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This thesis posits an innovative framework for rhetorically (re)analyzing disability history in higher education by overlapping disability rhetoric with disability aesthetics.

In *Academic Ableism* Jay Dolmage argues that an institution's aesthetic ideologies and architecture denote a rhetorical agenda of ableism. In *Disability Aesthetics*, Tobin Siebers argues that disability is a vital aspect of aesthetic interpretation. Both works determine that disability has always held a crucial, critical role in the production and consumption of aestheticism, as it invites able-bodied individuals to consider the dynamic, nonnormative instantiations of the human body as a social, civic issue (Siebers 2). Disability, therefore, becomes an indispensable aspect of both aesthetic representation and human experience.

With this framework, I rhetorically analyze both institutional aesthetic rhetoric, as well as students' aesthetic resistance to this rhetoric, at a mid-sized state institution in the late 20th century when Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was finally signed into law, and universities confronted a legal demand to no longer deny students access based on their disability. Rhetorical disruption occurs at these sites of student aesthetic resistance, and so scholars can in effect utilize disability aesthetics to expose academic ableism. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how disability scholars and historiographers can widen the view of disability history in higher education.

ARCHIVAL ARTISTRY: EXPLORING DISABILITY AESTHETICS IN LATE

TWENTIETH CENTURY HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Lauren Beard

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

> I have broken the old taboo/ named my affliction/ called it mine ~Anne Kaier, "The Examining Table"

The zeitgeist of mid-to-late twentieth century America championed a simple yet radical concept: equality. Just a brief glance at political culture during this time will reveal a mosaic of individuals whose names have become synonymous with tireless Civil Rights advocacy, such as Rosa Parks, Harvey Milk, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, and Martin Luther King Jr. This period of history also witnessed the rise of a sociopolitical entity that was making a powerful Civil Rights statement in mainstream America. Individuals with disabilities were beginning to cultivate a formidable political identity. Scotch and Barnartt, in their monograph *Disability Protests: Contentious Politics 1970-1999*, reveal that protests by both those with disabilities and their allies erupted in the 1970s and continued to "flourish" well into the 1990s (222-223). To quote Kaier's poem above, they had "broken the old taboo" of being satisfied with, and silent about, government paternalism and sub-par citizenship.

For one example, disabled war veterans lobbied for more effective instantiations of accessibility upon returning home from various twentieth-century wars, as when Vietnam veteran Richard Heddinger sued Washington D.C. in 1972 for not making its new "multi-billion dollar" subway system accessible for physically handicapped

individuals (Temple U). On April 5, 1977, disability activists and individuals with disabilities forced themselves into federal buildings across the nation and engaged in a sit-in protest to advocate for the passage of Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act, the section which guarantees disabled individuals the right to participate in government programs and services without discrimination (Johnson). In 1989, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was formed to help ensure those with disabilities could secure the right to an accessible education (Temple U). In 1990, George H.W. Bush signed the The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which promised holistic, equal Civil Rights, including legal protection against discrimination for individuals who have disabilities (Johnson). Also, beyond strictly political initiatives, in 1990, Boston held the nation's inaugural Disability Pride Parade, which allowed individuals who inhabit all aspects of the disability spectrum to unite and celebrate their bodies as a community (The Disability Pride Assoc). This recitation is not exhaustive, and many scholars have commented on how the actual implementation of these acts often leaves significant room for improvement, but nonetheless, one can see how those with disabilities fought to build an autonomous, compelling, and proud political body, which those in power could no longer so easily dismiss.

This project will explore how this era of visibility and protest took shape on a college campus. What tools did students with disabilities turn to in order to resist ableist norms? How did they take up space and articulate their identity within this institutional context of higher learning? Why is it important to be aware of this particular rhetorical

moment in history? This project will analyze a suite of activities on one campus, demonstrating one way scholars can analyze disability history within higher education by focusing on a framework of aestheticism and accessibility.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ARGUMENT

> Elaine Scarry writes that pain is simultaneously/ a thing that cannot be confirmed & cannot be denied./ In me, a shooting like a flash like a planet like a fire./ In you, a question mark. ~Jillian Weise, "The Body in Pain"

In the midst of these fights for equality in the late twentieth century United States, there existed an ideologically complex space that was and still is rich in rhetorical exchanges and performances, especially when confronted with disability. This space is the American college campus. This chapter will articulate how conversations surrounding disability in higher education began to take a more pointed form during this time. Ultimately, this analysis will reveal how a theoretical framework focused on space, aesthetics, and identity within this historical account can enrich scholars' understanding of, and intervention within, perceived narratives of disability within the university. After Section 504 became law and universities could no longer deny access to individuals based on their disability, institutions of higher education across the United States saw a dramatic increase in the numbers of people with disabilities both applying for college and disclosing their disabilities to their university.[1] In the wake of this increase, universities began implementing various educational accessibility services on their campuses in order to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities, such as disability service offices

[1] Further information regarding specific statistics of students with disabilities attending institutions of higher learning can be found at the National Center for Education Statistics website: https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64

which provided students with documentation that would allow them longer test-taking times or access to technology that assisted them in reading or writing (Nelson and Lignugaris-Kraft). However, there was not just a shift in the educational landscape of universities at this time, but a shift in the sociopolitical one as well. College and university presidents, deans, and other administrators were now pushed to think critically about their values and belief systems concerning abled and disabled bodies. For example, Why were students with disabilities previously barred from entry? What standards do Universities in the United States ascribe to? Are they fundamentally exclusionary? Which bodies do they privilege or not and why? Universities continue to face these questions today as new scholars and scholarship work to advance various social justice causes. In this vein, Dolmage writes that "we [as scholars] must wonder whether what we have to offer is truly worthwhile if it translates into politics of exclusion...and reductive definitions of human worth" (*Academic* 65). This paper's purpose is to highlight what disability scholars have been theorizing for years (namely, that students with disabilities bring valuable resources, insights, and contributions to the university) by investigating how disabled students at one university turned towards aesthetic measures to advocate for their access to, and validity within, higher education. To this end, I will now turn to my theoretical framework.

Disability scholar Jay Dolmage writes that academia is a moving, performative entity built on both a physical and metaphorical architecture of "steep steps" (2). The physical steep steps are the "stylistic and aesthetic center" of many campuses, leading most often to the library or other scholarly hub (2). Dolmage theorizes the steps as a sort

of spatial metaphor, within which exists a “latent argument about aesthetics or appearances, one that trips over the classroom, into ideology and into pedagogy” where instructors and administrators are “concerned about pattern, clarity, propriety--and these things are believed to be beautiful” (2). In other words, in order to achieve success and be regarded as normal and acceptable in higher education, one must be able to both physically interact with aesthetic architectural barriers (which were decidedly not built with disabilities in mind) as well as metaphorically climb the steep steps of higher education mentally. Therefore, just as someone with a physical disability cannot easily navigate literal steeps steps, the University system has been built in such a way that anyone who does not embody certain lofty privileged ideations of a student cannot easily succeed. These rigid aesthetic standards of uniformity and structure as hallmarks of an acceptable academic atmosphere disguise a deep seated tradition of “Academic Ableism,” or, an overwhelmingly positive valuing of “able-bodiedness” within the university (Dolmage 7). By privileging ability as a site of power and correctness, institutions of higher learning normalize what Dolmage would refer to as ableist aesthetics. Ableist aesthetics are the exclusionary barriers, both material and ideological, which are built with default able-bodiedness in mind, and are regarded as beautiful, iconic, and correct.

For example, consider the aesthetic ideology behind the many steps leading up to the Widener Library at Harvard, the “flagship” and “centerpiece of the Harvard libraries” reproduced below (library.harvard.edu). These daunting steps lead into one of academia’s most prestigious libraries, yet these steps overtly exclude certain bodies. Dolmage argues

that academic buildings which students and faculty use every day are “alive,” and thus “an inaccessible building...is alive and working to physically filter students out of the university every single day” (37). Dolmage argues these physical barriers equate to exclusionary educational barriers, in which teachers disguise their ableism with phrases such as, “I need to impose standards” or “I would be doing them a disservice if I didn’t prepare them for what is to come” (37). Therefore, by looking at campus architecture as a rhetorically living organism, one can begin to see ableist aesthetics as an insidious parasite which creeps its way into the physical and ideological spaces of the campus, even in areas where the university has attempted to cultivate accessibility, which I will discuss later.

Figure 1. Widener Library, Harvard University. Photo credit: Chensiyuan, 2009

Disability scholar Tobin Siebers also investigates this concept of aesthetics and what we are “allowed” to call beautiful by exploring twentieth century modern art (1). Siebers asserts that modern art actually conceptualizes the disabled body as a critical aesthetic form, which is significant because it posits the human body as both the “subject and object of aesthetic representation” (1). Explained another way, when artists position disability within the human body as focus of a piece of art, the audience must

contemplate the human body as a network of simultaneous beauty, unconventionality, strength, and damage. For example, creations such as Marc Quin's *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, depicted below, which is located in the very public space of Trafalgar Square, force audiences to interact with the fragile, dynamic, nonnormative instantiations of the human body as a social, civic issue (2). Disability, therefore, becomes an indispensable aspect of both aesthetic representation and human experience. Siebers asserts this art is significant because it "[returns] aesthetics forcefully to its origionary subject matter: the body and its affective sphere" (2). Modern artists with and without disabilities rearticulate artfulness and beauty not just to reflect the reality of disability in bodies, but also to challenge ideological assumptions that disabled bodies cannot be appreciated as beautiful. With this point of view in mind, he coins the term "Disability Aesthetics" to refer to "a critical concept that seeks to emphasize the presence of disability in the tradition of aesthetic representation" (Siebers 2). By expanding disability in art from a mode of artistic expression to a critical rhetorical concept, Siebers invites individuals to examine carefully the aesthetic role disabled bodies play in all aspects of society.

Figure 2. *Alison Lapper Pregnant* by Marc Quin. Photo credit: Brian Robert Marshall, 2006.[2]

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There are institutional aesthetic sites on every college campus that carry historical baggage which Dolmage calls ableist and eugenic (*Academic* 11-20). These sites employ traditional aesthetic values which adhere to what Siebers would deem idealist, "banal, unvarying" interpretations of the human form (33). For example, consider how universities depict important cultural figures on their campuses. In North Carolina alone, UNC Greensboro's statue of founder Charles Duncan McIver, Central Carolina's statue of founder James Edward Shepard, and UNC Chapel Hill's "Silent Sam" statue all depict upright, white men in similar stoic poses.These statues are rhetorical cultural sites, and the codes they embody speak volumes. Their bodies are all depicted the same way in a tidy, uniform fashion, just as institutions of higher learning align with tidy, uniform standards of academic success.

Figure 3. From Left to Right: Charles Duncan McIver, James Edward Shepard, and "Silent Sam." Photo credit: Alex Israel, 2014; RDUpedia, 2012; and Spaghet-Ti, 2018 respectively.[3]

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A recent political moment involving one of the statues, Silent Sam, further implicates the rhetorical significance of student aesthetic resistance on college campuses. On August 20th, 2018, students on UNC Chapel Hill's campus tore down Silent Sam, who had been erected at a busy and symbolic nexus of the campus to honor confederate alumni who fought and died in the civil war more than a century ago (*NY Times*). Before this event however, UNC student Maya Little, who identifies as African American, vandalized the statue earlier this year by splattering red paint mixed with her own blood on it, symbolizing graphically and literally the African and African American blood spilled at the hands of both confederate soldiers during the Civil War as well as white supremacists from Civil War times up to the present (*The Tab*). According to Siebers, this act of damaging the representative body of the statue means it has taken on a different rhetorical meaning. Siebers argues that once a formerly whole piece of art is damaged, "[b]eholders are free to fantasize about what [the] damaged [image] mean[s]" (83). To some, it means one more nail in the coffin of white supremacy in the south; to others it imbues a poignant loss of southern heritage and identity. Either way, the statue's form has changed, and with it, the reality of its content, "pushing the representation of disability beyond the limits of representation itself;" for instance, the statue transforming from a sight of honor to dishonor (Siebers 87). To put this concept another way, one could say the toppled, broken Silent Sam now represents a disabled body. These UNC students have created a new aesthetic and rhetorical meaning in Silent Sam by dismantling him, one in which the presence of disability is pivotal to the overall message of their dissatisfaction with, and resistance to, having a confederate façade on their

campus. Student aesthetic resistance has exposed the rhetorical codes and practices of institutional exclusion, and disability is an essential aspect of this defiance.

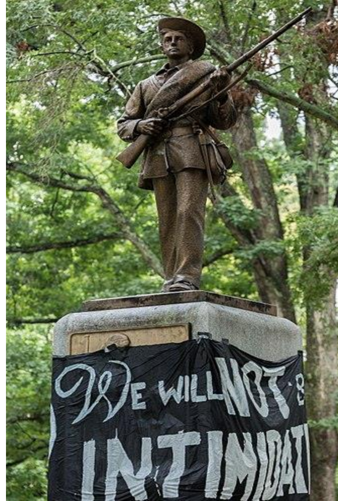

Figure 4. Silent Sam Image with Banner Reading "We Will Not be Intimidated." Photo credit: Martin Kraft, 2017.[4]

This one demonstrates Dolmage's claim that aesthetics on college campuses demarcate sites of power and privilege as well as Seiber's assertion that disability is a critical locus for challenging normative perceptions in aesthetic representation. This rhetorical moment of protest demonstrates how scholars can employ a framework for analyzing the intricate, complicated spaces marginalized students must maneuver daily on college campuses, as well as unique student responses to this space in both past and present moments. By overlapping Dolmage's theories on exclusionary aesthetics in higher education with Tobin Siebers's thoughts on disability as a critical aesthetic mode of representation and

[4] Reproduction of this image is allowed under the free license CC BY-SA 3.0. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/legalcode

interpretation, I will show how a group of college students with disabilities utilized art as a tool of resistance, self-affirmation, and community within the larger institutional aesthetics of the university.

Students with disabilities in higher education are constantly judged and excluded by the degree to which their bodies and minds fit within accepted institutional aesthetics and practices, both physical and intellectual. Therefore, this paper will seek to apply this Dolmage/Siebers theoretical framework to one specific moment on a college campus in the late twentieth century. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro's (UNCG) Archives house records from a rhetorically rich moment of student self-expression and advocacy through art. I begin my investigation into these archives by analyzing and contextualizing faculty-centered correspondences which delineate institutional aesthetic interventions from 1977-1996. Then, I perform a rhetorical analysis of student-centered disability newsletters from 1982-1998, which continually feature art, including the work of two artists the students invited to visit the campus, and two outside literary magazines the students contributed to and sponsored. The reason for these time ranges is both practical and historical. The University's archives grow richer as one approaches the late 80s and 90s, which corresponds with the emergence of a mainstream political consciousness within the disability community, as well as a growing number of protests and demonstrations.[5] Therefore, while this project does not seek to provide an explicit

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[5] For more information regarding political protests in disability history, please consult: Scotch, Richard, and Sharon Barnartt. "Disability Protests: Contentious Politics, 1970 - 1999." *Disability Protests: Contentious Politics, 1970 - 1999*. District of Columbia: Gallaudet UP, 2001.

connection between nation-wide activism and activism on UNCG's campus, it does acknowledge a trend in the amount of student-centered advocacy in the archives during this time compared with the rest of the United States. Ultimately, my analysis reveals the ways in which students operate in both private communities and public spaces, as well as how they work to inform and challenge those who, as poet Jillian Weise states at the beginning of this chapter, harbor a "question mark" regarding the reality of living in a disabled body.

I show how these students' aesthetic resistance functions as a small, local reclamation of identification, autonomy, and community within the larger rhetorical space of a public state university, and an even larger rhetorical space of Civil Rights advocacy in the late twentieth century United States. I argue that by repurposing and reclaiming the very tool of aesthetic ideology, production, and representation, which an institution of higher learning would employ to suppress disabled bodies, these students use aestheticism as a tool of confrontation and protest. Analyzing this small snapshot in relation to the broader national moment of disability advocacy can provide vital, regional texture to disability history. This analysis can then influence scholars' capacity to notice ableist aesthetics and to intervene in narratives of disability history that highlight only a medical or institutional viewpoint. Pursuing archival moments of disruption and resistance can upend these exclusionary perspectives and bring scholars to a richer understanding of disability history within higher education.

CHAPTER III

INSTITUTIONAL POWER STRUCTURES

> a movement spastic/ and unwieldy/ is its own lyric and/ the able-bodied are/ tone-deaf to this singing Jennifer Bartlett, from *AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Administrative Initiatives

In the 1980s, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) began implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which prohibits, under law, discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Therefore, many more students with disabilities were admitted to the university during this time.[6] First in this section, I remark on the national state of disability scholarship and literature in the late twentieth century (specifically as it relates to higher education), and how this literature reproduces a closed power structure of knowledge. Then, I investigate the pervasiveness of top-down initiatives for disability in the archival literature and actions taken by UNCG, especially remarking on aesthetic ideologies, both physical and metaphysical.

This term "top-down initiatives" is inspired by the work of Louis Althusser and his notion of the "hail." Althusser argues that "ideologies 'hail' subjects and enlist them as their authors…[, and within this hail an author] implicitly understands himself or herself as being a member of a social group that shares codes and conventions" (Sturken

[6] Further information regarding specific statistics of students with disabilities attending institutions of higher learning can be found at the National Center for Education Statistics website: https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64

and Cartright 50). By applying to, and identifying oneself as, a member of a university, these students are responding to an institutional hailing that implicates them within the normative and ableist values of higher education. Through acts of aesthetic resistance, these students challenge and reject the normative, hierarchical aspects of this interpellation, in essence using their "authorship" to promote a wider notion of accessibility. After discussing these initiatives, I will contextualize them within the framework of Siebers's and Dolmage's disability aesthetics.

Top-Down Interventions

Dolmage discusses this issue of administrative intervention directly in the context of accommodations and retrofits: "Retrofits address inequities and inaccessibility, but do so in ways that reinforce ableism, turning disabled people into charity cases or villains, while situating teachers [and] administrators...as heroes" (70). Also, this structure is perhaps such a pervasive element because students with disabilities did not have much of a platform to advocate for their rights on college campuses to begin with. For example, in 1984, UNCG Student Affairs advisor Elisabeth Zinser established a panel of participants to determine "the needs of handicapped students" "including a review of the implications of Section 504…[and] the development of an awareness of handicapped students on the part of the faculty and staff" ("Memorandum"). On this panel, there were six administrators, six faculty members, and only two students who identified as having a disability. These already marginalized students being outnumbered by faculty could have

contributed to a reticence of fully articulating the extent of their needs on campus, thus replicating a narrative of silence.

Most top-down interventions in the 80s and 90s centered around the implementation of Section 504 mentioned earlier. At UNCG, implementation of this federal legislation was not only a topic of hot debate among faculty, but it was also an agonizingly slow process for students with disabilities to receive the accommodations owed them under law. I will delineate a few specific instances of physical institutional barriers which signify ideological barriers. By analyzing these documents, I will engage Seiber's and Dolmage's theories on aesthetics with Foucault's power-knowledge relations. The language and strategies employed by administrators and faculty demonstrate how these initiatives emerge from within the closed power-knowledge structure of the university.

One major example in 1990 comes from a letter to Vice Chancellor Frederick Drake from George A. Keck, a library assistant at the time. The letter expresses a vehement opposition to a proposed accessibility ramp for the library's east entrance, which is the main entrance facing the busy street of College Avenue with the statue of Charles McIver, the institution's founder, poised stoically in front of it. This entrance is overwhelmingly the most iconic and most photographed entrance to the library. It is also the most convenient entrance for students living on campus to access, since it is on the same street as all the dormitories at the time. Keck writes that he is opposed to the idea of imposing a ramp at this entrance, and proposes that an accessibility ramp should be put at

the south entrance of the library where the basement and loading dock are. He describes the south entrance as one that “not many people even notice” (“Keck May 15th Correspondance with Vice Chancellor Drake”). Thus, one can see here that, as late at 1990, students with disabilities did not even have legitimate access to the south entrance, the *least* iconic and photographed entrance to the library. Indeed, up until now they had been using the “Housekeeping/Delivery area,” where they had to navigate “dumpsters,” “trash bins,” and the “clutter of the Mail Room” (“Keck May 15th Correspondance with Vice Chancellor Drake”). Dolmage writes in his article “Mapping Composition: Inviting Disability in the Front Door” that, “[h]ow disability ‘fits’ into our structures and practices reveals much about their potential for inclusion and exclusion. Attention to disability shows that physical structures equate with ideological structures” (15). Thus, one could read this statement from Keck as an exposure of the underlying sentiment that the bodies of disabled students are not important enough for a legitimate entrance. The only spaces these students’ bodies had the option to use were cluttered and housed with trash. The students were treated like excess, like trash.

Not just Keck, but also Special Collections Librarian Emilie Mills and Assistant Head Reference Librarian Nancy Ryckman sent Vice Chancellor Drake a petition demanding he not put an accessibility ramp at the east entrance. They denied the assumed responsibility he has placed on the library to accommodate students with disabilities, which implicates not just a physical but also an educational exclusion for disabled bodies (“Mills and Ryckman May 17th Correspondance with Drake”). They were also concerned about the “attractiveness” of the entrance:

> Finally, we have some concern for the Library building which has served as a focal point of the campus and symbol of the University for four decades. Students and alumni pose proudly for photographs there and the local news media often feature the portico as a prominent backdrop for reporting that takes place on campus. The Library...is a source of pride for everyone in the University community. To compromise the integrity of the classical facade is to interfere with a symbol of the institution. ("Mills and Ryckman May 17th Correspondance with Drake")

There are several aesthetic ideologies and value systems at work in this excerpt. Firstly, we can see that they fear how an image of disability will taint the symbolism of the University's iconography. People pose "proudly" at this entrance, which insinuates there is shame in featuring something meant for students with disabilities on this otherwise able-bodied staircase. Also, the media films news stories there, so again there is something shameful in visually reproducing an image of disability upon this "prominent backdrop" for the rest of the community to see, and again, they mention the pride and "integrity" of the entrance's symbolism. They also write that this entrance is akin to Chapel Hill's "Old Well," an iconic structure with a long, rich history of academia attached to it, which insinuates that a modification for bodies with disabilities would make this structure comparatively less-than ("Mills and Ryckman May 17th Correspondence with Drake"). There is an anxiety about what sorts of accommodations these bodies deserve and how these accommodations will affect the mainstream image of an institution of higher learning; checking off boxes to avoid a lawsuit from the ADA is doable, but modifying an established area of the university to accommodate the new students they have admitted demands too much. Also, Ryckman and Mills, both curators of the University's history, are working within a mindset of preservation. The stairs must

be preserved in order to uphold the university's history, which in this instance could be called a history of exclusion. Aesthetic tradition outweighs aesthetic intervention; hierarchy outweighs equality. There are conflicting interests at work which complicate institutional notions of what is truly accessible architecture and what is a quick solution to the disability problem. This moment also exposes literally and figuratively a history of steep steps.

Mills and Ryckman also sent out a memorandum in 1990 titled "Please route QUICKLY!" which tells faculty how the Facilities Planning Office "has proposed that a handicapped ramp be added to the side of the portico near Serials./ If you wish to express your concern about this proposal please sign the accompanying sheet. Please return the letter and sheets" to Mills or Ryckman. Not only are they placing urgency on stopping this project, but they are reaching out to their own sphere of power--other faculty members. Attached to this sheet are the names of 82 faculty members from various departments who opposed the accessibility ramp, which would have been put on the "side of the portico near Serials," very much out of the way and easily hidden by strategic camera angles if someone really did not want the ramp in the shot. Thus, not only does this entire scene harken back emotively to Dolmage's spatial metaphors and the idea that buildings are "alive" and actively "filtering" students, it also shows he is absolutely correct when he writes that "[d]isability is also produced, sometimes most powerfully, by our uses of space" (16). The east library entrance is where the news broadcasts UNCG to the public, and where the best and brightest of UNCG take photos to memorialize their time spent at an institution of higher learning. Any structure not identifiable with elitist

standards cannot exist in this public, rhetorically meaningful space. By refusing to "compromise the integrity of the facade," a site of both disability and ableism has been created.[7] Siebers also writes extensively on disability architecture and aesthetics. He asserts that buildings with disabled architecture, like an accessibility ramp, "summon an aesthetic revulsion equivalent to the disgust felt by many persons in face-to-face encounters with people with disabilities, thereby challenging the ideal of a hygienic and homogenous community" (61). Dolmage also tackles this notion of the elite: "[t]he self of selves that have been projected upon the space of the university are not just able-bodied and what is considered normal, but exceptional, *elite*. The university is the place for the very able" ("Mapping Composition," 17). I have reproduced images of the signed petition below, courtesy of the University Archives.

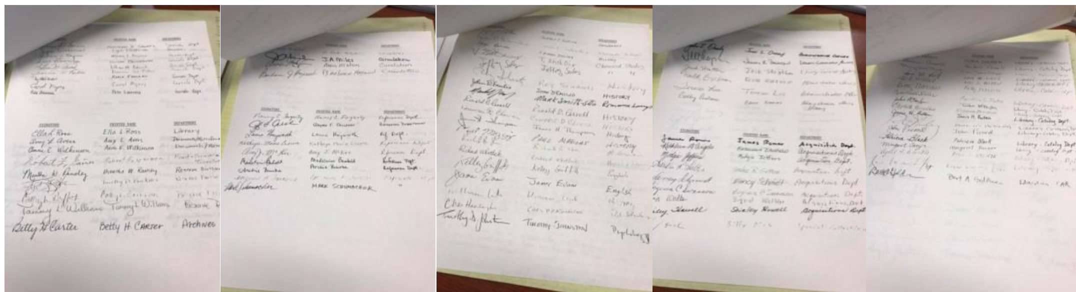


Figure 5. Petition Preventing Access Ramp at Jackson Library East Entrance.

Symbolically, these images represent a declaration of value and a hierarchy of tradition over progress. Ideologically, they represent an adherence to exclusionary elitism. This declaration stands today. The east entrance still does not have an accessibility ramp;

[7] Dolmage elaborates more fully on how our uses of space can create sites of disability in chapter one of *Academic Ableism.*

students with physical disabilities are even now denied access to this iconic entrance. UNCG has since built an expensive retrofitted connecting wing from the Elliott University Center to the library, but the doorway leading into the library is still not quite wide enough for most wheelchairs or for visually impaired students; several students and friends, myself included when I broke my ankles as a freshman, have historically had trouble navigating accessible entrances to the library. As Dolmage tells us, "[t]he retrofit is one way in which we address structural ableism (for instance an inaccessible space) with means that simply highlight and accentuate and invite disablism" (*Academic* 70). A retrofit that does not fully meet the needs of a student with disabilities reinforces the idea that disability is an individual burden that the person must and should expect to bear in an able-bodied society.

UNCG did strive to make certain student-centered buildings on campus more accessible during the late twentieth century, and both the demolishing of "architectural barriers" and the reconfiguring of academic programs continued to be at the forefront of UNCG's process of implementing Section 504 on campus. In a "Memorandum to the Chancellors" in the late 1970s, the federally-implemented, national Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) organization outlined exactly what and when accommodations needed to be implemented on campus. They specifically mentioned that "these actions...must be done in consultation with handicapped persons" ("Memorandum to the Chancellors, 1977"). However, the University Archives has saved correspondences from students to the chancellor and vice versa, and from HEW to the chancellor and vice versa, concerning accessibility issues, which they call "architectural barriers," for several

buildings on campus. For example, one night at the UNCG Taylor Theater, a student in a wheelchair, who holds an M.A. in English from UNC, was barred from experiencing art; she could not get in to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because there was no accessible entrance as of July 26, 1991 ("Boyles to Moran Correspondence 1991"). There was also a letter detailing the McIver building's absence of accessible bathrooms as of October 18, 1996 ("Sullivan to Wasserboehr Correspondence 1996"). UNCG started receiving funding from the Civil Rights office to begin implementing these changes as early as 1987, but in 1996 they were still receiving complaints about central, heavily-traveled buildings and sidewalks on campus being dangerous for students with disabilities, including students in wheelchairs and visually impaired students. Dolmage discusses the rhetorical significance of disability being a "cost [to a university] rather than an investment" and how this notion both significantly slows the process of implementing accessible spaces on campus as well as causes disabled bodies to become the objects of stigma (*Academic* 108). Indeed, the University underwent at least two separate federal investigations into alleged hazardous violations of the Section 504 Act in the early 90s ("U.S. Department of Education to Moran October 1993," "Robinson to the Chancellors 1991"). These violations reveal there is significant room for improvement regarding the priority placed on accessibility and equality in higher education.

Dolmage and Siebers both remark on the rhetoric of architectural aesthetics and the subsequent value system it places on bodies. Dolmage posits that the postmodern university is wholly neoliberal in its approach to student education; that is, knowledge consumption and production, and the student's subsequent employment, is now a

commodity for the university, which does little to encourage instructors to teach with a "diverse future" in mind (*Academic* 138). People with disabilities are more likely yhan their able-bodied counterparts to be unemployed or underemployed employed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics wrote that "a downward trend in employment for people with disabilities began in the 1990s and has continued on to the present" (Barnow 47). Linking aesthetics to ideology, Siebers also comments that "[b]eauty, order and cleanliness...occupy a special position among the requirements of society because they apply to artificial [imaginary] bodies" of ideal citizens that can work and produce tirelessly (71). Therefore, architecture that accommodates disabled bodies is seen as a waste and not much thought need be applied to effective retrofits and Universal Design.

Students responded to these half-hearted institutional accommodations by protesting for a more expanded notion of disability and campus-wide access. This advocacy pushed faculty and administrators beyond just a legalistic recognition of disability rights, as students turned toward a variety of aesthetic measures to challenge their institution and to demand recognition. The rest of this project examines how UNCG students in the late twentieth century confronted institutional barriers, and promoted disability resistance through art.

CHAPTER IV

STUDENT AESTHETIC RESISTANCE

> We step out/ and then, and then,/ the sound,/ melody of cane,' melody of crutch,/ melody of wheel,/ and the tap of the stick,/ the tick of ventilators,/ dilate, pulse,/ push breath through the street,/ roll forward and on. Petra Kuppers "Crip Music"

The scope of my ultimate archival selection ranges from the late 1980s into the late 1990s. The archive is most dense at this point, which can be attributed in part to the aforementioned national climate at this time. My analysis of the artifacts compiled below proceeds through four movements. First, I argue that grassroots student groups in late 80s and early 90s advocate for direct activism in the campus community by circulating a campus-wide newsletter. These newsletters both raise awareness within the student body at large concerning the constraints of their disabled peers as well as employ aesthetics and rhetoric to persuade all students to join the cause. Second, these grassroots student efforts direct other students with disabilities to submit their writings and art to more widely circulating opportunities, namely the nationally-read *Disability Rag* and *Kaleidoscope* magazines, promoting students' contributions to a larger disability aesthetic. Both of these efforts reveal an invitation for student collaboration and aesthetic creation to challenge institutional ableism. Next, I identify two further dimensions of aesthetic activism on campus: when disabled students invite disability aesthetics on campus in the form of enacted, embodied humor by comedian Terry Galloway, and again when they attempt to disrupt normalized aesthetics in the space of the campus's historic

and iconic art museum by inviting artist Hannah Wilke's *Intra-Venus* series. By analyzing these four moves of student activism, I argue that students turned toward aesthetic resistance in multiple ways in their efforts to disrupt and resist institutionalized ableism on their college campus.

Grassroots Student Groups

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro has saved student newsletters from the late twentieth century that feature voices from student-led disability groups, such as the "Students for Epilepsy Awareness" and the "Association for Handicapped Student Awareness," or the AH-SA ("DSS Newsletter Spring 1993," "Office of Handicapped Student Awareness brochure 1982"). Beyond just promoting different student groups and communities, however, most if not all of these newsletters feature art in some way, and, especially in the 1990s, these newsletters grow more rich in their display of student-led aestheticism. Artistic instantiations included spoken word performances, photography, creative writing, and more. Tobin Siebers's disability aesthetics and Jay Dolmage's theories on institutional aesthetics overlay fascinatingly in this archival collection, and operate to reveal the various ways students used aesthetics as a tool of defiance.

The earliest record of disability-centered student newsletters at UNCG appeared in 1982. There was a group of students on campus called the Association of Handicapped Student Awareness, or AH-SA. In their advertisements on campus, they make sure to note that "Membership is open to **any** UNC-G student" ("OHSA Brochure, 1982," emphasis original). This group was open and willing to align itself with non-disabled

students and cultivate intersectional allyships with the student body. Only a few years after Section 504 became law, these students were already working to dissolve institutional codes of exclusion and separation, or "logics of normativity," as Dolmage would call them. "Logics of normativity" refer to the assumptions put in place by society which foster disablism, the devaluing of disabled bodies, and promote ableism, the disproportionately positive regard for able bodies; ultimately, the notion behind "logics of normativity" is that disability is "less-than-human" and able-ness is the "default" (Dolmage *Disability Rhetoric* 21-22). By inviting students of all abilities into this student disability group, these students are arguing that disability is everyone's issue, dismantling the myth that it is "isolating and individuated," one of Dolmage's "Disability Myths" that influence the rhetorical performances and exchanges between abled and disabled bodies (*Disability Rhetoric* 35).

This group also participated in a "Special Arts Festival" every year, where students with disabilities could produce art of any kind and display it to their peers on campus. Therefore, beyond just subverting disability myths, these students are asserting themselves as subjects of aesthetic production. Siebers writes that "[d]isability aesthetics prizes physical and mental difference as a significant value in itself...it drives forward the appreciation of disability found throughout modern art by raising an objection to aesthetic standards and tastes that exclude people with disabilities" (19). The archives do not detail the specific artwork on display at these festivals, but this practice continued throughout the early eighties. Therefore, in the earliest record UNCG has of student-centered disability groups, one can find evidence of aesthetic resistance and self-expression.

Unfortunately, AH-SA was not mentioned again in the archives after 1984. However, this group provided the space for students to express their disability identities through art later in the twentieth century. For example, the 1987 and 1988 disability student newsletters encouraged submission to the national periodical *Kaleidoscope*, a "magazine of literature, fine arts, and disability," begun in 1979 by individuals with disabilities and their allies across the nation, that portrays critical submission themes on the intersections of art and disability (OHSA Newsletter 1988). *Kaleidoscope* is still publishing work today, with the mission of "creatively focus[ing] on the experiences of disability through literature and the fine arts[;]...this award-winning publication expresses the experience of disability from the perspective of individuals, families, friends, healthcare professionals, educators and others" (udsakron.org). Looking through the magazine's archives, one will find numerous artworks, personal essays, poems, and short stories encompassing a range of disability identities, from paraplegia to bipolar disorder. The OHSA, or Office of Handicapped Student Awareness, Newsletter mentions that the themes for the 1988 issue were "Disability as Metaphor" and "Cross-cultural Images of Disability" ("OHSA Newsletter 1988"). Therefore, one can see from this archival document that students at UNCG were thinking critically and aesthetically about the codes and boundaries that disability engages with and challenges within the rhetorical space of a college campus, and were also encouraging others to do the same.

Such modes of expression and critical contemplation are often denied to people with disabilities, because they operate in a society which prefers to relegate those who live with disabilities to an overcoming narrative or a narrative of meek gratitude. To

return to Dolmage's "Disability Myths," he mentions that one historically powerful anecdote surrounding disabled bodies is known as "kill-or-cure," in which the person either overcomes the disability (usually through the help of heroic, charitable members of society), or the disability must be killed off, and the person along with it (*Disability Rhetoric* 34). These students reject the "kill-or-cure" storyline propagated by media representation, and instead engage with disability as an aesthetic, knowledge-producing entity in and of itself. By refusing to hide or cure their perceived shortcomings, they actively defy traditional, ableist aesthetic norms and argue for a perspective which utilizes disability as a vital framework for understanding the various ways that bodies experience and perform within higher education. This contestation of traditional value systems works to expose exclusionary institutional codes of identification and posits a rearticulation of such codes to include disability as a necessary presence, instead of a problem to be cured or accommodated.

Students also turned to overtly political modes of expression and intertwined them with aesthetic rhetoric. In the 1989 DSS Newsletter, a student wrote a creative op-ed piece about the importance of individuals with disabilities having a political voice. She expresses her concerns over an apparent apathy in the disability community concerning this issue, and argues this attitude is detrimental because society already sees them as weak and powerless. She urges the community to come together as one and fight for their rights and for fair representation in government. The author then turns to the larger, able-bodied population and warns them of what may happen should people with disabilities continue to be excluded from mainstream politics by writing that this group of people

with disabilities “may very well cause the mighty to tremble if their agenda continues to be ignored!” (DSS Newsletter 1989). The author visually represents this political body of individuals with disabilities by inserting an image of Frankenstein’s monster in the middle of her op-ed piece (See Figure 6 below). She symbolizes, through a well-known literary creation, both the idea that this political body is made up of diverse parts, as well as the grotesque, othered, marginal, monstrous identity people with disabilities hold in mainstream consciousness. She repurposes this iconography of monstrosity and reclaims society’s creaturing of disabled bodies by envisioning them as a powerful force fighting for visibility and self-actualization in politics, a force to be reckoned with, not excluded, which further rejects the “kill-or-cure” myth, since *Frankenstein* also actively grappled with this narrative. This creative piece rhetorically overlaps Dolmage and Siebers effectively. The otherwise disqualifying aesthetic representation of disabled bodies as monstrous has now taken on a new rhetorical meaning, which Siebers argues is a pivotal aspect of Disability Aesthetics. Also, it performs this work in the space of a college newsletter, thus resisting the institutional and aesthetic codes of exclusion Dolmage theorizes in *Academic Ableism*.

potential power to make even the mighty tremble."
the National Press Club on February 23rd, could be powerful if ever woke up to the power which lay within its reach. An earlier Harris Poll, published in 1986 as "The ICD Survey of Disabled American: Bringing Disabled American into the Mainstream," surprised many professional caretakers. These good people had previously maintained their patient/clients would never become a significant constituency because of conflicting interests and turf battles. When representatives of the disability community finally got the chance to speak for themselves, it was learned the nay-sayers had been wrong. People with disabilities were aware of shared difficulties. The respondents revealed a growing sense of common identification. Only 16% did not identify with other disabled individuals. It can be anticipated this emerging minority will develop rather rapidly, since a clear majority of those less than 44 years of age consider the disabled a minority group. In spite of the negative stereotypes and second class status associated with being "handicapped," there is an expanding foundation upon which increased political power can be built.

Now, again the Harris organization by the National Organization on Disability, has given disability advocates significant data. This new information challenges everyone concerned about America's citizens who are unable to fulfill their potential and to end past patterns of discrimination. It is no longer appropriate to accept patched and threadbare programs. It's time for fresh initiative and cooperation.

National organizations and local networks will continue their registration and voting drives, but a new ingredient has been added to the political stew. Advocates within the disability movement now have facts to add to their moral arguments. Their constituents are highly interested in and involved with the political process. They can begin to project election results to encourage candidates to direct their attention to the social consequences of human vulnerability.

No one who wants to be president can realistically expect to be elected by a margin larger than the disabil vote. At least 24 million of the 36 million Americans with disabilities are of voting age. The remainder can expected to have two parents who want to see their children's options and opportunities expand.

This early installment of data on the political participation of voting-age people with a range of disabilities offers powerful political ammunition to those who hope to change the social climate surrounding "the h dicapped" of America. Organized and clear in their demands of the political system, such a host, mobilized common concern, may very well cause the mighty to tremble if their agenda continues to be ignored!

Figure 6. An Excerpt of the Op-Ed with the Creature’s Image

Disability student groups become less visible in the archives as one travels further into the 1990s, but there are still several disability student newsletters which encouraged participation in and featured creative works from another national literary magazine called *The Disability Rag.* This magazine, comprised of op-ed pieces, poems, short stories, and investigative journalism, engages with the political climate of the United States during this time regarding people with disabilities. This topic is of paramount importance during the late twentieth century because, as mentioned in the introduction, those with disabilities were now forming a powerful political presence in mainstream America, and so *The Disability Rag* as a kairotic response makes it an especially powerful rhetorical platform for college students, and the articles and creative works in this magazine are brash and unfiltered in their commentary. For example, according to *New York Times* author David Streitfeld, the *Rag* "takes aim at anyone or anything that...patronizes, stereotypes or takes advantage of the disabled." They expose the ableism and cultural fear surrounding disabilities by examining things like disability cure telethons by asking questions such as, "Why isn't the space program paid for by a national telethon? ... [Why is it that] vital services for disabled people--and research for cure, research this country pays such lip service to--must await the nickel-and-dime generosity of people who give money out of 'thankfulness' that they're not like the poor unfortunates they believe their money is going to 'save'" (qtd. in Streitfeld). The magazine contributors also expose what they consider to be patronizing icons like Richard Simmons who capitalize on disability, as well as the plastic surgery industry where someone looking for breast enhancement surgery is treated better than someone

who actually needs a remodeled body part (qtd. in Streifeld). To strike poignantly at deeply held Southern prejudices against people who appear as "other," the *Rag* compares ableism with racism: "I suppose people would have once said that racism was a fact of life...If you talked to a southerner in the '40s, the fact that a black person should be allowed to use the same restroom as a white person may have been fine and good, but they weren't going to do it" (qtd. in Streifeld). The 1998 July/August edition of the *Rag*, which was featured in the disability student newsletter, takes particular aim at overcoming narratives for disabled bodies in society by publishing four separate feature articles on Christopher Reeve, a former "Superman" actor who became paralyzed after an accident, and who publicly espouses eugenic research for disability cures (*Electric Edge Magazine*).

One can peruse *The Disability Rag*'s online archives from 1980 to 2004 and identify sophisticated critiques and commentary on the political unconscious of American society at this time. The political unconscious refers to the not-explicitly-stated-but-nonetheless-present ideology of "totality as the methodological standard of all human interpretation…[which] installs the image of an unbroken community as the horizon of thought" and which negates or eradicates any aspects of a "diseased, defective, or incomplete community…[i]n short, the political unconscious is a social imaginary designed to eradicate disability" (Siebers 62). The political unconscious is the driving force behind the insidious, exclusionary ideologies Dolmage analyzes on college campuses and that *The Disability Rag* analyzes in American society generally. Unfortunately, the archives do not reveal which students specifically participated in the

magazine or what they wrote, but encouragement to join other students in submitting to the magazine, as well as instructions on how to submit, were featured throughout the 90s newsletters. Ultimately, what these students' support of this magazine reveals is that, again, they are dissatisfied with ideologies that pathalogize them, and choose to defy this widespread sentiment with aesthetic resistance.

Another UNCG student with a disability also turned to aesthetic performance in order to create a space of visibility and legitimacy. The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Association, in conjunction with Disability Student Services, hosted a performance in 1991 entitled "Making Decisions for Life" by David Dean, a senior Anthropology student at UNCG who relates the experiences and difficult decisions he has faced living with HIV while being a college student ("DSS Newsletter 1991"). This performance consisted of Dean undertaking the role of storyteller and relaying his experiences to the audience. He invites the audience into a space of community and conversation, and repeatedly opens the floor to questions and commentary. The flyer for this event reveals that his performance took place in the Elliot University Center, a hub of campus that is central to student life. Thus, by occupying this space, Dean argues for his place among his peers, despite his heavily stigmatized disability. By openly marking his body as disabled, and forming a narrative of disability around himself, Dean performs a material rhetoric. Siebers writes that understanding the materiality of words is central to understanding disability aesthetics because it all begins in the body (123). Dean uses words to tell his story, but because he offers himself up as a visual embodiment of the narrative, his words are made flesh, and "when words gain materiality and appear in the

world as visible things…[they] acquire an additional power as a result" (Siebers 123, 124). By subjecting himself to scrutiny and inquiry, Dean directs his audience wholly towards his body, allowing them to form a critical connection between words, materiality, visibility and disability. This move cultivates a space for the possibility of reimagining and rearticulating the stigma surrounding a body that has been disabled by HIV. Also, by making himself a spectacle, Dean resists the ableist aesthetics that would mark his body as a failure, and instead embraces a form of disability aesthetics that would (re)imagine his body as an aesthetic site of knowledge-production and a radical, critical conception of the body (Dolmage *Academic Ableism* 173, Siebers 139). Thus, one can see from these historical moments how disability aesthetics are a powerful rhetorical performance of resistance against institutional aesthetic norms. The possibilities for an archival (re)investigation of disability history through this aesthetic lens are as limitless as they are promising.

Terry Galloway

Another example of aesthetic resistance on UNCG's campus is in 1991 when the disability student association invited performance artist Terry Galloway to UNCG. Galloway is deaf and visually impaired, and her performances are provocative, sarcastic, irreverent, and wholly resistant to established norms. Her jokes also often make fun of able-bodied people's ignorance when it came to people with disabilities. One contemporary example of this material is from a 2010 YouTube video where Galloway discusses her lisp. She says, "I'm literally deaf...and you may detect something odd about

my speech. Most people thinks it's French, but it's only a lateral lisp" (Galloway 00:11-00:16).

In her 1991 performance at UNCG, *Out All Night and Lost My Shoes*, Galloway uses her past and present experiences with her disabilities to invoke a rhetorically meaningful humor that creates a site of invitation for students to connect with others who face ableist stigma daily. For example, she jokes about being a failed abortion, and tells the audience she was a "freak" child growing up with "an enormous hearing aid box" that hung around her neck and "in between [her] breasts like a third one...and [she] had just got them!" (Galloway *Out All Night* 1:48-2:35). She then goes on to say she had a "dork kid haircut," "dork kid glasses," and did not have speech therapy to help her pronounce words (Galloway *Out All Night* 2:48-3:02). She proceeds to put on these glasses and embody her childhood self, remarking that even though she is not a child anymore, she is "still deaf, still short, and still a woman" (Galloway *Out All Night* 3:30-3:44). She tells the audience that the only weapon of defense she has for this unfair hand she has been dealt is "eyeliner," which she then proceeds to smear all over her face like a 5 o'clock shadow, while she talks about being afraid of getting beaten "black and blue" and "raped sixty times" as a disabled woman (Galloway *Out All Night* 3:34-5:00). She delivers this line in a sarcastic, blasé way, as if she were complaining about the weather. By transforming her body to reflect a masculine appearance and commenting on the intersection of gendered violence and violence against people with disabilities in this way, she unsettles audience members who are unfamiliar with disability stigma, and invites them to question their own privilege concerning others' lived experiences and

everyday realities. Therefore, not only does she challenge the representations and space that disability should have on a college campus, she also invites a sort of reprieve in which students with disabilities can laugh freely at society's ridiculous, outdated ableism. She makes the able-bodied individuals in the room uncomfortable for once.

Galloway's retelling of her childhood gets very explicit very quickly, but she is still operating within an overall context of rhetorically and comedically performing her disability, and she uses the avenues of stand-up comedy and performance art to tell the brutal reality of having a disability. Outside of this performance space, Galloway is a woman who has disabilities which stigmatize her. However, in this artistic moment, she performs her disability in an aesthetically humorous way, which empowers her to transform those modes of stigma and exclusion into "an entirely different set of meanings and emotions...promoting aesthetic variation [and] self-transformation" (Siebers 40). In other words, Galloway satirizes the social and political disqualifications of disabled bodies, as well as society's visceral reactions of disgust, in order to dissect ableism's absurdity and promote disability as a divergent yet nonetheless valid identity.

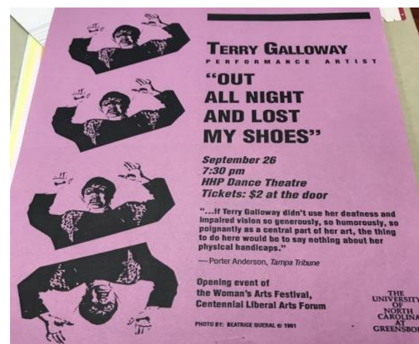


Figure 7. A Promotional Poster for Galloway's Performance at UNCG, 1991

Figure 8. Galloway Applying Eyeliner to Give Herself a 5 o'clock Shadow in *Out All Night and Lost My Shoes*

In a personal correspondence with myself, Galloway also revealed that she added a few skits into her routine which were "a central part of [her] performance at UNC Greensboro," and which relate directly to Siebers's and Dolmage's disability aesthetics. The three skits she mentions are: "Mr. Handchops," "Moments of Near Suspense," and "The Etiquette of Suicide." "Mr. Handchops" is a performance in which Galloway, dressed in a wild wig and torn up straight jacket, plays the part of a schizophrenic woman who believes she is a ventriloquist because her hand, also dressed in a tattered wig, speaks to her. The scene quickly spins out of control and digresses into screaming, at which point Galloway takes out a hammer and starts beating her hand, as if it were no longer a part of her; indeed, Galloway's hand gets its own billing in the credits (*Just the Funny Bits* 11:32-12:18). In "Moments of Near Suspense," Galloway acts out a day in the life of a person with paranoid schizophrenia. She performs as a woman coming home from work and having over a dozen paranoid, overwhelming thoughts in the span of two and a half minutes (Galloway *Just the Funny Bits* 7:05-9:35). After this skit, Galloway breaks the fourth wall, looks directly at the audience, and ends by exclaiming, "For two

and a half years I lived like that and nobody noticed!" (*Just the Funny Bits* 9:35-9:45). Finally, in "The Etiquette of Suicide," Galloway tells the audience how she wishes Amy Vanderbilt, the author of many etiquette books in the 20th century, had written a book on the etiquette of suicide before jumping out of a seventeenth story window, which Galloway says was decidedly "not very polite" (*Just the Funny Bits* 4:13-4:15). Galloway then adopts Vanderbilt's bubbly mannerisms and accent, and spouts off maxims from a pretend *Etiquette of Suicide* manual. Some of the maxims include: a butcher knife to the wrist as the most polite and effective strategy of ending it all when the insanity does finally take over, and also if one is using Sylvia Plath's "shake and bake" method, make sure to "plan your demise" at a time convenient for your family "as you will after all be monopolizing a major kitchen appliance" (Galloway *Just the Funny Bits* 5:35-5:58). In these skits, Galloway tackles mental disability explicitly. She openly identifies with being schizophrenic and suicidal, and her dramatizations of these mental disabilities exposes and satirizes the various ways society dismisses and stigmatizes mental illness.

For example, in "Mr. Handchops," Galloway dresses and acts grotesquely, invoking Seiber's notions of disability in art as "participat[ing] in a system of knowledge that provides materials for and increases material consciousness about the way some bodies make other bodies feel" (20). In other words, Galloway performs a schizophrenic mental breakdown, making the audience feel uncomfortable with her body, but only in the space of two minutes, and then she abruptly moves on. This compact yet violent display of disability both invites the audience to reconsider the assumptions they may

hold about mentally disabled people as well as pushes the aesthetic limits of humor as applied to the disabled body.

"Moments of Near Suspense" contests the notion that disability is only "a negative, private, individual failure" (Dolmage *Academic Ableism* 56). Galloway begins the skit in character, then directly invokes the audience, telling them that what they had just seen was a memory from her actual life, and that no one had ever noticed she struggled with paranoia. In this moment, she is no longer alone; her entire audience is now involved in her disability experience, and she creates a rhetorical space of simultaneous community and incrimination. The audience is forced to notice her otherwise invisible disability, but how many other people in their lives have they failed to notice or ignored completely? Siebers writes that, when faced with disability in art, the "beholders...must choose whether to embrace or to reject the strong feelings excited by disability" (40). Galloway extends this artistic choice into a critical, rhetorically significant moment through this aesthetic performance of her disability.

"The Etiquette of Suicide" satirizes the trivial ways society approaches individuals who struggle with suicidal thoughts. She jokes about Sylvia Plath's suicide, downgrades taking one's life to a minor inconvenience, and echoes societal ableism by putting the responsibility on the one who has the disability to try their hardest not to annoy anyone with it. As mentioned in the last chapter, Dolmage and Siebers argue that the architectural aesthetics of buildings emphasize some bodies, while hiding others, for example, the refusal to modify the steps in front of the UNCG library's east entrance for fear it would compromise the facade's integrity. This notion perpetuates the

aforementioned “kill-or-cure” myth in which, whether killed or cured, disabled bodies must remain invisible, since ableist aesthetic tastes “revolt against” these bodies (Siebers 1). Galloway takes a darkly sardonic yet nonetheless rhetorically effective approach to this issue by reciting all the most polite, least bothersome ways to kill oneself while miming them on her own disabled body.

Therefore, one can see how these three sketches uniquely and affectively address the disability experience, and her material resonated with her audience of college students. The student reviewing her visit in 1991 said the students were “excited” to see her performance because they “were sure [it] would relate to the experience of living with a disability” (“DSS Newsletter Fall 1991”). The author of this review goes on to write, “We found out that Terry Galloway is outspokenly unconventional about the way she thinks about life itself...She is irreverent in the way she talks about her disability, not being careful to use the ‘right,’ ‘politically correct’ words...her work is both ‘funny and grim’ [and students say they] identified with her” (“DSS Newsletter Fall 1991”). In a personal correspondence, Galloway told me she “loved [her] visit there” and “[has] lovely memories of that audience.” These students’ avid welcoming of Galloway to the campus emphasizes a desire to challenge and critique the ableist narratives imposed upon them by institutional aesthetics through their own disability-centered aestheticism.

Figure 9. Terry Galloway Demonstrating How to Kill Oneself with a Butcher Knife in “The Etiquette of Suicide” from *Just the Funny Bits*

Figure 10. Terry Galloway and The Hand of Terry Galloway in “Mr. Handchops” from *Just the Funny Bits*

Hannah Wilke

Another art piece these student groups hosted on campus was Hannah Wilke’s photography, sculpture, video, and watercolor series *Intra-Venus*. Much like Galloway, Wilke’s art is blunt and shocking in its portrayal of disability, and it provides yet another layer of analysis within the Dolmage/Siebers framework. According to the 1994 student newsletter, “[t]his exhibit documents the realities of her physical and mental transformations,” from being initially diagnosed with lymphoma to being completely

ravaged by it. Parental discretion was advised for the exhibit because the artistic renderings of her disability experience were mercilessly real. The photographs showed the corporeal and mental effects of her disability. For example, she created a series of photographs showing her smiling with a full head of hair, then crying with a balding head, and finally lying exhausted in a bed or slumping in a portable toilet seat with a completely bald head. She also created a photo series that focused on her mouth, which went from a happy smile, to a sore, puss-filled scream. In most of these installations, Wilke looks directly into the camera and at the audience, another direct invocation reminiscent of Galloway.

Also, Wilke had already passed away from her disability by the time the exhibit came to UNCG, so this archival moment is also a haunting demonstration of the morbidity faced by individuals with disabilities, as well as a reminder of the human body's mortality, which fuels the anxiety, disgust, and aversion disabled bodies evoke in society. Siebers tackles this idea of aversion by asserting that there is power in "pushing the representation of disability beyond the limits of representation itself" (87). In other words, he argues that works of art which utilize familiar mediums (painting, photography, etc.) to depict disability detach aesthetic ideals from their "beautification program in order to present a vision of disability made stranger, not prettier" (87). With this notion, Siebers asserts the value of creating art which is difficult for audiences to consume, and which elicits visceral reactions from them because of the way it portrays disability. In other words, disability in art should not only serve to make the art interesting or beautiful in a new and exciting way; sometimes it is unpleasant and painful,

and the precise point of the artwork is to capture this unadulterated reality. This rearticulating of aesthetic production by the artist, and aesthetic appreciation by the audience, creates a new mode of knowledge production in which disability can exist in an unapologetic yet nonetheless aesthetically valid space. This notion further implicates Seiber's aforementioned theory that disability in art is vital because it "return[s] aesthetics forcefully to its originary subject matter: the body and its affective sphere" (2). In this historical moment, the audience at UNCG is experiencing the pain harbored by a deceased woman's body. In a way, her engagement with Disability Aesthetics has immortalized her.

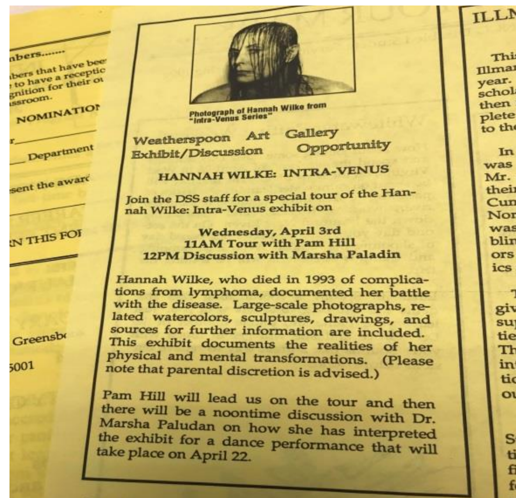
Perhaps the most striking aspect of Wilke's art is that she created sculptures and video of her body in various sexual performances, with intravenous needles sticking out of her breasts, and her inflamed genitals on display. In this moment, the series title *Intra-Venus*, itself a play on words, elicits critical rhetorical implications. Siebers writes that "visibility and the disabled body are closely linked," and that photography especially forces audiences to participate in a practice of bodily discrimination, where they decide explicitly whether a body pleases them or not (127). Wilke claims the title Venus, and indeed creates several photographs where she poses like the figure in Sandro Botticelli's classical painting *The Birth of Venus.* However, not only does she embody the exact opposite of what traditional aestheticism would deem a beautiful female form, she also arranges this artwork alongside images of herself in less classical and more pornographic positions. She critiques "the assumptions of idealist aesthetics," while simultaneously juxtaposing classical notions of beauty with erotica (Siebers 2). Wilke's art, therefore,

engages in an aesthetic contemplation of the ways society has historically depicted and consumed images of the female body as well as how disability displayed on said female body complicates these systems of production, consumption, and value. Thus, by hosting Wilke's work at UNCG's prominent and public Weatherspoon Art Museum, as well as hosting discussions of the work for individuals both with and without disabilities, these students argue for the legitimacy of disability aesthetics, experiences, and presence in both mainstream artistic spaces and mainstream spaces on college campuses.

To extend this point further, Dolmage writes, "[t]he normative demand in academia is that disability must disappear," but now that institutions accept disability as a reality, true and effective "[i]nclusion should mean the presence of significant difference—difference that rhetorically reconstructs" (*Academic Ableism* 84). Dolmage asserts that students with disabilities must have a legitimate space to exist in the university, instead of being forced into institutionally-mandated retrofits which try to cover up disabled bodies or make them seem as able-bodied as possible. Quoting disability scholar Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Dolmage argues that trying to place disabled bodies into institutionally-created retrofits in the name of accessibility while simultaneously denying them legitimate rights "[dilutes] the transformative potential of their participation in the public forum" (84). Therefore, by connecting Siebers with Dolmage, we can see the rhetorical value of these students hosting Wilke's *Intra-Venus* on UNCG's campus. The work took up space in the campus's most historical and iconic art museum, arguably, UNCG's aesthetic center. It is a poignant argument for the validity

of disability as both a critical knowledge-producing concept, and as a vital facet of the human experience within higher education.

Figure 11. A Photograph of Wilke from the *Intra-Venus* Series in which She Documents Her Hair Loss



Photograph of Hannah Wilke from "Intra-Venus Series"

Weatherspoon Art Gallery Exhibit/Discussion Opportunity

HANNAH WILKE: INTRA-VENUS

Join the DSS staff for a special tour of the Hannah Wilke: Intra-Venus exhibit on

Wednesday, April 3rd
11AM Tour with Pam Hill
12PM Discussion with Marsha Paladin

Hannah Wilke, who died in 1993 of complications from lymphoma, documented her battle with the disease. Large-scale photographs, related watercolors, sculptures, drawings, and sources for further information are included. This exhibit documents the realities of her physical and mental transformations. (Please note that parental discretion is advised.)

Pam Hill will lead us on the tour and then there will be a noontime discussion with Dr. Marsha Paludan on how she has interpreted the exhibit for a dance performance that will take place on April 22.

Figure 12. An Advertisement for *Intra-Venus* in the DSS Newsletter

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

> I am the volcano/ & every volcano/ you've ever met/ not metaphorically/ but really, I disrupt/ my job title is/ Disrupter in Chief/ rest assured you/ will be disrupted by me/ gently but firmly/ now & forever amen. Bernadette Mayer, "EYJAFJALLAJOKULL"

Where the Archive Ends and Begins

Ultimately, what this paper has sought to provide is an effective way to re-conceptualize disability history in higher education. This method of analysis emphasizes the intricate aesthetic experiences and responses students with disabilities have undergone and continue to undergo on our campuses and in our classrooms in order to speak back to institutional mandates that they either assimilate or disappear. The regional snapshot I have provided reveals a rich potential for (re)investigating marginalized and silenced voices in our universities' archives within this framework of disability aesthetics wherein students utilize aesthetic tools to challenge and critique institutional mandates that insist disability can only be understood as a bureaucratic, legal demand that is inherently at odds with academic excellence. Dolmage admits that "[a]cademic ableism is a difficult thing to consider" as it constitutes interrogating "our own privilege" in our pedagogy and research (*Academic* 39). However, even though disability in higher education is a complex and challenging issue, it is also an opportunity for rigorous

investigation into the aesthetic codes, structures, and ideologies that perpetuate marginalization as well as strengthen resistance to it. History can show us how past actions inform our present adherence to practices of exclusion and ableism, and it can also reveal how effective and essential these rhetorical moments of disruption are.

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