

# Disability Studies

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## Abstract

This chapter reviews three books published in 2018 centering on disability and resistance. It is organized into five sections. The first, 'Resistance, Disability, and Democracy', summarizes debates about the political obligations of disability studies, and outlines how disability justice is replacing the former emphasis on rights. The second section, 'Academic Perspectives', reviews the provocative collection *Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies*, volume 1, identifying areas of contention and raising questions about the field's current direction. The third section, 'Activist Perspectives', reviews Alice Wong's collection *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People*. The fourth section, 'Beyond Identity', reviews Robert McRuer's *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*. The concluding section, 'An Abbreviated Manifesto', asserts the vital role of disability justice in establishing alternatives to neoliberalism, resisting tyranny, and achieving democracy.

## 1. Resistance, Disability, and Democracy

In a blurb promoting Alice Wong's edited collection *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People*, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes that the book will provide 'real talk' for readers 'figuring out how to survive fascism'. The statement is representative of the tone of urgency surrounding much disability studies scholarship published in 2018. Surveying that scholarship, this chapter centers on discussions of 'resistance'. The word 'resistance' is perhaps one of the most used and disputed in 2018, not just in disability studies but everywhere, as seen in the twitterverse through the hashtags #Resist and #Resistance. Common critiques of the concept are that it is too vague, and that it signals a stance against something without

articulating what it is for. I find in recent disability scholarship not only forms of resistance that speak against the forces of fascism that are on the rise in many places across the globe, but also aspirational forms of resistance that seek to build disability justice. Building a world that strives for disability justice is, as Piepzna-Samarasinha's words remind us, a matter of survival. On this general point, there is consensus among disability studies scholars and activists. On the finer points of how disability justice can be achieved and what it should look like, however, there are differences of perspective.

The period under analysis here, roughly November 2017 through October 2018, was an immensely productive time for disability studies. Amongst so much remarkable work, I found it most useful to focus on scholarship that addresses the questions 'Where are we?', 'Where are we going?', and 'How do we get there?'. Therefore, this chapter takes as its starting point the provocative collection *Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies*, volume 1, edited by Katie Ellis (Curtin University), Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (Emory University), Mike Kent (Curtin University), and Rachel Robertson (Curtin University). Because the nature of the manifesto is generative, challenging, and sometimes confrontational, the essays in this collection provide a useful basis for identifying areas of contention and raising questions about our field's purpose and goals. In relation to those questions, I then review the collection *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People*, edited by Alice Wong (Disability Visibility Project), and the monograph *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance* by Robert McRuer (George Washington University).

The challenges facing disability justice activists and disability studies scholars at this critical moment in history are the challenges facing democracy as an ideal. Largely, these are questions of coalition and inclusion. Who should be part of the movement? What are the roles of nondisabled allies, caretakers, and family members? How accessible is 'the resistance' to people whose disabilities impact energy, mobility, intellect, and/or use of language? Are identity politics incompatible with class struggle? Some of the authors reviewed here speak from lived experiences of conflict within activist spaces. A theme of respectability politics emerges across the scholarship. To what extent should disability activists conform to social norms in order to have their voices heard? Feelings on this question differ strongly, with some saying that small concessions to the nondisabled majority are necessary to advance the cause, and others insisting that assimilation goes directly against the cause.

These debates call up the distinction between disability rights and disability justice. Simply put, the disability rights paradigm seeks equal

opportunities and reasonable accommodations within the existing power hierarchy, whereas disability justice requires a radical redistribution of power and revision of social values. Disability justice, according to Piepzna-Samarasinha in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018), ‘is a term coined by the Black, brown, queer, and trans members of the original Disability Justice Collective, founded in 2005 by Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, Eli Clare, and Sebastian Margaret’ (p. 15). As Akemi Nishida explains the split in *Manifestos*, ‘the rights movement [was] built to focus on a single issue—ableism—and attempted to solve the issue exclusively through legal protection, assuming that every disabled person has the means to access such protection’ (p. 240). She describes disability justice as committed to ‘intersectional analyses’, ‘cross-community solidarity’, ‘cross-disability solidarity’, and ‘accessibility beyond physical access’ (p. 240). Robert McRuer emphasizes confronting economic inequality, defining disability justice as ‘forg[ing] anti-neoliberal coalitions in the interests of a global crip imagination, which can invent new ways of countering oppression and generate new forms of being-in-common’ (p. 24). The disability justice paradigm therefore conceives of human weakness and vulnerability not as an exceptional state that disrupts progress or burdens the economy, but as a structuring principle of a collective and interdependent society.

At a fundamental level, there are different visions in the field about what kind of future is desired. The introduction to *Manifestos* states that for critical disability studies, ‘as with many social justice movements and disciplines, the end goal is that they are no longer relevant or necessary, as discrimination against people with disabilities is reduced to a historical footnote’ (p. 7). But is this to say that there is nothing else to value in the critical study of disability and society, apart from ending discrimination? There will always be disability; therefore there will always be value to studying it, and to amplifying the voices of those who experience it. And is ending discrimination enough if we do not also change the culture that enables it?

Raising questions about the field’s goals reflects growing tensions between theory and praxis. Consider the following cascade of circumstances disabled people face: worsening conditions of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and subminimum wages; lack of access to adequate housing, healthcare, nutrition, and transportation; an uptick in violence, hate speech, and discriminatory legislation and jurisdiction impacting women, queer and trans folks, people of color, migrants, and refugees; the pervasiveness of sexual assault and toxic masculinity; political decisions on infrastructure and the environment that generate impairments along axes of race and class; and the climate crisis killing elderly and disabled people at higher

rates than other sectors of the population. Understandably, some voices in the field are frustrated with scholarship that does not confront these realities directly.

## 2. Academic Perspectives

*Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies* developed out of a symposium in Perth, Australia, the purpose of which was ‘to discuss trends in disability theory, the evolving research agenda, interdisciplinary work, connections with disability activism, and how to build a stronger disability research culture in Western Australia’ (p. 4). Because the event generated ‘heated debate’ and ‘helped establish stronger connections between disability activists and academics’, the organizers decided to put out ‘a wider call throughout the world’ (pp. 4–5) for submissions of manifestos for the future. Owing to the collection’s origins at a symposium, the contributors mostly hail from Australia, though the US, UK, and Canada are also represented. That a reportedly global call for submissions resulted in papers only from the nations of the former British empire is disappointing, especially amidst recent calls for the field to engage more purposefully with non-Western perspectives and the global South.

Global perspective is important, though, especially in a collection that identifies itself as being about *critical* disability studies, as opposed to just disability studies, in its title. As the introduction defines this distinction, disability studies has been criticized for neglecting intersectionality by failing to consider areas related to disability such as ‘sexual identity, gender, race, and the Global South’ (p. 3), and critical disability studies emerged to address these shortcomings by integrating feminist, postcolonial, and queer theory perspectives. The editors go on to assert that the present is a good time to publish manifestos for the future of critical disability studies because we are well into what Rachel Adams called a ‘third phase’ of disability studies, in which tensions and disagreements in the field are being aired publicly through the international platform of social media (quoted p. 4).

The volume opens with Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s summary of the history of United States disability studies scholarship, identifying, through extensive endnotes, the publications she sees as constituting the ‘first wave’ of disability studies, which she situates in historical, literary, and social science scholarship published before 2001, and the ‘second wave’ of the field, which she defines as work that, while situated within a traditional discipline, ‘reaches across disciplinary boundaries by explicitly locating itself in critical disability studies’ (p. 14). Garland-Thomson lingers on

Joseph N. Straus's *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (2011) as exemplary of the second wave: it discovers disability in unexpected places—in the aesthetic principles of form and deformation central to musical composition—and assigns wonder to it. Wonder, for Garland-Thomson, is an important way to frame disability because it keeps us open to the possibilities of new meaning and value that human variations generate. Garland-Thomson commends Straus for his identification of four different modes of 'hearing' or experiencing music due to disability, and his celebration of their value, resisting normative formulations of musical production and reception that tend to frame such differences as pathology or gifts (p. 16). Garland-Thomson's enthusiasm for scholarship infused with wonder and positivity sets her perspective apart from those urging more direct political involvement from scholars in the field.

Sonya Freeman Loftis's contribution, 'Dear Neurodiversity Movement: Put Your Shoes On', occupies one side of a debate on respectability politics. Loftis argues that autistics and the neurodiversity movement need to make gestures of assimilation in order to gain credibility with their largely neurotypical audience. Using herself as an example, Loftis relates how, although she is uncomfortable wearing shoes, she decided to make this concession to neurotypical-dominant society in order to achieve tenure. By appeasing the nondisabled majority in small ways, she contends, neurotypicals like her can gain power: 'to achieve our ends—political equality, social acceptance, professional recognition—some assimilation may be needed from Autistic activists and self-advocates' (p. 20). We shall see later in this chapter the ways in which others take issue with Loftis's articulation of 'our ends'. Her use of the term 'neurodiversity movement' generally refers to the autistic community, although other scholarship on the concept in recent years is more inclusive of nonautistic forms of neurodiversity. Loftis writes, 'we need to reflect on respectability politics in strategizing our self-presentation and to consider audience awareness in our public performances of stimming' (p. 20). Others would argue that this strategy establishes an unfair double standard. The manifesto anticipates its own controversial reception with constant disclaimers: the words 'I'm not telling you to...' litter the page as Loftis clarifies what she is and is not suggesting autistics should do. The manifesto's expectation of an angry audience is part of its content, too, as it makes the case for less anger in the resistance discourse of autistic activist spaces, most of which are presumably online. In the end, Loftis asserts that she no longer tries to pass as neurotypical, and reckons with her own privilege in being able to make that choice now that she has tenure.

Also situated at the intersection of academia and activism, Washieka Torres's 'Not Now but Right Now: Creating Advocates and Scholars' provides a blueprint for organizing at universities. After laying out 'the state of disability affairs' (p. 29) with statistics, conveying the urgency of the community's needs without the sentimentality of story, Torres charts the tasks that we 'must' perform to meet our obligations to the community. We must teach students about ableist discrimination, yes—but teaching is not enough. We must inspire them to engage in disability justice activism beyond the boundaries of our classes, and maintain long-term mentoring relationships with students who see disability justice as a calling. We must connect with students beyond the ones we teach. We must help them recognize disability justice as worth exploring in any discipline, and in their lives. We must engage in 'interdisciplinary network building' (p. 30), involving experts from fields that do not traditionally participate in disability studies. We must develop the administrative literacy required to undertake the design of new programs for the study of disability. We must support student activism, and encourage their preferred methods of spreading influence through digital communities. For myself, as an early-career academic at a university that had no organized disability studies community when I arrived, Torres's chapter read like a summary of all the work I do beyond my actual job. Reading it, I felt an indescribable gratitude imagining all the other scholar-activists out there doing the same work. It made me feel connected to a larger purpose.

If for Torres disability justice organizing within universities is a 'must', for James Berger that obligation extends beyond the academy. He argues, in 'Rethink: Agency, Theory and Politics in Disability Studies', that because the majority of the disability community lives in poverty, scholars should focus most urgently on ending poverty, and work toward that end in coalition with the labor movement, especially care workers. Addressing the theory/praxis debate, Berger maintains that both theory and political work are stronger when not conflated. Disability studies scholarship, he ventures, is not political work. As an example, he discusses Stacy Clifford Simpican's *The Capacity Contract: Intellectual Disability and the Question of Citizenship* (2015), which explores the ways in which citizenship and rights are staked on intellectual and linguistic capabilities, and how the disability movement itself has perpetuated that exclusiveness by asserting that people with disabilities should speak for themselves. Simpican describes self-advocacy organizations in which able-minded allies dominate the business meetings and self-advocates assert themselves only socially. She reimagines political agency to include activities such as humor and dancing, which involve free expression

and disruption of norms. Berger disagrees that dancing constitutes political agency, writing bluntly, 'It does not confront power; it does not create alliances that have power. And its disruptive, transgressive potential is limited, if it exists at all. Those without effective language will not have political power nor agency. There is no way to finesse this' (p. 212). He softens the blow by continuing, 'There is no shame in being spoken for if you cannot speak' (p. 212), and reflecting on the responsibilities of those who speak and care for others. Berger expresses frustration with disability scholarship focused on identity and representation, because such issues prioritize the concerns of the able-disabled and erase the experiences of those unable to speak for themselves, and those living in abject poverty or institutions (p. 214). The best way forward, Berger asserts, is for disabled people and care workers to form powerful alliances that can fight for funding for home and nursing care, to pull both workers and disabled people out of poverty.

In 'Low-Level Agency: Disability, Oppression and Alternative Genres of the Human', David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder argue that the body should not be considered as a passive surface onto which history and oppression are written, but as a "lively materiality" (Sara Ahmed, quoted p. 189) confronting those forces. Tired of seeing disability proffered as an exposé of oppression, they ask what disabled lives bring into the world that might be considered desirable or exemplary. A disabled life holds a roadmap for building a world centered on interdependence, rather than harmful myths of independence. Taking up the same questions about ability and citizenship as Simplican and Berger, Mitchell and Snyder discuss liberalism's overdetermination of 'agency', which privileges the 'sturdy political citizen' (p. 194). They ask what might be gained by privileging instead the experiences of those with low-level agency, 'those who do not perform their opposition openly or even with a working knowledge of themselves as oppressed' (p. 194). Because liberalism conceives of personhood and rights in terms of property, even considering the body itself as a form of property, its conceptualization of suffering is problematically narrow, seeing it always in a framework of "human on human cruelty" (Asma Abbas, quoted p. 197). But in situations of low-level agency, as in the example of their daughter Emma's experiences with a series of thoracic surgeries, no one person or system is actually at fault. We need to make space, the authors suggest, to consider forms of suffering beyond frameworks of accountability in order to imagine more expansive genres of humanity.

The *Manifestos* volume enables reflection on where disability studies has been (Garland-Thomson on the first and second waves) and where it might go next in this 'third phase' of the field (Adams). It sets out provocative

positions on respectability politics (Loftis), activism in the academy (Torres and Berger), and low-level agency (Mitchell and Snyder). The collection also includes notable entries by Mark Anthony Castrodale on theorizing anti-militarism; Hailee M. Yoshika-Gibbons on connections to aging studies; Christina Fernandes and Rachel Robertson on maternal studies; Leanne McRae on intersections with cultural studies; Subini Annamma, Beth A. Ferri, and David J. Connor on disability critical race theory; Graham Pullin on design; and seven other essays on media and technology.

### 3. Activist Perspectives

While the essays in *Manifestos* contemplate where we've been and where we're going from an academic perspective, *Resistance and Hope: Essays by Disabled People* represents activism. With a second subtitle *Crip Wisdom for the People*, the collection is framed as a guidebook for survival in the Trump-era United States. Alice Wong's brief introduction opens with her heart racing on election night:

In my moments of fear and panic towards what I knew would happen, I was strangely comforted by the fact that disabled people have been surviving and resisting for millennia. [...] I reflected on Sins Invalid's show in October 2016, 'Birthing, Dying, Becoming Crip', and realized we weren't entering into a new moment; every moment is cyclical and tied to living, resisting, dying, and rebirth. We are all linked to one another for survival. (pp. 13–14)

As a whole, the collection forms a picture of American diversity, amplifying the voices of multiply marginalized people. All of the contributors are US-based, though several have origins elsewhere. Beyond the diversity of their disabilities and chronic illnesses, contributors are queer, trans, gender-fluid, non-binary, African American, Asian American, Latinx, indigenous, white, mixed-race, Jewish, Muslim, immigrants, and first-generation Americans. They are activists, organizers, artists, musicians, lawyers, writers, and comedians. Most of them are not academics: rather than listing institutional affiliations, most of their bios include a Twitter handle. *Resistance and Hope* is what you get when you draw together the fiercest voices from the online disability justice community. This collaborative enterprise, uncompromisingly committed to intersectionality and accessibility, represents a new way of doing things. The fact that the entire volume is available for free download from the Disability Visibility Project website in PDF, e-book, and audio formats makes it eminently accessible and shareable—a real gift to

the world from the contributors and editor Alice Wong. The essays are short—about the length of an average blog post—and rooted in lived experience. Those who, like Berger, have grown tired of scholarship in which we ‘refine our theories [and] find niches for arguments that haven’t quite been made in a particular way’ (p. 213), will find the collection refreshing.

The first contribution, by Lydia X. Z. Brown (they/them), picks up on the theme of respectability politics and conflict within activist spaces. Their essay, ‘Rebel—Don’t Be Palatable: Resisting Co-optation and Fighting for the World We Want’, takes an opposing stance to Loftis’s call for strategic assimilation. ‘We can’t let our movements be co-opted’, Brown insists, ‘by neoliberal, exploitative, and unaccountable individuals and organizations that push respectability politics or hackneyed and watered-down versions of the principles we fight for’ (p. 24). They characterize leftist organizing as ‘fighting wars on two fronts’ (p. 16): facing external threats like the alt-right and systemic injustices, as well as internal dangers like gatekeeping, abuse, and single-issue politics. Brown argues that those ‘laboring for liberation’ (p. 15) must prioritize values and principles above rigid ideology. For Brown, the ‘world we want to live in’ values ‘*interdependence, anti-violence, and accountability with compassion*’ (p. 17, emphasis in original). Brown’s essay, like *Resistance and Hope* overall, is aspirational without being idealistic. It illuminates the hard truth that activist spaces often replicate the divisions and biases they seek to resist. Brown reflects that, although joining the autistic activist community was life-changing and empowering, they encountered harmful disavowals of disability within that community:

Some of the first messages I got said that society needs to accept autistic people because autism is a valid difference and not a psychiatric or intellectual disability. Those messages actually say that our humanity is contingent on somebody else’s inhumanity (not to mention how they erase autistic people with psychiatric and/or intellectual disabilities). Disavowal [...] reinforces capitalist scarcity politics by saying that only so many people can be included or have rights. (p. 18)

Like Loftis, Brown alludes to conflicts within the autistic activist community, and the difficulty of resolving allegations of abuse between community members, each with their own experiences of trauma. They critique activism for having ‘its own overcoming myth’ (p. 20), expecting people to eventually progress beyond mistakes. Brown’s formula for disability justice is founded on recognition of our imperfections, and the fluidity of our capacities to engage.

We must ask difficult questions continually, hold ourselves accountable for our privilege and our potential to harm, while also forgiving ourselves.

The difficult questions Brown asks, including ‘Who can’t be here?’ and ‘When do I allow myself to be valid and when do I not?’ (p. 25), are raised again in Victoria Rodríguez-Roldán’s ‘Who Gets To Be the Activist?’ Continuing the theme of respectability politics, Rodríguez-Roldán recounts a story of meeting legislative proponents of the Murphy Bill, which would have taken away rights from people with psychiatric disabilities, and being told it would only apply to ‘serious mental illnesses [. . .] Like bipolar and schizophrenia’ (p. 161, emphasis in original). Rodríguez-Roldán describes the awkwardness that ensued when she shared that she and her partner both have bipolar disorder:

[T]he underlying sentiment was essentially: I’m not talking about *you*, you’re one of the good ones.

Who gets to be one of the ‘good ones’? What’s the criteria for membership into that club? [. . .] Is it being ‘mature’ (whatever that means), or dressing more or less professionally, or whichever other arbitrary metric of respectability we want to apply?

Or maybe a combination of all of the above, all of which boil down to *being perceived as harmless*. (p. 162)

As the rest of the essay suggests, ‘harmless’ does not mean non-violent or well-behaved, but non-threatening in a political sense. Those who pass as ‘good disabled’ get jobs as token hires, bolstering companies’ diversity profiles without upsetting the status quo.

Several essays in the collection pursue a theme of survival. Mari Kurisato addresses eugenic opinions that persist in our culture, as people frequently compare disability unfavorably to death. She revisits the horrific story of Sagami-hara, Japan, where a former caretaker murdered nineteen disabled people and injured twenty-seven others before turning himself in. When this occurred in July 2016, the names of the murder victims were not reported: ‘Hidden. As though their deaths were a crime they committed’ (p. 74). The tragedy prompts Kurisato to title her essay ‘They Had Names’. The caretaker had claimed that disabled people only brought misery to the world, and that it was better that they disappear. Reflecting on her own multiple disabilities and her tribal identity, Kurisato reflects on how her ancestors had to resist disappearing for generations: ‘For us Indigenous people, resistance is existence. [. . .] Natives have a history of this; resistance as ritual, as ceremony’ (pp. 76–77). When the world wants you to disappear, survival itself is resistance.

For Noemi Martinez, survival means different things to the different communities to which she belongs:

survival is coded differently to (white) crip communities and to crip of color communities. Here's where it gets tricky. I can be part of all these communities and circles, and yet still receive fragmented ideas of what survival means. That's why hope and the fight for existence is so tiring. Every community demands a certain amount of sweat so I can be worthy of belonging, of being 'in'. There is only one of me. (p. 103)

Martinez experiences lateral marginalization within her already marginalized communities: by mentioning one of her other identities, she is seen as divisive. Her Latinx community does not tolerate discussion of depression and suicidal ideation, and the mostly white disability community cannot comprehend her commentary on race, culture, and medical racism. Having a multiply marginalized identity means constantly struggling to belong, and Martinez's exhaustion in this vein gestures toward resistance fatigue.

Shain M. Neumeier gives an equally exhausting picture of survival, considering the contexts of American culture's unreasonable expectations of resiliency. Clichéd calls to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps and overcome adversity reflect 'an expectation that we keep pushing and changing ourselves to survive, no matter the cost, instead of questioning the artificial and wholly changeable systemic conditions that put our survival at stake in the first place' (pp. 142–43). For Martinez and Neumeier, survival involves rising to meet the expectations of community, whether these are communities to which one wants to belong or not. Survival, in some situations, demands that you be something you are not, or meet conflict when you fight for the right to be who you are.

Whether fighting to keep existing, overcommitting oneself to multiple communities, or just enduring the harmful rhetoric circulating in the media, most of the voices in *Resistance and Hope* acknowledge that being alive in these times entails exhaustion and fatigue. A theme of self-care therefore emerges in several of the essays (Kurisato, Vilissa K. Thompson, and Naomi Ortiz). Ortiz, who has built her career on self-care trainings for activists, describes how stress and anxiety are absorbed into the body: 'Newspaper headlines weave into my jaw, which tightens to brace for impact. The call from *mi amor* about how activism failed, their sadness fills my *panza*, up into my chest, leaving little room for breath' (p. 153). Written with a literary quality that many of the essays in the collection share, Ortiz's recipe for self-care

involves cultivating a space for hope. Hope carries the risk of disappointment: Ortiz reflects that when we take hope in the direct actions of protestors, for example, our hope lives and dies depending on the outcome. Ortiz describes a process of attentive breathing, paying attention to the body and what it needs, in order to prepare the body to give back to the world. 'In this time of sharp edges, self-care can feel so subtle, light, small. Yet, self-care is the magic ingredient to help us be flexible and adaptable. Self-care is the sunshine which helps hope grow' (p. 157).

Though Ortiz's final remarks on hope are sunny, such is not the case for every essay in the collection, which takes as its guiding question the relationship between resistance and hope. Anita Cameron remarks that hope is essential fuel for the resistance, because without the feeling that things can change, resisters will give up. Lev Kirov offers a darker contemplation on the search for hope:

If the future is going to be worse than the present, how do we proceed into the darkness? Is there a point in proceeding? As I grappled with the mathematics of disability and poverty, wondering if I can afford my medications and which ones I can survive without if push comes to shove, I came to the guiding principle of my life: life is worth living even if I am completely without hope for myself and my future. (p. 133)

For Kirov, sometimes one keeps hope alive for the sake of others, not oneself. 'Is that hope?' he asks; 'I don't know how to manufacture feelings of positivity. But I do know how to keep moving into the darkness and the unknown, waving my flashlight for the other lost and lonely, until my path ends' (p. 136). Even in the near-certainty that the future will be darker than the present, Kirov suggests, we can choose to be the light.

Mia Mingus offers more than a theory of hope in 'Building Back Belonging, Hope and Possibility': her essay testifies to the unexpected successes, reconciliations, and victories she has witnessed doing what she terms 'building alternatives' work (p. 119). Working to end the institutionalization of disabled people, for example, is not effective unless we have done the work of building alternatives to institutionalization, and making our communities safer places for disabled people to live. All the essays in the collection demonstrate that it is harder to build communities committed to inclusion than communities founded on exclusion. But Mingus insists that we remain open to the possibilities of creating real spaces of belonging. She recounts having witnessed abusers and perpetrators of violence taking accountability; survivors holding compassion and love for those who wronged

them, while also holding pain and anger; and bystanders taking accountability for their failures to intervene. ‘I have seen what many would call “impossible”, over and over again and I have only been able to witness these moments because of the discipline of possibility; and I will continue to build back belonging and practice a discipline of possibility until we are all free’, Mingus promises (pp. 127–28).

Building alternatives work, building back belonging, and developing the discipline of possibility are the answers to critiques of resistance that say it is *against* something but *for* nothing. Mingus asserts:

Resistance is only as powerful as what it is in service of. Resistance by itself—resistance just to resist—is not meaningful and will lead to burnout very fast. It’s when resistance is in service of something larger than itself that the true power of resistance is unleashed. (pp. 119–20)

What, then, are the contributors to *Resistance and Hope* resisting *for*? What is ‘the world we want to live in’ (Brown, p. 17)? To summarize the perspectives above, it is a world of accountability, reconciliation, compassion, care and self-care, non-violence, and interdependence; it is a world that recognizes and accepts the limitations of our shared humanity; it is a world in which we work collectively, so that none of us have to overextend ourselves individually.

#### 4. Beyond Identity

Collective resistance is also the subject of Robert McRuer’s *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*. The ‘crip times’ of the title are the present age of economic austerity—the book centers on the years 2010–16—and the invocations of Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854) and the British Marxist journal *New Times* (1989) are explicit and intentional. Like *Hard Times* and *New Times*, *Crip Times* spotlights the inherent injustice of economic inequality under capitalism. More specifically, the target of McRuer’s critique is neoliberalism, or ‘post-Fordism’ (p. 75), in which the state no longer regulates but arguably facilitates rapid short-term wealth accumulation through deregulation of industry, cuts to social spending, and privatization. Disability, McRuer contends, is central to the story of neoliberalism, though its centrality is often overlooked. Yes, disabled people are among the hardest hit by austerity, and yes, austerity tends to create and exacerbate disability and ill health in the poor and working classes—but McRuer’s most insightful observation is that disability as a *concept* features significantly in the rhetoric, stereotypes, and imagery that prop up neoliberalism and austerity.

Rhetorics of individualism—personal strength and weakness—are indispensable to neoliberal politicians popularizing their policies. Fetishizing ‘consumer choice’ and mobilizing discourses of ‘personal responsibility’ (p. 16), the architects of neoliberalism encourage people to see poverty as a consequence of laziness or reckless spending rather than systemic inequities. Ironically, the crisis that leads to austerity is often neoliberalism itself, and austerity as cure makes ‘the fantasy of consumer choice’ inaccessible for most people (p. 16). Still, the punitive monitoring at the individual level persists, while the financial institutions responsible for massive economic crises go unpunished. As McRuer explains the paradox of global austerity politics, ‘Austerity arguably generates extravagant abjection, literally wounding bodies and minds and then metaphorically redoubling that woundedness by pointing to the faded scars and insisting they *merit* austerity, as they have no value and supposedly generate no value’ (p. 101, emphasis in original).

McRuer’s use of the word ‘crip’ in the title and throughout the book, as in his other work, signals defiance and resistance: ‘the politics of *crip* have generally been actively collective or coalitional’ (p. 20, emphasis in original). The book explores local acts of collective resistance that gesture toward a world beyond austerity: acts of protest, art, and community-based responses to social problems. McRuer takes the United Kingdom as ‘ground zero for austerity’ (p. 24), but spirals out to consider collective resistance in other parts of the globe, including Madrid, Berkeley, Mexico City, Chile, and Greece. In each of these places, McRuer discovers ‘new disabled subjectivities and coalitions actively contesting the insidious ways disability has been made to speak in and for neoliberalism’ (p. 55). The ‘globalization’ referenced in the subtitle situates the global in the local: for each example, McRuer explains the particulars of the local politics that prompted communities to organize in resistance, while also contextualizing each story within the broader historical framework of neoliberal austerity.

Under austerity, the code word ‘reform’ (p. 116) justifies the slashing of disability benefits, leaving people to suffer, starve, and die. The readiest example is David Cameron’s ordering of ‘work capability assessments’ through the Department for Work and Pensions (p. 67). Under this scheme, Atos, a private French information technology company, visited disabled people’s homes to determine whether they were ‘fit to work’, and anyone found ‘fit’ would lose their benefits. ‘Fit to work’ ended up meaning fit to die, because many who were found ineligible to keep their benefits never found employment and became ‘destitute’ (Ferguson, quoted p. 67). The assessments especially impacted those whose disabilities were invisible or intermittent (pp. 126–27). Activists estimate that 10,000 people

died as a result of the work capability assessments (p. 68). All this was to make up for the £18 billion that had been cut from the welfare budget in 2010 with plans to cut £11 billion per year after that. One whistleblower claimed that Atos had had a 'target' to reduce the number of people receiving benefits by two-thirds (Ferguson, quoted p. 67).

The realities of our 'crip times' as exposed in this book are devastating. Contemplating these realities, and the human lives attached to them, makes it all the more frustrating to consider the rhetoric that enables such harsh circumstances. In 1978, Margaret Thatcher coined a distinction between 'workers' and 'shirkers' that supported a stereotype of those on benefits as lazy (quoted p. 33). American readers here might think of Paul Ryan's categories of 'makers' versus 'takers' as an almost exact repetition of her strategy. David Cameron used similar rhetoric in a 2010 campaign speech referencing a 'Broken Britain' and calling for personal and financial responsibility (quoted p. 33). American readers, again, might think of Trump's campaign book *Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again* (2015). These discourses, relying on widely held negative views about disability, are unfortunately powerful. Thatcher's 'shirkers' stereotype echoes in common insults such as 'spongers' and 'scroungers' in austerity-era Britain. Today's leaders are less subtle: Boris Johnson (London's Conservative mayor, 2008–16, and Foreign Secretary under Theresa May, 2016–18) suggested that poor people have low IQ, directly blaming poverty on disability (p. 150). McRuer describes such logic as part of 'a constant suspicion that turns attention *away* from class inequalities and *toward* (individualized) behavior' (p. 33, emphases in original).

Negative stereotypes of disability are useful ammunition when targeting other minority groups, such as immigrants, as McRuer's epilogue discusses. Nigel Farage, then leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a far-right group that pushed for Britain to exit the European Union, used metaphors of 'an able-bodied, muscular England defending itself against others' in his arguments, referencing the 'benefits tourism' of unwanted 'others' who were allegedly taking advantage of the UK's National Health Service (p. 222). 'UKIP in particular', McRuer contends, 'makes it possible to apprehend quite easily how and why the extensive discursive disqualification of disabled people (benefit scroungers, shirkers, malingerers) has germinated alongside the xenophobic, racialized disqualification of nonwhite bodies in England' (p. 224).

To illustrate the ways in which neoliberalism relies upon narratives privileging able-bodiedness, McRuer offers a close reading of Thatcher's St Regis Hotel speech. Thatcher said,

One of the reasons we value individuals is not because they're all the same, but because they're all different. I believe you have a saying in the Middle West: 'Don't cut down the tall poppies. Let them rather grow tall.' I would say, let our children grow tall and some taller than others if they have the ability in them to do so. (quoted p. 186)

These comments encapsulate neoliberalism's envisioning of economic resources as a zero-sum game, necessitating the cutting down of some people so that others may reach more dizzying heights. McRuer's book enables us to draw a line from this rhetoric, which might sound innocuous, to the thousands of deaths that resulted from the work capability assessments. Dangerously, Thatcher dispenses the language of diversity in service of her neoliberal agenda. Her meritocratic argument that equality of opportunity cannot guarantee equality of outcome, and the suggestion that this is due to the differences between individuals, works to make inequality seem like the natural outcome of competition, rather than a product of power and domination. The language of diversity, when used in this way, therefore 'provided an alibi (or a smokescreen) for the maintenance of "racial, gender, and class hierarchies"' (Ferguson, quoted, p. 187).

In support of his argument that 'this figuration of disability has been one of the key discursive building blocks of neoliberalism' (p. 177), McRuer offers examples of disability being used to either distract from or generate support for the austerity agenda. He describes how during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, hosted in London at great expense, a broad coalition of activists protested Cameron's welfare cuts and work capability assessments. While tens of thousands of disabled people faced poverty, illness, and death by austerity, an inspirational meme of South African double amputee Oscar Pistorius went viral online, and Paralympic athletes were commodified in the 'Meet the Superhumans' advertising campaign (p. 65). These forms of 'inspiration porn' (Stella Young, quoted p. 66) helped promote the neoliberal championing of individualism, keeping the predicament of the majority of disabled people out of the public eye. Recalling Rodríguez-Raldón's piece, we might say that these photo campaigns presented Pistorius and the Paralympians as the 'good' disabled, in opposition to the 'benefits scroungers' found 'fit to work', who were at that time losing everything.

If images of successful disabled athletes can be co-opted within a neoliberal narrative, so too can ideals of accessibility, McRuer warns. He considers the gentrification of Mexico City and its corresponding displacement of poorer people from their homes, as documented by Livia Radwanski for the artistic/activist collaborative El Museo de los Desplazados. A March

2013 event called ‘Mexico City for Everyone: The Accessibility Legacy of London 2012’ pushed a concept of accessibility based on that of the Olympics. Images in the slideshow depicted the London Aquatics Centre. Ironic, McRuer remarks, that the presenters chose for their icon of accessibility a space with a high fee for entry, therefore ‘accessible’ only to the wealthy (pp. 153–54). ‘As openness and accessibility are exported and imported’, McRuer warns, ‘*so too are the forms of displacement and dispossession that are masked by them*’ (p. 161, emphasis in original). Renovations for the sake of accessibility can therefore masquerade as being in the service of inclusion and a more diverse society, even as they shunt aside the bodies whose diversity is undesired. In a neoliberal understanding of the world as a collection of individuals striving for success, inconvenient bodies will always be disciplined, and although there is inevitable overlap with disability identity, it is not strictly an issue of disability, or identity.

These lessons have urgent value for disability studies because they demonstrate how a movement based on ‘identity’ and ‘rights’ will never be enough. Identity politics can be used to divide as well as to bring people together, so it is essential to remain vigilant to the divisive discourses. For this claim, McRuer draws on Antonio Gramsci, via Anne Finger’s scholarship. Gramsci wrote about how segregating populations via stereotypes can block the formation of revolutionary alliances that threaten the capitalist hegemony. Stereotypes of southern Italians as criminal and incapable served to naturalize economic inequality by locating the blame within problematic bodies rather than economic systems. Moreover, both the bourgeoisie and the Socialist Party used this disqualifying rhetoric (Finger, cited p. 34). There are problems with the rhetoric of both sides, too, in the present age of austerity. McRuer explains how the liberal focus on marginalized identities, when divorced from meaningful class analysis, is counterproductive:

class struggle and economic inequality [...] are often displaced onto identity concerns. For conservative politicians, the problem is thus never economic inequality, but problematic groups that can be identified and surveilled, such as people of color or immigrant workers; for certain well-meaning liberal politicians *and* academics, the ‘inclusion’ of more and more substantive identity groups can direct attention away from class struggle and class analysis, even when that is not the explicit intent. (pp. 132–33, emphasis in original)

Adding McRuer's insights to the perspectives in *Resistance and Hope*, it is evident that the field of disability studies must recognize the potential similarities between identity politics and respectability politics. Previously celebrated code words like 'diversity' and 'inclusion', when co-opted by neoliberalism, are emptied of all transgressive potential.

When the concepts of disability identity and rights are mobilized by coalitions that have a goal of actual social transformation, however, they can still be effective, especially in 'a time and place of indignation or outrage' (p. 45). When political and economic circumstances are blatantly unjust, the most powerful revolutionary move is to call direct attention to their consequences for disabled people. In the locales McRuer focuses on, 'the definite conditions of embodied precarity [...] have necessitated and called forth disabled people's positioning front and center in the struggle against austerity' (p. 45). The examples of collective resistance and activist art that he examines gesture toward the promise of a disability studies and disability activism beyond identity politics. Though some of the actions he describes are undertaken by disabled activists, confronting issues that are clearly connected to disability—such as the 'crip camp' in Berkeley, California, calling itself 'Arnieville' in protest at Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's cuts to disability benefits (pp. 101–03)—the actions that are *not* exclusively legible as disability affairs are arguably *more* powerful, generating a sense of broad collective struggle.

McRuer describes, for instance, the student movement against increased fees in Chile in 2011. The students' call for free and accessible education was not specifically a disability issue. However, when students went on hunger strike, and had to wear masks to protect their compromised immune systems, and use wheelchairs to march with their comrades, the imagery of the Chilean student movement resonated as disability imagery, calling attention to the shared mortality of all humans subject to austerity. McRuer remarks that images of the hunger-striking students offered up 'disability loosened from a certain kind of identity politics more legible and important (at least for some disability activists and theorists) in places like the United States' (p. 110). Here, *Crip Times* echoes scholarship critiquing disability pride as a first-world concern. The student protests in Chile were a performance of interdependent solidarity, as the students not on hunger strike relied on those who were, and vice versa. Their interactions were visible in the public sphere as the basis of an interdependent community.

If solidarity and interdependence are key features of 'the world we want to live in' described by the activists of *Resistance and Hope*, we might also look to the grassroots organizers in Greece. Under the harshest circumstances of

austerity in Europe, which elected officials failed to alleviate, activists opened over forty social medical centers around the country to meet the needs of those who could not afford treatments and medicine. ‘The crip tactic of social medical centers’, McRuer extols, ‘generates a double move, constructing anarchist forms of local care while keeping in purview the need for larger state strategies and extrastate tactics for ending austerity’ (p. 123). Under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras, the anti-austerity candidate who ended up capitulating to Germany and the Eurozone, the failure of Greece’s short-lived flirtation with what was called ‘socialism’ is similar to that of other nations bearing that label: pressures from the world order of global capitalism proved impossible to overcome. Those fighting austerity on the ground therefore have to look for solutions on all fronts, from the community to the state and beyond.

Given the amount of power that those who benefit from neoliberalism currently enjoy, McRuer’s tone in this book is not optimistic that that power can be taken away (p. 18). He does say that crip times mark ‘promise and possibility’ (p. 29), but he joins Nirmala Erevelles in cautioning strongly against a theorization of ‘limitless possibilities’ (Erevelles, quoted p. 99) that envisions a ‘choosing subject’ (Judith Butler, quoted p. 99) because such notions rely on the same individualism that drives neoliberalism. Significantly, McRuer’s stance on the concept of ‘hope’ is decidedly different from any expressed in *Resistance and Hope*. He references the editors of the quarterly *Salvage*, who argue that hope is ‘too weak a formulation’ for ‘salvage-Marxism’, which recognizes the bleakness of globalized capitalism and the failures of the left to effectively organize against it (*Salvage*, quoted p. 144). He later continues in his own words, ‘Hope is not, and likely should not be, the dominant sentiment, taking into account the ways in which hopefulness puts at risk what Michel Foucault termed a “hyper- and pessimistic activism”’ (p. 231).

The act of resistance McRuer describes in the greatest detail in his book is a performance-art piece called *Figures* by UK-based disabled artist Liz Crow. Crow sculpted 650 figures out of river mud—650 being the number of constituencies in the UK, and the number of members of the House of Commons in Parliament. Each figure was paired with the story of a single citizen who had died under conditions of austerity, or one still living but struggling to survive. The stories appear on the project’s website, ‘We Are Figures’, and the figures toured the UK in a mobile exhibition throughout the 2015 election, finally being burned in a public bonfire. Taken in its entirety, the performance piece sets the kind of tone McRuer encourages for the future of the field:

If disability activism and studies have critiqued the ways in which disabled lives have been objectified as case studies, *Figures* arguably works in another direction, generating a collectivist sense of ‘we’re all in this together’ and encouraging the proliferation of personal stories that bore witness to that collective experience. (p. 205)

For McRuer, the best crip resistance is that which ‘figures crip futures, often by bearing witness to crip pasts that are vanishing’ (p. 230). *Crip Times* therefore calls for a resistance that aspires to ‘totality’ in the Marxist sense, apprehending the full complexity in which the social struggles of our day all come to bear on one another, for ‘social relations that can (of course) be figured [...] can (of course) be changed’ (p. 217).

## 5. An Abbreviated Manifesto

In the spirit with which I began, I will conclude with an abbreviated manifesto synthesizing the formula for resistance offered by these three books. The critical disability studies we need in these ‘crip times’ is one that:

1. *Bridges activism and the academy.* Many of us routinely take our calling as educators beyond the boundaries of the classroom. We should also take advantage of the wisdom of community members by bringing them into our classrooms. Never forget that many of the most powerful acts of resistance are undertaken by students.
2. *Centers interdependence and abolishes myths of independence.* It’s crucial to recognize that ableist narratives of self-reliance are crafted to uphold the neoliberal agenda, perpetuating poverty and masking the injustices of wealth inequality.
3. *Rejects scarcity politics and replaces competition with collaboration.* Both within activist spaces and across lines of political division, we need to build our power on the basis of shared struggle.

As critical disability studies scholars, we can do more than refine our theories; as activists, we can do more than survive fascism. We are not resisting for the sake of resistance. We are building a dream for a different kind of world, a democracy loosened from the dehumanizing rhetorics of ableist neoliberalism. Disability justice is more than a theory: it is a feeling, a commitment to solidarity. Disabled activists Alice Wong, Mia Mingus, and Sandy Ho demonstrated this message on Valentine’s Day 2019 with the hashtag #AccessIsLove. The hashtag is inspired by Mingus’s keynote at the 2018 Disability Intersectionality Summit: ‘Disability Justice is Simply

Another Term for Love'. Radical thinkers have proposed a society structured on love before. Is such an old idea really so threateningly radical?

## Books Reviewed

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