Disability and its affective affordances: deformity, decay, disruption, distortion

Hiskes, A.R.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction[1]

1. Thinking with Affordances: The Query of Disability's Legibility

'David' by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1501–1504)[2]

'Into One-another III, to P.P.P.' by Berlinde de Bruyckere (2010)[3]

In the juxtaposition of the two images above, there is an immediate sense of tension in the way these images affect us. The left image shows Michelangelo's *David*; one of the most recognizable bodies in art history. The right image shows us a body that is more abstract and harder to define; instead, we may sense that we are looking at something *to do* with a body. The more unfamiliar and abstract second statue works affectively because it employs dissonance through combining familiar elements in

1 Sections of this introductory chapter are based on my article 'The Affective Affordances of Disability', which appeared in *Digressions: Amsterdam Journal of Critical Theory, Cultural Analysis, and Creative Writing* 3(2): 5–17 (2019). This chapter has been adapted and expanded from the original publication to fit within the context of this study.

2 Photograph used with the permission of Jörg Bittner Unna. Creative Commons CC BY 3.0.

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an unfamiliar bodily composition. The image of the left statue, on the contrary, is easily found to be more pleasing. Its elements are composed in a familiar way which is experienced as consonant. The left image shows us a body that is resting its weight on its right foot, seemingly between moderate tension (the pressed brow, slightly coiled right hand, right foot firmly on the ground) and nonchalance (slightly hanging shoulders, left foot floating over the ground at the heel, sling casually draped over left shoulder and aslant torso). The right image, by contrast, complicates the process of formally reading the body's position and form. Is it just one body we perceive, or, as the title suggests, two fusing into one? If we read the image from the right to left, there appear to be two. At the far-right end of the image, there seem to be two pairs of upper legs and knees, but when our gaze moves to the left, only a single pair of lower legs remains. If we move our gaze higher, we might read the statue as two "torsos" pressed on (or indeed, into) one another. Only the upper torso has arms and hands. At the far left of the image, on top of what we may read as the "shoulders" of the upper torso, there appears to be a "stump" or "outgrowth," seemingly akin to the heel of a foot, draped in the hollow of the torso below it. If we look at the position of the statue, the weight of both torsos seems to be supported by their knees and the hands of the upper torso.

In the West, people are accustomed to reading from left to right and from top to bottom. The *David* picture is consonant with both these directions. The statue in the picture is stable and firm on the right half of the body (visually left) while most of the movement in the statue is in its left limbs (visually right). It also supports a reading from top to bottom. Light falls on the statue from the top right corner, illuminating its head and torso, and shadowing its lower half. In contrast, *Into One-another* is read most smoothly from the bottom up, where we see the most identifiable aspects, namely limbs. Moving upwards, the reading process becomes increasingly difficult as the number of recognizable elements decreases. The light that falls on the statue enters the image similar to that of the image of the *David*, but instead the light is more evenly dispersed on the top torso, and it is the bottom one which is darkened by shadow. Apart from the formal structure of these images, we can easily identify the *David* as young, muscular and male. As such, it is highly mimetic; it represents to us familiar characteristics of a human body. *Into One-another* foregrounds its nature as being a body by resisting our ability to read it through identifying categories, such as age or gender.

From this, one can ascertain the following: reading the *David* is defined by identifying characteristics; I read the *David* in relation to a certain frame of reference pertaining to the human body. *Into One-another* does not as easily allow for this mode

of reading. It resists the process of identification that followed from reading the *David*. Continuing to read for form, the reader becomes aware of something else regarding the way these statues support themselves. *Into One-another* is arched back, resting on its knees and hands with its torso exposed. The *David*'s weight—as one can see—due to the slightly slanted left foot, rests on its right leg. But look again: the right leg is enveloped in a tree stump, seemingly prosthetically functioning to support the leg, in order for the statue to stand and remain upright.

In using the term *reading* in relation to images, I am following Mieke Bal, who writes that looking at images necessarily produces a reading, because "without the processing of signs into syntactic chains that resonate against the backdrop of a frame of reference an image cannot yield meaning" (298). When people read images in relation to a frame of reference, they initially tend to read for the things we recognize and to which we are attuned. What my reading above showed is that two things happen during this process of reading. Firstly, there is a relationship between reading the familiar and the unfamiliar and the way it affects us. Things that we are accustomed to tend to be more pleasing, whereas the unfamiliar and the difficult-to-read is often experienced as dissonant. Secondly, we often miss things when we do our initial reading: the tree stump enveloping the *David*'s leg might be attributed as "merely" being decorative, yet without it the statue would be likely to tumble over. Close reading, then, not only allows for an affective experience, but through attentive reading can also alter that experience. No one would initially read the *David* as a figure with a prosthesis, yet after the reading above such an interpretation becomes intelligible.

This line of reasoning is the inverse of the slogan often seen in public spaces and transport, that not all disabilities are visible. This study argues that disabilities are always a concern of *legibility*. This argument is related to Rosemarie Garland Thomson's argument that disability is a fluid concept since people can both gain and lose disabilities throughout their lives (1997:14). I propose that the notion of the fluidity of disability extends to the process of, how, where, and when we read for disability, as reading for disability is itself a contextual concern. This argument should not be confused with the idea that the legibility of disability consequently makes disability a social construct, as has been argued within disability studies.[4] As my reading of

4 The well-known social model of disability posits that there is a difference between the terms "impairment" and "disability," wherein the latter is a result of the interaction between a person with an impairment and an environment that disables them. See Tom Shakespeare's article "The Social Model of Disability" in *The Disability Studies Reader*. Edited by Lennard Davis, 5th edition, Routledge, 2017, pp. 95–103.

the statues above shows, my point of departure is that when one is confronted with bodies, normative or otherwise, they elicit that person to read them. Consequently, to be affected by the appearance of disabled bodies is entangled with the question of how one reads these bodies, and how one can read when affected.

I designate this relationship between affect and legibility as one of affordance. This term was originally coined by the psychologist James Gibson, in his book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (2014 [1989]). Gibson explains the concept of affordance as constituting a relationship between two or more elements wherein this relationship determines what the elements can afford in relation to each other. Gibson offers the following example: if a surface is horizontal, sufficiently extended and rigid, then it affords support to be walked on by a person or animal. The relationship between the qualities of the surface in combination with the ability of the person or animal to walk afford that the surface can be walked on, through which it becomes an affordance. Gibson therefore writes that "An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither" (121). Gibson argues that affordances are neither subjective or objective because affordances exist *as* relation, and are therefore dependent on a specific constellation of elements and features through which the affordance becomes constituted. Psychologist Thomas Stoffregen, who follows this relational-emergent definition of affordance (as opposed to affordance being an inherent characteristic to either environment or animal), consequently notes that "Affordances are opportunities for action; they are properties of the animal–environment system that determine what can be done" (124). Affordances have a complex relation to the notion of value, in that whether something is a "good" or "bad" affordance, *is* dependent on positionality and perspective. If an animal is able to cross a surface another party does not want it to cross, then from that party's perspective, it could be a bad or dangerous affordance.

I introduce the term *affective affordance* to designate that the appearance of, and interaction with, disabled bodies afford affective responses in relation to other bodies. Through using the concept of affordance, I do not categorize affective responses in "good" or "bad" ones in any moral sense. Affective affordance means that bodies hold the capacity to affect other bodies in a myriad of ways, through the senses available to our bodies. It is an affordance in that a relationship between two or more elements (in this case, bodies) is established that elicits responses in other bodies. Following my reading of the two statues above, I investigate how art and literature themselves explore affective affordances in relation to issues of disability's legibility. The focus of

this study therefore lies on the relationship between affective responsivity and legibility, how bodies are affected or affect other bodies, and how this relates to practices of interpretation of those bodies.

Adjacent to the affect-legibility relationship, I investigate how aesthetic judgement and appraisal are interwoven with that relationship, wherein I posit and subsequently develop aesthetic judgement to function as a mode of relationality. As shown in my reading of *Into One-another*, the affective responsivity elicited by something that is considered difficult to read may evoke a sensation of dissonance. Consequently, my point of departure is that legibility in relation to disability should never be considered a simple given. When we are affected by a non-normative body, a body that is difficult to read (and evokes the activity of interpretation), our senses also become engaged. Within the problematic of reading the disabled body, aesthetic judgement becomes a manner of relating to affective responsivity and interpretative practice that allows the interpreter to establish a position to that problematic based on a judgement of taste. To experience and determine a body as dissonant implies, but does not necessarily explicate, a certain distance to that body. Meanwhile, this dissonance might itself be evoked because of the difficulty of the richness of one's affective responsivity and the often limited ways in which interpretation can offer an account of that experience. Aesthetic appraisal may then be considered a mediation of the affect-legibility relationship through which one may reconcile a position in relation to the body one perceives and tries to interpret, and where a practice of valuation offers entry into the negotiation of affective proximity to disability. In other words, I consider aesthetic appraisal and judgement as affordances of an affordance, or a relationship of positionality that is afforded through the difficulties raised by the affect-legibility relationship.

Since literature and art are themselves aesthetic artefacts that elicit interpretation as well as inviting aesthetic evaluation, the approach I take in this study involves a double bind: the objects that I study require interpretation while they themselves are engaging with the issues of the interpretation of disabled bodies. In many of the case studies analyzed in this book, characters are often uncertain how to read the disabled bodies that appear and that they come in contact with. Uncertainty of interpretation at the diegetic level raises the issue of representing such interpretative uncertainty through textual form. This implicates the formal issue of how the representation of interpretative undecidedness must itself be interpreted through a reading of the text. In this sense the formal dimensions of the artwork/text through which the activity of interpretation is represented cannot be separated from the activity of interpretation that I do as a scholar.

Accordingly, the corpus of texts studied in this book all have in common an engagement with the double-bind mentioned above, albeit through different media (literature and film) and genres (narrative and lyric poetry). In my readings of these texts (described in more detail below), I focus on how relationships of affordance between legibility and affect both are established and investigated through genres such as narrative and lyric poetry, as the case studies actively engage with matters of interpretation *within* the text while they simultaneously invite interpretation from the reader. The issue of the interpretation of both text and the disabled body raised by these affordances requires paying attention to textual and aesthetic form. But just as interpretation is an activity evoked by encounters with literary texts as well as with disability, so too is a form a feature of both text and disabled body. Like interpretation, the representation of the disabled body through artistic and literary form intertwines aesthetic and bodily form. To pay sustained attention to form means that I draw from, and engage with, formalist approaches prevalent in literary and cultural studies through close reading. Whereas traditional formalist approaches in literary studies (such as the New Critics) divorce the text from its social and political contexts, my emphasis on the affective affordances of disability often moves the opposite way, engaging with texts from fields such as disability studies and social theory.[5] Thus, while I borrow from, and engage with, different formalist approaches with regard to how I approach my case studies, I am equally invested in providing insights into how relationships of affordances become established and to elucidate what they may teach us concerning the affect-legibility relationship as it is raised through the disability's representation.

As shown with the example of the two statues above, to situate the affect-legibility relationship as an affordance of disability automatically puts into question *how* we read disability. In what follows, I offer a brief overview of some of the dominant conceptions and models of disability prevalent in disability studies. In doing so, I am interested in the figurative aspects that these conceptions afford, since different conceptions also offer us different legibilities of disability. After considering some of the dominant conceptualizations and models of disability, I then look to the subfield of disability aesthetics, in order to consider the existing scholarship on the intersection between aesthetics and disability studies, and how I position this study in relation to this scholarship.

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5 For an overview of different historical and contemporary formalisms, see the 'Ars Formularia' chapter in Eugenie Brinkema's book *Life-destroying Diagrams* (2022). She also develops her own formalism in relation to cinematographic form dubbed 'radical formalism' in *The Forms of the Affects* (2014).

2. Disability and Its Paradigms

In many social and cultural situations and locations, disability remains either a largely unspoken subject or is made the topic of different professionalized languages, such as that of healthcare and medicine, (special) educational needs, human and employment rights, and policymaking in a variety of domains. Such practices have long been the object of scrutiny within disability studies, since these are simultaneously primary cultural sites where disability is discussed, and consequently, conceptualized. One of the methods to analyze the way in which disability is represented, particularly within cultural disability studies, is through the use of discourse analysis. Indeed, the slogan "nothing about us without us" often used in disability activism, points to the value placed on where, when and how disability is discussed, by people with and without disabilities. The professional languages developed and employed to discuss disability at the very least offer an approach to disability that is centered on and framed around *functionality*: to help live an independent and fulfilling life, to be included in social and cultural life, to be able to work, study and be a contributing member of society. Such an emphasis is in line with the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* (2006),[6] which has as one of its general principles the "full and effective participation and inclusion in society" (4) of people with disabilities, a principle which in many cases requires adjustments both large and small of a society to accommodate this participation.

The frame of disability as concerning living an independent and fulfilling life has given way to by now well-known models of disability: the medical model and social model.[7] To briefly reiterate, in the article referred to above, Tom Shakespeare (2017) explains the medical model as presupposing the disabled body as a body that, through being impaired, requires restoration, cure, or rehabilitation of some kind. It thereby presupposes the disabled body as a "defective" body that must be restored to the best extent possible. This presupposition in turn is founded on the idea that disabled bodies are a deviation from non-disabled, "normal" bodies. The criticism the medical model has received in disability studies rests on the fact that it divides disabled and non-disabled bodies, and through this division, intrinsically casts disability as anatomical and medically anomaly. Consequently, disability becomes that which is non-normative and an aberration. In response to this the social model of disability

6 https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf

7 The social model of disability was originally advanced by the sociologist Mike Oliver in his book *Social Work with Disabled People* (1983).

was developed, which argues that there is a conceptual distinction between the terms impairment (which designates a physical limitation) and disability, by which someone is socially excluded from participating in society through the way that society is organized. Thus, by not having a wheelchair-friendly entrance, a building can disable a person in a wheelchair from entering that building. Thirdly, the cultural model of disability follows from the observation that "the distinction between the biological reality of disability and the social construction of a disability cannot be made sharply" (34), as the philosopher Susan Wendell put it. It adds to and criticizes the social model as not giving enough account of the bodily and lived experiences *in relation* to cultural and social forces within which people with disabilities necessarily live (Mitchell & Snyder, 2005: 7).

Since the introduction of the social model, many scholars have come to critique its limitations.[8] One such limitation rests on whether a strict division between impairment and disability is sustainable. In her book *The Minority Body: a Theory of Disability* (2016), analytic philosopher Elizabeth Barnes evaluates the different models of disability, and whether the claims that people with disabilities are "worse off" in life, and whether life with disability is worth living, hold any salience. Barnes is critical of both naturalistic/medical models of disability as well as theories that argue that disability is solely a social construct. Barnes points out that while disabilities are indeed partly constructed through the interaction between person and environment, it is nevertheless the case that it is intrinsic to certain disabilities that they might cause pain or other discomfort, separate from outside influence of the environment. For Barnes, however, this does not mean that one could claim that life with disability is a life that is worse off, since this might only entail very specific situations and conditions, that there are many other factors that play into this, and that disabled and non-disabled people report similar levels of happiness (99). Given this, Barnes proposes the value-neutral or "mere difference" position when it comes to whether life with disability makes you worse off. With this position Barnes maintains that there is no logical ground for the claim that life with disability makes that life worse off than life without disability, since there are too many variables that determine quality of life to support such a claim, as well as too many reports from people with disabilities that disprove this claim.

Disability studies scholar Joel Michael Reynolds, in his book *The Life Worth Living: Disability, Pain, and Morality* (2022), calls the assumption that having a disability

8 Including Tom Shakespeare, in "Critiquing the Social Model" in *Disability and Equality Law* (2017).

causes deprivation and/or pain "the ableist conflation" (4). To Reynolds, the iterative connection that disability must be connected to pain and discomfort risks that the ableist conflation may come to support eugenic discourses and practices: "If … the ableist conflation holds, then it seems to follow that individuals and the state are in certain cases justified in ending or otherwise curtailing the lives of people with disabilities" (6–7). Barnes' and Reynolds' studies show how disability is primarily framed as a medico-ethical concern, in which the stakes are high: the phenomenon of disability becomes connected to the question of what life is worthy of being lived, which inadvertently gives leeway to the notion that certain lives are *not* worth living. Disability thereby also becomes connected, as Reynolds shows, to (bio)politics and eugenic practices.

This brief delineation of some of the dominant models and conceptions of disability shows that disability is primarily understood and posited as existing as a concern at the intersection of medicine, ethics, and politics. This framing posits that the primary concern in engaging with disability is the presupposition that disability would be intrinsically connected with pain and suffering. Understandably, the arguments raised by scholars like Barnes and Reynolds go against the naturalistic connection between disability and pain and suffering. But such a defense does not distantiate itself from taking disability in its very conception out of the medico-ethical domain in order to offer a different approach to the phenomenon of disability. Instead, it seeks to provide arguments as to why certain assumptions about life with disability are incorrect. While important in denouncing what Reynolds called the ableist conflation and in many cases exposing the absurdity of the underlying assumptions concerning life with disability, disability theorists have by and large countered naturalistic models by offering different models of their own design. Consequently, the reiteration of the conception of disability *as model* is questioned only insofar as these models do not give an adequate explanation for the lived experiences of people with disabilities.[9] Devlieger et al. therefore posit that "model thinking as pragmatic tools for reflecting are dominant in disability studies," but that models simultaneously simplify the reality of the lives of people with disabilities. However, this critique does not give an account of what other ways of conceptualizing disability are conceivable, and the authors conclude that they believe model-thinking will remain dominant (14). The question concerning the ways in which disability is figuratively conceivable in other ways than through that of the model is taken up in the fifth chapter of this study,

9 See, for example, Tom Shakespeare's and Nick Watson's article, "Beyond Models: Understanding the Complexity of Disabled People's Lives" (2010).

but for now it is important to unpack the logic that underlies thinking of disability as a paradigm, which is the logic that underlies that of the model.

In a series of three essays concerning methods of textual and figurative analysis, *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (2009), Giorgio Agamben explores different ways of reading texts other than via the established methods of semiotics and hermeneutics. The first of these essays is concerned with the concept of the paradigm. Often associated with T.S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2012 [1962]), the term is used so often in Kuhn's book that it is difficult to pinpoint an exact definition, although Agamben ultimately distills two as the most significant: the first is the "set of techniques, models, and values to which the group members [of a scientific community] adhere." The second use is defined as "simply an example, a single case that by its repeatability acquires the capacity to model tacitly the behaviour and research practice of the scientists" (11). These two meanings suggest a complex relationship to be covered by a single term: on the one hand the paradigm is itself the particular worldview with its organizing rules, on the other an example within a scientific practice which, through being an example of the practice, reifies that practice. The medical and social models of disability are paradigms in the sense that they constitute methods of how they conceptualize disability, yet within them are also specific cases or examples that reify these models as paradigms. The medical model works through a taxonomic logic that is inductive; a certain manifestation of a disability is compared to the other paradigms of the taxonomy in which it is placed, unless it does not fit within the existing taxonomy and as such becomes a separate paradigm as well as a new entry in the classificatory scheme. The social model, on the other hand, works the other way around; how does an environment (a school, an office, public transport etc.) disable a particular person with a particular impairment? This model is therefore deductive.

These models showcase the seemingly necessary practical applications of their method, but also the accompanying shortcomings. Either from moving from the universal to the particular or vice versa, both paradigms reify the opposition between the two, and as such the specific and particular disability is always examined within the limitations of its paradigm. This is practical because many manifestations of perceived disabilities share the same or similar characteristics, and as such methods of treatment are often also similar and knowledge of treatment may be shared within the paradigm. The problem with such a paradigm, however, is that it does not ask *what has become lost* by accepting this method as a *given* when engaging disability. That is to say, how one manifestation of a disability is separate from another like it. This is why paradigms, as particular examples, appear paradoxical, because of their

particularity coupled with their capacity to simultaneously be an example. Agamben explains this the following way:

> Paradigms obey not the logic of the metaphorical transfer of meaning but the analogical logic of the example. Here we are not dealing with a signifier that is extended to designate heterogenous phenomena by virtue of the same semantic structure; more akin to allegory than to metaphor, the paradigm is a singular case that is isolated from its context only insofar as, by exhibiting its own singularity, it makes intelligible a new ensemble, whose homogeneity it itself constitutes. That is to say, to give an example is a complex act which supposes that the term functioning as a paradigm is deactivated from its normal use, not in order to be moved into another context but, on the contrary, to present the canon—the rule—of that use, which cannot be shown any other way. (18)

As each disability is itself an example of anatomical deviances and irregular behaviors that allow it to be placed in its respective paradigm, through the homogeneity of its ensemble, as Agamben states, it *can be* an example in the first place. As Agamben points out, models therefore necessarily follow the logical operation of analogy, in which two elements are compared based on a correspondence or partial similarity. When two elements are compared based on perceived similarity and correspondence, they can subsequently be classified or grouped together. Agamben contrasts the logic of the analogy with that of the "metaphorical transfer of meaning." This transfer consists in comparing two elements with different qualities, of which the qualities of one element are placed on the other, which then generates new meaning.

If one considers the conceptualization of disability offered above in light of this juxtaposition of the logic of the analogy with that of metaphorical transference, disability is predominantly understood and conceived by way of analogy. Yet, no two disabilities are exactly the same, and in recognition of their dissimilarity, they can become singular. Agamben goes on to argue that if induction involves moving from the particular to the universal and deduction from the universal to the particular, the paradigm, conceived as a particular instance, may therefore be supposed to move from the particular to the particular. Importantly, this undermines a conception of a strict binary opposition of what we can conceive as solely universal or particular.

If disability is generally approached and examined through the established inductive and deductive paradigms of the various models through which it is conceptual-

ized, this is precisely why examining these conditions within artworks is so valuable. My comparative reading of the *David* and *Into One-another* focused on the particular features these artworks afford us; in the case of the *David*, it was how his right leg is enveloped in a tree stump that allowed me to read this prosthetically. In the case of *Into One-another*, it is the fact that that artwork complicates the reading process itself. These affordances offered by these artworks highlight how art draws our attention to the work's particulars. What separates the study of art from other paradigms for the way in which we may conceptually conceive disability, then, is that art can foreground its own particularity, challenging and defying existing categories. An alternative to the analogical conception of disability as a model is to move from the particular to the particular, as this study seeks to do. This is why I choose close reading as my method, commonly understood as a method that demands paying attention to particulars within artworks and texts, as well as involving a scrutiny of aesthetic form.[10] Reading for the particular and for form cannot give an overarching conceptualization or theory of disability the way a model of disability could, since this is precisely the analogous logic it resists.

Other theorists have previously engaged with thinking through the relationship between art and disability under the rubric of disability aesthetics. In *Disability Aesthetics* (2010), disability theorist Tobin Siebers developed and defined that term as follows:

> Disability aesthetics refuses to recognise the representation of the healthy body-and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty—as the sole determination of the aesthetic. Rather, disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result. Note that it is not a matter of representing the exclusion of disability from aesthetic history, since no such exclusion has taken place, but of making the influence of disability obvious. This goal may take two forms: (1) to establish disability as a critical framework that questions the presuppositions underlying definitions of aesthetic production and appreciation; (2) to elaborate disability as an aesthetic value in itself worthy of future development. (2010: 3)

10 For further support and delineation of this conception of close reading, see Annette Federico's *Engagements with Close Reading* (2016).

Siebers' proposed project of a disability aesthetics is explicitly political in that it casts a different conceptualization of disability in terms of it being a framework as opposed to a model. Siebers' point of departure with this framework is the juxtaposition between the harmonious and the beautiful (as understood by a "traditional aesthetics") and the way in which those terms can be redefined and embraced by disability aesthetics. To substantiate this division, Siebers offers examples of the association between the ugly and disability through analyses of artwork made under the Nazi regime, which emphasized sameness between bodies, partially through their robustness and health, rather than allowing for somatic variation and the representation of sickness and disability. That disability foregrounds bodily variety is reified in the following way: "Disability does not express defect, degeneration or deviancy in modern art. Rather, disability enlarges our vision of human variation and difference, and puts forward perspectives that test presuppositions dear to the history of aesthetics" (3). Here, again, Siebers negates specific qualities that he sees as having been associated with disability in the past in favor of a more celebratory attitude toward disability that would "enlarge our vision" of disability. This argument submits modern art to converge with the political aim of expanding our collective perspective on disability, risking ignoring or disqualifying art that would not explicitly align itself with this aim or allow for a reading of human variation. This culminates in the following statement concerning his project: "I am making a stronger claim: that disability is integral to modern aesthetics and that the influence of disability on art has grown, not dwindled, over the course of time. If this is the case, we may expect disability to exert even greater power over art in the future. We need to consider, then, how art is changed when we conceive of disability as an aesthetic value in itself" (10).

Although I agree with Siebers insofar that there is need for a consideration of disability in terms of it being an aesthetic value rather than solely a medico-ethical concern as it was conceptualized above, I also diverge from his claims. Within his approach to disability aesthetics, categories such as defect, degeneration, and deviance are preemptively disqualified as potentially valuable aesthetic terminology. Given the historical and cultural association of these aesthetic categories with disability, willfully ignoring them in favor of one's political position that disability "enlarges our vision of human variation" dismisses how degeneracy and deviance also influence and even contribute to a cultural and aesthetic understanding of human variation. While this study is sympathetic to the two goals mentioned by Siebers earlier, I contest his negation of the concepts of defect, degeneration, and deviancy as relevant aesthetic categories, and propose how we might read concepts like these for what they can

aesthetically afford. Given disability's capability to arouse such strong responses and judgements, Siebers goes on to argue for the embrace or abandonment of feelings aroused by disability:

> As modern art increasingly defines its future direction in terms of disability, artists represent disabled bodies more and more explicitly as aesthetic objects, and the beholders of these objects must choose whether to embrace or reject the strong feelings excited by disability. On the one hand, because modern art embraces disability as an aesthetic value in itself, there seem to be few objects with greater potential than disabled bodies to qualify as works of art. The modern in art manifests itself as disability, and disabled bodies possess an aura that seems to satisfy the artistic desire for new, varied and beautiful forms of appearance. On the other hand, aesthetic objects symbolizing disability are sufficiently disruptive that some beholders are tempted to reject modern art as "sick" and "ugly" and to call for alternative forms of art that are "healthy" and "beautiful" (40).

While I have thus far argued in part against the dichotomous nature of Siebers' divisions made within disability aesthetics, I would note that this does not mean that his observations are unwarranted or lack merit. Siebers gives examples of situations where audiences are disgusted by or deject art that engages and represents disability. Yet, by counter-offering this perceived dichotomy with that of the "embrace or rejection" opposition of the feelings aroused by disability, Siebers exchanges one dichotomy for another rather than exploring how we may develop a deeper understanding of how these particular artworks arouse these feelings in the first place. Siebers' argument that disabled bodies themselves may qualify as works of art is also not without risk, as it jeopardizes reducing a disabled body to the status of object which may be fit to be exhibited in public display, such as what has been done historically in the freak show for example.

Adjacent to Siebers, Ato Quayson has also delved into the question of how to relate to the feelings aroused by the representation of disability in his book *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (2007). Quayson writes that: "Contradictory emotions arise precisely because the disabled are continually located within multiple and contradictory frames of significance within which they, on the one hand, are materially disadvantaged, and on the other, have to cope with the culturally regulated gaze of the normate" (18). Quayson links the interpretation of disability within

literary texts to the way in which disability is already interpreted outside of them, arguing that this is how disability links aesthetics to its "ethical core," meaning that it is precisely *because* disabilities are interpreted outside of literary texts that the interpretation of the representation of disability within texts and artefacts cannot be fully separated from social practice. Quayson argues that aesthetic nervousness is ultimately coextensive with the nervousness regarding people with disabilities in the real world, which to him implies that there is necessarily an ethical dimension in our engagement with disability (19).

Comparing Siebers' and Quayson's positions, both link disability aesthetics to the domains of ethics and politics. For Siebers, the representation of disability in and through art becomes linked to the potential of an increase in the acceptance and celebration of human diversity. For Quayson, meanwhile, the interpretation of the literary representation of disability is necessarily linked to the interpretation of disability in the extra-textual world, thereby making the interpretation of disability in literary texts an ethical issue. While both theorists mention different affective responses and attitudes toward or elicited by disability, these theories do not offer an account of the affect-legibility question in relation to disability as I have posited it above. Neither Siebers nor Quayson offer detailed theoretical accounts of the relationship concerning being affected by disability and how one reads for it, preferring to consider the political and/or ethical consequences of being affectively moved by disability aesthetics.

3. Prosodies of Gaps and Bodies: Affect Theory and Disability

What Siebers and Quayson show is that disability ceases to be solely a question of how people with disabilities can function "properly" in a society; how we feel about this disability becomes paramount in how we may engage with it. Literary scholar Martha Stoddard Holmes provides the following perspective on this:

> The question of how to feel about disability, and why, is far from settled. It is a question that many of us actively face or refuse to face on a daily basis, regardless of where in culture we locate ourselves or our bodies. If we are seen as "different" by the culture in which we live, we may choose to avoid or embrace, disown or engage, this status; we may find it impossible, however, to ignore others' assumptions about the radically different identities we inhabit as a result of our

> different bodies. If, on the other hand, our culture sees us as "same" or unmarked, the problem of how culture assigns meaning to bodily difference will be easy to push out of our consciousness. (2009: 192)

Stoddard Holmes presents a political aporia that is often seen linked to the concept of disability. Its acknowledgement has to lead to its embrace or abandonment, while ignoring it only leaves the "the problem of how culture assigns meaning to bodily difference" unexamined, which does not mean it is not there. Yet, Stoddard Holmes' quote, taken from a study on the relationship between melodrama and physical disability in Victorian culture, rather than discussing *how* we feel about disability, instead refers to the process and choices we have in making disability signify, as a mark of bodily difference. But the way a body signifies its disability (or lack thereof) is different still from the way it is able to move us affectively. Stoddard Holmes' argument points out that the way we feel about disability carries with it political consequences, and claims that: "The stories that pervade our lives make disability resound so intensely in emotional terms that all other possible registers (scientific, environmental, artistic, sexual, economic, geographic, epistemological, statistical, sartorial, political, and so on) are often informed and overshadowed by affect" (3). This statement reinforces the notion that disability is a matter of discourse, but it does beg the question: how is that discourse "informed and overshadowed" by affect?

Stoddard Holmes explores this question through the notion of melodrama, which is defined by its emotional excess. She carefully delineates two different uses of this term. The first is the way in which "melodrama refers to a mode of experience in which value ("depths") resides in the embodied moment itself" (20), contrasting the exterior display of emotion with that of the idea of a turbulent, yet inaccessible, inner life. The second use is defined as "The gap that separates melodrama's emotional excess from lived experience marks a representational and aesthetic failure that takes place both on the stage or page and in the body of the viewer or reader" (20). Whereas disability is defined by a perceived lack of something, melodrama is both perceived as being too much of something and an aesthetic failure, which disability often is perceived to be, as well. Stoddard Holmes claims that contemporary viewers call something melodramatic "to express both disdain for the falsity of its emotion and its underlying fear of all feeling" (19). Although she does not explain the second half of this statement, it may be read as the fear of the way in which emotions, when they become excessive, can overpower us. The first half of this statement suggests that a difference can be made between "authentic" and "false" emotions, where supposed false emotions can evoke an emotional reaction precisely because of a perceived lack of authenticity. This

question of authenticity is prevalent for understanding how we read disability as well. The visibility of disability may be perceived as a guarantee for its authenticity (or forgery), while simultaneously, as with the statue of the *David*, we may not read for disability when it is presented to us in an unusual way. Both disability and emotion, then, share a propensity to have to engage with their authenticity, while their readers and viewers need to scrutinize how they read them.

So far, I have used the terms "affect" and "emotion" largely interchangeably. Although this is not uncommon in scholarly practice, simultaneously they can mean different things in different academic literatures. In her book *The Ascent of Affect* (2017), Ruth Leys traces the different ways in which emotion and affect have been conceptualized across the social sciences and humanities. Citing the writings of Brian Massumi, one approach is to define affect as non- or pre-personal forces, which Leys summarizes as "formless, unstructured nonsignifying forces or 'intensity'" (313), contrasting this with what she dubs the Tomkins-Ekman "basic emotions" paradigm, based on the work of the 20th century psychologists Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman. The "basic emotions" paradigm claims, as its name suggests, that there is a number of pre-fixed affective responses to outside stimuli categorized in preset emotions, which would later be popularized in literary studies by Eve Kosofski Sedgwick and Adam Frank in their book *Shame and its Sisters: a Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995). Both of these approaches have been the subject of critique. Margaret Wetherell critiques the first as constituting "a wrong turn" (19). She argues that affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and semiotics and that to separate those from the body is a futile endeavor (20). As far as the basic emotions paradigm goes, Wetherell offers three lines of argument. A psychobiological one, which asserts that there are contradictory results in the way different bodies respond emotionally to stimuli. A cultural argument, which argues that different cultures, regions and periods have different notions of concepts such as "affect" and "emotion" that are not universally shared, and as such may be interpreted as being, in part, social constructs. Finally, a third evolutionary critique is offered which examines how emotional responses may not be pre-programmed but are rather subject to the interaction between organism and environment.

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's definition, coming from a materialist perspective, is more in line with Massumi's earlier definition, which in itself shows influences of Gilles Deleuze's thought on affect, who in turn is indebted to the writings of the 17th-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Gregg's and Seigworth's definition of affect is as follows:

> Affect arises in the midst of inbetweenness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. (1)

Affect constitutes forces and intensities, but Gregg and Seigworth add that these forces also pass through and traverse bodies, showing how bodies can work on each other. Taking into consideration the previous addition of the prefix "pre-personal," I consider affective forces, in contrast to emotions, to hold a different relation to experience in that they do not necessarily reify one's intentionality and subjectivity the way an emotional experience would. As Gregg and Seigworth note, they may be barely consciously registered at all, which does not mean these forces are not there. The difference is that this process of the registration of affective impressions is itself the grounds for which the subject may assert that very subjectivity ("I am feeling …").

Not all literary and cultural theorists adhere to this distinction between affect and emotion. Reflecting on the distinction made between affect and emotion in affect theory, Sarah Ahmed explains that, in writing *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), her primary interest was in exploring the way different bodies can impress on one another and the affective *effects* emotions can have, explicitly not seeking to separate consciousness and intentionality (208). Furthermore, Ahmed's method is one that focuses on the rhetorical usage and capability of emotion in cultural texts. She analyzes the way in which emotions are used in social discourse to examine how, for example, nationalist white supremacist sentiments are presented as being in the name of love for one's country. What Leys and Ahmed share in their critique is the notion that emotion, in this regard, is prone to being reduced to intentional and subjective experience which affective intensities can transcend.

As with any conceptual distinction, I think that the primary question needs to be in what way this distinction is productive in advancing the way we think about both these concepts. To contrast emotion and affect purely on the notion of the subjectivity or intentionality of experience is to not distinguish them carefully enough. When we experience an emotion, it is quite clear that there is affective work involved; something, an object or a body (or a multitude of those) impresses upon us, which may lead us to exclaim a sensation of a specific emotion like love or hate. Often, however, such emotional states are jumbled or confused, where we may feel we feel a mix of these emotions, or we might even feel that these terms are inadequate or do not encompass the totality of what we are feeling, which of course does not mean that we are not feeling something. This leads us to a stimulating question the concept of affect offers us: how does representation relate to a concept that, by its very definition, entails forces and intensities that may be barely registered?

One literary theorist to take up this question is Isobel Armstrong in the chapter 'Thinking Affect' of her monograph *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000). Through an exhaustive and scrutinizing review of different sources, Armstrong explores different interpretations of the definition of affect, one being that affect is "a triple 'combination', bodily discharge, perception of that motor action and a qualitative assessment of pleasure or pain, held together by an indefinable 'core' experience" (110). To formulate the problem Armstrong examines more precisely, she questions the way in which affective forces, since they are corporeal forces, can be represented through symbolic means like language and images. Given the fact that affective experience is *de facto* a bodily experience, signs ultimately will always fail in representing affect fully, since a part of this experience lies precisely outside of the process of symbol-making and signification. One of the conclusions Armstrong offers is that affect is best thought of as residing in a space in between the forming of subjective experience and the directness of unconsciousness, dejecting the binary opposition of thought and emotion as wholly separated, and the value of aesthetic experience as necessarily having to reside in fully formed symbolic meanings: "Affect is not hostile to intellect but simultaneously feeds it and feeds on it. This is a theory of 'travail', of the work or labor of affect which brings epistemic questioning into being. Affect can do this because it is *mobile*" (119). For Armstrong, this mobility is vital because it underscores the somatic sociability of affect. It moves and impresses upon and through different bodies, and it is in this mobility that traces of symbols and signs can be formed through corporeal expression, while at the same time this expressivity is in itself caught in a continuous productive process of signification. Armstrong summarizes such a poetics of affect in the following way:

> As I have said, we should be thinking of the rebus and its capacity for suturing disparate languages or dialects from different orders of the self as 'representant' and hybrid symbol/affects. We should be thinking not only of the prosody of the body—the grimace, the shudder, and their somatic inscriptions in languages—but also of the prosody of the gap, the blank space, articulation through the pause, the moment of void. More important, we should be thinking less of the representation of these elements in the text in terms of substitution of symbol for originary affect; thinking more *of the reproduction of the conditions of affective life within the text itself*. If affect is untranslatable, and cannot be *in* language, cannot have content, we might seek for devious evidences of its inscription and consider the way it cheats itself into language or inhibits symbol-making, but in the last analysis the idea of substitution has to be abandoned and replaced by a dynamic understanding of the text as generating new affect patterns and thought structures. (124, emphasis in text)

Armstrong's words suggest a kind of formalism; affect is not *in* language but can be evoked by it through reading the different patterns in which signs are used, and not used in a text (the gaps), which themselves evoke affective and analyzable patterns and structures. The emphasis here on "the reproduction of the conditions of affective life within the text" and the affective-generative power of texts is crucial. Rather than only reading for the way in which a certain emotion is represented (in which affect would be reduced solely to content without regarding form, and consequently stop being affect as conceptualized above), the reproduction of affect through the forms of texts can show how art is itself generative of affect.

Still, the problem of representing affect could also be approached from the opposite direction. The two prosodies mentioned by Armstrong, that of the gap and that of the body, show different approaches to affect, which, like the relationship between affect and emotion, is both distinct and entangled. The issue of "thematizing" affect was already given as a problem for representation, and it is the prosody of gaps, with its focus on reading for pattern of form, which allows a different approach to explore how texts may generate affect. Yet, the prosody of the body, with its emphasis on bodily expressions (which are themselves signs), is not unimportant, least of all to this study. Earlier, we saw how in the work of Stoddard Holmes emotional excess and its authenticity and fictionality played a key role in the melodramatic representation of disability, but this obviously has to involve bodily expression. It

is key here that we do not understand the prosodies of the gap and the prosody of the body as opposites but rather that Armstrong posits the assignment as being how we may read for their entanglement. Bodily expressions themselves can form patterns and sequences; part of understanding the patterns generative of affect is understanding how to examine how its impressions move between and through the different represented bodies. In this way, bodily expression is not opposite to what one might call an affective formalism, but rather a part of the structures that it studies.

4. On Reading for Affective Affordances

The relevance of affective formalism for the way in which we read disability can be elucidated through the two prosodies of gaps and bodies. In my reading of the two artworks above, the gap in the form of the *David* that a surface reading would miss is the prosthetic function that the tree trunk enveloping its leg has, making it possible for the body to stand upright. The gap here is that, in reading for that which is in plain sight, we pass this over as being decoration. By contrast, *Into One-another* foregrounds reading the body *as form* by not offering expected signifying markers carried by bodies such as gender, age, or race, and allowing for the analysis of how this form thus generates affective responses. Affectively reading *for* disability's affordances, then, necessarily involves giving an account of the affect-legibility relationship itself when legibility is not a preemptive given.

Following Armstrong, positing legibility as concerning reading for the formal patterns within and throughout cultural and literary texts generative of affect that engage with disability can be contrasted with the notion of legibility as pertaining to being able to recognize a body based on identity characteristics. Though form can become connected to identification (for example, I can read the tree trunk that formally envelops the *David*'s leg *as* prosthesis), in many cases, reading for gaps and deviances may elude the possibility of the designation of a clear or coherent identity altogether, which opens up, rather than forecloses, legibility as pertaining to the question, "how can/do I read this?" Armstrong maintained that one can read for affect by reading for textual patterns through which it arises, including gaps and stops in the text, in relation to the prosody of the body (the gasps, grimaces, gestures and so on). Disability's entanglement with this claim is that disability so often involves the very notion of perceived gaps *within* the body's own prosody, solidifying the entanglement of these two prosodies when disability becomes a concern for rep-

resentation. In this study, as noted, such gaps are understood as affordances which allow me to explicate the relationship between the body's affective prosody and its representation.

The concept of affordance enjoys popularity in a variety of fields, and in relation to disability has been mainly examined through sociological and ethnographic approaches where scholars delineate the affordances between people with disabilities and different environments. In a comprehensive visual-ethnographic study entitled *Activist Affordances: How Disabled People Improvise More Habitable Worlds* (2023), anthropologist Arseli Dokumacı examines how people with disabilities adapt to the environments they inhabit and live in.[11] Reflecting on the relationship between affordance theory and disability, Dokumacı posits that affordance theory offers an account for the *absence* of certain affordances, but that affordance theory "does not have any way of accounting for actions and behaviors that take place yet correspond to affordances whose possible behaviors or actions require enormous amounts of *effort*, *endurance*, and *ingenuity* to be realized by impaired humans" (51). One limit of Dokumacı's study is that it does not expound on the affective connotations that a term like effort has. This is something that this study picks up on, articulating a reading of effort as a critical affective category associated with disability's affordances.

In relation to literary studies, I am also not the first to consider the value of the concept of affordance for working with literary and aesthetic form. In her book *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (2014), C. Namwali Serpell employs the term to think through the different ways in which literature may evoke uncertainty through the reading experience. Serpell uses the terms oscillation, enfolding, adjacency, accounting, vacuity, synchronicity, and flippancy to think through literary affordances. Caroline Levine, in her study *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2017), reads these four titular terms as literary forms that carry affordances: "To capture the complex operations of social and literary forms, I borrow the concept of *affordance* from design theory. *Affordance* is a term used to describe the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs" (6). Levine, taking her notion of affordance from design theory, has a different conceptualization of affordance from my own, since she sees affordances as latent *in* materials and designs rather than affordances themselves constituting a relationship, as per Gibson's conception.

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11 Both the terms *disabled people* and *people with disabilities* are used in disability studies. As Dokumacı explains, disabled people follows from the social model and emphasises how people can be disabled by society. "People with disabilities," meanwhile, takes a "people first" approach, not wanting people to be defined by their disability. In this study, I primarily use the latter term.

What is similar to Serpell and Levine in my own approach is that this study will look at four affective affordances that are not tied to clearly demarcated emotional states. Instead, this study chooses larger, overarching concepts that are often connected to disability. While disability can evoke a range of emotions and affective responses such as disgust, admiration, wonder, and fear, literary and cultural texts seldom investigate only one such state in relation to disability. They favor investigating the complexity of the intertwinement between such affective states.

The four affective affordances that I work with in this book, *deformity, decay, disruption*, and *distortion*, are chosen because they are concepts often associated with disability which simultaneously offer a multiplicity of affective responses for how characters in the texts I close read respond to and engage with disability. While these concepts are chosen to maintain the complexity and multiplicity of affective responses generated through the affect-legibility relationship of disability, I also take in consideration Tom Eyer's critique that "in approaching any local object of analysis, the language of entanglement and affordance tends, not always but often enough, to obscure the very differences that it sets out to celebrate" (26). Eyers warns specifically for the slippage of analysis into "sophisticated description," wherein such description would limit the argument made by virtue of emphasizing how entangled different formal elements are and stopping there. As shown in my comparative reading of the *David* and *Into One-another*, however, to clearly and fully separate description from analysis is difficult if not impossible; my reading of those statues described how and in what ways and directions I read them, which is pertinent to the analysis that follows. To analyze forms thus implies giving an account of the form that one perceives as fit for formal analysis. In other words, my point of departure is that description and analysis are themselves already entangled, but that the scholar must offer an account of this very relationship.

Whereas I have so far largely framed the affect-legibility query posed through disability as pertaining to the object read, the query equally pertains to the question of the activity of reading itself. Reading presupposes a capacity of the human body to become translated into an ability within specific cultural contexts, wherein it procures the ability to acknowledge, determine, decode, and interpret signs and sign systems. Therefore, adjacent and complementary to the question of how we should read disability as object lies the question of how aesthetic practices like literature investigate the relationship between reading and (dis)ability, or how bodily capacities are translated into abilities pertaining to reading practices.

The relationship between these two questions is never fully separated, and they motivate the selection of texts I study in this book. While the textual corpus for this

book consists of different genres (narrative in all chapters, lyric poetry in chapter 4), as well as different media (mostly literary texts, but a film is read in the following chapter), these works all actively engage with how the activity of reading disability necessarily affords the question of how one affectively relates to disability, and how the process of reading itself is often impaired due to being affected by that body. The amount of literary and cultural texts that explicitly feature disability is vast and growing.[12] The texts chosen for this study, while eclectic in terms of place of origin and time period, all share that they foreground the role affect and aesthetic judgement play in the way in which relationalities to disability emerges.

The four concepts that this book works with can themselves be divided into groups of two, where there is distinction concerning which of the two questions mentioned above is emphasized. The first two affordances discussed in this study, deformity and decay, refer to bodily conditions that can elicit powerful affective responses in those bodies that are witness to, or interact with, bodies that are deformed or in a state of decay.

The chapter on deformity investigates the relationship between performativity and the appearance of the deformed body through a close reading of Charlotte Brönte's novel *Jane Eyre* and David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man*. At stake in both texts are the myriad of strong affective responses aroused in other bodies through the appearance of the deformed body. I argue that the appearance of deformity is necessarily performative in nature, and I explore how this performativity alters, depending on the different settings and contexts through which the deformed body is made to appear. Due to the inevitability of the appearance of the deformed body as involving performativity, I argue that its presence concurrently raises the sensibility of agency itself. In other words, the deformed body's very appearance heightens the collective sensibility to the way in which action relates to that body. This performativity of the appearance of deformity is analyzed through the triad of concepts of seeing, revealing, and feeling, which I borrow from William Hays' 19th-century essay on deformity.

The third chapter examines the concept of decay as involving the emaciation and decline of the body while the body simultaneously tries to persevere and prosper. The drama of the body that decays thereby involves the way in which the body's prosody articulates and endows bodily use, disuse, and abuse with form. Through a reading of Hanya Yanagihara's novel *A Little Life*, I explore how different kinds of action and use of and between bodies relate to practices of articulation in the literary text, while,

12 For an overview of a great variety of literary texts that engage with disability, see Alice Hall's book *Literature and Disability* (2016).

following Armstrong's earlier notion of the prosody of the gap, also exploring what is formally unarticulated. Meanwhile, the chapter explores how different ways of relating to the body (having a body, doing a body) afford different relationalities to and between bodies that in turn produce different affective responses. The chapter reads through different genres of the actionable, including the desire to offer help, being helpless, the body as object for abuse, and the body as available for the usage of self-harm.

The fourth chapter, which engages with the concept of disruption, delineates different formal accounts through which disruption has been conceptualized throughout literary and narrative theory, as well as in disability studies. I show how narrative models of disruption conceptualize disruption as narrative rupture, which fails to account for the work disruption does in everyday life with disability. The chapter first explores the affective tonality of dissatisfaction through a reading of the novel *Still Life with Monkey*, which instead of dramatizing recovery and recuperation in relation to disability, as many disability-focused narratives do, dramatizes the possibility of accepting life with disability. I then move on from the genre of narrative to the lyric poetry of Laurie Clements Lambeth, whose work investigates how lyric form addresses the continuous disruption of living with disability. I argue that Lambeth's lyric enacts the event of the attempt of communicating this disruption, of the effort that any bodily action inevitably requires and imbues with sensible form the possibility and failure of this attempt. Subsequently, I argue that lyric theory's predominant focus is on what the evocation of the lyric can effectuate in the world, but thereby fails to consider a theory that addresses the capacity to enunciate the lyric in the first place.

The fifth chapter deals with the force of distortion, which it examines through the figurative form of the twist. Twisting involves the motion of twisting objects (like the body) conjoined with the twisting of words and worlds so as to give them a different sense. I do a close reading of Mariam Petrosyian's *The Gray House*, a novel in which disabled children and adolescents live together in a boarding school where inexplicable events take place. Narrated through the literary mode of the fantastic, the novel offers a wide cast of characters set in different timelines and places that all try to make sense of the events taking place in the House, while creating ways to live together in separate packs and dormitories. Working with the fantastic's notion of "that which cannot be, but is," I read the novel as exploring different modes of relationality to a world that is irresolute and defies definitive explanation. These modes of relationality are grounded in attitudes of speculative hesitation and anticipation that the world elicits due to its fundamental unpredictability. In response, the novel's characters attempt to read the world in order to distill an explanatory

scheme for the events happening in the House. They employ interpretation as an activity that affords a particular mode of relationality that seems to offer sure footing in a distortional and paradoxical world. While reactionary interpretation as activity is inevitable when faced with the inexplicable, the novel concurrently explores alternate modes of relationality through characters that seek to predominantly sense and tune into the House's world rather than interpret it. These relational modes intersect and intertwine with disability in that my reading explores how the characters' different capacities are translated into (dis)abilities, and how and where these capacities fall short or become saturated. Moreover, through a reading of the folkloric figure of the changeling featured in the novel, the chapter offers a theory of disability as affording the figuratively conceivable rather than the analogic conception of disability-as-model as has been conceived within disability studies, juxtaposing that logic's normativity with the contradictions of paradox.

Through expounding these four overarching affordances of disability, this study aspires to propose alternative and often paradoxical or conflicting conceptions of disability, not only against particular models (e.g., the medical or social model), but rather against the rule-example paradigm of logic that disability has been conceptualized under and results in model-thinking, whether this pertains to medicine, social theory, or disability studies itself. My aim is then not to provide answers to the medico-moral questions that have come to dominate the phenomenon of disability. As I argued in the previous section, disability has been subsumed into a moral and biopolitical framework that is a response to questions such as: when is life with disability worth living? Under what conditions would the termination of disabled life be permitted? What might warrant a eugenics of disability? Understandably, much work done by disability studies scholars has been to refute these questions, to prove why they are wrong, or to point out the very absurdity of raising them in the first place.[13] Engagement with this framework is inevitable since it encapsulates the dominant contemporary conceptual paradigm concerning disability.

Taking aesthetic judgement and affective response as points of entry into conceiving different modes of relationality concerning disability's affect-legibility query,

13 In an essay in *The New York Times*, disability rights activist and lawyer Harriet McBryde Johnson recalls her meeting with philosopher Peter Singer. Singer argued that certain children born with multiple and severe disabilities might warrant infanticide. They engaged in a discussion concerning the ethics of infanticide of children born with multiple/severe disabilities, and Mcbryde Johnson, herself having a neuromuscular disease, pointed out the absurdity of engaging in intellectual debate with someone who may believe your life is not worth living. See: https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/magazine/unspeakable-conversations.html

I seek not to answer the questions provoked through the medico-moral paradigm but instead argue for the posing of alternative questions raised through the texts with which I engage. To be sure, these questions come with their own problematics and complexities. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, the titular character and her lover, Rochester, engage in an interchange of different emotional dispositions and attitudes in an attempt to navigate the anxiety produced by disability through coming to terms with Rochester's new bodily condition. In *A Little Life*, Willem's impossible attempt to help and alleviate Jude's chronic pain due to his disability offers more insight into the limits of affect's articulation into language than it does provide an attitude or instruction on what "works" when wanting to help when confronted with disability.

Affordances, as Gibson pointed out, are neutral in the sense that any determined value is based on the context in which the relationship of affordance becomes constituted. By reading for the affective affordances of disability, or by reading for the ways in which affective and aesthetic responsivity becomes a mode of relationality, such affordances do not necessarily "work" if we take work to be shorthand for socially successful. Reading for an affordance implies reading for the actionable opportunities a particular set of relationships manifest. By reading for the affordances of disability, which is so often conceived as what does not work about the body, I am thereby reading for the actionable work done by the body that presupposedly does not work. As I argue in the conclusion, this approach to reading opens up the space of negotiation between the sensible and the actionable. In this way, this study asks how we conceive of the aesthetic sensibility of agency and the actionable, and simultaneously shows different ways in which the sensible opens up the space of action through various modes of (dis)abled responsivity.