The Problem Body

Projecting Disability on Film

- EDITED BY -

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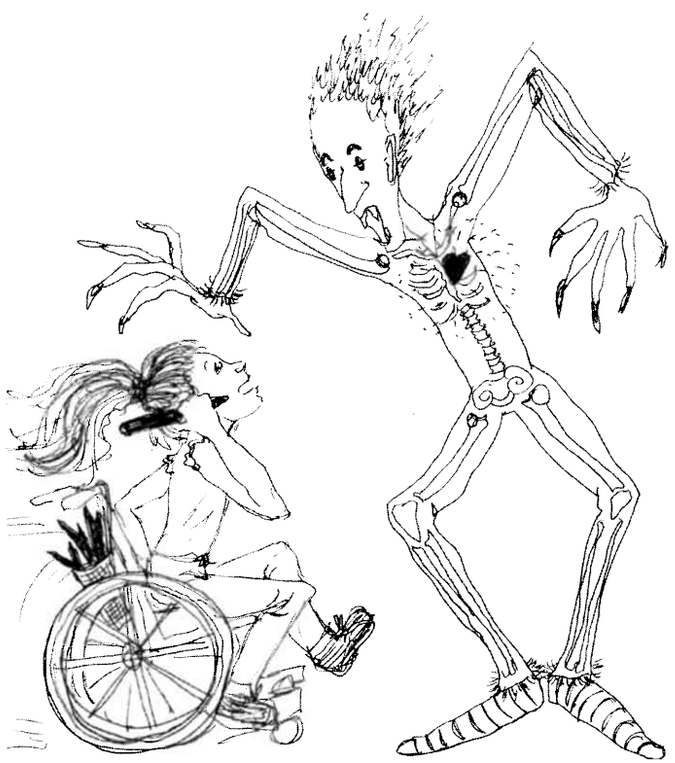
We dedicate this book to Emma, the pre-eminent Vampire Slayer.



EMMA THE VAMPIRE SLAYER BY RIVA LEHRER

The double-amputee war veteran Lieutenant Dan Taylor (Gary Sinise) lifts himself from a seated position on the floor into his wheelchair. *Forrest Gump*. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Paramount Studios, 1994.

SHARON L. SNYDER AND DAVID T. MITCHELL

Body Genres

An Anatomy of Disability in Film

Spectacular Disabilities

One of the more memorable scenes from Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1994) concerns the double-amputee war veteran Captain Dan lifting himself from a seated position on the floor into his wheelchair. The scene is pointed for a variety of reasons: First, the capacity to move one's body from the floor to a wheelchair solely with one's arms involves the execution of a substantial feat of strength. Second, the scene provides the viewer with a unique opportunity to stare at the dynamics of a physical transition we rarely witness—particularly from the safe social perspective offered by a movie theatre seat (or one's own furniture). And, finally, a viewer's knowledge of Gary Sinese's able-bodiedness encourages viewers to marvel at the special effects required to simulate amputation in not using one's legs to effect such a transfer.

This essay is excerpted from a chapter in our book titled *Cultural Locations of Disability* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). The book examines cultural spaces set out exclusively on behalf of disabled citizens, for example, charity systems; institutions for the feebleminded during the eugenics period; the rise of an international disability research industry; sheltered workshops for the "multi-handicapped"; medically based and documentary film representations of disability; and current academic research trends on disability in the academy. We characterize these sites as *cultural locations of disability* in which disabled people find themselves deposited, often against their will. At the very least, each of these locales represents a saturation point of content about disability that has been produced by those who share largely debilitating beliefs about the value of human differences. We trace these beliefs back to the eugenics era when disability began to be constructed as undesirable deviation from normative existence. Even in the face of the most benign rhetoric about disabled persons' well-being, these locations of disability have resulted in treatment (both in the medical and cultural sense) that has proven predominantly detrimental to the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in the creation of culture itself.

The identification of the latter two layers of imaginative involvement and spectatorial pleasure involved in performances of disability supplies an unanalyzed nexus of viewer identification—or dis-identification, as the case may be. As a witness to this spectacle the viewer is offered a unique opportunity in that the physical prowess of the accomplishment is rivaled only by the technological wizardry of erasing the actual legs of an able-bodied actor. Special effects threaten to overwhelm the more tried-and-true filmic spectacle: a disabled body navigating an environment in its own unique manner.

To interrogate this nexus between spectator and the filmed disabled body as a spectacle, we must inevitably delve into the psychic structures that give meaning to disability as a constructed social space. This space of psychic interaction does not exist universally, but a limited theoretical foray into this well-traversed arena of film criticism should provide opportunities heretofore unrecognized in disability studies.[1] In mainstream fiction film—identified in this essay as U.S.-based productions organized around principles of continuity editing associated with Hollywood industry—disability supplies an important opportunity to feed two seemingly antithetical modes of visual consumption: the desire to witness body-based spectacles and a desire to know an object empirically as an aftereffect of viewing. Whereas mainstream fiction film productions have been exclusively associated with the first viewing position—entertainment through the witness of spectacle—film technology's long historical relationship with the scientific gaze also needs to be theorized.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, what we have called cultural locations of disability have been produced primarily through the scrutiny of disabled bodies as research objects in the investigations of medicine, rehabilitation, and other fields devoted primarily to empiricisms of the body. Film spectatorship borrows from these weighty disciplinary practices in that bodies marked as anomalous are offered for consumption as objects of necessary scrutiny—even downright prurient curiosity. As Elizabeth Cowie contends regarding modes of spectatorship in documentary film, "In curiosity, the desire to see is allied with the desire to know through seeing *what cannot normally be seen*, that is, what is normally veiled or hidden from sight" (28; emphasis added). Disability plays this primary role in most Hollywood film productions in that it provides an opportunity for viewers to witness spectacles of bodily difference without fear of recrimination by the object of this gaze. In fact, social conventions of normalcy as products of historical viewing practices are highlighted in mainstream film representations of disability by the cultivation of a belief that one is witnessing a previously secret or hidden phenomenon.

1. The probing of psychic identifications in film criticism has produced a significant body of work, including Teresa De Lauretis's work in *Technologies of Gender* and *Alice Doesn't*; the analyses of Linda Williams discussed at length in this article; Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye*; William Paul's *Laughing Screaming*; and many others.

Cowie's repetition of the term "normally" in the above quotation provides a key to theorizing film spectator relationships to the screening of disabled bodies. To a significant degree, film produces interest in its objects through the promise of providing bodily differences as an exotic spectacle. What can "normally be seen" or "what is normally veiled or hidden from sight" secures a privileged position for disabled bodies on film because they promise an opportunity to practice a form of objectifying ethnography. That which is created as off-limits in public spaces garners the capital of the unfamiliar. Film promotes its status as a desirable cultural product largely through its willingness to recirculate bodies typically concealed from view. In this way the closeting of disabled people from public observation exacts a double marginality: *disability extracts one from participation while also turning that palpable absence into the terms of one's exoticism.* Film spectators arrive at the screen prepared to glimpse the extraordinary body displayed for moments of uninterrupted visual access—a practice shared by clinical assessment rituals associated with the medical gaze. Consequently, the "normative" viewing instance is conceived as that which is readily available for observation in culture. To a great extent, film's seduction hinges on securing audience interest through the address of that which is constructed as "outside" a common visual parlance.

In this essay we intend to chart some critical modes of spectatorship generated by conventions of disability portrayal in film. This is not an exhaustive effort by any means, and we do not intend to imply that these are the only viewing positions available. Rather, we intend to identify some significant viewing relationships commonly cultivated in mainstream film. Visual media analysis in disability studies has made some initial efforts to critique filmic portrayals of disability as predominantly negative and stereotypical;[2] yet, in focusing interest exclusively in this area, little attention has been paid to the dynamic relationship between viewers and disabled characters. Since, as we have argued, most people make the majority of their life acquaintances with disabled people only in film, television, and literature, the representational milieu of disability

2. For a critical assessment of this strategy of identifying positive and negative stereotypes of disability in visual media, see our analysis "Representation and Its Discontents," namely, the discussion on pages 17–21.

provides a critical arena for disability studies analysis (Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis* 52). The analysis of film images of disability provides an opportune location of critical intervention—a form of discursive rehab upon the site of our deepest psychic structures mediating our reception of human differences.

Excessive Film Bodies

To a significant extent this essay owes a debt to the work of feminist film critic Linda Williams. Williams has followed up feminism's efforts to anatomize the complex space that exists between images and their spectatorial reception by audience members. In particular, Williams concentrates—following on the heels of work by film theorist Teresa de Lauretis (*Alice Doesn't*)—on women as imbibers of their own filmed images. Whereas de Lauretis theorized this psychic structure as the site of a "double pleasure" where women identify with both the masochistic objectification of female characters and the sadistic position of the prototypical masculine viewer to whom film is often addressed, Williams probes a variety of genres, and, thus, a variety of potential modes of viewer identification. In essence, Williams's analyses fracture the act of viewing into a rich multiplicity of visual relations based on cross-genre comparison—particularly with respect to films she identifies as existing to elicit extreme bodily sensations in audiences. This attention to cross-genre structures of audience identification allows Williams to de-universalize the more monolithic cast of de Lauretis's influential analysis. Here we want to briefly review Williams's arguments as a predecessor text to our own deliberations. Williams's film bodies provide a key entry into our own speculations about the imagery of disability in mainstream Hollywood visual texts.

In her essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Williams opens by arguing that film bodies play at a critical nexus in film viewing practices. Rather than abstracting the body at a distance, "body genres" such as melodrama, horror, and pornography focus on the production of palpable sensation. Their filmic power depends upon the ability to situate the body in the throes of extreme sensation characterized by stimuli produced by pain, hysteria, terror, or sobbing, in other words, those sensations that involve our bodies in wrenching sensations that might be characterized as excessive. This constitutive excess produced as the key commodity in body genres allows Williams to stipulate heightened somatic involvement as the goal of certain visual genres (although this

may also function as the critical product of visual genres high and low as well). In other words, films participating in the body genres target the visceral emotional life of the body both on the screen and in viewing audiences. This analysis situates a phenomenological mode of spectatorship as a process that is critical to the interpretation of cinema and other visual media.

According to contemporary film criticism, a film's success depends upon its ability to generate sensations as well as replicate successful formula plotlines. Hence we can best understand films as *body genres* in that, for example, melodrama, horror, and pornography are experienced primarily in terms of the spectacular moments that generate sensations in the bodies of their viewers (Williams 702). For example, in melodrama a character's loss overtakes audience members, who are also encouraged to experience a similar sensation—usually toward another human being or a body function. In horror films the terror of an unexpected meeting with the villain (often disabled), and anxiety over potential or actual violence, produce an accord of sensations between characters and members of a viewing audience. In pornography, sexual arousal and orgasm performed by the film's characters are likewise intended to produce similar responses for the viewers. Each of these genre formulas depends upon its ability to cultivate an over-identification between viewer and imperiled character on-screen to achieve its desired effects. The body is endangered as a staple plot element in these works, and the degree to which audiences identify with the impending loss of control in their own bodies will determine the ultimate "success" of the film in question. Body films attempt to situate the filmed body in the throes of excessive emotion as an object of mediation for the anticipated viewer's own experience of embodied peril.

What is often deemed "inappropriate" by critics of such films is what Williams defines as "an apparent lack of proper esthetic distance, a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion" (5). The viewer surfaces from such film experiences betrayed by a sense of manipulation; audience members find themselves immersed in the "violence" of emotional excess and, in doing so, experience the aftermath of such immersion as a "cheap thrill." One could analyze Williams's analysis as a theory of guilty pleasures in cinema. All these generic forms depend on the portrayal of body spectacle to one degree or another: the horror movie provides violence as a visceral mechanism of terror; the melodrama uses pathos toward bodily loss as the primary tool to evoke intense grief or sadness; and pornographic film involves the explicit portrayal of body functions usually ruled out of bounds by classical cinema. Each form of bodily display

provides film viewers with an opportunity to "surrender" to extreme sensations rarely available in our non-film-mediated lives.

Rather than follow certain feminist approaches to such spectacles as condemnatory or as matters of "false consciousness" in female viewers who participate in the consumption of such genres, Williams contends that a multiplicity of viewing spaces exist within such products. In other words, rather than castigate such products as merely replicating the female viewer as "passive victim," body genres offer more than a simplistic formula of masochistic objectification. On the one hand, "identification is neither fixed nor entirely passive" (8); on the other, a viewer's oscillation among positions of power and passivity provides an opportunity to reconcile the *splintering* of self and other—at least for a while. Genre films set a field of signifiers into motion, and viewers try out various vantage points during the story. A pleasure of the multiple is at play in even the most hackneyed of formulas; therefore Williams encourages a more complex examination of "the system and structure" of sensation (2).

In addition, by addressing historically persistent problems such as sexuality, desire, and vulnerability, Williams argues that body genres provide a variety of "temporal structures [that] constitute the different utopian component of problem-solving in each form" (11). By taking up social issues that continue to resonate in the public context as "difficult," body genre films address the defining ambiguity of these problems through a perpetual recycling of their existence within the parameters of their plot structures. Thus, for Williams, the pleasure of horror results from its exposure of adolescent sexuality as not yet fully prepared for an encounter with a monster (as a symbol of insatiable sexual appetite); the investment in melodrama stems from a "quest for connection . . . tinged with the melancholy of loss" (11); and in pornography one might characterize the dilemma as the coincidental encounter between "seducer and seduced" at just the right moment for the pursuit of mutual gratification. In each formula, timing becomes critical to the structural parameters of the genre. The screen bodies "suffer" at the hands of time where pursuits are defeated, deferred, or satiated. The popularity of these plots pivots on their ability to dredge up longstanding (albeit dynamic) social problems that expose viewers to irresolution as a "solution." Thus the "resolution" comes about through the repetition of exposure to a social dilemma that can only be exposed rather than resolved.

To organize her thoughts on the operations at work in body genre films, Williams provides a diagram titled "An Anatomy of Film Bodies" which categorizes the predominating mechanisms at work in each formula. Using bodily sensation as a tool for assessing each genre's operation, the chart anatomizes gendered responses. For the purposes of this essay, what is critical in Williams's anatomy chart is the degree to which the sensations experienced both by bodies on the screen and by the audience coincide. The ecstatic shudder supplied by the horror film, the tears produced by the melodrama, and the orgasm of the pornographic all situate the body as seismic register of the genre film's successful application.

While mapping out the gender of each genre's presumed target audience—melodrama = girls, women; horror = adolescent boys; pornography = men—the diagram also identifies the prototypical affect associated with each formula from sadism (pornography) to sadomasochism (horror) to masochism (melodrama). In each case the dominant production of the gendered viewer reinforces cultural scripts targeted at an audience's relationship to norms of gender and sexuality extant in Western narratives of heterosexuality.

Thus Williams's "anatomy of film bodies" refuses simplistic dismissals of body genre films as crass or merely ideologically duplicitous, while also using their fantasy structures as a means to expose ideologically invested formulas. As she explains in the conclusion of the article, "body genres which may seem so violent and inimical to women cannot be dismissed as evidence of a monolithic or unchanging misogyny, as either pure sadism for male viewers or masochism for females" (12). In doing so, body genres offer an instructive entry into the complex structure of film fantasy within which we participate as members of a media culture.

If such a model can prove instructive for analyses of gendered pleasures and popular myths, we want to argue a similar utility for explorations of disabled bodies as staple characterizations within these popular formulas. Williams's own analysis hits upon a number of conventions pertinent to disability in film without recognizing film's investment in what Elaine Scarry terms the "body in pain" within her own gendered analytical system. Through "An Anatomy of Film Bodies," gender eclipses disability because Williams bypasses an analysis of the body's different pivotal function in the development of each genre.

Because body genres rely so intrinsically on extreme sensation, we argue that disability is certainly as crucial as gender in the primal structuring fantasies that comprise these formulas. In fact, body genres are so dependent on disability as a representational device (a process we have elsewhere termed "narrative prosthesis" [*Narrative Prosthesis* 6]) that each formula can also be recognized by its repetitious reliance on particular kinds of disabled bodies to produce the desired sensational extremes.

Whether it be the "bumbling fool" of comedy (as in the screwball plots of the 1960s that featured later disability telethon sycophant Jerry Lewis), or the disabled avenger of horror (as showcased in any number of psychological thrillers or monster plot formulas), or the long-suffering victim of melodrama such as in the plot of *Dark Victory* (1939) which has Bette Davis's character dying from some indistinct, non-terminal condition (!). Within such an analytical scheme one might also contemplate the various anatomical anomalies that drive pornography plots searching for the ultimate sexual encounter.

In every one of these cases we come upon a familiar body genre formula identified by Williams in her analysis of gender and sensation. Yet one can also identify representations of disability in each of these cinematic scenarios as a key form of embodiment that gives shape and structure to body genre formulas. Quite simply put: *disabled bodies have been constructed cinematically and socially to function as delivery vehicles in the transfer of extreme sensation to audiences.* In doing so, an anatomy of disabled bodies can provide a further deepening of our comprehension of the system and structure of body genres.

An Anatomy of Cinematic Disability

Whereas Williams's essay focuses primarily on the nature of sensations produced by body genres, a full analysis of their impact includes a discussion of the means by which such sensations are produced. This implies not only the undertaking of a theoretical analysis of psychic investments between characters and viewers, but also a scrutiny of the embodied conditions that play host to the generation of sensation in the first place. As a vehicle of sensation, disabled bodies play an important role as either the threatened producer of trauma (such as in the case of the monstrous stalker) or the threat toward the integrity of the able body. The extreme sensations paralleled in screen bodies and audience responses rely, to a great extent, on shared cultural scripts of disability as that which must be warded off at all costs. Bodies are subjugated to their worst fears of vulnerability, and/or the already disabled body is scripted as out of control. The order and mastery associated with the non-disabled body often becomes the threat posed in these film formulas. This fantasy of bodily control among audience members becomes the target of body genres as a fiction deeply seated in the desire for an impossible dominion over our own capacities. What Michel Foucault refers to as the government of the

body is at stake wherein individuals are produced as subjects responsible for policing their own bodily aesthetics, functions, and controls (48). In either case the disabled body in body genres surfaces as the locus of tension and the source of excessive sensation.

If productions of body genres display sensations that are, as Williams contends, on "the edge of respectable" (2), then one must contemplate the degree to which disabled bodies are made to demarcate the culturally policed borders of respectability itself. In fact, the designation of extreme sensations might be best characterized as a *response* to the "excesses" of human bodies displayed on the screen. In this manner we are discussing not a fact of bodies but rather a social investment in certain bodies' presumed proximity to abjectness. The "edge" implied by matters of respectability pivots on the fact that questions of social propriety always depend—to one degree or another—on something over which one has little to no control. A body of behaviors or actions deemed inappropriate depends on the degree to which one manages or masks the conditions of one's own materiality. Thus, in Tobin Siebers's terms, the disabled body is expected to engage in public "masquerades" of its own normalcy. "Success" in regard to disability (and all bodies in general) is judged according to one's ability to dissimulate actions or behaviors deemed aberrant and, thus, unrespectable.

The "body genres" relate directly to the degree to which one commands the behaviors and capacities of one's own body. We know that such command is elusive at best, yet the "non-excessive" body is defined by virtue of its ability to oversee and appropriately manage its own by-products. For instance, when John Belushi performs the role of a human "zit" by stuffing his mouth with mashed potatoes and then violently ejecting the contents onto all those around him in *Animal House* (1978), the comedic value of the scene produces a mixture of disgust and laughter that one equates with the essence of "gross" in comedy. The degree to which one experiences this reaction of disgust and laughter may be gendered in Williams's schema, but the vehicle of the sensation is a bodily function gone awry. The performance of a "zit" brings the question of such bodily operations into a public forum that is usually shielded from such discussions as unseemly, while the characterization reveals a bodily "outburst" no longer under the complete dominion of a fully socialized body. Bodies must remain within certain boundaries, and their "leakage" beyond such parameters violates social expectations of propriety (i.e., the appropriate self-mastery of one's bodily functions, fluids, and abilities).

In the chart in figure 1, we adapt Williams's structural dissection of film bodies for disability studies. Whereas her essay focuses on the body

GENRE	COMEDY	HORROR	MELODRAMA
1. Bodily Display	Faked Impairment	Inborn Monstrosity	Maimed Capacity
2. Emotional Appeal	Superiority	Disgust	Pity
3. Presumed Audience	Men (Active)	Adolescent Boys (Active / Passive)	Girls/Women (Passive)
4. Disability Source	Performed	External	Internal
5. Originary Fantasy	Sadism	Sadomasochism	Masochism
6. Resolution	Humiliation	Obliteration	Compensation
7. Motivation	Duplicity	Revenge	Restoration
8. Body Distortion	Malleability	Excess	Inferiority
9. Genre Cycles, "Classic"	Con Artist, Bumbling "Success"	Monster	Long-Suffering

FIGURE 1. Body Genres: An Anatomy of Disabled Bodies in Film

genres of pornography, horror, and melodrama, our own chart substitutes comedy for pornography in order to apply disability to the three foundational genres of film narrative, although, as we mentioned earlier, anomalous bodily anatomies are also on display in pornography as well. This chart details the psychic structures at play in popular Hollywood representations of disability.

From a disability studies perspective, one can readily recognize the significance of disabled bodies to the body genre formula. Rather than a generalized psychoanalytical theory, these plots depend upon the signifying affect of *disabled bodies* as a staple feature of most (we might almost dare to say "all") body genres. Bisecting the columns of three key genre formulas, the chart identifies nine rows of common characteristics found in disability portrayals. The opening category, "Bodily Display," typifies each genre with respect to the source of a character's disability (comedy = performed; horror = inborn/acquired monstrosity; melodrama = maimed capacity). The second row—"Emotional Appeal"—designates the anticipated emotional response toward disability display to which each genre appeals. Row three, "Presumed Audience," characterizes the intended viewers' gender and agency with respect to formulaic disabling spectacles. In "Disability Source," row four, we catalogue the degree of visibility characterizing the representation of disabilities across the three genres. As identified previously, row five ("Originary Fantasy") designates the presumed spectatorial role or affect experienced by viewers in relation to disability portrayals. Row six, "Resolution," refers to most typical forms of erasure that "resolve" the central disabling predicament in the binary cure-or-kill scenarios that all of these genre films take up. Row seven identifies the pervasive motivating force that compels disabled characters into action. "Body Distortion," row eight, lists the most common disability "etiologies" deployed in each body genre. In the final category—"Genre Cycles, 'Classic'"—we have noted the specific genre character types commonly associated with the mechanism of plot formulas.

In other words, every genre develops its own dependency on a specific disability type or two. These types function to give these genres shape and coherency. They become one of the primary means by which genres become recognizable as successful formulaic ventures. Consequently, one issue that this chart helps to establish is the degree to which disability itself is subject to scripted social formulas for its limiting meanings. Like film plots, the disabled body itself can be said to solidify a form of visual shorthand. Its appearance prompts a finite set of interpretive possibilities now readily recognizable to audiences weaned on the grammar of visual media. Without these readable disability formulas, most body genres would be significantly hampered in their sensation-generating objectives.

Consequently, beneath comedy's common portrayal of the disabled body as out of control, the habitual monstrosity of disabled avengers, the maimed capacity of sentimental illness drama, we find a variety of other disability subgenres such as blind "slasher" films that have been recycled for more than four decades now. For example, *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Wait Until Dark* (1967), *Jennifer8* (1992), *Silent Night, Deadly Night III* (1989), *You Better Watch Out*, and even *Afraid of the Dark* (1992) promote identification with visually impaired disabled female bodies in order to induce

intense feelings (masochism) of vulnerability in an audience. The genre consistently associates femininity and visual impairment with the sensation of extreme vulnerability that the act of stalking elicits. This repeated plotline produces a web of faulty associations that threaten to turn gender and disability into synonyms for the kind of excessive vulnerability that the situation of being hunted involves. The danger here is primarily one of synecdoche where phenomenologies of disability and gender become synonymous with social acts of terror.

Moreover, the genre of melodrama, or the extra-tissue "weepies," focused on both male and female figures, could hardly exist without award-winning and celebrated disability vehicles such as *The Miracle Worker* (1962), *Dark Victory* (1939), and even *Philadelphia* (1993). In these instances of disability body genres, the predominant, excessive sensation produced often hinges upon the cultivation of the fear of disability that commonly conditions audience ideas of embodiment. Film appeals to viewer concerns about the maintenance of one's bodily integrity, and thus the production of disability serves as a site of visceral sensation where abject fantasies of loss and dysfunction (maimed capacity) are made to destabilize the viewer's own investments in ability. A masochistic relationship between a suffering character and viewer vulnerability is inaugurated.

Nevertheless, these longstanding cinematic deployments of disability have remained undertheorized as a key component of all body genres. For instance, in thriller and slasher films a vengeful character with a disability is socially located as a monster. As a way of responding to socially depreciated situations, the monster secures his (and sometimes her) dire need to wreak havoc on non-disabled worlds as a form of retribution for bodily loss (Longmore). Such a contrivance can be witnessed as the naturalized explanation of the villain's motives in films such as *Touch of Evil* (1958), *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *Speed* (1994), *and Richard III* (1955). In turn, audiences undergo a dual structure of identification (sadomasochism) by worrying over their own impending disablement while finding pleasure in the "hunt" as the primary sources of their identification with the imperiled victim's membership among the normative. While there are myriad other combinations and permutations of these identificatory structures critical to the representation of disability (some of which we will discuss here as well), our primary focus will concentrate on the two genres identified above: monstrous thrillers and bumbling comedy films.

Examples of disabled vengeance include *Hannibal* (2001), though the

title character himself is ironically exempted from this formula as a further sign of his superiority as a cultured psychotic cannibal. Hannibal's (Anthony Hopkins's) psychiatric dementia is made glamorous—even titillating—in a classic disability hierarchy, by contrasting his figure to that of an even more unbearably repulsive, hyperequipped-power-chair-using, sexual deviant named Mason Verger (Gary Oldman). Audience identification is encouraged to re-orient itself in favor of Hannibal-the-cannibal by rooting for the murderous, and more visibly obnoxious, character to be dumped out of his chair and into a pit of flesh-eating hogs (and the character's personal assistant does oblige this "audience" desire). As an aside it is important to point out that the voracious hog is also a symbol in the family crest of the murderous disabled avenger Richard III. Consequently, the film uses this allusion to Shakespeare—or, perhaps even more likely, the James Bond–like retelling of the drama in Ian McKellen's film version (1995)—as a form of artistic insider lineage that helps to catapult its debased plot to the status of a psychological drama.

If audiences do cheer (or instead resist the film ploy and *grimace*) as the latest hypertech parasite receives his just deserts, we are also surrounded by ear-splitting grunts and chomping on the exegetic sound track to underscore the point that wheelchair users *really are* voracious consumers who burden society with their unproductive bodies. Thus the film stages a form of "just deserts" in feeding Virgil to flesh-eating hogs as an appropriately gruesome punishment for his embodiment of sexual and bodily deviancy. In such a way many screen scenes continue to encourage viewers to free themselves from the shackles of "politically correct" attitudes toward disabled and queer bodies as self-evident markers of pathological aberrancy.

Similarly, examples from the category of comedy body genre cinema, another site for disabled body viewing, also hinges upon narrow ideas about unacceptable bodies that encourage freak-show-like titillation, as well as humor born of an all-too-easy superiority toward each character's bumbling incompetencies. Indeed two such films—*Dumb and Dumberer* and *Stuck on You*—were released in the 2003 film season with promises to mock special schools, "idiocy," and two guys "stuck" together, as in conjoined twins. Such cinematic products promise to heighten prior body sensation exploits by doubling and tripling the forms of abject humiliation (sadism) that the featured characters are willing to undergo, thus giving a new twist to what disability studies critic Martha Stoddard Holmes refers to as the twin structure of Victorian disability plots.

The film field, as usual, seems open to anyone who can get a distrib-

utor and corporate backing, and promise to pull in revenues. Despite this limitation on concepts of mass appeal, there have been some films that dramatize a canny awareness about a social model of disability. These exemplars tend to take up disability as a core element of their storyline, as opposed to a series of freak encounters. The best examples of these counter-discursive forays include science fiction and comic-book plots developed in *Gattaca* (1997), much of *Unbreakable* (2000), and some might say *X-Men* (2000) and *X2* (2003). In these films trite attributions of the emotional life of disabled characters—vengeance, innocence, and barely forgivable motives born of tragedy—are swept up into a maelstrom of disability commentary and the plight of postmodern citizenry. As the character of Storm (Halle Berry) in the first sequel to *X-Men* points out to a new mutant:

> STORM: They don't want us so they seek to protect us.
> NIGHTCRAWLER: From whom?
> STORM: Everyone else.

All these films foresee a dystopic future where various incarnations of the gene police provide evidence of a new eugenics on the near horizon of our social context.

Mostly, though, our screens tend to transmit bizarre repetitions and standard excessive reactions to disability experience. In horror film—a genre, as we identify in the chart, where the villain is often represented as disabled—an audience's shared sensations are not cultivated with respect to the disabled characters' emotional experience. And if they are so encouraged, as in the overwrought plot twists of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and its various theatrical and cinematic spin-offs, they will eventually, and gleefully, be exposed, later on, as an unwise audience choice. In fact, inverse correlations to body genres occur if one goes at the topic of representation from a disability perspective: melodramatic elements take up personal intimacy—often with a character's self-denial and repulsion toward a newly acquired disability predicament—whereas horror films are likely to place us in a dreadful encounter with a monstrous, but still human and disabled, character. Hence audience experiences of sensation evoked by characters are not strictly a matter of simple identification; horror encourages emotions that serve to cement longstanding associations of stigma with bodily difference.

Even so, one does not necessarily reject metaphorization while interrogating what David Wills calls "the flaw in the trope of disability." A contest of metaphorical determinism—such as discussions of the overdone

overcoming narrative—destine one to nevertheless avoid taking refuge in an "essence" of embodied perspective. What disability studies is engaged in here is a contest of certain forms of metaphor that have dominated the historical canon of disability representations; we are in a visceral battle over images which, as disability studies has asserted, are not outside questions of embodiment. Since disabled people must negotiate a finite repertoire of social meanings (both externally and internally), there are significant stakes in the humanities-based analysis of disability.

For instance, Judith Butler has argued against the existence of a pre-discursive sex prior to a socially inscribed gender. In doing so, Butler does not seek to de-materialize the embodied subjectivity of "women," but rather to privilege a discursive component to embodiment itself. Similarly, in the case of disability, we exist in our bodies by negotiating a cultural repertoire of images that threaten to mire us in debilitating narratives of dysfunction and pathology. By contesting and expanding a representational repertoire of images in culture (even by virtue of shoring up the inadequacies of our current narrative possibilities), we also create space for alternative possibilities for imagining embodied experience itself.

Just as in the key scene in *Crash* (1997) where Rosanna Arquette says, "I'd like to see if I could fit into a car designed for a normal body," disabled people are constantly negotiating a self-image with respect to a normative formula. The goal in disability studies is to leave a permanent mark upon "normative" modes of embodiment—to mar the sleek surface of normativity in the way that Arquette's brace-buckle tears the leather bucket seat of the Mercedes without shame. Such a competition of image and metaphor refuses to distance audiences from the recognition that representation and embodiment are conjoined in a meaningful dependency that disability studies should not sever but deepen.

In the final section of this essay, "Cinematic Interventions," we turn to an analysis of disability documentary cinema as a site of resistance and political revision to the body genres discussed to this point. Our effort here is to forward these alternative film narratives as places where competing disability subjectivities can be forged and explored.

New Disability Documentary Cinema

In contradistinction to most examples of the body genre, we would contend that the current disability documentary cinema constitutes an avant-garde—even the inception of a veritable renaissance—in contem-

porary disability depictions. In each documentary, one encounters the privileging of disabled persons' voices not simply as a voice added to a growing cacophony of public debates about the meaning of disabled bodies, but also the explicit foregrounding of a cultural perspective informed by, and within, the phenomenology of bodily difference. For ease of definition, in this essay phenomenology means not only the capture of disability perspectives on film but also the meaningful influence that disability has upon one's subjectivity and even cinematic technique itself. Whereas some articles have recognized the former issue (Patterson and Hughes 325–40), we want to focus particularly on the latter, subjectivity and technique, as a means of designating the incarnation of bona fide disability cinema. Last, the third site of a shift in the depiction of disability has to do with the cultivation of disability-identified perspectives that have been formulated within subcultural communities, who are in turn influenced by both international disability rights movements and the area of disability studies.

To exemplify the first point: if we step back for a moment in film history and think about U.S. film that was born during the classical eugenics era, we are struck by the degree to which that era's visual film grammar assumes that an audience will be automatically repulsed and riveted by the display of *any* disability on-screen. For instance, in the public hygiene propaganda film *Are You Fit to Marry?* (1928), near the end of the mother's dream sequence, she imagines an adult version of her disabled baby as father to a strange brood of other disabled children. The pro-eugenics film takes up an explicit argument informed by beliefs about pangenesis in the nineteenth century—in that one kind of disability can (d)evolve into a myriad of other forms of disability. Whereas the adult version named Claude has something akin to cerebral palsy (a nongenetic disorder in and of itself), his progeny have rickets, amputations, feeble-mindedness, and a host of other unspecified maladies. One can only speculate that a psychic response cultivated in 1928 was a viewer's moral and aesthetic recoil in horror at the sight of disability-begetting-disability-begetting-disability.

But in our graduate seminar for students in disabled and disability studies at the University of Illinois of Chicago, viewers tend to find the above scenario ludicrous rather than repulsive. They may chuckle at the misinformed medical notions of an earlier decade, but mostly the students struggle to put themselves back into a mind-set where the mere sight of disability can be turned into a visual rhetoric of horror and distaste. The distinction between these two audiences, one admittedly imagined and projected into the past, says a great deal about the distance one travels in a course on representations of disability and cinema. Film study challenges

us to not dismiss a prior era's more pleasurable misinformation, but, more importantly, to trace out a longstanding tradition of representational strategies that continue to inform cinematic technique and influence concepts of "simply native" reactions to bodies. Consequently, even a film now some seventy-five years old can strike a contemporary audience as less farcical than proof of the degree to which new disability cinema must take up combat with a degrading visual inheritance. Documentary, after all, just like horror, melodrama, and pornography, makes bargains to demonstrate "real life" emotions—to bring forth the most credible and empirical insider account of disability truths and existence.

In other words, a course in the history of disability cinema still brings one face-to-face with a sense of the wreckage that can be wrought by generations of repeated representational patterns (such as those identified in our reconfiguring of Williams's "Anatomy of Disabled Bodies in Film" chart) that function to the detriment of disabled people's social identity. At the same time, we study ways that the anticipation of pleasurable information and spectacle for an audience has shifted genealogically across time.

For instance, the scene mentioned above from *Are You Fit to Marry?* exhibits a "grotesque" fantasy about the progeny of the disabled protagonist in a series of medium shots where the mere presence of physical and cognitive disability is intended to be evidence enough of the horrible future that awaits the mother's baby if she allows him to undergo a life-saving surgery at birth. The medium shot itself proves suggestive of any number of medical textbook photographs where an individual body is used as a stand-in for a generic disability type. Horror, in other words, is mobilized not only in the proliferation of a host of disabled bodies and the consequent social stigma that they bear, but also in the easy appeal to objectifying representational methods in medicine.

In a contemporary disability documentary such as Diane Maroger's *Forbidden Maternity* (2002), one also gains an intimacy with many disabled characters. But in order to counter the eugenics sensation of "something gone awry" in a lineage of defective progeny, Maroger employs a variety of techniques, settings, and dramatic situations that refuse to allow audiences to take up distance from, or distaste of, the presence of disabled bodies. Long shots, close-ups, and nonstandard framing give audiences an intimacy with disabled bodies usually reserved for private or clinical settings. In addition, Maroger also employs a cast of other disabled social intimacies that the documentary's main characters—Nathalie and Bertrand—have consciously sought out as an alternative support network to a repressive familial situation.

So we meet not only the two main characters, who both have cerebral palsy, but also their journalist friend, who has CP as well, and a host of other disabled children who now occupy the institution that they both grew up within. The film assumes a knowingness and comfort with this visual variety of bodily forms that move into and out of the alternative domestic and public space that Nathalie and Bertrand establish. In fact, the object of horror and the sadomasochistic associations that the genre traditionally employs are directly inverted in new disability documentary cinema by virtue of the fact that the audience is situated to respond with repulsion at the debasing mind-set that dominates the characters' interactions with an able-bodied world. Here is the key point: *whereas the proselytizers of the eugenics period denoted the disabled body as the objectionable object within a sea of normalcy, new disability documentary cinema designates degrading social contexts as that which need to be rehabilitated.*

But a mind-set is often difficult to depict, particularly when one seeks to designate a generalized and amorphous dominant perspective about people with disabilities—one that is ubiquitous and yet dispersed through evidence that comes only by way of compiled documents and numerous investigations and paperwork, pieced together incrementally over the course of a lifetime. Surely, as Mark Sherry has demonstrated, disability hate crime does exist, but many of the serious troubles of disability existence can be compiled only through the series of deflections, distrust, and disavowals that are reserved for disabled bodies in apparently separate and contingent moments of excessive care and discrimination.

By and large, *Forbidden Maternity* lingers on details that might seem too inconsequential in its depiction of Bertrand and Nathalie's life. For example, near the middle of the film there's an extended scene shot in the kitchen of their apartment where Bertrand makes salad with a friend who has come over to share dinner with the couple. Whereas Hollywood would rarely "waste" footage in the recording of such a seemingly innocuous scenario, *Forbidden Maternity* recognizes that one of its main oppositions is the mainstream supposition that disabled people are unduly dependent and cannot manage the details of lower-middle-class domestic life. Salad mixing, without some gut-wrenching and dramatic circumstance going on around it, would end up on the cutting room floor of most Hollywood productions. In disability documentary cinema this minutia of detail must be captured as the essence of the argument.

In many ways these films function as the empirical evidence captured visually that sets out to refute, in the same way that a developed qualitative research project can, scientific formulas about the management of

disability and our false reliance on a myth of personal independence. The day-to-day details *are the point* because it is at this most basic level of modern existence that bureaucracies have doubted the ability of people with disabilities to manage their own affairs. In this sense the new documentary disability cinema's focus on singular case studies opposes much of today's science on disability, which seeks to generalize management and control schemes for disabled multitudes who are all discounted from the start from being able to coexist with their non-disabled peers. Such a context of systemic doubt and suspicion entails scenes that ask people with mobility impairments to perform their walking gait as "proof" that they need a handicap parking pass or to answer to security guards about their intention to pay for an item just because they are in a wheelchair.

Such a point can also be found in a video such as *When Billy Broke His Head* (1995) where the filmmaker-narrator (Billy Golfus), who has recently experienced a traumatic brain injury, visits a veritable bevy of disabled activists and community members who suddenly populate his social landscape with a variety of previously unfamiliar disability perspectives. For instance, we visit the disabled musician Larry Kegan, who shares the details of his personal dressing habits with the protagonist, and by extension his audience, as a way of further underscoring the complex negotiation of even the most routine rituals of everyday life. Or we ride with Billy sitting next to a woman driver with a neurological disability who navigates the streets of her hometown in her modern equipped van with "only one minor traffic ticket in nine years." Such incidents significantly parallel the salad-mixing scene mentioned above in that they portray disabled people engaged in common activities that become extraordinarily uncommon, and even unlikely, within societies that seek to restrain, segregate, and institutionalize disabled people on behalf of their differences.

When viewers enter into these new disability documentary media landscapes, they discover immediately that routine activities refute the opposition to disabled people's freedom as a denial of the right to pursue lives that are recognizably ordinary. For a generation weaned on spectacular images, gravity-defying special effects, and the digitized erasure of appendages, the new landscape of disability documentary at first strikes one as anything but "spectacular" in comparison to the well-worn formulas of body genres. These films work to unfold arguments that demand a focus upon activities that have been all but ousted from traditional Hollywood fare. Our new disability documentary cinema strives, first and foremost, to make an ordinary life with disability imaginable and even palatable to those of us who have inherited a bankrupt tradition of

disability imagery. This demand upon the audiences of new disability documentary cinema involves what the cultural critic Michael Ventura explains as the imaginative leap of identifying with a character who is not "conventionally beautiful": "But the face of Helen Keller was marked by her enormous powers of concentration, while to cast the face of Mare Winningham in the role is to suggest, powerfully, that one can come back from the depths unscathed. No small delusion is being sold here" (177).

What one can also glean from the examples above, and what can be extended to a film such as our first documentary production, *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back* (1996), are that singular portrayals of people with disabilities are a staple and contrivance of popular genre filmmaking. Whereas in genre film the viewer consumes representations of disability one character at a time and most often follows that lone figure into an either/or resolution of death or cure ("the only two acceptable states" according to the disabled writer Anne Finger), new disability documentary cinema seeks to counter with the portrayal of disability *ensembles* (257).

One could argue that the primary convention of this new documentary genre is the effort to turn disability into a chorus of perspectives that deepen and multiply narrow cultural labels that often imprison disabled people within taxonomic medical categories. The medical model specifies a generalized body type that can be presumably true for all bodies within a classificatory rubric of disorder. While disability documentary films *do not* seek to repress, suppress, or erase the fact of differing biological capacities and appearances (as is sometimes charged in critiques of disability studies), they *do* seek to refute pathological classifications that prove too narrow and limiting to encompass an entire human life *lived*. For instance, in the above-mentioned film *Forbidden Maternity*, Bertrand and Nathalie's disabled journalist friend explains:

> As a person with C.P. I've always had to fight to explain those two letters that were my two letters—the letters that qualified me and always required an explanation. People could see I was disabled. I was obviously mobility impaired given the way my legs were. But when I mentioned "cerebral," they'd say, "cerebral?" From the way you speak one wouldn't guess you're *cerebrally* handicapped. So I'd say, "I'm not cerebrally handicapped. I have cerebral palsy. In other words, when I was born my brain was wounded and this had consequences. In my case, this resulted in walking difficulties. In another person with C.P. it may result in speech impediment or trouble using the hands. That's what *cerebral* means. I never said *mental*. It seems to me you're confusing the words *cerebral* and *mental*.

To confuse the word "cerebral" with the word "mental" is to attempt to malign one form of disability with another. Conditions become stigmatized by virtue of the fact that we allow attributes to endlessly bleed into further disorders. Thus disability exists on a lethal, medicalized continuum where ascriptions of inferiority deepen and further disqualify bodies.

As a result, people with physical disabilities find themselves refuting cognitive "involvements" (such as in the case of CP); and, in turn, people with cognitive disabilities find themselves having to charge those with physical disabilities with a further sedimenting of their own socially derived stigma. However, in either case the effort finds itself impossible because the fates of both groups are historically tethered to each other. Eugenics beliefs used physical disabilities and deformities to reference the "feeblemindedness" residing within, and those who tested below a certain IQ level found themselves standing naked in front of medical personnel searching for the inevitable physical stigmata (Mitchell and Snyder, "Out of the Ashes"). Today, those most likely to be institutionalized, as Frederick Wiseman's "Multi-handicapped" documentary series (1986) about the Talladega, Alabama, institution for Deaf-Blind people demonstrates, are consistently designated as residing among the "multiply disabled."

In addition, while it may seem surprising or even odd to be rehearsing the diagnostic fine points of the multiple permutations of individual experience of a disorder (in a particular environment enfolding a particular body), the point of the new disability documentary cinema is not to refuse impairment (as many contend even in disability studies) (Finkelstein 30–36; Shakespeare 293–300; Barnes 577–80). Rather, these films insist on recognition of a more complex human constellation of experiences that inform medical categories such as cerebral palsy. One must essentially explode the classification's rigid yet often amorphous parameters in order to recognize a more multiple and variegated existence within its boundaries.

To momentarily return to *Vital Signs*, a similar principle is at stake. Rather than foreground a singular voice capable of refuting the inhumanity and derision that disabled people associate with their most inconsequential social interactions, the video orchestrates a panoply of disability perspectives that multiply and exponentially represent what used to be inaccurately referred to as "the disability experience." The point of the film is not merely to present a chorus of voices all working in tandem but rather to capture the diversity, originality, and vitality of vantage points that comprise contemporary disability communities. Thus when

the disabled performance artist Cheryl Marie Wade says that "they can have their little telethons as long as we are on there [the television] doing all the other things we do," an alternative perspective from Bob DeFelice promptly counters that "I love telethons. I absolutely love them!" (*Vital Signs*). Like all vibrant subcultures, disability culture is diffuse and orchestrates multiple perspectives, as well as bodies, somatic systems, and minds.

After a showing of *Vital Signs* at a conference of special educators in Chicago, the first respondent in the audience exclaimed, "Wow! All those people are so articulate and in control of their life stories. They're nothing like the disabled people that we see in classes every day." After mulling over the meaning of the comment, we realized the point was that the video paraded a somewhat idiosyncratic and articulate group of disabled people who diverge wildly from the monotonous and misbehaved students who populate special education classes across the country. In response, we argued that disability documentary cinema was not a showcasing of a transcendent point of view but rather a visceral rewriting of the way that we understand disability. The subjects in *Vital Signs* are not about the singular insights of atypical disabled people, but rather about the creativity that sparks and energizes disabled people when they find themselves amongst a community of their peers, performing their knowledge and strategies for an audience that is anxious to learn the fine points of social negotiation in such hostile environments.

What shifts most radically in this scenario is not the persons depicted but the way one comprehends disability experience as the stoke to creativity—as opposed to tragedy, burden, misfortune, and the categories that populate most IEP forms. The new disability documentary cinema changes the terms upon which our understanding of disability experience rests. In *Vital Signs*, the Irish disabled performance artist Mary Duffy explains this dilemma succinctly when she comments, "most people approach me as if: you're a walking, talking disabled person. You're not supposed to talk back." This prototypical and gratuitous exchange highlights the fact that the social expectations of disabled people are so low that even the most cursory interaction promotes shock and disbelief. But the documentary is charged with instilling a new narrative pleasure: the request to have disabled persons with their unique postures, such as Mary Duffy, about disability-based insights and her own body's/life's exemplarity of it.

The follow-up comment to this somewhat disconcerting first observation at the special education conference was from teachers who worried about showing the film to their students for fear that disabled kids would

be turned off by being pegged as the "expert" on disability experience. As if they hadn't already been defined as detrimentally different within the normative classroom of most educational settings! In other words, the expressed concern was largely one that struggles with what it means to be singled out and stigmatized for a difference that has been noticed but not openly discussed. What if individual students have acquired a range of knowledge and experience that the teacher lacks? Our own approach to this issue is that without adequate pedagogical contexts about disability history and experience (such as those available in the new disability documentary cinema), disabled students will continue to drift and perform well below many of their non-disabled peers. Indeed in surveys of disabled student achievement in U.S. public education, only students with a developed disabled identity manage to perform at or above the academic level of non-disabled students. Such a fact calls for a redress of our public school curricula that continue to erase disability content from the canon of Western culture. Just as female students and students of color tend to flourish in educational settings that promote the insights of their own communities in history, disabled students will continue to find education largely irrelevant as long as it sidelines their experiences and body differences as insignificant or beside the point.

Cinematic Interventions

In closing we'd like to briefly return to our discussion of disability in historical context. One of the primary insights of the eugenics era was that disability proved to be a uniquely modern phenomenon: we had orchestrated a culture so fast-moving, complex, and demanding that many bodies could not adequately keep up. Yet, despite this accurate depiction of contemporary modern life, the fatal flaw in eugenics theory was that rather than targeting the social context as something in need of repair, disabled bodies themselves became the targeted sites of intervention. Thus efforts at cure, rehabilitation, segregation, prevention—even extermination—dominate the arsenal of eugenics' approaches toward disabled bodies. Disabled bodies were at the forefront of modern innovation: on the frontlines in their experience of how intervention upon the body has become a primary means of redress in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (hence the proliferation of a vast array of therapies and social services).

Popular film genres, such as those discussed in this essay, developed

accordingly by sporting a host of interventions to alleviate individual bodies of their socially derived stigma. In the 1950s, the first starring role for Marlon Brando in *The Men* (1950) featured the wonders of a newly minted rehabilitation industry that could successfully adjust even a paraplegic's incapacitated body; in the 1970s a spate of returning-veterans films foreground sex as the root of an appropriate personal adjustment to postwar disability. Melodramas such as *Forrest Gump* miraculously repair the bodies of double-amputees as a solution to the conundrum that disability has been made to present. As mentioned above, even more recently, horror films such as *Hannibal* promote the expendability of physically disabled bodies to the more fashionable and cultured exploits of "psychotic" cannibalism. All these films trade upon a dominant opposition in the post-eugenics period that is involved in extreme efforts to "fix" disabled people in order to alleviate society of the need to be more inclusive and accommodating of difference.

In contrast, the new disability documentary cinema seeks to target the rightful site of meaningful intervention, namely, a lethal and brutal social context. Rather than identifying different bodies as the appropriate source of intervention, uncomprehending social systems have begun to be targeted as a necessary domain of social commentary in film. All three of our documentary examples cited above foreground disabled bodies while interrogating contemporary social management systems that seek to survey, manage, and control nearly every aspect of their existence. New disability documentary cinema captures uncomprehending interactions between disabled persons and the bureaucracies that ensnare them. In *Forbidden Maternity,* Bertrand and Nathalie must solicit the help of a social worker in order to refute their institutional records that portray both of them as victims of "profound mental deficiencies." In *When Billy Broke His Head,* the narrator must show up at the welfare office in person to get his reduced SSI checks reinstated to the paltry amount of $522 per month. In *Vital Signs,* disabled artists turn their objectifying experiences within the medical industry into social commentaries about the eradication of their humanity in medical theatres and public-stripping clinical settings.

Rather than target the body as the site of intervention, the new disability documentary cinema targets the social services, rehabilitation, and medical industries as a more appropriate site of revision. These films tend to target those institutions that were initially designed to accommodate disability's "endless" differences. Yet, instead of flexible systems, contemporary institutions reveal themselves as efforts in the endless monopolization of all the details of one's existence. They become equal-opportunity sites of discrimination that extract disabled people from pursuing their lives by entrenching them in a morass of legalistic and bureaucratic paperwork. When viewed collectively, these films give one the sense that our post-eugenic era specializes in keeping disabled people busy so that they demand less of the outside world as active participants.

This is a wholly different take from the other world of body genres where people don't want to have their pleasures politicized. All the films that return disabled charges to institutions—or, worse, offer euthanasia—as a meaningful resolution (and we can even offer films with spectacular and complex disability-identified perspectives such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* [1975], *Rain Man* [1988], *Girl, Interrupted* [2000]), summon up assurances about the beneficence of therapists, modern social organizations, and incarcerating stone walls beneath "soothing" adobe façades. Most disability narratives, however experimental, eventually do end up trying to prove that every white coat means well in returning us to safekeeping—on-screen, through a window, where we witness disability experiences managed by comfortable quarters, as if filmed through a soft-focus filter. Such a patronizing impulse is well characterized at the conclusion of *Minority Report* (2002) when the protagonist (Tom Cruise) whisks off his autistic female charge for safekeeping on an island. There, presumably, she will both be shielded from the incomprehensions and exploitative tendencies of able-bodied culture while also finding her feminine passivity redeemed by his sexual interests. And it is in film that we encounter disability largely as a "plight to be conquered" as long as when the lights come up, we don't find the same bodies blocking the aisles on our way back to the theatre lobby.

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