Introduction

Amanda Baggs was an American nonbinary blogger who wrote on autism and disability and who was critically involved in the autism rights movement.[1] In their widely viewed short film *In My Language* (2007), Baggs communicates—through a computer-generated British-like female voice activated by the swift puncture of keys across a keyboard—their embodied experience of autism. The almost nine-minute film garnered attention for Baggs's commentary on how people who communicate nonverbally are often dehumanized and how they communicate outside conventional speech and language. Baggs used typing, captions, and picture symbols to communicate their thoughts and ideas but admitted that they found language an extremely tiring form of expression. Baggs also noted, "I communicate best outside of language altogether, but they haven't made tools to interpret that."[2]

This so-called foreign language was made up of Baggs's body rocking back and forth, the humming of their voice, and other seemingly repetitive behavior that involved twisting, slapping, and nuzzling different surfaces with their hands, face, or other parts of their body. Baggs's video begins with a sequence of these actions; then the screen shifts to a black screen with the words "A Translation" in white caps. Speaking in more detail about the film, David Wolman states, "In a synthesized voice generated by a software application, she [*sic*; they, meaning Baggs] explain[s] that touching, tasting, and smelling allow [them] to have a 'constant conversation' with [their] surroundings. These forms of nonverbal stimuli constitute [their] 'native language,' Baggs

explains (or embodied forms of communication) and are no better or worse than spoken language. Yet [their] failure to speak is seen as a deficit, [they say], while other people's failure to learn [their] language is seen as natural and acceptable."[3] Baggs's conception of their embodiment as a native language inspires my analyses of contemporary art practices of disabled artists in the forthcoming chapters. Baggs has offered a synesthetic account of autism in which sound, touch, text, and image comingle to formulate a language—and a "being with" of autism—that is uniquely their own. All these sensorial registers combine to expand sensory experience and, in turn, resensitize biased thinking toward autistic individuals.

My personal and professional life experiences and my intimate relationship in physically and cognitively negotiating the challenges of scale, space, and perception in and through ableist public places and architectures have inspired me to uncover how other artists such as Baggs are developing a potentially shared phenomenological mode of being in ways that can indicate a paradigmatic shift of knowing the world. Specifically, how are disabled artists around me illustrating unique, underexplored phenomenological experiences of being in the world—and being in the gallery—through their contemporary practices, and what new knowledges might these particularly embodied experiences bring? My goal, stemming from this inquiry, has been to build a new vocabulary and methodology around curating disability and access and to insist that this genre or movement of art must find a place in art history. My interest in making my exhibitions accessible connects to the ways I take up disability and the disabled body as an issue of social justice. For ten years, I have been actively thinking, curating, and writing about how access can be used as a methodology in which to curate exhibitions. My work has been guided by these questions: What are some new strategies for an embodied multisensorial approach to curating? How does the body read, see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and move through an exhibition space to encounter visual culture? Can we curate exhibitions with this framework in mind instead of thinking of the phenomenological relations with objects from simply a mono-sensorial (or one-dimensional) point of view, where vision is the predominant and biased sense?

This book is a chronicle of how I bring dwarfism into alignment through more than analogy with deafness, blindness, and sensory aspects of conditions such as autism, which is a translational modality of living through multimodal expression. Indeed, we—the artists in this book and I—are in community as individuals who have physical disabilities that are centrally sensory. *The Agency of Access: Contemporary Disability Art & Institutional Critique* argues that contemporary disabled artists are moving away from repre-

sentations of disability and, instead, creating an art of access, or access aesthetics, through artworks that center translation, sensory expansion, touch, and movement for audiences that offer an experience of "being with" disability. By making inequities in the museum more transparent, artists are also engaging in institutional critique, demanding agency, voice, empowerment, and social justice. On a broader level, this book also shows how disability art extends and repurposes precedents in art history in directions that compel us to regard the artistic past differently. For this reason, along with disability studies scholars, museum and gallery workers and leaders, and a wider interdisciplinary community of which I am part, I insist that art historians, especially, read this book.

In this book, I also maintain that work by contemporary artists who are associated with institutional critique and who deploy variable disability topoi—including deafness, blindness, sight, mobility, and autism—make audiences more sensitive to ways in which bodies take in information and process stimuli. Through engaging with this work, audiences can experience alternative sensory modes as a process of re-sensitization to stimuli that they currently diminish or neglect. Physically disabled embodiment, then, is a pathway for building new vectors of sense, much like synesthesia itself, and my goal is to demonstrate how artworks by contemporary disabled artists expand sensory experiences. These exhibitions and installations might therefore support an unlearning of visitors' "aesthetic education," which is closely linked to art institutions. While disabled artists may have come to rely on expanded sensory information to navigate a world not built for them, their artworks create synesthetic experiences to give viewers access to the rich experience of translation. This will be argued through contemporary multimedia practices by artists based in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and India.

The book aims to flesh out language and new analyses that posit themselves between the arena of representation and that of the senses. In this project, the disabled body captures the various haptic, aural, visual, synesthetic modalities the corpus is capable of transmitting. On the one hand, the book shows that artwork regarding disabled embodiment is much more than static and one-dimensional representations, and on the other hand, it also demonstrates how the undervalued and underutilized dimension of the senses is being afforded new recognition through the multisensory and synesthetic nature of the embodied disabled experience: "Disability arts practitioners often stretch the aesthetic understandings of whatever kind of art they practice, thereby challenging the taken-for-grantedness of the art form in question."[4] Contemporary disabled art expands the sensory experience for

visitors in ways that move beyond what earlier art movements and art exhibitions have achieved, including the experimental exhibition design of the Surrealists and Fluxus.

The contemporary artwork discussed in *The Agency of Access: Contemporary Disability Art & Institutional Critique* is grounded in traditions of bodily sensorium that are mined in less mainstream traditions, so that disability arts is understood not as an extension of the medical or the social model of disability. Rather, I draw from traditions in which altered modes of sensory experience are put forward in a private language of difference that audiences must stretch to reach and inhabit. This would entail asking something of the audience rather than "experiencing" disabled sensory modalities in more passive reception modes. By juxtaposing the work of historical artists with the work of contemporary disabled artists I aim to prove how disabled artists are offering unique and enhanced *disabled perspectives* to the important sensory-expanding work of generations of artists before them.

Museums and galleries today have certainly taken important steps toward acknowledging institutional critique and accessibility.[5] A museum must be concerned with ensuring that the museum building is physically accessible for disabled patrons, such as including wheelchair ramps or large font and Braille wall labels. Numerous museums have published important guidelines for staging accessible exhibitions. The Smithsonian Museum of American Art has made its foundational guidelines, "Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design," written by Katherine Ott, freely available online.[6] The Black disabled artist Carolyn Lazard's "Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice," commissioned by Recess in New York, and Shape Art's "How to Put On an Accessible Exhibition" are also available for free online.[7] Traditionally, issues of accessibility in a museum are confined to educational programs for those who are blind or deaf or use wheelchairs. Generic examples of these programs include touch tours of museum collections for those who are blind (at major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) or tours of exhibitions using an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter for the deaf, which are popular at museums such as the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art, also in New York. This confinement of responsibility for accessibility to education departments and visitor services functions insulates the institution at large from deeper changes that are needed, and this supports the pervasive attitude that visitors should support exhibitions rather than that exhibitions should support visitors. This preoccupation with a limited concept of access ironically has obscured the possibility of more generative disability-related content within exhibitions, displays, and other curatorial practices. The fact that such departments are often quite separate from the

curatorial department is itself revealing, in that disability is not widely considered a topic that needs thought, as opposed to treatment. Museums might think of disabled visitors as having so-called medical conditions and requiring physical access, but often they miss the cognitive or cerebral aspects of disabled embodiment.

In the past several decades there has been no shortage of museums and galleries attempting to organize multisensory art exhibition experiences for both the disabled and the nondisabled visitor. They recognize that they must break out of ocularcentric spectatorship experiences in a bid to expand the mostly monosensory nature of exhibitions. They also recognize that engaging audiences multisensorially is fun and helps the visitor take in more information. One example is the *Tate Sensorium* project from 2015, which attempted to activate all five senses through the use of new technologies. Paintings were selected that had sensorial potential; related quadraphonic sound was played through speakers set up in each corner of the room; and perfume diffusers were placed on the room's side walls to deliver scents that also activated the story of the painting. Other exhibitions of this nature use "sensory stations" or "sensory tours" that may offer three-dimensional printed replicas of original works of art on display, lift and sniff panels, demonstration carts, and interactive screens to witness synesthesia at play.[8] Under the leadership of Marleen Hartjes, a member of the accessibility and inclusion staff, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands, invested in multisensory experiences in exhibitions in 2016 through *The Multisensory Museum*, a major project that not only aimed to make the museum more accessible for those with visual and auditory impairments but also attempted to open up the museum to the population at large. Hartjes, who has since left the Van Abbemuseum, wanted to demonstrate that the dominance of vision can be challenged when our other senses are stimulated in provocative and effective ways as a means to engage with art. In 2018, Ellen Lupton and Andrea Lipps curated *The Senses: Design beyond Vision*, a large-scale exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, in New York that intended to operate as a manifesto for inclusive and multisensory design practices to push beyond vision.

However, while acknowledging their power to activate disabled and nondisabled audiences, exhibitions and projects such as these offer innovative reinterpretation of traditional objects rather than commissions with disabled contemporary artists that solve problems inherent in much larger systemic issues in exhibition design that aim to offer a broader template and framework for permanent change. While it is true that exhibitions such as *Tate Sensorium* are very likely the future for sensorial stimulation in the museum and contribute to the sensory-expanding work considered in this book, sustained and

long-term dialogical exchange with contemporary disabled artists is also critical for infrastructural change. Furthermore, consultation with and commissioning of contemporary disabled artists—as both artists and exhibition designers—should not only be appropriately compensated; it should also be recognized as disability justice work, in synthesis with methodologies of decolonization that are so crucial to museum work in this contemporary moment. Disability justice is a social movement that examines ableism as it intersects with race, gender, and sexuality. Disability justice organizers include Patty Berne and Sins Invalid, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, Alice Wong, and the late Stacy Milbern. Berne, in particular, has developed principles for disability justice in a working draft that presses the need for broad forms of access across marginalized groups.[9]

On a deeper level, there is also the problem of museums' creative conservatism with regard to exhibition design. Throughout the twentieth century, there have, in fact, been great and fascinating examples of experimental and innovative exhibition design work that broadens the scope of the prototypical viewing experience, but these paths were never taken up institutionally. This includes the work of Austrian American graphic designer and architect Herbert Bayer. While it is true that Bayer's work was still very much rooted in the visual primacy tradition of exhibition spectatorship, he nevertheless intended to break out of conventional spectatorship experiences that allowed for only one way to perceive art and from only one angle and one specific height. For example, he was interested in expanding the field of vision by tilting works of art above and below eye level (see Figure I.1). Unwittingly, Bayer was already opening up the viewing experience to bodies of different heights. His work in exhibition design serves as a model for the kind of work that the disabled artists in this book are executing. He was actually demonstrating a principle of extended vision, which gave much freedom to the viewing experience. One of Bayer's observations was that the exhibition designer's job is to "improve and intensify communication."[10] He called exhibition design a new language. Bayer's work connects to the argument of this book for his out-of-the-box thinking, where he would literally "explore possibilities of extending the field of vision in order to utilize other than vertical areas and activate them with new interest. The normal field of vision becomes larger by turns of the head and body, whereby the direction of viewing and the relative position of exhibits gains new possibilities."[11] This very much reminds me of Picasso's revolutionary work in Cubism and how he fragmented recognizable form into basic shapes and multiple perspectives side by side.

In one of Bayer's works, viewers see an unorthodox display of chairs suspended from the wall and areas of the floor that were raised to bring the

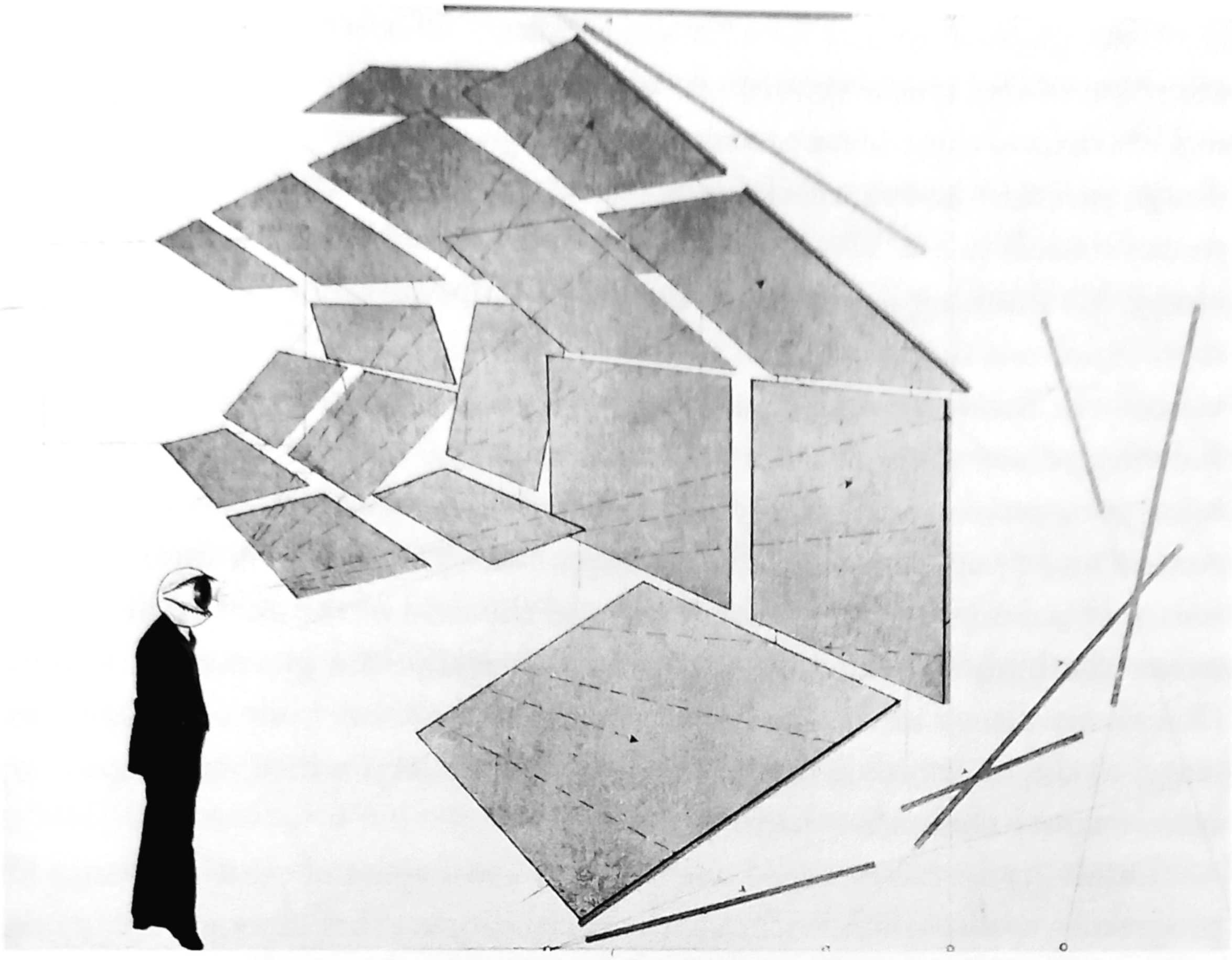


Figure I.1: Herbert Bayer, diagram of the field of vision from Bayer's catalogue for the Section Allemande of the Deutsche Werkbund, Paris, 1930. (© 2023 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.)

Image description I.1: A black-and-white illustration of a small figure standing in the bottom left corner of the composition. They wear a black suit and have a giant eyeball in place of their head. The figure stands in profile, looking to our right. Sight lines radiate up and down from the figure's pupil and intersect with floating rectangular planes.

viewer up to a higher viewing and walking area. Thus, scale, juxtaposition, heights, and orientations were all tools that Bayer experimented with in his exhibition design. He believed that "every subject is conditioned by its individual nature, by content, size, or special limitations"; this is pertinent not only to the experience that disabled artists are trying to communicate to audiences, but also to how disabled audiences may experience the art in a given exhibition or museum.[12] In other words, there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all viewing or embodied experience in the museum, which is contrary to how most exhibitions are designed, particularly when we consider that artworks are almost always hung for a so-called average-height viewing position. There is an assumption by the gallery curators, designers, and installers that this standard measurement for hanging artwork on walls will be comfortable or most accessible for all bodies. Bayer continues to say

that "the physical means by which the content of exhibits is brought to the attention of the visitor should not in themselves be autocratic or domineering."[13] I believe these ideas can readily be adopted within accessible exhibition design practices and methodologies—and, indeed, are embraced by contemporary disability art. While Bayer's ideas are limited within the expansion of vision, his thinking is important for virtue of intuitively understanding that there is not one singular way of seeing. To my mind, by attempting to expand vision—in front, behind, above, below, and at diagonals—the designer is showing us how to think more holistically and that we must take into account other perspectives, particularly the perspective of one, like me, who has short stature and people in wheelchairs. Bayer's work can also be interpreted as sensory because the ocular experience and the field of the gaze is affected by where the body is placed physically and spatially in a given environment. (Recall my discussion in the Preface regarding how my body is spatially oriented to the inaccessible height of works in a gallery, which can impact my other sensory channels—namely, hearing.)

Disability art has emerged only recently as an agent of creative change for progress in accessibility. Within earlier disability art that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, representations of disability by disabled artists explicitly aimed to offer bold and empowered self-acceptance of their bodies through playful, confronting, and revisionist representations—even spectacles. These representations came as a reaction to the stigmatizing gaze from a nondisabled public, where disabled people have been made to feel ashamed of how they look. Numerous scholars, such as Lisa Cartwright, Michael Davidson, Lennard Davis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Petra Kuppers, Simi Linton, Robert McRuer, Ann Millett-Gallant, Carrie Sandahl, Susan Schweik, and Tobin Siebers, have built a strong body of analyses that delves deeply into the complexities of disability in art, carefully avoiding reductionist binaries of so-called positive versus negative images. Rather, these scholars argue that powerful representations of the disabled body come with a great deal of agency, too. This continues to be a predominant practice, but less attention has been paid to the sensory-expanding work of the disabled artists I discuss in this book.

Tied up in sensory-expanding work is the work of access aesthetics, also known as creative access or access as praxis. This is a genre and an art movement that centers access as a medium that contemporary disabled artists use as a political strategy. Access now becomes the subject matter in concert with being the guiding principle for the design of exhibitions that offer new registers for exhibition spectatorship. Access aesthetics is relational, collective, and intersectional and intends to rearrange structures of power. Access aesthetics

balances between form and function, and it "anticipates disabled artists and audiences at its foundation."[14] Access aesthetics works in tandem with disability justice and institutional critique. As part of the work of access aesthetics, I aim in this book to deemphasize "vision." The focus should be on the corrective version of the word—*re*-vision—in its role to transform the sensory regime at large. My goal is to re-vision and reimagine disability, agency, and art through institutional critique, as well as to convey the book's reformist heart, where I am advocating for a paradigmatic overhaul of the field of art history at large. Indeed, while sensory expansion is a means to an end, as well as the fruit of this end, the end itself that I propose is change writ large, where this overhaul encompasses culturally dominant institutions, the public's experiences in them, and a whole system of bringing people together with art that follows and reinforces socially exclusionary practices, cultural values and mindsets, and human relationships.

In tandem with all the on-the-ground work that has taken place around instilling meaningful notions of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism policies in the museum, foundational and groundbreaking theoretical and scholarly work has been published. Richard Sandell has been the leading scholar on issues of museums and social justice for decades. His critical texts—*Museum Activism* (with Robert R. Janes, 2019), *Re-presenting Disability* (with Jocelyn Dodd and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 2014), and *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (with Eithne Nightingale, 2012), among many others—have brought attention to the deficits of global museum cultures in representing and serving their disabled audiences.[15] Maura Reilly's *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018) is important for its work in decolonizing the museum by offering examples of how curators have aimed to offset racial and gender disparities in the art world. Museum workers who have also written extensively on access and disability issues in the art world include Beth Ziebarth at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, DC, and Rebecca McGinnis at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The American Alliance of Museums also publishes books on the topic of access quite frequently, also written from the perspectives of museum workers with real-world practical experience. The film wittily titled *White Balls on Walls* (2022), directed by Sarah Vos, captures the struggles, vulnerabilities, and complexities of the inner workings of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam as its staff grapples with how meaningfully to embrace more diverse and equitable collecting and display practices within the museum. I want to note here that the argument I seek to make in this volume is that disabled artists are also now doing the access work, not just museum educators and other staff. That is, the museum staff is no longer working in isola-

tion. Having said that, I also recognize that disabled people at large (and not just disabled artists) have done much of the work of formulating definitions of access.

On that note, there is, of course, also a significant body of disability studies literature on access in its many dimensions, including the political and institutional reasons that access may not exist or is poorly done. Scholars such as Tanya Titchkosky alerted us all that access becomes meaningful through our relations with one another: "Access . . . is an interpretive relation between bodies. In this conception, we can explore how people wander about and act within social space—and discover how we are enmeshed in the activity of making people and places meaningful to one another."[16] Aimi Hamraie's writing on critical access studies and universal design has revealed how access emerges in imbalances of power and reflects specific dimensions of who belongs, who is a citizen, and so on.[17] I discuss more of Hamraie's thinking in Chapter 5. There are numerous predecessors who have accomplished the deep and complex work on the historicizing and theorizing of access and what access means politically across different fields, ranging from architecture, visual art, design, choreography, and dance to tactility, audio description, captions, and more. Those on whom I draw throughout this book include Hansel Bauman, Fiona Candlin, Constance Classen, David Gissen, Georgina Kleege, André Lepecki, Rebecca Sanchez, Tanya Titchkosky, and Sean Zdenek. Other influential thinkers who have contributed much to access as it intersects with space, education, pedagogy, media and communication, critical design, and other histories include Jos Boys, Jay Dolmage, Elizabeth Ellcessor, Elizabeth Guffey, Sara Hendren, Rob Imrie, Mara Mills, Margaret Price, Graham Pullin, David Serlin, Jonathan Sterne, Bess Williamson, and countless others. Marta Russell's *Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract* (2002) is a landmark book for its recognition of the alarming shrinking of social services in an age of economic austerity under capitalism.[18] I'm particularly inspired by the writings of the contemporary disabled artists Carolyn Lazard, Park McArthur, and Constantina Zavitsanos, who push against conventional definitions of access and accommodation.[19]

The main point I want to make here, however, is that the tools the artists deploy in this book, including image description, captioning, sign language, and other multimodal forms in the museum, are not simply depoliticized aesthetic tools that contemporary disabled artists use. Rather, they are products of movements and disabled people's interventions that have a long and storied history—in fact, disabled artists deploy these tools because they are already political. The artists knowingly take on that institutional history of disability activism both implicitly and explicitly and incorporate it into their

practices. This is also important to note because of the ever present concern about appropriation, in which artists use the tools not of their own access experience or nondisabled people engage with disability-specific tools and languages. While this continues to remain a concern overall within the field of contemporary disability art and art practices at large (I speak more about that at different stages in the book), I believe that the contemporary disabled artists I discuss in this book are working from places of deep knowledge of the lived experience of disability and have much to share.

Disability Art as an Heir to Art History

There are many historical precedents for the kinds of experiments that the contemporary disabled artists are undertaking, ranging from work by Fluxus to that of Lygia Clark. An arc of radical practice between historical and contemporary work aims, individually and collectively, to shed normative ways of looking and, instead, provides a multisensorial, uninhibited framework with which to engage with visual art. I aim to connect these dots and trace these genealogies between historical precedents for sensory-expanding work in art history and the work of contemporary disabled artists. A longer history of sensory experiments contextualizes the meaning and significance of contemporary disability art within broader fields of art history and visual culture. Many of the goals and functions of earlier sensory-expanding art movements from the twentieth century onward are analogous to those of disability art. Further, qualities such as complex embodiment, de-centering, and fragmentation, which are characteristic of conceptual art, can also be found in disability-themed art. This book defines a critical space for the work of artists with disabilities by laying out established theoretical art-history parameters to situate their practices.

I maintain that important conceptual relationships between historical work and contemporary disability art become multiplied, yet they remain hidden. On the whole, contemporary disability art's standing in art history has hardly been recognized. As a result, it remains disconnected from its artistic predecessors. This disconnect is arguably a reason for contemporary disability art's general exclusion from art museums and galleries. While it is true that museums are starting not only to show contemporary disability art but to collect it, too (particularly the work of Christine Sun Kim, Park McArthur, and Carolyn Lazard), museum professionals overall don't yet grasp contemporary disability art as the heir and creative extension of earlier movements and artists whose works are welcome in exhibitions. Until those relationships come to be recognized, art exhibitions and their audiences are likely to miss disabled

perspectives and all they have to offer in terms of creativity, enhancement of accessibility, and a broader understanding of art history itself.

In this book, I'm drawn to earlier art movements such as Fluxus because of their commitment to the experimental; this both made Fluxus avant-garde and guaranteed it would remain on the margins of art history and criticism, particularly during the period in which its experiments were being executed. Fluxus's marginal position also clearly resonates with the marginal position that disabled artists historically have occupied, ranging from the outsider art genre through contemporary disability art today. Further, as I've established, like contemporary disabled artists, artists from Fluxus used sense to orient audiences toward a richer interaction with their environments than were available through the normative bourgeois orders of meaning-making.[20] Fluxus scores, Fluxus event scores, Fluxus experiments with obstructing vision, Fluxus drip music, and Fluxboxes have a connection to contemporary disability art, given that sensory experimentation, sensory aesthetics, and a playful tension among antagonism, alienation, and access is inherent across each of the artistic genres and movements. What distinguishes between the two groups, of course, is that contemporary disabled artists are illustrating work that comes from within their own bodies that is always already multisensory, while Fluxus artists are evoking the sensorium through bodily experimentation using external resources to conjure up such responses and reactions.

I want to be very clear that while I'm establishing that contemporary disability art is situated within the same critical space as previous genres and collectives of avant-garde conceptual art practices from the 1930s onward, especially Fluxus, this does not make up for the failings of these movements. For example, Fluxus artists did not include any disabled artists (to my knowledge); nor did they think about how the very experiments with which they engaged were leading to insights that might have been even more revolutionary had they directly and sensitively engaged with the complex sensorial circuits of the disabled body. It's no wonder they simply didn't look to disabled embodiment and the sensory phenomenological experiences of disabled people as a profound means to justify what they proposed rather than try to experiment with normative bodies instead. Obviously, this was not an option that crossed the artists' minds in this period of time (with a few exceptions), given that Fluxus has already been demarcated as a movement that was predominantly male, apart from Alison Knowles. I'm suggesting that given the primitive occlusion of women in this movement, incorporating disability into their experiments would have been absolutely unheard of. So in their creativity, it apparently never occurred to the Surrealists and the Fluxus artists that they should think about disability. Instead, they fetishized disability as an

outcome of their sensorial experiments, and their outcomes—no matter how innovative and enlightening at the time—were never turned into practice or policies in terms of access and inclusion in the gallery and museum space that would have been welcomed by a range of visitors. Nevertheless, Fluxus artists (and others) offer a compelling art historiography for the treatment of the sensory as they move it toward a more central positionality. By aligning Fluxus and earlier art movements and artists with contemporary disability art, I'm indicating not only that I think this is an obvious progression, but also that contemporary disability art "gets" the centrality of the sensory because disabled bodies *are* the sensory.

Institutional critique was an art genre that stemmed from conceptual art that emerged in the 1960s. It was the art practice of critiquing the institution, debunking the myth of a supposedly neutral gallery space. Artists who worked within this genre challenged mimetic representation, iconography, and artists' production according to a different regime and timeline. Some of the mechanisms of the art museum and gallery that institutional critique focused on for its subject matter included funding, curation, acquisitions, leadership, power, and knowledge. In an anthology about the history and future of institutional critique, Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray identified three waves of the movement. The first wave began in the 1960s and 1970s and was led by artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, and Robert Smithson. It was followed by a second wave in the 1980s through the artists Andrea Fraser and Fred Wilson.[21] Both have taken on the roles of curator and exhibition designer as part of their practice in the genre, and Wilson particularly has redesigned museum spaces to shed light on the racist legacies of museum collections and displays. Wilson's *Mining the Museum* project in 1992–1993 at the Maryland Historical Society was a watershed for how Wilson's clever reorganization of objects aimed to offer a different narrative about histories of slavery in the United States from a Black perspective. His work exposed a legacy of violence, exclusion, and selective looking. Work such as this serves as an important backdrop to establish the connection to the exhibition design work of contemporary disabled artists. This is true because both Wilson and the contemporary disabled artists discussed do intersectional work to unveil limited perspectives of museum culture steeped in patriarchal, racist, and ableist frameworks. The third wave, in the 2010s, was marked by an even greater focus on activism, and contemporary disabled artists are certainly engaging with this paradigm in powerful ways.

Note, however, that disability art and disabled communities were not part of the original waves within the movement. Owing to this, the critique of museums in this book need not be limited to the art-history lens of institutional critique, as there is a significant body of literature in other fields that

also critiques the museum, including museum studies, cultural studies, architecture and design, and anthropology. For this reason, the reader may consider that this is a book that adds a critique to museums from an interdisciplinary perspective, not least of which includes disability studies, as all those fields combined support how museums need to undertake the deep transformative work to begin to make their spaces more equitable. Rather than a book that is framed primarily as a contribution to art history's institutional critique, it is more about how art history's institutional critique can open up its borders to the generative possibilities of access aesthetics.

Disabled artists from earlier decades must not be overlooked, as contemporary disabled artists are building on their important work. In fact, disabled artists have been powerfully contributing to the genre of institutional critique for much longer than we realize. For example, the disabled artist Joseph Grigely has spent a good portion of his career writing letters to museum curators and other institutional leaders regarding their consistent and oblivious elision of access for himself and other disabled artists. He has also spent decades collecting "captions" of his recorded exchanges with the hearing world as a person who is deaf. His handwritten postcards, index cards, and Post-It notes capture nonauditory communication he has had with people at art openings, coffee shops, and museums. Each card or note has a unique and idiosyncratic exchange, but viewed as a larger installation, the work conveys the holistic modality of Grigely's daily routine in communication. Ultimately, Grigely's work underscores how casual vocal conversation is translated into writing and how those translations are never exact replicas of the original.

A second disabled artist who is from the same generation as Grigely is Stephen Lapthisophon, a low-vision artist whose work was featured in *With Reasonable Accommodation* (2002), a solo show at the University of Illinois's Gallery 400. The installation took place during the twelfth year of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and emphasized the ineffective manner in which the public responded to its policies of accommodation and access for disabled people. Despite the ADA, many buildings and public spaces remain inaccessible to the disabled population to this day. Lapthisophon inserted ladders, sculptural intrusions, cardboard boxes, electrical cords, walkers, architectural details, images, signage, and obstacles in his installation to choreograph the way that visitors maneuvered—or, rather, tripped and strained—through the gallery space. Here, the artist, like the other artists in this book, reversed access so that the disabled subject was empowered, while the nondisabled figure was forced into the position of the minority. Lapthisophon attempted to arouse an empathetic response in his audience by reversing access privileges often taken for granted by nondisabled communities. His work re-

ally underscores one of the key methodologies that are being deployed with great frequency by contemporary disabled artists, as discussed in the next section.

Before the 2000s and around the same time as the period in which Grigely and Lapthisophon worked, other disabled artists engaged with access as a key aspect of art and performance in curation and in staging more representational works. These disabled artists included Petra Kuppers, Simi Linton, Carrie Sandahl, and Sins Invalid.[22] While the works of these artists focus more on representation, there are many connecting threads in terms of performance and multisensory access. It is also notable that this generation of disabled artists established or contributed to many of the access practices that we are familiar with now, such as the concept of relaxed performance, which is where the ambience and the rules of a typical theatrical performance are "relaxed" to benefit those with learning or sensory disabilities, such as autism.[23] I especially want to note the work of the San Francisco Bay Area disability justice performance project Sins Invalid, which Patty Berne cofounded in 2006. Berne, the executive director and artistic director of Sins Invalid, particularly wanted to center the work and the knowledge of "disabled, queer, gender nonconforming, and transgender artist-activists of color" through evenings of "art, workshops, and educational trainings."[24] Sins Invalid therefore also centered early conceptions of multisensory and accessible performance by virtue of the knowledges that the disabled performers brought to the stage, along with how the tenets of disability justice and politics could literally and most powerfully be brought to life. In naming these artists and projects, I am also identifying them as significant precursors to access aesthetics to which the contemporary disabled artists discussed in this book and I owe a great debt.

History, Politics, Methodology of Disability Art

The contemporary disabled artists discussed in this book belong to an unfolding generation that is contributing to a new multisensorial art field that demands to be recognized: disability art. It is a relatively new field of contemporary art that pertains to work about the experience of disability and disabled communication. Disability art emanated from the disability rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s.[25] The movement arose in a bid to deinstitutionalize disability care, as the institutionalization of this care was the dominant practice in the United States and the United Kingdom from the early to mid-1900s. It was at this point that the movement insisted on a conceptual shift from the medical model of disability, which considers disability a personal defect that should be corrected, to a social model of disability, where prob-

lematic and biased societal attitudes toward disabled people is where the true problem lies. In other words, disability is rooted in the environment, not in the individual. During the famous Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protest on March 12, 1990, disabled activists symbolically got off their wheelchairs and climbed up the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, DC, to bring awareness to the very slow progress of legislation being passed. As the wheelchair-less bodies hauled their forms up the stairs of the Capitol, this iconic scene became the ultimate performative disabled act in public space, to "dramatize the barriers confronting them" both physically and metaphorically.[26] The very look or appearance of the unruliness of the so-called Capitol Crawl demonstrated activists' power.[27] The grassroots group that organized the protest, American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT), formed in 1978, was fighting for new policy—that is, for what was to become the ADA, which was ratified by George H. W. Bush in 1990–1991. Even though the legislation, which was endorsed by Bush, had broad backing, it had been moving at "glacial speed."[28]

A major method that, I argue, is being deployed by contemporary disabled artists with great frequency is to play with the tension between "access" and "antagonism," similar to the goals of the ADA protestors of the Capitol Crawl. In this context, what I mean by "access" is where artwork is being "friendly" or welcoming to the museum visitor, even going as far as to inform them about the experience of an epistemological, physical, sensory, or spatial experience of disability that is gentle, gracious, and open-minded. By contrast, work that is "antagonistic" is much more aggressive in that it aims to poke fun at and to put up barriers for the nondisabled audience in acts of revenge or to instill shock, discomfort, and confusion. On the antagonistic approach, Joseph Grigely says that contemporary disability art is defined by what "many disabled artists now love to do: crip normative experiences and conventions, and return to the audience the complications of disability. The entire process has precedence in art that is often described as institutional critique."[29] Antagonistic works of art have already been executed through historical precedents such as Marcel Duchamp, and Grigely shares that the antagonistic qualities inherent in contemporary disability art today are also very much owing to institutional critique that built up momentum post-Duchamp in the 1960s and 1970s. Artists such as Daniel Buren, Adrian Piper, and Martha Rosler broke down the embedded conventions and protocols of the museum, offering opportunities for audience reflection for inherent biases that typically would go unnoticed or unchallenged. Here it was the institution that became art, similar to how contemporary disabled artists use the media and scripts of their so-called damaged bodies to highlight and extend new information about the senses. This occurs in tandem

with how contemporary disabled artists also use the media of the museum to empower their visiting experiences while simultaneously revealing museums' inequities and biases toward a so-called standard viewing experience, and they do this through either an accessible or antagonistic approach. Sometimes they combine the two styles in their work at once.

To emphasize how the specific corpus of artists I address in this book are explicit agonists, there are, of course, a large number of disabled artists who do not make work that confronts audiences with the artist's experiential specificities. The list of artists is extensive, so rather than drop a long list here, I will briefly focus on the work of Riva Lehrer, one of the highest-profile and most established disabled artists in the United States. Lehrer has been making representational self-portraits and portraits of other high-profile disabled figures within the artistic, cultural, and scholarly world for more than thirty years. Her goal has been to give visibility and empowerment to disabled people within these portraits, where they are being depicted on their own terms. Lehrer has acknowledged that the process of developing a portrait of someone is challenging—even fraught—given that the sitters experience the stigma of looking and the gaze on a regular basis. Under the gaze of a mainstream public, the disabled person is often under great scrutiny, and in her portraits, Lehrer ensures that her collaborators "determine the narratives that represent who they are."[30] I believe there is nothing antagonistic or tongue-in-cheek about Lehrer's work, as she is coming from a different positionality that aims to raise up the profile of luminous disabled figures in a bid to shed reductive associations commonly tied to the disabled subject. Lehrer's objectives are shared by many disabled artists from her generation and beyond. In this book, I suggest a shift in the semiotic interpretation of bodies, so that disability aesthetics encompass a literal mimicry between real disabled bodies and figural works of art, as well as the affective relations between each of them and the viewer.[31]

The contemporary disability art that I examine in this book addresses disabled people in the audience and does not attempt to "acquaint" nondisabled audience members with introductory ways of understanding disabilities. Rather, it plunges audience members into the depths of disability sensory experiences where one is asked to sink or swim without normative supports for meaning making. This makes disability embodiment much more agential rather than passively waiting for supports to navigate the world as able-bodied people do. Indeed, contemporary disability art does not elicit empathy; instead, it works to re-sensitize—literally and metaphorically—and to be assertive regarding the reality of their embodied experience. While empathy immerses audiences in a bid to reproduce challenges for disabled people, here, the "sink or swim" concept is more akin to "being with" a disabled person than trying "to

be like" a disabled person.[32] This approach is somewhat tied up in the notion that work by contemporary disabled artists is sometimes antagonistic and that, furthermore, there is a playful tension in work that, on the one hand, is welcoming and inviting, but on the other, refuses to cater to the norm. There is therefore a continuous back-and-forth between dialogic and antagonistic styles.

The artists in my study are creatively translating modes of atypical disabled communication using multimedia to generate an entirely new language—a new space—around disabled embodiment. These artists describe their daily experience communicating with the nondisabled world as one that occupies another space that misses information. They are effectively carving new space for a language of disabled embodiment that expresses the ineffable, effectively taking translation into (and tackling it in) a new register. Translation and access as artistic praxis within the context of contemporary disabled artists is where artists' offer ingenious new insights and methods in which our bodies may sensorially engage with the world. This is not related to the pejorative language of disability that the disability community shuns and against which academics work. This is language that falls outside the realm of disqualification regarding who is entitled to speak and not speak, for it is a language that is created by and for disabled "bodyminds" who speak freely and with fervor.[33]

It is important to acknowledge the limits of the goals of this book—for example, how much can a nondisabled audience learn from contemporary disability art? Do some of these works amount to a disability simulation experience, which many disabled people have rejected in other fields? Indeed, sharing insights regarding the sensory disabled experience is a tricky landscape to traverse, given that the potential for appropriation and mishandling by nondisabled artists and curators without a deeper understanding of disability history and culture is high. For example, Emily Watlington has provided writing on the accessibility of video art for sighted viewers that is a complex reading of how introducing access tools to a broader audience does not always result in a connection between disabled and nondisabled audiences.[34] This is true because some of the caption-based work privileges the disabled audience member and leaves out the nondisabled audience entirely. This is part of a more antagonistic approach by contemporary disabled artists that I discuss in more detail later and really reflects the degree to which they are frustrated by the consistent exclusion they experience in the art world.

As a white curator and art historian I also want to contend with the omission of race within disability studies scholarship and within disability arts and curatorial methodologies. Scholars and artists such as Moya Bailey, Christopher Bell, Nirmala Erevelles, Therí A. Pickens, and Sami Schalk have theorized at length on this topic. In this book, I have woven artwork by Indigenous,

Black, and brown artists into my analyses to show what intersectional access aesthetics looks, sounds, and feels like. These artists include the Lenape and Potawatomi neurodiverse artist Vanessa Dion Fletcher from Toronto (Chapter 1); the Oceanic artist Pelenakeke Brown, who resides in Aotearoa New Zealand (Chapter 2); the African American artist Shawanda Corbett (Chapter 3); the Indian disabled artist Sugandha Gupta, who is based in New York City (Chapter 4); and the Black disabled artist Carolyn Lazard (Conclusion). I do this work because politics of intersectional identity need to be sewn into the evolving schemata presented by disabled artists and curators so that access aesthetics does not remain white and in a silo. Lazard's work has a more emphatic role to play in the manuscript, because their praxis closes out the book in the Conclusion. Lazard's work showcases what an even more progressive model for access aesthetics may look and feel like in the future, and clearly others agree with my assertion, as the artist was awarded the highly prestigious 2023 MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship. In addition, Lazard's work has been informed by conceptual art of the 1960s, and while the artist is cautious about recuperating ideas by white male artists from the past, they also believe that conceptualism belongs to everyone and that "conceptualism and improvisation are black things."[35] Lazard's comments echo the links I make in this book; however, while I illustrate links between past and present practices as a means to show how contemporary disability art is deeply connected to art movements of the past, Lazard's thinking deepens this even further by adding the politics of race entwined with disability. Lazard not only expresses how disabled artists are always already connected to histories of conceptual art praxis but demands space especially for Black, brown, and Indigenous disabled artists, too.

In the past several decades, the disability community has found great allyship with the queer community, as both marginalized groups have come to recognize that they are joined by their supposed non-normativity, which relegates them to outlier status within society at large. While this book's scope means that queer, trans, and disabled positivity cannot be covered in great depth, I do want the reader to be aware of how important queer discourse, politics, and artistic praxis have become ingrained within access aesthetics. Disabled people of color, disabled queer people, and disabled queer people of color who initiated and set the stage for the disability justice movement—including, as mentioned earlier, Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Leroy Moore, and Leah Lakshi Piepzna-Samarasinha—have been vocal about how intersectional conversations on gender have also been absent. Sins Invalid (also mentioned earlier) has recognized this problem for decades within disability arts and culture and is founded on a mission to make space for Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color (BIPOC) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, inter-

sex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) voices and to recognize intersectionality within disability arts. Other disabled curators, such as Jessica Cooley and Ann Fox, have also noted this absence and attempted to offer more diverse representations in their exhibitions. Emerging disabled and disabled queer curators such as Ezra Benus, Taraneh Fazeli, Chella Man, and Iarlaith Ní Fheorais are paving the way for how effectively to eschew a more intersectional methodology for disabled curation that is simultaneously personal and political. The queer access ecologist DJ Who Girl (Kevin Gotkin) curates disability arts experiences through the mediums of sound, music, performance, and remote access parties and nightlife that offer progressive modes of intersectional, political, and aesthetic approaches to disability art praxis.

Given that one of the book's missions is to inscribe contemporary disability art in the canon of contemporary art in general, I also want to mention how important the intersectional scholarship of other art historians has been to my research and my thinking. While I aim to improve the diversity of my own offerings as a scholar and curator, I am nonetheless greatly affected by art historians and curators such as Julia Bryan-Wilson, Darby English, Jacqueline Francis, David Garneau, David Getsy, Jennifer Gonzalez, Candice Hopkins, Amelia Jones, Tirza Latimer, Gerald McMaster, Jordana Moore-Saggese, Derek Conrad Murray, Helena Reckitt, Maura Reilly, and Krista Thompson. These scholars offer in-depth analyses of art praxis by Black, brown, Indigenous, queer, and trans artists across the full range of contemporary mediums, including painting, sculpture, photography, works on paper, performance, installation, social practice, and video. All of them have also pointed out the absences in art history scholarship and within the canon at large regarding the representation of minority artists and minority subjects. The work in this book is always already affected and informed by these individuals, as they have provided templates and pathways for how work by minority identity artists can fruitfully be embedded in the broader contemporary art history discourse. My book is a reflection of their practices and these nodes of scholarship, and I hope that it joins their influential voices to cast a permanent place for disabled artists within this conversation.

Disability Art Theory

To begin a theoretical framing for the book, I rely on the concept of "complex embodiment," coined by late disability studies scholar Tobin Siebers in reaction to the limitations of the ideology of ability. He says: "Disability creates theories of embodiment more complex than the ideology of ability allows, and these many embodiments are each crucial to the understanding of hu-

manity and its variations, whether physical, mental, social, or historical. The ultimate purpose of complex embodiment as theory is to give disabled people greater knowledge of and control over their bodies in situations where increased knowledge and control are possible."[36] Complex embodiment can offer layers of inquiry and take us down an unconventional path, so that categories of difference, identity, and disadvantage in relationship to disability can no longer be essentialized. The perception and experience of disability is nuanced and contingent. *Complex embodiment* is a useful term because it resonates with the argument of this book regarding a call for a more nuanced understanding of our sensory selves. Indeed, the contemporary disabled artists reinforce Siebers's notion of complex embodiment through sharing complex experiences of the senses that demand recognition and exploration.

Robert McRuer's later conception of "crip theory" can be usefully applied within an art and art history context.[37] McRuer's crip theory looks at how disability and queerness inform each other through abject representations that are antithetical to so-called normality. Crip theory is more fluid and open-ended than the conventional medical and social models of disability because it allows for more variation and development of entirely new definitions of disability that don't need to conform to the boundedness of these categories. This open approach is applicable to this book because the artists and I are attempting to challenge and crip art history, offer an expansion of the senses, and develop more inclusive and accessible methods of display through agential exhibition design strategies. Crip theory is in alignment with this book's recognition of how the museum operates under systems that oppress disabled artists and audiences but often go unnoticed owing to ableism. Crip theory embraces one of the core methodologies of contemporary disability art—the tension between access and antagonism—as crip theory acknowledges that empowerment for disability oscillates between frustration and anger, on the one hand, and a desire to change and grow, on the other. Given that McRuer's crip theory encourages people to come out in the same vein as the queer history of coming out, where this agential self-identification helps to confront and break down ableism, my own coming-out process as a disabled person over the past ten years resonates with his call. Another powerful point that crip theory makes is around the need for collaborative work, coalition building, and forming community groups so that disabled allyship and identity can build and grow stronger. This connects with the disability justice movement, which advocates for this, too. In many instances in this book, the reader will observe that disabled artists are collaborating to build a new system of empowering strategies in the museum and gallery that meet their access needs and those of the disabled visitor.

The theoretical framework of disability materialism is also applicable to contemporary disability art in this book, rather than a disability studies tradition that is largely about exclusion and exposing human-made barriers. In the introduction to *The Matter of Disability: Materiality, Biopolitics, Crip Affect*, David Mitchell, Susan Antebi, and Sharon Snyder set up their argument with their belief that disability has an "ongoing potentiality to reshape the world."[38] Instead of fixing things gone awry, as we typically see in the medical model of disability, a "posthumanist disability approach provides an opportunity to encounter disability more viscerally as an active participant in the transhistorical, intraspecies, and cross-cultural interactions of materiality, sociality, structures, and environments."[39] As they say, disability is an active participant in meaning making, and it is not just about looking at disability through positive and affirming terms; it is more about how disability is evidence of embodiment's tendency to shift and unfold. Annmarie Mol explains that conditions of the body have agency and knowledge, too, beyond simply subjects.[40] Disability makes tangible for us how the body morphs into new rearrangements and new forms. In application to this book, *materialism* is taken to mean the reality of the enfleshed experiences of disability. Indeed, the artists in this book don't just offer the chance to see the body. They offer the chance to experience it, as well.

Contemporary disabled artists' methodology of access versus antagonism is also supported by useful concepts and theories in disability studies scholarship. I turn to theoretical supports for the "antagonism" component of the methodology first, which, I argue, is present in the artwork in much of this book. Most illuminating here is the groundbreaking thinking, again, of Mitchell and Snyder and their older but nonetheless still relevant scholarship around their concept of the "narrative prosthesis." Cited widely by many within the disability studies community (including me), this phrase "is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight."[41] The literary narratives that Mitchell and Snyder invoke all deploy the *deviant* disabled body. I'm interested in the "narrative prosthesis" here as theoretical framework in which, first, to position the "antagonistic" portion of the "access-versus-antagonism" binary. I'm suggesting that the deviant character deployed as a narrative prosthesis might be analogous to that of the agnostic nature of the contemporary disabled artists in this book. As Mitchell and Snyder discuss at great length, disabled characters are cast in literature, art, and film in antagonistic roles, and they argue that this is problematic and demeaning. In the context of this book, the contemporary artist as antagonist is empowered and playful and is not neces-

sarily taking on the same negative guises traced in historical representations across the humanities by Mitchell and Snyder. Also, within Mitchell and Snyder's conception, the antagonist role is inextricably tied to its representations, while in the context of this book, the antagonist is sensory and perhaps even invisible, given the move away from the figural. Is there power and trickery to be had in this invisibility (drawing on debates within disability studies that circles around the tension between visible and invisible disabilities)? Artists such as Carmen Papalia, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, push, extend, and complicate the deviant in the "narrative prosthesis" as I imply that the deviant in this context stems from a place of anger and frustration and a desire to have one literally walk with the disabled artist for a short time. Alas, being a deviant in Papalia's case also means being very witty!

Mitchell and Snyder's work has also been informed by the philosopher of phenomenology Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and phenomenology is an important philosophy that has much import in this book. Merleau-Ponty's work moved beyond empiricism and Cartesian dualities, such as mind and body or normal and abnormal; he developed a philosophy based on how knowledge is produced through bodily experience, emphasizing the "primacy of perception," embodied perception, and lived experience. This clearly resonates with disability studies. A pioneering and influential approach to phenomenology is how Sara Ahmed works with Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl to unpack and destabilize perceptions about queer orientations, a project that is similar to how I seek to find what is useful about disabled orientations. For Ahmed, typical orientations must be broken down, because, like Merleau-Ponty's behaviors, there are common internalized assumptions about how one is oriented in the world, specifically as it relates to sexual orientation—that is, heterosexual orientation is considered ostensibly normative, while queer orientation is not. Ahmed thus places importance on the knowledge to be gained from our queer orientations, given that the body comes to be defined by continually subscribing only to one form or type of orientation (that of the heterosexual). What Ahmed's work brings to bear in my discussion is that she not only talks about bodies as being informed and made up of our endowed, fuller spectrum of the senses; she also writes that "what gets near [our bodies] is both shaped by what bodies do, which in turn affects what bodies can do."[42] Bodies and their multisensorial contact with objects—whether a wall, a footpath, a blindfold, a walking cane, or a mound of debris—are integral parts of thinking and learning about the capacities of the body. Through the work discussed in this book, then, I demonstrate how the artists are presenting the body as a sponge, a surface, and a horizon of experience simultaneously in their engagements with objects.

Building on the phenomenology scholarship of Ahmed, the disability studies philosopher Thomas Abrams states: "We should question the kinds of bodies and modes of being together that have been taken as representative of the place of embodiment and intersubjectivity in the canon."[43] Abrams uses Ahmed as a jumping-off point in his goal to attend to "disablement as a mode of personhood that has deeper consequences for the phenomenological product itself."[44] Indeed, disability must be included if phenomenology is to be truly inclusive and representative of all varieties of humanity, and Abrams posits that we need to reorganize the canon of phenomenological philosophy itself. Abram's observations provide a powerful framework for the argument I pose in this book about how the phenomenology of the *sensory* disabled body is offering *particularized modalities* based on atypical conditions of bodily existence. I consider Merleau-Ponty and Ahmed more deeply in Chapter 4.

In turning to the "access" portion of disabled artists' methodology, *access intimacy* is a term that is most generative. Coined by the queer physically disabled writer, educator, and activist Mia Mingus in the essay "Access Intimacy" (2011), the term is defined as "the feeling of someone genuinely understanding and anticipating another person's access needs."[45] Access intimacy can be equated with "*liberatory* access rather than what we might call integrationist access. It demands collective attention to reshaping the norms, values, and beliefs structuring our world."[46] What is exciting and important about applying access intimacy to the artists' work is that it is also tied to the bourgeoning disability justice movement that fights ableism, as already discussed and applied to the work in this book. Those engaged in access intimacy work are in alignment with the principles of disability justice and are interested in world building and world making (and remaking). As Desiree Valentine states, "A radical conception of access goes beyond physical means and demands attention to the wealth of social, emotional, and mental diversities of ways to inhabit the world."[47] In other words, access intimacy means considering vulnerability and asymmetries of power in any relationship. This concept is not about fulfilling a check-box list of logistical needs that have to be met through a rights-based ADA model of disability accommodation and access. Rather, this intimacy must be garnered through "the development of individual and collective (re)orientations, ways of being responsive to our primary interdependence."[48] Access intimacy posited as an "orientation" makes it phenomenological, which also has powerful resonance with the subjugated knowledges that the contemporary disabled artists bring to bear on their work. Valentine astutely draws on Merleau-Ponty and his account of intimacy and the experience of the self in the world, which goes against the Cartesian model, quoting his observations of a sensory self rather than a self that is represented.[49]

Of course, these musings highlight and emphasize the argument I make in this book regarding the turn to the sensory, as distinct and separate from representation. Access intimacy wants—indeed, demands—that a phenomenological account of selves is fundamental to a wholly intersubjective and interdependent sensorial portrayal of disabled being in the world. Indeed, Valentine argues that such sociopolitical and epistemological orientations to the world are "practices of access themselves."[50] In saying all this, then, I'm now suggesting that the artwork that is foregrounded as more "welcoming" (i.e., accessible) in this book is building on the concept of access intimacy. Valentine states that access intimacy is a *practice*, which, of course, readily transfers to artistic practice.[51] The contemporary artists in this book practice by "sense-making," or creating individual artworks and immersive installations based on the lived experience of disability, and by taking on more complex and hybrid roles of exhibitions designers, curators and collaborators so that they literally rebuild and remake the world of the gallery and museum space.

Here I note that immersive installations and notions of the synesthetic encountered in the artwork in this book relate to affect and affect theory. Thus, "being with" disability also involves the mobilization of affect in multiple modes that might be considered both dialogic and antagonistic. The ideas that circle around affect theory involve how an artwork can have an affective or emotional impact on the audience member; immersive installations that also generate synesthetic encounters attempt to trigger or arouse emotions to instigate a transformative response in the person engaging with the work. Cristina Albu argues that more and more works of contemporary art intentionally enhance awareness of spectatorial space, and that within this space, we will have affective reactions that raise questions about the social fabric that we share and how we behave within that fabric. Installations such as these also "alert us to the critical need for reconsidering who we are, how we act, and what consequences our choices have on others."[52] I believe Albu's project has a direct connection to the work in this book, because while Albu does not explicitly reference contemporary disability art, she nonetheless points to a specific new development in contemporary art practice broadly that resonates with a full spectrum of artists who desire to create heightened awareness and changed perception in the museum visitor. Further, Albu identifies the tension and negotiation that takes place in contemporary art praxis around what she calls "reciprocity and antagonism" that is mirrored (her term) in the artwork discussed in my project. Albu also draws on the import of phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's philosophical framing, in addition to the recognition and assertion that art movements from the twentieth century, including the Dadaists, Futurists, and Duchamp, were the first to mold

artwork not only so that the focus was no longer on a contained and singular viewing experience, but also so that audiences became more aware of the act of perceiving and how the external environment affects those acts. Albu attempts to link these origins as part of a genealogy of participatory art and calls on Claire Bishop's and Grant Kester's scholarship to support her claims. She suggests that work by artists such as Olafur Eliason, Anish Kapoor, and Ken Lum, to name a few, provides "disorienting sensory experiences" that "casts doubt on visual perception and representation as it invites spectators to consider the ebb and flow of interpersonal dynamics."[53] My project extends on Albu's important theorizations to suggest that contemporary disability art has a very large role to play in these dynamics and that museums and audiences alike will benefit from hearing from them.

Chapter Overview

The book is organized into five chapters. In Chapters 1–4, I focus on ten artists, split into three to four artists per chapter. I examine how their artworks address and respond to particular issues around exclusionary practices regarding disabled experiences both inside and outside the museum. This includes the gaps in translation work using audio descriptions and captions, the possibilities and opportunities of de-centering vision and sensory aesthetics rarely considered for display in museums, what the realm of touch can actually reveal in the museum once it is fully sanctioned and uncensored, and movement through the gallery. These "issues" also happen to be the mediums that the artists use to demonstrate access as praxis—translation, sensory aesthetics, touch, and movement. In these four chapters, I keep the focus on art, combining to present a four-faceted case for contemporary disability art in the context of my argument for reform. Then, in Chapter 5, I analyze numerous exhibitions designed and curated by contemporary disabled artists to demonstrate a broader framework for responding to exclusion in the museum. I also suggest that exhibition design is a medium that the artists use alongside translation, sensory aesthetics, movement, and touch.

Overall, I spend much time analyzing and discussing artwork, which reveals my underlying curatorial sensibility. However, I also attempt to give broad-strokes historical and theoretical background within each of the chapters to provide context and to link the work of conceptual art with contemporary disability art in high-impact and enlightening ways. I do want to make the reader aware of another tension: how challenging it is for me to take an arm's length (and so more critical) approach to the artists giving readers insight into their practices, thanks to the relationships I do have with them. While I

understand criticality is important to achieve a balanced argument, ultimately the goal of my analyses is to show how contemporary disabled artists are finding innovative ways to explore access aesthetics; this, in turn, may affect how museums move forward with revising the spectator experience.

Contemporary disability art is actually an heir to many of the most influential art movements that still resonate with many contemporary artists today. Much of the material I include in the chapters is acquired from years of in-depth interviews with the artists, intertwined with my own reflections on exhibitions I have curated over ten years. This means that I will be examining older works in the book that make the most sense for the sets of arguments I'm presenting. While I do also address current works by artists, especially in Chapter 5 and the Conclusion, more recent works by my selected artists will likely come up in a future study, both of my own and other scholars. I also want to acknowledge that my theorization of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the primary sources of this book—namely, the contemporary art and its attending practices in translation, sensory aesthetics, touch, and movement—is based on materials that are still very much evolving and transforming into recognized and transformative fields. In each chapter, the reader will notice that I consistently mention the limited and still growing scholarship in each of the overarching themes. While it is challenging to write on subject matter against a backdrop of nascent scholarly literature, I also recognize that this field-building work must find a way into readers' hands, stumps, and minds. I hope that my contribution will be of use and value among the dynamic new scholarship on contemporary disability art, access aesthetics, and institutional critique blooming around me with great momentum as I write this book.

In more detail, Chapter 1 argues that the contemporary disabled artists Carmen Papalia, Christine Sun Kim, and Vanessa Dion Fletcher are engaged in using audio description, captions, and the language of Indigenous quillwork as subject matter for their praxis. Through this work, artists comment on the experience of translation for disabled and Indigenous people, including those who are blind, low vision, deaf, or hard of hearing or have learning disabilities. The artists offer their own versions of an enriched language in the process, which can be used by museums as a more inclusionary way to engage with a greater variety of audiences.

Chapter 2 considers how the contemporary disabled artists Carmen Papalia, Alison O'Daniel, and Pelenakeke Brown are shaping a new type of sensory aesthetics as another modality for museums to embrace to include disabled audiences. This sensory aesthetics literally helps to redefine the hierarchy of the senses, and the work shows how much more we can learn about

sensory information by taking unconventional sensory pathways. This brings us closer to the experience of being with disability while simultaneously experiencing an aesthetics of tension.

Chapter 3 argues that movement actually generates new information in which the definitions and contours of the sensorium can expand even further in the museum, through the work of Corban Walker and Shawanda Corbett. Disabled knowledge also offers spatial awareness in forms that are as antagonistic as they are guiding. Movement is captured by how one's body moves through space as a spectator and participant to gain awareness of how bodies can and do move differently, but movement has broader definitions, too.

In Chapter 4, I go more deeply into sensory aesthetics by focusing solely on touch. I discuss how touch needs to be encouraged in the museum and carefully thought through, instead of routinely prohibited. Fayen d'Evie and Sugandha Gupta use the generative experience of blindness and albinism, and Wendy Jacob uses the generative notion of deaf gain, to create new patterns of vibration through the permission to touch, contributing to revised sensory knowledge. The artists are charting new territory in their radical conceptual approach to "haptic activism" in a bid to reorganize museum practices, and to benefit a wider range of audiences, especially low-vision and blind visitors and deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors.

In Chapter 5 I turn to an examination of exhibitions curated and designed by contemporary disabled artists that develop clever way-finding practices and conceptual concerns that upend traditional spectatorship experiences in the museum. In doing so, these unusual tactics offer the audience an increased awareness and re-sensitization of disabled embodiment and politics. Ultimately, I argue that exhibition design is, and must be, artist-led, given that it is the contemporary disabled artist who is the expert in the simultaneous comfort and discomfort of the gallery visitor. This chapter also reveals that oftentimes much of this work in exhibition design and curatorship is executed as community-based collaborations.

In the Conclusion I remind the reader how my own literal institutional placement has made me profoundly oriented to the critique these artists perform. The political interventions I seek to make in the museum and gallery are, to use the language of access intimacy, world building, but they are also field building. The sensorial evolution and the tensions that I trace in contemporary disability art throughout this book are what excite me the most, and these are the reasons I wanted to write this book.