

THESIS

THE RHETORIC OF DISGUST:
CONSIDERING PUBLIC TEXTS OF DISABILITY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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While composition studies has paid heed to the topic of disability, it seldom explores the political and affective dimensions of disability studies, such as how bodies write and are written by the world. The purpose of this thesis is to explore discourses of disability by employing critical emotion studies, particularly theories of disgust, to rhetorically analyze two popular texts, *Freaks* directed by Tod Browning and *Fears of Your Life* by Michael Bernard Loggins. These texts illustrate how disgust works to both reaffirm and transform the normal/abnormal binary that maintains public perceptions of disability as a stigmatized and marginal identity. Largely, this analysis emphasizes the role of non-academic, non-institutional, and non-standard discourses of disability to revitalize composition's foundational commitment to supporting human agency and social change.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of John Harold Gordon.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of many
After this there will be plenty...

Back in the days
We were called *Idiots and Fools*
Locked in *Institutions*
Put in *Special Schools*

Today here I say
We are *Artists, Painters & Poets*
The time is now to show and prove
Proclamation!
A new day in a *Brand New Nation!*

—excerpt from “Proclamation: The 1st of Many” by Andrew Isadore Calderon, *Starlight’s Genesis: An Anthology of the Starlight Gallery* edited by Katherine A. Loewen

Andy’s poem “Proclamation: The 1st of Many,” is the final poem in *Starlight’s Genesis: An Anthology of the Starlight Gallery*. From the first time I read it in a coffee shop, until the last time I saw his persona, “Tha Poet A.I.C.,” perform it in June of 2011 at the book launch of *Genesis*, the content never changed. These words rooted Andy. They held him together. I remember asking him how he felt about the poem and why he wrote it when we first started to practice performance poetry together. He explained how he saw himself as similar to his peers in high school. For example, he always loved hip-hop—including but not limited to Ice Cube and Run-DMC—and so did they, but his peers called him “retarded.” Andy was marked by the institution, separated by the “special” programs of grade school. This is how Andy came to learn that something about him was different. He wasn’t “special” like one-in-a-million; he was developmentally disabled: the ridiculed of aggressive laughter. Although he never wanted disability to define his relationships, his peers never gave him the chance. When he recited his poetry, I told him to perform to all those people who bullied him, who didn’t give him a chance. He took a breath, looked at his fellow artists ready to listen, and said “I don’t see victims here. I

see survivors.” He paced and yelled and got quiet and stood stoic and patiently, yelled more. He was ready. Four months later, Tha Poet A.I.C. read “Proclamation” at an art event. He stepped on stage and warned his audience to step back, “cause a fire is about to come through this place...”

ENTERING DISABILITY STUDIES BY WAY OF *GENESIS*

In May of 2010 I graduated from Ithaca College and moved home to Buffalo, NY with absolutely no idea of what I was going to do. At the time my only job was as a barista, and from the little I knew, I was sure I didn’t want to brew coffee for the rest of my life, not making nearly enough money to pay my bills, let alone feed myself. Anytime a customer was unkind (which was fairly frequent), like throwing coffee at me or telling me how stupid women are, I had to suck it up and smile. For the customer is *always* right. I had just spent four years in college challenging myself to engage more critically with the world around me; I wanted to work somewhere I could feel relatively confident that I wasn’t just another mindless droid in a hegemonic, racist, sexist, homophobic, ablest society. What was I to do with all of this?

Several weeks after moving, my sister suggested I go to the summer gallery opening at Starlight Art Studio and Gallery—a day habilitation program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.¹ My sister, Jenny, has been working at group homes for adults with a variety of disabilities since she was a teenager. She had mentioned Starlight to me in several phone conversations while I was in Ithaca, but I was never able to go, especially being so lost in the practicality of my politics major: could I bite the bullet and lobby or go to law school? Were these my only options? This is how I walked into Starlight for the first time; this is how I joined the conversations within disability studies.

As I walked through the open doors at Starlight on a warm Friday evening, many artists greeted me, particularly artists who also lived at the group home my sister worked at. “Are you

Jenny's sister?" and "I'm so glad you came! Jenny said she invited you." Now while I will go into a much deeper analysis of the following cultural assumptions later, it still should not go without mention that there is a "look" to someone with a developmental disability; "they" are defined by difference, a difference accentuated by both the attraction and repulsion of disgust (i.e. the performativity of disgust, see Ahmed). So in regards to this particular situation at Starlight's gallery opening, I knew immediately that "I" was different from "them" because of how our bodies negotiated space; we walked differently, talked differently, and had distinctly different bodily features. I walk without a gait; I don't need a wheelchair; I don't slouch or stutter; no one has to help me bathe or wipe my ass. To summarize, my features were "normal," acceptable, while theirs were "abnormal" and disgusting.

One of the first artists that came up to me was JB. He said something along the lines of, "Hey, so Jenny says you're a writer. I'm a writer too. Any chance you would want to help me with my writing? I am trying to write my autobiography." I thought it was so sweet—like an "aren't they cute" kind of feeling. As problematic as it was, especially considering my desired resistance against being a "mindless droid," it still felt good that someone "less fortunate" needed my help.

JB then introduced me to the director of Starlight and the man who founded the program. He got me e-mail addresses and phone numbers galore. That night, I e-mailed the director, and asked about a literacy teaching position. The following Tuesday was my first day as the "poet-in-residence" at Starlight (a volunteer position). It was the call to action I had been waiting for.

I spent the first few weeks sorting through old files of poetry and autobiographies, making lists of artists who were interested, and finding permanent times to facilitate. I was just blown away by the writing that was happening at Starlight. I found myself wondering if these

writers even knew how brilliant their work was (another cultural assumption I was making). More to the point though, as I began to meet with the artists one-on-one, it started to become clear that I was “abnormal,” not “them.” In an environment of 50 plus artists, all with a developmental disability, and few teaching artists, I was not a part of the majority. This contributed to the defining attributes of the “normal” versus “abnormal” binary. In sum, the implications about how identities are not just socially constructed, but maintained at every juncture, were piling up on me, and this, still, was only the beginning of my time at Starlight.

Then in October 2010 Starlight hosted a gallery opening that celebrated their five year anniversary. This anniversary event was the first art opening that featured and promoted a public poetry reading. During this event, Andy’s father pulled me aside and asked about when his son would be published. He clearly expressed to me that his son is talented, that he has a voice that should be shared with the world, and now that I was there, he finally wanted to see something come from this. In sum, he saw how the other art forms were displayed around town, how they were sold and artists made money. He seemed upset that his son’s writing was not treated in the same light. So I made a promise to Andy’s dad that night. I promised that the next time we met would be at a book launch that featured Andy’s work. When I went home that night, I panicked. How was I actually going to make that happen?

This is when I became the editor of *Genesis* (even though we didn’t have this title yet). My role was to work side-by-side with the writers to develop, transcribe, and organize their writing, as well as find funding and maintain communication with an eventual publisher. So for the first couple of months, when I wasn’t at Starlight or working at one of my other three jobs, I drove around town, wrote letters, and searched for as many writers in the community as possible to see if they knew who might be willing to take this project on. Eventually I stumbled upon

BlazeVOX books, a local small press in Buffalo, NY. I composed a letter that explained what Starlight was, what these writers were doing, and asked if BlazeVOX would be a part of it. Not long after I got a phone call. BlazeVOX would publish it and I needed to send material immediately. Six months later, the anthology was released, featuring eight writers and sixteen visual artists.

The pinnacle moment of my life was the book launch of *Genesis*. To be honest, I don't remember much of this night. It was a chaotic haze of book signings, introductions, speeches, and keeping things on schedule. What I do remember is finding Andy's dad as he waited in line to get a book. I went up to him, handed him a copy, and asked if he remembered me. He said he would never forget me now, and thanked me for all my hard work.

Working at Starlight and on *Genesis* was full of terror, excitement, failure, frustration, and success—not far from what I feel writing a thesis now spawning from these moments. More to the point, my experiences at Starlight began a long term struggle with disability as an identity, as a cultural performance that can both challenge and sustain the normal/abnormal binary. This struggle to understand identity is at the heart of my thesis, because at each turn of my experience—from my first steps around Starlight to facilitating writing to becoming the sole editor of *Genesis* to looking back now at Andy's note to me in my copy, "None of this without you"—it felt like boundaries were being dismantled. Certainly writing and socially just change have an intimate relationship here. For example, because of the publication and access to writing, Andy's confidence, and subsequently, his literacy skills grew, which affected his identity as a Self-Advocate. However, while many walls were knocked down through my facilitation of writing at Starlight and the publication of *Genesis*, I also need to admit some of them were covertly maintained, sometimes by my own assumptions about disability and what is normal. For

example, I joined the Starlight community with a desire to “help” the people I felt bad for. I wanted to help “them” learn how to write, when in fact, “they” already knew how to write, and well at that. If anything, the most important barrier was about access, not necessarily language. In sum, the discursive experiences and expressions of emotions, like compassion and disgust, maintained the ideology that informs disability as an “abnormal” and marginal identity.

The purpose of my thesis then is to explore, more fully, the ways that rhetoric and the politics of emotions can unveil complicated notions of normality within counterpublic discourses of disability. Put simply, identities are socially constructed. One is not born “normal” or “abnormal.” We learn to be “special” in a society that focuses on meeting very specific and particular needs. Therefore, the roles that rhetoric and the economy of emotions play in such acquisitions are important. As such, this thesis is a call to action; it is a call for audiences to join this interdisciplinary conversation, to think critically, and ask some difficult questions. In sum, “norms” have a responsibility to pick apart and understand cultural constructions of ability and normalcy, because, as I will show in the subsequent chapters, “norms” benefit from building such barriers. As I have mentioned twice now, it made me feel better to help, and I am unable to just leave this sentiment, rich with privilege, aside.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ILLUMINATIONS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the traditions of interdisciplinary research, this study is about how critical understandings of rhetoric, disability, and emotions illuminate each other in much needed political ways. Additionally, for my purposes, conversations regarding disability and emotion all fall under the umbrella of rhetoric and composition. This is due to the fact that individuals are always operating within discourse communities that use, among many other tools, language and the body to shape and reshape the world. Moreover, I also will be drawing from the understanding within rhetoric and composition that all “texts” are processes and rhetorical acts—I put the word text in quotations because texts are more than just printed and written words; they can be a film or a billboard. In sum, the discourses that work through the non-traditional texts I utilize for analysis will always be regarded as political.

So falling from the umbrella of rhetoric and composition, disability is a social phenomenon and emotions are rife with political meanings. Markedly, like a picky eater, I will be pulling small portions of literature from each field. My audience will therefore not receive a full overview of each community, but as stated earlier, this thesis is a call for action. I want to emphasize that all three discourse communities matter, and urge my readers to investigate said communities beyond my study. More to the point, since my audience is primarily intended to be for rhetoric and composition scholars and students, I will provide some general definitions of the anticipated unfamiliar terms that I reference throughout this study: disability, freakery, and emotion. After covering these terms I will provide my research questions, unpack some major premises within the disciplinary fields of disability and emotions studies, identify the critical gap in rhetoric and composition, and finally, hone in on the theoretical roles of freaks and disgust.

KEY TERMS

The term “disability” refers to a socially constructed identity that signifies a politics about what is normal in a particular culture (Davis). In other words, disability refers to how bodies are marked as different and then regulated—from small occurrences, such as entering a building, to more macro conditions, like that of access. Furthermore, one of disability studies’ main goals is to explore how people with disabilities can re-appropriate the term “disability” and its political significations (e.g., Barnes; Linton). So *disability* has a twofold purpose here: first, as a social construct, and second, as a site for instigating socially just change.

Narrowing the view, within disability studies the term “freak” and the cultural location of the freak show has posed significant problems, while also providing a framework in which to view the “abnormal” body as ambiguous, and thus, a site of possible, subversive resistance (e.g., Bogdan 1988; Bogdan 1996; Chemers; Gerber 1990; Gerber 1996; Grosz). For example, in “(Post)colonizing Disability” Mark Sherry embeds the freak in a conversation about eugenics, ableism, and racism (101). Generally speaking, within disability studies the freak show is often assumed, both implicitly and explicitly, as purely exhibition, characterized as “the pornography of disability” (Bogdan, 1988, p. 2). On the other hand, some disability theorists refute such claims and suggest that the “freak,” like disability, is not inherently derogatory, but rather constructed (e.g., Adams; Bogdan 1988; Chemers; and Garland-Thomson 1996). Particularly, the working acts of freak shows (e.g. sword swallowers and blockheads) are literal performances and have the potential to call attention to how terms like “freak” and “disability” come to mark bodies as “abnormal” and therefore, marginalized. In calling attention to how such marginalization is formed or sustained, “freaks” can further reveal the potential for hegemonic

systems of appropriation to be affected by dominant *and* subversive forces. The term *freakery* refers to this tension that freaks and freak shows signify in reappropriations of disability.

Finally, critical emotion studies generally tend to focus on the function of emotions—i.e. what they do, rather than what they are (Ahmed). This discipline advocates that *emotions* are not internal experiences; they don't arise from somewhere inside of us. Emotions are social and political forces in a given society, naturalized to an extent where they feel like “ours” so as to conceal a fundamental element in how reality is constructed (e.g., Ahmed; Berlant; Harding and Pribram; Lindquist; Massumi; Worsham). In sum, one of the central purposes of emotion studies is to denaturalize, or deconstruct, our feelings to better understand the constructions of a truly not natural rhetorical situation.

So along the borders between these keys terms (disability, freakery, and emotion) lay my research questions, which guide this rhetorical study of the emotional dynamics within the counterpublic discourses of disability:

1. In lieu of the political and social issues that shape rhetoric and composition as a field, how might emotion studies expand composition theory's dialogue with disability?²
2. What is the rhetorical situation of a film featuring freaks during the turn of the 20th century (1860-1940) and what does disgust do in the counterpublic discourses that work through it?
3. What is the rhetorical situation of a recently published handwritten book by an author with a disability and what does disgust do in the counterpublic discourses that work through it?
4. What are the emotional and rhetorical patterns that maintain and/or transform disability as a stigma?

5. How do these rhetorical analyses complicate previous theories of identity in composition and disability studies? How might rhetoric and composition benefit from this new understating of disability as result of this analysis?

MAJOR PREMISES OF DISABILITY AND EMOTION STUDIES

There are six major premises (three for each theory) relevant for the purposes of this discussion that guide disability and emotion studies. For disability studies as an academic inquiry and ongoing conversation about reappropriation there are the following: (1) the theory of normality, (2) identity is a social construction, and (3) hegemonic power dynamics determine who constructs and who is constructed. Then for emotion studies as a field often focused on the function of emotions (i.e. what they do) there are the following: (1) disputing the reason versus emotion binary, (2) emotions are culturally constructed and therefore, political, and (3) denaturalizing emotions unveils the inner workings of hegemony. Finally, after identifying these major premises I will display how rhetoric and composition has begun to engage these ideas.

Additionally, and before unpacking these premises, it is important to briefly frame disability studies historically because the field of disability studies represents an important shift in disability culture. While I don't argue that disability studies is completely responsible for reframing disability as a social condition, it did play a major role. Prior to contemporary thinking about disability as a systemic symptom of hegemonic social institutions, disability was primarily understood as a personal impairment—i.e. a medical condition and a personal problem; disability was (and to a certain extent still is) something to be treated and cured. For example, the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 as revised in 2008 still defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual.” In contrast, by theorizing about normality, disability studies marks a historical rejection of

medical discourse. That is to say that within disability studies the language of limits signifies a society that is built around specific needs, and thus, rejects “other” and “different” needs.

With that in mind, one of the first major issues that disability studies takes up is that of normality. The theory of normality generally argues that disability is about how notions of the “normal” create marginal identities (e.g., Davis; Davidson; McRuer; Siebers 2006; Wilson). It is partially grounded in understandings of the “average” from bell curves in statistics (e.g., Davis; Wilson). In sum, when disability is thought to be different, an impairment, or less than human it is informed by cultural standards about what is “normal” or “average” for individuals in a given society. For example, as the editor to *Genesis* part of my job was to make the writing accessible to the general public. To do this, the literature needed to be changed from its original structure (usually handwritten and in a journal because many of the writers didn’t have access to a computer) to meet normative standards. While I never changed even a period without consulting the writer first, such purposed changes led to many heated debates. Like was it okay to use curse words? If so, which ones? Should people with developmental disabilities express their anger? Was it okay to misspell words on purpose—e.g. desyre instead of desire? Implicit within such questions (and debates that would go on for sessions) are standards that have the potential to kill a valuable vernacular. That is to say, certain standards are held in higher regard than others. They are more “normal,” and “average people” use them. Therefore, alternative ways of communication are thrown to the wayside because of assumptions about normal as average and standard. This is one of the central claims disability studies attempts to unveil about “reality.”

As should be evident, the second major premise identified—i.e. identity is a social construction—is at play within the theory of normality. In other words, the very idea of what is normal and what is abnormal is defined socially and is particular to a culture, which affects how

citizens identify themselves or are identified by others. So, generally speaking, disability theorists reject notions of the “natural” because it is a society, a culture, that defines the surfaces and boundaries from which identity is made, understood, and lived (e.g., Barnes; Davis; Davidson; Garland-Thomson 2002; Sherry; Wilson). For example, in my opening narrative I mentioned how I knew “immediately” after I arrived at Starlight for the first time that “I” was different from “them”; I immediately knew “they” were disabled and “I” was not. The term “disability” signified a cultural lesson about difference as the division of “I” and “them.” In other words, before I even shook the hand of a writer I had certain assumptions about what disability is and how to relate to it. This is the social construction of identity. Additionally, learning, or rather re-learning, how offensive some of my assumptions were is a matter of acknowledging how the social construction of identity is created and maintained—e.g. in watching a Jerry Lewis telethon or growing up in segregated school systems.

Finally then, the third major premise, which also intertwines with the first two, is about how hegemonic forces determine who social constructions serve. In disability studies the concept of hegemony is influenced by the works of Raymond Williams and Antonio Gramsci (e.g., Barnes; Charlton; Davis; Wilson). In this sense, hegemony refers to a dual, dynamic force at work within a given society: first is that of coercion, and second, consent. Also, it should be noted that while it is tempting to associate hegemony’s influence primarily with violence, or coercion, the most important piece is consent because hegemony is dependent upon those who do not necessarily benefit from its power. In “The Dimensions of Disability Oppression,” James Charlton breaks down this process of hegemony:

Hegemony is projected multidimensionally and multidirectionally. It is not projected like a motion picture projects images. The impulses and impressions, beliefs and values, standards and manners are projected more like sunlight. Hegemony is diffuse and appears everywhere as natural. It (re)enforces domination not only through the (armed) state but

also throughout society: in families, churches, schools, the workplace, legal institutions, bureaucracy, and culture. (154)

In other words, hegemony represents the dominant parts of a society as they imprint standards of normality upon the subversive, making it look and feel natural. In context to disability, one might argue that it is the “averages,” the “norms” (with their professional credentials in a system that caters to them) that possess the power to, for example, segregate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. It’s better for “them” anyways right? In this process the student with a disability is not only excluded from the “normal” classroom, but also from the potential to attain the necessary credentials so as to hold power and, thus, determine the boundaries of access. All the while the students both with and without disabilities feel the process is natural and justified. It feels like segregation is just the way things are supposed to be. In sum, hegemony is oppressive, cultural practices on the run; it’s an aqueous shape that continuously shifts forms to win consent, so that choices made by citizens in a given culture to, say, intentionally resist normalcy, end up producing the status quo, yet again.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to these major premises of disability studies, emotion studies also has three major premises as an academic inquiry into the role emotions play in a given society: (1) disputing the reason versus emotion binary, (2) emotions are constructed and therefore political, and (3) denaturalizing emotions unveils the inner workings of hegemony. From these major premises I will later focus specifically on disgust as it is relevant to “disabled” and “freakish” identities. Also, and again as mentioned earlier, throughout this discussion emotions, like disgust, don’t exist in a vacuum; they “play” with other emotions, like fear and compassion.

Having said that, many emotion studies theorists begin a critical conversation about emotion by refuting the traditional epistemic binary of reason versus emotion (e.g., Deigh;

Gregg; Harding and Pribram; Jaggar; Miller; Nussbaum; Spelman; Williams, Simon J.). For example, in “The Politics of Disgust and Shame,” John Deigh argues that contemporary emotion theory—represented by Martha Nussbaum’s focus on shame and disgust in both *Upheavals of Thought* and *Hiding from Humanity*—is descendant from the Greek and Roman stoics (383, 386-88). That is to say, the stoics acknowledged that emotions play a profound role in the distribution and creation of knowledge—hence Aristotle’s emphasis on pathos as one of the three pillars of rhetorical analysis in *Rhetoric* (Aristotle). More specifically, in *Phaedrus*, Plato argued that emotions need to be controlled, not cast out of the equation altogether:

In the beginning of this tale I divided each soul into three parts, two of which had the form of horses, the third that of a charioteer The horse that stands at the right hand . . . *he needs no whip, but is guided only by the word of command and by reason.* The other, however, is . . . *the friend of insolence and pride . . . hardly obedient* to whip and spurs. Now when the charioteer beholds the love-inspiring vision . . . the horse that is obedient to the charioteer, *constrained* then as always by modesty, *controls* himself and does not leap upon the beloved; but the other . . . springs wildly forward, causing all possible trouble to his mate and to the charioteer . . . *but finally, as the trouble has no end, they go forward with him, yielding and agreeing to do his bidding. And they come to the beloved and behold his radiant face.* (153, emphasis added)

While there is a lot that could be unpacked here, for my purpose the fundamental claim is that emotions are not the antithesis of reason. Plato’s metaphor, on the other hand, distinguishes the role of emotion in Western thought as having epistemic potential *if properly controlled*. Indeed, when both the dutiful horse and the “hardly obedient” horse finally yield together to the charioteer, they arrive at sound knowledge and “behold his radiant face” (Plato 153). While there still may be issues certain emotion theorists take up with such assumptions about “control” (e.g., Berlant; Massumi; Spelman; Stearns; Worsham), all in all, the emotion versus reason dichotomy is an epistemological myth, which, further, presents an opportunity to more deeply consider what it is that emotions do as a political forces in a given society.

With that in mind, theorists and scholars of emotion studies reframe the hegemonic processes that produce cultural identities by arguing that social experiences are already rife with affect, and that emotions are not internal experiences (e.g., Ahmed; Berlant; Gregg; Lindquist; Massumi; Williams, Simon J.; Worsham).³ As mentioned earlier, emotions don't arise authentically from somewhere inside of us. They are cultural constructions, a learned phenomenon. In their introduction to *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader*, Jennifer Harding and E. Deidre Pribram state that emotion studies examine "the emotions [that] different categories of subjects are permitted to experience and express at any historical juncture, and how both individuals and collectives are brought into being through specific articulations of emotion" (13). As entities that determine the available means of what one can be, individually or socially, emotions are political. In other words, political beliefs or values work their way through an individual partly through emotions. For example, returning to the first moment I walked into Starlight again, I've mentioned I felt a kind of "aren't they cute" feeling, a sense of pity or sympathy. This feeling implied a particular politics about literacy: I assumed priority of my discourse—part academic, part white, part middle-class and feminine. Initially, it seemed like my role was to "fix" the discursive difference between us so as to make writing "more accessible" to the normative. When assuming a position that regards emotions as political one can scrutinize how such emotions signify, say, a way of seeing a specific, situated someone as "backwards" and, thus, in need of "help." This is the political dimension implied in feeling emotions.

Finally, to expose the hegemonic processes of circulating, affective economies, at work "behind the scenes" with emotions, is called the process of denaturalization, the third and final premise to emotion studies I will cover here. Understanding emotions as political entities reveals how "reality" is a hegemonic construction that those in temporary positions of power have made.

In other words, if emotions are political they are revealed as unnatural. More specifically, denaturalizing the sense of pity or sympathy I felt initially at Starlight demonstrates a tendency to be governed by the normative. That is to say that I feel pity not because “I” feel it “authentically” but because I was taught to be sensitive to particular situations in very particular ways that reinforce and maintain hegemonic notions of what is normal, and thus, identities defined by normalcy. In sum, emotions are not natural, they are political in their commonplace associations—e.g. I feel bad, therefore I help—which supports a hegemony that appropriates something like disability in a given society.

CRITICAL CRACKS IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

Three major academic journals in rhetoric and composition, *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), *College English*, and *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, have predominantly focused on disability only as it is relevant to topics like open admission policies, basic writers, and standardized testing. In other words, disability is not widely discussed within the field of rhetoric and composition as a social phenomenon, let alone a political issue. More specifically, results for searching variations of the word disability in the research database ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) for each journal from 1966 until the present consist of a whopping 13 articles, the earliest dating back to 1989. In one of these articles in *College English*, “Performing the Rhetorical Freak Show: Disability, Student Writing, and College Admissions,” author Amy Vidali states that “the intersections of disability and composition is like a single stop sign in a no-name town they [others in the field] are only passing through” (635). As a theoretical and discursive field that promotes socially just change, how is social change supposed to occur when compositionists and rhetoricians do not fully engage with the political discourse of disability?

Additionally, another part of the problem here is that not only is disability a marginalized identity within institutional academies, but such scholarly journals in rhetoric and composition are all too focused on the academy, and specifically, postsecondary education. If composition studies is concerned with writing and literacy practices, be it through things like acquisition or transfer, why does our research, by and large only reflect such practices within the confines of academia? Put simply, writing happens everywhere. For example, The National Day on Writing states that “People in every walk of life, in every kind of work, and at every age write” (“About the National”). The point is that compositionists and rhetoricians are not doing enough to bring the public practices of composition into research. Composition should rise, more fully, to the challenge by frequently stepping outside the classroom, by being more inclusive of the public literacy work about, with, or for people with disabilities, like the work I’ve done at Starlight. These publics have the potential to significantly change the work we do, and support composition’s dedication to democratic ideals of breaking barriers to reach success. Therefore, the alternative, counterpublic discourses analyzed in this discussion will also act as a kind of answer to the question of composition studies’ relationship with publics.

More to the point, disability studies, as briefly mentioned earlier, is a location of scholarly inquiry that is grounded in rethinking the ideological assumptions, or myths about what is normal in a culture—i.e. the hegemony of normality. When looking at sites of cultural production, some disability studies theorists often utilize a direct corporeal language when theorizing about disability (e.g., Siebers 2006; Johnson; Garland-Thomson 2010; Toombs). For example, in “Disability in Theory: From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body,” Tobin Siebers states that “unless all adults have their *ass wiped* by someone else, unless the caregiver cannot *wipe his or her own ass*, the people who alone require this service will be

represented as weak or inferior” (179 emphasis added). By altering the discourse slightly, and creating a kind of new intellectual, discursive dialectic that combines the theoretical and material, what theorists like Siebers unveil is how “abnormals” are spoken for and represented by the “norms,” who also don’t really understand what it is like to be a deviation from the norm. In sum, direct, corporeal narratives embedded in theoretical texts rupture dominant models of thinking about identity and the body—a necessary and much needed critical technique that implicates composition theory.

In fact, within rhetoric and composition, a trend to integrate such dynamic discourses into academic learning environments has proven to be somewhat successful. In “Becoming Visible: Lessons in Disability” Brenda Jo Brueggemann et al. argue that incorporating “disability texts”—i.e. texts by an author with a disability—into the classroom empowers students through exemplifying how writing is intimately bound to political issues, like that of identity (382). For example, in “Becoming Visible” coauthor Barbara A. Heiffron documents her experiences in a composition class where she used selections from Nancy Mairs’s *Carnal Acts*—a autobiographical collection of essays about living with Multiple Sclerosis. Mairs’s book is similar to the narratives Siebers utilizes. It can be rough on its audience with some graphic language, but it shakes the foundation of discursive standards traditionally promoted in a postsecondary classroom. Take, for example, the following passage:

Living with this mysterious mechanism [MS] feels like having your present self, and the past selves it embodies, haunted by a capricious and meanspirited ghost, unseen except for its footprints, which trips you even when you’re watching where you’re going, knocks glassware out of your hand, squeezes the urine out of your bladder before you reach the bathroom, and weighs your whole body with a weariness no amount of rest can relieve. An alien invader must be at work. But of course it’s not. It’s your own body. That is, it’s you. (383-84)

From this passage, it is quite clear that Mairs does not hide the fact that, at times, she has not been able to cope with MS. So, how did the students of Heifferon's class, as well as Heifferon herself, respond to this?

Heifferon actually questioned whether such a text would be productive for a composition class, as it was assigned to her by the director of the department. To put it simply, Heifferon was possibly as surprised as her students. That is to say that the discussions in class were heated and divided; students acted simultaneously empathetic and repulsed by the narrative. Heifferon suggested they rhetorically analyze this tense situation. In example, Heifferon offers the experience of one of her students, who at first was only repulsed by the narrative. This particular student was able to move out of his initial anger and repulsion and into a space where he could analyze the situatedness of his response. More specifically, this student acknowledged that he felt he lives in a world where people *must* cope. That is to say that, as a culture, we seek stories that display strength and hope within situations like disability, and when we don't get them, we're uncomfortable. This student further identified the idea of the "unspeakable" and how reading Mairs's "unspeakable" experiences reminded him of his own: the loss of his father. Heifferon quoted her student stating, "For me speaking about my father's passing would be too traumatic right now. Until this semester I'd never even written about it" (386). To summarize, Heifferon saw results like this across the class, results that were critical, rhetorical, practical, and personal all at the same time. So by bringing disability theory into a discursive, rhetorical framework, one is able to theorize more deeply about the intimate politics of a hegemonic normality. This is the political potential of disability studies for composition theory.

Akin to the profound contributions disability studies can bring to composition theory is how rhetoric and composition understands and utilizes emotions. Despite some limitations—e.g.

focuses of cognition—rhetoric and composition has begun to engage in a dialogue with emotion studies (e.g., Jacobs and Micciche; Jurecic; Micciche; Trainor; Worsham). For example, in *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion & Composition Studies*, editors Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche discuss how composition settings are saturated with emotions, and as such, are sites where personal, social, and political experiences are constructed. They also argue that the movement of emotions infers a propensity to act, similar to understandings about the implicit resistance within rhetoric and discourse (see Berlin; Foucault). In sum, Jacobs and Micciche view emotions in educational composition settings as a “space of possibility for reimagining our approaches to teaching, research, and administration” (5). Therefore, composition theory again aligns itself with the goals of both emotion and disability studies by emphasizing not just the unveiling of systemic acts, but also the necessity to challenge the political boundaries from which those acts are born and sustained. However, while rhetoric and composition has begun to dabble in critical emotion theory, it again has only done so to the extent of its relevance and role within postsecondary institutional locations. Thus, my utilization of emotion theory intends to dive much deeper into the critical implications of what it is emotions do within counterpublic discourses of protest and resistance.

More to the point, inquiries into not just the “what” of hegemony, but the “how” is crucial to the reframing of disability. That is to say, how do individuals or collectives enact socially constructed roles of disability in the day-to-day? To explore questions like this it is necessary to acknowledge that conversations of emotions within rhetoric and composition are often grounded in the performativity of emotions (e.g., Ahmed; Lindquist; Massumi; Spelman). For example, in “Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy,” Julie Lindquist argues that we experience the world affectively. In other

words, the symptoms of hegemony, like ableism and homophobia, are acted out through emotions, and emotions therefore play a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of normality and the status quo. Furthermore, Lindquist suggests that “teachers must become skilled actors [of emotion], ever aware and able to negotiate tensions between control and improvisation” (195). For facilitators of knowledge to do so, Lindquist invokes Erving Goffman’s concepts of *surface acting* and *deep acting*, noting that the only way to distinguish the two is through control: “deep acting is, paradoxically, the process of exerting control in order to relinquish control” (197). While rhetoric and composition again displays a tendency to stay focus in postsecondary classrooms, what such theories can point to concerning rhetorical publics and disability is that rhetoricians and compositionists can negotiate social constructions of identity through discourse and through denaturalizing emotions.

Taken as a whole then, research within rhetoric and composition regarding both emotions and disability, while slim, affects the process of reaching socially just change. Regarding disability, when discussed as a social and cultural phenomenon, composition studies illuminates a blueprint of what disability can do, thereby pushing the boundaries of disability as a political force in the world. Compositionists and rhetoricians do much the same with emotion studies, having the courage to get personal, be uncomfortable, and turn ideas against themselves. Unmistakably, through rhetoric and composition, the road to political action and change isn’t about immediate satisfaction; it’s about exposing the feelings that scar, not just the ones that heal. For within the shame and embarrassment, the anger and hatred lay a very discursive and rhetorical need to speak the “truth” of the wound, to invoke normalcy so as to struggle, question, and recover from it. In other words, the symptoms of hegemony, like naturalized emotions and ideas of normality, can be used to against themselves. This is why it is so necessary to start

filling the gaps of composition studies, like that of disability. It's about asking the critical questions necessary to hone a field that desires to affect a society, and maybe even the world, in a socially just way.

REFINING THE FRAMEWORKS: FREAKERY AND DISGUST

As briefly mentioned earlier, studies of freakery critically challenge some of disability studies' assumptions, as a pioneering discipline, about historical representations of ability. Therefore, how compositionists and rhetoricians use freakery as a resource in research as well as in learning environments matters. Particularly, freakery acknowledges how the boundaries between performance persona and "real" person are not only blurred, but apparent (e.g., Adams; Bogdan 1988; Chemers; Garland-Thomson 1996). More specifically, in *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*, a literary criticism of freaks, Rachel Adams notices that at freak shows identity formation involves "a dual gesture of incorporation and repudiation" and that "freaks remind us [the audience] of the unbearable excess that has been shed to confer entry into the realm of normalcy" (7). In other words, at the freak show "normal" bodies must acknowledge what they lack, what they've given up in order to be "normal": norms make the distinction between binaries, like normal/abnormal, whereas, "freaks" don't make "comfortable" distinctions; they stand in front of you, staring back, unambiguous, yet never clarify the boundaries. The dynamics of such a location calls attention to how binaries, like normal/abnormal, are made. Thus, the freak show is a consistent site for the maintenance of cultural "rules." It is then through engaging in the process of how standards of normality are constructed that the "disabled" have an opportunity to reclaim their colonized bodies, or the bodies that dominant culture appropriates and markets.

As such, the relationship disability and composition studies maintains with freakery is important, especially in regards to theories about resisting the “normal” and reappropriating disability. In *Staging Stigma: A Critical Examination of the American Freak Show*, Michael M. Chemers puts it well: “although not every disabled body in performance is freakery, every disabled body in performance (on stage or in everyday interaction) enters into some kind of dialogue with the perceived history of the freak show” (25). At the freak show, “freaks” are performers that sometimes reflect the social “performances” of disability in a day-to-day context. So since identity is constructed, and because it is “performed” in a variety of contexts, and because freaks perform abnormality, disability is always, at the very least, in conversation with “freaks.” The freak show is, thus, an illuminating location regarding how identities are made and sustained, as well as how the subversive might challenge the status quo of normality via the symptoms of hegemony. In sum, the freak is both a revolutionary and a rejected Other.

Furthermore, in “Performing the Rhetorical Freak Show,” compositionist Amy Vidali argues that such ideas of freak performativity can be applied to moments when students disclose personal information regarding a disability. Vidali states,

Reconsidering the ambiguous agency of the freak . . . provides an important opportunity to rethink the idea of students . . . as mere rhetorical dupes of an oppressive admission system, revealing that students can manipulate both existing and unexpected rhetorical tropes for their own ends. (616)

In other words, rethinking the role of the “freak” as ambiguous—i.e. are they acting or is it real?—rather than say purely exploitative, complicates hegemonic power dynamics. The freak’s ambiguity reveals how the subversive can affect dominant social structures of difference. Again, the freak is both a revolutionary and a rejected Other.

More specifically, in popular culture the freak show is traditionally regarded with disapproval. Audiences often assume that “freaks” don’t want to be doing what they are doing;

they are forced into the profession or naively consent to it. This is somewhat suggestive of the cultural medical model that views disability as in need of a “cure”; “cure it or kill it” eugenicists used to say. While some “freaks” were certainly forced into the role, and while some people with disabilities might want to be “fixed,” these truths are, in fact, situational. “Freaks” and individuals with a disability are not “dupes,” and like the marginalized students in Vidali’s study, freaks consciously call on their rhetorical skills to reappropriate their social stature. Moreover, one of the rhetorical tools freaks call upon in such dynamic processes of resistance is disgust.

Like the freak, disgust, especially as it understood in critical emotion studies, is a dynamic emotion. As I will explain later, disgust involves two paradoxical movements: repulsion away and attraction towards. It is through such rapid motions that one learns, constructs, and maintains people, objects, and signs as disgusting, and therefore, something to Other or objectify. In sum, nothing is inherently disgusting; something is disgusting because it is made that way. Therefore, since the purpose of this conversation is to work with said understandings of disgust, it is important to briefly acknowledge how the theory of disgust got here, for it was not always a political conversation.

According to Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haide, and Clark R. McCauley in the third edition of the *Handbook of Emotions*, there are two grounding works that frame disgust: “Chapter XI” of Charles Darwin’s *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* and Andras Angyal’s “Disgust and Related Aversions” (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 757). Both argue that disgust is an oral sensation, derived from the fear of ingesting “bad” or contaminating objects (e.g., mold, feces, or the flesh of a corpse). Additionally, Rozin contributed the ideas of moral disgust and how disgust can be pleasurable, like in humor (e.g., Rozin and Fallon; Rozin, Lowery, and Ebert). Despite touching on the idea of morals and pleasure, much of the discussion about

disgust still remained fairly apolitical for quite some time, regarding disgust as “shaped by evolutionary forces that elaborated upon an older food rejection system based on distaste” (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 759). It was not until conversations started to become affected by cultural studies that disgust, as well as emotions in general, became about more than “gut feelings.” As outlined earlier, emotions for this discussion are always regarded as political and rhetorical forces in the world, rather than internal feelings originating from the self.

So there are three important theorists that played a significant role in changing the direction of conversations about disgust: William Ian Miller, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Sarah Ahmed. First, in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller begins to build upon disgust as a political emotion. What’s interesting is that Miller relies fairly heavily upon the previous understandings of disgust as a fear of contamination. For example, he states that a “taste-based conception of disgust cannot account for the fact that most contamination takes place simply by contact rather than by ingestion” (64). However, Miller also extends these theories more critically into discussions about the social impacts of disgust: “Disgust helps mark boundaries of culture and boundaries of the self” (50). In sum, Miller is one of the few theorists to acknowledge the political dimensions and social effects of disgust. That is to say that disgust is about more than the fear of ingesting “bad” things.

Another core theorist in this discussion is Martha C. Nussbaum. In *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, Nussbaum argues that emotions play a central role in law. She rejects the reason versus emotion binary on the basis that emotions play a central role in determining what actions are bad and how they should be punished. Furthermore, she argues that shame and disgust are two distinct emotions, and within law, they are “likely to be normatively distorted, and thus unreliable as guides to public practice” (Nussbaum 13). More to the point

though, Nussbaum also observes that, like shame, disgust is “a way of hiding from our humanity” (15). In other words, disgust reinforces “magical ideals” about what it means to be human, and then is frequently used to justify socially exclusive practices, like marginalization and institutionalization (Nussbaum 14). Overall, Nussbaum’s theories are potent in their criminal and judicial implications, and therefore, they do not have a central role in this discussion. Nonetheless, Nussbaum, like Miller, understands the political and rhetorical functions disgust plays in US society, and she remains a crucial theorist in developing the critical conversations about disgust.

Finally, Sarah Ahmed is another theorist that has participated in fostering a more critical conversation regarding emotions as political and social forces. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, and building upon Miller’s theories, she argues that disgust reveals a political function to emotions: “[i]f disgust is about gut feelings, then our relation to our guts is not direct, but mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the very impression we make of others and the way those impressions surface as bodies” (83). That is to say that disgust, as it is felt, is negotiated by the political, social, and economic institutions that shape a culture’s repertoire for feeling, including the notion of “guts.” Sure, emotions feel personal, they feel like “mine,” but it is only “my disgust” as much as it is “your disgust,” because “we” are products of the same social structures. Furthermore, Ahmed discerns that disgust is also performative in its paradoxical dual movement. She states that disgust is composed of two movements, a pull towards and a pull away from an object, and as these movements are felt as intense, “the objects seem to have us ‘in their grip’” and disgust is, therefore, performative (84).

Taken as a whole, these theorists present disgust in a manner that can affect the essential social mission of rhetoric and composition in meaningful ways, similar to how the freak

complicates notions of resisting hegemonic notions of ability. For example, in her conclusion, Ahmed argues that “the desire to feel good or better can involve erasure of relations of violence” (197). So, as a disciplinary field that relies heavily on doing “feel-good” work, it is necessary for rhetoric and composition to be wary of the illusions of “feel-good” justice. In other words, as Ahmed offers the critical idea that social justice is about facing the emotional consequence of the crimes of hegemony, rhetoric and composition, as it is concerned with social change, needs to pay close attention. The critical questions such understandings of emotions, like the ambiguity of the freak, can inform our practices as rhetoricians and compositionists in crucial ways when it comes to promoting human agency and social change. As the freak clearly communicates, the lines of oppression are not clear cut. They blur and blend, which signifies that actions made to meet socially constructive goals can actually do otherwise. In sum, social change about acting under informed notions regarding how hegemony works as a sly and intimate system that promotes unnecessary oppression and offensive appropriations.

METHODS: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

This study utilizes Lloyd Bitzer's elements of the rhetorical situation—i.e. audience, exigence, and constraints—to discuss the ways that two texts (a small sample of counterpublic discourses of disability) can alter how we think about disability as a tense social identity. I utilize rhetorical theory for this study because rhetoric is persuasive in the sense that it aims to create or instigate change. Additionally, since the sample size is small, I also utilize political understandings of disgust to reinforce the rhetorical situation of counterpublic discourses of disability as both maintaining and transforming the stigmatization of disability. In sum, my goal is to alter understandings about the discursive constructions of disability by drawing upon two texts within an interdisciplinary, theoretical framework—i.e. rhetoric and composition, disability studies, and emotion theory. Again, my research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. In lieu of the political and social issues that shape rhetoric and composition as a field, how might emotion studies expand composition theory's dialogue with disability?
2. What is the rhetorical situation of a film featuring freaks during the turn of the 20th century (1860-1940) and what does disgust do in the counterpublic discourses that work through it?
3. What is the rhetorical situation of a recently published, handwritten book by an author with a disability and what does disgust do in the counterpublic discourses that work through it?
4. What are the emotional and rhetorical patterns that maintain and transform disability as a stigma?

5. How do these rhetorical analyses complicate previous theories of identity in composition and disability studies? How might rhetoric and composition benefit from this new understating of disability as result of this analysis?

SAMPLE

As I have mentioned, in this analysis I utilize two texts to represent a sample of counterpublic discourses of disability, which highlight three different time periods: the turn of the 20th century (1860-1940), mid-20th century (1960-1990), and finally, turn of the 21st century (2000-present). Additionally, within this discussion, texts are broadly defined and refer to much more than the written word. Thus, the two texts I utilize for analysis are the black and white film *Freaks* directed by Todd Browning first released in 1932 then again in 1962, and an autobiographical book by Michael Bernard Loggins, *Fears of Your Life* published in 2004. These texts were chosen because both influenced, and to a certain extent continue to influence, how U.S. culture, broadly speaking, thinks about disability.

More specifically, and I will discuss this in much more detail in the subsequent chapters, *Freaks* was released twice partially because discourse around disability was very charged. Namely, *Freaks* was first released and then quickly banned in 1932, which was when disability as an identity started to become more public. In sum, the turn of the 20th century marks a time when people with disabilities were “breaking out” of institutions and into the public view. That is to say that when Browning first released *Freaks*, disability was on the verge of being seen, especially through the rhetorical situation of the freak show, a business that exploited the public’s curiosity of difference. Generally speaking, freak shows titillated the curiosity of audiences, who sometimes wondered what it was like to be “abnormal” or “disabled.” However, *Freaks* revealed, by incorporating both freaks and ideal bodies, that even “norms” are lacking

because they don't meet up to ideal standards, and therefore, normal as ideal is a fallacy. In a way, since *Freaks* challenged cultural standards regarding how American society was thinking about ability, normalcy, and the body, the film was banned. Then during the mid-20th century (1962) *Freaks* was released again, signifying a shifting historical moment in disability activism, validated by things like the first disability newspaper, *The Disability Rag*. Thus, it's hardly a surprise that challenges to the "norm" (as embodied by *Freaks*) were resurrected during a time when such challenges were more widely accepted.

Furthermore, how audiences struggled to respond to and find a place for *Freaks* for 30 years affects how someone like Loggins, a fifty year-old man living with a developmental disability, is able to rhetorically produce autobiographical discourse during the turn of the 21st century. This is mainly due to the fact that a discursive and cultural repertoire was absent before the turn of the 21st century. Furthermore, in "Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation," G. Thomas Couser explains that the first autobiographical works by individuals with a disability (mostly by authors with polio) were published shortly after WWII, towards the end of the turn of the 20th century, and then it wasn't until after 1985, the mid-20th century, that autobiographical works by people with developmental disabilities, like autism, were published (Couser 532). Thus, people with disabilities, especially those with a developmental disability, have historically been spoken for by people without a disability—e.g. caretakers, doctors, nurses, and parents. So a rhetorical analysis of a recent autobiographical text is greatly informed by a film about freak shows that spoke for someone like Loggins for at least 30 years. Having said that, it is my aim to rhetorically analysis these texts within the theoretical frame of rhetoric and composition, freakery, and political disgust so as to understand and challenge how hegemony has historically constructed and appropriated disability.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

My selection of rhetorical analysis is greatly inspired by Marie Secor and Lynda Walsh's rhetorical analysis of the so-called "Sokal Hoax." In 1996 New York University (NYU) professor Alan Sokal published "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" in *Social Text*, an academic, New York-based journal about postmodern cultural studies. The text purposed quantum gravity as a discursive, social construct through invoking the rhetoric of postmodern theory and cultural studies. The day the article was published, Sokal revealed in the academic magazine, *Lingua Franca*, that "Transgressing the Boundaries" was a hoax. In Marie Secor and Lynda Walsh's article, "A Rhetorical Perspective on the Sokal Hoax: Genre, Style, and Content," they discuss the rhetorical elements of Sokal's hoax. Through rhetorical analysis, Secor and Walsh identify a particular audience, context, and textual dynamics around Sokal's article to draw conclusions about how disciplinary preconceptions can be blinding. Secor and Walsh state that "those in a position to pay careful attention to text [the editors of *Social Text*] were preoccupied by consciousness of their own position within their field, *a disciplinary nearsightedness* that led them to misread the position of the perpetrator" (89, emphasis added). In other words, Secor and Walsh reveal through rhetorical theory that by not only studying and mimicking the rhetoric of postmodern theory (i.e. the community discourse) but also by understanding the tension between conservative scientific and literary scholarship (i.e. the exigence), Sokal was able to persuade his audience that he was in fact a spokesperson from the natural sciences in support of cultural studies—when in fact, he was not (Secor and Walsh 76). This is the power rhetorical analysis has in revealing the intimate structure of particular, discursive situations.

Moreover, *rhetorical analysis* is a method of looking at a “text” with a particular kind of sensitivity to the moment in which that text occurs—again, the word “text” referring to much more than words on a page. Such analyses breaks texts down to better understand how they came to be as well as their effects on an audience. Likewise, Lloyd F. Bitzer argues in “The Rhetorical Situation” that “a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world . . . rhetoric is a mode of altering reality . . . In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive” (3-4). In sum, rhetoric is born out of *kairotic moments*—i.e. opportunities “to speak on some urgent matter” (Bitzer 2). It is an influential, responsive act that is highly situational and seeks to affect someone or something.

Additionally, in “The Rhetorical Situation Revisited” Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao argue that while Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation has been challenged, especially in terms of the role of exigence, “the usefulness of the concept itself has not been questioned” (30). For example, Garret and Xiao note how in “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” Richard E. Vatz questioned the role of exigence and whether it existed before the speaker or as a construct of the speaker through discourse (31). However, in Garret and Xiao expansion of Bitzer’s theory by acknowledging how “discourse tradition” also influences the rhetorical situation, Garret and Xiao subsequently show how Bitzer’s theory is highly situational. In sum, the tools Bitzer offers via “The Rhetorical Situation” take on different meanings within different analyses, but are nonetheless valuable in their implications.

Having said that, Bitzer’s elements of the rhetorical situation—i.e. *audience*, *exigence*, and *constraints*—are the primary tools I utilize to analyze counterpublic discourses of disability via two different texts, which highlight three different time periods. I begin each separate

analysis by first providing a short synopsis of the text and identifying the audience, followed by some general context about the historical moment so as to situate the exigence and constraints. First then, rhetoric always necessitates an *audience* because for rhetorical discourse to produce change, as demanded by the exigence, there must be an audience for this discourse to affect into action. According to Bitzer, rhetorical audiences consist of “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (8). As such, audiences are very particular to the rhetoric being produced. In Laura Bolin Carroll’s “Backpacks vs. Briefcases: Steps toward Rhetorical Analysis,” she states that “[a]udience can determine the type of language used, the formality of the discourse, the medium or delivery of the rhetoric, and even the types of reasons used that make the rhetor’s argument” (49). As such, audience is a very powerful force in rhetoric; it directs the rhetoric in fundamental ways.

Secondly, *exigence* is a situation with a particular kind of urgency, a pressing problem which people must attend to; it is the reason or necessity for the textual event. Bitzer states that the “rhetor’s decision to speak is based mainly upon the urgency of the exigence and the probability that the exigence is rhetorical” (7). Notably, Bitzer makes an important distinction and emphasis here because the rhetorical quality of exigence requires that a situation be affected by discourse. Exigence is, thus, something to be altered through discourse. For example, in the case of composing and constructing *Genesis*, the fact that I couldn’t meet with the writers to brainstorm about chapters one day because of a blizzard is not something that could be affected by discourse; that is to say, discourse couldn’t literally plow the streets of Buffalo, NY. On the other hand, the urgency of the writers to go public with their writing is part of the exigence in which the discourse of the book and several poetry readings responded to. In sum, exigence marks a situation as rhetorical.

Finally, all rhetorical situations have particular *constraints* that place limitations on the ability to transform the exigence. Bitzer identifies two different classes of constraints: “(1) those originated or managed by the rhetor and his method...and (2) those other constraints, in the situation, which may be operative” (8). In other words, there are constraints that arise from the author(s) and those that result from the structure of the situation. For example, earlier in my literature review I mentioned the challenge to make the language of *Genesis* accessible to the general public. As a constraint, this rhetorical situation can be understood in two ways: first, as something that the writers and the editor can manage through revisions and edits; and second, as a limitation of how institutions teach literacy to its citizens. To summarize, constraints can limit the strategies available to rhetorically persuade an audience or change an exigence.

To demonstrate how I will operationalize this particular rhetorical method, I offer the following brief analysis using a billboard advertisement (see Figure 1) from my hometown, Buffalo, NY. It depicts a person with an unspecified disability in a hockey uniform, smiling. There is also a logo on the ad, which indicates an association with a local organization, Aspire of WNY. Finally, there are two phrases on the ad, one a tagline for the organization, “One-of-a-kind services for one-of-a-kind people,” and second, a few lines about the image of the boy, “His dream of scoring the winning goal isn’t disabled.” Taken as a whole, the ad seems to communicate a sense of empowerment that one can experience in associating with this organization.



Figure 1. Billboard from Aspire of WNY’s branding campaign by The Martin Group, 2011.

So, to provide some context, this ad was posted in 2010-2011 during a series of journalism investigations by the *New York Times*, which scrutinized agencies that run community programs and independent living centers throughout New York State for people with disabilities (see Buettner and Hakim; Hakim). This context *situates the exigence* of this historical moment that led to a rhetorical production of this billboard. Furthermore, this ad was also posed during a time in which Self-Advocacy groups⁴ and Disability Pride were becoming more commonplace within disability communities in Buffalo, NY. So as an agency appealing to *an audience* of individuals with disabilities and, possibly their families, *the exigence* of this billboard is about an urgency to assert Aspire as a supportive agency, rather than abusive, in the hopes of inspiring that same audience to apply for their “one-of-a-kind services.” In sum, Aspire is trying to politically align themselves with disability activist groups and movements through a rhetorical act.

Simultaneously, disability activists might critique this billboard by asking questions about its *constraints*: How does this billboard actually provide political power to those affected by abuse? Do individuals with disabilities or Self-Advocates have a position on the board of directors at Aspire? Is Aspire possibly making a spectacle of disability by putting this ad on a billboard, thereby being counterproductive? In fact, one could argue that by blowing up a picture

of someone who “looks” disabled only Others people with disabilities more. That is to say that this image creates a kind of spectacle of disability.

Taken as a whole, a brief analysis of the rhetorical situation of this billboard reveals an important tension: the billboard positions an individual with a disability as deinstitutionalized, but it also creates a spectacle. Now while a chapter could potentially be devoted to this billboard, the purpose here is to briefly display a possible analysis of a rhetorical situation. More importantly, this brief example highlights the important social tension that is unveiled when thinking critically about audience, exigence, and constraints. In other words, this brief example emphasizes that the rhetorical situation, as defined by Bitzer, takes emphasis off the invention and imagination of the rhetor and acknowledges the audience, institutions, and actions that create, maintain, and possibly challenge discursive appropriations of disability. In sum, social change is about more than being able to “speak well,” it is rhetorical.

Having said that, the next two chapters will rhetorically analyze the two texts I described above, *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life*. These analyses will include a discussion of the audience, exigence, and constraints, as well as the cultural politics of disgust. Furthermore, and in light of the limitation of working with such a small sample of texts, the discussion of disgust acts as a method to reinforce important conclusions about the rhetorical situation of counterpublic discourses of disability over a century. Finally, I will then conclude with a discussion about the rhetorical patterns within each analyses and how they show that counterpublic discourses of disability, as reinforced by their emotional politics, both sustain and challenge the normal/abnormal binary that marginalizes and Others disability as a social identity.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: TOD BROWNING'S *FREAKS*, 1932 AND 1962

In moving forward to the heart of my research it is necessary to restate its purpose. The purpose here is to explore the political and social dimensions of the disabled identity with the tools of rhetoric and composition. More specifically, this thesis looks at how disability as a sociopolitical identity is rhetorically expressed over time through counterpublic texts, like a formula slowly unraveling. As an inherently emotional experience, and living within a very particular emotional culture, disability has wavered between emotions like disgust and compassion politically.⁵ As mentioned earlier, the stigmatization of disability as “abnormal” crosses disciplinary boundaries. That is to say that disability is significant for compositionists, emotion theorists, and disability rights activists alike.

For instance, in “Becoming Visible,” Brenda Jo Brueggemann, et al. outlined why disability matters to composition: first, composition concerns itself with how language constructs and maintains the Other, second, compositionists hone in on the intersections of theory and practice, and finally, composition has an investment in challenging binaries (371). In other words, we as people are inscribed by the world, but we also have the power to (re)write it. In fact, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed shares a similar sentiment about emotions: “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects” (10). All in all, texts produce us as we produce them, and as I will show first with Tod Browning’s *Freaks*, and then in the next chapter with Michael Bernard Loggins’s *Fears of Your Life*, counterpublic texts of disability prove to be a rich source of radical attempts that not only reaffirm, but, more importantly, reappropriate the Other.

Furthermore, Brueggemann et al. also offers an intimate and crucial statement that circulates within disability circles: “If we all live long enough, we’ll all be disabled. We are all TABs—temporarily able-bodies” (369). And then in “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson extends and reinforces the same notion:

understanding how disability operates as an identity category and cultural concept will enhance how we understand what it is to be human, our relationships with one another, and the experience of embodiment . . . disability is the most human of experiences, touching every family and—if we live long enough—touching us all. (5)

In sum, there is no getting away from disability. Even as society tries to build walls around it, it knows no boundaries; it discriminates against no body. Such an existence validates the primary framework of rhetoric and composition for this thesis—a field known for its interdisciplinary disposition.

In addition to this theoretical purpose, this analysis also utilizes Lloyd Bitzer’s elements of the rhetorical situation—i.e. audience, exigence, and constraints—to discuss the ways that representations of carnival freaks simultaneously maintained and transformed the scripted body of disability around the turn of the 20th century, from around 1840 until about 1940, “the period of sideshow’s greatest popularity” (Bogdan 1988, p.ix).⁶ Additionally, this chapter will briefly touch on the mid-20th century (about 1960-1990) and then more fully expanded upon it in the following chapter’s discussion of *Fears of Your Life*. That said, while the history of disability certainly does not begin with freak shows or exhibitionism, it is an important moment in this history. As I outline further below, freak shows play a crucial role in shifting cultural attitudes about disability. Such fluid attitudes leads to a reinforcement of later alternative, public literacy practices I will further outline in the next chapter.

More to the point, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, I apply rhetorical theory for this analysis because rhetoric is persuasive in the sense that it aims to create or instigate change.

More particularly, a rhetorical analysis can transform a moment in history thought to be a simple, stagnant moment in the past, immune to any renovations whatsoever. In a way, transforming how to think of the past can reappropriate the identities lived out in the now. So my aim is emancipatory, with a scrutinizing, intellectual eye to alter our understandings of disability by drawing upon the rhetorical patterns within an interdisciplinary, theoretical framework—i.e. composition studies, disability studies, and emotion studies.

BACKGROUND SYNOPSIS

For the first part of this rhetorical analysis then, the text I utilize to discuss such representations of freaks during the turn of the 20th century and the beginning of the mid-20th century is the motion picture *Freaks* directed by Tod Browning, first released in 1932 and resurrected in 1962. As I will explain in more detail later, *Freaks* is a groundbreaking text in the history of disability. It represents disability in primarily two ways: first, with sympathy and compassion, and second, with disgust and horror. More specifically, and in terms of synopsis, the first half of the film focuses on building sympathy and compassion for a variety of freaks, some with disabilities. The audience is introduced to the limbless, the small, the big, the stuttering, and so forth through images of everyday activities, like eating, cleaning, and maintaining relationships. Soon after a strange love story begins to formulate. Hans (originally Frieda's lover) falls for Cleo, the ideal, able-bodied aerialist, who is in the midst of beginning a relationship with Hercules, the ideal, able-bodied strong man. Since Hans is a dwarf and Cleo is able-bodied, she does not take him seriously in his romantic endeavors. But once she learns of his riches, she decides to marry him only to try to kill him later and take his money. During the wedding reception (see Figure 2), the film takes a turn by invoking revulsion and disgust. For several minutes the freaks all drink and dance and chant three phrases, "Gooble gobble," "We

accept her,” and “One of us.” Immediately after the reception, when Cleo shows blatant disgust (and disrespect) at the reality of becoming a freak by marrying one, the freaks seek revenge on Cleo and Hercules. The film then ends with the freaks crawling through the mud, castrating Hercules (although this scene was cut from the original script), and transforming Cleo into a chicken woman (Hawkins 272). Hans and Frieda then reunite in the end and all is well.



Figure 2. Wedding Reception Still of Cleo, Hans, and Hercules, *Freaks*, 1932.

As *Freaks* blatantly states at the beginning, “You laughed at them, shuttered at them. And yet, but for the accident of birth, you might be even as they are. They did not ask to be brought into the world, but into the world they came. Their code is a law unto themselves: offend one, and you offend them all!” Due to this play between emotions like compassion and disgust, *Freaks* contains a critical social residue one can only now bring to full fruition with the tools offered by an interdisciplinary field like rhetoric and composition.

AUDIENCE, EXIGENCE, AND CONSTRAINTS⁷

During the turn of the 20th century, roughly the period between 1840 and 1940, American carnivals, circuses, and dime museums experienced both a steep rise and sudden fall in acceptance. The exigence of Browning's film *Freaks*, a point of significant decline in sideshow popularity, is a response to the cultural conditions of its time. For example, *Freaks* was originally released in 1932, not long after the box office successes of horror films *Frankenstein* (1910) and *Dracula* (1931). It is safe to assume that production studios, like Universal and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), took note of which movies were selling out. That is to say that if Americans were going to pay to see horror films, production managers (being the good capitalists they were) were going to maintain their own trademark, while giving their audience what they wanted: shock and horror (Borst 1973; Savada 2004).

Browning's *Freaks* is part of this dialectic between audience desire and production economics, but it is still much different than the other horror films of its time. Its exigence is distinct because it has appealed to more than just the avid horror-moviegoer. Because *Freaks* is set within a circus and features "real" freak (freaks that are freaks both on and off camera), it has an intimate relationship with the sideshow culture. As Rachel Adams argues in *Sideshow U.S.A.*, sideshows are "a stage for playing out many of the century's most charged social and political controversies" (Adams 2). Furthermore, Michael Chemers in *Staging Stigma* outlines how the freak show was also able to transcend many cultural barriers due to things like low admission costs; appeals to education *and* entertainment; and reliance on the visual rather than the linguistic for non-English speakers (71-4). Therefore, its audience is a noteworthy one: a democratic audience of mixed class, race, gender, ability, etc. In sum, the setting of freak shows offer up "[f]raudulent, thrilling, exploitative, and sometimes deeply moving" experiences that inhabit

spaces in films and literature “where unlikely individuals come together to contemplate the strangers within and the strangers without” (Adams 228). And like the sideshow, *Freaks* has received both extreme disapproval and appreciation. As Joan Hawkins recalls in ““One of Us”: Tod Browning’s *Freaks*,”

MGM withdrew the film from circulation shortly after its release. While the film could be seen, without the MGM logo, on the exploitation film circuit, it remained unavailable for mainstream viewing in the United States from 1932 (when MGM shelved it) until its revival in 1962. (Hawkins 266)

So initially in 1932 MGM took the film off its reels, and partly because of the negative press responses, which affected profits at the larger, money-making theatres. As a constraint difficult to rise up from, this is how *Freaks* inhabited the world until its revival via counter-culture “cultists”⁸ at the Venice Film Festival in 1962, where several years later it was hailed as a “minor masterpiece” (Adams 63; Church; Fiedler 297-8). So due to the spirit of the freak show, *Freaks* has a particular and curious audience, exigence, and constraints.

Before I further discuss these rhetorical elements though, it is important to further develop how *Freaks* has a special relationship with disability. First, it’s necessary to differentiate between a few different kinds of freaks, because not all freaks have a disability. For my purpose, I’ll identify three: born freaks, made freaks, and working acts. First, born freaks are individuals who are born with a difference, like an armless person. Most often these freaks are living with a disability, and can either be performers in a freak show or just put up for exhibition (i.e. put on a platform to be stared at). Also, the exhibitions of freaks are frequently the area of freak shows that popular culture and disability activism rejects as cruel, violent, and inhumane (see Bogdan 1988, p. 279-287; Gerber 1990 and 1996). Second, made freaks are individuals who create their physical difference, like tattooed people. Like the born freak, made freaks can either be performers or just put up for exhibition. Finally, working acts are individuals who acquire a

thrilling or dangerous skill, like sword swallowing or fire eating. Working acts can also be born and/or made freaks, but are always performers. However, it should be noted that even while performing all freaks are still put up on exhibition to a certain extent because of their relationship with the audience. That is to say that the audience comes to the freak show for the sole reason of looking at difference. What is more, while these three categories can certainly cross over, for my purposes when I invoke the word “freak” I primarily imply the meaning of the born freak, so I speak of both performing and exhibition, and subsequently, invoke the tension between them. Also, *Freaks* feature all three types of freaks, but primarily born freaks. In fact, in the credits, the film only lists one made freak (the Human Skeleton) and one working act (the Sword Swallower).

More to the point, *Freaks* displays a relationship with disability by simply featuring people with disabilities, like dwarfs, the Living Torso, a Siamese twin, a few Pinheads,⁹ a half boy, and so forth. Even more interesting is Browning’s relationship with the circus sideshow before *Freaks*:

He had run away from his home in Louisville, Kentucky at the ripe age of sixteen years to the lure of the sawdust where, under the canvas of the big top, he made his mark as a clown, acrobat, ringmaster, and contortionists. In fact, as part of a carnival troupe, the talented Browning did almost everything from driving stakes to playing the role of “Bosco, the Snake Eater” . . . he had the showman’s blood running through his veins. (Savada)

So in a way, *Freaks* was produced as a response from Browning to unveil a truth (lowercase “t”) about his experiences with the sideshow: freaks live as “normal” human beings do. They eat and clean and sleep and shit. They experience pain and sometimes fall in love. And although Browning displayed a trend in recalling images and memories of the sideshow, like in *The Show* (1927) and *The Unknown* (1927), *Freaks* remains quite different from these other productions. More specifically, *Freaks* took place within a circus, and utilized the most freak characters, who

were freaks off camera too. That is to say that the freaks featured in *Freaks* were not taking off a costume when they left set; Daisy and Violet Hilton left the set as Siamese twins, and Harry Earles (Hans) left the set as a little person.

What is more important though is the role freaks generally played within the social movement of disability. In her essay “Disability Culture Rap,” featured in *The Ragged Edge: The Disability Experience from the Pages of the First Fifteen Years of the Disability Rag*, Cheryl Marie Wade pays homage to freaks:

Naming and claiming our ancestors, our heroes. Like those circus and carnival freaks, the first disability performance artists. Those rowdy outcasts who learned to emphasize their Otherness, turn it into work, a career, a life. Oh, it may have been a harsh life, sometimes even brutal, but a life: they kept themselves from being locked away in those institutions designed for the excessively different that have always been such a prominent part of the American economy. And so we claim these survivors as our ancestors and we honor them. (Shaw 16)

As I mention in the first chapter to this discussion, freaks can certainly unlock a whole world of exploitative issues. But freaks also signify a moment of growth and liberation in the history of disability. As I’ll explain in more detail in the next chapter, without starting a trend to deinstitutionalize persons with a disability, counterpublic discourses might have never been a part of the disability movement. In fact, there might not have been a movement at all. As Wade states, freaks were “the first disability performance artists” (Shaw 16). Or as Chemers puts it, “While many persons with disabilities languish in attics and asylums, freaks gain exposure. While many persons with disabilities suffer extreme poverty, freaks make money. While many persons with disabilities remain isolated, freaks build community” (17). In sum, freaks survived outside of institutions and thrived in a violent era. Therefore, the residue of *Freaks* speaks to current, yet significant historical trends in how “normal” people can’t imagine living with such a horrendous punishment from God, and yet, cheer at the man with prosthetic legs as he crosses

the finish line in the Olympics. This is the boundary upon which the disabled body is and has been written, which personifies an unstable cultural view of disability to which I will now turn.

One cultural condition during the turn of the 20th century that informs the unusual exigence of *Freaks* is the scientific revolution as inspired by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) (Chemers). Notably, this revolution was framed by three wars—i.e. the American Civil War, World War I, and the beginnings of World War II. Overall, Darwinism signified a growing intellectualism regarding the origins and evolution of the human species, but was connoted very differently at times. On the one hand, Darwin's theories alluded to a supportive view of variety within the human species (Chemers 61-66). That is to say that disability could have been proof of the wrath of God, a punishment, say, of the sinners having sex before marriage, but with the introduction of Darwinism, disability could have also been part of an evolutionary species that adapts to changes in a particular environment. In fact, circus sideshows (the setting of *Freaks*) were saturated with the rhetoric of Darwinism, featuring not only the half-man/half-monkey (the "What Is It?") but an overabundance of variety in bodily and psychic forms. Therefore, part of the exigence for freak shows in general, and thus, for *Freaks*, deals with a growing curiosity about Darwin's concepts of variety and natural selection.

On the other hand, the same theories served "to place disabled people along the wayside as evolutionary defectives to be surpassed by natural selection" (Davis 7). That is to say that the same Darwinism that produced attitudes of curiosity at sideshows also went on to motivate and titillate eugenicists, the forefathers of fascist regimes like Nazi Germany, who promoted sterilization in the name of preserving the species (Barnes; Davis). Moreover, in the early 1900s it was completely legal in the U.S. through Eugenic Laws to segregate and discriminate individuals diagnosed with a disability through coerced institutionalization and sterilization

(Dybwad). Then during the onset of World War II and the Holocaust, the world became a stage in which social Darwinism and eugenics were put to a moral test (Davis 7-11). In sum, Darwinism as both a theory of evolutionary adaptations and of ethnic cleansing presented a sense of urgency for change that only a diverse, democratic audience (like that of the accessible, educational, and entertaining freak show) could act upon.

However, while these connotations of Darwinism certainly communicate a kind of urgency that demands discursive action, they don't fully explain why *Freaks* was banned. In many ways, the fact that *Freaks* was "shelved" (the main constraint of the film to fully transform its audience) not long after its release in 1932 could suggest that this diverse, Western audience understood the scientific revolution as a moral obligation to the species. That is to say that Darwinism was understood as about human origins, not as a strategy to "perfect" the species. So a horror film that concludes with representations of disability as monstrous could seem unappealing in light of commonplace sentiments against Germany's Nazi regime, even despite the compassionate tendencies of the first half of the film. For when the U.S. participated in a global affair *against* ethnic cleansing, how could the democratic public be interested in overtly reinforcing difference as horrific? In sum, it could be argued that *Freaks* just hit too close to "home," and was, therefore, shelved.

More specifically, during the three wars of the turn of the 20th century, as many soldiers returned home shell shocked, limbless, and sometimes paralyzed, how could U.S. society advocate alongside eugenicists of WWII for institutionalizing and sterilizing the disabled (a new category to which vets were being ascribed to) and not look cruel? In fact, many disability studies theorists have argued that veterans played a crucial role in the changing attitudes about disability taking place during this time period (e.g. Barnes; Couser; Linton; Seibers 2010;

Tremblay). For example, legislation like the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944, the 1944 Education Act, the National Health Service Act of 1948, and the National Assistance Act of 1948 was particularly influenced by “the general concern felt towards disabled ex-servicemen during and after the 1914-1918 and 1939-45 wars” (Barnes 27). In consideration of such context, it is no surprise that reviews, like that of the *New York Times*, carried a strong disapproval of *Freaks*, such as it being “so loathesome I am nauseated thinking about it . . . It is not fit to be shown anywhere” (Fiedler 296). In other words, the public struggled with how to represent disability culturally, partially because many veterans acquire a disability while serving. It was simply distasteful to represent disability as monstrous freaks rolling around in the mud (see Figure 3), so MGM removed its logo from *Freaks*.



Figure 3. Still of freaks in mud, *Freaks*, 1932.

Additionally, *Freaks* toyed around with the idea of sexuality and disability. As mentioned throughout this chapter, the first half of the film introduces its audience to freaks through images of everyday activities. For example, the armless woman is seen eating, the Siamese twins are

seen making their bed, and the Pinheads are seen in conversation. More to the point though, *Freaks* expresses an “explosion of sexualities” during these scenes of every day activity (Adams 64). For instance, Phroso the Clown attempts to engage in a relationship with one of the Siamese twins, played by Daisy and Violet Hilton. In one scene Phroso pinches Daisy’s character and asks Violet’s character if she feels it (see Figure 4), “an explicit curiosity about each twin’s ability to experience the other’s sexual pleasure” (Adams 73). Both the original script (the one that featured explicit sexual mutilation), and the revised one that made it to the screen, centers on such expressions of sexuality. In sum, no matter what way audiences look at *Freaks*, it is always at least about a little person flirting, falling in love, and marrying an ideal person. For even when Cleo tries to kill Hans in the end, she must fool him enough through displays of sexual affection to marry him.



Figure 4. Still of Phroso the Clown with Daisy and Violet Hilton, *Freaks*, 1932.

What's interesting though, is not only the wide variety of sexualities expressed outside of Hans and Cleo's relationship, but rather how this "explosion" is rhetorically situated alongside a dialogue about how to "dispel the stereotypical association of the disabled body with evil and monstrosity" (Adams 71). That is to say, audiences are not supposed to be afraid of *Freaks*, of their own curiosity of how Siamese twins "do it." In fact, one thing most contemporary theorists have in common when discussing *Freaks*, is the notable uncritical analysis of compassion within one scene (e.g. Adams; Hawkins; Fielder). In this scene, Madame Tetralini, "the owner of the circus," and a few freaks are outside the circus, in the countryside (Hawkins 268). Two men, one a groundskeeper at the circus, walk through the same countryside talking about the "horrible" and "twisted" freaks. Once Tetralini and the freaks come into view, the two men are completely disgusted (see Figure 5). Tetralini explains to the men that these freaks are "children," and the men reply that they are "welcome to remain." Tetralini then reinforces the conversation by stating to the freaks "How many times have I told you not to be frightened. Have I not told you, God looks after all his children." Although each theorist cited above analyzes this scene for different purpose, what each essentially assumes about the scene is its disruption of the stigmatization of disability. In other words, Tetralini's insistence on the freaks as children, and disability as childlike, defines disability as something audiences should feel sorry for, should feel compassion for and, therefore, instigates a kind of humanness to disability.¹⁰ In situating the sexuality of disability alongside this narrative of compassion, it positions such sexuality as not purely disgusting, not something to sterilize and institutionalize. Such non-traditional notations about the sexuality of disability during this time, again, could have led to a temporary revocation of *Freaks*. And as I will discuss below, these emotional narratives can be further interpreted in

two paradoxical ways: one, to reaffirm disability as inferior and two, to upset normative standards about what the body is able to do.



Figure 5. Still of Madame Tetralini, two men, and freaks, *Freaks*, 1932.

Before denaturalizing such narratives, I will conclude this section with a brief discussion about the curious resurrection of *Freaks*. More specifically, why after 30 years did it resurface, and as “part of the canon of the counterculture” (Fiedler 298)? It could be argued that in the midst of the Vietnam War and post-World War II, *Freaks* resurrected from a sense of nostalgia. The general American population wanted to be transported back to a time when “wars were won,” and subcultures were “really fighting for something.” It could also be argued that old horror films have a shelf life of 30 years before becoming “hip.” But the mystery of this resurrection echoes the general mystery of the sideshow itself (which is a fitting way to let the freak show rest in my pages). As Chemers notes,

What this complex history does reveal, however . . . is, once again, the inside joke that freakery has always, in one form or another and with varying levels of success, managed

to perpetuate on its detractors and eulogists. *Just when historians and critics seem ready to start carving the freak show's tombstone, up it springs, from its own ashes...more subversives, more alluring, and naughtier than ever.* (124, emphasis added)

The freak show as a location that, frankly, just won't die, speaks to a cultural need, a desire to look at the most "loathesome" and disgusting of the species. For, how could a woman really have a beard? It's just not normal!

So although the shelving of *Freaks* limited its exigence to transform popular notions of disability during the turn of the 20th century, its resurrection suggests a so-called second chance to turn stigma against itself during the mid-20th century. In other words, disgust involves a certain amount of attraction (as outlined in the first chapter to this analysis), without which the freak show, and thus, *Freaks*, wouldn't be the successful enterprises they are and have been. Put more simply, audiences just can't let go of their curiosity, an important and sticky element, as I will show in the section below, to the formation of disability studies, and therefore, composition's relationship with disability.

DISGUST REAFFIRMS AND REVOLUTIONIZES DISABILITY

The final section to this chapter aims to denaturalize the emotions associated with the film *Freaks*. As I have mentioned throughout this discussion, my focus is that of disgust. However, because of the kind of analysis I utilize with critical emotion studies, disgust is not regarded as a standalone emotion. It is also not regarded as internal, or something that originates within the body. As Ahmed states, "emotions circulate," and "move between bodies" (10). Moreover, to denaturalize the disgust referenced in the above section, I will show how disgust is "sticky," what "sticks" to it, and, finally, how it reveals not just a reaffirmation of a hegemonic notion of difference, but also how disgust revolutionizes disability.

First, how is disgust “sticky”? And what “sticks” to it? In order to address these concerns it is necessary to describe what stickiness is. According to Ahmed, it is impractical to understand disgust without understanding what it comes into contact with: “we can think of stickiness as an effect of surfacing, *as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs*” (90). Therefore, the stickiness of disgust is like a time capsule; it tells the stories of the bodies, objects, and signs that have stuck to it. For example, concerning *Freaks*, I discussed a commonly analyzed scene with Madame Tetralini, a scene of humanity and compassion (Adams; Hawkins; Fielder). What I called attention to above was about the relationship between disgusting, “explosive” sexualities and a narrative of compassion, and more importantly, how said theorists have not critically analyzed emotions, but rather naturalized them. In other words, a reading of *Freaks* as separately humane and horrific tends to normalize disgust as having no relationship with compassion. As William Ian Miller states in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, what such theorists don’t acknowledge is that “[t]o feel disgust is human and humanizing” (11). Put simply, disgust can have a sticky encounter with compassion. Disgust isn’t isolated from other feelings of humanity. It can transform compassion and vice versa, and this is precisely what is happening in *Freaks*, what its exigence is trying to transform regarding public perceptions of disability.

More specifically, in returning to the two scenes in *Freaks* highlighted above with Madame Tetralini and Phroso the Clown, who pinches one of the Siamese twins, it is evident that disgust is functioning not within the audience’s individual bodies but within cultural values. Disability has a history of being regarded as impure and subnormal, and “[i]t is culture, not nature, that draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy, those crucial boundaries disgust is called on to police” (Miller 15). That is to say, disability is stuck to disgust, and individual audience members are not making “original” or “authentic” judgments about

freaks, ability, or disgust in a movie theater. There's a longstanding emotional current here, and it's moving so fast that the audience can't easily see the politics of stickiness, let alone the stickiness itself. Therefore, the audience of *Freaks* assumes the emotions are "theirs" and disgust is naturalized.

Furthermore, this current is, in fact, a political tactic to naturalize emotions. Ahmed calls these currents "affective economies" and states that bodies, objects, and signs "generate effects" by moving between each other, and "it is the failure" of emotions, like disgust, "to be located in a given object or figure, which allows it to generate the effects that it does" (44-49). In other words, affective economies call attention to the concealed movement between the many things that stick (social, material, and psychic) to disgust. So when Phroso pinches Daisy's character, a Siamese twin, it is not only situated with a compassionate narrative about the humanness of disability, but within the histories of what sticks and has stuck to disgust. Disgust still invokes feelings of dirt and "sickening invasions," which is "bound up with questions of familiarity and strangeness" (Ahmed 86, 83). Phroso pinches Daisy's character because Siamese twins are strange and unfamiliar, and it, thus, invokes a sense of disgust and repulsion. It is a moment of intense affective momentum, which builds into the end of the wedding reception scene where the normative Cleo shouts "Freaks! Freaks!" (see Figure 6) and the audience is jerked right back into normative assumptions of disability. Disability as a form of freakishness is thus reaffirmed as a deviant and unfamiliar difference in *Freaks*.



Figure 6. Still of Cleo, *Freaks*, 1932.

What's more interesting though is that a reaffirmation of difference is not the only emotional interpretation *Freaks* offers its audience. *Freaks* utilizes emotional rhetorics in a way that calls attention to how emotions can be interpreted in many, and often contradictory ways. Because former theorists have not taken advantage of this truly groundbreaking text by denaturalizing the affective economies of *Freaks*, its effects in transforming audiences have not been fully documented. While I have referenced compassion quite frequently, and how it is truly central to this interpretation, Ahmed also offers a radically new understanding of disgust, which I would like to outline first.

So Ahmed argues that disgust is a “deeply ambivalent” emotion and that in feeling disgust individuals are drawn to “the very objects that are felt to be repellent” (84). In sum, disgust brings people closer to that which is disgusting only so they can pull away to register an object as offensive. Ahmed calls this a “double movement” and argues that this movement towards the disgusting is “forgotten . . . as the body pulls back” away from the disgusting (85). What's remarkable about her understanding of disgust is that it offers both opportunities to

reaffirm and transform normatives. For example, Phroso pinches Daisy's character not only because Siamese twins are strange and unfamiliar, but because an audience has a desire to make this difference less strange and unfamiliar. Despite the purposeful fact that the audience forgets as soon as witnessing occurs, desire is still stuck to disgust, which is to say that in *Freaks* there is a desire to transform perceptions of disability through the freak. In other words, disgust also upsets normative understandings to segregate and separate disability.

Additionally, as it is tied to compassion, disgust further signifies a desire to complicate the abnormal/normal boundary by understanding the difference of disability through greater parameters. In *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering*, Elizabeth V. Spelman outlines three responses to suffering, one of which is suitable to my analysis here: “[s]ufferers as the objects of compassion” (6). In her discussion of this response, Spelman states, “[o]ur emotions, or at least some of them, can be highly revelatory of whom and what we care or don't care about” (100). Now, although Spelman offers up a critical analysis of compassion, for my purposes here I am going to keep it simple, but it is only because her analysis of compassion is more fully applicable after the next rhetorical analysis. Therefore, the sense of compassion conveyed in and felt through *Freaks* reveals that audiences have a desire to empathize with individuals with a disability. As an indication of “how we see the world,” compassion signifies that the audiences *see* disability (102). This is quite remarkable considering the invisibility of disability for centuries through systems of segregation and institutionalization. For part of maintaining a boundary, like abnormal/normal, is the amount of visibility received in everyday discursive expression, like in films, which works to build and maintain the hegemonic status quo. In sum, simply seeing disability expands the parameters for understanding difference.

More specifically, *Freaks* as a public release that was resurrected after an outright rejection signifies that the public was interested in engaging in and struggling with notions of disability, like how people *have* disabilities, rather than *being* disabled. In other words, ability is not something that makes a person, but rather accompanies that person in a complex state of being. So although *Freaks* may not have been the first public text to begin engaging disability in such a manner, it certainly highlights an important historical moment in non-normative and non-standard discourse that challenged the hegemonic status quo. And it's important to mention that even within these transformative scenarios, audiences still didn't feel any better about the film's discursive engagement. In fact, feeling better does not mean that needs for social justice have been met, and therefore, should not be a considerable aim for compositionists when thinking about one's role with human agency and social change. As Ahmed states in her conclusion,

Feeling better is not a sign that justice has been done, and nor should it be reified as the goal of political struggle. But feeling better does still matter, as it is about learning to live with the injuries that threaten to make life impossible. The projects of reconciliation and reparations are not about the 'nation' recovering: they are about whether those who are the victims of injustice can find a way of living in the nation that feels better through the process of speaking about the past, and through exposing the wounds that get concealed by the 'truths' of a certain history. (201)

In sum, denaturalizing the emotions of *Freaks* is about giving voice to the historical injustices of, for example, institutionalism, segregation, and sterilization of freaks and people with disabilities. It doesn't feel better to expose the wounds, and it's not supposed to. Counter-discourses and discursive acts are not meant to be comfortable or feel good, neither is exposing or denaturalizing them. As mentioned in the literature review, since rhetoric and composition relies heavily on doing "feel-good" work, it is necessary for rhetoric and composition to be wary of the illusions of "feel-good" justice. But as the "norms" specifically learn about how "they" make life "impossible," as well as how life is made "impossible" to "them" because of such violent

reservations about difference, feeling better matters. In the next chapter, while I will skip over a lot historically, I will continue to highlight such counter-discursive acts concerning disability, which will again complicate the clear cut understandings of freaks, disability, and counterpublic texts like *Freaks*.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: MICHAEL BERNARD LOGGINS'S *FEARS OF YOUR LIFE*, 2004

The second piece of this rhetorical analysis moves deeper into issues of representation regarding imagining and writing disability as difference. While I pass over much historically due to the limitations of space, it is important to acknowledge that even the smallest sampling of discourse can trigger and, subsequently, change a lot. So now that I have covered what some of these representations of disability have been previously (i.e. within the film *Freaks*) it is important to move into an autobiographical text produced more recently: *Fears of Your Life* by Michael Bernard Loggins (2004). More specifically, although Tod Browning displayed an intimate relationship with disability through *Freaks*, he himself did not have a disability.¹¹ That is to say, making public the social and cultural work of a rhetorical analysis of representations of disability involves looking at public writing by authors both without and with a disability, because people with disabilities are represented by people without disabilities through discourse and represent themselves through discourse. Therefore, it is crucial to account for both kinds of rhetors in discussing representations of disability as they do overlap and conflict in important ways. For example, and in light of critical emotion studies, this section will further complicate disgust's relationships with disability, and thus, the discourses that create and reappropriate disability, by expanding sticky notions of compassion to empathy and pity. For compassion's relationship with disgust signifies more than a simple seeing in considering how audiences "choose" to act in response to an alternative public text produced by a specific rhetor. In sum, the purpose for this section is to continue exploring the political and social dimensions of disability with the tools of rhetoric and composition, and critical emotion studies.

Moreover, in *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, Christian R. Weissler defines public writing as consisting

of written discourse that attempts to engage an audience of local, regional, or national groups or individuals in order to bring about progressive societal change. Such discourse *intends* to be free of any coercive constraints or forms of domination, and it hopes to influence what Habermas calls “public opinion.” (90)

In other words, part of the purpose for alternative public writing, like Michael Bernard Loggins’s *Fears of Your Life* (the subject of this section) or even *Starlight’s Genesis*, is to instigate some sort of sociopolitical change. Like *Genesis*, *Fears of Your Life* is trying to rewrite what disability means and what it can do. Understanding counterpublic writing as an attempt to bring about change only further validates what a rhetorical analysis is trying to do in uncovering the rhetorical elements (i.e. audience, exigence, and constraints) that call for and lead to change. Put simply, public writing as it is about instigating change is rhetorical, and not just in the act of producing and making such discourse, but also in utilizing that discourse for rhetorical analysis, because a rhetorical analysis keeps the political current for change moving, which is extremely important in the face of constraints. As Weisser states above, counterpublic discourse “intend to be free of any coercive constraints or forms of domination,” but sometimes it is impossible to rid discourse of such constraints, and a rhetorical analysis reveals such limitations (90). Furthermore, such a critical awareness spawning from a rhetorical analysis is far more than pessimistic or an expression of an impenetrable roadblock, for it is simply a more thorough method to reveal and challenge the oppressive narratives of hegemony.

Having said that, this section continues to utilize Lloyd Bitzer’s elements of the rhetorical situation—i.e. audience, exigence, and constraints—to discuss the ways that disability is represented contemporarily within public discourse. In this case, Loggins’s *Fears of Your Life* represents an active form of reappropriation. As mentioned earlier, *Fears of Your Life* tries to rewrite what disability means, what it is able to do, and how it can be embodied. In addition to these rhetorical elements, I choose Loggins’s book for a few more reasons: First and quite

simply, it was a narrative I had not read before this analysis. In fact, I was completely surprised and excited to find a publication that wasn't *Genesis*, but carried a similar purpose and seemed to face similar struggles as a public publication. It literally put a jump in my step for weeks.

Second, *Fears of Your Life* comes out of an art program similar to Starlight, called Creativity Explored. The program is based in San Francisco, CA, a place known in disability communities for its creative, art education programs for people with disabilities—i.e. Starlight was inspired by art programs in San Francisco. And third, it was originally a zine, which addresses important constraints when I later consider implications for rhetoric and composition about modes of integration for counterpublic texts of disability.

Finally, I would like to, yet again, address the interdisciplinary situation of this analysis. Rhetoric and composition, much like emotion and disability studies, is saturated with the challenge to spread its wings and have a disciplinary home at the same time. For example, in a 2010 *College Composition and Communication* (CCC) review of four books that attempt to survey and provide a history of the field of rhetoric and composition, Chris M. Anson states: “selecting ten books wouldn't come close to giving us an accurate picture of the core of the field or suggest questions we need to investigate beyond its current borders” (227). Likewise, in a similar review essay of six research methods book from September 2012, Rebecca Rickly urges CCC readers to “go beyond looking only at books in our discipline” (236). In other words, composition, like other critical fields of study situated within the liberal arts, struggles with and embraces this sense of interdisciplinarity. For example, disability studies is often based on a similar paradox: the cultural construct to segregate disability and disability as a way of being that doesn't discriminate (e.g. Brueggemann; Garland-Thomson 2002). In other words, both composition and disability are caught in an emotional web between frustrating, limiting cultural

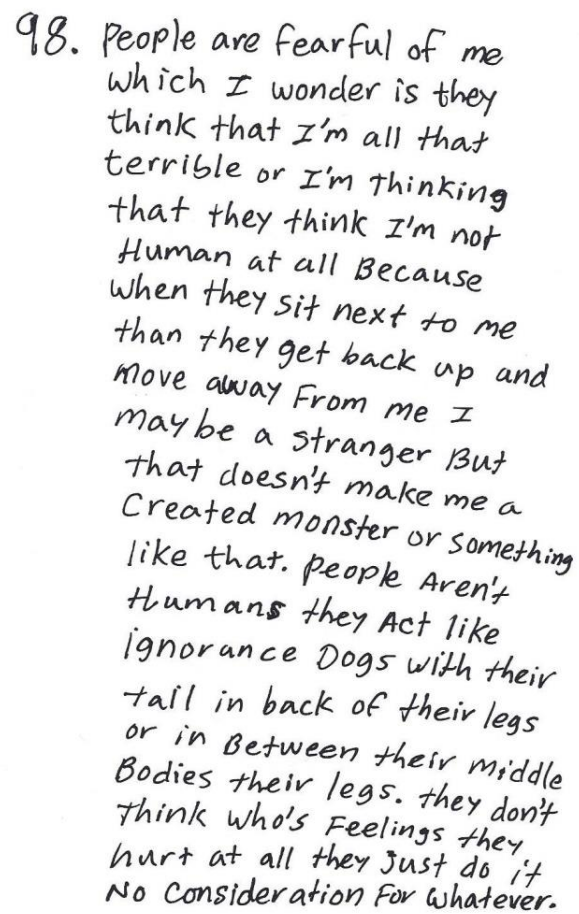
standards and a way of being that is centered upon resisting such standards. This analysis acknowledges this challenge, and flies with a sense of home anyways, which is to say that there are significant benefits to composition when drawing from other disciplines. In fact, this analysis, and more importantly, its implications about the role writing and discourse play in human agency and social change would be completely impossible without such a disposition.

BACKGROUND SYNOPSIS

Michael Bernard Loggins is a man, now in his fifties, with a developmental disability who lives in San Francisco, CA. He has published two books through the publication house Manic D Press, *Imaginationally* and *Fears of Your Life*. According to the radio show *This American Life*, Loggins, when first composing *Fears of Your Life*, felt he had particular fears in life that “just put him on edge. And one day he felt like he needed to write them down, to get them out of his system. And so he started writing, numbering each fear. And it quickly got to 10, then to 20, then to 30 and 40 and 50 until he had 138 of them” (“234: Say Anything”). *Fears of Your Life*, originally published in the artist’s zine *Whipper Snapper Nerd*, traveled from Xeroxed paper with staples to wall installations to, finally, a hardcover with glossy pages (Cavagnaro).¹² As mentioned before, it was composed at an arts program for adults with developmental disabilities in San Francisco, called Creativity Explored. The first section “Things that you are very Fearful of” is a collection of 138 fears. The second section “What Fears Can do to You” is a collection of 45 fears, which sometimes include images (i.e. hand drawings by Loggins).

Interestingly, the entire collection of fears is all in Loggins’s handwriting, and there are no page numbers. Figure 7 (below) is an excerpt from the first section that shows the current look of the book so as to provide an image for the following analysis. When I refer to *Fears of Your Life*, this is the handwriting, the personal touch I invoke, not just the words themselves, or

the ideas. Put simply, although *Fears of Your Life* now has a hardcover, in many ways it still carries with it the political and personal scent of a zine. As I will further analyze later, Loggins's handwriting is a curious element that embodies the disgust, empathy, and pity circulating around cultural meanings of disability.

A photograph of a handwritten page from a book. The text is written in cursive, slanted to the right, and is numbered '98.' at the top left. The handwriting is somewhat messy and expressive, with varying line heights and some ink bleed-through. The paper appears slightly aged or off-white.

98. People are fearful of me
which I wonder is they
think that I'm all that
terrible or I'm thinking
that they think I'm not
Human at all Because
When they sit next to me
than they get back up and
move away From me I
maybe a stranger But
that doesn't make me a
Created monster or something
like that. people Aren't
Humans they Act like
Ignorance Dogs with their
tail in back of their legs
or in Between their middle
Bodies their legs. they don't
Think who's Feelings they
hurt at all they Just do it
No Consideration For whatever.

Figure 7. Excerpt from Loggins's *Fears of Your Life*, 2004.

Additionally, Fear 98 was not chosen at random as simply an example of what this book looks like. Although I will spend time discussing Loggins's handwriting, I still want to acknowledge that like many of the other fears, it has a rhetorical purpose. It is political in character and subtly calls for change. More specifically, it calls its audience's attention to the construction of normal, and to how ideas of normal and abnormal relate and resist each other in

the U.S. It asks whether or not this is the kind of public relationship readers want to be engaging in. That is, do people without disabilities want to be a considerate public or do they want to be “ignorance dogs”? And do people with disabilities want to be “fearful” of what “strangers” think? Overall, because of disability activism’s discursive challenges to a public rhetoric that has played a dominant role in defining and representing disability (outlined below), it suggests that citizens, like Loggins, can rise up against dominant discursive tendencies by utilizing an alternative public rhetoric. But the question is, to what extent?

AUDIENCE, EXIGENCE, AND CONSTRAINTS

Disability activism (i.e. the disability rights movement, the self-advocacy movement, and the independent living movement) is one of the many frames of exigence for Loggins’s national public release of *Fears of Your Life* through the publication house Manic D Press in 2004. The reason for my selection of certain moments within disability activism as a primary exigence, say, in comparison to the long history of rehabilitation (see Stiker) is twofold. First, moments in this history, specifically in the U.S., have resulted in institutional changes, such as the establishment of independent living centers and anti-discrimination legislation (i.e. section 504 within the Rehabilitation Act 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) (see “American Disabilities Act” and “Your Rights”). Second, and as I have mentioned throughout this analysis, part of the constraints I work with are of time, resources, and space. Therefore, after identifying the audience, I pick and choose important moments to highlight within the history of disability activism in the U.S. so as to purport further investigation.¹³ This is not to say that the moments I choose are of the utmost importance within disability activism as a whole, but rather they make significant contributions to the maintenance of public writings about or by authors with a disability, like that of Loggins’s.

The audience then, for *Fears of Your Life* is particular and significant. While *Fears of Your Life* certainly reaches a general audience, both locally to San Francisco and nationally in the U.S, it communicates with specific members differently. First, Loggins is both the writer of and audience for *Fears of Your Life*. As mentioned earlier, Loggins just felt the need to get his fears out on paper. What this signifies is a need to communicate with the self, which establishes Loggins as both the rhetor and audience. Second, and more importantly, *Fears of Your Life* communicates with both an audience of people with disabilities and people without disabilities, albeit in different ways. For the former, it sets an example and continues to reinforce the idea that disability is a socially based construct, rather than purely a medical deficit. In other words, Loggins communicates sentiments about power and possibility, among other things, which are further outlined below. For the latter, it displays the important political stance of being able to speak for oneself. Historically, people with disabilities have often been represented by individuals without disabilities, such as family members and health care providers, which is one reason why disability has a history of being represented as a deviant difference (e.g. Brisenden; Couser; Docherty, et al; Mitchell and Snyder; Scotch; Siebers 2010). In other words, many of the limitations to disability activism are due to rhetorics of disability, as stuck to disgust and empathy, being created and/or maintained by people without disabilities, who, largely, have a lack of political awareness about speaking for others. Furthermore, in “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” Linda Martín Alcoff states that “there is no neutral place to stand free and clear in which one’s words do no prescriptively affect or mediate the experience of others” (20). Therefore, as people without disabilities, like myself, associate themselves with the work of disability studies and activism it is important to acknowledge how we maintain and embody the discursive politics of normalcy that marginalize people with disabilities to begin with. In sum,

when Loggins's words reach an audience, all members must acknowledge that this language is a political frontier rising out of years of oppression, abuse, and violence.

For primarily that reason, the exigence informing Loggins's publication is rooted in the social movements¹⁴ of disability activism (i.e. the disability rights movement, the self-advocacy movement, and the independent living movement). Such movements were concerned with discrimination, national infrastructure, institutionalization, and much more, and originated in the 1960s "on college campuses and in local communities" (Scotch 385). More importantly, challenging the politics of things like institutionalization and discrimination, which produce/maintain identity, also involves challenging naturalized emotions (like disgust and empathy) that both reinforce and transform the political difference of disability, which I will unpack more fully in the next section.

Having said that, some of the noteworthy participants of such activism include Judy Heumann, Paul Longmore, Ronald L. Mace, and Ed Roberts, all of which suffered from different types of polio (Kreston). Heumann organized Disability in Action (DIA), "one of the earliest disability advocacy groups" (Scotch 387). Longmore helped found San Francisco State's Institute on Disability Studies in 1996, and is well known for burning his first book, *The Invention of George Washington* (Longmore 2003). Mace was the founder and program director for North Carolina State University's Center for Universal Design ("About the Center"). As a concept, universal design refers to "the architectural design that provides access to the built environment for all people, disabled or not" (Davidson 133). And finally, Roberts established the first independent living center in the U. S., The Berkley Center for Independent Living (Scotch 388).

What's more important though, are the social barriers that each of these individuals faced, which helped prompt their respective political and social endeavors listed above. More specifically, Heumann was originally denied her teaching license by New York State; Longmore was completely dependent upon government funding to support his struggles with polio, which limited the royalties he could receive after publishing; Mace was initially rejected from North Carolina State to study architecture; and before attending college, Roberts was regarded by the state at "too disabled" to work (Kreston). Taken as a whole, the resilience of activists like these led to the passage of crucial legislation, but more importantly, to a redefinition of what disability means, as well as how it is mediated and represented culturally through discourse. These individuals represent the demand that disability be regarded as primarily a social issue, not a medical deficit. In sum, they embody the reappropriation associated with disability studies and necessary for social change via disability activism.

For example, as I mentioned above, Roberts established the first independent living center in the U.S., which went on to provide a model for other living support services nationally (Scotch 388). In "Independent Living and the Medical Model of Disability," Simon Brisenden outlines the implicit rhetorical significance to the independent living movement, as well as the establishment of independent living centers nationwide:

We are outcasts in a society that demands conformity to a mythologized physical norm, the pursuit of which leads to neurosis and is the cause of much guilt and suffering It teaches us to be passive, to live up to the image of ourselves as objects of charity that we should be grateful to receive, and to ignore the possibility that we may be active people who have something to contribute to society. (175)

In other words, the dominant discourse and rhetoric of society structures not only the experiences of people with disabilities, but also limits one's ability to challenge such rhetoric. In his article "Subaltern Counterpublics and the Discourse of Protest" Christian R. Weisser acknowledges

such struggles of social movement: “Publics are as much a product of their forms of communication as they are a product of their subject matter” (611). In other words, defining normal is an act of exclusion. So in building institutions to support and police this definition, a society can maintain a truly violent exclusion. In fact, in context to institutional living as so gruesomely outlined in several public exposés in the 1970s (see Blatt and Kaplan; *Willowbrook*), independent living centers offer a radically different discursive reality. More specifically, institutional living cultivated spaces of being that didn’t promote political attitudes or the possibility of alternative discourses; as Brisenden notes above, “[i]t teaches us to be passive” (175). What’s so profound about the disability rights movement then is that the politically discursive reappropriation that people are not “problems” to be “cured” or “fixed,” but rather multicultural and diverse, rises from the ashes of institutionalization, segregation, and thus, impossibility. That is to say, independent living maintains and nurtures such attitudes, creativity, and resistance (comparatively speaking, CCCC’s 1974 publication of “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” is politically a ripe selection). In sum, where there is power (e.g. institutionalization, segregation, and marginalization) there is resistance (e.g. independent living centers, and counterpublic discourses). So power can both reaffirm disability as Other and transform it.

Furthermore, one result of the independent living movement was a need for further communication to maintain such a reappropriation nationally. Put simply, while independent living centers fostered spaces for “consciousness raising and political organizing,” they spread across state lines and traveling isn’t always an option for everyone, let alone an easy one (Scotch 394). This need marks the birth of *The Disability Rag* (also known as “the Rag,” and currently, *The Ragged Edge*), a stepping stone for the self-advocacy movement, and “the unofficial

newspaper of the disability rights movement” (Scotch 394). *The Disability Rag* was founded in Louisville, KY and in its heyday (1980s) had roughly a 4,200 circulation rate (Streitfeld). In January 1997 *The Disability Rag* officially changed its name to *The Ragged Edge* and launched a website (although in '97 it was called “Electric Edge”) (“A little history”). Currently, it has no new posts since 2006 and isn’t taking submissions, but between the two, still functional sites (i.e. *Ragged Edge Online* and *Electric Edge*) there are plenty of archives to browse through.

However, during the 1980s *The Disability Rag* had claims to “the only periodical that cover[ed] disability as a civil rights issue,” and took as its target “anyone or anything that, in the magazine’s opinion, patronizes, stereotypes or takes advantage of the disabled” (Streitfeld). This included things like charity telethons, like Jerry Lewis’s work with the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA). As mentioned earlier, normative institutions that define disability rely heavily on the political stickiness of emotions: the disgusting is pitiful, and therefore deserves empathetic charity from normatives (see Russell). Over the years though, *The Disability Rag* also published book reviews, personal testimonials, poetry, and critical conceptual pieces on topics such as abuse and the medical model. In fact, “every piece displays an underlying conviction that the problems of the disabled aren’t just medical, but can arise out of prejudice, denial of access and discrimination” (Streitfeld). In other words, *The Disability Rag* aligned itself with the central mission of many activists, advocates, and eventually, disability studies itself: disability isn’t a medical deficit, it’s a social construct.

For example, in 1994 a special compilation of *The Disability Rag* was released, which featured numerous pieces from the first 15 years of its publication (Shaw). The following is an excerpt from “Disability Culture Rap” by Cheryl Marie Wade:

Aren’t disabled people just isolated victims of nature or circumstance? Yes and no. True, we are far too often isolated. Locked away in the pits, closets and institutions of

enlightened societies everywhere. But there is a growing consciousness among us: “that is not acceptable.” Because there is always an underground. Notes get passed among survivors. And the notes we’re passing these days say, “there’s power in difference. Power. Pass the word.” (Shaw 15)

This segment of Wade’s essay begins a powerful piece in which she identifies a sense of power and possibility I outlined above. She states “there’s power in difference. Power. Pass the word” over and over throughout this piece, always returning to the concept to reinforce it. It’s about maintaining the notion that where there is power there is resistance, especially since power has historically been kept from people with disabilities by “enlightened societies everywhere” (Shaw 15). The metaphor of passing notes reinforces this possibility by calling upon the history of “survivors,” successful legislation, and movements, like Helen Keller, the ADA, and the independent living movement. In other words, in between these “pass the word” moments Wade reminds her readers of their power through concrete examples. Below is an excerpt about Roberts:

But do you know the story of Ed Roberts, cripple freedom fighter, disabled man, who, armed with self-esteem and a portable respirator, broke the disability barrier to higher learning by insisting he had a right to an education, by insisting that the doors to the University of California at Berkeley be opened, and by doing so, laid a significant brick onto the foundation of the Independent Living Movement? Independent! Living! Movement! The language of it!—that revolution of identity and possibilities of disabled people. Oh, you may never have heard of it. It never made it onto prime time. Norman Mailer did not rush out to capture its essence in 30,000 words. Yet it took root; it grew; it spread all across this country, all around the world—because there is always an underground. Notes get passed among survivors. And the notes we’re passing these days say: there’s power in difference. Power. Pass the word. (Shaw 17)

What Wade is, furthermore, displaying in this piece is the centrality of language, of rhetorical acts, of composition to meaningful, political change. It is out of such rhetoric that *Fears of Your Life* is born, because without the independent living movement, without *The Disability Rag*, ways of building and maintaining power are significantly limited, and without power there is no alternative discourse to give exigence to personal, intimate writing.

Furthermore, in “Counterpublics,” Weisser states that one of the many conventions for creating alternative discursive practices in the U.S. is to appeal to an audience by utilizing personal narratives (614). Personal, lived experiences are crucial to dissenting views because

[t]he dominant discourse’s exclusion of some subjects as “private matters” can erase the histories and lived experiences of the subaltern, and emphasizing those histories draws attention to this deficiency within the dominant discourse and begins to bring the subaltern back into the conversation. (Weisser 2008, p. 614)

As I will outline in greater detail in the next chapter, in the face of hegemony, counterpublic texts are how individuals and/or communities can challenge and reappropriate the status quo. In other words, rhetoric and composition is central to the political reappropriations necessary to challenge the emotional stigmas of disability as a marginalized Others. As I will show later, such reappropriations have implications not only for public life, but for how composition is taught within institutions, which often aligns its pedagogies with the cultural politics of emotion referenced briefly throughout this section—e.g. how the disgusting is pitiful, and therefore deserves empathetic charity from normatives.

Before moving on to a brief emotional analysis of *Fears of Your Life*, I want to first acknowledge the constraints of this text to transform its audience. In other words, rhetorically situated within disability activism, Loggins faces some crucial limitations in altering the dominant discourse. As mentioned in the methods section to this discussion, Bitzer identifies two types of constraints: one originating with the rhetor and the other in the rhetorical situation. Therefore, the constraints I identify for this text imply origins with Loggins, disability activism, and the publishing industry.

More specifically, Loggins’s text is published through Manic D Press, a publication house founded in 1984 and based in San Francisco, CA. On their website, Manic D Press states that they “represent a diverse group of unique writers and artists, with emphasis on those who

have been shunned by the traditional publishing establishment for lacking commercial viability, regardless of their talent or future promise” (*Manic D Press*). So Manic D Press is in no way explicitly aligned with disability activism, and publishes non-traditional texts in the sense that they have been rejected by “the traditional publishing establishment.” Now, Manic D Press does not indicate that *Fears of Your Life* was rejected by another press before coming to them. So Manic D Press, therefore, seems to take on projects that have been outright rejected through mainstream publishing institutions *and* could be rejected if submitted. The point being that Manic D Press makes assumptions about the kinds of books that are rejected from public traditional institutions, *Fears of Your Life* being one of them.

In the case of *Fears of Your Life*, one of the obvious publishing ploys for Manic D Press is Loggins’s handwriting, or the non-traditional font of this book. That is to say that *Fears of Your Life* is non-traditional partially because the words are handwritten, rather than typed, and therefore, makes Loggins a “diverse” writer within the Manic D Press community. While Loggins’s handwriting certainly aligns itself with the politics of disability activism, it also reaffirms the deviant difference of disability, which furthermore embodies the unstableness of the freak. In other words, Loggins’s handwriting expresses a political desire to not reproduce normative visual discourses, but also continues to invoke an infantilization of disability. Therefore, *Fears of Your Life* has the potential to both transform and maintain normative standards of disability.

Additionally, the content (i.e. the listed fears) is tangled in such instability. For example, Figure 8 (fears 51-59 from the first part of *Fears of Your Life*, “Things that you are Very Fearful of”) displays Loggins’s rhetorical choice to include and give voice to a wide variety of fears. Loggins writes “Fear of sexually abused” right next to “fear of rolling down hill backward.” This

rhetical choice is powerful and meaningful. For one, it is not written in standard academic English. While it could say “Fear of *being* sexually abused” it doesn’t, and while it could say “fear of rolling down *a* hill backwards,” it doesn’t. Additionally, Loggins never writes “I fear.” He only uses introductory statements like “fear of” or “feared that.” So even though readers might see this book as Loggins’s fears, he doesn’t claim them as internal or individual, not in the title or the fears themselves. Taken as a whole then, Loggins resists standard forms of written English and normative understands of emotions. Even the organization of two extremely different fears together implies power, for it changes the possibilities of meaning for fear. The strange sticky web of fear is revealed. In other words, sexual abuse and rolling downhill can feel similar, and calling attention to this reappropriates what fear is, as well as what disability means and is able to do. In sum, someone with a disability is not only capable of feeling intense, complex, and political emotions, but is also capable of unveiling the politics of and redefining that feeling.

51. Fear of Sexually Abused.
52. Fear of rolling down Hill
Backward.
53. Fear of Bats.
54. Kids Feared that whatever
they have done wrong that
they afraid of getting
Punishment or their Parents
will kill them.
55. Fear of Heights.
56. Fear of storms.
57. Fear of being different.
58. Fear of getting Shot.
59. Fear of getting put out the house.

Figure 8. Excerpt from Loggins's *Fears of Your Life*, 2004.

So, to tie together my analysis of content and font, I will turn to one last Figure: Figure 9, which includes fears 10 through 18, again from the first part of *Fears of Your Life*, “Things that you are Very Fearful of.” Like Figure 8, Figure 9 juxtaposes certain fears, like “fear of elevators,” near other fears, like “fear of authority and punishment.” So sentiments about the state of living in an institution or even a group home, constantly under surveillance and at risk of punishment, sit right next to fears “normals” might associate with children. In fact, general reactions to the book on *Goodreads.com* seem to reinforce the idea that Loggins’s content and handwriting is childlike and, thus, non-normative. What seems like able-bodied readers, or possibly readers with an unidentified disability, state things like “I can appreciate *the child-like naivete* of his life fears,” and “the incredible list of personal fears is *something that unifies all of*

us” (“Fears of Your Life,” emphasis added). Loggins’s work as “child-like” and universal acknowledges a kind of Otherness to Loggins. In short, Loggins’s language, font, and concepts are different. So what the comments on *Goodreads.com* signify then is that audiences may not always be willing to challenge normalcy. However, Loggins nonetheless brings his audience into a space that challenges standards of normalcy via rhetorical choices in font, language, and content. Again, the constraints of this rhetorical situation are not black and white. Counterpublic texts of disability both challenge the hegemonic status quo and reinforce it.

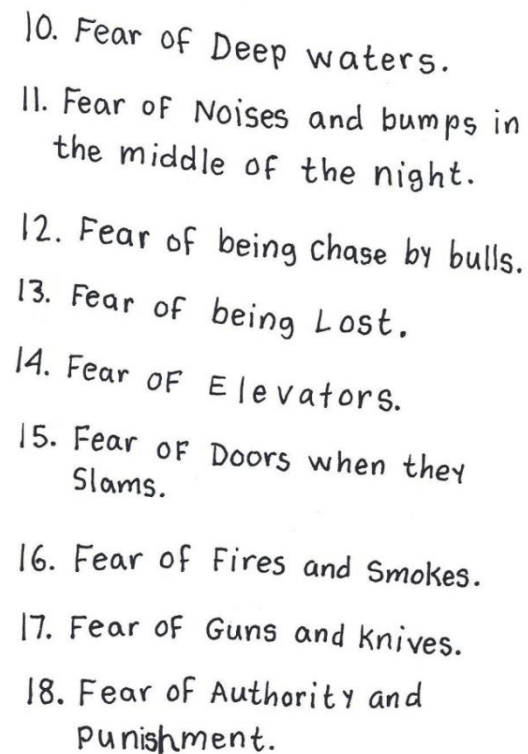
- 
- A handwritten list of 18 fears, numbered 10 through 18. The text is written in a cursive, handwritten style on a plain background. The list includes:
- 10. Fear of Deep waters.
 - 11. Fear of Noises and bumps in the middle of the night.
 - 12. Fear of being chase by bulls.
 - 13. Fear of being Lost.
 - 14. Fear of Elevators.
 - 15. Fear of Doors when they Slams.
 - 16. Fear of Fires and Smokes.
 - 17. Fear of Guns and Knives.
 - 18. Fear of Authority and Punishment.

Figure 9. Excerpt from Loggins’s *Fears of Your Life*, 2004.

Furthermore, in Browning’s *Freaks*, while such childlike sentiments invoked a sense of humanity for people with disabilities to simply be seen, *Fears of Your Life* displays how the same sentiments can also reinforce the normal/abnormal binary. It is as Cheryl Marie Wade expresses in another essay in *The Ragged Edge* about the need for assistance with private bodily

functions, such as urinating and defecating: “let’s face it: we have great shame about this need. *This need that only babies and the ‘broken’ have*” (Shaw 93, emphasis added). In sum, the rhetoric of disgust, as it is stuck to compassion, empathy, and pity validates the implications about the potential of counterpublic texts of disability to transform an audience. To more fully understand the implications of these emotions constraints, I must now turn to denaturalizing the emotions stuck to this rhetorical situation.

DISGUST REAFFIRMS AND REVOLUTIONIZES DISABILITY

As in the previous chapter, the final section of this chapter aims to denaturalize the emotions circulating around and within *Fears of Your Life*. While I have analyzed fear a little bit, my focus is still on disgust. However, since emotions are sticky, I will also briefly address compassion, empathy, and pity. As mentioned before, stickiness is like a time capsule; it tells the stories of the bodies, objects, and signs that have stuck to an emotion. Denaturalizing emotions and revealing such connections and stories requires an understanding of how the movement between such things is concealed, and thus, how the emotion is naturalized as internal and non-political. In sum, this section will outline what is sticking to disgust in this rhetorical situation characterized by *Fears of Your Life*, as well as how denaturalizing the affective economy of disgust illustrates a rhetorical instability (reflective of the freak), implying both possibilities for the reproduction of marginalization and for resistance.

So in *Fears of Your Life*, disgust is sticking to compassion, empathy, and pity, as well as Loggins’s rhetorical choices. In terms of compassion, empathy, and pity, I mentioned in the previous denaturalization that in *Fruits of Sorrow*, Elizabeth V. Spelman offers up a critical analysis regarding “[s]ufferers as the objects of compassion,” which in this case would mean people with disabilities as the object of compassion (6). More specifically, Spelman states that

“professions of compassion all too often are barely disguised forms of pity, that which is presented as an authentic and spontaneous concern for another human being is actually a selfish and cruel wallowing in the misfortunes of others” (65). So as the affective economy of disgust rapidly moves around and through the rhetorical situation of *Fears of Your Life*, what is concealed is that disgust’s relationship with compassion, empathy, and pity works to stifle the sufferer’s ability to transform the suffering into meaning. Then as this emotion economy inhibits transformations of suffering and oppression, feeling the suffering of others indicates an assertion of power and authority. In sum, as audiences express compassion or empathy for *Fears of Your Life* (like they do for freaks with a disability in *Freaks* and especially as *Fears of Your Life* embodies the meaning and experience of disability) the emotions are often expressed self-servingly not selflessly.

For example, Manic D Press communicates a sense of compassion and empathy in its mission statement. It seeks to publish the “outcasts” of creative writing, because other publication houses simply don’t. It wants to empathetically give the Others of literature a voice. Therefore, the non-traditional rhetoric of *Fears of Your Life*—i.e. Loggins’s handwriting, use of non-standard English, and alternative organization of content—embodies the “diverse” element Manic D Press needs to reinforce their mission. This use of *Fears of Your Life* makes the publication more about Manic D Press than about reappropriating disability, let alone the rhetorical choices made within *Fears of Your Life*. Thus, publishing *Fears of Your Life* is self-serving for Manic D Press. In other words, in making an assumption that *Fears of Your Life* would be rejected from “the traditional publishing establishment,” and therefore lacks “commercial viability,” *Fears of Your Life* is reaffirmed as Other, especially as it embodies disability. In sum, *Fears of Your Life* was published as an acknowledgement that this kind of text

is an unacceptable investment in comparison to other popular texts that sell. So *Fears of Your Life* was published partially as a result of the boundaries between what is normal in creative writing and what is abnormal, which reaffirms hegemonic notions of social and cultural norms, like who is able to write and join a conversation.

Additionally, Miller calls attention to how disgust, like compassion, reinforces the boundaries between “us” and “them”:

Disgust helps define boundaries between us and them and me and you. It helps prevent *our* way from being subsumed into *their* way. Disgust, along with desire, locates the bounds of the other, either as something to be avoided, repelled, or attacked, or, in other settings, as something to be emulated, imitated, or married . . . Disgust helps mark the boundaries of culture and boundaries of the self (Miller 50).

In other words, disgust, like the compassion it gets stuck to, is a tool that individuals use to differentiate between ways of life as normal or abnormal. So, to determine *Fears of Your Life* as different and having that “diverse” quality, Manic D Press utilizes the political economy of disgust, as it indicates where the rejects are. As Miller states, with disgust we can locate what is it be “avoided, repelled, or attacked” (50). Disgust is, therefore, stuck to *Fears of Your Life* because of the “diverse” differences it embodies via recognition from Manic D Press, which further invokes the need to differentiate through avoidance. So disability as it is stuck to disgust within this rhetorical situation is, yet again, relegated as Other. However, Amhed’s understanding of disgust as ambivalent calls attention to how Manic D Press also uses the “diverse” rhetorical elements of Loggins’s writing to transform the limitations of such boundaries.

More specifically, disgust, especially as it has to do with contact and proximity, signifies that Manic D Press works as a medium to get audiences closer to a counterpublic text of disability, like Loggins’s. So even while Manic D Press reinforces *Fears of Your Life* as

disgusting, and even if the audience rejects *Fears of Your Life* as repulsive, it still remains that the audience must first come into contact with the text before rejecting it, thus acknowledging *Fears of Your Life* has power. Manic D Press may express compassion and empathy in self-serving ways when it comes to their publication of *Fears of Your Life*, and as such, reinforce the economy of disgust, but they still make the book, and all its radical rhetorical choices, accessible to an audience.

Additionally, through radical rhetorical choices with font, language, and organization of content Loggins also invokes the instability of the freak: freaks as both exploitative and empowering to disability. More specifically, as a rhetor Loggins has been regarded as “child-like” and his ideas have been interpreted as something that can be universally applied to the masses (“Fears of Your Life”). That is to say, specific responses to *Fears of Your Life* that infantilize and universalize it reinforce the segregation, institutionalization, and marginalization of disability as difference. His rhetorical choices are Other, and not to be taken seriously. On the other hand though, Loggins still challenges his readers not only in new understandings of what disability means and can do, but also in making rhetorical choices with font, language, and organization of content. Put simply, just because some responses to his text have trouble acknowledging the power within it, doesn’t mean it is not there.

Furthermore, the constraints of *Fears of Your Life* embodied in Loggins’s rhetorical choices do signify a site of resistance. As Ahmed states, “[w]e need to respond to injustice in a way that shows rather than erases the complexity of the relation between violence, power, and emotion” (196). Loggins’s book, and others like it, rhetorically situates itself as a public text invoking emotion in compound ways. Particularly, he admits to the child-like fears, letting his audience assume this is the limit of the disabled mind. However, he situates these fears with

more critical ones, like fear 105 “What is fear? What does fear tells you about a stranger?” consequently, pushing those limits. Correspondingly, his handwriting signifies memories of learning how to spell and writing sentences as a child, a time attached to cultural rejections for some (all the while, also invoking a sense of process, a theory in composition studies that invokes attempts to recognize and reappropriate the position of Others in the academy). Such unstableness, a rhetoric that won’t sit still, reveals not only the complexity of violence, power, and emotion, but the necessity of conflict and tension for such discourses of resistance to be born.

As I have shown through these two rhetorical analyses the tools for showing and responding to social injustice lie within rhetoric and composition. Rhetors write exigence driven texts for audiences to respond to and create change. However, certain constraints limit what the audience is able to do. But in considering the cultural politics of emotions, like disgust, those constraints are unveiled as not a black and white concept. Yes, constraints like handwriting, infantilizing counterpublic texts of disability, and withdrawing a text altogether are a cause for concern, but it doesn’t mean that change didn’t and doesn’t happen. So in turning to the final chapter of this discussion, I will unpack the rhetorical patterns of the two texts I have rhetorically analyzed, as well as what those patterns imply about the cultural work counterpublic texts do. These patterns and implications, as I will further show, carry important understandings about public literacy work within both disability studies and rhetoric and composition.

IMPLICATIONS: WHAT COUNTERPUBLIC TEXTS OF DISABILITY DO

The purpose of this final chapter is to synthesize the rhetorical analyses of *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life* so as to discuss the implications rhetorical work has for disability studies, and vice versa, especially as validated by the cultural politics of emotions. More specifically, there are four rhetorical implications to this discussion: (1) normalcy is disrupted through popular culture when cultural expectations are not met, (2) text is a form of resistance, (3) there is no linear projection to resistance, and (4) it is through repetition that new discourses become familiar. By summarizing the previous analyses and then outlining the four different rhetorical implications my audience will gain a better understanding of how the relationship between rhetoric and composition and disability studies is mutually enriching. Overall, the aim of this final chapter is to show how rhetoric and composition illuminates counterpublic discourses of disability in new ways, as well as how disability studies brings important insights into research within rhetoric and composition about language politics, identity, and community literacy. Finally, to further reinforce these conclusions I will end by returning to my Starlight narrative.

To more fully summarize my previous analyses then, overall, *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life* highlight the crucial role freaks and freak shows play in shifting cultural attitudes about disability. In sum, the freak highlights an important instability regarding reappropriations of disability. Beginning with the rhetorical situation of the film *Freaks*, this film broadly signifies a growing uncertainty about what disability is. Situated during a time well known in disability communities for institutionalization, sterilization, and segregation, it was not common for people with disabilities to be represented within popular culture. However, the rhetoric of the freak show, as invoked through *Freaks*, provides an avenue for some people with disabilities to start challenging normative assumptions about ability, as well as the disgust frequently felt to mark

disability as abnormal. That is to say that the boundary upon which the normal/abnormal binary is defined and maintained is challenged by and through the freak, again as invoked through *Freaks*, because the freak invokes disgust as a political entity to be played with. Audiences want to both run away from the freak and get closer to it, revealing and validating Ahmed's critical understanding of disgust as a dynamic emotion (84-9). Therefore, *Freaks* presents the freak as both a revolutionary and a rejected Other.

Moreover, as time progresses, texts, like *Fears of Your Life* and even *Genesis*, invoke this tense position of the freak through utilizations of non-standard, non-academic, and non-traditional discourse. In particular, *Fears of Your Life* invokes a long social struggle teetering between the political rejection and integration of differences of ability. That is to say, *Fears of Your Life* invokes the curious resilience of the freak show that just won't die, and the audiences that won't let it die. In sum, the tension of the freak, as validated by a dynamic disgust, lives on through discursive mediums. More specifically, Loggins continues to challenge normative assumptions of ability by discussing fear in non-standard, non-academic, and non-traditional ways. Loggins utilizes an alternative font, language, and organization in discussing fear as a lifelong, unstable current that is not "his," similar to critical understandings of disgust and repulsion. In other words, Loggins asserts a reappropriation of disability via non-traditional and culturally rejected rhetorical tools—i.e. handwriting, non-standard English, and alternative organization of content. Therefore, while Loggins asserts agency by pointing out the imperfection of standards, like standard edited English, Helvetica, and fear as internal, so as to attempt to change how his audience feels about disability, he also reinforces the position of disability as Other via culturally Othered rhetorical techniques. Again, the freak represents both a revolutionary and a rejected Other.

All in all, *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life* represent a long term battle to reappropriate the difference of disability, and rhetoric is how individuals and/or communities challenge and reappropriate the oppressive status quo of normalcy. Moreover, in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” James Berlin argues that rhetoric is “a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (488). In sum, rhetoric employs the rhetor, the audience, and the situation in tense conversations, like about what disability is and how society should feel and act towards it. Berlin, furthermore, states that while rhetors and compositionists are wedged within such movements, “rhetoric contains within it the means for self-criticism and self-revision” (490). So despite the position of the rhetor or audience, within every rhetorical situation there lies a possibility for disruption, resistance, and counter-discourse, a Foucauldian notion. Therefore, the tools for showing and responding to social injustice do lie within rhetoric and composition as it is concerned with the politics of language. This is what the field of rhetoric and composition studies offers disability studies.

Having said that, the first rhetorical implication for this discussion is about how normalcy is disrupted through popular culture when cultural expectations are not met. For example, both *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life* do not meet cultural expectations. On the one hand, *Freaks*, among other things, brings people with disabilities to the big screen during a time when people with disabilities were not very visible in popular culture. So *Freaks* disrupts what is considered normal by not meeting, and thus challenging, cultural expectations about who can act. On the other hand, *Fears of Your Life* utilizes non-standard English during a time when such discourse is highly contested. So *Fears of Your Life* disrupts normalcy by not meeting, and thus

challenging, cultural expectations about who can write and how one writes. It is in this disruption that the second rhetorical implication is revealed: text as a form of resistance.

A text, like *Freaks* or *Fears of Your Life*, can be a site for resistance because of how texts attempt to disrupt and challenge cultural standards. Granted, just because texts can be a site of resistance does not always mean they are successful. For example, as sites for resistance, *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life* both reaffirm oppressive standards and transform them. Taken as a whole, both texts in this analysis show how counterpublic texts of disability are not always wholly successful in resisting the normalcy that they are challenging. In other words, *Freaks* and *Fears of Your Life* are sites of resistance, but because of their respective rhetorical situations, cannot be understood as only accomplishing resistance. Such an understanding of the rhetorical situation of a text reveals the third implication that there is no linear projection to resistance or social change. Such a linear projection is, in fact, ideal at best. For example, *Freaks* carries a strong scent of compassion for people with disabilities alongside explicit expressions of sexuality. That is to say, in *Freaks*, two things that seem to repel each other, or have little to do with one another exist at the same time and conduct cultural work together, however fragmentally. Put simply, social change is not a clean-cut, linear process, and analyzing venues of popular culture that attempt to disrupt normalcy and, thus, open up a space for resistance, reveals this implication. However, it is through repetition, like *Fears of Your Life* displays in carrying out certain sentiments from *Freaks*, that such disruptions become familiar and actually change something, the last rhetorical implication.

More specifically, *Fears of Your Life* carries out the cultural work of *Freaks* by continuing to make attempts at integrating disability via counterpublic discourse and popular culture. For example, by utilizing a non-standard font, *Fears of Your Life* embodies, and

therefore repeats the unstableness of the freak. Audiences are then again exposed to the tension of the freak as a cultural location that defies a single interpretation, which makes the freak, and the implications it embodies as revolutionary and Other, more familiar. Put simply, new narratives are beginning to stick due to the unrelenting repetition of the freak that just won't die. Again, the rhetorical work of rhetoric and composition brings much insight to disability studies about what it is that counterpublic texts of disability do.

In terms of disability studies and what it brings to rhetoric and composition, I want to briefly call attention to the September 2010 publication of *College Composition and Communication (CCC)*, as it is a special issue on the future of the field of rhetoric and composition. One of the notable articles in this issue is "Seeking New Worlds: The Study of Writing beyond Our Classrooms" by Bronwyn T. Williams. In it Williams argues that rhetoric and composition scholars "need to respond more systematically to a world in which the theory and practice of writing and reading increasingly challenge us to recognize the connections between what happens on campus and what happens in other places and at other stages of life" (130). In sum, Williams validates my central goal: to contribute to research in rhetoric and composition that speaks about the writing that happens at "other places and at other stages of life." Therefore, this analysis does not touch on college-level writing and instruction, but rather attempts to show the kinds of productive tensions that can come from theoretical discussions about discursive reappropriations of difference outside standard and academic bounds. More specifically, as illustrations of non-standard, non-academic, and non-traditional discourses, *Freaks and Fears of Your Life* offer critical insights into the politics of culturally integrating differences of ability via writing. Also, while I acknowledge that this discussion can speak to other critical conversations of identity, like with race, sexuality, gender, age, labor, and so forth,

disability highlights very specific needs and is highly situational. Therefore, the implications and conclusions this final chapter reviews does not suggest an uncritical transfer, but rather a starting point about the role rhetorical expressions of difference play in composition at large—e.g. in creating writing programs and curriculums, in gaining tenure, or in community literacy centers.

For example, disability studies has much to offer the field of rhetoric and composition's research on community literacy. Additionally, this subsection of community literacy crosses over with other subsections of rhetoric and composition, like language politics and identity studies. So as rhetoric and composition moves more deeply into research that pertains writing at "other places and at other stages of life," as Bronwyn suggest, disability studies is a crucial resource in developing theories and practices of community literacy, especially as it intersects with language politics and identity studies (130). In sum, disability studies poses critical questions about the relationship between identity and language, which implicates rhetoric and composition especially as it is concerned with revolutionizing writing, communication, and literacy. In the process of maintaining a social justice mindset and care for human agency, it is not enough to build pedagogies around just rhetorical skills and/or critical thinking. What rhetoric and composition must continue to delve deeper into are the critical questions that reveal how the research, teaching, and service of rhetoricians and compositionists is not only revolutionary, but systematic and institutional. Put simply, disability studies is one highly intellectual and creative area of inquiry to keep rhetoricians and compositionists on their toes.

Finally, critical notion of emotions, like disgust, validate and extend the rhetorical work of analyzing attempts to reappropriate disability via counterpublic discourse and popular culture in important ways. For example, in "Counterpublics," one of the discursive conventions of counterpublic discourses that Weisser, as a compositionist, discusses is appeals to pathos "as a

contrast to the logocentric discourse that permeates dominant public” (613). According to Weisser, emotions are “tools of engagement” to protest and resist dominant notions of power and difference (2008, p.613). However, Weisser’s inclusion of emotions does not explicitly regard emotions as political. Therefore, it is important to extend notions of the discourse of protest, especially as it involves emotional appeals, into critical understandings of emotions as not internal or apolitical. For if compositionists and rhetoricians are to utilize and support the counterpublic texts of disability, doing so uncritically in terms of emotions limits what counterpublic texts of disability can do. As I stated at the very beginning of this discussion, it is about exposing the feelings that scar, not just the ones that heal:

Our bodies have been shaped by their injuries; scars are traces of those injuries that persist in the healing or stitching of the present . . . Through emotions, the past persists on the surface of bodies. Emotions show us how histories stay alive, even when they are not consciously remembered; how histories of colonialism, slavery, and violence shape lives and worlds in the present. (Ahmed 202)

In other words, emotions can work to maintain and challenge histories of violent appropriations. Living with a disability or not, as U.S. citizens we are all shaped by disgust as it is stuck to needs to institutionalize and segregate Others. As such, regarding emotions as apolitical and internal, regarding feelings of disgust as purely “my disgust” buries the injuries of the past; it buries the violent histories of disability, of institutionalization, of segregation, and of sterilization that the freak attempts to disrupt and challenge. In sum, the discursive reappropriations of counterpublic texts of disability are concerned with uncovering these histories that emotions help to conceal so as to learn how to live with them and make them anew.

RETURNING TO STARLIGHT: FACING THE CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

In “Institutional Dimensions of Academic Computing,” Stuart A Selber asks some critical questions in regards to the field of rhetoric and composition’s participants as institutional

gatekeepers of literacy: “How should subaltern groups respond to dominant power structures? Should the focus be on incremental or wholesale change? Can change be made using the discourses and structures of the powerful, or are alternatives needed?” (16). In this exploration of the counterpublic texts of disability, I have suggested that as a subaltern group, people with disabilities should respond to dominant power structures in a discourse of “their” own. That is to say that people with disabilities and allies should respond to the oppressive appropriations of disability as abnormal in creative ways, which means utilizing alternative discourses other than the dominant to instigate change.

Likewise, in *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde reinforces the idea that challenging such appropriations of difference means functioning outside the dominant discursive means of persuasion:

It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. (112)

What Lorde makes clear here is that using the tools of dominant power structures will create change only temporarily, but that in finding alternative modes of communication and expression, change can happen. However, in considering counterpublic texts of disability, these discursive areas of protest, does not mean there are no difficult and intimate questions left. I may have addressed my research questions from the very beginning of this discussion about what rhetoric and composition can do for disability studies, and vice versa, but there is more hinging at the end of this study, and this final space attempts to give room to that. In sum, while I acknowledge the need for counterpublic texts of disability, I do so not to say changed happened, everything is

going to be okay, but rather to invoke some difficult questions, personify them by again invoking my experiences at Starlight, and leave them purposefully with my audience to grapple with.

So, the questions that immediately arise after stating the rhetorical implications of this exploration are as follows: What do we do with such discursive actions? How can compositionists and rhetoricians use such texts so as to support human agency and social change? How do compositionists know that they are not abusing counterpublic texts by bringing them into their research, teaching, and service? How do I know that by incorporating counterpublic discursive acts into the thesis genre I am not tainting such discourse with normative standards all over again? How does my audience know that the oppressive cultural practices of hegemony are not functioning through the thesis genre, the Times New Roman, or the standard academic English? Such questions transition back into my discussion of the audience of *Fears of Your Life*.

During my discussion of Loggins' audience, I mentioned that part of this audience is people without disabilities, and that as people without disabilities regard themselves as allies, like myself, it's important to acknowledge how we foster the politics of normalcy that Others people with disabilities. Therefore, as I intend the audience of this thesis to be primarily academics within rhetoric and composition, disability studies, and emotion studies, I want to be upfront about the tension this thesis embodies here. Many of these individuals who choose to read my thesis will be living without a disability, or possibility maintaining the invisibility of one. This is because the institution still widely rejects disability as unable and defective. Therefore, access to academic discourse and resources are often limited for the population I have been talking about for 80 plus pages. Immediately my mind is drawn back into Starlight, one of my primarily reasons for choosing this topic of disability, and I wonder how many of those

writers would be able to read this thesis and understand it. In other words, as a thesis, this genre of writing functions within standard, academic, and institutional boundaries. My words sit cold up in an ivory tower somewhere. Thus, there is an important conflict between the discourse I employ and the discourse I analyze.

However, it is in recognition of this tension between discourses that I can also be an ally in resisting the oppressive cultural practices found within the dominant discursive boundaries that I function within here. Once again, the both/and conclusion of reinforcing and transforming oppressive cultural practices apply. Put simply, like other allies, I am situated in this tension, and acts of resistance here is uncomfortable. For in every moment that feels like it aligns with human agency and social change, I know it also doesn't. Similarly, in "Assuming Responsibility: Disability Rights and the Preparation of Art Educators" Doug Blandy reveals his relationship with disability as a person not living with one. He tells horrific and frustrating stories of institutionalization, abuse, and labor violations. In one instance he discusses his volunteer work as an arts educator at a residential institution in Ohio. He taught in a room where all doors in and out were perpetually locked. He would come in and leave through one door and the other led to a residential ward. One day while teaching, that door to the ward burst open and several naked human beings ran through, chased by attendants with brooms. As Blandy states,

what was masquerading as education and treatment was more appropriately describable as the abuse of the most basic of human rights. I also knew at that moment that my professional work would be socially reconstructive. I could not, and would not, be party to perpetuating what I had witnessed. (181)

It is here that Blandy subtly acknowledges how he was both reinforcing and transforming oppressive cultural practices by working as an arts educator in a residential ward. However, Blandy also acknowledges that he has a choice to not participate in such violence, when, really, such conclusions about resisting violence are not clear cut. Remember, social change is not

linear; social conditions do not just change from good to bad because they are suddenly visible as horrific. Therefore, to further understand the role of the ally as not just protester and avid supporter of human rights and social change, but also as nurturer of the politics of normalcy that legitimizes and perpetuates abuse, I will be concluding with my story at Starlight in a new light.

When this journey began three years ago for me, as I walked through the doors of Starlight for the first time, I did not immediately feel the full weight of my conflicting views on difference. In recalling the narrative that begins this discussion, I mentioned that there is a “look” to disability, and I noticed this immediately upon walking into Starlight. I also mentioned that when JB asked me to help him with his autobiography my first reaction was “Isn’t he cute?” and that it made me feel good to “help” someone “less fortunate.” Then I mentioned how I wondered if “these writers even knew how brilliant their work was,” and that I was “abnormal” in “their” space. I then paused in my narrative. “The implications about how identities are not just socially constructed, but maintained at every juncture, were piling up on me, and this, still, was only the beginning of my time at Starlight.” Finally, I promised Andy’s dad a book, which resulted in *Genesis*, “the pinnacle moment of my life.”

By now it should be particularly obvious what’s going on within my experience that frames this analysis. I walked into Starlight treating the writers like children, infantilizing them, because as Madame Tetralini said, “God looks after all *his children*.” My first reaction to every writer at Starlight acknowledged the suffering, saw the segregation and the difference, but the motivation to join the community to do community work was self-serving, similar to Blandy. I wanted to help the poor children because it makes me look and feel like a better person. Remember, Spelman states that “professions of compassion all too often are barely disguised forms of pity, that which is presented as an authentic and spontaneous concern for another

human being is actually a selfish and cruel wallowing in the misfortunes of others” (65). I even took the time to wonder if the writers knew about their abilities. “Poor little writers,” I thought. All to just flip it around, as compassion calls its wallowing tendencies out. “I’m abnormal in your space, not you.” Sorry Katie, but flipping the binary doesn’t do anything.

Frankly, this is the addiction of community work. This is often where the passion begins, and it is simply wrong to conceal this truth (lowercase “t”). I felt like I was really doing something for the world, really helping, as most volunteers and allies do. And maybe publishing that book did do something. But in being an ally, in stopping hegemony’s invisible hands from appropriating disability once more, means calling it like it is. This work isn’t innocent.

Furthermore, throughout this graduate program in rhetoric and composition, I’ve joined the Community Literacy Center (CLC), made allies with other facilitators, and struggled with community engagement discussions within the core rhetoric and composition classes. My teachers and peers frequently ask each other questions like, “Why do we do this work?” and “Why devote hours of time and labor to services we usually don’t get paid for?” To put it simply, and because I choose not to speak for others, I do this work because I can see difference and suffering, because society easily marks where the deficits are. I rely on the wrath of hegemony, the cultural politics of emotion to find where work must be done. Once I arrive, oppressive cultural practices that reinforce the hegemonic status quo for ability work through me, as it is how I got there. But then something happens, a moment of genesis maybe. And then I leave, sometimes feeling like it’s without a trace, like nothing actually happened.

Likewise, in “Not Your Mam’s Bus Tour” Paula Mathieu discusses a similar process. She facilitated a “theater on wheels,” a collaborative composition project that lasted for six weeks and travelled around Chicago, IL (77-8). Bus riders gave performances and talks about being

homeless, although several scenes “had nothing to do with homelessness at all, because the writers wanted the audience to see that being homeless was just one aspect of their lives” (80). Something happened here, a moment of genesis maybe. Someone tried to rewrite the narrative here, the narrative of homelessness, like I tried to facilitate with the narrative of disability. And then it ends, just like that: “the built-up trust began to give way to more usual levels of individual anxieties and uncertainties . . . Despite the press and the success, the utopian moment passed and structural realities reappeared” (Mathieu 82). Pressing questions remain: did the theater on wheels do anything? Did *Genesis* really do anything?

When I said my goodbyes to the Starlight writers in June of 2011 much of what was expressed to me was sentiments about when I was coming back. I must admit, it felt good. It felt like, yes, *Genesis* did something, *my* work did something. However, when I left it also instigated much anxiety and uncertainty about what actually happened and what was to come. Some of the writers expressed it through the desire to have me stay so they could publish another book. In a way, we all knew I would leave and it would be like it was before. The writers would be “Starlight writers” marked by their life with a disability, as always.

In an exit interview I did for the Starlight newsletter that summer entitled “It Couldn’t Have Happened Without Katie” facilitated by Andy, I was asked “If you had the chance to come back to Starlight for *Genesis II*, would you?” I cautiously answered this question:

This is a difficult question for me, because a part of me, if the resources were available, feels like saying ‘Yes! No Doubt!’ But another part of me longs to see the day where each author publishes on their own. The empowerment that comes from such an accomplishment is much needed, and I think *Genesis* is a gift that opens that door, and I wouldn’t want to tamper with such an opportunity.

In sum, I tried to get at the idea that I opened a door, but “they” needed to walk through it, not me. But this isn’t what it is about. I just continued to not acknowledge the difference, as well as

how this book solidified their role as Others in the community. Again, *Genesis* might have done something, and linear change isn't possible, but the point is that these implications do not give permission to volunteers and activists to perpetually be blind to how we conceal the histories of violence and Othering.

More specifically, after leaving Starlight for this graduate program in Colorado I've had the opportunity to visit a few times. Each time the writers still expressed a need for me to come back and teach again. While I certainly won't stop here as a disability ally, and an honestly faltering one at times, or a community literacy facilitator, I'm cautious of these endings, of returning, and of these experiences. I don't know if I will go facilitate writing at Starlight again, but I do know I will continue facilitating writing, and partially because it makes me feel good about myself, which makes it necessary to be acutely cautious of what I claim from these experiences. Because for my work with literacy to be socially reconstructive, like any rhetorician, compositionists, or disability activist, it is necessary to believe change can happen but to also be critical of that change. As I reviewed in the introduction to this discussion, hegemony has a fluid shape that continuously shifts forms to win consent. It's seductive and intimate. It's powerful and persuasive. Therefore, if we are really allies and agents for social justice, it requires a sometimes brutal honesty of the mistakes, challenges, and burning scars that keep the fight ongoing. In sum, sometimes being an ally means existing in a perpetual state of uncertainty. There is no concrete conclusion to be found.

So to end, in the same way I began, I offer a poem from *Genesis*. It's the first poem in the book by Ricky Gene Hogan, and it's called "Stars and Clouds." This was also the first poem I helped Ricky write. When I first asked him if he wanted help with his writing he resisted. He said things like "I can't really write," or "I write too slow" for weeks on end. I patiently waited

for him to make his own choice, just offering him support if he needed it, and one day he came to me with the first three lines of this poem. He again said “I write very slow” and I simply looked at him and said “That’s great! I could use a change of pace around here.” After about a month or so, he finished it, and for me, it simply signifies what literacy facilitators and disability activists are left with at every critical and challenging juncture: the tension and uncertainty in pursuing human agency and socially constructive change.

I am
in the stars
and in the clouds.

I am in the world.
It is wild, a lifelong promise.
In this lifetime the world is bright
and sunny with warmth, an embracing hug.

In this lifetime the world is dark
and cold at night and day at times.

It is time to wait into the dark.

And I am
the Light.

ENDNOTES

¹ For the purposes of this study, an intellectual and/or development disability alludes to a cultural understanding of a physical and/or mental impairment that affects an individual's intellectual capacity and learning ability. Such disabilities are also commonly referred to as LD, or Learning Disability, especially within the field of rhetoric and composition. Some examples of said disabilities might be Down syndrome, autism spectrum, epilepsy, dyslexia, or brain trauma. While such disabilities can be assumed to be functioning from birth, I would like to modify this, because particular kinds of impairments can be formed from birth *or* afflicted through exposure to abuse over time. Additionally, developmental disabilities can affect an individual physically in many ways, from seizures to challenges processing texts, developmental disabilities take on many forms, but all are culturally understood to affect one's intellectual abilities.

² While I do not equate rhetorical theory, or even more generally rhetoric with composition or composition studies, I do speak of them somewhat interchangeably throughout this study. I do this because composition and rhetoric are extremely interconnected forces, like two leaves of the same branch; they arise from the same place, with similar concerns for writing and language.

³ Throughout this study, affect and emotion are regarded as different. However, like rhetoric and composition, emotion and affect work together. So on the one hand, emotions refer to social experiences. That is to say that emotions act as a kind of mediator, shaping the cultural imagination of what is possible between people and cultures. Affect, on the other hand, can be understood as intensity or attitude, existing prior to a moment of signification.

⁴ Self-Advocacy is an individualized movement within Disability Rights. One of the groups I was exposed to in Buffalo, NY was called iVoice.

⁵ Although this analysis primarily focuses on disgust, as outlined earlier in this thesis, part of the epistemology of emotions is that they are not static entities. Emotions exist in relation to each other, but due to the confines of this analysis, emotions like compassion will receive significantly less explanation and analysis than disgust despite their centrality.

⁶ Regarding some of my language choices (i.e. terms) starting with this chapter: because of its in-depth analysis, I utilize words that may be offensive to others, like "freak" and "dwarf." I want to officially state that the only reason I use such terms is because, in the words of Robert Bogdan in *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, "the business used them." In other words, Tod Browning used them, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) used them, and sideshow culture used them. So I use them here to help communicate the rhetorical situation of the time, not to maintain the behaviors of stigmatizing and marginalizing difference.

⁷ The reason this section combines audience, exigence, and constraints is that, for film in particular, it is near impossible to discuss them in isolation of one another. In other words, exigence often contributes to the constraints; audience contributes to the exigence, and so forth. Additionally, as a genre, films are made/called into being with an anticipation of a particular audience and exigence, as well as predictions of possible constraints.

⁸ In "Freakery, Cult Films, and the Problem of Ambivalence" David Church defines cultists as "fans who engage in repeated screenings, ritual behaviors, and specific reading strategies. These fans, or 'cultists,' gain subcultural capital by championing their object choices as more unique and supposedly less accessible than mass-marketed cinema. This sense of 'uniqueness' is reflected by the films' perceived difference from 'mainstream,' non-cult movies" (3).

⁹ A "pinhead" is often regarded as an individual with a neurodevelopmental disorder, microcephaly, which results in a smaller head circumference and below "average" brain function. In freak shows Pinheads were freaks that often spoke very little and had their heads accentuated by being shaved. Pinheads inhabit an area somewhere between the born and made freak.

¹⁰ Although this sense of compassion could be viewed as counterproductive, reinforcing a simplistic view of disability, it is a step forward, however small, from pure stigmatization. In other words, feeling compassion is a step up from locking people with disabilities away and sterilizing them.

¹¹ While I mention that Browning didn't have a disability, it is not to tokenize or pathologize Loggins's voice, or other voices of people with disabilities. It is only to acknowledge the much needed inclusiveness required of composition in moving forward with texts that represent disability.

¹² There are two things I want to note regarding a zine. First, a zine is a homemade, low budget publication that is often distributed locally or through mail requests. They are underground magazines that are often political and written by individuals who feel marginalized by institutional settings, like education, and want to challenge them by carving out a counter culture with its own literature and means of educating the public. Second, while there are

many political implications to the fact that Loggins's zine has been turned into a legitimate publication here, for the sake of space I will not address it, but I do acknowledge that a research study could be conducted alone on the purpose of zines and how changing the medium challenges the political purposes of them.

¹³ Additionally, while I could frame such activism as having roots in the early 19th century, I choose to leave such sources open for further research, especially since Loggins's publication occurs about two hundred years after such an argument (e.g. Dix; Ray).

¹⁴ I define the term social movement for this analysis as outward, rhetorical and discursive practices intended for an audience so as to change social/cultural attitudes, beliefs, and actions. I also acknowledge that there can be leaders in such movements, but that such leaders are always subjective and not necessary for or the sole reason of political success/failure. Therefore, for this analysis, I identify "participants" and "key players."

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