

MOBILIZING METAPHOR

Art, Culture, and Disability Activism in Canada

Edited by Christine Kelly and Michael Orsini



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DISABILITY CULTURE AND POLITICS

Series Editors: Christine Kelly (University of Manitoba)
and Michael Orsini (University of Ottawa)

This series highlights the works of emerging and established authors who are challenging us to think anew about the politics and cultures of disability. Reconceiving disability politics means dismantling the strict divides among culture, art, and politics. It also means appreciating how disability art and culture inform and transform disability politics in Canada and, conversely, how politics shape what counts as art in the name of disability. Drawing from diverse scholarship in feminist and gender studies, political science, social work, sociology, and law, among others, works in this series bring to the fore the implicitly and explicitly political dimensions of disability. *Mobilizing Metaphor: Art, Culture, and Disability Activism in Canada* is the inaugural volume in the series.



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MOBILIZING METAPHOR

Introduction

Mobilizing Metaphor

CHRISTINE KELLY and MICHAEL ORSINI

What's in a straw? For disability artist jes sachse,¹ the straw is both a useful aid and object brimming with cultural and political meaning. *Freedom Tube* is an art installation composed of ten thousand red and white straws arranged in what sachse describes as “a waterfall[-]like curtain, a foot from the ground to encourage approach, which is not something disability does” (Fisher 2015). *Freedom Tube* was given its name following a conversation sachse had with fellow disability artist Eliza Chandler, in which they discussed how straws were not just a mundane part of daily life for many disabled people, but an essential item for access.² The term “freedom tube” became an inside joke, a shorthand for a vibrant disability culture, and the tangible presence of straws a signpost that welcomes and celebrates different embodiments. Describing the work, sachse explains:

It was like one of those moments you have in life where, someone gives you this new phrase and all of a sudden you get this montage in your head and boom boom: I am seeing every time I've ever seen a disabled person use a straw, like this guy I can recall seeing drink pints of beer out of a straw[,] and all of a sudden it became this phrase that transformed this object for me as something I normally associated with kind of my daily ritual – just one of the myriad of little accommodations I do for myself without thinking[,] and it became this icon in my head, it was kind of pulsating. (Fisher, 2015)

sachse's homage to disability culture can be contextualized in their public presence, where sachse offers wide-ranging social and cultural commentary through social media, lectures, and blog posts on topics including income support, international and virtual crip communities, and daily experiences of mental and physical difference, among others. *Freedom Tube* is part of a larger agenda of disability justice grounded in the assumption that disability cultures and aesthetics can and do transform situated and lived experiences of difference.

Disability is situated amid competing representations, undelivered policy promises, and the harsh reality of material inequality. Despite the growing public presence of disability studies, politics, and art from the 1970s onward, disability continues to be depicted in highly reductive terms in mainstream literature, film, and television. Typically, these representations rely on tropes of overcoming and pity and characters played by non-disabled actors to ease the audience's discomfort about physical and mental differences. Yet at the same time, we are witnessing a proliferation of new visions and intricate cultural representations of disability by artists such as sachse.

Alongside these cultural battles of representation, living with a disability continues to be linked to material disadvantage, and worldwide austerity measures have reduced public spending meant to address these disadvantages. Disabled people are active agents in resisting and shaping this landscape, and our collection enters at this complex intersection of agency, representation, and material change. We ask: What is the role of disability art, which doesn't always have concrete demands, when there are pressing activist struggles to mount in legal and policy spheres?

On the policy front, austerity measures are perhaps among the most pressing concerns for disability activists. On May 7, 2014, a group of people gathered at an Ottawa community centre to hear Ellen Clifford, a disabled activist from Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), a UK-based direct-action group that has been a vocal opponent of austerity policies.³ The group gained worldwide attention during the 2012 Paralympic Games when it protested the sponsorship presence of Atos, a company contracted by the UK government to implement austerity measures (Lakhani and Taylor 2012). The DPAC protests highlighted a disjuncture between the promises of disabled achievement, overcoming, and accessibility heralded at the Paralympics and the daily reality of unemployment and poverty for many people with disabilities. In an age of austerity, people with disabilities live under constant threat of losing social benefits. People with disabilities and chronic illness must undergo medicalized, suspicion-driven "professional" assessments

primarily designed to balance government spending rather than to ensure the protection, or even survival, of disabled people.⁴

At the Ottawa event, Clifford (2014) recounted the history of DPAC and shared shocking examples of how the cuts were implemented. She reminded the audience that, at times, such policy changes can be directly linked to the suicide and death of disabled people. Or, as Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthom, and Katherine Runswick-Cole (2014, 982) explain, “If labour is slow death, living as a disabled person in 2014 might mean a quick one.” Indeed, in 2013 over 80 percent of the global population was affected by austerity measures (Ortiz and Cummins 2013). Yet Clifford’s key message was “if they thought disabled people were going to be easy targets, DPAC has proven them wrong.”

In 2014 the Ontario government attempted to “reassess” the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), which echoed the austerity program in the United Kingdom. Largely in response to a Raise the Rates campaign led by direct-action, anti-poverty coalition activists (including people with disabilities), the medical reviews were halted. In fact, in a complete shift, the 2015 and 2016 provincial budgets actually provide increases to ODSP recipients.

Alongside the radicalized efforts to enact social change, subvert neoliberal policy agendas, and improve the material conditions of people with disabilities, we are also witnessing an unprecedented moment for disability arts in Canada. The same week as the DPAC event in 2014, May 4–10, SPiLL, a non-profit Canadian arts organization, hosted a week-long artist retreat for Deaf artists in Gatineau, Quebec, the first event of its kind in Canada. In this collection, Paula Bath shares a first-hand community perspective of this event. At the SPiLL open house on May 9, each presentation was simultaneously interpreted into French, English, American Sign Language, and Langue des signes québécoise (Quebec Sign Language). Over the week, a group of fifteen artists from across Canada outlined and signed an ambitious manifesto that interweaves their existence as a political collective with their individual artistic creations, even when the artwork does not explicitly address themes of accessibility, language rights, or deafness.

Disability art, much like disability, is difficult to define, and the definitions are often contested. Rose Jacobson and Geoff McMurchy (2010, 1) define disability arts as “a vibrant and richly varied field in which artists with disabilities create work that expresses their identities as disabled people” and distinguish the history of disability art from the Deaf arts and De’VIA arts.⁵ This definition centres on the notion that disability art is by people with disabilities and is about disability. Yet disability scholars have

challenged the binary distinction between disabled and non-disabled as well as the very premise of identity-based politics (McRuer 2006; Schalk 2013). Kristin Nelson (this volume) explores the challenges associated with requiring individual artists to claim disabled identities and politics to be included in the category of disability art. Further, Rachel Gorman (2013) argues that the ability to claim politicized identities such as mad pride, disability pride, or Deafness relies on recreating racial and class inequalities and hierarchies of impairment. Indeed, how should we situate disability activism alongside cross-cutting identities that might merge racial, class, and disability identities without subsuming one of the categories?

We must also consider how the legacy of colonialism has worked to produce “states of injury” (Brown 1995) among Indigenous peoples, and the colonial repositioning of disability. In seeking to bring disability activism into a productive dialogue with Indigenous activism, we experienced significant challenges locating individual contributors who might reflect on these issues. An acknowledgment that none of the chapters deals specifically with these issues is not an excuse, but a recognition that there is a greater need to reflect on how disability activism, however multi-vocal and multi-faceted, has failed to sufficiently address how Indigenous bodies are marked by a colonial system of oppression that must be theorized independently of the focus of state-sponsored violence against disabled bodies (Greensmith 2012).

We highlight Clifford’s talk, SPiLL’s artist retreat from spring 2014, and the absent-presence of Indigenous perspectives to demonstrate the shifting landscape for disability activism that incorporates radical action and growing artistic communities, while continuing to exclude specific politicized identifications and histories. Despite the difference in tactics and even membership, both radical activism and disability art operate in the realm of meaning making and culture. Drawing on a disability justice framework and challenging aesthetic notions of what constitutes beauty, Mia Mingus (2011) writes, “There is magnificence in our ugliness. There is power in it, far greater than beauty can ever wield.” Instead of a commercialized call that “all bodies are beautiful,” Mingus starts from the premise that some bodies, particularly disabled and poor bodies, are continually deemed ugly. Historically, this ugliness was formalized into laws colloquially known as the “ugly laws” in the United States, which sought to prevent disabled and impoverished bodies from appearing in public spaces (Schweik 2009). As the shorthand name implies, these laws were about determining and controlling the concept of “ugly” while also being in themselves an ugly idea. The ugliness of being dragged from a wheelchair during an anti-austerity rally or

demanding multilingual interpretation in artistic contexts does not reclaim beauty in a vague, commercialized manner but disrupts the representational status quo around disability. “The ugly” also challenges politicized communities to interrogate practices of exclusion and demands a broader and more nuanced world of art and representation, including the exclusions of disability politics. Importantly, the disability justice framework evoked by Mingus and the turn toward the ugly emerge from centring the experience of disabled people of colour, refusing to simplify questions of identity, and do not shy away from critiquing the limitations of disability politics and scholarship.

Against this backdrop, we present a collection of essays exploring Canadian disability activism in its many forms. Our collection features contributions from artists and activists with disabilities, disability scholars, and many who cross these categories. Through this collection, we argue that disability activism in Canada is at once bold and vibrant in its diversifying tactics, but also fracturing in response to new economic and social realities. This collection considers the potential of seeing art as an integral element to broadening accounts of Canadian disability movements, an element that represents a lived practice of Mingus’s (2011) disability justice framework. This is not to say, however, that disability justice is the best or only mode of disability activism; rather, it helps us to appreciate the role of art and radical mobilizing in renewed, nuanced accounts of Canadian disability activism. And we should be careful, as well, in positioning disability identity and activism as somehow subsuming identities that are experienced through an intersectional lens that recognizes the multiplicity of oppression, one that is not always reducible to disability identity or status.

Indigenous and racialized individuals who experience disability may intervene in ways that upset any neat ordering of identities or that might seemingly resist naming disability or impairment directly. Forms of colonial violence, from the painful legacy of residential schools through to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, work to disable Indigenous bodies, even if the disabling nature of these acts of violence is rarely imagined as such. Instead, Indigeneity itself is reproduced as a pathology, as an affliction that is somehow synonymous with the act of being Indigenous (see Million 2013). There are also some difficult resonances between practices in residential schools and those in large-scale institutions for people with intellectual disabilities and psycho-social disabilities. In these ways, we hope that some of the reflections on disability activism discussed here resonate with Indigenous people who are in the forefront of thinking

about what it means to live and act in a world marked by colonialism and dispossession.

Acclaimed Indigenous artists such as Rebecca Belmore have, through performance, video, and other artistic forms, intervened in reimagining the Indigenous woman's body as a site for collective resistance against everyday colonial violence and trauma. While Belmore does not address disability directly in her work, themes of embodiment abound in her artistic practice and culminate in efforts to resist outside naming that is often required in disability politics. One of Belmore's first and better-known works, a performance titled *Artifact 671B*, found the artist seated immobile in -22°C weather for two hours on the frozen ground outside the Thunder Bay Art Gallery to protest an exhibition organized by the Glenbow Museum in conjunction with the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. As Belmore explains in an interview, however, it is frustrating for Indigenous artists to be asked to speak for all Indigenous people: "One thing that does puzzle me is this idea that my work is only concerned with identity politics ... I was recently asked during a visit if I ever get tired of always having to represent my people. I joked that I have never run for the position of 'chief.' Seriously, how do non-aboriginal people view themselves? That is my question" (quoted in Nanibush 2014, 217). The absence of Indigenous perspectives in disability studies is troubling and invites further reflection, but Belmore's work highlights how "identity politics" are also a by-product of a form of colonialism that forces individuals to assume tokenistic or spokesperson roles, something she strongly rejects.

Including artistic, radical, and cultural interventions within accounts of Canadian disability movements helps to broaden the parameters of disability activism in ways that are more inclusive of complex embodiments and reflective of historically-situated contexts, such as the overlapping traumas associated with settler colonialism. The historical erasure of Canadian disability experience and disability histories occurs within a context that cannot be separated from the grievous harms of state-sponsored violence against Canada's Indigenous inhabitants. In addition, it helps to "mobilize metaphor" by challenging the assumption that metaphor operates only in non-material realms. The chapters in this collection speak to a need to challenge the material–non-material divide, especially as it pertains to the performative potential of artistic expression to fashion new worlds of disability experience. *Mobilizing Metaphor* also represents alternative modes of knowledge production and seeks to disrupt the epistemic privilege granted to written, rational, and evidence-based forms of articulation.

Broadening the Parameters of Disability Activism in Canada

Scholarly literature on Canadian disability movements presents a picture of policy-based, cooperative, and state-focused activism that predominantly operates through non-profit organizations (Hutchison et al. 2007). A number of historic successes have followed in this tradition in Canada, including the oft-cited struggle to ensure the inclusion of mental and physical disability in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Peters 2003). Individual advocates and representatives of disability organizations often participate in policy consultations (Barnartt 2008; Stienstra 2003), such as the establishment of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (Kitchin and Wilton 2003). The history of policy involvement has led scholars to characterize Canadian disability activism as “non-confrontational” (Chivers 2007) and preferring to employ “lobbying” tactics (Carroll and Ratner 2001). Further, historic accounts of Canadian disability activism tend to emphasize the development and activities of non-profit organizations (Driedger 1989; Lord 2010; Lord and Hutchison 2007; Neufeldt 2003). Michael Prince (2012, 11) argues that Canadian disability activism is a valuable counter-narrative to neoliberalism and argues that the disability movement “is not an anti-capitalist movement nor is it anti-globalization.”

This style of activism and social change continues in Canada, where, in some cases, advocates and disability organizations work cooperatively with governments to achieve policy goals. Recent examples of successes include the development of and public education about the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act from 2005 onward and Canada’s role in developing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms also continues to play an important role in promoting and achieving change for people with disabilities through high-profile cases. Lisa Vanhala (2011, 64–67) documents over thirty-nine cases from 1985 to 2007 in which the four disability organizations in her study appeared before the Supreme Court of Canada in various capacities. There are more examples from other organizations excluded from Vanhala’s analysis, especially organizations addressing mental illness. At the provincial level, a historic class-action settlement in 2012 against the Ontario government acknowledged the harms and misguided approaches of large-scale residential institutions (Crawford Class Action Services 2014). This settlement represents an important development in deinstitutionalization against a backdrop where large-scale institutions continue to operate in other Canadian provinces and Alberta actually reversed its decision in fall 2014 to close the Michener Centre. Without question, Canada has a lively

and ongoing history of pursuing advances in disability rights through the court system. We should not discount the clear, measurable, and important history of disability activism in policy and legal arenas. Yet Lisa Vanhala (2011) admits that many of the key legal victories at the Supreme Court of Canada have not been implemented consistently by various levels of government, demonstrating the limitations of legal gains.

When held up against a historical record of vibrant, robust forms of legal organizing, one might assume that the present moment is characterized by a retreat from disability activism. But this is to misread the current situation: such a view is possible only if one assumes a particularly narrow understanding of what constitutes disability activism and engagement (Kelly 2013). In addition to anti-poverty mobilizing by groups like DPAC, individual disabled protesters have a visible and troubled presence in broad-based radical movements. Sunaura Taylor, Marg Hall, Jessica Lehman, Rachel Liebert, Akemi Nishida, and Jean Stewart (Taylor et al. 2016) share first-hand accounts of their involvement with various Occupy movements across the United States in 2011. The authors share moments where Occupy encampments demonstrate at least some initial acceptance and awareness of disability issues, but also moments of physical, social, and economic inaccessibility. Nishida's account in this collaborative chapter emphasizes the importance of people with disabilities joining Occupy movements. She writes, "We go to [Occupy Wall Street] to represent our community, especially those who cannot be there physically for various reasons; to show diversity within the 99%; to inform and educate people about ableism; to welcome disabled people who do not know about the community; and to be with each other" (ibid., 25). Intersectional movements are gaining awareness of disability politics and the necessity of including disabled people in efforts toward social justice. In Canada, disabled people also played an important role during the Occupy movement, and Melissa Graham and Kevin Jackson (this volume) share a first-hand account of organizing the annual Disability Pride March that originated during Occupy Toronto. Disability activists were also involved in the 2012 Quebec student movement (Blouin Genest, this volume). Reading about legal and policy successes related to disability in Canada can discursively erase, or at least distance, the work of individual activists engaged in broad-based, grassroots movements. Jen Rinaldi and nancy viva davis halifax (this volume) highlight the disjuncture between policy and legal successes and the world of disability art through what they term a "poetry of witness," which disrupts conventional framings of disability. In sharing her experiences with the Red Wagon arts

collective, Halifax observes the limitations of legal interventions, which are presumed to ameliorate material inequalities faced by people with disabilities more than poetry, art, or even radical activism do. She writes: “I am present for decades, witnessing the ordinary, iterative, neglected suffering – the lack in the amount and nutritional value of food over days and months extends into years; the inability to purchase tampons, deodorant, or tokens for travelling is not a Charter concern” (Rinaldi and Halifax, this volume). Art, and more disruptive forms of collective politics such as Occupy, hold potential and forge change in ways that move beyond policy and the courtroom.

Mobilizing Metaphor

Disability and Deaf arts in Canada are stronger than ever, with the Canada Council for the Arts releasing an equality strategy in 2012 to expand the arts; a robust renewal of the Abilities Arts Festival, now an explicitly disability-led organization called Tangled Art + Disability; the inclusion of disability art exhibits in museums and local art festivals such as Artsweek Peterborough; and the growing popularity of specific disabled artists. While the world of disability and Deaf art is growing, it remains underrepresented in scholarship on Canadian disability movements. For example, an important report on Canadian disability arts, titled *Lights ... Camera ... Attitude!*, is absent from other literature documenting the disability movement (Abbas et al. 2004). This appears to be a unidirectional problem, however, as an account by Jacobson and McMurchy (2010) about disability and Deaf art in Canada properly situates these artistic communities within broader discussions of disability activism. It is clear then that many of the artists see themselves and their work within a politicized disability framework, even if conventional ways of thinking about disability politics marginalize their contributions.

Indeed, many disability artists see themselves as activists and engage in what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2009, 193) calls “visual activism,” where people with disabilities put “themselves in the public eye, saying ‘look at me’ instead of ‘don’t stare.’” In the chapter by Carla Rice, Eliza Chandler, and Nadine Changfoot (this volume), both the creative process and the resulting digital stories by women who embody difference constitute political makings and foster an “aesthetic community.” Further, Rice, Chandler, and Changfoot situate the digital story project within a disability justice framework. As mentioned above, disability justice is an emerging cross-issue, radical, and transformative approach that moves beyond rights-based and

independent living discourses. Mingus (2011) explains, “I am not fighting for independence, as much of the disability rights movement rallies behind. I am fighting for an interdependence that embraces need and tells the truth: no one does it on their own and the myth of independence is just that, a myth.” Jeffrey Preston (this volume) uses his co-created webcomic *Cripz* as a political *détournement* to disrupt myths of disability perpetuated in mass media. The political acts imagined through the characters in *Cripz* extend into confrontational politics in the forms of chairmobbing and stairbombing.

Including examples of arts-based and radical activism in accounts of disability politics challenges the assumption that metaphor and affect do not operate in material ways. While Nirmala Erelles (2011, 119) critiques feminist scholars within and outside of disability studies for the “overreliance on metaphor at the expense of materiality,” this collection asks whether attention to metaphor and affect precludes tangible, material change in historical contexts. Is it irresponsible to focus on cultural or artistic interventions when there are concrete political struggles rooted in the retrenchment of the welfare state and its impact on people with disabilities? And how do we reconcile cultural and artistic production with more conventional forms of disability activism and mobilization, or should we even attempt to bridge these worlds of activism? Jay Dolmage (2014, 100) argues, “A cultural turn does not deny the materiality of disability, yet it troubles the origins and sedimentations of this materiality.” The relationships among material realities, embodied experiences, and emotion – especially emotions that are generated through creating and engaging with art – are difficult yet essential to explore.

Arlie Hochschild (1983) attended to emotion long before the “affective turn” in critical theory, highlighting the ways in which female flight attendants were required to engage in emotional labour through controlling and projecting emotions to produce specific responses in customers. Hochschild’s widely cited work demonstrates that managing emotions is a form of gendered labour and that emotional work produces measurable outcomes in large corporations in the form of profit. The assumption that the emotions of customers must be tended to in order to produce profit undergirds the logic of customer service that is a hallmark of the private sector, and has migrated beyond to influence the public sector broadly. More directly related to visual art, Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki (2014, 6) make a compelling case that “the cultural and political salience of visual autobiographies inheres in how they generate and critically mobilize affect for pedagogical

purposes.” There is ample support for challenging the imagined distinction between a world of art and emotion from the worlds of politics and tangible action. But this holds only if we accept that emotion and politics are discrete concerns.

The emotional turn has been felt throughout several social science and humanities fields (see Ahmed 2004; Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2005; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Gould 2009; Massumi 1995, 2002; Nussbaum 2001, 2004). Although this literature addresses a myriad of topics, a central theme relevant to the study of disability activism concerns the need to destabilize the separation of emotion from reason, wherein art and radical activism are presumed to emerge from emotional, “irrational” motivations (Flam and King 2005; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Gould 2009). It is common nowadays, however, to refute claims that emotions and rationality stand apart, uncoupled from one another (Damasio 2005). Rather, reason and emotion are seen as mutually co-constituted. Once we accept that we can think *with* emotions, that emotions don’t get in the way, it opens a space for affective ways of imagining and enacting disability art and politics. There is also a burgeoning literature on the role of emotions and affect in social movement activism, some of which disrupts notions of rationality that have characterized the study of contentious politics (see Flam and King 2005).

Emotions are often structured by social conventions and culture. Complex moral emotions such as compassion, disgust, fear, and anger “express explicit principles that we hold, or mere intuitions that we have never fully articulated” (Jasper 2006, 17). As Jasper explains, they reveal that we attach moral weight to our ability to express certain emotions. So we might feel shame, for instance, about our desire to express outrage or anger. Affects are non-conscious but registered experiences of bodily energy and intensity that respond to stimuli (Massumi 1995, 2002). Affect makes us feel emotions, while feelings capture the phenomenon of affect and emotions and connote bodily, felt experience (Gould 2009).

As discussed in Orsini and Wiebe (2014) in the context of autistic activism, while social movement scholars have sought to highlight the role of “opportunity structures” in facilitating and constraining political and social change, this tells us little about the ways in which actors attach feelings and emotions to their actions (Gould 2009, 18). Disability activism, as a discursive and political field, is thus a rich case for exploring how actors perform “a kind of emotional j[i]u-jitsu” (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2004, 423). For example, Audre Lorde’s quest for material revolution and recognition of

black women is intrinsically linked to emotion and art. For Lorde (2007, 39), emotion itself represents a form of resistance to the status quo: “For within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive.” In this collection, Drew Belsky details the role of grief in negotiating the ethics of representation and creating embodied art across identities, refusing to categorize loss, emotional responses, and relationships as subsidiary to the primary aims of critical scholarship. Catherine Frazee, Kathryn Church, and Melanie Panitch (this volume) also illustrate this emotional jiu-jitsu through their account of including the *Out from Under* exhibit in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. Frazee, Church, and Panitch demonstrate that emotionally-based haggling, tactics, and reactions were integral to achieving their aims and, further, that curatorial practices must be interrogated when considering the activist potential of disability art.

A focus on feeling rules is useful in thinking about disability politics in its temporal dimensions, especially as it pertains to exploring what it is appropriate to feel, and how this might shift over time. In an environment in which narratives of pity circulate around disability experience, disability activism can challenge the ableist assumptions embedded in these discourses.

In her original formulation, Hochschild distinguished framing rules from feeling rules, adding that feeling rules “do not apply to action but to what is often taken as a precursor to action” (Hochschild 1979, 566). Framing rules “refer to the rules according to which we ascribe definitions or meanings to situations.” Feeling rules, on the other hand, “refer to guidelines for the assessment of fits and misfits between feeling and situation” (ibid.).

The ways in which feelings and emotions are ordered and expressed in relation to disability can enrich our understandings of disability activism. These new framing rules of disability activism also upset conventional ideas of what constitutes contentious politics or social movement action itself. As part of our efforts to challenge a conventional focus on disability activism’s “successes” in the legal sphere and move beyond a focus on rational, strategic action, we are interested in how feelings and emotions as collectively generated sentiments can ground disability movements. An appreciation for the complex role of emotions and affects in disability politics asks us to reconsider how feeling rules might structure the environment in which activists and artists intervene. While not permanent or static, these rules can help us to uncover why certain emotions are privileged in activist settings during particular periods but discouraged in other contexts or periods.

These rules also help us to consider the relationships among art, agency, and intention. This is especially critical since an important critique in disability studies has centred on the need to move beyond pity or inspiration narratives. Positioning artistic, cultural, and radical interventions in the disability landscape means thinking about a template of emotions and affects that destabilizes ableist understandings of disability as always evoking sympathy, compassion, and pity. Anger, rage, and shame can be productive sites for imagining disability, as well.

Agency, Art, and Mobilization

Our choice of *Mobilizing Metaphor* as the title for this collection reflects an interest in a view of disability activism that is agency-based. As political, social, and cultural actors, we view disability activism as a mobilizing force – as an attempt to move beyond instrumental or strategic ways of thinking about disability itself solely as a metaphor. Disability activism, in all of its cultural, political, and artistic manifestations, implores us to challenge the idea that disability is a stand-in, a placeholder. At the same time, however, we reject the idea that artistic or cultural interventions that seek to reshape or rethink disability are somehow inferior to overtly political interventions. Both operate to challenge the terrain of disability activism and force us to confront the productive tensions that might emerge when we merge the artistic with the political.

The collection is organized into three key sections. The first section, “Assemblages of Disability Research, Art, and Social Transformation,” explores critical places where disability scholarship and artistic practice or methods combine to enable social change. The chapter by Alexander McClelland and Jessica Whitbread, for example, deals with cultural production in the field of HIV, which can be traced to the trailblazing efforts of artists’ collectives such as Gran Fury, better known for its slogan “Silence = Death.” Their chapter on the PosterVirus campaign deals with the criminalization of people living with HIV and opens up a space for linking HIV activist worlds with disability arts production. Another example, Véro Leduc’s chapter, “It Fell on Deaf Ears,” is uniquely situated to reflect on her own experience as an artist-scholar who brings Deafhood into artistic focus through the creation of a graphic signed novel. Rather than view the graphic novel as a cultural product intended to communicate a message to her audience, Leduc is interested in the production of art itself as an intervention brimming with political and social meaning. She uses the term “artivism” to

capture this move from a focus on the consumption of cultural products to an emphasis on the process itself as the fundamental feature of artistic and social/political transformation. As Leduc makes clear, these processes do not exist outside of society; they are “enmeshed both within the transformation of my own practice and position, as well as within the communities to which I belong.”

The second section, “Artistic Paths to Disability Activism,” considers firsthand accounts of creating art or using art for disability justice. Art can represent different forms of knowledge that do not necessitate instrumental outcomes that are more typically found in human rights or legislative challenges linked to disability. Instead, art and even radical activism work on the level of meaning making and shared definitions. The challenge of art is to take seriously the visual, the enacted, the artistic, the seemingly disorganized as valid forms of knowledge production and social change. For example, Lindsay Eales shares her account of co-founding and performing with CRIPSie, an integrated dance group in Edmonton, Alberta, demonstrating that creating these alternative spaces represents an expression, and action, of social justice. In Chapter 9, which is adapted from a speech delivered at the University of Ottawa in November 2014, *jes sachse* explores the concept of the liminal, making connections to the tangible marginality of prison and asylum spaces and the conceptual liminality of disability art. *sachse* and the art they create delves into issues of curation and the production of bodies, raising difficult questions about voyeurism and the implications of “hyper-storytelling framed by whomever has the most hits,” as *sachse* writes. Diane Driedger describes her experiences as an artist with disabilities who revises famous artwork by painting herself in. The artists in Driedger’s chapter have some connection to disability, and her work exposes disability narratives that sometimes sit below the surface.

The final section, “Rethinking Agency in Canadian Disability Movements,” includes chapters that consider new and renewed visions of agency and autonomy expressed through disability activist work. Pamela Moss’s chapter on “broken embodiments,” for example, forces us to confront the complex face of activism in terms of contested illnesses, drawing on the case of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). As Moss explains, people with ME “are more likely to experience their bodily sensations as broken embodiments rather than as simply feeling ill.” Moss develops the notion of perching as a way of thinking through a complex series of interventions (social, political, and biomedical) that individuals living with ME mobilize to cope with, challenge, and resist attempts to articulate the meaning of ME.

As she explains, “Perching is a practice of positioning oneself within biomedicine while maintaining a critical view of it.” While hardly without its share of risks for the individual patient who must engage with biomedical ways of knowing ill or disabled bodies, perching can be strategically important in nonetheless gaining legitimacy for the experience of living with ME, even if the interventions themselves do not dismantle hierarchies of scientific or biomedical authority.

It remains puzzling that social movement scholarship in Canada and more broadly has demonstrated only a limited understanding of the changing contours of disability activism and what this might hold for other accounts of social movement contestation, nationally but also in a comparative perspective. Certainly, initial interest and research on the Occupy movement paid close attention to the movement’s use of symbols and slogans to culturally populate the movement. Moreover, the student movement that emerged in Quebec in the wake of protests against university tuition hikes garnered significant attention, even if the movement’s progressive potential was challenged by its seeming inattention to accessibility for disabled students, both in terms of physical access to sites of protest as well as accessibility to higher education, as Gabriel Blouin Genest’s chapter in this volume demonstrates.

Disability activism and art, the shape of which is difficult to predict, not only present unique opportunities to explore questions that have animated the field of social movement studies for decades, but also hold potential promise as sites for asking questions about the expanding affective worlds of activism, some of which escape the state-focused lens privileged by social movement scholars and, moreover, the role of emotions in generating social change. In those cases where artistic or cultural forms of contention are addressed, they appear as supplements to more conventional modes of action, as tactics employed by actors to sensitize supporters or movement adherents. We hope this collection opens up spaces for thinking anew about the discursive and material boundaries that separate art, emotion, and disability activism. As this collection demonstrates, activists and scholars working in this field continue to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes art, culture, and disability, not to mention activism. For us, this includes a reappraisal of artistic, radical, and affective practices as interventions in their own right, as well as a greater appreciation for how disabled bodies and minds figure in these interventions. This need not imply pitting activist practices against one another, or searching for bona fide expressions of disability. Rather, it recognizes the productive potential of these