

**Disability in Motion: Phantasia, Ekphrasis, and Image Events Beyond Sight and Sound**

by

**Jessica L. Benham**

Bachelor of Arts in Communication, Bethel University, 2012

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Bethel University, 2012

Master of Arts in Communication, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2015

Master of Arts in Bioethics, University of Pittsburgh, 2019

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2022

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

**Jessica L. Benham**

It was defended on

March 25, 2022

and approved by

Dr. Paul Johnson, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication

Dr. Gordon Mitchell, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

Dr. Mark Paterson, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology

Dissertation Director: Dr. Brent Malin, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

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2022

# **Disability in Motion: Phantasia, Ekphrasis, and Image Events Beyond Sight and Sound**

Jessica L. Benham, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2022

I analyze media representations of disability rights protests, specifically the 1987 Deaf President Now protests, the 1990 ‘crawl up’ protest, and the 2017 American Health Care Act protests. I argue that disabled protestors strategically staged protests to draw the attention of mass media and that photography of disabled people offers the opportunity to explore the relationships between word and image, sight and sound. I engage with scholarship from argument studies, social movement theory, classical rhetoric, childhood studies, disability studies, queer theory, and media studies. I primarily approach images through a critical discourse analysis. I found three emerging themes: images, metaphorical language, and language which encouraged the reader to imagine an image within the mind.

In chapter one, I argue that the Deaf-ness of the protestors during the Deaf President Now protests was made visible in the media through a variety of strategies, including metaphors of sound and hearing. In chapter two, I argue that protest imagery from the March 1990 ‘crawl up’ protest was effective in drawing public attention to inaccessibility and spurring legislative change because it disrupted normative enthymemes. In chapter three, I analyze press photography of ADAPT’s June 22, 2017 Die In protest outside of Mitch McConnell’s D.C. office, arguing that changes in how and where people get their news has resulted in more sensationalized photography. In my conclusion, I summarize my arguments at an eighth grade reading level, intending to make my work legible within the disability communities where I find belonging.

## Table of Contents

Preface.....	ix
<b>1.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Project Description.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Argument.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3 Scholarship.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3.1 How do images argue? Answers from Argument Theory and Social Movement Theory .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3.2 Disability Studies on Images of Disability.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.3.3 Classical Rhetoric: Rhetorical Vision and Cleverness.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.3.3.1 Ekphrasis.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.3.3.2 Metis.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.3.3.3 Phantasia .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.3.4 Media Studies .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.3.4.1 Disability as studium .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.3.4.2 Disability as punctum .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.4 Methodology.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>1.4.1 Description of Discourse.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>1.4.2 Process of Analysis .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.4.3 Procedures .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.5 Precis of Chapters.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.5.1 Chapter Two .....</b>	<b>28</b>

1.5.2 Chapter Three .....	29
1.5.3 Chapter Four .....	30
1.5.4 Conclusion.....	31
<b>2.0 Deaf President Now.....</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 Method.....	34
2.2 Argument and Definitions .....	35
2.3 Visible Invisibility .....	40
2.3.1 Sign Language as a Hallmark of Deafness.....	41
2.3.2 Protest Signs and Banners: Context Clues .....	44
2.3.3 Rendering Disability as White .....	46
2.4 Captions and Context.....	50
2.4.1 Ekphrasis .....	50
2.4.2 Ekphrasis and Disability .....	51
2.4.3 Ekphrasis and DPN.....	53
2.5 DPN and Senses Beyond the Ears and Eyes.....	57
2.6 Conclusion .....	61
<b>3.0 The Queerness of Disabled Childhood: The 1990 ADAPT ‘Crawl-up’ .....</b>	<b>63</b>
3.1 Reproductive Futurism .....	67
3.2 Who Can and Should Protest? .....	74
3.3 Ableism and Ageism.....	80
3.4 Conclusion .....	87
<b>4.0 Disability, Death, and Resistance: The 2017 ADAPT Die-In.....</b>	<b>89</b>
4.1 Hyper-visual Audiences and New Roles for Photojournalists.....	92

4.2 Social Media and Image Events .....	106
4.3 Death and Disability .....	115
4.4 Conclusion .....	124
5.0 Conclusion .....	126
5.1 Chapter Two .....	128
5.2 Chapter Three.....	129
5.3 Chapter Four .....	131
5.4 Conclusion .....	132
Bibliography .....	135

## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 1 Reporters and News Organizations that Published Online Articles of the Event...</b>	<b>95</b>
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## Preface

I dedicate this project to all members of the disability community, which deserves many more histories and research of, by, and for us. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Brent Malin, for his tireless encouragement, support, and feedback. My sincere gratitude to the members of my committee, Dr. Paul Johnson, Dr. Gordon Mitchell, Dr. Mark Paterson, Dr. Candace Skibba, and Georgina Kleege, for all your wise comments and suggestions on various drafts.

Thank you to my now ex-husband, Karl Norman, for his support throughout much of this process. We always said that marriage made grad school easier, and grad school made marriage harder, and so it was. I'm glad we spent our twenties together and appreciate your support and friendship as we move through our thirties. This project would not have been possible without you.

To Hillary Ash and Ryan Blank, thank you for your accountability and friendship. The many hours we spent writing together formed memories that I will treasure forever. To Cheryl, Jess S, Erin B, Laine, Cori, and Jami, thank you for important moments of stress relief, laughter, fun, and wise counsel. To all of the many staff who continue to make my life as a state representative possible as I finished this dissertation, thank you for your service to the 36<sup>th</sup> district. Moira, Dan, Viola, Mahdi, Andrea, Vinny, Jamaal, Miriam, and Virginia – you all are a blessing not only to me, but to all our constituents.

To Ravi, thank you for your constant companionship, for your love of adventure at home, in Harrisburg, and beyond, and for always making me giggle with your antics.

To Erin G and Dr. H, thank you for helping me find the physical and mental strength to balance everything on my plate.

## 1.0 Introduction

On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, 54 people with disabilities were arrested in the Capitol Rotunda, where they had been protesting the American Health Care Act. These people were members of ADAPT, a disability rights advocacy organization known for its use of non-violent protests to influence legislators. In the 1990s, the same organization was responsible for advocacy in support of the Americans with Disabilities Act, including conventional lobbying, but primarily protest activity. ADAPT's members are well aware of how it looks when people with disabilities are arrested, and they plan to be arrested in order to draw media attention to problems.

Photographs of these arrests tend to be provocative. One photograph of the summer 2017 protests over the GOP healthcare bill was disseminated by the Washington Examiner.<sup>1</sup> It shows a woman grimacing toward the camera as she is dragged out of her wheelchair by the Capital Police; the hot pink sunglasses atop her blond curly hair match her fingernails as her arm stretches toward the camera. A woman in the background records the incident on her iPhone, while another cop stands by. It is the tiny details in this photographed moment which seem to catch the eye: the ponytail holder on her wrist, the vibrant yellow green on the cops' vests, the way her forehead wrinkles in distress or perhaps pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Leah DePiero, and Jack O'brien, "Wheelchair-Bound Protesters Removed from Protest Outside Mitch McConnell's Office," <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/wheelchair-bound-protesters-removed-from-protest-outside-mitch-mcconnells-office/article/2626808>.

A similar instance from the same protest was photographed by the *Independent*<sup>2</sup> and by *Vox*,<sup>3</sup> from different angles. This woman wears brightly colored animal print pants and a green t-shirt while being dragged out of her chair by the cops. Here, again, it is the small details: the red ball cap she holds in her hand, the blue bag hanging from her neck, the way her glasses are slightly askew, the other media blurred in the background with their cameras, the plastic gloves the cops wear. In *Vox*'s photograph, one catches a glimpse of her similarly brightly colored socks. Her lips are pursed in discomfort.

## 1.1 Project Description

Throughout disability rights movements in the United States, media representations, visual, written, and spoken, of disabled protestors both furthered and hindered the agenda of these movements. While previous research has documented the history of these protests, no significant analysis of the role of the media exists. In this dissertation, I analyze media representations of disability rights protests, specifically the 1987 Deaf President Now protests, the 1990 'crawl up' protest, and the 2017 American Health Care Act protests. I intend to provide a nuanced perspective on the role of the media in covering these protests, arguing that the representations are both productive and detrimental. In so doing, I seek to answer two questions: How do disabled

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<sup>2</sup>Emily Shugerman, and Alexandra Wilts, "Capitol Police Drag Disabled Protesters out of Wheelchairs During Trumpcare Protests," <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/healthcare-protests-disabled-woman-dragged-away-police-without-wheelchair-photos-video-a7803456.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Stein, "'No Cuts to Medicaid!': Protesters in Wheelchairs Arrested after Release of Health Care Bill," <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/22/15855424/disability-protest-medicare-mcconnell>.

protestors understand and engage with media portrayals of their protests? How does disability, as a theoretical tool, challenge our perceptions of which senses should be engaged by protest behavior?

## 1.2 Argument

My first argument is that, throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, disabled protestors strategically staged protests to draw the photographic attention of mass media; while the resulting images did not always circulate in the ways expected or desired, media coverage did draw attention to the lack of accessibility and inclusion, as well as the solutions proposed by the group. The images functioned as argumentative fragments, disrupting and reinforcing enthymemes associating disability with weakness, laziness, childhood, or lack of agency.

My second argument, on a more theoretical level, is that disability offers the opportunity to more thoroughly explore the relationship between word and image, sight and sound, in the representation of protests in the media. This is because disability allows the theorization of the absence of either sense, or both. In understanding disability as another form of knowledge production, I seek to disrupt the ocular and aural focus of rhetorical theory. Disability challenges the connection between sight and knowledge that is so often present in our discourse. *I see* means *I understand* or *I know*, while disability implies lack of knowledge: *she was blind to...* or *that fell on deaf ears*.

My third argument is that scholars of media studies and argument theory should employ theories about protests and social movements that move beyond the visual and the aural. Thus, I also speculate as to what non-visual and non-aural strategies disability counter publics could use

that might similarly communicate their message in the public sphere, while considering the challenges of circulation. I introduce the concept of the ‘sensory event,’ building on the work of Kevin Deluca, to consider more sensory dimensions of protest activity.

### **1.3 Scholarship**

This dissertation will engage with scholarship from argument studies, social movement theory, classical rhetoric, childhood studies, disability studies, queer theory, and media studies. In this section, I briefly overview the ways in which argument studies, social movement theory, disability studies, classical rhetoric, and media studies influence my theoretical perspective; other areas of scholarly influence will be discussed when relevant within later chapters.

#### **1.3.1 How do images argue? Answers from Argument Theory and Social Movement**

##### **Theory**

Argument theory and social movement theory provide the foundation through which I understand how images argue. Argument theorists have long debated whether images can function as arguments for social movements.<sup>4</sup> Argument studies scholar Kevin M. Deluca would call the

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<sup>4</sup> See: Catherine H. Palczewski, “Bodies that Argue: Power, Difference, and Argument,” (paper presented at the NCA/ACA Conference on Argumentation, Alta, 1997); Catherine H. Palczewski, “Argument in an Off Key: Playing with the Productive Limits of Argument. In *Arguing Communication and Culture: Proceedings of the Twelfth NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation, Alta, August 2001*, edited by G. T. Goodnight, 1-23. (Washington, D.C.: National Communication Association, 2002); David Fleming, “Can Pictures be Arguments?” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 33.1 (1996): 11-23; Ralph H. Johnson, “Why ‘Visual Arguments’ Aren’t Arguments,” In *Informal Logic at 25*, edited by H. V. Hansen. (Windsor, ON: University of Windsor, 2003).

photographs of the AHCA protests *image events*, in which protestors stage incidents intended to be photographed. He introduces the *image event* in his 1999 book *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* as a way to understand how and why certain images are disseminated on the public screen as part of a social movement strategy.<sup>5</sup> For Deluca, these images disseminated by the media can be an important part of social movement strategy.<sup>6</sup> John Delicath and Kevin Deluca explain the relationship between images and argument by understanding images as argumentative fragments.<sup>7</sup>

Images, for Deluca, are not arguments in and of themselves, but, by virtue of relating within and to other discourses, they become elements of arguments.<sup>8</sup> Delicath and Deluca write, “Image events communicate not arguments, but argumentative fragments in the form of unstated propositions, indirect and incomplete claims, visual refutation, and implied alternatives.”<sup>9</sup>

Deluca is especially interested in the ways images of bodies function as sites for argument on the public screen, writing, “Often, image events revolve around images of bodies – vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies. These political bodies constitute a nascent body rhetoric that deploys bodies as a pivotal resource for the crucial

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<sup>5</sup> Kevin Michael Deluca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Kevin Michael Deluca, “Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36.1 (1999): 9-21; Kevin Michael Deluca and Jennifer Peeples. “From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the ‘Violence’ of Seattle.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.2 (2002): 125-151.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Michael Deluca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Kevin Michael Deluca, “Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36.1 (1999): 9-21; Kevin Michael Deluca and Jennifer Peeples. “From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the ‘Violence’ of Seattle.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.2 (2002): 125-151.

<sup>7</sup>John W. Delicath and Kevin Michael Deluca, “Image Events, the Public Sphere, and Argumentative Practice: The Case of Radical Environmental Groups,” *Argumentation* 17(2003): 315-333.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 322.

practice of public argumentation.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Cate Palczewski positions argument as play and looks to the body as a site for arguments.<sup>11</sup> Yet, significant analysis of images of *disabled* bodies, arguably a category fitting many of the characteristics listed above, has historically been missing from the study of this image world.

Delicath and Deluca posit that, “images, operating as argumentative fragments, are capable of offering unstated propositions and advancing indirect and incomplete claims in ways that function to block enthymemes as well as advance alternatives.”<sup>12</sup> Image events, Deluca and Peebles claim, “move the meanings of fundamental ideographs. With such practices, they are attempting to create social movement...the rhetorical tactic of image events works not so much through identification as disidentification.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, images argue through a process of enthymematic disruption.

### **1.3.2 Disability Studies on Images of Disability**

To understand how images of disability in particular function to both block enthymemes and move meanings through disidentification, we have to first understand why the public eye is so drawn to visual evidence of disability. Of staring at disability, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, “We stare because we are curious and we are curious about staring....the eyes hang on,

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<sup>10</sup> Deluca, Kevin M. “Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36 (1999): 9-21, qt. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Palczewski, Catherine H. “Bodies that Argue: Power, Difference, and Argument.” (paper presented at the NCA/ACA Conference on Argumentation, Alta, 1997); Palczewski, Catherine H. “Argument in an Off Key: Playing with the Productive Limits of Argument. In *Arguing Communication and Culture: Proceedings of the Twelfth NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation, Alta, August 2001*, edited by G. T. Goodnight, 1-23. Washington, D.C.: National Communication Association, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> John W. Delicath and Kevin Michael Deluca, “Image Events, the Public Sphere, and Argumentative Practice: The Case of Radical Environmental Groups,” *Argumentation* 17(2003): 315-333, qt. 317-18.

<sup>13</sup> Deluca and Peebles, “From Public Sphere to Public Screen,” 52.

working to recognize what seems illegible, order what seems unruly, know what seems strange.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Susan Sontag argues that disabled people are stared at because of “repulsive attractions.”<sup>15</sup> While Sontag condemns the urge to stare as a “despised impulse,”<sup>16</sup> Garland-Thomson views staring more productively: “a stare is a response to someone’s distinctiveness, and a staring exchange can thus beget mutual recognition, however fleeting. In this way, how we look at one another can be a productive aspect of our interpersonal, even our political, lives.”<sup>17</sup> While research within disability studies tends to focus on *staring*, DeLuca places an emphasis on *glances*, speed, and distraction.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps what makes images of disability so powerful is their ability to turn glances into prolonged stares. Of course, there are also dangers of disability imagery; about disability visibility, Garland-Thomson argues, “The risk of all activism is that it will not make this last leap from intent to effect.”<sup>19</sup>

### 1.3.3 Classical Rhetoric: Rhetorical Vision and Cleverness

Three concepts from classical rhetoric are useful for me as I understand the ways in which images function in media coverage: ekphrasis, phantasia, and metis.

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<sup>14</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux/Picador, 2003), 96.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>17</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 185.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin M. DeLuca, “The Speed of Immanent Images: The Dangers of Reading Photographs.” In *Visual Communication: Perception, Rhetoric and Technology*, edited by D. S. Hope, 79-90. New York: Hampton Press, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 194.



### 1.3.3.1 Ekphrasis

Rhetoricians have parsed the relationship between word and picture, eyes and ears, sight and sound for years. For example, speech which inspires the audience to envision can be a powerful rhetorical tool. Known as *ekphrasis*, or *putting before the eyes*, this technique is defined in the Progymnasmata as: ‘a speech which leads one around, bringing a subject matter vividly (*enargos*) before the eyes.’ An intriguing juxtaposition: the *image event* requires no ears or speech, *ekphrasis* no eyes or physical sight, yet each relies on both the ears and eyes, if only metaphorically. *Ekphrasis* is key for this research theoretically because the concept allows the exploration of the relationship between photography, captions, and image descriptions in news media coverage. For instance, in the images circulated by the news media of the ADAPT ‘crawl up’ protest, there are few, if any, visual cues suggesting that the participants are disabled. Instead, the news coverage provides captions mentioning handicapped or disabled protestors, or discusses disability in the article. In this way, *ekphrasis* is employed by the media: the unseen, the invisible, is brought before the eyes.

### 1.3.3.2 Metis

The tactics used by marginalized people to make disability visible in image events are rhetorically clever, making the moment of the photographer’s flash one defined by *metis*: cunning adaption. Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant define *metis* as:

A type of intelligence and thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills and experience acquired over the years. It applies to situations which are shifting,

disconcerting and ambiguous, which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic.<sup>20</sup>

Metis “enables the smaller and weaker to dominate the bigger and stronger.”<sup>21</sup> Taking up this thought from Detienne and Vernant, Michel de Certeau aligns *metis* with *tactics*, rather than with *strategy*.<sup>22</sup> Tactics are the practices of the everyday, ordinary people that resist the order established by the strategies of the powerful.<sup>23</sup> Jay Dolmage introduces *metis* to disability rhetoric, as a way of understanding how disabled individuals, through the use of clever trickery that takes advantage of their position of supposed abjection, can be skillful rhetors.<sup>24</sup> *Metis*, Dolmage notes, is etymologically connected to difference in embodiment, especially disability, since it comes from the idea of physical curving, crippling, and articulations.<sup>25</sup> *Metis* clearly structures the relationship between disability and image events.

Disability image events necessarily require the use of *metis*. When people with disabilities stage an image event, they do not control the public screen and are, therefore, disadvantaged. They must engage in a bit of playful trickery, a *tactic*, to draw the gaze of key gatekeepers. *Metis* facilitates the temporary inclusion of subaltern publics in the public sphere,<sup>26</sup> a necessary condition of image events as argumentative fragments.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, *metis* is about cleverly generating new forms, new embodiments of argument, while, similarly, *disability* prompts us to imagine new

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<sup>20</sup> Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (New York: Harvester Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (Syracuse University Press, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Deluca and Delicath

possibilities of being.<sup>28</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, “it is not that beauty attracts us per se but rather that by attracting us something becomes beauty.”<sup>29</sup>

When activists with disabilities play into the eye-catching nature of disability to draw stares, they effectively make disability visible in ways that counter audience expectations, thus creating a spectacle that interrupts enthymemes in the minds of the audience. Garland-Thomson calls the practice of “putting themselves in the public eye” “visual activism.” It has only been in the past 30-40 years that people with disabilities have lived visibly among us, and people with disabilities are under-photographed and under-represented by the news media; therefore, people do not expect to see disability represented.<sup>30</sup> The interrupted enthymeme, then, is about the very existence or non-existence, agentic, or non-agentic, active or passive nature of disabled bodies.

But disability image events are not only about negating audience expectations or countering enthymemes. Deluca and Peebles argue that image events are a vehicle through which to hold the powerful accountable and develop a counterpublic subjectivity, re-writing notions of acceptable public engagement.<sup>31</sup> The *metis* of the disability image event is also about productive opportunities, chances to imagine new realities and new argumentative possibilities.<sup>32</sup> Vernant and Detienne note, “relations of force are constantly upset by the intervention of *metis*...the defeat of the weak and the frail is not a foregone conclusion.”<sup>33</sup> Images of disabled activists, then, make visible “new” bodies in which to engage publicly, and possibly upset existing power dynamics.

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<sup>28</sup> Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*.

<sup>29</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 187.

<sup>30</sup> Cassandra Phillips, “Re-imaging the (Dis)Able Body,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 22(2001): 195-208.

<sup>31</sup> Deluca and Peebles, “From Public Sphere to Public Screen.”

<sup>32</sup> Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*.

<sup>33</sup> Vernant and Detienne, 46.

Garland-Thomson notes, “If their visual politics of deliberately structured self-disclosure succeeds, it can create sense of obligation that primes people to act in new ways.”<sup>34</sup>

Yet, as Amber Jacobs notes, “metis may reverse power relations, reverse binaries, turn the hunter into hunted, turn rational certainty inside out – but by its nature will never shore up, consolidate, develop or sustain.”<sup>35</sup> Metis’ complicated relationship with political action troubles the notion that *image events* could make a lasting impact on public policy.<sup>36</sup>

Given the variety of ways in which disability can be invoked by the media, disabled activists cannot control the dissemination of these images. *Metis* provides an understanding of these unpredictable constraints that structure the image event. *Tuche*, meaning *happenstance or chance*, is closely tied to *metis*, because being in the right place at the right time, as we would say, is crucial for *metis*, the cunning slight-of-hand that stages the image event. In other words, while the protestors can do their best to stage the event and ensure the media are there, an uncontrollable element, chance or fate, is involved: the protestors cannot control everything about the environment or the audience’s interpretation of the images.

Speaking of timing, if *metis* and *tuche* are about the right *place*, *metis* and *kairos* are about taking advantage of the right moment. Though protestors are able to choose when to protest, *kairos* is about the *opportune* time and such a time may be difficult to predict. Protestors can consider context, history, and environment, but they cannot make an opportune moment appear nor control such a moment when it does come to pass.

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<sup>34</sup> Garland-Thomson, 194.

<sup>35</sup> Amber Jacobs, “The Life of Metis: Cunning Maternal Interventions,” *Studies in the Maternal* 2.1 (2010): 1-12, qt. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Yet, *metis* also has a relationship with *chronos*, relying on the progression of time to create opportune moments. De Certeau notes, “Metis in fact counts on an accumulated time, which is in its favor, to overcome a hostile composition of place.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, *Disability* plays nicely with both: the slow progression of a chronic condition or the kairotic moment of injury. Yet images of disability are not often contextualized, making the capturing of disabled bodies by the camera more about *kairos* than *chronos*. *Tuche* stands somewhat in opposition to *techne*; *tuche* being that which is beyond human control, with *techne* the tools used to advance change. Both are necessary for *metis*, which relies both on happenstance and the tactics of the movement. Thus, the *metic* nature of disability adds a necessary reminder to theories about *image events*: these events can only be *staged* if chance grants that time and place cooperate.

### 1.3.3.3 Phantasia

Having demonstrated how enthymematic disruption is generally considered to occur through a theorization of disability images, I turn now to consider what visual rhetoric might *look like* without vision. For quite a long time, to read meant also to speak aloud; the practices of *seeing* and *speaking* have not long been separate.<sup>38</sup> Stephanie Daza and Walter S. Gershon argue that sound and silence have been always present in qualitative research, but under-acknowledged because of our preference for sight.<sup>39</sup> Sound, these authors state, reveals the limits of the ocular:

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<sup>37</sup> De Certeau, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Daza and Walter S. Gershon, “Beyond Ocular Inquiry: Sound, Silence, and Sonification,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 21.7 (2015): 639-644.

What is imagination without an *image*? What is research without a *gaze*?...What if we could play this article (sing, play, speak, rest, breath it together) as a duet, where harmony and discord were sounded? Would we need this line about flattening authorship in an attempt to work differently from academic-business-as-usual or remind readers that co-writing is as valuable or more than single-authored scholarship for tenure and promotion?<sup>40</sup>

Yet, can rhetoric break with the visual, or is the rhetorical inherently visual? Can we have imagination without material images? *Phantasia*, a concept articulated by Aristotle in *De Anima*, is often translated *imagination* and shares the same root with the Greek word for *image*, but is actually quite difficult to conceptualize in English. In *De Anima*, Aristotle writes, “As sight is the most highly developed sense, the name Phantasia has been formed from Phaos (light) because it is not possible to see without light.”<sup>41</sup> *Phantasia*’s definitional complexity offers new possibilities for understanding rhetoric and visuality. Krisanna Scheiter explains:

*De Anima* 3.3, [Aristotle’s] most extensive discussion on *phantasia*, is extremely unclear. Towards the beginning of the chapter he describes *phantasia* as that which produces images, such as in memory. But he does not explain what this means or how we use these images...it becomes quite clear that *phantasia* does more than just produce images; *phantasia* is supposed to explain appearances...Many commentators claim that the way something appears to us cannot be explained through mental images, and so they argue

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 642.

<sup>41</sup> *De Anima* 3.3 [trans. J. A. Smith].

that Aristotle is either using *phantasia* in more than one way in *De Anima* 3.3 or he does not really think *phantasia* is a capacity for producing images.<sup>42</sup>

Scheiter reconciles these perspectives by arguing that *phantasia* is inherently about images and that “these images are key to understanding perceptual appearances.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Debra Hawhee explicitly breaks with the more common metaphorical understanding of the connection between knowing and seeing in *phantasia*, arguing, “rhetorical vision nevertheless occurs very near and sometimes at the level of direct sensory perception.”<sup>44</sup>

Understanding disability as another way of knowing, however, pushes against literal, rather than metaphorical, understandings of the connection between knowing and seeing. I argue that *phantasia*, and the rhetorical coordinate *ekphrasis*, are not fully sense-able under a theory of visual imagery alone. The warmth of phaos, after all, is both in its color and its temperature. To reflect the capacity of all humanity to use *phantasia*, even those who are blind or visually impaired, I argue that *phantasia* is not primarily about the material object that is seen, but rather about the mind’s capacity to envision in response to outside stimuli. Hawhee herself notes, “*Phantasia*, that is, includes but goes beyond sense perception; it involves movement, merges with desire, and strains toward action and judgment.”<sup>45</sup> Jamie Dow argues:

*Phantasia* and cognates are important words in the *Rhetoric* as a whole, and are used to indicate how the listener takes things to be. The words are used to make clear that this is not necessarily how things actually are. So, someone can be persuaded by something

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<sup>42</sup> Krisanna M. Scheiter, “Images, Appearances, and *Phantasia* in Aristotle,” *Phronesis* 57 (2012): 251-278, qt 251-252.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>44</sup> Debra Hawhee, “Looking Into Aristotle’s Eyes: Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Vision,” *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 14.2 (2011): 139-165, qt. 141.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

that he thinks is a piece of good rhetorical reasoning, even if it is not – this would be a case of persuasion by ‘apparent enthymeme.’”<sup>46</sup>

A metaphorical understanding of *Phantasia* provides an explanation of how image events function to disrupt enthymemes, as *phantasia* inherently involves judgment or deliberation within the mind. If rhetorical vision is about lifting the unseen before the mind’s eye, it should then be possible to experience image events without seeing the images. Jamie Dow seems to believe this is so, arguing about *phantasia*, “it would be absurd to understand ‘apparent enthymeme’ as meaning something that has the visual or auditory appearance of an enthymeme. This has nothing to do with sensory appearances at all. It simply marks how the listener takes the matters under discussion (not just signs or sounds) to stand.”<sup>47</sup> Ned O’Gorman similarly suggests, “many passages [of *De Anima*] that address *phantasia* can be understood without invoking ‘images,’ and some passages do not make sense under an image theory alone.”<sup>48</sup> O’Gorman suggests that theories of *phantasia* ought to explore the limitations of sight and argues for a broader understanding of *phantasia* as involving many kinds of sense perception.<sup>49</sup> Thus, I suggest that the practices of captioning photographs and audio-describing visual aspects of performances, common within disability-savvy museums and theaters, demonstrate that one can experience *phantasia* without needing to engage physical sight. Considering the deliberative aspect of *phantasia*, this implies that one can experience enthymeme disruption as a result of an image event without seeing the image.

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<sup>46</sup> Jamie Dow, “The Role of Emotion-Arousal in Aristotle’s Rhetoric” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2008), 213-214.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>48</sup> Ned O’Gorman, “Aristotle’s ‘Phantasia’ in the ‘Rhetoric’: ‘Lexis, Appearance, and the Epideictic Function of Discourse,’” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 38.1 (2005): 16-40, qt. 19.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



### 1.3.4 Media Studies

My work is also informed by media studies. In his examination of photography, Barthes defines two elements which structure interest in a photograph: *studium* and *punctum*.<sup>50</sup> The *studium* refers to social-cultural-political context that trains viewers to understand and categorize photographs in certain ways; Barthes remarks, “What I feel from these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from a certain training...a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs.”<sup>51</sup> Like Deluca, Barthes conceives of a world filled with images, in which humans are naturally interested because our culture emphasizes the importance of images. But beyond our general interest in photographs that appeal to our cultural sensibilities, Barthes defines the *punctum*, the specific element in a particular photograph that “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”<sup>52</sup> Like Deluca’s understanding of image events as enthymematic interruption, Barthes’ *punctum* is about punctuation “which will disturb the *studium*.”<sup>53</sup>

#### 1.3.4.1 Disability as studium

Disability plays interestingly with Barthes’ two elements, because disability is simultaneously a social construct and an individual embodied experience. Of disability as socially constructed, Ellen Barton wrote that disability is premised on “a dynamic set of representations

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<sup>50</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

that are deeply embedded in historical and cultural contexts.”<sup>54</sup> Simi Linton further argues, “[disability] is an arbitrary designation.”<sup>55</sup> In western culture, the disability label attaches stigma to particular bodies and minds. As Heather Keith and Kenneth Keith argue, “labels...connote generalizations...and labeling typically suggested deviance and stigma.”<sup>56</sup> Bill Hughes situates this understanding of disability within a Foucauldian perspective, noting: “disability and impairment neither refer to, nor represent, essences of particular individuals or of a certain population at large. On the contrary, these terms refer to a decentered subject position that is the product of the movement of power.”<sup>57</sup> Because disability imagery is relatively rare, it cannot help but provoke a general interest, *studium*, largely structured by our culturally mediated understandings of what disability implies. Kenneth Lindblom and Patricia Dunn wrote, “Disability stems not from physical defect in particular human bodies, but rather from social constructions of ableness that inform categories such as ‘normal’ and ‘disabled.’”<sup>58</sup>

Because it is structured by culture, disability could, then, be understood as *spectacle*. Guy Debord defines *spectacle* as “not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images,”<sup>59</sup> which seems very similar to how Deluca conceives of the *image world*.<sup>60</sup> Yet, Deluca rejects the notion of the *spectacle* as a lens through which to understand how images

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<sup>54</sup> Ellen L. Barton, “Textual Practices of Erasure: Representations of Disability and the Founding of the United Way,” in *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, edited by James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, 169-199 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 2001), qt. 169.

<sup>55</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Heather Keith and Kenneth D. Keith, *Intellectual Disability: Ethics, Dehumanization and a New Moral Community* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 10.

<sup>57</sup> Bill Hughes, “What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute to Disability Theory?” in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, edited by Shelley Lynn Tremain, 78-92 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), qt. 81-82.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Lindblom and Patricia A. Dunn, “The Roles of Rhetoric in Constructions and Reconstructions of Disability,” *Rhetoric Review* 22.2 (2003): 167-174, qt. 169.

<sup>59</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1967), 4.

<sup>60</sup> Kevin M. Deluca, “The Speed of Immanent Images: The Dangers of Reading Photographs,” in *Visual Communication: Perception, Rhetoric and Technology*, edited by D. S. Hope, 79-90 (New York: Hampton Press, 2006).

function because of the generally negative connotations of the word and because of Debord's association of the spectacle with false consciousness.<sup>61</sup> Debord writes: "The spectacle obliterates the boundaries between self and world by crushing the self besieged by the presence-absence of the world and it obliterates the boundaries between true and false by driving all lived truth below the real presence of fraud ensured by the organization of appearance."<sup>62</sup> Deluca disagrees with any perspective that posits that images are an illusion compared to material reality: "In the landscape of public screens, the feel of images constitutes the real."<sup>63</sup> Yet, disability is also experienced as individual embodiment, not merely as photographed representations. Therefore, while it seems reductionist to define disability solely as *spectacle* or *studium*, it is also problematic to so closely conflate images of disability with material experiences. After all, as Deluca and Peeples note, bodies cannot be contained by discourse, but they are "simultaneously...constructed in discourses and exceed those discourses."<sup>64</sup>

#### **1.3.4.2 Disability as punctum**

Thus, Barthes' *studium* does not fully explain the power of disability image events. There is a particular element that pierces the soul; the *punctum* is the element that makes disability visible in/on the photographed body.

Most dissemination of images featuring people with disabilities likely play into common stereotypes and reinforce stigma, regardless of any positive impact they might have. In the 1990s,

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<sup>61</sup> Kevin Michael Deluca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Debord, 219.

<sup>63</sup> Kevin M. Deluca, Ye Sun, and Jennifer Peeples, "Wild public screens and image events from Seattle to China," in *Transnational Protests and the Media*, edited by Simon Cottle and Libby Lester, 143-58 (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), qt. 150.

<sup>64</sup> Deluca and Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen," 20.

John Clogston and Beth Haller developed a schema of media portrayals of disability, wherein even the more progressive models are problematic in some way.<sup>65</sup> When used as a tactic of disability social movements, image events likely are intended to play into a minority/civil rights framework, which Clogston defines as a progressive model. In this model, disabled individuals are positioned as members of an oppressed group, with a legitimate civil rights claim.<sup>66</sup> While certainly less demeaning than other models, this framework promotes the concerns of the homogenized group over any individual's experience.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, if a particular image fails to communicate the civil rights argument, the image may be used within a media discussion that frames disability through one of the more common models: medical, social pathology, or supercrip.

Mass dissemination of images in ways legible to senses beyond the eyes and ears continues to present a challenge to my theorization here. Yet, given the increasing presence of technology like *haptic feedback* on iPhones, such a future seems fairly close. The Andy Warhol Museum, for instance, has textured, plastic objects that translate the look of many of Warhol's iconic pieces into touchable art through the use of raised lines.<sup>68</sup> *Out Loud* is the audio-guide to the Warhol Museum and demonstrates the ways in which the aural can surpass the visual; not only does the guide describe in detail the visual elements of the museum, but listeners are able to hear the voices of scholars and members of the Warhol family, an addition which those who solely see the art and written descriptions miss.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the ability to touch the reproductions of the art is not

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<sup>65</sup> John S. Clogston, *Disability Coverage in 16 Newspapers* (Louisville: Avocado Press, 1990); John S. Clogston, "Changes in Coverage Patterns of Disability Issues in Three Major American Newspapers, 1976-1991" (paper presented to the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, Missouri, August 11-14, 1993); Beth Haller, "Rethinking Models of Media Representation of Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 15:2 (1995), 26-30.

<sup>66</sup> Clogston, *Disability Coverage*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Andy Warhol Museum, "Accessibility," <http://www.warhol.org/visit/accessibility/>.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

only a newly-emerging accommodation within the art world aimed at including blind and visually-impaired guests, but also plays nicely against the general museum aesthetic of *look-but-don't-touch*. When we accommodate those who cannot see, we provide new ways of knowing for everyone.

Given the amount of training audio-describers are required to attend, it seems reasonable to suggest that when one hears an audio description of a performance or image, one does not merely *hear about* an image, but one *hears* the image. Of course, hearing an image remains a distinct experience from seeing an image, yet the kind of separation from or lesser status that the addition of *about* suggests seems dismissive. The *Listening is Learning* campaign describes the process of audio description as “making the visual verbal.”<sup>70</sup> The campaign suggests that non-disabled people also stand to gain from audio descriptions, arguing that the engagement of both visual and auditory channels increases the capacity of working memory.<sup>71</sup>

Even if audio descriptions of images can facilitate *phantasia* and the enthymematic disruption of an image, our expansion of the image is still limited to the visual and aural. The preference for visual and auditory information processing is likely linked to our ability to more easily disseminate products that use images and language than smell, touch, or taste. Walter Ong wrote, “Hearing rather than sight had dominated the older poetic world in significant ways, even long after writing was deeply interiorized...Written material was subsidiary to hearing in ways which strike us today as bizarre.”<sup>72</sup> Ong argues that we transitioned to a visual culture of

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<sup>70</sup> Listening is Learning Campaign, "How Does Description Benefit Students with Visual Impairments?," [http://listeningislearning.org/background\\_description-bvi.html](http://listeningislearning.org/background_description-bvi.html).

<sup>71</sup> Listening is Learning Campaign, "How Does Description Benefit Students Without Visual Impairments?," [http://listeningislearning.org/background\\_description-no-bvi.html](http://listeningislearning.org/background_description-no-bvi.html).

<sup>72</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), 117.

information consumption because print, even more than writing, “situates words in space.”<sup>73</sup> Printed words allowed for, indeed encouraged, easier silent reading than written words.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, printing commodified words more than spoken culture:

Persons in a primary oral culture can entertain some sense of proprietary rights to a poem, but such a sense is rare and ordinarily enfeebled by the common share of lore, formulas, and themes on which everyone draws. With writing, resentment at plagiarism begins to develop.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, the ability to record and disseminate audio, whether music or spoken words, makes the aural a consumable, own-able product. *Phantasia*, too, has been captured by capitalism. Jacques Khalip et al. note: “the industrial exploitation of *phantasia*...[suggests] the possibility of remote-controlling their [consumer’s] behaviors...But this was less a matter of controlling bodies by the automatisms of machines...than steering them by stimulating the automatisms of their unconscious.”<sup>76</sup> Aristotle also acknowledged the potential for *phantasia* to be a source of manipulation: “And because phantasia remain in the organs of sense and resemble sensations, animals in their actions are largely guided by them, some (i.e. the brutes) because of the non-existence in them of mind, others (i.e. men) because of the temporary eclipse in them of mind by feeling or disease or sleep.”<sup>77</sup> Yet, *phantasia*, whether engaged through the visual or the aural, is not the sole domain of the capitalist elite. We can envision a counterpublic capturing our

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>76</sup> Jacques Khalip, Giorgio Agamben, and Cesare Casarino, *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 224-5.

<sup>77</sup> *De Anima* 3.3 [Trans. Smith].

imagination through tactics, like the image event, which disrupt the enthymemes promoted by the powerful.

No similar mass media exists for disseminating scents, tastes, or touch, though something like smell-o-vision, a system created and solely used for the 1960 film *Scent of Mystery*, could perhaps be developed further. Perhaps we should be grateful, as images come to mind of the “Feelies” from *Brave New World*: “‘Going to the Feelies this evening, Henry?’ Enquired the Assistant Predestinator. ‘I hear the new one at the Alhambra is first-rate. There’s a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it’s marvelous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects.’”<sup>78</sup> Yet, we can imagine how technology like this could be co-opted by a counter-public. While there is no resistance movement in *Brave New World* (though one could argue the John’s “the Savage” suicide is an act of resistance), one can envision what such a resistance movement might look like. Given the absence of a free press in London in 632 A.F. (After Ford), the public screen becomes inherently a wild one, though I question if the notion of a *screen* is enough to capture the machinery of the Feelies. Perhaps we must return to the Shakespeare “All the World’s a Stage,” a return likely to be appreciated by John given his love of Shakespeare. Or is it that when we consider the totality of human sensory experience that we come full circle back to the public sphere?

In this new brave world, resistance forces would not be able to capture the eye of the camera equivalent, given its artificial, government-enforced focus on pleasure, in ways we find familiar. Yet, imagine that sensual Feelie interrupted by John’s pain, where everyone in the audience not only sees or hears but also feels that pain. Or, an interruption that causes Alphas to experience what it feels like to be a Gamma, arguably the closest analog to disability in the story, considering

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<sup>78</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1932), 35.

the physical and mental limitations artificially created by the government. Is there an “event” that could ever cause an Alpha to feel empathy for a Gamma? Certainly, neither seeing nor hearing the Gammas was sufficient.

Returning to the present material reality, we do not currently have technology that allows us to inspire *phantasia* in a mass audience through engagement with senses other than sight and hearing. There are some virtual reality devices that do allow for a small sense of touch over distance, but they are not broadly adopted. Yet, imagine the power of smell for the environmental groups upon which Deluca focuses his analyses. If we could fill living rooms with the smells of factories and dumps, would not-in-my-backyard become not-in-any-backyard? Disability calls for us to imagine these new possibilities, challenging the ocular-centric lens of *phantasia*. *Disability* is difficult, if not impossible, to define; yet, many people at least think they recognize the appearance of disability in photographs. Reframing the persuasive power of *phantasia* through the lens of disability challenges us to envision, to reach out, to perk our ears, to sniff new ways of experiencing images.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

Throughout most of this dissertation, I will approach images through a critical discourse analysis, as developed by Norman Fairclough. Initially, Norman Fairclough defined discourse in a fairly limited way, as referring to written or spoken language use. He regards language as “a form of social practice...This...implies that discourse is a mode of action...as well as a mode of



representation.”<sup>79</sup> However, others have extended critical discourse analysis to also include images as a form of discourse. Gillian Rose writes:

Discourse analysis can also be used to explore how images construct specific views of the social world...this type of discourse analysis therefore pays careful attention to an image itself (as well as other sorts of evidence). Since discourses are seen as socially produced rather than created by individuals, this type of discourse analysis is especially concerned with the social modality of the image site.<sup>80</sup>

Yet, in later works, Fairclough also begins to expand his conceptions of discourse noting: “We might say that any actual instance of language in use is a ‘text’ – though even that is too limited, because texts such as television programmes involve not only language but also visual images and sound effects.”<sup>81</sup> Understanding images as an inherent part of discourse means acknowledging that images also are a form of social practice and a mode of representation. This also means noticing that images and language function intertextually, a key component of discourse analysis, as well as inseparably – that, at times, separating what is language and what is image is complicated by the practice of *ekphrasis* or experience of *phantasia* as discussed earlier. We also cannot separate language and images from their social context: “As a method, discourse analysis pays careful attention to images, and to their social production and effect.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), qt. 63.

<sup>80</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), qt. 146.

<sup>81</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (New York: Routledge, 2003), qt. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, qt. 147.

### 1.4.1 Description of Discourse

Having established that critical discourse analysis can be applied in an image world, I turn now to more specific elements of the method. Fairclough calls for researchers to identify the particular discourses that they are examining (the ‘corpus’) and then to collect supplementary materials that help contextualize the discourse.<sup>83</sup> Rose notes the importance of researchers spending significant enough time with the corpus: “familiarity with the sources will allow you to identify key themes, which may be key words, or recurring visual images.”<sup>84</sup>

Thus, in this project, the corpus is composed of the contents of various archives related to the disability rights movement from the mid-1970s through the early-1990s, with particular attention to newspapers and other forms of mass media in which protest coverage appeared. These archives include the Deaf President Now collection (MSS 148, boxes 2 and 3, and MSS 119, boxes 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9), housed at Gallaudet University; the Wade and Molly Blank Papers (Series 3, boxes 8 and 9) and the Laura Hershey papers (Series 3 and Series 8), both housed at the Denver Public Library. The online ADAPT museum also houses significant newspaper coverage related to the Capitol Crawl.<sup>85</sup> The online Disability Museum has a limited number of media images related to the Americans with Disability Act and Deaf President Now. More broadly, I will search through a variety of newspaper archives for the dates of the specific protests; these archives include Newspapers.com; NewspaperArchives.com; Proquest Newspaper Archives, and GenealogyBank.com.

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<sup>83</sup> Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change.*, qt. 226.

<sup>84</sup> Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials.*, qt. 157.

<sup>85</sup> <https://adaptmuseum.net/gallery>

### 1.4.2 Process of Analysis

Fairclough also prescribes a particular process of analysis for discourse analysis, founded in a three-part model: (1) examining the function of the text, (2) understanding the discursive processes which create and structure the text, while also defining how it is consumed and understood, and (3) noting the larger social practices within which the text belongs.

In this dissertation, I use many of the theories and concepts discussed previously to understand the function of the images, including argumentative fragments, disidentification, staring, metis, ekphrasis, phantasia, and studium/punctum. Rose notes that, “An important part of that framework is how a particular discourse works to persuade. How does it produce its effects of truth?”<sup>86</sup> Understanding images as argumentative fragments provides a framework for examining how these discourses work enthemematically in the minds of viewers to function persuasively.

To understand discursive processes, I immersed myself in the historical context of the time periods in which the images were produced, while also considering the ways in which the current location of the images also contributes to the discursive process. As Rose argues, “the institutional location of a discourse is also crucial.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, I have sought not only to understand the historical context of each protest and the media technologies of the day, but also to comment on the present day archival location of each collection. I also considered, as Rose calls researchers to do, the “terms of the audience assumed by images and texts.”<sup>88</sup>

Finally, I consider the larger social practices in which these images are situated. I consider the ways in which all newspaper images tend to be circulated and the common practices around

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<sup>86</sup> Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials.*, qt. 161.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

newspaper consumption in both the historical and present contexts. I also consider the ways in which the photographed subjects – disabled people – tend to be treated and viewed broadly in society.

### 1.4.3 Procedures

For each archive, I reviewed the finding aid and selected the boxes and folders relevant to the protests. Going through the folders, I examined their contents, specifically looking for newspaper clippings with photographs. When allowed, I took pictures using my smartphone camera, and when photography was prohibited, I took extensive descriptive notes. I looked for patterns in how journalists documented the protest events, both in the kinds of photographs which were preserved and also in the written context. In searching for patterns, I found three emerging themes: images, metaphorical language, and language which encouraged the reader to imagine an image within the mind, referred to above as *ekphrasis*.

I question: Do these images mandate a certain frame of reference, a particular way of speaking about them? Are these images presented in such a way as to cause certain identifications and disidentifications? I also examine potential disconnects between the intentions of the activists in staging the image events and the messages conveyed by the journalists and photographers. As Rose writes, “Discursive formations have structures but that does not necessarily imply that they are logical or coherent. Indeed, part of the power of a specific discursive formation may rest precisely on the multiplicity of different arguments that can be produced in its terms.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 164.

## 1.5 Precis of Chapters

### 1.5.1 Chapter Two

In chapter two, I examine photos, oral histories, and newspaper coverage from the Deaf President Now protests. Gallaudet University, one of the few colleges for Deaf people in the United States, is a center for Deaf culture and research. Yet, as Fred Pelka notes: “For the first 124 years of its history, not one of Gallaudet’s presidents had ever been Deaf.”<sup>90</sup> In 1987, when the current president, Jerry C. Lee, announced his upcoming retirement, Deaf activists from across the country, but also including current students at Gallaudet, began a campaign calling for a Deaf president. The March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988 on-campus rally had an estimated attendance of 1500 people, but the university still appointed a hearing president on March 6<sup>th</sup> who had no previous experience working with Deaf people. Pelka recounts what followed:

“The student strike that resulted – lasting from that Sunday night, March 6 to Sunday, March 13 – has been called ‘The Week the World Heard Gallaudet.’...On March 13<sup>th</sup>...Dr. Irving King Jordan...became Gallaudet University’s first Deaf president.”<sup>91</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that the Deaf-ness of the protestors was made visible in the media through a variety of strategies, including metaphors of sound and hearing, but also in the images themselves. These techniques contrast significantly with those illuminated in the preceding chapter, where the vast majority of the protestors had easily visible disabilities. Because the images did not always clearly indicate disability, the written aspects of the news coverage bore the task of

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<sup>90</sup> Fred Pelka, *What Have We Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) qt. 397.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

demarcating disability; the images themselves necessitated written coverage that made visible invisible disability. The tension between visible and invisible disability in the Deaf President Now protests underscores the dangers inherent in ocular- and aural-centric theories.

### 1.5.2 Chapter Three

In chapter three, I argue that the protest imagery from the March 1990 ‘crawl up’ protest was effective in drawing public attention to inaccessibility and spurring legislative change because it disrupted normative enthymemes and was, in other words, *queer*. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1990, a group of disability activists - among them, Jennifer Keelan, age 8 – abandoned their wheelchairs and other mobility devices at the foot of the steps to the US Capitol building. The theatrics of the crawl-up drew media attention and the resulting images, especially one of the young Keelan, circulated broadly.

I question, What was it about this image of this disabled child that caused viewers to pay attention? Was it that she was ‘too old’ to be crawling? Was it the ways in which cerebral palsy visible marked her young body? Was it simply the determined look on her face as she famously stated, “I’ll take all night if I have to”? Perhaps the quirky bandana? Or, is it that Jennifer Keelan’s body, marked as a white, feminine, disabled childhood, is somewhat queer? Robert McRuer argues that disability and queerness are contingent upon each other, while Kathryn Stockton claims that the child, in itself, is queer. Alison Kafer brings disability and childhood together, writing, “The Child through whom legacies are passed down is, without doubt, able-bodied/able-minded.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), qt. 29.

I intend to demonstrate that theories from visual argument, images studies, and visual rhetoric allow us to understand how the work of these scholars and others are implicated in images of disability protests. To do so, I analyze photos of Jennifer Keelan housed in the ADAPT museum. In this chapter, I, first, argue that disability and childhood are mutually constituted through queerness; second, I claim that images of Jennifer Keelan inscribe disability and childhood in such a way as to emphasize a need for disabled futurity, one which complicates the debate over queer futurities; finally, I consider the implications of Keelan's disabled childhood, as captured in this photo, for theories of queerness, disability, images, and argument.

### **1.5.3 Chapter Four**

In chapter three, I analyze photography of ADAPT's June 22, 2017 Die In protest outside of Mitch McConnell's D.C. office. I argue that the changes in how and where people get their news has resulted in more sensationalized photography of disabled protestors than in protests analyzed previously. Disabled protestors have also adapted to use new technology to more widely broadcast their demands. I first discuss the changing role of photojournalists and protest journalism in the hyper-visual world of social media. Newspapers are now very online, and access to social media means that anyone with a following can share images. Second, I examine the use of social media by protestors and their allies. Finally, I look at the ways in which disabled protestors capitalized on the enthymematic connections between death and disability in our culture to communicate their demands. Much like the photos of Keelan from the 'crawl up,' the photos from the die-in play into enthymemes of disability (childhood and death, respectively) and yet also function to challenge our pre-conceived notions that structure the enthymematic connections.

#### **1.5.4 Conclusion**

In my conclusion, I summarize the previous chapters at an eighth grade reading level, intending to make my work legible within the disability communities where I find belonging. Too often, university researchers are accused, perhaps rightfully, of using a particular community within their research and giving nothing back. Thus, to attempt to break with that trend, in this chapter, I desire to give back.



## 2.0 Deaf President Now

*As a hearing person, I expected a unique kind of silence on the campus of Gallaudet, where the majority of the students are Deaf or hard of hearing and American Sign Language is primarily used. Instead, I encountered a different kind of sound – because no one knew how much noise they were making. Assumption shattered. For the best.*

*I felt like an interloper, walking into the Gallaudet archives, as a hearing person. My sign language is limited to ‘hello, my name is...,’ ‘I’m hearing, no sign,’ ‘thank you,’ and ‘done.’*

*I’m halfway across the room, and the archivist begins rapidly signing at me.*

*“I’m hearing, no sign,” half wishing I knew how to add “and I’m embarrassed about it.”*

*I make it to his desk and hand him the index card, “Hi! I would love to look at MSS 148 today. Thank you!”*

*He motions to me at the paper that I have to fill out, which I do, signing “thank you!” He wheels the cart of boxes out to me.*

*Somewhere, someone is watching coverage of a swim meet on their computer, water splashing and commentary blaring; no one else seems to notice. I open the box and begin to take notes about the newspaper clippings inside.*

Gallaudet University, one of the few colleges for Deaf people in the United States, is a center for Deaf culture and research. Yet, as Fred Pelka notes: “For the first 124 years of its history, not one of Gallaudet’s presidents had ever been Deaf.”<sup>93</sup> In 1987, when the current president, Jerry C. Lee, announced his upcoming retirement, Deaf activists from across the country, led by current students at Gallaudet, began a campaign calling for a Deaf president. The March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988 on-campus rally had an estimated attendance of 1500 people, but the university still appointed a

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<sup>93</sup> Fred Pelka, *What Have We Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) qt. 397.

hearing president, Elizabeth Zinzer, on March 6<sup>th</sup>, who had no previous experience working with Deaf people. Pelka recounts what followed:

“The student strike that resulted – lasting from that Sunday night, March 6 to Sunday, March 13 – has been called ‘The Week the World Heard Gallaudet.’ ...On March 13<sup>th</sup>...Dr. Irving King Jordan...became Gallaudet University’s first Deaf president.”<sup>94</sup>

The appointment of Zinzer was especially disappointing to the students because the other two candidates in the final pool of applicants – Irving King Jordan and Harvey Corson – were both deaf. On March 6<sup>th</sup>, when the board announced the selection of Elizabeth Zinzer, a group of angry students gathered outside the building where the board meeting was held and spoke with board chair Jane Spilman. Not content with her answers, the students returned to campus to plan a large protest for the following day.

The protest on March 7<sup>th</sup> began with students obstructing all entrances but the front entrance to campus, allowing the students to control who was able to enter. The protest group had four demands: 1) The appointment of a deaf president, 2) The resignation of Jane Spilman, 3) 51% deaf membership of the Gallaudet board, 4) no retaliation against the protestors. When the board met later that day with protest leadership, they refused to meet any of the demands.

Protests continued on March 8<sup>th</sup>, including a large rally on the football field, and on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Importantly, while protest leadership had been speaking with press since the evening of March 6<sup>th</sup>, the board and Elizabeth Zinzer did not organize a press conference until March 9<sup>th</sup>, which gave the protestors nearly four days to share their message with the nation, without contradiction or spin from the university administration. On March 10<sup>th</sup>, Irving King Jordan spoke to the protestors in support of their demands. Later that day, Zinzer resigned. The next day, March 11<sup>th</sup>, students

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 398.

marched in celebration to Capitol Hill. Jane Spilman resigned from the board on March 13<sup>th</sup> and Phil Bravin, a deaf man, was appointed in her place. He announced to the students that I. King Jordan had been selected as president.

Historical and political accounts and analyses of the week-long protest at Gallaudet abound, including Jack R. Gannon's *The Week the World Heard Gallaudet*, which includes many photographs and comic strips, in which Gannon describes in detail each day's events. However, I've found little to no comprehensive research about the role of news media, beyond the occasional mention. The exception may be John B. Christiansen and Sharon N. Barnartt's *Dear President Now! The 1988 Revolution at Gallaudet University*, in which the authors rather extensively describe the ways in which protestors and news media communicated across language and cultural barriers.<sup>95</sup> While Christiansen and Barnartt recount what happened between protestors and reporters, they do not analyze the resulting news coverage or photographs. Their work provides part of a foundation upon which my research in this chapter is built.

## 2.1 Method

In this chapter, I examine images in the newspaper coverage from the Deaf President Now protests, as collected in Gallaudet University's archives, in collections MSS 119 and MSS 148. I

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<sup>95</sup> John B. Christiansen and Sharon N. Barnartt, *Deaf President Now! The 1988 Revolution at Gallaudet University*, Gallaudet University Press, Washington, D. C. , 1995.

spent three days in Gallaudet's archive, taking detailed notes on each image that appeared in the newspaper clippings, as well as any references to the hearing status of the protestors. Some of the items in the archive were also contained in Gallaudet Library's general collection; I was able to take photographs of those items, but not of the items solely held in the archive.

After collecting notes and photographs of the newspaper clippings, I organized them by date and by photograph, since many of the newspapers used the same or similar photographs. I then noted common trends in content, context, and distribution of the photographs, which I organized into three themes: the visible ways in which the photographs revealed Deafness; the use of captions and context to demarcate Deafness in the photographs, including the frequent use of puns and metaphors related to sound, deafness, and hearing that appeared in the newspaper coverage; and the sensory experience of the protests that went beyond what the photographs and captions could fully capture.

## **2.2 Argument and Definitions**

I argue that the sensory events of Deaf President Now disrupted enthymemes linking deafness with incompetency and with incommunicability by making d/Deafness visible in strategic ways. Here, I think it is useful to define what I mean by deafness, as to be deaf and to be Deaf are, in fact, two different things. Hearing impairment or hearing loss ('deaf') is difficult to make visible: in some of the photos, hearing aids are visible, which is one of the few ways I can think of to make physical deaf-ness visible. Cultural Deafness ('Deaf'), however, can be made visible in photographs in many ways, which is the main focus of this chapter.

What does it mean to be culturally Deaf? Paddy Ladd, in *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, defines a few important terms:

deaf/Deaf: The lowercase ‘deaf’ refers to those for whom deafness is primarily an audiological experience. It is mainly used to describe those who lost some or all of their hearing in early or late life, and who do not usually wish to have contact with signing, preferring to try and retain their membership of the majority society in which they were socialized. ‘Deaf’ refers to those born Deaf or deafened in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance, many of whom perceive their experience as essentially akin to other language minorities.<sup>96</sup>

Deaf culture: This term was developed in the 1970s to give utterance to the belief that Deaf communities contained their own ways of life mediated through their sign languages. Belief in the existential accuracy of this terminology has greatly outstripped research into it, leaving its users vulnerable when required to explain or defend its tenets. Lack of research has also made it hard to enact cultural norms and values within various important domains such as Deaf education. Nevertheless, the important task of understanding Deaf communities cannot be said even to have begun whilst Deaf cultural research remains unrecognized and unfunded.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters LTD, 2003, qt. xvii.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, qt. xvii-xviii.

However, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, in *Deaf Subjects: Between Identities and Places*, complicates this simplistic division between deaf and Deaf. Brueggemann writes: “When one is pressed, it is hard to determine at any one moment in a text whether the Big D cultural/linguistic arena is where we are or whether we are just in the same d audiological/medical space. And what if we are in both places at the same time? The long-standing and footnoting practice of establishing some kind of border patrol between these terms tries to define and differentiate – apples here, oranges there – but more often than not, the aliens still wind up looking very much like natives.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, the distinction between deaf and Deaf is less a given definitional boundary, Brueggemann argues, and more a site for rhetorical investigations.

Thus, the boundary between deafness and Deafness is blurry at best: after all, is the presence of visible sign language in a photograph symbolic of deafness or Deafness? What about a visible cochlear implant? In this way, I build upon Brueggemann’s work. I further argue that, in the absence of a visibly disabled embodiment, the cultural symbols of disability can stand in for disability itself. Of course, there are many Deaf scholars and activists who will argue that deafness is not, in fact, a disability, but more akin to a difference in language and culture. Harlan Lane, Richard C. Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg recount in *The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry*:

“The four students who led the Gallaudet uprising were Deaf children of Deaf parents; they were deeply imbued with a sense of Deaf-World, and they were natively fluent in ASL. One of them explained to *USA Today* the significance of the event as it relates to the identity of Deaf people: ‘Hearing people sometimes call you handicapped.

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<sup>98</sup> Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Deaf Subjects: Between Identities and Places*, New York: New York University Press, 2009, qt. 14.

But most – maybe all deaf people – feel that we’re more of an ethnic group because we speak a different language. We also have our own culture...There’s more of an ethnic difference than a handicap difference between us and hearing people.”<sup>99</sup>

From their perspective, perhaps there is no disability to be made visible for my argument at all. Yet, in the context of the US disability rights movement, Deaf President Now is always included as important historical moment and the needs of Deaf people for accommodations in a primarily hearing society mirror those of other disabled people, especially when considered from a cultural or social definition of disability.

Historically, deafness has been associated with incompetence and with incommunicability. Brenda Jo Bruggeman underlines these associations by connecting deafness and queerness: “Considered bestial, savage, sinful, ‘unnatural,’ perhaps insane, and most likely immoral for most of their post-Enlightenment histories, deaf and gay individuals share a history of ‘stigma.’”<sup>100</sup> I further explore the connections between queerness and disability in chapter two.

Paddy Ladd outlines a shift in dominant cultural perspectives on deafness before and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States: “although most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an explosion in the numbers of sign-oriented Deaf schools, Deaf clubs, organizations and publicans, the last 20 years of the century saw a total reversal of attitude and policy.”<sup>101</sup> Ladd describes the rise in Oralism, an approach to deafness grounded in “the inherent inferiority or inhumanity of Deaf people and the

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<sup>99</sup> Harlan Lane, Richard C. Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg, *The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry*, Oxford University Press, 2011, qt. 26.

<sup>100</sup> Brenda Jo Brueggemann, *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness*, Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1999, qt. 152.

<sup>101</sup> Ladd, 113.

inadequacy of their language.”<sup>102</sup> Tying Oralism to the surfacing of medical discourses on deafness, Ladd explores the ways in which physicians constructed deafness as an illness, rather than a cultural marker. 20<sup>th</sup> century perspectives on deafness, Ladd argues, were heavily influenced by Oralism and medical discourses present at the turn of the century. Deafness was positioned as an illness causing communication problems that the deaf person needed to overcome through assimilation into the dominant hearing culture.

The Deaf-world, as Ladd terms it, resisted these characterizations of deafness. Ladd credits, in part, Gallaudet University’s faculty and publishing house for creating an alternative, cultural discourse of deafhood. Ladd notes:

“The National Deaf-Mutes College (later Gallaudet University) was founded in the 1860s and produced a steady stream of graduates and professionals for the pre-oralist education system, and indeed public life generally. This process continued after Oralism – indeed it remained the one place where sign language could not be outlawed, since the students were effectively adults who could not be browbeaten in this way...throughout the century it remained the one lighthouse beacon that illuminated the darkness which had fallen across the Deaf world.”<sup>103</sup>

It is fitting, then, that Gallaudet University is the setting of the protest photography that I analyze in this chapter.

During the Deaf President Now protests at Gallaudet, the Deafness of the protestors was made visible in the media through a variety of strategies, including metaphors and puns about

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<sup>102</sup> Ladd, 114.

<sup>103</sup> Ladd, 58.



sound and hearing, but also in the images themselves. Because the images did not always clearly indicate disability, the written aspects of the news coverage bore the task of demarcating it; the images themselves necessitated written coverage that made visible invisible disability. The tension between visible and invisible disability in the Deaf President Now (DPN) protests underscores the dangers inherent in ocular- and aural-centric theories.

Thus, I, first, examine the visible ways in which the photographs revealed Deafness; second, I discuss the use of captions and context to demarcate Deafness in the photographs, including the frequent use of puns and metaphors related to sound, deafness, and hearing that appeared in the newspaper coverage; third, I conclude by thinking about DPN in the context of sensory protests beyond sight and sound. Throughout, I acknowledge the ways in which these techniques disrupted negative enthymemes of Deafness and reinforced the competency and communication ability of both protestors and I. King Jordan.

### **2.3 Visible Invisibility**

*Chien Min Chao catalogued and organized every newspaper article that he could find into a series called *The Articles List of the Deaf President Now Movement*. A stack of spiral bound books seemed to tower over me on the table in front of me. The archive itself only had about 10 of the books in the series, but I quickly found that the entire series was in the main collection of the library. This provided an added benefit: while the archive prohibited photography of the collections, the main library did not, allowing me to more quickly go through the collection since I could take photos, rather than write descriptions. If I could pile them all on top of each other without them sliding, the entire series was probably about a foot and a half tall.*

According to the guide to the series, the vast majority of the newspaper articles did not contain photographs. In this section of the chapter, I focus my attention on those articles that did contain photographs, analyzing the ways in which these photographs made visible an ‘invisible’ disability. I argue that there are two major ways in which deafness is made visible in the photographs themselves: through a focus on moments of sign language use and the inclusion of protest signs in the images, while also noting the ways in which these protests were rendered as primarily white spaces.

### **2.3.1 Sign Language as a Hallmark of Deafness**

One of the ways in which Deafness is made visible in the photographs I explored is that the vast majority of the images highlighted the use of very obvious sign language. For example, in a March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1988 article from the Casper, Wyoming *Star Tribune* titled “Popular President,” an image shows I. King Jordan, Gallaudet’s New President, surrounded by students clearly using a variety of signs, including deaf applause (what, to a hearing audience, might look a bit like jazz hands) and the sign for Deaf Power (one hand over the ear and the other fist raised into the air). While a hearing audience might not know how to interpret the signs, it is clear in this photograph that sign language is being used. This particular photograph of I. King Jordan surrounded by students is re-circulated throughout many of the articles in the collection; it is the most frequent picture to accompany the announcement of his presidency.

Another common picture alongside articles announcing the new president is one of I. King Jordan in front of a giant letter G; he looks back and up toward the letter, while also obviously signing. Upon close examination, it is clear that he is wearing a hearing aid in the ear facing the

camera. There are also microphones pointed toward him, suggesting that he may have been both speaking and signing.

A picture I only saw used once to accompany this announcement appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1988: I. King Jordan is shown looking toward the camera making a sign that most non-signing people would interpret as the “OK” sign, but depending on movement, placement, and what his other hand is doing, could mean any of about 100 things in ASL.<sup>104</sup> Regardless of how most people would interpret the sign, it is still clearly a use of sign language.

An article in the *Atlanta Journal* on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1988 shows I. King Jordan signing – his right hand is in the 2 position with the tips of his fingers directed into the other palm, which is perpendicular to his chest and facing in. My best guess as to a translation was either “purpose” or “meaning,” depending on movement,<sup>105</sup> so I checked with Michelle Walker, a Deaf activist from the Pittsburgh area and friend, who thinks he’s in the middle of signing either “means” or “meaning.”<sup>106</sup> I write about the process here because I believe that the process of understanding meaning making and interpretation is important: a casual observer might glance at the photo, see ‘sign language,’ and not bother finding meaning after that; an interested observer, with limited ASL familiarity like myself, might be able to get close to deciphering possible meanings; and a Deaf ASL user will likely have an entirely different, more accurate perspective. Either way, this is an obvious use of sign language, even to the casual observer.

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<sup>104</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoSMkb87Xu4>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.handspeak.com/word/search/index.php?id=1751>;  
<https://www.handspeak.com/word/search/index.php?id=1364>

<sup>106</sup> Facebook chat, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

In the context of the entire archive, these photos of I. King Jordan function in contrast to pictures of the previous president, Elizabeth Zinzer, who is typically pictured with no hand movement, next to an interpreter using sign language. Obvious hand movement is used to signal that Jordan is Deaf, and Zinzer is not. The exception to the portrayal of Elizabeth Zinzer as not using signs is the photograph of her most commonly circulated with the news of her resignation. In this photograph, she is pictured using the sign for “I Love You.” In the absence of having seen any of the other news coverage about the protest, a casual observer might interpret this photograph alone to imply that Zinzer is an ASL user; of course, these photographs are not circulated in isolation, so the surrounding news stories make it very clear that her resignation came because the students wanted a Deaf president who knew ASL. In this case, surrounding context is necessary to render Zinzer’s photographed ‘Deafness’ illegitimate.

In other photographs, the use of sign language was less clear, especially the photos that only contained students raising their fists. In interpreting these photographs, I found myself grateful that I do not know much sign language – as this allowed me to more easily consider how a non-signing audience (likely the vast majority of the audience of the non-Deaf-specific news sources) might interpret the photographs. In fact, it was not until I saw a caption from the *Boston Globe* that I understood that the Deaf Power sign was being used. Initially, I simply interpreted the raised fists as a typical act of protest behavior, perhaps used in reference to the Black Power movements happening in the same era – and today, any number of protest groups might similarly hold their fists in the air. *The Boston Globe*, of March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1988, captioned a photograph: “Students from Gallaudet University in Washington, the nation’s only liberal arts school for the deaf, wave their fists and hold their ears in a sign of ‘deaf power’ during a demonstration at the Capitol yesterday. The students hailed the resignation Thursday night of president Elisabeth Ann

Zinser.” I had this “AH HA” moment in the archive when I read this caption, a moment where I was captured by how the in-group and the out-group might interpret these photos. Where the in group might see “Deaf Power,” the out-group might only see young people raising their fists and might not even notice their hands over ears.

The photojournalists captured communicative moments featuring recognizable sign language, which in turn made Deafness visible to viewers of the photographs. Signing hands, in this way, are the punctum in these photographs. Raised fists are certainly typical of the genre of protest photography, but the blurred movement of signing hands is less so. Perhaps because they’re in motion, the hands do appear to almost literally rise up out of the photographs and grab the attention of the audience. The focus on the signing hands makes these photographs seem more intimate than typical protest photography, making the protestors seem relatable even as the signing hands demarcate them as Other to a non-Deaf audience.

### **2.3.2 Protest Signs and Banners: Context Clues**

As is common with protests, Deaf President Now protestors carried signs making clear their demands. In DPN, however, the signs performed a secondary function of communicating the Deaf-ness of the protestors. In this section, I use the word “sign” fairly loosely – to refer to literal signs, but also banners, messaging painted on cars and other surfaces, and clothing. While many of photographs did show protestors signing, those that did not most often included protest signs.

For example, in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* of March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1988, a photograph depicts a large group of protestors standing behind yellow tape reading “police line do not cross” and holding signs reading “Deaf President now!” and “We want DEAF PRESIDENT.” The *Milwaukee Journal*

of March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1988 contained a photograph where protestors held signs stating “HONK FOR DEAF PREZ NOW” and “Zinser, Please QUIT! Now.” Both of these Associated Press photographs were widely circulated by other newspapers as well. Another frequently circulated AP photo showed a group of protestors in front of the US Capitol building, holding a large banner that said “DEAF PRESIDENT NOW.” The focus by the press on signs emphasizing the word “Deaf” remind viewers of the photographs of the Deaf identity of the protestors.

The word “Deaf” becomes even more poignant when literally written on the bodies of the protestors, as seen in an example from the Rochester, New York *Democrat and Chronicle* from March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1988: the photograph features a man with “DEAF” painted on his cheek – though it is not visible in the photograph, the caption lets us know that “PREZ” is painted on the other cheek. The focus of the photograph on only the word “DEAF” seems to highlight this as basically a label on him as a Deaf person.

The protestors also produced t-shirts and sweatshirts with the phrase “DEAF PREXY NOW” on it. For example, in a United Press International photograph circulated in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* on March 11, 1988, a crowd of protestors is shown with their fists in the air and one of the students at the front wears a sweatshirt with “DEAF PREXY NOW” on it. Wearing the phrase on their clothing allows the students to simultaneously share their messaging in a way easily legible to the camera while still having their hands free to sign.

The signs with clear demands identify the students as articulate and communicative, disrupting enthymemes connecting Deafness and incommunicability. That the students were unified in their demands, and that these demands came across clearly in the press photography (and in the press overall) were primarily responsible for the success of the protests. The student protestors quickly won the battle of public opinion, leaving the Gallaudet board with little choice

but to negotiate. The students came across as organized and unified, while the board and administration seemed confused, disorganized, and frequently off message. As a result, the students' demands were fairly quickly met.

### 2.3.3 Rendering Disability as White

An outlier photograph, which I didn't see circulated in other news sources, was in the *Big Spring Herald/The Crossroads of West Texas* of March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1988. In this photograph, a person is shown writing "I AGREE GALLAUDET" and "SUPPORT GALLAUDET" on a vehicle. I couldn't find a similar photograph anywhere else, but I wanted to draw attention to this photograph because it was the only photograph I could find featuring someone who is obviously a person of color.

I can't find historical demographic data for the racial makeup of the student body at Gallaudet, but the university did not admit Black students until 1954<sup>107</sup> and in the early 2010s, published a report showing that Black students still had the most difficulty being admitted to the school.<sup>108</sup> A few years before DPN, Hairston and Smith noted that, "Black deaf individuals seldom socialize freely and on an equal basis with the white deaf population."<sup>109</sup> And with regard to DPN specifically, Stuart and Gilcrest write:

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<sup>107</sup> <https://dcmp.org/learn/366-black-deaf-culture-through-the-lens-of-black-deaf-history>

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.gallaudet.edu/office-of-international-affairs/demographics/diversity-experiences-of-entering-gallaudet-students>

<sup>109</sup> Hairston, Ernest and Linwood Smith. *Black and Deaf in America: Are We that Different*. T.J. Publishers, 1983, p 2.

Many minority deaf people initially did not feel included in the now historic movement. Angel Ramos, a deaf Hispanic man who teaches math to preparatory students at Gallaudet University says, “I remember on the third day of the protest, a steering committee...selected about 20 leaders to speak out in support of the protest. I was sitting in the audience, and I looked at the group of 20 white people who had been chosen. I thought to myself, ‘There are no black leaders up there; there are no Hispanic leaders up there.’ I am not saying this was intentional, but it was the same kind of oversight we minority deaf experience again and again in the deaf world.”<sup>110</sup>

The exclusionary politics of the white DPN leadership, intentional or not, furthered existing divides in Deaf spaces and was a contributing factor as to why the majority of newspaper photographs contained only white or white-passing people (though admittedly, the black and white nature of the printed photos also makes it more difficult for me to identify differences in skin color).

And yet, these white protest leaders had Black Deaf people to thank for the foundation of their protest movement:

“The Deaf-World has received a lot from black Americans. In the first place, black Deaf Americans are in its ranks and leadership, as are other multiethnic Deaf people. Moreover, it was black Americans who launched the civil rights era that so greatly re-empowered Deaf Americans. Black Americans, hearing and Deaf, were involved in the Deaf President Now movement” (Harlan Lane, Richard C. Pillard, and Ulf Hedberg, *The People of the Eye: Deaf Ethnicity and Ancestry*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 55).

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<sup>110</sup> Stuart, P., & Gilchrist, A. (2005). A sense of identity. In J. Fuller, B. Hollrah, J. G. Lewis, & C. McCaskill-Henry, Black perspectives on the Deaf community (pp. 61-72). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University, p. 61.



The civil rights movement certainly laid the groundwork for Deaf President Now, and many civil rights leaders expressed support for the DPN protests. For example, Rev. Jesse Jackson sent a letter to the students, writing, “The problem is not that the students do not hear. The problem is that the hearing world does not listen.”<sup>111</sup> When the students led a triumphant march to the Capitol, they carried a banner loaned to them by the Crispus Attucks Museum, which read, “We Still Have a Dream.” When civil rights leaders marched to get MLK day declared a holiday, that was the banner they carried. While I did not see photographs of this banner in the news photography, there were photographs of it in a few of the historical books documenting the protest. The lack of inclusion of the banner in news photography ignored the connections the protestors were trying to make between the Civil Rights movement and the Deaf President Now protests, and furthered the appearance of the movement – and of disability itself – as a white space.

While the racism of white-dominated Deaf spaces was largely responsible for the apparent whiteness of these protests, the lack of published photographs of Black and Brown people in newspapers in the late 1980s was not endemic to coverage of these events, but was widespread in nearly all news coverage. In 1987, the same year the protests at Gallaudet occurred, Herman Gray published a content analysis of race in news coverage, arguing that news coverage reflected, sustained, and constructed the dominant social order around race and racism. The constraints of television, he noted, meant that news coverage reflected not the reality of what happened, but “the active construction of the social world by newswriters and newsmakers” (385) – a claim easily also applied to newspapers. Thus, since we know that some Black and Brown people were present at the DPN protests, we can read their lack of visible presence in mainstream newspaper coverage

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<sup>111</sup> <https://www.gallaudet.edu/about/history-and-traditions/deaf-president-now/the-issues/letters-of-support/rev-jesse-jackson>

as part of a dominant media narrative that would continue the construction of disability rights advocacy as a primarily white space.

And today, Gallaudet’s racism problem continues, a reflection of the racism inherent in primarily white disability spaces. The primarily white leadership of Gallaudet and of newsrooms across this country is reflective of the overall whiteness of powerful institutions. Who tells the stories, photographs the stories, and decides the outcomes? When it’s nearly all white people, we end up with coverage that only constructs disability protests – and disability itself – as white. And certainly, as a white person myself, I have to acknowledge that my own writing about these protests is also likely limited in that way.

In June 2020, the National Black Deaf Advocates wrote a letter calling for Gallaudet President Roberta Cordano to be removed from her position for failing to fully address the concerns of the Black Student Union at Gallaudet: “As Black Deaf individuals, we feel the knee of injustice and inequity from President Cordano’s deflection from our concerns about systemic racism at Gallaudet University.”<sup>112</sup> The Black Student Union has created a petition calling for 6 changes: “additional training for the officers at the Department of Public Safety, additional training for the staff and faculty of Gallaudet University, increase of diversity in staff and faculty, include student representatives in the University hiring process, increase of diversity in the student body, [and] introduce a zero tolerance policy to stop racism at Gallaudet University.”<sup>113</sup> The racism of primarily white disability spaces is not merely a problem of our past.

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<sup>112</sup> <https://www.dailymoth.com/blog/national-black-deaf-advocates-writes-open-letter-calling-for-gallaudet-president-bobbi-cordano-to-step-down>

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/gallaudet-university-black-lives-matter-movement-calls-for-change-at-gallaudet-university-31de3280-0219-4b7b-b7ea-076dfa1675da>

## 2.4 Captions and Context

Captions and context, though not always essential to making the Deafness of the protestors clear, added information and were, sometimes, necessary to facilitate the interpretation of the protests as Deaf protests. I understand certain descriptions of disability in captions as a kind of *ekphrasis*, or *putting before the eyes*. In the Progymnasmata, *ekphrasis* refers to rhetorical technique in which the speaker inspires the audience to envision: ‘a speech which leads one around, bringing a subject matter vividly (*enargos*) before the eyes.’ Certainly, as I argued in the previous section, Deafness is literally brought before the eyes often quite forcefully in these photographs, but in other cases, vivid written descriptions of the protests are what make Deafness apparent. The captions and context build on the photographs to continue the framing of Deaf people as competent and communicative, ultimately resulting in the public pressure for the Gallaudet board to meet the demands of the students.

### 2.4.1 Ekphrasis

Grant F. Scott describes ekphrasis as something that “involves vivid descriptions of places, persons, or things; its purpose is to invoke or animate the object and to persuade listeners or readers that they are in its presence.”<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth B. Bearden emphasizes the potential intertextual possibilities of ekphrasis, founded in the representational capacity of ekphrasis.<sup>115</sup> I extend Bearden’s description of ekphrasis to argue that ekphrasis is negotiating the relationship between

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<sup>114</sup> Grant F. Scott, *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994).

<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth B. Bearden, *The Emblematics of the Self: Ekphrasis and Identity in Renaissance Imitations of Greek Romance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, , 2012).

description, cultural artifact, and the enthymematic capacity of the human mind; while literary scholars may not consider these *texts*, making our understanding of *text* more expansive allows us to consider the ways in which ekphrasis is always in between, always in relation to multiple points of reference, and necessarily in a liminal space between sensations and texts. Ekphrasis is also, by its nature, excessive. Murray Krieger describes ekphrasis as “a set verbal devise that encouraged an extravagance in detail and vividness in representation, so that – as it was sometimes put – our ears could serve as our eyes.”<sup>116</sup> *Our ears could serve as our eyes*. Here, Krieger demonstrates the power of ekphrasis to cross the artificial boundaries we have created between our sensory organs.

#### 2.4.2 Ekphrasis and Disability

Similarly to Krieger, W. J. T. Mitchell examines the ways in which lines between sensory mediums are blurred: “All media is mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no ‘purely’ visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism.”<sup>117</sup> In a like way, I argue that ekphrasis complicates the relationship between senses, which, as I have previously argued, seem artificially separated from a disability perspective:

The purple and orange making exclamations in my ear drums.

The hum of the lights, so bright, so vivid, made like bubbles in my head...

The bright colors of purple and orange splashed across my view

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<sup>116</sup> Murray Krieger, *The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992)., qt. 7.

<sup>117</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)., qt. 5.

Twisting my eyes away from the conversation.  
I had hearing that felt to me so similar to seeing  
Eyes and ears so connected I could not tell them apart.<sup>118</sup>

In this piece, James S. Kizer and I argued that, among other differences from the neurotypical population, Autistic people experience sensation in a way that blurs the lines between the arbitrarily defined senses. Deafness is also a sensory disability, with implications for crossing sensory boundaries. As Mitchell writes: “language becomes ‘literally’ visible in two ways: in the medium of writing, and in the utterances of gesture language, the visible language of the Deaf.”<sup>119</sup>

In this sense, I am arguing that *ekphrasis* makes possible an image event without a physical image: instead, the reader is prompted to create images in the minds’ eye, from which enthymematic disruption can still result. Mitchell articulates the common assumption that this is, in fact, impossible: “a verbal representation cannot represent – that is, make present – its object in the same way that a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do.”<sup>120</sup> And yet, Mitchell goes on to describe a notion of *ekphrastic hope*, wherein our imagination lets us overcome this impossibility which he described; this hope is countered by *ekphrastic fear*, in which, “we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually.”<sup>121</sup> Ekphrastic hope and fear, Mitchell argues, is founded in our desire to remain distinct from the Other, as, were ekphrasis truly realized, the separation between Self and Other would, in essence, collapse.

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<sup>118</sup> Jessica L. Benham and James S. Kizer, "Aut-Ors of Our Experience: Interrogating Intersections of Autistic Identity," *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 5, no. 3 (2016)., qt. 78.

<sup>119</sup> Mitchell, 99.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 154.

I do not argue that Ekphrasis entirely collapses the difference between the ways in which the Eyes and the Ears capture sensation; rather, I argue that one can hear with Eyes and Ears and one can also see with Ears and Eyes. The process of seeing with the ears is different from the seeing with the eyes, and yet ekphrasis makes *ear sight* possible.

This possibility is realized through a kind of *phantasia*, in which one creates and deliberates over images within the mind. In *De Anima*, Aristotle writes, “As sight is the most highly developed sense, the name Phantasia has been formed from Phaos (light) because it is not possible to see without light.”<sup>122</sup> As I claimed in the introduction, *phantasia* is not primarily about the material image, but rather about the minds’ capacity to envision in response to any kind of outside stimuli, which includes but can go beyond the visual.

### 2.4.3 Ekphrasis and DPN

Both cultural and physical (D/d) deafness are difficult, though not impossible, to capture through visual means alone, so captions and article text often provide necessary context for understanding what is happening in a given image. Beyond that, the captions and article text could, at times, even stand in for the images themselves, rendering the images supplementary, rather than crucial, for the messages. For example, *The Milwaukee Journal* on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1988 contained an image captioned as follows:

AFTER THE FALL – Elisabeth Ann Zinser (right), who resigned Friday as president of Gallaudet University, the world’s only liberal arts college for the deaf, spoke with Jane Bassett Spilman, chairman of the university’s board of trustees, at a press

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<sup>122</sup> *De Anima* 3.3 [trans. J. A. Smith].

conference in Washington, D.C. Zinser was named president last weekend, but Gallaudet students refused to accept her because she can hear and does not know sign language. Zinser resigned in the face of a boycott of classes. The students want a deaf person named president and also are demanding that Spilman resign.

This caption is packed full of information that not only describes what happens in the picture, but everything that has lead up to the picture being taken.

The question, of course, becomes: Does such a description have the same power to disrupt enthymemes as the image does? In this case, I argue that it has more power because without the caption, the photo is literally a context-less picture of two women who vaguely look like they're talking to each other. This photo alone, as far as I can tell, appears to have no persuasive power, while the caption distinctly reinforces the ideas that the Deaf students are both communicative and competent, hopefully disrupting any enthymemes linking Deafness with incommunicability and incompetency that exist in the minds of the readers.

Yet this may be a bit of a strawman photo for this argument, so let's take, in turn, a more complicated collection of three photos, from the *USA Today* on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1988. The first photo, at the top of the page, is the largest of the three: it features I. King Jordan surrounded by students waving their hands in ASL applause. The photograph is captioned: "New President: I. King Jordan, former arts and sciences dean, is surrounded by cheering Gallaudet students Sunday at a news conference after he was promoted." This is a photo that is the most often circulated after Jordan's appointment as president, appearing in almost every major news publication. It most often appears in concert with a photograph of Zinser's resignation. In the *USA Today*, however, it appears above a photograph of Jane Spilman and a photograph of Phillip Bravin.

In the photograph, Jane Spilman speaks; in front of her we see the two hands of the interpreter, but not the rest of the interpreter's body. The photograph is captioned: "Old Board Chair: the resignation Sunday of Jane Spilman, who does not know how to sign, is repeated in sign language." The full version of this photograph appeared in the *San Antonio Express News* on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1988; in the full photo, we can see the rest of the interpreter, who is wearing glasses. It is captioned: "Jane Bassett Spilman, chairwoman of Gallaudet University's Board of Trustees, announces her resignation Sunday in Washington, D.C. The unidentified woman on the right is translating Spilman's statement to sign language." The motivation behind only including part of the picture in the *USA Today* may simply have been to fit all of the photographs on the page and to keep the photo of Spilman the same size as the photo of Bravin. Nevertheless, viewing the body of the interpreter as disposable indicates a potential lack of understanding of the importance of the rest of the body to sign language. While the hands are important, their position in relation to the body and accompanying facial expressions are crucial to meaning making. Without that context, the inclusion in the interpreter feels more like a prop than something meaningful.

Directly next to the photo of Spilman is a photograph of Philip Bravin, who is using his hands to sign and is wearing glasses. The caption reads: "New board chair: Philip Bravin signs the news of a new Gallaudet president." In contrast to the old board chair, who required the hands of another in front of her to communicate, Bravin is a competent communicator without assistance.

If I were to list out every silly pun or metaphorical reference to deafness contained in the titles of the articles I examined, this section would become far too lengthy and tedious. Instead, I present a selection of the titles where the writers and editorial staff clearly had a bit too much fun:

- "Gallaudet underscored a revolution in silence" (*Norwich Bulletin*, Mar. 13, '88)
- "Listen Carefully" (*Evening Journal*, Mar. 10, '88)



- “Lesser gods must give up their control of the deaf” (*Sunday News Journal*, Mar. 20, ‘88)<sup>123</sup>
- “Silent No More” (*Miami Herald*, Mar. 10, ‘88), “Signs of trouble” (*Miami Herald*, Mar. 11, ‘88)
- “Gallaudet deaf students learn power of their voices” (*St. Augustine Record*, Mar. 12, ‘88)
- “Hearing impaired vow to be silent ‘no more’” (*Ocala Star-Banner*, Mar. 17, ‘88)
- “Deaf issues finally reach hearing ears” (*Tampa Tribune*, Mar. 19, ‘88)
- “Deaf gain their voice and they have more to say” (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Mar. 13, ‘88)
- “A world hearing things its own way” (*Gwinnett Daily News*, Mar. 29, ‘88)
- “When deaf students made themselves heard, the world listened” (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Mar. 8, ‘88)

This kind of wordplay in this context makes visible deafness in a different way: by challenging readers’ assumptions of a connection between deafness and lack of communication ability. These phrases, captions, and article titles are witty, though when gathered together like this, they’re a bit repetitive! But taken separately, they’re each clever enough to cause the audience to pause and perhaps reflect on the unconscious ways they’re viewed communication breakdowns between Deaf and hearing people as a problem solely of Deaf people’s supposed failure to communicate, rather than as a shared breakdown to be navigated together. In a more roundabout way, the images themselves and the captions challenge the centering of the abled, hearing person

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<sup>123</sup> A reference to *Children of a Lesser God*, a play by Mark Medoff about a Deaf school, later adapted into a film.

as well by positioning the bodies of Deaf students and sign language front and center. Decentering hearing people forces the hearing audience to consider their own biases as they tune into the Deaf speakers.

## 2.5 DPN and Senses Beyond the Ears and Eyes

Though I focus in this dissertation on the dissemination of images by newspapers, I want to take a brief moment in this chapter to consider the ways in which the DPN protests provide examples of protests that could mass-engage senses beyond the eyes and ears. Though mass dissemination of sensation may not be possible (yet), I consider them limited only by our current technology.

The presence of bodies is an important element in many, though not all protests.<sup>124</sup> For example, Jeffrey S. Juris, in his analysis of counter-summit protests in Prague and Barcelona, emphasized how embodied protest roused emotions in observers: “Image is linked to emotion through embodied performance...protest performances generate powerful emotions, which prepare activist bodies for action.”<sup>125</sup>

Through a study of Indigenous protests during the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Brett Neilson examines how the very nature of bodies presents a challenge to those who would seek to

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<sup>124</sup> I wrote about one such protest in which bodily presence was not required, #StopCombatingMe, in my MA thesis.

<sup>125</sup> Jeffrey S. Juris, “Performing Politics: Image, Embodiment, and Affective Solidarity during Anti-Corporate Globalization protests,” *Ethnography* 9.1, 61-97, qt. 65.

control or constrain a protest: “Although the state can restrict the possibilities for protest by means of policing activities, these strategies of regulation can only go so far without resulting in bodily violence that itself creates a media spectacle.”<sup>126</sup>

Red Chidgey, in *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times*, employed a case study of suffragette protests around the 2012 London Olympics to explore the ways in which activists reckoned with the complicated ties of the historical suffragette movement to imperialism and colonialism. Chidgey argues that protestors negotiated this legacy in several ways, including through the ‘embodied mnemonic activism’ of foot stepping (“intentionally assembling in sites of historic interest to enact new scenes of protest.”<sup>127</sup>

Deaf President Now was no different: the student protests were successful in part because of their use of embodiment to rouse emotions, to resist control by the university administration, and to march where historic protests had marched. Three key moments of embodiment stood out to me in these protests: the blocking of university entrances, class boycotts, and the march to the Capitol.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, students had blocked every single entrance to campus with large crowds of students, allowing only students and emergency personnel on campus. The board of trustees was supposed to meet with university administrators, but found it difficult, if not impossible, to enter campus. The university provost made it to the meeting through a hole in a chain link fence; Phil Bravin, a Deaf board member, was allowed to enter campus by a group of students that included his son, Jeff. Physically blocking the board members from attending their meeting was, in many

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<sup>126</sup> Brett Neilson, “Bodies of Protest: Performing Citizenship at the 2000 Olympic Games,” *Continuum* 16.1, 2002, 13-25, qt. 18.

<sup>127</sup> Red Chidgey, *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times*, Palgrave MacMillan: 2018, qt. 92.

ways, reflective of the ways in which Deaf students felt excluded from the governance process at the university. The division of the gates and fences is emblematic of ekphrastic fear, maintaining a physical, literal barrier between the self and the Other prompts reflection on the inherent, non-physical barriers between the different lived experiences of hearing administrators and board members and Deaf students, faculty, and staff. That some, with permission from the student protestors or without such permission, managed to break through these barriers reveals the ekphrastic hope in the moment – that in some limited way, the board members might be able to *experience* the desires, needs, and expectations of the students.

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, students allowed everyone to come and go from the campus freely, but used their bodies – or rather the absence thereof – in a different way: by organizing a class boycott. The boycott, which lasted in some form throughout the duration of the protests, were facilitated, in part, by the fact that many faculty were already on the side of the students and, indeed, were protesting alongside them. Bodies in the streets instead of in classroom seats were a powerful disruption of normal campus life. Surely the loudness of the protests and the silence of the classrooms impacted the hearing faculty, staff, and board members more profoundly than the Deaf ones – and yet, how to gesture at the presence/absence of noise in the printed pages of a newspaper? In many ways, the crowded, ‘busy’ appearance of many of these photographs, featuring hands clearly in motion, stood in for noise, potentially causing the viewer to experience a moment of *phantasia*, where their mind could fill in the missing sensation.

On March 11, following Zinzer’s resignation as president, the students were still controlling the campus gates: “we still have three-and-a-half more demands to go!”<sup>128</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup> Jack R. Gannon, *The Week the World Heart Gallaudet*, Gallaudet University Press, Washington, D.C.: 1989, qt. 109.

National Association of the Deaf organized a march that drew over 3,000 people from around the United States to Washington, D.C.: “the deaf community had never before experienced the likes of Friday’s march to the Capitol.”<sup>129</sup> Because of Zinzer’s resignation, the march was triumphant and was the first DPN action for which the organizers had permission: a permit to march. Every other action to this point had been an act of defiance: class boycotts, blocking campus entrances, screaming over the speeches of board members, and so forth. The celebratory nature of the march in a space outside the campus and the accompanying permit granting permission were symbols of the ways in which the students’ message resonated beyond the campus walls. The students had previously met with congresspeople, received letters from leaders across the country, and were surrounded by allies who had traveled far to support them. The embodiment of celebration is far different in its energy from the embodiment of defiance and protest, and that dynamism is something *felt* far more than it is something *seen*, which complicates conveying that energy through photography. And yet, we catch hints, phantasms, glimpses, and gestures: faces with expressions of joy contrast with frustrated faces in earlier photos, the signs express success (“board busters!” read one) rather than demands, and if one were to close ones eyes and let the mind wander just a bit, one can almost imagine what it would have felt to be there.

How to transmit all the sensations of students leaving classrooms for streets? How to make an audience feel as though they are present with the students blocking the gates to campus? Imagined future technology makes space for theorizing: The parlor walls from *Fahrenheit 451* are intended to demonstrate the dangers of technology in isolating ourselves from other people, in a society where books are destroyed whenever found and book-lovers preserve them by

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<sup>129</sup> Gannon, qt. 109.

memorizing them, a throwback to oral culture. Yet the wall-sized televisions from the book hint at a promise in addition to a peril: like the public screen today, the parlor walls have the potential to be ‘taken over’ by a sensory event, one more potent than our current technology in allowing the audience to feel surrounded by that which they watch. In a small way, virtual reality headsets are already making this possibility closer to reality. Or, imagine if the Holodeck on *Star Trek* could host participatory news briefings. The audience could be there, but not there: observer-participants, but without the ability to change the real world outcome. Oh, how I wish I could march alongside the students at Gallaudet – how much easier would this chapter have been to write? Sadly, of course, for a cowboys-but-in-space sci-fi show, Riker’s fantasies take priority.

For now, until we get a more immersive news distribution technology, we will have to make due with rhetorical techniques like ekphrasis, putting not only before the eyes, but before the ears and nose as well.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The student protestors were successful in having their demands met by organizing effectively in ways that demonstrated that their competence and ability to communicate were because of their d/Deafness, not despite it. They capitalized on receptive journalists and photographers, a national audience primed to support their cause, and strategic alliances with faculty, staff, public figures, and elected leaders. Their media strategy was also successful because

the Gallaudet board and administrators were never able to create their own sympathetic narrative and, for the most part, did not speak with press outside of a few official press conferences.

Though deafness has been considered an invisible disability, my analysis of these newspaper photographs reveals that deafness can be made very visible on the body or through photographed context. Many photographs contained blurry movements of hands in ways that were obviously American Sign Language and visible hearing aids. Protest signs and banners made it clear that the protest was about Deaf rights and issues. On the other hand, because of the historical exclusion of BIPOC from Gallaudet, the white leadership of the protest, and racist newspaper coverage trends, the protests were also photographed as primarily white spaces, making only white or white-passing deaf people visible.

Journalists also used captions and context to demarcate Deafness in the photographs, including many puns and metaphors related to sound, deafness, and hearing. Perhaps the headline and caption writers each individually thought they were being clever or unique, but when taken as a genre, this tendency was tired. Nevertheless, photograph captions and the context of the articles helped make Deafness visible to readers.

The Deaf President Now protests also provide a vehicle for considering the ways in which future technology could allow protest reporters to capture and disseminate a broader range of sensory experiences to a mass audience, potentially increasing the potential for audience members to experience and therefore more greatly understand the message of the protestors.

### 3.0 The Queerness of Disabled Childhood: The 1990 ADAPT ‘Crawl-up’

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1990, a group of disability activists - among them, Jennifer Keelan, age 8 – abandoned their wheelchairs and other mobility devices at the foot of the steps to the US Capitol building. Fred Pelka recounts: “the ‘crawl-up’ at the Capitol steps on March 12 – provided some of the most powerful images in the history of the movement.”<sup>130</sup> Michael Auberger, a member of the disability protest group ADAPT, likewise reminisces that “It wasn’t ADAPT, it didn’t feel like ADAPT, to just march and not do any sort of direct action. So the crawl-up was something we’d set up to meet that need...after all these years you still couldn’t get into the Capitol using a wheelchair...It was definitely theater, but it was also a statement.”<sup>131</sup>

The theatrics of the crawl-up drew media attention and the resulting images, especially one of the young Keelan, circulated broadly. Joseph Shapiro argues that “the one lasting image of the fight for the ADA was a ‘crawl up’ of the steps of the West Front of the United States Capitol building...The cameras, of course, zoomed in on 8-year-old Jennifer Keelan. A disabled child’s struggle played to every media reflex. Even if the crawl up was a shameless play to old stereotypes, ADAPT knew what it was doing.”<sup>132</sup>

The *image event*, as described in my introduction, is how I categorize this protest. Kevin Deluca’s *image event* provides an effective framework for understanding how images function as argumentative fragments: not arguments in of themselves, but fragments that make arguments

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<sup>130</sup> Fred Pelka, *What We Have Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, qt. 515.

<sup>131</sup> As quoted in Pelka, p. 517.

<sup>132</sup> Joseph Shapiro, “Disability Policy and the Media: A Stealth Civil Rights Movement Bypasses the Press and Defies Conventional Wisdom,” *Policy Studies Journal* 22.1 (1994): 123-132.



through disrupting normative enthymemes within the minds of viewers. Some of the articles about the ‘crawl up’ protest did not contain images, but instead, engaged in a detailed description of what the author saw. We might understand this as *ekphrasis*, or *putting before the eyes*; this technique is defined in the Progymnasmata as: ‘a speech which leads one around, bringing a subject matter vividly (*enargos*) before the eyes.’ An intriguing tension: the *image event* requires no ears or speech, *ekphrasis* no eyes or physical sight, yet each relies on both the ears and eyes, if only metaphorically.

I understand the disruption of normative enthymemes, either through image or image descriptions, to be a form of queering and crippling media coverage and claim that, in the image of Keelan, disability and childhood are mutually constituted through their queerness. It will be useful, then, to explain what I mean by *queer*. Though Annemarie Jagose uses ‘queer’ to refer specifically to ‘mismatches between sex, gender, and desire,’ she also suggests more broadly that queerness can be a form of resisting stability.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Judith Butler writes, “‘The term ‘queer’ emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity.’”<sup>134</sup> Queerness, for Butler, helps subjects negotiate compulsory performances. Others have suggested that queerness is a failure and a negative. Robert McRuer considers the ways in which disability and queerness are contingent upon each other when he argues, “the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Annemarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (Melbourne University Press, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 226.

<sup>135</sup> Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2002), qt. 89.

There is a certain queerness to the idea of childhood as well. Of the child, Kathryn Stockton notes, “The child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back...innocence is queerer than we ever thought it could be.”<sup>136</sup> Alison Kafer brings disability and childhood together, writing in response to Lee Edelman, “The Child through whom legacies are passed down is, without doubt, able-bodied/able-minded;”<sup>137</sup> she continues, “I am not arguing for an expansion of the privileged imaginary to include disabled children...I want to interrupt this privileged imaginary by making apparent its assumptions.”<sup>138</sup> I look also to Jasbir Puar, who emphasizes, “the child is just one such figure in a spectrum of statistical chances that suggest health, vitality, capacity, fertility, ‘market virility,’ and so on.... The challenge is...to understand how the biopolitics of regenerative capacity already demarcate racialized and sexualized statistical population aggregates as those in decay, destined for no future.”<sup>139</sup> I intend to demonstrate that theories of visual argument, image studies, and visual rhetoric allow us to understand how the arguments of McRuer, Stockton, Kafer, Puar, and others are implicated in images of disability protests.

Thus, when I argue that disability and childhood are mutually constituted through their queerness, I mean three things:

- (1) Disability and childhood are both a failure to exist within normative time.
- (2) Disability and childhood both resist the normative embodiment of an agentic subject.
- (3) Ableism and ageism both reinforce and construct each other, founded in a conception of what it means to be a subject and a citizen.

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<sup>136</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, qt. 5.

<sup>137</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013, qt. 29.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>139</sup> Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), qt. 211.

What was it about the Jennifer Keelan image event that caused journalists to pay attention, to snap photos, to engage in such vivid image description? Was it that she was ‘too old’ to be crawling? Was it the ways in which cerebral palsy visible marked her young body? Was it simply the determined look on her face as she famously stated, “I’ll take all night if I have to”? Perhaps the quirky bandana? Or, is it that Jennifer Keelan’s body, marked as a white, feminine, disabled childhood, also seemed queer?

Considering this framework within which disability and childhood are mutually constitutive through queerness, I suggest that protest imagery of Jennifer Keelan from the ADAPT ‘crawl-up’ performed the discursive function of drawing public attention to inaccessibility and in spurring legislative change because it queered normative enthymemes. The image of Keelan was, after all, “the one photographic image from the ADA fight to register in the public memory.”<sup>140</sup> Specifically, the images and image descriptions of Keelan were consumed as argumentative fragments, queering, crippling, disrupting and reinforcing enthymemes associating disability with weakness, laziness, childhood, or lack of agency. While the resulting images or image descriptions were not always disseminated in the ways expected or desired by the protestors, this media coverage did draw attention to the lack of accessibility and inclusion, as well as the solutions proposed by the group.

In this paper, I analyze photos and descriptions of Jennifer Keelan housed in the ADAPT museum. There are two images of Jennifer Keelan from the ‘crawl-up’ protest housed in this archive (one from the Los Angeles Times and the other from the Denver Post), and numerous descriptions and mentions of her. I, first, argue that Keelan’s disability and childhood, as captured

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<sup>140</sup> Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement*, New York: Random House, 1993, qt. 133.

in these images, exists within larger social practices regarding childhood and disability; within those larger practices, these images function to complicate the discursive processes surrounding reproductive futurism, inscribing a need for disabled futurity. Second, I suggest that the photographs of Keelan challenge conceptions of who can and should participate in the social practice of protest activity. Finally, I claim that the news coverage of Keelan further underscores the intrinsic, discursive relationship between ableism and ageism.

### 3.1 Reproductive Futurism

The Associated Press, on March 13, 1990, wrote:

Using her arms to drag her small body up the Capitol steps, 8-year old Jennifer Keelan joined some 60 disabled Americans Monday in lobbying for legislation to guarantee their civil rights. “I’ll take all night if I have to, “ Jennifer said to others crawling along side her. She paused just past the halfway point for a sip of water on a bright and unseasonably hot March day, then resumed pulling herself up the rest of the 83 marble steps. Keelan, a blond-haired second grader from Denver, was the youngest of about 60 people with disabilities who left their wheelchairs and crawled up the West Front of the Capitol. <sup>141</sup>

This article contained no pictures, but relied instead on description, using the rhetorical technique of ‘ekphrasis’ that I mention above in order to put the image of image of Keelen before-

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<sup>141</sup> <http://adaptmuseum.net/gallery/picture.php?/92/search/203>

the-eyes of news readers. In this way, as I similarly argued in the previous chapter, the article inspires readers to create a mental picture; such pictures, I argued, are accessible to a wider audience, including those with vision impairments. In this mental picture, the small stature of Keelan is emphasized, indicative of her childhood, but her particular disability is not described, rendering, again, her childhood as more ‘visible.’ Because of such emphasis on her childhood, Keelan’s participation in the ‘crawl up’ protest was cast as a movement toward disabled futurity. Nxtbook Media reports, “Organizers of the crawl saw the action as a fight for recognition and equality not just for themselves, but for the future generations of people with disabilities, as well as for children like Keelan.”<sup>142</sup> Others, like Mary Johnson or Tobin Siebers, saw the media’s focus on Keelan as troubling, given a desire to separate the connection between disability and childhood. Thus, disabled futurities complicate the discussions about futurity within queer studies.

In queer theory, the debate around futurity has centered on the anti-social thesis, which essentially argues that, to be queer is to be anti-social, anti-relational, and anti-futurity. Since I argue that an image of a disabled child in the context of an argument for a disabled future is *queer*, then I must necessarily disagree, at least in a small way, with the anti-social thesis. Lee Edelman critiques movements that focus on The Child, arguing that such a focus forces the audience to be constrained by what he calls ‘reproductive futurism’:

Terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by

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<sup>142</sup> <http://www.nxtbook.com/faircount/ADA/ADA25/index.php?device=accessible&pg=60>

casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.”<sup>143</sup>

Edelman further asserts, “queerness names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children...’ figures, outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order’s death drive.”<sup>144</sup> Tim Dean frames the anti-social thesis as such: “some aspect of homosexuality threatens the social and that it might be strategic politically to exploit that threat...insofar as we fail to reproduce the family in a recognizable form, queers fail to reproduce the social.”<sup>145</sup> For Tim Dean, the antisocial is most useful through a revised genealogy; through Guy Hocquenghem, Dean complicates the antisocial, claiming that it is not about “the end of sociality but rather its inception,” a reading he argues is also legitimized by Bersani.<sup>146</sup> The antisocial, for Dean, represents an opportunity to move “beyond the normative coordinates of selfhood” where there “lies an orgy of connection that no regime can regulate.”<sup>147</sup>

As someone who never intends to grow a child, I share Edelman’s frustration with the continual focus on The Child, but, as an activist, I’m reminded that very real, material children do exist and have needs; I’m concerned that a no-futures perspective only is legible within the existence and lived experiences of some queers. Like Tim Dean, I yearn for the time when we can move beyond regulations that guarantee individual rights, but still, nevertheless, recognize the material value in civil rights discourse. Borrowing from José Esteban Muñoz, I believe that the anti-social suffers from a lack of imagination—imagination that I believe the queer, disabled child

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<sup>143</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> Tim Dean, “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 819-828, 826.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 827.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 828.

gives to us.<sup>148</sup> Like Muñoz, I call for a reinvigoration of queer utopianism, adding that such a futurity must also be a disabled utopia. As I remain unconvinced as to the real possibility of existing in complete anti-relationality, if we are to be relational, we ought to do so with a bit of hope.

Thus, I argue, a *no futures* negativity does not easily map onto disability. While, as one queer disabled femme, I personally have no desire to pass on my lax joints and accompanying pain to a child, nor do I desire the stickiness, noise, and fluids commonly associated with children, the belief that disabled people already have no futures is so common that I cannot, in good conscience, promote an idea that furthers this perspective. In other words, I argue that a queer disabled future is, in fact, a negative, the anti-social.

On one hand, I can see why a focus on the child, what Edelman calls ‘reproductive futurism,’ can be used to further ableism -- prenatal testing, segregation, and eugenics are some examples that come to mind. Certainly, a focus on The Child has been used to justify a wide range of policies and practices that have harmed disabled people, children and adults alike. And for some, Jennifer Keelan as the central image in news media was a problem, precisely because of this desire to disrupt the connection between disability and childhood. Mary Johnson, editor of the *Disability Rag*, recalls: “One might question why a movement intent on showing that disabled people are adults, not children, would make their central media image a child?”<sup>149</sup>

Yet, on the other hand, when disabled people are denied a ‘reproductive futurism’ to begin with, when it is the able-bodied that is so implicit in the “Child” of which Edelman speaks, then the idea of no futures needs to be complicated. A disabled future is queer because it is anti-

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<sup>148</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 819-828

<sup>149</sup> As cited in: Lennard J. Davis, *Enabling Acts: The Hidden Story of How the Americans with Disabilities Act Gave the Largest US Minority Its Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 196.

normative, but also because, to borrow from Halberstam, it is a kind of failure – a failure to wallow in what society sees as a disorder, a failure to give up when faced with discrimination and ableism, and a failure to accept the words of a doctor as absolute truth.

A striking example is the case of Ashley X, a developmentally disabled girl who was given growth attenuation hormonal treatment, a hysterectomy, and breast bud removal before she was 9 years old. The quintessential case for the child not allowed to become sexual or adult, she gives her name to the Ashley Treatment, as these interventions are now known. What is it about the disabled child that makes us so uncomfortable with her growing to adulthood, with her having a future, sexual, reproductive, or otherwise? Ashley X is given no future; if up to her parents and the doctors, she would remain the same, stagnant. Yet, perhaps it is just me, but it seems there must be a hope that she somehow fails at this task set in front of her.

Is it that the disabled child is the queerest child? Most children do not 100% develop according to typical, average child development guidelines; children fall within some percentile or another. Might we consider this a child's queering of how adults understand the developmental process, this movement toward the future? Thus, when a child, like Ashley, develops so queerly, she challenges adult understandings of all children; the Ashley child becomes even more, in Kathryn Stockton's words, "the ghostly gay child (emblem and icon of children's queerness)."<sup>150</sup> Thus, it seems to me that when a disabled queer has a future, defying the path set in front of her, she is the most anti-social of all. In the photos, even though they are still images, Jennifer always seems to be in motion, moving forward and upwards.

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<sup>150</sup> Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.



Disabled children without futures are also present in Jennifer's aura, however. She told reporters that she was inspired to advocate and participate in the crawl-up because of her friend Kenny Perkins, who had died in January 1990. Joseph Shapiro writes: "Kenny Perkins...had died six weeks before at the age of six and...had been to eight ADAPT demonstrations. Unable to speak, the result of severe head trauma from an automobile accident when he was an infant, Kenny would blink his eyes twice to say "yes," once for "no."<sup>151</sup> When Keelan reached the top of the steps, she said, "I'm doing it for Kenny." Jennifer was not the only activist inspired by the dead child; at her court hearing following her arrest after protesting, Christine Coughlin mentioned Kenny and stated, "I'm here for the children...The children of the future who shouldn't be told they can't sit in a restaurant because they cause a fire hazard, and for the children who shouldn't have to be told that they can't ride a bus or get into a bathroom, or have adequate nursing care."<sup>152</sup> Even the references to the dead disabled child underscore a call to do better for the disabled children of the future. Rhonda, Kenny's mother, told the *Handicapped Coloradan*: "Children need to be in the movement because it is for the children . . .the ultimate goal."<sup>153</sup> While this may seem, by definition, a move toward reproductive futurism, the movement toward making space in the future for non-normative children nevertheless seems a material good.

While the negative impacts of reproductive futurism have been frequently discussed in queer studies, the tensions suggested by the examples above seem to indicate that we should not be so quick to abandon reproductive futurism – that, in fact, reproductive futurism, particularly

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<sup>151</sup> Joseph Shapiro, "Climbing Society's Mountains – The Disability Rights Movement Arrives," *The Alicia Patterson Foundation*, <http://aliciapatterson.org/stories/climbing-societys-mountains%E2%80%93disability-rights-movement-arrives>.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> "These are the people who chased APTA," *Handicapped Coloradan*, 1989, <http://adaptmuseum.net/gallery/picture.php?/127/category/5>.

when deployed by children, on behalf of children, is a valuable organizing tool.<sup>154</sup> For example, we might look to the climate strikers as an example of children strategically deploying reproductive futurism on their own behalf. Is it really so bad if disabled and queer children call for all of us to care about their futures? Here, I think of Greta Thunberg, who is Autistic, speaking at the UN and invoking reproductive futurism with the now viral line: “You have stolen my dreams and my childhood.”<sup>155</sup> Or similarly, Emma Gonzales, one of the Parkland students, who is bisexual, calls for young people to march for their lives.<sup>156</sup> Certainly, Donald Trump wishes that Greta Thunberg would act more childlike, tweeting: “Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!” and sarcastically, “She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future.”<sup>157</sup> Greta weaponizing her lost childhood to force adults to consider the long-term implications of climate policy counteracts Trump’s denial of futurity and underscores the ideological challenges that The Child can pose.

Is there *really* something anti-queer about a queer or a disabled child begging for survival? While, certainly, I agree that there are ways in which reproductive futurism is weaponized in anti-queer ways, the examples I have provided suggest that to care about the future of others, especially the futures of young people, is not inherently bad and, in fact, may at time be quite good.

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<sup>154</sup> I might even suggest, though I won’t explore it here, that *all* organizing tools have both negative and positive implications. Certainly, for some, the negatives outweigh the positives, but often it is the reverse.

<sup>155</sup> [https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/un-general-assembly-09-23-2019/h\\_1957a2c029304256fade71f0f72c1341](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/un-general-assembly-09-23-2019/h_1957a2c029304256fade71f0f72c1341)

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.them.us/story/queer-teen-girls-are-leading-the-gun-control-movement>

<sup>157</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/12/politics/greta-thunberg-donald-trump/index.html>

### 3.2 Who Can and Should Protest?

The presence of young humans like Jennifer Keelan and Kenny Perkins in the movement, despite the attempts of adult advocates to discourage their participation, troubles the negative implications of words like *childlike*; perhaps the characterization offers an opportunity for solidarity, rather than solely functioning as a diminutive. Keelan, in reflecting back on her participation, argued: “I knew that I was not only representing myself, I was representing my generation. If I didn’t do it, then no one from my generation would be represented” (as cited as Lennard Davis, *Enabling Acts*, 193). In many ways, Keelan acted ‘adultlike,’ demonstrating a maturity and self-awareness considered usual for young people of her age. And yet, as I look around at the many global movements led by children today, perhaps it is rather that adults are quite bad at recognizing the ways in which children act with maturity and self-awareness unless viewed with hindsight – and certainly, adults rarely recognize their own behavior as ‘childlike.’

Furthermore, though the protestors at the ‘crawl up’ consistently rejected the comparison between childhood and disability, childhood studies questions why being compared to children is inherently negative. Childhood studies helps interrogate what it means to *treat someone like a child*, what it might be to construct an agentic childhood or even an agentic disabled childhood, and how a comparison between childhood and disability has the potential to be reclaimed for benefit. After all, if both disabled people and young people are treated like children – like they don’t have agency, the ability to contribute to society, or the right to have opinions – then perhaps rejection of the ‘childlike’ label by disabled people only further reifies discrimination against young people. In a 2010 Ted talk titled *What Adults Can Learn from Kids*, Adora Svitak suggests that behaviors associated with childhood are normal behaviors across the lifespan, arguing “the traits the word ‘childish’ addresses are seen so often in adults, that we should abolish this age-

discriminatory word, when it comes to criticizing behavior associated with irresponsibility and irrational thinking.”<sup>158</sup> Considering the ways in which the construct of irrationality is used to dismiss disabled people, I posit that an anti-child position may well also underscore ableism.

Perhaps then, the presence of young disabled advocates in the movement should be considered a natural one, in that descriptors like *moron*, *retard*, *childish* all critique the same behaviors by casting judgment on the actual people who are interpolated by those words. Tyler Bickford explores the relationship between disability and childhood, mentioning Alison Kafer’s work on temporality and disability in the context of talking about typical childhood development:

Discourses of childhood and disability explicitly overlap in many ways, not least in their shared construction in terms of ‘temporality’ (Kafer 2013). Disability is frequently articulated using the language of childhood development, so terms like ‘retardation’ identify a pause in a course of cognitive and psychological development that ‘normal’ children pass through.<sup>159</sup>

While Bickford’s construction of disability and childhood through temporality is not inaccurate, I am not convinced that this is an argument that Kafer makes. In fact, Kafer seems to be making a very different argument: Kafer uses temporality not to argue that disability is a pause in normal development of children, but rather that disability is not considered a valued or valid way of developing and to imagine “what it means to project disability into the future.”<sup>160</sup> Nevertheless, both Bickford and Kafer draw attention to the ways in which *temporality* structures

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<sup>158</sup> Adora Svitak, *What Adults Can Learn from Kids*, Ted Talk, [https://www.ted.com/talks/adora\\_svitak](https://www.ted.com/talks/adora_svitak).

<sup>159</sup> Tyler Bickford, *Schooling New Media: Music, Language, and Technology in Children’s Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.

<sup>160</sup> Alison Kafer, *Feminist Queer Crip* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 20.

the experiences of children and disabled people. Therefore, while *childlike* or *childish* may never be the adjectives of choice for disabled adults (or for children!), disabled activists might consider that these words and comparisons are not merely infantilizing, but also offer the opportunity to consider new alliances.

The *Los Angeles Times* article about the ‘crawl up’ protest contained an image of Keelan crawling up the steps, surrounded by photographers and other protestors, with the caption, “Jennifer Keelan, 8, of Denver, left, leads protestors on a crawl up the West Front of the U.S. Capitol.”<sup>161</sup> Certainly, the adults in the movement would not have described Keelan as a movement leader, though she had been an active participant, and she had not been involved in organizing or planning the protest itself. Lennard Davis writes, “no one arranged for Keelan to crawl up the steps. It was the press that made her an icon, since the story was touching and ‘inspiring,’ which is the media’s usual modus operandi concerning disability issues in the news.”<sup>162</sup>

Building on the work of John Clogston and Beth Haller in disability media studies, I have previously<sup>163</sup> discussed the ways in which media in the United States typically portray people with disabilities, including the SuperCrip model, which is sometimes conventionally called “inspiration porn.” Those who staged the protests appear to have been aiming for a civil rights model of portraying disability, which Beth Haller calls a more progressive category of media coverage, in which disabled people are portrayed as part of a group with legitimate claim to accessibility as

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<sup>161</sup> <http://adaptmuseum.net/gallery/picture.php?/64/search/203>

<sup>162</sup> Lennard J. Davis, *Enabling Acts: The Hidden Story of How the Americans with Disabilities Act Gave the Largest Minority Its Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 196.

<sup>163</sup> See: Jessica L. Benham, “Xavier as Marvel’s super-crip: Reframing disabled masculinity in the X-Men films.” In C. Bucciferro (Ed.) *The X-Men films: A cultural analysis*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, and Jessica L. Benham, “Fabulous Fetishization: Kylie Jenner’s *Interview* Cover and Wheelchair Identity Politics,” *Gender Forum*, 68, 2018.

civil rights. Of course, there are drawbacks to even this more progressive model, as movements toward civil rights tend to end at the achievement of rights for some, but not justice for all.

Certainly, much of the coverage of the ‘crawl up’ protest mentioned the quest for civil rights and even framed the cause of the protestors favorably. Yet, the focus on Jennifer Keelan as an inspirational figure tended more toward what Clogston and Haller call the SuperCrip model, in which disabled figures are portrayed as superhuman for doing tasks we would not celebrate if abled people did them. And yet, Keelan’s status as a child complicates this analysis because we often position children, abled or disabled, as inspirational when they participate in protest activity. Is Keelan discussed as *more* inspirational than an abled child would have been? Given the frequent mentions of her ‘dragging’ herself or ‘leaving her wheelchair,’ I argue that she is positioned as even more inspirational, or even more of a hero, than abled children are, thus embodying the supercrip model.

Returning to the statement about Keelan leading protestors up the Capitol steps, we might speculate that the *LA Times* did not mean to imply that Keelan was a movement leader, but rather that she was the first up the steps, but this would not have been an accurate representation either. The particular images which were captured and the ways in which they were disseminated were not according to the intentions of the protest planners.

Here, I mean to argue that the unwieldiness of disability and childhood in image events reveals an underlying queerness in the ‘image event’ itself. Like attempts to define queerness, any attempt to concretely name how disability and childhood appear in an ‘image event’ is bound to fail. Like the murkiness of queerness, the element in the ‘image event’ that results in enthymematic disruption is hard to pin down. Nevertheless, though difficult, I will continue to attempt to breakdown the specific ways in which images of Keelan at the ‘crawl up’ protest challenged our

internal and social narratives about childhood and disability – in this section, with regard to our societal conceptions of what a protestor looks like, and in the next section, with regard to connections to citizenship and capitalism.

Thus, here, I argue that the portrayal of both childhood and disability in these images matter because they challenge our conceptions of what it means to be a protestor: that our children have a place in disability movements and that, as has been argued in both the chapter before and the chapter which follows, disabled people can and do participate in civic life, including protest activity. There are particular elements in all the photographs of Keelan that catch the viewer's eye and interrupt enthymemes, and I divide them between Keelan's embodiment and environment.

Keelan's body is obviously both small and disabled in every photograph. The photographers and editors seem to make a conscious choice to ensure her legs, which are bent at atypical angles, are visible in every published photograph. Using context clues, like the steps or the adult bodies near her, each photographer has made apparent that she is small in comparison to typical adult bodies. Smallness and fragility are linked concepts, tied to both disability and childhood in our culture. These are the elements in the photographs that stick out to the casual viewer – a small child, with bent legs, positioned centrally where human eyes tend to glance first.

Youth movements and protests have been common throughout history, but a child of 8 years old is young even for those movements, and Keelan looks younger still than typical for 8 years of age. Thus, her presence in the photograph is not only eye-catching, but also surprising. Our brains have expectations of who will appear in protest photography: perhaps a fierce-looking college student at the youngest. The enthymematic connection between being of a certain age (and, by extension, maturity) and participating in civic life is engrained. Keelan's embodiment, as a very young-looking disabled child, in the photographs disrupts these enthymemes, provoking reflection

on the relationship between maturity, age, disability and civic participation and inspiring the conclusion that even very young children can be mature enough to have opinions on public policy. When we reject a comparison between disability and childhood, what does this say about the agency of actual disabled children? Perhaps when children become present and powerful parts of protest movements, being like a child becomes a comparison we can reclaim.

While Keelan's body is most central to the photographs and, thus, likely to be the most noticed, aspects of the environment in these photographs also stick out. Most, though not all, of the photographs of Keelan also include a bearded adult man, Michael Winter. Michael Winter was the executive director of the Berkeley Center for Independent Living, one of the birthplaces of the disability rights movement in the United States, and a key player in disability rights advocacy in the 1980s and 90s. Winter describes what happened the day of the crawl-up, "At the very beginning, I looked up and thought I would never make it. But right below me was a seven-year-old girl who was making the same climb, step by step, her wheelchair left somewhere below or whisked somewhere above. This was Tom Olin's young niece. I felt an obligation to be a role model for this girl and we ultimately made it to the top together." The contrast between the heavily bearded, longhaired Michael Winter and the diminutive Jennifer Keelan was incredibly stark – and yet their fight was shared. Winter would go on to become the director of the Office of Civil Rights for the Federal Transit Administration. While they are both people with disabilities, Winter and Keelan's differences were more apparent than their similarities in the photograph: Winter is a broad-shouldered, dark-haired large bearded man, making Keelan seem, by contrast, perhaps even more small and childlike, with her honey-colored hair and intense gaze. These differences stand out, piercing the viewers' eyes and widening again the possibilities of who protests.



### 3.3 Ableism and Ageism

The *Los Angeles Times*, of March 13, 1990, describes Keelan in this way: “At the close of the rally, when dozens left their wheelchairs to crawl to the Capitol entrance, spectators’ attention focused on 8-year-old Jennifer Keelan of Denver, who propelled herself to the top of the steep stone steps using only her knees and elbows.”<sup>164</sup> The article featured a black-and-white image of the girl, which I cannot find reproduced anywhere else, though I have found similar photos from the same angle. In its scanned and reproduced form, the *LA Times* photo would not be recognizable as anything other than a blurred representation of figures, unless someone had seen the image before, a sad reminder of the poorly preserved history of the disability rights movement. Yet, perhaps the photo’s blurriness and illegibility, except to the in-group, is, in itself, a kind of queerness. In fact, even the photo description in the ADAPT archive does not recognize that this is Jennifer Keelan, simply stating:

Looking down from the higher steps at a person crawling up the steps on their hands and knees. To this person's left side is part of another person climbing by sitting and to the right a pair of legs and shoes of another stair climber. Behind the person in the center, on steps closer to the base of the flight of steps are many more people just beginning the climb and still others standing and sitting at the bottom cheering them on. Part of the ADAPT flag is visible in the crowd.

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<sup>164</sup> <http://adaptmuseum.net/gallery/picture.php?/99/search/203>

A similar photograph, which I found on Nxtbook Media,<sup>165</sup> is from a similar angle and much clearer, and assists my interpretation of the photograph from the archive. In the photographs, Jennifer is certainly a small human, and we learn from the accompanying article that she is 8 years old. She is pictured from above, pushing herself up the steps with her arms, next to Michael Winter. However, the article never mentions that Jennifer is disabled, nor are Jennifer's mobility aids visible in the photograph. Her childhood, both in the text of the article and her apparent small size in the photo itself, is arguably made more visible than her disability. Yet, I argue that the photo is, nevertheless, a construction of Jennifer Keelan as disabled through inexplicitly naming her as a member of a group of disabled people and through the ways in which the position of her body is captured within the photographs. The caption of the photograph reads:

Difficult Climb. Scores of disabled people crawled up the steps of the U.S. Capitol, in a protest over delays in congressional action on a bill to expand their access to jobs, transportation and public services. Many of the demonstrators left their wheelchairs to dramatize the barriers they confront dally, organizers said.

Though Keelan is not specifically named here, we can easily read her as part of the 'scores of disabled people' and perhaps can even assume that she may have 'left [her] wheelchair.'

From other photographs, such as that on the front cover of Fred Pelka's book *What We Have Done*, it is clear that Keelan does use a wheelchair. This photograph is from the 'wheels of justice' march, which occurred earlier in the day on March 12<sup>th</sup>. Important to note, here, is the difference between photographs published in media coverage as compared to those contained in broader archives and other reference materials because the news photographs are not sufficient to

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<sup>165</sup> <http://www.nxtbook.com/faircount/ADA/ADA25/index.php?device=accessible&pg=60>

understand the context of the marches or the significance of Keelan herself marching. In fact, there were very few photographs of Keelan that circulated and were reused by many news sources, while the photographs contained in the archives and in reference books were more numerous, and were often taken not by the press, but by individuals within the protest movements, providing more context to the marches.

In the *LA Times* photograph itself, Keelan's body is not positioned normatively. At 8-years-old, she is too old for crawling to be considered as 'developmentally appropriate' behavior and even the way in which she crawls is non-normative. Though it is difficult to see in the image, her right hand is twisted inward toward her body, splaying her shoulder outward; her legs drag behind her, seeming to barely help support her body weight; she looks downward, as if she can only spare the energy to focus on her movement in the now, rather than looking forward to see where she is going. Clearly, this image conveys both childhood and disability, as demonstrated both by its content and its context.

This connection between childhood and disability is underscored by the ways in which ableism and ageism similarly constrain what it means to be a productive member of society. Childhood Studies has problematized defining the *child*. Certainly, the medical establishment has developed categorizations regarding developmental stages, despite these being only averages, percentiles, and norms. There are also legal definitions of child and adult, though these are also troubled when certain children, more often children of color, are tried as adults for certain supposedly adult-like crimes. Capitalist norms around who is expected to perform labor also structure cultural constructions of the child. Yet, this comparison relies on a particular construction of childhood, based around a notion that childhood is incompatible with labor. This was certainly not true for child-aged individuals throughout history and is not true for many so-called children

today. Is it that children who labor are children by age only and adults otherwise? Or is it that childhood is tied neither to age nor to experience with work? *Child* is clearly not a stable identity, nor is it a social position granted much autonomy, agency, or productivity by society; yet the image of childhood that is Jennifer Keelan is not one of helplessness, but rather one of determination and agency, reliant only on her own choice to crawl up the steps. We can assume that the permission and support of a parent or guardian was necessary to facilitate this action on Keelan's part, yet none of the news coverage confirms this theory.

Able-bodied children grow up and old, in a way even more compulsory than heterosexuality or ability, but disabled children are not always implicated in this system of compulsory aging: a system so-entwined with others. An able-bodied child *must* grow up, *must* marry, *must* have a job, and *must* reproduce, and the cycle continues. In this system, a disabled child *must* be reliant, *must* be cared-for, *cannot* work, and *should be* cured, eliminated. For the able-bodied child, the *child* label is not an identifier that can be clung to in ways other descriptors and categorizations are, growing up and old is compulsory. Yet, images, more than the written word and more than film, stabilize the child. Though some news coverage revisited the story of Jennifer Keelan at the 25-year anniversary of the ADA, her place in the movement will always be that of the child in this photograph.

More so than childhood, disability as an identity has become politicized in the United States, a useful tool for lobbying for change, as demonstrated by the eventual passage of the Americans with Disability Act, enabled by the actions of ADAPT and other disability rights organizations. I argue, too, that disability is unstable, given it is an experience relative to environment and attitude, subject to change throughout the lifespan. Like childhood, disability is a social position often denied autonomy, agency, and productivity. Lennard Davis argues that

“disability studies is fundamentally based, among other things, on the idea that people with disabilities should have autonomy over their own lives...while that appeal to autonomous identity may be tempered by a recognition that we are all interdependent, that the model of the free and autonomous individual is a bit of a myth, and that appeals to normality are hegemonic, autonomy over one’s body is still a valuable idea.”<sup>166</sup> Keelan’s actions as a disabled protestor, regardless of her age, in propelling her body up those steps reclaim a disabled autonomy, underscored by the twisted, queer positioning of her body. Media coverage of the images of Keelan provide a concrete example of what Alison Kafer calls, “a narrative of overcoming,” especially given the caption “difficult climb,” in which “disability is presented as something to be overcome through personal achievement and dedication.”<sup>167</sup> Tobin Siebers wrote of the protest:

Some activists worried that the coverage pictured the image most people with disabilities want to avoid – that they are pitiable, weak, and childlike...predictably, in fact, the cameras picked out exhausted, eight-year-old Jennifer Keelan for special attention, twisting the emphasis from the concerns of adults to those of children and suggesting that ADAPT was taking advantage of children for its cause.<sup>168</sup>

Yet, the images of Keelan also have the potential to resist this narrative, given the context of the call for the passage of the ADA and greater accessibility in society. Siebers continues, “At the end of the day, however, the major networks stressed the important message that people with disabilities were demanding their civil rights.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Lennard Davis, *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2013), 99.

<sup>167</sup> Kafer, 89.

<sup>168</sup> Tobin Siebers, “Disability as Masquerade,” *Literature and Medicine* 23.1 (2004): 1-22, 9.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

If both ageism and ableism suggest that disabled people and children are not full and productive members of our society, the content and context of these images of Keelan powerfully disrupt this suggestion. Not only is she a determined protestor, as seen in the photos and described in the news coverage, but Keelan is also fighting for the passage of the ADA, legislation that would support the efforts of disabled people to become productive and integrated members of society. Because of this context, Keelan's photographs reveal that both ageism and ableism are structured by a compulsory performance of white capitalist and citizenship norms.

The act of protesting is a right guaranteed in the United States, a form of participating as a citizen. Perhaps protesting for the supports and accommodations necessary to work and engage in society is the greatest act of capitalist citizenship possible. Whether such acts of capitalist citizenship are *good* is questionable, but at least in this case, the actions of disabled protestors facilitated the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, legislation that would enable generations of disabled people to live materially better lives.

As scholars, it's tempting to critique notions of agency, citizenship, and productivity – and certainly, there have been many disability and crip studies scholars who have done so, as I briefly do here. I would not argue that it is wrong to delve into the more problematic implications of the work that concepts of agency, citizenship, and productivity perform in our culture; in fact, I believe it is necessary. And yet, when on the material level so many disabled people (and other marginalized people) are barred from participation in employment, civic life, and autonomous decision-making, scholars who critique desires for agency, full participation, and inclusion need to do so in ways that acknowledge the privilege at play. While I get the desire to throw out capitalism, to reject the confines of citizenship – people like me are among the ones who don't survive the revolution.

It is *easy* for people who receive the full benefits of capitalist citizenship, for those who never (or rarely) have their agency questioned to engage in discussions about the theoretical implications of certain words or systems. It is not easy for me, because when I participate in civic life, my right to do so is constantly questioned. And yet, who am I, as someone privileged enough to have legal status as a citizen, privileged enough to be well-educated, privileged enough to have never had the courts claim someone else should make decisions on my behalf...who am I to critique the desire for the benefits of citizenship, among them safer participation in a capitalist economy, by someone who does not have them? And further, how am I to reconcile my own desire to receive more fully the benefits of citizenship with my concern about the damage systems of imperialism, nationalism, and capitalism do in our world? I think these are the questions that I never get to answer – that the longer I walk down the path on this journey, I will only ever find myself closing half the distance each time.

Someone commented to me the other day, a quip about moving to Canada if Donald Trump won re-election, and maybe I was just in a bad mood, but I snapped back, “Canada doesn’t take people like me.” I think I hurt their feelings and made them a little uncomfortable. But, I guess the reality of it is, I’m going to wrestle internally with “citizenship” because as long as there are some places that don’t want people like me (or people of any number of marginalized identities), I’ll always be grateful for the place where, even if it doesn’t want me, I have a legal right to be. And is that problematic as hell? Sure. But the gratitude remains alongside the acknowledgement of the privilege of even being grateful in the first place. Of course, the concept of a ‘place’ abstractly wanting or not wanting someone is also a bit odd, and I’m sure scholars of place and space would have plenty to say about it, but as I am neither, I’ll just let it be here a strange turn of phrase.

To speak more plainly, I'm grateful that the Americans with Disabilities Act enshrines my civil rights into law and grateful for the actions of both protestors and lobbyists in ensuring its passage. Yet, at the same time, I also remain concerned about the ways the act reinforces structures of citizenship and capitalism that, in protecting my rights, cut others out of what should be theirs. After all, what good is the right to integrated, competitive employment if one is not capable or desirous of conventional productivity? What good is it if one is not granted the legal right to exist in this country, let alone the legal right to work? What good are integrated classrooms, if students are still taught inaccurate, colonialist history, if trans kids can't play sports or use bathrooms?

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have suggested that images of Jennifer Keelan from the 'crawl up' protest functioned discursively to draw attention to the problems faced by disabled people in the US, particularly because they queered normative enthymemes connecting disability and childhood to weakness, laziness, and lack of agency. Specifically, Keelan's disability and childhood, as photographed and described in the media coverage, inscribed a need for disabled futurity, challenging our ideas about who can and should participate in democratic social processes.

There have been and continue to be attempts to create narratives of agentic disabled childhood or even agentic disabled adulthood, that do not rely on white capitalist norms of citizenship, but these norms are the foundation of a system that is larger than any one human or even any one movement. I watch as disabled advocates create protests that require no physical embodiment at a protest location, only to see these social media protests (some of which have been



very effective) dismissed as Slacktivism. I think of the ways in which autistic advocates were able to provoke changes to the Combating Autism Act through Twitter-based advocacy, or the ways in which disabled writers were able to push Kamala Harris on her mental health platform, advocacy which some claim was the final straw for her presidential campaign. Capitalist norms structure what we consider to be work and what we consider to be slacking; and under these structures, new disabled norms of protesting cannot escape being categorized in the ‘slack’ category.

Disabled movements have also been, problematically, structured by systems of citizenship. In July 2019, an ADAPT organizer and, at the time, president of the National Council on Independent Living, Bruce Darling made a horrible statement, claiming that Democrats did not care as much about people with disabilities as they cared about immigrants. Ignoring, of course, that there are disabled immigrants, Darling’s statement reinforced an oppression Olympics wherein the needs of various marginalized segments of the populations are positioned in opposition to each other, rather than acknowledging that our liberation is bound together. Darling did eventually issue a statement apologizing.

Agency may itself be bound within capitalistic norms of productivity, but is nevertheless useful to consider while we are yet held in capitalism’s grasp. Is a protest that changes no minds and no systems unproductive? Perhaps – I think there are many who would argue that such a protest is unproductive. But nevertheless, I’d still argue that such an unproductive protest demonstrates agency. Furthermore, the crawl up protest *did* change minds and systems, which while it may have reinforced the connections between capitalism, productivity, and agency also had a materially positive impact on people’s lives.

#### 4.0 Disability, Death, and Resistance: The 2017 ADAPT Die-In

While the two previous chapters have been analyses of events that happened before I was born, for this chapter, I have memories of my own. On June 22, 2017, I woke up, had my coffee, and went to the doctor's office for my yearly check-up. On my way home, I stopped by the mall to buy myself a new pair of dress shoes, as I'd worn my old pair all the way through. By the time I got home and settled in to do my reading for my bioethics class, my Twitter feed was full of tweets about a direct action outside of Mitch McConnell's office: a 'Die-In' organized by National ADAPT against the *American Health Care Act*. By the end of the day, the event was trending nationally on Twitter.

After ADAPT found out that the Senate was going to vote on a substantial budget cut to Medicaid, they organized a 'die in' protest that included about 60 protestors, most of whom had disabilities. The protest began outside of Mitch McConnell's office in D.C. at about 11 am EST on June 22, 2017. The activists, many of them getting out of their wheelchairs, laid on the floor outside in the hallway and inside in McConnell's office to symbolize dying. Eventually, members of the Capitol Police told them to get up and leave or be arrested. By about 12:30 pm, the police were handcuffing protestors, loading them into transport vehicles, and charging them with blocking a public space. The protest attracted the attention of numerous photojournalists, whose photos were disseminated both on social media and, later, in news stories about the event.

Later that afternoon, around 5 pm or so, I packed up and headed to Pittsburgh's Carnegie Science Center, where I had helped to organize and run a sensory-friendly event for Autistic adults. My social media feeds were filled with photographs of the arrests – it was impossible for me to fully focus on the Science Center event, as I was too preoccupied. The event went late into the

evening, and I went home and crashed hard into bed. The next morning, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, I went downtown to participate in a 24-hour ‘protect our healthcare’ protest outside of Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey’s Grant Street office. I may not have been able to be in D.C., but direct action runs in my veins.

An analysis of press photography of ADAPT’s June 22, 2017 Die In protest outside of Mitch McConnell’s D.C. office is a useful addition to my study because its inclusion allows me to demonstrate the ways in which protest coverage has changed from past to present. This is especially relevant because ADAPT organized both the ‘crawl up’ protest analyzed in the previous chapter and the ‘die in’ protest that I examine in this chapter, allowing me to describe ways in which ADAPT has or has not changed tactics in the past nearly 30 years.

To collect photographs of the protests, I used several methods. Using databases like google news archives and newspapers.com, I searched for newspaper coverage of the Die In for the date of the protest (6/22/17) and the day following. The search results included national news coverage of the events and one firsthand account from a protestor in Vox. Using internal search engines on Twitter and Facebook, I searched relevant hashtags and search terms for the dates 6/22/17-6/23/17 to find social media posts. The common hashtags were: #SaveMedicaid, #ADAPTandResist and #NoCutsNoCaps. #ADAPTandResist is a very common hashtag used for all of ADAPT’s actions, while the other two were more specific to this particular protest. I then categorized the photographs into those taken by photojournalists, by protestors, and by other observers.

In this chapter, I argue that the technological and cultural changes in how and where people get their news has resulted in more sensationalized photography of disabled protestors than in the past two protests analyzed in previous chapters. At the same time, disabled protestors have adapted, using new technology to more widely broadcast their demands. I first discuss the

changing role of photojournalists and protest journalism in the hyper-visual world of social media and the ways in which this differed from their roles in the 80s and 90s. I continue to think about images in much the same ways as in previous chapters. Like the DPN and ‘crawl up’ protests, the die-in is very clearly an image event, a protest incident that ADAPT meant to be photographed by the press. Yet, the technological context of this image event is vastly different from the previous ones: newspapers are now very online (some even without print editions at all!) and access to social media means that reporters, protestors, allies, and detractors can all disseminate images.

Second, I examine the use of social media by protestors and their allies. Here, I am somewhat limited by method. I imagine that Instagram, as a photo dissemination platform, would have been used by protestors, but the search functions on the app do not allow me to narrow by date, making it functionally impossible for me to find photographs related to the event on Instagram. That said, Instagram does not allow as widespread of dissemination as Twitter, because at the time, it lacked the equivalent of a ‘retweet’ (a function that the Instagram app of 2020 can somewhat replicate via shares in ‘stories’). As a result, I focus on Facebook and Twitter usage.

Finally, I look at the ways in which disabled protestors capitalized on the enthymematic connections between death and disability in our culture to communicate their demands. The ‘die in’ image event played into the enthymemes in our culture, which intertwine disability and death. I consider whether these images effectively functioned as argumentative fragments that could disrupt these enthymemes. Much like the photos of Keelan from the ‘crawl up,’ the photos from the die-in play into enthymemes of disability (childhood and death, respectively) and yet also function to challenge our pre-conceived notions that structure the enthymematic connections.

#### 4.1 Hyper-visual Audiences and New Roles for Photojournalists

The previous protests that I examined, DPN and the Capitol Crawl, both occurred before the emergence of so-called “Web 2.0” and its associated “social media,” which allows individual users to rapidly disseminate images in a way that was not possible at earlier moments. Both photojournalists and protest participants took photographs during DPN and the Capitol Crawl, and these photographs were disseminated via print newspapers or by being printed and shared among protestors. While the digital camera existed at these earlier moments, I found nothing to indicate widespread electronic dissemination of these previous images, likely because access to technology like email was still somewhat limited and because cell phones with built-in cameras did not yet exist. By contrast, the 2017 Die-In was organized in an era where access to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms was common, photographs could be taken and posted directly from smartphones, and where many people read newspapers online rather than in print.

The first cell phone with a built-in camera, the SCH-V200, was manufactured by Samsung in 2000 and could store up to 20 pictures but had to be connected to a computer to retrieve the photos.<sup>170</sup> Later that same year, Sharp released the J-SH04 which could both take photos and send them electronically.<sup>171</sup> By 2003, camera phones were widespread in the United States.<sup>172</sup> Facebook was founded in 2004 and introduced the ability to post photos from a computer web browser in 2005, when the site was still limited to users with a college email address. In 2006, the site would open up to users 13+ with a valid email address and the “share” button was added. Twitter was founded in 2006 with a 140-character limit per Tweet, primarily to allow users to post via SMS

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<sup>170</sup> <https://www.digitaltrends.com/mobile/camera-phone-history/>

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

(which would be increased to 280 in 2017, when the prevalence of smartphones decreased reliance on texting to Tweet).<sup>173</sup> Unlike Facebook, where “friending” required a mutual connection, Twitter’s “following” did not require both users to follow each other in order to see someone’s tweets. In 2007, Twitter introduced the hashtag, another feature setting it apart from Facebook. That same year, Facebook released its mobile site: m.facebook.com.<sup>174</sup> Twitter’s retweet function was introduced in 2009 and the ability to view photos linked from other sites (like Flickr) without leaving the Twitter website was added in 2010. In 2010, Facebook released its original app, as did Twitter.<sup>175</sup> Facebook added the ability to post photos directly from a phone in 2011.<sup>176</sup> In the same year, Twitter enabled the direct posting of photographs on Twitter from webpage or from the app.<sup>177</sup>

While these developments allowed everyday people to post and disseminate images, they also impacted photojournalism itself. By the time the Die In protest was occurring, the role of photojournalists shifted from taking pictures primarily for print distribution to also taking photographs for digital distribution via online articles, Facebook, and Twitter. In this section, I argue that the changing role of photojournalists resulted in a more rapid distribution of images, which existed in competition with images disseminated by protestors, allies, and opponents. I examine this new role and the changing contexts of protest imagery through the lens of *metis*, *tuche*, and *kairos*, concepts that I introduced at the beginning of the dissertation and return to now in this final chapter.

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<sup>173</sup> José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>174</sup> <https://mashable.com/2013/08/01/facebook-mobile-evolution/>

<sup>175</sup> <https://mashable.com/2013/08/01/facebook-mobile-evolution/>; <https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/09/twitter-acquires-atebits-maker-of-tweetie/>

<sup>176</sup> <https://mashable.com/2013/08/01/facebook-mobile-evolution/>

<sup>177</sup> <https://mashable.com/2011/08/09/twitter-photo-sharing-all/>

While *metis*, cunning adaption or rhetorical cleverness, has been a factor throughout all of these disability protests, the immediacy of social media makes *metis* an even more necessary characteristic of successful protests. Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant define *metis* as:

A type of intelligence and thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills and experience acquired over the years. It applies to situations which are shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic.<sup>178</sup>

Because of social media's participatory nature, it is always 'shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous.' The quickness of image dissemination and the rapid ability of observers to respond to the shared picture means that protestors must quickly adapt as situations change. Similarly, photojournalists must simultaneously be responsive to what's happening in the moment, while also rapidly sharing what has already been documented. Anastasia Veneti notes some of the difficulties of protest photojournalism: "In the context of protests and demonstrations, photography can be tricky, ambivalent and highly conflictual. As various photojournalists argue, the photographing of protests is a very idiosyncratic, dynamic and inherently political process that can become very personal and, as such, it is likely to create tensions between one's own beliefs and professional guidelines."<sup>179</sup> Here, it is evident that the taking of a photograph of a protest also contains elements of *metis*: tricky, ambivalent, conflictual.

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<sup>178</sup> Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (New York: Harvester Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>179</sup> Anastasia Veneti, Aesthetics of protest: an examination of the photojournalistic approach to protest imagery, *Visual Communication* 2017 Vol. 16(3) 279–298, qt. 282.

Thus, protest photojournalism in the context of social media is characterized by *metis* three-fold: the trickery of the protestors that initially draws observers, the ambivalence and conflictual nature of capturing moments on camera, and the shifting, disconcerting nature of social media. For the Die-In protest in particular, photographs and video content were included in nearly every article published online, but journalists also were live-tweeting photographs and descriptions of events on Twitter as they were happening. This allowed those who were not physically present at the event to see what was happening in real time and interact with the tweets. To create an image event that works in person, on a live updated social platform, in asynchronous digital articles, and in print is no easy task.

Reporters who were onsite and tweeting included Olivia Messer, Andrew Desiderio, Rebecca Perry, Kristin Wilson, Vaughn Hillyard, and Mariam Khan. There likely were other reporters and news outlets present, but the limitations of data collection on Twitter mean that I can't find every tweet by a reporter covering the event.

**Table 1 Reporters and News Organizations that Published Online Articles of the Event**

<b>Outlet</b>	<b>Reporter</b>	<b>Photojournalist</b>	<b>Link</b>
Washing ton Post	Perry Stein	Astrid Riecken	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/disability-advocates-arrested-during-health-care-protest-at-mcconnells-office/2017/06/22/f5dd9992-576f-11e7-ba90-f5875b7d1876_story.html">https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/disability-advocates-arrested-during-health-care-protest-at-mcconnells-office/2017/06/22/f5dd9992-576f-11e7-ba90-f5875b7d1876_story.html</a>
CNN	Daniella Diaz and Pete Grieve	n/a	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/22/politics/protests-mitch-mcconnell-office-health-care-bill/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/22/politics/protests-mitch-mcconnell-office-health-care-bill/index.html</a>
CBS News	Blair Guild	n/a	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/health-care-bill-protesters-stage-die-in-outside-mcconnells-office/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/health-care-bill-protesters-stage-die-in-outside-mcconnells-office/</a>



The Hill	Josh Delk	Embedded tweets w/ images	<a href="https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/338985-police-force-protesters-staging-die-in-over-obamacare-repeal-from">https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/338985-police-force-protesters-staging-die-in-over-obamacare-repeal-from</a>
Time	Katie Reilly	Jacquelyn Martin (AP)	<a href="https://time.com/4831386/disability-advocate-protest-gop-health-care-bill/">https://time.com/4831386/disability-advocate-protest-gop-health-care-bill/</a>
Vox	Jeff Stein	Mark Wilson (Getty), Embedded tweets w/ images	<a href="https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/22/15855424/disability-protest-medicare-mcconnell">https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/22/15855424/disability-protest-medicare-mcconnell</a>
Huffington Post	Ryan Grenoble	Saul Loeb (Getty), Mark Wilson (Getty), Bloomberg (Getty), Kevin Lamarque (Reuters), Embedded tweets w/ images	<a href="https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mitch-mcconnell-health-care-protest_n_594be412e4b0a3a837bdf1b7">https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mitch-mcconnell-health-care-protest_n_594be412e4b0a3a837bdf1b7</a>
Business Insider	Madeleine Sheehan Perkins	Jacquelyn Martin (AP), Kevin Lamarque (Reuters),	<a href="https://www.businessinsider.com/disabled-people-die-in-protest-mitch-mcconnell-senate-republican-gop-health-care-bill-2017-6">https://www.businessinsider.com/disabled-people-die-in-protest-mitch-mcconnell-senate-republican-gop-health-care-bill-2017-6</a>
Washington Examiner	Leah DePiero, Jack O'Brien	Jacquelyn Martin (AP), Embedded tweets w/ images	<a href="https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/wheelchair-bound-protesters-removed-from-protest-outside-mitch-mcconnells-office">https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/wheelchair-bound-protesters-removed-from-protest-outside-mitch-mcconnells-office</a>
Salon	Sophia Tesfaye	Jacquelyn Martin (AP)	<a href="https://www.salon.com/2017/06/22/police-drag-away-protesters-in-wheelchairs-from-mitch-mcconnells-office/">https://www.salon.com/2017/06/22/police-drag-away-protesters-in-wheelchairs-from-mitch-mcconnells-office/</a>
The Nation	Zoë Carpenter	Not listed	<a href="https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/if-we-lose-our-health-care-we-will-begin-to-die/">https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/if-we-lose-our-health-care-we-will-begin-to-die/</a>
Pacific Standard	David M. Perry	Chip Somodevilla (Getty)	<a href="https://psmag.com/social-justice/medicaid-is-worth-dying-for">https://psmag.com/social-justice/medicaid-is-worth-dying-for</a>
Capital Gazette	Perry Stein	N/A	<a href="https://www.capitalgazette.com/ct-disability-advocates-arrested-at-protest-20170622-story.html">https://www.capitalgazette.com/ct-disability-advocates-arrested-at-protest-20170622-story.html</a>
USA Today	Jessica Estepa	Embedded tweets w/ images	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/06/22/protesters-have-sit-mitch-mcconnells-office/419748001/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/06/22/protesters-have-sit-mitch-mcconnells-office/419748001/</a>
Rolling Stone	S.E. Smith	n/a	<a href="https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/why-disability-rights-activists-stormed-mitch-mcconnells-office-196423/">https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/why-disability-rights-activists-stormed-mitch-mcconnells-office-196423/</a>

Yahoo	Taylor Rogers	n/a	<a href="https://news.yahoo.com/1379865-175316717.html">https://news.yahoo.com/1379865-175316717.html</a>
Fox	CNN Wire	n/a	<a href="https://www.fox17online.com/2017/06/22/disability-advocates-protest-outside-mcconnells-office-over-health-care-bill/">https://www.fox17online.com/2017/06/22/disability-advocates-protest-outside-mcconnells-office-over-health-care-bill/</a>

*As you can see, there were 6 articles that contained no photographs. Some of these contained videos.*

It has been difficult to identify who included coverage of the event in their print newspaper, as little comes up for key word searches in the date range in places where print newspapers have been archived, so I am focused primarily on circulation on social media and in online coverage. This focus also reflects the changing nature of where people get their news. Eric Alterman writes:

“Taking its [print newspapers’] place, of course, is the Internet, which is about to pass newspapers as a source of political news for American readers. For young people, and for the most politically engaged, it has already done so. As early as May 2004, newspapers had become the least preferred sources for news among younger people...It is a point of ironic injustice, perhaps, that when a reader surfs the Web in search of political news he frequently ends up at a site that is merely aggregating journalistic work that originated in a newspaper, but that fact is not likely to save any newspaper jobs or increase papers’ stock valuation.”<sup>180</sup>

The majority of the news articles about the protest featured either embedded tweets with photos from reporters (not necessarily reporters for that outlet) who were onsite at the protest or

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<sup>180</sup> Eric Alterman, “Out of Print: The death and Life of the American Newspaper,” In *Will the Last Reporter Please turn Out The Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It*, Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard (eds.), 2011, 3-17, qt. 5.

photos from AP or Getty photographers, which meant that many of the same photographs were circulated throughout different papers. Digital articles made it easier for me to find out who the photographers were, a task that had been impossible for most of the photographs in previous chapters.

Another key difference from the DPN and Capitol Crawl protests is that fewer photographs ended up in circulation in articles. While DPN and Capitol Crawl coverage often featured many *similar* photographs from paper to paper, the Die-In coverage recycled pictures by the same photographers over and over. This is likely due, in part, to newspapers frankly having fewer financial resources because of the emerging role of private equity in the media market. Louise Grayson writes that, “The professional editorial photographer is facing challenges in these areas today that include budget restrictions, limited access to public spaces, meetings, news events and tight deadlines. Concurrently, the digital environment demands immediate images to be produced constantly.”<sup>181</sup> Eric Alterman notes this tradeoff: “we are about to enter a fractured, chaotic world of news, characterized by a superior community conversation but a decidedly diminished level of first-rate journalism.”<sup>182</sup> Paul Starr echoes this observation, writing that: “while the new digital environment is more open to “citizen journalism” and the free expression of opinions, it is also more open to bias, and to journalism for hire.”<sup>183</sup> Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson similarly explain that:

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<sup>181</sup> CITIZEN PHOTOJOURNALISM: How photographic practices of amateur photographers affect narrative functions of editorial photographs, Louise Grayson, *Journalism Practice*, 2015 Vol. 9, No. 4, 568–579, qt 572 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1030142>

<sup>182</sup> Alterman, 15.

<sup>183</sup> Paul Starr, “Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers (Hello to a New Era of Corruption): Why American Politics and Society Are About to be Changed for the Worse,” In *Will the Last Reporter Please turn Out The Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It*, Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard (eds.), 2011, 18-37, qt. 21.

In the age of the Internet, everyone from individual citizens to political operatives can gather information, investigate the powerful, and provide analysis. Even if news organizations were to vanish en masse, information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge would not disappear. But something else would be lost, and we would be reminded that there is a need not just for news but for newsrooms. Something is gained when reporting, analysis, and investigation are pursued collaboratively by stable organizations that can facilitate regular reporting by experienced journalists, support them with money, logistics, and legal services, and present their work to a large public. Institutional authority or weight often guarantees that the work of newsrooms won't easily be ignored.<sup>184</sup>

Therefore, while the role of the photojournalist remains essentially the same – to attempt to capture the shifting, conflictual, and ambiguous (metic) nature of protests – the mechanisms for doing so have changed because of the role of social media and the declining resources of newspapers. Veneti continues to describe the precise role of photojournalists in two parts: to document the concrete happenings of the protest, but also to capture the vibe and spirit of the event: “The difficulty lies in the fact that they are no longer aiming for pictures that merely describe the event, but instead they are seeking to take captivating photos moving beyond the use of standard photo- journalistic techniques that serve to embody the narrative story of the protest.”<sup>185</sup> I view this second type of photograph through the lens of what Lilie Chouliarakl and Tijana Stolic describe as the ‘visual enactment of vulnerability.’” In their analysis of photojournalism of the 2015

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<sup>184</sup> Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson, “The Reconstruction of American Journalism,” In *Will the Last Reporter Please turn Out The Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It*, Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard (eds.), 2011, 55-90, qt. 59.

<sup>185</sup> Veneti, 288.

so-called migrant crisis in Europe, Chouliarakl and Stolic write: “At the heart of this potential for recognition inherent in the photographic encounter lies the visual enactment of vulnerability. For, even though it is always a matter of embodied precarity, vulnerability should not be approached as a fixed pre-existing condition but as, importantly, also a performative practice that is iteratively enacted through the meaning-making choices of photography.”<sup>186</sup>

While photos of the first type, documenting the timeline of what happened, were tweeted by photographers (and then frequently embedded as tweets in articles), photographs of the second type were what were featured in digital articles. For protestors, this second type of photograph presented an opportunity for metis, for a clever trickery that would allow the protestors some control over the captured image, which I discuss further in the next section. From the photographer’s perspective, these captivating, spirit-motivated photographs were the moments to attempt to visually capture the vulnerability of the protestors, and in so doing, capture not the *narrative* of why they protest, but the *emotion* of why they protest. Catherine Corrigan-Brown and Rima Wilkes contrast the ways in which protestors can be portrayed in photographs, either as rational actors or as emotive subjects: “From the perspective of news values, the most sensational images are those that display violence or emotion”<sup>187</sup> and “One core element of appearing as a legitimate actor is to be shown as rational and peaceful, although this clearly leads to less dramatic and visually interesting photographs with lower news values.”<sup>188</sup> Thus, the dilemma: to stage a

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<sup>186</sup> Lilie Chouliarakl and Tijana Stolić, Photojournalism as political encounter: western news photography in the 2015 migration ‘crisis’, *Visual Communication* 2019 Vol. 18(3) 311–331, qt. 315.

<sup>187</sup> Catherine Corrigan-Brown and Rima Wilkes, “Picturing Protest: The Visual Framing of Collective Action by First Nations in Canada,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 56(2) 223–243, 2012, qt. 231.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 235.

dramatic and emotive protest incident which could result in engaging, viral imagery but decrease one's legitimacy or to focus on legitimacy while decreasing exposure.

And for people with disabilities, the dilemma is even greater as affect and emotion hold a different history in disability studies than in other corners of the academic world. Elizabeth J. Donaldson and Catherine Prendergast write:

“In psychiatry and in culture at large, emotion is monitored, measured, and regulated. In some cases, emotion is elicited; in others, suppressed. The lack of emotion is pathologized: the "flattened affect" of people diagnosed with schizophrenia is treated as a disabling symptom by psychiatrists. And the presence of emotion is pathologized: sustained feelings of sadness prompt consumers to seek medical and pharmaceutical interventions, while sustained feelings of elation might lead consumers to shun them.”<sup>189</sup>

As disabled people, we are either composed of too much emotion or too little, never able to fully be seen as rational actor or as justly angry. And yet, as Donaldson and Prendergast go on to write, “There is a certain power in transgression; abject bodies and abject emotions can reveal the fault lines of foundational concepts of what the body should be or should do.”<sup>190</sup> Here is an opportunity to think again about the ways in which focusing solely on the sense of sight is limiting. As Shannon Walters writes, “Attending to the sense of touch is another way of valuing rhetoricity and rhetoricability of people with psychological disabilities...[who] use touch to communicate with others and to convey a sense of felt *logos* in their rhetorical productions. These communications operate beyond traditional understandings of logic, reason or rationality, forming

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<sup>189</sup> Elizabeth J. Donaldson and Catherine Prendergast, Introduction: disability and emotion: "there's no crying in disability studies!" *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* (Vol. 5, Issue 2), 2011, 1.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

identifications based on mutual ways of feeling and experiencing relationships and the world.”<sup>191</sup> If we extend the sensations possibly triggered by viewing a photograph beyond the visual into the realm of touch, a new basis for a disabled, emotive rationality is created. As I have argued previously, the inherent connection between *touch* and *metis* is one of the bases for understanding how *phastasia* can be inspired without physical sight.

On one hand, photographs which capture vibe and spirit might be criticized for their shock value or for giving in to the sensationalism that is emblematic of current media practices, and yet, on the other hand, these photographs have the potential to inspire an emotional response, normative or non-normative in nature. (And here, even as I use this metaphor of one hand and the other hand, I think of one of my best friends, who has no arms, and therefore no hands. Disability challenges our language, or language challenges the ways in which we conceptualize disability. Perhaps ekphrasis allows an armless man to have metaphorical hands, much like it can ‘bring before the eyes’ without necessitating vision.) As Teresa E. Weikmann and Thomas E. Powell note in their examination of war photography: “Scholarly justification for the shock value of photojournalism can be found in visual framing effects research showing that emotional responses to graphic images can mobilize citizens to political action.”<sup>192</sup>

Thus, this second kind of protest photojournalism is necessary for the protestors to achieve their stated goal. Amy Lyford and Carol Payne write, “Like other forms of commodity, these images—such as the photographs that fill newspapers, magazines, and television screens—

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<sup>191</sup> Shannon Walters, *Rhetorical Touch: Disability, Identification, Haptics*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2014, 87.

<sup>192</sup> Terea E. Weikmann, Thomas E. Powell, The Distant Sufferer: Measuring Spectatorship of Photojournalism, *International Journal of Communication* 13(2019), 2899–2920, qt. 2900.

collectively form dominant cultural meanings of particular events or experiences for public consumption. While many of us may acknowledge that photographs are not purely objective, we also need to understand more specifically how particular image forms actively shape not only personal or collective memory, but also public policy.”<sup>193</sup> I am concerned, therefore, with how these photographs that captured an image event inspire *phantasia*, with how the ekphrastic nature of the article context then inspires enthymematic interruption, and then with how those argumentative fragments are deployed to manufacture political change.

One genre of photograph, in particular, tends to be highlighted in news articles: the moments in which disabled protestors are arrested. The 6 articles that featured standalone photographs, rather than embedded tweets, all highlighted pictures of wheelchair users being arrested. One of them, in *Business Insider*, featured a play-by-play series of photos of the protest, which documented what happened, in order. This primarily fell into the first category of protest photojournalism described above, though a few of the photographs demonstrate some of the affective power of the more emotion-laden photos mentioned above. One, for example, taken from above by Jacquelyn Martin of the Associated Press, featured a man lifted from the floor by 5 officers in uniform, while a man in a suit walked by, turned away.

One photograph, taken by Jacquelyn Martin and featuring the arrest of Stephanie Woodward, appeared over and over again (*Time*, *Business Insider*, *The Washington Examiner*). Taken from a side angle, the photograph contains 3 police officers, only one of whom is fully in the photo, carrying off Stephanie Woodward, who is white and has blond curly hair. All we can

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<sup>193</sup> Amy Lyford & Carol Payne (2005) Photojournalism, Mass Media and the Politics of Spectacle, *Visual Resources*, 21:2, 119-129, qt. 122. DOI: 10.1080/01973760500074034



see of Stephanie is her outreached arm, her pink fingernails contrasting with the bright green safety vests worn by the officers, and her head, with pink glasses or sunglasses (it isn't possible to tell from the angle) perched atop her hair. Her face is contorted in what looks like pain, and she's looking sideways, making eye contact with the camera, and therefore the viewer. In the background, another officer observes, and behind him, are two women, dressed in business casual, who appear to be taking photographs or videos on their phones. This photograph, and others nearly indistinguishable from it, was the most commonly circulated on Twitter as well.

And the arrests of two particular protestors were documented by multiple photographers in almost every news story: Stephanie Woodward as noted above, and another unnamed woman whom I do not recognize and who is not named. Jacquelyn Martin also captured a picture of the second woman being arrested, which appeared in both *Salon* and *Business Insider*. Saul Loeb, with Getty Images, caught a shot of the arrest, which appeared in the *Huffington Post*, and Mark Wilson's (also for Getty Images) version of the same arrest was in *Vox*. Martin caught the shot from the woman's left and Loeb's and Wilson's were from her right. In each of these three pictures, other reporters and cameras are very visible. In fact, in the direct center of Wilson's shot is another reporter capturing a picture from the other side of the arrest. All three photos also feature the white woman, with very short gray hair, grimacing, and show that she is wearing a green t-shirt and what appears to be rainbow cheetah print sweat pants (side note: Where can I buy a pair?). She has a navy fannypack hanging from her neck and in Loeb's and Martin's shots, her hand carrying a red baseball cap is visible. In Wilson's and Loeb's photos, it is evident that an officer is holding her up entirely off the ground by each one of her arms and another officer holds both feet up in the air. Her arms are wrenched uncomfortably out of place, pulling her shirt up to reveal her midsection. Wilson's photo is closer in than Loeb's, whose picture shows more of the surrounding crowd.

Martin's photo is closer still, showing only the two officers holding her arms and a few members of the media closer into the shot. The officers are all wearing white gloves. In the *Salon* version of Martin's photo, the top of the photograph is cut off, removing the officers' heads, any heads of the media, and the top of protestor's head (including her eyes) out of the frame.

All of these photographs are eye-catching and draw the audience in to look, and then read, further. They capture the vibe of the arrests and certainly have the strong potential to encourage an emotional response from the viewer. It is not, however, immediately clear from the photos themselves that these protestors have disabilities: there are no context clues, like wheelchairs, in these photographs that are showcased in the articles, though later in the articles or in embedded tweets, other photos showing wheelchairs are included. Instead, the captions or article titles provide the needed immediate context. For example, the article in *Salon* is titled "People draw away protesters in wheelchairs from Mitch McConnell's office," with the title in large letters beneath the photo. Similarly, *Vox*'s title is above the photograph: "No cuts to Medicaid!': protesters in wheelchairs arrested after release of health care bill."

As these images suggest, the role of photojournalists, with regard to protests, has shifted in the era of social media: they document and share in the moment, capture photographs that can later be used to draw readers into a digital article, and ultimately, these articles may consist primarily of the embedded tweets containing photographs by journalists at the scene. All of this is certainly a departure from trends noted in my two previous chapters.

## 4.2 Social Media and Image Events

In this section, I'll discuss the ways in which these photographs demonstrate the *metis* employed by the protestors in their construction of this image event, while also considering the role that social media played in allowing protestors to share their own narratives. I also include Stephanie Woodward's first-person essay, published in *Vox*, in my analysis in this section. The Die-In was certainly a protest event intended by the protestors to be photographed, making it clearly fit into the *image event* category. "The die-in — where protestors physically disrupt a space by laying down their bodies to simulate corpses — represented the harm that the bill would do to so many disabled people," wrote Woodward in her first-person account.<sup>194</sup> And it worked: there were so many press photographers at the scene that it was nearly impossible for photographers to get a picture that didn't have numerous other photographers in it.

While a 'Die-In' was not a new idea, it was still a rhetorically clever way to show the impact of the healthcare legislation that included cuts to Medicaid totaling approximately \$800 billion. Jay Dolmage describes the connection between *metis* and disability: *metis* literally comes from the idea of physically curved, crippled or articulated and so is etymologically connected to a difference in embodiment.<sup>195</sup> Disabled rhetors, then, can take advantage of their position of abjection to reclaim a platform through *metic* trickery, and a Die-In is a clear example of this behavior. *Metis* also relies on *tuche* (happenstance) and *Kairos* (opportune moments). While the Die In is a clever rhetorical move, the most circulated photographs relied on the actions of non-protestors: the arresting cops and the photojournalists, demonstrating why the right place/right

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<sup>194</sup> <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2017/6/27/15876442/healthcare-medicare-cuts-disability-protests>

<sup>195</sup> Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (Syracuse University Press, 2014).

time dynamic is something that the protestors, the image event stagers, can't fully control. After all, as Woodward noted, "When I woke up on Thursday morning, I didn't expect a picture of me in handcuffs to wind up all over the internet."<sup>196</sup>

On the other hand, social media grants a platform to protestors that isn't as reliant on gatekeepers. Gatekeeping is not entirely absent: Social media message transmission is still somewhat reliant on people who have large followers to amplify the messages via retweets or shares and social media algorithms and preferential treatment for verified users perform a gatekeeping function. But posting something on social media is still substantially easier than scoring a media interview. Sebastian Valenzuela notes these two angles of social media use: "On one hand, social media seem to reduce the costs of collective action and facilitate the creation of critical mass, which enables citizens to more easily organize them-selves and voice their concerns publicly. On the other hand, there is the risk of furthering inequality if the population of social media users is skewed toward the technologically savvy and those with high human, social, and economic capital."<sup>197</sup> And social media platforms themselves can play a gatekeeping role: "Platforms such as Facebook play the gatekeeping role in two ways: as infrastructure providers that provide access to platforms on different levels, and through infrastructure mechanisms that use the platform features and capabilities to enable, control, and shape the behavior of users."<sup>198</sup>

As José Van Dijck notes, "Likability is not a virtue attributed consciously by a person to a thing or idea, but is the result of an algorithmic computation derived from instant clicks on the

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<sup>196</sup> <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2017/6/27/15876442/healthcare-medicaid-cuts-disability-protests>

<sup>197</sup> Sebastián Valenzuela, Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behavior: The Roles of Information, Opinion Expression, and Activism, *American Behavioral Scientist* 2013: 57(7) 920–942, qt. 936.

<sup>198</sup> Emad Khazraee and Alison N. Novak, Digitally Mediated Protest: Social Media Affordances for Collective Identity Construction, *Social Media + Society*, January-March 2018: 1–14, qt. 3.

Like button.”<sup>199</sup> Van Dijck goes on to describe the mechanisms by which social media platforms structure and control user behavior:

“Besides deploying algorithms, a platform’s coded architecture makes use of *protocols*. Protocols are formal descriptions of digital message formats complemented by rules regulating those messages in or between computing systems...protocols are technical sets of rules that gain their usability from how they are *programmed* and how they are *governed* or managed by their owners...Interfaces are commonly characterized by *defaults*: settings automatically assigned to channel user behavior in a certain way. Defaults are not just technical but also ideological maneuverings; if changing a default takes effort, users are more likely to conform to the site’s decision architecture.”<sup>200</sup>

Thus, while social media does make sharing information and perspectives more accessible to the average person, it, like traditional news media, is not without bias. Juan González and Joseph Torres note that both traditional news media and alt media, like radical and labor press, are dominated by white editors and writers, excluding the perspectives of Black and brown people.<sup>201</sup> As a result, news media of all types have “produced news accounts imbued with racial bias.”<sup>202</sup> González and Torres express both hope and reservations that the Internet might help level the playing field: “the new medium provides all Americans, including communities of color, the opportunity to create their own media presence, to return to a period of citizen journalism of our nation’s early years. But it is far from certain that people of color will share equally in those

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<sup>199</sup> Van Dijck, 13.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>201</sup> Juan González and Joseph Torres, “News for All: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media,” In *Will the Last Reporter Please turn Out The Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It*, Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard (eds.), 2011, 185-193.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

opportunities, or that the depictions of race in America will move substantially beyond repackaged stereotypes from prior eras.”<sup>203</sup> Algorithms, protocols, and defaults are all created by human beings and are thus subject to reproducing the same structural and personal biases as their human creators and as traditional news media. Nevertheless, social media’s low barrier to entry does have some advantages, particularly in broadening the number of photographers of an event that are not affiliated with traditional news media.

Social media is useful both for documenting a protest and also for turning people out to protest. Sebastian Valenzuela also writes, “these platforms enable otherwise disengaged users to join political and social causes... For various forms of protest behavior, such as where to go to attend a street demonstration, knowledge of mobilizing information is essential.”<sup>204</sup> Similarly, John T. Jost et al. attest: “For movement organizers, social media provides an efficient vehicle for the rapid transmission of information about planned events and political developments, thereby facilitating the organization of protest activity.”<sup>205</sup> And on the topic of social media usage during the protest itself, Emma S. Spiro and Andrés Monroy-Hernandez note: “While debate about the specific role of social media and networked technologies will continue, it is clear from recent events that platforms like Twitter will be used to exchange information, share stories, and interact with other participants during political protests.”<sup>206</sup> Some of those documenting the protests might be considered ‘citizen journalists,’ a category which pre-existed social media. As Nikki Usher

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 192-193.

<sup>204</sup> Valenzuela, 925.

<sup>205</sup> John T. Jost, Pablo Barberá, Richard Bonneau, Melanie Langer, Megan Metzger, Jonathan Nagler, Joanna Sterling, Joshua A. Tucker, How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Networks, *Advances in Political Psychology*, Vol. 39, Suppl. 1, 2018, qt. 86. doi: 10.1111/pops.12478

<sup>206</sup> Emma S. Spiro, Andrés Monroy-Hernández, 2016, Shifting Stakes: Understanding the Dynamic Roles of Individuals and Organizations in Social Media Protests, *PLoS ONE* 11(10): e0165387, qt. 2. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0165387

writes, “Citizen journalism has been around since the heyday of the popular press. And since its inception, professional journalism has been in a commercial relationship with citizen journalists. Citizen contributors who were at the right place at the right time have sold snapshots to newspapers for breaking news.”<sup>207</sup> Social media increases the likelihood that a citizen journalist’s work can be noticed and circulated by traditional news media, which Usher argues is a process news media should use to their advantage in making coverage timely and relevant.

Social media assists in turning people out to the right place, at the right time, while also becoming a vehicle for communication during the protest. And yet, social media also changes how the timing of the protest is experienced. Anne Kaun argues,

Crucial changes in temporality are particularly based on the decrease in circulation time of information with the help of social media towards real time and immediacy in which production and consumption are collapsed. Immediacy is here understood in terms of acceleration of circulation towards direct delivery. Similarly, real time captures access to media content without perceptible delay. This acceleration, however, often obscures the peculiar process of mediation and mediated meaning production. In that context, media technologies, in general, and social media, in particular, have certain properties that allow for particular content production. This is to say that digital immediacy encompasses an acceleration in production, distribution and consumption time, but does not preclude mediation and experiences beyond the immediate.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Nikki Usher, “Professional Journalists, Hands Off! Citizens Journalism As Civic Responsibility,” In *Will the Last Reporter Please turn Out The Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done To Fix It*, Robert W. McChesney and Victor Pickard (eds.), 2011, 264-276, qt. 265.

<sup>208</sup> Anne Kaun, ‘Our time to act has come’: desynchronization, social media time and protest movements, *Media, Culture & Society* 2017, Vol. 39(4) 469–486, qt. 471.

Thus, *Kairos* is not only the opportune moment for an action to occur and be documented in real life, but must also include the opportune moment for dissemination on social media.

Using hashtags like #ADAPTandResist, #NoCutsNoCaps, and #SaveMedicaid, protestors shared their own photographs via Twitter. Of the tweets with photographs shared by protestors, the most recirculated, by far, was tweeted by the Washington, D.C. chapter of ADAPT (@DCAdapt) and had 6.6k retweets, 533 quote tweets, 305 replies, and 12.9k likes. The tweet read: “Dawn Russell being loaded onto police bus for processing with her fist raised in POWER! #ADAPTandRESIST #SaveMedicaid #FreeOurPeople.” The picture shows two uniformed officers loading Dawn, a powerchair user who appears to be white with long hair wearing jeans and a t-shirt featuring an American flag and some illegible writing (due to distance and photograph quality), into a van using a wheelchair lift. One of the officers has a hand on Dawn’s arm. Dawn has raised her other fist into the air and is not looking at the camera, but above and to the right of the photographer. The other officer stands by, looking at something to the photographer’s left.

Dara Baldwin (@NJDC07) tweeted “@NationalADAPT Some are out of jail! Still waiting on others! #ADAPTandRESIST #SaveMedicaid” alongside a picture of a group of people, some standing and some using wheelchairs outside along a paved path next to what appears to be a parking lot. Dara’s tweet got 342 retweets, 26 quote tweets, 466 likes, and 25 replies.

Colleen Flanagan (@ColleenFlangan) tweeted, “They allow us to use bathroom but no accessible stall at Capitol Police HQ. Make us free so we can pee! #ADAPTandRESIST.” Colleen’s tweet also contained a photograph of a young-looking, white-appearing person with long, brown hair pulled back in a ponytail sitting in a powerchair. The person has a furrowed brow and is wearing glasses and a white sweater over a black t-shirt – one can make out the phrase “the future” on the t-shirt. And since I own a similar t-shirt with the same font on it, I know that it says



“The Future is Accessible,” but of course, many viewers would not have this context. The person is also wearing a grey skirt and holding a phone in a pink case.

Michael Phillips (@wholeexpanse) tweeted, “Hey, @marcorubio @SenateMajLdr @RandPaul Would you drag me out of your office if I stopped by? #ProtectOutCare” with a selfie. Michael is wearing a black hat with “NIRVANA” written on it, glasses, and a grey shirt with white polka dots on it. He is laying on a brightly patterned blanket. Michael has tattoos with lots of lettering, but they are not legible in the picture. His nails are painted green. Michael appears to be white and a very small human, with arms that are thin and twisted. There is a piece of paper on top of him, which reads: “Hi, my name is Michael Phillips. I live at home because of a Medicaid Waiver. Don’t cut Medicaid, don’t take away my home...#ProtectMyCare.” From the context of his other tweets, it appears Michael was unable to attend the protest in person and yet social media allowed him to participate in a way accessible to him and still make an impact. His tweet had 5.5k likes, 404 quote tweets, 427 replies, and 3.9k retweets.

Michael passed away on March 26, 2020 at the age of 39 due to a pulmonary embolism.<sup>209</sup> As I’ll discuss in the final section below, early death is so very common in disability communities and our grief seems to be ever-present. I can’t count the number of fellow advocates I’ve lost. The vast majority of the other tweets only had around 20 engagements, with a few getting up to a hundred, limiting their circulation, and thus, their impact. One other tweet, by Sam Crane, which received around 700 engagements, I’ll discuss in the next section because of its particular relevance to death and disability.

It is no accident, I argue, that the tweets by protestors that had the most engagement and were recirculated the most featured pictures of obviously disabled people, unlike those featured in

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<sup>209</sup> <https://www.tampabay.com/news/2020/03/26/michael-phillips-tampa-disability-advocate-dies-at-age-39/>

the news articles or the most popular tweets by reporters. The audiences are vastly different: the reporters reach a broader, more general audience, while tweets from protestors don't appear to have substantial reach beyond those already tuned in to the disability rights conversation. As noted in the previous section, the more stylized, sensationalized photographs tend to be popular with a general news audience, which is why the dramatic photographs of arrests would be recirculated in news article and in the tweets of reporters. On the other hand, an audience primarily of people with disabilities might be more motivated by identification: the struggle to find an accessible bathroom, the use of the ventilator, or the relatively still, calm shot of a wheelchair user being loaded into a police van.

While many of those photographs were taken by disabled people of other disabled people, others were selfies, taken by the poster of themselves. Though these photographs did not experience wide circulation outside of the in-group, the identificatory work these photographs do is significant, nonetheless. Disabled photographers of disabled people *perform* a recognition of the self in the photographed subject, while selfies call out for the viewer to *recognize* the self in the subject. Louise Grayson explains, "The evidentiary power attributed to photographs carries over not just to the camera itself but who holds the camera."<sup>210</sup> Valerie Barker writes that those who take selfies do so to "say something about who they are, connect with others, feel better about themselves, feel empowered, and to a lesser extent, identify with others like themselves."<sup>211</sup> Barker continues, "it appears that selfies can be used to make a personal and/or political statement."<sup>212</sup> JB Brager echoes: As a practice and a product, [the selfie] is marked by concerns of virality and fame,

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<sup>210</sup> Grayson, 570.

<sup>211</sup> Valerie Barker, This Is Who I Am: The Selfie as a Personal and Social Identity Marker, *International Journal of Communication* 13(2019), 1143-1166, qt. 1158.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 1159.

but also surveillance and legibility within the always already exclusionary rubric of the human as a visual project.”<sup>213</sup>

Thus, the selfie, in the context of this protest, is an attempt to make legible the lived realities and concerns of disabled people. And yet, these photographs did not circulate broadly, not only reducing the legibility of the subjects, but also, when considered alongside the photographs by journalists, which found a much larger audience, marking the disabled self as surveilled by the other. Brager also notes: “The selfie as a product constructs a consumable subject within rubrics of humanitarian sentimentality. The failure of humanitarianism as a sentimental project, then, becomes a failure to see violence when it is happening, against certain populations, and also a failure to see certain populations as anything other than victim, wholly lacking agency.”<sup>214</sup> The photographs of disabled people being violently arrested circulated widely, playing into this tendency to see disabled people, not as having agency to document their own lived experience, but as victims experiencing an injustice.

Thus, the lack of substantial reach outside of an audience of like-minded individuals means that Twitter was not an effective means for the protestors to share their version of the narrative with an outside audience, leaving them on unequal footing with the reporters whose storytelling through tweets and articles reached a much wider audience. And yet, as I’ll argue in the next section, by taking advantage of the ways in which they are naturally understood to be victims by the non-disabled audience, the protestors still accomplished their main goal - to stop the defunding of Medicaid - because the image event they staged communicated their message through the reporters.

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<sup>213</sup> JB Brager, On the Ethics of Looking, in A. Kuntsman (ed.), *Selfie Citizenship*, 161- 163, 2017, qt. 161.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

### 4.3 Death and Disability

Disability and death are tightly intertwined in our cultural consciousness in countless ways. As a person who lives in chronic pain, I've been told by people that they don't know how I live like that and that I'm so inspirational because they'd rather be dead. Conservative groups tie abortion, life, death, and Down Syndrome together in legislative proposals. Our cultural arguments over euthanasia and assisted suicide are all tied up in the question of what lives are worth living – and have spawned a disability rights group called Not Dead Yet. It seems appropriate and potentially effective, then, for a disability rights group to stage a Die In to begin a conversation about what is necessary to live a good life as a disabled person.

The Die In plays into these enthymemes connecting death and disability. In his book *Disability Rhetoric*, Jay Timothy Dolmage discusses one of the many ways in which disability stories are told in our society: the kill-or-cure myth. He writes: “Just as a loaded gun shown in the opening scenes of a movie will eventually be fired, a disabled character will either have to be ‘killed or cured’ by the end of any movie or novel in which they appear.”<sup>215</sup> The stories we tell about disabled people influence how we perceive them in real life: “the tenuousness and expendability of the disabled body are not just mythological... Disabled adults are four times more likely to be victims of violence than non-disabled adults.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Dolmage, 39.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha, in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, wrote of the abiding grief we all hold in disability activist and performance spaces, the pressure to push ourselves past our limits to do as much work as we can while we're here, and the constant drive to sustainability that no one ever seems to reach: "What is also true is all the days you work sick and in pain. All the invisibilized labor you do to lie down before and after, to take pain meds and stretch and carry Chinese medicine tea pills with you to ward off or mitigate the"<sup>217</sup>

*A pause*

*I have to be honest, here, and not finish that quote just yet because here is where the tears stopped me. I spend so much of my time not thinking about loss, fear, or sacrifice, burying that grief of how many co-organizers, activists, and friends we've lost over the years, ignoring my own worry that I may only be here for a short time. My disability on its own is not life-threatening, but neither were the disabilities of many of my friends who died due to neglect, refusal by health insurance to pay for treatment, police, interpersonal violence...or lately, to COVID-19.*

*I stopped here to cry because I don't know how bad COVID would be for me, if I got it. I assume bad because of my connective tissue disorder which likely impacts my lungs, but I never realized how much energy I was expending to not think about that, to not feel about that. I don't often think about, much less feel about, how my fear of a short life drives me to work harder, do more, push myself, not slow down, and judge myself harshly for every rest, break, or bit of sleep I get. Sometimes the trauma just wells up.*

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<sup>217</sup> Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018, 190.

So anyways, I don't think I can finish writing that quotation here, but here's another one from later in that chapter that feels more right to write:

I don't have a magical solution. But I know that as I write this, I am forty-one, a performer and a writer, on my second pneumonia in two months, watching a lot of our beloved artists ...become ancestors in their forties and fifties and sixties. And I am committed to figuring out together how we can remake performance culture's expectations and figure out our own disabled and chronically ill performance ideas that allow our bodyminds to thrive. I want us to live to get old.<sup>218</sup>

...I want us to live to get old. Sometimes, my abled peers complain about their grey hairs or their newfound backaches. I'm going to cry again just admitting it, but I secretly celebrate every new grey hair. It means I'm still here. The backaches I've always had – the pain has always made me feel alive.

And it's not just the death that traumatizes our community over and over again – it's the ways in which new people become disabled through the actions (or lack of action) of the State and it's the *who* is more likely to join our ranks: Black and brown people, poor people, LGBTQ+ people, and others who are already marginalized. As Jasbir K. Puar notes in *The Right to Maim*, “There is a productive tension, then, between embracing disability as a universal and inevitable condition, and combating the production of disability acquired under duress of oppressive structures of social injustice.”<sup>219</sup> I live this tension all the time: I say that disability is an inevitable

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>219</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, Duke University Press, 2017, 70.

and acceptable part of natural life and, at the same time, I am also angry when a Black man is shot by police and paralyzed.

*I stopped writing for the night here. Later, in bed, I was doom-scrolling through Twitter, and a tweet from Stephanie Woodward popped up in my feed. I hadn't been following her, but one of my friends who does had liked the tweet. "Been tear gassed four times tonight. I feel like maybe three was enough for me. [shrug emoji] #roc #RPD #JusticeForDanielPrude" I guess I was just having one of those nights where writing this dissertation seems so much less important than living through these times, but I'll circle back to that in the final, conclusion chapter.*

In invoking death, this Die In action takes advantage of the ways in which we subconsciously connect death and disability in our society, and certainly, in the tweets and even in the written news coverage, this is what comes across most strongly. It is this future death, a potential death, contrasted with a current, vibrant life that stands out and pierces the viewer. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes describes two elements or characteristics of photographs: the punctum and the studium. The studium, Barthes writes, is "the extension of a field, which I perceive quite familiarly as a consequence of my knowledge, my culture"<sup>220</sup> and also "a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment...but without special acuity."<sup>221</sup> Some of the photographs from the Die In protest lack a punctum and are what Barthes would call *unary photographs* since they adhere to the genre of protest photography without any distinct features. But most of these protest photographs have a punctum: "this element which rises from the scene, shoots out from it like an

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<sup>220</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 25.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

arrow, and pierces me....A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."<sup>222</sup>

Barthes explicitly connects the punctum to time and thus, to death: This new punctum, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the noeme ('that-has-been'), its pure representation."<sup>223</sup> He continues, "Each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death."<sup>224</sup> Herein lies the connection between the punctum and metis: through Chronos and Kairos: the slow passage of time toward death or toward progress and that immediate moment where the photographed action is captured. Metis is a tactic protestors can use to capture the attention of a photographer, hoping that the captured photograph contains a punctum that stirs up enthymematic disruption in the mind of the viewer, in this case disrupting the connection between disability and death.

Sam Crane (@Samanticka), who works for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, tweeted, "Arrests continue. #ADAPTandRESIST #SaveMedicaid" with a picture of a wheelchair user (Laura Halvorson, a protestor the 'in group' would recognize) holding a sign that says, "Medicaid = LIFE + LIBERTY 4 Disabled Americans." Because of the way Twitter crops photos, viewers can only see the bottom of the wheelchair and the sign. However, if one clicks to open the photo, as I did, there is greater context, including a few police officers gathered in the background, appearing to be preparing to arrest other wheelchair users. This tweet got 7 replies, 295 likes, 36 quote tweets, and 315 retweets. In this tweet, the explicit connection between disability, life, independence, and Medicaid is made clear. And yet, the photograph in its cropped form, which is how Twitter users would initially view it, is mundane – there is little about it, in my judgment that

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 97.



would cause the viewer to pause and open up the photograph to view the rest of the context. A sign with words on it, is all the initial glance would see, the very definition of *studium* in the context of a protest. This leads to the question – why the relatively high level of engagement on the photograph that is common for the genre? My guess is that a lot of the engagement can be traced back to a popular quote tweet by a Twitter user with a large following: Steve Silberman (a popular author who wrote a book about Autistic history called *Neurotribes*). Silberman quote tweeted Sam Crane’s tweet with the caption: “Happening now: Disabled folks being arrested for protesting the GOP cutting their Medicaid lifeline.” Silberman’s quote tweet had 246 likes, 426 retweets, 31 quote tweets, and 24 replies, and my guess is that this directed a lot of attention and interaction onto Sam Crane’s initial tweet.

On Twitter, I could find no photographs of the actual Die In action of people laying down. Part of this may be the limitations of the search on Twitter. It’s impossible for me to find every tweet with a photograph from the protest for several reasons: first, it is beyond human knowledge to know every term that would’ve been relevant and tweeted; second, Twitter does not permit searching by location other than in relation to one’s current physical location; and third, because user’s privacy settings may mean that such tweets are only visible to their followers. Thus, protest photography that appears on Twitter is, at least in part, a bit ephemeral. And, in late 2020, with Twitter’s introduction of “fleets” – pictures and words that appear in bubbles at the top of the Twitter homepage and only last for 24 hours – the ephemeral nature of photographs disseminated through Twitter is only increasing. And even looking through the newspaper coverage, all of which described the Die In as people laying down, there were only two such photographs, both of the same man laying down, which appeared in the *Huffington Post* (Mark Wilson) and *Business Insider* (Jacqueline Martin). The photographs are from roughly the same angle and likely taken

around the same time. As it turns out, photographs of people laying down are not particularly interesting to look at, at least to me, likely because they lack a punctum. It is difficult to immediately tell from these photographs of people laying down exactly why or what caused them to do so, and there are no details that rise up out of the pictures to capture more than a fleeting glance at the photographs.

But other photographs, particularly the two that were circulated the most on Twitter and in news stories, had punctums, which I argue, is why they were so popular and recirculated so frequently. In fact, depending on the characteristics of the viewer, there are several things which might rise up out of the photos and capture the attention of the viewer. For me, it's the outstretched arm of Stephanie Woodward or the way in which the unnamed woman appears so uncomfortably stretched out by the cops holding each limb. But for others, it might be the brightly colored clothing of each protestor, or the pained looks on their faces, or the green vests of the officers. In many ways, it is impossible to describe in language the nature and function of a *punctum* in a photograph, because containing the *punctum* in language systemizes it in a way that begins to reduce its piercing power. These details are those uncontrollable, un-staged, and perhaps unintentional by the photographer, but which ensure that the viewer must pause over the photograph and be drawn in by the emotional resonance of its content. Each of these small details stick out in a way that immediately draws the viewer in to linger on the photograph, and all of these characteristics are vivid reminders of how very alive these protestors are.

The punctum rises up out of these photographs and disrupts the enthymematic connection between disability and death, a connection that viewers may not even be aware is pervasive in society and therefore, within all of us. The ways in which these photographs challenged our cultural expectations around disability reflects the ways in which the protestors sought to correct

societal misconceptions around what it means to be *alive* as a disabled person. In her first-person accounting of the events for *Vox*, Stephanie Woodward writes:

In terms of real people, this means that not only are our medications and wheelchairs at risk, but our lives and our liberty are, too. Many disabled Americans who rely on community-based services would either die or be forced into nursing facilities and other institutions just to get the services and supports they need to live. When I say live, I don't just mean to continue breathing, though many of my friends and millions of Americans do depend on Medicaid to simply stay alive. When I say live, I mean to truly live. To live in the community, to work, to raise a family, to have cats and eat a ridiculous amount of pizza rolls and cheeseburgers like I like to do. I mean to live an ordinary life. I mean to live in freedom.

As a fellow cat lady who enjoys junk food, I identify with what Stephanie is describing as an ordinary life, but I also know that many non-disabled people don't know in their cores that disabled people can and do live ordinary, fulfilling lives.

*While I'm writing this section, I've gotten away to this little farm in Holbrook, PA, where there's no WiFi and no cell service. For me, it's a much-needed vacation from all the busyness of my political campaign, a break from Twitter notifications, and from constantly being attached to my Gmail inbox. I'm spending an inordinate amount of time watching Star Trek, because it's one of the few shows that's on this TV that I can tolerate. Among the commercials featuring washed up celebrities advertising extended car warranties, Medicare supplemental insurance, and hearing aids is a commercial that reeks of white saviorism: it's for a non-profit that performs eye surgeries apparently entirely on Black and Brown people (since they're the only people shown in the ad)*

*and for \$25, you, too, can sponsor someone's eye surgery to restore their sight. The ad paints blindness entirely as tragedy: showing a father who can no longer support his family, a child who was born blind and can't play with others, and a grandmother that relies on someone else 'for everything,' and the surgery as a complete cure for blindness. Even as isolated as I am in this moment, with only my cat for company, I can't escape the ableism that suggests a disabled life is not worth living.*

By countering the ableist enthymematic connection between death and disability, the protestors helped observers understand why disabled lives are worth living and how Medicaid funding enables people with disabilities to live free, good lives. It's impossible to tell what impact this ultimately had on stopping the American Health Care Act, which would've defunded Medicaid. The Die In Protest was part of many protests across the country, including the one I attended outside of Senator Toomey's office in Pittsburgh, and ADAPT members would continue to participate in healthcare reform protests throughout the fall and summer. With that said, these protest movements were part of a broader national conversation that would influence key Senate Republicans to not pass ACA repeal legislation. The US House had passed the American Health Care Act in May, prior to the Die In protests. On the same day as the protest, Senate Republicans released their amendment of the AHCA: the Better Care Reconciliation Act, which failed to pass on July 25, 2017 because of opposition from nine key Republican members. The Republicans then attempted a different amendment: the Obamacare Repeal and Reconciliation Act, which also failed to pass later that same week, due to seven opposing Republican house members. And finally, the Senate Republicans, in the same week, attempted a so-called 'Skinny repeal' amendment, which only made a few, but still significant, modifications to the ACA, and it failed due to 'no' votes from Senators Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, who had voted against the two other repeal

attempts, and also from Senator John McCain, who had voted yes on the first attempt. As part of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, Congress would repeal the individual mandate, but otherwise did not pass an ACA repeal bill.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The 2017 Die In Protest disrupted enthymemes connecting disability and death because it was a successful image event, drawing in press photographers who took striking images of the arrests. The protests I analyzed in the previous chapters took place in a time where people had less access to social and digital media, so by contrast, the coverage of the 2017 protest was more sensationalized, taking advantage of the ways in which news is quickly recirculated on Twitter. The protestors also used the new technology to take their own photographs and disseminated them on their own social media feeds.

The ‘die in’ image event reflected the ways our cultural norms tie disability and death together. And yet, the photographs of the event exploded these norms, suggesting instead that disabled lives are worth living and that Medicaid enables those lives to be lived. In this way, the image event effectively communicated the demands of the protestors: that Medicaid not be defunded.

There are substantial limitations to my analysis in this chapter. I wasn’t at the protest myself, which makes it very possible for me to be wrong about things, because unlike in previous chapters, there aren’t historical write-ups that documented the events. Instead, I have to rely on news coverage and the social media feeds of protestors. And here, again, I’m limited because it’s

not possible for me to find every Tweet or Facebook post about the event. I'm also writing about people who are still, for the most part, alive, and I don't have the resources to interview them.

*This chapter was emotionally difficult for me to write. Sometimes there are no words for the losses that our communities have suffered, and writing this chapter reminded me of my own frailty that goes beyond the typical human frailty that non-disabled people experience. And yet, I'm grateful for the rare opportunity to confront what troubles me during this time. It has not been easy to run for elected office. It's never easy to run. And yet this year, when the devaluing of disabled and queer lives is so very evident, my heart is heavy for the communities of which I am a part. In this context, writing about a contemporary protest was difficult, but necessary. I look forward, in the next chapter, to concluding this work, summarizing it in a way accessible to disabled people, and reflecting on living during these times.*

## 5.0 Conclusion

I finished the first two chapters of this dissertation in 2019, a year that seems now so very distant after the events of 2020 and early 2021. I finished the third chapter in early January of 2021, before packing up and heading to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to be sworn in as state representative for Pennsylvania's 36th legislative district.

Writing a dissertation during a pandemic and during a campaign for elected office was certainly an experience. 2020 was a time in which, personally and politically, I experienced significant ableism from others. I think to the ways in which some politicians suggested that it was okay for older adults and people with disabilities to die from COVID-19, as though our deaths would be less painful or our lives less meaningful than others. And then personally, being a disabled, queer public figure on the Internet...need I say more?

Thus, to be writing a dissertation about disabled (and often queer, too) social movements during a time when our lives were even more publicly devalued felt both necessary and fulfilling. Certainly, as I was writing the third chapter in 2020, I felt as though I were speaking very sincerely to the moment in which I was located as a disabled, queer leader.

I was sworn in as state representative on January 5th, 2020. I became the first out woman from the LGBTQ community and the first openly Autistic person to be a member of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The feelings of being in that gilded space, a space where people like me do not usually get to belong, was at times, overwhelming. To go from protesting the actions of some elected officials to being one is a transition that I am still experiencing.

I drove out to Harrisburg on the 4th and drove back the afternoon of the 5th after the ceremony concluded. Unlike most years, where such a ceremony would've been grand, full of

guests, and followed by receptions, this one was short, done in several distanced groups, and without any of the accompanying celebrations.

On January 6th, the next Wednesday, I had back-to-back virtual meetings. I had just finished a meeting when a friend texted me, “Are you watching the news?” I quickly turned it on and watched the escalating assault happening at the US Capitol. I wish I could say I was surprised, but Trump, his allies, and his followers had been headed this direction for quite some time. The rest of the day, meeting after meeting was canceled from my calendar.

I would later learn of attacks on state capitols, though none in Pennsylvania. I’m writing, currently, a month-to-the-day later, on February 6th, having just returned from a week of session, pushed back by weather from Monday-Wednesday to be Wednesday-Friday. To this day, there are armed guards throughout the state capitol complex.

I thought about the disabled people who were arrested and thrown out of the US Capitol, merely for laying on the ground and peacefully demonstrating, and how strikingly different they were treated by the Capitol police than the January 6th traitors. But I thought also of the overwhelming whiteness of the protest groups, as pictured in photography, that I examined in this dissertation, and of the very valid critiques (like #DisabilityTooWhite) of the disability rights movement. White protestors, whatever their other identities, need to consider not only their differences from alt-right groups, but the ways in which they may be similarly reinforcing white supremacy.

In this conclusion, I want to not only summarize the chapters of this dissertation, but also to make them legible in ways accessible to those not versed in the scholarly language of the academy and as accessible as possible regardless of someone’s age or reading ability. As a disabled person, I seek to write not only about my community, but to then re-interpret my findings into



everyday language so that anyone who wants to understand may do so. Therefore, as I revisit each of the chapters, I am striving to use language with a readability score of fifth grade or lower on the Flesch-Kincaid Index.

## 5.1 Chapter Two

In chapter two, I wrote about photos from the Deaf President Now marches. Deaf students marched because they wanted a deaf leader at their school.

I wrote three things about each photo. One: how we see someone is deaf. Two: the things around the photo. Three: the senses and feelings of the march.

Some people lie about Deaf people. Some people say Deaf people aren't smart. Some people say Deaf people can't communicate. Those are lies. The marches showed that Deaf people can be smart and good at communicating.

Deaf can mean two things. Deaf can mean someone cannot hear. Deaf can also mean someone is part of a group who tell shared stories and share ways of being someone who cannot hear.

Sometimes, in these pictures, people wear hearing aids. Hearing aids help people hear. One way of seeing deafness is seeing hearing aids.

Sometimes, in the pictures, people's hands look like they are moving. This could be sign language. Sign language is made by making shapes and moving hands, face, and body to communicate. One way of seeing deafness is seeing sign language.

Sometimes, people carried signs that said words about being deaf. Seeing the signs is one way of seeing deafness.

Most people in the pictures looked like they had white skin. Many places with Deaf people had leaders. Many of these leaders were people with white skin. This was not fair. This is also called racism.

40 years ago, people took these pictures. These people did not take as many pictures of people with Black or Brown skin to put in newspapers. This was not fair. This is also racism.

Racism makes it look like only white people were marching. This was a lie. There were also people with Black skin and brown skin who marched.

Sometimes, the words written around the pictures told us more about what was going on. Sometimes, the words made us laugh because they were funny. The funny words help us remember what the marchers wanted.

The marchers showed that they were smart and talked about what they wanted. They wanted a leader who was like them. They wanted a deaf leader. The writers and people who took pictures helped tell the story of the marchers. The people in charge did not talk to the writers as much. There were also more marchers than people in charge. So the people in charge gave them what they wanted. The marchers celebrated.

## **5.2 Chapter Three**

In chapter three, I talked about a march where people crawled up steps in Washington, D.C. They crawled up the steps to show that some people can't use steps. Some people use chairs with wheels on them to roll from place to place. Steps don't let people roll up them. No ramps keep some people out of important places. This is called inaccessibility.

Inaccessibility is more than just steps. The marchers used steps as an example. The steps are an example of how people with disabilities are not included. The marchers wanted elected officials to pass a bill. This bill was called the Americans with Disabilities Act, or the ADA.

The ADA would make people include people with disabilities. The ADA would help people with disabilities have jobs. The ADA would help people with disabilities be able to go to stores or to food places.

One of the people marching was named Jennifer Keelan. Jennifer had a disability. Jennifer was 8 years old. Most of the people marching were grown-ups. This meant that Jennifer was special. The writers saw her and did not pay attention to the grown-ups. The people taking pictures saw her and did not pay attention to the grown-ups.

Some of the grown-ups didn't like this. They did not want people with disabilities to be treated like kids. But kids can do great things. Jennifer did great things. She helped show that the world is not fair to people with disabilities. She also helped show that kids can make change. She helped show that people with disabilities can make change.

I want to explain a big word: enthymeme. It is a Greek word that means "inside the mind." It is said eh-THUH-me-muh. A Greek man Aristotle used the word to talk about things we know that we don't need to say. If I say "Ariel," many people think "Little Mermaid." That is an example of an enthymeme.

Other enthymemes: If I say "disability," many people think "someone who cannot do things." If I say "child," many people think "someone who cannot do things." But Jennifer did great things. Jennifer showed that the enthymemes are lies.

If I say, "disability," many people think "someone who is not strong." If I say "child," many people think "someone who is not strong." If I say, "disability," many people think "someone

who is lazy.” If I say, “child,” many people think “someone who plays” or “someone who does not work.” But Jennifer was strong. Jennifer worked hard. She showed that the entymemes are lies.

Jennifer wanted a future where she could do more great things. She crawled up the steps to show that she wanted change. Jennifer showed that she could help make change.

The pictures of the march showed a lot of white people. This happens a lot and is a problem. It is a problem because Black and brown disabled people march too. But when they march, fewer pictures are taken. Fewer stories are told about them. We need to change that.

The crawl-up march helped pass the Americans with Disabilities Act. The march showed that disabled people are strong. Disabled people work hard. Disabled people can make change.

### **5.3 Chapter Four**

In chapter four, I talk about a group of disabled people that heard that the Senate was going to decrease their healthcare. In 2017, Mitch McConnell was trying to decrease money for healthcare. The disabled people got together outside of his office. They laid down on the floor, like they were dead.

The police told them to go away. The disabled people did not listen. They wanted to show: they will die without healthcare. The police tied up their hands. The police put them in vans. The police arrested them. Many people took pictures of this. The photos were put on social media. The photos were put in newspapers.

Some people think disability and death are similar. The disabled people laid down like this similarity. But also, the disabled people showed that they are alive. They showed this by being

active in protest. They showed that healthcare is important. They showed that healthcare needs money.

They were successful. Mitch McConnell did not take money away from healthcare.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

In 2021, I now exist as a disability self-advocate, an academic, and a policymaker. In each of these roles, I see chances to learn from this research and to make change in the future. I think about the ways in which I have faced discrimination in each of those roles, even though in every place, I am always all three of those things.

It is not easy to be a self-advocate. Our experiences, and the ways we have learned from them, are not usually seen as important or valuable. I know – from what I have seen, heard, and learned – that we can still make change, even when other people stand in our way. We can use our unique experiences to think, see, smell, hear, sense new ways of convincing those in power to make change. Non-disabled people seem to rely too much on only a few senses. Disability teaches us that we can be smart and creative. We can use any or all our senses to inspire change.

The Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh is an imposing and impressive structure. I started working on this PhD in 2015 – and still feel as small now by comparison to the Cathedral as I did then. The Cathedral does not feel welcoming, and in many ways feels foreboding, much like the academy itself is not welcoming to marginalized people. A place like the Cathedral of Learning was not built for someone like me. Only a select few of the entrances are wheelchair accessible. Sometimes the elevators have planned downtime. Quiet spaces for students? Not prioritized. This dissertation is an ode to the ways in which the sights, sounds, smells,

feelings, and all other senses of a place like the Cathedral discourage participation in academic life by people with disabilities. Unlike Gallaudet University, the subject of one of the chapters of this dissertation and a place meant to specifically center one kind of disabled experience, the University of Pittsburgh is not intended to welcome disabled people. And if students at Gallaudet still had to fight to have Deaf people be seen as leaders, then we have a difficult fight at Pitt as well.

Academics have a particular responsibility to fight for changes within and outside of the academy. Too often, our work speaks only to other academics, using jargon and providing action steps that are only relevant to other scholars. I see this problem even within this very dissertation – while I made it a priority to use plain language in parts of this conclusion, I did not do so throughout the entire dissertation. Clearly, I have more work to do myself. As academics, we need to make the scholarly world more broadly accessible – and often, that means doing something we’re not good at: wheeling our chairs back and shutting up. It means amplifying and supporting the messages of marginalized people. It means using every possible communication means and engaging every possible sense to fight for change within our walls. Academics tend to be good at the world of words – sight and sound – but we need to do more with other senses if we truly want to make change.

And if we want to actually make change, we cannot rely on our scholarly work where again, we often are speaking only to other academics. We must engage with the world through social media, news media, and engagement in politics. We cannot pretend, regardless of our field, that the work we do is apolitical. It does not and cannot ever exist outside of a politicized context. It is our responsibility, then, to leave the academy and engage, as scholars, with the outside world. We should participate in protests, we should lobby our elected officials, we should write letters to the editor and op eds. But as I say all of this, I acknowledge, too, the institutional barriers that

prevent much of this. Scholars, especially non-tenured or contingent ones, can so easily lose a precious and scarce academic job by participating in political activity. Broad institutional change – spearheaded by those most privileged in our ranks – is necessary too.

Like the Cathedral of Learning, the Pennsylvania Capitol is not a building friendly to marginalized people. The leather office chairs, brocaded sofas, and gilded ceilings signal to my working-class soul that I am not welcome here, entrances are mostly not wheelchair accessible, and pride flags are torn down from the Lt. Governor’s balcony through legislation specifically passed to order just that. This place, like the Cathedral, was not built to welcome me. Governments have a particular responsibility to create a society that allows everyone, regardless of who they are, to thrive and succeed. And governments, as in the first and third chapters of this dissertation, are often the targets of disability protests.

But what if our elected leaders joined us in our protest of the unjust systems of which we are a part? These structures and systems pre-dated our elections and will likely persist after we no longer serve. I recognize that the pronouns in this section become confusing – because I am both disabled person and elected official here. In the Pennsylvania General Assembly, I am a member of the minority party, which means I have no control over what legislation is allowed to come up for a vote. This structure is oppressive and undemocratic and also larger than any one member can tackle on their own. Elected officials should recognize the fundamentally dysfunctional aspects of government and understand the roles that movement work and community organizing play in pushing for change.

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