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Theorizing a Future for Disability Media Studies: A Virtual Roundtable

Abstract

What follows is a roundtable discussion, conducted through email in early 2023, between me (Emma Ben Ayoun, editor of this issue of *Spectator*) and three major scholars working today: Neta Alexander, Pooja Rangan, and Tanya Titchkosky. Each has made important contributions to the growing field of disability media studies, and each brings a singular background and expertise to their work. It was an honor to be able to bring them together in this way, and to be in conversation with them. Their ideas (in these pages and elsewhere) will, I think, be profoundly valuable to disability media scholarship for decades to come.

Emma Ben Ayoun: How do you conceptualize the connection between disability (whether disability as a category, as a field of inquiry, as a justice project, etc.) and media (filmic or otherwise), both in general and in your own work? What, for you, is the most important aspect of that connection?

Neta Alexander: I come to this question and this roundtable wearing two hats: I'm an assistant professor of film and media at Colgate University, working in the intersection of digital media studies, science and technology studies, and critical disability studies, and I'm a "disabled cyborg" (to borrow a term from design researcher Laura Forlano), a cancer survivor and a pacemaker-equipped cardiac patient who also was born with a facial paralysis. The ability to bring both identities into my scholarly work is a recent development that I owe to disability scholars and activists invested in auto-ethnography as a methodology for the study of how bodies meet the world. This beautiful body of literature includes writings by Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha, Aimi Hamraie, Johanna Hedva, John Lee Clark, Eli Clare, and Jonathan Sterne, among many other writers and scholars invested in expanding the reach of disability studies.

In the recent decade disability studies has moved beyond representational or narrative critiques of Hollywood's inherent ableism. These earlier works still help us explore and challenge topics as varied as the politics of casting, accessibility features, identification, and the ableist gaze. More recently, however, critical disability studies have sought to enrich emerging fields such as infrastructure studies, interface design, gaming, and algorithmic studies, centering the non-average user and the entanglements between bodies and digital technologies.

Theories that move beyond the Western obsession with the visual, from John Lee Clark's analysis of Protactile, a movement and touch-based communication method developed by and for DeafBlind people, to Pooja Rangan's work on the documentary audit and sonic ableism, open up exciting horizons for media studies. This has also taken the form of queer and crip game controllers, as studied by David Parisi, and tactile and olfactory technologies that will become more prevalent in the age of augmented and virtual reality. And it signals a shift from theorizing accessibility as a regulatory tool to thinking about it as a creative medium in its own right, such as through the use of open captions, poetic audio descriptions, and ramps that allow museumgoers to collaboratively explore installations and dance performances.

This emphasis on the human body is not new and can be found in most works of media theory. Yet disability studies deconstruct the notion of a universal user, spectator, or listener, attending instead to understudied moments of misuse and remaking by users whose bodies do not neatly fit the design scripts of developers. These include blind users developing text-to-speech and screen reader technologies, manipulating the speed of audiobooks, films, and television shows to listen to them faster, or reimagining the desktop and

the mouse cursor. At the same time, as I explore in my forthcoming book, prevalent design features unintentionally exclude users with disabilities, for example, by making automated refreshing and autoplaying incompatible with screen readers. Critical disability studies invite us to map the ways in which hardware and software reshape the human body, often at a speed and scale detrimental to users' health and emotional well-being.

As a digital media scholar, I am increasingly aware of the ways in which technologies touted as pleasurable, on-demand, democratizing, and empowering effectively promote an ascetic ideology by which the human body is either generalized as male, able, and white—or is ignored altogether. I use the term *ascetic* to conjure how digital technologies recast biological needs such as sleep, rest, and nourishment as obstacles to screen engagement and enhanced productivity. Pushing against techno-utopian discourses of infinite growth and acceleration, critical disability studies return us to the lived, embodied, and singular experiences of bodyminds. These bodyminds have limited and fluctuating levels of energy, or "spoons," to use a disability studies concept, as opposed to bodiless minds that can be uploaded to the cloud and live happily ever after (or until the fossil fuels needed to sustain ubiquitous data centers make this planet inhabitable and new data farms are built on Mars).

Tanya Titchkosky: To engage the question of how I conceptualize the connection between disability and media, I follow my dyslexic ways and go backwards. Media and media studies are an opportunity to re-engage with what I take to be a key orienting principle for my work, namely, disability is a mediated phenomenon. The concept of mediation may seem obvious to those working in media studies. But like all critical studies, media studies can take a positivist turn, sweeping past the essential quandary of our cultural embeddedness. With a more strident focus on mediation, this embeddedness is not swept under the knowledge-rug, and critical inquiry can address mediation as an all-important substance of disability and explore how disability is made meaningful.

Focus on mediation -- this is a principle that can put the brakes on the idea that there can be any direct knowledge of disability through science, or medicine, or through subjective experience. It is a principle that says that there is no direct

access to disability; disability *is* a mediated phenomenon. Media studies offers a way to encounter any appearance of disability as locations of mediation where the focus can be on how our lives with disability are composed through, as is asserted by critical Indigenous studies, "all our relations;" relations reflected in and (re)producing representations of people, places, things, animals, spaces, knowledge and economic regimes.[1] The most important connection between disability and media studies is, for me, *mediation* as a focal point insofar as this allows for disability to be addressed as cultural, through and through.

One way of engaging disability as a mediated phenomenon is by orienting to representations of it (us) as social action, as doing something, as agentive. People can, of course, judge these actions and show how media representations of disability are prevalent or rare; good or bad; authentic, drag-like, or absolutely missing the mark.[2] Still, disability comes to us through representations that also *do something to both the perceiver and the perceived*; things such as distinguishing nature from nurture, making the given seem distinct from the made, separating biology from culture. Put differently, media depictions of disability are ways of making sense. Sensing anything is never just the sensorium reaching out to touch some preexisting substance, since sensing itself is already a mediated relation between perceiver and the perceived.[3] The focus on this action of sense-making can be studied so as to reveal something of the meaning of our perceptual relations with disability.

Given that people have no access to disability except as mediated through sense-making, media studies is a place to examine these interpretations as they are concretely produced as cultural objects (filmic or otherwise). Insofar as media studies is committed to mediation as the focus of its inquiry, it can thrive with disability, and all else that is human, as an encounter of interrelatedness where what we are or what we know is intertwined with all our relations since we are *en medias res*. When media studies turns our focus to mediation, the opportunity exists for one's inquiry to embrace being stuck in the middle of things which can liberate us from the Enlightenment drive on the yellow brick road of transcendental truth.

Pooja Rangan: Alison Kafer conceptualizes disability as a political-relational problem (rather

than as an individual impairment, or as purely socially constructed) that can only be solved through social change, that is, through the transformation both of the built world, and of discriminatory attitudes and ideological systems that implicitly define which bodies are normal and which are deviant. As a media scholar, and more specifically, as a scholar of documentary politics and ethics, I have found this central invitation of critical disability studies to be tremendously provocative and generative. Jonathan Sterne and Mara Mills frame this invitation as "dismediation," or a call to theorize media infrastructures, interfaces, technical and formal design, and practices of use from a disability perspective—one that grasps that media and disability are mutually constitutive.

Dismediation offers, at many levels, a corrective to what I referred to in my first book as "immediation," or a mandate to communicate in a manner that is immediately, normatively, and universally recognizable as being "human." Dismediation begins with the presumption not of sameness, or of some underlying essence, but of difference, without over- or under-valuing that difference. It approaches disability not as representational content but as a method, a process, and a political horizon. It demands methodological fluidity. We need intersectional and interdisciplinary thinking to understand how disability is tied, as noted by crip-of-color scholars Sami Schalk and Jina B. Kim, to racism and other forms of structural oppression and neglect. Only then can we unlock the disability histories, politics, and theories that enable us to rethink what is at stake in our media ideologies and idioms of practice, and imagine what a future hospitable to disability look like.

While working on my forthcoming book, *The Documentary Audit* (a book on how listening, in documentary, has come to be associated with accountability), I spent a lot of time thinking about how ableist assumptions inform the transactional, risk-averse imaginary of "access" that informs documentary discourse. Since roughly the midcentury *vérité* turn, access has been understood as the leveraging of power or trust to acquire entrance to private or inaccessible realms deemed to harbor documentary value. Release forms (modeled on a medicalized understanding of disability as individual impairment) secure access and minimize risk for documentarians by releasing them from responsibility for any potential harm to their subjects. This is prime territory for thinking through "dismediation." In one of the chapters of my book, titled "Listening in Crip Time," I excavate the role of disability activists in Japan and the USA in agitating the norms of documentary access and enacting a crip counterdiscourse of access understood as shared resource, risk, and responsibility. In both the case studies I look at, Hara Kazuo and Kobayashi Sachiko's *Goodbye CP* (1972) and Jordan Lord's *Shared Resources* (2021), embracing access as a challenge and a commitment shapes crip documentary aesthetics that require audiences to remediate their listening through the pathways of another person's embodied particularity and access requirements. This is a powerful act of solidarity. When access needs are treated not as afterthoughts but as the fundamental vocabulary of documentary, transformative relational shifts follow.

Emma Ben Ayoun: What, in your view, is the future for disability in/and media studies? How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your thinking about disability and media, whether as a scholar, teacher, or consumer of media?

Pooja Rangan: If media studies is to have a future, I hope it is a future that embraces disability as valuable and integral! Cripping media studies is not about expanding bibliographies, research sites, objects, questions, and methods; it requires us to fundamentally rethink some of our basic assumptions and practices as media scholars, including expectations around scholarly productivity and teaching modes (and loads), how and where we convene and gather, who is impacted by the way we conduct hiring, mentoring, teaching, assessment, and so much more. My thinking around this is informed by crip-of-color critique, which asks us to think of disability in terms of precarious populations; to shift our understanding, in Jina B. Kim's words, from disability as *noun* (a minority identity) to disability as *verb* (the organized disablement of vulnerable groups through the withdrawing of access and resources). We need to think less in terms of individual accommodations (although this can be a powerful tool in its own right) and more in terms of recalibrating the baseline around "more disruptive modes of organizing life together."

At the beginning of the pandemic, my workplace, like many others, was quick to coopt

decades of disability expertise, embracing online learning as a temporary shift of norms that was subsequently jettisoned to protect the in-person/on-campus experience that it is at the heart of the liberal arts business model. This temporary "mainstreaming" of disability accommodations was an example of what Aimi Hamraie has called the ableist hijacking of Universal Design, which has largely been interpreted as a design modification that accommodates nondisabled people ("it benefits everyone") and disavows disability, despite its roots in the work of disability activists. But access, done right, is not smooth or conflict-free. It means breaking things. Access is not a finite or temporary endeavor. It doesn't have a completion date. It is a collective enterprise and an ongoing process, and it takes time, resources, and energy. As Jordan Lord reminds us, access doesn't make things simpler or more transparent; it actually makes things thicker and more opaque. As scholars of opacity and mediation, shouldn't we be excited about the prospect of theorizing and practicing access?!

Neta Alexander: With its lockdowns, social isolation, and unequal toll, the pandemic made questions of bodies and mediation more urgent than ever. The rise of long COVID cases created a debilitation event on a global scale, pushing previously healthy people to seek advice from those with extensive experience managing fatigue, pain, and the distrust of the medical establishment, namely, chronically ill people and those with autoimmune diseases. Federal and state policies prioritizing treatment for healthy, young patients revealed how rooted ableism and ageism are.

The pandemic accelerated technological trends such as remote work and video conferencing, offering unprecedented access to cultural and scholarly events to immunocompromised people stuck at home. Like any media platform, however, Zoom is not the neutral intermediary it pretends to be. It is a global company that has censored events, failed to block Zoobombing, charges hefty fees for premium services, and normalizes the "living at work" zeitgeist. Zoom is a good example of how the same platform can be enabling and disabling. It connected communities of activists and scholars at a time when their voices were desperately needed, but it also privatized public debates and higher education, and inflicted harm on its users in the form of fatigue, migraines, eye strain,

lower back pain and sleep-hindering blue light.

What disability scholars teach us is that the pandemic might have come to an end *as a media event*, yet it still threatens the lives of millions, while its risks and effects are not equally distributed. Marginalized communities, including people of color, low-wage workers (cast as "essential" during the lockdowns), and the elderly, are still at a much higher risk to die from COVID, especially after the federal government dismantled the pandemic emergency regulations in the spring of 2023.

As we move past the emergency phase of the pandemic, we can begin to study the role that different media platforms played in the "infodemic" it germinated. We should study how YouTube became a vaccine misinformation machine before changing its policies and how Fox News covered anti-lockdown protests while Trump was still in power. Media scholars should explore how the pandemic accelerated the rise of domestic spectatorship at the expense of moviegoing and reshaped a highly competitive streaming industry racing to produce increasingly expensive content. Should we theorize binge-watching, for example, as a harmful addiction or as a form of self-care?

As we conduct these studies, we should look further into the horizon, imagining the kind of media needed to support and sustain local, enduring networks of care. We should theorize touch as an epistemology and a necessity, a human right the loss of which risks emotional distress and depression, especially among young people. And we should uncover histories of disability activism by those who navigated risk, sickness, and mutual care decades before COVID entered our lives.

Emma Ben Ayoun: Tanya, you have written extensively about the role of image, imagination, and symbol, as well as (more recently) the encounter, in disability studies. Could you share a bit more about how you theorize encounters in disability studies and disability media, and how, if at all, you think that sociology and media studies might work in collaboration around issues of disability theory and disability justice?

Tanya Titchkosky: During the pandemic lockdowns, I co-edited a collection, *DisAppearing: Encounters in Disability Studies* (2022) with Elaine Cagulada, Maddy DeWelles, and Efrat Gold – at the time, all three were PhD candidates from

OISE, University of Toronto. "DisAppearing" was our way of framing a significant political issue that we experienced in our various realms of social justice work and teaching. The issue we noticed was that attention to disability (typically regarded as a degraded state of being), leads to disability appearing in only a few limited ways, ways that seem very separate from any idea of disability-as-possibility. Whether disability appears as a human rights issue, as oppression, as biological deficit, as a need for overcoming, or one aspect of being human, in each depiction, something else about disability is made to disappear. It can seem as if disability is only interesting as a limit without possibility, and as such, many other meanings disappear. Moreover, when disability becomes part of larger social justice discussions, it again disappears quickly as problem solved by, for example, the implementation of an accommodation procedure. The concept of *encounter* is our way to slow down and to frame our methodological approach to this DisAppearing act[4]so as to reveal something of the way meaning is made.

If it is the case that to perceive someone or something as disabled is to get caught in an appearance/disappearance interpretive loop, then a focus on how we *encounter* a disability moment is a way to live ethically, inquisitively and even creatively with this loop. Instead of finding an escape hatch through assertions of objective knowledge of impairment or subjective knowledge of disabled minds, bodies, and senses, *DisAppearing: Encounters in Disability Studies* works with both objective and subjective representations of disability in order to demonstrate how people live in the middle of these dis/appearances. Such an engagement is a way to draw out the symbolic meaning of disability and, in this way, perhaps forge more imaginative and life affirming relations with disability.

An important consequence of doing disability studies together with media studies is this promise of 'more' – especially for those who aim to forge a more vibrant understanding of the complexity of our lives together.

Emma Ben Ayoun: Pooja, some of your recent work has circled around questions of access, and I sense, across your work, an interest in the structures of knowledge and time that different forms of media - in particular the voice, and practices of listening - can produce. In your recent writing on

access and "crip time" in Jordan Lord's film Shared Resources, you write: "Listening sideways is the opposite of listening for the gist. It means listening for the props and supports that have been cut out or kicked away…It means developing an ear for the unaudited and unaccounted love work of collective care that props up documentary stories." I'm curious to know how you might think listening sideways in relation to some of your earlier work. How do schemas like "crip time" and others allow you to think differently about other texts you've written about?

Pooja Rangan: I'll begin by offering some context for the quote. It is a reference to Jordan Lord's use of audio description and open captions* not as optional, segregated access features but rather as an aesthetic principle, a formal challenge, and a fount of narratorial invention. By engaging their mother and sister in narrating and describing their own access fatigue while caring for Lord's father (whose eyesight has been threatened by war debilitation, debt, and bankruptcy), Lord activates a whole other dimension of the film than the one that unfolds on screen. This is what I mean when I say the film asks us to *listen sideways*: the film takes us outside the timeline, to the space of access work, love, care, and exhaustion that props up the story of their father's recovery. Lord's decision to offer "catch" contracts to participants in their film also "catches" what might otherwise end up on the cutting floor in another sense: it accomplishes the opposite of a standard documentary release, in that it shifts the burden of risk and responsibility back to the filmmaker, and enables the participants to renegotiate the filmmaker's access to them in perpetuity.

At a both formal and political level, Lord's film thickens the listener's sense of what access means, what it *can* mean for cinema. It slows down listening, inviting and challenging the listener to experience what Ellen Samuels, following Alison Kafer, calls the "wormhole" of crip time. Samuels is talking about how disability and illness have the power to interrupt linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and "cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings." But this commitment to access has also created access obstacles for the film. By creating access for those who appear in their film, and for disabled audiences, Lord risks turning off commercial

distributors for their film, many of whom are averse to the idea of burned in (rather than optional) access features, and to Lord's refusal to treat those who appear in their film as liabilities. We might say that Lord refuses the conventions that might allow their film to fit more easily, circulate more easily, within an ableist and humanist mediascape. In my previous book I referred to these conventions as "immediations," or audiovisual tropes that include and leverage minoritarian participation by winnowing experiences and worldviews that do not fit a normative humanizing story arc. Lord is committed to slowing down access and dilating time even as those commitments restrict the circulation of their film.

audio description refers to the verbalization of images and text that appear on screen in order to make visual media accessible to blind or partially sighted audiences, usually on an optional prerecorded audio track; open captions are burned in to the image, as opposed to closed captions, which can be turned on or off.

After the contributors to the roundtable circulated their initial responses to these questions, they also shared their responses to what the others had written.

Tanya Titchkosky: Reading Pooja Rangan's and Neta Alexander's contributions to this virtual round table, I feel compelled to discuss a possible orientation behind the many topics we three raised. But, first, the topics themselves. Pooja Rangan writes, "media and disability are mutually constitutive." In this constitution an amazing breadth of interests resides thriving at this intersection. The vastness of engagement, the sheer breadth of topics that have arisen invites a moment to pause and take stock. There is a diversity of critical literature, informed by Black, Trans*, Critical Indigenous and Queer studies, engaging sensorial, physical, intellectual and emotional forms of embodiment. Through this literature, disability studies/media studies theorizes phenomena such as Hollywood, gaming and digital technologies, museums, documentary forms, performance spaces, as well as the temporary "mainstreaming" of design and access modifications related to the covid-19 pandemic. This raises a pool of concerns that generates the following question: What possible orientation makes for such a vital set of concerns and how to live creatively with them?

One response to this question that can be gleaned from all three of us is that we arrived into this pool of concern through a sense of *dissatisfaction*. Coursing through our short contributions is a sense that dissatisfaction can nurture inquiry. It is a unique kind of dissatisfaction in that it is not content with pointing out limits and stopping there. This dissatisfaction is, ironically, dissatisfied with the limits *of* pointing at the limits.

All three of us have pointed out the lack of access for disabled media creators as well as limited forms of disability representation and social spaces for media production and performance. And, yet, dissatisfaction persists. Neta Alexander, for example, addresses how the field of DS/MS has noticed the inherent ableism in Hollywood casting, and in many other Hollywood practices and structures. This work of noticing is not, however, described by Alexander as sufficient, and this hint of dissatisfaction carries with it a need for more complex inquiry. A sense of dissatisfaction is apparent as well in Pooja Rangan's discussion of contrasting meanings of access found in practices of documentary creation. Access that responds to a realist turn in documentary creation might minimize risk and reduce responsibility of the documentarians, but not actually provide a "methodological fluidity" that invites "us to rethink what is at stake in our media ideologies and idioms of practice, and imagine what a future hospitable to disability looks like" (Rangan ¶2). In my contribution, there is a dissatisfaction with forms of inquiry in disability and media studies offering critiques of exclusion that do not grapple with how such critiques are themselves mediated by the phenomena they aim to address. All of us have demonstrated that an inherent ableism is both prevalent and powerful, and yet pointing it out is not enough.

There is a sense of dissatisfaction in our contributions, a dissatisfaction that comes along with approaches to access and media that make its interests and products clear and certain *things*, noun-like instead of verb-like as Rangan puts it. On a similar path of critique, Alexander suggests that critical disability studies is "pushing against techno-utopian discourses of infinite growth and acceleration" (Alexander ¶4). This sense of dissatisfaction with easy notions of improved media access arises when Rangan writes "access doesn't

make things simpler or more transparent; it actually makes things thicker and more opaque." (Rangan ¶6). In our contributions there is an abiding sense of dissatisfaction with current idioms of practice and the products of mediation accomplished through any and all media platforms, new or established. There is a sense of dissatisfaction that does not allow any one of us to jump to positing a solution as sufficient, or just, since every practice, product and platform is simultaneously enabling and disabling as Alexander's discussion of zoom highlights.

Still, dissatisfaction frames a way to pursue inquiry in that it provokes a need to witness or remember the harm we do to one another in our creative and critical practices. The violent history of mediation is neither accidental nor sporadic – it is constant. There is a violence that comes with the territory of all acts of constituting, distributing, and consuming representations of people and our relations under contemporary conditions. Hence; the need to harness dissatisfaction. Instead of ignoring it or dissolving it in final solutions, dissatisfaction can act as a frame for inquiry. Final solutions are, after all, constructed within history and not external to the overwhelming history of human harm. Ignoring this history is not a solution at all, let alone final.

The methods we mention, such as immediation, dismediation, glitch, recalibration, as well as pausing, have the potential to embrace an inquisitive relation to dissatisfaction. All these methods express an understanding that able-ism is both too much, and too little. It is too much an ideal, too much of a standard against which we are depicted and measured and, it is too little, it does not permit us to recognize and respect the ways in which we relate to each other as embodied beings situated in lives often not of our own choosing.

Our three responses to Emma Ben Ayoun's invitation to contribute to this special issue of *Spectator*, in relation to key ways Disability Studies is intersecting with Media Studies, can be read as related to Sylvia Wynter's suggestion to the academy in general. Her suggestion also steers inquiry through the frame of dissatisfaction. Wynter says,

> Look back at all the "Studies" that were called for, all the "Studies" that have come up. Each is saying, "Look at how I've been negatively represented." Suppose we ask, "What are the rules that govern those representations, and why?" You then begin… [5]

Wynter is dissatisfied with merely pointing out "negative" representations while discussing some of the limits behind how University's incorporated Black Studies. To actually engage such dissatisfactions, "We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it."[6] We can do the work of this re-writing by focusing on mediation, by focusing on the rules that govern the ways we know embodiment and its representation. This work provides for the possibility of revealing the forms of knowing that govern representations and our relations to them.

Pooja Rangan: I want to thank Emma for the opportunity to respond to these incredibly thoughtful reflections from Neta and Tanya, and for creating an iterative process that asks us to *think with and through* one another's embodied pathways and crip encounters with media studies. As a process, this roundtable format enacts so much of what I find valuable about disability studies, and its invitation to think through relationships of access, dependency, and need. Tanya and Neta both take up this invitation, by offering us what artists Amalle Dublon and Constantina Zavitsanos, in a conversation with Park McArthur, call a "backstage pass" to the behind-the-scenes access-work that mediates, to reference Tina, the manner in which disability appears or disappears. McArthur writes (and I think this is worth quoting): "Figuring out together with a person or people who are providing access often means running temporary interference to rules of security, business, and customer service that mediate kitchens, break rooms, and storage areas as work sites. Tina's [Zavitsanos] called this the backstage pass."[7]

As film and media studies scholars, we are too often enjoined to practice methods that leave our embodied knowledge backstage, and with them, methods that urge us to dwell in the spaces of unmediation and dismediation to consider how and where our bodies meet the world. What I really value about Tanya and Neta's responses is their reminder of the feminist epistemologies that disability studies and practice brings so powerfully to the fore, and to keep thinking through how these epistemologies come into tension with knowledges criss-crossed by other

intersectional identities. Speaking for myself, I can say that re-encountering media study through disability has been an opportunity to return to these all-important questions of method, and to dignify the role our cyborgian bodies play in shaping how we know what we know.

When I initially drafted the book chapter on documentary and access that I mention in my response, I was still identifying as nondisabled, and trying to sort through what kind of vantage that offered. Writing and thinking alongside Neta and some of the other scholars she mentions, I have developed a much finer political-relational sense of how that identification has unproductively created what Tanya brilliantly names an "appearance/ disappearance" interpretive loop. Neta's lively investigative writing about her pacemaker and how it provides medical companies "intimacy access" (a term Jordan Lord has coined for describing the documentary value for funders of gaining access to private moments) has helped me think more inquisitively about how my sleep apnea machine not only "leaks" information about me, but also determines how I can show up – foggy or unfoggy – in my day job as a film and media professor.

I came to disability studies through postcolonial media studies. Reading Trinh T. Minh-ha's writing about politically and socially debilitating impacts of linguistic access (commentary, subtitles, dubbing) that drives the grain and musicality of non-Anglophone and non-native Englishes underground allowed me to see what I could bring, as someone who speaks, thinks, listens, and reads with an accent, to conversations among disabled maker-scholars about sensory access. These are questions I parse in my contribution to the anthology I recently edited with my immigrant sisters Akshya Saxena, Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan, and Pavitra Sundar, *Thinking with an Accent: Toward a New Object, Method, and Practice*. In it, I paint a picture of what it might mean to think coalitionally across the experiences of becoming accented and becoming disabled. Parity, respect, mutual intelligibility, care, self-reflexivity, and attunement are all critical concerns of the kind of interdisciplinary scholarship my coauthors and I try to model in this book. Sounding out this critical commitment in the company of Tanya and Neta also allows me to hear and reiterate anew how interdisciplinarity remains a crucial concern and horizon of disability thinking.

Neta Alexander: I would like to build on Pooja's discussion of "dismediation" as defined by Sterne and Mills to further develop the "political horizons" of disability media studies. As Pooja reminds us, disability is always-already intersected with other identities and as such it "demands methodological fluidity." Drawing on media historian Whit Pow, it could be helpful to add the concept of "unmediation" to this discussion. Pow's archival work counters the violent history of mediation in relation to trans bodies. As such, it is "a history of things that *cannot be documented or mediated*, or things that *evade or dismantle mediation* in relationship to trans life" (emphasis in original).[8] This can take the form of the erasure of trans bodies from archives and histories of media, as was the case with trans game designer Jamie Faye Fenton, who experimented with glitch art as early as 1978.

However, unmediation has broader implications as it also applies to "the breakdown of the screen through the glitch, which makes the user aware of the construction of the computer system, and the user's own interpellation (or lack of interpellation) within these systems."[9] For Pow, the waiting embedded in a glitch opens up a breathing space from which to better understand one's relationship to the machine and the ideology embedded in it. These rare moments of "undoing" and "unmending"—two concepts central to critical disability studies—reveal the extent to which computational systems based on binary divisions are "designed to be *immediate* but in reality are *mediating*" (emphasis in original): "to unmediate is to call attention to this continuous mediation, to the continuous interpellation we experience through media, to the fact that systems of governance function similarly—that some people are interpellated fully into systems of powers, while other are not."[10] This work joins a growing body of literature reading the digital glitch as an ontological moment of reflection that, in turn, might lead to resistance. As such it is in dialogue with crip readings that emphasize how differently-abled people have been hacking, misusing, and remaking media and electronics to better fit their needs while challenging, and often improving upon, industry standards.

Read through both Pooja's discussion of the normate structures of documentary "immediation" and Tanya's "focus on mediation," Pow's interdisciplinary study rejects the

capitalist investment in seamlessness, flow, and immersion. Concepts such as dismediation and unmediation help us chart the political horizons of disability media studies by opening up a new set of questions: Who is included in the history of media production, distribution, and reception? Whose body was denied representation and recognition? How does one's non-normative embodiment shape their creative output? And what kind of archives can help us uncover forgotten histories of activism and resistance?

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Pooja Rangan is a documentary scholar based in Amherst College, where she is Associate Professor of English and Chair of Film and Media Studies. Rangan is the author of the award-winning book *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary* (Duke UP 2017), and co-editor of the anthology *Thinking with an Accent: Toward a New Object, Method, and Practice* (UC Press 2023, now available in print and as a free open access ebook). Her new book-in-progress, *The Documentary Audit*, explores how listening has come to be equated, in documentary discourse, with accountability.

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Notes

1 Titchkosky: Thomas King, *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Native Prose* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999), 1; and Sarah Hunt, "Ontologies of Indigeneity: The Politics of Embodying a Concept," cited in Titchkosky, Cagulada, DeWelles and Gold (eds.), *DisAppearing: Encounters in Disability Studies* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2022), 9.

2 Titchkosky: see Elizabeth Ellcessor and Bill Kirkpatrick (eds.), *Disability Media Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), and , Katie Ellis, Gerrard Goggin, Betha Haller and Rosemary Curtis (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Disability and Media* (London: Routledge, 2020).

3 Titchkosky: see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1945), and Tisawii'ashii Manning, "The Murmuration of Birds: An Anishinaabe Ontology of Mnidoo-Worlding," in Feilding and Olkowksi (eds.), *Feminist Phenomenology Futures* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 154-182.

4 Titchkosky: Relatedly, I have written about this as a "politics of wonder" in *The Question of Access* and as a tri-part engagement between knowledge, space, and interaction as composing meaning in *Reading and Writing Disability Differently*.

5 Titchkosky: Sylvia Wynter, "Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter by Greg Thomas," in *Proud Flesh: A New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness* IV(14), 2006: 17.

6 Titchhosky: Sylvia Wynter & Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in K. McKittrick (ed.), *Sylvia Wynter on being human as praxis* (Duke University Press: Durham, 2015), 18.

7 Rangan: Amalle Dublon and Constantina Zavitsanos, "Dependency and Improvisation: A Conversation with Park McArthur," *Art Papers* 42, no. 4, Special issue on Disability and the Politics of Visibility (2018/2019): 52-54; the quote appears on 52.

8 Alexander: Whit Pow, "A Trans Historiography of Glitches and Errors," *Feminist Media Histories*, Vol. 7, Number 1, 203.

9 Pow, "A Trans Historiography," 203.

10 Pow, "A Trans Historiography," 204.