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#### The valorization of resistance, survivability, and agency instrumentalizes black madness for white liberation and ignores how the black mad subject experiences asociality

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This strategy is not the only or primary way to read challenges to rac- ism and ableism. The problem exists (pace Hortense Spillers) at the level of grammar. These projects tend to have one vector: they “transform(ed) sys- tems and culture.”20 Note that transform operates as transitive where Black, disabled bodies perform the work of transformation rather than undergo the process of transformation. Yet Black, disabled bodies will not always behave as agents that transform or those who are transformed in equal mea- sure or, as noted above, with a degree of reciprocity. Allowing for more than one vector between Black, disabled bodies and the systems in which they operate clarifies the following: it is inaccurate that the only critical relation- ship between Blackness and disability (specifically, madness) is one of libera- tion from ableism. At times, Blackness exacerbates the presence of ableism, or cultural norms facilitate ableism.21 In accounting for these moments, I trouble the corollary of the logic above: namely, that whiteness withal the privilege embedded in it lacks the tools for its own liberation and must rely on Blackness to acquire its release. Here, Blackness becomes a reduced space where whiteness enacts its privilege by instrumentalizing Blackness. In this paradigm, Blackness for all its cultural complexity becomes another reac- tionary space that exists to indict whiteness, rather than a culture and sys- tem of thought all its own.22 We must consider the spaces when mere expo- sure of oppression is not only not emancipatory but can also be detrimental, where demonstration and acknowledgement of one’s various intersecting socially marginalized positions does not equal political agency. We must also consider what happens when Black cultural locations refuse whiteness as an interlocutor in favor of intraracial conversations. In short, when mad- ness is “a Black thang” (with all that evokes in terms of exclusivity and ableist objectification). I take up the question of intraracial context and conversation in the next discussion. For now, I turn to another foundational moment in the study of Blackness and disability to read in the breaks of the critical material. I con- tinue the conversation about the critical impulse of mutual constitution that looks to retrieve agentive stories of Black disabled folks as instantiations of anti-ableist radicality. Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s Extraordinary Bodies (1997) includes a chapter on physical disability in Ann Petry’s The Street, Toni Morrison’s oeuvre, and Audre Lorde’s Zami. Though Thomson’s dis- cussion does not explicitly discuss mental disability, cognitive impairment, or crazy-as-insult, I find it instructive for this conversation. Madness shad- ows each of the texts under scrutiny since the characters deviate from intra- cultural norms by being Black women who seek class ascension despite the odds (Petry) and wider American cultural norms by participating in and identifying with communities labeled deviant (and crazy) by the dsm IV (Lorde). Of course, Morrison’s characters are literally haunted by their ac- tions and kinfolk, which always forces the question of whether Morrison’s characters could be labeled crazy. It becomes useful to think about Mor- rison’s, Petry’s, and Lorde’s work (especially as part of Garland Thomson’s project) from the perspective of Octavia E. Butler: namely, that sanity is communally defined and anyone who deviates from agreed upon norms is treated as mad. The characters’ desires for themselves (and the methods they use to achieve them) exceed the racialized and gendered boundaries drawn for them. Indeed, because they also have physical disabilities, their behavior trespasses the boundaries drawn based on ability as well. Madness cannot be cleaved from these conversations. Thomson’s claims about the represen- tation of physical disability as agentive and liberatory have implications for whether madness has similar representational possibilities.23 Thomson offers that the collective project of these Black women’s writ- ings provides an antidote to white racist depictions. These powerful bodies— extraordinary, in Thomson’s lexicon—participate in a “collective project of cultural revision [that] challenges the African-American woman writer to produce a narrative of self that authenticates Black women’s oppressive history yet offers a model for transcending that history’s limitations.”24 Moreover, the primacy given to disabled women figures “reveals the shift in African-American literary representation from a modernist to a postmod- ernist mode, a change that parallels the ideological move of minority groups from assimilation to affirmation of cultural and ethnic differences.”25 While I partly agree that these representations “render oppression without rein- scribing it,”26 I hesitate to read in them the triumph that Thomson affirms. On the one hand, Thomson rightly points out that these characters do not completely represent physical deviance. On the other, they do not, as she says, “repudiate such cultural master narratives as normalcy, wholeness, and the feminine ideal.”27 I would attribute this aspect of their representation to the way that the social model of disability upon which Thomson relies does not fully account for the way madness shows up in these texts.28 The social model privileges a particular kind of mental agility and cognitive process- ing to combat the stigma and material consequences that arise as a result of ableism. In turn, the model dismisses madness as a viable subject position, ensuring that those counted as such—either by communal consensus or psy- disciplines—remain excluded from conversations about disability because they cannot logically engage. For the characters in Thomson’s study, this has the pernicious effect of erasing some of the master cultural narratives they work against: those that acknowledge their physical disability and link it to mental disability as a way to further disenfranchise and disempower them. Thomson’s work reads these figures (based on their representation of physical disabilities) as liberatory for the larger narrative and theoretical spaces of ethnic modernism. I hazard that these characters’ relationship to disability suggests an investment in internalized ableism, particularly vis- à-vis sexuality. For example, Thomson reads Ann Petry’s Mrs. Hedges, a tall, dark-skinned Black woman with avoirdupois who works as a madam, as one who refuses victimization. Important for this conversation is the way Mrs. Hedges is not only physically disfigured by burns but also read as ex- ceeding the gendered and racialized boundaries the text’s Black commu- nity (voiced through the protagonist) circumscribes for her. Her madness is not biomedically defined, but it carries psychosocial repercussions given how she is treated. Thomson bases her reading of Mrs. Hedges as liberatory on Hedges’s sexualized gaze on the main character and her profession as a madam. Yet, there is no room for Hedges to acquiesce to or enjoy the sexual- ized attention she receives from the rich white man who controls the street. The novel makes it clear that part of Hedges’s rejection of the man’s sexual advances is financial. She cannot be in bed with him literally and economi- cally. However, what the novel leaves open is that Hedges’s rejection of him is also about her own denigrated view of her sexuality.29 She is still limned as monstrous, grotesque, even if Hedges as a figure shifts the understand- ing of monstrosity. Inasmuch as Hedges’s physical disability allows her to move from one position in the economy to another more powerful one, she must rely on a chosen life of celibacy and a masculinized, monstrous ap- pearance to secure and maintain her new economic position. Her celibacy also shores up her power by keeping the madness of her disfigured, disabled, interracial sexuality in check. That is, though the disability is no longer in the background of the text, the cultural baggage of internalized ableism ap- pears in the foreground replete with eschewing sexual desire and limiting the association with traditional forms of femininity. Even if Petry’s proj- ect does—according to Thomson—pave the way for Black authors to shift from assimilation to affirmation and provide a challenge to the static rep- resentations of disabled figures in modernist texts, Mrs. Hedges’s refusal to engage in her own sexuality complicates a reading of this figure as liberatory vis-à-vis physical disability and the charges of madness that accompany her character. Reading Mrs. Hedges as agentive certainly poses challenges given the internalized ableism within Petry’s text, especially since the novel focuses on intraracial encounter. First, physical disability only liberates Mrs. Hedges from the intraracial economy of the street by providing an avenue for power. Yet, within intraracial encounter, she remains circumscribed by the discourses of madness because community members consider her mad for transgressing boundaries of race and gender. Second, the interracial encoun- ter does not allow for her agency within the critical literature. Thomson claims that Petry’s text, as well as the others, counters the limited represen- tations of disability within modernist texts. Implicitly, the logic of such a critical move—regardless of its truism—mandates that Blackness become the vehicle for (mostly white) others’ liberation from ableism in their read- ing practice. In that way, it is the presence of Blackness that shores up white liberalism by not only providing a representation of Blackness but also a complex rendering of white-centered notions of disability. Elsewhere, I have argued similarly—that we ought to attend to the way that Blackness and whiteness function in the interracial multiability en- counter. In my article on television’s Monk, I proposed that Blackness and madness cannot take up the same space within one interaction. I read the protagonist’s unnamed obsessive-compulsive disorder as a disability that “misfits” with other (usually minor) characters’ Blacknesses.30 At times, one is used for comedic fodder or erased in favor of representing the other or eclipsed as a way to demonstrate white liberalism. My article describes the relationship between these two identities as mutually constituted, but it evinces some slippage when attempting to discern why the protagonist’s disability erases the other characters’ Blackness. Since Blackness and mad- ness do not reside in the same body, the various drama-comedy scripts ter- giversate about what difference among difference can mean, often mobiliz- ing white liberalism to police disability and Blackness. Rereading my own work with an eye toward the breaks, I find that we not only lack a criti- cal vocabulary for describing Blackness and madness simultaneously, but it is also assumed that one must take priority over the other. The end result is that in this interracial encounter—whether fictionalized, theorized, or criticized—either Blackness or madness must be erased. Important for this conversation is that the multiracial, multiability encounter shifts depending on the social position of the characters. Blackness cannot and should not be marshaled as the radical space for white liberalism to mount its critique of ableism or racism. When Blackness and madness exist in the same space, multiple ways of reading should become possible, some of which eschew the possibility of radicality and others that might usher it in. The multiability interracial encounter also allows for Blackness and mad- ness to be erased when improperly thought of as agentive. Because both dis- courses are often conceptualized as unspeakable or illegible, their presence can facilitate and consolidate the power that creates abject material condi- tions. Nirmala Erevelles makes this point most forcefully: “The analytic category of disability is useful in destabilizing static notions of identity, ex- ploring intersectionality, and investigating embodiment, [yet] I argue that the effectiveness of much of feminist disability studies remains limited be- cause of its overreliance on metaphor at the expense of materiality.”31 In other words, Blackness and disability have the potential to destabilize the rhetoric of normalcy that holds them as abject, but they are curtailed in do- ing so when mislabeled as agentive. In Erevelles’s exploration of the lived conditions of war, she argues that when disability (both physical and men- tal) intersects with Black and brown bodies in the developing world or in disenfranchised communities within the developed world, their confluence indicts unchecked multinational corporate greed because it reveals the po- liticized nature of impairment. With this in mind, there can be no ableist or racist narrative available that prioritizes individualized achievement (read: overcoming) or bemoans bad luck (read: pity) because the root cause impli- cates specific governments, companies, the people who run them, and those who are complicit in them. In addition, Erevelles resists ascribing agency to the disabled people of color she discusses, perhaps because, in this version of David and Goliath, Goliath is winning. More to the point, the material conditions for celebration and agency require material resources not avail- able to everyone, and mere knowledge of one’s situation cannot be proxy for freedom from it, nor does awareness equal agency.

#### **The critical purchase of the human relies on notions of agency which the mad black are barred from – the only ethical demand is to disinvest from the human**

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Both strategies for engaging the human have merit: find the traces of what and who is used to constitute the concept and underscore the processes by which the human creates itself as superior. Recall that the mad Black is both an embodied positionality and an aesthetic intervention. As such, it hints at some common conceptual ground and useful disagreements. The mad Black cannot so simply slip into history as an aberration, nor can it so easily slip out of history as a failure. Here, the mad Black advocates a con- sistent questioning of how abjection functions, and from where it arises. It also acts as an adroit poker player. It sees the ideology of ability and raises it the possessive investment in whiteness (pace George Lipsitz), questioning how one arrives at universality if the so-called soundness of the bodymind is not the sole reason for exclusion. That is, the mad Black reveals a set of breaks to read: without a reliance on ocularity and a skepticism about lin- ear conceptions of time and narrative, it disrupts the easy alignment of dis- ability with whiteness or Blackness with degradation. Reading these breaks requires the disruption courted by Sylvia Wynter’s refusal of the category Man and broaches what Siebers termed the “conceptual horizon” marked by the ideology of ability.23 Mad Blackness calls for no less than a retooling of the terms of humanity itself. It questions the desire for ability, and the desire for whiteness. Since the Enlightenment positions madness and Blackness as a set of “ontological foils for the modern, rational, European subject,”24 the fissures reveal where, how, and with whom current ideological investments lie. Further, their undoing and unmaking requires an unmooring that reck- ons with constructs that have heretofore been unavailable. As my previous comments suggest, there exist a few cultural and social locations that allow us to question the utility of the human. Specifically, the appeal to universality and the possessive investment in whiteness cohere in one’s relationship to the nation-state. How is one defined as a citizen if madness or Blackness functions as a default disqualification? Those schol- ars working on physical disability have given a cursory nod to abjection,25 madness forces disability studies to reckon with where abjection arises and how it might be embraced.26 Taking a methodological cue from Nirmala Erevelles, who explores what it might mean to embrace disability as a part of Blackness, we need to examine abjection as a social location where Blackness and madness can powerfully defang the critical purchase of the human. It is not coincidental that much of the work on madness comes from the fields of rhetoric and composition because so many of the narratives we embrace about madness view it as a fundamental issue of communication. These scholars intervene in the sacralized understanding of madness as uncom- municative and therefore unripe for analysis in perpetuity. Madness and Blackness exert hortatory pressure on all modes of critical analysis, forcing an examination of how we place the human at the center or overlook it as the default premise.27

#### Post-enlightenment notions of the human privilege unique mental superiority in its desire for the rational subject

**da Silva 05,** Denise Ferreira, Professor and Director of the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice at the University of British Columbia, Ethnicities, September 2005, “’Bahla Pelo Negro’: Can the subaltern (subject of raciality) speak?”, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1468796805054959, apark 8/28/21

Throughout the last two centuries, transparency and the ontological descriptor it authorizes, historicity, has governed modern ontological accounts and provides the ethical basis for conceptions of justice. This ethical supremacy of transparency results from Hegel’s (1977[1807]) notion of the Transcendental Subject (spirit) that consolidates modern representation. This resulted from an account of the trajectory of reason as the path of a self-producing/self-revealing sovereign which locates its ‘ends’ (goals, designs) in post-Enlightenment Europe where human beings have social configurations which actualize the principles reason authorizes, namely universality and self-determination. Besides consolidating the transparency thesis and historicity (interiority/temporality) as the privileged ontological horizon, Hegel’s resolution of reason into freedom had two other crucial effects. First, it rewrites the subject as a desiring thing, one that emerges out of a movement of engulfment of extended (exterior/spatial) things, which now become but vanishing moments that will be resolved (reduced/ sublated) as the subject moves towards transparency. Second, when it places post-Enlightenment European minds and social configurations safely in transparency, Hegel’s statement enables, as Foucault (1994) argues, the writing of man as the sovereign subject and privileged object of knowledge; that is, his resolution both necessitated and enabled the formulation of scientific projects which attempted to capture how reason operates in the actual ‘conditions of (human) existence’. Elsewhere (Silva, forthcoming), I describe the manufacturing of the arsenal, the analytics of raciality, assembled by the sciences of man and society, which transform the human body and social configurations as products/effects of universal reason. I show how the assembling of this arsenal became possible when the writers of the Science of Life, George Cuvier’s ‘laws of conditions of existence’ and Charles Darwin’s principle of ‘natural selection’, delimited a whole sector of nature, i.e. the domain of living (self-producing and self-moving) things. With this, they introduced another version of reason, namely productive reason, which combines Hegel’s Transcendental (self-producing) Subject with the scientific version of reason as a regulative force of the universe. Put differently, the Science of Life enabled knowledge projects which addressed self-consciousness as phenomena, in the Kantian sense These projects attribute the mind’s unique abilities – thought, language, representation itself – to the exterior regulation, to how universal reason governs the mechanisms (organic structures and functions) necessary for the emergence, maintenance, bodily and social (re)production of human life. Following the lead of the Science of Life, the 19- and 20-century sciences of man and society would manufacture another ontological horizon, namely globality (exteriority/spatiality). When their arsenals addressed bodily and social configurations found across the surface of the globe, they produced these configurations as signifiers of how the tools of productive reason institute – as they produce and regulate – human (moral and intellectual) difference. Nevertheless, as they already presuppose Hegel’s resolution, these knowledge projects always already assumed that post-Enlightenment Europe was securely placed in transparency. Their leading tools, the concepts of the racial and the cultural, consistently reproduce these assumptions when they address the mind as a product and effect of outer-regulation. In the 19th-century, the racial would enable statements that write the difference between post-Enlightenment Europeans and their contemporaries as irreducible and unsublatable. Such accounts of human difference result from how the Science of Man’s toolbox, through the examination of brain forms and functions and the theses of permanence of characters and hybridity, mapped bodily and social configurations seeking to reveal how exterior forces, i.e. ‘the laws of conditions of existence’, institute distinct kinds of human minds. In 20- century anthropology and sociology of race relations, the cultural would play this role. Here, however, the focus would be upon the variety of social configurations, the origins of which Franz Boas attributed to the ‘laws of thought’ and action and Radcliffe-Brown described as expressions of the basic structures of representation (Silva, forthcoming). When producing the global as a modern (scientific) signifying context, the racial and the cultural circumscribe the places of both (a) the transparent ‘I’, when they describe the privileged trajectory of the European ‘I’ (the subject); and (b) the affectable ‘I’, the ‘others of Europe’, whose (bodily and social) markers they write as the cause of their subaltern trajectories in modern social configuration. This is not a dismissal of the politics of difference. Not only do both, the racial and the cultural, re/place post-Enlightenment European minds and social configurations in transparency, as each finds that European bodily and mental configurations express the superior mental powers that enable the manufacturing of the principles of universality and selfdetermination, the ones that testify to the realization of the ‘ends’ of reason. When doing so, each also firmly places the ‘others of Europe’ in affectability, as each describes their bodily and social configurations as expressions of a mind which is subjected not only to the exterior tools of universal reason but which, because of that, would not resist the force of the post-Enlightenment European civilizations.

#### Black madness is in the position of abjection and bare life in relation to whiteness – black mad bodies are securitized against because their mere existence disrupts the privileged notion of the autonomous bodymind

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To be clear, Butler’s aesthetic intervention does not exclusively exist in the ideological spaces of syntax and punctuation. One of the rules of science fiction is that the world the author creates must abide by its own internal logic. Within the world of Fledgling, part of the internal logic is the history of the Ina people. Though Butler does not break the rule insisting on an in- ternal logic, she does not abide by the idea that the characters must be aware of the internal logic to which they abide. That is, the Gordons’ liberalism and silence and the antagonists’ hatred and genocide are two sides of the same narrative coin. They each participate in an act of historiographical revision, changing their past relationship to disability and Blackness by ex- cising them. Unlike the critical impulse that permits representational detec- tive work to recuperate Black disabled bodies and experiences, they cannot recuperate that which they do not think they have lost. They cannot treat as radical that which they considered so abject so as to not exist at all. But- ler’s text intervenes in the narrative logic that assumes the accepted stories about Ina origin and history are complete without the input of either the present or purported anomalies from the past. Ina construct the absence of Blackness and madness as a ballast of their identity ab ovo. The Gordons do not want to admit to the idea of Ina racists. They do not want to deal with the reality that Ina can be gravely mentally injured. (In point of fact, Shori’s father, Iosif, is the only Ina who acknowledges that her head injury could be part of Ina experience.) Racism and ableism exert differing pressures on Ina history and ontology. Each destabilizes the Ina’s notion of self, such that their only recourse is denial. To embrace the presence of racism in that moment would be to admit the possibility of dishonor and to more heavily court embarrassment and shame regarding Ina history or identity. To think about Ina injury, particularly amnesia, troubles the overarching paradigm they have developed for discussing their relationship to illness. Most often, they think in terms of physical disabilities, usually temporary injury that can be rectified, such as broken bones or pierced flesh. Here, Shori’s amne- sia upsets their understanding of themselves as generally sound—in rela- tion to humans superlative—in mind and body. The absence of a possibility for cure destabilizes an aspect of themselves they consider fundamental— memory as tied to their longevity and as a necessary tool for their survival. Since mutual constitution occasions the recuperation of Blackness and mad- ness, they would be absorbed in their history or origin stories but not nor- malized based on abjection. According to these Ina, they were not present to be absorbed at all. This historiographical maneuver implies that madness and Blackness have and create separate historical trajectories which, when combined with a history that insists on whiteness and ability, is destructive to their sense of self. By muddying history, Butler allows Black madness to shift one of the hallmarks of science fiction: the audacity to imagine the future. The at- tempted genocide and the rhetoric of erasure push toward creating a bare life for Shori. Agamben develops the concept of bare life to account for those who exist between zoe (mere life) and bios (good life) and whose existence is included as a part of the Western cultural landscape but occluded from visual representation or polite conversation. Moreover, those with bare lives lose their rights as citizens, and their existence is limned by their fungibil- ity. Alexander Weheliye revises this concept to think through the Middle Passage instead of the Muselmann of the Holocaust, remarking that other bodies in the Western world are also susceptible to bare lives. In Weheliye’s revision, the bare lives to which Black people become susceptible are made possible by their de facto and long-standing position of fungibility vis-à-vis the state.68 In Shori’s case, the possibility remains that bare life becomes af- fixed to her Black amnesiac body not simply by virtue of genocidal action but also because of the accepted idea that the Ina exist outside the confines of race and racialization discourses. In thinking through Shori’s Black madness as variation rather than aber- ration, the text opens the space for Shori to display certain kinds of agency, loosen the hold of a bare life. Yet because her allies have to advocate for her to be considered Ina, I am hesitant to ascribe to Shori’s Black madness an agentive quality. That is, how far away from a bare life can she be if her ex- istence must be consistently justified before their Council of Judgment, and even then not fully decided or accepted? Black madness remains a provo- cation. Even as it forms the locus for the invagination of their history and the fold of their future, it both allows for agency and forecloses it. Black madness remains a wrinkle in the linear progression of history and time because of its opposition to their dominant ideology. As a result, it cannot have anything but a vexed agency, nor can it create itself outside the confines of a bare life. Moreover, Black madness, given its loss of time (amnesia) and aversion to time (changing the narrative) shifts the possibility of recupera- tion as a form of agency. Linked as it is to a bare life, affixed in history as such, it cannot fully recuperate its past nor rewrite the history to tell its story from its perspective.

#### **The impact is antiblack ableism that justifies suffering beyond suffering under the guise of hyper/ability**

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By using historical and theoretical examples from Black Studies and Disability Studies, we show that a Black feminist disability framework is emergent and intersectional. These examples, when analyzed with such a framework in mind, are rich with unexplored connections across both disciplines. Embedded within the narratives of some of the central figures and theories of these fields are the ingredients for creating the unifying framework. For example, the excess strength and otherwise “too muchness” of Blackness is an oft-deconstructed trope in Black Studies. The myth of the strong Black woman has been critiqued in many ways, notably by a powerful range of Black feminist scholars but has rarely been examined as a form of ableism—internalized or social (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2009; Collins 2000, 2005; Giddings 2007; Harris-Perry 2011; Mataka 2000). The myth suggests that Black women are uniquely strong, able to endure pain, and surmount otherwise difficult obstacles because of their innate tenacity. Black women are disallowed disability and their survival is depoliticized. Survival is a form of resistance and a source of celebration, particularly in the face of the reality that, as Lucille Clifton said, “Every day something has tried to kill me and has failed” (Clifton 1993, 25). There is a productive tension in recognizing the critical connections of the celebration of survival in the context of the demands made on Black bodies to transcend all suffering (Derricotte 2010). Resilience is praised while trauma, violence, and pain are too common to actually be interrogated for very long. The logic of Black hypervisibility produces subjects that are barred from weakness—and disability in Western thought as figured through non-normative bodies is the ultimate sign of unsuitability. To counteract such notions of unsuitability, a form of strategic essentialism has been adopted that upholds internalized ableism and ultimately disallows Black suffering through embracing an identification with this presumed hyper-ability. How many of us grew up with parents who warned us of having to be twice as good as our white counterparts? Designed to fortify Black children against the profound racism that is masked in a masquerade of meritocracy, this notion of having to be “twice as good,” while often true, also marks the difficulties with discussing trauma, health disparities, and psychiatric or physical disabilities within Black communities. If one is not able to work twice as hard to keep up with the masquerade, then what value does one have to the project of Black redemption? The cultural tradition from which this adage stems has been supported by studies and corroborated with empirical evidence. Black people are more likely to be surveilled, punished, and passed over for promotion than their white counterparts in all societal institutions. Black workers must demonstrate a significantly higher level of skill than their white counterparts in order to keep their jobs despite receiving lower wages and fewer opportunities for promotion (White 2015). Black people cannot afford to be disabled when they are required to be phantasmically abled in a white supremacist society. By bringing disability studies and a Black feminist theoretical lens to address this myth, scholars are better able to explain Black people’s reluctance to identify as disabled and potentially offer new strategies for dismantling ableism within Black Studies.

#### **The alternative is a methodological and narratological mad blackness that disrupts notions of ocularity and linearity while refusing calls to radicality, agency, and solutions**

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Considering Black cultural contexts where mental illness and cognitive dis- ability occur, the two major Western modes of interpretation—ocularity and (drawing on our earlier conversation) linear time—no longer retain the exclusive right to interpret meaning. The Black mad are, in some sense, no more. They become the mad Black. I theorize mad Black and mad Blackness as a formulation that disrupts the ocular and linear legacies of the West’s conception of space and time, respectively. To theorize the concept of the mad Black or mad Blackness opens up critical space to consider how the dis- courses of madness and Blackness not only operate in intraracial spaces but also intensify and dismantle common understandings of each other. When mad becomes a modifier for Black it carries with it the charge of excess (i.e., more Black, really Black, unapologetically Black, Blackity Black), anger, and insanity as it simultaneously functions as an intensifier for Blackness itself. In some ways, madness amplifies Blackness in this conception, pushing it to excess, but it also has the potential to dismantle it. Said potential lies precisely in the disruption of Western space and time. Sight no longer acts as the dom- inant modeof sense making. Linear progressions of time no longer capture the movement of subjects and objects through narrative. Mad Blackness fills in the gaps heretofore created by reading strategies (i.e., mutual constitution) that rely on these two Western modalities of interpretation. For instance, Octavia E. Butler’s mad Black character cleaves time from space with her very existence, such that the linear progressive narrative plane is disrupted. She also foregrounds the lie in thinking of the impeachability of sight as the dominant mode of interpretation. Her allies cannot see her illness. Their understanding based on sight—no matter its superlative quality— is impoverished. The mad Black then is not solely disruptive because of its embodiment. But also, the mad Black figure and mad Blackness stage a narratological intervention in how we analyze and tell stories about race and disability writ large. Mad Blackness describes the aesthetics of a text that refuses to adhere to ocularcentrism or linearity. In these texts—including but not lim- ited to the ones in these conversations—madness and Blackness pervade the structure of the text such that linear renderings of the narrative always do a disservice to the text and an emphasis on sight forecloses interpretive possibility. To be clear, it is not that ocularcentrism and linearity are wholly inappropriate, but rather that they are explicitly incomplete due to the influ- ence of madness and Blackness in the structure and characters of the text. As a result, mad Blackness necessarily critiques texts that denigrate madness or Blackness or both. Despite, and perhaps owing to, this disruptive quality, I would not define mad Blackness as a revolutionary force, nor would I expect mad Black figures to offer solutions. Their disruption—of interpretation, of narrative—does not require that they provide solutions, since that contrasts their suspicion of linearity and teleology, nor does it require that they be benevolent, since that often requires they be in service of those that create and maintain anti- Black ableist and sanist structures. This book, Black Madness :: Mad Black- ness, is one such example of a mad Black text. As I mentioned, the conversa- tions herein reveal critical conversations to themselves, and seek to perturb some of the foundations upon which Black studies and disability studies rest all while yoking them irrevocably together.

#### **Our mad methodology allows for the extension of radical compassion to disembodied voices that condemns Western boundaries of sanity**

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Mad methodology seeks, follows, and rides the unruly movements of madness. It reads and hears idioms of madness: those purported rants, raves, rambles, outbursts, mumbles, stammers, slurs, gibberish sounds, and unseemly silences that defy the grammars of Reason. It historicizes and contextualizes madness as a social construction and social relation vis-à-vis Reason. It ponders the sporadic violence of madness in tandem and in tension with the structural violence of Reason. It cultivates critical ambivalence to reckon with the simultaneous harm and benefit that may accompany madness. It respects and sometimes harnesses "mad" feelings like obsession and rage as stimulus for radical thought and action. Whereas rationalism roundly discredits madpersons, mad methodology recognizes madpersons as critical theorists and decisive protagonists in struggles for liberation. To be clear, I am not suggesting that madpersons are always already agents of liberation. I am simply and assuredly acknowledging that they can be, which is a heretical admission amid antimad worlds. I propose a mad methodology that neither vilifies the madperson as evil incarnate, nor romanticizes the madperson as resistance personified, nor patronizes the madperson as helpless ward awaiting aid. Rather, mad methodology engages the complexity and variability of mad subjects. Regarding anger, the warrior poet Audre Lorde asserts that it is "loaded with information and energy." Mad methodology is rooted in the recognition that phenomenal madness, medicalized madness, and psychosocial madness, like angry madness, are all "loaded with information and energy." Mad methodology proceeds from a belief that such information can instruct black radical theory and such energy can animate black radical praxis. Most urgently, mad methodology primes us to extend radical compassion to the madpersons, queer personae, ghosts, freaks, weirdos, imaginary friends, disembodied voices, unvoiced bodies, and unReasonable others, who trespass, like stowaways or fugitives, in Reasonable modernity. Radical compassion is a will to care for, a commitment to feel with, a striving to learn from, and an openness to be vulnerable before a precarious other, though they may be drastically dissimilar to yourself. Radical compassion is not an appeal to an idyllic oneness where difference is blithely effaced. Nor is it a smug projection of oneself into the position of another, thereby displacing that other. Nor is it an invitation to walk a mile in someone else's shoes and amble, like a tourist, through their lifeworld, leaving them existentially barefoot all the while. Rather, radical compassion is an exhortation to ethically walk and sit and fight and build alongside another whose condition may be utterly unlike your own. Radical compassion works to impart care, exchange feeling, transmit understanding, embolden vulnerability, and fortify solidarity across circumstantial, sociocultural, phenomenological, and ontological chasms in the interest of mutual liberation. It persists even and especially toward beings who are the objects of contempt and condemnation from dominant value systems. It extends even and especially to those who discomfit one's own sense of propriety. Indeed, this book sometimes loiters in scenes and tarries with people who may trouble readers. I hope that this book also models the sort of radical compassion that persists through the trouble. I characterize mad methodology as a parapositivist approach insofar as it resists the hegemony of positivism. (As a philosophical doctrine, positivism stipulates that meaningful assertions about the world must come from empirical observation and interpretation to generate veritable truth. However, when engaging the phenomenal, the spiritual, the aesthetic, the affective, and the mad, we must deviate from the logics of positivism.) Mad methodology finds great inspiration in other cultural theorists' parapositivist approaches, including the Apostle Paul's account of "faith," Édouard Glissant's "poetics of relation," Avery Gordon's haunted and haunting sociology, Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," Jack Halberstam's "scavenger methodology," Ann Cvetkovich's compilation of an "archive of feelings," Christina Sharpe's "wake work" and Patricia J. Williams's "ghost gathering." These thinkers study sublime, opaque, formless, subjunctive, scarce, dead, and ghostly phenomena that thwart positivist knowing. As a parapositivist approach, mad methodology does not attempt to wholly, transparently reveal madness." How could it? Madness, after all, resists intelligibility and frustrates interpretation. Conceding that I cannot fully understand the meaning of every encounter, I often precede my observations with the qualifiers maybe, it might be, and it seems. Between these covers, I madness embrace uncertainty and irresolution. I heed poet-philosopher Glissant's insistence that "the transparency of the Enlightenment is finally misleading... It is not necessary to understand someone-in the verb 'to understand' [French: comprendre] there is the verb 'to take' [French: prendre]-in order to wish to live with them.I want to live with the madpersons gathered in this study, but I do not t to take them. I strive to pursue madness, but not to capture it. Recall that II began this chapter by warning you to hold tight. Mad methodology also, sometimes, entails letting go: relinquishing the imperative to know, to take, to capture, to master, to lay bare all the world with its countless terrors and wonders. Sometimes we must hold tight to steady ourselves amid the violent tumult of this world-and sometimes we must let go to unmoor ourselves from the stifling order imposed on this world. I am describing a deft dance between release and hold, hold and release. In short, mad methodology is how to go mad without losing your mind. At length, this book will show you.

#### The ROB is to open up spaces for disembodies voices – exposing these breaks in knowledge production is a pre-requisite to deconstructing violence because these discussions are always just erased

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To that end, I draw on those who read within the folds and breaks, a concept and methodology that attends to connections between discourse and materiality as infinite and inextricably bound. The complex web of re- lationships between Blackness and madness (and race and disability) is con- stituted within the fissures, breaks, and gaps in critical and literary texts. Hortense Spillers’s work in “Interstices: A Drama of Small Words” (1984), and “‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe’: An American Grammar Book” (1987), opens up this critical space and methodology in her discussion of the flesh. She depicts the flesh as a text that has, makes, and acquires meaning. The flesh of Black women in particular, since it has been erased from history, in its abrogated status exists within what Deleuze later terms the fold: a space not solely of possibility, but one that continuously gets erased. Since Deleuze develops the fold vis-à-vis Leibniz’s understanding of the Baroque aesthetic (read: within a tradition of Western and Enlightenment thought), I find it useful to think through how the fold shows up in the aesthetic praxis of the artists-theorists under scrutiny. The fold exists within the self, between the self and other, and between groups of others, as a space from which to interpret and understand the various critical and creative possibilities avail- able. In addition, development does not occur on a linear plane: it constantly folds, unfolds, and refolds. Most important for my readings, the fold func- tions as a space that creates and sustains possibility. Spillers’s work not only anticipates Deleuze but also expands its reach by making explicit which sub- jects consistently live within the fold, an idea disability studies scholar Len- nard Davis echoes when he writes about the way ideas and subjects within the fold get erased.48 Yet, the fold as understood by Deleuze is not merely the place where history and aesthetics rest. It is mercurial and oppositional, since, as Hortense Spillers theorized prior to Deleuze, it is emblazoned on Black flesh. Fred Moten’s In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radi- cal Tradition (2003) conceptualizes the “break,” a methodological kissing cousin to the fold, as a racialized space that pinpoints how history, music, and race—as discursive concepts and material consequences—function as oppositional even as they are coextensive. Moten’s “break” signals the kind of rupture that creates and catastrophizes Blackness and madness, which he punctuates by using other words to describe the break like the cut, or the process of breaking, like invagination, or intussuscepted (all of which I borrow).

## Case

#### Subject formation relies on an autonomous separation of the body and the individual that excludes crips – within civil society, they can never express themselves as autonomous subjects able to move beyond their bodies – the only ethical demand is the end of subjectivity and to affirm crip subjectivity

**Braswell 11** (Harold Braswell, “Can there be a Disability Studies Theory of "End-of-Life Autonomy"?”, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1704/1754)>

While there are many competing conceptions of "autonomy" (Christman, 1998), there is common ground among philosophers in understanding "autonomy" to be a conception of **subjectivity** that **defines the individual as a self-governing being** (Buss, 2008). In this view, individuals are coherent, self-knowing entities with the capacity to understand and, ideally, to act on their own desires. These desires are, in turn, what is best for the individual: In other words, the individual him or herself is best able to determine his or her own conception of the "good life" (Emanuel, 1991, p. 81). This conception is considered independent of and, conceivably, even in opposition to society. The individual is thus prior to society, and while society can provide the means of realizing the individual's desires, it does not constitute them. The individual is master and creator of himself. As a conception of subjectivity, "autonomy" determines the organization and function of the state. In liberal democracy, the state adopts an attitude of "neutrality" with regard to its citizens (Emanuel 1991, p. 36). The state does not postulate a unified vision of the "good life," to which its citizens universally ascribe. Rather, by abstaining from proposing such a unifying public conception, the state allows its citizens, in the private sphere, to determine their own vision of the "good life" (Fineman, 2004, p. 19; Emanuel 1991, p. 36). The state is thus organized to avoid paternalism, which is "the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm" (Dworkin, 2010). Consequently, the liberal state fosters the "autonomy" of its citizens by abstaining from contact with them. This view is consistent with and dependent on the autonomous individual's originary asociality. Less commented on—but no less important—is the manner in which "autonomy" conceives of the individual's relation to his or her body. The autonomous individual is master of his or her own body, but his body is not synonymous with the self. Rather, the self owns the body like a piece of property (Andrews, 1986; Rao, 2000). He or she instrumentalizes it, using it as he sees fit, in accord with ~~his~~ (their) particular vision of the good life. The autonomous subject exerts mastery over his or her body; such mastery is, in fact, the mark of ~~his~~ (their) freedom—and any attempt to manipulate the individual's body against ~~his~~ (their) will would be the ultimate example of paternalistic domination. "Autonomy" thus reifies a Cartesian division between subjectivity and corporeality, postulating the individual as prior to his or her body in a manner that parallels ~~his~~ (their) relation to society. Thus, just as society can impinge itself on the individual's autonomy, so too can the individual's body, if it resists ~~his~~ (their) commands. This presumptive conflict between subjectivity and corporeality is what makes the very concept of "end-of-life autonomy" possible. The Intersection of Political "Autonomy" and "End-of-Life Autonomy" How does the conception of end-of-life autonomy in bioethics relate to this broader definition of "autonomy" as a form of political subjectivity? Just as "autonomy" connotes the individual's self-realization in the absence of external political impairments, so "end-of-life autonomy" marks a space in the private sphere where the individual can make decisions about his own life without imposition from political authority. The state recognizes individual "autonomy," but, due to its neutrality, it is not understood to affect "autonomy" itself. Similarly, the relevant medical information tendered in "informed consent" is a precondition for patient autonomy, but does not compromise this autonomy in any way. Like the state, this information is considered to be of a neutral character. In this sense, "end-of-life autonomy" extends political neutrality to medical authority: The nullification of the doctor's own perspective of the "good life" and the presumed neutrality of medical data is parallel to the liberal state's coupling of a lack of a conception of a public good with its own neutral political structures. The "neutrality" of medical and political spheres is, in turn, only possible because "autonomy" conceives the individual to be primarily acorporeal and asocial. Thus, in a seeming paradox, the medical and political aspects of "autonomy" represent the individual as fundamentally independent of both medicine and politics. The autonomous individual's independence from body and society is reflected in the construction of the bioethical encounter, as well as that of social action more generally. Consequently, one cannot discuss "end-of-life autonomy" without implicitly commenting on the political organization of life in liberal democracy. My treatment of the disability studies rethinking of "autonomy" will move between these micro- and macro- levels, in recognition that any reformulation of "end-of-life autonomy" will necessarily also reformulate the relationship between individual, society, and the state. Rethinking Autonomy The first claim in a disability studies reformulation of autonomy is that "autonomy" is itself, prior to any application to persons with disabilities, saturated with ableist norms. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has argued that the rise of liberal individualism—which, as Paul Root Wolpe notes, is synonymous with autonomy (Wolpe, 1998, p. 43)—was predicated on ideals of self-government that were prejudicial against the disabled (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 43). The deviant corporeality of the disabled body refused the dictates of the autonomous individual. Similarly, the visible dependence of persons with disabilities on social relations—whether incarnated in caretaking bonds or technological prostheses—was the denigrated opposite of the autonomous self's constitutive independence. As a reminder of the individual's dependence on both body and society, disability represented the destruction of the autonomy (p.44). Historically, then, **the rise of the autonomous subject created disability as a pathology.** For Garland-Thomson, the primordial asociality of the autonomous individual obscures the relational core of individual identity. A disability studies rethinking of autonomy, in contrast, highlights the role of relationships in the constitution of individual identity. Various sources exist for such an argument: Most recently, feminist physicist Karen Barad (2006) has analyzed the experiments of Niehls Bohr to argue that discrete relata do not preexist the relationships that bind them, but rather are a product of these relationships (p. 140). Barad's claims accord with Foucauldian accounts of the discursive production of the modern individual (Foucault, 1971, 1978). A clinical basis for such arguments can be found in the work of developmental psychologist Phillipe Rochat whose work Others in Mind postulates the primacy of culturally-formed caretaking relationships in the development of self-consciousness (Rochat, 2009). This theoretical, historical, and clinical literature demonstrates that the self is always already interpenetrated with the other. "Autonomy's" insistence on the necessarily coercive or instrumental character of relationships is thus untenable. But disability studies also raises questions about relational theories of subjectivity. Such theories cannot account for the possibility of "internalized discrimination"—a concept fundamental to disability critique (Campbell, 2009, p. 16; Charlton, 2000, p. 27). The problem of "internalized discrimination" supersedes debates about whether the self is primarily isolated or relational. Both phenomenologically oriented and intersubjective developmental psychologists, while disagreeing on the primacy of the "first-person perspective" (Zahavi, 2005), share a view of the subject as a coherent entity. This coherence may be relational or not, but, in either case, it eliminates the possibility that a person could, in some sense, be turned against him or herself. This view of the self as a coherent entity is fundamental to the autonomous subject. The hegemony of "autonomy" in bioethics explains why the field not only considers internalized discrimination to be irrelevant to determining autonomy, but in fact cannot conceive of it as a possibility. **Disability studies must propose an alternative conception of subjectivity, one based not in coherence, but rather in conflict**. Grounding the subject in conflict makes it possible to conceive of how persons with disabilities, because of the conflictive nature of life in an ableist society, can persistently devalue their own existence. At the same time, a conflict-based theory of subjectivity highlights that such internalized ableism is never total—and that it always possible for individuals to oppose it. Grounding the subject of disability studies in conflict thus makes it possible to conceive of not only internalized ableism, but also a world without it. The inability of the liberal conception of autonomy to imagine internalized discrimination relates to its model of civil society and the state. The liberal state provides the grounds for individual autonomy through the negative freedom of not interfering in the social order. This perspective naturalizes the social order as an entity that allows for the equal self-realization of its members. It cannot conceive of society as privileging some individuals over others (Felski, 1989, p. 168, cited in Slaughter, 2007, p. 146). As a result, this view is unable to conceive of ableism or, for that matter, or any form of power relations. In contrast, a disability studies rethinking of autonomy understands society to be defined, like the individual, by conflict—particularly (though not exclusively) the conflict between the able and disabled. This conflict manifests itself in and is mediated by individual psychology, just as individual psychology mediates social organization. Both must be considered, as both are fundamentally intertwined. This critique of the presumed neutrality of the liberal state applies as well to the procedures designed to determine whether a particular individual is acting "autonomously" or not. "Autonomy" presumes a radical separation between the individual and the procedural measures taken to ensure the autonomy of his decision. The framing of the choices presented to the individual, as well as the procedures that ensure that he is of "sound mind" (Werth, 1998, p. 5) are not considered to limit him, but rather to provide neutral vehicles for the realization of ~~his~~ (their) freedom. Thus, as I discussed earlier, "informed consent" is considered to be an essential precursor of autonomy because the medical information it supplies is considered to give the individual the possibility of choice, without determining which choice he or she would make. But, as Karen Barad (2006) has argued, Bohr's experiments rendered the presumed neutrality of the measuring apparatus highly suspect. Just as relata are a product of relationships, so too the scientific measure produces the very entities whose existence it presumes to catalog (p. 140). As a result, in Barad's view, the goal of science should not be to claim the neutrality of its measures but instead to scrutinize the seemingly discrete identities that its measures create (p. 393). A disability studies critique of "autonomy" would thus draw attention to how "autonomy's" neutral procedures produce the very autonomous subjectivity they claim to discover, and how the resulting "autonomous" subject is structured according to ableist norms. For example, Paul Root Wolpe (1998) has highlighted that the legal model for end-of-life autonomy is the private contract (p. 51). But, as Martha Albertson Fineman (2004) has pointed out, the private contract obscures the public nature of the private sphere (p. 226). This false division skews decision-making in bioethics and liberal politics more generally. While the negative freedom of autonomy leaves individuals presumably free from public forces, it does not enable them to make demands on the state and society. Thus physician-assisted suicide is legitimized as an "autonomous" choice due to its private nature, but an individual demand for healthcare would not be protected as an exercise in "autonomy" (Wolpe, 1998, p. 53). Similarly, the presumably neutral category of the "removal of life-sustaining treatment" creates an articulation of subjectivity in which **individuals exist separate from and prior to technological prostheses**. An alternative, as illustrated by Fiona Kumari Campbell as well as Barad, would be to adopt the view that technology—including end-of-life technology—is expressive of and constitutive of individual character (Campbell, 2009, p. 53; Barad, 2006, p. 158-9). The seemingly "neutral" measure of the individual's desire to remove treatment is what enacts their separation, producing the asocial autonomous subject it claims to discover. The same is true of the conception of causation underpinning "autonomy." Here, the individual's desire to die must be traced to a discrete medical cause. Were it shown that this desire were due to social or psychological factors—such as poverty or, for example, a desire to enact vengeance on a father figure—then its "autonomy" would be nullified. But this very understanding of causation presumes that medical data are discrete entities readily isolable from social, economic, and psychological forces. In fact, the central concern of the disability rights movement has been to show the social valorizations implicit in purportedly neutral medical measures (Charlton, 2000, p. 23-36). By treating medical data as neutral facts, "informed consent" separates both them and the deciding individual from any mediation by society. The result is a conception of not only medicine, but also individual subjectivity as atomized entities. Autonomy's criterion of "consistency of character" is especially problematic. In an ableist society, individuals will, by default, tend to be consistently ableist. They will frequently have derogatory perceptions about life with disability, and will be particularly fearful of living with the open acknowledgement of their dependence on others. The achievement of such acknowledgement would not be a form of "consistency of character;" rather, it would be an active development of one's character towards a heightened understanding and experience of life as a social being. But the criterion of "consistency of character" will, in an ableist society, always be prejudiced against such realizations—considering them deformations of the individual's "consistent" self. Its seeming neutrality enforces ableism. Finally, "autonomy" enacts a split between the individual and his or her body. The autonomous individual's consideration of his body as property precludes a consideration of the body's role in constituting subjectivity. This self/body split is inherently prejudiced against individuals who, while living, **cannot express themselves in terms that render them legible as autonomous subjects**. Thus, persons in persistent vegetative states cannot be recognized as autonomous beings; rather, their autonomous decision must be determined by the information on their advanced directives, which refers to a time when they were "autonomous" (Olick, 2004, p. xviii). As "vegetative" bodies, they do not figure as legal or medical subjects. This obfuscation of the living body is a product of autonomy's acoporeal construction of the self. Thus, rather than neutral, the very measuring apparatus of "autonomy" produces a conception of the individual that, in its self-coherence and independence from both technological and biological processes, is constituted by ableist norms. This conception of the individual is buoyed by an understanding of medical data as asocial markers of objective truth, and an understanding of society as a coherent and power-free sphere that gives all its members equal opportunity for self-realization. Such a conception of subjectivity is, I have argued, inherently ableist, and it should be abandoned by disability studies. Nevertheless, though I think that we should abandon this liberal conception of "autonomy," I do not think that we can give up on "autonomy" itself. In the following section, I argue that disability studies scholars must appropriate "autonomy" for our own ends, and explain how we can do so.

#### The logic of compulsory ability is the foundation for the rehabilitation complex, a demand for the perfect body and mind, unharmed, unimpeded, unimpaired. Crips that do not fulfill the role of the supercrip are merely tolerated through scripts of pity that cast crips as a drain on society who are unable to participate in civic life.

**Campbell 2012** (Fiona Kumari Campbell, disability studies icon, writing “Stalking Ableism: Using Disability to Expose 'Abled' Narcissism” published in “Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions” by Palgrave McMillian, pgs 212-232, published in 2012 [http://www.academia.edu/5858813/Stalking\_Ableism\_using\_Disability\_to\_Expose\_Abled\_Narcissism\_in\_D.\_Goodley\_B.\_ Hughes\_and\_L.\_Davis\_eds.\_Disability\_and\_Social\_Theory\_New\_Developments\_and\_Directions\_Bashingstoke\_Palgrave\_ Macmillan\_2012](http://www.academia.edu/5858813/Stalking_Ableism_using_Disability_to_Expose_Abled_Narcissism_in_D._Goodley_B._%20Hughes_and_L._Davis_eds._Disability_and_Social_Theory_New_Developments_and_Directions_Bashingstoke_Palgrave_%20Macmillan_2012)) TJS

I start our discussion by providing a brief sketch of the project of ableism (if you want more elaboration and complexity, see Campbell, 2009). A survey of the literature suggests that the term is often referred to in a fleeting way with limited definitional or conceptual specificity (Clear, 1999; Iwasaki and Mactavish, 2005). When there is commentary, ableism is described as denot- ing an attitude that devalues or differentiates disability through the valuation of able-bodiedness equated to normalcy (Ho, 2008). Or alternatively, ableism calls for a presumption of able-bodiedness and as Chounaird (1997: 380) puts it ‘ableism entails a way of being’. For some, the term ableism is used inter- changeably with the term disablism. In my book Contours of Ableism (2009) I note that disablism focuses on the negative treatment towards disabled peo- ple and social policy. I argue that while this approach is commendable, it still distorts research and policy responses. Why? Disablism is concerned with disa- bled people as Other (those people) – Other than ‘us’. The ‘us’ is presumed to be able-bodied – an able-bodied perspective. There may be a tendency under this perspective to respond along the lines of what can ‘we’ do for them? There is little consensus as to what practices and behaviours constitute ableism. Paring it down, at its core ableism characterises impairment or disability (irrespective of ‘type’) as inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, to be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated. Ableism refers to a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human. (Campbell, 2009: 5) An ableist perspective might propose that in a democracy disabled people should be treated fairly on the basis of toleration. Such a stance does not however suggest that disability is considered a reasonable and an acceptable form of diversity, or indeed that disability can be celebrated. Ableist thinking is based on a premise where all disability, irrespective of type and degree is assumed to be unacceptable. Disability is harmful and inter alia a form of harm. In my work I conclude that disability is both provisional and tentative – it is always subject to being erased if a solution comes along (cure, correction, elimination). Ableism denotes the meaning of a healthy body, a normal mind, how quickly we should think and the kinds of emotions that are acceptable to express. The universal reach of reason gains potency when coupled to a self-assured individual autonomy. Reason as truth becomes dis- course dependent and in turn generates notions of ‘disability’ and ‘ability’ (able-bodiedness). The human (adult) subject is assumed to be an independ- ent centre of self-consciousness, who holds autonomy to be intrinsically val- uable. Neo-liberalism’s normative citizen in the words of C. B. Macpherson (1964: 3) is a nominal ‘possessive individual’: free in as much as he [sic] is proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the will of others and freedom is a function of possession ... Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors (emphasis added). This imaging of the neo-liberal subject insists that all people fit Macpherson’s regulatory ideal. Ableism involves a degree of mastery over the mind and body in particular ways where styles of comportment and habits are ranked. The tool of comparison, of normativity, is the ‘benchmark ~~man’~~, the normative citizen who is ‘who is invariably White, heterosexual, able-bodied, politically conservative, and middle class’ (Thornton, 1996: 2). Of course these characteristics then are put out as aspirational markers. These beliefs do not take account of differences in the ways we express our emotions, use our thinking and bodies in different cultures and in different situations. There is pressure in modern societies, particularly in developing economies for us to show we are always productive (doing something ‘useful’) and con- tributing. Ableist belief values certain things as felicitous and particular sorts of contributions. Disabled people are often seen as a burden, a problem, a drain on the system, who make no civic contribution. According to this understanding of ableism, ‘disability’ refers to people who do not make the grade, are unfit in someway – and therefore are not properly human. My first claim is that the notion of ableism is not just useful for thinking about disability but also other forms of difference that result in marginality or disadvantage. Theory far from being abstract can help each of us make sense of our lived experiences and provide the tools for considering what is ‘going on’, to help us ask the critical and vital questions of contemporary life. Interrogating ableism means thinking about what being abled means to us today in Britain, the US, Australia, South Africa or Sri Lanka. A focus on ableism can also unpack what is produced phenomenologically by the dis- ability experience. The nuances of ableism are not static; they are transcategorical, having specific cultural alignments with other factors such as race, gender, sexuality and coloniality. Compulsory abledness and its conviction to and seduction of sameness as the basis to equality claims results in a resistance to consider peripheral lives as distinct ways of being human lest they produce marginalisation. Pointing to difference can be quite dangerous on a number of grounds. Differences can be reduced to the lowest common denominator, with attributable and immutable (pigeonholing) characteristics that can become signs of deviancy or delight. A call to sameness appears to be easier as these requests galvanise and rearticulate the normative even if such a norm is somewhat vacuous and elusive.