

Monstrosities, Miracles, and Mission

Religion and the Politics of Disablement

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There is something more wonderful than gloss, than wholeness.¹

“Was Blind But Now I See”: The headline sang from a special issue of *Newsweek* magazine devoted to “The Next Frontiers” in medicine and technology (June 24, 2002). This article specifically announces the development of neural prosthesis to remediate blindness, deafness, and voice and balance loss. But its echo of the genre of the “miracle story” feels uncomfortably familiar to many disabled persons. The story unfolds like this: Position a disabled body as evincing a humanitarian need; resolve the riddle of suffering, which appears to imprison the disabled body; and all will be able to enter the promised land of perfection. To be sure, most faith healing accounts have an additional stock character—namely, the Holy Spirit, which has frequently been construed as that power which cures disabled bodies. Yet Spirit is not restricted to religious appeals: “[T]he ‘hardest’ science is about the realm...of pure spirit,”² historian of science Donna Haraway observes. So we might well wonder whether the remarkable transcendence accruing even to the scientific ledger implicates the transcendent potency of the Holy Spirit of Christianity.

¹Mary Oliver, “Whelks,” *New and Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 30–31.

²Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 153.

The historian Michel Foucault (an important source for postcolonial theory) suggested that late modernity in its healing ventures was attempting to materialize something like “the original state of health.”³ Foucault’s ironic quip challenges a culturally operative picture of health that assumes that, either in the past or in the proximate future, an Edenic “zero” point—a state of human wholeness, absent disease and genetic mutation—can be identified, even now achieved. Further, Foucault tracked the rise of modern medicine to a certain materialist assumption: Medicine would be “a lay carbon copy” of the Church, assuming thereby a parallel “spiritual vocation.”⁴

Because historians of science such as Haraway and theorists such as Foucault trace this imaginary of modern (Western) science to Christianity and its generative assumptions about [S]pirit, we must then ask whether the reproductive capability of biotechnopower resembles a certain redemptive Christian imaginary in which Spirit redeems bodies into a “nature enterprised up”—a nature in which there is no suffering, no toil, no death, and certainly, then, no disability.⁵ Biotechnology might represent the latest secularization of certain Christian hopes for a transformation of nature. At the same time, it supports—not just in its actual effects, but in its culturally purported capacity to materialize the incredible—the emergence of the ideal self of the market economy. Its stories of miraculous healings dare all humans to “wake to the dream of human perfection,” as Dr. James D. Watson puts it.⁶ This dream, this Western vision of the perfect, the whole and wholesome body, should worry Christian theology, which may then find a postcolonial analysis unexpectedly useful. Theology, this essay argues, needs to consider the way in which secularized forms of the miracle story and its evocation of wholeness—this picture of health—play into the hands of late capitalist and neocolonial conditions.⁷ Given the shared impetus of biotechnology and

³Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 31–32.

⁴Ibid., 32.

⁵Marilyn Strathern in Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium: FemaleMan®_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 102.

⁶Watson is one of the founding fathers of modern genetics. See *The Globe & Mail*, Toronto, 26 October 2002, A1.

⁷My critique pertains to the Western cultural invocation of wholeness set within contemporary philosophical idealism—or what might also be called “cultural Platonism.” In this cultural schema, wholeness is imagined as an idealized, intact, and bounded form. Anthropologically speaking, this view of human wholeness can be traced to the model “man of reason” informing modern science and colonialism. Lacan suggested that, psychoanalytically considered, such a view of “wholeness” results from a cultural fixation on “the mirror stage”: As a toddler attaches to her/his mirror image as “the true real” (rather than the heterogeneous fluxes and flows of the body), so a whole culture identifies the self with ego-image. That disability still theologically appears as but a dimension of pastoral care concerns might suggest that theological invocations to wholeness—for example, in liturgical and spiritual practices—can easily become conflated with this predominant cultural ethos. This idealist appeal to wholeness should be distinguished from the organismic holism of chaos-complexity theories.

capitalism, I would suggest that at the heart of market economy lies a “globally media/ted idealism”—a state in which the ideal becomes normative and therefore “normal.” Bringing postcolonial theory into conjunction with disability studies may help us formulate theological intuitions for living amidst the colonizing vectors of globalizing capitalism in such a way as to disrupt them.

Certain bodies have been socially construed as lacking full humanity—thus, as less than “whole.” In modernity, these were the “degenerate types.” The “degenerate” is an early modern conflation of what we today distinguish as disability, race, and gender. The notion of degeneracy operates in tandem with modern scientific anthropology, complementing its ideal of the autonomous self-made, self-mastering individual. Race and gender, which were earlier considered degenerate conditions, have been raised as primary analytic vectors for decolonizing and then postcolonial theory, extending from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* through Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*. Yet modernity’s overarching trajectory of degeneracy has not itself been analytically deconstructed, despite these recuperated subjective locations. Following theorists Wendy Brown and Lennard Davis,⁸ I would suggest that this leaves in place a subjective idealism, even within race and gender identities, which is epitomized by the marginalization of disabled persons.

I am suggesting that debility has served as a heretofore unstudied vector of imperialism. If this is so, then we understand why both disabled persons and colonial subjects have been jointly marked as the territory of mission and objects of social pity. So marked, disablement has been read as necessitating (humane) intervention. Consequently, sociologist Sherene Razack follows upon postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak’s critique of “the politics of [colonial] rescue” or, variously, “the politics of saving” to challenge from the viewpoint of disabilities studies the modern mentality of fixing or curing.⁹ Neither critique has yet been taken up within theologies concerned with social justice. Such theologies will thus find important clues to the “postcolonial” within this emerging disability discourse.

Further, the territory or “space of degeneracy” has generally been socially patrolled by what the psychoanalytic theorist of decolonization Frantz Fanon identified—for a different context—as “the gaze” and that which disability studies refers to as “the stare.” Psychosocially, this colonizing of bodies manifests itself in terms of what Fanon called “epidermalization.”¹⁰ Caught in the stare, the colonized or “disabled” body—thoroughly objectified and physicalized—“takes place at the skin,”

⁸Lennard J. Davis, *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and other Difficult Positions*, *Cultural Front* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

⁹Sherene Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

¹⁰Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968).

threatening to collapse the psychic room of personhood. I propose to work with disability studies to deconstruct the ideology of normalcy, the prevailing presumption to whole(some)ness, which uses the construction of the pathetic body to stimulate its “fear of falling” out of likeness and into the economic and physiognomic bottomlands.¹¹

In this essay I therefore consider the religious use of “disablement” and how the metaphor, when imbricated with Spirit, figures into modern, Western, Christian and cultural eschatology and social, even scientific and economic, practice. As an epoch, modernity was—according to ecofeminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant—imagined to be the time of the earth’s “redemption from ‘the Fall’” and so an occasion for redemption from the curses of time, toil, and troubles.¹² Absorbing that plot-line as the cultural dialectic of wholeness overcoming the broken, modernity cancels out the possibility of ethical relation with those it sees in terms of brokenness.¹³ But here the anxious exercise of caring concern is mediated or seen through an ideal form. Hence, Spirit was made into a dominant, controlling power that comes heroically to “rescue” and to “fix” those construed as disabled—as physically broken and/or culturally handicapped. This practice of Spirit’s physics of transcendence is about as effective as our attempts to rescue and to fix the nations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Comparably, bodies—and not just bodies of disabled persons—are “dominated” by a scientific view of “the original state of health,” just as Iraq and Afghanistan experience domination by a globally mediated ideal. So the pneumatology toward which I work in this essay promotes Spirit not as the power to rescue and repair according to some presupposed “original state” or ideal form, but as the energy for “unleashing multiple forms of corporeal flourishing.”¹⁴

Globalization’s Specular Spectacular and Its “Body Silent”

The postmodern age dawns as a bombardment of images and spectacle: Take the stars of music, sport, fashion, and business, or even just the tasteful First World-Class Citizen at home in his/her L.L. Bean, Tommy Hilfiger, or Polo Ralph Lauren casuals. Mirror them by satellite and through movies, the Internet, and advertising across the globe. “Branding” the star styles in transnational markets but exponentially multiplies this cult of public appearance and its spellbinding powers of

idealization.¹⁵ Although for ancient Platonism the ideal was not considered humanly achievable but was ascribed to the gods alone,¹⁶ the ideal has now become the expected standard of and for public, cosmopolitan life. The wholesome self—brought to health by biotechnology, cosmetically augmented so as to achieve a “more natural” look, and fashionably coutoured in the global marketplace (MTV its “most compelling...catalog”)—has become normative.¹⁷ This idealized image of the self might be considered, political scientist Benjamin R. Barber asserts, the most lucrative item for sale on the global market. Given the intensification of the media web, any citizen of the globe cannot but imbibe this Western technologically-enabled, aesthetically-toned idealism.

Amidst the media/ed postmodern society of spectacle, surface, image, and icon, I want to pose the question of “*the body silent*”¹⁸ at the heart of biotechnology’s miracle and of cultural public performance. Thinking about disability in relation to international politics can, given cultural presuppositions about disability, seem “globalizing”—psychologically speaking. Disability tends to be associated with an individual and unique morphology and hence seems applicable to a very limited population. Consequently, the connection between disability studies and global, especially economic, issues can seem an incredible stretch. But I want to ask, wheeling myself up next to Derrida, “what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role *in the system*, an abyssal role rather?”¹⁹ Derrida asserted that what is excluded may actually play a key role in systemic construction and stabilization. With his thesis in mind, I want to advance the suspicion that “the ubiquitous unspoken topic of disability in contemporary culture” may sustain Empire’s artery of normative idealism.²⁰ I share Davis’ surmise that disability may be the “specter haunting normality in our time.”²¹ If ideation mobilizes economics,²² then disrupting the representation of the normal, now idealized self might begin to diffract not only the “global media/ation” thereof, but the economics thereby metabolized.

¹⁵Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, 1st Picador USA ed. (New York: Picador, 2000), 57–61.

¹⁶Jennard Davis, “Bodies of Difference,” in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, by Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2002), 100–101.

¹⁷Klein, *No Space, No Choice*, 121.

¹⁸See Robert Murphy’s disability memoir, “The Body Silent” (New York: Henry Holt, 1987).

¹⁹Cited in George Aichele and Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 120 (italics added).

²⁰Snyder, Brueggemann, and Thomson, *Disability Studies*, 2.

²¹Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, 34.

²²Ali Al Amin Mazrui, *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (London and Portsmouth, N.H.: J. Currey; Heinemann, 1990).

¹¹See Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 4–6, 14–15.

¹²Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 28–29.

¹³Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 6.

¹⁴Dr. Harry Maier (personal discussion in 2003).

Thinking about disability studies together with postcolonial theories might also allow us to begin to track those who are today being written off, given the prevailing ideology of the normal. As theorist Homi Bhabha argues, “The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of *degenerate* types...in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.”²³ While Bhabha’s postcolonial strategies of mimicry and hybridity have proven feasible in dereifying race and ethnicity or other assumed authenticities, colonialism—as theorist Robert Young points out—“operated both according to the same-Other model, and through the ‘computation of normalities’ and ‘degrees of deviance’ from the white norm.”²⁴ This bottom line of normalcy/deviancy—more intimately internal to and developmentally archaic in the psyche—shuts down the place of personhood. Whereas the feeling of lack of vitality can occasion what bell hooks calls “eating the [ethnic] other,” the ideology of normalcy as wholeness construes itself in rigid abjection of the pathetic.²⁵ The threat that one might degenerate and perish—the obverse of social and evolutionary Darwinism (and therefore, perhaps, the specter haunting growth economics)—remains a potent physical anxiety. In an economy in which image sells and looking good is everything, the disabled body may not be at all irrelevant, but may rather be a needed, if abject, other—a silenced body of evidence serving up the ideal.

Yet as the earlier reference to miracle stories has insinuated, I suspect such silencing of bodies transpires not merely in culture “at large.” Rather, Christian theological use of the metaphor of disablement and its purported remarkable healing accounts informs and reinforces the avoidance—if even by way of miraculous remediation—of disability itself and may therefore inadvertently support the advance of global capital as a regime of public appearance. Within sacred text and spiritual practice, the metaphor of disablement has been used to establish over against it the physics of Spirit as a terrestrially transcendent power and the contours of spiritual bodies as definitively “whole.” Rather than blessing corporeal flourishing in all its multiple forms, even when it limps, wheels, and winces, even progressive, liberal theologies focused on “Jesus as Healer” might be included under what theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid would designate as “decency theologies.”²⁶ Given the impetus of modernity and

²³Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 154 (italics added).

²⁴Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 180.

²⁵Bell hooks, “Eating the Other,” in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1992).

²⁶Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1, 9.

the colonial, economic enhancement of notions of the good life and self-image, Christian theologies—Althaus-Reid suggests—can and have become conflated with middle-class morality. Such “decency theologies” discipline bodies into the status quo of “the normal.” Given the constituent biotechnopower of the global market, might we not at least need to consider the possibility that theologies of healing can get caught up in the ideology of normalcy?²⁷ Further, might disability metaphors help us bring to conscience those sites—interpersonally, if also internationally—where we in the West are simultaneously engaged in “civilizing mission and a violent subjugating force?”²⁸

Monstrous Races: Disablement, Degeneracy, and the Geography of Mission

Disablement, in all its physiological variations—for example, blindness, deafness, muteness, and the like—has been a politically and religiously deployed metaphor of boundaries and their trespass. As a metaphor deployed along the boundaries of international politics and economic practice, as well as within Christian eschatology and social mission, disablement incites remedial impulses. Physiognomic handbooks of the second through fourth centuries clearly figured Jesus as beautiful, with spiritual formation itself focused on becoming more God-like in this regard.²⁹ This spiritual mirroring was reinforced with the construction of the liminal concept of the “monstrous races.” From the fifth-century Greco-Roman teratological traditions to the Euro-Western colonial centuries spying degenerate races and continents, the concept of the monstrous has limned the Christian eschatological imaginary. Augustine displayed a somewhat intriguing and respectful reserve to his curiosity about monstrosities (which included cyclops, cynecephali or the “dog-faced,” Pygmies, scio-pods, androgynes, antipodes and hermaphrodites, among others). This same encyclopedic imaginary of monstrous races was consequently set as figural horizon at “the ends of the earth” for seventh- to tenth-century Christian evangelization. These frightful curios were presumed to populate the uncivilized territories. The need to remediate their abject otherness becomes somewhat more eschatologically urgent for missionaries of the latter half of the first millennium than it had for Augustine.

Augustine, relying on Pliny’s *Natural History* to supplement regional tales, believed the monstrous races to be but continuous with the

²⁷My question parallels the insight of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who insist that psychoanalysis facilitates adjustment to the machinery of capitalism. See Young, *Colonial Desire*, 167–68.

²⁸Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 148.

²⁹Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible, Contraversions* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

monstrous births known among any populace. Now it would be best to assume God knows what God is doing in the generation of monsters, Augustine advises, adding that “it would be utterly wrong for anyone to be fool enough to imagine that the Creator made a mistake...”; God is not an “imperfectly skilled craftsman.”³⁰ Augustine, on the first breath, insists that “monstrosities,” too, are descendants of Adam. But taking a second breath, he calls into being the majority force of the self-same: “However, it is clear what constitutes the persistent norm of nature.”³¹ So how, then, does Augustine explain the Divine’s apparently purposeful craftsmanship in the generation of “abnormal” members of the human race? “The name ‘monster,’” Augustine writes, “...evidently comes from *monstrare*, ‘to show,’ because they show by signifying something...” While “contrary to nature and so...called ‘unnatural,’” Augustine continues, “[t]hese ‘monsters,’ ‘signs,’ ‘portents,’ and ‘prodigies’...ought to ‘show’ us...that God is to do what he prophesied that he would do with the bodies of the dead, with no difficulty to hinder him, no law of nature to debar him from so doing.”³² In other words, the monstrous de-monstrate. They serve as a stage set for the display of divine power, specifically of the power of Spirit to resurrect life, to make bodies whole.

Augustine’s confidence that heaven held the miracle of remediation to “normalcy” for such bodies allows him to demarcate their temporal presence as ontological proof for the resurrection: Earthly monstrosities were paradoxically but signifiers of the wonder-working power of the Divine. The “monstrous” were seen not for who they were, but through the power of the contrary—that is, for what God’s power would do with them. Now Augustine did not construe miracles as supernatural. Rather, he assumed that their transformative energies were in contiguity with the miracle of everyday life. Nevertheless, Augustine routinizes in the Christian imaginary the remediation of physiological variances: Be assured that heaven normalizes the human body.³³ Such spectacles of daily encounter, Augustine insinuated, reawaken human wonder and respect for “the vigorous power” of God.³⁴

As the ecclesiastical historian Bede constructs his eighth-century historical account of the Christianization of the known world, these monstrous races became more foundational for Christian eschatology. Christian evangelization takes shape (at least in the understanding of Bede) as an act of pastoral concern. This concern was, however, vested with the self-interested, internal urgency to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth so as to occasion the end of time. As contemporary historian

Ian Wood puts it, “Mission at the geographical limits of the earth could thus be related to the eschatological end of the world.”³⁵ Laboring ever outwards to the edges of earth’s limits, missionaries turned the eschatological key to the *parousia*, the promised time of fulfillment. But the ends of the earth were peopled, or at least populated, such that between Christians and the promised land—time of the *parousia* lived “the other,” the monstrous races. Wood comments on Bede’s positioning of the monstrous at the limits of the earth: “More than a simple geographical limit was being established: the limits of humanity were being scrutinized.”³⁶ If Augustine habituated the Christian imaginary to a sense of “normalcy,” it appears that for Bede and Christian mission this imaginary has become a map for adjudicating the acceptability of the other’s humanity.

For Augustine, the monstrous were clearly “bodies of evidence” bearing witness to divine power. By the latter half of the first millennium, they become something more of an eschatological keystone in evangelistic concerns. Missionaries’ felt need to proselytize required them to discern the shape of humanity: If human, the monstrosities were to be prosthetically supplemented or rehabilitated—that is, fitted with the gospel; if not human, they were to be eliminated. The humanity of “the other” was discerned, based on the evangelist’s unconscious, self-referential anthropology.³⁷ As it was historically configured in the eighth to tenth century, evangelical mission proceeded as repair to the ends of the earth, which simultaneously necessitated remediation of the edges of humanity. Mission was not yet replete with the notion of improvement and progress, nor with the annexation of territory. Nevertheless, the colonization of time already begins to aggravate against the anomalies peopling the horizon of the Christian imagination.

Modern colonialism, assuming in its own way this evangelical, eschatological need to reach out to the ends of the earth, advanced using a psychosocial map of “zones of degeneracy.”³⁸ The notion of degeneracy was based on the Enlightenment’s evolutionary story of the “Family of Man.” This biological map of humanity’s evolution presumed that the civilized modern European human was both descendant from those so-called earlier, “primitive” races of distant continents now encountered in the age of continental discovery and the epitome of evolved, civilized humanity. Degeneracy here came to categorically encompass the less-than-wholesome others of the emergent modern self—namely, “the ‘internal enemies’ of the bourgeois male—women, racial others, the

³⁰Augustine, *City of God*, Book XVI, chap. 8, 663–64.

³¹Ibid., 662.

³²Ibid., Book XXI, chap. 8, 982–83.

³³Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 87.

³⁴Augustine, *On the Gospel of John*, 8.2.1.

³⁵Ian Wood, “The Ends of the Earth: The Bible, Bibles, and the Other in Early Medieval Europe,” (paper presented as part of the series Title in the Text: Biblical Hermeneutics, Colonial and Postcolonial Pre-Occupations, Green College, 2002), 19.

³⁶Ibid., 26.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 361.

working class, people with disabilities." These degenerate types, it was feared, "would weaken the vigorous bourgeois body and state."³⁹ The moral propriety of the middle class as also the moral superiority of the colonizing nation depended on spatially confining degeneracy, both geographically (whether to a specific country, continent, or neighborhood) and socially—for example, to a particular class. The stigmatic markers of debility conceptually included what we distinguish as gender, race, and disability. These "stigmata" of debility, which were conflated under the canopy of "degeneracy," also then denoted the spatial confinements to which such bodies must be returned—for example, to slums, housing zones, the streets, and asylums. That is to say, as Razack explains, disability—and also therefore race and gender, because these were categorical variations of disability—have been territorial markers. Because "physical, mental and social defects pulled people down...[i]t was therefore necessary," Razack observes, "to avoid this pull downwards by maintaining rigid boundaries between those prone to decay and those who were to participate as citizens in the new social order."⁴⁰ The rights and benefits of liberal humanism, Razack concludes, were then applied only necessarily in the zones of cultured civility.⁴¹ Limited employment options or simple "social isolation," one of the most frequent confinement strategies in regards to disabled persons, also effect social containment.⁴² That even today a person in the West who becomes disabled often drops down in his or her profession and in social class status might well suggest the continuing habit of strategic quarantine of disabilities.⁴³

During modernity, the Western world's sense of itself as an advanced civilization obversely depended on the delimitation of degeneracy—both geographically and physiologically. Yet given the anxiety around contamination, there would need to be both confinement of the despoiled and, as Razack goes on to explain, "controlled excursions" across the boundary between the respectable and the degenerate: "It was not enough to seal off the disorder and the disease. It was also necessary to repeatedly affirm that bourgeois subjects could journey into those regions and emerge unscathed in order for those subjects to deny the permeability of their body politic and to position themselves as

invincible."⁴⁴ Among the means of allowable transgression, Razack includes not only prostitution (the primary subject of her research article) but also touch and "rescue work"—thus, for example, the "salvation armies" of Christians as also science, medicine, and medical missions.⁴⁵ Territorial transgression could thus be used to establish a dominant culture's sense of human, even humane, superiority. And would not miracle stories, translated through the mode of modernist realism, then serve likewise as training manuals in sympathy? After all, in novels, Davis explains, the disabled character "is placed in the narrative 'for' the non-disabled characters—to help them develop sympathy or as a counterbalance to some issue in the life of the 'normal' character."⁴⁶ But sympathy, when reinforced with an internal ideal, can be an incredibly aggressive energy.⁴⁷

In that vein, the metaphor of disablement as connoting deficiency not only marks off for modernity a presumed zone of human insufficiency, the metaphor has also been read to authorize access. The notion of degeneracy—with the disabled body as somatic and geographic template—"invites" the imperial dynamic of a superior's "helping" a "deficient" person or population. It mobilizes the imperialist to act as savior.⁴⁸ The metaphor of disablement, in other words, maps out a "politics of rescue." What has been conceived of as "social mission" plays on the moral sentiment of uplifting those designated as degenerate types. Or, as disabilities theorists Mitchell and Snyder put it in another context, the metaphor of disablement "acts as a shorthand method of securing emotional responses."⁴⁹

Whether in international politics and economics or in Christian mission, the metaphor works by subverting the need for conscious reflection. So employed, the metaphor invited what Ashis Nandy called the second wave of colonialism. "Its carriers," Nandy explains, referring to the Christian, humanitarian, social and medical mission, "were people who, unlike the rapacious first generation of bandit-kings who conquered the colonies, sought to be helpful. They were well-meaning, hard-working, middle-class missionaries, liberals, modernists, and believers in science, equality and progress." This second wave of colonialism, Nandy nonetheless observes, "released forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all," principally because these

³⁹Sherene Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 15, no. 2 (2000): 94 n7. Razack references here to the work of Foucault.

⁴⁰Sherene Razack, "Race, Space, and Prostitution: The Making of the Bourgeois Subject," *Canadian Journal of Women and Law* 10 (1998): 361.

⁴¹Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence."

⁴²Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5 n1.

⁴³Robert Francis Murphy, *The Body Silent*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1987), 124–25.

⁴⁴Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 362.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 362–63.

⁴⁶Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, 45.

⁴⁷Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, chap. 5.

⁴⁸Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability, The Body, in Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 17.

soft technologies worked on the everyday life habits of the body.⁵⁰ Humanitarian concern became emotionally leveraged by a metaphor that had become emotional and strategic shorthand for “saving action urgently required.” While seeking to exercise compassion, practitioners override critique of their own ideological investments; compassion then misfires into eradicating that which is “different.” Might we, then, need to reconsider the modern figuration of a culturally unique Jesus coming into contact with the untouchables—for example, presumably transgressing Jewish religious prescriptions as well as territorial boundaries?

The cultural construction of “disability” as we specifically inhabit it in the twenty-first century emerged alongside the industrial and economic “normalizations” of modernity. Within the modern regime of what Foucault called “biopower,” “bodies of individuals and populations are now measured against norms related to utility, amenability to profitable investment, capacity for being usefully trained and prospects of survival, death and illness.”⁵¹ As a consequence thereof, more than two-thirds of disabled persons in North America have been left unemployed and with limited access to the capitalist economic structure. Not surprisingly, Western society’s commitment to the elimination of suffering through advancing biotechnopower forms subjects according to the needs of this society for productive and efficient bodies and populations, such that (as bioethicist Gerald McKenny observes) “what appears to be a moral commitment to...the elimination of suffering is also a way of producing [“the societally desirable, normative”] body.”⁵² According to the politics of representation that encodes relations among citizens of the globalizing culture, disablement metaphorically works to contain physiological variance. By mapping the bodies of those to be pitied, medicalized, socialized, rescued, fixed, rehabilitated, or contained, the metaphor of disablement also simultaneously occasions a sense of and the power of the normative as that toward which citizens should strive.

Both formerly colonized peoples as well as persons with disabilities have been cast as “deficient” and “degenerate.” From the stage of the metropolitan theatre where the Western wholesome self gets publicly performed, I—as one living among the potentially “GenRich” or biotechnologically enabled—pursue this critique of “globally media/ted idealism.” The fixation on ideal image and the excessive regime of health that avoids recognizing the social construction of normalcy blend with

⁵⁰Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), x–xi.

⁵¹Gerald P. McKenny, *To Relieve the Human Condition: Bioethics, Technology, and the Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 204. See also Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 172.

⁵²McKenny, *To Relieve the Human Condition*, 207, 209.

traces of economic colonialism to produce “images of luxury under late capitalist...culture.”⁵³ The international trade in human organs, an illicit system through which first world-class citizens procure livers, kidneys, and lungs from the poor of Istanbul, the Philippines, and also the immigrant underworld of globalized metropolitan centers, may suggest the colonizing extremes to which this image of wholeness now extends.

The demarcation of disability remains, like an electrified fence, highly activated as Western culture goes global. As globalization of the Western economy sweeps the planet and as countries are brought into the patterns of industrial and postindustrial capitalism, the body count of “the disabled” swells. Because of the way in which the capitalist economy reorients relational communities, “leaving solely the ‘cash nexus’ of the many bonds underlying human mutuality and mutual responsibilities,” it has been estimated that upwards of 90 percent of persons with disabilities worldwide are unemployed.⁵⁴ This isn’t necessarily an issue of “humanitarian backwardness” in non-Western countries, but a sign of the impact of how Western-style economic globalization and its inherent body politics shifts the patterns of relational interdependence, which bodies with disabilities often require. Even given the mixed and confluent classes of the planet, somatic stigmata—morphological differences established through the gaze of the dominant—remain as much in use today to prevent border crossings as during earlier stages of modernity.⁵⁵

Religions Use the Metaphor of Disablement “To Think With”

From the Greek reading of monstrous births for messages about that culture’s social character to contemporary culture’s scapegoating of disabled persons, disability metaphors have stayed philosophical commitments to idealism. Disablement is, given our contemporary culturally idealist commitments, psychically registered as social disruption, an exception proving the rule—that is, the rule of the normative ideal. This ideal functions as a boundary limit of culture itself. Christianity, too, has used the metaphor of disablement “to think with.”⁵⁶ Without forgetting that the metaphor of disablement appears to mark the

⁵³Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 133.

⁵⁴Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 4.

⁵⁵See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 194–95; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 38.

⁵⁶Christianity and Judaism may have analogically engaged disabled bodies in the same way that Karen King insightfully quipped that “men use women to think with.” King’s insight was cited by Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Romans,” in *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekkl*esia-logy of Liberation*, by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

eschatological edge of the world for Christianity, let me also suggest that modernist Christianity—implicitly reading disablement as degeneracy—has laid down the metaphor (1) “as a...signifier of social and/or individual collapse,”⁵⁷ (2) as a map for social mission, and (3) as a spiritual diagnostic. The metaphorical use of disablement as a spiritual diagnostic is not somatically innocent, but in fact always already presumes the prescriptive need for redemption. For example, a people “blind” or “deaf” to the ways of God must, we have learned to presume, require remediation, because blindness and deafness must be obstacles.

Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda’s *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* provides a relevant case in point. This book presents a lucid analysis of the transnational aspects of globalization and its subjective effects, including the short-circuiting of ethical agency among Christians. Moe-Lobeda’s text deserves to be celebrated for taking up what Marcuse called the very difficult and unwelcomed work of liberating the majority from “a relatively well functioning, rich, powerful society.”⁵⁸ Yet Moe-Lobeda hinges her theo-ethical analysis on the metaphor of disablement and its remediation. She writes: “I argue that the prevailing model of economic globalization normalizes and dictates political-economic relationships that *cripple* human capacity to make decisions...[M]any people, insulated by privilege, remain *blind* to the suffering and ecological devastation created by current global trade and investment regimes. Others, while aware, feel *muted, dwarfed* by the situation.”⁵⁹ By her use of the various physiological variations classified as disabilities, she implicitly equates disability with occlusions in character development, indeed with morally inferior obstacles to full humanity.

Additionally, the book is neatly divided into Part 1, which “explores...the disabling of moral agency,” and Part 2, which “explores...the enabling of moral agency by relationship with God indwelling creation.”⁶⁰ A miracle story—the healing of the paralytic, I would assume, based on her rhetorical refrain—provides the not-so-covert scrim for the remediation of this disablement. She writes, echoing Jesus’ command to the paralytic in Matthew 9 and Mark 2, “The moral crisis...is the failure to get up and walk.”⁶¹ And again, “The purpose of all that I have said is...that we might rise up and walk away from compliance with economic violence and toward resistance, new vision and rebuilding.”⁶² To be sure, Moe-Lobeda appears to be using a biblically familiar method of employing disablement as a spiritual

analytic of reversal, that is, “You say, ‘I am rich’...not realiz[ing] that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17–18). Yet such reversal does nothing to displace the demand for normalcy. It still leaves persons with disabilities declassified and silenced subjects.

Certainly, Moe-Lobeda provides us with a careful, intentional analysis of the effects of globalization on a North American populace. The point here is rather to raise awareness of the way in which rhetorical recourse to metaphors of disablement can move so powerfully as to undercut the aim of an author, even an activist theologian such as Moe-Lobeda, who undoubtedly intends full and multiple flourishing, as well as to undercut the critical, ethical response-ability of a populace. The metaphor of disability, made biblically available to Christian theology, continues to serve as, if not the quintessential, at least an irresistible, paradigm of brokenness in Christian discourse. Read as “brokenness,” the disabled condition, given modern Christianity’s redemptive plotline, specifically requires spiritual remediation—as if disability were ever and always then lacking that energetic infusion of Spirit. Hence my claim that disability has strongly figured into how we calculate the physics of Spirit.

Couched as a problem ever in need of solution, disablement always already then evokes a resolve to correct the deviance. To use the metaphor of disability as spiritual diagnostic is to assume as natural the transformative transcendence thereof. Strategies of resolution have typically included (a) the remediation of deviance through cure or cosmesis, including prosthesis; (b) extermination of the deviant other; and (c) keeping deviance at bay and under control via strategies of confinement or containment, while maintaining rights of allowable trespass.⁶³ But please note: “Thinking with the [disabled] body” requires silencing those persons living with disabilities. Such egoic cogitation presumes physiological disablement to be “lack,” and then leaps over the testimony of persons with disabilities so as to repair and to rescue, to cure.

Harlan Lane, a psychologist who has practiced among the Deaf-World and who has as such also been consultant within the Belgian protectorate of Burundi, calls this equation of disability with lack “an extrapolative leap, an egocentric error” of “imposing the familiar on the

⁵⁷Snyder, Brueggemann, and Thomson, *Disability Studies*, 16.

⁵⁸Cited in Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 16.

⁵⁹Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2002), 3, 9 (italics added).

⁶⁰Ibid., 1.

⁶¹Ibid., 4.

⁶²Ibid., 133.

⁶³Although extermination of the deviant other may seem to be an antiquated and primitive solution, disability activists have insisted that certain acts of euthanasia or “mercy killing” be reconsidered in this light—for example, the Tracy Lattimer case, as well as “voluntary” suicide of disabled persons. The lack of communal, relational, and economic support along with the insistent individualism of our culture can pressure disabled persons and/or their families to read their quality of life as minimal—the social construction of what makes for “life” thereby condoning the elimination of the life of a disabled person. Other disability activists view the human genome project as itself a campaign of “cultural genocide” in regards to differently enabled persons.

unfamiliar.”⁶⁴ Among disability theorists, Lane has most explicitly laid out the parallel between imperial acts of territorial colonization and the colonization of persons whom dominant culture has considered disabled. He insists in his text *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* that terms of colonization fit both scenarios: “I call deaf communities colonized, using the term in an extended sense—as when...Foucault speaks of the ‘colonization of the body’ by the state—because deaf communities have suffered oppression in all its forms and consequences, in common with other cultures that were literally subjugated by imperial powers.” In an effort to mediate the contemporary struggle between the Deaf-World and the technologies of normalization, Lane writes: “To imagine what deafness is like, I imagine my [hearing] world without sound—a terrifying prospect, and one that conforms quite well with the stereotype we [hearing persons] project onto members of the deaf community.”⁶⁵ The hearing person, thinking him/herself into deafness, can only imagine it to be something like the silent treatment, a sociological form of punishment, driving a person toward despair, even threatening cognitive growth. Swallowed up in such existential, if egoistic dread, colonizers consistently refuse to change their frame of reference to take in the world of the other. Rather, saturated in dread, they override the alternative structures and values of the colonized. Caught in the swirls of their own existential anxieties, the colonizer is unable to think otherwise. Yet such dread and consequent benevolent paternalism proves beneficial to the colonizer—placing and keeping “its beneficiaries” in a dependent relation, a dependency that proves economically and psychologically advantageous to the colonizer.

Physiological variations categorized as disablement—for example, blindness, deafness, being crippled, to name but a few—may be among the most frequently employed metaphors of difference in scriptural, theological, and liturgical evocation. Simply deploying the metaphor of disablement does not then insure that the lives of disabled persons have been taken into consideration. Reflecting on the use of the metaphor within literature, Mitchell observes what may also be true for religious communities: “[D]isabled peoples’ social invisibility has occurred in the wake of their perpetual circulation throughout literary history.” So, for example, Augustine’s demarcating of monstrous bodies did not enable Christians to see the disabled person, but trained Christians to overlook and to speculate on the other, without actual engagement of and appreciation for her/his life. As a “master metaphor,” Mitchell continues, disablement “provides a means through which literature performs its social critique while simultaneously sedimenting stigmatizing beliefs about

⁶⁴Harlan L. Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1992), 10, 33.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 40.

people with disabilities.”⁶⁶ Building on the assumption that disability is naturally obvious to everyone and, beyond doubt, a deficiency at that, the use of the *metaphor* of disablement actually participates in the dynamics of socially constructed exclusion of disabled persons. A disabled person can, after all, be the picture of health but for the exclusionary social gaze and the consequent social, architectural, and economic structures of exclusion. So deploying the metaphor of disablement creates the crisis of and for redemption, rouses the anxieties, and warrants the redemptive intrusion. Reading back from the purportedly “diseased heart of Africa,” modern Christianity’s deficient other, anthropologist Jean Comaroff warns that “metaphors of healing have justified ‘humane imperialism.’”⁶⁷

Could disablement be a keystone in Christianity’s eschatological imagination? in its soteriological economy of what bodies need and desire? and thus also in Western presumptions to culture and civility? Although perennially posed as “a problem in need of a solution”⁶⁸—hence the social credibility of miracle stories—disability is no more natural nor innocent as a social construction than race or gender. It is, writes Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation.”⁶⁹ For disabled persons, physiological disablement is not existentially a suffering: It is what is—the condition and possibility of our living, of our liveliness. But then what happens to the Christian eschatological imagination, which has from Augustine through biotechnology been configured as the dream of wholeness, of normative resolution, even as the scientifically configured dream of human, indeed humane, technical perfection? The eschatological teleology of Christianity, in other words, may also have harbored the power of social construction of the disabled as marginal and therefore alien other.

Razing the Theaters of Cultural Power

From charity telethons to *Reader’s Digest* and *Chicken Soup* moralisms for the soul, from freak shows to biotechnology labs, from evangelical evocations toward missionary colonialism to repeated readings of gospel miracle accounts, disabled persons have been made the show ponies of mercy, medicine, monstrosity, and miracle. The stories are formulaic: Set up the image of the disabled as “weak and handicapped,” then valiantly rescue with superior power (which may be evidenced by “the crip’s” own amazing inner spirit). Such scenarios seem to expect disabled persons to

⁶⁶Snyder, Brueggemann, and Thomson, *Disability Studies*, 24 (italics added).

⁶⁷Jean Comaroff, “The Diseased Heart of Africa: Medicine, Colonialism and the Black Body,” in *Knowledge, Power, and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*, ed. Shirley Lindenbaum and Margaret M. Lock, Comparative Studies of Health Systems and Medical Care, no. 36 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 313.

⁶⁸Snyder, Brueggemann, and Thomson, *Disability Studies*, 15.

⁶⁹Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 6.

provide physical evidence of and laudatory gratitude for the beneficence of remediatary, redemptive actions. Yet the dominant, observes James Scott, "have a collective theater to maintain which often becomes part of their self-definition."⁷⁰ I want, rather, to suggest that miracle stories or medicine shows—the fantastic of technobiopower, for example—actually serve as a theater for dominant cultural power.

Although miracle stories have typically been read as stories of miraculous remediation of the pitiful body, I would suggest we turn our focus around: Might not these stories contribute to "the dramaturgy of power" necessary for imperial presence? I am suggesting that we read what have come to be called (following the history of Western biblical scholarship) "the miracle stories"—the stories that have been normatively framed for us as the healing of various disabling conditions—as discourses vying for and consolidating social power. This would equally include stories coming out of today's biotechnology labs—for example, "Was Blind But Now I See"—as out of our theological texts.

If miracle stories then, on the one hand, establish "the incredible" as a power of the dominant, their success must be equally, on the other hand, that of training a "way of looking and being." That is, the function of miracle stories may be that of passing on the prevailing normativities. Social spectacles that objectify deficiency, observes Comaroff, digging through the human effects of colonialism, also obversely give "a definition of person, of body, health and society."⁷¹ Davis, speaking from the venue of disability studies, echoes her point: "[A]natomizing of this form of difference [—disability, that is—] is nothing less than people's desperate attempt to consolidate their normality."⁷² Because no one is normal and all have to work hard to conform, "the person with disabilities is singled out as a dramatic case of not belonging. This identification makes it easier for the rest to think they fit the paradigm."⁷³ Disability is a social construction; it is a certain reading of "bodily particularities in the context of social power relations."⁷⁴ An indisputable morphological condition, a somatic particularity, allows culture to assume that "difference...reside[s] in the person rather than in the social context." This is especially true in Western culture, where disability is medicalized and scientific rationalism prevails, such that, as regards persons with disabilities, "we are able to ignore our role in producing it."⁷⁵ But produce it a culture does, particularly as a containment strategy for that which troubles the cultural ideal. As Thomson asserts, "The

'disabled' emerged...in tandem with its opposite: the abstract, self-possessed, autonomous individual" of and for industrial, now global, capitalism.⁷⁶

To demystify this theater of cultural power, we might recall this observation: These miracle stories have kept the person displayed on the pallet as "the body silent." Disability is not allowed to speak, to narrate, but is used instrumentally. By definition, those in "that condition" have been assumed not able to speak up. Representative others then assume the need to step in—like ventriloquists—as "voice of the voiceless." So as postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak has remarked, Hegel's concept of Spirit, aspiring and evolving to full consciousness, both required and foreclosed the presence of "the native informant," that fictive figure of primitivism, to mark the unconscious of nature. Spivak's argument suggests that, like disabled bodies in the history of literature, colonial natives were both discursively situated and silenced. They carry, she writes, "the mark of expulsion from the name of Man."⁷⁷ As Spivak puts it, following Freud and Lacan, the rejection of an incompatible idea—namely, the full humanity of this displayed other—together with "the rejection of affect served and serves as the energetic and successful defense of the civilizing mission."⁷⁸ Using the shortcut of these rejections, Spirit has been turned into a dominant, controlling—indeed, "colonizing"—power. In order to promote Spirit as multiplying forms of corporeal flourishing, Christian practice must come to include an "ethics of alterity" where it has previously inscribed transcendence—a transcendence that now appears to cover over an affective, ethical lapse.⁷⁹ An ethics of alterity—as opposed to the voracious dialectic of modernity's "Spirit"—would begin to swerve us from the heroic, redemptive path often taken in relation to an/other.

Releasing Spirit from Effecting Normativity

To answer the question "from what must we be saved," Christianity has often borrowed against the lives of disabled persons. Within Christian discourse, Spirit has been that divine contour vested with the power to heal, to make the broken whole again. In modern theology, Spirit has been construed as the eschatological agent of the end and therefore—as Wood observed in reflecting on Bede—of the edges of humanity. Spirit has, as was already true for Augustine, been gaining its religious credibility by its "treatment" of disability—its *textually* performative ability to cure, to miraculously remediate, to solve and resolve the loose ends and ragged edges of the human body.

⁷⁰James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 49–50.

⁷¹Comaroff, "Diseased Heart of Africa," 319.

⁷²Davis, "Bodies of Difference," 106.

⁷³Ibid., 105.

⁷⁴Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 6.

⁷⁵Martha Minow cited in Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 21.

⁷⁶Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 40.

⁷⁷Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 6.

⁷⁸Ibid., 4, 5.

⁷⁹Ibid., x.

Consequently, Christianity's *doxological* hymns to Spirit—that, for example, “life conquers death,” or that the body rises from the grave all glorious—have often been confused with *propositional* claims about the fabulous power of Spirit and its capacity for “making whole.” But if the miracle spectacle, with the disabled body at its theatrical center, consolidates a way of looking at the world (a perspective that I have variously called *globally media/ted Platonism* or *normative idealism*), then Spirit has become an agent amenable to *companioning imperial power*.

Yet “wholeness is in fact,” Davis counsels us, “a hallucination, a developmental fiction” attached to the mirror stage.⁸⁰ As Christian theologians we must in turn consider the extent to which wholeness might also be an eschatological illusion. Turning to the liturgical and eschatological evocation of wholeness at the heart of the religious imaginary, I apprehensively ask: Might the fact that we construe wholeness as the epitome of sacred encounter itself collude with the ideation mobilizing globalization, given the way in which wholeness is equated with conformity to cultural images disseminated as *ideal-self*?

In order to develop theologies of Spirit and healing praxes that can disrupt this cult of public appearances, continuing conversation with disability studies in its convergences with postcolonial theory is needed. Interface with disability studies may disquiet the prevailing normativities of the body and, more particularly, the way in which those normativities have been soteriologically embedded in Christian theology. Inasmuch as transcendence might be construed as the physics of Spirit, rethinking Spirit in its familiar, if contrarian correlation with disability—again, as physical or cultural handicap—may help us ferret out a way of holding life sacred, of creating the conditions of *entrustment to and for life* as distinct from the *transcendental imagination informing technobiopower*.

In her *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Musa Dube recommends that women in decolonizing zones open out what she calls “*Semoya space*” (*Moya* means “Spirit”)—a critical discourse-zone supported by the biblical hermeneutic of “*listening to what the Spirit says*.”⁸¹ Pneumatology has been singularly definitive in the formation of African Independent Churches—churches seeking, that is, liberation from “colonialism, capitalism, racism, and cultural chauvinism.”⁸² Describing these capacious “*new spaces*” attuned to Spirit, Dube explains that this new spatiality comes about by *defining “new frameworks of imagining reality and building social, economic, and political structures that do not espouse patriarchal and imperial forms of relationships.”* If, in Dube’s

postcolonial reconstruction, Spirit both demands “*the courage...of critical assessment of social structures*” and occasions viable, new cultural imaginaries that can be *feasibly inhabited*,⁸³ then disabilities studies would insist that Spirit’s physics need not split transcendence from relational interdependence. “It seems to me,” writes Dawn DeVries, regarding the doctrine of creation through a disabilities perspective, “that the ‘new creation’ could be understood not in terms of a restoration of the ‘old’ order [i.e., nature as cosmic plenitude or Edenic paradise and thus as the cure visited upon persons with disabilities], but as the *fashioning of a new order in which pain, exhaustion, and death are inducements to a new understanding of community*.”⁸⁴

Refusing the modernist crises of personal defects, the plot of brokenness to wholeness, and therefore refusing to make life a capitalist production, persons with disability might give Spirit a renewed lease on life. To improvise on the thought of Robert Murphy, author of the memoir *The Body Silent*: As the presence of the poor betray the American dream, persons with disabilities constitute the refusal of not only the American ideal, but Christian eschatological idealism.⁸⁵ We refuse to be resolved, saved, made whole, thereby “invalid/ating” eschatological idealism and hopefully some of its aggressive pity, preferring our histories of flesh, even as functionally enabled by technology. As the poet Mary Oliver puts it, “There is something more wonderful than gloss, than wholeness.”⁸⁶ Strikingly, then, while the decolonized may hold strategic wisdom for disrupting the controlling interests of globalizing capitalism, *Crip Culture* may be key to unlocking its imprisoning normativities and its mandatory public appearances.⁸⁷

⁸⁰Ibid., 116.

⁸¹Dawn DeVries, “Creation, Handicappism, and the Community of Differing Abilities,” in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, by Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark L. Taylor (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994), 137.

⁸²Murphy, *Body Silent*, 116–17.

⁸³Mary Oliver, “Whelks,” in *New and Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 30–31.

⁸⁴The term “Crip Culture” simply queers the terms of social exclusion—“crip” for crippled. The term was used by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder in the video *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back* (Marquette, Mich.: Brace Yourselves Productions, 1997), available from Fanlight Productions, www.fanlight.com. For what reads as a powerful manifesto for the “outing” of “the disabled community,” see Simi Linton’s call for “letting our ‘freak flag fly’” in Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 3–4.

⁸⁰Mitchell and Snyder, *The Body and Physical Difference*, 54.

⁸¹Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2000), (116)

⁸²Ibid., 40