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

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Disability and Its Affective Affordances

Disability and Its Affective Affordances

Deformity, Decay, Disruption, Distortion

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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.

3 Photograph used with the permission of Mirjam Devriendt. All rights reserved.

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.

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

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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 prefixed 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.

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,

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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.

CHAPTER 2

Deformity

1. Disability and the Affordances of Deformity

In 1754, the British author and politician William Hay, who described himself as a hunchback, published *Deformity: an Essay*. Hay was a long-standing Member of Parliament (MP) for Seaford in the House of Commons.[1] Hay wrote in that essay that "My Subject however will be my apology; and I am sure it will draw no Envy upon me. Bodily Deformity is visible to every Eye; but the Effects of it are known to very few; intimately known to none but those, who feel them; and they generally are not inclined to reveal them" (24). Hay posits deformity as something that is unavoidable to see, yet simultaneously maintains that the affective effects of deformity are a lot more difficult to know, since that is a matter of feeling, and subsequently, of revealing by those who are affected by such feelings. Simultaneously, however, Hay also connects bodily deformity as a matter of apology, as something that should be apologized for, and what could consequently not be the topic of envy; no one would want to have a deformed body.

From Hay's text, we may delineate three elements that could be understood as affordances of deformity, namely seeing, feeling, and revealing. Deformity is something that needs to be perceived; feeling, in Hay's words, primarily involves the feelings of the people whose bodies are considered deformed; revealing, meanwhile, involves the revealing of such feelings. In this chapter, however, I rearrange this triad of terms and their relationships based on the reading of the case studies. Seeing becomes a concern of revealing to *be seen*, where the seeing of a deformed body necessarily involves the *showing* of that body, wherein the act of revealing that body elicits affective responses as a dramatic, performative act. Deformity, posited as a matter of performative showing, complicates and dramatizes the agency of the disabled subject whose deformed body is involved, since to be shown and displayed concurrently turns the disabled subject into an aesthetic object.

In this chapter, I explore these affordances of deformity through a reading of two case studies: Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (2006 [1845]) and David Lynch's film *The*

1 See Kathleen James-Cavan's article *"[A]ll in Me is Nature": The values of deformity in William Hay's Deformity: An Essay* (2005).

Elephant Man (1980). Both novel and film share a concern with the performative display of the deformed body. *Jane Eyre* is a text that has been studied extensively in literary studies, including through various approaches aligned with disability studies.[2] My own engagement with the novel will focus on some of the novel's final scenes, in which Jane, the titular protagonist, reunites with Rochester, who was her love interest. Rochester was caught in a housefire without Jane's knowing, and when the two lovers reunite Rochester is anxious with how Jane might respond to his now deformed body. My reading of these scenes will focus on the way in which seeing, revealing, and affect are intertwined through the performativity of the aesthetic judgement afforded through the presentation of the deformed body. Since revealing suggests a gesture of performatively showing a body, what matters is *how* this body is shown and subsequently appraised. Through William Reddy's theory of emotives, wherein he posits emotional states as what can be performatively attributed to other parties, I argue that such attribution of emotional states can have a prosthetic function aimed to alleviate the anxiety around the revelation of the deformed body.

My reading of *The Elephant Man* continues this reading of the performativity of revelation. The film explores the life of John Merrick, a deformed man who is exhibited in freak shows before being taken into a hospital. Merrick is *made* to be seen in a variety of cultural locations: the freak show, the hospital, and the home, amongst others. Each setting affords different ways in which Merrick's body comes to be aesthetically appraised, showing how appraisal itself is subject to the setting through which the deformed body is made to appear and designates the agency the revealed body itself may have in that setting. While the presentation of Merrick's body affects those who are witness to it, this performative presentation also calls into question the distribution of agency of the involved parties and how agency can be a matter of sensibility. Because Merrick's body affects other bodies he comes into contact with, the degree of agency of these latter bodies often decreases, while Merrick's agency gradually increases throughout the film. Yet, this increase is then problematized in the film, thereby calling into question the fairness of this distribution of agency. Through a reading of Elaine Scarry's work on fairness in tandem with the film, I delineate the way in which ethical fairness and aesthetic fairness are intricately intertwined in considering how the deformed body is made to appear.

2 A collection of essays entitled *The Madwoman and the Blindman: Jane Eyre, Discourse, Disability* (2012) was published which examined various aspects of *Jane Eyre* that engage with disability, both explicitly as well as implicitly.

Heather Laine Talley, in her sociological study *Saving Face: Disfigurement and the Politics of Appearance* (2014), argues that "Diagnostic criteria for 'disfigurement' do not live in any medical text. Nor is there a shared collective understanding of what kinds of appearances might be deemed disfigured and what might simply be called unusual. Like "normal," which shifts historically and culturally, 'disfigured' is also rife with multiple meanings. Yet despite the term's ambiguity and elasticity, it has a very definite, deeply felt social reality" (15). Talley connects disfigurement and deformity with semantic ambiguity. The fact that the appearance of deformity exists on a spectrum of possible aesthetic judgements ranging from "disfigured" to "unusual" implies that this appearance elicits aesthetic appraisal. Talley refers to this as "deeply felt social reality"—how and when a deformed body is made to appear necessarily carries an affective charge for other bodies. There thus exists a gap between the language to describe or diagnose deformity and the need to relate to deformity *via* language, where the way in which these bodies affect other bodies often exhaust the reach of such descriptions.

What is deformed presents itself (or is presented) for aesthetic appraisal, thereby reiterating that it falls outside a perceived "norm" in some way. The gesture of appraisal does not necessarily suggest what that norm is then supposed to be, however, which would be a deliberately affirmative gesture towards establishing a norm. The affirmative gesture here is one that signals the necessity of the event of aesthetic appraisal itself as a way of relating to the deformed body. The privation of the normative in the appearance of the deformed body opens up a not yet fully designated, but already affectively charged, semantic space. As literary and disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson has stated: "Bodily forms deemed to be ugly, deformed, fat, grotesque, ambiguous, disproportionate, or marked by scarring or so-called birthmarks constitute what can be called appearance impairments that qualify as severe social disabilities" (2005: 1579). This act of "deeming" has two aspects. It is a speech act that seeks to constitute a semantic separation between the deformed body and other bodies. And it is performative in the sense that this separation is strengthened through the use of emotive speech acts that, for example, signify disgust or abhorrence. This chapter consequently examines how emotive language is employed to negotiate the affects aroused through deformity's appearance, as well as how this act of "deeming" can severely impair disabled subjects in the way in which their agency is acknowledged and distributed through the use of aesthetic judgement by other agents.

2. Deformity and the Act of Aesthetic Appraisal[3]

In *Jane Eyre*, about halfway through the novel, the titular protagonist meets and eventually falls in love with Mr. Rochester, to whom she is employed as a servant and dependent. Although Rochester and Jane intend to marry, it is revealed that Rochester is already married to a "mad woman" whom he keeps locked away in his residence, which prohibits the lovers from matrimony. Jane subsequently flees from Rochester's estate, unable to live as Rochester's lover out of wedlock. Later in the novel, and far away from Rochester, Jane believes she can hear her name being called by him and decides to go back with the intention of finding out how Rochester is doing. Due to a fire at the Rochester estate caused by Rochester's wife, who perished in the process, Rochester becomes blind, disabled, and disfigured. In my analysis I will focus on the episodes that detail the reunion of the two lovers after these events and examine the complex relationship between the expressed emotions and the generated affects between them.

After Jane discloses to Rochester that she has inherited a small fortune, the following dialogue and events ensue:

> 'But as you are rich, Jane, you have now, no doubt, friends who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lameter like me?'
>
> 'I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich; I am my own mistress.'
>
> 'And you will stay with me?'
>
> 'Certainly—unless you object. I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely; I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.'
>
> He replied not; he seemed serious—abstracted; he sighed; he half opened his lips as if to speak; he closed them again. I felt a little embarrassed. Perhaps I had been too officious in my offers of companionship

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3 Sections of paragraphs 2 and 3 of this chapter are based on my article 'Prosthetic performatives: Reading disability's discomfort through emotives and affect patterns in Jane Eyre', which appeared in *Textual Practice* 35(12): 1941–1956 (2021). These paragraphs have been adapted from the original publication to fit within the context of this study.

> and aid; perhaps I had too rashly overleaped conventionalities; and he, like St. John, saw impropriety in my inconsiderateness. I had, indeed, made my proposal from the idea that he wished and would ask me to be his wife; an expectation, not the less certain because unexpressed, had buoyed me up, that he would claim me at once as his own. But no hint to that effect escaping him, and his countenance becoming more overcast, I suddenly remembered that I might have been all wrong, and was perhaps playing the fool unwittingly; and I began gently to withdraw myself from his arms—but he eagerly snatched me closer.
>
> 'No—no—Jane; you must not go. No—I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence—the sweetness of your consolation; I cannot give up these joys. I have little left in myself—I must have you. The world may laugh—may call me absurd, selfish—but it does not signify. My very soul demands you; it will be satisfied; or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.' (440)

Jane, encountering Rochester, emotes a particular attitude towards him, designating him as lonely, which she aims to solve through particular forms of companionship. Cultural historian William Reddy (2001) has defined the emotive as a (first-person) speech act that is performative in that it has the appearance of a description (e.g., "I feel angry"), that, through designating the emotional state as such, the utterance changes the specific emotional state through the descriptive act, dejecting others; "Emotives are influenced directly by, and alter, what they 'refer' to. Thus, emotives are similar to performatives (and differ from constatives) in that emotives do things to the world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions, instruments that may be more or less successful" (105). The instrumental nature of emotives espoused by Reddy shows their relational nature, as seen here in Jane's projection of loneliness on Rochester, which asks for a response in turn from the person on whom the emotion is projected.

The forms of companionship Jane proposes relate a series of actions—reading, walking, sitting, waiting, and being hands and eyes to him—that have a complex relationship with Rochester's disability. These actions are all perlocutionary in the way that J.L. Austin has defined them, that is, to bring about an effect in the world through the speech act itself (101–102). The perlocutionary force of Jane's list lies in its power to alter the present by imagining a particular future, in which their companionship will take on a specific form through the aforementioned activities. Of the various activities, walking and sitting are seemingly trivial in relation to any

physical impairments caused by Rochester's disability. But as Rochester lost one of his hands and his sight in the fire, both reading to him and being eyes and hands to him follow a prosthetic logic where Jane can be his hands and eyes, thereby putting herself in the position of a prosthetic companion. This is further emphasized by Jane's suggestion to wait on Rochester, suggesting her willingness to be of his service. Jane's perlocutionary act succeeds because the suggested future relates a future of possible prostheses. Through relating this series of possible actions through which she could serve Rochester, this also suggests a reversed relationship of dependency, as these suggestions emphasize Rochester's inability to do these things himself. Although Jane tells us she felt a "little embarrassed," she does not connect this embarrassment to her own prosthetic suggestions but rather to her overleaping conventionalities.

Isobel Armstrong, in an article that carefully delineates the idea of a so-called perlocutionary poetics, argues that such a poetics is in part founded on how we may consider what different verbs do in reading literary texts: "Perlocutionary verbs seem to me to appear in chains or as compounds with other verbs, persuading us to make careful distinctions between them" (2016: 200). Armstrong argues that the perlocutionary force of verbs, when chained together, changes because they may signify differently than when verbs are not presented together. It presses us to examine the particular signification of the series of verbs that are placed together. Going back to the list of verbs Jane presented to Rochester, it is when these verbs are formed into a series that the illocutionary act, the locution, and the perlocutionary force of these verbs compounded into a series can be explicated. Of all the verbs listed, reading to, walking with, and sitting with are all conveyed in their literal usage. "To be eyes and hands," however, suggests a relationship of metonymy. Rochester's sight and hands have been damaged in a house fire, and subsequently Jane sees the possibility of placing herself in the role of filling the loss of ability of Rochester's own sight and hand. To wait on Rochester, finally, suggests a relationship of servitude that has also become prosthetic in nature due to Jane's suggestion of her ability to replace the functions of his sight and hand.

While the locution of the first verbs can be interpreted literally and creates no distance between the illocutionary and locutionary acts, as a series, the verbs carry a different perlocutionary force, offering prosthetic companionship to Rochester. Stanley Cavell explicates that the force of the perlocutionary make for "imagination and virtuosity," relying on insinuation and persuasion (173), even without speaking: "Further, that perlocutionary-like effects—for example, stopping you in your tracks, embarrassing or humiliating you—are readily, sometimes more effectively, achievable without saying anything, indicates that the urgency of passion is expressed before and after words" (173).

Whereas Jane's action resonates with Cavell's suggestion that imagination (by her use of perlocutionary verbs) and virtuosity (which will be displayed by her wit, as we shall see) rely on persuasion, persuasive acts necessarily try to manifest a particular future outcome. In Jane's case, she tries to persuade Rochester by "playing the fool unwittingly." Yet, after concluding that this does not have the desired result, she slowly draws away, which in turn evokes a response in Rochester. Cavell's argument, relevant to Rochester's reaction to Jane, highlights that perlocutionary effects can occur even without words, implying that a response can still be present.

The perlocutionary effect Jane's suggestion has on Rochester is that Rochester in turn initially only offers the suggestion of a response through a series of three other verbs: sighing, opening his mouth, and closing it again. In performative terms, the sigh, and the opening and closing of the mouth do not have a clear illocutionary intent. They may signify fatigue or discontent, for example. The perlocutionary force, however, is much clearer, as it causes Jane's embarrassment. What causes this gap between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary in this instance is the lack of accompanying emotive statements. Rochester's initial response signifies not one possible interpretation but a myriad of them. The open-endedness of Rochester's response (or rather its lack of clarity) has Jane considering several possible motivations and that she had been wrong to think Rochester would want her for his wife. Rochester does not offer a response other than Jane observing him half-opening his lips only to close them.

Following Armstrong's suggestion made in the previous chapter that we need to read for both the prosody of the gap and the body, it is in this response that the two coalesce. Rochester's gesture is itself a response given through his body, but there is a gap between this response and one that would be articulated, thus creating room for suggestion. It is only as Jane withdraws her body from his that he pulls her closer, and the caesura between suggested response and uttered response comes into being. Here Rochester combines both sensuous experience ("I have touched you, heard you") with how it moves him affectively ("felt the comfort of your presence—the sweetness of your consolation"), concluding that these are the joys he cannot do without, as he has little left in himself. Here, Rochester (inversely) mirrors Jane in several ways. First, there is the repetition of relating a series of acts, but in Rochester's case they are not activities related to companionship but rather relate personal sensuous experience. Secondly, whereas Jane's list was a projection of the recent future, Rochester's list is an account of the recent past; both of the lists derive their perlocutionary force in part from their relationship with temporality, but Rochester's perlocutionary force lies more in line with Reddy's account of the effect that the designation of an emotional

state of being can have. Rochester here appears to mirror Jane's emotive projection (in his suggestion of consolation), but rather than projecting this on her attitude, as Jane did with him, he finds her to be the source of the emotional state of joy that is lost in himself.

The suggestion that Jane's relationship to him is one of dependability is here emphasized by Rochester himself, as without Jane, Rochester's soul would "take deadly vengeance on its frame," which simultaneously removes the possibility of a life apart from Jane without seemingly resulting in lethal consequence. Jane, rather than being disparaged by Rochester's words, discovers that rather than a lack of attraction towards her, it is his disability that cautions him:

> 'I will think what you like, sir; I am content to be only your nurse, if you think it better.'
>
> 'But you cannot always be my nurse, Janet; you are young, and must marry one day.'
>
> 'I don't care about being married.'
>
> 'You should care, Janet; if I were what I once was I would try to make you care—but—a sightless block!'
>
> He relapsed again into gloom. I, on the contrary, became more cheerful, and took fresh courage. (441)

Here we find another gap, as Rochester's exclaims: "I would try to make you care—but—a sightless block!". I read the em-dashes as a form of aposiopesis, which, similar to Rochester opening and closing his mouth without saying something, creates a space to imagine what is not said. The use of "but," however, suggests that because of the sightless block he cannot make her care, but due to the use of aposiopesis it remains unclear what the function of "a sightless block" is to Rochester. Identification as one, or the presence of one (or both), for example. If we would follow the second possibility, we may then read "a sightless block" as metalepsis, a block as something that is in the way—a contrast to a prosthesis—as blocking Rochester from making Jane care. As such, the identification as a block and the presence of one become not separate options but rather are simultaneously possible.

The focus of what the source of Rochester's countenance is in Jane's focalization shifts from herself towards Rochester's disability. Concurrently, there is a change in their described emotional states. Rochester falls back into gloom, whereas Jane becomes increasingly cheerful. This then gives way to Rochester presenting his deformed arm to Jane in the following scene:

> 'On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails,' he said, drawing the mutilated limb from his breast, and showing it to me. 'It is a mere stump—a ghastly sight! Don't you think so, Jane?'
>
> 'It is a pity to see it; and a pity to see your eyes—and the scar of fire on your forehead; and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this, and making too much of you.'
>
> 'I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm and my cicatrized visage.'
>
> 'Did you? Don't tell me so—lest I should say something disparaging to your judgment.' (441)

Rochester shows his mutilated limb not initially for Jane's original aesthetic judgement, but rather to agree with his own emotional appraisal, expecting her to be revolted. Jane swiftly transitions from expressing pity to love, addressing each of Rochester's disfigurements and acknowledging the risk of loving him too much due to his deformity. Ridiculing the pity she expressed previously, she suggests that the pity she emoted may itself be a potential source for an excessive and even dangerous love, a love that would be "too much"—that is, dangerous because of its excessiveness and what that might imply (which remains undisclosed). Rochester again asks for Jane's appraisal ("Am I hideous, Jane?" "Very, sir: you always were, you know." (443)), showing Jane's attempt to use irony in order to alleviate any insecurities Rochester might possess about his appearance being too gruesome for him to imagine Jane still desiring him.

At this point, Jane's initial reluctance has been replaced by confidence. Although never explicitly related to the reader by Jane, her use of irony implies that she perceives a shift in that, rather than Rochester having an issue with her as his partner, he finds himself an unfit partner due to his disfigurement and disability. Although Jane's use of humor seemingly alleviates the tension between the two characters present in the earlier scene, this does not mean that the entire issue has been resolved. As the following scene shows, Jane has difficult feelings regarding Rochester's disability, as we are offered the thoughts of Jane as she perceives Rochester sitting in a room:

> I came down as soon as I thought there was a prospect of breakfast. Entering the room very softly, I had a view of him before he discovered my presence. It was mournful, indeed, to witness the subjugation of that vigorous spirit to a corporeal infirmity. He sat in his chair, still, but not at rest; expectant evidently, the lines of now habitual sadness

> marking his strong features. His countenance reminded one of a lamp quenched, waiting to be relighted, and, alas! it was not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression; he was dependent on another for that office! I had meant to be gay and careless, but the powerlessness of the strong man touched my heart to the quick; still I accosted him with what vivacity I could. (444)

In this encounter between Jane and Rochester, we are offered only her focalized thoughts, not the words between them, and instead of Rochester presenting his body to Jane for aesthetic appraisal, this situation has markedly shifted from the previous scenes. Here, Jane reads Rochester both as image and mood. Habitual sadness is expressed through lines on his features; his countenance is metaphorically compared to a quenched lamp, "waiting to be relighted," that is, altered. She narrates her emotion not as pity to be erased by the danger of an excessive love, but rather the opposite. Here, it is a mournfulness for his "corporeal infirmity" which she is captivated by, and the way Jane narrates her own relation to him once again follows a prosthetic logic, exclaiming that it is "not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression", but with a more careful tone than she did previously, accosting him with "what vivacity" she could.

As Jane feels mournful for Rochester's bodily condition, this is different and distinct from the feelings she disclosed to him earlier, where she maneuvered rhetorically, starting at pity but ending decisively at love, in which she did not recount the inner emotional turmoil that this passage discloses. In this sense, we could read this scene as Jane saying one thing and meaning another. What I argue, however, is that Jane is saying one thing and feeling something else. That is, her discourse with Rochester and her emotional inner life are indeed not the same, but this also allows one to read this differently than Jane intentionally concealing part of her feelings for Rochester. This reading is made possible because of the differences in the set-up of the scenes themselves. In her exchange with Rochester, I showed how there was a quick exchange and succession of emotions either displayed or designated between the two lovers through the use of emotives. In this last scene, however, the form of engagement is marked by the distance that allows Jane to read Rochester's deformity allegorically, thereby not engaging him in a direct way.

3. Prosthetic Performatives: Emotives as Prosthetic Language

The various scenes I have close read follow a rapid succession of different emotional states both felt and projected by the two characters in relation to Rochester's disability. First it is Jane who feels uncertain, doubting whether Rochester wants her for his wife while simultaneously projecting loneliness on him as part of an argument to open the way for the possibility of Rochester making her his companion. She simultaneously casts this companionship as a form of prosthesis, offering to not only become his sight and hands but also the companion who is willing to wait on him, foregrounding Rochester's disability, and consequently giving her the insight that it is not her, but rather Rochester's disability that arouses—or strengthens—the feeling of uncertainty in Rochester. For his part, Rochester's disability complicates how he expresses himself, creating various gaps whenever he attempts to reply to Jane.

Following Reddy's theory emotives, the act of naming an emotional state is itself understood as being a locutionary act that requires a response. In this, I follow Rei Terada's reading of how emotions function in relation to textuality: "Unrepresentable by any individual sign, emotion is represented by traces in a differential network. Textuality offers an alternative to expression and indication. Textuality plays in post-structuralist theory the double role that expression plays in philosophy, being both a means of representing emotion and an explanatory scheme of the operation of emotion" (2003: 45). This double role thus involves that emotions necessarily gain expression through their articulation in language, while language simultaneously functions as the means through which we create an understanding via explanatory schemes of emotion, such as Reddy's theory of emotives.

Scholars working at the intersection of literary and disability studies have expounded the relationship between prosthesis and language. Mitchell and Snyder define the concept of prosthesis as follows: "In a literal sense a prosthesis seeks to accomplish an illusion. A body deemed lacking, dysfunctional, or inappropriately functional needs compensation, and prosthesis helps to effect this end. Yet the prosthetisizing of a body or a rhetorical figure carries with it ideological assumptions about what is aberrant. The judgement that a mechanism is faulty is always profoundly social" (2000: 6). The prosthetic logic I have alluded to both follows and deviates from the definition that Mitchell and Snyder propose. For Jane, Rochester's disability is an imaginative space made possible through their exchange, where she can occupy through various forms of prosthetic companionship. Yet rather than a lack, it is *because* of Rochester's disability that Jane can imagine a role for herself.

Rochester's disability consequently affords that it functions as a prosthetic for Jane, through which she comes to understand that she can still become his wife.

My use of the term prosthesis, then, is closely related to how Mitchell and Snyder define the twofold function of their concept of narrative prosthesis; "disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization, and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (47). Although it is true that the anxiety evoked by Rochester's deformity in both characters propels the narrative forward, my argument is that, while emotional language evoked through disability can perform alleviation of those emotions through language, this performative use of language does not entail a full resolution of feelings (in this case pity) towards disability. This is what I call *prosthetic performativity*: those emotions related to discomfort and anxiety raised by and through disability that may then be attempted to be "worked through" by the performative exchange of emotive utterances. Following Mitchell and Snyder's argument that rhetorical figures may too serve as prosthetic functions in narratives involving disability, these exchanges themselves become affective in that the perlocutionary force that is generated through the use of emotives not only affects the intended recipient but also works back on the speaker, who then needs to readjust their position in relation to the situation accordingly.

Mitchell and Snyder cite David Wills, who, in a study on the concept of prosthesis, espouses four different relationships between body and word that allow us further insight into the relationship between prosthetic and affect at play here:

> The word that issues from a body is often believed to glean a corporeal aura from its material host.
>
> …
>
> The word always augments a prosthetic relation to an exterior material that it cannot possess or embody.
>
> …
>
> A word returns to the body a sense of possession of the external world that it cannot possess.
>
> …
>
> The body's need to comprehend a materiality external to it is answered via the ruse of language—that is, the word provides the body with the necessary illusion of its successful entrance into the space of the Other. (137–141)[4]

4 Wills uses the term here in the phenomenological sense, as constituting what is different from the Self.

Wills' relationships point not just to the semantic content of language but also to its affective charge. What Wills refers to as "the ruse of language," the entrance into the Other's space provided by words, is further complicated by Rochester's "corporeal aura," conveyed not only through spoken words but also through incomplete ones or silences, creating room for suggestion and interpretation. In the scenes I have close read, Rochester constantly sought affirmation of his deformity through asking for Jane's judgement ("It is a mere stump—a ghastly sight! Don't you think so, Jane?"), but through asking for Jane to agree with his own aesthetic judgement, this also sets up the possibility for Jane to disagree and fall into pity—something Jane appears well aware of by replying "one is in danger of loving you too well for all this, and making too much of you."

What is telling in the four prosthetic relationships delineated by Wills is that the use of words "return a sense of possession" of something—a world or a body—that it cannot possess. In my reading, this could be read as Rochester asking for Jane's agreement regarding his own negative aesthetic appraisal, as confirming the negation of the possibility of a shared world between him and Jane. But Rochester's initial inability to speak, and the gaps in his speech, can also be interpreted as a distance between word and body. Earlier, I read Rochester's seemingly referring to himself as a "sightless block" as metonymy, as something that is blocking Rochester from having a sense of possession of his own body. Jane, by contrast, uses languages to articulate her desire to become a prosthetic companion for Rochester. Jane's relation between body and word, then, is the opposite of Rochester's. Whereas Rochester's dependency on Jane lies in her acceptance of his visage, and disagreement, or at least the complication with his own aesthetic judgement of his own body, Jane in turn uses her words—prosthetically—to imagine and offer a future to Rochester where she could place her own body in a prosthetic relation to Rochester's deformity.

The two positions delineated above regarding the relationships between word and body—Rochester's seeming sense of a lack of possession of his body and Jane offering hers to him in service through specific bodily functions—need to be elucidated further in terms of their respective prosthetic natures, as these are simultaneously congenial to as well as dependent on one another. Wills writes that

> the body can only be named thanks to the word, and the word can only take form thanks to the idea of the body. The struggle here is therefore with a reciprocity of body and word that cannot be reduced to reference, that continues beyond any hope of unity, and that on the contrary installs divisibility as the principle of any enunciation

> whatsoever. There is no body that is not also an articulation, and no articulation that does not imply a radical notion of divisibility (141).

In Wills' writing we find that neither body nor word is originary to the other, but rather that they coincide. The possibility of simply referencing the body through speech is in Will's estimation a reduction of the relationship between body and word, because when one speaks of the body, this is not only a reference to it but an *articulation* of that body. As such, language is the primary prosthesis of the body in that through one's means of articulating it, one offers a division of the body and how it may be experienced and/or imagined. The divisibility of the body through the word consequently means that the body is a body of parts. The notion of prosthesis itself is therefore reimagined. Rather than understanding prosthesis as a recuperation of a supposed originary lack or deficit of the body, Wills argues that "It is therefore the figure of the chiasmus, that between body and word—or indeed a chasm, that into which the words of prosthesis fall locked in a corporal embrace—that structures or at least regulates the words that follow, marking the time of the prosthetic condition" (141).[5] The prosthetic condition thereby involves the way in which the divisibility of the body—itself conditioned because words necessarily articulate this divisibility—is also simultaneously prosthetisized, i.e. put together again, through the use of words.

To mark the prosthetic condition for both Rochester and Jane leads us not only to two different relationships that are imagined between word and body but also to the ability of establishing a third relationship between their own relationships to the body. Rochester's body becomes divided as the aposiopetic gaps in his utterances express what he finds inarticulable about his body. Meanwhile, the very same troubled articulation of Rochester's body allows for Jane to imagine dividing her own body into the functions that could be of service to Rochester. Therefore, what the logic of prosthesis offers is not only to make legible the relationship between word and body of the individual but also the creation of a new, third relationship in and through the generation of prosthetic language between and through different bodies.

In my reading of these scenes of *Jane Eyre*, there are different aspects that we can distill as specific affordances of deformity. Given Rochester's presentation of his mutilated limb for Jane's aesthetic appraisal, we can read this as a performative act in that, through the gesture of presenting it, it becomes a matter of how the deformity

5 The chiasmus is a rhetorical figure in which words or grammatical constructions are repeated in reversed order. Wills uses it here to elucidate how body and word oscillate.

comes to appear. Rochester specifically presents his mutilated limb to Jane, asking her if she agrees with him in his judgement that it is a "ghastly sight." Through presenting his own limb as a gesture for aesthetic appraisal, Jane's judgement gains the character of something that requires either approval or negation, a situation that she's aware of and consequently tries to downplay by saying one could make too much out of Rochester. In Jane's allegorical reading of Rochester sitting near the fireplace, the appearance of his deformity is again at stake, but this time noticeably through the absence of interaction on Rochester's side. Here Jane's reading of Rochester's body also turns Rochester's body into an object that can be read, making him not a subject in the interactive process of reading but its object.

My reading of *Jane Eyre* argues how the performative use of language functions prosthetically to afford a mode of relationality to the appearance of the deformed body in which the affective tension aroused by this appearance finds its uneasy and complicated articulation. But what is concurrently at stake in how aesthetic judgements regarding deformed bodies are made is how these deformed bodies are made to appear and the nature of the judgement of the appearance itself. How does the potential objectification of the deformed body through performing an aesthetic judgement relate to how disabled subjects can exercise their own agency?

4. Games of Make-Believe: Performativity and Appearance

My analysis of scenes from *Jane Eyre* argues that the appearance of deformity affords a specific kind of negotiation concerning emotional stations evoked through deformity, namely the way in which emotives are exchanged between the involved parties to imagine a specific social and prosthetic role for themselves wherever deformity appears. In what follows, I will read David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man*, which allows me to pursue how deformity casts the trio of terms that this chapter opened with—seeing, revealing, and affect—as complicating the relationship between deformity and agency. This is because Lynch's film follows the eponymous character across various socio-cultural contexts, primarily the freak show, the home, the hospital, and the theater. In each of these contexts, what is at stake is how the revealing of the deformed body is employed to affect the bodies witnessing the revealing, and the way in which being affected subsequently shapes and influences agency.

Based on the texts *The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity* (1971) by anthropologist Ashley Montagu and *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (2012 [1923])

by the surgeon Frederick Treves, Lynch's film offers a portrayal of the life of Joseph Merrick (called John Merrick in the film), a man with severe facial and bodily deformities. The film follows Merrick from his captivity in a Victorian freak show to being noticed by Treves and taken into the London Hospital for study and treatment. The film explicitly thematizes the presentation of the deformed body, which could best be explained through a scene that takes place halfway through the film. After Treves has taken Merrick from the freak show into the London Hospital, word gets out to the aristocracy of London society of Merrick's residency there, who subsequently wish to visit him. Mrs. Motherhead, the head nurse at the hospital, confronts Treves about this and argues that these new visitors do not "hide their disgust" for Merrick. Afterwards, Treves' wife finds him sitting in a chair in his home, staring aimlessly out in front of him. When she asks him what's the matter, Treves explains that he has made Merrick into a "curiosity" again by allowing people to visit Merrick in the hospital. This culminates in Treves asking himself, "What was it all for? Why did I do it?" followed by "Am I good man, or am I a bad man?".

Although I will return to this scene later to examine it more closely, for now this scene makes evident the fact that the way Merrick is put on display is itself discussed in the film and, furthermore, is explicitly tied to ethical concerns as shown by Treves' question. *The Elephant Man* explores the ways in which the appearance and revelation of the deformed body afford the explicit positing and framing of such questions, thereby setting a distribution of agency between the film's characters and their affective responses. Since these questions are intrinsically concerned with the way in which Merrick's body is made to appear and how this affects those who are witness to these appearances, the way in which these appearances and their subsequent responses are performed and represented must be taken into account as well.

The first encounter both the viewer and Treves have of Merrick is when Treves attends a Victorian-style carnival which includes a freak show in London. Treves appears to be looking for something specific and follows a policeman who enters a backstage area of the "FREAKS" section, with a "NO ENTRY" sign prohibiting the general audience from entering. Treves follows the policeman through the backstage area, encountering several "stock" freaks, such as the strong man and dwarves. Treves eventually stumbles on a conversation between two men, a London official and one Mr. Bytes, the self-proclaimed owner of the freak show, in front of an exhibition entitled "ELEPHANT MAN" with a cardboard wall that has an elephant drawing, prohibiting both the viewer and the audience in the film from viewing what lies behind it. The official intends to close the freak show down in the following dialogue:

LONDON OFFICIAL: This exhibit degrades everybody who sees it, as well as the poor creature himself.
BYTES: He is a freak. How else will he live?
LONDON OFFICIAL: Freaks are one thing, there's no objection to freaks. But this is entirely different. This is monstrous and should not be allowed![6]

The official states that in fact, the creature referred to is not a freak but something "entirely different," namely monstrous. Through this argument, the official effectively displaces the creature from the other freaks exhibited at the freak show, who are already there *because* of their status as freaks. The argument to separate the monstrous from the freak given by the official is that, if freaks have entertainment value, the monstrous "creature" would *degrade* anyone who sees it. What is at stake is not the fact that the creature itself is judged as degraded, but rather that merely beholding it would be enough to degrade the audience. The fact that Merrick is not mentioned by name in discussing this scene prohibits the evocation of Merrick as a person to the audience who attend their discussion and instead further evokes the connotation of Merrick as an animal, as supported by his stage name seen on the sign: the Elephant Man.

The first time Merrick actually appears in the film is preluded by a scene in which Treves, after discovering the new location of the freak show, negotiates a private viewing with Bytes, as well as their respective roles in this showing:

TREVES: Are you the proprietor?
BYTES: And who might you be, sir?
TREVES: Just one of the curious. I'd like to see it.
BYTES: I don't think so. No sir, we're … closed.
TREVES: Now, I'm paying handsomely for a private showing!
BYTES: Handsomely? Who sent you?
[*Treves hands coins to Bytes*]
TREVES: Beg your pardon?
BYTES: Never mind … I'm the … owner.

In this exchange, Treves and Bytes fill in their respective roles of the curious viewer and the "owner" of the body about to be exhibited. This exchange is important because it

6 This and all further transcripts are based on my own rendition of dialogues of the film, as well as a rendition of the script found at IMSDB: https://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Elephant-Man,-The.html.

sets up a theatrical model: that of the exploiter of the theater and the body (or bodies) to be displayed, and that of the anticipating spectator. But the model is disrupted by Bytes' subtle shift from "proprietor" to "owner"; the first term is commonly used to describe the owner of establishments, the second, however, also connotes ownership over a body—in this case Merrick's. Treves is subsequently led down a dimly lit corridor, in which Bytes spectacularly introduces Merrick as though he is addressing a full audience, accompanied by the following lines:

> BYTES: Life ... is full of surprises. Consider the fate of this creature's poor mother. Struck down in the fourth month of her maternal condition by an elephant, a wild elephant. Struck down on an uncharted African isle. The result ... is plain to see. Ladies and gentlemen, the terrible Elephant Man!

As the curtain that conceals Merrick is shifted, Merrick initially appears still concealed, by a large robe he is wearing (fig. 1), and then ordered by Bytes to turn around, after which Merrick is briefly shown (fig. 2), an order echoed by a boy that acts as a stagehand for Bytes. This is followed by a considerably longer medium-wide shot of approximately 27 seconds that zooms in on an (extreme) close-up of Treves's face with his mouth agape as he looks upon Merrick's body, seemingly captivated, resulting in a single tear rolling down his left cheek (fig. 3). During Merrick's first appearance, his body did not appear at all; it was only hinted at, concealed behind the decorated cardboard poster, thereby evoking suspense in both Treves and the viewer in regard to this body absent from the scene. In this second appearance, however, Merrick's body *is* shown, but the combined time of the two shots in which Merrick's body is shown in this scene is approximately six seconds. Meanwhile, the slow zoom-in on Treves' face lasts 27 seconds before there is a fade-out.

The gradual increase in the actual presence of Merrick's body—first visually absent but hinted at, then present but covered up, and finally briefly visible—follows a schema in which the tension is built up both for the viewer and Treves. In what sense can this scene be thought of as performative? Judith Butler has offered the following understanding of performativity:

> Performativity is ... not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical;

(Figure 1)

(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)

> indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity). (1993: 12–13)

In light of Butler's theory, the theatricality of performativity is not as foregrounded as the initial presentation of this scene may suggest, namely a man with a deformed body who is hidden by a curtain that is being revealed after another man introduces him through a supposed origin story. If the nature of performativity is based on what set of norms is reiterated, one performative aspect of this scene is clear: a body designated as "abnormal" or "monstrous" is being put on display in front of an audience and ordered to perform certain acts ("stand up!" "turn around!"). But as William Egginton notes, this reiteration is not something fully under the control of the participants involved: "Performativity, as a mode of imposition of bodily forms … does not, for the most part, describe an agency-rich method of creating one's self and body to one's own specifications" (16). Egginton's comment ties into Butler's notion of performativity in that an instance of performative theatricality is connected to the historicity it reiterates but cannot be fully under the control of the performers. Even as they actively name and designate their own roles, this does not grant them full control over how these roles are acted out. They become part of the make-believe they have set up for themselves in the execution of a performance. Thus, if Merrick is *made* to perform by Bytes, Bytes' theatrical introduction is itself warranted by the historicity of the theatrical introduction of the freak in a freakshow to evoke suspense in the audience, even if, in the case of this scene, the power of this performance is limited due to the fact that Bytes is performing in front of a meager audience of one, namely Treves.

This performance is dissimulated when Merrick's body is revealed to Treves. Treves, who sought access to a private viewing under the ulterior motive of being "one of the curious," is captivated by Merrick's body, as the 27-second zoom-in on his facial expression emphasizes. The limited time we initially get to look at Merrick ourselves, as opposed to the time we spend looking at Treves, who himself is looking at Merrick, begs the question of how to read this look. Susan Sontag (1966) has noted how the *stare*, in contrast to the look or the gaze, is characterized by its compulsive nature; the person who is staring cannot divert their look elsewhere. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson offers four qualities that set the stare apart from the look and the gaze. Like Sontag, Garland-Thomson argues that staring is a physical response characterized by astonishment. Secondly, she argues that staring "has a history sedimented over time and across space that is specific to each culture, which in turn shapes its meaning and

practice" (2009: 13). Thirdly, staring "establishes a social relationship between starer and 'staree'" (13). It is an interpersonal action through which we act out who we imagine ourselves and others to be. The fourth quality, according to Garland-Thomson, is that staring can become a vehicle for the production of knowledge when the stare becomes a quest to know and render what is stared is into something legible (14).

The revelation of a deformed body is closely tied to the imagination—what we expect this body to look like—and the actualization of its appearance. This is reaffirmed in the third point made by Garland-Thomson, suggesting that staring affords us the opportunity to consider how we come to appear in the eyes of the other person. The form of imagining done by Treves is, however, a specific form of imagining, what Kendall Walton calls imagining *de se*, "a form of self-imagining characteristically described as imagining *doing* or *experiencing* something (or *being* a certain way), as opposed to imagining merely *that* one does or experiences something or possesses a certain property" (29). This form of imagining is relevant here because, in assuming the role of "one of the curious," Treves is also willingly playing what Walton calls a game of make-believe, the imaginative act of acting out certain roles in a shared game (12), or in this instance, a performance. The fact that this is a shared performance means that the kind of imagining taking place cannot solely be an imagining *de se*, since Treves and Bytes *both* partake in this performance, making it what Walton refers to as a social imagining. Social imagining involves an act of imagining that relies on the notion that not only can one imagine oneself to fulfill a certain role or act a certain way, but that it is also possible for us to agree upon what is collectively imagined; being in a performance, for example (18). This requires that each participant is not only actively aware of the role others play but also of the shared conviction that everyone is playing a role. However, it often remains unclear what the other is imagining exactly, and because of this lack of clarity in the conviction of the other, the negotiations of these agreements become themselves incorporated into the game of make-believe that is being acted out.

Even if the agreement of what game of make-believe is being acted out between Bytes and Treves may be unclear, what *is* clear is that Merrick plays a different role in this performance because it is questionable to what extent he has an active or participatory role in the first place. While Merrick's body is being displayed for Treves in this performance, he is being ordered around; he does not speak or act on his own accord. The actualization of the appearance of Merrick's body shows a specific way in which the deformed body is made to appear—specific because it is made to be without agency. Treves' imagination is initially fed through what Walton calls prompters: objects that speak to the imagination and allow us to imagine them to be something that they are

not (for example, clouds in animal shapes) (22). For Treves, these prompters included the cardboard wall with the poster of a menacing elephant and the drape prohibiting the audience from seeing Merrick's body, thus feeding into his imagination. But imagining *de se* goes further, in that in imagining *de se*, we do not only imagine a specific object but rather also the way in which we imagine ourselves to be, feel, or act in relation to that object. Thus, the activation of the imagination through prompters sets up a specific form of suspense. Whatever is lurking behind the cardboard wall and drape *becomes* worth seeing because it is simultaneously covered up and hinted at.

As viewers, our access to Treves' imagination has become blocked because we *have* seen what Treves has seen, however briefly, yet we cannot collectively imagine *with* Treves whatever it is he is imagining, since instead of the camera either following him or his line of sight, it is Treves' own face, affectively marked by the tear rolling down his face, that has now become the site of what we are invited to imagine ourselves. The tear, Roland Barthes has remarked, is a way to "address myself to someone ... By weeping, I want to impress someone, to bring pressure to bear upon someone" (1978: 181). Treves' tear here presses on the performance itself once Merrick's deformed body is revealed. For the tear pressures what Treves imagined *de se*, to be "one of the curious" as part of a game of make-believe, giving him a clear role. But the actual revelation of Merrick's body overwhelms Treves so that it leaves him to stare in what Garland-Thomson called astonishment. Astonishment finds its etymological roots in the Old French *estoner* (to stun, daze, deafen), and the Latin *extonare* (a compound of *ex*, out of, and *tonare*, thunder, implying being thunderstruck). Astonishment, as the translation of the tear's affective pressure, makes legible how affect cannot only drive bodies but also paralyze them. The 27-second zoom-in shows how the revelation of the deformed body holds the power to not only stun the staree but may also freeze and astonish the starer, if the deformed body manages to surpass what the starer had imagined *de se*. Thus, it is not only Merrick whose agency is diminished through the display of his body. Rather, my reading of the scene shows how the revelation of an appearance, as an affordance of deformity, can diminish the agency of the people who witness that body, pressured into staring through this very appearance.

Treves brings Merrick back to London Hospital, where he presents Merrick to other physicians in a lecture hall. Merrick is presented in a mobile installation with curtains, prohibiting the audience from seeing him. As Treves requests his assistants to pull the curtains away, there is a cut, and instead the camera is positioned behind Merrick (fig. 4). Although the viewer has seen Merrick's body briefly in the previously discussed scene, the camera angle again focuses on the response of the audience to Merrick. This time, however, the shadow of Merrick's body is visible through the cur-

tain, but only to further distort the form of Merrick's body. Concurrently, Treves' role has now shifted, moving from "one of the curious" to that of a physician exhibiting a case study to his colleagues. Treves introduces Merrick as follows:

> TREVES: Gentlemen, in the course of my profession I have come upon many lamentable deformities of the face due to injury or disease as well as mutilations and contortions of the body depending on like causes. But at no time have I met with such a perverted or degraded version of a human being as this man. I wish to draw your attention to the insidious conditions affecting this patient … [*addressing an audience member*] Can you see over there? Note, if you will, the extreme enlargement of the skull, the right upper limb which is totally useless, the alarming curvature of the spine. Would you turn around please?
>
> TREVES' ASSISTANT [*addressing* Merrick]: Turn around please!
>
> TREVES: The looseness of the skin, and the varying fibrous tumors that cover ninety percent of the body. And there is every indication that these afflictions have been in existence, and have progressed rapidly, since birth. The patient also suffers from chronic bronchitis. As an interesting side note, in spite of the aforementioned anomalies, the patient's genitals remain entirely intact and unaffected. [*Addressing his assistant*] Thank you.
>
> [*Treves' assistant removes Merrick's loincloth, exposing his genitals to Treves' audience*]
>
> TREVES: And his left arm is perfectly normal, as you see. So then, gentlemen, owing to this series of conditions, the congenital exostosis of the skull, extensive papillomatous growth, large pendulous masses and connection of the skin, the great enlargement of the right upper limb, involving all the bones, the massive distortion of the head, and the extensive area, covered by papillomatous growth, the patient has been called the 'Elephant Man'. Thank you.
>
> [*Audience applauds enthusiastically*]

This scene differentiates from the one previously discussed in that, similar to my reading of *Jane Eyre*, it connects the presentation of deformity to aesthetic judgement that was absent in the previous scene. It is noticeable that Treves starts by explicitly passing judgement on Merrick by stating that he has never met "with such a perverted or degraded version of a human being." He describes Merrick's condition as "insidious,"

his deformities "lamentable," and the curvature of his spine as "alarming." It is only as the speech progresses that his use of medical terminology increases with terms such as "papillomatous growth" and "chronic bronchitis." There are also, however, several descriptions and terms that intertwine medical and aesthetic terminology ("the looseness of the skin," "the massive distortion of the head," "fibrous tumors").

It is not my aim here to argue for a strict separation between medical and aesthetic terminology, but rather that it displays the intertwinement of aesthetic judgement in a professional, scientific presentation. Jean-Marie Schaeffer argues similarly that "the distinction between pure and impure aesthetic judgement seems to me to be pointless. The cogent distinction is rather that between judgements based on aesthetic appreciation and judgements based on other criteria … it being understood that the same object can at the same moment, or at different moments, be judged according to several kinds of criteria, that it can be the object of a composite judgement" (2015: 96). Thus, several of the terms and descriptions used here by Treves are part of a passing of judgement, but it is the wrong question to ask whether this is either medical or aesthetic. Gérard Genette (1999: 70) has noted how the attribution of predicates that themselves possess an aesthetic quality infers that the determined aesthetic quality resides in the object discussed, lending it the appearance of an objective evaluation. It is precisely the lack of ability to clearly differentiate between the medical and aesthetic aspects of judgement, and moreover, the simultaneity of aesthetic terminology within a medical presentation, that lends the aesthetic aspect of the judgement here its rhetorical efficacy.

The relevance of the use of aesthetic judgement is also in part due to its absence in the previously discussed scene, even though many aspects are clearly mirrored. Now, Treves has become the one to put Merrick on display rather than being "one of the curious." The audience, as seen in fig. 4, is a specialized scientific one (consisting of other doctors), diverging from the mixed variety of attendees of freak shows. Concurrently, like Bytes before him, Treves initially veiled Merrick's body from the attending audience, consequently creating theatrical suspension by invoking the audience to imagine what is behind it through this concealed, deformed body he eventually reveals. Treves' affirmative aesthetic judgement about Merrick's body is performative in the sense that, even if the audience members should be as astonished as Treves was in the previous scene, the act of judging (both medically and aesthetically) reiterates the norms that are associated with the medical presentation read as a theatrical situation. Treves' speech starts with asserting that Merrick is both perverted and degraded; these are not just moral judgements, but aesthetic ones in that they refer not to Merrick's actions but rather his deformed appearance. Perversion has

its etymological roots in the Latin *pervertere*; that which has been turned the wrong way. A deformed body is here cast, from the outset, as what is intrinsically turned out wrong. Treves subsequently supports this judgement by explaining what the medical conditions of Merrick's body supposedly are. Rhetorically, this powerfully demarcates the distinction between presenter and presented: between Treves' agency affirming him to be in control of the situation (emphasized by making sure the audience can actually see Merrick's body), and Merrick's total lack of response and action.

As Butler maintained, performativity is not primarily theatrical, since, according to them, theatricality is produced insofar as the historicity of a situation remains dissimulated in the face of performativity's apparent theatricality. In effect, this implies that a performative situation always asks us to be sensitive toward what remains dissimulated in the scene. In this case, the dissimulation of the theatrical revelation of the deformed body remains dissimulated due to the fact that the boundaries of the theatrical situation established remain largely intact through the clarity of the roles of the actors. Treves as the presenter, Merrick as the man (or medical object) presented, and the audience to witness. Furthermore, the formal construction of the scene to the viewer enhances this further, for the camera angle used in this scene, as shown in Fig. 4 displays how the shadow highlights and even further distorts Merrick's deformities. Thus, while Merrick's body is revealed to the audience addressed to Treves, the body does remain concealed from the viewer, but the silhouette cast by the shadow through the scene's formal arrangement allows for the evocation of further curiosity from the viewer precisely because this silhouette is further deformed through the camera angle and presentation. Even though we have previously briefly seen Merrick, the viewer becomes implicated in the theatrical situation, as the angle invites us to imagine *de se* what it would be like to be a part of Treves' audience in beholding Merrick in the light, facing him directly.

(Figure 4)

When Merrick is put in the isolation ward of London Hospital, he catches the eye of Dr. Carr-Gomm, the hospital's governor. Since Merrick's deformity is deemed "incurable" by Carr-Gomm, he initially presses Treves to get rid of Merrick, but Treves convinces Carr-Gomm to meet with Merrick instead. In order to convince Carr-Gomm to keep Merrick at the hospital, Treves trains Merrick in preparation for the interview with Carr-Gomm. The interview initially goes well, as Merrick was taught to say "Hello, my name is John Merrick" by Treves, as well as a few other simple sentences. But as Carr-Gomm presses Merrick further, it becomes increasingly clear to him that Merrick's answers are not spontaneous but rather scripted:

> CARR-GOMM: How do you find Mr. Treves, as a teacher I mean?
> MERRICK: [*mumbling*] ... Very kind.
> CARR-GOMM: How long did you and Mr. Treves prepare for this interview?
> MERRICK: ... Very kind?
> CARR-GOMM: Yes, of course, I understand. Well, it's been a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Merrick.

As Carr-Gomm leaves, convinced Merrick does not belong in the hospital and would require being constantly looked after, Merrick starts to recite the 23rd psalm. Although parts of the psalm were taught by Treves for the interview, Merrick continues the psalm beyond what was originally taught. Treves calls Carr-Gomm back, and Merrick explains he has read the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. In terms of it involving a performance, the scene takes the form of a test: it is only after Merrick has shown himself capable of autonomous speech, as well as being literate rather than only being capable of recitation, that Carr-Gomm changes his mind to keep him. This display of Merrick's agency, however, does not mean he breaks out of the performances in which he is placed; the difference Merrick is given is a matter of degree rather than one of category, precisely because this agency is attributed *to* him. He is still subjected to the situations others place him in, and while what is appreciated is his ability to act on his own accord, this is done within the boundaries of a setting controlled by others.

Carr-Gomm asks Treves to see him in his office, during which Carr-Gomm asks Treves whether he can "imagine the kind of life he must have had?" Treves answers assertively that he can. But Carr-Gomm refutes this by answering: "I don't believe so. No one could possibly imagine it, I don't believe any of us can!" Carr-Gomm, suggesting that the life Merrick has led is not for another person to imagine, sharply contrasts the way in which imagination was used earlier: by evoking what Merrick's

body may look like, by presenting it through theatrical means, and by imagining whether or not he is a person capable of acting autonomously. These situations were concurrently conceived in performative settings: either through a game of theatrical make-believe, a medical presentation, or an examination interview. The tension created by Carr-Gomm's rebuttal thus lies at the intersection between the impossibility of imagining the life Merrick has lived on the one hand and the applied ability to direct that life through performances on the other. Even though Treves has seemingly "rescued" Merrick from being exhibited at freak shows, he has not rescued him from continuing to be placed in performative settings but, contrarily, has only redirected this exhibiting through a change of setting.

5. "Stand up!" / "Turn around!": The Affective Sensibility of Agency

Merrick is allowed to stay in London Hospital, and Treves invites him over to his house for tea, where Merrick meets Treves' wife, Ann. Merrick is brought to tears by the kindness Ann shows him, exclaiming that no woman so beautiful has ever treated him so well. As they take tea, Merrick apologizes to the couple for having made a "spectacle of himself" earlier. Although not intended as irony, we might read this statement as such. Linda Hutcheon explains irony as follows: "From the point of view of the interpreter, irony is an interpretive and intentional move: it is the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and the unsaid. The move is usually triggered (and then directed) by conflictual textual or contextual evidence or by markers which are socially agreed upon" (1994: 11). Interpreting Merrick's statement as ironic is possible because the film has already shown how Merrick was made into a spectacle by others as I've argued in my readings of the previous scenes, thus making his own display of emotion not much of a "spectacle" by comparison. Simultaneously, however, Merrick's apology also further perpetuates Merrick's newfound agency, as it is also a display of taking responsibility for and interpreting his own actions. Merrick then notices family pictures posited on top of the fireplace, and after examining them, he offers the Treves couple a picture of his own mother, which he keeps in a small medallion:

> ANN: Oh, but she's … Mr. Merrick, she's beautiful!
> MERRICK: Oh, she has … she has the face of an angel! … I must … must have been a great disappointment to her.

ANN: No, Mr. Merrick. No, no. No son as loving as you could ever be a disappointment.
MERRICK: If only I could find her! If she could see me with such lovely friends here now. Perhaps she could love me as I am? I've tried so hard to be good.
ANN: [*starts crying*] I'm so … Oh, I'm so sorry!

The scene marks Merrick's behavior (and, by extension, his character) with a quality of innocence. Earlier, when Treves showed Merrick pictures of their children, Merrick believed the (apparent) lie that their children were out with friends rather than sent away so as to avoid seeing him. In the conversation with Ann, Merrick's own appearance ("a great disappointment") is initially contrasted with that of his beautiful mother ("the face of an angel"), only to then be further juxtaposed with Merrick's attempts to "be good"–this sequence moves Ann to tears (fig. 5). As with Treves before her, I do not propose to read Ann's affect in terms of the emotions we might attribute to her. Here, Merrick's display of innocence (not realizing the children are hid from him, his own statement that he tried "so hard to be good"), suggests a *saturation* of affect, as Ann is affectively moved by Merrick to such a degree that she flees the room. In her study on the transmission of affect, Teresa Brennan argues the following:

> The only other point that needs to be stressed at the outset is that affects have an energetic dimension. This is why they can enhance or deplete. They enhance when they are projected outward, when one is relieved of them; in popular parlance, this is called "dumping." Frequently, affects deplete when they are introjected, when one carries the affective burden of another, either by a straightforward transfer or because the other's anger becomes your depression … All this means, indeed the transmission of affect means, that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the "individual" and the "environment." (6)

Brennan's use of the terms "individual" and "environment" points to her argument that projected affects from one body may be impressed on others: the body's social environment. Whereas Brennan talks of enhancement and depletion, saturation here involves Ann becoming overwhelmed, driving her out of the scene. As such, a reading of Ann's reaction here in terms of either enhancement or depletion would be too

(Figure 5)

limiting. To saturate affect here refers to the point by which bodies that are initially propelled and driven by affect towards an object, while simultaneously or consequently being driven away by that same object cause a situation in which neither affective drive dominates. This causes affective saturation and produces a new, often immobilizing affective reaction in the receiving subject (as in this scene). Merrick's condition, determined to be incurable, affirms his status as a deformed character who strives to "do good," while never being able to rid himself of his deformity. This incurability, coupled with his appearance, creates a seemingly paradoxical effect that evokes affective saturation: on the one hand, Ann is *driven* towards him (attracted by her curiosity to know what he, and Merrick's mother, looks like). Yet, when Merrick exclaims that he has "tried so hard to be good," Ann, in the knowledge that his condition will never change, is then affectively compelled, following Merrick's statement, to draw away from him.

This scene is followed by Merrick receiving Madge Kendal in his room at the hospital, a prominent actress who brings him a picture of herself and a book containing plays by Shakespeare. After relating that she is a stage actress, Kendal and Merrick exchange lines from the first act of *Romeo and Juliet*, creating another performative setting. Only this time, Merrick has become an active participant in the performance. As the scene unfolds, Romeo and Juliet kiss, but Merrick, upon encountering this passage, simply states, "and then it says they kiss," putting the book away. Kendal, however, continues enacting the scene and kisses Merrick on his cheek, telling Merrick that he is "not an elephant man at all," but rather Romeo. Merrick then sheds a single tear (fig. 6), seemingly mirroring Treves' tear earlier. In the scene where Treves first saw Merrick, I interpreted his stare as one of astonishment and his tear as a pressure on the performance he took part in. But Barthes posed that

the tear may also be read as a form of address. Merrick, by putting the text away, initially breaks the theatrical mode of address between him and Kendal. Through continuing with the scene, however, Kendal draws Merrick back in. Merrick, like Treves before him, seems astonished as well, but this time the tear is an address to Kendal (and seemingly the viewer), rather than a pressure that is brought to bear on the performance. It is the *continuation* of the enactment of the scene that moves Merrick.

(Figure 6)

Meanwhile, during the evenings, Merrick is visited by Jim, the hospital's night porter, who arranges visits for Londoners that want to see Merrick. Merrick, who has just received a dressing case from Treves and Carr-Gomm, is combing his hair and addressing Kendal's picture in an exaggerating manner, attempting to emulate a posh accent while doing so. Jim barges in on Merrick's private performance to show him off to a number of drunk men and women from a local pub. The men force one of the women to kiss Merrick (fig. 7), who is visibly distressed, and then push the woman and Merrick on his bed. As the men pour liquor on Merrick, they show him his own visage in a mirror, to which Merrick screams in terror. The men, laughing, then parade Merrick around in his room.

The scene I have described shows multiple points of contact with Merrick's body, but these are all brief: the forced kiss is broken as the woman tries to push herself away; the men parading Merrick's body only hold it briefly as they try to pass him on to the next man. Earlier, I made the argument for what I called affective saturation, building on Brennan's theory of affective transmission: the way in which, once people are driven to something, they can be driven away from it once this point of saturation of this affective drive is reached in a certain body. Merrick's deformed body,

thus comes to function as the nexus around which other bodies organize themselves, are affectively drawn but driven away once they are put in actual physical contact with the body. The point of affective saturation is thus tied to the physical proximity certain bodies have to Merrick's deformed body.

In relation to the previous scene, another bifurcation now appears. Initially, Merrick was presented in Bytes' freak show. This was then followed by Treves showcasing Merrick for his colleagues, which in turn was followed by Merrick finally receiving guests from London society, of which one of its most prominent members stated that Merrick was "not an elephant man at all." If this sequence were to be interpreted as an ascending line (which the film itself complicates, as we shall see), in which Merrick increasingly gains agency, the night-time visits undermine this ascent, as Merrick is manhandled by Jim and his visitors, depriving him of any agency he enjoys during the daytime. Merrick's degree of autonomous use of his body in these performances is intrinsically tied to the interaction others have with that body, whether he is showcased, a relatively active participant in the performance, or manhandled and abused. This distinction in the nature of the interaction gains importance in relation to the argument I make concerning deformity's relationship to performativity. The way in which deformed bodies come to be displayed or perform their own appearance is dissimulated differently from non-disabled bodies. As Butler maintained, performativity concerns the "act-like", or what is not necessarily explicated *as* an act—recognized as such. The deformed body's appearance consequently both emphasizes its appearance *as* act in that it affectively moves and compels other bodies, yet simultaneously the affective effects evoked through deformity's appearance become dissimulated through the cultural locations that mediate these appearances, disallowing the full address of appearance *as* act.

(Figure 7)

Merrick, taken away by Bytes, who had joined Jim's group, is reinstalled in the freak show, but then subsequently released by the freak show's other members and returns to London. Arriving at London station, Merrick attracts the attention of a boy who follows him while blowing props against him and asking, "Why is your head so big?" Merrick starts to walk faster and faster (made difficult by a limp right leg), runs over a girl, and attracts the attention of an increasing number of people who eventually corner him. Merrick then exclaims, "No! I am not an elephant! I am not an animal! I am a human being! I am ... a man," before collapsing.

As I have traced the development of Merrick's agency, this is the first time we see Merrick not *complying* with the performative situations to which other people submit him but rather confronting the mob that chases him like an animal. Merrick's willful defiance of being chased is a slide from being apprehended as an aesthetic object to becoming a political subject. Sara Ahmed notes the following on agentive defiance: "There is agency in this becoming; *there is life*. The attribution of wilfulness shows us how objects (and objects can includes [sic] those we would ordinarily call subjects, those who we bequeath with a "who," a bequeathing that thus far has been restricted) have lives other than the ones we give them" (2014: 47). If I attribute Merrick's resistance here to a willful act, this willful act is then also a resistance to the lives other people have given him; recall the discussion and disagreement between Treves and Carr-Gomm about whether the life of Merrick was imaginable—a discussion that excluded Merrick. But this resistance is feasible only through acting willfully, which Ahmed notes is often in discord with complying with the will of others (95). Merrick's statement thus has a double function: by speaking out against the mob that corners him, Merrick also affirms his own autonomy, while the actual content of the exclamation itself creates a split between man and animal, where the former, we may derive from Merrick's words, should not be chased up like the latter.

After Merrick is recovered by Treves, it is related that Merrick is dying (although it remains uncertain whether Merrick himself knows), and Treves takes him to the theater. At the end of the theatrical performance (which consists of a series of fade-ins and fade outs with overlapping images rather than clear narrative content), Kendal comes out on stage and dedicates the performance to Merrick. She states: "Ladies and gentlemen, tonight's performance was very special to me, because it was very special to someone else. A man who knows the theatre, and who loves the theatre. And yet this is the first time he's ever been here. I wish to dedicate the whole company's wishes, who dedicate with all their hearts, tonight's performance to Mr. John Merrick, my very dear friend." As the members in the audience start to applaud Merrick, the following dialogue ensues between Treves and Merrick:

TREVES: Go on, John, they want to see you.
MERRICK: I can't!
TREVES: It's alright, stand up! They want to see you.

Merrick stands up to receive a standing ovation and members of the audience shouting "Bravo!" (fig. 8). Treves' addressing Merrick to "stand up!", however, echoes earlier scenes in the film, where Merrick was put on display in Bytes' freak show, and told the same words, just as Treves also told Merrick to "turn around!" during the presentation at the hospital. These imperative formulations sharply direct the agency of the deformed body, functioning as a command. Despite the crowd's cheerful reactions, Merrick is again put on display, whereby the agency gained in the previous scene is again diminished. If Merrick was at first an object of shock, wonder, and awe, then a medical anomaly, then a literate and intelligent man with a deformed body, what are we to make of this final showing? After returning from the theater, Merrick places the finishing touch on a miniature cathedral replica he is building and goes to bed. Merrick has two pictures hanging in his room: one of a child praying at his bed and the other of a child lying in bed asleep. He looks at these paintings and, as he normally sleeps sitting up supported by several pillows due to his chronic bronchitis, removes them in order to be able to sleep lying down, but this also causes him to die through asphyxiation.

(Figure 8)

The scene depicts a crowd cheering for Merrick, and by being presented once again, the scene suggests both an inexplicable and sudden change in attitude from the perceiving audience (one of appreciation), while at the same time showing a diminishing of agency in Merrick through his compliance. Recall Kendal's statement that Merrick

both knows and loves the theater while it his first time present in one. This may again be read ironically. As I have shown in my reading, Merrick is instead subjected to nearly nothing but theatrical, performative settings. This scene also perpetuates the film's interior/exterior analogy of Merrick's fair character and deformed body, respectively, as being designated a "lover of the theatre" by a prominent member of the stage further enhances his earlier status as a literate and intelligent person, while the fact that he is a lover of the theater seems to (ironically) point us back to Merrick's own past of being exhibited in the freak show.

Given this perpetuation of the interior/exterior analogy through the use of performances, this allows one to question whether such an analogy implies that disabled subjects *should* do good *because* of their disability, or rather, *can be* active subjects. In the first case, disability becomes something for which one should seek atonement, yet in the case of the second option, the relation to disability is a lot less clear. Recalling Merrick's last scene, his choice to go to sleep lying down rather than sleeping sitting up creates a split. On the one hand, we may read this gesture as Merrick's final act of conformity—to adapt to normal behavior, even at the cost of his own life. Yet simultaneously, the fact that Merrick *chooses* how to sleep, even at the cost of his own life, reaffirms his agency as an autonomous human being. It is not my aim to resolve the scene's duality, but, as my use of the term in this section's title, *sensibility of agency*, suggests, to probe it further.

The fact that Merrick dies through asphyxia links Merrick's deformity to his demise. Yet, during his lifetime, the film continuously emphasizes that Merrick "tried to be good," while simultaneously being unable to escape the disabling condition of his own deformed body. Thus, the film sets up a strong contrast between different kinds of *fairness*—that of Merrick's body and his character. Fairness, Elaine Scarry explains, "is used both in referring to loveliness of countenance and in referring to the ethical requirements of 'being fair,' 'playing fair,' and 'fair distribution'" (1999: 91). A sense of an apparent *lack of fairness* arises throughout the film in the way Merrick is treated. Merrick, whose countenance is considered to be the opposite of fair, is treated accordingly; what is unfair gets treated unfairly. But a change occurs when Merrick's character is judged to be morally fair, and a lack of fair treatment then creates a desire for justice when Treves consequently confronts Jim upon finding out he has been exhibiting Merrick in the hospital.

Scarry notes how symmetry has been a longtime conceptual companion to beauty, but also argues that symmetry in the sphere of justice "remains key, particularly in accounts of distributive justice and fairness," and that "in periods when a human community is too young to have yet had the time to create justice, as well as in times

when justice has been taken away, beautiful things (which do not rely on us to create them but come on their own and have never been absent from a human community) hold steadily visible the manifest good of equality and balance" (97).

I want to place Scarry's connection between ethical and aesthetic fairness adjacent to my reading, as the fact that Merrick inspires others around him to demand justice (by not allowing him to be exhibited further) and do good (by taking Merrick to the theatre and giving him gifts, for example), thus shows the fairness that they perceive in, or project on, his character, even when they doubt their own—as when Treves wonders whether he is a good man or a bad man for allowing London society to visit Merrick.

An initial key difference between aesthetic and ethical fairness, however, is that we tend to conceive of the first as something tangible, perceivable through our senses, that accompanies subjective taste and cognitive judgement, whereas we do not consider ethical fairness to be in the domain of sensibility. Scarry argues: "It is the very exigencies of materiality, the susceptibility of the world to injury, that require justice, yet justice itself is outside the compass of our sensory powers" (102). But she goes on to say that "it may happen on occasion that the fair political arrangement itself (not just the laws prescribing to or guaranteeing it) *will* be condensed into a time and space where it becomes available to the senses, and then ... its beauty is visible" (103). This turn of phrase is close to what Jacques Rancière would come to call the distribution of the sensible, which he defined as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions with it" (2004a: 7). Rancière's definition points to the fact that, while what is given in aesthetic sensibility may present itself as "self-evident facts," the use of "distribution" here refers to the way in which different parties also sense from their respective positions, implying that different positions afford different ways of sensing what we believe to be "in common."

Thus, if fairness is tied to the exigencies of materiality and its susceptibility to injury, this helps elucidate our understanding of Merrick's deformed body as it is placed in different aesthetic-political distributions, open to the senses. Merrick's body itself becomes placed in such a distribution due to the concomitance of his deformed, aesthetically unfair body, a body that due to its disabilities is "susceptible to injury," combined with an ethically fair character, thereby highlighting its frailty and lack of symmetry. This body moves other bodies it is placed into arrangement with through affecting them—Treves' astonishment upon seeing him for the first time, Ann becoming overwhelmed when taking tea with Merrick, Mrs. Kendal's

renunciation of Merrick as the Elephant Man, and as such, in its frailty, becomes a body worth caring for, even when some of the political consequences tied to that caring—the continuation of Merrick being exhibited—might not be judged as fair to the body in question; a deformed fairness.

6. Conclusion

What emerges from my reading of deformity as affordance is the apparent disjunction between different kinds of fairness in relation to the deformed body. Even when we are driven away from what may initially appear as aesthetically unpleasing, we can be driven back towards it due to the beauty of its frailty, as something worth caring for. Scarry subsequently argues that aesthetic objects, whether animate or inanimate, confer on the beholder a "surfeit of aliveness" (89). This surfeit of aliveness afforded by aesthetic objects thereby heightens one's sensibility to aliveness rather than raising the level of aliveness itself.

Scarry's emphasis on aliveness begs the question of how this relates to disability, given my reading of *The Elephant Man* above. Can disability heighten our awareness—or in Scarry's terms—our access to the already existing level of aliveness present? Scarry points to an asymmetrical relation, that of the aliveness present in all persons and the aliveness with which we credit them (90). As I have suggested in my reading of *The Elephant Man*, the deformed body can metonymically extend and raise the sensibility concerning the frailty of all human bodies, thus making other bodies that encounter it begin to care for it. One affordance of disabled subjects, then, is that they can become *both* productive and active political subjects by not negating this aliveness present in all persons but raising one's awareness of it and the collective sensibility of the frailty of the deformed human body as something worth protecting and caring for.

My use of the terms *productive* and *active* is motivated by Agamben's reading of these terms. Agamben argues production is aligned with the term *poiesis*, in the sense of unveiling something: "The essential character of *poiesis* was not its aspect as a practical and voluntary process but its being a mode of truth understood as unveiling" (1999: 69). Acting, meanwhile, is connected to *praxis*: "central to *praxis* was the idea of the will that finds its immediate expression in an act" (1999: 68).

It is provocative that Agamben understands *poiesis* as a form of unveiling and production into presence, given the emphasis on revealing in this chapter. In light of my own discussion, the performativity of deformity showed how a deformed body can

be made to appear in a performative setting, can be unveiled to a receiving audience, but that the bringing into presence of a deformed body can *act* on that audience in unforeseen ways, by driving them to and away from that body or by raising their sense of aliveness in the other, which is therefore an important affordance of deformity. Simultaneously, the deformed body itself can *act* within the performative setting it finds itself placed in by refusing to be *acted on* in a certain way (such as being unveiled), as with Merrick being chased down.

The animated tension that arises from this distinction between unveiling and acting now becomes increasingly lucid. On the one hand, the performativity of bringing a deformed body into appearance may heighten our increased awareness of aliveness. Consequently, what is brought into presence through the unveiling of the deformed body is an increase in sensitivity towards the sense of aliveness of all bodies involved. On the other hand, this bringing into appearance can also *act* upon us affectively and drive us both *to* and *away* from that body. This last gesture complicates agency in the sense that, as my readings of *Jane Eyre* and *The Elephant Man* show, being affectively driven by another body is not a manner of intentional agency in that I decide to be driven toward or away from it, but rather because I *am* affected by it.

In *The Elephant Man*, we saw how Treves, initially describing Merrick as the most "perverted or degraded version of a human being" he had ever encountered in front of his colleagues, eventually came to care for Merrick and to *take* care of him. Scarry notes how the more we recognize the level of aliveness in others, the more we perceive the fragility of this aliveness and consequently seek to protect it (90). Thus, we may read Treves' efforts to take care of Merrick as willful effort—to preserve and promote what affects him as a fragile fairness—even if this, at times, is against the will of the man of whom he wants to take care. As aliveness and fragility become bound together in the deformed body, the perceived and sensed waning of aliveness—to decay—is produced into presence. This waning of aliveness, as we have seen, is intimately bound up to questions concerning who or what this quality is ascribed to, who, as an aesthetic object, becomes worth caring for, and who can become willful political subjects. In the next chapter, I will explore what the uses of decay are.

CHAPTER 3

Decay

1. Disability and the Affordances of Decay

In the introductory chapter, I argued that in the medical model, disability is often defined as a defect of the body. A defect of the body points to a lack, or absence, of bodily function. Through this definition, disability is considered a loss, privation, or negation of function, precisely because such a definition presupposes that a function be present in order for the body to be available for use of any kind. When disability is conceptualized on the basis of this presupposition, as the negation or privation of this type of use, this may consequently also disqualify it for a second type of use: a body that does not function properly in relation to what it is supposed to be used *for*.

In this chapter, I consider the dynamic between those two notions of use in relation to the concept of decay. Etymologically, decay stems from *cadere*, to fall, coupled with the prefix *de-*, off or out. This chapter examines how bodies that fall or come apart relate to how that body is used, or can still be used, and how the process of the body falling apart affects both the subject whose body it involves as well as how decay affects others. I explicate the body's relation to use by discerning between two different kinds of use: uses *in* and *of* the body on the one hand, and what the body is used *for* on the other. By uses in and of the body, I mean the different functions a body is ordinarily, and often normatively, deemed capable of. This includes functions such as breathing, walking, speaking, etc. By what the body is used *for*, I refer to the various activities in which a body can engage, such as labor or play, for example.

I thus posit decay here as the deterioration of the living body rather than the decomposition of corpses. If decay is marked by the deterioration of the body, this is coupled with the fact that the body continually strives to preserve itself. The body that comes apart is caught in the struggle of simultaneously being broken down and striving to recuperate, where the breaking down of the body and its functions influences ways of imagining what that body could or should be used for. This struggle of the body is marked by affect in several ways. When a body is in a state of decay, it can affectively move other individuals. They might want to help or restore that body, or they might react to it aesthetically, through being repulsed by it. Building on the previous chapter, I further explore how affective responses to the decaying body afford different forms of relationality. While a body in decay loses its functionality,

this is then not only a concern for the subject whose body it involves but also for the way in which others relate to that body.

In the previous chapter, I showed how Jane, moved by Rochester's disability, could imagine her body engaging in a prosthetic relation to Rochester's—to be his hands and eyes. Decay affords a different mode of relationality in that not only do others react to the decaying body, but the subject whose body comes apart responds affectively as well. Decay limits both the actual bodily capacity and evokes uncertainty regarding what one imagines one's body to be capable of. Consequently, the subject needs to somehow reconcile with the loss of function and the breaking down of one's own bodily capacities, while other people who care for the decaying body respond affectively in their attempts to want to care for, conserve, or (ab)use that body.

The relevance of examining decay for disability studies lies in the questions and issues decay provokes. As I showed in the introductory chapter, disability advocates and scholars have argued that while a relationship between pain and disability is often too hastily established, this argument should and cannot deny that many disabilities can be evocative of pain. In relation to disabled embodiment, I take here as my point of departure Tobin Siebers' notion of complex embodiment. In Siebers' perspective, complex embodiment theory needs to involve itself with and find ways to account for the corporeal reality of the lived body, particularly since disability can be accompanied by chronic conditions (like chronic pain). He argues that the economy of representations and accounts of embodied experiences like pain inform our understanding of pain, therefore arguing against a unidirectional model wherein pain would only inform its cultural representation (2017: 325).

Decay, understood as the affective struggle of the concurrent breaking down and persevering of the body, invites me to question how bodily autonomy can be practiced while the body comes apart and how that relates to embodiment, which I will understand here as three ways of relating to the body: that of having a body, being a body, but also ways of "doing" the body, i.e., enacting or performing it. To practice bodily autonomy suggests a modicum of control over how that body is used by a subject, which involves objectification of the body, that is, to instrumentalize it toward the use of some end.

Use connotes a sense of purpose. When we use someone or something, there is a perceived end to that use. As Sara Ahmed explains in her study on use: "Use is a relation as well as an activity that often points beyond something even when use is about something: to use something points to what something is for" (2019: 23). Decay, however, is often accompanied by an increasing lack or inability of bodily use. While use cannot but evoke a sense of purpose (or in the latter's case, purpose's

explicit absence) when we relate it to human bodies, we associate decay as the *inevitable* consequence of the lived human body. A decaying (and by extension, increasingly disabled) body can become more difficult to find uses for. As such, this can be used as an incentive to "restore" the body, which in turn makes it available for use. Ahmed's reading of the relationship between body parts and wholes offers insight into this matter. Through a reading of a myriad of texts, Ahmed's argument traces how parts can come to be perceived as being "rebellious" (2014: 100). Ahmed draws on the work of Blaise Pascal, who proposed the following: "If the foot and the hands had a will of their own, they could only be in their order in submitting their particular will which governs the whole body. Apart from that, they are in disorder and mischief; but in willing only the good of the body, they accomplish their own good" (2003, 132 [1669]).

Pascal's argument gives way to a reading of the body where parts become mischievous and disorderly if left to their own devices, yet by allowing them to be subjugated to the bodily whole, they will ultimately also serve themselves. As Ahmed notes: "Implicit in the drama of Pascal's description is how the will binds memory and utility: the part in willing only the good of the whole body must remember that body by becoming useful to that body" (100) and she continues that "A willing part would be *for* what it is assumed as *for*. To become part is to inherit this prescription; it is to acquire a function" (101). By the parts' being of use to the body, the body in turn may become productive, a means to an end.

The capacity of the disabled body to become productively able towards an end may then become a matter of restoring that body back towards normative ability, as in the medical model of disability. In an overview article concerning critiques of both the medical and social models of disability, Justin Anthony Haegele and Samuel Hodge show that the medical model is centered on "fixing" the perceived impairments of persons with disabilities "toward function and independence" (195). Such an understanding of independence would render it conditional on whether the body in question conforms to a preconceived notion of what a "healthy" body is. This not only would subscribe to a normative understanding of "health" (a common critique of the medical model), but rather does not question how bodily autonomy could be practiced by rebellious bodies that, from one perspective, may not appear to function as a "whole." When bodies are perceived as being unruly, this implicitly carries with it the normative connotation that bodies would otherwise be "under control." What I argue is that, instead, the way in which bodily autonomy can be asserted is itself connected to ways in which bodily capacity turns into (dis)ability. As bodily autonomy evokes the notion of the possibility of a degree of control over the body, this in turn reifies the ability/disability dichotomy, as bodies less in control appear as to be *more*

disabled. Subsequently, my argument is that disabled and decaying bodies emphasize and dramatize the struggle for bodily autonomy.

In order to explore how different relational forms—having, being, and doing—to the disabled and decaying body can be exercised, I will do a close reading of the novel *A Little Life*, by the American author Hanya Yanigahara. Divided into seven parts over 720 pages, *A Little Life* initially appears to trace the development of the lives of four friends, who are in their mid-to-late twenties and live in New York City at the start of the novel: Malcolm, JB, Willem, and Jude. Malcolm starts out as an architecture student from a wealthy family who eventually establishes his own practice. JB is a visual artist who creates a project in which he follows the lives of all four of them through his paintings, with an emphasis on the lives of Willem and Jude. Willem is an aspiring actor and part-time waiter who eventually becomes successful in film, and Jude is a student of both law and mathematics who becomes a successful litigator at a private law firm. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the character of Jude turns into the focal point of the story and that the events in the lives of his friends come to revolve around his in the narration.

Jude is introduced as something of an enigma: not only is he an eminent and prolific student of two separate academic fields (mathematics and law), he is also multi-talented (excelling at singing, playing classical music, and cooking) and a private tutor in a variety of subjects. Simultaneously, Jude has a limp due to what is initially disclosed by him as the result of a car injury, episodes of intense pain which leave him paralyzed, painful wounds on his legs as a result of the aforementioned injury, and we eventually learn that he cuts himself. As the novel progresses, Jude's past slowly becomes disclosed to certain characters within the novel, and consequently also to the reader. We learn that he grew up in a monastery where he was physically and later also sexually abused, and that the car injury was not an accident but rather the result of an intentional collision by one of his many abusers. Both his body and personal situation slowly but steadily deteriorate over the course of the novel, and he increasingly needs to start using a wheelchair. Ultimately, after decades of an intermingling of care, use, and abuse, his body is nearly fully exhausted and decayed by the end of the novel, when he commits suicide.

In my reading of *A Little Life*, I argue that Jude's body becomes the nexus of different kinds of use and abuse: friends that want to help and care for him and his body (albeit largely on their terms), as well as abusers who punish, force, and damage his body. The novel's title occurs in its narrative, when Brother Luke—Jude's caretaker and confidant in the monastery he grows up in, who becomes an abuser and prostitutes him—tells Jude he has to "show a little life" (417) when Jude is being raped by Luke's

clientele. The phrase "a little life" is used here in its affective sense, what I referred to in the previous chapter as aliveness, the aesthetically sensible quality of liveliness sensed in another body. It is exactly the performance of this quality that decay complicates, since decay involves a body that is in a state of deterioration while the body simultaneously tries to persevere, limiting the ways its capacities may become abilities. This dramatization of the body as caught between two different forces—perseverance and decay—also offers a second reading of the novel's title, namely a little life in the formal and representational sense; a life that is ostensibly "small," inevitably in part because of the challenges of the representation of bodily use and abuse.

The use and abuse of Jude's body self-harm and disability raise the question how the pain of his disabled and decaying body can be represented through language, for which I engage with Elaine Scarry's account of pain, who argues that pain destroys language. I suggest that while Jude's self-harm is damaging his body, it is concurrently a practice of bodily autonomy. The representation of the practice of self-harm in turn requires me to explore how disabled embodiment challenges notions of having, being, and doing the body, and the objectification of the body. I then move on to explore how the body in decay relates to an increase in inaction. As decay decreases bodily capacity and consequently the ability to act or use itself, I argue that the body in decay, through its inaction while also needing to persevere, becomes an abject bodily condition. Decay is then posited as the condition of the body wherein it expels the body's subject, while the occurrence of this expulsion simultaneously constitutes the I, or subject, who inhabits that body.

2. Caesural Cuts: The Literary (in)Articulation of Pain

The novel introduces Jude's self-harm when Jude tells Willem that there has been "an accident" (68) and that he needs to take him to Andy, Jude's physician. Upon arriving at Andy's, Willem is finally able to see Jude's wound, which is described as a "choking of blood, as if Jude's arm had grown a mouth and was vomiting blood from it, and with such avidity that it was forming little frothy bubbles that popped and spat as if in excitement" (68). Through simile, Jude's wound as a mouth that is vomiting blood with excitement evokes the sensibility of a body that is bursting and desiring to come apart. Willem drives Jude home in silence, while the past events beg for an explanation. Back home, this then leads to Willem exploring Jude's body with his hands while Jude is resting, wanting to know the history of his wounds:

> Under his hands, the fabric didn't so much yield as it did bend and crease, like cardboard, and although he was only able to fold it to the inside of Jude's elbow, it was enough to see the three columns of neat white scars, each about an inch wide and slightly raised, laddering up his arm. He tucked his finger under the sleeve, and felt the tracks continuing onto the upper arm, but stopped when he reached the bicep, unwilling to explore more, and withdrew his hand. He wasn't able to examine the left arm—Andy had cut back the sleeve on that one, and Jude's entire forearm and hand were wrapped with white gauze—but he knew he would find the same thing there. (73)

The "neat white scars" suggest a formal arrangement in their "neatness" of all being a similar length and slightly raised, which indirectly refers to the type of use to which the body has been submitted. The arrangement of form here is what cancels out the possibility of coincidence or accident, precisely because arrangement is evocative of intent, thereby acting as an itinerary. Willem's tactile exploration turns into haptic feedback: "feeling the tracks" of the scars on Jude's arm results in an "unwillingness to explore more". Pablo Maurette posits affect as "our most primordial form of proprioception" (9–10), as what affords a primary orientation with regard to how the parts of a body, or different bodies, relate through being affected via touch. Willem's proprioceptive exploration consists of the tracing of his own fingers over Jude's arm, using his own body's sense of touch to assimilate how the scars form an arrangement. Following Jude's scars, an interval opens between the knowledge the scar's arrangement affords and Willem comes to sense the contours of a history of (ab)use through the formal arrangement of scars in three columns, divulging that they were not the result of an accident, yet all the while not disclosing their full history or etiology.

The above events take place right before a New Year's Eve party to be held at Jude and Willem's apartment, which Willem wants to cancel due to Jude's condition, but Jude successfully convinces Willem to let it continue to take place because they are unsure who JB has invited. Before the guests arrive, the four friends go to the roof of the apartment building for fresh air and a smoke, but accidentally lock themselves out. Willem's thoughts are focalized as follows:

> But idiotically, no one had his phone: they were down in the apartment, where they themselves should have been, were it not for fucking JB, and for fucking Malcolm, who so unquestioningly followed every-

> thing JB said, every stupid, half-formed idea, and for fucking Jude as well, for last night, for the past nine years, for hurting himself, for not letting himself be helped, for frightening and unnerving him, for making him feel so useless: for everything. (77)

To feel useless here means to be unable to apply oneself, to be unable to have one's help accepted the way one wants that help to be applied to someone else. This in turn affectively leads to being frightened and unnerved. The lack of ability to apply oneself and to be of help turns into frustration. Jude then proposes the idea of them lowering him down the side of the apartment and dropping him on the fire escape in order to reach the window. Unsurprisingly, Willem contests this idea but is ultimately won over because Jude locked the windows with a contraption of his own devising, and only he knows how to open it. Willem and JB lower Jude, who drops on the fire escape, followed by Willem:

> The drop was scarier, and the landing harder, than he had thought it would be, but he made himself recover quickly and went over to where Jude was and wrapped his arms around his waist, tucking his leg around a spindle to brace himself. 'I've got you,' he said, and Jude leaned out over the edge of the railing, farther than he could have done on his own, and Willem held on to him so tightly that he could feel the knuckles of Jude's spine through his sweater, could feel his stomach sink and rise as he breathed, could feel the echo of his fingers' movements through his muscles as he twisted and unkinked the twigs of wire that were fastening the window into its stile. And when it was done, Willem climbed onto the railing and into the bedroom first, and then reached out again to pull Jude in by his arms, careful to avoid his bandages. (80)

Willem's own body moves from being initially useless to becoming of use: by extending Jude's body via his own, Jude is able to gain entrance into their apartment. As mentioned, Sara Ahmed noted how use establishes a relationship between things and what they are meant for. Ahmed offers that this relation points "beyond something even when use is about something" (2019: 23). What Willem's help to extend Jude's reach is about, is gaining entrance to their apartment. Yet what does it point *beyond*? What Willem's body is *for* is not limited to the gesture of holding Jude's body, thereby extending it, but rather that through this, Willem's own body can become of use.

Willem's earlier acquisition of tactile knowledge through exploring Jude's body is iterated while concurrently differentiated: the tightness of his grasp around Jude's waist is connected to rise and fall of his breath, the feeling of his spine, and the "echo" of his finger's movements.

The echo of his fingers that Willem feels in his muscles necessarily involves a repetition of something, ordinarily a sound. I read the echo as metonymic repetition that is connected to Willem's sensation of becoming useful—metonymic because his own body has become congruent to the task that Jude's body is involved in. The rhythms of two bodies (the rise and fall of Jude's breath, the echo in Willem's fingers) are evoked through the service of a shared task and are necessarily connected to the other body also engaged in the same task. The "for," or direction, of Willem's use thereby lies in the desire where the use of the body becomes autotelic.

The quote ends, however, with Willem being careful not to touch Jude's bandages and, by extension, the fresh wound underneath. Once they are inside the apartment, something else becomes apparent:

> Willem saw that on the inside of his wrist his bandage was stained with a deep-burgundy splotch, and recognized, belatedly, that the rapidity of Jude's breathing was not just from exertion but from pain. He watched as Jude sat heavily on his bed, his white-wrapped hand reaching behind him to make sure he would land on something solid.
>
> Willem crouched beside him. His elation was gone, replaced by something else. He felt himself weirdly close to tears, although he couldn't have said why.
>
> 'Jude,' he began, but he didn't know how to continue.
>
> 'You'd better get them,' Jude said, and although each word came out as a gasp, he smiled at Willem again.
>
> 'Fuck 'em,' he said, 'I'll stay here with you,' and Jude laughed a little, although he winced as he did so, and carefully tipped himself backward until he was lying on his side, and Willem helped lift his legs up onto the bed. His sweater was freckled with more flecks of rust, and Willem picked some of them off of him. He sat on the bed next to him, unsure where to begin. 'Jude,' he tried again. (81)

Willem's elation of having been able to be helpful becomes replaced by "something else." Since "something else" signifies the presence of something unknown, it is this lack of reference itself that becomes evocative of affect, as Willem feels himself close to

tears. Kathleen Stewart proposes that "Affects are not so much forms of signification, or units of knowledge, as they are expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation" (40). Involuntary participation can also involve the confrontation of the impossibility to participate; to be confronted with the problem of not being able to be of use. Willem's body is overcome with wanting to cry without him being able to articulate a clear or definitive reason, in attempting to try and become an extension of that other body, with Willem lifting up Jude's legs on the bed.

But the limits of his usefulness, of his ability to be an extension of another body, are drawn sharply by his inability to share in or alleviate the pain experienced by that body. Instead, what he learns is the uncertainty that comes with facing the limits of his ability to help while facing Jude's pain. Stewart further states that "Ordinary affects highlight the question of the intimate impacts of forces in circulation. They're not exactly 'personal' but they sure can pull the subject into places it didn't 'intend' to go" (40). Intimate but not personal: for Willem to witness Jude's pain is to learn of it but not be able to share in it. His intention of being useful and helpful is not only limited by this inability to share in the pain of another but also productive of an affective whelm, as the epistemological uncertainty of not knowing how to help or continue is coupled with an affective certainty of his own body being moved close to tears. The scenes therefore suggest a gap between the desire to be of use and the possibility to be of use, whereby this limitation of one's ability to help is what becomes evocative of affect.

While this scene is marked by the uncertainty, and by extension, inability, of what to do when facing the pain of another, it is also an exposition of the limits of the language surrounding pain's articulation. Jude's words each come out "as a gasp," while Willem repeats Jude's name when he is unable to say something else. The limits pain may place on language have been described by Elaine Scarry in the following way: "Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language … Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (1985: 4). By "actively destroying" language, Scarry refers to the capacity of physical pain to render the body unable to speak coherently *because* it is overcome by pain, therefore only being capable of uttering cries, wails, and the like. One of Scarry's main supporting arguments for the thesis that physical pain actively destroys language is that:

> Physical pain—unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content. It is not of or for anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language. Often, a state of consciousness other than pain will, if deprived of its object, begin to approach the neighborhood of physical pain; conversely, when physical pain is transformed into an objectified state, it (or at least some of its aversiveness) is eliminated. A great deal, then, is at stake in the attempt to invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language; the human attempt to reverse the de-objectifying work of pain by forcing pain itself into avenues of objectification is a project laden with practical and ethical consequence. (1985: 5–6)

The lack of referential content that Scarry links to pain sets it apart from other states of consciousness. When Willem's elation was replaced by "something else," I suggested that the inherent referential nature of "something else" itself becomes the content; but it thus also divulges the lingual limits caused by pain, since Willem cannot fully share in Jude's pain either physically or in language.

Yet if we read Scarry's argument closely, it suggests not so much the claim that pain "actively destroys" language, but rather that it prohibits its articulation. Scarry's claim that pain actively destroys language has, consequently, been contested. Susannah Mintz writes that "So axiomatic has this idea become that until recently, accounts of pain in literature have tended to flounder in the apparent contradiction of literary artifacts depicting an experience that cannot be written" (4), while Anna Jurecic has responded to Scary's argument that "Her claims may be valid with regard to extreme forms of torture. But her argument has foreclosed a discussion of less extreme forms of pain. The very fact that there is an abundance of literature about pain, however, calls into question the validity of her argument in relation to milder or chronic pain" (44). Somewhat nuancing these critiques is Martha Stoddard Holmes, who notes that Scarry references the McGill Pain Questionnaire and is careful to acknowledge that not all physical pain eradicates language. (2005: 133). Stoddard Holmes's reference to the pain questionnaire correctly reminds us that indeed Scarry *does* argue that, while pain can be language destroying insofar as it refrains the body in pain to articulate words and sentences, pain can become generative of other language through the acts of witnessing or tending to another's pain, particularly in medical contexts (1985: 5). The body in pain may thus become generative of discourse surrounding or referring to that body.

In my own critique of Scarry's claim, I want to place emphasis on the notion of the supposed *destruction* of language that she argues for, in order to propose and subsequently elucidate a more nuanced understanding of this account, insofar as it pertains to the formal features of the literary representation of physical pain. It was observed that Scarry's argument concerning the destruction of language in the experience of physical pain is rooted in the idea that this experience may render a body incapable of articulating intelligible words and sentences, where the ability of the voice is reduced to solely uttering screams, shrieks, and so on. But this incapacity of the body in pain is itself best understood as an apparent *lack* of the voice's otherwise generative force. The claim that language is destroyed, in contrast, would suggest that language (as representational artefact) is in fact already in existence; for how else could we suggest that it be destroyed? This conceptualization allows us to distinguish between the absence of the otherwise generative feature of linguistic invention during the experience of bodily pain and the destruction of language—already in existence—as artefact or discourse. My motivation to make this distinction is that in attempts to give accounts of pain (such as the many parts of *A Little Life*), this distinction allows us to make pain legible through reading for the ways in which language falls short of directly representing or giving accounts of pain.

What I suggest is that absences through, about, and of pain become present absences when examining the legibility of the formal dimensions of the textual artefact. Moreover, absences of statements of pain as formal caesura in literary accounts of pain may run parallel to the ways in which bodies can be made undone. Jude's cutting *in* his body is accompanied by a cutting *off* of language, an inability to speak of and articulate this pain. Isobel Armstrong notes in a reading of the functioning of caesura that:

> The break opens up the meaning of nothing, of negation, and tries out different meanings of devastation and its consequences. It asks for a moment of withdrawal into self and the moment of self-cancellation in despair, of making the self nothing, of seeing the self as negated object, in order to understand what 'nothing' could mean, the caesura of death. But the break does not terminate thought, despite its severity. The ambiguity of the pause asks the reader to interrogate it. (2011: 135–136)

Armstrong connects the caesura to negation but articulates this negation as being productive. To her, the caesura may ultimately be connected to the possibility of

interrogating what it could mean to make the self nothing in the present absence created by the caesura. Her emphasis on the caesura's negating force can itself be productive of a new possibility of reading. If the despair evoked by a break or a cut metonymically relates to the unmaking of the self toward a "nothing," as the undoing of the legible relationships that would hold a self together, this process might become something that we can think through via the literary account, given its employment of caesuras. As such, in reading for articulation's absence created by and through formal breaks and cuts, we can read how, when, and where pain is *not* articulated or addressed, and *why* that may be the case.

3. Helplessness and Accessorial Alteration

In the scenes above, Willem found a use for his non-disabled body through being helpful to Jude's disabled body. But his ability to help met its limits when it could not share in that body's pain, resulting in how the limits of the articulation of pain also allows me to elucidate a limit in how a body can be of use to another body. Apart from exploring use's limits through being of help, *A Little Life* is equally interested in how the limits of use can be transgressed by venturing into abuse. Halfway through the novel, Jude enters into a relationship with a man called Caleb, who starts abusing him physically and psychologically. Their first moment of (forced) physical intimacy is narrated as follows:

> Caleb leans in and kisses him, very hard, so that his back is pressed against the door, and Caleb's arms make a cage around him. In that moment, he goes blank, the world, his very self, erasing themselves. It has been a long, long time since anyone has kissed him, and he remembers the sense of helplessness he felt whenever it happened, and how Brother Luke used to tell him to just open his mouth and relax and do nothing, and now—out of habit and memory, and the inability to do anything else—that is what he does, and waits for it to be over, counting the seconds and trying to breathe through his nose.
>
> Finally, Caleb steps back and looks at him, and after a while, he looks back. And then Caleb does it again, this time holding his face between his hands, and he has that sensation he always had when he was a child and was being kissed, that his body was not his own,

> that every gesture he made was predetermined, reflex after reflex after reflex, and that he could do nothing but succumb to whatever might happen to him next. (314)

This citation opens with the metaphor of Caleb shaping his own body into a cage with his arms, trapping Jude's body. Being locked in a cage reconfigures intimacy in the act of a kiss, not pertaining to the kiss's often convivial nature but rather as trigger for a "sense of helplessness." Caleb's forced kiss in turn forces a recollection of what Brother Luke would tell Jude to do in the monastery, namely to do nothing but let his body be used. The abuse of the body triggers that body to do nothing but let the body be invaded by another body—"the inability to do anything else." Importantly, Jude's objectification of his body is done through the free-indirect narration of the action being described. With respect to this, Scarry notes that "The body tends to be brought forward in its most extreme and absolute form only on behalf of a cultural artifact or symbolic fragment or made thing (a sentence) that is without any other basis in material reality: that is, it is only brought forward when there is a crisis of substantiation" (1985: 127).

I introduced Scarry's argument concerning how it lies within the power of pain to destroy language, but here she offers a different perspective on that relationship, as language that distances itself from the body's material reality. A discursive act of objectification of the body—a body that does nothing and is thereby made available as an object to be acted upon—is accompanied by a description of disembodiment. The crisis of substantiation encompasses the erasure of everything except the body: the world and Jude's "very self." This involves the free-indirect narration that Jude's body is "not his own," which reifies the notion that the self, conceived as a linguistic construct, can negate and separate itself from the material reality of the body to which it is attached.

It is this combination of objectification and disembodiment coming together that is constituent of our understanding of the body as being in a state of helplessness. Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero considers the helpless through the Italian term for helpless, namely *inerme*: "As its etymology suggests, the 'helpless one' (l'inerme, literally 'the unarmed one') is he who does not bear arms and thus cannot harm, kill, or wound. But in everyday usage, rather than this incapacity to take the offensive, the term 'helpless' tends to designate a person who, attacked by an armed other, has no arms with which to defend himself" (2009: 30). Cavarero's description highlights the passivity and inability of the helpless to harm another body and the lack of arms to defend one's own. Both inabilities refer to the same initial incapacity, namely the

inability to weaponize one's body for either offensive or defensive purposes.

Simona Forti has further expounded on this notion of helplessness, which she calls the Dostoevskian paradigm, which she describes as "the clear distinction between the omnipotent action of the evil actor and the totally passive inaction of a subject who is deprived of any capacity to react" (119). In Forti's formulation, absolute polarization in the dispersal of power is the ground of the Dostoevskian division of evil demons versus absolute victims (35). Forti's paradigm presupposes a specific distribution of action among the involved parties, where perpetrators and abusers are necessarily the bodies that act *on* the bodies of the victims. Helplessness therefore becomes congruent with an absolute lack of bodily ability, with a body deprived of any capacity to act in its own defense, and which is thus the object of action and use by other bodies.

With respect to helplessness' etymological roots in taking up arms, Sara Ahmed elucidates how "There are two noun versions of the word "arm." The first derives from the Old English word for upper limb (*earm*), and from the Latin for shoulder (*armus*): the second derives from the Old French word "for weapons of a warrior" (*armes*) and from the Latin for tools of war (*arma*). These two senses meet in the idea of a meeting, as words for that which is fitted together" (2014: 192). The notion of bodies without arms, without the means to attack or defend ones that have arms, is implicitly but inevitably congruent with the notion of disability. A body without arms is unable to act in its own defense and is condemned to a state of helplessness. In my reading of Ahmed and Pascal, I noted that rebellious parts, which may be conceived of as either individuals or limbs, can be designated *as* rebellious when they do not submit to the will of the larger body of which they are, or are being made, a part. Helplessness, proposed here as the outcome of the combination of objectification and disembodiment, is understood as the passive and receptive pendant to acting as a rebellious part. It is the bodily state that is antithetical to action.

As the narrative continues, Caleb learns that Jude occasionally uses a wheelchair, to which Jude responds that he sometimes needs it but then adds, "Rarely. I don't use it that often." To which Caleb's responds, "Good, see that you don't" (319). During a meet-up for dinner in which Jude arrives in his wheelchair, Caleb says to Jude that he must clearly not be feeling well and calls it off. Caleb later elucidates his response to Jude's disability by tracing it back to his own ill parents, his father having had multiple sclerosis and his mother having an unknown disease:

> 'She had face pains, headaches: she was in a sort of constant low-grade discomfort, and although I don't doubt it was real, what bothered me so much is that she never seemed to *want* to try to get better. She

> just gave up, as did he. Everywhere you looked there was evidence of their surrender to illness: first canes, then walkers, then wheelchairs, then scooters, and vials of pills and tissues and the perpetual scent of pain creams and gels and who knows what else.' He stopped. 'I want to keep seeing you,' he said, at last. 'But—but I can't be around these accessories to weakness, to disease. I just can't. I hate it. It embarrasses me. It makes me feel—not depressed, but furious, like I need to fight against it.' He paused again. 'I just didn't know that's who you were when I met you,' he said at last. 'I thought I could be okay with it. But I'm not sure I can. Can you understand that?'
>
> He swallowed; he wanted to cry. But he could understand it; he felt exactly as Caleb did. 'I can,' he said. (320–321)

Illness is rhetorically conceived as something one *should* resist ('she never seemed to *want* to get better'), which is in turn connected to and contrasted with "giving up" and "surrendering" to illness. This sets up a divide between health and illness, whereby it is made implicit that the latter is a non-desirable bodily state. Caleb then moves to name different tools and technologies that may aid the sick or disabled body and extend functions that are considered to be lost or to lessen pain. Yet their very presence is congruent with the "surrender" to illness because they inevitably show a body unable to function the way it should on its own. Therefore, the presence of these items is described by Caleb as "accessories to disease" in contrast to, for example, accessories to health. Rather than making it possible for a body to regain lost functions or alleviate pain, they emphasize the body *not* being in a state of health and not being able to function without them.

Caleb's speech undermines other understandings of the relationship between health and illness, like imagining the possibility of being healthy while disabled, and furthermore proposes that health is a state in which one is free from illness and disability. As such, a disabled person could never be qualified as being healthy or lay claim to health. Caleb's attitude toward accessories to the body envisions a way of reading the body in which it must be readymade to function *without* the use of accessorial objects, since these are explicitly linked to illness. Yet as Scarry argues, it is not only sick or disabled bodies but all bodies that can imagine their accessorial relationship to objects, natural or artificial, as being extensions of those bodies: "Long before man extends himself out into the world by making other artifacts, he extends himself out into the world by holding onto a found object (stick, stone) that increases, extends, the length and strength of his arm" (1985: 173). The cruciality of

the ability of the imagination to establish this accessorial relationship to outside objects is elucidated further: “A person using a weapon or a tool can therefore take credit for, ‘experience’, a large alteration without himself ‘experiencing’ any direct bodily alteration; he experiences alteration without himself risking the aversiveness that ordinarily accompanies self-alteration; he objectifies his presence in the world through the alterability of the world” (175). In Caleb’s polemic, it is the body itself that is being imagined as an object that can be altered via the accessorial, turning Scarry’s statement inside out. Rather than referring to the alterability of the world, Caleb’s argument refers to a reading that suggests a definitive dependency of the body on accessories, where the “risk of self-alteration” that Scarry mentions becomes precisely what Caleb rejects.

Caleb’s assessment of the “accessories to weakness and disease” rests on it being a matter of preference, as he tells Jude: “I just didn’t know that’s who you were when I met you.” This sentence evokes a disabled body that is weak, incapable, and does not *want* to get better. By introducing the notion of what a disabled person *wants*, this in turn conceptualizes the use of the wheelchair as a matter of personal preference, which in turn is a choice *for* what is deemed weak. Later, Caleb tells Jude, “You’re disgusting. I couldn’t even look at you, not ever’ ” (334). This aesthetic judgement connects weakness with the evocation of disgust. In an essay that explores the role of taste in aesthetic judgement, Jerrold Levinson argues that “One’s taste, in the sense of personal preferences in matters aesthetic, arguably not only partly reveals who one is or what sort of person one is, but also partly constitutes who one is or what sort of person one is. Let us term the totality of such aesthetic preferences an aesthetic personality” (228). The aesthetic judgement as the ground on which Caleb can base his assertions is important precisely *because* it is subjective—to use a wheelchair becomes a matter of preference of how one wants to appear as the choice of one’s accessory, and thus contributes to one’s aesthetic personality. The relationship between weakness and disgust through one’s chosen accessories shapes an aesthetic personality that connotes everything that is not healthy or robust. Timothy Aubry has argued that: “To maintain that the aesthetic is inevitably impure is to recognise that it is not in fact categorically innocent. The aesthetic can and must be put to all kinds of uses, some more defensible than others” (20). One understanding of the impurity of the use of aesthetic judgement lies in its ability to be (ab)used as a determining ground for one’s tastes, whereby different qualities (perceived physical weakness and bodily disgust) may become connected. On the grounding of the judgement of taste, Sianne Ngai posits that:

> Even if one agrees with the judge of beauty, but in a way that becomes especially conspicuous if we disagree, her emphatic judgement's primary reference seems to be to itself, calling attention to itself as an emphatic judgement in a way that seems to make any other potential judge's response to that judgement (and thus the relationship between aesthetic judges) irrelevant to what the experience ultimately includes or means (2012: 169).

Our convictions regarding aesthetic judgement are based on its tautological argumentative structure (e.g., "It is beautiful because I think it is beautiful"). Ngai notes that the judgement of another aesthetic judge is ultimately irrelevant to what was included in the experience and judgement of the first aesthetic judge, since the secondary judgement can never fully refute the tautology of the first. The power of the tautological aesthetic judgement, therefore, is that it is inexhaustible. Though one could give supporting arguments for one's judgement, this does not necessarily derail or strengthen the proclaimed conviction, but it certainly further roots the position of the aesthetic judge with regard to the judged object or subject. As Scarry proposes, self-alteration may occur in the willing act of objectifying the body. But objectification itself may happen when a body becomes the object of aesthetic judgement.

4. Objectification and the Self-Harming Body

Moving from the way in which Jude's disabled body is aesthetically judged by other people, I now examine how Jude relates to and judges his own body. Previously, I discussed how objectification relates to the relationship between two different bodies; however, acts of objectification can also be applied to one's own body. I understand the combination of objectification and disembodiment as the act of perceiving one's body as object coupled with the notion that one's body is not one's own. The term objectification has been elucidated by Martha Nussbaum, for whom the main underlying idea of objectification is that "one is treating as an object what is not really an object" (257). That is to say, any act of objectification seemingly entails ways of reducing the subjectivity of the subject in favor of foregrounding what Nussbaum refers to as instrumentality (257). The "not really" part in the phrase "what is not really an object" concurrently establishes that any act of objectification necessarily involves the imagination, as one needs to imagine a human body as an object to which instrumentality can be assigned.

The overarching concept of instrumentality is pivotal because it accentuates the relationship an act of objectification has with an idea of purpose *for* the object, thus tying the act of objectification directly to the notion of use the object may have. As acts of objectification involve the body, the instances of the acts become the site of negation between subjectivity and objectification. In *Volatile Bodies* (1995), Elizabeth Grosz notes that “the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable” (20). This point of mediation is important in any act of objectification because it can implicitly establish an “inside/outside” conception of the body, where the subject resides within the body, thereby making it easier to objectify the body, since it becomes the outside, which is not only observable to outside parties but also an object with which those parties can engage.

Now how does the dynamic described above relate to a self that considers itself an object, as appears to be the case with Jude’s practice of self-harm? After having been raised in a monastery in his youth, Jude flees the monastery with Brother Luke, who, as mentioned above, prostitutes Jude in order to make money to stay at motels. In order to cope with being raped time and again, Luke teaches Jude how to cut himself:

> But then the brother said that he would teach him a secret, something that would help him relieve his frustrations, and the next day he had taught him to cut himself, and had given him a bag already packed with razors and alcohol wipes and cotton and bandages. ‘You’ll have to experiment to see what feels best,’ the brother had said, and had shown him how to clean and bandage the cut once he had finished. ‘So this is yours,’ he said, giving him the bag. ‘You let me know when you need more supplies, and I’ll get them for you.’ He had at first missed the theatrics, the force and weight, of his falls and his slams, but he soon grew to appreciate the secrecy, the control of the cuts. Brother Luke was right: the cutting was better. When he did it, it was as if he was draining away the poison, the filth, the rage inside him. It was as if his old dream of leeches had come to life and had the same effect, the effect he had always hoped it would. He wished he was made of metal, of plastic: something that could be hosed down and scrubbed clean. He had a vision of himself being pumped full of water and detergent and bleach and then blasted dry, everything inside him made hygienic again. (419)

The passage marks a series of important developments in comprehending the act of cutting. There is a transition in the way Jude harms himself, from slamming his body into walls, which he did in the monastery, to cutting into his own body. The theatrics of the slams and falls are contrasted by the secrecy and control that the cuts offer. These are decisively different techniques of undoing the body. When Jude slams his body into a wall, this is often narrated as being compulsive in nature and can be read as metonymic for a desire to break out of both the physical and social spaces that confine him. By contrast, cutting into the body necessarily involves the penetration of the body *by* an external object. The relevance of this change of orientation (body towards object, or object penetrating body) is that the act of penetration itself is congruent with the rape of Jude's many abusers. But the cutting differs in that it allows a modicum of control as to how much damage one wants to inflict and where and when one wants to inflict it, and ensures it can be a private act, whereas slamming one's body into an object may draw attention. One manifestation of objectification that Nussbaum suggests is violability, which involves the permissibility to break into the body perceived as an object (257). The treatment of the body as lacking boundary integrity, when it involves objectification of the self, here involves not the permissibility of the damaging of an external body but rather reasserts control to the acting subject since here control is asserted over one's own body through the act of cutting.

Whereas slamming his body is simply something Jude started doing himself, cutting is expressly narrated as something that he is taught. Through Brother Luke's offering that Jude should experiment with what "feels best," the cutting becomes readable as coping mechanism, as something that can contrast with the abuse done to his body by others. Self-harm as coping mechanism is *about* something, as it suggests that there is something that needs to be coped with. In a study that examines how different meanings are attributed to practices of self-harm, sociologist Kesherie Gurung writes that "Self-harm is obviously 'about' certain things; specifically, it is 'about coping' with 'things' that the individual finds overwhelming and feels self-harm is the best or only coping mechanism available" (34). The things that an individual finds overwhelming, that very individual may then experience as falling outside their control. The "aboutness" of self-harm therefore involves control over one's own body. In this scene, the aboutness of cutting has a different aesthetic concern: cleanliness. Cutting becomes connected to what would allow poison and filth to be washed away and allow Jude's body to become "hygienic again." Self-harm as coping mechanism thus functions as that practice whereby Jude is able to manage the "filth" his body has been exposed to through rape. Cutting here connotes bloodletting, the promise that Jude's body could be drained of filth and subsequently fully cleansed.

What the passage delineates is how abuse "sticks" to the body as affective residue, something that one cannot be cleansed of in the way one would wash filth of the body's surface. The incisions created by cutting are thus metonymically related to an act of cleansing because, through creating a physical incision, they allow "filth" to be spilled from a "dirty" body, even as this act cannot be final—affect cannot fully spill in this way.

In a study that examines different ways in which self-harm can be understood as having signification, Angela Failler has noted on repetitive cutting that it "tests and retests the skin's capacity for containment: Will it hold this time? Thus, cutting and marking the skin may be understood as an effort to define the self or the boundaries of the self, especially when one feels under threat of emotional disorganization or at risk of 'falling to pieces'" (16). Cutting as a way of testing, of at once testing the limits between the boundaries of self and body and whether the body "will hold," is simultaneously an act of reestablishing the boundaries of the body on one's own terms. While the practice of self-harm is concerned with regaining a sense of control over the body, through which the acting subject can distinguish autonomous control over the control of abusers, it is important to note that the body itself can do things (like "fall to pieces") over which the subject has no absolute control. Consequently, any act of self-harm posited as an exercise in bodily autonomy is always subsumed in what the body is already doing or affected by on its own accord.

This point is especially relevant in relation to both disability and decay. Disability may emphasize not only a limit of control over the body but also the inability to estimate how one's bodily capacities become abilities. Or, the limits of bodily capacities may become known only when that limit is somehow reached in practicing abilities. The subject whose body is disabling them does not choose how or where the limits of the disability are set. Similarly, a body that is in decay finds itself at the intersection of the struggle between the body itself trying to persevere while it is concurrently falling to pieces.

Some time after Jude's relationship with Caleb has ended, Willem finds himself becoming romantically attracted to Jude. After telling Jude about his attraction, Jude is initially startled and surprised, but the two enter into a romantic relationship. The narration details that:

> That night, though, as he lay in bed, he thanked his body for keeping itself in check, for controlling itself for so long. For those months he secretly thought of as his and Willem's courtship, he hadn't used his wheelchair once. His episodes had been seldom, and brief, and never

> in Willem's presence. He knew it was silly—Willem knew what was wrong with him, he had seen him at his worst—but he was grateful that as the two of them were beginning to view each other in a different way, he had been allowed a period of reinvention, a spell of being able to impersonate an able-bodied person. So when he was returned to his normal state, he didn't tell Willem about what had been happening to him—he was so bored by the subject that he couldn't imagine anyone else wouldn't be as well—and by the time Willem came home in March, he was more or less better, walking again, the wound once again mostly under control. (478)

If previously bodily capacity was linked to Jude's ability to hurt himself and exercise autonomy, this quote further explores the relationship between bodily capacity and control. The episodes of pain caused by Jude's legs that have been largely absent are here narrated as a matter of control—not as the subject controlling his own body (as in a sense of ownership or possession over the body), but as the body "controlling itself for so long." Control here implies not only a body that is free from pain, but a body that, because it is free from an experience of pain, manages to *behave* itself according to the subject's hopes and wishes, not because control over the body can actually be asserted by that subject. This lack of control is subsequently made congruent with disability, where the "spell of being able to impersonate an able-bodied person" inevitably connotes the degree of bodily capacity that one has control over.

The ability referred to in the phrase "able-bodied person" points to the connotation of a normative conception of bodily ability, of a body that is available to act free from pain and toward a normative conceptualization of the body. Ability in the phrase "being able to impersonate," meanwhile, points to a conception of ability that is dependent on the capacity of the disabled state of the body. It concerns the very need to pass as able-bodied in the first place, which is relevant *because* of Jude's disability since the disability might block that ability to pass. Thus, the success of such an impersonation relies on how well one is able to perform with one's body, which is in turn dependent on how much a disability is "under control." Tobin Siebers has noted how such an act of impersonation is called "passing," the successful act of the disabled individual who passes as abled: "Passing is possible not only because people have sufficient genius to disguise their identity but also because society has a general tendency to repress the embodiment of difference" (2004: 3). I do not necessarily link the repression of the "embodiment of difference" to Willem but rather to Jude

himself. His own boredom at the effects of his disability is projected onto Willem as something that would also bore another person.

Jude being thankful *for* his body itself signals the interval between objectification and embodiment. To be thankful for one's body for staying under one's control connotes that the disabled body is on the cusp of losing control. Since the control referred to here is not the subject's control *over* the body, the body's control *of itself* suggests that there is a decisive interval between the body's capacity for agency and the subject's power to direct that body. Earlier in this chapter, I examined how both Ahmed and Pascal argued that bodily parts can be interpreted as being willful, as not subjugating to the demands of the whole of the body. But this conception of the body as being rebellious (because it does not submit to do what one wants it to do) implicitly extends (separate) agency to the body itself, while at the same time one still embodies it. Jude being grateful of his body distances himself from that body, since thanking *it* differentiates the body from necessarily coinciding *with it*. Here, the act of objectification of the body alludes to the inevitability of having to be embodied, depicting that pain and the lack of bodily control that may accompany disabled embodiment cannot always be a matter of choice.

In an article that explores the relationship between embodied action and how bodies are enacted, Annemarie Mol and John Law ask: "We all *have* and *are* a body. But there is a way out of this dichotomous twosome. As part of our daily practices, *we also do (our) bodies*. In practice we enact them. If the body we *have* is the one known by pathologists after our death, while the body we *are* is the one we know ourselves by being self-aware, then what about the body we *do*?" (45). The way of relating to the body by *having* it and *being* it has, in my discussion of the novel, been connected to objectification and embodiment, respectively. "Doing" one's body, according to Mol and Law, involves enacting that body.

The recurrent tension that arises in the previously discussed scenes can be understood as the interval that exists between the ability to exercise control over one's body and the capacity to enact that body itself, to "do" one's body in the first place. A particular conception of decay is relevant in developing an understanding of that interval, which is delineated by Cavarero (2002):

> Thus, if action, in the crucial form of killing—regardless of the promise of intention of revenge—is always an act of the body, suicide is also such an act. Even that which, with self-procured death, robs action of its necessary bodily dimension, is itself an action. Here we may

> also discern that the choice is between consciously robbing oneself (or another person) of life by an act of the body, or dying (entering nonbeing) by the internal bodily decay that is completely independent of our will … It is exactly the expectation of this internal decay that opens up the space of inaction. (132).

The "space of inaction" that is opened, according to Cavarero, consists of the interval (or expectation) between bodily action and the internal bodily decay that consequently sets the limit on the very possibility of bodily action. Cavarero points to an important difference between action and inaction in that she asserts decay as being "completely independent of our will," which suggests that bodily action is generally considered to be primarily directed by the will of the subject. Thus, even acts of apparent harm to the body, such as self-harm or suicide, are still directed acts, and it is their status as directed acts that allows one to distinguish them from being understood as a form of decay, since decay is an involuntary process. But as I have argued earlier, the ability to act is always reliant on bodily capacity, which is in turn determined by the state of bodily decay, as the quote shows. This also makes decay congruent with disability, as the more decayed a body is, the more disabling it becomes to enact the body. The question that remains to be explored from Cavarero's quote is how decay "opens" a space of inaction. This phrasing suggests that decay, while diminishing the bodily capacity to act, is generative of something else, which allows me to question what that space of inaction may be.

5. Disability, Decay, and the Abject

To expound on the generative potential that is opened up by decay, I want to further examine the tension between action and inaction in the body. In his *Aesthetics of Ugliness* (2015 [1853]), the German philosopher Karl Rosenkranz offers an expansive overview of aesthetic categories and judgements associated with the ugly, including decay. For Rosenkranz, decay is a repulsive sight because it shows us a form that was once self-determining and in control of its basic presuppositions surrendering to the elementary powers it once appeared to dominate. This is repulsive because it is a paradox of apparent freedom existing in a state of unfreedom through disintegration (117). Repulsion for Rosenkranz is that which "repels us from itself, in that it awakes distaste through its clumsiness, horror through its deadness, and disgust through its hideousness" (173). Decay, which is a constraint on the freedom of bodily capacity, or

freedom in unfreedom, is generative in that it forces us to react aesthetically to that body, in that it affects us with repulsion—decaying bodies drive other bodies away.

A Little Life takes up the question of how a person can be affectively expelled from their *own* body. As Jude grows older, his body slowly starts to atrophy and degenerate as a result of his disability:

> As he had grown older, the wounds—their frequency, their severity, their size, the level of discomfort that attended them—had grown steadily worse. Long gone, decades gone, were the days in which he was able to walk any great distance when he had them ... When he was younger, it might take a few weeks for one to heal. But now it took months. Of all the things that were wrong with him, he was the most dispassionate about these sores; and yet he was never able to accustom himself to their very appearance. And although of course he wasn't scared of blood, the sight of pus, of rot, of his body's desperate attempt to heal itself by trying to kill part of itself still unsettled him even all these years later. (583)

The narrative relates how the wounds on Jude's legs grow in size and severity, which connotes and strengthens the lack of control Jude has over his body that was explored in the previous section. These wounds can be contrasted to Jude's cutting as they are not the result of Jude's inflicting these wounds upon himself but rather an effect of Jude's progressive disability. The wounds' affective force is related through Jude's inability to "accustom himself to their very appearance." This inability to relate to what his body does emphasizes the lack of enactment of the body, as enactment of the body faces a limit in its decay, having to reckon with the body's deterioration and subsequently one's increasing lack in capacity to enact the body as one wants. Jude's unsettlement evoked by "his body's desperate attempt to heal itself by trying to kill part of itself" connects this affect to the lack of Jude's ability to enact the body. It is his bodily affective response to a body that is experienced as being at odds with itself. For to save itself by killing a part of itself shows how the body is interpreted as a persevering whole that is stopping the wrong parts (the wounds) from dissolving the bodily whole.

The affective force ushered by the onset of decay thus depicts Jude's inability to reckon with his emaciating body. This inability to relate to one's decaying body in turn makes decay legible as being abject. Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), has elucidated the abject as follows:

> When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object* … What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I (1).

In Rozenkranz's account of repulsion, repulsion affectively distances the repulsed subject in its capacity to evoke distaste or horror. By contrast, the abject in Kristeva's formulation is neither purely epistemological nor affective in nature, but rather, as she writes, something that can beset a self. Her conceptualization of the abject as something that besets a self resists a notion of the abject as something (an object) from which one could distance oneself in order to retain one's autonomy, and therefore retain a distance through one's autonomy in relation to what would be considered abject. The abject is that which is opposed to an I because it violates autonomy, which Kristeva goes on to expound as that which is against myself: "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). Kristeva's choice of verbs strongly connotes the separation of a self from a body, yet as shown in the previous quote, Kristeva does not consider the abject as having a proper or defined object by which a self could contrast it. Since there is an I that necessarily experiences itself as being expelled *from* itself, in the logic of the abject the I is concurrently partly established through such bodily expulsion, as the I is necessarily embodied. Kristeva explains this bodily dimension of the abject further:

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. (3)

Kristeva's distinction here between death, which is not necessarily abject, and bodily decay, which *is* abject, relies on the possibilities of how one can relate to death. Signified death, such as death as being signified by an image, allows one to conceptualize

death as a sign and thereby relate to it as an object. In contrast, decay does not allow one to "understand, react, or accept," as the body extricates itself from the border of still being alive, or as formulated in the previous quotation, the body's "desperate attempt to heal itself by trying to kill part of itself." For Kristeva, "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). The abject in relation to disability is therefore not so much tied to the extent to which Jude identifies as disabled, but rather that the abject destabilizes what can be expected of the body, thereby also destabilizing one's imagination of one's bodily capacity.

As Jude's body deteriorates further, his physical incapacity increases his inability to walk long distances. What I read as abject about that experience is his inability to react and accept this decrease in his ability. By this I do not mean an outright refusal of having to reckon with decreased physical ability, as such a conceptualization would turn the decrease itself into an object to which one could relate. Since the abject is that which destabilizes borders, it destabilizes the horizons of what Jude can even imagine his body as being capable of. To feel as if one knows one's bodily capacity, or to have a clear conception of one's limits, already posits that capacity as something that is framed and bordered. Kristeva's "twisted braid of thoughts and affect" that defines the abject should be understood as disrupting the borders of what is knowable about one's body, and allowing for an understanding of decay as that which is experienced as increasingly *disabling*, rather than a homeostatic conception of disabled embodiment.

In the two essays Kristeva has published on disability, she does not explicitly tie disability to the abject. Kristeva argues for a way of relating to people with disabilities that substitutes the term "integration" for the to her preferable "interaction," as the latter "expresses a politics that has become an ethics" (2010: 256). She goes on to relate that disability "awakens a catastrophic anxiety that in turn leads to defensive reactions of rejection, indifference, or arrogance, when not the will to eradicate by euthanasia" (257–258). For Kristeva, this anxiety is produced because "the disabled person opens a *narcissistic identity wound* in the person who is not disabled; he inflicts a threat of *physical or psychical death*, fear of collapse, and, beyond that, the anxiety of seeing the *very borders of the human species* explode" (251). Kristeva's language here evokes a kind of infectious metonymy: exposure to disability opens a wound in the non-disabled, but this wounding itself is a kind of disabling of the non-disabled subject. Furthermore, if disability holds the power to "explode" the borders of the human species, this begs the question of how Kristeva's approach to disability relates to the abject, given that the abject is characterized by its destabilization of borders,

as we saw earlier. Kristeva evokes congruency between disability and the awareness disabled people have of their own mortality, and she argues that disability is often perceived as deficit: "The so-called solitude of the disabled person has inevitably an absolute companion, a permanent body double: the pain of mortality. Even if this person is not sick, even if they do not feel specific pains, their disabilities remind them permanently—them or at least those around them if the deficit deprives them of consciousness—that they are not like others who are able to live in denial about their mortality" (2013: 122).

Josh Dohmen has commented the following on Kristeva's conception of disability: "when Kristeva attributes isolation and awareness of mortality to disabled subjects, it is unclear whether this is her isolation and awareness of mortality or that of disabled others. Abjection in the face of disability renders any such determination unstable." (772). Linking Kristeva's conceptualization of disability to that of the abject, Dohmen argues that being confronted with disability becomes linked to abjection through the expulsion by the non-disabled other. Moreover, disability conceived as abject renders it unclear where such expulsion begins or ends. Criticism of Kristeva's approach to disability is also offered by Jan Grue, who writes that "when arguing that human vulnerability is visible in its most prominent and disturbing aspect in the bodies of disabled people, Kristeva is simultaneously implying that vulnerability is a totalizing characteristic of the disabled experience" (53). I acknowledge Grue's critique that Kristeva's continued emphasis on vulnerability and mortality in relation to disability may be problematic in that it risks strengthening the notion of disability as something undesirable or weak because vulnerable. However, my reading of *A Little Life* shows that this novel *does* relate to its reader a narrative wherein pain and infirmity become explicitly connected to disability. Furthermore, it allows for a reading where disability becomes conceived as abject because of its congruence with the decay of the disabled body itself. The power of the abject in decay destabilizes the borders of disability in such a way that disability's disabling effects on the can no longer be a matter of accurate estimation.

The infection in Jude's legs persists, and the intensity of treatments increases, but these fail as Jude continues to lose weight, grows weaker, and his ability to walk is almost completely gone while the pain in his legs never recedes. Andy suggests amputating Jude's legs in order to avoid the possibility that Jude may potentially develop sepsis, to which Jude eventually concedes. Willem then dies in a car accident in which Jude is not involved, leaving him behind. Jude does not see a reason to continue living without Willem, and he starts to eat less and less, drugging himself to sleep through his days, his life reaching its nadir. As Jude goes through the motions of his life, the narrative emphasizes simple actions and events:

> He gets up, he totters downstairs. He swims, but poorly, slowly. And then he comes back upstairs, he makes himself breakfast. He sits and eats it, staring into the apartment, the newspapers folded on the table beside him. He opens his mouth, he inserts a forkful of food, he chews, he swallows. He keeps his movements mechanical, but suddenly he thinks of how grotesque a process it is, putting something into his mouth, moving it around with his tongue, swallowing down the saliva-clotted plug of it, and he stops. Still, he promises himself: I will eat, even if I don't want to, because I am alive and this is what I am to do. But he forgets, and forgets again. (683)

The list-like quality evoked by the series of actions the scene relates is elucidated by the logic related at the end of the quote. Eating when one does not want to is accompanied by the act of eating anyway, because one is alive and this is what a person who is alive does. Not wanting to eat is a willful and positive negation, since while it is a negation of an action (eating), it is concurrently a desire—a desire not to eat anymore. This negating want is willful because it is subjugated to the will ("I will eat," "I don't want to"), and this will in turn is connected to the logic of being alive, which encompasses eating in order to continue living. The quote also relates how this situation is judged as being grotesque. Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund elucidate how the grotesque can involve extravagance, "to be wasteful and excessive," as well as a "lack of moderation" (71). Food getting stuck down the throat can be read as being metonymically connected to Edwards' and Gralund's reading of the grotesque as being extravagant. But here, the swallowing of the food as something that gets stuck is grotesque because Jude does not *want* to eat; what has become excessive is the will of wanting to live. What is judged as wasteful and excessive follows the inverse logic of what otherwise would generally be deemed moderate, the simple necessity of eating. Jude's actions appear grotesque to himself as his own denial of a negating want, of not wanting to eat, is subjugated to the will of staying alive.

Earlier, I explored how Jude understood his body as killing part of himself to save himself. Here, the will to eat subjugates the want not to eat, the desire to stop eating, and thus the desire not to be alive. Decay thereby involves a particular type of struggle, the struggle of the body that occurs when it, or part of it, has given up and is simultaneously still subject to the striving of being alive and remaining alive. A body in conflict with itself when undergoing decay becomes affectively marked through *exhaustion*, which finds its etymological root in *exhaustus*: to be drawn off or used up. A used-up body is a body that comes to see its desires, its wants, to be subservient to

the body's innate striving to push on. To push on, the body moves from one action to another (sitting, opening the mouth, chewing, swallowing), where the representation of the registration of these otherwise ordinary actions emphasizes the exhaustion that stems from being subjugated to the bodily will of staying alive. As became clear from the quote by Cavarero, decay opens the space of inaction, or disuse, of the body. But not only does inaction lead to decay, but decay simultaneously involves the question of how a body can be disused in the first place, since in its striving to persevere the body necessarily enacts itself. In this striving to persevere and preserve itself, a subject that desires the body's own negation, the desire not to use that body any further, now transforms the relationship to the body into a site of struggle, since this too involves a lack of control over the persistent bodily will to stay alive.

For Kristeva, abjection was marked by it being a bodily state in which borders are transgressed, where the "I" is expelled while it is concurrently established in that act of expulsion, and as such, abjection is defined by its ambiguity. As the body extricates itself in decay, it becomes an object insofar as that is *not* an act of willing bodily objectification. Nussbaum's understanding of objectifying the body was marked by its instrumentality, the notion of using the body toward some end. Objectification therefore necessarily preemptively understands the body as having a degree of capacity to be enacted, including to be turned or turn itself into an object. When the body becomes an object in its own decay, this does not follow the same logic of objectification. Since abjection does not know an object to which it relates, it has a different way of relating to what is considered an object. Sara Ahmed argues that "objects become abject only insofar as they threaten the identity of the 'subject,' of 'who I am' or 'who we are.' As such, the border object 'stands in for' the threat of the 'not' to the 'I' or the threat that the 'I' might become the 'not'" (2005: 103). From this argument it would follow that, since decay is marked by the body negating itself, the body itself is the threat of the not. But what is so provocative about Jude's reaction to his own decay is not that his body is failing him, but rather that it does not fail him *enough*. Abjection is not the decaying body standing in for the I becoming the not, since the not, the not wanting to eat, is itself what is desired and subsequently negated by the body. The not that is negated, or the "myself" that is extricated from the body as it is constituted, is a self that desires its own negation. Decay is marked as an understanding of a body that finds its capacity to enact itself waning, including how it might choose to objectify itself, and subsequently limits how a subject wishes to embody that body in the liminal situation that decay affords.

6. Conclusion

I have not only followed the narrative of *A Little Life* as it tells the story not just of how a disabled body becomes used and abused time and again, but I have also traced how that use and abuse concerns the person whose body it involves and his attempts to assert a modicum of bodily autonomy through the act of self-harm, while cutting concurrently incapacitated Jude's body further, besetting a state of decay. My reading of *A Little Life* should not be understood as offering either a therapeutics or a pathology of disability and decay, but rather an argument for how these concepts can destabilize the ways in which bodily capacity turns into bodily ability. It is through this destabilization that decay becomes generative in its evocation of affect, both in the body it concerns as well as the bodies that need to relate to it. Rather than decoupling pain from disability, the novel narrates episodes of pain that involve Jude's disability, and those grow increasingly worse over time as his body deteriorates further.

One way of reading the novel's ending, which closes with Jude committing suicide, could also be interpreted as a simplistic synecdoche for the narrative arch as a whole, that for some individuals life does not "get better." Such simplicity of the narrative's ending is contrasted by the complexity of what such an ending may disclose to its reader. If life does not get better, what *does* it do when it gets worse? One of the things *A Little Life* importantly does is resist the narrative of overcoming, which would be Jude prevailing over the events that happened to him, prevailing over his disability, and would involve him being restored back to physical and mental health as the people around him would see fit—even while some of these people do love and care for him. I read the novel's ending as resistance, as an overcoming *of* overcoming, as resistance to the need or desire for a story to end in what might traditionally be conceived of as a "happy end." In a study and critique of the concept of happiness, Sara Ahmed writes that "It is not just that we can be happy *about* something, as a feeling in the present, but some things become happy *for us*, if we imagine they will bring happiness *to us*" (2010: 26). The term happy end involves the desire of a story to conclude by bringing happiness to its reader, delivering her from the conflict and drama that the novel entailed. As Ahmed explains, happiness is often regarded as the "end of all ends" (26), and as such, the desire of the happy end subjugates the story to being instrumental in offering a saccharine conclusion. The overcoming *of* overcoming, however, should not be equated with unhappiness or even with an unhappy ending. Moreover, one of the issues raised by the absence of a happy end is that we may be inclined to start thinking of happiness and unhappiness in binary terms, where the absence of the first would necessarily involve the emergence of the second.

What I have aimed to make legible through my reading of *A Little Life* is the way in which it offers understanding and insight into "difficult" subjects, such as objectification and decay, as valued alternatives to the pleasurable sensation evoked by a happy end. In terms of its affordances, I have aimed to elucidate several concepts and the relationships between these concepts that the novel engages with through its vast narrative. While many aspects of the novel have been purposefully left untreated in my reading (including matters pertaining to issues of economics and class, race, religion, and gender), given that one of this novel's concerns involves how the disabled body is culturally made and unmade, I want to suggest that stories concerning disabled bodies do not need a happy ending, i.e., an acceptance of or coming to terms with disability as the novel's conclusion, or alternatively, a restoration back to normative health. Instead, stories that diverge from overcoming have much to offer and teach us concerning how we continuously culturally shape, relate, and think through our bodies. As the concept of disability allows me to think through the values and insights a lack of satisfaction in the absence of a happy end affords, in the next chapter I will consider how disability's affordances to rupture life may connote dissatisfaction and what the affordances of disruption may involve.

CHAPTER 4

Disruption

1. Disability and the Affordances of Disruption

In the previous chapters, several instances were already given of disability's potential to disrupt. When Jane Eyre reunited with Rochester toward the end of the novel, Rochester did not know how to relate to Jane after becoming disabled. His anxiety concerning his new condition ruptured not only their ability to relate their past experiences to one another but also disrupted the process of communicating the shared anxiety felt during their reunion. Similarly, when Treves' wife Ann heard about Merrick's hope that his mother could see him with his new friends in *The Elephant Man*, the scene was ruptured by the friend in question becoming affectively overwhelmed and subsequently retreating from the scene. In *A Little Life*, after aiding Jude in moving down a fire escape to break into their own apartment, Willem witnesses Jude wincing in pain afterwards, unable to help him or relieve this pain, disrupting both his desire and ability to be of further help.

My point here is not to propose a deductive line of reasoning that would claim that disability necessarily disrupts social relations wherever it appears. Rather, I argue that *when* disability is disruptive, it draws our attention to the formal characteristics of the genre it is disrupting, e.g., a soliloquy, a situation, a narrative, etc. This affordance of disability to disrupt might seem to indicate that the forms of relationality that it disrupts are already outlined before the disruption happens. In this chapter, I argue and explore the opposite: that disruption's potential with regard to disability lies in its ability to make a relationality's formal characteristics legible through the analysis of different aesthetic forms and genres.

I examine two aesthetic forms used to mediate and represent relationality to disability, namely situational narrative and lyric poetry. These two forms are not fully opposite in how they may represent experiences of disability, as poems can possess narrative aspects and narratives may have qualities commonly associated with poetry. While lyric poetry and narrative may share certain features, I argue for the importance of some of their differences. This is primarily connected to the temporality of these genres. Whereas narrative recounts a sequence of actions and events, lyric poetry, because it is necessarily recited and overheard in the present, itself constitutes an event.

With the first case study of this chapter, Katharine Weber's novel *Still Life with Monkey* (2018), I argue how the narrativization of experiences of disability mediates the continuous adjustment to everyday life. This results in a dominant affective experience of dissatisfaction with one's life as a situational narrative that ultimately does not find a restitution but rather stresses the importance effort comes to take in living everyday life. I then move on to reading two lyric poems by Laurie Clements Lambeth. The poems' formal characteristics represent, apostrophically invoke, and disrupt the effort that is often connected to relating the experience of living with disability, implicating the reader's effort in turn. I argue that these poems' affordances of disruption can be read as a negation of narrative's dominant sequential ordering of the disabled experience that ends up requiring a "resolution" to living with disability. Simultaneously, my reading of these poems emphasizes the effort the apostrophic power to enunciate requires from the poet, disrupting a preemptive conception of seamless enunciation.

In his study *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, (1997) sociologist Arthur W. Frank offers a typology of illness narratives and defines what he calls the restitution narrative as consisting of the following basic elements: "The plot of the restitution has the basic storyline: 'Yesterday I was healthy, today I'm sick, but tomorrow I'll be healthy again'" (77). These three elements not only emphasize the temporal nature of the restitution narrative, but they are also a way of organizing the experience of illness. While illness and disability are different concepts, Frank's elucidation of the restitution narrative is relevant to disability studies because its ordering of events may be applied to disability as well. Frank notes that: "The restitution story is about remaking the body in an image derived either from its own history before illness or from elsewhere" (87). Thus, restitution narratives rely upon the desire to restore the ill or disabled body back to normative health, which according to Frank is constituted by the fact that illness itself necessarily signals the mortality of the subject: "What needs to be staved off is the deeper contingency represented by illness itself: the contingency of mortality. Any sickness is an intimation of mortality, and telling sickness as a restitution story forestalls that intimation" (85). In Frank's analysis, the telling of the restitution story itself functions as a disruption of the intimation of mortality. This intimation is disrupted because the restitution of the story (getting healthy again) is also often the *resolution* of the story.

But there comes a risk with designing a typology like Frank's. This risk, he states, is "creating yet another 'general unifying view' that subsumes the particularity of individual experience" (76). Such a general unifying view would rest upon a deductive line of reasoning mentioned earlier, as well as in the introductory chapter of this study:

examples are employed in order to recognize and formulate a pattern upon which a theory or typology such as Frank's can be built. Frank's defense for constructing such a typology is that the "originality" of an illness is not deprecated by it, because the three different narrative types he defines intertwine (the other two being the Quest and Chaos narrative) (76).[1] Furthermore, the restitution plot in particular is founded on the simple observation that many illness narratives are focused toward "getting well."

Typologies like Frank's bear a resemblance to the pathological patterns sought out under the medical model of disability, in that the presence of similarities between perceived disabilities may allow for the construction of a new classification or the removal of an older, outdated one. An important distinction here is that, whereas disabilities are dominantly perceived as being "natural" (that is, related to occurrences that happen in the body or mind), narratives instead fall under the umbrella of the artificial, as the constructed stories of human beings. In the telling title of his essay *Who put The* The *in the* Novel? (2002) disability studies scholar Lennard J. Davis traces the shaping of the (predominantly) realist novel as historically converging with the modern conceptualization of the normal/abnormal dichotomy (92). This simultaneous development coalesced into pervasive normative tendencies in the novel's form. According to Davis, "The novel as a form relies on cure as a narrative technique." He expounds this as the realist novel's tendency to have its characters go through moral transformations and "cure" the plot of its "abnormal initiating events" (98). Elsewhere, Davis writes that "People in disability studies have learned to be suspicious of this paradigm because it seems to be one of the master plots of an ableist culture. Nondisabled people apparently can't get enough of this narrative fix, but those of us in disability studies look cautiously at any disability whose narrative turn automatically follows this pattern" (2013: 66).

Narrative's insistence to find a resolution, or in Davis' words, a "cure," is based on the fact that, by simply being present, narratives make us desire to know what happens next. D.A. Miller points out in his study *Narrative and its Discontents* (1981) that narrative possesses a tendency to keep going yet ultimately lacks finality. He concludes that "For the production of narrative—what we called the narratable—is possible only within a logic of insufficiency, disequilibrium, and deferral, and tradi-

1 Frank designates chaos narratives as "anti-narratives" (98), and as stories that would resist mediation. Yet, by giving examples and representations of such stories, this claim may be contested. Quest narratives, meanwhile, concern those stories which are concerned with the "journey" of coming to relate to one's illness differently as the story progresses.

tional novelists typically desire worlds of greater stability and wholeness than such a logic can intrinsically provide" (265). In affective terms, the presence of a narrative situation can be understood as propelling its audience toward its resolution based on this desire toward narrative's ultimate wholeness. Peter Brooks proposes that "Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire" (61). A narrative must reach a conclusion in order for it to be satisfactory. Inversely, unfinished or disrupted stories may evoke dissatisfaction. As I read in both Frank's and Davis's arguments, narrative accounts impose structure on a sequence of actions and events (life before the disability, the disabling event, life with disability), but this structure also forces the complexity given in experience to conform to narrative's genre constraints.

If narratives predominantly mediate experience in order to converge the series of its depicted actions and events towards a resolution, I argue that this can be contrasted with forms of representation that are *situational* in nature. If the events in a restitution narrative can be considered hierarchical in nature in that they culminate toward the acme of the plot, my argument is that in situational narratives events happen in a paratactic, or horizontal, manner. In a situation, arranging events in a hierarchical manner is complicated precisely because the relevance attributed to events implies that they do not work toward apotheosis. In a situational narrative, I argue, disruptions occur and are experienced over and over by the characters of that narrative in living both in the situation and continuously adjusting to it.

A contemporary approach that argues against the neat structuring of traumatic events can be found in Lauren Berlant's study *Cruel Optimism* (2011). One of the characteristic features of what they call "the historical sense of the present," is that it is "perceived, first, affectively: the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else, such as an orchestrated collective event or an epoch on which we can look back" (2). According to Berlant, our shared ideas of what it could mean to live the "good life" are in our contemporary present marked by an impasse: a situation in which no apparent progress seems possible. Whatever fantasies we may hold of the good life, these fantasies are lived and felt in the present. Such fantasies, imbued with hope and a feeling of optimism that things "could get better" and move beyond the impasse, themselves become objects of attachment which we nourish and cling onto. This explains the title of the book, because cruel optimism "exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). The complexity of the good life fantasy is rooted in the fact that, as a form of desire, such optimism is accompanied by "dread, anxiety, hunger, curiosity, the whole gamut from the sly neutrality of browsing the aisles to excitement at the prospect of 'the change that's gonna

come'" (2), making optimism itself not necessarily feel optimistic. Since Berlant's argument takes the historical present as being lived in the everyday, they contrast their work explicitly with that done in trauma theory,[2] as the latter takes as its point of departure a rupturing event that allows for the bifurcation of a "before" and "after" period formally similar to the restitution narrative. Berlant's focus on the impasse is founded upon the notion that crises can become stretched out and experienced over a longer period of time that is therefore not an exception to ordinary daily life, but rather *becomes* it.

The nature of a sustained and self-perpetuating crisis integrated into daily life makes Berlant focus on what they define as a situation: "A situation is a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event" (5). A situation is marked by its focus on orientation and a fleeting sense of passage: a state of affairs that *could* come to matter, but not necessarily so. The "animated and animating suspension" of such a state of affairs shows how that suspension itself is felt in the present, as it lies on the cusp of becoming what we could dub "an event," wherein the designation of something *as* an event would rupture the perpetual impasse that was posed by the situation in the first place. Situations allow themselves to be stretched out over a longer time, where the suspension here is not the same kind of suspense found in the restitution narrative. There, the suspense lies in the decisive event in which a disabling and disruptive event will be restored, creating a longing for resolution. In the situation the sense of suspense lies in what may turn out to become designated as an event in the first place, constituted by its trademark sense of indirection and indecisiveness. Berlant's theory thereby seeks to undermine the way in which fantasies of upward mobility project a promise that, since that promise is lived in the present, does not necessarily come to unfold. What may or may not become recognized as an event remains to be seen, and even when it does become recognized as such, its impact is not predetermined. Berlant delineates the relationship the situation has with genre in the following way:

> As Fredric Jameson would argue, the activity of living within and beyond normative activity gets embedded in form, but I am less interested in the foreclosures of form and more in the ways the activity of

2 Particularly the work of Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996).

> being historical finds its genre, which is the same as finding its event. Adjustments to the present are manifest not just in what we conventionally call genre, therefore, but in more explicitly active habits, styles, and modes of responsivity. (20)

The "activity of being historical" finding its genre can be connected to narrative's constituency of a series of actions and events, which constructs a history. Narrative as genre thus "finds it event" as that event becomes historical when told in a narrative. Berlant is keen to point out that adjustments to the present are manifest "not just" in what we could call a genre (like narrative), but also in the habits and styles through which we respond through living in that present. I argue for and delineate a nuance of Berlant's claim. Different genres allow for different styles and modes of responsivity to manifest themselves. Since in the situational narrative events do not necessarily culminate toward a resolution of plot, Berlant distinguishes between their use of the terms "event" and "happening" within situational genres. Happening refers to the narrative's tracking of what may become designated as an event. However, Berlant adds that even when something becomes recognized as an event, "there is no *a priori* consequence, habit, or style of resonance that intensifies the ordinary in a particular way" (80).

Berlant's distancing themselves from the "foreclosures of form" mentioned earlier should not be understood as a distancing of formalism altogether. Elsewhere, referring to Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) and Michael Snediker's *Queer Optimism* (2008), Berlant notes that "*Cruel Optimism* is a more formalist work than either of these projects. Here, optimism manifests in attachments and the desire to sustain them: attachment is a *structure* of relationality" (13). The kind of formalism Berlant is interested in, closely resembling the interest of this study, lies in the formal aspects of "active habits, styles, and modes of responsivity," precisely because their inherent relationality allows us to make legible the ways in which relationships of attachment gain form.

Scholarly work on the relationship between cruel optimism and disability is limited, and it has so far focused on how common promises connected to disability consist of "citizenship, empowerment, community, social action and a route out of, or protection from, poverty" (Runswick-Cole et al. 2015: 163), as well as on the relationship between disabled people and the International Symbol of Access (Fritsch, 2013: 135), where the latter would promise access and participation. These studies elevate cruel optimism's analytical lens in order to study systemic promises of upward mobility that people with disabilities are subjected to, but they lose the focused scope of the

analysis of adjustment to the present in everyday life that Berlant's own work is interested in, on which I also focus.

In what follows, I will not analyze the notion of disruption through a narratological lens emphasizing what events would be disrupting in a story, which would follow the restitution narrative model discussed above. My line of analysis follows Berlant's approach to the extent that the analysis of modes of adjustment to the present through different genres allows me to examine how and where the affective lives of the characters involved become disrupted through the situational narrative of living with disability. In this conceptualization, disruption is thus not understood as a single, larger, rupturing event, but rather as a series of smaller ruptures that occur in relation to attachments to fantasies of the good life via the situational genre.

2. Dissatisfaction: The Affective Tonality of Disability's Situational Narrative

I delineated the situational narrative as concerning a state of affairs characterized by its animated and animating suspension, which produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may eventually become an event. In order to examine how situational narratives represent the adjustments to everyday life with disability, I take as my first case study Katharine Weber's novel *Still Life with Monkey*. Weber's novel follows the life of a middle-aged, well-to-do American couple, Duncan and Laura Wheeler, when Duncan becomes a quadriplegic after a car accident. Laura convinces Duncan to get the help of a trained capuchin helper monkey, named Ottoline, as they adjust to their new life with Duncan's disability; hence the novel's title. In contrast with the plot-driven restitution narrative, the novel is not concerned with the fantasy that Duncan's condition will get "better," since any such possibility or prognosis is removed from the outset. Rather, the principal fantasy that the novel is concerned with is the possibility to adjust and come to terms with the situation of living life as a quadriplegic, for Duncan to come to accept his new condition.

In its opening chapter, the novel details a scene depicting Duncan's new situation, as Laura shows one of Duncan's Personal Care Assistants (PCA's), Martha, their garden. The state of the garden is described as follows: "Nothing out there had been touched in four months, except the little patches of grass in front and back which got mowed too short by the indifferent lawn care jockey who came too often and charged too much" (10). This is closely followed by a description of Duncan's reaction:

> He couldn't bear to watch Laura showing Martha the ruined garden. Duncan hated the way he felt like an abandoned child at these moments, left out, spying pathetically on the grown-ups he depended on for everything. How could anyone expect him to get used to living this way? Who would be satisfied, who would think this was enough of a life? (11)

The scene combines Duncan's physical inability to tend to the garden and its poor state with his affective inability to bear Laura showing the garden to Martha, of which he is not a part. What is suspended in this situation is Duncan's condition, which will not improve. The situation's sense of emergence, meanwhile, is proposed through the questions posed in the scene: "How could anyone expect him to get used to living this way?" and "Who would be satisfied, who would think *this* was enough of a life?" The questions are not directly posed by Duncan, however, but by the narrator, making them instances of free indirect speech. Both questions refer to the situation (living *this* way, who would think *this* was enough), and thereby establish the *tone* of the situation.

I.A. Richards posited the concept of tone as the attitude of the speaker to the listener: "He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate recognition of his relation to them. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing" (182). The rhetorical tone of the questions does not directly relate Duncan's thoughts but instead establishes the tone of the situation *because* of their inability to be answered in a straightforward fashion, while their referential nature aids in establishing the situation *qua* situation, a new state of affairs that unfolds because Duncan finds it unbearable to have become dependent. In *Ugly Feelings* (2005), Sianne Ngai traces the development of the concept of literary tone and expands on this concept as follows: "It should be clear that by 'tone' I mean less the dramatic 'attitude' adumbrated by the New Critics than a global and hyper-relational concept of feeling that encompasses attitude" (43). Ngai's conception of tone still envelops the notion of a relational attitude but expands it as including what she calls the text's affective bearing, which implies its orientation toward its audience. She emphasizes that the analysis of tone is predominantly concerned with the formal aspects of how we gain an understanding of the work as a "totality," as well as the "holistic matrix of social relations" in which we understand the work (43). Tone therefore implies a sense of speaking referentially of the text or artefact as "whole" or "total" (the tone *of* the text) but at the same time such holism remains conceptual in nature. Ngai goes on to state that "tone is a feeling which is perceived rather than felt and whose

very *nonfeltness* is perceived. There is a sense, then, in which its status as feeling is fundamentally negative, regardless of what the particular quality of affect is" (76). For Ngai, tone conjoins both to the formal aspect of a work with the perception of what is *not* felt, but only perceived, due to its holism. We can speak of the tone of a situation in that a situational narrative combines this holism with the sense of emergence of what may become an event in the state of affairs of which the situation consists.

Several chapters into the novel, the situation Laura and Duncan are in is further established through elaborate descriptions of their new shared everyday life and Duncan's apparent inertia in it:

> When Laura insisted on turning the television off, Duncan would sit in his chair in front of the big front windows in their living room, gazing out at the daily life of Lawrence Street with at least a flicker of interest, which was better than the zombie television stare. Laura had no idea what could possibly hold his attention for so many hours. Their neighbors' activities had never before fascinated Duncan in the nine years they had lived on this block. The comings and goings of the children across the street, almost always herded by their au pair and not their parents, held his attention for a few moments, but sometimes, when Duncan had stared out the window all afternoon, barely answering any of her attempts at conversation with more than a syllable or two, Laura felt herself on the edge of panic. How could this go on? His point exactly. (89)

This passage follows Duncan's different modes of looking, (gazing through the window, staring at the TV) as the object of Laura's own perception is the relationship between Duncan's orientation and his perception. The shift Laura detects and follows thus carries the amount of interest Duncan has in what he is perceiving, to the point of being oriented towards something (the TV) but apparently not perceiving at all (suggested through the zombie stare that accompanies his orientation). If tone is what is perceived rather than felt, and it is the nonfeltness that is perceived, what Laura perceives is the *lack* of any affective bearing in Duncan's perception regardless of his orientation. This is further amplified because, as I.A. Richards posited, tone reflects "the awareness one has towards those he is addressing." Duncan, barely communicating with Laura, thus signals a lack of awareness of, and interest in, the world around him, including Laura herself. In turn, this propels Laura to "the edge of panic," where the perceived lack of affect in someone else is the cause of heightened affect in Laura.

The tone here is determined by juxtaposing two differentiated affective bearings of the situation's characters: one perceived as being void of affect, the other affectively charged *because* of the void perceived in the other. Laura "feeling herself on the edge of panic" becomes, again through free indirect speech, connected to a question: how could this go on? The rhetorical nature of this question, however, suggests it should be read as though implying the presentimental repercussion of a state of affairs where the exact opposite is implied: *this is how things will be forever*. The situation's quiddity is marked by it being an impasse, the seeming impossibility of the situation to effectively change. Laura's state *isn't* panicking, however, but rather being "on the edge" of it. Being on the edge implies a tipping point, as though, in contrast to the dissatisfaction referred to earlier (as not being able to make enough of the situation), to Laura it is a question of the situation possibly becoming "too much" because of the lack of change. The text thereby manifests how the affective tension elicited by the situation Duncan and Laura find themselves in runs parallel to the way situations relate to events. In this situation, affective tension comes close to its cusp but does not culminate as a transition to a different affective state (like elation), which could effectively mark the parallel transfer to a different event, possibly rupturing the situation's impasse.

In both scenes, the posing of rhetorical questions through free indirect speech (who could be satisfied with this life? How could this go on?) sets up the tone of the situation as one of dissatisfaction. Etymologically, satisfaction can be traced back to the Latin *satisfacere* (to make amends), which in turn is a compound of *satis* (enough) and *facere* (to make). With the prefix *dis-*, dissatisfaction connotes not making enough. Dissatisfaction implies the presence of a particular affective tension arc, where this tension is seemingly oriented toward becoming satisfied—the possibility, or promise, of making enough out of a situation. Dissatisfaction's tension arc may therefore initially seem to resemble that of the restitution narrative. But unlike the restitution narrative, dissatisfaction within what is predominantly a *situation*, by contrast, does not imply a progression that is adamantly driven by its plot. In my reading of the scenes above, the tone was established by a supposed lack of change in the situation itself, and a lack of potential for the situation to change. As such, the sense of emergence characteristic for the situational narrative as genre is that the state of affairs *won't* change, that there won't be an even that will rupture the situation back into a plot-driven narrative.

Earlier, I delineated how, in Berlant's account, situations involve the adjustments of habits and styles to the situation. In her study *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (2009), Rei Terada proposes, through a reading of Nietzsche,

that dissatisfaction involves *minding*, the minding of the suffering that one undergoes (120). In *Still Life with Monkey*, the activity of minding becomes the predominant mode of responsivity for Duncan as he adjusts to the rearrangement his home requires. When the Wheelers' home becomes rearranged in order to make space for various devices and objects Duncan will need to use, this is narrated as follows:

> The worst of it for Duncan was the sight of the commode squatting on its rubber-tipped feet on the lovely spalted maple floorboards (he had refinished them himself over a long weekend), which glowed like honey in the late summer sunlight filtering through branches of the overgrown rhododendron outside. His blood pressure had soared within minutes after he rolled in the door. A headache suddenly pin-balled from temple to temple as he looked around his reorganized study. He felt the room growing dark. "They must work hard to make all this shit as ugly as possible!" Duncan exclaimed. (123)

Duncan's perception of the commode on his "lovely spalted maple floorboards" involves a doubled contrast: not only are the lovely floorboards contrasted with the ugly commode, but the arrangement of the room is also contrasted with how Duncan himself once did it. The original arrangement involved a specific pleasing aesthetic perception and sensation (the glowing of the floorboards through the rhododendron) contrasted with the current arrangement. The original arrangement connoted light and warmth, whereas in the new arrangement Duncan feels "the room growing dark." This then culminates in a definitive aesthetic judgement: they must work hard to make "all this shit" as ugly as possible. Although a comparison, "all this shit" does not refer to just the commode but the entire rearrangement of the room. But by comparing it to what is possible to make of the room, the comparison thus involves not two clearly designated objects but two abstract conceptualizations: the whole of the actual reorganization of the room, and all possible arrangements of the room to choose from. Sianne Ngai notes on the form of aesthetic judgements themselves that "Although judgments also have form, style, and a kind of apparitionality (through a 'strange and anomalous' grammar converting evaluations into properties of objects), it is as if the mere fact of being verbal blocks us from recognizing that they are no less 'aesthetic' than the perception of form, a moment stereotypically imagined as silent" (2020: 21) and that "ways of speaking tethered to specific ways of perceiving are as meaningful as the latter—and constitute forms of appearance in their own right, too" (2020: 21–22). I noted how dissatisfaction's etymology connotes not mak-

ing enough, and here this emphasis on *making* is reflected in Duncan's judgement. Duncan's own arrangement of the room was made by himself, with specific attention given to wood choice and the way the light falls on it. The arrangement of the room made by the PCA's, meanwhile, neglects any aesthetic considerations concerning the room's appearance.

In the situational narrative, ruptures take place in the rearrangement of specific forms of adjustments made in everyday life, like the arrangement of a bedroom: the rupture not only between one arrangement of the room and another, but the role that aesthetic considerations could play in such arrangements. As I have read the tone of the situation in *Still Life with Monkey* as being one of dissatisfaction, this allows me to further elucidate different aspects of disruption that now gradually become apparent. If in the restitution narrative, disruption is predominantly understood at the level of event, in the situational narrative of life with disability we can now start to see that disruption occurs at the level of one's mode of responsivity. Since the adjustment of habits and styles necessarily presumes the capacity to adjust from the person whom the adjustment concerns, it is this aspect that becomes emphasized in *Still Life with Monkey*, as Duncan finds his life disrupted by all the things to which he himself does *not* have the ability to adjust anymore.

3. Paratactic Disruptions of the Everyday

Above, a happening was delineated as a "becoming-event," i.e., something that occurs that is *not yet* accorded the status of event but rather something that carries the sense that it *could* become designated an event once it ends up changing the state of affairs of a situation significantly. The rearrangement of Duncan's room may thus be read as a happening, as something with *some* significance, yet not enough to become an event within the narrative structure. Many happenings can thus occur in a series, in turn compromising a situation's state of affairs. The series in turn contributes to constituting the text's tone, which is a mode of address that here was primarily expressed through free indirect discourse. As a narrative is necessarily an account that relates a series of actions and events, it implies that the account is addressed to someone. Judith Butler, in *Giving an Account* (2005) offers a critique of the relationship between narrative and the structure of address:

> I would suggest that the structure of address is not a feature of narrative, one of its many and variable attributes, but an interruption of

> narrative. The moment the story is addressed to someone, it assumes a rhetorical dimension that is not reducible to a narrative function. It presumes that someone, and it seeks to recruit and act upon that someone. Something is being done with language when the account that I give begins: it is invariably interlocutory, ghosted, laden, persuasive, and tactical. It may well seek to communicate a truth, but it can do this, if it can, only by exercising a relational dimension of language. (63)

For Butler, a certain structure of address itself could be a disruptive gesture within the context of narrative. The underlying argument for not subsuming the structure of address as a feature of narrative is that "To hold a person accountable for his or her life in narrative form may even be to require a falsification of that life in order to satisfy the criterion of a certain kind of ethics, one that tends to be break with relationality" (63). As for such a break, they specify it as follows: "we may be preferring the seamlessness of the story to something we might tentatively call the truth of person, a truth that, to a certain degree, for reasons we have already suggested, might well become more clear in moments of interruption, stoppage, open-endedness" (64). Butler's argument has two distinct parts. First, to give an account of oneself in narrative form tends to require coherence in and of the narrative. The various actions and events follow one another in such a fashion that they evoke a sense of the "seamlessness of the story"—of everything fitting neatly together. Yet in the process of creating a seamless story, the person who tells the story might end up (inadvertently) falsifying the given account, as that is what a seamless, coherent narrative demands. Secondly, according to Butler it is the ruptures and stoppages of the structure of address that could clarify what they refer to as "the truth of a person." While Butler's contestations against narrative are primarily ethical in nature, a story's seamlessness or its rupture is also an aesthetic concern. As I previously argued, stories can make us desire to know what happens next in order to reach a satisfactory ending. Stories that do not follow a seamless sequence of actions and events are not, however, void of aesthetic sensibility.

Butler writes of "narrative form" as well as "primary forms of relationality," where the latter possesses the potential to break the seamless flow of the former. As such, it would be inaccurate to say that the disruptions that disrupt narrative forms would be non-relational. Rather, *Still Life with Monkey* traces its own stoppages and interruptions through the interruptions of what were everyday events. In a dialogue that spans three pages, Duncan explains to Laura how the PCA's repeatedly burn or unevenly slice the English muffin he has for breakfast. Although Laura first mocks Duncan ("Oh

no, the horror!" (206)), Duncan presses the issue: "I feel deprived and I get upset, and then I feel guilty, as if I'm being peevish with the PCA's about every little thing, and meanwhile, even when I am fussy, they can't get everything right. I give up asking. I don't care. It doesn't really matter" (206). On the following page, however, Duncan seemingly contradicts himself, saying that he "loved the little details of my life" and that now he is supposed to be the "patient patient," even though he *does* still care about these minute details (207). The point here is not that one statement would be truer than the other. Indeed, it could be easily argued that Duncan's statements are contradictory and incoherent, but this was Butler's point in arguing that a certain structure of address can interrupt narrative; it is no longer seamless. One arguably obvious way of reading this sequence is that something that would be marked as trivial is blown up out of proportion, hence Laura's initially mocking reaction. But another way of reading this sequence is that the concern Duncan shows with "being peevish about every little thing" points to the nature of the disruption taking place. The disruption, then, is not *just* the inability to prepare the English muffin the way Duncan wants to. It also concerns a rupture in the seamlessness of preparing it, which involves the tone the text consequently takes. Either Duncan cares and addresses the "little details," or he plays the "patient patient."

The crispness of the English muffin that Duncan addresses over these three pages may be read as *pars pro toto*, where the apparent minutiae of everyday life need to be addressed in order to begin the larger project of addressing not just that one's life has been disrupted by an accident, but rather the stream of disruptions that continue to ripple throughout everyday life. Adjacent to the seamlessness that narrative could provide when it gains coherence, *Still Life with Monkey* proposes its own aesthetic theory at the beginning of the novel, around the concept of *sprezzatura*.[3] The novel elucidates *sprezzatura* as follows:

> There was a word for this false carelessness, this studied nonchalance, Laura had told Duncan the first time he admitted to her this chronic habit of his, when they had been together for about a month. When he revealed the way he concealed his efforts because he wanted everyone to believe that his brilliant work and accomplishments flowed naturally from a wellspring of genius, she had nodded and simply replied, *sprezzatura*. He didn't know there was a word for this, that it was not

3 The concept was originally introduced by the Italian Renaissance author Baldassare Castiglione in his *The Book of the Courtier* ly introduced by the Italian Renaissan(2004 ([1528]).

> solely his invention and experience. When he looked it up, Duncan discovered that Laura was more than exactly right. *Sprezzatura* can also describe a form of defensive irony, the disguising behind a mask of apparent indifference what one really desires, feels, thinks, or intends. That too. (15–16)

Sprezzatura, the novel tells us, involves a "studied nonchalance," where one's actions and achievements may appear effortless, but in fact are rooted in the sustained practice and/or study of particular acts or gestures. But it is also defined as an apparent indifference that conceals one's actual, underlying state. What both of these definitions share is that they involve a form of concealment. Where they differ is how they conceptualize this concealment. In the first definition, the thing concealed (the practice) is not something that could be retrieved because the practice has been integrated into the practice of the action: the effort that has given rise to the effortlessness of a gesture. In the second instance concerning "defensive irony," however, whatever is concealed lays behind a mask, suggesting accessibility if the mask were to be removed.

In his monograph on *sprezzatura*, the Italian aesthetician Paolo D'Angelo writes on *sprezzatura* that "it is etymologically connected with disregard and heedlessness, we should bear in mind expressions such as "heedless of danger": one is heedless of art, ability, and ostentation, just as she is heedless of a dangerous situation, that is, she is not ignoring the situation but preventing it from making her behave rigidly or with apprehension" (14).

In my reading of *Still Life with Monkey*, I have sought to trace how efforts concerning adjusting to modes of everyday life not only required *more* effort but also how this increase in effort itself became one of the narrative's focal points. Rather than possessing the ability to afford heedlessness, different aesthetic activities, from the proper arrangement of a room to the right preparation of an English muffin, became something to be heeded by Duncan. Thus, rather than concealing effort in order to do everyday activities in a seamless manner, the disruptions of everyday activities come to emphasize the effort now needed not only to adjust to Duncan's new situation but also the continuous awareness of adjustment. If successful *sprezzatura* involves the concealment and integration of the effort put into one's heedlessness of a situation, *Still Life with Monkey* explores what happens when the nature of effort becomes the focal point of everyday living.

One of the novel's final chapters consists of a suicide letter Duncan has written for Laura. Although various things are addressed in the letter, a full page and a half is dedicated to all the things Duncan misses, from the ability to scratch his butt to being

able to plan a yoga class and then not attend (266). As these experiences of the everyday change due to Duncan's inability to perform these actions, or that he has come to rely on others to perform them, the effortlessness and heedlessness with which Duncan lived his life become enlarged and emphasized. This emphasis becomes a concern *for* form. Earlier, I argued for narrative's incapability to mediate and represent the whole of experience of life with disability. By default, then, Duncan's list is inexhaustible; it could go on indefinitely. The fact that there is a list implies that the list both has a form and that this form itself metonymically suggests its inexhaustibility. Here is an excerpt from the list:

> I miss being spontaneous in a million ways. I miss cooking. I miss working in the garden. I miss yoga even though I hardly ever went to the yoga classes I signed up for. I miss signing up for yoga classes and not going to them. I miss riding on trains and planes. I miss shifting gears while accelerating, feeling the gears engage as I shift the stick hard into the top gear and ease off the clutch, timing it perfectly to mesh with the surge of power as I step on the gas. I miss stepping on the gas. I miss getting dressed. I miss getting undressed. I miss turning over in bed. I miss using my hands. (266)

There is no immediately clear connection to the activities mentioned in this list. Some of them refer to the absence of bodily ability, but not all of them. As the list goes on beyond this segment, the examples become even more disparate and differentiated. Rather than reading this list as attempting to represent all the experiences Duncan misses, I argue that this could be better read as a form of parataxis. Literary scholar Michelle Dicinoski offers a concise and clear delineation: "In paratactic structures, component parts—independent clauses of a sentence, for example, or sections of a book—are placed side by side with little or no overt linkage. Juxtaposed, the parts form a whole, but the relationships among the different parts are often unclear" (100). Stanley Fish describes parataxis as "Rather than indicating the logical progression of thought, connectives such as 'thus' and 'so' are just place markers; 'but' and 'and' are the words that carry the experience forward, the first signaling a thought going in a new direction, the second saying 'and, oh, this has just occurred to me.'" (62). What both of these quotes make clear is that parataxis is founded on the unclarity of those activities or items it connects by putting them side by side—there is a certain triviality or arbitrariness to them. As Dicinoski proposes, parts may form a whole since a list like Duncan has a definitive beginning and end. Simultaneously, the list itself does

not necessarily contain all of the things that Duncan misses. The importance of the paratactic form is that it denies a grammatical arrangement that would indicate a hierarchy between activities.

Disruption, as I have argued, is not only a disabling event that takes place on the level of the structure of the story. Instead, different forms of disruption continually happen in adjusting to life after a disabling event. *Still Life with Monkey*'s situational narrative is thus far from a seamless narrative. Rather than strictly following the (hierarchical) linearity of the restitution narrative, the novel follows a paratactic (or horizontal) arrangement of happenings in its modes of responsivity to the everyday, whereby what happening matters, and to what degree, remains quite unclear due to the paratactic arrangement of this everyday life.

I can now more clearly distinguish the different kinds of disruption that I have delineated in my reading of *Still Life with Monkey*. Disruption occurs at the level of the mediation of experience through narrative. While the whole of experience cannot be mediated by narrative, narratives carry a sense of seamlessness, of a logical or linear sequence of actions and events. In *Still Life with Monkey*'s situational narrative, linearity is displaced by parataxis, as a seemingly trivial collection of happenings that stand side by side. The linear progression of the restitution narrative is disrupted by a form that manifests a horizontal order of representation that subsequently disrupts the prioritization of happenings and events, canceling the possibility of the restitution narrative's hierarchical ordering toward a seamlessly structured plot.

The paratactic nature of all the examples given is constituted by parataxis' *lack* of clarity: there is no hierarchy of importance between the proper preparation of an English muffin and the inability to work in the garden. But while the interruption of these events is trivial insofar as they could be replaced by another example, they are concurrently relevant in that the very disruption of such everyday activities has been fundamentally changed in everyday life, allowing for the genre of the situation to emerge, and causing these activities to stand side by side in a horizontal fashion. From the defilement of the arrangement of a room to the inadequate preparation of food, my reading of *Still Life with Monkey* emphasizes both the evaluative aspects and the sensibility concerning the amount of effort any disruptive event and action costs.

4. A Poetics of Permutability: Attempt, Effort, and Sensible Form

In my critique of the genre of the restitution narrative, I have been careful not to *fully* oppose it to the situation, since situations too still possess a degree of sequential

ordering of actions and happenings. Hence my use of the term *situational narrative*, to convey that, to a certain extent, the linear arrangement of action and events of which any narrative consists still applies to what we designate as situations.

The question that I now turn to pursue pertains to the way in which genre and adjustment to the present coalesce when the genre moves on from narrative altogether to lyric poetry. A different genre from narrative, lyric poetry offers different affordances in the mediation of disability's rupture from narrative. The lyric poem, however, is not merely the form through which these habits and styles in the adjustment to the present are represented (as though they are simply its "contents"). Such a conceptualization of form is explained by literary scholar Angela Leighton as follows: "The question 'what is outside or what is inside a form?' perfectly captures the way that form is both a container and a deflector. Imagined visually, it looks two ways: to the shape it keeps in and the shape it keeps out" (16). The inside/outside conceptualization of form connotes the idea of form as a "container" of its contents, whereas the "deflector" aspect of form concerns how the form of an object marks its boundaries from other objects. Thinking of form in terms of it being a container of experience is problematic because it suggests that its contents could then be simply transposed into another form. Building on this, I argue that we cannot separate the form of address from whatever it is that is addressed.

Parallel to the form-content question as it pertains to genre runs the form-content question concerning appearance. As I argued in my reading of *Still Life with Monkey*, appearances in relation to disability become concerned with the effort of appearance's visibility and concealment. It became clear that appearance itself does not disappear in the mastery of a gesture through rigorous effort; rather, the appearance of *effortlessness*, as the concept of *sprezzatura* suggests, is what is manifested. Coming back to Berlant's claim that the activity of the historical present finding its genre is the same as it finding its event, appearances are not divorced from the events of a particular genre but on the contrary, gain form *through* the genre that manifests their appearance.

The poetry collection *Veil and Burn* (2008) by American poet Laurie Clements Lambeth shows particular interest in this inter-formal relationship. In an essay included in *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (2011), Lambeth, who has multiple sclerosis, delineates how her early symptoms manifested themselves: "The outlines between things blurred. Unable to detect the difference between my skin and fabric, my thumb and a buttonhole, my hair and the elastic I stretched to contain it, I slipped into a dimension where there was little distinction between the outside world and the inner contours of my own body" (174). And that "It was this way that MS entered my poetry—not in subject, but in the ways in which it altered my body's place in the

world, as though the outline of what I could call 'me' was a broken line, permeable and wavering, and what was inside that perimeter was a shimmering transparency, at once me and not me" (175). Here we find an interest in form through the notion of the outline—the separation between body and world. Yet the outline is not described as a solidified, stable form but on the contrary, as permeable and wavering, a broken line. And while she on the same page refers to the "fluidity" of this outline, this outline still marks the "inside of a parameter," which in turn is a "shimmering transparency, at once me and not me" (175). In Lambeth's words, we seemingly find both the notion of the container (the bodily outline as a parameter of the self), and that of the deflector: the bodily form's boundary with the world. Yet the container is a container that spills over, the deflector an unsteady outline of the body's variable contours. There is a commitment to form in Lambeth's formulations, but that commitment is specifically focused on the potential of form's permutability, its wavering and fluid nature. Concomitant to this commitment to form is the attention given to appearance. In the first quote, there is the emphasis of dressing the body (and the indistinctness between dress and body) and the "shimmering transparency" that the unsteady outline of the body demarcates. The combination of the permeable form and the wavering transparency suggests a conceptualization that imagines the constitutive principle of the relationship between form and self to be their interdependent unsteadiness.

The question Lambeth's poetics consequently poses is how we may apprehend an appearance when its very foundation is its instability. *Veil and Burn* alternates its poems with reflective vignettes, called fragments. In the *Gauze Fragment*, Lambeth reflects on her deteriorating eyesight and shows where the collection's title came from: "In Hollywood's golden age, the camera was often veiled by a thin piece of fabric to dissolve any harsh features or wrinkles in close-ups. The cameraman burned cigarette holes into the fabric to bring the eyes to sparkle. I have a feeling that my vision is something between the veil and the burn, or that it alternates between the two" (39). The constellation of the employed metaphor consists of three separate elements: the camera, the veil put over the camera to "dissolve any harsh features," and finally the burns made in the veil to make the eyes sparkle of the actors on screen. If the common metaphor (or metonymy) for the eye would be the camera itself, Lambeth equates her vision as either the veil *or* the burn that veils the camera, or as alternating between them. Thus, her vision is that which veils the vision of the camera, which would dissolve the harsh features of the people seen, or the burns, which bring out the sparkle.

Similar to the conceptualization of her protean bodily outline, Lambeth imagines her deteriorating vision as that which *enhances*, and concurrently manipulates, the

appearances on the screen as recorded by the camera. Both this fragment and the collection's title refer to the veil and the burn, the veil draped over the camera and the burns burned into the veil. But simultaneously *veil* and *burn* are also verbs. Something is being veiled just as something burns, or that thing is being burned into. Even if the veil and the burn as nouns enhance the image perceived when draped over the camera, Lambeth's vision is concurrently what does the veiling and what is burning into whatever it perceives.

Lambeth's foundation of the conceptualization of both her body and vision is constituted by the unsteadiness and deterioration of bodily impairment. As briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell have proposed a cultural model of disability with a reading of impairment that involves both the encountering of environmental obstacles *and* the socially mediated difference of embodied difference itself (2006: 10). To think through impairment as itself being socially mediated is relevant to Lambeth's poetry because, as my reading of her poetics shows, she is specifically interested in exploring the permutable, wavering nature of her own body through lyric. Rather than opting for either impairment or disability as her poetic principle, however, I read her poetics as one where the term *permutability* is more fitting. Permutability is a compound of *permutation* and *ability*. The first word can be traced back to the Latin *permutationem* (a change, alteration, or revolution), whereas ability can be traced back to *habilis* (that which is easy to manage or handle) and *habilitatem* (an aptitude or suitability). Permutability, then, connotes the continuous change (or revolution) in and of one's aptitude and what needs to be "handled." Since permutability connotes the continuous changeability of form, the notion of form as "container" (where the form could change, but the "content" would stay the same), is challenged.

Philosopher Catherine Malabou has offered the following astute critique of this delineation of form:

> I do not believe that the problem of the limit of metamorphoses as traditionally conceived derives from the fact that they [metamorphoses] present themselves as the journey from one form to another. It is not form that is the problem; it's the fact that form can be thought separately from the nature of the being that transforms itself. The fact that form is presented as skin, vestment or finery, and that one can always leave without an alteration in what is essential … As if, in the evening, form could be left hanging like a garment on the chair of being or essence. (17)

Malabou dismisses the idea that metamorphosis could take place where a change in form would be unaccompanied without a concurrent change in the "being" or "essence" of whatever underwent that metamorphosis. As the last line indicates, the notion that form would be only a garment is what needs to be contested. If we bring Malabou into conversation with Lambeth, what is striking is that Malabou too uses examples we often associate with form, that which is sensible and located on the surface of the body: skin, vestment, and finery. The sensible appearance of the surface is, however, not superficial; the point is that it is not the only aspect that changes, not that it is irrelevant. In *Veil and Burn*'s second poem, entitled *Symptoms*, Lambeth explores this relationship between dress and body:

> I'll try to tell you how it feels: girdle
> my grandmother wore, tight-laced corset
> worn by her mother in Wales, but it seldom slips
> from my ribcage. No hooks or laces, only
>
> spaces of remission, then relapse,
> a trip to the ancient clothes again:
> crinolines, skirts grazing ankles, long
> satin embroidered sleeves that rub and pull
>
> naked skin, saying, *now and then you must*
> *try to feel through this, and this*. All that fabric
> wound around torso, legs, the dresses
> and sheets binding to keep me in
>
> bed. *The cure is rest*, they tell me. Dizzy,
> drunk when I haven't drunk, I'm drawn
> to the wall to prop me. I've been known to sport
> a cane, per the fashion, to smooth the gait.
>
> Fix my mouth in a loose pout when speech
> eludes its muscles, tired, stiff as the garments
> that hold me. On occasion, they'll fall
> to reveal this body, a window of cellophane
>
> wrapping my limbs, a ring for each finger. (3)

In this poem, the genre (lyric) finds its event in that of the *attempt*. For the first sentence announces the speaker's intention: she will *try* to tell "you" (which may be us, the readers of the poem, or an unnamed addressee) "how it feels." Rather than simply telling us, the intention of *trying* to tell us, to attempt it, is explicated. In the third stanza, the prosopopoeia of the clothes the speaker wears, too, tell her that she should *try* to feel through their fabric. Echoing my reading of *sprezzatura* earlier, there is an emphasis on effort as being pivotal in the way in which the speaker relates both *to* her body and how she relates her body *in* the poem to her addressee. Thus, there are different kinds of attempt and effort involved here. The speaker's attempt to convey "how it feels" can be differentiated from the attempt of the clothing to bind the speaker's body and ask her to try and feel through them. This is still different from the muscles holding the body together, and in particular the speaker's mouth (which she "fixes" in the last stanza), through which the speaker tries to speak. In a mimetic gesture, the speaker attempts to implicate the reader in her own attempt to convey "how it feels" (where we are not privy to what "it" refers to) through requiring the reader's own effort in reading or listening to the poem and make sense of it. Thus, the effort required from the reader studying the poem is not that of the speaker, since the poem relates the speaker's attempt to relate how it feels, implicating the reader in turn to *try* to relate to what it is the speaker attempts to convey. Rather than referring to a particular emotion with the phrase "how it feels," the speaker seeks to communicate affective conditions concerning her body (the fixing of it, the binding of it, holding it together) precisely through this nesting of effort and attempt within the poem.

It might be tempting, given the poem's title, to read the speaker's efforts as wanting to convey the bodily symptoms of MS. The word symptom can be traced back to its Greek roots in *symptoma*, a happening or accident, and its stem *sympiptein*, to fall or coincide together. Just as the speaker tells us that she will try to tell us how it feels, coincidentally, the speaker's clothing tells her to "feel *through* this." In the last stanza we learn that what the speaker would feel through her clothing, namely her own body, is "a window of cellophane wrapping my limbs." The clothing that covers the speaker's body therefore covers a body which is itself a window, suggesting a framed opening that admits light, evocative of translucence. The transparency that a window of cellophane suggests is contrasted with the material fact that this cellophane window is wrapping her limbs—which of course refers to the speaker's own body as well. The body is, then, translucent and opaque simultaneously, both the frame and the object framed. As the speaker's body is both formed and evocative of being transparent, this in turn is done through the lyrical form itself, allowing these different conceptualizations to stand next to each other.

In *Forms of Poetic Attention* (2020), literary scholar Lucy Alford proposes that "In poetic contemplation, the object of attention is composed as present before us by the formal object that is the poem. Here the formal and semantic objects are perhaps the most in sync, as the one act of attention runs parallel to the other. The mirroring of direct (formal) and imagined (representational) perception causes the gap between the two to narrow nearly to the point of immediacy" (57). While the poem's formal structure is present to us as readers, it needs to be read in order for the representational objects of what the poem relates to us to be conveyed. In this case, what the speaker attempts to relate is the experience of her bodily condition, which, like the poem itself, involves at once both a semantic and formal object. The body as semantic, representational object (as that which is dressed and bound, but concurrently described as a window of cellophane that wraps the limbs in turn) informs our semantic conception of the body's formal materiality: as what needs to be dressed but simultaneously dresses itself. Thus the "gap between the two"—the semantic and formal objects—that a poem relates is here to be understood as being mirrored in what this poem itself both addresses and is, while simultaneously establishing the interdependence of the semantic and formal dimensions of the body represented both *in* and *as* poem, proposing how the two are inescapably intertwined.

The poem succeeds in conjoining the speaker's effort to relate "how it feels" with the reader's effort to understand the speaker's effort in turn. Contrasting the effortful attempt with which the speaker's attempt to "tell us how it feels," is the ease with which the speaker relates her appearance to the reader through its descriptions and stress on the appearance and garments the speaker wears. The third stanza relates the speaker's appearance with cool confidence: "I've been known to sport a cane, per the fashion, to smooth the gait." And "Dizzy, drunk when I haven't drunk, I'm drawn to the wall to prop me." In both sentences, what could have been related as a matter of functional and bodily attempt and effort, the speaker here endows her movement and appearance with particular aesthetic qualities. The cane is not related as an instrument of support or prosthesis, since the verb *sporting* implies the active intent on the speaker's behalf to display the cane, turning it into an aesthetic accessory with the aim of manifesting a smoother way of moving. The speaker drunkenly-but-not-drunk being drawn to the wall to prop herself, rather than connoting the more serious implication of the speaker being unable to balance her body, suggests a theatricality in and of her movement.

In juxtaposition to the effort of the clothing and muscles that hold the speaker's body together, the bodily appearance of the speaker is related as a matter of fashion and aesthetic effect. Considering Lambeth's earlier statement about her vision being

both the veil (which diminishes harsh features) and the burn (which brings out the sparkle), the speaker through these phrases moves to conjure her appearance in the reader's imagination as one where the supposed "harsh features" of her movement and appearance instead become evocative of being fashionable and worthy of capturing the reader's visual imagination. But this is not all the poem has to tell us about appearance. In the second stanza, the speaker relates some of the clothing that she wears. What is noticeable is that the mentioned garments all cover up the speaker's body. Crinolines (structured petticoats that hold out a skirt), the skirts grazing ankles, and the sleeves that cover up the speaker's arm, all cover up and bind the speaker's body. The juxtaposition of effort and appearance should not be understood as the direct opposition of those terms. Rather, in continuation of my reading of *Still Life with Monkey*, to display one's appearance requires a degree of effort, and that effort can itself come to have an appearance through gaining form. Thus the phrase "sporting a cane" cleverly shifts the image of the disabled body relying on the cane for support (a predominantly functionalist image), to the body that supposedly chooses to appear in a particular way of its own volition. As I argued in my reading of *Still Life with Monkey*, *sprezzatura* connotes the concealment of effort, bringing about a display of effortlessness. Similarly, the phrase "sporting a cane" emphasizes the speaker's choice on the use of the cane, while the reader may wonder whether the cane is also necessary.

Italian philosopher Barbara Carnevali, in her monograph *Social Appearances: A Philosophy of Display and Prestige* (2020), has written on appearance that

> Appearance is basically a fabric caught between two conflicting, equally powerful impulses: displaying versus concealing, public versus private, vanity versus shame and *decoration* versus *decorum*. Whatever displays also conceals; whatever seeks to cover up is often precisely what exposes and highlights: a veil over a face, the strands of hair combed over a bald spot, or the blushing and stammering of someone who is intimated, all end up calling attention to exactly what they seek to conceal. (23)

Carnevali offers several oppositions, but the quotation starts with the metaphor of appearance as a "fabric caught between two impulses." The metaphor is not trivial because fabric is itself what is on the surface and sensible. Thus, for Carnevali, the conflict between the pairs of powerful impulses she contrasts is itself made sensible by taking place on those surfaces that are sensible to others. Through this sensibility, appearance becomes a medium of communication:

> The aesthetic dimension of communication lies in this *irreducibility of the medium*, from which social philosophy should also draw its relations between form and content. Compared to the romantic conception of expression, the representative view breaks the immediate communicative relationship, inverting its principle and logical order, so that it is not intention that makes use of the medium (as subordinate and derivative instrument) but rather the mediation itself that makes communication possible: mediation incorporates internally, as it intrinsic possibility, the principle of noncorrespondence that the philosophy of the 1960s was fond of defining as "difference". (29)

Coming back to Carnevali's statement above regarding concealment, we can now understand a conception of concealment as non-intentional, which is relevant to the argument I am making regarding disruption. In my reading of Butler, I argued how their critique of narrative as a mode of address rests primarily on the supposed seamlessness that a story can convey in the act of giving an account. This seamlessness is itself then considered valuable, which for Butler's was motivation to argue for the value of interruptions and stoppages in narrative as tentatively signaling "the truth of a person." The structure of Carnevali's argument follows a similar reasoning. For Carnevali, the non-intenional reading of appearance and concealment rests on the "irreducibility of the medium," by which she means that concealment, too, is susceptible to being sensed precisely because when we sense concealment it is still a matter of sensible appearance. Thus, the sporting of a cane, the drunkenly prop against the wall, might be initially understood as intentional gestures in order to conceal something, but this concealment is sensible through the *appearance of* the concealment itself—we can sense something is concealed from us.

In my conception of disruption, disruption is to be understood in a similar vein as Carnevali's fabric. On the one hand, there is the way in which one wishes to appear or display oneself (and the effort this takes), and on the other, the actual sensible form that results from the effort and attempt to appear in a particular manner. But it is this sensible form, following Carnevali, that is mediated to us. It is important to emphasize that any "intentionality" is itself *mediated* within what is made sensible through a particular form, and which we sensibly perceive as what is being disrupted. My conception of disruption is therefore less interested in the notion of the supposed "success" of an appearance, since this would reify an intentionalist stance, and instead relays the focus on the ways in which disruption-as-form is made sensible via different representational genres.

I now want to come back to Berlant's argument that the adjustment to one's situation (or historical present) does not only manifest in genre but also through the habits, styles, and modes of responsivity to that situation. It becomes clear that different genres afford different modes of responsivity. The situational narrative of *Still Life With Monkey* positioned Duncan as becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the situation he was in and his inability to continue and adjust his habits before his accident. In this case the use of the genre of narrative itself necessitates the narration of adjustment to one's situation. Concurrently, in my reading of the novel, one would also still be able to make a clear distinction between disability and impairment as conceived through the social model. Duncan's quadriplegic condition as impairment can then be separated from all the things that disable him in the situational narrative, like the inability to prepare his muffin the way he prefers it. As I showed earlier, the cultural model by contrast understands impairment, too, as socially mediated difference. In a further exploration of the cultural model, sociologist Anne Waldschmidt has proposed that we should therefore also understand our conception of impairment as an effect of cultural mediation and discourse (2017: 24 in *Culture—Theory—Disability*). I would like to take this argument one step further. When the speaker in *Symptoms* imagines her body both as what needs to be held together by her garments *and* as a window of cellophane that wraps her own limbs, the speaker proposes a different conception of the body, which rests, as I have argued, on the permutability that Lambeth's lyric makes possible.

5. Enunciation Impaired: Epideictic Events and Poetic Power

In *Symptoms*, the speaker conceptualized her body as what is on the edge of the lack or loss of containment and form. Parallel to this lies the speaker's explication of the attempt to try to tell us how "it" feels, where my reading argued that this "it" refers to both the body's simultaneous containment and the loss of that containment. If narrative by definition represents a series of actions as events, the lyric poem can also do those things. But it is concurrently an event itself. Jonathan Culler writes how lyric attempts "to be itself an event rather than the representation of an event" and that, in Aristotle's conception of mimesis, lyric was not included because it was "considered a speech event, *epideixis*, rather than a representation of action" (2015: 35). Culler's claim does not refute the formalist model of reading a poem with a fictional speaker in which an audience overhears the speaker's address to an addressee (also

called triangulated address).[4] Culler, building on work by Barbara Cassin,[5] proposes that "Despite the plurivocity of the term *performance* in both English and French, 'performance' is doubtless the best translation of *epideixis*: discourse conceived as an act, aiming to persuade, move and innovate" (130).

When the speaker in *Symptoms* attempted to *try* to tell her addressee "how it feels," the event of it *being* an attempt is constituent of succeeding in bringing about what it describes, precisely because we as readers become implicated in the attempt. The point is not, then, as Girard Genette has maintained, that lyric is ultimately susceptible to being understood as mimetic representation (1992: 32). Rather, even if lyric has representational aspects, it concurrently is epideictic—an event itself.

In the final poem that I now turn to, bearing the humorous title *Ode to the Upper Lip*, the speaker invokes the epideictic figure of the apostrophe:

> O delicate and subtle row,
> o lines that grow downward,
> spiny fence stakes every one,
> forgive me your uprooting,
> o moustache:
> equivalent to an adolescent boy's
> tender growth, fuzz
> too rampant for beauty. (31)

This opening stanza immediately sets up a dramatic relationship between the speaker and her own body through the speaker's address. The speaker's facial hair, described as "rampant," is what requires "uprooting" for beauty's sake, causing the speaker to apologize. The stanza's first three lines all offer figurative and hyperbolic descriptions (delicate and subtle row, lines that grow downward, spiny fence stakes) before the sixth line apostrophically puts a name to what the speaker has been describing (and to which her apology is directed), namely her moustache. As Culler points out, the figure of the apostrophe is often connected to the notion of an intense feeling, causing the speaker in question to break out lyrically. But why does an impassioned speaker turn to apostrophe? Culler's reply is that "to apostrophize is to will a state of affairs,"

4 This model, as Northrop Frye delineated it, supposes that the poet "turns his back to his listeners, in order to address something which the audience then 'overhears'" (2000: 250 [1957]).

5 See "La performance avant le performative, ou la troisième dimension du langage," in *Genèse de l'acte de parole*, ed. Cassin and Carlos Levy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 122–128.

whereby inanimate objects may be bound to the speaker's desire (215). Culler goes on to argue that apostrophe invokes the object addressed to act or not act in a certain way, relying not on the speaker's passionate intensity but rather on "the possibility of magical transformation" (216).

The provocative twist in the poem at hand is that it turns this apostrophic logic around. Rather than being either inanimate or animate, the speaker's apostrophizing personifies the moustache as inanimate receiver of the apostrophe, but the moustache is itself *already* animate, since it grows on the speaker's body. The possibility of a magical transformation takes place through the moustache's growth; what the apostrophe instead does is address this transformation. Moreover, the growth is not willed by the speaker. On the contrary, the removal of the growth is that for which the speaker is apologizing. As such, the moustache's growth is considered rampant and unruly. The poem *does* bend the moustache to its desire, however, by employing it as a recipient of the speaker's apology. This apostrophe's attempt to will a state of affairs involves turning the moustache into its recipient. The poem's second stanza continues:

> Dissolved, camouflaged, cut,
> yanked, tweezed in a desperate hour,
> exhumed, weeded, mown.
> O how you suffer. Unwelcome, you return. (31)

The rich variations of verbs used to refer to hair removal are not only in keeping with apostrophe's hyperbolic nature but also build up to the last line, the suffering of the moustache itself. We can of course ask *how* the moustache itself could suffer since it is a part of the speaker's body. As Barbara Johnson has noted, "Apostrophe is … both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/Thou structure of *direct* address in an indirect, fictionalized way. The absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic" (1986: 30). What the various recipients of the apostrophe proposed by Johnson share is their lack of animation; they are all inanimate. This notion of the apostrophic recipient becomes disrupted in Lambeth's poem precisely because the speaker addresses something that is *already* animated. Similar to *Symptoms*, *Ode* mirrors this disruption of lyrical convention in the representational aspects of the poem because the moustache's growth too is disrupted in the poem. As the first stanza already indicated, the moustache's removal is inescapably bound to the speaker's beauty. The poem then introduces Irena, who we can deduce to be a beautician tasked with the removal of the speaker's wanton hair:

> O moustache, if it were the fashion,
> I would cultivate and twist your ends,
> eager to see (and feel!) how long
> you'd grow, how you'd curl.
> But now I must deny you.
> Irena hands me the mirror.
>
> *A little red now, but … you know,*
> she says, smoothing on a lavender
> shimmer, *beauty hurts*. (32)

The speaker here shifts from being the voice who's apostrophically addressing the moustache to becoming an actor in the situation who is handed the mirror. In the last stanza, while not explicated, it is suggested that it is Irena who is now addressing the speaker through prosopopoeia, not the moustache. In fact, the moustache has completely disappeared, as the "little red" refers to the speaker's waxed upper lip, the part of the body where the moustache once was.

The poem's animated (and subsequently removed) recipient of the speaker's apostrophe therefore invites two different readings of disruption. From one perspective, the moustache's animated perpetual growth is what disrupted the speaker's beauty, provoking its removal. On the other hand, it is the growth itself that is disrupted by its removal that the speaker laments. This duality is mirrored (and ultimately resolved) in the poem. For while the speaker's apostrophic address animates an already animated object, the speaker, asserting to the moustache, "But now I must deny you," effectively nullifies the apostrophic address with this denial, as by the end of the poem, the addressed object, and with it, the apostrophic enunciation, have been removed altogether.

What connects both of Lambeth's poems is their shared concern for containment, appearance, and the sensible form of the epideictic event. I connected this to the notion of permutability, which concerns the continuous change of what needs to be handled in Lambeth's poems—the body. One may be inclined to assume that the final poem does not explicitly address disability, but *Ode* invokes rampant and unruly hair growth, metonymically connected to disability through its shared *lack* of restraint and the need for containment of her body. *Symptoms*, meanwhile, connects the explication of the attempt and the effort needed to relate bodily experience through the lyric to the effort that living with that body itself requires. The disruptive affordance disability offers lyric poetry, thus points not to the *effect* that a poem has (which is

often considered in terms of successful or unsuccessful), but to the effort required to enunciate or recite poetry in the first place. Culler's observation that "The 'O' of apostrophic address connects mouth and event" (223), shows that *a* mouth is always needed to invoke apostrophe, and while prosopopoeia often attributes mouths to objects that have none, lyric theory has not yet carefully considered the effort of the mouth required to invoke the apostrophic event, which my readings of Lambeth's poems emphasize.

What differentiates narrative from lyric, according to Culler, is that the telling of a narrative necessarily refers to past events, while the lyrical enunciation always occurs in the present time, therefore making itself an event (226). This ability to evoke the "now" of lyrical time rests on the poet's power to enunciate. As Barbara Johnson states, "The poetic performance suggests not that the poet is more intense than other people, but actually that he says less. The complete thought he utters is not 'X is Y', but 'I invoke X'. The problem of poetic authority does not depend on what the poet says but on his capacity to *call*" (2008: 8–9). Like Culler, Johnson refutes the notion of the impassioned poet who breaks out in apostrophe to release and express her feelings, though she does relate a different aspect: that of the poet's *capacity* to call. Culler similarly speaks of poetic power: "If one major effect of lyric address is the replacement of a narrative temporality with temporality of the poetic event, this contributes to what is perhaps its most important effect, the evocation of poetic power" (229). Poetic power, according to Culler, involves the poet's vatic ability to address, for example, the sun, winds, or their own body; to will a state of affairs that involves the apostrophic addressee. Poetic power connects this capacity of the poet to call with the effects that call can have. Examining the limits of poetic power, Culler offers a reading of a poem in which the poet commands a river to rise, then stop (both of which have no effect) and finally to "not turn back," to which the river evidently concedes. Culler consequently reads poetic power as the poem's power to effectuate a state of affairs, which can be taken into doubt—not all poem's succeed in what they say they (will) do.

What this and many analyses of lyric poems have in common is that they focus on the apostrophic *effect* of the poem through which the addressee becomes animated, but implicitly tend to take for granted the poet's *capacity* to enunciate the poem in the first place. Literary scholar Frans-Willem Korsten notes: "To Culler, the 'self' is central, both as the one who calls the things into being that it addresses and as the one who, simultaneously, calls itself into being" (192). Korsten's concern lies with the inherent relationality of apostrophic address (between speaker and addressee) on which it is constituted, and that this relationality suggests that the speaker, through

this capacity to address, therefore also calls themselves into being *as* speaker. This further elucidates Culler's claim that the apostrophe connects mouth *and* event since the result of this connection is that a "self," or speaker, is constituted through the poetic call.

In *Mood and Trope: The Rhetoric and Poetics of Affect* (2020), John Brenkman poses that "Modern criticism has responded to the paradoxes of the lyric I with approximate, largely inadequate distinctions such as empirical self and poetic self, biographical self and persona, poet and speaker, and so on. Such distinctions beg the question of the relation of the poet to the speaker, the person to the persona, and so on" (91). Such a distinction between poet and speaker, I argue, should also concern the study of the relationship between the capacity of the speaker's body and how this capacity constitutes the figure of the rhetorically effective, enunciating poet. The poems I have read concern the poet's relationship to her body, including the capacity to "try to tell how it feels"—thereby connecting the poet's power to effectuate an external state of affairs with the bodily capacity to speak.

Reading *Symptoms*, I emphasized the effort required from the poet to enunciate through elucidating lyrical address as attempt ("let me *try* to tell you how it feels"). While any state of affairs willed by apostrophic address may fail to effectuate, by displacing the inherent assumption of the success of the power to address with this explication that the poet is *trying* to enunciate rather than simply enunciating, the poem paradoxically cannot but succeed *as* mode of address (because it is addressed nonetheless). Meanwhile, it thereby offers us the understanding that the power to enunciate itself should not be taken for granted. Jacques Rancière has proposed that "the modern lyric revolution is not a way of experiencing oneself, of experiencing the profundity of one's inner life, or conversely, of immersing it in the profundity of nature. It is primarily a specific mode of utterance, a way of accompanying one's saying" (2004b: 12). Rancière's rhetorical shift from an expressive model of the lyric to the emphasis on utterance as a way of accompanying (rather than coinciding with) one's own words is more closely aligned with my readings of Lambeth's poetry. For while Lambeth's poetry employs apostrophe (and therefore calls a speaker, or a self, into being, as Korsten suggests) in addressing objects (like the moustache) and an audience (like an implied reader), both poems disrupt the correspondence of the I of the speaker with the conventions associated with apostrophe because of the permutable conceptions of the body Lambeth manifests through her lyrics.

Since the poet addresses something that is *of* her but not *her*, the poem suggests that the capacity of the poet's body and the poet as speaking I, as a subject who apostrophically addresses, do not coincide. For it is precisely the capacity of the speaker's

body to disrupt the speaker's beauty with its unruly growth that provokes the invocation of apostrophe by the poet. But since the speaker's body is unruly, so too can her enunciation be disrupted by that body. The notion of the accompaniment of one's words can here be understood as the differentiation between the disabled body's own capacities (to grow as it wants, to be unruly, and so on) and the necessity for this to be lyrically addressed, which thereby in turn necessitates the invocation of a lyrical I that addresses. Rather than an originary I addressing what is happening to the body, Lambeth's poems carefully delineate the disruption the body manifests as that which the speaker may attempt to describe while being disrupted, which affirms the differentiation between the body's capacities and the poet's poetic power.

The conceptualizations of bodily disruption in Lambeth's poems I delineated are relevant to disability theory, because it builds on the elucidation of the cultural model's differentiation between impairment and disability. If impairment, too, can be socially mediated, as the cultural model maintains, how and where do we read for this mediation? As my readings of these poems argue, the presence of lyrical address implies at the very least the success that such address is taking place, but it can simultaneously emphasize the effort on the speaker's behalf to enunciate, appear, contain, or dissolve her body through lyric poetry. Impairment is intrinsically linked to the bodily capacity needed to address such an impairment or to the poet's capacity to invoke the apostrophic call. It also connotes that the presence of lyrical address, even when written, *asserts* the concurrent inevitability of disruptive bodily presence—the body of the speaker and that of the poem are fundamentally intertwined. The cultural model follows the social model's understanding of disability insofar as it also understands disability as that which becomes constructed in the interaction between individual and an environment. But it also asserts that physical impairment, which necessarily refers to and involves one's bodily condition, is *also* socially mediated rather than being an *a priori* condition as the impairment/disability opposition might suggest, as per the social model. What my readings have shown is that the notion of impairment should not be thought separately from bodily capacity, since bodily capacity itself functions socially: in how we can and must address how our bodily capacities become (dis)abilities.

6. Conclusion

I started this chapter by arguing for the limitations of the restitution narrative model as it pertains to disability. In this model, disruption is conceptualized as the break in

between life before and after disability in a sequential series of actions and events. I contrasted this notion of disruption with the argument that disability's disruption can point us to the formal characteristics of what it is disrupting. Different genres through which the experience of and relationality to disability is mediated thus afford different kinds of disruption. In the situational narrative, an impasse experienced in living with disability was shown to be concerned with a suspended state of affairs centered around a sense of emergence, in which a happening may actually become a larger event and thereby drastically alter the situation. I read the situational narrative as creating a paratactic, horizontal arrangement of its happenings and becoming-events, precisely due to this apparent lack of "big" events, in which all of the happenings of everyday life with disability come to seem inconsequential and incapable of manifesting change. I connected this to the tonality of dissatisfaction and effort, the concern of the affective work to "make enough" out of a situation, to become satisfied with it.

This emphasis on effort and its appearance was continued in my reading of Lambeth's two lyric poems. While the temporality of the lyrical present distinguishes it from the sequential telling of narrative (even when, as in the situational narrative, the sequence of actions and events is experienced as suspended), what connects all of my readings offered in this chapter is the emphasis on effort disability can place in both narrative and lyrical genres. In *Still Life with Monkey*, Duncan and Laura's apparent inability to make enough out of their situation was connected to the notion of *sprezzatura*, the ability to make any particular gesture appear as effortless. Effort became connected to disability precisely through showing how everyday actions, like tending to a garden or preparing one's favorite meal the right way, become disrupted *because* they suddenly require new and different effort. Likewise, Lambeth's depiction of her appearance in her poems allowed her to "sport" her cane but disrupted the form of lyrical enunciation by simultaneously explicating it as attempt.

As Butler suggested, when one tells a narrative (or gives an account of oneself through a narrative), there is a tendency to want it to carry a sense of seamlessness, when a plot finds its resolution, for example. A primary problem with the seamlessness of these accounts, I have argued, is how they formally organize and represent effort in relation to disability. If effort is often conveyed as hardship that has been overcome by the end of the story, this is precisely not the relationship to effort that the texts I have studied in this chapter manifest. For what connects both the novel and Lambeth's poems is the sustained emphasis on effort *throughout*, that to socio-aesthetically appear (without a moustache, sporting a cane, or presenting one's disheveled and untended garden) is never separated from the bodily effort it requires to appear (or

make an object, like a house, appear the way one desires). The sustained attention on the effort of appearance marks an imperative shift from the notion of disruption as singular break to a conceptualization of disruption as continuous because the affective work effort requires is itself continuous. This stress on the effort appearance requires might be reason to pause: for what is it that such sustained attention given to effort affords readers?

As the notion of *sprezzatura* suggests, the effort put into a gesture or action might disappear from sight with enough practice of that act. And while it may be possible to represent an amount of effort required for a particular gesture or skill, the perceived or sensed effort then becomes framed through the particularity of that action and its accompanying moment. In contrast, in the case studies I have analyzed, effort is not a matter of singular incident but rather of continuity. To stress or demand that attention be given to the effort of appearance in life with disability does not come without friction. This sustained attention given to the effort appearance requires (again and again) can be tied to what Rancière elsewhere calls the "rules of appropriateness between the significance of words and the visibility of things" (2011: 21). Such rules of appropriateness dictate how, when, and where something is made visible and sensible, and how, when, and where it is addressed—which does not need to coincide with an appearance.

The capacity needed to enunciate or to appear is commonly simply considered a given. Even if appearances conceal something, or if apostrophic enunciations do or do not effectuate their intended state of affairs, what is considered appropriate is that we do not call into question the givenness of this appearance or enunciation itself, but instead examine their effects. The demand on and implication of one's sustained attention given to effort that I have argued for in this chapter can disrupt what is conventionally considered to be appropriate to address. What such conventional "rules of appropriateness" dictate is not that they neglect or disregard disruption in relation to disability. More accurately, such conventional rules (or narrative models) propose a conception of disruption that one can come to understand as made to fit into the seamlessness of a given account. Such a conception of disruption, as seems to be suggested through the restitution narrative, then posits disruption as a break (the moment or incident that one becomes disabled) that fits its model, thereby making it appropriate to it. Effort in this model subsequently becomes the work of restoration, of "getting better."

The understanding of disruption I delineated can be understood as being subversive to this previous understanding and is so precisely because it requires sustained attention to effort. When attention to effort becomes connected to everyday life with

disability, effort ceases to be optional; hence my usage of the terms "requirement" and "demand." In relation to representation, this shifts the distance restitution narratives may evoke (as concerning an account of events that happened in the past) to the demands that effort asks in somehow accounting for its everydayness, thereby also asking for its recognition and subsequent address. This address concerns itself with the way in which disruptions happen in everyday life with disability over and over, ultimately resisting representational models that converge toward the affective states of "overcoming" or "acceptance." Moreover, connecting effort to the way in which it is addressed implies that it has a communicable, social function. The visibility of effort, and inversely, the effort of visibility, or the effort of appearance, is intrinsically connected to the way the affective work effort requires is or is not addressed and how we recognize and socially acknowledge and tend to it.

In this chapter, I have argued for the intertwinement between the formal aspects of representation and how they may draw our attention to and even emphasize bodily capacity (which, like the term *affect*, also cannot be directly represented), often setting affective demands on the reader (to be invested in, or to put effort into the text). This offers an entrance into the fourth chapter, which is concerned with the concept of distortion, traditionally understood as the bending out of shape of an originary form. Rather than questioning the normative assumption of "originary" in originary form, I instead look at the affordances of disability to twist objects and words out of shape and, following this chapter, how this further relates to the affective capacities of the disabled body.

CHAPTER 5

Distortion

1. Disability and the Affordances of Distortion

In the previous chapter, I argued how the concept of disruption can be understood not as a single rupture or break in the given account of a life, but rather that disruption can draw our attention to the continuous effort involved in living with disability. This chapter examines the affordances of a concept related to disruption but differentiates from it in important ways; that of distortion. According to the OED, distortion involves three different meanings: 1. The twisting awry or out of shape of an object; 2. The twisting or perversion of words and stories so as to give to them a different sense; 3. The change in the waveform of a signal emitted by an electronic device that impairs the quality of its reproduction.[1] What these three meanings have in common, and what distinguishes distortion from disruption, is that distortion implies the presence of some object (a word, a body, an electronic signal) that somehow becomes *twisted* from its original shape or sense. By contrast, disruption evokes the *break* or *rupture* of an object.

This chapter explores these denotations of distortion as an affordance of disability through a reading of Mariam Petrosyan's novel *The Gray House* (2017).[2] The novel's title refers to a house (capitalized and referred to as "the House" in the novel) that is a home for disabled children and adolescents, functioning as a boarding school. The House is divided into five dormitories numbered one to six, with the fifth inexplicably missing. All inhabitants of the House, including the counselors, are given a nickname by another inhabitant as soon as they enter it. The dorms also have nicknames, based on animals: the First are Pheasants, the Second Rats, the Third Birds, and the Sixth are the Hounds. The Fourth does not have its own nickname, and this only becomes partly elucidated late into the first book, as the members of the fourth broke off from a previous group. Positing different narratives from different timelines that are also told by different narrators, the novel defies a traditional linear plot in favor of this

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1 https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/view/Entry/55713?redirectedFrom=distortion#eid

2 The novel was originally published in Russian as three separate novels that were collected into one volume. In the English translation, the three novels are referred to as "books," and retain the titles of the original novels: *Smoker, Eight Days in the Life of Jackal*, and *The Abandoned Nests*.

kaleidoscopic form. The reader is only partially made privy as to why certain events take place in the House, how they happen (and have happened), and whether the House may possess agency of its own. This novel deviates from previous chapters' case studies in that it does not feature one particular character with a disability surrounded by non-disabled characters, but instead the majority of its characters have various and different disabilities. Pivotal to the novel is how these various characters try to live together in the House, which conjoins a sense of camaraderie with that of rivalry and violence between the House's many inhabitants.

Through the frequent inexplicability of the events that take place in the House, the House's students desire to understand its history and why these events occur, as they try to live together through these events. Given the centrality the novel places on both indeterminacy and inexplicability, I will read the text through the literary mode of the fantastic, as delineated by literary scholar Rosemary Jackson in her study *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981). Jackson argues that the fantastic as literary mode borrows from both the conventions of what she calls the "marvellous" as well as the "mimetic" or realist mode of literature,[3] while never being fully reducible to either. Given that the novel's size and complexity subvert traditional linear plot-structures, I will not attempt to subjugate it to a reading of a predominantly chronological fashion, since that would forcefully go against the way the novel works. Instead, through reading select passages, I intersect and intertwine these readings with the argument concerning the affordances of distortion I make in this chapter.

Coming back to the denotations of distortion delineated above, the fantastic holds the power to distort and subsequently subvert normative orders attached to the modes mentioned. The fantastic therefore finds part of its constitution as literary mode in the activity of distortion. It needs to draw and subsequently twist conventions associated with these other modes. Although both exposing and resisting the normativity found in a dominant cultural order, the fantastic does not offer a "solution" through proposing a different order. Rather it (briefly) opens spaces of disorder and disturbance that through imbuing the cultural imaginary with fictive form evokes a different world. Jackson writes that: "Presenting that which cannot be, but is, fantasy exposes a culture's definitions of that which can be: it traces the limits of its epistemological

3 With the marvellous mode, Jackson refers to what she also calls the "fairy story," referring to the tales of authors such as the Grimm brothers, Tolkien, and Hans Christian Andersen. Central to the marvellous is that it offers a complete history and narrative told by an omniscient narrator. The mimetic or realist mode, meanwhile, refers to the realist novel that presupposes a claim of equivalence between the fictional world and the extratextual one.

and ontological frame" (23).[4] Jackson contends that "that which can be" is implicitly exposed by fantasy's transgressive distortion of the epistemological and ontological frames from which it draws. As such, fantasy needs to transgress the boundaries of those frames to present a different world.

Beyond the tracing of epistemological and ontological frameworks from which the fantastic draws and subsequently distorts to "present that which cannot be, but is" this chapter concerns itself with how we may affectively relate to being presented with "that which cannot be," with which Jackson's study is much less concerned. She states that "The presentation of impossibility is not by itself a radical activity: texts subvert only if the reader is *disturbed* by their dislocated narrative form" (23). Subversion by the fantastic succeeds if it disturbs the reader, but disturbance is a successful affective *effect* the reader may experience when presented with the impossible.

Literary scholar Tzvetan Todorov posited that the nature of how we relate to the fantastic lies in hesitation, arguing that the reader must hesitate between an interpretation of the story's events as being either natural or supernatural. This hesitation also takes place at the diegetic level by the story's characters who may also hesitate in the face of the story's inexplicable events (Todorov 33). The affective tension elicited by hesitation does not need to find an affective resolution in certainty or determinacy within tales of the fantastic. Instead, hesitancy is the disposition Todorov designates as being constituent of the fantastic mode of literature.

Adjacent to hesitation as an affective relation elicited by the presentation of the impossible, through my reading of *The Gray House* I posit and expound *anticipation* as hesitation's affective counterpart. While *The Gray House* defies "traditional" linear narrativity, over the course of its three books it builds up towards the inhabitants' graduation day; the day when the students will be released from the House and continue life outside of it. Furthermore, the novel explores anticipation through smaller scopes as well: the interest in new arrivals to the House; their expectations concerning future events; and the anticipation of the reactions to these events by other characters. Whereas hesitation causes one to doubt when being presented with the impossible, anticipation is concerned with (the uncertainty of) what is to come, while this concern itself (similar to hesitation) takes place in the present. In literary studies, anticipation has been mainly studied through narratological, cognitive, and

4 Jackson employs "fantasy" and "the fantastic" congruently. She draws from William Irwin's study *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (1976), who writes that "A fantasy is a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility: it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into "fact" itself" (x).

structuralist approaches under the guise of *prolepsis* (the Greek term for anticipation), often referring to the analysis of usages of what is more commonly known as the flash forward in narratives. In contrast, my interest lies in anticipation as an affective tension, founded on a time that is felt and taken in the present that concerns a future event that is not yet actualized. I argue that anticipation involves a present concern with the manifestation of the improbable or impossible, though the confrontation with "what cannot be, but is" necessarily anticipates what else may be(come) the case. As such, being faced with "what cannot be, but is" does not stop with its apprehension but elicits *further* anticipation.

Whereas for Todorov hesitation is primarily a matter of interpretation concerning the events one is presented with, my reading will shift the emphasis from a predominant concern for epistemological doubt (what is either natural or supernatural) to one that examines hesitation as the affective consequence of living in and interpreting a paradoxical world. As mentioned above, the fantastic draws from the conventions of other literary modes and distorts them. *The Gray House* presents such a fantastic world that draws from conventions associated with other modes, but adjacent to and intertwined with a concern for the interpretation of events lies an emphasis on a hesitance of relationality: (how) can I be a part of this world? In line with Jackson's conceptualization of the fantastic, the novel does not explain many of the events that happen in The House; this is not the point. Instead, hesitation is expounded as the distortion of the relationship between the twisting of words and stories and the parallel twisting of the ability to sense and perceive the world one is a part of, effectuating affective indeterminacy.

While my reading of *The Gray House* proposes anticipation and hesitation as relevant affective relationalities of the fantastic, Jackson asserted that texts subvert only if they *disturb* the reader. Jackson goes on to state that the fantastic "lies inside closed systems, infiltrating, opening spaces where unity had been assumed. Its impossibilities propose latent 'other' meanings or realities behind the possible or the known. Breaking single, reductive 'truths', the fantastic traces a space within a society's cognitive frame. It introduces multiple, contradictory 'truths': it becomes polysemic" (23). Disturbance at the affective level of the reader becomes connected to the disturbance of the unity of a closed system that is opened. This latter disturbance is connected to polysemy, the ability of a text to hold multiple and contradictory meanings simultaneously. Distortion has much affinity with polysemy since distortion draws from words and stories to give them a different sense, thereby purporting a new sense that contrasts the one that it distorted. Jackson's words therefore suggest that the truth of the presupposed closed system which is subverted by the fantastic is not

(fully) eradicated but rather supplemented with a different, contradictory "truth" that comes to coexist with it. Building on Jackson's argument, my claim is that we should understand the proliferation of such contradictory "truths" as distortion's affordance through the literary mode of the fantastic.

In Jackson's argument, the unity of closed systems is connected with "single, reductive truths." To argue *for* contradiction and paradox as affordances of distortion, what is at stake is not to replace one reductive truth for another. This is why distortion necessarily draws from (and by extension, is dependent on) such closed systems. If it would succeed in eradicating one normative order another would come to replace it. Instead, by holding different and contradictory truths together, the distortion elicited by the fantastic allows us to further understand the normativity attached to those systems it draws from.[5]

Given that *The Gray House* is a tale of the fantastic that concerns a House filled with students with disabilities, this begs the question what reductive truths and normative attachments are related to disability. The field of disability studies has understandably given much attention to the concept of normativity in relation to disability, but less attention has been given to the kinds of normativity the field itself produces. In their overview article *Exploring Normativity in Disability Studies* (2015), disability studies scholars Simo Vehmas and Nick Watson trace the various uses of the concept of normativity within the field. They note that "Disability studies has always included a strong normative dimension, founded as it is on a belief that life for disabled people could be better coupled with a desire to identify and challenge what are seen as discriminatory practices and beliefs. All theoretical accounts in the field contain either implicit or explicit normative judgments about the ethical or political issues that affect disabled people's lives" (4). Vehmas' and Watson's intervention is that, while many theoretical accounts advanced by disability scholars have sought to develop critiques of ableism based on its normativity, they understand these theories as being themselves normative, albeit in different ways. According to Vehmas and Watson, the theoretical accounts they in turn critique thereby manifest their own normative propositions and implications.[6]

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5 For example, *The Gray House* is a narrative and therefore has aspects of linearity. It also diverges from this with passages which do not push the narrative further in any way, or even by employing different genres, like lyric poetry.

6 Phil Smith (2004) sees disability's normativity in that it is founded in disease and filth metaphors, whereas Rosemarie Garland Thompson writes that disability functions as a synecdoche for all forms that culture deems non-normative (2002). Goodley et al., meanwhile, state that "disability demands non-normative and anti-establishment ways of living life" (2014: 348).

Vehmas' and Watson's primary concern lies with the normativity placed on disability that is produced through ethical judgement and political statements (4), but they largely disregard the normativity attached to the ways in which disability has been conceptualized through the different *models* of disability that have been proposed (the medical, social, and cultural). This distinction matters because the normativity connected to the way in which disability is conceptualized influences the kind of ethical and political normativity that may follow from this conceptualization. The texts discussed in previous chapters were primarily written in what Jackson refers to as the realist or mimetic mode of literature, where the predominant conceptualization of disability is a socio-medical one.[7] While I think it would be a "reductive truth," to use Jackson's terms, to try and place those representations of disability in any single one of disability studies' proposed models, the conceptualization of disability as a socio-medical concern and the normativity attached to it is precisely what the fantastic needs to draw from in order to distort and subsequently subvert its normativity.

A conceptual parallel between the fantastic and disability relevant to this chapter is that they both transgress pre-established norms while the treatments for this transgression markedly differ. Whereas the transgression of the fantastic is proposed through presenting "that which cannot be, but is," disrupting the normativity espoused by a dominant order, the medical model defines and reduces disability's transgression to a relationship between a bodily normate and its divergence in empirical-medical anomaly. The medical model of disability has, of course, seen responses in the social and cultural models of disability (as discussed in previous chapters). As Vehmas' and Watson's argument suggests, scholars in disability studies, while demonstrating their own normativity, do so largely in response to the normativity they see as being attached to disability. What these conceptualizations of disability lack, however, is what *The Gray House* affords through connecting disability with the distortion the fantastic elicits: to allow us to think of disability in relation to "that which cannot be, but is." In other words, to think of disability as a matter of the imagination.

The Gray House does not overthrow the socio-medical model conception of disability as found in other texts but draws from and distorts it. The novel does so by reiterating the figure of the *changeling*, common in Western folklore and fairytales. The changeling, as the name suggests, was in such stories swapped for other children

7 In *The Elephant Man*, John Merrick was studied and put on display as a medical anomaly; in *A Little Life*, Jude's medical condition and deterioration were a constant cause for concern; and in *Still Life with Monkey*, Duncan's adjustment to life as a quadriplegic took center stage.

and often had (hidden) disabilities that omitted description. Due to the changeling's resistance to denotation and its appeal to figurative connotations, the understanding of disability as denotative becomes distorted, where such a denotative conceptualization of disability would follow the normative logic of models through which disability is commonly conceived. Instead, I argue that the figure of the changeling affords what I call figurative conceivability, by which I mean the ambiguous, paradoxical, and polysemic connotations concerning disability that the changeling produces or that may be assigned to it, but never fully stabilized. By being itself a distortional figure, the changeling posits how disability affords what is conceivable and imaginable. This subsequently twists the socio-medical conceptualization that posits its understanding of disability which follows a normative representational logic of the model. In that conception, normativity is manifested because this logic dictates how instances of disability fit into the model's conceptualization.

Following this, the chapter closes with an elucidation of Jackson's notion that for the fantastic to be successful in its subversion, it needs to *disturb* the reader. Disturbance, as mentioned, is different from anticipation and hesitation in that it is an affective effect of the fantastic rather than one of the affective relationalities it elicits. I examine disturbance as involving simultaneous dissimulation of the subject with the assimilation of the text, taking my cue from Roland Barthes' literary aesthetics. For Barthes, the reader's subjectivity can be dissimilated through the process of reading, which simultaneously "generates" the text, which he likens to a weave, that I read as involving another form of twisting. Through a reading of select passages of the novel, I argue how *The Gray House* appropriates and twists this process of dissimilation-as-immersion delineated by Barthes. I suggest that the dissimilation of the subject as Barthes envisions it necessarily draws our attention to the ways in which bodily capacity becomes interpretative ability in the dissimilation he describes. In order to create a representational-allegorical relationship with a text, my reading of *The Gray House* argues that such interpretative ability necessarily rests on bodily capacity and complicates how capacity turns into ability.

2. Twisting Prolepsis: Anticipation and the "Expected Unexpected"

In *The Gray House*'s first book, entitled *Smoker* (named after one of the novel's characters), we follow the story of an armless boy named Grasshopper as he arrives at the House. Grasshopper is taken in by a counselor named Elk, who puts him under the guidance of an older boy named Blind. When Grasshopper arrives at the House, it is

relatively quiet as most of the other inhabitants are away on a summer trip. When summer ends, the inhabitants return. Grasshopper then rushes out to look at them:

> "Can you hear that?" Blind, sitting on the floor by the door, asked him. "Hear how much noise they're making?" Blind held the boy's shorts for him. The boy quickly thrust his legs through the openings, one, then the other. Blind did the zipper. "You don't like them?" the boy asked, watching his sneakers being laced. "Why should I?" Blind pushed the boy's foot off his knee and put the other one in its place. "Why should I like them?" The boy was barely able to wait for his blazer and refused the comb. His fair hair, grown out during the summer, remained disheveled. "Come on, I'm going!" he blurted out. Then he ran, his feet unsteady from anticipation. The corridor, then the stairs, then the first floor. The door was being kept ajar by a striped bag. He ran out into the yard and froze. He was surrounded by faces. The faces were unfamiliar, alien, they cut like knives. The voices—shrill, frightening. He was scared. These were not the people he'd rushed to meet. (41)

This passage starts with an orientation: Blind is affected by noise, but the noise is separated from Blind and Grasshopper, by something that is outside of the room they are in. Disability becomes intertwined with anticipation, as Blind and Grasshopper need to go through a set of actions before Grasshopper is able to run out, preventing him from seeing the newcomers straightaway: first he thrusts his legs into the shorts, then Blind does Grasshopper's zipper, then he ties his shoelaces. Anticipation finds its origins in the Latin *anticipare*, which is a combination of *ante* (before) and *capers* (to take). To anticipate involves taking (care of) something ahead of its actualization. To take something before it is actualized, the scene suggests, is to become unsteady with it, as Grasshopper can barely contain himself.

Sarah Ahmed, in her article *Affective Economies* (2004), proposes that affect works through aligning some bodies with other bodies (117). Ahmed writes that "the individual subject comes into being through its very alignment with the collective. *It is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies*" (128). With this last argument, Ahmed means that, because affect traverses through and between bodies, affect cannot be *located* in a body in the sense of that body being a "container" of affect; it is continuously being affected by its surroundings. Thus, the way in which a body becomes aligned in a particular way

with its surroundings is dependent on the way that body is affected by it. The surfaces of collective bodies are then generated through the traversal of affect that aligns these bodies in a similar way.

In the scene above, Grasshopper's anticipation affectively aligns his unsteady body with the bodies that produce the noise but are not yet there. As Grasshopper runs through the House—the corridor, the stairs, the first floor—upon entering the yard, there is a difference between what he apparently anticipated (since the text does not disclose this), and what he finds in the yard. The alignment generated through anticipation becomes twisted: instead of being oriented toward the newcomers, Grasshopper now becomes *surrounded* by their faces. Here, the "surfaces of collective bodies" are described as follows:

> They too were browned by the sun, they laughed, they were dappled with patches of color, but they were all wrong. He lowered himself onto the step, keeping his catlike gaze on them. A shiver ran down his spine. So that's how they are, he thought bitterly. They are all assembled from little pieces. And I am one of them. I am just like them. Or will be soon. We are in a zoo. And the fence is for keeping us all in. There was one in a wheelchair, white like a marble statue, with snowy hair and a haggard look, and another one, nearly purple, bloated as a week-old corpse and almost as scary. This one also could not walk, and he was surrounded by girls pushing his wheelchair. The girls laughed and joked, and each had a flaw; they too were glued together from pieces. He looked at them and wanted to cry. (41)

Grasshopper assesses the newcomers as "all wrong," but how should we read this assessment? Earlier, I mentioned that distortion presupposes an original form that is twisted out of shape. What is out of shape here is the expected or anticipated shape itself, for the bodies that appear before Grasshopper are described (through free indirect speech) as being "assembled from little pieces," which is "how they are." Implicitly, then, the scene contrasts bodies assembled from pieces with an absent conception, such as the body as a unitary whole. This is then followed by metaphorical descriptions of the different "pieces" that make up these bodies, as what makes them stand out: "white like a marble statue;" "bloated as a week-old corpse." At the end of the passage, to be glued together from such pieces becomes connected to these bodies having a flaw. What is "wrong" and "flawed" becomes connected to unexpected disabled bodies; it connects the anticipation from the quote above with the

actualization of the ways in which these bodies appear to Grasshopper. Anticipation and actualization intertwine when Grasshopper (again through free indirect speech) thinks, "I am one of them. I am just like them. Or will be soon." Grasshopper both already is and will become like the others, assembled from pieces.

Ahmed writes that "Emotions work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence) … My economic model of emotions suggests that while emotions do not positively reside in a subject or figure, they still work to bind subjects together. Indeed, to put it more strongly, the nonresidence of emotions is what makes them "binding." " (2004: 119). Adherence is effectuated because Grasshopper recognizes himself to be like the newcomers, but the stickiness that Ahmed refers to here sees the transition of initial excitement in anticipation to Grasshopper's bitterness and being overwhelmed that he is "just like them." The scene enacts the twisting of a relationship of anticipation and alignment to becoming *bound* through this relationship when it is actualized: Grasshopper states that he is "just like them. Or will be soon." This latter statement can also be read as one of anticipation, but it involves the anticipation of what *will* come rather than what *could* be. It suggests a disabled future is already predetermined.

Within literary studies the common term used for anticipation (and the Greek word for it) is *prolepsis*. Literary scholar Mark Currie notes that "prolepsis is normally assumed, at least in its narratological context, to name an excursion forwards in a sequence, this excursion seems to be a journey to somewhere which precedes the point of departure" (2007: 42). Adjacently, Currie posits a notion of what he calls performative prolepsis, which "produces the future in the act of envisaging it, so that the possible transforms itself into the actual. It does so in a range of modes and moods which can be placed somewhere on a scale between fear and hope" (44). Currie's understanding of performative prolepsis is based on the act of reading since it is through this act that the reader may herself anticipate what is about to happen within the narrative.[8] The actualization of the imaginary is assimilated within the act of envisaging since it imbues the possible with imaginative form. This is important because, coming back to the notion of distortion, it allows us to ask *how* the anticipated possible is transformed into the actual. Furthermore, prolepsis is connected to what we either fear or hope the outcome to be, which connects anticipation to its affective drive (either towards the thing anticipated or away from it).

8 Literary scholar Teresa Bridgeman has expounded this notion through a reading of Genette's use of the term *anonce*, as brief allusions as to what may happen later in the narrative, rather than actual flash forwards (125).

In relation to this notion of performative prolepsis, what is missing in the scene above is what Grasshopper *imagined* the newcomers to be like; such a description was omitted. Instead, we only learn about his assessment to the newcomers once he sees their disabilities as "all wrong" and "flawed." There was anticipation at the diegetic level, but within the narrative the actualization only took place when Grasshopper ran out to face the newcomers. The twisting of that affective relationality that I read into one of becoming *bound* ran parallel to the anticipation of a disabled future that *will* come rather than what could be.

This predetermination that the narrative suggests is itself a feature of fictional narrative: a novel is already a complete and finished narrative when we start to read it. In his later study, *The Unexpected* (2013), Currie writes of this tense (the future perfect or future anterior) of fiction: "If we accept the reading of a narrative as a model of temporal experience it seems to represent human action in its most passive mode in relation to a future that is not open, the arrival of which we simply await. The future, in a written narrative, is accessible to us, as readers, in a way that seems to render it ontologically distinct from the open future of life: a false future which is, in fact, the past, since it is already written" (66).

Currie proposes an ontological distinction between the temporal experience of life and that of written fictional narrative, where the first is experienced as being open and not predetermined to us in experience, and the second is predetermined in the tense of the future perfect, what Currie elsewhere refers to as "this will have happened." Currie's account of the difference between the future perfect tense of fictional narrative and the experience of the temporal "openness" of life also connects the predetermination of fiction with "action in its most passive mode," but more importantly, Currie connects fiction's predetermination with falsity. With the term "false future," Currie is not arguing that fiction is false in the sense that it is commonly charged with, i.e., that fiction would be untrue, telling events that have not actually happened. It is false in the sense that it is predetermined and would offer the reader a "false" sense of anticipation in the act of reading. Fiction thereby twists the experience of anticipation in life (where we anticipate in life's open-endedness) with that of anticipation in the future anterior, where we anticipate, through reading, in a preset world. Jacques Derrida has commented on the future anterior that it is "It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can therefore only announce itself, present itself, in the species of monstrosity" (2016: 5 [1974]). Connecting the future anterior to the concepts of normality and monstrosity, Derrida's comment highlights that, as a tense, the predetermined and closed future of a fictional narrative is seen as an aberration of the normality of the open-ended experience of life suggested by Currie.

While this connotation of falsity effectively pertains to all fictional narrative for Currie, the fantastic twists fiction's future anterior by intertwining the anticipation that takes place at both the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels.[9] In other words, the anticipation in the act of reading by the reader is intertwined with the intradiegetic anticipation of the events and characters within the story. While this too can occur in any other kind of fiction, what is at stake in the mode of the fantastic is how it distorts the normativity of this relationship between extra- and intra-diegesis, where the reader's anticipation and the intradiegetic anticipation do not necessarily converge. Currie notes that "narrative in fiction is inherently disposed towards the relation of the unexpected, and makes use of habitual, repetitive and familiar events as a setting for the unexpected to such an extent that the everyday and the ordinary actually carry within them a foreshadowing of an unforeseeable future" (2013: 18). Since this predisposition follows familiar habits and repetitions (through genre conventions, for example), it is a kind of "expected unexpected," a foreshadowing that lies within normative expectation.[10]

If the normative horizon of expectation afforded by fiction is to be distorted in the mode of the fantastic, it consequently needs to work with narrative time as its material. The scene of *The Gray House* above takes place in a timeline that seemingly takes place before another timeline, that of the "present." This is in itself conventional enough and would suggest that the different linear narratives that are in place would eventually cross over into another. Yet simultaneously, the novel suggests that time in the House repeats itself. The how and why of the operation of time in the House is, however, never fully disclosed to the reader; it just occurs. In an exchange towards the end of the novel, two of the members of the fourth dormitory, Noble and Tabaqui, have an encounter concerning the nature of time in the House, when Tabaqui addresses Noble:

> "You are aware that your memory is a part of you? And not an insignificant part. Those who return could become somebody quite different from who they were before. And not experience some of the things

9 Gerald Prince defines extradiegetic as that which takes place outside of the diegesis, but in reference to different kinds of diegetic levels. (1987: 29). I use the terms *intra* and *extra* as that which is in- or outside the diegetic world (and thus involves the reader).

10 Hans Robert Jauss proposed the term *horizon of expectation* to refer to the way in which an audience may receive literature "as works of its present, in the unity of a common horizon of literary expectations, memories, and anticipations that establishes their significance" (1982: 38).

> they have experienced on the previous loop. Which would make the next loop itself different as well." "I know," Noble says. "You're wasting your time. I will not reconsider." "You are of the Forest," I say. "It's in your blood. You shall not find rest until you join with it." "I know," he says. "But she is not there." "Your love has consumed you. And the first thing it devours is reason, mind you. Speaking of love ... Are you sure that when you become a different you, you'll still love the same person that you love today? Absolutely sure?" "Of course." And he smiles. The smile of a maniac. Or of someone in love. (639)

Tabaqui suggests that time in the House is not just linear but consists of loops, i.e., repetitive cycles of time. He says that Noble should join the "Forest," a place adjacent to the House in which enigmatic events take place over the course of the novel. Tabaqui thereby suggests that by joining with the Forest, Noble could not only break out of the House's loops but, more importantly, "find rest" as it is in "his blood," evoking an eschatological return to an essence or wellspring from which Noble would stem. Noble, who is in love with another inhabitant of the House, wishes to stay to repeat the loop in the hopes of experiencing this love over and over. But Tabaqui's warning suggests that, while he could stay, the repetition of the loop does not mean he would experience the same events; his words imply that, even as the House would go through another loop, the Noble he is now, constructed out of his memories and experiences, might not return at all, twisted through the loop's repetition. Simultaneously, however, Noble assures Tabaqui that, even if *he* would change, his love would certainly be repeated over and over, suggesting that is what would remain consistent.

The anticipation of Noble's hope to relive his love through the repetition of the loop is not connected to the possibility of a future linear time, but rather that a given chronological time might repeat and distort itself over and over through remaining in the House, even at the cost of Noble not remaining himself. Parallel to this, Tabaqui's words suggest that the time of the Forest, where Noble would finally "find rest," contrasts the time of the loop as a time seemingly without action or event, as it is a time of rest.

By placing different timelines and events adjacent to one another, the novel distorts the common conception of anticipation as a device of prolepsis that preemptively accepts the givenness of the future anterior's determinism. Instead, anticipation is here more closely related to what literary scholar Gary Saul Morson dubbed sideshadowing: "Whereas foreshadowing works by revealing apparent alternatives to be mere illusions, sideshadowing conveys the sense that actual events might just as well not

have happened. In an open universe, the illusion is inevitability itself … *Something else* was possible, and sideshadowing is used to create a sense of that "something else" " (117–118). The usage of "sense" is relevant in relation to anticipation, precisely because it connects sense to the "openness" evoked by the unexpected. Simultaneously and paradoxically, however, the scene with Grasshopper displayed the future anterior's determinism in relation to disability, through Grasshopper's realization that he will be "just like them."

The sense of openness that the novel evokes through evoking *more* anticipation about the unexpected is at the same time conjoined with a closed future. By twisting the normativity associated with the horizon of expectation, it intensifies affective anticipation by continuously emphasizing the possibility of what *could* happen. In this way, the distortion of linear time effectuates more connotations of "what could happen"—without such options being actualized. Therefore, anticipation (and, as we will see, hesitation as well), as an affective relationality, is the manifestation of suggestive connotations that are never explicated or necessarily manifested. While never fully undermining the normativity of linear narrative time, the constant return to anticipation that the fantastic enacts subsequently leads us to a related affective relationality associated with anticipation, that of hesitation.

3. Speculative Hesitation: Sensing in an Irresolute World

In moving from anticipation to hesitation, the relationship between these two affective relationalities might seem apparent enough. As Currie mentioned, anticipation is played on a scale of hope and fear, what we wish or do not wish to happen. Hesitation might then involve the moment of inaction in being faced with the moment we anticipated—hence Grasshopper's moment of freezing when he rushed out to meet the House's other inhabitants. Whereas anticipation etymologically involves taking something ahead of its time, hesitation stems from the Latin *haesitare*; to stick fast or remain fixed, but also has the connotations of being irresolute or undecided. While they appear connected, anticipation and hesitation are at odds in terms of their connoted agency, of the way they conceive the relationship between action and inaction. Furthermore, hesitation's Latin roots seem contradictory: how can something be fixed while simultaneously irresolute?

Adjacent to what Todorov designates as the extradiegetic hesitance experienced by the reader concerning whether the events in the story are natural or supernatural, and that the intradiegetic characters can experience the same, he adds that the reader's

attitude toward the text must reject allegorical interpretations (33). Todorov notes that the characters' hesitance involves their "estimation of events in the narrative; we might call these units "reactions", as opposed to "actions" which habitually constitute the argument of the narrative" (33). This appears to be a matter of interpretation, but Todorov adds that it is also "concerned with a represented theme, that of perception and its notation" (33–34). Todorov thereby connects the interpretation of events by the characters with the way in which perception is represented via the text. Todorov's suggestion to resist allegorical readings is echoed by Jackson, who argues that through attempts to allegorize the fantastic, it "loses its proper non-signifying nature. Part of its subversive power lies in its resistance to allegory and metaphor" (41). The non-signifying nature of the fantastic is elucidated by Jackson as "A reluctance, or an inability, to present definitive versions of 'truth' or 'reality' makes of the modern fantastic a literature which draws attention to its own practice as a linguistic system. Structured upon contradiction and ambivalence, the fantastic traces in that which cannot be said, that which evades articulation or that which is represented as 'untrue' and 'unreal' " (37).

By stressing the connection between reluctance and interpretation, both Todorov and Jackson suggest an understanding of hesitation as an epistemological matter. Similar to anticipation, I want to propose hesitation as concerning an affective relationality, where I seek to expound hesitation from the question posed earlier: how can hesitation connote being "fixed" while being simultaneously irresolute? The seemingly paradoxical nature of this question is explored in *The Gray House* through the ambiguity of the many practices that occur in the House. In the novel's first book, *Smoker*, we follow the eponymous character, who is a new arrival to the House (and also acts as a narrator). Confronted with the bizarre and absurd events that take place in the House, Smoker reflects on how he should interpret these and the actions of his co-inhabitants when he has a realization:

> Once I managed to *say the word*, I suddenly was free to realize that this "game" would have to include much more than just appearance. It was the right word, and, having caught it, I understood that I had been looking for it for a long time. For the word that would contain the key to everything happening in the House. All it took was the recognition of the fact that the Game encompassed *everything* around me. (84)

Smoker's realization concerning what he experiences in the House offers him an interpretative framework: that what is happening in the House is a "game," an overarching

scheme of which the rules remain obscure to him. This realization does not juxtapose appearance with reality, but rather appearance with design, as Smoker subsequently realizes that "someone somewhere must have designed this at some point" (84). Even if the realization that he has become part of a game does not automatically offer him all the answers as to what the game's rules are, the term acts as a heuristic device that allows Smoker to relate to the world around him since it presupposes that every element is part of a larger plan. By envisioning the House's world as a game, the frame of Smoker's perspective on that world is fixed, even if the rules of the game remain unclear. What *is* clear from this frame, however, is that the rules are something that can be discovered: "I wanted to laugh out loud and scream that I was onto all of them now. All of their bats, throwing knives, coups, face powders, and scorpions in oil" (86). By laughing and wanting to scream that he is "onto them," Smoker asserts the certainty of his position, and the particularities of the things that remain irresolute are subsequently trivialized. Regardless of what the exact explanations for all of these things might be, Smoker's realization that this world is a game offers him the fixity that answers *can* be given in the first place.

In the final chapter of the novel's first book Smoker's interpretative framework is put to the test. A confrontation ensues between the characters of Pompey, who is the leader of the Sixth, and Blind, who leads the Fourth. As the students circle around Pompey, who is seemingly ready for a confrontation, Blind steps into the circle and kills Pompey by stabbing a knife in his throat. The text never explicates what the conflict concerned, although the text suggests Pompey wanted to take over leadership of the Fourth. With Pompey dead before his eyes, Smoker rushes off in his wheelchair. Tabaqui, also in a wheelchair, goes after him:

> "Smoker. Calm down. You've got to calm down," he kept repeating. I told him I was absolutely calm. He produced a flashlight from his backpack and we proceeded along. Very slowly. Tabaqui was trembling and mumbling, "Not with me, barred from me, find yourself another skin, walk up the river, join with the moon, but never with me, not now and not soon ..." I laughed. "Please stop with the crazy," he said, "or we'll have to slap your cheeks and pour water on you. And I don't think anyone wants to do that at the moment." "What is it you want to do at the moment?" I said. "Lots of demands on your time?" ... I laughed again. I laughed and laughed, and then I literally choked on the laughter as it turned into a spasm. I vomited. Right on my legs. I didn't have time to lean over or turn to the side. (214–215)

Smoker's hysterical laughing fit is juxtaposed with him asserting to Tabaqui that he is "absolutely calm." Provocatively, Tabaqui asks Smoker to "stop with the crazy," which indirectly undermines the situation's own absurdity that they were witness to a (seemingly random) killing that just took place. The "crazy" is Tabaqui mumblingly rehearsing a riddle that ostensibly refers to the event that took place earlier. It suggests that whoever is addressed should not join with the speaker ("not with me, barred from me"), but is evocative of the transitive nature of the House, its inhabitants, and its surroundings. "Find yourself another skin" seemingly echoes Tabaqui's earlier explanation to Noble concerning the loops of time the House is caught in and that inhabitants can return in another loop, whereas to "join with the moon, but never with me," resembles that passage's suggestion of the inhabitants joining with the House's Forest, i.e., the world outside the House. Like that passage however, it is never fully disclosed to what the riddle ultimately refers.

My reading of the passage above is deliberately speculative and hesitant in that it does not allow for any decisive interpretation, even as the text *does* invite the reader to start interpreting Tabaqui's riddle. The ambiguous motivation behind Pompey's killing as well as Tabaqui's riddle match what Todorov's designates of the fantastic as propounding an "ambiguous vision." Todorov proposes that the ambiguity arises through the coincidence of the character who perceives the world and who simultaneously narrates the events, creating a scene, or vision, that becomes ambiguous and open to different readings (38). Thus, Smoker's focalization tells us he is "absolutely calm," while he simultaneously has a laughing fit. While the first sentence could be read ironically (since the remarks to Tabaqui also suggest irony), a reading wherein Smoker believes himself to remain calm is also possible. Focalized through Smoker's account of the House's events, the reader thereby becomes implicated in the mysteries the novel presents, and following Todorov's emphasis on reaction over action in the fantastic, we primarily follow Smoker's *reactions* to the events that he witnesses. This emphasis on reaction over action is relevant because, as my reading of the passages above shows, while Smoker's interpretative framework aims to construct an explanation of what is going on around him (the "game"), this framework does not influence or control his surroundings in any significant way. The dual movement of simultaneously inviting interpretation through ambiguity *and* asserting interpretation's limitations is not an epistemological problematic but rather the fantastic's assertion and affordance as literary mode.

In Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic-phenomenological study *Freedom and Nature* (2007 [1966]), he argues that hesitation relates to choice in that hesitation simultaneously falls short of choice and also marks the attempt of a choosing (Ricoeur 137). He states

that "the choice to which it refers is always conceived as absent, impossible, desired, delayed, or feared" (137). Ricoeur elucidation helps us better understand what is "fixed" in the question "how can hesitation be fixed while remaining irresolute?"; hesitation occurs precisely in what Ricoeur calls im-possibility rather than indecision.[11] Ricoeur points out that the fixity of perpetual indecision manifests absence, desire, fear; what these have in common is their not-yet-thereness, being temporally present through their absence.

A similar relationship concerning the presence of absence is characteristic of the literary fantastic for Jackson: "A gap between signifier and signified works both ways in the modern fantastic. On the one side there's a presentation of 'nameless things' … the 'something', which can have no adequate articulation except through suggestion and implication" (38–39) and that "the endeavor to visualize and verbalize the unseen and unsayable is one which inevitably falls short, except by drawing attention to exactly this difficulty of utterance" (39). On the other side, meanwhile, "lie 'thingless names', also recurring in the fantastic as words which are apprehended as empty signs, without meaning … They are inverted and invented 'nonsense' (non-sense) words, indicating nothing but their proper density and excess." (40). These quotes display Jackson's preoccupation with the semiotic operations of the fantastic, where there is either a signified without a proper signifier or vice versa. Jackson's analysis, however, can be pushed beyond semiotics. As she points out, the gap between signifier and signified draws attention to "exactly this difficulty of utterance," which in my own reading involves more than just their semiotics.

Similarly, when Jackson speaks of the "proper" density and excess of thingless names (and their non-sense, i.e. a difficulty or impossibility of sensing), this is evocative of the fantastic's affective power. These gestures toward "difficulty of utterance" and affect necessarily implicate the body within the hesitation problematic, which brings us back to Ricoeur, who notes the following on the way in which the body is implicated in hesitation:

> Genuine possibility is one which I open in myself as I decide, that is, in opening possibilities in the world by an actual project. The mark of such possibility projected ahead of myself is the feeling of capacity or power which includes alerting the body, with all its abilities poised on the verge of actual action, awakened or encountered by the project

11 Im-possibility, for Ricoeur, emphasizes the presence of possibility in hesitation: "The root possibility is not an indecision which destroys choice, but the power which initiates choice itself" (138).

> in the reality of the body. Hesitation illustrates these truths in principle by a *reductio ad absurdum*: in the chaos of my intentions lurks the conviction of my powerlessness. I experience not my possibility, but my im-possibility: "I am not up to it," "I am not of my depth," "I am lost, swamped"—I feel powerless. (138)

Ricoeur refers to a process of "opening" that is connected to the double movement of failing to choose between options while simultaneously conceiving of the options or possibilities themselves. Importantly, Ricoeur connects this to the body's capacity to be affected by the opening to these possibilities through choice. In hesitation's opening, Ricoeur finds that the possibility of choice in combination to the body "with all its abilities" affects the body to be on "the verge of actual action." Ricoeur's analysis therefore connects being presented with choice in a perceived conjuncture as affecting the body. It also points out that, for the body to be affected, it needs to hold a certain capacity to be affected by the presence of choice and im-possibility. Thus, when Ricoeur proposes that hesitation emphasizes impossibility in a *reductio ad absurdum*, this is founded on the argument that the conviction of powerlessness is itself constituted by the body's principal capacity to be affected by hesitation's opening.

This relationship between capacity and ability is explored in the novel after Smoker's and Tabaqui's exchange, when Alexander, another member of the Fourth, gets behind Smoker's wheelchair and drives him to the bathroom, where he and another member (Humpback) undress him:

> Once we reached the bathroom, Alexander unloaded me on the floor and undressed me down to my briefs. I was sitting on the wet floor, trembling. He took away my clothes and returned to wash the wheelchair, and still I was sitting there, naked. Then he and Humpback shoved me into the shower stall, turned on the water, and closed the door. I stretched out in the little tiled alcove, under the jets of water cascading down my back, and listened to their voices, muted by the frosted glass, mingling with the sound of the shower. Listened to them talk while they were washing my wheelchair. (215)

This scene, in contrast to the ones described previously, strips away any marvellous elements in the text and describes how Smoker's disabled body is handled by his fellow students. Smoker's earlier laughing fit is displaced with trembling as they carry him to the bathroom. The scene does not divulge *why* his body is trembling—is

it because he is sitting undressed on a wet floor? Because of the killing he witnessed? Both?—this only further enhances the fantastic's evocation of speculation. Trembling denotes an uncontrolled shaking or quivering of the body, yet connotes so much more: fear, anxiety, excitement, and so on, inviting the reader to read "into" the text through the question it inevitably raises. Smoker's body is not acting but is being acted upon as he is placed naked in the shower stall, and his wheelchair is taken from him. The nakedness of Smoker's body emphasizes how that body becomes increasingly receptive to his surroundings as the shower's water falls on him. Lying stretched on the ground and unable to move, Smoker's body becomes a listening body, but it is a distorted listening, with voices heard mutedly through glass as the voices blend with the falling water, making it impossible for Smoker to make out what the voices are saying.

While Smoker's epistemological framework of understanding the world he was in was a game was reactionary in nature (a reaction *to* being confronted with that world), the scene above is equally reactionary but reconfigures the relationality between the capacity of the body to be affected by that world and its ability to act upon it. It is Smoker's bodily capacities that become twisted—not a willing orientation toward something, but a being affected by something, like witnessing a killing, that subsequently twists the body that is affected. Distortion manipulates a body into being receptive to its hesitant relationality, which opens that body to choice and possibility. It foregrounds the body's (receptive) sensing of the world and also shows how sensing itself can be distorted. The absence of any marvellous aspect in this scene and the foregrounding of its literary realism through emphasizing Smoker's disability via his wheelchair also resists allegorization of the body, i.e., the body as allegory for the text itself being distorted, and instead stresses the "reality of the body" (to use Ricoeur's terms) and its capacities.

Ricoeur ultimately conceives of the relationship between affect and hermeneutics as follows: "Affectivity is essentially disordered. Confronted with an affective impression, I can endlessly ask, what is it? All meaning, summed up in these words, must be determined, defined, that is, understood by starting with a false infinite, with an indefinite, the affect" (144). While he acknowledges that affect exceeds the interpretative act, this excess, in his analysis, is "problematic as long as the self does not take an attitude towards it" (144). For Ricoeur, the activity of interpretation necessarily starts from the given that affect is never exhaustive, a point of departure from which hermeneutic engagement with the "what is it?" question commences.

The fantastic is not apathetic to hermeneutics but instead appropriates its interpretative moves as representational enactment. It proliferates affective speculation

through hesitant openings, employing hermeneutical gestures as its medium at both the intra- and extradiegetic levels (as both the story's characters and the reader are faced with the same inexplicability, causing them to interpret). As Jackson posited, the fantastic propagates both nonsense (as in nonsense words), as well as *non-sense*, a difficulty, and twisting, of sensing the world.[12] Distortion as I have expounded it here refers to the manipulation of the relation between these two uses of sense to manifest different affective relationalities (continuous anticipation and hesitation) in the relationship between the intradiegetic (how the characters sense and interpret their world) and the extradiegetic (the way in which the text seeks to manipulate the reader's interpretative and affective relations to itself).

4. Distortion as Engagement: The Changeling and Figurative Conceivability

Given that the distortion operational in the fantastic involves the twisting of words and stories so as to give to them a different sense, distortion involves taking original material that is twisted out of its recognizable shape. Literary scholar Irène Bessière writes that the fantastic "is produced by a relativizing process which grows out of the play upon ambivalences. Because it is a narrative structured upon contraries, fantasy tells of limits, and it is particularly revealing in pointing to the edges of the 'real'" (62).[13] Bessière's assertion that the fantastic involves a form of play is important in that this play itself involves the playful twisting of material that then transgresses the real, but can only do so because it still presumes the real as a point of reference. The ambivalence mentioned by Bessière is related to the way in which the fantastic produces contraries through this play. Rather than producing a relationship of thesis and antithesis, however, the contraries produced through the fantastic are asymmetrical in nature. The original is never fully negated by what the fantastic produces through distorting it, thereby espousing ambivalence, and pervades the boundaries between the real and the imaginary.

Because of this asymmetrical transgression, Joanna Russ posits fantasy as being a kind of violation: "Fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it. The actual world is constantly present in fantasy, by negation … fantasy is what

12 This distinction between the two uses of sense resembles Jacques Rancière's delineation of what he calls *dissensus*: "Dissensus is a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies'" (2010: 139).

13 Trans. Rosemary Jackson.

could not have happened; i.e. what *cannot* happen, what *cannot* exist" (52). What "cannot exist" is not simply the negative mirror image of what *does* exist. The affirmation of negation that Russ stresses violates the real because it still includes it as a point of reference rather than negating it. This is why distortion is best understood as producing polysemy: the coexistence of multiple and contradictory meanings and truths that, due to their coexistence, never *fully* make sense. What cannot exist comes to paradoxically co-exist with what already exists.

As shown in the previous paragraphs, *The Gray House* does not deny a socio-medical conceptualization of disability. Blind helped Grasshopper put his trousers on because he did not have any arms, and Smoker, who uses a wheelchair, was put in the shower by his fellow students. This emphasis on "realist" aspects of disability the novel contrasts with ones that are drawn from the marvellous. The novel does, however, also draw from different conceptions of disability, thereby allowing these asymmetrical conceptions to co-exist within the diegetic world.

One marvellous conception that the novel draws from is the figure of the changeling. In brief, the changeling is a figure in European folklore that describes the exchange of one child for another by fairies (Briggs 134). While detailed descriptions of changelings were often omitted in folkloric tales, research suggests that the birth of disabled children gave rise to this belief of exchange. In her article *Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy* (1988), Susan Schoon Elbery writes that: "Changelings often do not walk, run, or dance unless they think they will not be observed. Most are very small; they may have unusual eyes, ears and/or hands. They are described in many cases as wizened, with dark wrinkled skin. They frequently cry at all hours of the day or night; in some tales, the sound of the cry itself is unusual" (63). Schoon Elbery also notes that detailed descriptions of changelings are often omitted, thereby making it unclear what they may look like. Changelings, then, are the product of an exchange, whereby the new child is a twisted version of the original. But rather than these distortions pertaining only to the changeling's body, they also pertain to its abilities—how it walks, cries, or dances.

In *The Gray House*, the changeling appears in the middle of the novel as a figure who stalks the forests and swamps that surround the House, and it remains unclear what the changeling is a changeling for, but we later learn that the character is simultaneously Blind, the leader of the Fourth. When the reader is introduced to changeling as it's stalking the swamps, it becomes seduced by the singing of Saära, a creature that lives in a swamp near the Forest: "When he sings, the song distorts the whole of his face and his eyes go almost blind. His fingers tease and tear the grass, he trembles, shaken by his own voice, and he waits. The song always brings him visitors" (427–

428). Saära, though not himself described as a changeling or disabled, distorts his own body through the sonorous use of his voice, rendering him nearly blind; a temporary disability. The changeling hears Saära's singing that "keeps getting more sweet, loud, and seductive" (428), until he is won over and is caught in Saära's trap:

> "Why," he says, "do you walk into the trap like some common prey?" "Curious," the changeling explains. "And beautiful. Sing another one." Saära fumes silently. Singing for nothing? Not luring, not yearning? Shame, shame for evermore! "All right," he says finally. "But only if you come down with me. And give me something valuable in return." "Deal." (431)

Saära's singing is one of yearning and a luring; the voice is used to draw a prey into his trap, to catch and ensnare it. Yet, as the first sentence of the passage suggests, the changeling willingly lets himself be caught, seduced by the subterfuge of Saära's song. Singing to lure and seduce prey ultimately leads to an exchange of some kind, echoing the transactional nature of the changeling's folkloric origins. The changeling desires more singing and must offer Saära something in return. The changeling then offers Saära its blood, for which Saära then sings more of his songs. As Saära sleeps in his burrow after the exchange, the changeling retreats into the Forest:

> Once inside he starts remembering the songs he bought with his blood. He needs to repeat them before he forgets. His back is caked in drying mud. He sits up and puts his arms around his knees. The long white stems of his fingers intertwine. He recalls all the songs, from the first words to the very last ones, and falls asleep, satisfied. The Forest waves its dark branches over him. (432)

The changeling's body becomes a container for Saära's songs as he sits in a folded position by covering his arms around his knees, his fingers intertwined, enveloping himself before he himself is enveloped by the Forest, concluding this frame story. *Frame* here does not only denote a story within a story but also a story *about* framing. Saära's singing seduces his prey, but the prey itself deliberately walked into it. Furthermore, the text never divulges what exactly the changeling is a changeling *for*, but it does involve an exchange. As Saära sings his songs that distort his face and render him almost blind, the changeling gives up its blood to Saära in order to hear more songs which its body contains, which is then enveloped by the Forest.

Singing is connected to that which is sonorous and visceral, as that which twists the singer's body, and songs are what is stored within the body, which is itself stored in the Forest. Rather than an allegorical tale of symbolic exchange and folding, the text twists the changeling's folkloric connotations by distorting the nature of the exchange taking place. Instead of one child being exchanged for another, the text stresses the materiality of the bodies involved, who both gain and lose (dis)abilities through the character's transactions.

This is expounded further when the changeling, who is now somehow turned (back) into the character of Blind, comes to his senses:

> He treads slowly. His face is untroubled, like that of someone sleeping peacefully. His fingers run ahead and then return when he remembers the way. Now is the time of the crack between the worlds. Between the House and the Forest. He prefers to cross it in his sleep. When he's inside it his memory stumbles over familiar obstacles, and the body stumbles with it. When he's inside it he doesn't have command over his hearing. He doesn't hear things that are there, or hears the ones that aren't. (439)

Blind's body, instead of being willfully determined by him, readjusts to the crack between the worlds of the House and the Forest in an apparently liminal time of reverie, as his face appears to be sleeping peacefully. But then the text states that he actually prefers to cross this crack in his sleep, evoking a somnambulistic figure that moves and acts in a trance-like state. His fingers "run ahead" but return when they remember; his body stumbles along with his memory; and finally he hears what is not there and does not hear what is there. The text thus points to a conception of the body as one of external determination, where bodily abilities (to listen and perceive) are twistable, in a state of flux. In the scene discussed in the previous paragraph, Smoker sought to *make sense* out of the world he perceived which ultimately twisted his body into becoming a receptive, listening body, that was a distorted listening as it was overwhelmed by that world. Here, external determination is proposed as a process of *attunement* between the sleepwalking, blind body and the liminality of the worlds it moves in between.

Blind's lack of command over his hearing does not allow him to distinguish what is or is not there. His senses, too, become distorted. This is not a luring as with Saära's songs, or the heuristic device of the "game" Smoker employed to explain the world around him. Distortion concerns the twisting of the relationship between the epis-

temological "making sense" of the world, discerning what is or is not true, and the parallel twisting of the aesthetic abilities through which we sense and act in that world. Where Smoker's body was eventually twisted by the world he aimed to make sense of (and thereby tried subjugating it to his understanding), it is not that Blind *knows* what the Forest wants of him (and neither does the reader), only that there is a demand. When he is interrogated by one of the counselors concerning his whereabouts during the Longest Night, Blind says: "The night woke me up and made me hear ... Why? I don't know. No one knows" (440). The text continues: "Blind listens patiently. It's the only thing that's left. Listen when you can't explain. Thorns are springing up on the road to the Forest. The internal clock had chimed morning long ago. But the night doesn't end" (440). Smoker sought to understand the game he believed to be a part of, which eventually rendered him unable to process that world and twisted his body from an interpreting one into a receptive, listening body. Blind's senses too are distorted, but he is listening without needing an explanation *why or what for* he is listening: "Listen when you *can't* explain." Through the transformation of the changeling into Blind (and vice versa), the text opens up distortion's polysemy. As mentioned above, the changeling in folklore denoted a child that was exchanged for another child, but that often evaded close description. *The Gray House* assimilates this reading of the changeling by taking some connotations (that of the changeling being a figure of exchange, and lacking detailed description), while omitting others (that of the exchange of children).

Wolfgang Iser has delineated how fictional texts assimilate new combinations of connotations through the workings of *selection* and *combination*. Iser states that selection involves the event (rather than the intentional act) through which a text (dis)assembles from different referential fields (social, historical, cultural). This process for Iser is non-intentional in the sense that selection in a literary text constitutes the possibility to inquire how this selection relates to these referential fields, rather than these fields involving a pre-established repertoire of choices: "If an act of selection were governed by a set of rules given prior to the act, then the act itself would not transgress existing boundaries but would simply be one form of actualizing a possibility within the framework of a prevailing convention" (5). Combination, meanwhile, refers to new relationships a text makes conceivable through the transgressions manifested via selection: "Combination as a fictionalizing act endows the imaginary with a specific form according to the relations to be established. This form of the imaginary eludes verbalization. At the same time, however, it can never dispense with language, for language points to what is to be concretized. It also enables the concretization to be shaped and thus fed back into existing realities" (11). For Iser, fiction

is what gives form to the imaginary,[14] as what concretizes the imaginary in language. Yet, as the quote shows, imbuing the imaginary with form "eludes verbalization," Iser offers the following explanation as to why this is:

> Owing to its figurations, figurative language makes its references conceivable. Such language dwindles to an analogue that merely contains the conditions that will allow a reference to be conceived, but it cannot be identical to that reference. We may therefore discern a strange ambiguity in the function of this figurative language: as an analogue it permits and conditions conceivability, and as a sign it denotes the linguistic untranslatability of what it refers to. (11)

While figurative language imbues the imaginary with form because it is analogous in nature (and thereby establishes a relationship between two signs, rendering it analogically conceivable), it evades full "translation," by which Iser means that it cannot establish a "stronger" denotative relationship to its reference. Iser's theory thereby suggests that by imbuing the imaginary with figurative form, it makes the imaginary conceivable but simultaneously not denotatively referential. This lack of denotative referentiality opens up the text's polysemy: the coexistence of contradictory or non-complimentary connotations without a definitive denotation.

The figure of the changeling, as my reading argues, foregrounds the analogous nature of the figurative. Rather than being carefully described in the text, as Blind twists into the changeling and back, the text emphasizes the figure's connotations in favor of its denotation, intertwining the economic functions of exchange (the blood that was traded for more songs), with that of making itself a figure through which (dis)abilities can come and go. Through this distortional transition of the changeling, the text simultaneously refers to the figure's folkloric origins (as an exchanged disabled child that was able to conceal its disabilities), while transgressing and subverting other (socio-medical) conceptualizations of disability that rest on the analogical conception of the *model*.

As Iser posited, new relations of figurative language that imbue the imaginary with form also feed back into reality, which is how fiction may afford what is con-

14 In Iser's theory, the fictionalizing act mediates between the real and the imaginary. He defines the act of fictionalizing as giving the imaginary an "articulated gestalt" that differs from daydreams and reveries (3), while simultaneously "outstripping the determinacy of the real" (3), offering its affordances of transgression.

ceivable. In the case of the conceptualization of disability, the changeling subverts the logic of the model as disability's principle of conceivability. At the start of this chapter, I noted that while there has been research done on the normativity that disability studies itself produces, this did not involve the normative conceptualizations of disability, specifically its conceptualization through different models.

The term model stems from *modulus*, a measure or standard, which according to the OED involves "A representation of structure, and related senses. A set of designs (plans, elevations, sections, etc.) for a projected building or other structure; a similar set of drawings made to scale and representing the proportions and arrangement of an existing building."[15] While criticism of the different models of disability exists,[16] this criticism deals with what these models propose, rather than critiquing the conceptualization of disability *qua* model. Models automatically establish a relationship of analogy with external reality which itself creates a situation of particular instances not adhering to the model. For example, Palmer and Harley (2012) have argued that the social model of disability excludes lived experiences with impairment. As its etymological roots suggest, model conceptualizations of disability *conceive* a specific kind of normativity that is founded on this relationship of analogy, regardless of its aims.

Both the logic of distortion and that of the model work via analogy and resemblance. Distortion cannot take place without twisting the normative analogic relations from which it draws, producing asymmetrical contraries through the polysemy manifested. The logic of models proposes a relationship between the model and particular instances or examples, which effectuates normativity by virtue of the analogous character between the model and the example, where bad examples, still recognized *as* examples, may become "abnormal," "aberrations," and so on. Consequently, where they diverge is in their operation. Distortion seeks to twist and subvert, whereas the logic of models seeks to converge and conform.

In their study N*ormality: A Critical Genealogy* (2017) Peter Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens state that the normal "often suggests something more than simply conformity to a standard or type: it also implies what is correct or good, something so perfect in its exemplarity that it constitutes an ideal" (1). This goes for models themselves as well: by proposing models as the ideal relationship of analogy with which to conceptualize disability, the model itself is implicitly taken to be an ideal (and normative)

15 https://www-oed.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/view/Entry/120577?rskey=fp9tS1&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid

16 Haegele and Hodge (2016), *Disability Discourse: Overview and Critiques of the Medical and Social Models*. And Terzi (2004), *The Social Model of Disability: A Philosophical Critique*.

conceptualization for it. Georges Canguilhem writes that "A norm, or rule, is what can be used to right, to square, to straighten. To set a norm (*normer*), to normalize, is to impose a requirement on an existence, a given whose variety, disparity, with regard to the requirement, present themselves as a hostile, even more than an unknown, indeterminant" (239). To "impose a requirement on an existence" is for Canguilhem the pre-conception (e.g., of the good or ideal) that a norm necessarily enforces to right and straighten, which is the opposite of twisting. Any order suggested by the use of a norm automatically invokes the possibility of its inversion, but this does not have to be of the same kind. Canguilhem continues: "the inversion of a logical norm does not yield a logical, but perhaps an aesthetic norm, as the inversion of an ethical norm does not yield an ethical, but perhaps a political one. In short, norms, whether in some implicit or explicit form, refer the real to values, express discriminations of qualities in conformity with the polar opposition of a positive and a negative" (240). Norms, Canguilhem argues, espouse normativity through polarity, but the opposite term can be of a different kind.

In the case of disability, the normativity of the model is that it forces a conception of analogous convergence (of thinking in terms of the model and its examples), regardless of the model's particular contents. Distortion can only contrast this by appropriating the model's logic, since the straightening that norms manifest can only be twisted by taking it as its material. *The Gray House* thereby does not simply posit one norm concerning disability in favor of, or against, another. To distort the straightening imposition on existence that normativity necessarily executes, the novel equally necessarily encapsulates the dominating normative conceptualization of disability as a "model" within its world while simultaneously placing radically different ones besides them through its usage of the figuratively conceivable. If the normativity of models seeks to converge to an ideal (even if this is model thinking itself), the distortion manifested in *The Gray House* espouses pluralist aesthetic divergence—diversity in the relationalities and abilities concerning making sense and sensing the world.

5. Fantastic Disturbances: Assimilative Reading and Disabled Dissimilation

My reading of *The Gray House* posits a notion of distortion that does not rest on intentionality but instead on how the twisting of the interpretative act affords different affective relationalities. Roland Barthes, in his etymological reading of the word *text*, suggests that the classic conceptualization of textual interpretation takes text to act as

a veil, behind which truth and meaning are hidden (1975: 64). Barthes then contrasts this conception with the text as *weave*: "we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue—this texture—the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web" (1975: 64).

Barthes' quote describes a parallel twisting of the textual weave that entails the assimilation of the text with the parallel dissimilation of subjectivity—thus the spider dissolves while the web is constructed. This culminates in the argument that during reading as a weave, "it is not my 'subjectivity' I encounter but my 'individuality', the given which makes my body separate from other bodies and appropriates its suffering or its pleasure: it is my body of bliss I encounter" (62). For Barthes, the twisting that the dissimilation of subjectivity entails is principally ecstatic in nature, favoring the body-of-bliss over the subject that distantiates herself from the text through the readerly attitude that favors contemplative interpretation and consequently would reinstantiate subjectivity.

While the fantastic shares with Barthes the emphasis on reading as a practice of dissimilation, these are two different kinds of dissimilation. Barthes' argument pushes toward an understanding of dissimilation that employs the figure of the weave as the dissolution of the reader-as-subject in favor of the body-of-bliss, i.e., reading as dissimilation of the subject that might move beyond representation. This is not the case in the literary mode of the fantastic. As I argued in the previous paragraphs, the fantastic never seeks to dismiss normative representational logic (like that of the model), but instead appropriates and distorts it. Contrasting Barthes' ecstatic body-of-bliss that would be manifested through the unmaking of the subject as the consequence of literary dissimilation, my reading of *The Gray House* posits an uncertain receptive and interpreting body, a body with (dis)abilities. This problematizes not the unmaking of subjectivity but rather the assimilation of the relationship between the interpretive ability and the body's capacities.

Earlier, I presented Rosemary Jackson's argument that the fantastic succeeds in its subversion only if it *disturbs* the reader (23). Toward the end of the novel, as the students approach their graduation day, the House is thrown into such disturbance, for what will come after graduation? The students come together for Fairy Tale Night; an evening in which the House's inhabitants share stories about themselves. The novel alternates between Smoker narrating and reviewing the tales told and short chapters that are some (but not all) of the actual tales themselves, with each tale being from a different student. One of the short frame-story chapters included is Noble's tale. It opens with Noble finding himself in the middle of a road as he comes

across a place called the Roach Motel. Taking up odd jobs around the motel, Noble is alerted that there will be trouble. As he tries to get away, his legs hurt (due to an undisclosed impairment), and a motel resident warns him of the Forest. Lost again and wandering, the tale ends with Noble being found by Blind near the Forest, who welcomes him home (674). As the novel switches back to Smoker recounting Fairy Tale night, he dissects to what extent the tales he hears, including Noble's, are actually fairytales:

> It too was not a fairytale. Noble was telling us about living in some small town, what he did there and how he was trying to make some money. It was clear that he'd invented this out of whole cloth, but at the same time I had this gnawing feeling that he was in fact relating something that really happened. It was only the ending that did turn magical, and that suddenly and way over the top, as if Noble got tired of straining his imagination deciding how he was going to get his character out of the bind he'd put him into. There even was an appearance by Blind there, contrived and inappropriate, in my opinion. (681)

Smoker dissects Noble's tale along the lines of the genre conventions of the fairytale. He asserts that Noble's tale was "invented out of whole cloth," implying full mimetic invention, but simultaneously has a "gnawing feeling" that it is somehow based in reality. He evaluates Noble's story as being "way over the top," while his own reading practice is itself situated in a fantastic world where inexplicable events occur.

In effect, Smoker's reading of Noble's frame story, which itself is a tale of the fantastic, imitates the reader's own reading practice of the novel by trying to determine how this story fits in with certain genre expectations and how to evaluate and interpret them, attempting to order the world. The fantastic thereby accompanies the frame story with *frame reading*: we, as readers, are reading someone else's reading practice that imitates our own. This doubles the representational relationship that fiction creates in that, while we as readers can ponder in what way Noble's frame story relates to *The Gray House*'s narrative and world, the questioning of the relationship of the ludic feint (to immerse oneself in the story by questioning the permeability of fiction and reality) itself becomes woven into the text.

While Barthes posited a conceptualization of the textual weave wherein subjectivity is dissimilated in tandem with the assimilation of the text, Smoker's reading practice weaves his own reading practice with that of the reader, enacting the way in which a reading can be used in an attempt to establish order out of disorder, through

its affordance of what fits and does not fit in with a genre's conventions (what is or is not typical of a fairytale). *The Gray House* thereby twists Barthes' weave inside out: through reading a frame reading, the reading subject is not dissimilated through the text's perpetual interweaving, as Barthes suggests, but is instead invited to double down on interpretation. Rather than encountering the body-of-bliss that Barthes' literary aesthetics propose, the novel distorts this affective relationality in relation to the text-as-weave. For Smoker, in his reading, mentions a gnawing feeling that the tale is somehow based in reality. But the reality referred to is paradoxically a fantastic world. Rosemary Jackson notes that "By foregrounding its own signifying practice, the fantastic begins to betray its version of the 'real' as a relative one, which can only deform and transform experience, so the 'real' is exposed as a category, as something articulated by and constructed through the literary or artistic text" (84). In the fantastic, conceptions of the real are made susceptible to distortion, effectuating a specific affective relationality. For the hesitation that the phrase "gnawing feeling" evokes—because uncertain about said feeling but somehow provoked—is constituted in the fantastic's inexplicable world, rendering the attempted order that may be gained through interpretation futile. Smoker's reading of the ending of Noble's tale connects the fantastic with supposed tiredness. Mimetic invention is not understood as creative but explained through an as-if affective relation ("as if Noble got tired of straining his imagination"), i.e., the use of the imagination in storytelling as a disturbance which is deemed "contrite and inappropriate"—a meta-aesthetic commentary on the fantastic within the fantastic that paradoxically mocks its own non-signification.

Whereas both Todorov and Jackson maintained that the fantastic should not be subjugated to allegory and metaphor and that part of its power lies in its resistance to allegorization, *The Gray House* distorts the act of allegorization through appropriating and enacting assimilation and dissimilation within its own text. What is therefore at stake is the disjunction between the ethical imperative (not) to allegorize and consequently subjugate the fantastic text and the supposed power of the text to resist allegorization. As Smoker listens to and evaluates more stories other students tell, he suddenly slips from the bed he was sitting on:

> Then someone stepped on me. I figured I'd better get up on the nearest bed before they trampled me, but there was no space on the nearest bed. It was occupied by Shuffle, his guitar, Owl (I think), and someone hiding behind a backpack. That someone said, "Hey, what are you doing? It's packed here." So I crawled on. In the next three minutes I got stepped on about two dozen times, so by the time the break ended

> I was hurting all over. Thankfully, when Tabaqui declared the end of the break and everyone took their seats, someone lit the Chinese lantern. Just one, but that was enough to save me. I saw a place for me. (684–685)

The scene, similar to the scene where Smoker was placed in the shower by his fellow students, displaces the dominance of interpreting the world and stories that one is surrounded by with that of the material reality of the socio-medical conception of the disabled body, that is, a body in peril of being trampled. As with the scene where Smoker was dragged into the shower presented earlier, the scene breaks with Smoker being involved with interpretation to shift attention to the realism of his disabled body that is unable to walk. Smoker describes himself as saved by the lighting of a lantern through which he can *see* a place for himself. Seeing a place can be read as a physical space Smoker *perceives* through sight, but this sentence can also be subjected to a reading in which seeing is understood figuratively, i.e., "seeing" a space for oneself in the world at large.

Jackson writes on the relationship between the body and interpretation in the fantastic that: "The subject's relation to the phenomenal world is made problematical and the text foregrounds the impossibility of definitive interpretation or vision: everything becomes equivocal, blurred, 'double', out of focus" (49). Jackson's words here implicate a distortion of sight that consequently manifests a disabled condition. Jackson conflates "definitive interpretation" with "vision" because what is at stake in her argument is the confusion of self and other that tales of the fantastic afford (50).[17] This culminates in Jackson stating that "All these thematic clusters revolve around difficulties of perception and knowledge: the question of vision and the control of the 'eye'/'I' of the subject" (51). Jackson espouses a particular conception of the eye/I conflation, wherein knowledge and perception are clustered together in order to make the argument that the fantastic problematizes interpretation. But this dismisses the sensibility of the distorted sight to which she herself alludes.

The passage above (and the passages discussed previously), offer a different relationship to the eye/I conflation. For whereas perception indeed evokes the necessity of the body to interpret the world it is perceiving, perception is itself susceptible to metaphoricity. Furthermore, in my reading, interpretation has been cast as an ability that affects the body that interprets, thereby continuously putting into question

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17 This is, of course, explored in *The Gray House* as well, with the use of the changeling as a figure that is supposed to be a child which it is not.

what *capacity* is needed for the ability to interpret—interpretation through blurred and distorted vision cannot but draw our attention to the capacity of the interpreting body itself. *The Gray House* thereby affords a different conception of the relationship between perception and knowledge, one that goes against the eye/I conflation in the way that Jackson posits it, because it constantly draws attention to the distortion of the bodily capacity needed to interpret.

Through separating the conditions of interpretation from interpretation itself, a differentiation can subsequently be made between *the power of allegory* and *the ability to allegorize*. For Jackson the fantastic's resistance to allegory is founded on its non-signification, i.e., the inability to establish a definitive allegorical or metaphorical relationship between the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic, but this argument in itself necessarily rests on the capacities of the body that interprets the world around it. Jackson notes that "It could be suggested that the movement of fantastic narrative is one of metonymical rather than of metaphorical process: one object does not stand for another, but literally becomes that other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability" (41–42).

Whereas for Barthes the "unmaking of the subject" in the activity of reading involves the encounter with one's body-of-bliss, suggesting the desirability of the dissimulation of readerly subject, the emphasis on material metamorphoses that is predominant in *The Gray House*'s fantastic narrative foregrounds how the activity of reading makes us question how capacities may become abilities. This involves the relationship *between* two relationships: the representational relationship of signs *and* the affective capacities of the body that interprets these signs. Consequently, distortion as affordance allows for a reading between the way in which the twisting of the representational relationship relates to the twisting of the capacities of the interpreting body.

6. Conclusion

The Gray House, perhaps fittingly, does not offer a clear ending after the students' graduation. Apart from the students that actually graduated from the House and live in the Outsides, the novel also mentions the Sleepers, Jumpers, Striders and students who have simply vanished without any trace. Sleepers are described by Smoker as "Neither dead nor alive … There just wasn't a word for what they were" (694). They are still physically present in the world after graduation, but no one visits them.

Jumpers and Striders meanwhile, seemingly have access to a different world, as one student explains to Grasshopper early in the novel that they are "Those who visit the Underside of the House. Except that Jumpers are kind of thrown there, while Striders can get there by themselves" (141). Then finally, there are those who have inexplicably vanished (and the text never discloses whether they might have been Jumpers, Striders or something else still).

This taxonomy displays the novel's paradoxicality towards the notion that novels must come to an end. For it encapsulates all conceivable positions with regard to plot endings: those whose lives continue outside The House, as in a realist tradition, where life moves on in linear fashion; those who disappear mysteriously, and without it being disclosed *how* they disappeared exactly, encompassing marvellous and fairytale elements; and then finally the Sleepers, who are part of the world and life of those students who graduated and went into the Outsides, but, as the quote above shows, are neither alive nor dead but apparently infirm, evoking a liminal, in-between state, an indefinite ending.

One of the novel's final chapters is *Voices From the Outsides*, a series of vignettes in which different characters offer some reflections on life many years (at least twenty) after graduation. Some of these vignettes reflect on the Sleepers, and how different characters have different attitudes towards them. Smoker collects newspaper clippings, but then abandons it because "it was too painful, thinking about them, imagining them. Easier to deal with the living or with the truly dead." The character of Horse, meanwhile, says "No, none of us went to visit them. What's the point?" (705). Black reflects that "Honestly, I don't care about the Sleepers. I'm not even going to pretend that I'm grieving for them" (706). Then the text offers a vignette by Red, who says "I do visit them from time to time. No flowers, of course. Why shouldn't I? … There's nothing scary about them. They don't wither, they don't waste away, they don't look like corpses at all" (706). There are various dispositions shown here toward the Sleepers, from the pain of imagining them (Smoker), to indifference (Horse and Black), to an apparent jovial and uninhibited outlook (Red). The disjunction in these responses is contrasted with the fact that the Sleepers themselves are physically present but unable to communicate. The novel thereby connects the in-between, liminal position with the sensibility of disability at its most inexplicable manifestation, in a seemingly comatose condition ("There just wasn't a word for what they were"). This connection subsequently affords the ways in which a story's ending can be distorted. For some characters the story does end (as they have vanished, closing the story), and for some the story does go on (beyond the novel's narrative, as an open ending and apparent continuation). The anthropomorphic Sleepers do not negate

these options, but add a third, one that entails neither continuation nor ending.[18] For as their name suggests, they could, at some point, wake up. But it is their liminality (in between ending and continuity, in between life and death), which the novel affirms without negating the dualism of open and closed endings.

While they *are* named, Smoker paradoxically also asserts that "there just wasn't a word for what they were"—a signifying non-signifiying sentence. The Sleepers simultaneously elicit a response in the novel's characters that connects the interpretative act with different affective dispositions as described above. Importantly, the Sleepers themselves have no abilities at all and exist in a homeostatic condition ("They don't wither, they don't waste away"). Their non-signifying nature becomes connected to a state of bodily permanence, of bodily capacity without any ability. The inability to fully make sense of the nature of the Sleepers thus becomes connected with how other characters are affected by them. The twisting that occurs, then, is that by coupling non-signification with a state of bodily permanence the Sleepers effectively foreclose the closure of definitive interpretation.

In my reading of distortion in relation to disability, the relationship between making sense and how one senses or is affected by the world is central to what is subject to become twisted. This implies that what the fantastic, as literary mode, affords in relation to disability is precisely that it calls into question how the twisting of capacity into ability is connected to the twisting sensibility. My reading of *The Gray House* further undermines the idea that we can think of these separately. Smoker's and Blind's relationalities to the House are fundamentally distinct in that Smoker sought to subjugate the world through explaining it through the heuristic device of "the game" that he believed he did not know the rules of yet. When faced with the gruesome and inexplicable nature of that world he became overwhelmed *by* that world. The metamorphic character of Blind/the changeling, meanwhile, predominantly tried to attune to the House's world through his available senses, but as one of his focalized thoughts suggests ("listen when you can't explain"), he too is bound to interpret the world he is a part of. While both characters interpret *and* sense the world they inhabit, distortion thus affords different relationalities between sensing and making sense. This reading, in keeping with the previous chapters, extends the argument that literary and aesthetic analysis allow us to read for the way in which bodily capacities become (dis)abilities in cultural texts.

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18 I am using the term *anthropomorphic* as delineated by Paul de Man, who proposes it to not function as a trope, but rather "a proper name," which freezes tropological propositions into "one single assertion or essence" (241).

Concerning the ways in which readers may hold themselves accountable for how they interpret literary texts, literary scholar Irmtraud Huber recasts the difficulty of the fantastic as relating to a pro-active attitude in adopting "readerly responsibility." She writes of the fantastic:

> As the choice of an appropriate stance of reception is made deliberately problematic, fantastic texts may serve to foreground the mechanisms and ground-rules governing the dynamic processes of the fictive, not only in its constitution but also in its effect. As readers are forced to become aware of and question their approach to a textual representation, reception may become a conscious act of taking readerly responsibility. (72)

Huber goes on to argue that "ultimately readers are confronted with interpretative choices that involve agency and responsibility. This is a fantastic beyond subversion, a fantastic that is no longer driven solely by the need to deconstruct but by a desire for reconstruction" (73). Huber places the term "reconstruction" adjacent to readerly responsibility because " 'reconstruction' answers both to the pervasive attempt to establish meaningful connections by renewing the (impossible) possibility of communication and to the revaluation of the fictive that attends this process" (48).

I agree with Huber insofar that the fantastic complicates the way in which the reader responds to and interprets the fantastic text and thereby implicates the reader, which Huber understands as "agency and responsibility." Her argument, however, subsequently displaces subversion in favor of reconstruction, where the fantastic's inexplicability is recast as a "pervasive attempt to establish meaningful connections". What is at stake in differentiating Huber's approach to the fantastic from my own is the way in which her chosen terminology (which emphasizes reconstruction, responsibility, communication) suggests a relationship to representation that becomes political precisely because it verges toward allegorization of the fantastic. Such a reading subjugates the fantastic to the project of reconstruction as a desirable readerly response, denying its transgressive nature.

My reading of distortion through *The Gray House*, by contrast, emphasizes that while concepts like "agency" and "responsibility" are indeed called into question through the fantastic text, they simultaneously necessarily involve the question concerning how these concepts relate to the way in which the fantastic twists the capacity of the interpreting body, and twists how to give an account of them, both intra- and extra-diegetically. Consequently, Huber's argument is twisted inside out. Similar to

Ricoeur's line of argumentation that hesitation is grounded in powerlessness, and affect in disorder, transgression is here not understood as the "pervasive attempt to establish meaningful connections." Instead, it proposes that interpretation necessarily rest on the pervasive contingency of the capacity of the body that may translate into (dis)abilities, and how the body's capacities are necessarily implicated in the way we construe meaning.

Transgression is thereby posited as more than an intentional act. Through my reading of distortion, I argue that transgression implies that agency and responsibility (as responses of and to events and sites of reading) are susceptible to become twisted, constituting them in the contingency of bodily capacity. Rather than "restoring" the fantastic as a signifying literary mode, distortion as a concept of affordance delineates the way in which the text simultaneously assimilates and dissimilates the relationship between capacity and representation through this relationship becoming twisted. In the conclusion of this study, I will argue how the approach centered on reading for affordances differs from such approaches that advocate for recuperation, repair, and reconstruction.

Conclusion

Pragmatically Inconvenienced: Disability and the Event of Reading

Throughout this study, I have elucidated how we can read for disability in terms of what it may afford us affectively. Reading for affordances as "opportunities for action," as Thomas Stoffregen put it, involves the way in which affect relates to action; how it moves, enacts, or sometimes stifles bodies. What makes reading for disability in relation to affordance complex, as I have argued throughout my case studies, is that disability often problematizes the very notion of bodily capacity for action. In this conclusion, I delineate how this complex entanglement of affordance and disability is relevant for the way in which the activity of reading is theorized in literary and cultural studies. I argue that reading for affordances relates to contemporary approaches to scholarly reading practices and discern how the other two concepts used in the study's title—affect and disability—should become central to scholarly work that concerns contemporary reading practices.

Since the concept of affordance was developed in fields associated with social psychology and design and gained the most purchase there, I start by briefly reiterating how the concept is employed by one of its main conceptual developers after James Gibson, the cognitive scientist and usability engineer Donald Norman. In his book *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988), Norman defined affordance as "the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used" (9). This early definition by Norman conceptualizes affordances as properties of objects rather than as relational-emergent features of a constellation of elements (like an animal being able to walk over a rigid surface). When read with the eyes of a humanities scholar, Norman's definition undoubtedly opens a plethora of questions: how to distinguish between the "perceived" and the "actual?" How do we consider which properties are fundamental? Why are we focusing on how something could be used?

Norman would return to the concept's originator, to redefine and further delineate that affordances "refer to the actionable properties between the world and an actor (a person or animal). To Gibson, affordances are a relationship. They are a part of nature: they do not have to be visible, known, or desirable. Some affordances are yet to be discovered. Some are dangerous. I suspect that none of us know all the affordances of even everyday objects" (2004).[1] Norman's earlier emphasis on use is delineated in

1 For the full text, see: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265618710_Affordances_and_Design

terms of what is "actionable," or, what can the thing whose affordances we consider *do*, and importantly, what is a particular affordance a *relationship* of. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, and as Norman reiterates here, to think with and read for affordances has a complex relationship to the concept of value, because affordances are not to be preemptively subjugated to the values we place on them. Their very apprehension calls into question why, how, when, and where we perceive them. Yet, reading for affordances *does* orient actors to look for what is actionable in the relationship they are perceiving, and to consider how the actionable itself is constitutional of a perceived relationship of affordance.

In my own study, I have limited myself to look at the concept of affordance in relation to the unlikely concept of disability. Unlikely because, as we have seen, disability is so often associated with the conception of a body that supposedly does *not* work. This was done on purpose, in the sense that I sought to adopt reading for affordances as an approach and attitude in the way Norman delineates it above, without a clear preconception about what is preemptively known, visible, or supposedly desirable. Reading for affordances, by asking for an orientation of analysis toward the actionable, could subsequently be understood as a political and ethical attitude. Since it orients itself to the study of the effects of actionable properties of perceived relationships, reading for affordances demands that precedence is given to questions such as "How does this relationship afford action?" or "What does this relationship of affordance *do*?" over questions of political and/or ethical desirability (such as "How *should* we treat people with disabilities?" or "How could studying cultural texts help us reduce ableism in society?"). Given this focus on the study of the actionable, thinking with affordances is perhaps best understood to be in league with philosophical pragmatism.

In the second paper of his series *Illustrations of the Logic of Science*, Charles Sanders Peirce wrote his pragmatic maxim: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (1878).[2] Peirce's maxim suggests how we might gain a conception about a phenomenon, namely through studying the effects that have "practical bearings." It is through our evaluation of these practical effects how we come to understand the phenomenon at hand. To apply this maxim to how we gain an understanding of disability through its effects, let us consider the medical model of disability. The conception of disability in this model is actualized because the effect the phenomenon of disability has on

2 For the full text, see: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Popular_Science_Monthly/Volume_12/January_1878/Illustrations_of_the_Logic_of_Science_II

people is that it makes them want to "correct" it. Thus, the practical bearings that are a consequence of the social effects of disability is that it organizes people to seek to "restore" that disability. But let us also notice Peirce's final phrase, "our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." When the effect of disability is only that we believe it is something that requires correction or rehabilitation of some kind, this then becomes the whole of our conception of what disability is.

By thinking of the relationship between the concepts of affordance and disability, I have sought to ask what some of the practical bearings are of a phenomenon that is so commonly understood to be tantamount to defect and deficiency. To think with and through the affective work that is being done by the body that supposedly does not work thereby means to expand "the whole of our conception of the object" at hand. In this study, I have delineated how, in considering the actionable affordances of disability, the actionable is itself a matter of becoming affectively oriented. D*is*ability, as the medical model shows, orients us toward a privation of presupposed bodily ability, of what we feel is lacking, not there, or not working. This is the prefix of *de* and *dis*; of what we sense and understand as being *against*. Another way disability affectively orients us, as shown in my reading of the novels *A Little Life* and *Still Life with Monkey*, is that it drives (other) bodies to want to *re*store, *re*habilitate, and *re*pair; this is the prefix of *again*.

These two ways of being affectively oriented through disability are also the terms in which attitudes in literary studies are cast in framing its contemporary paradigms of reading practices. In my conclusion of the previous chapter, I briefly engaged with the scholarship of Irmtraud Huber, who argued for an understanding of the fantastic as being *re*constructive. Such a gesture, which necessarily entails a tone of affirmation ("to construct once again"), is contrasted with the negative gesture of being against, of refusal. A gesture Rita Felski, in her influential book *The Limits of Critique* (2015), associates with that title's last term, critique. The "again vs. against" paradigm in literary studies is delineated by Felski as follows:

> Both aesthetic and social worth, it seems, can only be cashed out in terms of a rhetoric of againstness. And yet there are other salient desires, motives, agendas that drive acts of reading and that receive short shrift from critics scouring works of literature for every last crumb of real or imagined resistance. *We shortchange the significance of art by focusing on the "de" prefix (its power to demystify, destabilize, denaturalize) at the expense of the "re" prefix: its ability to recontextualize, reconfigure, or recharge perception.* Works of art do not only subvert but also con-

> vert; they do not only inform but also transform—a transformation that is not just a matter of intellectual readjustment but one of affective realignment as well (a shift of mood, a sharpened sensation, an unexpected surge of affinity or disorientation). (17, emphasis in text)

In Felski's conception, critique is aligned with gestures we associate with privation, such as *de*mystifying or *de*naturalizing a text. Felski employs the term "hermeneutics of suspicion" to delineate these attitudes toward reading, drawing from Ricoeur's study *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970). The *re-* prefix, meanwhile, offers gestures of affirmation. To place texts in different contexts, or to read them again from a different approach, hint at the added value of (re-)reading once more. This latter collection of gestures, as was the case with Huber's argument for reconstruction, enjoys a positive connotation by virtue of its affirmative character.

As the last line of the above quote shows, Felski is much interested in the way in which the different attitudes and gestures also offer different affective "realignments." Further elaborating on restorative ways of reading, Felski notes that "To interpret in this way is to feel oneself addressed by the text as if by a message or a proclamation, to defer to a presence rather than diagnose an absence. The words on the page do not disguise truth but disclose it. Such a "hermeneutics of restoration" is infused with moments of wonder, reverence, exaltation, hope, epiphany, or joy" (32). Although it is important to note that Felski does not condemn critique and in fact states to be much indebted to it, she does set up an opposition between the two different hermeneutical attitudes. For whereas such a hermeneutics of restoration is associated with the positive affective forces and aesthetic sensations mentioned here, Felski states that critique is "Purged of obvious signs of affect and attachment," and that "the temperature of critique is cool rather than hot" (74). Regardless of the salience such an opposition may have in considering readerly attitudes in contemporary literary studies, Felski's binary framing creates a double bind in that any commentary one might have on this opposition seemingly automatically puts oneself on the side of critique, which is here conjoined with the "negativity" of refusal. A reply to this frame is similar to offering a reply to the imperative "Stop being so defensive!" in which any rebuttal affirms that one is, in fact, being defensive. Felski's motivation, however, is not to silence the voice of critique. Rather, as the title of her book suggests, she asserts that it is not the only readerly attitude available and that readerly attitudes carry consequences.

While I agree with Felski that different ways of approaching texts afford different affective relationalities, her framing does risk aligning certain readerly attitudes with

specific affective values: "hope, epiphany, or joy" are sided with the hermeneutics of restoration, and paranoia, speculation, and refusal are on the side of the hermeneutics of suspicion. A reader trained in critique would be quick to point out that the first hermeneutic stance is imbued with positivity and naivety, while critique is here cast as distant, arguably "negative," and/or seemingly without affect as Felski claims. Although Felski does briefly engage with the concept of affordance,[3] reading for affective affordances with regard to disability, I argue, is disjunctive to the "against vs. again" paradigm as proposed by Felski.

The against vs. again paradigm as it is commonly framed for disability is different from that same paradigm as outlined for literary studies. Whereas in literary studies "against" is aligned with the suspicious attitude of critique, the "against" connoted with disability is that of what does not work, as a physical deficit that is a given. Though suspicious attitudes and interpretations have certainly manifested around disability historically and culturally,[4] both its conceptualization and sensibility as defect in contemporary Western culture are connected to presuppositions concerning bodily normativity. The restorative approaches to both literary text and disability arguably have more in common, in that they are imbued with seemingly positive affective forces, albeit different ones. The medical model seeks to "restore" the disabled body, whereas the restorative hermeneutics of Felski seeks to draw our attention to the affective states of wonder, hope, and joy.

Since disability is connoted with what does not work, by asking what its affordances are, I am asking what the affective effects are of the preemptively defective and disqualified. The bifurcation of the positive and negative affective connotations to different styles and attitudes of reading of both the disabled body and the literary text is displaced by the primacy of the question what kind of work the analysis of the relationship between practices of representation and the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility itself does; hence my interest in the way literature itself represents and works with aesthetic judgements concerning disabled bodies. Such an approach to reading is no less affirmative than restorative practices of reading claim to be, but, in contradistinction, opens up the possibility of exploring different styles and positions of affirmation. Whereas Felski posits that "moments of wonder, reverence, exaltation,

3 See pp. 164–165, where Felski briefly mentions this concept in the context of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory and her notion of so called post-critical reading, with which the approach of reading for affordance, as I delineate it here, holds some affinity.

4 See, for example, Martha L. Rose's *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability In Ancient Greece* (2003), and Henri-Jacques Stiker's *A History of Disability* (2019).

hope, epiphany, or joy" are valuable in practicing a hermeneutics of restoration, to examine the workings of such affective forces and aesthetic experiences does not automatically make them come undone. Rather, it affirms that they themselves manifest further affective effects that are worth studying.

Affirmation, of course, implies a strengthening of one's assertion and position. The kind of affirmation that follows from reading for affordances is different from the kind of affirmation that follows from restorative or reparative attitudes of reading, since to be oriented by affordances is to be oriented toward the actionable. Whatever we conceive of what the actionable is, it is the opposite of what is stuck, unmoving, or unchangeable—terms that are commonly connoted with disability. This is why in the previous chapter the figure of the paradox played such a central role, since disability is at once both cast as actionable and simultaneously stuck—characters in wheelchairs, like Smoker, despite it being a novel of the fantastic, are not suddenly able to walk.[5] To ask what relationships of the actionable disability affords, with all its supposed and connoted deficits, involves asking what the requirements for contemporary gestures of affirmation are, rather than accepting affirmation as a given the way the hermeneutics of restoration presents it here. Such a slide is not nitpicking, but rather a way of thinking with disability in terms of it being an inconvenience in the way Lauren Berlant delineated that concept:

> At whatever scale and duration, "inconvenience" describes a feeling state that registers one's implication in the pressures of coexistence. In that state the body is paying attention, affirming that what's in front of you is not all that's acting on or in you. Whatever tone it takes, whatever magnetic field it generates, this latter kind of contact with inconvenience disturbs the vision of yourself you carry around that supports your sovereign fantasy, your fantasy of being in control. (2022: 3)

To be inconvenienced is to be drawn to a state of affirmation by what the body perceives, because "what's in front of you is not all that's acting on you." Affordances are always a matter of perception and sensibility. They are perceived because the perceiving body is itself in some way affected; acted upon. Whatever we perceive to be affordances, we do so because our body holds the capacity to be affected by that

5 In her study *On Paradox* (2022), Elisabeth Anker argues that paradox has actually been the dominant rhetorical figure at work in contemporary critical theory, and offers a reading of some of its limitations.

relationality sensed. In positing affordance as constituting a relationship as I have done, this implies that, whereas affordances are sometimes understood as concerning the perceived properties of an object, the fact that an affordance is a *relationship* rather than such perceived properties necessarily puts in question how the body perceives what it perceives because it is acted upon. The actionable is then not understood as pertaining solely to the perceived actionable properties of the external object, but rather allows for a mode of investigation that involves questioning how the body was affected by itself holding capacities to be or become actionable to external objects and forces. Such a questioning is a matter of becoming inconvenienced in one's fantasy of personal sovereignty, a loss of the idea of control that one held of oneself concerning the relationships of affordance that one would choose to be a part of rather than having them be pressed on oneself. This is why being an inconvenience to, or to be inconvenienced by, another person, event, or object is often accompanied by the affective forces of irritation and anxiety.

Disability cast as inconvenience is subsequently often the producer of much social friction as shown in the case studies in this book. Because disability's inconvenience is so closely connected to the friction concerning the actionable, this inconvenience is carried over into gestures of affirmation. Since the nature of affirmative gestures implies a strengthening of assertions, disability inconveniences such gestures, pointing to what one might call the affirmation of contingency, but which is equally the contingency of affirmation. The friction this relationship between disability and affirmation affords points to the metonymic nature the concept of disability has concerning the inherent contingent nature of the actionable body. Whatever one senses and perceives as being actionable about the body is never simply a given. In the chapter on deformity, I argued that Merrick's deformity affords a heightened sensibility to aliveness precisely because his disability limited how his body could fall asleep, making his life contingent on it. In the chapter on disruption, I proposed how disability foregrounds the affective work of effort and conjoins that with the event of the attempt. The event of the attempt contrasts with gestures of affirmation precisely because it draws one's attention to the bodily capacities required to make an affirmative gesture in the first place.

How does such a conception of the relationship between affect, disability, and affordance relate to the ways in which reparative and restorative reading have been posed in literary studies, and why is this important? In Felski's framing of the against vs. again paradigm, aesthetic experiences are strongly connected to the hermeneutics of restoration rather than with critique. This casts the domain of the aesthetic in literary study as a valuable experience that literature can afford, as Felski also argues

in her book *Uses of Literature* (2008). I do not disagree with this claim, but aesthetics through such a frame becomes divorced from the way in which aesthetic sensibility plays a crucial role in the way we constitute the domain of the actionable. By this I mean that, similar to Rancière's argument that the distribution of the sensible discloses what is in common, what is perceived as actionable is a matter of how our senses become engaged. In this conception, the dynamic between the sensible and the actionable is oscillating because actions determine how we come to sense what is common, but our senses in turn influence how we may conceive of the actionable.

Such an understanding of the relationship between the aesthetic and the actionable is disjunctive with, and an inconvenience to, Felski's positing of "moments of wonder, reverence, joy," and so on. That framework casts aesthetic experience *as* "an experience" which relates to pleasure and the episodic genre of the moment. I deliberately use *disjunctive* and *inconvenience* rather than "against" or "critical of," since Felski herself discusses the possible critiques her framing of the aesthetic will inevitably invite. My point, however, is not simply to critically argue how aesthetic experiences can themselves be framed and constructed, but that a framing like Felski's poses an overview of readerly approaches that does not account for the relationship between the actionable and the aesthetic as I am proposing it here. Because it is unaccounted for, to pose and argue for the relevance of this relationship is asymmetrical to the against vs. again paradigm as presented by Felski, and allows me to delineate my position in contrast to restorative reading practices.

In her seminal essay "Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading," included in her book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as the essay's title implies, laid some of the groundwork from which work like Felski's draws. While the essay gives more space to a critique and evaluation of so-called paranoid reading than it does to offering an exposition of reparative reading, Sedgwick concludes her essay that reparative reading is "no less acute than a paranoid position," and that "What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (150–151).

Sedgwick's language treads carefully in how it envisions the attitude of reparative readers (no less acute, realistic attached and so on), but connects this attitude with "extracting sustenance" of objects like cinematic and literary texts. While different from Felski's framing in her envisioning of how the reader should assert herself, to be able to draw sustenance from cultural artifacts is arguably a proposition with which Felski would largely agree. What the conceptualization of the *re-* prefix in the work of scholars like Huber, Felski, and Sedgwick and other strands of reparative

reading and the hermeneutics of restoration share, involves a realignment between a conception of the reader's attitude and the orientation and tone of her literary and aesthetic appraisal. Attitude, in that, as Sedgwick suggests, reparative readers may still be understood to be acute as well as astute. Orientation and tone, meanwhile, should not be focused on suspicion and critique which these theorists consider the dominant orientation and tone in literary studies, but rather should focus on Felski's aesthetic moments, or Sedgwick's drawing of sustenance. In her valuation of Sedgwick's essay, Heather Love conclusively summarizes that "reparation in the essay is on the side of multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love. If reparative reading is better at the level of ethics and affect—and there is really no doubt that it is—it also looks better at the level of epistemology and knowledge" (237).

Of course, reparative reading, like any other approach in literary studies, does not escape becoming the subject of its own critique. In her study *The Ruse of Repair* (2021), Americanist Patricia Stuelke argues that reparative reading practices are more concerned "with the problem of how to live and survive in a world that remains terrible even after one has learned to critique it from whatever positions of power or disenfranchisement one occupies, even after one has gained the knowledge and skill to name the thing that is wrong, and then learned that that capacity hasn't done as much to change the world as one might have hoped it would" (29). For Stuelke, reparative reading is itself a method of coping with the juncture of the supposed inefficacy of critique to bring about change, noting that "This is the dead end against which the turn to the repair feels good, feels like relief, freedom, and creative possibility" (29).

Stuelke connects the "positive" affective forces of relief, freedom, and the openness associated with reparative attitudes with the reactionary position of "how to live and survive in a world that remains terrible even after one has learned to critique it." This formulation is not too far removed from the conceptions of the reparative stance shown by Sedgwick and Love, who argue for its consolatory potential. Stuelke connects this stance to an apparent impassivity that accentuates an implicit shift from critique's desire to somehow alter its object (or the relationship we have to that object), to one that is predominantly focused on developing techniques of coping and consolation within a given context, which to Stuelke implicates and emphasizes the passive acceptance of such a givenness of the object in question.

Stuelke notes that a turn to repair and away from critique involves investment "in a fantasy of an apolitical aesthetic education that can at best teach a morally relativistic appreciation of beauty" (29). According to Stuelke, the suggestion that aesthetics could become divorced from politics may generate a morally relativistic attitude toward aesthetic concerns. Such relativism is founded on the idea that what-

ever aesthetic experiences allow one to draw sustenance from, or whatever moments of wonder, reverence, and hope present themselves, they posit a relationship to the aesthetic that is fundamentally transitional and ephemeral precisely because it is of a reactionary nature that seeks to offer refuge from the state of the world. Critique rears its head against a notion of aesthetics that becomes divorced from the actionable, refusing this relativism it associates with the reparative position.

So how does reading for affordances relate to this ongoing discussion between different conceptualizations of reparative reading and critique? To be sure, it draws from both reading practices and does so in a way that preemptively sees these different approaches as fundamentally intertwined in actual scholarly practice. To read for affordances means reading for the way in which previously unconceived relationships between materials, people, words, and worlds allow for the study of their equally novel operation and effects. It is not necessarily antagonistic to either reparative reading's gesture of offering sustenance or critique's gestures of refusal, since it cannot recognize the binary again vs. against paradigm the theorists above have posited and furthermore recasts affirmation in a radically different way.

As mentioned, affirmation here involves being oriented toward the affirmative that something "works," in the sense of it becoming actionable, and the inquiry as to *how* something becomes actionable as affordance. While I have stated that such a gesture of affirmation is itself political in prioritizing these questions in favor of others, its politics subsequently conceives of the negotiation between the sensible and the actionable as a central concern. Since to perceive an affordance necessarily implies that one has been affected in some way, what is at stake is not only to recognize and study the affordance itself but also to question why it was that this affordance was the one perceived. In my reading of *The Gray House*, this was the fundamental difference in the manifestation of attitudes concerning one's relation to one's receptivity to the world: either to try and interpret that world through different heuristic devices as a mode of relationality that seeks to protect one's sovereignty and explain, or attempt to subjugate the world to that explanation; and a relationality that preconceives the body as being in a constant negotiation of attunement with the world. In my reading of the novel, these attitudes offer us a different conceptualization of the aesthetic because I argue that the negotiation between the sensible and the actionable takes primacy, and that such attitudes themselves offer a different entry into how we conceive and relate to the domains of the political and the ethical, since here the hermeneutic act of wanting to interpret one's world is cast as a specific relationality that cannot be taken for granted, and that one's reading is informed by what the conditions for reading that world are.

It is here that disability plays a crucial role in allowing the scholar to pose a question that both reparative reading and critique omit altogether: what does it take to be able to read? From Treves' stunned look in seeing John Merrick for the first time in *The Elephant Man*, to Willem being uncertain how to read Jude's disability in *A Little Life*, to read for the affective affordances of disability means to become oriented toward examining the conditions under which reading practices themselves involve balancing on the tightrope spanned between legibility and being affectively overwhelmed. Any gesture that implies affirmation of reading therefore must arise out of the notion that affect is indefinite and legibility a variable. It is a variable, in that this approach dispenses with the notion of a supposed baseline in epistemological and intertextual baggage that the reader must carry with them in favor of an attitude that politicizes this very issue. In other words, disability is an inconvenience to the presupposition that the ability of individuals to engage in any hermeneutical activity is a given.

Disability thus discommodes sites of reading precisely through politicizing the conditions of the activity of reading itself. By rejecting the notion of a baseline for reading, this also implies the rejection of a chronological order under which reading should commence. With this, I mean that one is very often simply determined to read by the environment one is in, and that any discussion concerning what is needed to read is part of the negotiation between the sensible and the actionable.

Such an understanding of reading as aesthetic conduct has been expounded by Marielle Macé, in her essay *Ways of Reading, Modes of Being* (2013). She considers reading as what affects the reader by opening a dynamic of attraction and response. Macé writes that "We must consider not simply conduct, but kinds of conduct, and not simply readings, but styles of reading. Indeed, the manner of practices in aesthetic situations is also their content: the style of reading, the "how" determines the experience that it constitutes, which then acquires its singular character" (220). For Macé, stylization and manner are not separated from reading as an event that happens to readers, but rather she argues that through such an event stylization occurs. In this conceptualization of reading, the dynamic between the sensible and the actionable is therefore not one in which the reader herself solely intends how to read, but rather that the event of reading equally determines how the reader becomes individuated:

> The fact that reading happens to individuals (individuals who, though determined, defy definition of their identity by any simple property) is not a methodological impasse, preventing us from grasping the shared aspect and social implications of reading. What we encounter here is a

> call to recognize the modicum of individuation at work in our every gesture, spurring us to use thought itself as individuation, as it elects its proper scale and position in the multiple singularities of literature. (218)

Macé's conceptualization of reading does not posit the relationship of the readerly attitude to the text as one wherein the reader is cast as an autonomous figure that freely approaches the text; rather, reading *happens*. What is novel about this theory is that reading is posited as an event of stylization, and that through such stylization, the reader may consequently become individuated. The notion of "multiple singularities" Macé alludes to is then different from the idea that a text offers entry to, or offers us, different and multiple perspectives. Instead, it implies that each event of reading, regardless of the number of readings one engages with, is concurrently an event through which stylized individuation occurs. This also explains why Macé sees the definition of identity through "simple properties" as what the event of reading as well as the reader defies, since this process would be based on the recognition of one's idea of one's identity in the event of reading rather than the stylization-as-event in the way that Macé describes.

In her deliberations concerning reading as a predominantly determined aesthetic conduct, Macé is confronted with what the implications of such an understanding of reading are. If one posits reading as something that can *happen*, rather than it being a solely intentional activity, then what is at stake is the way in which the determined *how* of the reading follows into it gaining a "singular character," or the "multiple singularities" which according to her literary reading has to offer. Consequently, Macé ends up, albeit briefly, in the language of capacity and ability. She writes: "Reading comes to represent a kind of cognitive stylization; it calls first upon a very intimate capacity to deal with signs, losing one's bearings in impromptu representations. It also calls for the ability to continue a literary style in one's own life (making a path with it, against it, or in spite of it, in the terrain of the discernible world, to which reading inevitably leads one back)" (223). But how is it that Macé comes to the language of capacity and ability? Much like some of the theorists I've engaged with that either evoked or directly employed these terms—Elaine Scarry, Jonathan Culler, Barbara Johnson, Paul Ricoeur—Macé uses these terms only in passing. However, the major concern is that Macé links capacity in being confronted with signs as where one can lose one's bearings, echoing Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of hesitation, and ability on the side of intentional actions (making a path, resisting it, and so on).

As I have argued in this study, reading, whether posited as either predominantly an event or an intentional action, necessarily brings the theorist back to the question I offered earlier: what does it take to be able to read? It is unsurprising that Macé still captures the consideration of this question in "cognitive stylization," since to her stylization is understood as an event that happens, as what the reader must undergo when they become engaged in reading. Consequently, stylization becomes connected to losing one's bearings in one's encounter with a text, precisely because the activity of reading is not a given but, as I have maintained, a matter of negotiation. This negotiation involves the way in which a text appeals to an individual's capacity and how capacity subsequently becomes translated into ability under a set of circumstances that call for it. This negotiation is, I argue, a crucial consideration for a theory of the event of reading. Additionally, the conditions under which capacities are translated into abilities are to be understood as a matter of affordances, which are always a question of relationality. Since ability has its etymological roots in *habilitas*, which connotes aptitude, or the perceived and sensed tendency concerning the fit between the reader and whatever text she engages with, (dis)abilities are consequently to be understood as an issue of relationality. Such an understanding of relationality in relation to the event of reading allows for an evasion of the either/or construction of reading (i.e., one can or cannot read this text), instead orienting our attention to the conditions under which a body comes to read, making legibility, as noted above, a variable and matter of degree. In this way, disability inconveniences those theories of reading that simply bypass this question by considering legibility to be a given rather than a question of the relation between capacity and ability as produced through engagement with a text.

This approach to reading for affordances is inconceivable without thinking about the capacity-ability question of reading, with which theorists tend to be confronted but only skirt around. The consideration of the capacity-ability question, and the way it has been largely absent in literary theory, should equally take its cue from reparative modes of reading as well as critique. From the reparative mode, it may draw how such a consideration can create new strands of scholarly research into how and where reading occurs, under what conditions, and how, where, and why we consider reading to take place, whom it concerns, and what we consider the criteria of its successes and failures. From critique, one may borrow its critical attitude by asking why the capacity-ability question has only received marginal attention so far in the history of literary theory, from the presupposition that many theorists of literature treat reading ability as a simple given in relation to the study of literary form rather than something that complicates a theory of close reading. When understood as a given, to

think of instances of disabled reading inconveniences theories that did not want to, or could not, consider this question at all.

Consequently, disability-as-inconvenience also becomes disability-as-imposition, as what imposes itself in asking to be considered in theories of reading. But this is what the pragmatic inconveniences of disability afford us in relation to legibility. Rather than foreclosing events of reading when reading ability gets called into question or even closed off, reading for the affordances of disability means that we can call into question how and why events and theories of reading can become politicized in this way.

In future research, I intend to further expound on the relationship concerning how bodily capacities become further translated into abilities and what this means for cultural sites of reading. For now, I hope that this study may contribute to all the scholarly work that seeks to expound reading for affordances as an approach, in the belief that reading with literary affordances holds much potential for the development of the multiple ways we consider the event of reading to simultaneously be an event of affirmation and change.

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Summary in Dutch

Nederlandse samenvatting

Dit proefschrift, *Disability and its Affective Affordances: Deformity, Decay, Disruption, Distortion*, stelt dat gehandicapte lichamen ons affectief raken en dit raken ons uitnodigt om deze lichamen esthetisch te lezen. Deze uitnodiging poneer ik als een zogeheten *affordance*. Dit Engelstalige begrip, dat in het Nederlands geen directe vertaling kent, is bedacht door de Amerikaanse psycholoog James Gibson. Gibson stelde dat een *affordance* een relatie is tussen minimaal twee elementen, waarbij de specifieke mogelijkheden die door het samenbrengen van die elementen ontstaan de relatie ook kenmerken. Als voorbeeld gaf Gibson dat een omgevallen boom op een rivier door een dier gebruikt kan worden om die rivier te overbruggen. Met dit voorbeeld wilde Gibson aantonen dat de mogelijkheden van *affordances* niet inherent goed of fout zijn, maar dat dit altijd afhangt van een perspectief. Zo wil het dier de rivier wel overbruggen, maar is dat mogelijk slecht nieuws voor de persoon die aan de overkant staat.

Ik beargumenteer dat de wijze waarop gehandicapte lichamen ons affectief kunnen raken kan worden begrepen als een *affordance*. Wat ik *affective affordances* noem omhelst dat het verschijnen van en de interactie met gehandicapte lichamen affectieve reacties mogelijk maken in relatie tot andere lichamen, bijvoorbeeld angst, verwondering, of walging. Ik bestudeer de wijze waarop zulke affectieve reacties worden mogelijk gemaakt aan de hand van literatuur en andere kunstvormen. De literatuurwetenschapper Isobel Armstrong stelt in haar monografie *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000) dat affecten niet direct gerepresenteerd kunnen worden in literaire teksten, maar dat wel onderzocht kan worden hoe de formele kenmerken en patronen in een tekst affect kan genereren. Ik volg haar benadering door middel van *close reading* te bestuderen hoe de formele kenmerken van een tekst betrekking hebben op wat een tekst qua thematiek adresseert. Het formalisme dat ik in dit proefschrift beoefen is, in tegenstelling tot sommige eerdere benaderingen in literatuurwetenschappelijk formalisme, niet gescheiden van socio-politieke benaderingen. Ik combineer een formalistische leeshouding met het engageren van theorievorming in o.a. *disability studies* en *social theory*, omdat in mijn lezing van de teksten die ik bestudeer de sociaal-emotionele verhoudingen en handelingen tussen actoren centraal staan.

De bovenstaande benadering die ik in dit proefschrift uitwerk poneert een alternatief op het zogeheten model-denken, dat prominent is in *disability studies*. Het

beargumenteert dat, hoewel zij inhoudelijk verschillend zijn, de verschillende *disability* modellen (medisch, sociaal, cultureel) handicap conceptualiseren a.d.h.v. een analogische en taxonomische logica, die dominant is in de medische wetenschappen. Deze logica stelt dat individuele manifestaties van handicaps in een bredere taxonomie kunnen worden geplaatst, om zo tot algemene behandel- en therapievormen te kunnen komen. Deze logica werkt van het particuliere geval naar het generaliseerbare.

Dit proefschrift biedt een alternatief op model-denken doordat het de wijze waarop lichamelijke capaciteiten cultureel en sociaal vertaald worden naar (dis)abilities centraal stelt. In tegenstelling tot de taxonomische benaderingen, stelt de *close reading* van literaire teksten en kunstwerken ons in staat om van het particuliere naar het particuliere te bewegen. Hoewel kunstwerken ook onderhevig kunnen worden gemaakt aan generalisatie, kunnen ze tegelijkertijd de eigen uniciteit benadrukken en weerstand kunnen bieden aan vormen van categorisering.

Deze nadruk op lezen is tevens iets dat in de teksten die ik bestudeer zelf centraal wordt gesteld. Het kunnen aannemen van een houding aan de hand van esthetische oordeelsvorming is een centrale kwestie voor de personages, sprekers en actoren in de teksten die ik bestudeer. Wanneer we affectief worden geraakt door een gehandicapt lichaam, een lichaam dat veelal moeilijk te lezen is (en zodoende juist interpretatie oproept), raken ook onze zintuigen betrokken. Ik stel dat binnen de problematiek van het lezen van het gehandicapte lichaam het esthetisch oordeel een manier van omgaan met affectieve responsiviteit wordt die de duider in staat stelt een houding aan te nemen ten opzichte van die problematiek.

De relatie tussen affect en leesbaarheid van het gehandicapte lichaam heeft niet alleen betrekking op dat lichaam, maar eveneens op de activiteit van het lezen zelf. Lezen veronderstelt de capaciteit van het menselijk lichaam om vertaald te worden in een zogeheten *ability* binnen culturele contexten die om lezen vragen, waarbij ik lezen opvat als de vaardigheid om tekens en tekensystemen te herkennen, te decoderen en te interpreteren. Grenzend en complementair aan de vraag hoe we handicap als esthetisch object moeten lezen, ligt daarom de vraag hoe esthetische praktijken zoals literatuur de relatie tussen lezen en *(dis)abilities* zelf onderzoeken, of hoe lichamelijke capaciteiten worden vertaald in *abilities* die verband houden met leespraktijken. Ik stel derhalve dat de vraag "Wat is ervoor nodig om te kunnen lezen?" een relevante vraag is voor de literatuurtheorie, die eveneens te lang door haar genegeerd is.

In het inleidende hoofdstuk begin ik met een vergelijkende lezing van twee beelden, de *David* van Michelangelo Buonarroti (1501–1504) en *Into One-another III, to P.P.P.* van Berlinde de Bruyckere (2010). Daar waar het eerste beeld leesbaar is doordat

het voldoet aan herkenbare identiteitskenmerken (gender en leeftijd), is het tweede beeld lastiger leesbaar doordat het duidelijk te maken heeft met lichamelijkheid, zonder dat meteen duidelijk is hoe dat lichaam in elkaar zit en werkt. Ik stel dat de leesbaarheid van het eerste beeld als plezierig kan worden ervaren, terwijl het tweede beeld, doordat het proces van lezen bemoeilijkt, een dissonante ervaring teweegbrengt. Vervolgens zet ik uiteen wat de dominante benaderingen tot disability zijn, en hoe de benadering die ik ontwikkel zich hiertoe verhoudt (zoals hierboven beschreven). Ik positioneer mij binnen het veld van *disability aesthetics*, waarbinnen wordt gepleit dat de diversiteit van het gehandicapte lichaam als een vorm van schoonheid moet worden gevierd, en onze visie op menselijke variatie vergroot. Ik beargumenteer dat een dergelijke benadering moedwillig de relevantie van termen als 'degeneratie', 'misvormheid' en 'aberratie' verwerpt, en dat de studie van zulke concepten kan bijdragen aan een cultureel en esthetisch begrip van lichamelijke variatie.

In het tweede hoofdstuk, dat over het misvormde gaat, behandel ik twee gevalstudies. De roman *Jane Eyre* (1845) van Charlotte Bronte, en de film *The Elephant Man* van David Lynch (1980). Het misvormde lichaam, zo beargumenteer ik aan de hand van drie sleuteltermen—*zien, voelen* en *onthullen*—kan niet verschijnen zonder een performatieve situatie te creëren. Ik onderzoek hoe, in de slotscènes van *Jane Eyre*, handicap gebruikt wordt door de betrokken personages om emotionele toestanden aan zichzelf en de ander te kunnen toewijzen door middel van performatief emotioneel taalgebruik, genaamd *emotives*. Door dit gebruik te onderzoeken, beargumenteer ik dat de uitwisseling van *emotives* de personages niet helpt om hun emoties te verlichten, maar de vorming van een prothetische relatie van wederzijdse afhankelijkheid mogelijk maakt tussen de twee hoofdpersonen van de roman. Vervolgens beargumenteer ik dat de uitwisseling van emoties en het gebruik van taal als prothese leesbare lacunes in en tussen performatieve taalhandelingen veroorzaakt, die door deze leesbaarheid patronen van affect kunnen genereren.

In mijn lezing van *The Elephant Man* onderzoek ik hoe het misvormde en gehandicapte lichaam van het hoofdpersonage John Merrick perormatief tentoongesteld wordt in verschillende sociaal-culturele omgevingen—de *freakshow*, het ziekenhuis en het thuis. In elk van deze contexten ontstaat een andere performatieve situatie, waarbij de gemeenschappelijke deler is dat Merrick continu als het object van onthulling en tentoonstelling fungeert. De performatieve aard van deze contexten maakt het mogelijk dat er een specifieke distributie is van het handelingsvermogen ontstaat tussen de actoren, waarbij Merrick enkel de ontvanger is van de esthetische en medische oordeelsvorming van andere partijen. Tegelijkertijd zorgt de perfor-

matieve tentoonstelling van het misvormde lichaam van Merrick ervoor dat andere actoren zowel erdoor worden aangetrokken als afgestoten. Ik sluit het hoofdstuk af met het argument dat de handicap en fragiliteit van het lichaam van Merrick juist de esthetische waarneembaarheid van de *levendigheid* van het lichaam kan vergroten in andere actoren.

Het derde hoofdstuk onderzoekt het concept van lichamelijke aftakeling of verval (Engels: *decay*). Ik vat verval op als de affectieve worsteling van het gelijktijdig afbreken en volharden van het lichaam, waarbij deze worsteling vormen van handelen bemoeilijkt. Ik onderzoek de consequenties van deze worsteling aan de hand van een *close reading* van de roman *A Little Life* van Hanya Yanagihara. In deze roman volgt de lezer vier vrienden, Jude, Willem, Malcolm en JB. Jude heeft een handicap waarvan zowel de vrienden als de lezer de geschiedenis initieel niet weet, maar gaandeweg wordt duidelijk dat deze het gevolg is van fysiek geweld, en Jude gedurende zijn leven onderworpen is aan uitbuiting en verkrachting. Om met zijn verleden om te gaan doet Jude aan automutilatie, waardoor zijn lichamelijke conditie steeds verder verslechtert.

In mijn analyse van de roman onderzoek ik hoe lichamelijke autonomie kan worden beoefend terwijl het lichaam uiteenvalt en hoe dat zich verhoudt tot belichaming. Ik begrijp belichaming hier als drie manieren om het verband tussen subject en lichaam vorm te geven: dat van het hebben van een lichaam, het zijn van een lichaam, en het 'doen' van het lichaam. Ik beargumenteer dat verval de mogelijkheid tot handelingsvermogen van het lichaam bemoeilijkt en dramatiseert, en dat deze dramatisering van de actie van en het gebruik van het aftakelende lichaam verschillende vormen van actie in andere lichamen kan uitlokken. Wanneer een lichaam in een staat van verval verkeert, kan het andere individuen affectief in beweging brengen. Zo pogen sommige personages Jude's lichaam te willen helpen of herstellen, terwijl anderen er weer met walging op reageren en het willen misbruiken.

Wanneer Jude aan het einde van de roman niet meer verder wil leven, blijft zijn lichaam volharden en is hij niet in staat zijn lichaam te onderwerpen aan zijn wil om te sterven. Omdat verval de lichamelijke capaciteit vermindert en het lichamelijke vermogen om te handelen of het lichaam te gebruiken beperkt, betoog ik dat het lichaam in verval, door zijn inactiviteit en tegelijkertijd de noodzaak om te volharden, een abjecte lichamelijke toestand wordt.

In het vierde hoofdstuk onderzoek ik de werking van het concept onderbreking of ontregeling (Engels: *disruption*) in relatie tot handicap. Ik begin met een schets van het zogeheten herstel narratief, uitgewerkt door de socioloog Arthur Frank (1997), waarin de breuk in relatie tot chronische ziekte en handicap wordt geconceptualiseerd als de

onderbreking tussen het leven voor en na de handicap door bijvoorbeeld een ongeval. In tegenstelling tot deze benadering stel ik een andere conceptualisering van de breuk voor aan de hand van twee genres: het situationele narratief en het lyrische gedicht. Voortbordurend op het werk van Lauren Berlant (2011) poneer ik dat het situationele narratief zich onderscheidt van andere narratieven doordat de bepalende factor is wat als 'gebeurtenis' (Engels: *event*) wordt toegekend. Een situatie kenmerkt zich als een toestand waarin iets dat er misschien toe gaat doen zich ontvouwt te midden van de gebruikelijke activiteit van het leven. In een analyse van de roman *Still Life with Monkey* (2018) waarin de man van een welgesteld Amerikaans echtpaar, Duncan en Laura Wheeler, na een ongeluk quadripleeg wordt, stel ik dat wat er in de roman op het spel staat niet de vraag is of Duncan überhaupt 'beter' kan worden, maar of hij zijn nieuwe lichamelijke conditie kan *accepteren*. De roman detailleert de aanpassing van Duncan en Laura aan hun nieuwe leven, waarin ik de affectieve toon van de tekst lees als een van ontevredenheid (Engels: *dissatisfaction*). Door de ontregeling van alledaagse esthetische aangelegenheden (zoals het precieze bereiden van een Engelse muffin of het juist leggen van een houten vloer) legt de roman nadruk op de *moeite* van deze alledaagse activiteiten. Aan de hand van het 16e-eeuwse concept *sprezzatura*, dat in de roman onderwerp van gesprek is tussen Laura en Duncan, beargumenteer ik hoe de schijn der moeiteloosheid, of juist de zichtbaarheid van moeite, benadrukt en verkend kan worden aan de hand van *disability*.

In het tweede deel van het hoofdstuk werk ik de affectieve werking van moeite verder uit aan de hand van de poëzie van Laurie Clements Lambeth. In haar gedicht *Symptoms* (2008) poneert Lambeth, die zelf MS heeft, een spreker die in het gedicht *probeert* te vertellen 'hoe het voelt' ("*Let me try to tell you how it feels*"). In mijn lezing van dit gedicht stel ik dat deze nadruk op de *poging* van het overbrengen van leven met de symptomen van MS middels lyriek, in plaats van aan te nemen dat dit zomaar communiceerbaar is, juist de moeite of zelfs onmogelijkheid ervan benadrukt. Aan de hand van het werk van Lambeth beargumenteer ik dat de theorie van de lyriek hoofdzakelijk de focus heeft gelegd op de retorische effecten en kracht van de lyriek, daar waar ik stel dat *disability* de aanname dat een gedicht zomaar voor te dragen is, compliceert. Deze complicering, voortbouwend op het voorgaande hoofdstuk, betreft hoe lichamelijke capaciteiten wel of niet kunnen worden vertaald naar *abilities*, zoals het kunnen voordragen van een gedicht.

In het vijfde hoofdstuk, aangaande vervorming (Engels: *distortion*), bestudeer ik de roman *The Gray House* van Mariam Petrosyan (2017). In die roman wonen kinderen en adolescenten met een verscheidenheid aan handicaps in een internaat waarbinnen ongelofelijke en onverklaarbare gebeurtenissen plaatsvinden. Ik lees de roman

binnen de theorievorming van het fantastische, zoals eerder uitgewerkt door Tzvetan Todorov (1975) en Rosemary Jackson (1981). Todorov stelt dat kenmerkend voor het fantastische is dat er aarzeling en verwarring optreedt met betrekking tot het functioneren van de vertelwereld, zowel bij de personages van de diegesis als bij de lezer. Jackson omschrijft dit als de fantastische presentatie van "dat wat niet kan zijn, maar is" (23), en daarmee een paradoxale wereld tot stand brengt. Het fantastische put uit de normatieve conventies en ordes van zowel de realistische literatuur als die van het genre van het sprookje, om die te vervormen en vervolgens te ondermijnen.

Een conceptuele parallel tussen het fantastische en *disability* is dat ze allebei vooraf vastgestelde normen overtreden. Daar waar het fantastische conventies uit andere literaire modi overschrijdt, overschrijdt *disability* wat men verwacht met betrekking tot hoe een lichaam verschijnt of werkt. Wat medische conceptualiseringen van handicap echter ontberen, is wat *The Gray House* biedt door handicap te verbinden met de vervorming die het fantastische teweegbrengt: ons in staat te stellen over handicap na te denken in relatie tot 'dat wat niet kan zijn, maar is'. Met andere woorden: handicap beschouwen als een kwestie van verbeelding.

Ik werk in dit hoofdstuk twee affectieve relationaliteiten uit aan de hand van mijn lezing van de roman, anticipatie en aarzeling. Anticipatie en aarzeling treden in het fantastische op doordat zowel de personages als de lezer geconfronteerd worden met onverklaarbare gebeurtenissen in het internaat. Ik stel dat deze gebeurtenissen zowel de personages als de lezer aanzetten tot interpreteren, waarbij ik poneer dat binnen het fantastische interpreteren functioneert als een vorm van relateren om grip op een wereld te krijgen aan de hand van haar (on)verklaarbaarheid. In de roman worden personages echter overweldigd door de gebeurtenissen die plaatsvinden, waarbij ik beargumenteer dat er een parallelle verdraaiing plaatsvindt tussen hoe een lichaam waarneemt (Engels: *sensing*) en gebeurtenissen kan duiden (Engels: *making sense*), waardoor interpretatie niet kan leiden tot definitieve verklaringen van het functioneren van een wereld. De roman biedt een alternatieve vorm van het kunnen relateren tot een wereld door middel van het continu leren zintuigelijk af te stemmen op die wereld.

In de conclusie beargumenteer ik hoe het lezen voor *affordances* zich verhoudt tot het *against vs. again* paradigma binnen de literatuur- en cultuurwetenschappen. Dat paradigma wordt door de literatuurwetenschapper Rita Felski (2015) gezien als het onderscheid tussen enerzijds kritische en speculatieve benaderingen tot de literatuur, en anderzijds reparatieve benaderingen die vooral de herstellende, voedende en esthetische waarden van literatuur benadrukken. Ik beargumenteer dat de benadering die ik in dit proefschrift uitwerk haaks op dit paradigma staat, doordat het lezen

voor *affordances* zich focust op wat ik *the actionable* noem: de sociaal-culturele onderhandeling van wat wij als 'actie' duiden en hoe actie ondernomen kan of dient te worden. *Disability*, zo concludeer ik, ondermijnt de vanzelfsprekendheid van een gedeeld begrip van actie. Het stelt ons in staat om onszelf kritisch te bevragen hoe veronderstellingen en aannamen over de relatie tussen handelingsvermogen en het lichaam tot stand komen, en wat wij als valide vormen van handelingsvermogen beschouwen.

Curriculum Vitae

Andries Hiskes was born on August 26, 1987, in Gouda, The Netherlands. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Information and Media Studies from The Hague University of Applied Sciences in 2010. Since graduating, he has held various teaching and research positions at the same institute. He pursued a master's degree in Media Studies: Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at Leiden University and graduated in 2015. He was awarded a PhD research grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) as part of the Doctoral Grant for Teachers program in 2018. In that same year, he was co-organizer of the Ravenstein Winter School on Literature, Emotion, and Affect held at the University of Amsterdam. During his doctoral research, he attended The Institute for World Literature at Harvard University in 2019 and The School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University in 2023. He is co-initiator and organizer of The Politics of Disablement Summer School held at The University of Humanistic Studies and part of the Utrecht Summer School international program. He has given presentations and workshops on his research across universities in Europe (Stockholm, Budapest, Rome, Aarhus, Limerick, Mälardalen, Utrecht, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Karlstad) and the USA (Chicago, Boston, Ithaca). He was the secretary of the LUCAS PhD Council at Leiden University, editor for the LUCAS Graduate Journal, and a member of the LUCAS impact committee that advances the valorization of the research done at LUCAS. His scholarly work has been published in *Textual Practice*, *The Journal of Posthuman Studies*, and *Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies—Technologies—Power*, among others. He is part of the Creative-Critical Approaches to the Health Humanities consortium that was awarded an Incubator Grant from The Netherlands Research School for Literary Studies (OSL) in 2023. In 2024, he was appointed as Principal Lecturer Inclusion & Participation at The Faculty of Health, Nutrition & Sport, The Hague University of Applied Sciences.