

## CRIP UTOPIA AND THE FUTURE OF DISABILITY

## L'UTOPIE DES HANDICAPÉS ET L'AVENIR DU HANDICAP

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## Abstract

Thomas More's seminal work *Utopia*, written in 1516, has inspired works such as Robert Owen's *A New View of Society* (1970) and H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (2005), which theorize their own vision of a perfect society based on socialist ideals of co-operation, interdependence, unity, and harmony. Drawing on cultural Marxist Frederic Jameson's (2001a; 2001b) critique of the Utopian genre, the author analyzes the two Utopias of Disability Studies scholars Vic Finkelstein (1975; 1980) and Adolf Ratzka (1998), as well as the Anti-Utopian responses of critics Paul Abberley (1996; 1997, 2002) and Tom Shakespeare (2002; 2006). While Utopians Finkelstein and Ratzka work toward dispelling what Jameson refers to as the "collective fantasy" of nondisabled people—that disability is preventable and antithetical to "the good life"—anti-Utopians Abberley and Shakespeare concentrate on the difficulties of the fluidity of the disability/impairment distinction central to Finkelstein's emphasis on employment.

*Keywords: disability, collective fantasy, Utopia, social model, group identity*

## Résumé

L'ouvrage fondateur de 1516 de Thomas More, *L'Utopie*, a inspiré les œuvres *Propositions fondamentales du système social* de Robert Owen et *Une utopie moderne* de H.G. Wells. Ces dernières ont théorisé une vision de la société parfaite fondée sur les idéaux socialistes de coopération, d'interdépendance, d'unité et d'harmonie. À partir de la critique littéraire marxiste de l'utopie de Frederic Jameson, j'analyserai les discours utopistes des chercheurs Vic Finkelstein et Adolf Ratzka, ainsi que les perspectives critiques anti-utopistes de Paul Abberley et de Tom Shakespeare. Ces auteurs oeuvrant dans la discipline des Études sur l'incapacité. Alors que Finkelstein et Ratzka tendent à éclipser la notion de Jameson de "fantasie collective" partagée par les personnes n'ayant pas d'incapacités, lesquelles croient souvent que le handicap est une réalité qui peut disparaître et qui n'égale pas avec la poursuite d'une "bonne vie", les anti-utopiens Abberley et Shakespeare concentrent leurs efforts sur les difficultés concernant la distinction entre les concepts d'incapacité et de situations de handicap, élément central de la perspective de Finkelstein sur l'emploi (1975/1980).

*Mots-clés: handicap, incapacité, fantaisie collective, utopie, modèle social, identité de groupe*

## Introduction

Disability Studies is founded on identifying and dispelling social exclusion and social oppression through ideals of harmony, unity, and interdependency among disabled people as a group; these same ideals permeate much of modern socialist Utopian thought. They spring from a galvanizing hope for a better society, a better future, and better lives for disabled people. It should thus be little surprise that two disability scholars have ventured to envision a society where these ideals have become manifest. Vic Finkelstein (1975) and Adolf Ratzka (1998) wrote two very different Utopian narratives 20 years apart that pose the same question: what are the problems that disabled people face and what might a society look like where these problems were solved?

Central to both of these Utopian endeavours is a critique of the unjustified resistance inculcated in contemporary culture by the free-market system to provide disabled people with social supports and dignified work. However, the way disabled people directly influence the shaping of a more inclusive socioeconomic system in these Utopias varies radically, reflecting the different historical contexts particular to each author's composition. Written in an era prior to the descent of socialist thought, Finkelstein's focus on the power derived from physically disabled people who draw together as a coherent group is reminiscent of a socialist commune, where capitalist imperatives are discarded, and everyone

works not for profit but to help themselves and their community. Ratzka's future society, however, reflects the contemporary, postmodern context, demonstrating how neo-capitalistic economic structures can be radically altered to suit the needs of a more disparate group of disabled people of various minorities and cultural allegiances. Before we move on to an analysis of these two narratives, we must first situate them within the Utopian genre itself and determine what exactly we mean by Utopia.

Thomas More's original 1516 work *Utopia* was a critique of both society's structure and values and the vanity of trying to plan or institute any "perfect" society (More, 2001). While the term *Utopia* is at present generally understood to mean "perfect society", it literally means "no place", combining the Greek words *ou*, meaning *no*, and *topos*, meaning *place*. While it is unclear whether More believed in the efficiency of his Utopia, the works of later writers who imagined less ambiguously positive societies have become termed as *Eutopias*, meaning good place, derived from the word *eu*, meaning *good*. This term shares an interesting relationship with the related Greek derivative *eugenics*, which itself is derived from the word *eu*, meaning *good* and the suffix *genes*, meaning *born*, a term coined by Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Gaulton. Inherent in the idea of eugenics is the possibility of "improving" society by increasing the quality of the genes of those who comprise it by either preventing those with undesirable traits to pass genes on (positive eugenics) or encouraging those with desirable traits to procreate (negative eugenics) (Carlson, 2001, p. 11). The upshot here is that,

just as More realized that there could be no perfect society, there will likely never be a perfect genome or contingent physical and mental constitution, because ideals of what is good or perfect change constantly with the interplay of a society's culture, technological development, and socioeconomic structure.

Neither Finkelstein nor Ratzka claim to have a cohesive understanding of human nature or society that would allow them to construct a perfectly functional human society, but instead engage in what Gregory Claeys (1999) terms a Utopian satire, in which an author intends “a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the existing society” (p. 2). Their works are also certainly *Eutopias* in that the disabled people and their communities are empowered, vital, and contributing citizens. To determine the place of these Utopias within Disability Studies, I turn to Frederic Jameson's notion of the Utopian impulse.

#### Frederic Jameson and the Utopian Impulse

I refer to Frederic Jameson's analyses of the Utopian genre to identify and explain three manifestations of what Jameson calls the “Utopian impulse” (2005, p. 230) evident within Disability Studies. Firstly, from its inception Disability Studies has been engaged in an anti-Utopian critique of the collective fantasy permeating mass culture—that impairment is tragedy and that through hard work a healthy normal body can be achieved and maintained. Secondly, disability scholars Finkelstein and Ratzka have engaged in actual Utopian projects that imagine ideal, inclusive communities that dispel the able-bodied collective

fantasy. Finally, Tom Shakespeare (2006) and Paul Abberley (1996) provide anti-Utopian analyses of Finkelstein that criticize his emphasis on work and disablement.

Jameson distinguishes between the Utopian principle, the will to systematically change the socioeconomic and geographical structure of a society to make it function better, and the Utopian impulse, which refers to a more latent hope for a better life and society that can be found dispersed throughout culture. The idea of a Utopian impulse embedded in culture arises with the realization that it had become very unlikely that historical events would conspire to manifest any Utopian principle through Marx's prediction of a proletarian revolution. Therefore, Jameson, a disciple of the Frankfurt school, defers to its cofounder Ernst Bloch by tracing the dispersion of the Utopian principle throughout consumer culture, reformed as tendrils of the Utopian impulse to be seen "at work everywhere, in all the objects of culture as in all social activities and individual values or more properly psychological phenomena" (Jameson, 2001a, p. 364). The Utopian impulse is often manifested in different forms whereby "cultural objects become no longer mere diversions or distractions but the unconscious or semi-conscious exercise of collective fantasy" (Jameson, 2001a, p. 366).

The exercise of collective fantasy can be glimpsed in so simple a scenario as browsing 10-foot long store shelves with 30 distinct kinds of well-marketed toothpaste, each brand promising to make your life that much better than the

other. More powerfully, it is the fantasy that we are supposed to have the physical wherewithal to maintain our bodies, stay free from impairment, and embody youth and beauty. The burden of choice creates the further burden of responsibility, for if products exist that can ostensibly optimize appearance and health, then those who fall short sadly feel at fault.

As it is a *collective* fantasy, no one escapes from its effects entirely, so it not only predisposes nondisabled people to devalue the lives of disabled people, but it corrodes the self-worth of disabled people themselves. Furthermore, many deviations from the bodily ideal, such as obesity or even aging, are met with approbation and a measure of blame, which is even more misguided at a time when obesity and geriatric populations are increasing dramatically.

Disability Studies has long been critical of this Utopian impulse, most notably in the writing of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1996) and Tom Shakespeare (2002), who each embark on an anti-Utopian project to decipher and defuse the affects of Utopia on disabled people. Garland-Thomson (1996) describes this process of disablement as part of a hegemony that is meant to preserve privileged categories such as healthy, beautiful, normal, intelligent, and so forth. Those unfamiliar with disabled people and the experience of disablement may comfortably fit into privileged roles without questioning the system, while those who do not fit in so easily are left in a marginal position that they must accept or resist.

Tom Shakespeare attributes part of the psychological origins of hostility toward disabled people to the tendency of nondisabled people to “deny their vulnerability and frailty and mortality, and to project these uncomfortable issues onto disabled people, who they can subsequently oppress and exclude and ignore” (2002, p. 29). Two causes of impaired psychosocial interaction between disabled and nondisabled people identified by Harlan Hahn (1988), an American sociologist, likely stem directly from this collective fantasy. The first is existential anxiety, or the projected threat of the loss of physical capabilities; the second is aesthetic anxiety, or the fear of others whose traits are perceived as disturbing or unpleasant. These psychological states of denial and anxiety may originate from a cultural devaluation of impairment, but this devaluation is itself enmeshed with social structures that exclude impaired people from public and economic venues, which in turn prevent individual validation through social activity and paid work.

Until the mid-1990s, the increasing dispersal of the collective fantasy’s effects and an end to disablement seemed within reach, according to the promulgations of British disability scholars such as Mike Oliver and Colin Barnes (1998), and Finkelstein. Not only did these Marxist social modelists apply their brand of historical materialism to conceptualize disability in the past (Gleeson, 1997), but they had also used this method to predict the future of disability. They foresaw an end to disability in a Utopian future where the social model would be applied effectively so as to do away with the social discrimination that is rooted in material barriers. This Utopian dream was fueled both by the increasing

efficiency with which the disability movement effects progressive changes in policy and the community, as well as the burgeoning complexity and strength of Disability Studies in the academic arena.

Oliver, Barnes, and Finkelstein continue to promote what Shakespeare (2002) refers to as a “strong” social model, which makes a much more rigid binary distinction between disability and impairment, posing an ethereal “society” as the sole cause of disablement. Despite Shakespeare’s continuing extensive criticism of this model in his book *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (2006), his strong distinction between disability and impairment provided fertile grounds for imagining an endpoint of disability politics. Thanks to this distinction, since the movement’s inception, there has been an ideologically intoxicating Utopian dream that involves minority revolution and an end to disablement.

The following Utopia written by Finkelstein presents a community in which inclusion in the workplace and public areas does away with the stigmatization and consequent internalized oppression of people with physical impairments. Finkelstein argues that disablement can thus be abolished, but he could not overcome those flaws found in past Utopian projects: incomplete knowledge of socioeconomics and community. However, like More, this was almost certainly not his intent.



## Crip Utopia and Socialist Triumph

Finkelstein's 1975 essay "To Deny or Not to Deny Disability" is a Utopian critique of how Western societies have disabled people with physical impairments by failing to accommodate the synthetic physical environment to their needs. He envisions a Utopian community composed entirely of 1,000 or so wheelchair users who drew together because of a shared sense of exasperation with a society that has adapted far too little to suit their needs. Able-bodied people became a part of this community "through no fault of their own" (Finkelstein, 1975), and since it was so difficult to accommodate them in an environment set up specifically for wheelchair users, they had to twist and stress their bodies in order to navigate their new environment; as a result, they developed various impairments. Since they could not physically adapt to the town, this group became the "able-bodied disabled", marked by bruises on their heads and increasing decrepitude. It became so bad that

special aids were designed by the wheelchair-user doctors and associated professions for the able-bodied disabled members of the village. All the able-bodied were given special toughened helmets (provided free by the village) to wear at all times. Special braces were designed which gave support while keeping the able-bodied wearer bent at a height similar to their fellow wheelchair-user villagers (Finkelstein, 1975).

This short allegory touches upon most of the political issues common to the social paradigm: stigma based on physical difference, inequality, physical accessibility, unemployment, and a lack of understanding between privileged and subjugated groups. Wheelchair users ran their entire community and every institution within it, including the mass media, and able-bodied people "are only

rarely seen” and thus “little understood” (Finkelstein, 1975). The wheelchair users were also in control of the means of production through the use of adaptive aids, ironically promoting the value of complete independence.

Because everyone in this community looked the same in terms of physical impairment, and was able to contribute to supporting themselves and their community by working, Finkelstein does away with aesthetic and existential stigmatization by resolving economic and resource difficulties that devalue those who cannot produce as much or at all. This vision was a response to the resistance that British advocacy groups encountered when trying to establish positions for disabled people on committees that allocated resources and developed community programs for disabled people (Oliver, 1990). This philosophy of self-direction is epitomized by the slogan “nothing about us without us”, as advocates for self-advocacy and self-management within the disability rights movement had “begun to organize for their emancipation and joined the growing numbers of groups struggling against the social discrimination” (Finkelstein, 1975).

In conclusion, Finkelstein describes an emergent group of “able-bodied disabled”, those nondisabled people who injured themselves navigating the unaccommodating environment. This group came together in order to promote their own minority interests within the little society, and even felt that they could contribute vital cultural and political knowledge due to their specific experience that wheelchair users would not have. This account illustrates how reasonable,

even inevitable, it is that any minority group in such circumstances should not, and would not, stand for such subjugation. The moral of the story is that when living in a community specifically structured to facilitate one mode of mobility, the well-adapted majority becomes complacent and resistant to alter an environment for the needs of an already stigmatized minority.

Criticisms leveled at this Utopian allegory concentrate on the obvious: wheelchair users have different physical impairments and conditions; they need home care and other social supports from others, at least to some extent, regardless of adaptive aids; it is unlikely that disabled people identify so strongly with each other that they would reject able-bodied family and friends; most importantly, barriers to socialization and employment are not the main concerns of many wheelchair users and disabled people in general. Although this fiction or “fable” (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 44) may seem naïve as a functional Utopian community, like Thomas More’s original 1516 work *Utopia*, it is meant to be a critique of both a society’s structure and values, and the vanity of trying to plan or institute any perfect society (More, 2001).

The deeper problem with this allegory is Finkelstein’s implication that there is some sort of end situation, a final goal at which point an equitable society will be established and disabled people will achieve their ultimate emancipation. This view is supported by his 1980 essay in which he adapts Marx’s conception of societal transformation in a three-stage progression, the final stage of which “marks the beginning of a struggle to reintegrate people with physical

impairments” and “heralds the elimination of disability” (Finkelstein, 1980, p. 8).

Fellow strong social modelists Mike Oliver and Colin Barnes (1998) echo this

sentiment:

Disabled people have no choice but to attempt to build a better world because it is impossible to have a vision of inclusionary capitalism: we all need a world where impairment is valued and celebrated and all disabling barriers are eradicated. Such a world would be inclusionary for all (p. 62).

Claire Tregaskis (2002) attributes this tendency of Finkelstein, Oliver, and Barnes

to their advocacy of a materialist model, for although they mention the

importance of attitudes, “there is an assumption that change in the position of disabled people will only come about with the removal of capitalism, the system which is seen as having created disability” (1998, p. 263).

Despite the grand vision of these strong social modelists, it will take far more than restructuring urban areas and the workplace to negate the biological realities underpinning notions of impairment and related social causes of disablement. While it is still important to work toward removing environmental barriers, this will not be enough to negate the social mechanisms of disablement, which are based in large part on existential and aesthetic anxieties evoked by bodily difference and anomalous appearance. Environmental restructuring and change can only go so far, so other avenues of resistance that can be wielded by any disabled person must be further developed and recognized.

One form of resistance to which Jameson turns in order to undermine the dominant ideology in an era of diminishing distinctions between groups of competing interests is simple self-reflection:

It is thus no longer merely a question of repudiating the values and philosophies of my class enemies, but rather of some much more complicated process of self-analysis whereby I come to detect and eradicate the ideological infection inevitably present in myself as well (Jameson, 2001a, p. 366).

However, encouraging disabled people to critically appraise and challenge disabling forces is already a central project of Disability Studies, so for an oppressed underclass disproportionately prone to poverty and unemployment, any solutions will be part of an ongoing, fluctuating, and often ambiguous process, as we shall see in the next section.

#### Utopian Dialectic and Anti-Utopian Reactions: The Disability/Impairment Distinction

In “Utopianism and Anti-Utopianism”, Jameson (2001b) outlines various antinomies, or opposing ideas, between Utopian and anti-Utopian projects that aim to dispel the collective fantasy. The most important function of these antinomies is the formation of a dialectical process whereby the anti-Utopian projects sow the seeds of the next Utopian project (Jameson, 2001b), such as those of Abberley (2002) and Shakespeare (2006) to follow. In other words, Finkelstein’s Utopia is an anti-Utopian reaction to a wider, less coherent, Utopian collective fantasy, and the anti-anti-Utopian responses of Abberley and Shakespeare build upon and refine Finkelstein’s ideas. As we see below, an exploration of the disability/impairment distinction reveals the complexities inherent in conceptualizing the future of disability.

Paul Abberley is one of the few strong social modelists to have actively struggled to incorporate impairment into an understanding of disability while accounting for how changing meanings of impairment must consequently change contingent notions of disability. Abberley approaches impairment as an unstable category, complicating Finkelstein's theories of individual and group identity, as well as oppression and Utopia. In an anti-Utopian reaction to Finkelstein, Abberley means to overlook the more obvious flaws; he instead explores the implications arising from Finkelstein's implicit assumption that paid work and an accessible workplace could both negate any negative effects of impairment and put an end to disability. He explains that Finkelstein reinforces the trope of modern social theory that identifies an impaired individual's inability to meet certain demands of work performance (with or without environmental adaptations) and productivity as a primary source of disablement. Despite shifting the focus from biological to social causes of exclusion, Finkelstein still emphasizes the necessity of enabling the impaired individual to work. Abberley finds this troublesome, as it does not account for certain impairments, such as extreme fatigue or mental incapacity, which could never be completely offset by adaptive aids or reorganized workplaces.

In "Work, Disability, Disabled People and European Social Theory", Abberley (2002) refutes the usefulness of classical social theory (pretty much as a whole), as well as social psychology and symbolic interactionist theories, as effective methods to account for how changing conceptions of impairment relate

to ideas of oppression. While his dismissal of 200 years of social theory is likely premature, the need for alternatives to paid work for individual self-esteem and validation in the eyes of others are undoubtedly warranted. In refutation of Finkelstein's materialist Marxist analysis, Abberley urges that if we must search "elsewhere than to a paradise of labour for the concrete Utopia that informs the development of theories of our oppression, it is not on the basis of classical analyses of social labour that our thinking will be further developed" (2002, p. 135). Even in a world where all impaired people could be employed and participating in the creation of social wealth, the means of production may very well change more quickly than extensive adaptive infrastructure, leaving many disabled people unable (or unwilling—being enabled to do miserable work is not very helpful) to adapt accordingly. Many impairments severely limit the ability of an individual to ever work, so there will always be some individuals who cannot contribute to society, or at least not in this particular way. We must never forget that we cannot derive a person's value from their contribution to the GDP.

He is actually clearer about the nature of his misgivings in his earlier essay "Work, Utopia and Impairment", arguing that the way in which a particular sociological analysis is critical of "the real world is predicated upon the notion of how things could be, a Utopia. Classical social theories give participation in production a crucial importance for social integration; in their Utopias work is a need, a source of identity" (Abberley, 1996, p. 64). The logic of productivity involves a value judgment of the worth of impaired modes of being, such that

policy and means of distribution ensure an individual who cannot work due to impairment receives only enough to subsist. A society that overvalues the ability to work will find it difficult to move beyond the incentive principle, and a system structured to prevent indolence is simply no longer tenable.

Tom Shakespeare reflects on the difficulties pointed out by such social modelists as Abberley and rejects most of the social model's basic tenets. Shakespeare outlines three ways in which impairment is an essential cause of disability as well as a socially constructed category. Firstly, it is necessary to have an impairment in order to experience disabling barriers, such that "there can be no impairment without society, nor disability without impairment" (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 34). According to Shakespeare: Impairment may not be a sufficient cause of the difficulties which disabled people

face, but they are a necessary one. If there is no link between impairment and disability, then disability becomes a much broader, vaguer term which describes any form of socially imposed restriction (2006, p. 34).

B. Hughes (2002) elaborates on this point: "posing impairment as fundamentally biologically constituted, devoid of social meaning and separate from the self, impairment can only be biological dysfunction and thus identified solely by the authority of the medical gaze" (p. 67).

Abberley points out two ways in which impairment may fluctuate according to availability of medical resources such as treatment, adaptive aids, and prostheses. In this way, oppression results not only from disability, but impairment as well. The first way that a cultural understanding of impairment may



vary occurs if a cure is found. Once a given impairment “may be prevented, eradicated or its effects significantly ameliorated it can no longer be regarded as a simple natural phenomenon even if it were at one time correct to do so” (Abberley, 1996, p. 64). Although Abberley is in danger here of attempting to choose both an essential and relative sense of impairment, the latter stance is helpful; once a common impairment becomes easily treated, it loses its sense of naturalness or inevitability, and takes on a social meaning insofar as “the withholding of treatment when it is possible and desired must be seen as a form of oppression” (Abberley, 1996, p. 64). However, Abberley does not explore at what point a treatment becomes “possible and desired” in terms of resource distribution, need, and cost.

Shakespeare’s (2006) second reason as to how the meaning of impairment changes is through social arrangements such as war, poverty, and malnutrition; more importantly, impairment is often exacerbated by social arrangements. The construction of impairment changes according to how well developed technology is, the cost of delivering this technology, and the distributive infrastructure put in place to assess individuals in order to establish priority. It is likely that the availability and low cost of the technology itself not only changes the construct of the impairment but also heightens our perception of its negative attributes. Deborah Marks (1999) provides an intriguing example in which disability groups lobbied in New York State to have voice augmentation devices categorized as prosthetics rather than needs because they give the user

a “voice”. Prosthetics fall under medical insurance since they are seen as replacement body parts, whereas adaptive aids are funded by either social services or an individual’s own resources because they assist or provide a new ability rather than replacing what is accepted to be a biologically natural part of the person (Marks, 1999).

These examples also illustrate Shakespeare’s third point:

what counts as impairment is a social judgment. The number of impaired people depends on the definition of what counts as impairment. The meaning of impairment is a cultural issue, related to values and attitudes of the wider society. The visibility and salience of impairment depends on the expectations and arrangements in a particular society: for example, dyslexia does not become a problem until society demands literacy of its citizens (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 35).

This applies to the potential of new biotechnologies to foster eugenic attitudes, whereby the very availability of prenatal screening makes having disabled children morally questionable. This could also be extended to the debate over cochlear implants in the Deaf community, as a prosthesis makes being part of Deaf culture a choice as opposed to an inevitability. Deaf parents are condemned for choosing deaf embryos through in vitro fertilization, or the needs of Deaf individuals themselves are dismissed, as it is deemed their fault for not indulging in the technology. Both of these examples illustrate how advances in technology that change the very meaning of impairment can make the normal deviant as well as create factions within minority groups brought together by the similar cultural experience arising from their biological commonality.

Jonathan Cheu (2002) takes up this issue in “De-gene-erates Replicants and Other Aliens: (Re)Defining Disability in Futuristic Film”, arguing that the inception of genetic engineering as it is represented in science fiction films presents the possibility that as long as certain sections of society have more access to genetic therapies than others, our definition of impairment will change drastically. In this case, instead of making impairment and the contingent category of disability obsolete, definitions of both of these categories will simply shift. If disability is a construction based on relative bodily difference and ability, then it will likely persist if developing biomedical resources are not allocated fairly.

Likely the most important of the above distinctions is Shakespeare’s first point concerning impairment: Disability must have a biological basis in order to distinguish disablement from other forms of social restrictions that ideally can be solved through changing social attitudes. This fact leads to one of Abberley’s most crucial points: Unlike physical differences such as race, sex, or sexual orientation,

for disabled people the biological difference...is itself a part of the oppression. It is crucial that a theory of disability as oppression comes to grips with this “real” inferiority, since it forms a bedrock upon which justificatory oppressive theories are based and, psychologically, an immense impediment to the development of political consciousness amongst disabled people. Such a development is systematically blocked through the naturalization of impairment (1997, p. 165).

Marks supports this distinction, claiming that “to leave out impairment means that it becomes difficult to distinguish disability from other forms of

oppression” (1999, p. 150). Mairian Corker and Carol Thomas (2002) affirm that impairment should be considered as a biosocial phenomenon rather than an unproblematized biological or naturalistic phenomenon. Instead of concentrating on socioeconomic factors of disablement shared by most disabled people, there “should be an analysis of the similarities and differences in disability experiences associated with the full range of impairments” (Corker & Thomas, 2002, p. 24). Although people with various impairments confront some forms of disability which are common to all disabled people, “there are also specific kinds of encounters with ableism more closely bound up with the features of the impairment itself” (Corker & Thomas, 2002, p. 19). Corker and Thomas further complicate the matter when they emphasize that “the study of disability should carefully consider the ways in which oppressive social relationships intersect and the consequences that this has to lived experience” (Corker & Thomas, 2002, p. 24). However, accommodating the diverse experiences of both impairment and disability makes it more difficult to envision group solidarity, let alone co-operation among groups. While a commonality of some sort is necessary to maintain an active political or cultural group, the distinction between disability and impairment in any situated individual experience will likely never be clear or certain, and consequently neither will the corresponding forms of oppression and resistance.

### Reformation of the Utopian Impulse

The Utopian meta-narrative of the strong social model has been gradually dissolved by its anti-Utopian critics, but does this mean that a coherent and effective disability movement is less possible? I think that the grander vision of an inclusive society will persist, but the processes involved have simply become more complicated. These processes are clarified by Jameson in his description of what he considers to be the most important Utopian antinomy: the developing relationship between small political groups that pose a shared anti-Utopian resistance toward oppressive collective fantasies. These minority groups, who come together in cultural solidarity, based on shared experiences of discrimination and stigma due to race, gender, sexual orientation, or biological difference, ground the anti-Utopian position.

It has been a common phenomenon among feminist, queer, and disability activists to militantly blame a complementary majority group to be the active cause of their oppression in early periods of their intermingling theoretical development. However, as each particular group has matured its members have developed divergent notions of group-, individual-, and multiple-identities, for disabled people are generally of a certain gender, race, and cultural background as well. Despite these difficulties (or maybe because of them), Jameson argues:

group politics only begin to evolve in a radical direction when the various groups all arrive at the common problem and necessity of their strategic interrelationships, something for which any number of historic terms are available from Gramsci's "historic block" through alliance politics to the

“popular front” of “marginalities” currently proposed by “queer theory” (Jameson, 2001b, p. 390).

This convergence of interest is becoming increasingly apparent with the incorporation of feminist and queer ideologies into Disability Studies, and even more encouragingly with the incorporation of disability theory into an increasing number of other disciplines. In keeping with his conception of the dialectical procession of Utopian/anti-Utopian thought, Jameson concludes this argument with the proclamation that “any active or operative political anti-Utopianism (those which are not mere liberalism in disguise) must sooner or later reveal itself as a vibrant form of Utopianism in its own right” (Jameson, 2001b, p. 392). In the following Utopian project, Ratzka (1998) poignantly extrapolates this developing trajectory among minority groups in the United Minority parties of the future.

### Crip Utopia and the Future of Disability

Ratzka’s “Crip Utopia and the End of the Welfare State” (1998), written more than 20 years after Finkelstein’s original foray into the genre, offers a more tongue-in-cheek, satirical narrative of both the societal collective fantasy and anti-Utopian project of Disability Studies. He also echoes similar concerns about work, policy, oppression, and empowerment raised by Finkelstein, Abberley, Shakespeare, Thomas, and Corker; however, in contrast with the positions of the strong social modelists, Ratzka imagines a capitalist society of economic and political inclusion.

Unlike Finkelstein's Utopia, Ratzka's work is not set in the present or immediate future, but somewhere around 2050, and instead of simply critiquing society's unwillingness to change for the benefit of disabled people, he concentrates on how alternatives to paid work could reduce the stigmatization of disabled people. Ratzka's perspective is likely informed by the international Independent Living movement's philosophy, which can be characterized as a political minority model that has been heavily influential in the North American disability movement. Ratzka addresses the concerns of Mairian Corker, Shakespeare, and Abberley insofar as he accounts for multiple intersecting and coalescing forms of oppression based on race, gender, religion, and impairment.

The viewpoint character of Ratzka's narrative is his fictional friend Crip van Winkle, a man "of strong convictions and moral fortitude", a wheelchair user who had himself cryogenically frozen because he had had enough of discrimination. He emerges from his cryogenic chamber in 2050 and is met by an historian who wants to learn about life in the last century. These two interlocutors, Crip van Winkle and his new historian friend, play two different narrative roles: Crip is naïvely amazed at the social advancements made by (and not for) disabled people while the historian relates the details of this future Utopia matter-of-factly, as though it has always been common sense to adapt environments and social systems in order to include all people. The historian expresses his own amazement about how backwards people were in Crip's time. Through this dialogue, Ratzka is both criticizing Western society's irrational resistance to adapt

to the needs of the disabled minority, while engaging in a satirical projection of how reconciling various conflicting disability philosophies might work.

The historian explains to Crip that a “young and angry disabled generation” heralded the minority revolution in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, initiating radical political change such that United Minority parties sprang up “and soon after dominated politics just about everywhere. They quickly moved to protect their constituencies’ human and civil rights through detailed and tough laws” (Ratzka 1998). The United Minority party was led by the president of the United States of Europe: a black, Jewish, lesbian, single parent, smoker, and recent immigrant. Talk about your fluid identity!

The United States of Europe officially abolished apartheid in the year 2024, making the international sign of access forbidden because “it singles out and stigmatizes a particular group of citizens” such that it would have been more practical “to mark the places that were inaccessible in order to point to the full extent of the injustice” (Ratzka, 1998). Competing charities run by factious interest groups, “one for left-hand amputees, one for right-hand amputees, victims of Foot and Mouth Disease and other assorted ailments” were done away with and in their place a National Science Foundation was instituted to control all money for research, such that nobody would be reliant on “private funding for things like health care, food, shelter, clothing or assistive devices” (Ratzka, 1998). Of course, one institution to handle all of the essentials of life would likely hold far too much power to remain benign, resulting in a dystopian scenario.



In this brave new world, most disabled people work. In this respect, there is hardly any difference between the disabled and nondisabled population anymore: “Perhaps a couple of percentage points, but nothing like the 50-60% that you had last century” (Ratzka, 1998). However, along with an emphasis on work, Ratzka imagines the implementation of what are presently trial methods of resource distribution for those who cannot support themselves, methods that address much of Abberley’s concerns about stigma and devaluation caused by an inability to work. Everyone receives a “citizen’s wage that allows a comparable lifestyle, such that most disabled people work, as many in proportion to nondisabled people” (Ratzka, 1998). Disabled people receive direct payments from the government that enable them to negotiate their own purchases of personal assistance services, assistive devices, and transportation, regardless of income. Everyone is required by law to purchase disability insurance in order to do away with financial difficulties following acquired disability. Not only does this make people aware of their tenuous (or temporary) able-bodied status, but it ostensibly does away with the stigma of poverty and dependence that derive from the necessary high taxes to fund an extensive system of social supports.

### Conclusion

The Utopian projects of Ratzka and Finkelstein, and the anti-Utopian reactions of Abberley and Shakespeare, all struggle with issues of equality, individual validation, environmental barriers, resource distribution, and resistance

to normative values. As rates of impairment rise rapidly with an aging population, dispelling the ableist collective fantasy is not only vital to the well-being of disabled people, but people in general, for as biomedicine advances, concepts of impairment will shift along with what we consider to be the normal body. It is likely that this fluctuation of impairment due to advances in medicine will affect conceptions of disability as much as a strong political disability movement that strives to change both societal attitudes and environmental accessibility. A rapid increase in obese and geriatric populations contrasts sharply with the mass mediated presentations of the ideal body and are less tenable than ever, causing a mounting reliance on the health care system to manage the diverse number of aging related illness and disability. This population increase will both serve to swell the numbers of the disability movement and increase awareness of the social adversity involved, while at the same time push Medicine toward new cures and prostheses. This will likely further stigmatize those too impaired to work at present, while undermining any simplistic notions of disability as a coherent group.

Shakespeare points out that “there are so many barriers to be removed, that perhaps it has not been necessary to think about what the inclusive environment might look like, when the Utopia is finally achieved” (2006, p. 44). However, I would argue that imagining a barrier-free Utopia is vital to the movement’s momentum. Predictions of future states of disability according to the social model’s assumptions that a barrier-free environment is possible and will

do away with disability may seem naïve in retrospect, but its impetus in this regard may also be indicative of the structural limitations of new theory to provide motivation for such visions of the future. While there unfortunately have not been any anti-Utopian reactions to Ratzka's brilliant narrative, it stands as an accessible and exemplary exploration into how our contemporary theory and policy offshoots are constantly diverging and growing back into themselves.

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