display also provides a medium for positive identity politics and an opportunity to protest cultural images of disabled people."[13]

Rod Michalko's book *The Difference That Disability Makes* further investigates these cultural perceptions of disability. Michalko is interested in the identity that forms around the experience of disability. Although identifying with disability, as with other identities such as race or gender, is not usually a voluntary or conscious act, he suggests that it bears investigation in order to isolate the political significance of disability as an identity category. The author explains, "while our identities are ready-made and we do step into them, […] they are nonetheless *made* and are not natural."[14] In order to account for the social location of disability as an identity, Michalko elaborates on how the construction of disability is socially mediated and breaks down how disability relates both to the body and to the society the disabled person lives in.

These formulations of disability are derived from foundational works of disability studies, such as *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* by Simi Linton. A cornerstone of disability theory, *Claiming Disability* works to outline disability studies as an academic discipline by illustrating the sociological factors that influence attitudes toward disability. According to Linton, disability studies

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[13] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (June 2000): 335, accessed February 9, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041845.

[14] Rod Michalko, *The Difference That Disability Makes*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 5.

"explores the critical divisions our society makes in creating the normal versus the pathological, the insider versus the outsider."[15] These dichotomies are then broken using "sociopolitical analysis of disability […] informed both by the knowledge base and methodologies used in the traditional liberal arts, and by conceptualizations and approaches developed in areas of the new scholarship."[16] The result is an interdisciplinary field that locates disability not only as an element of bodily experience, but as an identity that has social, political, and cultural roots.

The redefinition of disability through the scholarly intervention of disability studies has also come to influence aesthetic theory. In order to conceptualize these implications, Tobin Siebers wrote a landmark exploration of an aesthetic model he termed "disability aesthetics." This conception is based on the notion that, while much of Western art history has been dedicated to achieving idealistic perfection, modern art has supplanted the pursuit of the ideal in favor of more emotionally driven works. A significant amount of popular modern and contemporary art deals with emotions through direct reference to the body, especially bodies that are abstracted, or "disfigured," in order to evoke visceral reactions. References to pain, illness, and wounds abound, modern art has forfeit the pristine and the beautiful in favor of what Siebers reads as visual manifestations of disability. He writes, "in the modern period, disability acquires aesthetic value because it represents for makers of art a critical resource for thinking about what a human being is."[17] Within this

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[15] Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, 2.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Tobin Siebers *Disability Aesthetics*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Uniersity of Michigan Press, 2010), 3.

framework, the aesthetic development of modern art from the 1950s onward can loosely be read as a growing interest in disability as a lens for pursuing a deeper understanding of the self and others.

This background is central to my reading of the artworks analyzed in this thesis. In order to read disability art, viewers must first address and reconcile latent preconceptions about disability that are ubiquitous in Western culture. Central to the proliferation of disability art is the assertion that disability is not merely a medicalized state of being. Instead, it is understood that physical and mental impairments result in social estrangement and political disempowerment, factors that restrict disabled individuals' quality of life in a greater magnitude than the impairment itself. Viewers of disability art must reconcile, not renounce, their individual compulsion to stare at noticeably disabled individuals when they appear in public spaces. Disability art provides an avenue to explore the implications of these stares, while providing a permissible avenue to stare and to wonder about disability and those who experience it.

Models of Disability

Because it so closely pertains to the body, disability has historically been seen in light of medical science, which treats disability as a condition that is located within the individual's body that is indicated through a form of physical and/or mental impairment. In this formulation, the medical model reacts to disability by attempting "fix" the "problem" in the person's body, thereby eradicating any impairment that distinguishes the disabled person from the nondisabled person.[18]

[18] Ann Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 7.

The obvious shortcoming of this perspective is that not every disability can be resolved through medicine, leaving people to "suffer" their disability or to pursue a greater level of "normalcy" through lifelong rehabilitation.[19]

The implicit assumption that informs this way of thinking is that disability is an inherently undesirable way of being. Rod Michalko notes how, during an appointment with an ophthalmologist after he began developing blindness, "at no point during our conversation did I tell the doctor I did not want to be blind, nor did he ask me whether I wanted to be. Yet, we both knew I did not. […] It was just as easy to see that the doctor did not want me to be blind either."[20] Michalko concludes that this assumption did not warrant discussion because the preference for "normalcy" is universal in our cultural attitudes toward the body. The implications of this centrality of able-bodiedness as the unmarked standard, what Robert McRuer calls "compulsory able-bodiedness," are widespread; the desire to maintain and reinforce the superiority of the nondisabled body serves not only to assign value to bodies specifically, but also to privilege able-bodied identities and able-bodied perspectives.[21] Just as Judith Butler understood gender identity to be molded through normative ideals more so than formative experiences in her landmark work *Gender Trouble*,[22] closer study suggests that the identifier "disabled" is similarly rendered through cultural expectations about the body.

Within the medical conception of disability, the issues that disabled people face are considered "personal tragedies" that are outside the control of, and

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[19] Rod Michalko, *The Difference That Disability Makes*, 44.
[20] Ibid, 46.
[21] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, 89.
[22] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc., 1990), 16.

therefore are not the responsibility of, the nondisabled majority. To disrupt this conventional understanding, activists began developing notions of a "disabling society," which creates social and physical barriers that impede access and result in the exclusion of disabled people.[23] Termed the "social model of disability," this way of thinking draws a distinction between an *impairment*, the physical and/or mental differences that are located in the person's body, and *disability*, which "is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society."[24] This perspective accounts for disabled people's "isolation and segregation, in every area of life, such as education, work, mobility, housing, etc."[25] as a result of institutional barriers. In doing so the social model conceptualizes disabled people as an oppressed group through the shared experience of being limited by both physical and attitudinal barriers to participation.

Through this lens, public policy and choices in the construction of the built environment that deny disabled people to full, unencumbered access to public spaces are politicized and shown for what they really are: exclusionary. To explain why these barriers persist despite legislation such as the ADA in the United States and the DDA in the United Kingdom, Tobin Siebers links this issue back to aesthetics by arguing, "Culture is not merely a web of symbols. It is a web of body symbols."[26]

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[23]Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, eds., *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research* (Leeds, UK: Disability Press, 2004), 1.
[24] Paul Lewis et al., "Fundamental Principles of Disability," discussion between the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation and The Disability Alliance, November 22, 1975, Leeds University, last modified October 1997, 3, accessed December 29, 2015, http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/UPIAS-fundamental-principles.pdf.
[25] Ibid, 4.
[26] Tobin Siebers *Disability Aesthetics*, 71.

This explains how "architecture and landscape design not only attempt to project a sense of beauty but exclude people deemed ugly or defective by making their access to society difficult or impossible."[27] Noting the prevalence of wheelchair-accessible ramps tucked away to the backs of buildings, accessible entrances snaking around to avoid main thoroughfares instead of taking the most direct route, and planters with flowers creating obstacles on otherwise accessible pathways, Siebers draws a connection between the aesthetic preference for "civic beauty" in reference to public spaces and the exclusion of disabled people.[28]

The effect of the built environment on social interactions has been theorized independently of disability studies through architectural semiotics. Using a symbolic interactionist lens, architecture can be read for encoded signs and symbols that give meaning to the built environment.[29] Environmental psychologists Denise Lawrence and Setha Low explain that built forms "condense powerful meanings and values; they comprise key elements in a system of communication used to articulate social relations. The complex levels of meaning associated with sites are manipulated by political actors for a variety of purposes in different situations. The arrangement of sites and the organization of their meanings thus ultimately correspond to the social structure."[30] Because architecture's meaning is rendered through social assignments of value, the observations made by Lawrence and Low provide a foundation for

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[27] Ibid, 72.

[28] Ibid, 79

[29] Ronald W. Smith and Valerie Bugni, "Symbolic Interaction Theory and Architecture," *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 134, accessed January 3, 2016, http://ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/docview/224798935?accountid=1055

[30] Denise L. Lawrence and Setha M. Low, "The Built Environment and Spatial Form," Annual Review of Anthropology 19 (1990): 466, accessed January 6, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2155973.

understanding how sociological factors influence disabled people's level of access to the built environment.

Locating disability within the sociopolitical and built environments gives political bearing to an identity that had historically been assigned the role of "personal tragedy." The social model is therefore essential to understanding how disability is constructed, devalued, and excluded through processes that have nothing to do with the bodily impairment itself, but out of a collective cultural discomfort with the difference of disability and the desire to maintain the illusion of an idealized "healthy" and "beautiful" public. Within this framework, disability art enters the scene and employs the strategy of "cripping" to problematize these cultural tendencies and draw attention to the exclusionary motivations and normative ideals that have led to these constructed preferences.

A Note on Language

Our collective discomfort with disability is evident by the hesitancy with which we approach language that references disabled people. Although euphemisms such as "differently abled" and "handi-capable" attempt to compensate for earlier, less sympathetic language, these terms equally reflect the social discomfort around confronting the difference of disability. Political scientist Harlan Hahn explains "we [disabled people] have dispensed with all the terms like 'physically challenged' and all that stuff because every time you use a euphemism it's like saying 'this is so awful that we have to disguise it with these fancy words.'"[31] Behind these disguises are

[31] *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*. Directed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder. Boston: Fanlight Productions, 1995. Posted on Youtube by David Mitchell, August, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P23ov4QVHhI Part 2, 00:15:40.

disabled people— or people with disabilities— and the order makes all the difference.

In the United States, the disability community took the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 as an opportunity to make a statement about the importance of language choice and to dispose of previously favored terms like "handicapped" that carry negative connotations. The document instead utilized the term "individuals with disabilities," which has been popularized colloquially as "people with disabilities," to describe people who experience physical and/or mental impairments. This "people-first language" was favored in order to emphasize the separation between the individual and their disability.[32] However, some find the process linguistically separating an individual from their disability to be problematic in its own right.

It has been argued that person-first language treats disability as a condition that affects individuals but is ultimately separate from their identity.[33] As a result of linguistically moving disability away from personal identity "disability is treated as a 'condition' [and] interpreted as a 'given.' Disability is the condition of having a body that is a problem. Thus, disability is stripped of any social location or social significance. It simply is."[34] In this formulation, as Rod Michalko points out, disabled people are seen simply as "normal people with _____"; the "abnormality" is located within their individual bodies and this difference does not constitute a

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[32] Tony K. Boatright, "What Do We Call 'Em?," *Pn* 64, no. 11 (2010): 54-57, accessed November 10, 2015, CINAHL with Full Text, EBSCOhost (105114881).
[33] Rod Michalko, *The Difference That Disability Makes*, 148.
[34] Tanya Titchkosky, "Disability Studies: The Old and the New," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 25, no. 2 (2000): 206, accessed November 8, 2015.

marker of identity.

Analyzing the language in this way suggests the same pitfall as the medical model of disability: it can be argued that person-first language reinforces the notion that disability is located solely in an individual's impairment, and also reveals the desire to emphasize personhood (a "normal" quality) over disability (an "abnormality"). In order to linguistically integrate disability into its social location, the term "disabled people" has also become popular. In response to the perception that "people with disabilities" curtailed the social significance of disability, "disabled people" posits disability as a marker of identity that forms around shared experience.[35]

For the purposes of this paper I will be using the term "disabled people" in order to foreground disability as unifying identity that is located in institutional barriers and social stigma. I am interested in the ways that disability artists intuitively respond to these social forces and how their responses mediate social expectations about disabled bodies through the language of art history.

Cripping the Canon

This thesis will place works of disability art in conversation with the practices of different artistic genres that have developed throughout the modern and contemporary periods. My interest is in how disability artists select artistic practices that developed without the inclusion of disabled people and appropriate the forms to integrate disabled identities into the artistic conversation. Through this

[35] Angelo Muredda, "Fixing Language: 'People First' Language, Taxonomical Perspectivism, and the Linguistic Location of Disability," The English Languages: History, Diaspora, and Culture 3, (2012), 3-5; Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 13.

process of cripping the art historical canon, I believe that disability artists are making important, highly political assertions about broader issues of inclusion and exclusion that disabled people face day to day. By focusing on elements of their lived experiences as disabled individuals, such as being the subject of stares or moving through space differently than nondisabled people, disability art not only provides an outlet for airing personal experiences with discrimination, but also actively redirects attention to the sociopolitical factors that underlie the marginalization of disabled people individually and collectively.

To trace its art historical lineage, this paper will follow the chronology of the artistic movements being referenced by works of disability art. This will begin with action painting, a method of abstraction developed in the late 1940s and 1950s by artists like Jackson Pollock who used embellished movements to create loose dripping strokes that captured the essence of the artist's gestures. This tradition, which revolutionized modernism, is reliant on the body's movement through space. Because of this, this practice would have initially been conceptualized in a way that excludes the experience of physical disabilities that limit the artist's mobility. Contemporary British artist Sue Austin appropriates the language this artistic tradition and challenges these underlying assumptions by creating action-based paintings using the movement of her electric wheelchair. American artist Tucker Stilley, who is paralyzed, adopts similar formal means to assert his vitality and wide range of abilities despite being unable to move. Like the gestural abstraction of the 1950s, Austin and Stilley capture the ephemeral action of the artist while simultaneously drawing attention to how disability sets apart their modes of

movement through the world.

With a similar interest in movement, Park McArthur installs exhibitions of readymade, everyday objects that act as personal artifacts of her disabled body's repetitive actions. In the language of gestural abstraction, the canvas was regarded as an arena across which the artist moved. This emphasis on the active process of painting foretold the vocabulary of installation art, a genre that developed in the 1960s in which art objects are placed within a gallery setting to transform the space as a whole. Installations, to varying degrees, construct immersive environments that impose sensory stimulus on the viewer as they move through the space. Unlike action painting's preoccupation with the suggestion of the artist's body, installation instead works to create effects on viewers' bodies as they interact with the prescribed space. British artist Ryan Gander utilizes installation to generate environments that situate viewers in the position of the disabled subject, a heuristic technique that simulates alienation in order to provide insights into disability experience.

As a development analogous to the growth of installation art, the 1960s and 1970s also saw the popularization of performance art and looser performative approaches to art making. Unlike action painting, which offers artistic remnants of the artist's movements, and installation, which does its work on the viewer's body, performance conceptualized the artist's body as a medium all its own. By removing the layer of separation between the body and its audience, performance allowed for an immediate exchange between artist and viewer using the body as the mode of communication. Feminist artists utilized performance to emphasize the constructed

elements of feminine identity and to play out stigmatizing stereotypes of femininity. Through performance, Amelia Jones outlines how "artists have used their bodies to dismantle the parameters of these norms and disrupt accepted signifiers of identity."[36] Disability artists have similarly adopted performance, as Garland-Thomson discussed in *Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists*, to initiate and mediate a staring exchange between the disabled artist and their audience. In doing so, artists like Mary Duffy and Kevin Connolly have crafted performative practices that subtly manipulate the voyeuristic stares that follow visibly disabled bodies into an arrested artistic gaze. In doing so, like their feminist predecessors, these artists interrupt otherwise unchallenged views of disability identity as "tragic" and illuminate their experiences as a disabled person through the practices of talking and staring back.

By 1980, the climate of political protest for racial and gender equality began to effect the art world such that public art became increasingly prevalent and took on a renewed meaning. Once reserved almost exclusively for historic memorials, public art during this period became a site for contesting claims to public space. Increasingly, minority groups looked to create and install public art pieces that reflected their unique position in society and generated a sense of shared community experience. While these practices continued without the inclusion of disabled subjectivities, contemporary artists now redress this problem by creating works, like Tony Heaton's *Monument to the Unintended Performer,* that represent disability experience in the public sphere. The relationship between the disabled

[36] Amelia Jones, comp., *The Artist's Body*, ed. Tracey Warr, revised ed. (Phaidon Press, 2012), 13.

minority and public space is generally tense due to the extent to which disabled people are unable to easily access many public spaces and, when doing so, they are forced to accommodate probing stares from passersby. The placement of images of the disabled body in the public sphere is equally fraught with anxiety. The controversy that arose over a publically installed statue by Marc Quinn of disabled artist Alison Lapper demonstrates these reservations. Using this controversy to incite conversation about disability and equality, disability artists have used public art to demand social recognition and assert their right to exist and to participate freely in the public sphere.

By placing these works of disability art in conversation with the conventions they are reacting against and analyzing the tensions that develop through the lens of crip theory, this thesis works to explore both the art historical and sociopolitical significance of these interventions into the artistic exploration of the self in society.

Bodies in Motion: Enabling Action

For centuries artists approached the canvas out of the desire to reproduce an image they had visualized as faithfully as they could. In 1952, art critic Harold Rosenberg wrote a review of what he called *The American Action Painters*, whose technique instead treated the physical act of painting as the subject matter of the artwork itself.[37] This new approach marked a shift "from coming to the canvas as a place to render a prior image, to coming to the canvas as a site for acting."[38] The resulting painted image was secondary to the process of creating, which was highly kinetic and allowed excess paint to drip loosely from the brush in strokes that capture the essence of the artist's force and gesture. Rosenberg noted, "in this gesturing with materials the aesthetic, too, has been subordinated. Form, color, composition, drawing, are auxiliaries."[39] Instead of the traditional formal elements, the emphasis in this technique was on the movement of the artist as they interacted with the materials.

By reformulating painting as visual residue of an act undertaken by the artist, Rosenberg argues that the work of art becomes inextricably linked with the artist's biography. By "living on the canvas,"[40] the artist immortalizes the actions they took in the moments leading up to the piece's creation. This demanded a new way of interpreting the visual language outside of color, line, and form, and instead, as

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[37] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," ARTnews, January 1952, 22, accessed December 30, 2015.
[38] Wayne J. Froman, "Action Painting and World-As-Picture," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 473, accessed December 24, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/431284.
[39] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 23.
[40] Ibid.

Rosenberg suggested, through "a vocabulary of action: its inception, duration, direction."[41] These elements of the new vocabulary are not readily intellectualized or understood visually, but instead are best understood through how the body reacts to the tension in the artist's gestures. Action painting reimagined the motion involved in painting both as the labor of the painting's creation and the content of its subject matter. In doing so, action painters conflated the visual and motor experiences, creating a uniquely tactile and somatic way of conceptualizing visual experience.[42]

Among action painters, Jackson Pollock stands unparalleled in the public consciousness. His loose, dripping movements are emblematic of the gestural technique and have become canonized as exemplars of the style. Pollock's method of creating these works developed out of a desire to have an unlimited capacity to move around the painting. Robert Goodnough visited Pollock in his studio in 1951 and documented the artist's method of moving/painting. In order to allow his movements to flow naturally across the canvas, Pollock worked on the floor and walked around his studio to assess the work's progress from all angles.

With the canvas before him, he worked with "rapid movements of the wrist, arm and body, quickly allowing [paint] to fall in weaving rhythms over the surface. […] At times he would crouch, holding the brush close to the canvas, and again he would stand and move around it or step on it to reach to the middle."[43] Goodnough described this process as a "ritual dance" that relied upon his body's intuitive sense

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Wayne J. Froman, "Action Painting and World-As-Picture," 474.
[43] Robert Goodnough, "Pollock Paints a Picture," ARTnews, May 1951, accessed December 30, 2015, http://www.artnews.com/2012/11/26/pollock-paints-a-picture/.

of rhythm and movement.[44]

Because of the dynamism of the process, this artistic practice gives information not only about Pollock's ritual movement, but also about his body as a whole. Pollock's technique required that his body be able to produce these rapid movements and to perform this dance in order to achieve his signature visual outcomes. In this sense, action painting preserves the artist's presence through the painted remnants of their dynamic gesturing. The piece, therefore, is always suggesting the absence of a body that it is referencing.

In *The Artist's Body*, Amelia Jones places action painting as an early manifestation of body art, which is loosely defined as a form of art outside of the brush and canvas tradition that is made by the artist using their body as the subject or material of the work. While gestural abstraction fits into this category because the work suggests the artist's body through its rhythm and absence, Jones is careful to note the sociopolitical significance of believing that bodies like Pollock's needed only to be implied in the work and not overtly shown. She argues that, within the modernist tradition, the artist represented "'disinterested' and thus resolutely disembodied subjects—usually the white, Western male: the allegedly universal subject."[45] Although not explicated by Jones, this universal figure also clearly represents the nondisabled body as the normative standard.[46]

Within this history of gestural abstraction, there would seem to be little room

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, 20.

[46] Feminist artists later appropriated the principles of gestural abstraction to protest the centrality of the white male subject in the actionist tradition. For example, Janine Antoni's *Loving Care* (1992-1996) utilized an attribute of the artist's femininity, her long hair, to disperse paint around the canvas in movements inspired by earlier abstract expressionists.

for the participation of physically disabled artists, whose bodies do not move in ways similar to the artists who developed the technique. British artist Sue Austin interrupts these expectations, however, as she creates an innovative new form of action painting using the movement of her electric wheelchair.

> I started using a wheelchair 16 years ago when an extended illness changed the way I could access the world. When I started using the wheelchair, it was a tremendous new freedom. But even though I had this newfound joy and freedom, people's reaction completely changed towards me. It was as if they couldn't see me anymore, as if an invisibility cloak had descended. They seemed to see me in terms of their assumptions of what it must be like to be in a wheelchair. When I asked people their associations with the wheelchair, they used words like "limitation," "fear," "pity" and "restriction." I realized I'd internalized these responses and it had changed who I was on a core level. A part of me had become alienated from myself. I was seeing myself not from my perspective, but vividly and continuously from the perspective of other people's responses to me.[47]

In order to reclaim her sense of freedom, Austin reacted against these stereotypes by using her newfound mobility to shatter the assumption that moving through the world in a wheelchair is necessarily limiting.

From this frustration *Freewheeling: Present and Absent* (2009) [Fig. 2] was born. The project consists of a series of works on paper and public "installations" that Austin created by dripping paint and other materials onto the wheels of her power wheelchair and moving across the canvas or directly across the ground. The movement of her chair produces two parallel lines, which she twists into euphoric curves and loops as she spins and moves through space.[48] Like earlier action painting, which documented the bodily movement of the artist by preserving the

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[47] Sue Austin, "Deep Sea Diving…in a Wheelchair," filmed December 2012, TED Video, 9:38, posted 2012, http://www.ted.com/talks/sue_austin_deep_sea_diving_in_a_wheelchair#t-14146

[48] Kate Torgovnick-May, "See Much More of Sue Austin's Incredible Wheelchair Art," TEDBlog, entry posted January 8, 2013, accessed January 6, 2016, http://blog.ted.com/see-much-more-of-sue-austins-incredible-wheelchair-art/.

angle and intensity of their gesture as they applied paint, Austin's works provide visual documentation of her unique movement through space.

The artist reinvents the traces left by her wheelchair by offering them as evidence of the autonomy that the wheelchair has afforded her, an "expression of the sense of agency, freedom and expansion engendered by the experience of using a 'power'chair."[49] This celebration of the agency she experiences when using her wheelchair confronts and rejects the notion that she, as a wheelchair user, is limited in her ability to move through the world. By participating in the actionist tradition of capturing ephemeral movements, Austin is protesting the prevalent belief that wheelchairs are restrictive. She subverts these expectations by demonstrating her ability to move through graceful, twisting lines.

As the title reveals, *Freewheeling: Present and Absent* focuses not only on her range of movement as a wheelchair user, but on her visibility as well. Austin explains, "Without this wheelchair I am absent from society, unable to take part in the social network of becoming, unable to add my own narrative to the multitudinous stories from which our lives and cultures are woven. Within this wheelchair I also find myself absent from society, a cloak of invisibility seems to descend when negotiating social spaces."[50] Here, Austin confronts the alienating discomfort that many nondisabled people react with when engaging with, or even simply seeing, a wheelchair user in public.

The invisibility that Austin introduces here results from the tendency for

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[49] Sue Austin, "An Absent Presence or a Present Absence? An Installation in Three Parts," Freewheeling, last modified 2009, accessed January 4, 2016, https://freewheeling.carbonmade.com/projects/2312967.
[50] Ibid.

nondisabled people to avoid looking at people who are visibly disabled, especially those who use wheelchairs. Although this avoidance likely arises out of the cultural pressure to suppress reflexively staring, looking away further grounds disabled people's social experiences in isolation.[51] Anthropologist Robert Murphy, who became disabled later in life, analyzed his experiences with such interactions after becoming disabled. After he began to use a wheelchair, Murphy noticed a change in his relationships with his colleagues. In *The Body Silent* he recalls the first faculty meeting he attended following his return to work, "People whom I knew did not look my way. And persons with whom I had a nodding acquaintance did not nod; they, too, were busily looking off in another direction."[52] Feeling isolated by people's tendency to avoid eye contact after he began using a wheelchair, Murphy deduced that the shame that many disabled people feel about their bodies is generated through interactions such as these, not because of the disability itself.

According to Murphy, the tendency for nondisabled people to avoid acknowledging those who are physically different works to diminish the personhood and self worth of the disabled person. Because nondisabled people often look away from disabled individuals for fear of staring, disabled people are regularly denied standard communicative exchanges like friendly eye contact. This social invisibility, in turn, begins to damage the individual's sense of self-worth and creates shame around the source of the invisibility, their physical impairment. The weight of social exclusion and the shame that results has serious repercussions on a

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[51] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, 83.
[52] Robert Murphy, *The Body Silent*, 2001 ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 91.

person's self-confidence and dignity.[53]

Recognizing the effects of this fundamental social exclusion Austin noted, "Almost everyone I've spoken to says that when they started using a wheelchair they became invisible as a person."[54] In response to her own encounters with socially generated shame and self-debasement, *Freewheeling* draws attention to issues of social visibility and confronts viewers with documentation of her agency and movement. Simultaneously present and absent, Austin's appropriation of the language of gestural abstraction crips the technique by creating visual residue of her body's unique, uninhibited movement through the world. In the process, the "universal" nondisabled, white male subjectivity of historic actionist intentions is subverted and refocused on Austin's disabled female subjectivity.

While Austin's project aimed to take on assumptions about her physical limitations and issues of self-worth and visibility, the work of American artist Tucker Stilley retreats from explicit social commentary to explore the centrality of the body and its tenuous position as the link between one's inner life and the external world. Stilley began his life nondisabled and started his artistic career at Massachusetts College for Art's Studio for Interrelated Media, where he was trained in artistic methods that incorporated innovative and unorthodox technologies. With this foundation, he became interested in the interaction between fine art and

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[53] Ibid, 93.

[54] Sue Austin, qtd in "Art Students Shatter Stereotypes," *The Herald* (Plymouth, England), June 16, 2006, accessed January 5, 2016, http://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/Taking-opportunity-shatter-stereotypes/story-11427908-detail/story.html.

technology and went on to pursue media arts in collaboration with MIT.[55]

In 2005 Stilley was diagnosed with ALS (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease) and began developing paralysis.[56] Driven by his existing interest in the artistic potential of technology, Stilley began to assemble adaptive devices that would allow him to continue his art practice as the paralysis progressed. "I knew that, in order to work, I would have to stay ahead of the progression," he recalled in an interview, "[This] required careful planning. They tell you very dire things in the doctor's office— which are all true— but if you're pragmatic, bullheaded and happen to have an outstanding team working with you, it's amazing what you can do."[57]

Today, Stilley's paralysis has progressed such that he controls only the movement of his eyes. In the frequently asked questions on the artist's website, he responds to the questions about "how paralyzed" he is with a characteristically dry wit, retorting "Oh, very. You wouldn't like it."[58] Utilizing eye movements, he manipulates a system of computers that allow him to speak using a text-to-speech program, access the internet, and create works of art.[59]

The system is built around an infrared beam that illuminates Stilley's face and a camera that captures where the light falls. A computer then uses these two inputs to distill the angle and intensity of his eye movements. The principle is

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55 "Artist's Bio," *The Outer Shell*, accessed March 27, 2016, http://www.tuckerstilley.com/studio/?page_id=3024.

56 Ibid.

57 Tucker Stilley qtd. in Tariq Kamal, "No Limits," *Pasadena Weekly* (CA), October 17, 2013, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.pasadenaweekly.com/cms/story/detail/no_limits/12529/.

58 Tucker Stilley, "Why Newjack Rasputin?," The Outer Shell, last modified November 26, 2014, accessed April 4, 2016, http://www.tuckerstilley.com/studio/?p=2230.

59 Eve Fowler, "Lines of Sight Tucker Stilley," *Artist Curated Projects,* last modified January 13, 2013, accessed March 26, 2016, http://artistcuratedprojects.com/filter/PROJECTS/Lines-of-Sight-Tucker-Stilley.

similar to a night vision camera, which harnesses infrared light to produce a legible image despite the lack of visible light. Just as in night vision footage, Stilley's infrared beam reflects off the human eye causing his eyes to glow brightly. The camera picks up these reflections and the computer runs a series of procedures to measure the precise angle of Stilley's eyes against known coordinates on the computer screen.[60]

Through this process, which runs continuously when his computer is in use, Stilley's computer is able to distill exactly where he is looking and sends the cursor to that point. Leaving the cursor still for a moment, which is accomplished by Stilley fixing his eyes on a single point, causes the computer to shift to a magnifying feature that allows him to place the cursor with immense precision, down to the pixel. Another moment's pause on the location of the cursor with the magnifier and the computer registers a mouse click.[61] These steps afford Stilley an exceptional amount of control over his work. Despite his greatly limited mobility, this system provides him with the tools to lead a full life, as well as a method for making art that does not sacrifice its reliance on his skill and precise execution.

As a result of his clever problem solving, Tucker Stilley has maintained a thriving art practice and experiments liberally with video art, music, digital art, and has even produced a series of comics. His fine art practice treads the line between digital painting and collage. Using his workstation's brute computing force, Stilley runs commands that automatically comb thousands of existing images on the internet and pull pictures for Stilley to manipulate "manually" or which he runs

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

automated actions over, most often with randomized parameters that generate unique and unexpected results.[62] Within his body of work is a series titled *Lines of Sight*, which are created by tracking the movement of his eyes around the computer screen. He explains on his website that the series is intended to document his activity in a way that conjures the figment of actionist art in the modern period:

> It's meta-art—an artifact— a map of my eye movements on the screen over some amount of time. The circles and dots are where my cursor paused, the bigger the black spot, the longer the pause. The title indicates the time period of the scanning covered. Some scans are quite short— 20 minutes perhaps— and some are as long as a week! The movements are my natural routine— eating, coughing, typing, research, painting, editing, programing music, watching movies and the biggest black spots of all—sleep.[63]

Just as Sue Austin used the movement of her electric wheelchair to demonstrate her vitality and independence as a wheelchair user through her sweeping, euphoric tracks of paint, Stilley is presenting visual residue of his own daily tasks as evidence of his constant activity. In doing so he is actively challenging the assumption that he, because of his paralysis, is unable to do anything. The series presents an image of paralysis that is flagrantly contrary to imagined limitation by documenting the ways in which Stilley, despite his physical stillness, is always in motion.

One work from the series called *Eye—10 Hours (No. 8)*, as the title suggests, tracked the artist's eye movements over a 10-hour period from 2:28 am through 12:30 pm on January 19, 2013. The diaristic implications of such a precise record of the artist's activities are hard to ignore. The piece represents a snapshot of Stilley's

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Tucker Stilley, "Lines of Sight," Tucker Stilley, last modified February 2014, accessed April 2, 2016, http://tuckerstilley.com/collection.cfm?collection=Lines%20of%20Sight&c_id=9.

life, a record of exactly what he did during that period without performative artifice or reductive editing.

All while sitting completely still, the piece reveals that Stilley was hard at work, constantly moving and probing, settling only occasionally in one place for a prolonged period. These actions are documented in the repetitive, scratching lines that mar the surface of the work. A clear axis stretches from the bottom-right to top-left corners of the composition along which the lines are darker and more repetitive. The viewer can imagine these lines accumulating as Stilley read line after line of text, or edited a particular area of an artwork. Perhaps, because the title refers so explicitly to a specific stretch of time, Stilley could recall the exact activity that resulted in this pattern.

Among the lines are interspersed dots that represent areas of intense focus. We may imagine the artist analyzing sections of text or studying images closely. The movement tracker gives us insight into Stilley's inner world, where he is always thinking and constantly active. In this particular composition, Stilley even provides the viewer with a benchmark of inactivity to measure against—sleep, which is represented by the largest dot just left of center along the bottom of the screen where his eyes settled during rest. In visually capturing his activity, Stilley is challenging the blank idleness that is readily attributed to people who are fully paralyzed and unable to signal interest through their physicality.

This series, along with all of his artistic output, is part of a larger project Stilley has undertaken titled *The Permanent Record of Newjack Rasputin*. The title refers to a nonsense alias Stilley adopted after he was diagnosed with ALS, what he

called a "new protective persona."[64] The comic books that Stilley has written follow Newjack as he is "stricken with an insidious incurable fatal disease that will leave him little more than a throbbing paralyzed husk — kept alive by machines — a brain in a jar."[65] To combat this fate, Newjack reinvents himself as "a super hero cripple pixel jockey whose tentacles reach deep into the interweb."[66] Through the character Newjack and his escapades, Stilley explores issues of the body and the physicality of autonomy and identity. The sum of the project is self-creation, a means through which Stilley fashioned a new, digitized body to inhabit in order to combat the fragility of the physical body.

Although coded through his personal experiences, these issues find bearing outside of Stilley's individual encounter with ALS. Robert McRuer notes in *Compulsory Able-Bodiedness* that, despite the normalization of the able-bodied ideal, this model is impossible to achieve. This is because able-bodiedness, regardless of its dominance in social discourse, is always temporary. With longevity comes the certainty that the body, as it ages and accumulates wear, will gradually deviate from the able-bodied ideal. In this sense disability, despite its social marginalization, is the only identity that all people can and likely will encounter if they live long enough.[67] Artists have long recognized this outcome and have explored instability as it relates to the self, both physically and mentally. Amelia Jones highlights the

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[64] Tucker Stilley, "Why Newjack Rasputin?," The Outer Shell.

[65] Tucker Stilley qtd. in Holly Myers, "Review: Tucker Stilley at Monte Vista Projects," Los Angeles Times (CA), April 24, 2009, accessed April 4, 2016, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2009/04/tucker-stilley-at-monte-vista-projects.html.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Robert McRuer, "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence," *The Disability Studies Reader*, 95-96.

tendency among artists to investigate "the temporality, contingency, and instability of the body […] reaching to express the self that is invisible, formless and liminal."[68]

From Stilley's position as an observer with paralysis, these concerns are made imminently clear. His continued presence through the assemblage of artworks under the moniker Newjack Rasputin distills those elements of the self that exist in the liminal space outside of physicality and offers them for critical review. Being confronted with the body's temporality, Stilley retreated to digital spaces that do not rely on physicality and through which he can continue to lead a full and unencumbered life despite his paralysis.

Within this framework, the *Lines of Sight* series functions as a record of Stilley's embodiment, and an exploration of the ways that the self is simultaneously bound up in and independent of corporal experience. Through his dynamic eye movements, the artist redresses the overt physicality of earlier actionist practices. The movements captured in the works represent actions through which Stilley accesses things we often associate solely with physicality: communication, expression, and creation, are all easily accomplished without the use of his body.

Despite the wide range in physical ability that characterize individual experiences, Sue Austin and Tucker Stilley appropriate the language of gestural abstraction to reveal that physical impairments do not necessarily preclude anyone from participation in society. Instead, as Austin highlights, preconceived notions about physical limitations are actually far more limiting than impairments themselves. By adopting gestural practices both artists successfully communicate

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[68] Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, 11.

through, as Rosenberg suggested of Pollock, “a vocabulary of action: its inception, duration, direction.”[69] The works stand in as visual proof that their individual impairments are not barriers to participation. Confronting viewers with their exploration of the external world, both Austin and Stilley work to break down attitudes that disempower the disability community at large.

[69] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 23.

Bodies in Environments: Installation and Atmosphere

While action painters like Pollock worked to create marks that suggested the presence of the artist's body *in* the artwork, later feminist artists appropriated the notion of painting as activity and interpreted it through the desire to instead place the artwork *on* the body. Engaging with these desires, representations of the artist's body shifted from being expressed as a veiled presence to the artist instead using images that directly implicate their body to make visible the "specific body that labored to produce the work."[70] Coming out of 1960s feminist traditions, this approach to revealing the artist's body reflects the movement away from modernist conservatism toward the contemporary interest in exploring the interrelationships between the body, art, and society on a broader scale.[71]

American artist Park McArthur is in dialogue with these histories through her art installations, which are concerned with issues of access and social exclusion. In September of 2014 McArthur opened an installation titled *Passive Vibration Isolation* [Fig. 4], which drew meaning out of movement as first envisioned by the actionist tradition, and rendered it through an assemblage of readymade materials. Readymade art, a style conceptualized by Marcel Duchamp, are works that consist of everyday, mass-produced objects that are available for purchase by consumers. Employing readymade materials in works of art usurps their ordinariness and redeploys the object for a new purpose. This novel viewpoint on art making deemphasizes the physical substance of the piece, since the work itself requires no technical skill on the part of the artist to produce, and instead the demands

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[70] Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, 31.
[71] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 6.

investigation of the conceptual baggage encapsulated by the object through its inclusion in the work of art.[72]

The exhibition's press release faithfully recounts the materials McArthur brought together for the installation:

> Pushed up against the edges of the room, measured bolt hole center to bolt hole center, abrasive-resistant rubber provides durable, economical protection for loading docks and trailers that can withstand years of repeat abuse. […] Custom stainless steel armatures modeled after department store advertisement stands from Japan display old sleepwear by Victoria's Secret; Forever 21; and by Nancy Herman, my grandmother, who makes me pairs of pajama pants for Christmas. The pajamas are full of holes. They hang from the armatures by these holes.[73]

Austere as this description suggests, in total the installation is composed of 5 industrial rubber loading dock bumpers, 5 commercial clothing racks, and 5 pairs of worn pajama pants.[74] This assemblage, although seemingly arbitrary, was selected by McArthur to suggest and politicize elements of her experience as a wheelchair user and a disabled woman in ways that echo and protest earlier actionist interests.

Critic John Beeson notes of the exhibition:

> Even before their adoption by McArthur, both the bumpers and the pajama pants were products specifically designed for ease of use. This kind of bumper is used in warehouses to absorb the force exerted when a truck, picking up or dropping off deliveries, collides with the walls of the loading dock. It protects both the truck and the dock from damage and keeps the process running. The pajama pants, being flannel, are insulating. And being baggy, they provide a lot of give for someone rolling around in his or her sleep or moving around the house. […] These features have been developed, and these goods are widely available, because of a demand that is centered to a large extent around the human body.[75]

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[72] "Ready-made," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2014), accessed January 10, 2016, http://www.britannica.com/art/ready-made.

[73] Park McArthur, "Passive Vibration Isolation," news release, accessed January 10, 2016, http://www.essexstreet.biz/exhibition/83.

[74] Ibid.

[75] John Beeson, "Park McArthur: Lars Friedrich," *Artforum*, January 2015, 229, PDF.

In combining these disparate objects McArthur subtly crafts an allegory of the economy that has grown around bodies, particularly disabled bodies, through products that are designed and marketed under the pretext of accommodation. As these themes become integrated in the gallery space, the press release pointedly pushes viewers to consider the significance of these associations by reminding us "accommodation is a commodity too."[76]

While the bumpers and clothing stands were purchased and shown in their original conditions, the pajama pants hang off the armatures from holes and show signs wear that suggest prolonged use. The pajamas belonged to the artist and, initially, served their function as practical clothing and not as pieces of art. Through long term use the pants developed holes from the movement of the artist's body as friends and family helped to lift her into and out of bed.[77] This repeated motion, the friction of McArthur's body against her bed sheets, culminated across many days and weeks of the artist's private life in the rips and threadbare wear that the pajamas show. By incorporating these objects into an installation the artist is suggesting that the wear on her clothes is indicative of greater frictions she experiences, both physical and attitudinal, while moving through the world.

In publically displaying clothing that shows wear from her repetitive movements, McArthur is giving the viewer information about her body in a way not dissimilar from action painters of the 20th century. Here, however, she goes further

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[76] Park McArthur, "Passive Vibration Isolation."

[77] Park McArthur, "Against Accomodation," interview by Daniel S. Palmer, *Mousse Magazine*, February 2015, accessed January 11, 2016, http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=1269.

to problematize the distinctions between public and private spaces. Unlike earlier actionist attempts to capture motion, the motion that can be read from McArthur's clothing is not that of a "ritual dance," but of private rituals carried out in the home as an element of her embodied existence as a disabled person. Where the activity of artists like Pollock was choreographed around certain formal outcomes, McArthur offers a more honest image of her motion not as she composes it for public display, but as she experiences it in her daily life. She provides visual evidence of her body's movement, but does so through the diaristic display of artifacts that resulted directly from her lived experiences in the private sphere.

McArthur calls the groupings of pants and clothing racks "commodes." Serving doubly as a cheeky jab at our willingness to associate disability with medical supplies, the title actually refers to the Latin word *commodus*, which means "to fit" and is the root of the English word "accommodate."[78] In an interview, she explains that these titles are integral to the reading of the installation:

> Commodus generates commodity, so there is an aspect of exchange, and of smoothing exchange relations. I want to articulate why accommodation is such an insufficient concept. So much of structural access, be that an elevator, or a ramp, or signage in braille, or affirmative action, or a loan, is a minimal relational proposition: a ramp can get a person in and out of a place, but what about what happens inside? I don't want to be accommodated, I want to help change the very systems and structures that view my presence as an act of accommodation.[79]

As John Beeson had noted, each of the materials in the installation were produced and sold to accommodate specific needs. McArthur adopted these materials to create an atmosphere that centers on the physicality of accommodation through the

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

assemblage of materials that are designed, as the press release states, to "absorb the shock."[80]

Conceptually, McArthur is linking the commodified market of "accommodation" to the negligible efforts toward accommodation taken by the nondisabled majority. She unflinchingly stresses that disabled people's social marginalization is generated through society's unwillingness to adapt different practices in order to more holistically accommodate disabled people. As writer and professor Anne Finger points out, while most institutions are aware of that legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act exists, issues of access and accommodation are often approached in terms of how little can be done to comply with the law.[81] McArthur registers this reluctance to resolve accessibility issues in ways that would allow for the full, unimpeded inclusion of disabled people. Using minimal formal intervention on the part of the artist, McArthur diagnoses these problems and protests the notion that disabled people should be the ones who symbolically "absorb the shock" of their own disenfranchisement.

Giving evidence of her banal daily routines through the long term wear on the pajamas caused by her movements into and out of bed, McArthur, like the generation of body artists before her, is prompting us to be mindful of "everyday actions, encouraging our observation of the structure and meaning of daily life."[82] Drawing significance from an object as unassuming as used clothing, the exhibition takes on meanings that politicize disability and confront problems about access and

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[80] Park McArthur, "Passive Vibration Isolation."

[81] Anne Finger in *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*, Directed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P23ov4QVHhI Part 1, 00:01:34.

[82] Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, 29.

public policy. The holes in her pajamas are suggestive of the inadequacy of accommodation as a policy, as they represent the culmination of the friction between her body and the products designed to accommodate her movement. By publically installing these articles of clothing, the artist symbolically extends this friction outside of her own body and into the public realm, where it is reapplied and made manifest in the symbolic friction that disabled people generate when trying to move through spaces inadequately designed for their ease of use.

As McArthur's integration of disparate readymade materials into an installation suggests, the modern and contemporary periods saw the role of the art object undergo a radical change. Around the 1960s the actionist notion of art as an active process began to take hold and was applied to increasingly abstract, conceptual media. This growing interest in art as a form of activity developed into the conceptualization of art "as something which occurs in the encounter between the onlooker and a set of stimuli."[83] This exploration of artistic possibilities occurred concurrently with a growing interest in a field called 'psychogeography,' which suggested that the unique ambiance of an environment had a measurable effect upon the emotions and behaviors of individuals.[84] With these inspirations in mind, installation art flourished out of the desire to create a work of art that is not simply an object to behold, but an environment to inhabit and experience.[85]

Ryan Gander adopted the genre of installation, like McArthur, yet with very different intentions. While McArthur's assemblage retained its focus on the artist's

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[83] Michael Archer, *Installation Art*, ed. Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 26.
[84] Ibid, 26.
[85] Ibid, 29.

body, though absent and distant as a result of her alienation, Gander's 2005 installation *Is This Guilt in You Too?—(Cinema Verso)* [Fig. 5] instead does its conceptual work on the *viewer's* body. To achieve this, Gander set out to create an immersive environment carefully crafted to evoke specific somatic reactions. Critic David Watson walks us through Gander's milieu in his review of the installation:

> Lit only by the flickering half-light of a makeshift white-washed cinema screen that dominates one wall, careful squinting reveals you are in what appears to be a partially renovated storeroom. Discarded tools and building materials are strewn across the floor; probably part of the artwork but just as likely evidence of the gallery's ongoing refurbishment. A back-projected blurred film shimmers to a muffled soundtrack. A pool of clear sound close to the right corner of the screen draws you to a scratched patch revealing the empty auditorium beyond the glass. You're in the wrong place; you're on the wrong side of the screen. To the left of the screen a door waits, promising entrance to the cinema. But the corridor beyond leads only to a locked door. You're forced to retrace your steps and return to the space behind the cinema screen. It dawns on you about then that this is it. This is the artwork.[86]

When going to a gallery to take in an art installation few viewers would envision a scene like this: an unlit room, debris littering the floor, and an image of a film you cannot watch or understand flickering dully on a makeshift screen. Yet this is the environment imagined by Ryan Gander, what Watson described as "a disorienting and unsatisfying experience."[87] Here, as in *Passive Vibration Isolation*, the absence of obvious artistic craftsmanship forces the viewer to direct their attention instead to the installation's conceptual weight. As a wheelchair user himself, that Gander would intentionally create an obstacle filled setting is telling. As viewers stumble through the darkened and disorienting space, the environment

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[86] "Ryan Gander: Is This Guilt in You Too? (Cinema Verso)," Disability Arts Online, last modified December 16, 2006, accessed December 24, 2015, http://www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk/ryan-gander.
[87] Ibid.

demands that they adopt a consciousness about their mobility that non-disabled individuals do not typically experience.

In the darkness, the artist provides two stimuli on which viewers will be inclined to fixate. The first, a blurred video of a car in a snowy field, provides little insight into the meaning of the piece. The car is stationary; a thin layer of snow has fallen over it to indicate its idleness and there is no disturbance in the snow to reveal where the car came from, obliterating any narrative the film may have revealed. The second, an audio recording, draws the viewer toward what Watson describes as a "scratched patch" [Fig. 6] at the corner of the screen. Douglas Fogle, a critic for *Artforum*, described this effect in detail:

> Standing in one corner of the room, viewers could look through a gap in the whitewash, which revealed a full-fledged cinema behind the screen. A directional speaker meant that this corner was also the only place where the otherwise barely perceptible audio track could be heard clearly. We were either unable to see the image (if we walked too close to the screen), or unable to hear the dialogue (if we moved too far away from it), a disjuncture that served to emphasize our dependence on the intersection of sound and vision.[88]

The incoherence of the audio and visual stimuli in the installation serves to confront the typical (non-disabled) viewer with a type of sensory confusion otherwise unfamiliar to them. Just as the physical obstacles stimulate the viewer to become conscious of the physicality of their mobility, the concerted effort required on the part of the viewer to interpret these audio/visual miscues draws attention to the otherwise easily overlooked complexity of our sensory experience.

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[88] Douglas Fogle, "Denied Parole: Douglas Fogle on the Art of Ryan Gander," Artforum, February 1, 2007, accessed February 13, 2016, http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Denied+parole%3A+Douglas+Fogle+on+the+art+of+Ryan+Gander.-a0165318901.

In designing the installation, Gander crafted an immersive environment that did its work on the viewer by inciting somatic responses to sensory isolation and confusion. The gallery space itself was cripped, ironically, by being rendered inaccessible through the intervention of the artist. This artistic strategy went further than to suggest disabled subjectivities through visual symbols, instead actively demonstrating the ways in which an experience becomes, again in Watson's words, "disorienting and unsatisfying"[89] when your access is restricted and disordered.

While the sensory experience of the environment constitutes one element of the installation's conceptual weight, its meanings are further grounded in the strangeness of the setting the viewer occupies. As the reviewers note, a small scratched section at the corner of the screen reveals that it is not a screen at all, but a window looking into another room. On the other side of the window the installation's veneer of desolation is broken by a glimpse into an inviting auditorium just beyond the dark confusion of the gallery space. There is no way into the theater, however; viewers find themselves forced to look out at the warm familiarity of a theater just out of their reach. With this revelation about their limited access to a larger space, viewers must reconcile that they are not looking *at* the screen at all, but are *behind* the screen, in the place of the spectacle being looked at. Through this subtle suggestion, "the work disorientated the viewer by placing them unwittingly on the other side of the modern day looking-glass—behind a cinema screen."[90]

The evocation of the looking glass as a device for reading the installation

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[89] "Ryan Gander: Is This Guilt in You Too? (Cinema Verso)"

[90] "'Is This Guilt in You Too?' (Cinema Verso), Ryan Gader," Outset, accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.outset.org.uk/england/projects/ryan-gander-is-this-guilt-in-you-too/.

draws out further implications that Gander wove into the seemingly destitute setting. Sociologist Charles Cooley developed the notion of the "looking glass self," a device for analyzing how an individual's view of themself is socially mediated. In line with the feminist theories of identity so far discussed, the looking glass self contends that identity is shaped through an awareness of how we may be perceived by our peers and the internalization of these supposed judgments, which account for feelings about oneself such as pride or embarrassment.[91] This theory of the self reveals the extent to which both identity itself and feelings of self-worth are bound up in socialization.

Within the context of *Is This Guilt in You Too?*, the cinema screen serves as a looking glass that produces in the viewer an awareness of their position of social alienation and isolation. It is clear, then, that Gander intends for the sense of exclusion wrought by this discovery to create an anxiety and self-consciousness in the viewer. The self-consciousness the installation thrusts on the viewer, coupled with the defamiliarizing experience of being forced to occupy a space inadequately designed for their physical access is not subtle in its allusions to the daily struggles faced by disabled people. In effect, Gander created an artwork that functioned on the viewer's body to simulate the estrangement he and other disabled individuals experience in daily life.

In a letter, English artist Matthew Higgs remarked that meeting Ryan Gander in person after running into him at a pub clarified his understanding of the concepts

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[91] Nathan Rousseau, "Charles Horton Cooley: Concept of the Looking Glass Self," introduction to *Self, Symbols & Society* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 4, accessed February 15, 2016, http://www.csun.edu/~hbsoc126/soc1/Charles%20Horton%20Cooley.pdf.

that he believes Gander takes on in his art making. Because Gander uses a wheelchair, throughout their conversation Higgs found himself crouching slightly to better engage with Gander in the loud, crowded barroom setting. Adopting Gander's vantage point led Higgs to draw conclusions about how Gander's unique way of moving in the world shapes his point of view:

> In this slightly awkward and uncomfortable position I was obliged to re-consider my relationship with my own circumstances, with things I might otherwise take for granted. (A scenario that I believe Ryan actively encourages in the viewing of his work). I experienced a mild sense of both physical (and social) estrangement— a temporary interruption to the norm. It only occurred to me later that this slightly uncanny sensation—whereby the mundane things that surround us become somewhat unfamiliar—might also have something to do with Ryan's work.[92]

As Higgs suggests based on this interaction, Gander's artistic project is focused, in part, on exploring and manipulating the attention we pay to familiar objects and environments. The artist speaks to these goals explicitly in an interview with Adrian Searle for *The Guardian*. He affirms that his artworks are meant to interact with the gallery space and to exploit the ways that gallery settings can help refocus viewers' attention on otherwise unnoticed details.

> We pay extra special attention and all our senses are acutely on edge in here [a gallery setting] because we're in this context and we know that these white walls signify that we should be aware of what's going on around us. But there's more brilliant stuff out there than there is in here, it's just that we're not acutely aware of it when we walk outside. […] [Making art is] like having a highlighter pen, isn't it? And just picking bits out sometimes.[93]

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[92] Matthew Higgs to Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen, February 23, 2003, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands, accessed December 24, 2015, http://www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/the-death-of-abbe-farria.

[93] Ryan Gander, "Meet the Artist - Ryan Gander: Living Is a Creative Act," interview by Adrian Searle, video file, 05:52, The Guardian, October 15, 2012, accessed March 26, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/video/2012/oct/15/ryan-gander-meet-artist-video.

In the case of *Is This Guilt in You Too?*, Gander turns his artist's "highlighter" to the social alienation that disabled individuals are often subjected to. As he suggests in the above excerpt, his intention is not necessarily to create a "new" sensation. Instead, his work redirects the viewer's attention to a type of disenfranchisement that constantly affects people, but which is not widely recognized by nondisabled individuals. Drawing from his experiences as a wheelchair user, Gander creates an environment in which nondisabled viewers have social exclusion enacted on them. In effect, the environment that Gander crafts in the gallery is nothing more than a role reversal, a glance through the looking glass at the experiences of the "other."

Utilizing installation as a medium, Park McArthur and Ryan Gander both work to evoke an awareness about disability experience that resonates throughout the exhibition space. Interestingly, in both cases the artists choose austere aesthetic means to communicate complex ideas about their experiences as wheelchair users. The emptiness of the gallery spaces work to cue the viewer into the strangeness of the installation, demanding closer analysis and deeper inquiry. The two installations, through radically different means, work to reveal the ways in which ableist attitudes, not physical impairments, contribute to disabled peoples' social disempowerment.

Bodies in Space: Presence and Performance

Irish artist Mary Duffy, who was born without arms, uses her body as a site for contesting disability identity in a way that is conscious of earlier performance art traditions. In the 1960s and 70s, performance artists began exploring the role of the body as the "locus of the self and the site where the public domain meets the private, where the social is negotiated, produced, and made sense of."[94] Out of this practice, the body became an artistic tool for exploring the self and socially constructed nature of identity. Feminist art provides a rich history of performance art dedicated to assessing and protesting constructions of the self, especially as they relate to prevalent forms of violence in contemporary society, such as war and rape.[95]

These feminist traditions provide a precedent for employing performance art as protest, and a methodology through which the body becomes the site for transgressing normative ideals as they related to gender, race, and sexuality.[96] Disability artists like Duffy intercept this history and crip it by inserting disability identity into the conversation. Like the women who developed feminist performance practice, Duffy is self-consciously implementing the female nude with an understanding of the artistic traditions that have long disempowered it. Since art historical conventions have largely been shaped by heterosexual men, the female nude has been conceptualized in relation to a masculine subjectivity. As a result, images of women have often been thought of as allegorical, that is, not representing an individual but instead standing in for an idea. In doing so, the female nude has

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[94] Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, 21.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid, 30.

been reduced from a relatable subject to an object that exists for the male gaze and stands in for a set of semiotic symbols.[97]

Earlier examples of feminist critiques of social attitudes toward the female nude include the photographic archive of performances called *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* [Fig. 7] by Hannah Wilke. Spanning from 1974-1982, this series consists of photographs taken by the artist to document her reclamation of the female nude through unapologetic self-portraiture. Nude from the waist up, Wilke adorned her body garishly with props and pieces of chewed gum shaped like vulva that served doubly to decorate herself—or "starify" herself, as the series' title suggests—and to evoke imagery of puncture wounds. Striking exaggerated poses that caricatured the sensual artifice desired by fashion models, Wilke unabashedly put her body on display.[98] Although initially dismissed as narcissism, early feminist reappropriation and self-exhibition of the female nude was an exercise in reclaiming the female body and exposing the ways in which "art history has depended on sexual exploitation and often violence against the female body, while it has erased female subjectivity."[99]

Although this feminist lineage provides context for later examples of disability performance like Duffy's, the tradition necessitated appropriation and expansion to better fit the intersection between female and disabled subjectivities. Because of her experiences as a visibly disabled woman, Mary Duffy enters the

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[97] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 28.

[98] Elizabeth Manchester, "Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism," The Tate, last modified September 2008, accessed January 4, 2016, http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wilke-marxism-and-art-beware-of-fascist-feminism-p79357/text-summary.

[99] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 38.

tradition from a different perspective than her '70s feminist foremothers. While earlier feminists were concerned with race, gender, and sexuality, and investigated how these were connected within the hypersexualization of women, Duffy's experience with objectification is derived, in part, from the opposite problem: disabled bodies are medicalized, asexualized, and devalued.[100]

By participating in the tradition of feminist performance Duffy reinvents and reapplies the meaning ascribed to self-exhibition by incorporating her experiences as a visibly disabled woman. In displaying her body, Duffy is commenting jointly on society's (and art history's) infinite desire to possess the female body and her own exclusion from the economy of this desire.[101] Because of this, performing in the nude for a disabled artist carries with it new and specialized meanings that crip the existing artistic tradition. Duffy's nudity is protest; a powerful argument against feelings of shame that are imposed on the disabled female body and an assertion of her right for her body to be seen, to be called beautiful, and to be accepted as whole.

The piece, called *Stories of a Body* (1995) [Fig. 8], was created following a visit Duffy had with her doctor concerning her armlessness. In their exchange, the doctor expressed his guilt and regret about the popularity of thalidomide, a drug taken during pregnancy to treat morning sickness that unexpectedly caused birth defects in 10,000 children worldwide.[102] Duffy felt as though her exchange with the doctor was not motivated by him addressing her needs as a patient, but instead out

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[100] Ibid, 38-9.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Laurence Cawley, "Living and Ageing with Birth Defects Caused by the Drug Thalidomide," BBC News, last modified July 30, 2013, accessed January 2, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-23500853.

of his selfish desire to be pardoned by one of the "victims" he and the medical community felt responsible for.[103] This experience motivated Duffy to reconcile the injustices she experienced as a child under the medical gaze with her daily experience of being a visibly disabled woman, and therefore, as being the target of staring.

The performance opens with the stage cloaked in darkness until, after a long and uncomfortable pause, the stage is suddenly bathed in light revealing the artist standing nude before the audience. "You have words to describe me that I find frightening," she says as she holds her body still, facing her armless torso pointedly toward the audience in a delicate contrapposto. Her body is lit against a black backdrop, making her appear white like marble. Her figure, armless and elegant, evokes the classical Venus de Milo, a figure preeminent in Western conceptions of beauty. With a soft yet provocative voice, she continues:

> Every time I hear them they're whispered or screamed silently, wordlessly through front to middle page spreads of newspapers. Only you dare to speak them out loud. I look for them in my dictionary and I only find some. The words you use to describe me are: "congenital malformation." In my child's dictionary I learn that the first part means "born with." How many times have I answered that question, "Were you born like that or did your mother take them dreadful tablets?" How come I always felt ashamed when answering those big staring eyes and gaping mouths? "Did you have an accident or did your mother take them dreadful tablets?" Those big words doctors used—they didn't have any that fit me properly. I felt, even in the face of such opposition, that my body was the way it was supposed to be. It was right for me, as well as being whole, complete, and functional. […] Today, I'm winning battles against my own monster—my inner critic who has internalized all of my childhood oppressions. The oppression of constantly trying to be fixed, to be changed, to be made more whole.[104]

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[103] Mary Duffy, "About Stories of a Body."

[104] *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*, Directed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P23ov4QVHhI Part 2, 00:10:35;00:12:31

As she speaks, Duffy manipulates the staring exchange that develops between performer and audience. Her body becomes a site of contestation as viewers must reconcile two conflicting socially mediated responses to Duffy's form: the intrusive stare that she garners in response to her pathologized "lack" of arms and the rapt gaze drawn by a young, voluptuous, and classically beautiful woman displaying her body openly. The duality of Duffy's body representing social constructions of both desire and revulsion reveal a complexity that is often denied to disabled identities. Duffy's presence as performer problematizes oversimplified narratives about disability and demonstrates how disability and sexuality coexist.[105]

Duffy's words flutter effortlessly between her own autobiographical accounts of her childhood self seeking meaning in a body that she was told is flawed and the words, as a lifetime of experience has taught her, that the audience might otherwise use to describe her. By repeating back the probing questions that she is regularly confronted with while out in public spaces, Duffy is protesting the notion that her body, because of its visible difference, is open to public scrutiny.[106] Appropriating oppressive language in this way, according to Judith Butler, turns "power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power,"[107] which Duffy exploits by using other people's searching questions to create room for understanding and intervention.

She upsets the dynamic of the staring exchange by thrusting responsibility back onto the audience. The artist accuses the audience through association with the

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[105] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Staring Back," 336.
[106] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 26.
[107] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 241.

collective "you" who defines her body in this way and who view her with "staring eyes and gaping mouths," the very thing she is inviting through the act of performance.[108] By using performance as a way of confronting and sanctioning these questions and stares, Duffy enacts the alienation and shame that she and other disabled people are made to experience through strained interactions with nondisabled people.[109]

In doing so, Duffy makes the audience complicit in her dehumanization, all the while reminding them of the effect that this treatment has had on her as an individual.[110] "In doing this performance," Duffy wrote in an explanation of the piece, "by standing here, naked in front of you; I am trying to hold up a mirror for you, I am making you question the nature of your voyeurism."[111] Duffy's self-exhibition generates a space for inquiry into meaning ascribed to the body, to disability, and to womanhood, by summoning and subverting the stares she experiences in her daily life. By putting her body on display, Duffy speaks to her dual-identity as a disabled woman and to the history of "otherness," of both femininity and disability, which she is reacting against.

Using narrative to express the tension between her body's history and social expectations, the performance creates an environment in which Duffy controls how her body is perceived. She uses this opportunity to perform an act of self-making that defies definition based on her supposed "lacking" and instead asserts that, for

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[108] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Staring Back," 337.

[109] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 26.

[110] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Staring Back," 337.

[111] Mary Duffy, "About Stories of a Body," Mary Duffy Artist, accessed December 26, 2015, http://www.maryduffy.ie/section771231.html.

her, her body is "whole, complete, and functional." This claim undermines the medical model of disability, which reads disability as a fundamental incompleteness based on the normative ideal of what a body "should" be able to do.[112]

To communicate the effect that this construction of disability has on disabled people, she explains that she must struggle with her "inner critic who has internalized all of [her] childhood oppressions." As a child, Duffy explained in an interview, she was made to wear artificial arms that would give her the appearance of having arms despite not being usable in any way. Even as a child, she recognized that these measures were taken for other people's comfort around her, even if they came at the expense of her personal freedoms.[113] By proudly displaying her body through an act of self-exhibition, Duffy resists the shame about her body that she was taught at a young age, giving herself a space to claim her rights to exist and be seen. The personal monologue about her experiences doubles as a social dialogue as she uses the performance as an opportunity to talk back to the doctors and institutions that have tried to speak for her and define her body in ways that were unfamiliar and uncomfortable. This exercise is both personal and political, as the act of exposing and speaking about her disabled body also serves to expose the medical and social institutions that have deemed it undesirable.[114]

Like Duffy, who reclaimed the story of her body both from medicalized narratives and from routine voyeurs (both institutional and individual),

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[112] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Staring Back," 336.
[113] Mary Duffy, "Mary Duffy: Unarmed and Dangerous," interview by Mo McDevitt, video file, 28:32, Vimeo, posted by Northern Visions NvTv, June 6, 2012, accessed December 24, 2015, https://vimeo.com/43561234.
[114] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 26.

photographer Kevin Connolly has transformed the stares he is subject to in daily life into an ongoing performative act. Connolly, who was born without legs, grew up in rural Montana and quickly became accustomed to the stares that accompanied being the only person in the area who looked like him. Although he was continuously fitted with prosthetics as he grew, he recalls that "their functionality was poor, at best, requiring me to wear crutches and haul around these two artificial limbs that collectively weighed more than the rest of me. Lacking practical purpose, the only reason for me to wear the legs was aesthetic. The doctors in Spokane wanted me to look normal, even if I had to be virtually stationary to do so."[115] For Connolly, who went on to become an X-Games medalist in extreme skiing,[116] stationary simply was not an option.

Eschewing prosthetics and wheelchairs as cumbersome and expensive, Connolly developed a mode of transportation uniquely fitted to his needs: skateboarding. With cheap, widely available skateboards at his disposal, Connolly began gliding through streets and in between obstacles as quickly and efficiently as people using bicycles.[117] With this mode of transport affording him a new level of mobility, Connolly decided to travel abroad on his own. Although born legless and well accustomed to expertly navigating stares, as he began this journey he found his experiences to be especially alienating. While in Ukraine, Connolly began to notice that the stares he was receiving were long and emotional, not the passing inquisitive

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[115]Kevin Michael Connolly, *Double Take: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 25.
[116] Ibid, 142.
[117] Ibid, 85.

glances that he was accustomed to.[118] He was frequently stopped by people on the street and given money as alms despite his objections and attempts to explain his relative wealth across the language barrier. On a few occasions he was forcefully pulled aside, touched without his consent, anointed with holy oils, and asked to pray by strangers who mistook his disability for divinity.[119] These experiences gave him occasion to reflect not only on the cause of people's stares, his leglessness, but also to consider the assumptions that informed the stare.[120]

While traveling in the past, including a previous visit to Ukraine, Connolly realized that he had exclusively used a wheelchair for transportation. "In a way, that wheelchair packaged me into something that was socially acceptable. I didn't have legs, but the wheelchair implied that I was being looked after or dealt with. […] Suddenly, [by using a skateboard] I wasn't packaged neatly into the socially acceptable script of being wheelchair-bound; I was more of a spectacle."[121] By failing to reproduce accepted visual signifiers of disability, Connolly realized he was inadvertently failing to comply with cultural scripts that guide how we expect disability to be performed.

Like all identity categories, disability identity is constructed through the performance of certain culturally coded actions. Just as with sexuality, gender, and race, disabled people who may not immediately *appear* disabled may "pass" as non-disabled and "come out" only to those whom they choose, suggesting that the

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[118] Ibid, 110.
[119] Ibid, 113-115.
[120] In many European cities, impoverished individuals with impairments similar to Connolly's use skateboards as a means of transportation because of their cost-effectiveness. This may explain the persistence with which he was offered alms; he had unwittingly adopted a performance that is considered by many to be a visual representation of poverty and begging.
[121] Ibid, 110

distinction between disability and able-bodiedness is more ambiguous than many believe. In public spaces, when we read someone as being disabled we are not doing so out of explicit information about that specific individual's body or condition. Instead, we are reacting to certain visual cues that we interpret as manifestations of disability. Judith Butler was among the first to theorize the performative nature of identity in terms of gender, the expectations for which are socially constructed and mediated.

> When Simone de Beauvoir claims, "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman," she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition. In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.[122]

Through the intersection of queer theory and crip theory, this notion of identity as a "stylized repetition of acts" is just as readily applicable to disabled identities. Like gender, disability is established through information gleaned through bodily movements and appearances. As a legless person, Connolly fails to conform to this script of performing his disability by choosing not to use a wheelchair or similar assistive device, thus creating an upset between our expectations about the visual presentation of disability and the individualized reality of disability experience.

Unwilling to sacrifice the freedom the skateboard afforded, Connolly continued his travels to Vienna and continued to generate stares and to be photographed as an oddity by people on the street. As his frustration with his

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[122] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988), 519.

visibility grew, he impulsively took a photograph of a man who he noticed staring at him. Feeling empowered by the notion of staring back, he continued to photograph stares for the remainder of his trip. As he reviewed the photographs, Connolly began to realize that his photographs captured something much larger than just his personal vindication. He remembers going over the photos in his memoir, *Double Take*:

> I'd shot beggars, school kids, couples, and even one very shocked-looking priest. When I viewed the images on the screen, each of my subjects appeared identical, if only for a moment. That curious glance was linked, from person to person, across the spectrum of age, money, culture, or anything else. There was something empowering in taking those photos. […] Until now, being stared at had been a frustrating—but unpreventable—burden that I had to bear with a grin. Finally, I was able to find my own use for that stare, and it felt good.[123]

These photos became the foundation of *The Rolling Exhibition* [Fig. 8], a series of over 32,000 photographs from thirty-one cities and fifteen different countries that grew out of this interest in the staring exchange.[124]

Despite his frustration with the persistence of starers, Connolly's project is not designed to chastise its subjects. Instead his work points to our collective drive to stare at an unusual sight in order to make sense of it. "I do the same thing," Connolly said in an interview, "I'm not above that, by any means. And if I saw a no-legged guy in the street — hell, yes, I would stare."[125] What differentiates staring from casual looking is the level of interest we invest in the subject, an interest that is

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[123] Kevin Michael Connolly, *Double Take: A Memoir*, 129-30.
[124] Suzi Taylor, "People Are Curious," *Mountains and Minds*, November 27, 2007, accessed January 1, 2016, http://www.montana.edu/mountainsandminds/article.php?article=9276.
[125]Bob Brown, "Man Without Legs Harnesses Public Gaze," *ABC News*, last modified January 1, 2007, http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=3957287&page=1.

normally prompted by things we find unexpected.[126]

Because all people share an embodied experience, we tend to pay little attention to our bodies as *bodies*, and instead treat them as tools through which we attain our needs and desires. Culturally, the nondisabled body has remained an unmarked identifier that is constructed as "normal" and "ordinary," thereby cloaking it from closer consideration. It is often not until a body begins to "malfunction" that we return our attention to the corporeality of embodied existence. Visibly disabled bodies or, "unexpected" and "extraordinary" bodies as Garland-Thomson calls them, draw attention because they do not conform to our expectations of what constitutes an "ordinary" body.[127]

Because the distinction between "ordinary" and "extraordinary" bodies rests on a constructed notion of how a body "should" look and behave, staring interactions between disabled and nondisabled people embody ideologies that devalue the disabled subjectivity. As such, the staring encounter that develops in response to the sight of an unexpected, visibly disabled person carries sociological significance. These reflexive stares draw a line between the nondisabled starer and disabled staree that highlights the difference of disability and casts the interaction as "abnormal" versus "normal," and "spectacle" versus "voyeur." [128] This process disempowers the disabled person by creating a dichotomy that separates the starer and staree and "enacts disabled subjects' social isolation, rejection, and

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[126] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Staring at the Other," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005), accessed January 5, 2016, http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/610/787.
[127] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, 37.
[128] Ann Millet, "Staring Back and Forth: The Photographs of Kevin Connolly," Disability Studies Quarterly 28, no. 3 (September 2008), accessed December 24, 2015, http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/124/124.

subjugation."[129]

The Rolling Exhibition is about staring. By photographing people as they stare, Kevin Connolly captures the moment of inquiry into his disability and transforms it. With his camera, Connolly returns the stares that he receives and problematizes the interaction, confronting the nondisabled public as a whole with images that capture our curiosity and protest his oppression. Like Duffy, who offers her performance of *Stories of a Body* like a mirror, Connolly's performative response to his starers documents the staring exchange from a perspective otherwise inaccessible to nondisabled people who do not share in the alienation of stares. His images capture the questions and assumptions that run through our minds in the instant that we are processing the presence of an unexpected body.[130]

The body of Connolly's photographic project offers itself as a study of staring, its motivations, and its consequences. Despite the geological breadth of the project's scope, people of different races, ethnicities, genders, ages, locations, and cultural backgrounds are all united in front of Connolly's lens, if only for a moment. The photographs reflect back to us how we must look when we inevitably stare, as the same mystified look is repeated time and time again on the faces of those who encounter Connolly and his skateboard. The project also suggests that the unity struck through the shared experience of staring is established at the expense of the disabled experience of being stared at.[131]

While the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the move toward equality

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[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, 89-90.

on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality, these movements failed to encompass disability as an identity in need of reclamation. This separation between disabled identities and other minority and oppressed identities is bound up in the medical conception of disability as a flaw located in the person's body or mind. Historically, the disabled figure has been employed to provide justification for unequal treatment. For example, women were denied full rights as citizens based on the assertion that their physical and mental capacities were not comparable to the male standard. Supposed markers of femininity such as irrationality, physical weakness, and emotional hysteria were treated, essentially, as physical and mental disabilities that "proved" women's inferiority to men.[132]

Ironically, the groups who worked to protest these assertions also cast disability as inferior. Some suffragists who campaigned for women's right to vote did so on the premise that women's association with disability was unfounded and slanderous. Rather than protesting the notion that disability should preclude a citizen from full rights and participation, the argument instead turned to proving that women did not experience these deficits and therefore were as capable of participation as any nondisabled male. Accordingly, narratives supporting women's equality developed out of the desire to create distance between the "capable" woman, and the "idiots" and "lunatics" who could be "proven" inferior by medical tests.[133]

Connolly's photographs capture the cultural remnants of these arguments.

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[132] Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in *Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001), 33.
[133] Ibid, 43-4.

While the rest of the world, regardless of identity, can come together through the act of staring, the disabled body continues to draw stares. Because of its history as justification for discrimination, society continues to imagine disability as a tangible, medical rationale for exclusion and isolation, rather than investigating the social causes that are at work. In the act of staring back, Connolly intervenes in the staring exchange and opens himself and the starer up for further interaction. Through this project, Connolly has found that people not only reflexively stare, but also are driven to create narratives that attempt to "explain" his leglessness. "In Bosnia, someone thought he was a landmine victim; in Romania, a gypsy vagabond; in Ukraine, a beggar; in New Zealand, a shark attack survivor; in the United States, a wounded Iraq war veteran."[134] By engaging with starers, Connolly opens himself up to address inquiries into his disability.

Although sometimes invasive, Connolly is interested in transforming probing questions and isolating stares into productive conversations. "The questions people ask me— 'How do you go to the bathroom? […] How do you get up on counters? How do you cook?'— All these things don't really bug me, anymore," he said in an interview with ABC News, "That's largely due to the fact that I'm older, and that that's what I'm capitalizing on in this photography project— utilizing those questions and that curiosity for my own benefit."[135] Repurposing the stare, the source of isolation and alienation for many disabled people, into generative interactions gives Connolly the ability to contest stereotyped notions of disability. By highlighting the differences of his unique body, Connolly simultaneously

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[134] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, 91.
[135] Bob Brown, "Man Without Legs Harnesses Public Gaze."

summons and challenges judgmental gazes in order to transform his daily experiences with staring into an ongoing performance, which he documents through the photographs he captures of his starers.

Both Kevin Connolly and Mary Duffy utilize performative practices to produce artwork out of their stareable features. Duffy adopts the more direct approach by talking back through her spoken autobiography. *Stories of a Body* confronts the audience with accusatory language, conflating their reactions to her body with her pathologization and dehumanization under the authority of medical professionals. Her nudity, which acts as a visual manifestation of the candidness with which she speaks, reveals everything that may mark her body "other," demystifying the unknown. Firmly guiding the audience as she speaks, Duffy generates a transformative encounter between herself and the audience in which she is able to assert her wholeness and denounce the individuals and institutions that view her body, and by extension her life, as tragically incomplete. Just as Duffy utilized performance to talk back to her oppressors, Connolly adopted *The Rolling Exhibition* as a means through which he could return the stares he draws in his daily life. In capturing the shock with which people react to his unusual body, Connolly provides an avenue for the nondisabled viewer to gain insight into the social alienation that afflicts people with disabilities. His work, then, gives bearing to the claim that barriers that inhibit disabled people's access are not only physical, but result from the attitudes and reactions of the public. As both artists' practices demonstrate, cripping performance can illuminate elements of disability experience that are otherwise inaccessible to the nondisabled observer.

Bodies Claiming Space: Art and the Public

As we have seen through the work of the disability artists discussed so far, the relationship between the public and the disabled body is fraught with discomfort for both sides. As sites that express civic values, public monuments have a history within disability rights advocacy. During the final weeks leading up to House of Representatives' decision on the Senate-passed Americans with Disabilities Act, disabled people rallied to protest delays in the decision and to reaffirm the bill's importance to the disabled community.[136] To show their support, approximately 1,000 people organized at the base of the Capitol building stairs singing songs and chanting, "free our people,"[137] a cry reminiscent of the civil rights protests that lawmakers in Washington saw three decades earlier.[138]

During the rally, about sixty physically disabled individuals set down their canes and crutches and left behind their wheelchairs in order to crawl up the 83 stone steps that symbolically separated them from the legislature that held their fate. Although the local newspaper was careful to note that the Capitol was, in fact, equipped with wheelchair accessible ramps and elevators,[139] the symbolic magnitude of what was remembered as the "Capitol Crawl" gave weight to disabled people's struggles to exist within institutions that refused to accommodate needs

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[136] William J. Eaton, "Disabled Persons Rally, Crawl Up Capitol Steps: Congress: Scores Protest Delays in Passage of Rights Legislation," The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, CA), March 13, 1990, accessed December 24, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-03-13/news/mn-211_1_capitol-steps.
[137] *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*, Directed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P23ov4QVHhI Part 1, 00:48:00.
[138] William M. Welch, "Disabled Protesters Make Stand: Demonstrators Crawl up Capitol Steps," The Free Lance-Star (Fredericksburg, VA), March 13, 1990, 6, accessed December 24, 2015, https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=IOFLAAAAIBAJ&sjid=b4sDAAAAIBAJ&pg=6535,2252422&hl=en.
[139] Ibid.

that diverge from those of nondisabled citizens.

Like the Capitol Building, which represents political power and civic unity in the United States, London's Trafalgar Square is similarly renowned for its public importance. The Square, which is located centrally in the city next to the National Gallery, is decorated with fountains and sculptures depicting some of Britain's greatest heroes. The central pillar is occupied by a statue of Lord Nelson, a naval hero, and three of the four plinths are decorated with sculptures of other notable historical figures, including two generals and a king.[140] The fourth plinth, which was initially built to hold an equestrian statue of King William IV, remained empty for many years due to lack of funding. In 2003 London mayor Ken Livingstone proposed that the plinth be filled with temporary art pieces to enliven the vacant space.[141] This decision transformed the blank plinth into a malleable site for public artwork.

In 2005 artist Marc Quinn was commissioned to produce a piece for the fourth plinth location. The piece was to be a larger reproduction of an earlier work he created in 2000 as a part of a series called *The Complete Marbles*.[142] The series, which is made up of eleven life sized marble sculptures of people with congenital and acquired amputations, was shown in 2004 and received a standard amount of media attention. The show was largely dismissed as another rendition of the shock and sensation that Quinn and the group of artists he associates with, known as

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[140] Sarah Lyall, "In Trafalgar Square, Much Ado About Statuary," The New York Times, October 10, 2005, Art & Design, accessed January 7, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/10/arts/design/in-trafalgar-square-much-ado-about-statuary.html?_r=0.

[141] "Square's Naked Sculpture Revealed," BBC News (London, England), September 19, 2005, accessed January 7, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/4247000.stm.

[142] "The Making of 'Alison Lapper Pregnant'," Marc Quinn: Studio Diaries, last modified December 15, 2015, accessed January 8, 2016, http://marcquinn.com/studio/studio-diaries/the-making-of-alison-lapper-pregnant.

"Young British Artists," are known for.[143] In a cutting condemnation of the show written for the New York Times, critic Ken Johnson argued "Some might read it as a celebration of human diversity, but the sculptures have such a kitschy blandness that it is hard to see them as anything other than ready-mades in a Koonsian game intended to make us think more about the artist's intellectual cleverness than the humanity of his subjects"[144] With as bleak reception as this, few could have predicted the response that followed only a year later.

On September 15, 2005 a crowd of people were gathered around the plinth awaiting the unveiling of the newest installation. Journalist Rachel Cooke remembered the statue's debut fondly "the cloth came off and it was as if someone had switched on a light. Against a sky the colour of old underwear, a circle of buildings that might as well be built of concrete for all the life and warmth their stony facades exude, Quinn's womanly but warrior-like [marble statue] … glowed like a beacon."[145] Over eleven and a half feet tall and weighing twelve tons, the immense marble sculpture of artist Alison Lapper posing in the nude was a commanding presence in the Square [Fig. 10].[146]

Lapper, who was born without arms and with shortened legs, was seven months pregnant when she was contacted by Quinn to sit as his model. Wary of having her physical difference exploited, she was initially skeptical of his idea.

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[143] Hilton Kramer, "Marc Quinn Sculpture Meets Shock Standard for Limbless Nudes," The Observer, last modified January 26, 2004, accessed January 8, 2016, http://observer.com/2004/01/marc-quinn-sculpture-meets-shock-standard-for-limbless-nudes/.

[144] Ken Johnson, "Marc Quinn -- 'The Complete Marbles,'" *The New York Times*, January 23, 2014, Arts, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/23/arts/art-in-review-marc-quinn-the-complete-marbles.html.

[145] Rachel Cooke, "Bold, Brave, Beautiful," *The Observer* (London, England), September 18, 2005, Art & Design, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/sep/18/art.

[146] Ibid.

Quinn, who is himself nondisabled, occupied a delicate position and had to prove that he wasn't, in Lapper's words, "just another one in the long line of people who have exploited disability and used it for its curiosity value."[147] After extended discussion of his approach and his interest in depicting disabled subjects, she and Quinn came to an agreement.

Although nondisabled and therefore at risk of becoming a voyeuristic viewer of the disabled body, Quinn approached the matter with a focused objective: to reenact and problematize notions of classical beauty through depictions of people with visible disabilities. Like Duffy who used her body to invoke the classical Venus de Milo, Quinn's work in *The Complete Marbles* series makes reference to the Elgin Marbles, fragmentary pieces of sculpture that were removed from the Greek Parthenon and are currently housed at the British Museum. Quinn's interest in sculpting people with extraordinary bodies grew out of his realization that classical works of art continue to represent the height of idealized beauty despite often being damaged or incomplete, while people with bodies that appear "incomplete" according to the normative standard are not afforded the same consideration.[148]

With the series, Quinn created a dialogue between his work and neoclassicism, an artistic movement that was prominent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the style most typical of public monuments. Neoclassicists worked to revive the style of the earlier Greco-Roman classical period, which emphasized symmetry and poise. The neoclassical program produced works that

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[147] Alison Lapper, *My Life in My Hands*, 2006 ed. (London, England: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 234.
[148] "The Complete Marbles," Marc Quinn Artworks, accessed January 8, 2016, http://marcquinn.com/artworks/the-complete-marbles.

imitated the balanced idealized beauty of the classical period, which is so deeply integrated in Western notions of beauty that much of the study of aesthetics has been derived from these foundations. Classical and neoclassical works highlight balance and commensurability as hallmarks of beauty, going as far as to derive bodily proportions through mathematical calculation in order to ensure that each part of the body seems perfectly composed with the next. Sculptures executed in this style therefore do not represent the individual as they looked, but are essentially intended to stand in as moralizing figures that represent heroism and virtue through physical perfection.[149] This fundamental conflation of bodily perfection with notions of goodness and valor follows the same logic as the belief that a healthy body leads to a healthy mind,[150] both of which necessarily preclude disabled people from achieving this "perfection."

In choosing an artistic movement that bound up moral judgments within its conception of aesthetic perfection, Quinn is making an argument against these associations. Here he posits Lapper and the other disabled models with whom he has worked as being "complete" in spite of their "lack" by the standard of the classical ideal. In the language of neoclassicism, Quinn's sculpture proposes Lapper as an anti-ideal to the whole, symmetrical, idealized male form. *Sunday Times* writer Waldemar Januszczak identified the significance of this interplay with the classical past, stating:

> By carving Allison Lapper out of pristine marble, Quinn is taking on the Greeks; he is disputing with Phidias, with Michelangelo, with Sir Joshua Reynolds, with every authoritarian with imagination that has ever

[149] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 56.
[150] Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, 14.

> insisted upon a standard shape for the human in art; he is contradicting 2,000 years of creative misrepresentation of what being human means; and he is giving Allison Lapper the same amount of artistic attention that Canova gave the Empress Josephine. As if that were not enough, Quinn is also cheekily rhyming his sculptures with the broken remnants of classical art — the armless Venus, the legless Apollo — that are the staple diet of all collections of the antique. These are serious achievements.[151]

Through his work, Quinn is encouraging the viewer to register connections between his marble sculptures of disabled individuals and the celebrated, though incomplete, classical sculptures that they are referencing. Both the artist's goal as well as the formal elements (barring the size) of the sculpture remained the same between *The Complete Marbles* exhibition and the unveiling of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* on the fourth plinth of Trafalgar Square, but the reactions from viewers changed dramatically. By moving the sculpture of Alison Lapper from the white box of a gallery and into a public place the statue was recontextualized and reinterpreted, encouraging new implications, conversations, and disputes to arise around the piece.

In a bold affirmation of the sculpture following its debut, chairman of the Disability Rights Commission Bert Massie extolled the virtues of Quinn's piece. While he broadly commented on his satisfaction with Quinn's interest in representing the beauty of the disabled body, Massie lauded the sculpture's social significance, "I'm extremely proud that one of the most popular tourist attractions in London will display a very powerful sculpture of a disabled woman."[152] Others such

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[151] Waldemar Januszczak, "Matter of Life and Death," *Sunday Times*, December 10, 2000. Qtd in Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, 58.

[152] Bert Massie qtd in Maev Kennedy, "Pregnant and Proud: Statue of Artist Wins Place in Trafalgar Square," The Guardian (London, England), March 16, 2004, accessed January 13, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/mar/16/arts.artsnews.

as Robin Simon, the editor of the British Art Journal, dismissed the sculpture stating, "I think it is horrible. Not because of the subject matter, I hasten to add. I have a lot of time for Alison Lapper. She is very brave. It is just a repellant artefact."[153]

Others still argued that the statue was inappropriate specifically for a location that is historically and culturally coded as heavily as Trafalgar Square stating, "That a naked woman should be filling the empty plinth in Trafalgar Square is ridiculous. Trafalgar Square should be a place where men who have served their country should be honored."[154] London mayor Ken Livingstone argued contrary to this position that "This Square celebrates the courage of men in battle. Alison's life is a struggle to overcome much greater difficulties than many of the men we celebrate and commemorate here."[155]

These opposing reviews of the sculpture represent elements of the controversy that the public installation of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* incited. Unlike its previous incarnation that was shown quietly with *The Complete Marbles*, this monumental and public version of the piece drew unparalleled scrutiny and acclaim. By inserting an image of Lapper's disabled body directly into public space the sculpture's meaning was transformed and, just as disabled people experience while occupying public spaces, the disabled body was opened up to public examination and judgment. Based on the differences in the sculpture's reception between its first showing and its debut on the plinth, the sculpture itself is shown not to be the object

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[153] Robert Simon qtd in Nigel Reynolds, "Whatever Would Nelson Think?," The Telegraph (London, England), September 16, 2005, accessed January 12, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/4197485/Whatever-would-Nelson-think.html.
[154] David Whiting qtd in Sarah Lyall, "In Trafalgar Square, Much Ado About Statuary."
[155] Kevin Livingstone qtd in Nigel Reynolds, "Whatever Would Nelson Think?"

of interest but, instead, the implications that it prompted in the Square heralded intense curiosity. Jointly achieved by Quinn and Lapper, the cripping of Trafalgar Square immediately drew the public's disdain and interest.

In Trafalgar Square Alison Lapper became a hero. In the company of men who were military heroes and kings, the austere sculpture of Lapper herself takes on heroic qualities: Her womanhood, her pregnancy, her disability, the only markers of her identity that we can glean from her nude body, become markers of her agency and her dignity. Reflecting on the installation of his work in Trafalgar Square, Marc Quinn remarked:

> When I was making the marble sculptures in *The Complete Marble* series, they seemed to me like public sculptures from the future. But now that Alison Lapper is in Trafalgar Square, the present has caught up to the future. Marble is the material used to commemorate heroes, and these people seem to me to be a new kind of hero – people who instead of conquering the outside world have conquered their own inner world and gone on to live fulfilled lives. To me, they celebrate the diversity of humanity. Most monuments are commemorating past events; because Alison is pregnant it's a sculpture about the future possibilities of humanity.[156]

In the company of historic British citizens, Lapper provides a point of comparison between the venerated figure of the white, nondisabled man that dominated country's past and the underrepresented diversity of its population.

Lapper's placement in the Square simultaneously highlights these elements of heroism while the contrast that develops between her body and those of the other statues underscores her deviance. Being placed as a public spectacle, the sculpture exposes latent stereotypes and assumptions that result in these two views

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[156] Marc Quinn, *Recent Sculptures Catalogue,* Groninger Museum, 2006, quoted in "Alison Lapper Pregnant," Marc Quinn Artworks, accessed January 8, 2016, http://marcquinn.com/artworks/single/alison-lapper-pregnant.

of Lapper's body. "It is so rare to see disability in everyday life," Lapper noted in response to the intense debate that her body wrought on London, "let alone naked, pregnant, and proud. The sculpture makes the ultimate statement about disability—that it can be as beautiful and valid a form of being as any other."[157] Recognizing that the controversy stems form her unexpected level of visibility, Lapper diagnoses the roots of people's discomfort.

The sculpture provides a rare view of the familiar form of the female nude while it exists in two conditions that ordinarily render it invisible: pregnancy and disability. By inserting Lapper's extraordinary body into a public Square, she and Quinn are proposing that these characteristics should not be marginalized, shamed, or hidden from sight.[158] Further, the unexpected sight of Lapper's body, both pregnant and disabled, incites questions about her womanhood and sexuality. "Viewers may come to these public sights with often unacknowledged ideas that the kinds of bodies [like Lapper's] are somehow disqualified from womanhood."[159] In its intense visibility, Quinn's sculpture demands that these assumptions be reconciled with the reality of Lapper's pregnancy, and the sexual agency it implies.

The Fourth Plinth Program has transformed Trafalgar Square into a space where traditional works of public art meet contemporary works, creating a tension between past and present attitudes about the functions of public art. Historically, public art manifested as public monuments like those older sculptures found on the other plinths of the Square. Each sculpture is a monument to an individual who is

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[157] Alison Lapper qtd in Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art,* 55.
[158] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, 157.
[159] Ibid.

raced white, gendered male and, as military heroes, are resolutely able-bodied. Conceptually, public works such as these seek to venerate a specific individual for their service. In the process, however, the monument becomes syncretized to a set of idealized values involving service to the country. [160]

The sum effect is that traditional historical monuments to individuals work doubly to venerate the individual and to construct stable and valued narratives of national history around a consensus that the actions of the individual should be aspired to. Ann Millett-Gallant writes, "Monuments are versions and visual mediations of history, specifically ones constructed by those in power. Monuments often refer specifically to acts that have enforced that power, such as wars, conquest, conversion, colonialism, and violence, and therefore monuments legitimize power and its enforcement visually."[161] As such, the three permanent monuments on the plinths in Trafalgar Square actively stand in for narratives that reaffirm the systems of power that valorize the figure of the white, nondisabled male citizen who serves the country defends the existing order from those marked "other."

As the adoption of *Alison Lapper Pregnant* suggests, this approach to public monuments has been drastically transformed since the last of the Square's permanent sculptures was unveiled in 1888.[162] As a result of the rising climate of activism and egalitarianism that pervaded the sixties and seventies, by 1980 the role

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[160] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art,* 54.
[161] Ibid.
[162] "Trafalgar Square and the National Gallery," in Survey of London: Volume 20, St Martin-in-The-Fields, Pt III: Trafalgar Square and Neighbourhood, ed. G H Gater and F R Hiorns (London: London County Council, 1940), 15-18, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol20/pt3/pp15-18

of public art was redefined in order to better capture the democratic spirit that an increasing number of people believed should be reflected in works that are deemed "public" art.[163] This shifted the focus of public works away from the traditional figure of a specific, noble individual and instead advanced socially engaged works that would foster interactions between the artwork and the community in which it is placed. Rather than honoring individuals who represent compliance with ideologically loaded values and idealized narratives, these new public works became the site of social recognition and representation, community building, and communication.[164]

Many public arts projects from the 1980s onward protest notions of the public as socially homogenous and instead work toward the goal of "honoring individuals marginalized and erased by dominant values and the structures that personify them."[165] Unlike earlier monuments that employed the white, abled male figure to stand in as an image of the public, these projects highlight the diversity of the population out of the desire to "capture the tensions and dynamism of the contemporary urban population, and are intended to create not just dialogues, but controversy."[166] As *Alison Lapper Pregnant* demonstrates, public art employed in this way has the potential to generate productive controversies that encourage reflection on what we as a society value and deem worthy of publicizing. Through this exercise, public space becomes a site for contesting the relative visibility of

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[163] Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice, Populism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 111.
[164] Ibid, 112.
[165] Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art,* 55.
[166] Ibid.

certain citizens over others and for determining the implications of these values.

Conclusion

The fascination and hesitancy with which we approach visible disability betrays our attempts to ameliorate physical difference by denying its social significance. In response to this discomfort with extraordinary bodies, disability art works to diagnose and challenge social attitudes that disempower disabled individuals. Given the extent to which disabled narratives have been suppressed in mainstream culture, disability art finds little precedent in the art historical canon. Recognizing this exclusion as symptomatic of the broader marginalization of disabled experiences and identities, artists protest the absence of disability from visual history by appropriating existing forms and disrupting their traditional meanings by integrating disabled perspectives.

Through the process of cripping artistic practices, disabled artists provide nondisabled audiences with unique and otherwise inaccessible insights into issues ranging from social justice to physical access. This approach creates room in discourse for an affirmative attitude toward disability and an appreciation for the distinctive sociological insights disabled viewpoints have to offer. Disability art is radical in that it encourages viewers to stare, to explore their discomfort, and to learn about the immense range of experiences that characterize the diverse category of "the disabled."

Because of its somatic implications, disability art practice has so far been derived primarily out of the body art tradition. Beginning with action painting and its emphasis on bodily movement, this paper explores how the modern and contemporary periods' fascination with the individual is disrupted and redirected to

those individuals who often find themselves invisible in public spaces. Sue Austin and Tucker Stilley work to protest the social invisibility experienced by disabled individuals by visually documenting the ways in which they remain active despite physical impairments. These works, which capture the activity of the artist in ways that both resonate with and reject actionist practices, draw out the uniqueness of disability experience and argue for the validity of living with the aid of assistive devices.

The interest in the body that grew out of action painting was not long confined solely to the artist's body, as the genre of art installation became a site for enacting sensations on the viewer's body as well. Park McArthur and Ryan Gander manipulate the atmospheres of their installations to simulate the frictions disabled people experience while moving through environments ill suited for their ease of use. In these instances the artist's hand is made difficult to decipher through a restricted formal vocabulary, instead allowing the sparse gallery spaces to guide the viewer through symbolic displays of disenfranchisement from public space. McArthur and Gander project their social alienation and frustration with physical barriers onto the viewer, eliciting empathy and protesting the difficulties of moving through a world reluctant to accommodate your needs.

The immediacy of performance makes it an effective tool for exploring disability because of the strong reactions wrought by unexpected bodies. Both Mary Duffy and Kevin Connolly boldly display their physical differences and, in doing so, evoke wonder and horror at their unique physicality. By maintaining their agency through the act of talking and staring back at nondisabled voyeurs, the artists

demand that the viewer reflect on their reflex to stare. The confrontation between artist and viewer communicates the frustration of being made into a spectacle and invites viewers to question the nature of their own desire to stare at physical difference.

Because disability is a socially mediated and culturally devalued identity, the movement of disabled individuals through public spaces is inherently tense. When disability art interacts with public space, as was the case with Marc Quinn's sculpture of Alison Lapper, latent attitudes about the disabled body are forced to the surface. The controversy that developed out of Lapper's intense visibility as a work of public art incited conversation about disability and revealed how the presence of the disabled body is treated as an issue that demands public scrutiny. Defiantly looking out on Trafalgar Square regardless of public opinion, the sculpture asserted disabled people's right to be seen in the public sphere.

Each of these techniques aims to redress practices that have historically precluded disability by inserting disabled perspectives into the conversation. The works discussed in this paper function as inquiries into the self, into the body, and into the ways that the individual interacts with social bodies. These explorations are far reaching and, because issues of identity are multifaceted, the discursive potential of disability art cannot be understated. It is important to note, however, that this potential has still largely gone unrecognized. Most, if not all, of the disabled artists included in this discussion are largely unknown to the mainstream art world, despite their accolades within disability discourse. By examining the art historical lineage in which these works are participating and investigating their sociopolitical

significance, it is my ambition to demonstrate the importance of disability art practice and to argue for the need to integrate crips into the canon.

Fig. 1. Tony Heaton, *Monument to the Unintended Performer*. 2012. Source: Loz Pycock, 2012, Digital Image. Available from: Flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/99245765@N00/8024098517 (accessed December 21, 2015).

[Images Removed for Copyright Reasons]

Fig 2. Sue Austin, *Freewheeling: Traces from a Wheelchair*, 2009.
Available from: http://blog.ted.com/see-much-more-of-sue-austins-incredible-wheelchair-art/

Fig 3. Tucker Stilley, *Eye— 10 Hours (No. 8)*, eye tracking across 10 hours from 2:28 January 19 to 12:30 January 19 2013.
Available from: http://tuckerstilley.com/collection.cfm?collection=Lines%20of%20Sight&c_id=9

Fig 4. Park McArthur, Exhibition view from *Passive Isolation Vibration*, 2014.
Available from: http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2014/10/park-mcarthur-at-lars-friedrich/park_mcarthur_passive_vibration_isolation_16/

Fig 5. Ryan Gander, Exhibition view from *Is This Guilt In You Too?*, 2006.
Available from: http://www.outset.org.uk/england/projects/ryan-gander-is-this-guilt-in-you-too/

Fig 6. Ryan Gander, viewer interaction with *Is This Guilt in You Too?*, 2006.
Available from: http://www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk/ryan-gander

Fig 7. Hannah Wilke, S.O.S. Starification Object Series, 1974. Gelatin silver prints with chewing gum sculptures, 40 x 58 1/2 x 2 1/4", Museum of Modern Art.
Available from: http://www.moma.org/collection/works/102432

Fig 8. Mary Duffy performing *Story of a Body* at the 1995 "This/Ability" disability and performing arts conference at the University of Michigan. Still from *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*, directed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, 1995. Posted on Youtube by David Mitchell, August, 2013, Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P23ov4QVHhI. 00:10:35;00:12:31.

Fig 9. Kevin Connolly, from *The Rolling Exhibition*, 2007. Digital Image.
Available from: http://www.therollingexhibition.com/gallery.php

Fig 10. Marc Quinn, *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2005. Marble, 11.6 x 5.9 x 8.5',
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