

complicit; the only way to approach the figure is in the spirit of ironic blasphemy, turning the figure against its very origins. And Bradley Lewis's use of the figure to critique the same psychopharmaceutical industry that originally birthed the cyborg seems the perfect illustration of such blasphemy. We need more such disability studies perspectives. Yet part of that work must include a reckoning, an acknowledgement, of the cyborg's history in institutionalization and abuse. Otherwise the irony, the blasphemy, the critique, is lost.

I close with this story to insist, alongside both Haraway and her critics, that the cyborg is not innocent. Our metaphors, our tropes, our analogies: all have histories, all have consequences. As Hiram Perez argues, part of the work of the critic is to explore the effects texts and images have on people's lives.¹²² The blurring of boundaries, the permeability of bodies, the porousness of skin—all take on different meanings depending on whether they are viewed through the prism of institutionalization or as part of a strategy of feminist analysis. Arguing for the breakdown between self and other, body and machine, takes on a different hue in the context of coercive medical experimentation and confinement. The cyborg, in other words, can be used to map many futures, not all of them feminist, crip, or queer.

Haraway herself acknowledges this fact, warning us from the beginning of the cyborg's complicity in militarization, colonization, and control. Yet it remains a figure of feminist possibility, pointing toward a feminist futurity or, in Haraway's framing, "an elsewhere, not as a utopian fantasy or relativist escape, but an elsewhere born out of the hard (and sometimes joyful) work of getting on together."¹²³ To return to the epigraph that begins this chapter, "who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival."¹²⁴ This question has political, ethical, and epistemic dimensions, and answering it will require grappling with the histories and futures described here. It is a question I urge us to ask. If, as Haraway claims, "cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue," then the cyborg may very well be a perfect figure for refusing the erasure of disability from our presents and futures.¹²⁵ But in the spirit, if not the practice, of Haraway's manifesto, I argue for responsibility in making such claims.

6 Bodies of Nature

The Environmental Politics of Disability

The creatures that populate the narrative space called "nature" are key characters in scientific tales about the past, present, and future. Various tellings of these tales are possible, but they are always shaped by historical, disciplinary, and larger cultural contexts.

—Jennifer Terry, "Unnatural Acts' in Nature"

ALTHOUGH CONCERN WITH the environment has long been an animating force in disability studies and activism, "environment" in this context typically refers to the built environment of buildings, sidewalks, and transportation technologies. Indeed, the social model of disability is premised on concern for the built environment, stressing that people are disabled not by their bodies but by their inaccessible environments. (The wheelchair user confronting a flight of steps is probably the most common illustration of this argument.) Yet the very pervasiveness of the social model has prevented disability studies from engaging with the wider environment of wilderness, parks, and nonhuman nature because the social model seems to falter in such settings. Stairs can be replaced or supplemented with ramps and elevators, but what about a steep rock face or a sandy beach? Like stairs, both pose problems for most wheelchair users, but, argues Tom Shakespeare, "it is hard to blame the natural environment on social arrangements." He asserts that the natural environment—rock cliffs, steep mountains, and sandy beaches—offers proof that "people with impairments will always be disadvantaged by their bodies"; the social model cannot adequately address the barriers presented by those kinds of spaces.¹ I, too, recognize the limitations of the social model and the need to engage with the materiality of bodies, but I am not so sure that the "natural environment" is as distinct from the "built environment" as Shakespeare suggests. On the contrary, the natural environment is also "built": literally so in the case of trails and dams, metaphorically so in the sense of cultural constructions and deployments of "nature," "natural," and "the environment."

Disability studies could benefit from the work of environmental scholars and activists who describe how “social arrangements” have been mapped onto “natural environments.” Many campgrounds in the United States, for example, have been designed to resemble suburban neighborhoods, with single campsites for each family, clearly demarcated private and public spaces, and layouts built for cars. Each individual campsite faces onto the road or common area so that rangers (and other campers) can easily monitor others’ behavior. Such spacing likely discourages, or at least pushes into the cover of darkness, outwardly queer acts and practices.³ Environmental historians such as William Cronon document the displacement of indigenous peoples from parklands; indigenous people were removed and evidence of their communities was destroyed so that the new parks could be read as pristine, untouched wilderness.⁴ Nature writers such as Carolyn Finney and Evelyn White explain that African Americans are much less likely than whites to find parks and open spaces welcoming, accessible, or safe; histories of white supremacist violence and lynchings in rural areas make the wilderness less appealing. Park brochures, wilderness magazines, and advertisements for outdoor gear have, in turn, tended to cater to overwhelmingly white audiences.⁵ As these examples attest, the natural environment is also a built environment, one shaped by and experienced through assumptions and expectations about gender, sexuality, class, race, and nation. As Mei Mei Evans argues, “One way of understanding the culturally dominant conception of what constitutes ‘nature’ in the United States is to ask ourselves who gets to go there. Access to wilderness and a reconstituted conception of Nature are clearly environmental justice issues demanding redress.”⁶

How might we begin to read disability into these formations? How have compulsorily able-bodiedness/able-mindedness shaped not only the environments of our lives—both buildings and parks—but our very understandings of the environment itself? One way to address these questions is by examining the deployment of disability in popular discourses of nature and environmentalism; another method would be to uncover the assumption of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness in writings about nature. I follow both paths in this chapter, unpacking the work of disability and able-bodiedness/able-mindedness in cultural constructions of nature, wilderness, and the environment. As with the visions of a “better” future found in discussions of reproduction, childhood, community, and cyborgs, visions of nature are often idealized and depoliticized fantasies, and disability plays an integral, if often unmarked, role in marking the limit of these fantasies. Whether we focus on nature writing or trail construction (the subjects of the first two sections of this chapter), disabled people are figured as out of place.

Given the often exclusionary dimensions of “nature” and “wilderness,” it is important to explore how those considered out of place find ways of engaging and interacting with nature. As Evans argues, the “culturally dominant conception of what constitutes ‘nature’” becomes more clear when we encounter the narratives of those who are not expected or allowed “to go there.” In the final section of this chapter, then, I explore

the possibility of a crippled environmentalism, one that looks to disabled bodies/minds as a resource in thinking about our future natures differently. I argue that the experience of illness and disability presents alternative ways of understanding ourselves in relation to the environment, understandings which can then generate new possibilities for intellectual connections and activist coalitions.

Natural Exclusions

We tend to think of the definitions of terms such as “nature,” “wilderness,” and “environment” as self-evident, assuming their meanings to be universal, stable, and monolithic. However, as William Cronon argues, “‘nature’ is not nearly so natural as it seems.”⁸ On the contrary, our encounters with wilderness are historically and culturally grounded; our ideas about what constitutes “nature” or the “natural” and “unnatural” are completely bound up in our own specific histories and cultural assumptions. What is needed, then, is an interrogation of these very assumptions.⁹ Instead of taking for granted the qualities we attribute to wilderness experiences, such as spiritual renewal or physical challenge, we can ask, as Linda Vance does, “[W]hose values are these? What do they assume about experience, and whose experience is the norm? What other social relations depend on or produce these values? What is their historical context?”¹⁰ We can extend the scope of these questions to include an examination of ableism and compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness: Whose experiences of nature are taken as the norm within environmental discourses? What do these discourses assume about nature, the body/mind, and the relationship between humans and nature? And how do notions of disability and able-bodiedness/able-mindedness play a key role in constructing values such as “spiritual renewal” and “physical challenge” in the first place?

In this section, I examine three sites of able-bodiedness/able-mindedness: a canonical environmental memoir, a controversial ad in a mainstream hiking magazine, and an autobiographical essay in ecofeminist philosophy. These are three vastly different texts, with different agendas and from different time periods. I bring them together in order to sketch out the role disability plays in constructions of the natural environment. In the first two selections, the figure of disability is explicitly invoked in order to be immediately disavowed, making clear that disability has no place in the wilderness. Both hail the able body, or the nondisabled body, as the proper denizen of the outdoors; they deploy the figure of disability to further cultural representations of nature as a rugged proving ground, making disability the dystopic sign of human failure, or potential failure, in nature. The final example, the ecofeminist essay, shares the presumption of able-bodiedness that runs through the first two representations, this time presenting the nondisabled body as the grounds through which we arrive at ecofeminist insight. Reading each of these examples through a critical disability lens reveals the ways in which we assume the environmental body to be a very particular kind of body.

One of the most explicit articulations of a compulsorily able-bodied/able-minded environmentalism is found in Edward Abbey's cult classic *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*, first published in 1968.¹¹ In this highly acclaimed memoir, Abbey offers a polemic against "industrial tourism" in national parks, a phenomenon which is destroying wilderness areas across the country and robbing all of us of our ability to access nature. Abbey repeatedly draws on disability metaphors to make his case, most notably when he refers to cars as "motorized" or "mechanized wheelchairs."¹² By equating cars with wheelchairs, Abbey presents automobiles as having a literally crippling effect on our ability to experience nature. The motorized wheelchair becomes the epitome of technological alienation, of technology's ability to alienate us from our own wild nature and the wilderness around us. Sarah Jaquette Ray calls this pattern the "disability-equals-alienation-from-nature trope,"¹³ arguing that Abbey's text relies on disability as "the best symbol of the machine's corruption of . . . harmony between body and nature."¹⁴

This representation becomes even more clear later in the book, when Abbey exhorts everyone to get out of their cars/wheelchairs and walk: "Yes sir, yes madam, I entreat you, get out of those motorized wheelchairs, get off your foam rubber backsides, stand up straight like men! like women! like human beings! and walk—walk—WALK upon our sweet and blessed land!"¹⁵ Although Abbey elsewhere allows for travel by bicycle and horse, he frequently hails walking as the only way to access "the original, the real" nature.¹⁶ Abbey's assertion that we must get out and walk, that truly understanding a space means moving through it on foot, presents a very particular kind of embodied experience as a prerequisite to environmental engagement. Walking through the desert becomes a kind of authorizing gesture; to know the desert requires walking through the desert, and to do so unmediated by technology. In such a construction, there is no way for the mobility-impaired body to engage in environmental practice; all modalities other than walking upright become insufficient, even suspect. Walking is both what makes us human and what makes us at one with nature.¹⁷

Abbey's framing has been influential. As Ray notes, the environmental movement is deeply attached to the notion of "the solitary retreat into nature as the primary source of an environmental ethic."¹⁸ It is common to find ecocritics making connections and deriving insight from hiking trips and other adventures in the wilderness. By implying that one must have a deep immersion experience of nature in order to understand nature, ecocritics create a situation in which some kinds of experiences can be interpreted as more valid than others, as granting a more accurate, intense, and authentic understanding of nature. They ignore the complicated histories of who is granted permission to enter nature, where nature is said to reside, how one must move in order to get there, and how one will interact with nature once one arrives in it.¹⁹ (As we will see later in the chapter, these assumptions then play a huge role in struggles over increasing disability access in parks and public lands.)

This kind of exclusionary framing of nature is on full display in a provocative advertisement for Nike's Air Dri-Goat shoe. The advertisement ran in eleven different

outdoor magazines in the fall of 2000, reaching a combined circulation of approximately 2.1 million readers. It featured a picture of the shoe against a hot-pink background, with this accompanying text:

Fortunately, the Air Dri-Goat features a patented goat-like outer sole for increased traction, so you can taunt mortal injury without actually experiencing it. Right about now you're probably asking yourself, "How can a trail running shoe with an outer sole designed like a goat's hoof help me avoid compressing my spinal cord into a Slinky' on the side of some unsuspecting conifer, thereby rendering me a drooling, misshapen non-extreme-trail-running husk of my former self, forced to roam the earth in a motorized wheelchair with my name, embossed on one of those cute little license plates you get at carnivals or state fairs, fastened to the back?"

To that we answer, hey, have you ever seen a mountain goat (even an extreme mountain goat) careen out of control into the side of a tree?

Didn't think so.

In the first two days after publication, Nike received over six hundred complaints about the ad, and the company withdrew it from further circulation. Three public apologies followed, each one containing more cause for offense.²⁰ The perceived need for multiple apologies testifies to the blatant offensiveness of the ad. It is not surprising that the ad came under attack: it paints an incredibly negative portrait of people in wheelchairs, trivializes and mocks the experiences of those who have survived spinal cord injuries, and dehumanizes disabled people. Most important for my exploration of crip futures, however, are its assumptions about disability and nature, or, more to the point, its assumptions about the place of a disabled person in nature.

First, in running this advertisement, Nike has assumed that the readers of *Backpacker* and similar magazines are neither disabled nor allies of the disabled, casting outdoor enthusiasts and disabled people as two mutually exclusive groups.²¹

Second, the advertisement assumes that disability prohibits encounters with nature, dooming one to roam "carnivals or state fairs" rather than mountain ranges. It is perhaps no accident that Nike's advertisement conjures an image of disabled people at the fair or carnival, buying accoutrements for their wheelchairs. From the 1840s through the 1940s in the United States, disabled people were frequently exhibited in public at traveling sideshows and carnivals, cast as "freaks," "freaks of nature," and, in a blending of ableist, racist, and colonialist narratives, "missing links."²² Freak shows were one of the few places where one could see disabled people in public, and the Nike advertisement extends this depiction of the carnival as the proper terrain of the disabled body. Conversely, it makes clear that once one becomes disabled, mountain ranges and wilderness areas are out of reach.

Third, it reminds nondisabled hikers that they must be ever vigilant in protecting themselves from disability, denying any trace of disability in or on their bodies. These last two assumptions are interrelated, in that nondisabled hikers must deny disability precisely because it (allegedly) prohibits encounters with nature. In other words,

the advertisement is explicitly invoking a disabled body in order to reassure readers of their own able-bodiedness. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, the figure of disability "assures the rest of the citizenry of who they are not while arousing their suspicions about who they could become."²³

Thus, two distinct bodies appear in this text. The first is the nondisabled body ostensibly shared by both Nike associates (the advertisement's "we") and Nike consumers ("you"). The text tells its readers little about this nondisabled body; it takes shape only when juxtaposed with the second body in the text. Unlike the first body, which is unmarked, the second, disabled body is described with utmost specificity: readers learn of its appearance ("drooling, misshapen," and "forced" into a wheelchair), its inabilities ("non-extreme-trail-running"), its quality of life (a "husk of my former self"), and its home ("carnivals or state fairs"). The disabled body appears in the text only as the specter of impending tragedy; one can allegedly ward it away by assertively and aggressively staking one's claim to nature, by "taunting mortal injury" and celebrating one's alleged hyperability. As Ray suggests, it is the "threat of disability" that makes "the wilderness ideal body meaningful"; part of the thrill of adventure is risking—yet ultimately avoiding—disablement.²⁴ Thus disability exists out of time, as something not-yet and, with the right equipment, not-ever. In order to belong to the text's "us," one must deny any physical limitations or inabilities, casting oneself as separate from and superior to the disabled figure. "We" are not drooling or misshapen disabled people, the text proclaims, we are hikers, and never the twain shall meet. Nike explicitly repudiates the disabled body, casting it as the antithesis of the hiker's body, which is the body "we" all have and want to preserve.

The hiker's body as imagined by both Nike and Abbey is necessary because it is only through it that we are able to truly experience nature (or to experience true nature). Nature, wilderness, mountain ranges: all are described as separate from "us," but we can bridge or transcend that separation by rugged, masculine individualism; disability serves both to illustrate that separation between human and nature and to exacerbate it. Although my third site, an ecofeminist essay, does not rely on this kind of explicit ableism, it, too, continues the narrative of separation from nature. Its reliance on this trope is harder to recognize, as it comes in the context of a much more critical approach to "nature" and "wilderness" than that found in Abbey or Nike.

In her essay "Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality," Linda Vance traces her political and theoretical development as an ecofeminist. Vance weaves accounts of her own hiking experiences into the essay, revealing how her experiences in and through nature have played an important role in her journey toward ecofeminism. For most of the essay, Vance writes in the first person, describing her personal experiences with nature (e.g., "I hike through the Green Mountains"), but there is one passage in which she shifts to the third person, writing about "an ecofeminist":

On a bad day, then, say when she's hiking through a spruce bog trying to convince herself that being a food source for mosquitoes and black flies is an ecologically

sound role, an ecofeminist can despair, and start to feel like she is the least loved cousin of just about everyone, and sister to no one. Except, of course—and here she pauses, a boot heavy with black muck arrested in mid-step, and she looks around—except, of course, nature. Sister. Sister Nature.²⁵

In this passage, Vance's phrasing itself suggests that "hiking" and "being an ecofeminist" are related activities: by shifting from a description of her own particular experiences to the adventures of an unnamed ecofeminist, Vance positions the figure as a stand-in for all ecofeminists. Moreover, she suggests that it is *through* this kind of rugged activity that "an ecofeminist" comes to understand herself in relation to non-human nature. Vance's ecofeminist comes to a key realization as she hikes through the muck; indeed, the act of stepping through the bog is what spurs her insight. Hiking, according to this passage, is vital to an ecofeminist's development of her relationship with and understanding of nature; without such hikes, "an ecofeminist" will remain in some way separate from nature. Once again, able-bodiedness is necessary in order to bridge or transcend the essential separation between human and nature.

Ecofeminism, for Vance, is a complex theoretical and conceptual framework deeply invested in activist practices; she would likely oppose Abbey's assumption that cities are unnatural and impure while wilderness is not.²⁶ However, the passage under consideration here reflects an assumption not far from Abbey's that one must immerse oneself in nature in order to understand it and one's relationship to it. In describing "an ecofeminist's" hike through the mucky bog, Vance suggests that people need to have personal, physical experiences of the wilderness in order to understand, appreciate, and care for nature. But what kind of experiences render one qualified to understand and care about nature? Are all experiences of nature equally productive of such insights? And how do we define "experiences of nature" in the first place?

These questions lead me back to Shakespeare's assumption that the natural environment is completely separate from social arrangements. Each of the sites I have examined here—Abbey, Nike, Vance—operates under a similar assumption, at least when it comes to the body of the hiker. These accounts take for granted the existence of trails that accommodate one's body, presenting access to "nature" not only as necessary to personal growth or renewal but also as apolitical. Abbey is the extreme here, making clear that the hiker's access to parks and wilderness is natural, but everyone else's (those in "motorized wheelchairs," for example) is political, debatable, and ideally stoppable. To tell a tale of a lack of appropriate access—no trails wide enough for a wheelchair or level enough for crutches—would be to insert the all-too-human into "the wilderness," thereby violating the persistent dualisms between the human and the natural and the natural and the political.

Thus, what is needed in ecofeminism, ecocriticism, and environmentalism in general are the narratives of people whose bodies and minds cause them to interact with nature in nonnormative ways. How might a deaf ecofeminist understand her position within the natural world differently than a hearing one? What can narratives about

negotiating trails on crutches reveal about the ways in which all trails—not just “accessible” ones—are constructed and maintained? How do concepts of “nature,” “wilderness,” and “ecofeminism” shift when elaborated by an ecofeminist who experiences nonhuman nature primarily through sound, smell, and touch rather than sight, or by an ecofeminist who draws more on sounds and sensations than on words? In what ways would “ecofeminist activism” be transformed by someone whose chronic fatigue and pain prevent her from traveling more than a few blocks from her house but do not hinder her environmental organizing, lobbying, and fundraising efforts? How might the use of a service dog affect an ecofeminist’s understanding of his relationship with nonhuman nature?

One of my hopes in writing this essay is that nondisabled ecofeminists will supplement these questions with queries of their own: How might reflecting on her able-bodied status affect a nondisabled ecofeminist’s understanding of the ecofeminist project? In what ways would he alter his concepts of “nature” and “politics” after thinking through his position in an ableist culture? Making space for these kinds of questions expands the domain of ecofeminism and environmental movements, challenging the representation of nondisabled experience as the only possible way to interact with nonhuman nature. Such challenges will necessarily entail expanding our understandings of nature as well, which will, in turn, affect the environments around us. Our conceptions of “nature” and the natural, in other words, play a direct role in how we shape parks and other public lands.

Accessible Trails and other (Un)Natural Disasters

Ableist assumptions about the body certainly influence the concrete realities of access, thereby affecting disabled and nondisabled people alike. Steep, narrow, and root-filled trails are barriers not just for people with mobility or vision impairments but also for some seniors and families with young children. Similarly, nature education has developed around the needs of the nondisabled, as attested by the dearth of interpretive materials available in alternate formats such as Braille, large print, or audiotope.²⁷ The lack of maps, guidebooks, park brochures, and explanatory markers in large print affects not only those who identify as disabled, however, but all people with low vision. Thinking through these issues can help deconstruct the ableist assumptions embedded in contemporary and historical ideas about nature. Ecofeminists can then begin the process of tracing the impact those assumptions have had on the design of trails and park materials, designs that, in turn, have determined who is able to use such resources. As Rob Imrie and Huw Thomas argue, “These contexts may be thought of as perpetuating forms of environmental injustice, in which inappropriate and thoughtless design means that disabled people cannot use significant parts of the environment.”²⁸

Mobility is one of the key issues in terms of trail access, and proposals to create wheelchair accessibility are often met with scrutiny, as if such access were inherently more damaging to the environment than access points for nondisabled people.

Plans to build an accessible canoe launch on Maine’s Allagash Wilderness Waterway, for example, were met with opposition from environmental groups because such a launch would allegedly damage the waterway.²⁹ Although some critics were clear that they opposed any new access points on the waterway, regardless of their design, others seemed more concerned about the level of accessibility offered by this proposal; there was a sense that an accessible launch would be more damaging to the environment than an inaccessible one. But most canoe launches are created by clearing away brush, altering the gravel or sand levels near the water, and constructing parking areas and toilets, raising doubts as to whether accessible launches are really more detrimental than inaccessible ones. An accessible site may differ from an inaccessible site only slightly, having wider doors on the bathroom and a wider and more level path to the water, changes that are not necessarily more disruptive or damaging.

When I was visiting a wildlife refuge in Rhode Island in the spring of 2007, one of the staff recounted the recent outcry from the local community about making trails within the refuge wheelchair accessible. According to their complaints, both the materials used in such a trail (in this case, crushed asphalt) and the users of such trails (presumably people with wheelchairs or other mobility aids) would be too noisy; birds that nested in the area would be scared away by the trail’s imagined new inhabitants. However, given how frequently hikers use cellphones, talk loudly with their companions, or yell after a child, it is hard to believe that noise is the real fear here. While birders may dislike those interruptions as well, they were not advocating for barriers to keep them out; children were permitted in the park without having to undergo some kind of silencing or muting practice. (Moreover, I would imagine a crushed asphalt trail or, especially, a paved trail would be much quieter than one made of thick gravel or covered in dry, brittle leaves and branches).

Or, to take yet another example, in 2000, when a group of disabled and nondisabled hikers made a trek to the newly accessible hut at Galehead in the White Mountains, they were met with derision on the trail by a nondisabled hiker who accused them of taking up too much room and harming the terrain. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Dan Bruce condemned those involved with the hike, charging them with “selfishness”: “Wheelchairs do incredible damage to trails in these fragile areas. Did anyone in the group do an environmental assessment before attempting the exploit or consider that the damage done to the trail by their wheeled equipment may take years for nature to repair?”³⁰ What interests me about Bruce’s letter, and the comments from the hiker on the trail, is the presumption that wheelchair users inevitably damage trails more than other hikers do.

It was not just the disabled hikers’ presence on the trail that garnered criticism, however, but the very idea that a backcountry cabin would be retrofitted with a wheelchair ramp and accessible bathroom. Challenging the need for the ramp, one reporter asked “why people in wheelchairs could drag themselves up the trail and not drag themselves up the steps to the hut?”³¹ If the hikers were able to complete such an arduous

hike, in other words, surely they were capable of crawling up the steps to the cabin. This challenge to the appropriateness of the Galehead ramp exemplifies the ways in which nondisabled access is made invisible while disabled access is made hypervisible. Steps are themselves an accommodation, just one made for a different kind of body; as Jill Gravink notes, rather than focus on ramps as being out of place, the reporter could have just as easily focused on stairs, demanding of nondisabled hikers, "Why bother putting steps on the hut at all? Why not drag yourself in through a window?"³²

Those who protest the development of accessible trails and services consistently use the language of protection in making their claims; in their view, increasing disability access and protecting the environment are irreconcilable. But the fact that it is often only *disability* access that comes under such interrogation suggests an act of ableist forgetting. As the steps/ramp question shows, the development of trails and buildings that suit very particular bodies goes unmarked as access; indeed, it is only when atypical bodies are taken in to account that the question of access becomes a problem. The rhetoric of ecoprotection then seems to be more about a discomfort with the artifacts of access—ramps, barrier-free pathways—and the bodies that use them. Trails, which are mapped, cut, and maintained by human beings with tools and machinery, are seen as *natural*, but wheelchair accessible trails are seen as *unnatural*. The very phrasing of these sentences reveals the differences in valence: trails, by definition (or, more to the point, *naturally*), are not wheelchair accessible; they need no modifier. Reading for disability, then, opens up these assumptions, making visible the ways in which the constructedness of *all* trails is covered over by focusing on the constructedness of *some* trails.

Some disability organizations, such as California-based Whole Access, have countered these assumptions, stressing that, while all trails affect the land, well-designed trails can both minimize that impact and maximize accessibility for all people, including those with mobility disabilities.³³ For example, installing boardwalks over fragile land, as has been done in the Florida Everglades, Cape Lookout National Seashore, and Yellowstone National Park, promotes access for people with mobility impairments and people with small children while also protecting delicate terrain from direct traffic. People are less likely to step off the boardwalk and walk through prohibited/protected areas than they are on a trail. In collaboration with California State Parks, Whole Access documented how trails that follow the natural contours of the land (as opposed to steeper trails that cut vertically through a slope) tend to reduce erosion, require less maintenance, and increase accessibility because of their more gentle slopes and inclines.³⁴

Access to the wilderness, as many disability activists and advocates argue, is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. Some accessible trails and entry points are better than none, and trails that cannot be brought into full compliance with accessibility guidelines can often be easily modified to permit some disability access. Don Beers, a district supervisor with California State Parks, explains, "The big thing was changing my

mindset that [accessibility] had to be all or nothing. . . . The thought now is, let's look at every trail to make it as accessible as possible."³⁵ Beers's instruction to make every trail "as accessible as possible" can be interpreted narrowly; like the call for "reasonable" accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, it can potentially be used as a way to rule out some changes as too extreme (as "unreasonable"). But, read radically, making every trail "as accessible as possible" means that every trail needs to take every kind of body and way of movement into account. That doesn't mean that every single trail will actually accommodate every single body—there will be terrain too rocky or too steep for some bodies and modalities. But this is true for all bodies, disabled and nondisabled. What shifts in this view is that trails are no longer designed only for one single body, and that decisions about trails are recognized *as* decisions, ones that can be changed, extended, modified.

Moreover, making every trail as accessible as possible disrupts the long-standing pattern of making visitors' centers and very short nature trails accessible, while ignoring disability access everywhere else. Such a model of access, argues Ann Sieck, a wheelchair hiker who has long been involved in attempts to improve wheelchair access in Bay Area parks, sends "the alienating—if unintended—message that for disabled people the outdoors is available only at 'special' facilities. It is hard to describe how painful it is to be excluded through simple indifference, or through the ignorance of planners who see no need to maximize the usability of trails that are not designated 'whole access.'"³⁶

Yet, as Laura Hershey recounts, even when wheelchair hikers discover trails for themselves, their experiences are often not incorporated into official park literature. Hiking in Yosemite with her lover and their attendant, Hershey came upon a sign with "a red circle and bar canceling out the universal wheelchair access symbol." After much discussion, Hershey and her companions chose to continue, and after a difficult and bumpy ride they arrived at a magnificent view of a waterfall. Hershey included a description of the hike in "Along Asphalt Trails," an essay for *National Parks*, the magazine of the National Parks Conservation Association. Prior to publication, however, an editor cut that section of the essay because it might encourage readers to ignore posted signs.³⁷ Yet, as Hershey's story demonstrates, such signs are based on ableist assumptions about what "accessible" trails look like. I have hiked on the trail Hershey describes, and it was more rugged than I could handle in my manual chair; I made it to the waterfall only with generous help and my willingness to crawl on the ground. It is inaccessible to many folks with mobility impairments (and perhaps also to adults traveling with small children, or elderly hikers, or those uninterested in such a strenuous hike), but not all. What seems important in Hershey's story is its insistence that disabled hikers have the same opportunities as nondisabled hikers to make their own decisions about access, including unsuccessful (or even risky) ones.

Thus, the problem of assuming access to be an all-or-nothing endeavor extends beyond the construction and maintenance of trails to the training given park rangers

and wildlife docents. As long as they are talking to nondisabled hikers, park rangers are full of detailed information about hiking trails in the area. I have often observed rangers asking hikers what kind of terrain they want, how long they want to hike, and what level of difficulty best suits their needs. As a wheelchair user, however, I am seldom asked these kinds of questions, as if my desired level of difficulty were self-evident. As Sieck notes, "park rangers are also unable to answer questions about a trail's usability—it's either designated as accessible or not, end of discussion."³⁸ This lack of information is mirrored in park maps and other material that make no mention of accessible facilities, or, more often, that assume accessible facilities to mean only one kind of experience.

Scrambling, Climbing, Touching, Holding: How to Crip the Trail Map

Loss is a topic disabled people are typically reluctant to discuss, and for good reason. Disability is all too often read exclusively in such terms, with bitterness, pity, and tragedy being the dominant registers through which contemporary US culture understands the experiences of disabled people. Why encourage such attitudes by speaking publicly about our inabilities, frustrations, and limitations? Yet loss is undeniably one of the motivations behind this chapter, behind my concern with trails and beaches and access. Prior to my injuries, I was a runner, and running was an activity I loved largely for its solitude. Running gave me the adrenaline high of physical exertion, but more importantly it served as a meditative practice, as a way to be outside alone in nature. I ran along the beach in eastern North Carolina, through the woods in upstate New York, next to farmland in northern California; I used these experiences to clear my head, to make sense of my thoughts, to maintain my mental and physical health. When Linda Vance writes about discovering herself in nature, feeling at one with the ecosystem, or developing relationships with nonhuman nature by wading through a bog, I know exactly what she is talking about; I feel it in my bones. Although I agree with environmental critics in their deconstruction of the "nature" experience, and their insistence that there is no bright line between nature and culture, I cannot deny that I feel different "outside," away from traffic and exhaust pipes and crowds of people. That I have been conditioned to feel this way does not change the fact that I feel more at peace in my body when perched on the side of a cliff, or gazing over a meadow, or surrounded by sequoias.

Loss factors into all of this because such experiences are made much more difficult by the body I have now, the body that relies primarily on a wheelchair for mobility. It is hard to find an isolated yet accessible trail that will grant me the solitude I seek; it is hard to get down to the water's edge or up the cliff's peak. Part of this difficulty is due to the histories of trail development and access discussed earlier—the assumption that only certain kinds of bodies need to be accommodated in parks and on trails—but it is also due to the terrain itself. There simply are hills too steep, creeks too rocky, soil too sandy for a wheelchair; or, rather, ensuring access to some locations would mean so drastically altering those locations that the aesthetic and environmental damage

to the area would be profound. (The same is true, of course, for *nondisabled* access to some areas.)

Thus, this kind of project entails reckoning with loss, limitation, inability, and failure. Indeed, I long to hear stories that not only admit limitation, frustration, even failure, but that recognize such failure as ground for theory itself. What might Vance's ecofeminist have learned about her connection to nonhuman nature if she had fallen in that mucky bog? How might her framing of nature shift if she had turned around that day, finding the bog too slippery for her loping gait? Moving outward from ecofeminism, we can occasionally find disability in popular nature writing, but almost always as something to be overcome, and overcome spectacularly. The story of Eric Weihenmayer's blind ascent of Mount Everest, for example, relies on disability to hold our interest, but the narrative's very structure assumes that our interest is dependent on disability eventually being vanquished.

Weihenmayer's memoir, *Touch the Top of the World*, suggests that successfully hiking Everest was a way for him to "transcend" his blindness. His story would lose its thread if it ended not with the successful ascent but with Weihenmayer discovering that the peak was simply too high, or the climb too dangerous, or the risks too great. Weihenmayer does mention two instances when he and his climbing partner turned back, failing to reach the summit of Humphrey's Peak in Arizona, and, later, of Long's Peak in Colorado. But these two stories appear in the first few pages of the book, and only in passing; their function in the narrative is to make Weihenmayer's later successes all the more remarkable.³⁹

Weihenmayer's climb—not to mention his career as a motivational speaker—exemplifies the narrative of the "supercrip," the stereotypical disabled person who garners media attention for accomplishing some feat considered too difficult for disabled people (depending on the kind of impairment under discussion, supercrip acts can include anything from rock climbing to driving a car). Weihenmayer is familiar with the supercrip narrative, and at times seems wary and tired of it, but his book cannot easily be read through any other lens. Its narrative structure repeats the overcoming tale over and over again, both within and between chapters, and everything about the marketing of the book, from its cover images to its promotional blurbs, reiterates this interpretation of Weihenmayer. Supercrip stories rely heavily on the individual/medical model of disability, portraying disability as something to be overcome through hard work and perseverance. And a disabled person accomplishing an amazing adventure in the wilderness is one of the most pervasive supercrip narratives; such stories are popular because of their twinned conquests: both disability and wilderness are overcome by individual feats of strength and will. As Petra Kuppers notes, "[T]he same language of overcoming used traditionally in relation to nature conquests also informs much writing about disability: conquest and vanquishing, lording over or being lorded over, climbing the mountain or perishing on its slopes."⁴⁰ Indeed, it is the very combination of these barriers that makes the stories work.

To return to my earlier questions, then, what stories get effaced by this focus on the supercrip's achievements? Can we imagine a cripp interaction with nature, a cripp engagement with wilderness, that doesn't rely on either ignoring the limitations of the body or triumphing over them? In asking these questions, I am motivated by a desire to write myself back into nature even as I unpack the binary of nature and self, nature and human. Discussions about the practicalities of access—such as Whole Access's advocacy for universally designed trails—is certainly a necessary part of this work; the sooner we recognize that all trails are built interventions on the landscape, and as such can be reimagined or reconceived, the sooner we can make room for a fuller range of bodies, including but not limited to disabled people. Equally important, however, is a willingness to expand our understanding of human bodies in nonhuman nature, to multiply the possibilities for understanding nature in and through our bodies. If, as Catriona Sandilands argues, queer ecology means "seeing beauty in the wounds of the world and taking responsibility to care for the world as it is," then perhaps a feminist/queer/cripp ecology might mean approaching nature through the lenses of loss and ambivalence.⁴¹

There are disabled people and disability studies scholars doing exactly this kind of reimagining. In *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, poet Eli Clare provides a moving reflection on the diverse ways human bodies interact with nonhuman nature. He begins with a tale of hiking New Hampshire's Mount Adams:

The trail divides and divides again, steeper and rockier now, moving not around but over piles of craggy granite, mossy and a bit slick from the night's rain. I start having to watch where I put my feet. Balance has always been somewhat of a problem for me, my right foot less steady than my left. On uncertain ground, each step becomes a studied move, especially when my weight is balanced on my right foot. I take the trail slowly, bringing both feet together, solid on one stone, before leaning into my next step. . . . There is no rhythm to my stop-and-go clamber.⁴²

Clare scrambles up and down the mountain, climbing on all fours when he cannot trust his feet. As do other ecocritics and ecofeminists, Clare uses his experiences as a ground for theory, in his case moving from this particular hike to a longer meditation on the politics of bodies, access, and ableism. In other respects, however, Clare's narrative of the mountain stands in stark contrast to the prevailing narrative of moving through nature without any difficulties. In Clare's ascent of Mount Adams, he must eventually reckon with the limitations of his own body. As the afternoon wears on, Clare and his friend realize that they will probably need to turn around before reaching the summit, given Clare's slow pace and the remaining hours of daylight. Such a decision doesn't come easily, however, and Clare shares his frustrations with his reader:

I want to continue up to treeline, the pines shorter and shorter, grown twisted and withered, giving way to scrub brush, then to lichen-covered granite, up to the sun-drenched cap where the mountains all tumble out toward the hazy blue horizon. I want to so badly, but fear rumbles next to love next to real lived physical limitations,

and so we decide to turn around. I cry, maybe for the first time, over something I want to do, had many reasons to believe I could, but really can't. I cry hard, then get up and follow Adrienne back down the mountain. It's hard and slow, and I use my hands and butt often and wish I could use gravity as Adrienne does to bounce from one flat spot to another, down this jumbled pile of rocks.⁴³

Clare goes on to discuss his ambivalence with this decision, an ambivalence stemming from his own internalized ableism. He cannot help but feel that he should have gone on, he should have overcome his limitations:

I climbed Mount Adams for an hour and a half scared, not sure I'd ever be able to climb down, knowing that on the next rock my balance could give out, and yet I climbed. Climbed surely because I wanted the summit, because of the love rumbling in my bones. But climbed also because I wanted to say, "Yes, I have CP [cerebral palsy], but see. See, watch me. I can climb mountains too." I wanted to prove myself once again. I wanted to overcome my CP. . . . The mountain just won't let go.⁴⁴

Clare uses this experience to reflect on the ways in which disabled people hold ourselves up to norms that we can never achieve, norms that were based on bodies, minds, or experiences unlike our own. We want to believe that if we accomplish the right goals, if we overcome enough obstacles, we can defend ourselves against disability oppression.⁴⁵ The mountain, both literal and metaphorical, becomes a proving ground rather than a site of connection or relation, and it is this characterization that Clare challenges throughout the book.

The mountain as proving ground is a terrain of fierce independence; "In the wilderness myth, the body is pure, 'solo,' left to its own devices, and unmediated by any kind of aid."⁴⁶ Crippling this terrain, then, entails a more collaborative approach to nature. Kupperts depicts human-nonhuman nature interactions not in terms of solo ascents or individual feats of achievement, but in terms of community action and ritual. Describing a gathering of disabled writers, artists, and community members, she writes,

We create our own rhythms and rock ourselves into the world of nature, lose ourselves in a moment of sharing: hummed songs in the round, shared breath, leanings, rocks against wood, leaves falling gentle against skin, bodies braced against others gently lowering toes into waves, touch of bark against finger, cheek, from warm hand to cold snow and back again.⁴⁷

In this resolutely embodied description, the human and nonhuman are brought into direct contact, connecting the fallen leaf to the tree, or the breath to the wind. What entices me about this description is that it acknowledges loss or inability—she goes on to describe the borders of parking lots and the edges of pathways as the featured terrain, not cliff tops and crevices—and suggests alternative ways of interacting with the worlds around us. Rather than conquering or overcoming nature, Kupperts and her comrades describe caressing it, gazing upon it, breathing with it. Such forms of

interaction are made more possible by recognizing nature as (and in) everything around us. The edges of the park, the spaces along its borders, are a part of nature, too.

Moreover, Kupper's "we" is an acknowledgement of the ways in which our encounters with nature include and encompass relations with other people. Humans are interdependent, and our relationships with each other play a role in our understanding of the nonhuman world. Samuel Lurie, who is nondisabled, hints of this interdependence in an essay about his relationship with Clare:

On one of our first hikes in Vermont, on a steep, slippery trail, the kind where Eli moves especially slowly—he was shrugging off my outstretched hand, not wanting any help. But I was only offering it in part to provide balance. "We're lovers out on a hike," I reasoned, "you're supposed to want to hold my hand." He laughed, relaxing, the tension breaking. . . .

We hike more easily now, Eli referring to my hand serving as that "third point of contact"—stabilizing and comforting.⁴

How might this story of interdependence, of moving through nonhuman nature in relationship, expand the realm of ecofeminism? How might it bolster the claims of ecocritics who reject popular distinctions between humans and nature by presenting other humans as part of our encounters with nature? What happens to theory when it is no longer based primarily on tales of individuals' encounters with nature, but on experiences of interdependence and community? Hiking with a small child, assisting an elderly relative through the woods, or sitting with a neighbor in a city park—all activities we might be doing already—can transform our ideas about nature and about ourselves. Recognizing our interdependence makes room for a range of experiences of human and nonhuman nature, disrupting the ableist ideology that everyone interacts with nature in the same way.

In her video "In My Language," A. M. (Amanda) Baggs offers a visual and aural description of her interactions with the world around her, a description that radically expands econormative conceptions of both nature and interaction. To be clear, the video is not "about" nature and the environment but is, rather, an autobiographical account of living with autism. Yet, in this self-portrait, Baggs interacts fully with her surroundings, challenging implicit assumptions that nature only exists "out there" as opposed to in the everyday spaces around us. In the first half of the video, the only sounds we hear are Baggs's wordless songs and noises; the second half features a script Baggs wrote that is voiced by her computer. Throughout, we watch Baggs touch, smell, listen to, look at, and tap objects around her. In one scene, Baggs runs her fingers under a faucet, gently moving her fingers through the water. These images are accompanied by text scrolling across the bottom of the screen, and Baggs's computer voices the words she has typed: "It [my language] is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment. Reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings. . . . The water doesn't symbolize anything. I am just interacting with the water as the water interacts with me."⁵ The images confirm Baggs's syntax: the water spills

across her fingers, shifting its flow in response to her movements. In foregrounding this mutual interaction between fingers and water, between self and stream, Baggs pushes us to expand our conceptions of both language and nature; indeed, the two are intimately related. Language is about interaction with our environments, a mutual interaction that does not, cannot, occur only in spoken words or written text.

Yet, as Baggs reminds us, spoken words and written text are almost always the only forms of communication recognized and valued as language. Similarly, only certain kinds of interactions with the environment are recognized as such; swimming in the ocean and wading in mountain streams are more likely to be understood as meaningful ways to interact with water, while running one's fingers under a faucet is not. But why not? The answer lies partly in long-standing assumptions that nature and the environment only exist "out there," outside of our houses and neighborhoods; the answer lies, too, in long-standing—and even less visible—assumptions that only certain ways of understanding and acting on one's relation to the environment (including other humans) are acceptable. These assumptions have significant material effects. Seeing nature as only "out there," or faucet water as categorically different from ocean water, makes environmental justice work all the more difficult. And, as Baggs argues in her video, seeing her diverse interactions with her environment as strange or abnormal makes it all too easy to ignore the institutionalization and abuse of people on the autism spectrum or people with intellectual disabilities.

Artist Riva Lehrer offers more visual images of crip approaches to nature, representations that argue for human-nonhuman relationships based on the very limitations or variations of the body that are typically ignored in environmental literature. In *In the Yellow Woods* (fig. 6.1), a woman kneels on the ground, peeling the bark from a branch with her knife. She looks down, concentrating on her work, completely focused on the task before her. On the ground around her are scattered bones, bones she has carved herself from tree branches and trunks. A perfect pelvis, a rib cage, random bits of leg and spine—all lie next to her on the ground. She is literally carving a body from the trees. The painting, and the woman, seem inhabited by loss; the intensity of her concentration suggests the necessity of these new bones, these bones untouched by pain or surgery or breakage. And yet the scattered placement of the bones suggests that this work is not about creating some wholeness, not about finding the cure in this forest; she has not arranged the bones in the shape of a body, and she is not inserting them into her skin. Rather the bones seem to sink into the fallen leaves, to become part of the autumn landscape.

Bones become roots, linking this woman—her body, her self—to the landscape, literally grounding her in space and time. And time itself is in play here, as these bones vary in their coloration, marking time across their surfaces. The pelvis gleams white, new, untouched by rain and storm, while some of the longer bones—rib, clavicle, femur—bear the marks of time, calling to mind fossils of previous generations, suggesting that these bones are not only for her. By the same token, the dress pattern



Figure 6.1. Riva Lehrer, *In the Yellow Wood*, 1993, acrylic on panel.

tacked to the tree in the background suggests a future project, a sign of additional work to come, a guideline for other bodies. Although depicted alone in this forest, signs of other bodies, other figures, echo around the woman.

It is the process captured in the painting that captures me, that draws me in to the figure's meditative practice. How does this painting simultaneously offer a new map of the body and a new map of nature? How might it open up new avenues of understanding ourselves in relationship to nonhuman nature? Indeed, how does it blur the very line between the human and the nonhuman? Reading this painting from a crippled eco-feminist perspective, I see a woman making a connection between caring for the body and caring for the earth, suggesting an expanded view of health that looks beyond the boundaries of the body. This is not a supercrip story of triumphing over disability, and it's not an ableist story of bodies without limitation. It's a story of recognizing ourselves in the world around us, recognizing common structures of bone, flesh, oxygen, and air.

These connections manifest again in Lehrer's portrait of Eli Clare, part of her *Circle Stories* series of paintings chronicling the lives of disability artists, activists, and intellectuals. In this 2003 painting (fig. 6.2), Clare crouches on the ground, one knee touching the sandy soil, the other bracing his body. In the background is a river lined by trees, trees that are reflected in the surface of the water. The detail with which the flora is represented is telling, making clear that the plants are as important as the person. In fact, "person" and "plant" are not so easily distinguished, as evidenced by the young sapling emerging out of Clare's chest. The tree is rooted firmly in the ground



Figure 6.2. Riva Lehrer, *Circle Stories/Eli Clare*, 2003, acrylic on panel.

before Clare, and it curves to snake through his shirt. It's not clear if Clare has buttoned his shirt around the tree, clutching it to his chest, or if the tree made its own way onto Clare's skin, the two figures moving upward together. The painting is breathtaking in its conjuring of an entire ecosystem, one that recognizes human as inextricably part of nature. Its power also lies in its mythology, in its blending together of environmental, disability, and gender politics.

As Lehrer makes clear in her artist's statement, her *Circle Stories* paintings are intensely collaborative. She meets repeatedly with her subjects, studying and discussing their work, and brainstorming potential imagery. Lehrer's work with Clare coincided with his transition from butch female to genderqueer to transman (the collaboration lasted approximately two and one-half years), and it seems no accident that this young tree explodes from the site of Clare's changed chest. The image implicitly challenges easy depictions of technology as bad, as encroaching on the alleged purity of nature. This tree is healthy, vibrant; advanced biomedicine hasn't stunted its growth. On the ground before Clare are long locks of red hair, even a piece of a braid, suggesting that Clare has shed traces of femininity just as the trees around him will drop their leaves. The site of nature serves as a site of transformation in this painting, the clutched tree rooting Clare in his history but also exploding outward in new directions.

These tales of the gendered body intertwine with tales of the crip body. Clare writes poignant prose and poetry about living in a body marked by tremors and an uneven gait, signs of his cerebral palsy. Knowing these histories of Clare's body, I can't

help but notice that it is Clare's right hand that clutches the tree to his chest, his right hand that pulls the shirt closed around his sapling. In an essay titled "Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies," Clare writes, "Sometimes I wanted to cut off my right arm so it wouldn't shake. My shame was that plain, that bleak."⁵⁰ This image serves as an antidote to that memory, a reclaiming of that right arm. The steady sureness of the sapling—rooted, curving into Clare's body without breaking or splintering—becomes linked to the sure shaking of Clare's body, so that the tremors become rooted in both the body and the place. Like with the bone woman in the forest, Clare isn't connecting with nature in order to be cured of his allegedly broken body, but rather is solidly locating that body in space and time. He's not getting rid of the tremor but locating it, grounding it; it's as much a part of his body as the tree. As in her self-portrait *In the Yellow Wood*, Lehrer again presents a model of embodied environmentalism, of a concern with how we can get on together, earth, bone, and body.

I bring these paintings into my exploration of disability and environmentalism because they conjure images of nature-human relationships that not only allow for the presence of bodies with limited, odd, or queer movements and orientations, but they literally carve out a space for them, recognizing them as a vital part of the landscape. The content of Clare's and Lehrer's work as activists encourages my paying attention to these images, facilitates my placing them within the discourse of ecological feminism and environmentalism. Both of them are longtime advocates for environmental causes: *Exile and Pride* is a complex meditation on relationships among race, class, poverty, labor politics, gender, and environmental destruction/conservation in the Pacific Northwest, and Lehrer is a longtime supporter of animal rights movements.⁵¹ Moreover, they both make explicit connections between these environmental projects and their location in disability communities. Clare writes poignantly about the disabling effects of logging on bodies and ecosystems, and of coming to understand his cripp body on the rural roads and creeksides of rural Oregon. His book, which bears the subtitle *Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, is dedicated "to the rocks and trees, hills and beaches," suggesting a direct link between his understanding of queer disability and the landscapes around him. Similarly, Lehrer's paintings often combine landscapes with portraits, and nonhuman animals are a common presence in her paintings and drawings. In two of her most recent series, *Family* and *Totems and Familiars*, she showcases relationships between human and nonhuman animals; in the latter, she depicts cripp artists such as Nomy Lamm alongside their animal familiars, animals that serve as alter egos or sources of strength. The cultural productions of artists such as Clare and Lehrer enact alternate versions of nature and of humans' position within it. They are imagining and embodying new understandings of environmentalism that take disability experiences seriously, as sites of knowledge production about nature. Their future visions, because grounded in present cripp communities, recognize disability experiences and human limitations as essential, not marginal or tangential, to questions about "nature" and environmental movements.

7 Accessible Futures, Future Coalitions

A vital moment in coalitional political rhetoric is its ability to construct connections among struggles that may be not only diverse, but opposed to one another in many respects.

—Catriona Sandilands, *The Good-Natured Feminist*

WHEN DESCRIBING DISABILITY studies to my students, I often draw on Douglas Baynton's insight that "disability is everywhere in history once you begin looking for it."⁵² For Baynton, "looking for it" entails not only recovering the stories of disabled people or tracing histories of disability discrimination but also exploring how notions of disability and able-mindedness/able-bodiedness have functioned in different contexts. Baynton issues his provocation to historians, but disability studies scholars in other fields have extended its reach, pushing their own colleagues to recognize disability as a category of analysis. Deeply influenced by and indebted to this work, I use this final chapter to read Baynton's assertion differently. Rather than direct his insight outward, to those not currently working in disability studies, I turn inward, directing it to the field itself. If "disability is everywhere . . . once you begin looking for it," where do we, as disability studies scholars and activists, continue *not* to look? Where do we find disability and where do we miss it? In which theories and in which movements do we recognize ourselves, or recognize disability, and which theories and movements do we continue to see as separate from or tangential to disability studies?

These questions, and potential answers to them, have surfaced in previous chapters, but in this final chapter I address them more directly. In imagining what accessible futures might look like or might include, I find myself thinking about the possibilities of cross-movement work, both intellectually and politically. If disability is everywhere once we start looking for it, then why not look for it in the other social justice movements at work in contemporary culture? My understanding of disability rights,