

ARTICLE

Desiring Disability Differently: Neoliberalism, Heterotopic Imagination and Intracorporeal Reconfigurations

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ABSTRACT: Challenging the undesirability of disability is a shared responsibility that requires us to imagine disability differently. In order to imagine disability differently, we need to understand how the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination—key to processes that create good disabled and able-bodied neoliberal subjects—works to curtail who is perceived to have a desirable body. In order to desire disability differently, we must begin with marginal, heterotopic imaginations whereby disability is not something to overcome, but rather is part of a life worth living. In this article, I build on Foucault's concepts of heterotopia (1998), milieu, and the government of things (2007), and Karen Barad's agential realism (2007), as well as draw on the work of Mel Chen (2012) and Rod Michalko (1999) in order to argue that the heterotopic imagination reconfigures how we consider disability to emerge, with whom, and where. By mobilising the heterotopic imagination, we can come to recognise that disability does not emerge as an individualised human body, but rather is an intracorporeal, non-anthropocentric multiplicity. To desire disability differently through the heterotopic imagination is not simply to allow the current formulation of disability to become desirable, but rather to *radically alter how* we desire disability, in addition to altering what disability is, how it is practised, and what it can be.

Keywords: disability; heterotopic imagination; neoliberalism; intracorporeality; agential realism

Introduction

More than 20 years have passed since the introduction, in 1990, of the groundbreaking *Americans with Disabilities Act* (A.D.A.) in the U.S. and the introduction, in 1992, of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (D.D.A.) in Australia; and more than 15 years have passed since the introduction, in 1995, of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (D.D.A.) in the U.K. And yet, it "is

still not fashionable to be disabled.”¹ Despite changing legislation, increasing levels of public accessibility, the push to productively employ disabled people, and even the inclusion of disabled people on fashion runways,² something about disability remains unfashionably undesirable. I maintain that this undesirability of disability stems from what disability theorist Alison Kafer calls “an ableist failure of imagination.”³ This ableist failure of imagination exposes how it is the case that disabled people are increasingly included and integrated into western neoliberal economies and social life and, yet, disability simultaneously remains a deeply and profoundly undesirable category of being. The best evidence of the undesirability of disability is the prevalence of the public sentiment that the majority of people would rather die than be disabled,⁴ or would not want to have a disabled child.⁵ Although some disabled people both have and produce value within neoliberal economies, and despite the fact that many people enthusiastically support the rights of disabled people to access education, work, and have meaningful social lives, disability remains stubbornly undesirable. Indeed, even many disabled people would agree with Kafer who cautiously comments that she does not wish to become “more disabled” than she already is.⁶

Challenging the undesirability of disability is a shared responsibility and goes beyond the inclusion of disabled people within the exploitative and individualised relations

¹ Dan Goodley, Bill Hughes, and Lennard Davis, “Introducing Disability and Social Theory” in Dan Goodley, Bill Hughes, Lennard Davis (eds.), *Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

² Ruth Spencer, “Model Danielle Sheypuk: ‘People with Disabilities are Consumers of Fashion,’” *The Guardian* (February 14, 2014). Accessed on: February 26, 2014. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2014/feb/14/model-wheelchair-new-york-fashion-week>; Katy Winter, “Breaking Down Barriers: Russian Designers Present Catwalk Collections on Disabled Models at Moscow Fashion Week”, *Dailymail* (2014, March 31). Accessed on: April 7, 2014. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2593426/Breaking-barriers-Russian-designers-present-catwalk-collections-disabled-models-Moscow-Fashion-Week.html>

³ Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4.

⁴ Iris Marion Young, “Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought”, *Constellations*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1997), 340–363; Anita Silvers, “Reconciling Equality to Difference: Caring (F)or Justice for People with Disabilities”, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1995), 30–55; Stacy Clifford, “Making Disability Public in Deliberative Democracy”, *Contemporary Political Theory*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2012), 211–228; Dominika Bednarska, “Rethinking Access”, in Sharon Kleinman (ed.), *The Culture of Efficiency: Technology in Everyday Life* (USA: Peter Lang, 2009), 158–169.

⁵ Ranya Rapp, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus. The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Norman M. Ford, *The Prenatal Person: Ethics from Conception to Birth* (Blackwell: UK, 2002); Kristen Karlberg, “Shaping Babies: No Not THAT Kind! Can I Try Again?” in *Gendered Bodies: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 2nd ed.); Kristen Karlberg, “Am I Good Enough for My Family: Fetal Genetic Bodies and Prenatal Genetic Testing”, in *The Body Reader: Essential Social and Cultural Readings* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

⁶ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 4.

of neoliberal capitalism. That is, challenging the undesirability of disability requires more than individualised access to education, employment, or vibrant social lives. Challenging the undesirability of disability requires that disability be imagined differently, that is, imagined in ways that ensure that disability can be collectively practised and experienced differently. In order to imagine disability differently, it is imperative to understand how the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination both works to curtail who is considered desirable and informs the production of a good, individualised neoliberal subject that limits disabled and able-bodied people alike. Neoliberal policies and practices individualise both the able-bodied and disabled bodies through forms of debility and capacity⁷ and through the economisation of social relations and life itself⁸ such that a critical stance on these forms of social, economic and political relations is not enough to extricate ourselves from our role in the maintenance and reproduction of these relations. In order to desire disability differently, we must begin with marginal, heterotopic imaginations whereby disability is practised not as something to overcome or merely tolerate, but rather as a part of a life worth living. Building on Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia,⁹ a concept that marks "outside places" by their discontinuity and multiplicity, and drawing on the work of Mel Chen¹⁰ and Rod Michalko,¹¹ I argue that the heterotopic imagination reconfigures how disability emerges, with whom it emerges, and where. When disability is viewed through the lens of the heterotopic imagination, it becomes an intracorporeal, non-anthropocentric multiplicity that exceeds the individualised human body inscribed by neoliberal capitalism. To elaborate on disability as this emergent multiplicity, I read Chen's and Michalko's work alongside Foucault's concepts of the milieu and government of things, as well as the agential realism of feminist materialist Karen Barad.¹² Desiring disability differently does not merely allow the current formulation of disability to become desirable. On the contrary, desiring disability differently through the heterotopic imagination *radically alters* how we desire disability, as well as what disability is, how it is practiced, and what it can be.

⁷ Jasbir Puar, "Coda: The Cost of Getting Better. Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints", *GLQ*, no. 18, vol. 1 (2012), 149-158.

⁸ Michelle Murphy, "The Girl: Mergers of Feminism and Finance in Neoliberal Times", *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2013). Accessed February 27, 2014. Available at: <http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/gender-justice-and-neoliberal-transformations/the-girl-mergers-of-feminism-and-finance-in-neoliberal-times/>

⁹ Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces", in James D. Faubion (eds.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (New York: New Press, 1998), 175-85.

¹⁰ Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Rod Michalko, *The Two in One: Walking with Smokie, Walking with Blindness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

¹² Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

The Hegemonic Social Imagination

As a field of study, disability studies has thoroughly charted the contemporary history of disability in Western societies, marking the ways in which disabled people have been significantly excluded from social and political communities.¹³ Despite the fact that disabled people are increasingly integrated into the neoliberal labor force¹⁴ and have become an emerging and lucrative consumer population, the contemporary neoliberal hegemonic social imaginary remains firm in its ableist assessment that disability is not a desirable form of being. Although the difference of disability can be, and in some contexts is, celebrated in terms of “disability pride,” it is commonly assumed that disabled people would rather be able-bodied¹⁵ or would be “better off dead,”¹⁶ or never born at all.¹⁷

The contemporary neoliberal hegemonic social imagination privileges and compels able-bodiedness above any form of disability to the extent “the value of a disability-free future is seen as self-evident.”¹⁸ The value of a disability-free future is taken as self-evident due to the force by which disability has been linked to a life of “suffering,” “unhappiness,” “dependency,” “poverty,” “disadvantage,” and “incapacitation.” Insofar as many disabled bodies fail to meet standards of independence, rationality, control, or are not adequately productive, many disabled people thus fail to meet perceived standards of what it is to be a worthy subject, a failure that denigrates disabled lives. Although many states have made tremendous strides towards formal integration of disabled people, many of them continue to be excluded from full social participation because disability remains stubbornly outside of what is considered a life worth living. Kafer’s “ableist failure of imagination” or what I call “the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination” cannot fathom a future that includes embracing the *desire* for disability. Note that the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination does not refer to a faculty of the human mind that pre-exists any given subject, but rather is a process of signs, discourses, material relations, and feelings that are simultaneously con-

¹³ For example, Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995); Brendan Gleeson, *Geographies of Disability* (London: Routledge, 1998); Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], “Disability Good for Business”, *The National* (February 26, 2014). Accessed on: March 13, 2014. Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/TV+Shows/The+National/ID/2439758698/?page=2>

¹⁵ Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁶ Sally Hayward, “The Canadian Legal System, the Robert Latimer Case, and the Rhetorical Construction of (Dis)ability: ‘Bodies that Matter?’” *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, vol. 37 (2009), 187–201.

¹⁷ Rapp, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus*; Ford, *The Prenatal Person*; Karlberg, “Shaping Babies: No Not THAT Kind! Can I Try Again?”; Karlberg, “Am I Good Enough for My Family”.

¹⁸ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 3.

stituted by, and constitutive of, subjectivity. Thus, the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination does not merely exist in the mind of any given subject, even as it shapes how people understand themselves and others, impacts expectations, goings-on, and norms of relating, including the capacity to mark a life as one worth living.

In *The Body Problematic*, Laura Hengehold argues that it is our imagination that unifies and stabilises our otherwise fractured and discontinuous embodied experiences.¹⁹ To make this argument, Hengehold begins with Kant's notion of imagination and how, for Kant, imagination is constitutive of a body. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant names the transcendental imagination as a faculty that actively forms a concept for every intuition, and creates the unity of "different representations under a common one."²⁰ In Kant's theoretical framework, the faculty of reason requires that our apprehensions of particular experiences ultimately form a whole, even though we are never able to experience the whole as such because our level of analysis or description limits any knowledge that we may have and, thus, prevents us from knowing a thing-in-itself.²¹ For Kant, because we cannot know reality in its totality nor can we know things-in-themselves, we use the imagination to stabilise and transform discontinuities into a seamless whole. This is true of bodies as much as of the world. In other words, in order for the world and our reality to make sense as a whole, some details must always be left to the imagination.²²

People are not unrestrained in how they fill in the gaps of this fragmented and uncertain reality, that is, they cannot fill in the gaps with whatever imagined unity that they choose. Rather, relations of power delimit and determine what constitutes wholeness in order to give value to the fragments of the world that people experience. Currently, the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination is mobilised through institutional practices, symbols, discourses and representations that work to stabilise and unify the neoliberal subject. Foucault's genealogical histories map the ways in which modern forms of administration, knowledge-production, and power take "advantage of the very fact that we have no access to our bodies as 'things-in-themselves' in order to tell us what those bodies *really are* and what they *really need* or *really can do*."²³ For instance, power works on bodies so as to produce and naturalise a self-governing subject who subscribes to neoliberal individualism and economisation and ableist configurations of disability.

¹⁹ Laura Hengehold, *The Body Problematic: Political Imagination in Kant and Foucault* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Gyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B93.

²¹ Hengehold, *The Body Problematic*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 117.

When disability is taken as a simplified, biological, and undesirable “monolithic fact of the body,”²⁴ what disability *really is* and *really can do* is delimited by the very historical configurations of knowledge/power that depoliticise how disability came to be naturalised as such in the first place. Kafer argues that disability is overwhelmingly “depoliticized, presented as a fact of life requiring determination and courage, not as a system of marking some bodies, ways of thinking, and patterns of movement as deviant and unworthy.”²⁵ As Robert McRuer has argued, although it is true that disabled people do not embody *absolute* deviance, they nevertheless remain subordinated within a system of compulsory able-bodiedness.²⁶ As a result of this subordination, the normative able-body masquerades as a neutral nonidentity: the autonomous, rational subject that can smoothly move *his* body in accordance with what is considered acceptable and appropriate within the social sphere.²⁷ Such ability signifies a body that deserves recognition and is enabled to participate in social life. Disability, in contrast to this normative, neutral, nonidentity, is given meaning through the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination that defines disabled people as unworthy, inadequate, and dependent, while naturalising disability as excessive, contaminated, indicative of helplessness, pitiable, deviant, tragic, and inferior.

In general, people avoid disability. When disability is thought about at all, however, questions of desirability quickly arise. Most quality-of-life measures assume that disability is ontologically problematic²⁸ and are deeply embedded in neoliberal processes of individualisation and the economisation of life.²⁹ In medical literature and practices, disability is associated with flaw and deficit and is hierarchically distinguished from the norm. Indeed, questions of selective abortion, prenatal screening, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide cannot be untangled from normative sentiments according to which a disabled life is not a life worth living.³⁰

In a shift away from medicalisation and configurations of knowledge/power that depoliticise disability, and in order to claim a political presence, the disabled subject has

²⁴ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁶ McRuer, *Crip Theory*, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁸ Sara Goering, “‘You Say You’re Happy, but...’: Contested Quality of Life Judgments in Bioethics and Disability Studies” *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, vol. 5, nos. 2-3 (2008), 125–135.

²⁹ Murphy, “The Girl: Mergers of Feminism and Finance in Neoliberal Times”

³⁰ Shelley Tremain, “The Biopolitics of Bioethics and Disability”, *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, vol. 5, nos. 2-3 (2008), 101–106; Ruth Hubbard, “Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Should Not Inhabit the World?” in Lennard Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 74–86; Marsha Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion”, in Lennard Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 87–100; Michael Berubé, “Disability, Democracy, and the New Genetics”, in Lennard Davis (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 100–14.

asserted itself as having a viable, worthy, and intelligible body, as a body that matters, and as a life worth living. The success of such assertions has led to the emergence of the disability rights movement, disability pride, and the development of a positive minority identity, uniting persons with various impairments in the common experience of able-bodied oppression. Such able-bodied oppression has been articulated through a conceptual distinction made between disability and impairment, positioning disability as a social disadvantage that is imposed on top of a neutral physiological impairment. The problem is thus located in the interaction between bodies and the social and material environments in which they are situated. People are made to be disabled by external barriers, like stairs, lack of accessible and affordable housing, inaccessible work environments, transportation systems, or social services, etc.

The disability rights movement has done a great deal to politicise the ableism that disabled people experience; in doing so, however, the disability rights movement tends to replace the heterogeneous world of impairment with a homogenised (and homogenising) disability identity. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson puts it, social and political circumstances have forged disabled people as a “highly marked, heterogeneous group whose only commonality is being considered abnormal.”³¹ Similarly, Simi Linton comments:

We are everywhere these days, wheeling and loping down the street, tapping our canes, sucking on our breathing tubes, following our guide dogs, puffing and sipping on the mouth sticks that propel our motorized chairs. We may drool, hear voices, speak in staccato syllables, wear catheters to collect our urine, or live with a compromised immune system. We are all bound together, not by this list of our collective symptoms but by the social and political circumstances that have forged us as a group.³²

The focus on an exterior environment as the site for the production of disability threatens to depoliticise the difference of impairment and bodily aspects of disability, as well as homogenise the diverse differences within disabled communities. In other words, when disability is construed as something externally contributed to bodies, impairment threatens to be naturalised as an already existing interior biological identity upon which culture and other factors external to the subject act.

Regardless of how politically useful the distinction between impairment and disability has been to assertions of rights and demands for access to work, transportation, and community life, this strategy of political sameness is caught up in the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination that organises bodies to make them productive within a neoliberal economy; that is, the disabled body of the disability rights movement is rendered intelligible

³¹ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 24.

³² Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 4.

and valued as a body that matters in order to claim its status as a body that can work and produce. Both the A.D.A. and the UK D.D.A. promote disabled people as potentially productive workers, framing such promotion of disabled people as an act of social justice.³³ To be regarded as a productive worker does not, of course, create a secure position for the disabled subject within neoliberalism; it does, however, make disabled people available to the labor market, that is, available to the *precariousness* of the labor market. Within the logic of neoliberalism, disabled subjects, insofar as they remain juxtaposed to the rational, independent, individualised and economised neoliberal subject, teeter between these circumstances: forced to live or left to die. That is, either disabled subjects become productive subjects and thus are valued as lives worth living or they risk exclusion altogether.³⁴ Mapping out the power relations of the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination is a move away from the construal of disability as a problem of exclusion in order to interrogate how worthiness itself is produced both economically and socially, an interrogation that aims to highlight the dangers that are interwoven with potential gains for disabled people who become productive subjects. In order to move away from the neoliberal approach that makes disability intelligible by capacitating some disabled bodies to make them economically and socially productive and, in addition, to disrupt these particular social renderings of disability as excessive, contaminated, helpless, deviant, tragic, and inferior, we must take up the political aspect of impairment, for the production of the physiological and material reality of impairment is part of the social production of disability.

Shelley Tremain has innovatively drawn on Foucault's mechanisms of disciplinary power/knowledge and Judith Butler's performativity of embodiment in order to argue that the materiality of the impaired body cannot be dissociated from the practices that bring it into being.³⁵ Impairment cannot be a value-neutral fact of the body or merely a biological description because it is always already saturated in medical, legal, social, and cultural constructions of disability. Both impairment and disability are effects of historical conditions, contingent on relations of power/knowledge. Tremain notes that to link impairment to disability in this way does not amount to a denial of important material or biological differences between bodies, but rather points to the ways in which "these differences are always

³³ Sunaura Taylor, "The Right not to Work: Power and Disability", *The Monthly Review*, vol. 55, no. 10 (2004). Accessed on August 8, 2014. Available at: <http://monthlyreview.org/2004/03/01/the-right-not-to-work-power-and-disability>

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³⁵ Shelley Tremain, "On the Subject of Impairment", in Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare (eds.), *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 32-47; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

already signified and formed by discursive and institutional practices.”³⁶ In short, Tremain’s argument is that the impaired disabled body appears through historically-specific practices that naturalise impairment as an already existing interior biological identity upon which culture acts.

The turn toward the ways in which power/knowledge has naturalised impairment is not a turn away from the social production of disability. Biomedical practices have been complicit in the emergence of the category of impairment, which, in turn, has informed the production of disability. Through impairment as a power/knowledge relation, disability becomes about both barriers to *doing* as well as barriers to *being*. In this vein, Eli Clare writes: “in defining the external, collective, material nature of social injustice as separate from the body, we have sometimes ended up sidelining the profound relationships that connect our bodies with who we are and how we experience oppression.”³⁷ Bodies matter because we live in them and because the disciplinary power/knowledge relations that constitute the self—both as impaired and as disabled—are embodied. Thus, as Tremain remarks, “When we recognize that matter is an *effect* of historical conditions and contingent relations of power [...] we can begin to identify and resist the ones that have material-ized it.”³⁸

Barriers to *doing* require changes to the built environment, access to resources, funding and supports such as a guaranteed living wage and affordable, accessible housing. In addition, *doing* requires dismantling barriers to *being*, that is, barriers that end up foreclosing and delimiting what is considered a life worth living. Thus, in order to remove barriers to *being* and *doing*, we must transform the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination and dismantle the investment in neoliberal subjectivities that sustains it. Inasmuch as we imagine disability through both medicalisation and neoliberalism as an individualised problem, we fail to engage disability as an emergent intracorporeal multiplicity. In order to build on Tremain’s insights, and in an effort to set out a position that grounds disability as an emergent intracorporeal multiplicity and thus diverges from the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination of disability, I shall now turn to Foucault and Barad. Taking up disability as an intracorporeal multiplicity in this way opens up space for the heterotopic imagination of desiring disability differently.

Intracorporeality, Agential Realism, and the Milieu of a Government of Things

³⁶ Shelley Tremain, “On the Government of Disability”, *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2001), 627.

³⁷ Eli Clare, “Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness”, *Public Culture*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2001), 359.

³⁸ Tremain, “On the Subject of Impairment”, 35.

The notion of intracorporeality, a notion which builds upon both Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality³⁹ and Gail Weiss's concept of intercorporeality,⁴⁰ posits that bodies are formed *within a relation*, rather than formed "across" or "between" already-formed bodies. To perceive how bodies emerge within a relation is to emphasise that any given body only ever emerges from, and is constituted by and within, always already entangled relations. Such an intracorporeal emergence suggests that any enactment of a body is ontologically and epistemologically saturated, never stable, or final.

Barad introduces the neologism of intra-action to signify "*the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.*"⁴¹ In contrast to the notion of interaction, whereby separate entities precede their coming together, the "notion of intra-action," Barad explains, "recognizes that distinct agencies do not proceed, but rather emerge through, their intra-action."⁴² Such "distinct agencies" are distinct only in their mutual entanglement and do not otherwise exist as individual elements.⁴³ Thus, the "agency" of matter in general or of any given thing in particular is not an attribute or property of matter or of the given thing, but rather an ongoing reconfiguration of the world.⁴⁴ As such, matter is a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations that in each specific enactment reconfigures the world. Matter is not simply a passive property of things.⁴⁵

Following Barad, and building on Tremain's denaturalisation of impairment, I want to argue that disability is not a property of a thing and does not biologically inhere in one body. In other words, the "essence" of disability is neither (say) a genetic mutation nor (say) a wheelchair blocked by a flight of stairs; rather, disability emerges as an historically-specific onto-epistemological materialisation of intra-active matter. Onto-epistemology highlights knowing as a material practice of engagement that is of the world in its differential becoming.⁴⁶ Epistemology and ontology, like impairment and disability, cannot be separated because practices of knowing are material in ways that are drenched in power relations that constitute how a given subject or object emerges, although these power relations do not fully determine its emergence. In this way, impairment/disability is not a biological or social identity that inheres within a body, but rather is a material practice. This understanding of disability *as a practice* builds upon Foucault and Butler insofar as it moves away from linguistic representationalism towards the "constitutive aspects of discursive practices

³⁹ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁴¹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33; emphasis in original.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

in their materiality.”⁴⁷ As Barad states, “Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated.”⁴⁸

Barad is clearly indebted to both Foucault and Butler: as a posthumanist, however, Barad perceives anthropocentrism in their work and explicitly departs from it by emphasizing the import of both the agency of matter to continually reconfigure the world and the role of the nonhuman in shaping practices, such as the practices of disability. In addition, Barad contends that Foucault is unclear about “the material nature of discursive practices”⁴⁹ and fails to account for how “materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power.”⁵⁰ For Barad, what is important is that the body’s materialisation must take account of “*how the body’s materiality* (including for example, its anatomy and physiology) *and other material forces as well* (including nonhuman ones) *actively matter to the processes of materialization.*”⁵¹

Barad’s contentions with Foucault have been taken up by Thomas Lemke, who argues that the concepts of milieu and the government of things, concepts that Foucault introduced in his 1978 lecture series at the Collège de France,⁵² leave open a way to go beyond perceived anthropocentric limitations of his work by accounting for the relational entanglement of “men and things, the natural and the artificial, the physical and the moral.”⁵³ While it is true that Foucault’s analyses of power/knowledge focused primarily on the human sciences and what Barad calls “the social,” Lemke argues that a posthumanist approach is “implicit but not developed in Foucault’s work.”⁵⁴ In the 1978 lectures, Lemke notes, Foucault’s “interpretation of the art of government does not conceive of interactions between two stable and fixed entities— ‘humans’ and ‘things.’ Rather, Foucault employs a relational approach” that deals with a “complex of men and things,” including resources, means of subsistence, climate, customs, habits, and ways of acting.⁵⁵ The relational empha-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 65; emphasis in original.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

⁵² Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977- 1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵³ Thomas Lemke, “New Materialisms: Foucault and the ‘Government of Things,’” *Theory, Culture & Society*, (2014), 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7; see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 96.

sis that Lemke finds in Foucault is further substantiated by the concept of the milieu that, according to Foucault, “is needed to account for action at a distance of one body on another.”⁵⁶ Foucault remarks:

The milieu is a set of natural givens—rivers, marshes, hills—and a set of artificial givens—an agglomeration of individuals, of houses, etcetera. The milieu is a certain number of combined, overall effects bearing on all who live in it. It is an element in which a circular link is produced between effects and causes, since an effect from one point of view will be a cause from another.⁵⁷

The milieu marks the way in which individuals “only exist biologically bound to the materiality within which they live.”⁵⁸ Lemke concludes that “Foucault quite clearly accepts the idea that agency is not exclusively a property of humans; rather agential power originates in relations between human and non-human entities.”⁵⁹ If the concepts of the milieu and the government of things suggest an implicit posthumanism in Foucault’s work, they nonetheless remain unfortunately underdeveloped.

Barad’s “agential realism,” which works to explicitly develop a posthumanist performativity, focuses on humans *of* the world, rather than *in* the world. That is, human thought, knowledge, practices, embodiments, and subjectivities are not just in relation to the world outside of humans, but rather emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Barad’s focus on being *of* the world, rather than being “in” the world, points to the ways in which nonhumans play a role in (what she terms) “naturalcultural practices” and how matter itself has agency and intra-acts with the human.⁶⁰ Barad writes that humans are not “simply located in particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity.”⁶¹ In other words, human “existence is not an individual affair;”⁶² on the contrary, it is only through entangled intra-relating that individuals emerge at all.⁶³ In short, “agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements.”⁶⁴ In this way, bodies are not simply in the world, but rather are

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 20-21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Lemke, “New Materialisms”, 8.

⁶⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 32.

⁶¹ Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter”, in Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman (eds.), *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 146; emphasis in original.

⁶² *Ibid.*, ix.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33; emphasis in original.

engaged in a reconfiguration of what exists by intra-actively co-constituting the world. The dynamism of matter—human and nonhuman—brings forth new worlds.⁶⁵

When we conceive disability as an intracorporeal practice, we recognise that it is the onto-epistemological emergence of the world, rather than any one thing. As such, it is an emergence based on particular materialities that are informed by ever-shifting framings of what it is to have a body and what that body can do. The neoliberal hegemonic constitution of disabled bodies as lives not worth living would be one such specific materialisation of the disabled body. The way in which neoliberalism makes disabled bodies worthy through production and consumption would be another materialisation of the disabled body. If the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination limits what it is to have a body and what that body can do, then, the heterotopic imagination must work to open space for desiring disability differently, so as to be able to collectively practice and experience disability differently.

Taking account of the intracorporeality of embodiment (disabled or not) requires both a social imagination and an ethic that works counter to contemporary logics of what constitutes a worthy subject. Thus, heterotopic imagination becomes an important tool with which to open up space to desire disability differently, as well as to be accountable to the nonhuman upon which any emergence depends.

The Heterotopic Imagination

For Foucault, any possible world involves a multiplicity of spaces. For Foucault, furthermore, a multiplicity of spaces involves what he calls heterotopias:

[R]eal places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable.⁶⁶

Foucault offers an example to illustrate his notion of heterotopias. A mirror is a heterotopia, he explains, insofar as a mirror “makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal—since, to be perceived, it is obliged to go by way of that virtual point which is over there.”⁶⁷

In a move that suggests a shift in his work toward biopolitics, governmentality, and the management of the life of populations, Foucault outlines two types of heterotopias: cri-

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶⁶ Foucault, “Different Spaces”, 178.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

sis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation.⁶⁸ Regardless of type, however, what is key for Foucault is that each heterotopia “has the ability to juxtapose in a single real place several emplacements that are incompatible in themselves.”⁶⁹ He notes, furthermore, that “heterotopias are connected with temporal discontinuities” and “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at the same time.”⁷⁰ Thus, heterotopias are marked by incompatibility, discontinuity, and difference.

Heterotopic imagination, then, emphasises incompatibility, discontinuities, temporal differences, and offers a space that is both open and closed. Foucault suggests that struggles over subjectification should not attempt to form an overarching imaginary for themselves.⁷¹ Hengehold, drawing on Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, Volume One*, comments that “this approach is exemplified by his reluctance to treat sexuality as a source for identity or a general object of liberation, affirming, instead, the plurality of ‘bodies and pleasures.’”⁷² The lesson to draw from Foucault’s reluctance is that disability itself should not be marked as a liberatory subjectivity, but rather should ignite the heterotopic imagination as vehicle of multiplicity, where desiring disability differently is to attest to the incompatible, discontinuous, and temporal difference of disability as a way to approach the intracorporeality of embodiment and a relational ethic that accounts for the nonhuman, rather than doing so in the name of new economic markets.

The heterotopic imagination that opens up disability as a multiplicity changes “the range of actions people believe are possible in a given historical situation,” and the ability of people “to envision a way of life or quality of life.”⁷³ Heterotopic imagination provides the space to ask “In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?”⁷⁴ It is impossible to know what a singular, contingent body can do until it becomes clear with what bodies it can combine, and what the constraints are of those combinations.

⁶⁸ Each heterotopia “has a precise and specific operation within the society” (Foucault, “Different Spaces”, 180). Crisis heterotopias are privileged, sacred, or forbidden places reserved for “individuals who are in a state of crisis with respect to society and the human milieu in which they live” (Ibid., 179). Of crisis heterotopias, he gives examples of adolescents, menstruating women, women giving birth, and elderly people. For Foucault, crisis heterotopias are being replaced by heterotopias of deviation, which are spaces “in which individuals are put whose behavior is deviant with respect to the mean or the required norm” (Ibid., 180). Hospitals and prisons serve as examples of heterotopias of deviation.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 181.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 182 and 183.

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997), 316.

⁷² Hengehold, *The Body Problematic*, 219.

⁷³ Ibid., 282-283.

⁷⁴ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, 315.

I want to offer two examples to elaborate how the heterotopic imagination works to desire disability differently and elide the hegemonic social imaginary that neoliberalism sustains. The first example is drawn from Mel Chen's temporally-altered couch experiences⁷⁵ and the second is drawn from Rod Michalko's experiences with his guide dog.⁷⁶ In both cases, disability is desired differently through the heterotopic imagination by reconfiguring how we consider disability to emerge, with whom it emerges, and where.

In *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, Mel Chen engages with Chen's own mercury toxicity, an involuntary intoxication that "may not register its own pleasure or negativity in recognizable terms."⁷⁷ For Chen, toxicity is "a *condition*, one that is too complex to imagine as a property of one or another individual or group or something that could itself be so easily bounded."⁷⁸ Chen's toxicity emerges through onto-epistemological intra-action. Such an emergence cannot be separated from Chen's own situatedness as an ambiguously-gendered Asian person, who, through toxicity, turns increasingly away from human sociality and toward the comfort of inanimate things:

Given my condition, I must constantly renegotiate, and recalibrate, my embodied experiences of intimacy, altered affect, and the porousness of the body. The nature of metal poisoning, accumulated over decades, is that any and every organ, including my brain, can bear damage. Because symptoms can reflect the toxicity of any organ, they form a laundry list that includes cognition, proprioception, emotion, agitation, muscle strength, tunnel perception, joint pain, and nocturnality.⁷⁹

Chen narrates how a "day of relative well-being" leads to an exploration of Chen's new neighborhood and ends with Chen lying on a couch, unable to rise. Chen, who takes readers through this day, connects the ways in which movement, racism, chemicals, affects, and a couch all intra-act in the emergence of Chen's disability. Upon setting out in Chen's new neighborhood, Chen remarks:

I have forgotten for the moment that I just don't go places 'on foot' because the results can be catastrophic. [...] It is for a moment free—in its scriptless version of its future—to return to former ways of inhabiting space when I was in better health. Some passenger cars whiz by; instinctively my body retracts and my corporeal-sensory vocabulary starts to kick back in. A few pedestrians cross my path, and before they near, I quickly assess whether they are likely

⁷⁵ Chen, *Animacies*.

⁷⁶ Michalko, *The Two in One*.

⁷⁷ Chen, *Animacies*, 198.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 196; emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

(or might be the ‘kind of people’) to wear perfumes or colognes or to be wearing sunscreen.

⁸⁰

As the pedestrians pass, Chen longs for a chemical respirator that Chen can wear “with love” and “effect a smile” from behind, even if the Chen-mask is read by others as “a walking symbol of a contagious disease like SARS.”⁸¹ Chen remarks:

When I used to walk maskless with unsuspecting acquaintances, they had no idea that I was privately enacting my own bodily concert of breath-holding speech, and movement; that while concentrating on the topic of conversation, I was also highly alert to our environment and still affecting full involvement by limiting movements of my head while I scanned.⁸²

Chen notes that in some of these interactions, Chen would run out of breath and be compelled to “scoot ahead” in order to avoid particular hazards, quickly explaining, “I can’t do the smoke.”⁸³ Of this, Chen remarks: “the grammatical responsibility is clear here: the apologetic emphasis is always on I-statements. [...] Yet,” Chen observes, “the individuated property assignation of ‘I am highly sensitive’ furthers the fiction of my dependence as against others’ independence. The question then becomes which bodies can bear the fiction of independence and of uninterruptedness.”⁸⁴

A body that must “follow the moment-to-moment changes in quality of air” cannot bear the fiction of uninterruptedness, and will never “walk in a straight line.”⁸⁵ As such, Chen’s body could be read by way of the hegemonic social imaginary that tries to unify and solidify the meaning of a masked ambiguously-embodied Asian person; however, Chen turns towards heterotopic imaginations of the body of the world in which “humans are to a radical degree no longer the primary cursors of my physical inhabitation of space. Inanimate things take on a greater, holistic importance.”⁸⁶ The import of inanimate things is made clear as Chen lies on the couch. Chen’s lover comes home and greets Chen, who offers only a grunt in return. Of Chen’s lover, Chen remarks:

She comes near to offer comfort, putting her hand on my arm, and I flinch away; I can’t look at her and hardly speak to her; I can’t recall words when I do. She tolerates this because she understands very deeply how I am toxic. What is this relating? Distance in the home be-

⁸⁰ Ibid., 198.

⁸¹ Ibid., 200.

⁸² Ibid., 199.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

comes the condition of these humans living together in this moment, humans who are geared not toward continuity or productivity or reproductivity but to stasis, to waiting, until it passes.⁸⁷

In such a toxic period, Chen comments on how “anyone or anything” that Chen connects with is all “the same ontological thing.”⁸⁸ Chen is shocked when the body of Chen’s lover does not acknowledge that Chen snuggled against her earlier that day. Chen realises later, however, that the “snuggling and comforting happened in the arms and back of my couch.”⁸⁹ This startles Chen who questions: “What body am I now in the arms of? Have I performed the inexcusable: Have I treated my girlfriend like my couch? Or have I treated my couch like her, which fares only slightly better in the moral equations?”⁹⁰ Or, Chen further wonders, “have I done neither thing?”⁹¹ Upon feeling better, Chen finds the conflation unbelievable; nevertheless, it is only because Chen has regained a “human-directed sociality” that the couch is an unacceptable partner. Before Chen becomes centered back on the human moment, Chen and the couch are, as Chen says, “interabsorbent, interporous, and not only because the couch is made of mammalian skin.”⁹² And further: “The sentience of the couch, in our meeting and communing, becomes my own sentience as well.”⁹³

Within toxicity, masks, and couches, desiring disability differently emerges. Chen’s disability is a practice, not a stable unified identity, a practice that involves the mingling of chemicals, a mask, a couch, and change in time. Toxicity emerges in intra-action and is intracorporeal. To read Chen by way of the heterotopic imagination that emphasises discontinuities and temporal differences is to see how toxicity emerges with Chen on the couch and behind the mask. The heterotopic imagination does not unify or stabilise this toxicity, which becomes readable as both open and closed, as differently desirable.

While Chen snuggles in the arms of the mammalian-skinned couch and is shaken from an anthropocentric centering, disability emerges in the relation, a relation that is at once comforting and unacceptable. To be shaken from “human-directed sociality” requires a change in imagination and an opening to the discontinuities of what is acceptable. To experience disability as *of* the world, as an emerging multiplicity, rather than just *in* the world as a stabilised individualised object, is a space of heterotopia.

The thrust of this heterotopic reading of Chen’s situation does not aim to valorise any sufferings that may be associated with disability in general or with Chen’s toxicity in

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 203.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 204.

particular. Heterotopically imagining disability does not valorise suffering, but rather takes sufferings seriously by not stabilising disability as a fact of an individualised body, by not imagining a type of suffering that can be embraced by a neoliberal market logic, and by not imagining a suffering that is over-determined by the hegemonic social view of a life not worth living. To point to the heterotopic space that an intracorporeal, relational emergence of disability opens, is to value what is *of* the world, and acknowledge the ways in which hegemonic social imagination imposes sameness upon difference, as well as the ways that neoliberalism seeks to pull profit from suffering.

Creating a world where particular forms of suffering can be alleviated requires a shift away from the social hegemonic imagination and embrace of the heterotopic. A heterotopic imagination opens the space where multiple futures are possible. Such a shift changes how suffering can even be considered, opening space for non-anthropocentric sufferings that are interwoven with disability. Thus, the point is to acknowledge and work to alleviate sufferings while opening space in which to desire disability, a space where it is easier to effect a smile behind a mask, where comfort can be found in the arms of couch without alarm, and where toxicity is found in relation, rather than attributed to an individual. As an intracorporeal emergence, toxicity becomes a responsibility of the many, not one, and the agencies involved are multiple.

My second example of a heterotopic opening that highlights the intracorporeal emergence of disability is the relation between Rod Michalko and his guide dog Smokie. “Alone together,” Michalko (1999) and Smokie form intracorporeally as disability becomes multiple, partial, and transitory.⁹⁴ Michalko, in discussing his relationship with Smokie, remarks that Smokie “gave me a sense that blindness meant something more than the inability to see.”⁹⁵ With Smokie, Michalko experiences blindness as an occasion to “make a place in the world,”⁹⁶ a place that emerges within the relationship of Smokie and Michalko and extends out, implicitly imparting “a conception of the world.”⁹⁷ That is:

A blind person needs a guide who will not merely move her through the world but also *bring* that world *to* her and *take* her *to* it. Guides bring blindness and sightedness together in a world which is neither ‘blind’ nor ‘sighted’ but within which they both appear and live.⁹⁸

When Michalko visits a Canadian guide dog school to inquire about attaining his first guide dog, he is introduced to a Labrador Retriever named Leo. Michalko, in learning how to hold a harness, comments that he experiences “a sense of *distance*, an *expansion* of my im-

⁹⁴ Michalko, *The Two in One*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

mediate environment. It seemed as though my 'sense of touch' was enhanced by Leo and his harness. I could 'feel' further than I ever had before. Harness and Leo in hand, I felt my tactile sense replacing my sense of sight."⁹⁹

With Leo, Michalko is *taken* to the world and has the world *brought* to himself.¹⁰⁰ Blindness and sightedness do not exist in two individual bodies—that is, blindness in Michalko and sightedness in Leo—but rather both emerge within them together and are of the world together. Furthermore, both Michalko's and Leo's sensual experience is rearranged, expressing a different tactual intra-action. It is not that Michalko is able to walk forward *as if he had eyes* while in contact with Leo. Rather, a different sort of sightedness and a different sort of blindness emerge within the two.

Shortly after Michalko's experience with Leo, he is partnered with Smokie who becomes his guide for many years. Michalko remarks: "Whatever Smokie and I do, whatever kind of life we experience together and whatever else we mean to each other, we are 'person and dog' sharing a life together. We are 'human and animal' living in the world and moving through it together."¹⁰¹ The relation of Michalko and Smokie blurs the borders of the autonomous human self that feels and acts. There is an alone togetherness that has its own affect, experience, movement and speed. Michalko and Smokie compose a body-together that is defined by zones of intensity and proximity, a body in which it is unclear exactly where Michalko's "own" physical body ends and Smokie's "own" physical body begins as they create their intracorporeal emergence. When Smokie and Rod come together in an intracorporeal emergence, disability is a property of neither human nor animal. Disability is of the world in this emergence. Michalko remarks: "Smokie and I walk alone together 'in blindness.' Whether Smokie knows that I am blind in the way that I or other people know it, I cannot say. But he does know."¹⁰² In Smokie's knowledge of blindness, Michalko and Smokie "live *in* this differentiation," they are, as Michalko puts it, "together in our movement as one."¹⁰³ They mark the shifting boundary of an affective and dynamic relationship that goes beyond any sentimental discourse about dogs' devotion and unconditional loyalty to their masters, displacing the primacy of the visual. As Barbara Noske (1989) notes:

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 183; emphasis in original.

Not many people have seriously tried to imagine what it must be like to perceive and conceive the world in terms of “olfactory images” (such as dogs must do) or “tactile images” (as horses do to a large extent), or “acoustic pictures” (as dolphins and whales must do). [...] We humans are heavily biased towards the visual. [...] But for a dog scenting is believing.¹⁰⁴

To imagine Rod and Smokie heterotopically, is to take their intracorporeal emergence together as a mark of different sensorial and perceptive capacities that alter what a body can do. The neoliberal hegemonic social imagination reduces the relationship between Michalko and Smokie to the normative explanation according to which Michalko has a vision deficit that is then compensated by Smokie’s sight. In normative terms, guide dogs are prosthetic devices that compensate for a loss or lack. Often portrayed as “heroic,” the guide dog restores autonomy to the human partner so that they can work, shop, and socialise. In contrast, through a heterotopic imagining, Smokie and Michalko intra-act, composing a movement that is within each of them, but belongs to neither of them. One does not become the other, but rather intra-acts within the two.

The social hegemonic imaginary posits a conception of blindness that understands it is an undesirable state of being, an understanding according to which “blindness is an uninhabitable home.”¹⁰⁵ Michalko remarks that this conception “is how I understood my blindness before I had Smokie—as a condition that I had to overcome—and I believed that Smokie would help me do so.”¹⁰⁶ However, Michalko’s experience of blindness in interaction with Smokie alters the *being* and *doing* of blindness. Michalko remarks: “Blindness is an occasion to *make* the visual present through means other than sight. The senses of touch, smell, and hearing can bring one into touch with the never-ending movement of the visual.”¹⁰⁷ Such a remaking of blindness is a moment of heterotopic imagination.

Alone together, Michalko and Smokie navigate their city. “Our aloneness begins with our need to concentrate. Smokie needs to attend to an endless stream of stimuli—vehicular and pedestrian traffic, curbs, obstacles of various kinds on the street, the location of buildings, direction, and so on,”¹⁰⁸ while Michalko concentrates on Smokie’s every move. “Like him, I am concentrating on a vast array of stimuli. I attend to sounds, smells, and changes in air flow that often indicate that we have moved past a building and toward an intersection. Alone together, we concentrate.”¹⁰⁹ In this concentration, Michalko finds that “My self is now *our* self. Smokie’s self too is *our* self. We are ‘at home together,’ which

¹⁰⁴ Barbara Noske, *Humans and Other Animals: Beyond the Boundaries of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 58.

¹⁰⁵ Michalko, *The Two in One*, 102.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

means that we are continuously making a home for our self."¹¹⁰ Michalko explains the construction of an "our self" with Smokie in this way: "Smokie and I are not merely side by side. We move together as one, touching and imaging both each other and our world. [...] We depict a world to each other generated by our difference and sameness. We communicate this world to one another through the ineffability of the togetherness."¹¹¹ As Michalko's world emerges as a relation within himself and Smokie, the spaces that Michalko had previously inhabited are altered. Michalko notes: "I became familiar with each and every corner of the bars and cafés in my neighbourhood, and Smokie showed me the tables in these establishments that held the most space for him to lie down besides me."¹¹² The world that Michalko and Smokie generate "springs from [their] communication in the midst of the world and from [their] movement through it."¹¹³ As Michalko puts it, "I also became more familiar with those streets I already knew, as Smokie showed me stretches of grass, bushes, hedges, and trees that I had not been aware of."¹¹⁴

Taking up Michalko and Smokie's experiences as a space of heterotopic imagination opens up the possibility of desiring disability differently, a possibility enabled by a different imagination of bodies. This new form of imagination and its different spatial arrangement of imagination, speaks to Barad's conception of intra-action. Michalko and Smokie, along with Chen and Chen's mask and couch, show through their various practices of disability that within disabled communities there are ways to imagine disability differently. It is here, in practices of disability, that the heterotopic imagination arises. And yet, it is not enough to simply celebrate the openings that Michalko and Smokie provide. Heterotopically imagining disability's desirability requires an opposition to the neoliberal hegemonic social imaginary. Despite the fact that Smokie is a dog, Michalko often feels that Smokie "is more easily accepted by society than I am."¹¹⁵ In this vein, Chen, too, comments that "the statement that someone 'treated me like a dog' is one of liberal humanism's fictions: some dogs are treated quite well, and many humans suffer in conditions of profound indignity."¹¹⁶ Thus, heterotopic openings must be utilised to do more than merely oppose the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination that governs the ways in which disabled people themselves wish to be included within the neoliberal social relations.

Desiring Disability Differently

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91; emphasis in original.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹¹⁶ Chen, *Animacies*, 89.

Hengehold argues that for both Kant and Foucault, bodies are located at the interstice of certainty and uncertainty that characterise human existence and subjectivity.¹¹⁷ The point is to affirm the fractured and discontinuous, rather than to escape into an imposed unity of the same. This affirmation of the fractured and discontinuous is a political project because, as Hengehold notes, “those who have certain kinds of bodies tend to live, and to believe themselves bound by, the fictions created by other groups.”¹¹⁸ Although we live according to the myth of stability, we never actually experience stability. The body tries to compensate for the persistence of fractures and discontinuities and the imagination becomes bound to this compensated reality. Heterotopic imagination begins with the experience of discontinuity, the incompatible, and the multiple. Such a starting place necessitates a whole other ethics of being of the world where it may be possible to desire disability differently. Clare comments:

the goal isn't to make irrevocable difference disappear. [...] Every time I walk down a street and someone stares, trying to figure out my body, to make sense of my shaky hands and slow speech, or to determine whether I'm a man or a woman—and if a woman, surely a dyke—I know nothing has changed. What has changed is how I perceive my irrevocable difference, how I frame it, what context I place it into. [...] I want to grow to a place where I can fill my skin to its very edges. For any of us to do this work, we need all the allies, lovers, community, and friends we can gather, all the rabble-rousing and legislation, all the vibrant culture and articulate theory we can bring into being.¹¹⁹

When intracorporeality is taken seriously, the skin becomes a permeable organ with no stable edges. Filling one's skin to the edges is thus a practice of masks, couches, and dogs. Reading those masks, couches and dogs as something other than SARS, tragic, or man's best friend, is the work of the heterotopic imagination. The heterotopic imagination matters for disability if there is to be a *we* forged that is able to desire ways of living that have not yet been within the frame of possibility. An “ableist lack of imagination” effects how disabled people understand and practice disability, in addition to how it impacts on the ways in which able-bodied people approach disability.¹²⁰ Disabled people need to think about their own self-perceptions and futurity and how to disrupt the oppressive imaginaries within disability communities, including the neoliberal hegemonic social imaginary in which many disabled people seem to have been caught. In this way, the import of Chen and Michalko is to posit the role of the heterotopic imagination for all of us in re-shaping ableist, neoliberal social relations. Regardless of each of our own forms of embodiment, all of us are

¹¹⁷ Hengehold, *The Body Problematic*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹⁹ Clare, “Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies”, 364.

¹²⁰ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 4.

implicated in the hegemonic social imaginary that shapes our lives; thus, the challenge of disability and heterotopic imagination is a shared responsibility.

Kafer suggests that “we must trace the ways in which we have been forged as a group [...] but also trace the ways in which those forgings have been incomplete, or contested, or refused.”¹²¹ The “we” that must be forged, must be forged in opposition to the homogenised “we” of the disability rights movement according to which disability identity coheres through a shared experience of ableism.¹²² Rather, the “we” must be forged as an intracorporeal emergent multiplicity whereby disability is *of* the world. In this forging of disability, multiple agencies are differentially implicated and involved. As such, it is a “we” that must be forged so as to take account of how some of us are capacitated by neoliberal capitalism while others are left to die. Furthermore, it is a “we” that must be forged against neoliberalism and against the neoliberal hegemonic social imagination. Foucault remarks:

The problem is [...] to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a “we” in order to assert the principles one recognizes and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather necessary to make the future formation of a “we” possible, by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me that the ‘we’ must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result—and the necessarily temporary result—of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it.¹²³

Kafer contends that disability is experienced in and through social relationships.¹²⁴ I would highlight that those relationships emerge intracorporeally and are relationships of both the human and nonhuman world. A heterotopic imagination takes intracorporeality seriously and forces us to reckon with the ways that disability is not just something that tragically appears in the world that we must tolerate or include, but rather that disability is an emergence of the world; that is, disability is a practice. As an intracorporeal practice, disability is a life worth living.

Fredric Jameson has remarked that “It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations.”¹²⁵ As Jameson sees it, in other words, on the terms of our current social imagination, it is easier to imagine the end of the earth than to imagine the end of capitalism. In our current neoliberal individualised moment, furthermore, it seems to be easier to imagine the elimination of disability through

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²² Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*; Linton, *Claiming Disability*.

¹²³ Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations”, in Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by, (New York: New Press, 1997), 114-15.

¹²⁴ Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 8.

¹²⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xii.

expensive techno-scientific solutions like genetic therapies, invasive surgeries, or other medical interventions than to imagine desiring disability differently. This ableist failure of imagination affects all people, even disabled people themselves who wish that they will not become “more disabled” or who desire to be able-bodied. Taking the sufferings and intracorporeal possibilities of disability seriously challenges the neoliberal hegemonic social imaginary that privileges corporeal stability and gives space to heterotopic imaginings grounded in relationality and intracorporeal multiplicities. Such spaces imagine bodies differently. In that difference, a space for desiring disability emerges.

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