

Crippled Speech

Marshall, Caitlin

[ProQuest-Dokument-Link](#)

KURZFASSUNG (ENGLISH)

QuietBob97 is an alaryngeal speaker who foregrounds prosthetic voices in a series of sound-only YouTube videos. With performances designed to retrain a listener's ear for different voices, QuietBob aspires to dismantle the stigma of un-naturalness that places the humanness of his voice (and his self) in question. This essay reads QuietBob's performative moves to develop a theory of *crippled speech* – the representational crippling of speech and the concomitant desubjectification that attends bodies of vocal difference. Working between crip theory and Foucault's norm, crippled speech contributes to sound and disability studies a new paradigm for hearing and thinking vocal alterity.

VOLLTEXT

"I'm hard of speaking can you please listen louder" (QuietBob97, Video 1).

[Audio/Video not available]

This is a YouTube video posted by QuietBob97, an alaryngeal speaker whose vocal cords were surgically removed in 1997 because of a tumor ("AL: You Decide"). In a series of twenty anonymous and sound-only video performances, QuietBob deploys multiple prosthetic voices to educate his audience about and advocate for those like him who "do have a voice...just not a natural voice" ("Voiceless"). When QuietBob describes himself as "hard of speaking," he implies that his speech is disabled despite his semantically correct, clearly articulated request to "listen louder." Indeed, any testament to linguistic debility is forsworn in his poetic reworking of a familiar plea. His difficulty is not with words, but with their medium. Thus, while QuietBob demonstrates that, as the title of another video has it, "Voiceless Isn't Speechless," he simultaneously signals that vocal difference cripples speech. Being hard of speaking, the most common question people ask QuietBob is "what?" ("AL: You Decide"). Others regularly communicate that **his voice is disturbing, an impingement from which they need relief** ("AL: More Q's"). Heads turn in his direction because his vocal alterity, and not his address, commands attention. Everything he says is heard as a potential trick or joke, making Halloween utterances superbly felicitous, and April Fool's Day enunciations doubly un-so ("Things You Can"). Crippled speech is the condition of voice in socio-political marginality, a condition in which a vocalizer's speech routinely fails to act. Somehow always constative, what is called into question as true or false is not the content of the speaker's address, but the human-ness of the speaker ("AL: You Decide"). Crippled speech therefore proscribes the recognition of a speaker's personhood, transmogrifying individuals into things and political subjects into the politically abject. QuietBob signals this marginality when he claims that he sounds like something "other than" or "outside" the sonically human: "I sound like a robot or like a really big bug" (Skype Interview).

To describe QuietBob's speech as "crippled" is importantly not to label it as disabled, but to emphasize that his **speech is heard as disabled**.¹ Such a distinction does not erase QuietBob's lived experience of impairment, but rather suggests that crippled speech is understood through a particular mode of listening and hearing. This distinction is in keeping with current thought in disability studies which, while recognizing impairment as a becoming at the confluence of the biological and socio-political, maintains that socio-political attributions of disability are the constructed effects of disabling built environments that are both material and ideological (Erevelles, *Disability and Difference* 36-38).² Crippled speech is thus brought into being by the disabling environment created by normative hearing. To cripple speech is a technology of power that, when applied, marks vocal difference, whether that

difference is perceived as racialized timbre, queered inflection, deaf accent, or dystonic slurring.³ The term “crippled speech” describes both the norm of a discriminatory mode of listening and hearing, and the markedness of non-normative utterances.

Crippling the “Acoustic Shadow”

Situated within and contributing to emergent conversations between disability, sound and voice studies, the term “crippled speech” riffs on and deepens the project of crip theory.⁴ Elaborated in Robert McRuer’s book of the same title, crip theory accounts for the ways performances of queerness and disability make visible, de-naturalize, and in some instances dismantle the confining strictures of ableism and the discriminatory uses of queer and disabled bodies that ableism inaugurates. Just as queer theory reclaims the formerly derogatory term “queer,” crip theory reworks the stigma of the disparaging label “cripple” to define as “crip” the acts and social actors that build desirable futures for queer and disabled people. However, as I will demonstrate, crip theory depends on a normative model of voice, and therefore cannot account for QuietBob’s crippled speech. In this essay I extend crip theory and put it into dialogue with a sonic reading of Foucault’s theory of the norm. I do so in order to provide an account of how normative voice and hearing are crippled, and to explicate the mechanism whereby power cripples non-normative modes of sonic representation.

Methodologically, my theoretical framework and analysis are inspired by the dual performativity of QuietBob’s videos. Equal parts activism and theory, his performances take crip and crippled speech as both their content and form. By doing so, QuietBob moves beyond the socio-political confines imposed on his vocal difference and sounds out disabled life, rights, and thought. At the level of content, his videos listen to and think about voice otherwise. His work also functions on a higher level: framing and then crippling the context of his crippled speech by denaturalizing the disabling contours of normative voice and hearing. This essay offers the theoretical framework of crippled speech to crip the limitations of existing, normative models of thought and listening, and then applies said framework to the content of QuietBob’s video performances for the formal purposes of constructing an academic environment that is accessible to and resonant with vocal difference.

An instance of a normative theoretical model for voice can be heard in McRuer’s consideration of the speech acts of two crips.⁵ In the first example, crip speech is delivered by Andy, a disabled British activist protesting cuts to public benefits for people with disabilities; the second example is the filmic version of the stuttering King George VI as portrayed in the movie *The King’s Speech*. McRuer examines both crips’ speech as congealing “disability rights, recognition, and identity” in the political climate of 2011 (“The Crip’s Speech” 8). In McRuer’s reading, Andy’s speech act crips the paternal, anti-disability sentiment of UK economic policy, while the fictional king’s speech crips the masculinist and able-bodied requirements for fluency that underpin national political leadership. Herein lies the central concern and conceit of McRuer’s essay: that the sonic difference between Andy and George’s speech is, for all intents and purposes, inaudible.

The relatively simple point I’d like to make here is that the difference between Andy and George’s speech is indeed audible. George’s speech is creditable as the *king’s speech* by virtue of the monarch’s authority, regardless of his impairment. Thus, his speech acts in the name of, and serves the state. This is in stark contrast to Andy, whose crip speech acts on behalf of people with disabilities. However, McRuer reductively hears George VI’s speech as crip because the King stammers. QuietBob’s work can show us that McRuer’s aural assumption is an artifact of an ableist paradigm for hearing that positions body and voice as directly equivalent to one another. Thus while McRuer’s reading of *The King’s Speech* makes the essentialist implication that George’s crip speech results from physical disability, I will argue that crip speech is in fact the performative mobilization of crippled speech towards the making of desirable futures for disabled individuals.

McRuer’s way of listening is the norm. Even in the most radical academic fields, an essentialist paradigm for hearing and voice is the rule, rather than the exception. This is because while it is a central tenet of disability studies that material and ideological built environments, *not* bodies, are disabling, neither crip theory nor disability studies has extended this foundational premise to voice, speech, or communication disability.⁶ The result is that leading theories of disability can’t parse crippled speech because these theories unintentionally reproduce naturalized, ableist

hearing—a position that attributes crippled speech to innate, biological impairment as opposed to the effects of power. The presumed equivalence between voice and body means that while established modes of thought can effectively analyze performances and the performative context of voice, they cannot hear or attend to the *sound* of QuietBob's voice as a discrete site of inquiry. Instead, existing theory routes hearing and thought to a critical cul-de-sac that upholds the normative, default presumption that QuietBob's speech is crippled because he has a communication disability.

The effect of the sonic normalization of academic theory is that QuietBob's crippled speech falls into what Nina Eidsheim has termed the "acoustic shadow": "an area in immediate proximity to the source of a loud sound. The sound is projected not to its immediate locale but rather reaches further. Ironically, the space most immediately close to the source is thereby in its acoustic shadow and the sound is not audible" (*Voice as a Technology* 117). For Eidsheim, the acoustic shadow serves as an analogy for the unquestioned and unquestioning silences of certain analytic models of vocal music on the topic of vocal difference. Extending her analogy to crip theory, I claim that one of the functions of normative hearing and voice is to cast an acoustic shadow over vocal difference, rendering it inaccessible not only to hearing, but also to critical modes of thought that are predicated on such a normative model. What is needed, therefore, to carry out the project of hearing and thinking QuietBob's crippled speech is an intervention into normative theoretical paradigms of hearing and voice. Listening louder, QuietBob's own method for sounding and hearing vocal difference, provides a suggestive model for such an intervention. As a theoretical template for making audible and strange the contours of normative voice and hearing, listening louder prompts us to think voice not as a natural symbol of a material body, but as an arbitrary sign of how a body has been positioned, socio-politically, by and in power. Improvising from Jonathan Sterne, who describes what is audible as a question of a political subject position structured by power and difference, I listen louder to hear voice as the sound of the body that is equally structured by power and difference. Accounting for this power, however, will ultimately require new theoretical tools that can parse the normalizing operations that condition what we hear as voice. I wish to supply such theoretical tools by complementing crip theory with the work of Foucault. Though crip theory falls into the acoustic shadow of normalizing power and therefore is inadequate as an analytical framework for hearing and thinking QuietBob's crippled speech, Foucault provides a potent apparatus for sussing out voice in the acoustic shadow precisely because his theory of biopower pivots on the concept of normalization. I therefore invoke Foucault in conjunction with crip theory in order to crip normative paradigms for hearing and voice.

When I speak of normalization, I refer to Foucault's concept of the norm, which shuttles between and co-articulates disciplinary and regulatory technologies as they are applied to individuals and to the general category of man-as-species with the aim of taking control over and optimizing life (*Society* 252, 246). Leveraging the Foucauldian concepts of the norm and normalizing society, I develop the analytical framework of crippled speech to characterize a technique of biopower whereby voice is made to function as a sonic norm, and where deviation from this sonic norm produces what Foucault describes as a "biological-type caesura"—a "break"—in the continuum of the human (*Society* 255).

Importantly, Foucault defines racism as the key mechanism that fragments the human species along the fault lines of normalization by producing biological-type difference between the "good" race, and the "bad," "inferior," "degenerate," or "abnormal" race(s) (*Society* 255). Since, for Foucault, racism is the fundamental apparatus a normalizing society deploys for discriminating between "what must live and what must die," it holds that the biological-type differences that fragment the human race also function to mark members of the disqualified race(s) for death (*Society* 255). In this theoretical context, the biological-type difference produced by racism extends beyond racialized conceptions of skin color to include eugenic theories of what Foucault, in 1976, termed "abnormality" or "degeneracy" (*Society* 264n4). To rephrase, Foucault says that in normalizing societies, "abnormality" and "degeneracy"—stigmatized labels that, in the post-Americans with Disabilities Act era, have largely been replaced by the critical term "disability"⁷—are conceptualized in racist terms (*Society* 258). Foucault's formulation of racism can thus be understood to target and produce disability. This definition resonates strongly with what Fiona Kumari Campbell defines as ableism: a structure of power that produces a dichotomy in the human species between

“normative” and “aberrant” individuals. Ableism is also characterized by “the enforcement of [this] divide between a so-called perfected or developed humanity...and the...undeveloped and therefore not really-human” (215), Campbell explains.

I suggest that Foucault’s concept of racism functions to mark and enforce the divide in the human species produced by the norms of ableism. In my reading of Foucault, to state that abnormality and degeneracy are “conceptualized in racist terms” means two things (*Society* 258). At the most basic level it means that material “human variation,” what the norm produces as disability (Garland Thomson 17),⁸ is cleaved from the human and marked for death by racism. Second, I read this to mean that degeneracy and abnormality become the signs of biological-type difference writ large at the symbolic level. Attributions of degeneracy and abnormality serve as the symbolic markers that police deviation from ableist norms. Thus, the targeting of non-normative voice by racism is what produces a sonically disabled voice, whether the perceived difference of that voice be a difference of race, ability, sexuality, gender, or another category. QuietBob’s voice sounds disabled not because he lacks vocal cords, but because his vocal difference has been targeted for crippling.

Foucault’s notion of racism is productive for disability studies because it can be read as working in parallel with the norms of ableism.⁹ Returning to Foucault’s fully-realized account of the operations through which racism arbitrates and polices the norm thus extends theories of the norm, normate, normalcy¹⁰ and ableism. Moreover, Foucault’s discussion of racism, the norm, and normalizing society is in service of his larger conception of biopower (*Society* 253). Biopower, which deploys racism to supplant other discourses about the right to “take life,” such as that of sovereignty, adjudicates the question of life by harnessing the norm (*Society* 241). This analytic tension between normalization and the political stakes of life places Foucauldian theory in conversation with QuietBob’s foremost question: how the sound of his un-natural voice places his human-ness in jeopardy.

“Voiceless isn’t Speechless”: Articulating Crip Theory

Listening louder takes shape in engagement with QuietBob’s videos as a queered and twisted perceptual practice that distributes hearing across multiple sensory registers, bodies (human and non-human), and thoughts. When put into play, the praxis of listening louder makes audible the hegemony of normative voice and its contradictory re-articulations, unsettling “the ways in which able-bodiedness is naturalized” (“The Crip’s Speech” 3). As fierce reterritorializations of disability, crip acts put a “curb cut” into complex structures of constraint that cripple, and “transfor[m]...the substantive, material uses to which queer/disabled existence has been put by a system of compulsory able-bodiedness” (*Crip Theory* 32). Listening louder, in both name and approach, might be understood as QuietBob’s own method for crippling crippled speech.

QuietBob’s crippling makes strange and crooked our own hearing, an act he signals in the semantic reworking at the heart of his methodology. Listening louder is, after all, a twisting of a familiar vernacular entreaty: “I’m hard of hearing. Can you please speak louder?” In his contorted formulation, QuietBob stages the failure and debility of his own voice in order to perform both speaking and hearing as radically contingent acts. With a series of video performances that articulate the assemblage of his otherness, QuietBob contextualizes both his crippled speech and the contours of a crippling vocal hegemony in a contemporary American social formation.

For example, in “Answering Questions about My Larynx/Embarrassing Story #2,” QuietBob lampoons the mechanism designed to restore gender to an electrolarynx user’s voice (seeVideo 2):

I have a Servox...it has two preset pitches: male and female. The one you are hearing now is male. [Raises pitch preset.] This is female. It’s higher pitch because obviously females have higher voices because they have higher vocal chords, or rather, shorter vocal chords. [Lowers pitch preset.] I doubt you’d *know* whether it was a male or female speaking with one of these unless you heard them speaking side by side.

[Audio/Video not available]

The joke here is that even though QuietBob has just explicitly inhabited male and female voices “side by side,” by the time listeners arrive at his final statement, his return to a supposedly male pitch goes unrecognized, as in fact it would in a reader’s acoustic imagination were the stage directions of the video not explicitly edited into the clip. It is not until his concluding caveat—“unless you heard them speaking side by side”—that a listener is prompted to

recursively categorize the statement as male and recognize the degree to which QuietBob must perform gender semantically in order for it to resonate. QuietBob's message here is loud and clear: as a non-normative performance of voice, an electrolarynx is evacuated of gender.

In this video, QuietBob also performs his disability as a lack of vocal expressivity, a lack he caricatures in song (Video 3): "Another person said I should try singing. Well here's just a little bit...I don't have much range: Happy Birthday to you Happy Birthday to you Happy Birthday Happy Birthday Happy Birthday to you and many more." [Audio/Video not available]

An electrolarynx has such a negative relation to expressivity, the punchline goes, that even vocal music is reduced to affectless speech, ultimately losing its meaning.

In tandem with these intentionally failed vocal acts, QuietBob's videos recompose a listener's ear for voice, drawing attention to the multiple strategies the hard of speaking use to voice against crippled speech. In these performances, QuietBob disrupts normative modes of attunement and opens acoustic space for hearing and thinking vocal difference. For example, QuietBob defines his voice as the coupling of corporeality and prosthesis in "Speaking without Vocal Chords," placing voice beyond the able-bodied and biological larynx (see Video 4).

The sound that you are hearing is produced by something called an electronic or artificial larynx. This is a small, cylindrical device. A very high quality buzzer actually, that I press against my throat when I want to speak. I mouth my words while pushing a button and this device provides a steady buzzing sound so that my words can be heard. [Audio/Video not available]

In "Artificial Larynx vs. Text to Speech Software: You Decide," Bob complicates paradigms of voice-to-body particularity when he plays both his artificial larynx and Michelle (a voice-recipe belonging to his computer's Expressive Text-to-Speech application) to stage an interview with himself. QuietBob also displaces voice to hyper-aural frequencies, unsettling a host of assumed (a)symmetries between voice and presence: with an intact trachea and larynx but missing vocal folds, Bob cannot phonate but can articulate most consonants, sounding much like laryngeal speakers do when mouthing words. Thus, in "Speaking without Vocal Cords—Part 2," when Bob removes his artificial larynx, his voice whispers in the inter-dubbing that occurs between video titles and his own faint string of pops and hisses (Video 5). QuietBob achieves a similar effect in face-to-face conversation when his voice materializes between his mouthed words and a listener's straining ears and lip-reading skills (Online Commentary). [Audio/Video not available]

Collectively, these videos posit voice as a moment when multiple targeted effects (for example: flesh, prosthesis, listening practice, text, gesture, the quality of a computer's microphone/speakers, etc.) congeal in performance; they perform voice as what Stuart Hall, building on the work of theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser, terms an "articulation." An articulation is an assemblage of arbitrary elements that are linked to one another to form a "complex structure." Though this structure presents an outward unity, its linked elements have no natural relation, or (as Hall would say), "no 'necessary correspondence'" to one another. Finally, Hall emphasizes that because all articulations are structures, they are therefore structured by power (325). Brilliantly, the articulations played out in QuietBob's videos are multiple and contradictory. First, by staging a crippled speaking practice, the videos de-articulate a network of links and relations naturalized as and attributed to voice: the biological, gender, expressivity and intimacy, able-bodied corporeality, and the discrete human subject. Further, QuietBob performs his un-natural voice as *crip* speech—as a series of acts that reorder the material, ideological and political relations that voice. In doing so, QuietBob defines the articulation of natural voice as a reductionist norm, a grouping of contingencies that, despite their difference, produce a voice that sounds "univocal" (Hall 325-29).

Hall's discussion of univocality explains how a complex articulation can simulate unity and coherence, or (pardon the expression) appear to speak in a clear, straightforward and authoritative voice. QuietBob's videos highlight how the very natural-ness of normative voice—its perceived wholeness, ontological fixity, and biological correspondence—enables it to dissimulate the complex and contradictory conditions of its own production. Finally, the performative interplay of crippled and crip speech makes QuietBob's vocal difference familiar, legible, and agential at the same time that it makes strange the normative voice listeners once heard as natural. This move of

defamiliarization makes audible and questionable the sensory regime of natural voice, emphasizing that natural voice simulates sonic cohesion and univocality because it is an articulation structured in and overdetermined by power. QuietBob's videos draw his voice out of the acoustic shadow, thus allowing him to both accent the ascendancy of natural voice while critiquing its power to cripple vocal difference.

"Natural Voice"

Being an alaryngeal speaker has turned QuietBob into quite a performer. With the help of his artificial larynx, he can "impersonate a razor, impersonate a swarm of bees, [or] impersonate an alarm clock" ("Things You Can"). Or, "if [he] fail[s] to charge [his] battery fully, then [he] become[s] a mime" as he deploys silent speech and "hope[s] you can read [his] lips" ("Phoneme Envy"). What QuietBob's voices can't do, however, is help him to impersonate a "person," a "human" or someone or something "real." These are some of the words QuietBob uses to describe what natural voice sounds like. Natural voice, that sonic fantasy that has QuietBob "lust[ing] after [his] GPS's voice," is for all intents and purposes sonically foreclosed to him ("Phoneme Envy"). This doesn't mean that natural voice is absent from QuietBob's videos. Natural voice persists, if ever so quietly, in the still, avatar-like image that is the sole visual component of nearly all QuietBob's videos. This framing image, a still from a laryngoscopy video, captures a set of "normal" vocal cords in an approximated position, or mid-voicing. The presumptively natural voice produced by this larynx has been silenced both by the quieting logic of the still frame, and by the large, red interdictory circle that QuietBob has superimposed upon it to represent, he claims, "no vocal cords" ("Artificial Larynx vs. Text to Speech Software—Part 2"). At its simplest, "no vocal cords" refers to QuietBob's literal lack of these laryngeal structures. At its most profound, in dialogue and at play with QuietBob's videos, this image is a refusal of a false dichotomy between natural and unnatural voice, and the teleology of normalization that such a dichotomy renders invisible. Calling on Foucault, we may read the above image of natural voice as the norm to which QuietBob responds. Because the norm of natural voice directly intervenes in the question of life, it holds that the issues of personhood and human-ness are, as QuietBob has identified, the lynchpins of the vocal conjunctures he performs. In the era of the biological, the definition of life is a conceptual paradox. On one hand, life is categorized as opaque, ephemeral, unobservable, and as the fundamental law of nature. This principle is at work in QuietBob's video image in the way that the laryngoscopy video still, indexical of an attempt to capture elusive vocal function, equates the complex series of articulations that voice with the "natural," biological larynx. Such capture is ultimately synecdochic in that generic laryngeal structures stand-in for the assemblage of Bob's voicelessness. On the other hand, a functional anatomy across life also grants life a conceptual transparency and authorizes the intervention of power-knowledge. Intervention into biological structure and function means that life can be carried on and reproduced through both disciplinary and regulatory practices. These practices take place at the level of the individual body, what Foucault terms anatomo-politics (*Society* 243), and at the level of the population, what Foucault conceives of as biopolitics (*Society* 245). QuietBob's video image represents this conceptual transparency too. The fundamental presumption of laryngoscopic imaging, after all, is that voicing is demonstrable via the visible action of the vocal folds. Importantly, these two seemingly opposed concepts of life—that life is both natural and opaque, yet follows an observable structural plan—work in tandem, each concept validating and vanishing behind the other,¹¹ as evidenced by the double valence of QuietBob's video image.

Thus the unintelligibility and ephemerality of nature requires and invokes the disciplinary and regulatory practices of modern power-knowledge so that life itself may be sustained and preserved. And in corollary, disciplinary and regulatory practices require the norm of "natural voice" (and its binary opposite: un-natural voice) for their continued exercise upon life. The paradoxical episteme of biology functions to mask and render inaudible its own operations: a univocal, biological and naturalized understanding of voice comes to speak for, or in place of, the complex and contradictory archive of disciplinary and regulatory practices that actually articulate it. To read this movement through QuietBob's screen image, the pictured larynx fantasizes a natural voice that is iconic of life in general—a voice that, to quote QuietBob's Text-to-Speech persona, "almost sound[s] human" (seeVideo 6) ("AL: You Decide").

12

[Audio/Video not available]

“Listening Louder”

With its giant red slash, QuietBob’s interdictory circle cuts the univocality of natural voice. This cut (a disarticulation of natural voice that is also a quieting of it) produces a louder listening to the forms of life sounding inside and against the norm’s acoustic shadow. Additionally, the superimposition of the interdictory sign on top of the laryngoscopic image makes visible and audible the quieting teleology of the norm by illustrating how unnatural voice (the silence of “no vocal cords”) is always produced as the constitutive other of the natural, indexed in this case by the laryngoscopic image underlying the interdictory sign’s figure. Read holistically, this red slash is QuietBob’s refusal of natural voice and of the normalizing society such a natural voice instrumentalizes.

The image is also central to QuietBob’s performative interventions into ways life might mean differently, and into how it might be differently configured, recognized, and sustained. Key to his interventions is the strange and contorted, or crip, deployment of the interdictory sign. I want to pause to reread the image alongside QuietBob’s claim that having “no vocal cords” interdicts his personhood or humanness. For Foucault, the anatomo-politics of life propagates a classificatory system wherein beings “differ at their peripheries, and resemble each other at their centres. ...[T]heir generality lies in that which is essential to their life; their singularity is that which is most accessory to it” (*Order of Things* 267). Having “no vocal cords” excludes QuietBob from life’s generality and the generally human. For a moment then, let us reconsider the interdictory sign as an interdiction of QuietBob’s very being.

In a spectacular coup de théâtre, QuietBob seizes and twists this interdiction into a performatively rich play of anonymity. By their very nature, QuietBob’s artificial larynx and silent speech do not reveal his particularity; all users of the Servox prosthesis possess the same monotonous tone quality, and the silence of his mouthed speech renders it equally impersonal. Because he has “no vocal cords,” the altered materiality of QuietBob’s physical body cripps and thwarts a listener’s desire to hear in QuietBob’s voice what Roland Barthes has fetishized as the “grain” (182).

QuietBob’s sonic anonymity is carried over into the visual field as well with a static screen image that resists the traditional close-up, confessional-style shot of many YouTube videos. Though this interdicted image is meant to communicate (and speak back to) QuietBob’s proscription from human particularity, it ironically does so with the image of a natural voice that, despite adhering to the norm, belongs to an unidentifiable speaker. Emphatically, it is QuietBob’s anonymity, the very condition of his interdiction from the generally human, that enables him to stage a louder listening to crippled speech, and to redefine the terms of a political hearing.

QuietBob’s staging of anonymity is felicitous, I argue, because such a mise en scene means that the sonic symbol of his voice can be linked to no person and to no material body. As such, QuietBob’s video voices evade the crippling enforcement of the norm, defined by Foucault as the mechanism through which bodies and their voices are targeted for discipline and regulation: racism. Here, it is necessary to stress that Foucault defines racism as the “precondition” for normalizing society (*Society* 256). The apparatus that animates the modern state, racism exercises the right that was previously reserved for the sovereign and “makes killing acceptable” in a system of power that otherwise “takes life as both its object and objective” (*Society* 254, 256). Foucault understands racism as serving two functions. First, it deploys norms to diagnose and hierarchize racial distinctions. As markers of “the break between what must live and what must die,” these distinctions target a plan for the purging of “the bad race...the inferior race,” a murderous procedure for the improvement and purification of life in general (*Society* 254-55). Importantly, Foucault emphasizes that those who are marked for killing by power include the “degenerate, or the abnormal,” and that killing is defined broadly to mean “every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (*Society* 256). Crippled speech is not simply the conjuncture or fallout of racist articulation, but constitutive of that normative, hegemonic articulation. This is to say that crippled speech is not only the result of a racist crippling of vocal difference, but also that it is heard as the very ontological difference that justifies targeting for death in the first instance. Crippled speech is both the fundamental difference that racist function is predicated on, and is the product of that racist function. As such, crippled speech ensures that a normalizing society can continually reproduce its own conditions of possibility. We may now parse the significance behind QuietBob’s claim: “I sound like a robot or like a really big bug” (Skype Interview). Through the process of crippling speech, individuals whose speech has been crippled by normative

perception are separated from the continuum of the properly human. By positioning alaryngeal speakers as members of an inferior or aberrant race, vocal norms deem them unworthy of the recognition of life. Denied recognition as human, individuals with vocal difference are stripped of the rights and protections of the human: they are marked for death. Thus, to sound inhuman—to sound like a robot or bug—is the sonic symbol of death. In contrast, because normative voice sonically evidences life, normative voices implicitly appeal to recognition and subjecthood. Normative voices signal the indisputably human, therefore garnering the rights and protections befitting such a designation. Crippled speech, the sonic effect of the racist enforcement of the vocal norm, therefore locates bodies of vocal difference as the constitutive others to the “good” or human race, desubjectifying and barring these bodies from human recognition precisely because they have been cleaved from the realm of the properly biological. It is ultimately this disputed ontology that causes QuietBob’s voice to sound abject. While QuietBob himself does not inhabit an abject position outside the human continuum, the perceived sound of his crippled speech nevertheless impels his very being towards the non-human.

This projected abjection and resulting death—which in QuietBob’s case is not a physical death but, I conjecture, a social and political one—masks the exercise of racism in the co-production of the unmarked norm of the natural, human voice. Crucially, the unmarked norm registers both at the level of the symbolic and at the level of the material, with body and voice each figured as the biological extension of and proxy for the other. This is the ability of natural voice to compulsively and compulsorily absent the relations of power it instrumentalizes while simulating a transparent, whole, coherent, and univocal account of power’s operation. Natural voice thus effects a second order crippling, one that happens in conception: this is the crippling that makes voices of difference unheard and unthinkable in normative, vocal models of representation; this is the crippling that renders QuietBob’s performances illegible even to crip theory.

In consideration of the power of the norm to cripple representation, QuietBob’s listening louder becomes intelligible now not only as a queered method of listening but also as a series of crip speech acts for the transformation of the performative field of power that articulates audibility. For example, when QuietBob is asked in “Artificial Larynx vs. Text to Speech—Part 2” why he uses a screen image of an interdictory circle superimposed over a larynx, he responds that this image “makes it easier to speak freely, *so to speak*” (emphasis added). Here, QuietBob implies that norms for voice preclude him from speaking freely outside the performative conditions of anonymity he has established. His statements in this video and in others are calculated to remind us that the meanings that accrue to voice accrue *performatively*. What’s more, though QuietBob is able to crip the performative field of articulation to his own, liberatory ends, his videos also point to the performative moves that cripple speech.

For QuietBob then, listening louder, as a method for rearticulating this racist structuration, is a transformation of the performance and performative conditions of articulation, a radical reordering of the built environment of speech. Take, once again, his screen image, where an interdictory circle cuts the univocality of natural voice. In this instance the hushing of natural voice and the resultant re-attunement to the acoustic shadow of the norm reorders the built environment of the videos to create a different type of acoustic space, one that is more resonant with a quieted logic. Following Eidsheim—who, in “Sensing Voice,” establishes that the materiality of environment shapes what voice and sound can be and are understood as—QuietBob’s alternative acoustic space fundamentally reshapes and provides a radical opening for what listeners can hear, how speakers can be, and what they can represent. A quieted logic, one that recognizes and reclaims crippled speech as a way of living and knowing, therefore enacts the crip speech act and epistemic shift that is listening louder.

As just one example of QuietBob’s quieted logic, his screen image cripples speaking freely for those who speak differently—for those who “so to speak.” The promise of “so to speak” is that it might encompass any number of radical redefinitions of what speech might be, including, as Bob indicates, spoken silence. In the acoustic space of Bob’s videos—thought and built otherwise—freedom of speech is posited as a disabled right, and the able-bodied valence of “freely” is rearticulated with a disability positivity that redefines the time, meaning, coherence, ontology, and in fact, the very *sense* of voice. Listening louder, the apotheosis of a quieted logic, is the crip speech act that therefore fundamentally affirms an otherwise-life in the acoustic shadow.

"The Different Voice Project"

In his final video, "The Different Voice Project," QuietBob reaches out to others in a "different voice category" in a bid for unified action:

One thing we seem to have in common: people are often perplexed by our voices. We sound different. That's why I'm making this video. I would like your help. If you sound different, if your voice is different from most people's voices, I'd like to hear from you, if you'll pardon the expression. I would like to make a video with your help. Here's what I would like to do. I would like to gather videos from people who have vocal challenges, that is, whose voice sounds different, and combine them into one video that explains why we sound different. ...Let's do this together. His call for activism doesn't necessarily rely on a normative, vocal model of protest and identification. Individuals falling into "different voice categor[ies]" are encouraged to make contact with QuietBob by any means possible; he wants to "hear from you," but that is just an "expression": in truth, QuietBob is calling for solidarity among those he otherwise would not be able to hear from at all. With its quieted format, the "Different Voice Project" suggests it might provide access to advocacy, and an amplification otherwise to those unable to be heard through normative, traditional mechanisms of protest.

QuietBob's final YouTube video not only calls for ways of voicing that can intervene in traditional norms for voice, redefine modes of activism, and affirm different types of life; it also demands that we academics develop a "Different Voice Project" of our own. Developing such an academic project is essential to being in solidarity with and remaining accountable to crip speech. For though crippled and crip speech stakes out a "voiceless isn't speechless" positionality, no performative move can provide QuietBob access to the built environment of normative voice. Surgically stripped in 1997 of his natural voice, QuietBob no longer has entrée to the knowledge or representative power that would enable him to give voice to normative voice. QuietBob can no longer speak from vocal norms and is therefore disabled from giving an account of power in its own voice.

This is, again, how power renders its operations invisible: by quieting the difference it acts upon. Thus while crip speech may be a successful strategy for affirming queer and disabled life inside the acoustic shadow, it can't pierce the normative ideology that is its source. What crip speech *can* do, however, and what QuietBob does through listening louder, is to call power to account. QuietBob's video series has convinced me that the task of academic theory is to answer this call. In developing a "Different Voice Project," theory moves hearing and thought out of the acoustic shadow to account for the ways power cripples the material and ideological articulations that voice. This is not a speaking for or on behalf of vocal difference; crippled speech can "so to speak" for itself. Instead, a "Different Voice Project" puts a curb cut into normative ideologies of voice and hearing in order to help sustain otherwise modes of thought and life. As I have endeavored to show, developing a "Different Voice Project" will require a shift in the built environment of academia's own critical and theoretical structures—a shift to which this essay begins to listen louder.

Caitlin Marshall

University of California, Berkeley caitlinmarshall@berkeley.edu

Footnotes

1. This is not to imply that disability identity is in any way negative, but rather to insist that the choice to claim identity as a person with disabilities must be QuietBob's alone. Interestingly, this identification is one that QuietBob plays with and against throughout his videos, and is part of his strategy for crippling crippled speech (see forthcoming discussion). Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that when QuietBob does claim identity as a person with disabilities, he establishes this identity as a privileged position, inflecting the entire corpus of his videos with a disability positive tone.

2. See additionally Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*.

3. Here I use the term "vocal difference" in the most capacious sense. "Vocal difference" as a term is meant to resist the impulse to categorize sonic differences. Examples of such categorization include the designations of speech disorders (such as stuttering), language and communication disorders (such as autism), and vocal disability (such as vocal cord paralysis). This terminology does not intend to elide or deny the specific experiences of individuals with

these disabilities. On the contrary, the term “vocal difference” is first and foremost an acknowledgement that the terrain encompassing voice and speech is already over-policed. Second, as a broad identificatory category, “vocal difference” more accurately reflects the extensive and indiscriminate nature of the violence exercised by the mode of sonic discipline and regulation this paper defines as “crippling speech.”

4. Recent scholarship by Mara Mills and Michele Friedner makes tremendous strides in placing disability and sound studies in conversation. Their work offers important correctives to what Jonathan Sterne, in his remarks at the 2011 American Anthropological Association, has identified as “the creeping normalization of Sound Studies.” Yet the majority of writing at the intersection of these two fields addresses deafness. While deaf studies provides trenchant histories of the way oral communication normalizes fundamental humanist concepts such as personhood (Lane), information (Mills), voice, ethics and rights (Bruegemann), and nation, belonging, and citizenship (Baynton), “Crippled Speech” aims to contribute to this fruitful body of work a consideration of how oral communication is itself normalized, and to what ends.

5. I'd like to thank Robert McRuer for his generosity in sharing with me the text of his talk, “The Crip's Speech in an Age of Austerity.”

6. Two notable exceptions to this under-theorization of voice and impairment in disability studies include Joshua St. Pierre's recent work on stuttering, and Nirmala Ereveles's exquisite writing on the challenge autism poses to conceptions and valuations of authorship (“Voices of Silence”).

7. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed as broad civil rights legislation for people with disabilities in 1990.

8. Rosemarie Garland Thomson defines the production of the *normate* by describing the process of enfreakment, a spectacle that “choreographed bodily differences that we now call ‘race,’ ‘ethnicity,’ and ‘disability’ in a ritual that enacted the social process of making cultural otherness from the raw materials of human variation” (64).

9. Though out of scope for this essay, a conversation between Foucault and disability studies also enables a discussion of racism and ableism as co-articulated processes across material and symbolic registers. Such a move is promising in its contribution to recent work in disability studies that examines race and disability as co-constituted becomings that may even function analogously at the level of the discursive (see Nirmala Ereveles, Todd Carmody, and Mel Chen).

10. Theories of the norm, normate, and normalcy have become central to disability studies through the work of Rosemarie Garland Thomson (cited above) and Lennard Davis.

11. My thinking here is influenced by Henri Lefebvre's readings of the illusion of transparency and realistic illusion (27-29).

12. This importantly emphasizes Eidsheim's groundbreaking point that sound is also a look (*Voice as a Technology*).

References

Barthes, Roland. “The Grain of the Voice.” *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. Print.

Baynton, Douglas C. *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996. Print.

Bruegemann, Brenda Jo. *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness*. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet UP, 1999. Print.

Campbell, Fiona Kumari. “Stalking Ableism: Using Disability to ‘Expose’abled Narcissism.” *Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions*. Eds. Dan Goodley, Bill Hughes, and Lennard Davis. New York, Palgrave Macmillan. 212-232. Print.

Carmody, Todd. “Rehabilitation Analogy.” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1.2 (2013): 431-439. Print.

Chen, Mel. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affects*. Durham: Duke UP, 2012. Print.

Davis, Lennard. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. New York: Verso, 1995. Print.

Eidsheim, Nina. “Sensing Voice: Materiality and the Lived Body in Singing and Listening.” *The Senses and Society* 6.2 (2011): 133-155. Print.

---. *Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance*. Diss.

- University of California San Diego, 2008. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2008. Print.
- Erevelles, Nirmala. *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- . "Voices of Silence: Foucault, Disability, and the Question of Self-Determination." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 21.1 (2002): 17–35. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003. Print.
- . *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.
- Friedner, Michele and Stephan Helmreich. "Sound Studies Meets Deaf Studies." *The Senses & Society* 7.1 (2012): 72-86. Print.
- Garland Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. NY: Columbia UP, 1997. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance." *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*. Ed. UNESCO. Paris: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural, 1980. 305–345. Print.
- Lane, Harlan. *The Wildboy of Aveyron*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976. Print.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991. Print.
- McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York U P, 2006. Print.
- . "The Crip's Speech in an Age of Austerity: Composing Disability Transnationally." 2012. Unpublished Essay.
- Mills, Mara. "Do Signals Have Politics? Inscribing Abilities in Cochlear Implants." *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*. Ed. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.
- . "Media and Prosthesis: the Vocoder, the Artificial Larynx, and the History of Signal Processing." *qui parle* 21.1 (2012): 107-149. Print.
- . "On Disability and Cybernetics: Helen Keller, Norbert Wiener, and the Hearing Glove." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22.2-3 (2011): 74-111. Print.
- QuietBob97. "Answering Questions About My Larynx/embarassing Moment #2." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 19 Nov. 2007. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "Artificial Larynx Vs. Text to Speech Software - More Questions, More Answers." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 10 Aug. 2010. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "Artificial Larynx Vs. Text to Speech: Part 2." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 7 June 2010. Web. 7 Mar. 2015.
- . "Artificial Larynx Vs. Text to Speech: You Decide." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 24 May 2010. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "Different Voice Project." *YouTube*. Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 19 Oct. 2013. Web. 7 Mar. 2015.
- . "Hard of Speaking." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 30 Jan. 2008. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "I Have Phoneme Envy." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 3 March 2010. Web. 7 Mar. 2015.
- . Online commentary. "Answering Questions About My Larynx/Embarrassing Moment #2." *YouTube*. "My vocal cords were surgically removed in 1997. Since then, the electrolarynx has been my primary form of speech, although in one_ on one conversation, I often put the device aside and the person I'm speaking with just reads my lips." 19 Nov. 2007. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . Skype interview. 17 Apr. 2009.
- . "Speaking Without Vocal Cords." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 21 Nov. 2006. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "Speaking Without Vocal Cords—part 2." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 10 Nov. 2009. Web. 10 June 2015.
- . "Things You Can and Cannot Do Without Vocal Cords." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 17 June 2009. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "Voiceless Isn't Speechless." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 18 May 2007. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
- . "Your Voice—Part 1: How it's produced." Online Video Clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 30 September 2008; Web; 10

June 2015.

Seibers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2008. Print.

Sterne, Jonathan. "Hearing." Conference paper. Annual Meeting for the American Anthropological Association. Montreal, Quebec. 2011.

St. Pierre, Joshua. "The Construction of the Disabled Speaker: Locating Stuttering in Disability Studies." *Literature, Speech Disorders, and Disability: Talking Normal*. Ed. Christopher Eagle. New York: Routledge, 2013. 9-23. Print.

AuthorAffiliation

Caitlin Marshall is a PhD Candidate in Performance Studies, with a Designated Emphasis in New Media at the University of California Berkeley. Her dissertation, "'Power in the Tongue': Sonic Undercommons and the Making of American Voice," works at the confluence of performance, sound, disability, and critical race studies to mobilize speech impairment as a broad material and theoretical category for investigating how American citizenship was established as an exclusionary vocal limit in the antebellum era.

DETAILS

Thema:	Auditory system ; Video recordings ; Hearing ; Naturalness ; Speeches ; Disability discrimination ; Listening ; Acoustics ; Speaking ; Disabled people ; Disorders ; Sound ; Otherness ; Disability studies
Titel:	Crippled Speech
Autor:	Marshall, Caitlin
Titel der Publikation:	Postmodern Culture
Band:	24
Ausgabe:	3
Erscheinungsjahr:	2014
Herausgeber:	Johns Hopkins University Press
Verlagsort:	Baltimore
Publikationsland:	United States, Baltimore
Publikationsthema:	History, Sociology
Quellentyp:	Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift
Publikationssprache:	English
e-ISSN:	10531920
Dokumententyp:	Journal Article
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2014.0020

ProQuest-Dokument-ID: 2559457820

Dokument-URL: <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/crippled-speech/docview/2559457820/se-2?accountid=14626>

Copyright: Copyright Johns Hopkins University Press May 2014

Datenbank: Literature Online

Copyright Datenbank © 2023 ProQuest LLC. Alle Rechte vorbehalten.

[Allgemeine Geschäftsbedingungen](#) [Kontaktieren Sie ProQuest](#)