

Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013. 276 pages. Paperback \$27.00. ISBN: 978-0-253-00934-0

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Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* makes important interventions into feminist theory, queer theory, and disability studies by bringing disability to bear on feminist and queer theoretical frameworks and addressing how disability is figured in and through these categories of difference. Throughout this complex and exciting book, Kafer interrogates how disability has been rendered, unquestionably, the site on "no future" (10) and demands that disability be recognized as a site for political engagement (17). Kafer's arguments are timely and, more than this, urgent as they narrate disability life as vital and necessary in the face of cultural narratives of disability as a site of no life and no future. This book breathes the poetics of disability life, a life that is consistently under threat, in a way that is complex, clear, highly accessible, and grounded in the politics of everyday life. For this reason, it may not be just that this book is highly teachable (which it is); this is a book that *must* be included in any disability studies, queer theory, and feminist theory curricula.

In Chapters 1 to 4, Kafer takes up her provocative statements: "The very *absence* of disability signals a better future. The *presence* of disability, then, signals something else: a future that bares too many traces of the ills of the present to be desirable. Disability is a future no one wants" (2). In Chapter 1, she makes the argument that it is particularly important to think carefully and critically about crip, queer, and feminist temporality and futures in the midst of discourses that produce the disabled, sick, queer, and racialized body as no life, and thus, threaten these lives. Through an engagement with Munoz, Puar, Ostrander, Halberstam, and Sedgwick, among others, and in conversation with Eldelman's (2004) articulation of "no future" (as cited in Kafer, 28-29), Kafer provides clear and strong evidence for how discourses of normative temporality and futurity, the presumed desire for longevity and the biopedagogies of health threaten the lives of disabled people, queer people, racialized people, and those living with HIV/AIDS. In the face of this, as she writes, "'fuck[ing] the future' (Freccero, 2006) can seem like the only viable crip response" (31). However, as Kafer asserts, "'fucking the future' takes on very different valence for those of us who are *not* supported in their desire to project themselves (and their children) into the future in the first place" (31).

Chapter 2 demonstrates the implications to how "disabled people are continually being written out of the future, rendered as the sign of the future no one wants" (46) through an analysis of the haunting case of Ashley X and the "Ashley Treatment." This chapter explores how Ashley was rendered "frozen in time" and "out of time" (66) in a number of ways which provoked the violent and drastic treatment that has become her namesake, a medical intervention which attenuated her growth and halted her puberty. Justified as necessary for keeping Ashley's cognitive self and physical self aligned, the Ashley Treatment is linked in Kafer's analysis to eugenic histories, neoliberal articula-

tions of independence and productivity, and the charity model of disability, and reveals a cultural disdain for disabled futures. This is but one of the dangerous and deadly consequences of imagining disability as a depoliticized site rather than the grounds on which we must fight for justice, beginning with the right to life and to a future.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer an urgent and important intervention into contemporary discussions of futurity that are currently occupying the academic landscape, led by Edelman, Cooley, Munoz, Jameson, and Michalko. While Kafer acknowledges that discourses of futurity render queer, crip, racialized, and poor people and communities sites of no (good) future, she is not giving up on the future altogether. In these chapters, and following Munoz, Kafer builds a solid case for why we must imagine crip futurity anew in the face of a future that desires normativity, suggesting that imagining such futures, even utopias, must be invoked as a way to keep on living.

Chapters 3 to 5 take up how disability is configured and erased in utopian futures. Through a feminist analysis, Chapter 3 explores how ableism and heteronormativity work together to position deaf lesbian parents as failing to protect their children from queerness and disability in their decision to use a deaf sperm donor. Kafer uses the feminist utopian classic Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of time*—a novel which, in fact, imagines disability to be absent from a feminist utopia—in order to explore the dimension of this story of the deaf lesbian parents which reveals how a different (disabled) future may be a better future.

Chapter 4 uncovers how the images of disabled people featured in the Foundation for a Better Life's (FBL) *Pass It On* campaign billboards perpetuates overcoming and singular narratives of disability and, in this way, premises that we share in the understanding of what a "better life" could be. This chapter uncovers how FBL's billboards elide the ways that disability is clarified by race, class, and neoliberalism as well as how it is produced by colonialism, imperialism, and war. Performing a discourse analysis onto many of FBL's billboard, as well as the billboards culture-jammed by the Billboard Liberation Front, again Kafer reveals, following Chapter 3's discussion of Piercy's novel, how disability is overcome and erased in imaginations of better lives and utopian futures, both in normative life and in alterity.

Following Chapter 3's exploration of the feminist/crip connection, Chapter 5 analyzes how disability figures into the feminist imagination of the cyborg, described by Haraway as "guid[ing] us to a more liveable place" (2004, as cited in Kafer, 103). Offering a robust history and future of feminist cyborg theory, this chapter also brings disability studies to bear on feminist cyborg theory by engaging disability studies scholars and activists such as Michalko, Erevelles, Erickson, Kurzman, and Hershey. Kafer asserts that although feminist and critical race theories have taken Haraway and other early feminist cyborg theorists to task for how women of colour and people living in the global south are used to illustrate cyborg theory while racism and colonialism remain unexamined, such critical interventions have neglected to consider the implications for how disability is deployed in renderings of cyborgs. Filling this theoretical gap, Chapter 3 interrogates the ways that "disability and disabled people are decontextualized, removed from the

realm of the political, and presumed to play no active role in the category breakdowns that animate both the cyborg and the manifesto” (115).

Given how fraught framings of utopias and figures of cyborgs are for disability studies and disabled people, it may seem as though we should altogether turn away from them. However, throughout Chapters 3-5, Kafer positions imagining crip utopias as a critical part of grappling with crip futurity, for in utopias, even feminist and queer utopias, disability is so often eradicated. And in so doing, Kafer builds a case for why cyborg theory is worth holding onto. An example of this is found in Chapter 5 as Kafer’s articulation of the usefulness of cyborg theory to make meaningful the ways that medical technology interacts with the body, a phenomenon she positions as common among disability, HIV/AIDS, and trans communities.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Kafer continues to explore how disability is used in the service of producing normalcy as she thinks the relationship between disability and the environment afresh. Chapter 6 connects the ways that disabled people are written out of nature to the project of compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, addressing the question: “Whose experiences of nature are taken as the norm within environmental discourse” (131)? Kafer begins this chapter by asserting that although there has been scholarly inquiry into the connection between disability and the environment, particularly through the social model, much of what has been made about this connection thus far, in both disability studies and activism and environmental studies and activism, has been relatively straightforward and she asks us to think about this relationship with greater complexity. With Cronon, Kafer starts off by de-naturalizing terms such as “nature,” “wilderness,” and “the environment.” This chapter goes on to demonstrate how, through compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, disabled bodies are culturally produced as unnatural and positioned as out-of-place in nature. She goes on to consider how disabled people and communities take up space in nature following a number of examples, including: a Nike advertisement which imagines disabled people to be “freaks of nature” and the response to this ad; an essay by ecofeminist Linda Vance taken up for how it images nature as “natural” and not necessarily political; a debate on a *New York Times* article which suggest that wheelchair-user hikers have more of an adverse impact on nature than non-wheelchair-user hikers; a piece of life-writing about being in nature by Clare, which articulates this experience as neither one of limitation nor supercrip triumph but of interdependence; as well as Riva Lehar’s paintings of Clare in nature. Kafer suggests that for the way that Clare’s writing and Lehar’s painting engender a new kind of environmentalism, one that takes disability experience seriously, they offer up new understandings of a future in which limitations are essential rather than tangential.

Disability studies is currently being called to think about the relationship between the environment and disability in recognition of the various and violent ways that impairment and “debility” (Puar, 2011) is produced through processes of colonial and neoliberal injury, such as war, environmental racism, and other environmental effects. In Chapter 7 Kafer responds to this call by continuing to explore how disabled bodies interact with nature and the environment by reflectively asking, following Baynton, “If ‘disability is everywhere...once you begin looking for it,’ where do we, as disability studies

scholars, continue *not* to look?” (149). This chapter begins with an analysis of Bernice Johnson Regan’s essay, *Coalition Politics: Turning the Century*, and then moves on to explore potential sites for coalition building between queer, feminist, and crip communities: bathrooms as contested public spaces for, and pertinent to, the activist agenda of racialized, queer, trans, and disabled people; and reproductive justice and the limitations of the pro-life/pro-choice binary with Asch, Saxton, Tremain, and Smith. She also engages the work of environmental justice activists and scholars, such as Alaimo and Johnson, to think about how disability, disease, and environmental injustice are conflated in the environmental justice movement and how, “disability studies and activism would be enriched by attending not only to the ways in which built environments constitute or exacerbate ‘disability,’ but also to how materiality, at a less perceptible level—that of pharmaceuticals, xenobiotic chemicals, air pollution, etc.—affect human health and ability” (Alaimo, 2002, as cited in Kafer, 158). Kafer is clear that we need environmental analyses that engage a disability studies perspective to “do more than cast disability and disabled minds/bodies as tragedies or aberrations” and poses the complicated and absolutely necessary question, “How can we continue the absolutely necessary task of challenging toxic pollution and its effect [debility] without perpetuating cultural assumptions about the unmitigated tragedy of disability?” (159). In this concluding chapter, Kafer calls for a kind of coalition building in which environmental scholars and activists and disability studies scholars and activists resist the temptation to frame impairment as regrettable in their fights against environmental racism and devastation, and do not shy away from engaging the abhorrent ways that we become disabled within neo-colonialism and neoliberalism. In such debates, disability could be constructed as an unquestionably good life and desirable future, eliding the deadly processes of racism, neoliberalism, and ongoing legacies of colonialism *or* constructed as no life and no future, eliding narratives of disability pride, culture, arts, and community, narratives that Kafer so powerfully weaves throughout this text. However, Kafer demands that we think through and work within these contradictions in our coalition work.

It is difficult to make compelling and clear interventions into such a contentious topic as reproductive technologies and justice, environmental justice, and how disability is produced through environmental racism. It may be risky to bring disability studies to bear on figurations of feminist utopias, cyborgs, and critiques of how the figure of the cyborg has been deployed. However, to orient toward disability as a place where we must enact justice rather than as a depoliticized site, requires us to grapple with these difficult questions. Thinking seriously about coalition building between feminist, queer, and crip communities and politics, as Kafer urges, demands that we do not arrive at simple answers. And in a culture that articulates disability as no life and no future, we must contend with such uneasy questions and answers in order to keep on living. *Feminist, Queer, Crip* does just this in its deeply political and poetic renderings of and demands for living into feminist, crip, and queer futurity.

References

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