# ---Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities---

# Part 1

## Ch. 5 – Ecosomatics

#### Alt?? - Ecosomatics allows us to reunderstand and situate ourselves as disabled folks in new ways as the environment changes. It’s a situation of new and difficult encounter that requires a reckoning with the way spaces shape our feelings and our bodies.

#### Embodied politics are particularly key – RATHER THAN THINK where can we live and survive (Get off the rock or elitist green capitalist formulations) WE SHOULD THINK about how the structures themselves are disabling conditions.

A mutual emphasis on place is a useful foundation upon which to establish a dialogue between disability studies and literary ecology. As Casey (1993) documents throughout his phenomenological analysis of place, the body is a pivotal component of the place- making process, to the point that embodiment and emplacement are almost synonymous. In the preface to Getting Back into Place, a philosophical and ecocritical examination of the place- world, Casey argues, “Place ushers us into what already is: namely, the environing subsoil of our embodiment, the bedrock of our being-in-the-world” (xvii). As he documents over the five parts of his book, this status of being- in- the- world is informed by our intellectual traditions concerning place, our ways of moving within space, our modes of dwelling in and around built places, our encounters with wilderness, and our experiences journeying between different places. Central to all of these aspects of place-experience is the body. Orientation and emplacement require a dialectical engagement between our lived bodies and our environment. Casey explains, “If I am to get oriented in a landscape or sea-scape (especially one that is unknown or subject to a sudden or unpredictable variation), I must bring my body into conformity with the configurations of the land or the sea. . . . The conjoining of the surface of my body with the surface of the earth or sea— their common integumentation— generates the interspace in which I become oriented” (28). The alternative is displacement and desolation, a kind of “place pathology” (38).

A key part of the emplacement equation, Casey contends, is the body- in- motion. Our understanding of the multidimensionality of place— here and there, up and down, near and far, and so on— occurs through a series of ongoing movements, precipi tated by the body, in and between places. Casey writes, “My body continually takes me into place. It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being- in- place. Although we rarely attend to its exact role, once we do we cannot help but notice its importance. Without the good graces and excellent services of our bodies, not only would we be lost in place— acutely dis oriented and confused— we would have no coherent sense of place itself” (48). It is important here to call attention to the fact that Casey’s phenomenology of place more or less presumes a compulsory able-bodiedness; this is to say that as thorough as his examination of the body’s experience of place is, he does not account for the disabled body. The theoretical body that he imagines in his calculations is one much like his own. In fact many of the illustrations he uses to flesh out his narrative of the place- world come from his own able- bodied experiences, which he takes as the default. In his chapter on directionality, for example, he alludes to the importance of sight as the primary sense in the place- making and orientation process, noting how “the primacy of vision contributes powerfully to the dominance of the forward direction” (84). This raises questions about how emplacement works for those who are born blind and how relationships to place change for those who become blind later in their lives. Furthermore Casey builds his case for ecocentrism in the penultimate chapter of his book by positing the acts of “walking” and “ambling,” particularly as described by Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, as powerful metaphors for the dialectic between body and environment and proscribes them as ideal processes through which we get back into place. What happens when bodily impairments alter or severely limit motion? Are such bodies doomed to suffer eternally from place pathology, forever disoriented and displaced?

By posing such hyperbolic questions, I do not mean to discount Casey’s analysis of the place- world; while stemming from an able- bodied perspective, his mapping of the relationship between embodiment and emplacement provides a steady foundation for an inclusive ecosomatic paradigm. What I hope to draw attention to in raising these questions is the perhaps too obvious fact that not all mind- bodies are the same. The larger question, then, is: How might we modify the narrative of place to account for a wider variety of bodies and even for the multiple variations a single body might go through as it changes due to aging, illness, or accidents? For example, Casey highlights how transitions between places are often accompanied by feelings of desolation and displacement, as the embodied subject mourns the place she is leaving behind. Considering the deep entanglement of bodies and environments, it logically follows that changes to the subject’s body may also bring on this feeling of displacement, even if the embodied subject remains in a place familiar to her. Again, as Mairs’s comment in the epigraph suggests, changes to the body lead to subsequent changes in one’s perception of and experience with being in the world. The title of Mairs’s (1996) book, Waist-High in the World, is a nod toward this very notion, as Mairs remaps the world from the point of view of her impaired, wheelchair-bound body.

What adding a disability perspective to place- studies draws attention to most powerfully, however, is not the disabled subject’s emotional and intellectual process of re/emplacement but the disabling elements of the built environment. In this sense issues of place are a central aspect of recent scholarship on disability, particularly those strands that rely upon the social model, with its emphasis on the spatial and place- based contexts that defi ne disability. With origins in “Fundamental Principles of Dis ability,” published in 1976 by the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS), the social model has continued to take shape over the past three decades and has developed many branches, often complementary but sometimes contradictory. As a whole, however, the various strands of social model theory share the fundamental principles as first outlined by the UPIAS. In her overview of the evolution of the social model, Claire Tregaskis (2002, 457) summarizes these principles, noting their emphasis on the need to “[challenge] disabled people’s own internalized oppression by enabling them to make sense of their experience in a way which explains that it is not, after all, ‘their own fault’ that they face discrimination and social exclusion. Instead, responsibility for that exclusion is placed at the door of a normalizing society that has rigidly developed and maintained structures to . . . reward those who most closely conform to socially prescribed models of appearance and behavior.” In essence the social model provides a vehicle for the important work of redefining disability and taking it out of the purview of medical discourse. As Simi Linton (1998, 11) argues in her landmark book, Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity, “the medicalization of disability casts human variation as deviance from the norm, as pathological condition, as deficit, and, significantly, as an individual burden and personal tragedy.” Disability studies, on the other hand, recasts disability as something created by discriminatory social, political, and economic practices and environments. So rather than focus on treating “the condition and the person with the condition,” disability activists instead spotlight “‘treating’ the social processes and policies that constrict disabled people’s lives” (11).

One of the derivatives of this shift from a medical definition of disability to a social definition is that the social model places great emphasis on the contexts that create disability; that is, it moves the focus away from viewing the impaired mind- body as an isolated phenomenon and instead highlights the mind- body’s relationship to the places it occupies. Admittedly this shared concern in disability studies and ecocriticism for spatial (or, more broadly, environmental) contexts provides somewhat tenuous ground for a coalition between the two fi elds. The problem has to do with the divide between the decidedly sociopolitical schema of disability studies and the alleged asocial tendencies of ecological criticism. The environmental contexts that disability studies scholars are most concerned with are, after all, predominantly social ones: the built environments and sociopolitical transformations of space into places that create disability. The earliest versions of social model theory developed by scholars like Michael Oliver and Vic Finkelstein examined how “the experience of disability depends on the sort of society we live in” and pointed out, for example, the disabling effects of capitalism in Great Britain (Tre gaskis 2002, 460). The focus, in other words, tends to be on how social systems and policies create disability by placing barriers on individuals with physical and mental impairments. Understand ably there is little need to consider the nonhuman community, or at least dimensions of the natural world that are unsocialized. To put it simply, looking at Yellowstone National Park through a disability studies lens means not focusing on the flora and fauna that defi ne the place but instead examining whether the National Park Service’s management of the park’s facilities limits or promotes access for those with physical or mental impairments. So while the consideration of place is a necessary aspect of both theoretical approaches, this factor alone is not enough to bridge the gap between disabilities studies and ecological criticism. But it is, I contend, a starting point: if a shared emphasis on place is not a bridge, it is at least an important connecting thread.

As a metaphor, a way of organizing human perceptions about the natural world, the ecosomatic paradigm has the potential to reorient our way of thinking about the relationship between the body and the social and natural environments it inhabits. It presents an ideal model for eradicating disability in the manner imagined and theorized by scholars like Tregaskis, who pursue a social constructionist approach to disability. As Solveig Man gus Reindal (2010, 127) notes, Tregaskis represents an extreme idealistic position wherein she argues that disability could be outright eliminated if society was reorganized in such a manner that it accounted for the needs of every one of its members. In this vein Peter Freund (2001, 689), for example, has suggested ways in which “transport- public space” might be structured to accommodate the majority of human mind- body types that maneuver through space in different ways, whether walking or in wheelchairs. He asks us to “move from asking what bodies can function in a particular context . . . to asking what types of structures can accommodate the widest range of bodies” (691). To this end Freund advances the “architectural paradigm” of “universal design”— a “minority voice in the chorus of architects”— to illustrate the practical ways in which, “over time, deconstructing and reconstructing the social organization of space would benefit many bodies, not merely those that are impaired. . . . We must universalize non-disabling spatial organization” (704).2 Whether it is the architecture of individual buildings or the broader architecture of urban and regional planning, the idea is that social and political organization needs to structure and restructure space to universalize access.

#### Idealism is good. Even if pragmatism is sometimes necessary, space for idealism opens new doors for pragmatism. – Not great?? Answers medical model necessary (accounted for by this article??)

Many within and outside of disability studies have questioned, and rightly so, the viability of this idealistic approach. Indeed much of the criticism concerning the social model in general stems from what Reindal (2010, 127) refers to as the “over- socializing of the phenomenon of disability.” While most disability studies scholars agree that social barriers are a major impediment to the lives of people with disability, many express concern that the social model does not fully or properly account for the experience of impairment and the limitations that such impairments impose on disabled people’s lives no matter what the social environment.3 As J. R. Richards argues, a paraplegic may very well maneuver with ease around a town structured on the principles of universal design, but still “there would be prob lems about trying to keep with a party climbing in the Himalayas” (qtd. in Reindal 2010, 127). One cannot theorize away limitations imposed by bodily impairments.

I am not an architect, nor a sociologist or regional planner, for that matter, so I am not equipped to address the practical applications or implications of a “universal design” approach to disability. And I agree with critics of the social model who call for greater attention to the experience of impairment and who emphasize what Tobin Siebers (2001, 747) calls “the new realism of the body.” I am particularly interested, though, in exploring the dialectic between the body (and the experience of the subject) and the structure of the social and natural environments in which it is situated; the social model, particularly in Freund’s (2001, 691) sociomaterial analysis of it, ultimately “recognizes the inseparability of the body from its social structural, mate rial integument.” I am interested, then, in how the social model underscores the experiential and theoretical contiguity of the body and its surrounding environment. I think there is room to develop the social and ecological applications that such an idea as contiguity makes possible. Furthermore I think there is much to be gained by taking an ecological approach to the social model to see how the land community operates as an organizing structure and to examine what kind of potential such an approach has for redefining disability.

#### NOTE: There is a section on apocalypse but after cutting it I deleted it. It doesn’t help as a debate card but is good to show what the social model means. It could be a good narrative for a K of extinction from disability studies. Like maybe extinction is good (well extinction isn’t but imagining that extinction through the barren wastes of post-apocalypse provides a speculative fiction solution to address ableist norms and demonstrate the ways that the social model is correct orienting us toward new modes of relating to disability.) Included below

McCarthy’s (2006) Pulitzer Prize– winning novel, The Road, is particularly instructive here because it documents how modes of embodiment and emplacement must be renegotiated by the novel’s protagonists in the face of environmental devastation. In this manner McCarthy’s novel may be read as an allegory for the social model, one that employs the ecosomatic paradigm to both deconstruct conventional norms of embodiment and to offer a cautionary tale about impending environmental degradation. The action of the novel can be summed up as follows: In the aftermath of an unspecified apocalyptic event, the world has become an ashen and cold place where most living things have died. Those who are still alive can be broken down into two basic categories: those who cannibalize (“the bad guys,” as McCarthy’s protagonists label them) and those who do not (those who “carry the fire”). The narrative follows an unnamed father and son as they travel through this barren landscape— what was once the southern Appalachians— hoping to find better and warmer conditions near the coast. The journey to the coast is a hazardous one, simultaneously tragic and beautiful as the father and son confront the best and worst of humanity.

The postapocalyptic setting is an intriguing one from a social model perspective because it represents an environment stripped of all but the most rudimentary social structures. This stripped- down environment and the various figures that move across it help to demonstrate the power of place within the social model in a couple of significant ways. First, the human body’s relation to space and place in this postapocalyptic landscape is altered completely, as the relationship between signs and the signified that existed in the preapocalyptic world— ostensibly our world— has been unalterably deconstructed. The narrator reveals this fact by describing the status of this new world, its defining nondefinitiveness: “Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air” (11). This semiotic erosion is a tragic circumstance of the postapocalyptic world, particularly from the point of view of the father, whose ties to the forms that defined the old world are a constant source of sorrow and loss. It is also a difficult, near- impossible place to inhabit. But it is a difficult, near- impossible place to inhabit for all bodies, from the young to the old and from the healthy to the infirm. Furthermore because the landscape is devoid of meaningful physical or social structures, it presents an intriguing reverse example of the “universal design” metaphor, that ideal mode of spatial organization that seeks to accommodate as many mind- body types as possible. Because the ashen wilderness makes its demands equally on all comers, the category of disability is, like most other things in The Road’s world, stripped of its meaning.

Second, from a social model perspective, the unmade (or remade) world in The Road destabilizes the notion of a normative mind- body and thereby explodes the distinction between able- bodiedness and dis- ability. Particularly instructive is Rosemarie Garland- Thomson’s (1997, 9) coinage of the term normate, which “designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings.” The normate is a “constructed identity” that grants authority and power based on a series of overlapping hierarchies involving gender, race, sexuality, and mind- body types; thus the normative heterosexual, able- bodied, Caucasian male provides the model through which alternative configurations are perceived as deviations. Such a construction is responsible for a series of economic and political oppressions that limit the agency of those who cannot claim normate status. Within the fictional world of The Road the figure of the normate in the preapocalyptic world— the healthy and unimpaired body— is reinscribed by McCarthy in the new world as a sign of moral corruption. The blood cults, whose members manifest healthy bodies by the old normative standard, must be viewed as anything but normal. Their vigor and average body weight signal their cannibalism and designate them as the “bad guys.” Conversely the emaciated and weakened bodies of the “good guys” represent the new standard, redefining emaciation, at least on a symbolic level, as a sign of strength and moral fortitude. Such a reversal, of course, is hard to conceive when measured by the standards familiar to us in the here and now. But this reversal powerfully reveals the central claim of the social model: the social- environmental context has the power to disable the impaired body. If you change the context, you can liberate the body by eliminating disability as a defining marker of difference. In the postapocalyptic world that McCarthy imagines in The Road, the dramatic changes wrought by environmental ruination even work to cast deviant forms of embodiment— bodies wracked to the point of near death— as beautiful.

#### Discourse and storytelling matter – the beliefs and imaginations of our cards create a world of what we can imagine and create. Narrative prosthesis is an example of the kind of work we can do to identify and avoid ableism in our own storytelling. Ecosomatics embraces that but goes further to ask for critique alongside embodied politics.

The ecosomatic paradigm builds on the assumption that the association between people and places, as Francesco Loriggio (1994, 6) contends, is part of an ongoing process predicated on the “dialectic of what there is and what people believe or imagine there is.” What we “believe or imagine” is shaped and articulated, in large part, by literary art and certainly by the stories we tell, hear, and repeat. Literature and storytelling are powerful forces in shaping our individual and collective environmental imaginations. Casey (1993, 254) would refer to the work that literature does as “thickening,” the label he uses to describe the process wherein “something emerges from the . . . dense coalescence of cultural practices and natural givens.” An ecocritic might call this process “developing a sense of place”— envisioning the deep entanglement between the natural and cultural parameters of place. As the geographer J. Nicholas Entrikin (1991, 5) explains, narrative is one of the most effective tools for explaining and investigating the complex nature of our relationships with places: “To understand place requires that we have access to both an objective and a subjective reality. From [a] decentered vantage point . . . place becomes either location or a set of generic relations and thereby loses much of its significance for human action. From the centered view- point of the subject, place has meaning only in relation to an individual’s or a group’s goals and concerns. Place is best viewed from points in between.” Because narrative provides a form that allows for the synthesis of the decentered (natural, objective) and centered (social, subjective) dimensions of place, it offers perhaps the clearest view of this in- betweenness. In narrative, storytellers can pull together the disparate elements of place into a representative whole. Literary narrative provides a means to organize and mediate this complicated process of emplacement. Although Entrikin’s overall aim is to emphasize the usefulness of a narrative- like approach to the geographical study of place, his conclusions also make clear the value of place- oriented literary ecology precisely because literary narrative can provide insight into both the human endeavor of place- making (and unmaking and remaking) and how this endeavor is influenced by the overlapping social, historical, and ecological con texts in which it is undertaken.

As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000) have persuasively shown, literary narrative also gives us fodder for understanding the place of disability within our culture. Through much of their work, particularly Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse, they point to “the prevalence of disability represen tation [in narrative art] and the myriad meanings ascribed to it” (4). They refer to this prevalence as “narrative prosthesis,” which “mediates between the realm of the literary and the realm of the body” and therefore provides a “way of situating a discussion about disability within a literary domain while keeping watch on its social context” (7, 9). While “stereotypical portrayals and reductive metaphors” abound in literature, Mitchell and Snyder contend that with the right methodology and interpretive schema there is much to be learned about disability and norms of embodiment from our stories (163). A crucial aspect of the methodology involves paying attention to the social and historical contexts of narratives that employ disability as a metaphor or trope or that feature characters with disabilities. They write, “Since the seemingly abstract and textual world affects the psychology of individuals (and, thus, the cultural imaginary), the interpretation of these fi gures and their reception proves paramount to the contribution of the humanities to disability studies. One cannot assess the merits or demerits of a literary portrait, for example, without understanding the historical context within which it was constructed and imbibed” (42). In historicizing literary representations of disability, the lit erary critic performs work that has the potential to liberate and expand our understanding of embodiment.

The ecosomatic approach to literature I am proposing here is an extension of the narrative prosthesis idea, one that scrutinizes the ecological as well as social- historical contexts of literary rep resentations of embodiment. That is, the ecosomatic approach recognizes the variety of somatic experience and seeks to nullify the able- bodied/disabled dyad by emphasizing the metaphor ical power of considering the impaired body in relation to its environmental situatedness. Ultimately literary narratives that incorporate an ecosomatic imperative highlight the role the mind- body plays in the process of emplacement and thereby have the capacity to reorient our sense of and behavior toward both the human body and the natural world. We see this capacity in McCarthy’s novel about a possible future world that explodes norms of embodiment; as I demonstrate in the section that fol lows, we also see this capacity in Hogan’s environmental justice narrative, Solar Storms, which traces her narrator’s ecosomatic awakening and reveals the kind of cultural work literary ecology can accomplish when paired with insight from disability studies.

#### Scars/physical disablement and other disability stories in tellings of indigenous literature can participate in narrative prosthesis. But there is a positive way that we can offer disability counternarrative instead. The key is that embodiment does mean a different feeling of the world but that the story supports a narrative that follows: Disablement -> yes still a way forward (this is like survivance versus survival for disablement)

The function of Angel’s impairment within the broader semi otic system that Hogan creates to address her social concerns qualifi es it as an example of narrative prosthesis. As Mitchell and Snyder (2000, 48) explain, writers often use disability as a trope to address a variety of social concerns, though “they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions.” This is to say that within mainstream literature the disabled body has been appropriated to address just about every social issue imaginable except the social construction of disability itself. Given the prevalence of disability in our stories, however, even stereo typical representations of disability, if unpacked with the right methodology, can offer insight into the social experience of dis ability. That Hogan draws a distinct correlation between Angel’s scar and the ravages of settler colonialism suggests that on the surface Angel’s disability is merely a trope, a vehicle to transmit the author’s environmental justice message. However, I would argue that it is precisely through this linkage between Angel’s body and the colonized landscape that Hogan enacts a double critique, wherein she plots a path away from colonialism and toward environmental justice while simultaneously positing a theoretical and spiritual framework that explodes the normal/abnormal dichotomy upon which disability is typically constructed. In looking at Angel’s transformation through an ecosomatic lens, it becomes apparent that Hogan’s novel offers what Mitchell and Snyder refer to as a “disability counternarrative” (164).

The correlation between Angel and the Boundary Waters land scape is emphasized throughout Solar Storms, perhaps most potently in descriptions that highlight their shared disfi gurement. For example, in the second half of the book, when Angel arrives in the northern lands of her ancestors, she observes, “It was a raw and scarred place, a land that had learned to survive, even to thrive on harshness. At fi rst it seemed barren to me, the trees so thin and spindly, the soil impoverished, but soon I felt a sympathy with this ragtag world of seemingly desolate outlying places and villages. . . . Like me, it was native land and had survived” (224). What the land has survived— and what it continues to survive— are the cataclysmic effects of the hydroelectric power project, loosely related to the actual James Bay Project in Quebec, where the construction of dams and power stations has altered the landscape and destroyed much of the native habitat.6 On one level, of course, Angel sympathizes with this ragtag and scarred landscape because she is viewed by others as herself ragtag and scarred; on another level her emerging appreciation for the transcendent beauty of the land— its endurance in the face of alteration and destruction— indicates a process of reconditioning that involves constructing new ways of viewing her own body.

Her evolving intimacy with the land and her recognition of it as a “living creature,” a view she adopts from her great- great- grandmother, Dora- Rouge, stands in stark contrast to the dam builders’ perspective on the land. As Angel comes to realize, the debate over the dam project ultimately manifests a much deeper collision of ideologies, loosely divided along Native and non- Native lines. In recalling the defenses of the hydroelectric proposal levied by the government and corporation offi cials, she explains that “their language didn’t hold a thought for the life of water, or a regard for the land that sustained people from the beginning of time. They didn’t remember the sacred treaties between humans and animals. . . . For the builders, it was easy and clear- cut. They saw it only on the fl at, two- dimensional world of paper” (279). In their evaluation the builders read the land in terms of its economic viability or by how well it fi ts the paradigm of industrial capitalism. As an outlying place with a complex network of rivers and lakes, the Boundary Waters region does not possess this economic value of its own accord, as it repels the forces of agricultural and commercial development; for a developed nation like Canada, however, the region is ripe for hydroelectric development.

This is where the language employed in disability studies comes into play to further establish the contiguity between Angel’s body and the land. Garland- Thomson’s (1997) notion of the normate is again instructive here: if we apply this theoretical approach to the land community, we can see how the strategies used to defi ne and represent the disabled body as a deviant Other have been employed (and continue to be employed) to direct the development of natural resources and the exploitation and destruction of whole ecosystems. For example, for much of the nineteenth century surveyors and settlers characterized the arid American West as essentially disabled, defi ned by what it supposedly lacked: water and trees. The failure of the western grasslands to measure up to normative standards embodied by the woodlands east of the Mississippi initiated a centuries- long battle to “reclaim” this abnormal terrain; it was a process man aged by the Bureau of Land Reclamation, which was created specifi cally to diagnose and treat the problem of the arid terrain. To “reclaim” in this instance means to actually alter the land from its natural state so that after irrigation it looks and produces like an economically viable, agricultural landscape. As it is with the arid West, so it is with the remote Boundary Waters region. In both cases the dam, as a tool of reclamation, can be read as a prosthetic device, a contraption meant to correct a presumably abnormal and disabled landscape so that it conforms to norma tive standards of economic utility.

Angel’s early attempts to hide her scars and the hydroelectric company’s attempt to correct the Boundary Waters both fi t within a medical- model scheme that reads difference as defi ciency. As the novel progresses, Angel adapts to the cultural rhythms of her blood relatives and witnesses and experiences a way of being in the world that follows instead the contours of natural cycles. As a result of these experiences she moves away from the divisive and hierarchical paradigm of the dominant culture and toward an ecosomatic ideal. This transformation is cemented as Angel commits herself to defending the “ragtag and scarred” land of her ancestors, an activism that culminates in public statements she makes against the dam project, which are broadcast over the radio. Hers is therefore a manifold conversion experience, a spiritual, political, ecological, and cultural coming of age that is manifest in the new name she is given by the Fat Eaters, Maniki, which means “the girl who turned human” (295). This of course is precisely the point: what Angel learns, or relearns, is what it means to be human, and she does so not by changing herself but by refashioning the mirror in which she views herself and her body. She comes to understand the physical environment, and her embodiment within it, as part and parcel of what Casey classes as the “universal fl esh.” She comes to see emplacement and embodiment as intertwined. Castor (2006, 160) identifi es the central role that place plays in developing empathy within and for Hogan’s narrative: “Place . . . gives shape and proportion to the narrator’s feelings in a way that provides her with enough critical distance from her pain to allow her to create imaginative spaces for a more defi ned yet fl exible sense of identity to emerge.” By coming to “live in the body where the land spoke,” as Angel puts t, she breaks down the barrier between herself, her community, and the world. She bears witness to the conterminous nature of the social and the natural, the individual and the ecological, as implied by the metaphor of the universal fl esh. She achieves an ecosomatic unity that dissolves the split between nature and culture and that understands the inexorable link between the two. In reconstructing her idea of humanity and resisting normative standards, her wounds lose their power to defi ne her as deviant and instead become a visual marker of her new humanity. Birgit Hans (2003, 98) too notes that, formerly a “mark of isolation, Angela’s [sic] scarred face, has become one of belonging.” She reevaluates her body from an ecological, and not simply social, context and therefore erases not her physical scars but the worn- out meanings that others would attach to her scars.

This personal victory over her body corresponds to the victory Angel and the protestors achieve in their fi ght against the hydro electric company, bringing a halt to the building of further dams. Angel explains, “It was too late for the Child River, for the caribou, the fi sh, even for our own children, but we had to believe, true or not, that our belated victory was the end of something. Yes, the pieces were infi nite and worn as broken pots . . . but we’d thrown an anchor into the future and followed the rope to the end of it, to where we would dream new dreams, new medicines, and one day, once again, remember the sacredness of every living thing” (344). These new dreams and new medicines are grounded in an ecosomatic defi nition of wholeness— one that accounts for fl uidity and change. Ultimately, to deconstruct the f i gure of the normate, whether applied to the human body or the natural landscape, is a pursuit that has benefi ts from both a disability studies and an ecocritical perspective. The ecosomatic paradigm exhibited in Angel’s transformation promotes the ideal of, indeed the life- sustaining need for diversity— of bodies, minds, and landscapes. It is signifi cant, of course, that her transforma tion occurs as the result of an accumulation of stories that realign her relationships toward the human and nonhuman communi ties of which she is a part. It is also signifi cant that her activism takes the form of public storytelling in her interview broadcast over the radio. Hogan’s novel ultimately affi rms the power that stories have to give shape to the world and to condition our behavior toward it. This faith in stories is essential to the eco critical enterprise in general and to literary ecology in particular. Whether it is the story Angel hears about the source of her scars, or Hogan’s story about Angel’s coming of age, or even the story I am telling here about what Hogan’s novel might teach us about our connection to place and the role of the body in connecting to place, stories structure the world for us and can dictate how, or even whether, we care for it. The process of emplacement, Casey (1993) tells us, is one that requires guidance from something or someone else. Much of this guidance comes from the contours of the land community itself, “the lay of the land,” but Casey reminds us that “human beings rely on intermediary presences,” be it a map, a local guide, or a work of imaginative fi ction (250).

#### Narrative good – maybe perm card to Cap K – narrative key to movements.

Narrative and metaphor give us ways to conceptualize and make tangible the richness of the wild and built places we inhabit. They “thicken” our experience of places, as Casey puts it, adding layers of meaning to our encounters with the natural world. Even when the stories are about places we’ve never been, even if they are about fictional places that never were, they still have the power to shape our sense of place and to make us care about places that are real and that we do inhabit. This is a crucial ingredient and a critical idea to grasp. At the end of her essay calling for the incorporation of the disability perspective into the environmental movement, Alison Kafer (2005, 145) proclaims, “We cannot forge a movement based on the assumption that only those of us who can scale the mountain can care about the mountain.” Compassion for the mountain— or the prairie, ocean, forest, or urban green space— comes from many sources and from many different types of stories. The beauty in contiguity is this: our love of place, wherever it may come from, is transferrable not only from one place to another but also from page to place and back again.

## Ch. 6—Bodies in nature

#### Disability is thought to be in opposition to nature—the threat of disability is what makes wilderness meaningful is often invoked in ecocritic writings. Thus able-bodiness is required to bridge the gap between the human and nature. Ecofeminism and ecocritism need nonnormative narratives of disabled folks who interact with their environment differently. By challenging are understandings of nature we can change nature itself.

**Kafer 17** Alison Kafer. Ray, Sarah Jaquette, et al. Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory. University of Nebraska Press, 2017. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/book/51846. Bodies of Nature Page 227. //CSand

We tend to think of the defi nitions of terms such as nature, wilderness, and environment as self- evident, assuming their meanings to be universal, stable, and monolithic. However, as Cronon argues, “‘nature’ is not nearly so natural as it seems.”7 On the contrary, our encounters with wilderness are historically and culturally grounded; our ideas about what constitutes nature or the natural and unnatural are completely bound up in our own specifi c histories and cultural assumptions. What is needed, then, is an interrogation of these very assumptions.8 Instead of taking for granted the qualities we attribute to wilderness experiences, such as spiritual renewal or physical challenge, we can ask, as Linda Vance does, “Whose values are these? What do they assume about experience, and whose experience is the norm? What other social relations depend on or produce these values? What is their historical context?”9 We can extend the scope of these questions to include an examination of ableism and compulsory able- bodiedness/able- mindedness: Whose experiences of nature are taken as the norm within environmental discourses? What do these discourses assume about nature, the bodymind, and the relationship between humans and nature? And how do notions of disability and able- bodiedness/able- mindedness play a key role in constructing values such as “spiritual renewal” and “physical challenge” in the fi rst place? Bodies of Nature 205 In this section I examine three sites of able- bodiedness/ablemindedness: a canonical environmental memoir, a controversial ad in a mainstream hiking magazine, and an autobiographical essay in ecofeminist philosophy. These are three vastly different texts, with different agendas and from different time periods. I bring them together in order to sketch out the role disability plays in constructions of the natural environment. In the fi rst two selections the fi gure of disability is explicitly invoked in order to be immediately disavowed, making clear that disability has no place in the wilderness. Both hail the able body, or the nondisabled body, as the proper denizen of the outdoors; they deploy the fi gure of disability to further cultural representations of nature as a rugged proving ground, making disability the dystopic sign of human failure, or potential failure, in nature. The fi nal example, the ecofeminist essay, shares the presumption of able- bodiedness that runs through the fi rst two representations, this time presenting the nondisabled body as the grounds through which we arrive at ecofeminist insight. Reading each of these examples through a critical disability lens reveals the ways we assume the environmental body to be a very particular kind of body. One of the most explicit articulations of a compulsorily ablebodied/able- minded environmentalism is found in Edward Abbey’s cult classic, Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness, fi rst published in 1968.10 In this highly acclaimed memoir Abbey offers a polemic against “industrial tourism” in national parks, a phenomenon that is destroying wilderness areas across the country and robbing all of us of our ability to access nature. Abbey repeatedly draws on disability metaphors to make his case, most notably when he refers to cars as “motorized” or “mechanized wheelchairs.”11 He thus presents cars as having a literally crippling effect on our ability to experience nature. The motorized wheelchair becomes the epitome of technological alienation, of 206 Alison Kafer technology’s ability to alienate us from our own wild nature and the wilderness around us. Sarah Jaquette Ray calls this pattern the “disability- equals- alienation- from- nature trope,” arguing that Abbey’s text relies on disability as “the best symbol of the machine’s corruption of . . . harmony between body and nature.”12 This representation becomes even more clear later in the book, when Abbey exhorts everyone to get out of their cars/wheelchairs and walk: “Yes sir, yes madam, I entreat you, get out of those motorized wheelchairs, get off your foam rubber backsides, stand up straight like men! like women! like human beings! and walk- walk- WALK upon our sweet and blessed land!” Although Abbey elsewhere allows for travel by bicycle and horse, he frequently hails walking as the only way to access “the original, the real” nature.13 His assertion that we must get out and walk, that truly understanding a space means moving through it on foot, presents a very particular kind of embodied experience as a prerequisite to environmental engagement. Walking through the desert becomes a kind of authorizing gesture; to know the desert requires walking through the desert, and to do so unmediated by technology. In such a construction there is no way for the mobility- impaired body to engage in environmental practice; all modalities other than walking upright become insuffi cient, even suspect. Walking is both what makes us human and what makes us at one with nature.14 Abbey’s framing has been infl uential. As Ray notes, the environmental movement is deeply attached to the notion of “the solitary retreat into nature as the primary source of an environmental ethic.”15 It is common to fi nd ecocritics making connections and deriving insight from hiking trips and other adventures in the wilderness. By implying that one must have a deep immersion experience of nature in order to understand nature, Bodies of Nature 207 ecocritics create a situation in which some kinds of experiences can be interpreted as more valid than others, as granting a more accurate, intense, and authentic understanding of nature. They ignore the complicated histories of who is granted permission to enter nature, where nature is said to reside, how one must move in order to get there, and how one will interact with nature once one arrives in it.16 (As we will see, these assumptions then play a huge role in struggles over increasing disability access in parks and public lands.) This kind of exclusionary framing of nature is on full display in a provocative advertisement for Nike’s Air Dri- Goat shoe. The advertisement ran in eleven different outdoor magazines in the fall of 2000, reaching a combined circulation of approximately 2.1 million readers. It featured a picture of the shoe against a hot- pink background, with this accompanying text: Fortunately, the Air Dri- Goat features a patented goat- like outer sole for increased traction, so you can taunt mortal injury without actually experiencing it. Right about now you’re probably asking yourself, “How can a trail running shoe with an outer sole designed like a goat’s hoof help me avoid compressing my spinal cord into a Slinky’ on the side of some unsuspecting conifer, thereby rendering me a drooling, misshapen nonextreme- trail- running husk of my former self, forced to roam the earth in a motorized wheelchair with my name, embossed on one of those cute little license plates you get at carnivals or state fairs, fastened to the back?” To that we answer, hey, have you ever seen a mountain goat (even an extreme mountain goat) careen out of control into the side of a tree? Didn’t think so. 208 Alison Kafer In the fi rst two days after publication Nike received over six hundred complaints about the ad, and the company withdrew it from further circulation. Three public apologies followed, each one containing more cause for offense.17 The perceived need for multiple apologies testifi es to the blatant offensiveness of the ad. It is not surprising that the ad came under attack: it paints an incredibly negative portrait of people in wheelchairs, trivializes and mocks the experiences of those who have survived spinal cord injuries, and dehumanizes disabled people. Most important for my exploration of crip futures, however, are its assumptions about disability and nature, or, more to the point, its assumptions about the place of a disabled person in nature. First, in running this advertisement Nike has assumed that the readers of Backpacker and similar magazines are neither disabled nor allies of the disabled, casting outdoor enthusiasts and disabled people as two mutually exclusive groups.18 Second, the advertisement assumes that disability prohibits encounters with nature, dooming one to roam “carnivals or state fairs” rather than mountain ranges. It is perhaps no accident that Nike’s advertisement conjures an image of disabled people at the fair or carnival, buying accoutrements for their wheelchairs. From the 1840s through the 1940s in the United States, disabled people were frequently exhibited in public at traveling sideshows and carnivals, cast as “freaks,” “freaks of nature,” and, in a blending of ableist, racist, and colonialist narratives, “missing links.”19 Freak shows were one of the few places where one could see disabled people in public, and the Nike advertisement extends this depiction of the carnival as the proper terrain of the disabled body. Conversely it makes clear that once one becomes disabled, mountain ranges and wilderness areas are out of reach. Third, it reminds nondisabled hikers that they must be ever vigilant in protecting themselves from disability, denying any Bodies of Nature 209 trace of disability in or on their body. These last two assumptions are interrelated, in that nondisabled hikers must deny disability precisely because it (allegedly) prohibits encounters with nature. In other words, the advertisement is explicitly invoking a disabled body in order to reassure readers of their own able- bodiedness. As Rosemarie Garland- Thomson argues, the fi gure of disability “assures the rest of the citizenry of who they are not while arousing their suspicions about who they could become.”20 Thus two distinct bodies appear in this text. The fi rst is the nondisabled body ostensibly shared by both Nike associates (the advertisement’s “we”) and Nike consumers (“you”). The text tells its readers little about this nondisabled body; it takes shape only when juxtaposed with the second body in the text. Unlike the fi rst body, which is unmarked, the second, disabled body is described with utmost specifi city: readers learn of its appearance (“drooling, misshapen,” and “forced” into a wheelchair), its inabilities (“non- extreme- trail- running”), its quality of life (a “husk of my former self”), and its home (“carnivals or state fairs”). The disabled body appears in the text only as the specter of impending tragedy; one can allegedly ward it away by assertively and aggressively staking one’s claim to nature, by “taunting mortal injury” and celebrating one’s alleged hyperability. As Ray suggests, it is the “threat of disability” that makes “the wilderness ideal body meaningful”; part of the thrill of adventure is risking— yet ultimately avoiding— disablement.21 Thus disability exists out of time, as something not- yet and, with the right equipment, not- ever. In order to belong to the text’s “us,” one must deny any physical limitations or inabilities, casting oneself as separate from and superior to the disabled fi gure. “We” are not drooling or misshapen disabled people, the text proclaims; we are hikers, and never the twain shall meet. Nike explicitly repudiates the disabled body, casting it as the 210 Alison Kafer antithesis of the hiker’s body, which is the body “we” all have and want to preserve. The hiker’s body as imagined by both Nike and Abbey is necessary because it is only through it that we are able to truly experience nature (or to experience true nature). Nature, wilderness, mountain ranges: all are described as separate from “us,” but we can bridge or transcend that separation by rugged, masculine individualism; disability serves both to illustrate that separation between human and nature and to exacerbate it. Although my third site, an ecofeminist essay, does not rely on this kind of explicit ableism, it continues the narrative of separation from nature. Its reliance on this trope is harder to recognize, as it comes in the context of a much more critical approach to nature and wilderness than that found in Abbey or Nike. In her essay “Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality,” Vance traces her political and theoretical development as an ecofeminist. Vance weaves accounts of her own hiking experiences into the essay, revealing how her experiences in and through nature have played an important role in her journey toward ecofeminism. For most of the essay Vance writes in the fi rst person, describing her personal experiences with nature (e.g., “I hike through the Green Mountains”), but there is one passage in which she shifts to the third person, writing about “an ecofeminist”: “On a bad day, then, say when she’s hiking through a spruce bog trying to convince herself that being a food source for mosquitoes and black fl ies is an ecologically sound role, an ecofeminist can despair, and start to feel like she is the least loved cousin of just about everyone, and sister to no one. Except, of course— and here she pauses, a boot heavy with black muck arrested in midstep, and she looks around— except, of course, nature. Sister. Sister Nature.”22 In this passage Vance’s phrasing itself suggests that “hiking” and “being an ecofeminist” are related activities: Bodies of Nature 211 by shifting from a description of her own particular experiences to the adventures of an unnamed ecofeminist, she positions the fi gure as a stand- in for all ecofeminists. Moreover she suggests that it is through this kind of rugged activity that “an ecofeminist” comes to understand herself in relation to nonhuman nature. Vance’s ecofeminist comes to a key realization as she hikes through the muck; indeed the act of stepping through the bog is what spurs her insight. Hiking, according to this passage, is vital to an ecofeminist’s development of her relationship with and understanding of nature; without such hikes “an ecofeminist” will remain in some way separate from nature. Once again able- bodiedness is necessary in order to bridge or transcend the essential separation between human and nature. Ecofeminism for Vance is a complex theoretical and conceptual framework deeply invested in activist practices; she would likely oppose Abbey’s assumption that cities are unnatural and impure while wilderness is not.23 However, the passage under consideration here refl ects an assumption not far from Abbey’s, that one must immerse oneself in nature in order to understand it and one’s relationship to it. In describing an ecofeminist’s hike through the mucky bog, Vance suggests that people need to have personal, physical experiences of the wilderness in order to understand, appreciate, and care for nature. But what kind of experiences render one qualifi ed to understand and care about nature? Are all experiences of nature equally productive of such insights? And how do we defi ne “experiences of nature” in the fi rst place? These questions lead me back to Shakespeare’s assumption that the natural environment is completely separate from social arrangements. Each of the selections I have examined here— Abbey, Nike, Vance— operates under a similar assumption, at least when it comes to the body of the hiker. These accounts take 212 Alison Kafer for granted the existence of trails that accommodate one’s body, presenting access to nature not only as necessary to personal growth or renewal but also as apolitical. Abbey is the extreme here, making clear that the hiker’s access to parks and wilderness is natural, but everyone else’s (those in “motorized wheelchairs,” for example) is political, debatable, and ideally stoppable. To tell a tale of a lack of appropriate access— no trails wide enough for a wheelchair or level enough for crutches— would be to insert the all- too- human into the wilderness, thereby violating the persistent dualisms between the human and the natural and the natural and the political. Thus what is needed in ecofeminism, ecocriticism, and environmentalism in general are the narratives of people whose bodies and minds cause them to interact with nature in nonnormative ways. How might a deaf ecofeminist understand her position within the natural world differently than a hearing one? What can narratives about negotiating trails on crutches reveal about the ways all trails, not just “accessible” ones, are constructed and maintained? How do concepts of nature, wilderness, and ecofeminism shift when elaborated by an ecofeminist who experiences nonhuman nature primarily through sound, smell, and touch rather than sight, or by an ecofeminist who draws more on sounds and sensations than on words? In what ways would ecofeminist activism be transformed by someone whose chronic fatigue and pain prevent her from traveling more than a few blocks from her house but do not hinder her environmental organizing, lobbying, and fundraising efforts? How might the use of a service dog affect an ecofeminist’s understanding of his relationship with nonhuman nature? One of my hopes in writing this essay is that nondisabled ecofeminists will supplement these questions with queries of their own: How might refl ecting on her able- bodied status affect Bodies of Nature 213 a nondisabled ecofeminist’s understanding of the ecofeminist project? In what ways would he alter his concepts of nature and politics after thinking through his position in an ableist culture? Making space for these kinds of questions expands the domain of ecofeminism and environmental movements, challenging the representation of nondisabled experience as the only possible way to interact with nonhuman nature. Such challenges will necessarily entail expanding our understandings of nature as well, which will, in turn, affect the environments around us. Our conceptions of nature and the natural, in other words, play a direct role in how we shape parks and other public lands.

#### -Crip environmentalism, nature is not just “out there”, recognizing disabled experiences key

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Loss is a topic disabled people are typically reluctant to discuss, and for good reason. Disability is all too often read exclusively in such terms, with bitterness, pity, and tragedy being the dominant registers through which contemporary U.S. culture understands the experiences of disabled people. Why encourage such attitudes by speaking publicly about our inabilities, frustrations, and limitations? Yet loss is undeniably one of the motivations behind this essay, behind my concern with trails and beaches and access. Prior to my injuries I was a runner, and running was an activity I loved largely for its solitude. Running gave me the adrenaline high of physical exertion, but more importantly it served as a medita- 220 Alison Kafer tive practice, as a way to be outside alone in nature. I ran along the beach in eastern North Carolina, through the woods in upstate New York, next to farmland in northern California; I used these experiences to clear my head, to make sense of my thoughts, to maintain my mental and physical health. When Vance writes about discovering herself in nature, feeling at one with the ecosystem, or developing relationships with nonhuman nature by wading through a bog, I know exactly what she is talking about; I feel it in my bones. Although I agree with environmental critics in their deconstruction of the nature experience and their insistence that there is no bright line between nature and culture, I cannot deny that I feel different outside, away from traffi c and exhaust pipes and crowds of people. That I have been conditioned to feel this way does not change the fact that I feel more at peace in my body when perched on the side of a cliff, or gazing over a meadow, or surrounded by sequoias. Loss factors into all of this because such experiences are made much more diffi cult with the body I have now, the body that relies primarily on a wheelchair for mobility. It is hard to fi nd an isolated yet accessible trail that will grant me the solitude I seek; it is hard to get out to the water’s edge or up to the cliff’s peak. Part of this diffi culty is due to the histories of trail development and access discussed earlier, the assumption that only certain kinds of bodies need to be accommodated in parks and on trails, but it is also due to the terrain itself. There simply are hills too steep, creeks too rocky, soil too sandy for a wheelchair; or, rather, ensuring access to some locations would mean so drastically altering those locations that the aesthetic and environmental damage to the area would be profound. (The same is true, of course, for nondisabled access to some areas.) Thus this kind of project entails reckoning with loss, limitation, inability, and failure. Indeed I long to hear stories that not only Bodies of Nature 221 admit limitation, frustration, even failure but that recognize such failure as grounds for theory itself. What might Vance’s ecofeminist have learned about her connection to nonhuman nature if she had fallen in that mucky bog? How might her framing of nature shift if she had turned around that day, fi nding the bog too slippery for her loping gait? Moving outward from ecofeminism, we can occasionally fi nd disability in popular nature writing, but almost always as something to be overcome, and overcome spectacularly. The story of Erik Weihenmayer’s blind ascent of Mount Everest, for example, relies on disability to hold our interest, but the narrative’s very structure assumes that our interest is dependent on disability eventually being vanquished. Weihenmayer’s memoir, Touch the Top of the World, suggests that successfully hiking Everest was a way for him to “transcend” his blindness. His story would lose its thread if it ended not with the successful ascent but with Weihenmayer discovering that the peak was simply too high, or the climb too dangerous, or the risks too great. He does mention two instances when he and his climbing partner turned back, failing to reach the summit of Humphrey’s Peak in Arizona and, later, of Long’s Peak in Colorado. But these two stories appear in the fi rst few pages of the book and only in passing; their function in the narrative is to make Weihenmayer’s later successes all the more remarkable.36 Weihenmayer’s climb— not to mention his career as a motivational speaker— exemplifi es the narrative of the “supercrip,” the stereotypical disabled person who garners media attention for accomplishing some feat considered too diffi cult for disabled people. (Depending on the kind of impairment under discussion, supercrip acts can include anything from rock climbing to driving a car.) Weihenmayer is familiar with the supercrip narrative and at times seems wary and tired of it, but his book cannot easily be read through any other lens. Its narrative structure repeats the 222 Alison Kafer overcoming tale over and over again, both within and between chapters, and everything about the marketing of the book, from its cover images to its promotional blurbs, reiterates this interpretation of Weihenmayer. Supercrip stories rely heavily on the individual/medical model of disability, portraying disability as something to be overcome through hard work and perseverance. And a disabled person accomplishing an amazing adventure in the wilderness is one of the most pervasive supercrip narratives; such stories are popular because of their twinned conquests: both disability and wilderness are overcome by individual feats of strength and will. As Petra Kuppers notes, “The same language of overcoming used traditionally in relation to nature conquests also informs much writing about disability: conquest and vanquishing, lording over or being lorded over, climbing the mountain or perishing on its slopes.”37 It is the very combination of these barriers that makes the stories work. To return to my earlier questions: What stories get effaced by this focus on the supercrip’s achievements? Can we imagine a crip interaction with nature, a crip engagement with wilderness, that doesn’t rely on either ignoring the limitations of the body or triumphing over them? In asking these questions I am motivated by a desire to write myself back into nature even as I unpack the binary of nature and self, nature and human. Discussions about the practicalities of access, such as Whole Access’s advocacy for universally designed trails, is certainly a necessary part of this work; the sooner we recognize that all trails are built interventions on the landscape, and as such can be reimagined or reconceived, the sooner we can make room for a fuller range of bodies, including but not limited to disabled people. Equally important, however, is a willingness to expand our understanding of human bodies in nonhuman nature, to multiply the possibilities for understanding nature in and through our bodies. If, as Bodies of Nature 223 Catriona Sandilands argues, queer ecology means “seeing beauty in the wounds of the world and taking responsibility to care for the world as it is,” then perhaps a feminist, queer, crip ecology might mean approaching nature through the lenses of loss and ambivalence.38 There are disabled people and disability studies scholars doing exactly this kind of reimagining. In Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation, poet Eli Clare provides a moving refl ection on the diverse ways human bodies interact with nonhuman nature. He begins with a tale of hiking New Hampshire’s Mount Adams: The trail divides and divides again, steeper and rockier now, moving not around but over piles of craggy granite, mossy and a bit slick from the night’s rain. I start having to watch where I put my feet. Balance has always been somewhat of a problem for me, my right foot less steady than my left. On uncertain ground, each step becomes a studied move, especially when my weight is balanced on my right foot. I take the trail slowly, bringing both feet together, solid on one stone, before leaning into my next step. . . . There is no rhythm to my stop- and- go clamber. Clare scrambles up and down the mountain, climbing on all fours when he cannot trust his feet. As do other ecocritics and ecofeminists, Clare uses his experiences as a ground for theory, in his case moving from this particular hike to a longer meditation on the politics of bodies, access, and ableism. In other respects, however, Clare’s narrative of the mountain stands in stark contrast to the prevailing narrative of moving through nature without any diffi culties. In his ascent of Mount Adams he must eventually reckon with the limitations of his own body. 224 Alison Kafer As the afternoon wears on, Clare and his friend realize they will probably need to turn around before reaching the summit, given Clare’s slow pace and the remaining hours of daylight. Such a decision doesn’t come easily, however, and Clare shares his frustrations with his reader: I want to continue up to treeline, the pines shorter and shorter, grown twisted and withered, giving way to scrub brush, then to lichen- covered granite, up to the sun- drenched cap where the mountains all tumble out toward the hazy blue horizon. I want to so badly, but fear rumbles next to love next to real lived physical limitations, and so we decide to turn around. I cry, maybe for the fi rst time, over something I want to do, had many reasons to believe I could, but really can’t. I cry hard, then get up and follow Adrianne back down the mountain. It’s hard and slow, and I use my hands and butt often and wish I could use gravity as Adrianne does to bounce from one fl at spot to another, down this jumbled pile of rocks. He goes on to discuss his ambivalence with this decision, an ambivalence stemming from his own internalized ableism. He cannot help but feel that he should have gone on, he should have overcome his limitations: I climbed Mount Adams for an hour and a half scared, not sure I’d ever be able to climb down, knowing that on the next rock my balance could give out, and yet I climbed. Climbed surely because I wanted the summit, because of the love rumbling in my bones. But climbed also because I wanted to say, “Yes, I have CP [cerebral palsy], but see. See, watch me. I can climb mountains too.” I wanted to prove myself once again. I wanted to overcome my CP . . . . The mountain just won’t let go. Bodies of Nature 225 Clare uses this experience to refl ect on the ways disabled people hold ourselves up to norms that we can never achieve, norms that were based on bodies, minds, or experiences unlike our own. We want to believe that if we accomplish the right goals, if we overcome enough obstacles, we can defend ourselves against disability oppression.39 The mountain, both literal and metaphorical, becomes a proving ground rather than a site of connection or relation, and it is this characterization that Clare challenges throughout the book. The mountain as proving ground is a terrain of fi erce independence: “In the wilderness myth, the body is pure, ‘solo,’ left to its own devices, and unmediated by any kind of aid.”40 Cripping this terrain, then, entails a more collaborative approach to nature. Kuppers depicts human- nonhuman nature interactions not in terms of solo ascents or individual feats of achievement but in terms of community action and ritual. Describing a gathering of disabled writers, artists, and community members, she writes, “We create our own rhythms and rock ourselves into the world of nature, lose ourselves in a moment of sharing: hummed songs in the round, shared breath, leanings, rocks against wood, leaves falling gentle against skin, bodies braced against others gently lowering toes into waves, touch of bark against fi nger, cheek, from warm hand to cold snow and back again.”41 In this resolutely embodied description, the human and nonhuman are brought into direct contact, connecting the fallen leaf to the tree or the breath to the wind. What entices me about this description is that it acknowledges loss or inability— she goes on to describe the borders of parking lots and the edges of pathways as the featured terrain, not cliff tops and crevices— and suggests alternative ways of interacting with the world around us. Rather than conquering or overcoming nature Kuppers and her comrades caress it, gaze upon it, breathe with it. Such forms of interaction are made more 226 Alison Kafer possible by recognizing nature as (and in) everything around us. The edges of the park, the spaces along its borders, are a part of nature too. Moreover Kuppers’s “we” is an acknowledgment of the ways in which our encounters with nature include and encompass relations with other people. Humans are interdependent, and our relationships with each other play a role in our understanding of the nonhuman world. Samuel Lurie, who is nondisabled, hints of this interdependence in an essay about his relationship with Clare: On one of our fi rst hikes in Vermont, on a steep, slippery trail, the kind where Eli moves especially slowly— he was shrugging off my outstretched hand, not wanting any help. But I was only offering it in part to provide balance. “We’re lovers out on a hike,” I reasoned, “you’re supposed to want to hold my hand.” He laughed, relaxing, the tension breaking. . . . We hike more easily now, Eli referring to my hand serving as that “third point of contact”— stabilizing and comforting.42 How might this story of interdependence, of moving through nonhuman nature in relationship, expand the realm of ecofeminism? How might it bolster the claims of ecocritics who reject popular distinctions between humans and nature by presenting other humans as part of our encounters with nature? What happens to theory when it is no longer based primarily on tales of individuals’ encounters with nature but on experiences of interdependence and community? Hiking with a small child, assisting an elderly relative through the woods, or sitting with a neighbor in a city park— all activities we might be doing already— can transform our ideas about nature and about ourselves. Recognizing our interdependence makes room for a range of experiences of human and Bodies of Nature 227 nonhuman nature, disrupting the ableist ideology that everyone interacts with nature in the same way. In her video In My Language, A. M. (Amanda) Baggs offers a visual and aural description of her interactions with the world around her, a description that radically expands econormative conceptions of both nature and interaction. To be clear, the video is not “about” nature and the environment; rather it is an autobiographical account of living with autism. Yet in this self- portrait Baggs interacts fully with her surroundings, challenging implicit assumptions that nature exists only “out there” as opposed to in the everyday spaces around us. In the fi rst half of the video the only sounds we hear are Baggs’s wordless songs and noises; the second half features a script Baggs wrote that is voiced by her computer. Throughout we watch Baggs touch, smell, listen to, look at, and tap objects around her. In one scene she gently moves her fi ngers through the water coming out of a faucet. These images are accompanied by text scrolling across the bottom of the screen, and Baggs’s computer voices the words she has typed: “It [my language] is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment. Reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings. . . . The water doesn’t symbolize anything. I am just interacting with the water as the water interacts with me.”43 The images confi rm Baggs’s syntax: the water spills across her fi ngers, shifting its fl ow in response to her movements. In foregrounding this mutual interaction between fi ngers and water, between self and stream, she pushes us to expand our conceptions of both language and nature; indeed the two are intimately related. Language is about interaction with our environment, a mutual interaction that does not, cannot, occur only in spoken words or written text. Yet, as Baggs reminds us, spoken words and written text are almost always the only forms of communication recognized and 228 Alison Kafer valued as language. Similarly only certain kinds of interactions with the environment are recognized as such; swimming in the ocean and wading in mountain streams are more likely to be understood as meaningful ways to interact with water, while running one’s fi ngers in the water under a faucet is not. But why not? The answer lies partly in long- standing assumptions that nature and the environment exist only “out there,” outside of our houses and neighborhoods; the answer lies too in longstanding— and even less visible— assumptions that only certain ways of understanding and acting on one’s relation to the environment (including other humans) are acceptable. These assumptions have signifi cant material effects. Seeing nature as only out there or faucet water as categorically different from ocean water makes environmental justice work all the more diffi cult. And as Baggs argues in her video, seeing her diverse interactions with her environment as strange or abnormal makes it all too easy to ignore the institutionalization and abuse of people on the autism spectrum or people with intellectual disabilities. Artist Riva Lehrer offers more visual images of crip approaches to nature, representations that argue for human- nonhuman relationships based on the very limitations or variations of the body that are typically ignored in environmental literature. In In the Yellow Woods (fi gure 6.1), a woman kneels on the ground, peeling the bark from a branch with her knife. She looks down, concentrating on her work, completely focused on the task before her. On the ground around her are scattered bones, bones she has carved herself from tree branches and trunks. A perfect pelvis, a rib cage, random bits of leg and spine— all lie next to her on the ground. She is literally carving a body from the trees. The painting, and the woman, seem inhabited by loss; the intensity of her concentration suggests the necessity of these new bones, untouched by pain or surgery or breakage. And yet Bodies of Nature 229 the scattered placement of the bones suggests that this work is not about creating wholeness, not about fi nding the cure in this forest; she has not arranged the bones in the shape of a body, and she is not inserting them into her skin. Rather the bones seem to sink into the fallen leaves, to become part of the autumn landscape. Bones become roots, linking this woman— her body, her self— to the landscape, literally grounding her in space and time. And time itself is in play here, as these bones vary in their coloration, marking time across their surfaces. The pelvis gleams white, new, untouched by rain and storm, while some of the longer bones— rib, clavicle, femur— bear the marks of time, calling to mind fossils of previous generations, suggesting that these bones are not for her only. By the same token, the dress pattern tacked to the tree in the background suggests a future project, a sign of additional work to come, a guideline for other bodies. Although she is depicted alone in this forest, signs of other bodies, other fi gures, echo around the woman. It is the process captured in the painting that captures me, that draws me in to the fi gure’s meditative practice. How does this painting simultaneously offer a new map of the body and a new map of nature? How might it open up new avenues of understanding ourselves in relationship to nonhuman nature? How does it blur the very line between the human and the nonhuman? Reading this painting from a cripped ecofeminist perspective, I see a woman making a connection between caring for the body and caring for the earth, suggesting an expanded view of health that looks beyond the boundaries of the body. This is not a supercrip story of triumphing over disability, and it’s not an ableist story of bodies without limitation. It’s a story of recognizing ourselves in the world around us, recognizing common structures of bone, fl esh, oxygen, and air. 230 Alison Kafer These connections manifest again in Lehrer’s portrait of Eli Clare, part of her Circle Stories series of paintings chronicling the lives of disability artists, activists, and intellectuals. In this 2003 painting (fi gure 6.2) Clare crouches on the ground, one knee touching the sandy soil, the other bracing his body. In the background is a river lined by trees, trees that are refl ected in the surface of the water. The detail with which the fl ora is represented is telling, making clear that the plants are as important as the person. In fact person and plant are not easily distinguished, as evidenced by the young sapling emerging out of Clare’s chest. The tree is rooted fi rmly in the ground before Clare, and it curves to snake through his shirt. It’s not clear if Clare has buttoned Fig. 6.1. Riva Lehrer, In the Yellow Woods, 1993, acrylic on panel. Bodies of Nature 231 his shirt around the tree, clutching it to his chest, or if the tree made its own way onto Clare’s skin, the two fi gures moving upward together. The painting is breathtaking in its conjuring of an entire ecosystem, one that recognizes humans as inextricably part of nature. Its power also lies in its mythology, in its blending together of environmental, disability, and gender politics. As Lehrer makes clear in her artist’s statement, her Circle Stories paintings are intensely collaborative. She meets repeatedly with her subjects, studying and discussing their work and brainstorming potential imagery. Lehrer’s work with Clare coincided with his transition from butch female to genderqueer to transman (the collaboration lasted approximately two and a half years), and it seems no accident that this young tree explodes from the site Fig. 6.2. Riva Lehrer, Circle Stories #10: Eli Clare, 2003, acrylic on panel. 232 Alison Kafer of Clare’s changed chest. The image implicitly challenges easy depictions of technology as bad, as encroaching on the alleged purity of nature. This tree is healthy, vibrant; advanced biomedicine hasn’t stunted its growth. On the ground before Clare are long locks of red hair, even a piece of a braid, suggesting that he has shed traces of femininity just as the trees around him will drop their leaves. The site of nature serves as a site of transformation in this painting, the clutched tree rooting Clare in his history but also exploding outward in new directions. These tales of the gendered body intertwine with tales of the crip body. Clare writes poignant prose and poetry about living in a body marked by tremors and an uneven gait, signs of his cerebral palsy. Knowing these histories of Clare’s body, I can’t help but notice that it is his right hand that clutches the tree to his chest, his right hand that pulls the shirt closed around his sapling. In an essay titled “Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies,” Clare writes, “Sometimes I wanted to cut off my right arm so it wouldn’t shake. My shame was that plain, that bleak.”44 This image serves as an antidote to that memory, a reclaiming of that right arm. The steady sureness of the sapling— rooted, curving into Clare’s body without breaking or splintering— becomes linked to the sure shaking of his body, so that the tremors become rooted in both the body and the place. Like the bone woman in the forest, Clare isn’t connecting with nature in order to be cured of his allegedly broken body; rather he is solidly locating that body in space and time. He’s not getting rid of the tremor but locating it, grounding it; it’s as much a part of his body as the tree. As in In the Yellow Wood, Lehrer again presents a model of embodied environmentalism, of a concern with how we can get on together, earth, bone, and body. I bring these paintings into my exploration of disability and environmentalism because they conjure images of nature- human Bodies of Nature 233 relationships that not only allow for the presence of bodies with limited, odd, or queer movements and orientations, but they literally carve out a space for them, recognizing them as a vital part of the landscape. The content of Clare’s and Lehrer’s work as activists encourages my paying attention to these images, facilitates my placing them within the discourse of ecological feminism and environmentalism. Both of them are longtime advocates for environmental causes: Exile and Pride is a complex meditation on relationships among race, class, poverty, labor politics, gender, and environmental destruction and conservation in the Pacifi c Northwest, and Lehrer is a longtime supporter of animal rights movements.45 Moreover they both make explicit connections between these environmental projects and their location in disability communities. Clare writes poignantly about the disabling effects of logging on bodies and ecosystems and of coming to understand his crip body on the rural roads and creek sides of rural Oregon. His book, which bears the subtitle Disability, Queerness, and Liberation, is dedicated “to the rocks and trees, hills and beaches,” suggesting a direct link between his understanding of queer disability and the landscapes around him. Similarly Lehrer’s paintings often combine landscapes with portraits, and nonhuman animals are a common presence. In two of her most recent series, Family and Totems and Familiars, she showcases relationships between human and nonhuman animals; in the latter she depicts Nomy Lamm and other crip artists alongside their animal familiars, which serve as alter egos or sources of strength. The cultural productions of artists such as Clare and Lehrer enact alternative versions of nature and of humans’ position within it. They are imagining and embodying new understandings of environmentalism that take disability experiences seriously, as sites of knowledge production about nature. Their future visions, because grounded in present crip 234 Alison Kafer communities, recognize disability experiences and human limitations as essential, not marginal or tangential, to questions about nature and environmental movements.

# Part 2

## Ch. 8 – Blind Indians

#### NOTE – Good for loss and curing debates w/ setcol

#### Set col perms/link turns disability?

Káteri Tekakwí:tha (1656– 80) was a Mohawk woman who left her home in what is now upstate New York to join a Jesuit mission, where she practiced extreme self- mortifi cation until her death at age twenty- four. Blinded and scarred by smallpox, she has been associated with miracle cures, and in 2012 she became the f i rst Native American woman to be canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church.1 Often called “the lily of the Mohawks,” she is also a patron saint of ecology and the environment. Almost two centuries later the Wampanoag minister known as Blind Joe Amos was making a more overt defense of his indige nous territory in Mashpee, Massachusetts. Wampanoag people remember Blind Joe preaching under an oak tree because the local minister wouldn’t let Mashpee Indians meet in their own church. Amos eventually ousted the scurrilous Rev. Phineas Fish, and in 1833 he led a revolt against settler theft of Mashpee land and timber.

In these two life stories colonial land dispossession and bodily impairment come head to head with indigenous sovereignty and survival. One has been (literally) canonized in Euro- American and popular discourse, the other virtually forgotten outside the indigenous community from which he hailed. One appears (to some indigenous people) a sellout, the other a fi gure of fi erce resistance. But both of these lives challenge us to read disabiity within indigenous ontologies, which are, in turn, inextricable from indigenous territories, ecologies, and community. Popular histories, biographies, and other media tend to treat these blind Indians like most other blind characters, oscillating between pity and supercripping. But Káteri and Blind Joe can also be read as doing serious ecological and social justice work. Each was a visi ble part of the fabric of her or his community, and each arguably helped steward tribal environmental and cultural practices. Káteri and Blind Joe embody the toxic legacies of settler colonialism, but they also register the resurgence of indigenous people and their ecological knowledge.

#### Disabled indigenous folks are uniquely silenced due to racism and ableism

Blind Joe, conversely, is rarely mentioned by non- Natives. Occasionally a local newspaper will note that the Mashpee Bap tist Church (led by Rev. Curtis Frye Jr., Amos’s great- great- great- grandson) still celebrates Blind Joe Amos Sunday on July 15.3 In one report from Massachusetts in 1849, the Commission to Examine into the Condition of the Indians in the Commonwealth describes Joseph Amos as “tall and manly, with a phrenological development which Spurzheim might have envied, with his face turned to heaven, and his sightless sockets swimming with tears, he seemed the very personification of the loftiest spirit of rapt devotion.”4 This ambivalent (to put it mildly) description reveals the layers of anxiety over the challenge Blind Joe represented to colonial power: the commissioners enlist scientific racism to express simultaneous awe and revulsion for indigenous masculinity and phenotype, and they struggle to contain this power on the grounds of Amos’s religious fervor and disability. Like many blind people, then and now, Amos was likely not totally blind; he did wear spectacles. The very phrase “sightless sockets,” with its eager insistence on emptiness, belies the state’s profound fear that what Amos saw was indeed the limits of its own power. Comparing the image of the veiled lily, so feminine and white, with that of the bespectacled preacher, so visionary and black, it is not surprising that Euro- American and mainstream Christian accounts have preferred the former.

#### Colonialism is a disabling condition

Invasion also continues in the production of new disability and illness among Native people. New scholarship on disability in the Global South has begun to articulate the profound connections among disability, colonialism, and ecology. Nirmala Erevelles, Julie Livingston, and the scholars who founded the journal Dis ability and the Global South are highlighting the different disabil ity politics, disability cultures, and even disability ontologies that emerge outside the Global North and under conditions of neoco lonialism, neoliberalism, and transnational capitalism.7 From this orientation we can see the effects of the colonialism that has never really been “post- ” among indigenous people worldwide. These effects appear in the intergenerational trauma that is the legacy of boarding schools from Canada to Australia; in the psy chological condition known as “split feathers syndrome,” which is a product of the systematic out- adoption of indigenous children away from their home community and culture; and in diabetes, which is only one result of the destruction of indigenous land bases, and thus of traditional foods and dietary practices. The structure of colonialism also appears in blindness and eye dis ease, which in the twenty- fi rst century continue to occur among indigenous people at much higher rates than among many other groups. Calling Káteri “She who pushes with her hands” depolit icizes her impairment, which was not congenital but caused by disease carried into the Mohawk Valley by French settlers. In a non- Mohawk, colonial context this moniker also tends to make her an object of pity. Many popular Catholic accounts describe her as stumbling around the forest where, they say, she placed small crosses in the ground as a devotional act. The image of a hapless blind Indian— endowed with the spiritual vision lacking in her heathen compatriots, fl agging the earth for the Church— has obvious use value for settler colonialism. It makes Káteri what Sarah Jaquette Ray would call an “ecological other,” par adoxically romanticizing her “connection with the earth” while cutting her and her people off from their ongoing political and territorial claims.8 Káteri may be a “patron saint of the environ ment,” but that seems to mean little on most Catholic websites beyond celebrating her as a “child of the forest” who is “close to nature.”9 The oldest stereotype in the book, this hackneyed image performs deeply entrenched cultural work, deliberately masking Native peoples’ specifi c ecological knowledge and land rights.

#### Disability justice is trans/queer/poc/justice – setcol specific

If the image of blind Káteri putting her crosses in the ground has seemed to endorse such colonial ownership under the most facile kind of environmentalism, the rewriting of Mohawk historiography by Mohawk people and the Mashpee preservation of Blind Joe’s story chart paths for new understandings of disability, indigeneity, and ecology. Certainly Blind Joe and possibly Káteri were accepted as spiritual leaders and intellectuals, as pivotal players in their interlocking cultures and land bases. Is there some relationship between their disabilities and this leadership? The disability activist Eli Clare has written a typically beautiful rumi nation on the relations between ecological diversity and human diversity. In his inimitable, thoughtful way he acknowledges the diffi culties with the comparison: “It would be all too convenient and neat to suggest that without disability, humans recreate ourselves as a monoculture.” And yet, he ponders, “ecological restoration is one powerful way to repair the damage wrought by monocultures and to resist the forces of eradication. A radical valuing of disabled and chronically- ill bodies— inseparable from black and brown bodies; queer bodies; poor and working- class bodies; transgender, transsexual and gender non- conforming bodies; immigrant bodies; women’s bodies; young and old bod ies; fat bodies— is another part of the same repair and resis tance. . . . Simply put, the bodies of both disabled/chronically ill people and restored prairies resist the impulse toward and the reality of monocultures.”27 Our intersecting fields— indigenous studies, environmental humanities, disability studies— continue to debate how best to conceptualize this kind of “radical valuing”— of bodies and nature, of bodily natures. The term restoration, as Clare shows, is deeply vexed, implying as it does a cure, a return to some ostensibly pristine original state. Many critics nowadays also reject the term sustainability on the grounds that it has been co- opted by corporations invested in greenwashing or by capitalist projects invested in “development.” I would like to point out that one benefit of keeping sustainability in the mix is that this term keeps a door open to the growing field of sustainability science, a field only about as old as ecocriticism, which demands community- engaged scholarship and focuses expressly on “coupled human- natural systems.” Surely, for the most thoughtful scholars in environmental humanities, disability studies, and indigenous studies systems are critically important. In conversation with sustainability scientists we can attend not only to earth systems, food systems, and cultural systems but to systems of power, domination, and resistance.

#### PIC?? Sustainability is a good word for the kinds of repair to the environment and bodies disabled/indigenous people seek – “PIC OUT OF RESTORATION”

If the image of blind Káteri putting her crosses in the ground has seemed to endorse such colonial ownership under the most facile kind of environmentalism, the rewriting of Mohawk historiography by Mohawk people and the Mashpee preservation of Blind Joe’s story chart paths for new understandings of disability, indigeneity, and ecology. Certainly Blind Joe and possibly Káteri were accepted as spiritual leaders and intellectuals, as pivotal players in their interlocking cultures and land bases. Is there some relationship between their disabilities and this leadership? The disability activist Eli Clare has written a typically beautiful rumi nation on the relations between ecological diversity and human diversity. In his inimitable, thoughtful way he acknowledges the diffi culties with the comparison: “It would be all too convenient and neat to suggest that without disability, humans recreate ourselves as a monoculture.” And yet, he ponders, “ecological restoration is one powerful way to repair the damage wrought by monocultures and to resist the forces of eradication. A radical valuing of disabled and chronically- ill bodies— inseparable from black and brown bodies; queer bodies; poor and working- class bodies; transgender, transsexual and gender non- conforming bodies; immigrant bodies; women’s bodies; young and old bod ies; fat bodies— is another part of the same repair and resis tance. . . . Simply put, the bodies of both disabled/chronically ill people and restored prairies resist the impulse toward and the reality of monocultures.”27 Our intersecting fields— indigenous studies, environmental humanities, disability studies— continue to debate how best to conceptualize this kind of “radical valuing”— of bodies and nature, of bodily natures. The term restoration, as Clare shows, is deeply vexed, implying as it does a cure, a return to some ostensibly pristine original state. Many critics nowadays also reject the term sustainability on the grounds that it has been co- opted by corporations invested in greenwashing or by capitalist projects invested in “development.” I would like to point out that one benefit of keeping sustainability in the mix is that this term keeps a door open to the growing field of sustainability science, a field only about as old as ecocriticism, which demands community- engaged scholarship and focuses expressly on “coupled human- natural systems.” Surely, for the most thoughtful scholars in environmental humanities, disability studies, and indigenous studies systems are critically important. In conversation with sustainability scientists we can attend not only to earth systems, food systems, and cultural systems but to systems of power, domination, and resistance. Sustainability also keeps a door open to indigenous and global antipoverty movements around the relations between cultural and ecological diversity.28 One activist, Waziyatawin (Dakota), invokes sustainability as an indigenous value when she observes that, at the very moment of inexorable planetary crisis, we are witnessing the rise of powerful indigenous liberation movements, such as the resistance at Oka and the recent Idle No More movement. “Just when liberation may be within our grasp,” she writes, “the ecological destruction may be so complete that Indigenous lifeways may be impossible to practice. In this context there is a simultaneous and urgent need for both the restoration of sustainable Indigenous practices and a serious defense of Indigenous homelands.” Waziyatawin calls this “the paradox of indigenous resurgence.”29 She shows that indigenous ecological knowledge is not some primordial, free-floating commodity, ready to be lifted by settler colonials when they feel in crisis, but knowledge utterly intertwined with indigenous sovereignty and self- determination.