A RHETORIC OF TOUCH:
DISABILITY AND THE RESHAPING OF RHETORICAL BODIES

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by
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Abstract

In “A Rhetoric of Touch,” I ask how rhetorical and composition studies can value the contributions of contemporary writers with disabilities. I trace a trend of tactile rhetorics among today’s disabled rhetors, such as Temple Grandin, Nancy Mairs, Dawn Prince-Hughes and Eli Clare, all of whom use the sense of touch in order to enable rhetorical production. After exploring the dominant tradition’s discomfort with touch and disability, I show that disability is actually integral to the shaping of the able orator. Theories from disability studies regarding how the disabled body has been medicalized, rehabilitated, and normalized illuminate how rhetoric and rhetorical bodies have been similarly treated by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian.

As an alternative to this tradition, I redefine the sophistic concepts of *logos*, *metis*, and *kairos* as tactile rhetorics, arguing that these flexible practices can reshape rhetoric for a wide range of rhetors. I draw on Empedocles’ theories of fleshy *logos* and integrate current writing by people with disabilities to redefine *logos* as multi *logos*. Similarly, I blend sophistic theories and disabled rhetorics to redefine *metis* as tactile intelligence (rather than cunning intelligence) and *kairos* as tactile timing (rather than simple timing). I construct a theory of “rhetoric reshaped” which stretches contemporary rhetoric and composition studies to respond to the needs and contributions of disabled rhetors. Rhetoric reshaped transforms the traditional rhetorical appeals of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* and the traditional canons of invention, arrangement, style, delivery and memory, for a range of rhetorical situations. I coordinate between neo-sophistic studies, feminist rhetorics and disability studies to explore the possibilities disabled rhetors offer to contemporary rhetorical and composition studies.
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Introduction: Untangling Disability, Rhetoric and Touch

Touch represents a confirmation of our boundaries and separateness while permitting a union or connection with others that transcends physical limits. For this reason, of all the communication channels, touch is the most carefully guarded and monitored, the most infrequently used, yet the most powerful and immediate (S. Thayer Book of Touch 18).

In one of the most well-known scenes of disability in recent history, Helen Keller, a deaf-blind young girl who had previously been deemed unruly, retarded and uneducable, experiences a communication breakthrough with her teacher Annie Sullivan, when she makes the miraculous connection between the letters that Sullivan signs into her hand and the feeling of cool water running over her hand from a pump. In her autobiography, The Story of My Life, Keller describes her experience:

As the cool stream gushed over one hand [Miss Sullivan] spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that ‘w-a-t-e-r’ meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away. (35)

Despite the fact that this scene, immortalized repeatedly on stage and on film in The Miracle Worker, is probably one of the most wide recognized and recalled scenes of disability in the United States, it points to gaps in knowledge, research and scholarship in the two main disciplines it so interestingly weaves together. The fields of rhetoric and composition and
disability studies have yet to fully explore the sense of touch, poignantly immortalized in Keller’s introduction into symbolic language, but noticeably absent from studies of language and disability. Touch becomes the main way in which Keller learns the world, as she writes, “I did nothing but explore with my hands and learn the name of every object I touched; and the more I handled things and learned their names and uses, the more joyous and confident grew my sense of kinship with the rest of the world” (36).

Despite her growing sense of confidence with language, Keller was prone to attacks on the credibility and authenticity of her character as a rhetor. Keller wrote her autobiography in collaboration with her teacher, Annie Sullivan, to whom she was extremely close, and Sullivan’s husband, John Macy. Charges of plagiarism and doubts regarding the authenticity of her work followed her throughout much of her life. People doubted her as a rhetor, questioned the credibility of her ethos, and were skeptical of her abilities. They suspected that others were contributing too much to her rhetorical success. As Keller’s example indicates, rhetoric produced in close connections, especially physical, embodied collaboration, elicits anxieties regarding authorship and authenticity. For this reason and others I will explore in the following chapters, touch has been ignored and denigrated in rhetorical studies because the sense of touch disturbs basic assumptions regarding the status of the ideal or able rhetor. Touch calls into question the accepted model of the ideal orator shaped by the rhetorical tradition, who creates communication independently, ably, and without messy interconnections between bodies. Touch disturbs the boundaries of bodies and of rhetoric.

Although both rhetorical studies and theoretical studies of disability have largely ignored the sense of touch, a trend exists among contemporary writers with disabilities who use touch to enable communication, which I term “a rhetoric of touch,” or as “tactile rhetorics.” The kinship
that Keller describes through touch inaugurates us into an underappreciated but valuable nexus of rhetorical strategies shared among a variety of disabled rhetors. The following chapters work towards identifying the sense of touch as a rhetorical strategy among people with disabilities, and recovering a rhetorical history and theory for appreciating these contributions. Beginning to revalue the sense of touch in rhetoric and in the rhetorical production of people with disabilities requires three steps. In this introduction, first I identify in broad strokes the multiple ways in which disabled rhetors today are using the sense of touch in their rhetorics, then I explore the suspicion of touch and its relation to disability in the rhetorical tradition, and finally I suggest how to reshape rhetoric to accommodate the variously embodied and minded practices of disabled rhetors who use tactile rhetorics by outlining the chapters of “A Rhetoric of Touch.”

The Trend of Tactile Rhetorics among Disabled Rhetors

From popular autobiographies, Oscar-nominated films and national best-sellers to science writing, technical communication and interdisciplinary academic writing, people with disabilities are writing and communicating on their own and in contexts of collaboration in ways that are increasing their visibility in many genres, disciplines and contexts.1 Because of new communication technologies—from ones as mundane as the internet to others as specialized as assistive technologies, people with disabilities are showing that they are capable not only of fulfilling traditional expectations of rhetorical competence, but also that they are uniquely positioned to invent new ways of producing rhetoric. Although the next chapter will explore the connections between rhetoric and disability more fully, for now I call attention to the

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1 Popular autobiographies include Temple Grandin’s Emergence: Labeled Autistic and Thinking in Pictures, or Nancy Mairs’ reasonably well-known Waist High in the World and Jean-Dominique Bauby’s best-selling The Diving Bell and the Butterfly to name a few. A recent Oscar-nominated film, Autism is a World, garnered attention as well. In interdisciplinary science and technical writing, Temple Grandin and Dawn Prince-Hughes, both women with autism who hybridize academic and popular genres, have received attention from media.
communicative competencies and innovations that people with disabilities are making by
terming them disabled rhetors, an assignment that resists a tradition of excluding the disabled
from rhetoric.2

In naming a “rhetoric of touch,” I identify a productive trend among contemporary
disabled rhetors who demonstrate rhetorical strategies based on touch. People with disabilities,
especially those whose physical and cognitive disabilities affect their rhetorical capacities, often
occupy unique positionalities that invite them to find novel, inventive ways of achieving
rhetoricity and communicative competence. People with disabilities often live their everyday
lives in close contact, interconnection and interdependence with other bodies, an experience that
shapes their rhetorics. What I identify as rhetorics of touch are rhetorical strategies by which
people with disabilities come into physical contact with other bodies and environments to enact
rhetorical production. Although I focus on physical and material intersections of bodies in
rhetorical production, these rhetorical strategies also contain connections between literal touch
and figurative, metaphorical, and even emotional touch. A collection of some of the first widely
published writings by people with disabilities, called The Ragged Edge, indicates how the sense
of touch binds people with disabilities together but often creates friction with dominant
traditions, such as rhetorical and writing traditions. Editor Barratt Shaw writes:

It is hard to unravel the tangled, knotted ball of the disability experience—isol ation and
differentness versus a common identity . . . learned helplessness versus defiance,

willingness to make waves and change the status quo; pity, destroying dignity, and its

2 Like any label, “disabled rhetors” necessarily does not do justice to the wide variety of people with disabilities who
produce rhetoric. It does, however, attempt to name the efforts of a group of people with disabilities who achieve
rhetorical competence and innovation; it also makes an argument for more comprehensively including disability in
rhetoric—its tradition, practice and theories.
other side, fear, fear of our differentness, our “imperfection,” as if perfection were humanly achievable, and then our own fear, raw fear of attitudes that would destroy our kind. . . . This book attempts to weave a rough but strong cloth from these gnarled strands, to give the feel of the disability experience. (xii)

This rough description of the disability experience feels much like the driving questions that have worried rhetorical studies from its onset: how to establish a trustworthy ethos or identity, how to create common ground among diversities of audiences and rhetors, how to manage the emotional appeals of pathos (pity) and ethos (dignity), how to achieve excellence in rhetoric and other pursuits, and how to instigate social change. The feel of the disability experience, this ragged edge, is for Shaw and other writers “a good image for the way people with disabilities live, at a rough and often raveling interface with the rest of society” (xii). The texture of the ragged edge is not only an image, but also the experience of people with disabilities in rhetoric, as their efforts both chafe against and transform the rhetorical tradition.

In the examples below in this and the following chapters, I demonstrate that a strategy of touch-based rhetorical production is a means of persuasion that exists among some of today’s most well-known rhetors with disabilities, such as Temple Grandin, and even among a cadre of lesser-known rhetors. Tactile rhetorics are rhetorical strategies rooted in diverse bodily knowledges developed by disabled rhetors and their interactions with a wide variety of bodies. When disabled rhetors use touch as a rhetorical strategy to enable rhetorical production, they enact a cognitive and embodied rhetoric that literally positions different bodies in contact with each other in productive ways.³

³ I take the cue of many body studies and deny the mind-body split, positing that the body is always minded and cognition is always embodied. In some cases, I may focus more on physical or cognitive disability to be attentive to
Temple Grandin, the author of several bestsellers and dozens of scientific articles, is a well-known disabled rhetor who almost always co-writes with a collaborator. As an animal scientist and a person with autism, Grandin writes about how her experience with disability has influenced her life, her writing and her career. Although Grandin explains that she “thinks in pictures” and is a visual processor who often needs the assistance of a co-writer to organize her ideas, the sense of touch also figures prominently in her composition process. She explains that particularly because of the sensory problems with touch that accompany autism, she learned how to manage her senses differently, with strategies that I argue enable her rhetorical production.

After spending a summer on her aunt’s farm, for example, and observing the workings of a V-shaped pressurized cattle chute used to hold animals and keep calves calmly in place for vaccinations, Grandin tries the machine herself, finding its gentle pressure relaxing enough to help her manage her anxiety, allowing her to cope with many of her sensory problems. The squeeze machine also results in Grandin’s increasing rhetorical and career success. She writes, “When I was in the chute, I felt closer to people. . . . [A]lthough [it] was just a mechanical device, it broke through my barrier of tactile defensiveness . . . and I was able to express my feelings about myself and others” (Emergence 96). Although her doctors are skeptical, Grandin credits the therapy of the squeeze chute with her burgeoning self expression and academic success, as she uses it as an incentive for getting homework done. Grandin’s increased ability to express herself results in rhetorical success as well; she is chosen to give a commencement speech at her graduation. In college, Grandin becomes interested in pursuing scientific studies, new research and article writing on animals and design. She writes that “in college I was making

the real material differences between certain disabilities, but I always keep in mind (as do most disabled rhetors) that the body always already includes multiple and diverse ways of knowing.
great strides in communicating with people. I attributed this ‘break-through’ in getting along better with people to my maligned squeeze machine” (104).

Upon reflection, Grandin realizes the power of the machine’s touch, writing in a diary entry, “The squeeze chute gives me the feeling of being held, cuddled, and gently cradled. . . . This is hard to write down. Writing it down is a form of accepting the feeling” (105). In the challenging practice of putting into words her own understanding of writing as a form of acceptance, Grandin links her rhetorical production with her learned regulation of her sense of touch, uniting her expression, emotion, rhetoric and body productively. Although she claims she thinks “in pictures,” has “a cow’s eye view of the world,” it is primarily through touch that she achieves career and rhetorical success. She uses her sensitivities to cattle’s visual, tactile and other sensory perception systems, for example, to design the circular-shaped humane slaughter systems that enable the cattle to touch each other as in the handling process, a design in use in over half of the United States’ animal handling facilities. Furthermore, in her rhetorical success, including numerous best sellers, she demonstrates alterative and valuable methods of composing in relation to her environment and other bodies.

Another scientist with autism, anthropologist Dawn Prince-Hughes exhibits a similar rhetorical strategy based on touch. As a teenage runaway, Hughes, not yet diagnosed with autism, struggles to find her place in the world, understand her difference, and make connections in a seemingly alien world. She spends her days as a runaway watching the gorillas in a local zoo, and eventually comes to understand her disability based on her observations and then her physical contacts with the gorillas. By watching the gorillas, she learns social cues that clue her into making connections with other people. Observing gorillas, she learns of the social contexts in which people make meaning, establish connections, communicate individually and
collaboratively, and create communities. Honing these skills eventually leads her to pursue a PhD in interdisciplinary anthropology, start her own family, and write about communities of autism in two well-received books. Before observing and interacting with the gorillas, Hughes describes her autism often as a glass barrier between her and the rest of the world. She writes, “I knew the glass was moving when a gorilla touched me. A gorilla touched me, and I connected to a living person as I had never before” (4-5). Although she, like Grandin, emphasizes her visual processing in her observing of the gorillas, it is more through the sense of touch that Hughes achieves a new connection. In fact, in her repetition about the touch she shares with a gorilla, she draws attention to a story of transformation that poignantly opens her memoir.

As a zoo aid, while charged with the task of feeding strawberries to Congo, a five hundred pound male silverback gorilla, she sets the scene of this transformative touch. Although the keeper shows Prince-Hughes how to carefully lay out strawberries, keeping her hands back so that Congo does not grab her fingers, contact occurs because Congo eats up the berries as fast as she lays them down in between the bars.

And then, in an instant, it happened. We put our fingers down at the same time. His gigantic finger, black and leathery, soft and warm, rested on my digit. We stared at our fingers, and neither of us moved. Finally, I looked up into his soft brown eyes. They were dancing in surprise. We stayed like that for what seemed like a long time, our fingers joining five million years of evolution and reaching out to bridge the gap of generations traveled. He leaned forward slowly until he was six inches from my face. I could feel his breath. His steady eyes peered into my soul, and he did not blink. I leaned forward and
rested my forehead on the bars. Our faces were almost touching. We stared at each other, our fingers still together.

I relaxed into his touch and his nearness. *This is what it is, I thought.* *This is what it means to love and be loved. This is what it is to touch and to look another person and feel its meaning. This is what it is to not be alone in the vastness of the space we hurtle through among the coldness and the dying. This is what it is to live,* I thought. (6)

In this opening scene, Hughes introduces herself in her writing and in her world. The sense of touch, as it connects her first to the gorillas and then eventually to her work, to her new family and to building an autistic community, functions largely in her “emergence” (3) as an autistic person with an autistic identity. The sense of touch offers a powerful and poignant impression with which to open her personal narrative, as it provides a way in for her to realize life, love, meaning and connection. By connecting with Congo, she begins a process of re-connecting with the humans in her life and work.

As Keller’s touch-based education points out, and as I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation, a wide range of disabled rhetors—blind, deaf, autistic and physical impaired—use touch to produce rhetoric. John Hull, a blind man who keeps a regular journal, describes how his sense of touch structures his body, speech and writing differently. Waking to a loud rainstorm, Hull presses his forehead to the glass and writes:

> My body is similarly made up of many patterns, many different regularities and irregularities, extended in space from down there to up here. . . Instead of having an
image of my body, as being in what we call the ‘human form’, I apprehend it now as these arrangements of sensitivities, a conscious space comparable to the patterns of the falling rain. . . . My body and the rain intermingle, and become one audio-tactile, three-dimensional, universe, within which and throughout the whole of which lies my awareness. This is in sharp contrast to the single-track of consecutive speech that makes up my thoughts. This line of thought expressed in speech is not extended in space at all, but comes towards me like carriages in a goods train, one after the other, coming out of the darkness, passing under the floodlight of knowledge, and receding into memory.

(324-325)

Hull contrasts his audio-tactile, embodied experience with rain, which he expresses as three-dimensional “arrangements of sensitivities” opposed to the typical limits of the inflexible “single-track” of consecutive speech. In a later journal entry, he writes of the change that tactile experiences bring to him, explaining, “it is many months since I began to appreciate the illumination and sense of real knowledge that comes through touch” (326). He relates multisensory strategies as he explains the process of “developing the art of gazing with my hands” (326). He explains that “[w]eight, texture and shape, temperature and the sounds things make, these are what I look for now” (327), a transformation that is evidenced in the more descriptive tone his journal entries take once he learns the language of touch, as he spends paragraphs luxuriating over the feel of a velvet bag and a stone owl figurine.

As Hull’s language of touch indicates, in some instances the tactile strategies of disabled rhetors explicitly acknowledge the sense of touch. Although Grandin, Hughes and others acknowledge touch tangentially in their rhetorics, other disabled rhetors, particularly those who
use facilitated communication (FC), employ touch as a crucial part of rhetorical production. FC is usually defined as some form of a system involving a picture board, speech synthesizer or keyboard that a non-communicative or semi-communicative disabled person manipulates by hand or via the touch of a facilitator, a trained specialist who provides wrist, arm or shoulder support. In his memoir of adopting an autistic boy named DJ, Ralph James Savarese establishes the importance the sense of touch to his relationship with his son even before he learns a modified form of FC:

The first time I met the three-year-old boy who would become my son we butted heads. Without any eye contact at all, without any animosity, without anything that could be construed as emotion, he took me by the second finger on my right hand to the couch in the family room, waited for me to sit down, sat down himself, and then brought our two skulls swiftly together. Emily, who was standing in the doorway, was a surprised as I—surprised that he’d even registered my presence, let alone that he’d approached me, doubly surprised the encounter was so intimate, so physical, so literally heady. . . .This version of embrace—our two foreheads joined by the pressure of his tiny hands—left me dazed. . . . For twenty minutes we stayed that way: two bighorn sheep fallen asleep in play or combat. (31)

DJ, previously labeled as an untouchable child who struggles to make physical, emotional or communicative connections with others, evinces an attachment to Savarese with hand-holding and a “heady embrace.” This physical connection structures DJ’s entry into language, his integration into a new family and his continued interdependence between himself and his support
network. Emily, Savarese’s wife, becomes DJ’s primary facilitator when he learns a modified and individualized form of FC, which includes picture boards, hand-over-hand writing, and a simple finger holding while typing. As he learns language through FC, DJ is enabled to tell a horrific story of physical and sexual abuse that he suffered while in foster care. He also exhibits aggression towards Emily, as they collaborate in a touch-based language system that puts DJ on a path of painful recovery regarding past abuse. As they attempt to decipher DJ’s associative thought processes in language, the Savareses notice that the concept of “poking” resurfaces often in DJ’s communication, often referring in general to anything he dislikes. As DJ begins to narrate his past more deftly with his growing language and FC skills, his parents see that poking, in addition to being a metaphor, also refers to the sexual abuse DJ suffered at the hands of an older foster child, a literal transgression of bodily boundaries. Physicality, good and bad touch, and language are intimately intertwined for DJ, as he not only learns language productively through his body, but also learns to put to words past sexual abuse. Touch, through FC, is how DJ enters into language, but it was also how he receded from language, in his reaction to horrific abuse. Not surprisingly, this paradoxical relationship to touch surfaces in DJ’s FC-typed dialogue with Emily:

“Do you sometimes feel your body and sometimes not?”

“yesbn”

“Do you feel your body better when you touch someone or someone touches you?”

“yes’

“Is that part of why you like to hold on to someone’s finger when you type of point?”

“yes.” (17)
With Emily’s prompting, DJ reveals a common challenge for people with autism: difficulty with prioperception, the brain’s ability to locate the physical body in relation to space, the environment, and other people. Touching seems to work for DJ, as it does for number of other people with autism and other disabilities, because a facilitator’s touch focuses the body’s placement in relation to the environment and keyboard. The exchange that directly follows, however, demonstrates that touch and language are not so simply connected for DJ.

“i killedb you,” DJ replied . . .

“You killed me?” Emily asked.

“i plitted toi kiol [plotted to kill]”

“Why?”

“you hurth njust by talking,” he explained.

“What do you mean? I hurt your feelings just by having a conversation with you?”

“yes because you try to make me free hurt.” (276)

The only two people DJ talks about killing, or becoming free from, are Emily, his mother-facilitator, and Kyle, his sexual abuser. Touch, both in its healthful and harmful iterations, is still being sorted out in DJ’s young mind, as he enters into language. He feels he must kill Kyle, as he often types, “to be free;” but he also feels he must free himself from any hands, including a facilitator’s, that attempt to author him, shape him, or direct him. A poem written by DJ, around the time of the revelation of his sexual abuse, puts these conflicting emotions into perspective, with the multiple bodies involved in his struggle. Comparing himself to a tree, he describes
“branches that try to yearn freedom but they fear it./ trying to get freed point out their great/ hurt
yearning long, long branches that live/ forever then they have to let go/ your hand trying to go”
(279). Like other disabled rhetors I will investigate, DJ uses environmental metaphors in order to
express his troubled tactile relationship to communication. His relationship to rhetoric and touch
is tied up in the helpful and harmful ways he has been touched; his hands are like tree branches
reaching for freedom, attempting to break free from facilitation and past hurt. But DJ also finds
productive meaning in touch and rhetoric, as Savarese suggests with his portrayal of his and his
sons’ locked heads, as sleepy, quiet sheep and in his facilitation with Emily. Tickling, in fact,
becomes their most reliable form of communication before DJ acquires words. In his own form
of individuated FC, DJ works with the messy constructions of language in touch with the hard
realities of achieving psychological, physical and rhetorical independence from the things that
hold him down.

DJ’s complicated relationship to the sense of touch in his communication gestures toward
the larger controversy involving FC and the broader questions this controversy raises regarding
the sense of touch in rhetoric and composition. FC, which I have defined as a method of
communication usually involving a person with a disability, assistive technology and a trained
facilitator, in which the facilitator provides physical support to the communicator, first came to
attention in the 1990s. First celebrated as a breakthrough and then maligned as a hoax, FC
crystallizes the suspicions surrounding touch in rhetoric. Although the technique is controversial
and studies on both sides of the debate present evidence to support opposing conclusions, FC as
a technology offers a useful way of beginning to think about the diverse, tactile and collaborative
ways in which rhetoric is produced and the difficulties touch poses to the dominant rhetorical
tradition. Rosemary Crossley (1997) and Douglas Biklen (1993; 1997) have carried out extensive
studies of FC, which is at its basic form a method of providing physical support to uncommunicative or semi-communicative people with disabilities, often people with autism, Down Syndrome, or other cognitive-physical disabilities. Since many people with disabilities exhibit physical symptoms such as tremoring, difficulty with finger isolation, perseveration, and proprioceptive awareness problems that make it difficult to write, type, or even sign, providing physical support is one means of enabling their communication. Critics of FC claim that there is a “ouija board” effect in which the facilitator, through touch, unconsciously or consciously moves the hand of the communicator. Skepticism toward FC, although it has yet to be theorized specifically by rhetorical studies, brings into focus key questions in rhetoric: how can rhetorical and composition studies appreciate the rhetorical production of non-normative rhetors, or communication produced by bodies in contact and outside of the mold of the single, independent, self-contained rhetor? How can rhetoric adjust notions of the authorial integrity and credibility of a non-normative rhetor’s ethos? Most importantly, the controversy of FC raises questions regarding the place in rhetorical production not only of the body but also of bodies in contact.

Although the sense of touch has not been studied extensively in FC or even in other fields, supporters of FC such as Savarese and Biklen argue for remaining open-minded about the method, an argument I apply to a wider range of tactile rhetorics. Biklen argues for assuming competence rather than taking a position of suspicion or doubt regarding the products of FC. Savarese sums up the outlook of presuming competence as crucial for two reasons: “1) there’s so much we don’t know about why FC does and doesn’t work and 2) before coming to a definitive

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4 A scathing Frontline documentary did much to discredit the technique as did its unfortunate conflation with child sex abuse cases in the 1990s. Some children, like DJ, were abused at the hands of caretakers, and there are some cases of fraudulent FC; but evidence from other sources such as Biklen and Crossely situates FC as a complex but usually generative and healing method of language acquisition. Although I cannot do justice to the entirety of the FC debate, I take its main points as invitations to consider the larger and equally complex questions regarding the sense of touch in rhetorical production.
conclusion about its efficacy, people ought to give the technique a sustained try” (xxiv-xxv).

Speculating on the efficacy of tactile therapy, Savarese writes, “All of us, I would say, whether disabled or not, are dying to be touched; it’s hard to quantify the benefits of such touching, though the work of Stanley Greenspan and others, [Marilyn] Chadwick contends . . . reveals the extent to which learning in young children is driven by feeling” (269). He continues, explaining, “My own experience head-butting with DJ, then wrestling and tickling with him, seems to confirm the efficacy of such an approach . . . [M]ight FC be an extension of this principle?” (269).

“A Rhetoric of Touch” takes touch in general as an extension of FC and contributes to revaluing the sense of touch in rhetorical production. As the examples from Grandin, Hull, Hughes and DJ all demonstrate, people with disabilities use touch as a valuable strategy for producing rhetoric. Grandin uses touch to manage her own personal sensory difficulties, a strategy that enables rhetorical success in her life writing and her career as an agricultural designer. For Hughes, a touch inspires her to form familial connections and connections among people in a community of autistic writers, which she calls a “culture of one,” preserving connection and individuality. Hull employs touch in order to re-conceptualize the form of his body in the world, and reaps benefits in his experiences and descriptions in writing. DJ develops a more complicated connection to touch in his burgeoning rhetorical prowess, as he uses a healing tactile method of communication to tell a story about abusive touch. Uniting each of these rhetors is a sense of what is at stake in the connections between language and touch: negotiations between agency and dependency, isolation and connection, and independence and interdependence.
Disability and Touch in the Dominant Rhetorical Tradition

The controversy surrounding FC and the suspicions that followed Keller’s writing encapsulate several key anxieties that swirl around questions of rhetoric and the body that have been percolating since the beginning of the rhetorical tradition. Most often rhetors who use FC are attacked on the basis of authenticity and authorial integrity because rhetoric has narrowly defined the status of the rhetor and ethos formation as a single person untouched by outside influence. The debate surrounding FC points to larger and more historically rooted doubts surrounding non-standard communication styles and the disabled body and bodies in general as a site of rhetorical production. From ancient times, persuasion was directly identified with the physicality of the body, including touch, in its representation in Peitho, the goddess of seduction and persuasion. As an attendant of Aphrodite, Pietho was associated with beauty and persuasion, as she was associated with Greek suitors who negotiated for women’s hands in marriage with their fathers for competitive bride prices. Gorgias explored the association between seduction, physical force and persuasion in the story of Helen and her relations with Paris. He likened the power of persuasion to a type of touch in the form of physical force that can bend audiences’ minds and bodies. Plato, and to some extent, Aristotle, railed against rhetoric’s connections to the body, especially connecting seduction and persuasion. Plato condemns rhetoric for its association with the body in general but in particular to its effect on the body, comparing it to “counterfeit” arts, such as cosmetics. Platonic and Aristotelian definitions of rhetoric that rest on the ambivalent place of the body in rhetoric persist today. Routinely, disabled rhetors who use FC are “believed” more readily as they depend on less physical contact by facilitators. The physicality of rhetoric, often materialized in touch, poses problems for a tradition that is uncomfortable not only with the body but with rhetoric’s effect on bodies.
Although touch is clearly a generative rhetorical strategy for a number of disabled rhetors, the rhetorical tradition chafes against the sense of touch in rhetorical production as much as it resists the embodiment of disabled rhetors. The dominant tradition, which is uncomfortable with the body in general, demonstrates particular discomfort with disabled bodies and the sense of touch. Traditional rhetoric denigrates touch, is suspicious of it, or uses a sense of touch or shaping to narrowly mold able rhetorical bodies that exclude the contributions of disabled rhetors. The Roman rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian, who synthesize the ancients and add their own requirements, sum up the friction between disability and rhetoric. The “gifts of nature” that Cicero requires of the orator are all able-bodied characteristics: “the ready tongue, ringing tones, strong lungs, suitable build and shape of the face and body as a whole” (305). Already seemingly built into the mind and body is a narrow mold of ideal abilities. Ironically, just as integral to the ideal orator, however, is disability. Cicero determines the ideal orator directly in relation to the disabled orator, using the counter-example that “there are some men either so tongue-tied, or so discordant in tone, or so wild and boorish in feature and gesture, that, even though sound in talent and in art, they cannot enter the ranks of the orators” (305). Cicero constructs the ideal, able orator directly in relation to the disabled orator. Disability is the raw material with which and against which the rhetorical tradition shapes its rhetors.

As I suggest in this introduction and argue in the following chapters, disability is not as marginal a consideration to the rhetorical tradition as it seems, but is instead centrally related to the foundations of rhetoric, particularly the literal and figurative shaping of rhetorical bodies. Recognition of the deeply co-constitutive relationship between disability and rhetoric, often materialized in the sense of touch, can be a crucial wedge for addressing the exclusions of the rhetorical tradition and for including a wider range of rhetors in rhetorical studies today. The
understanding of the ideal orator as a narrowly able orator is firmly entrenched in the tradition, identifying a narrow form of exclusively ableist rhetoric as the only form of rhetoric, forming at least two exclusions. First, people with disabilities are excluded from rhetoricity, when they clearly demonstrate competence. Second, a narrowly ableist mold of the ideal orator also whittles down the available rhetorical strategies of all rhetors, along degrees of abilities and disabilities. Often times, this exclusion carries with it an exclusion of the diverse means of persuasion that disabled rhetors bring to rhetorical situations, such as the tactile strategies we have investigated above.

Despite the fact that the sense of touch is often a generative strategy for rhetorical production by disabled rhetors, the rhetorical tradition does not, as it is usually interpreted, support or value contributions that disabled rhetors presently enact. Stretching the rhetorical tradition and rhetorical studies today for disabled rhetors involves first tracking how touch has been denied and deployed in the tradition. This reveals how the dominant tradition has structured definitions of rhetoric and definitions of who can and cannot be considered rhetorical bodies. Next, stretching the tradition involves exploring alternatives, in order to reshape rhetoric for disabled and diversely abled rhetors. It is my argument that a history, theory and practice of touch exists in the sophistic tradition, and that recovering these elements can support the tactile strategies of a range of disabled and variously abled rhetors. Taking the sophistic studies as a crucial contributor, this reshaping of rhetoric draws from the insights of three related fields.

**Disability Studies**

Insights from the theories and activism of disability studies, in particular the writing of disabled rhetors, is the most effective way of reshaping rhetoric for disability. Important work by Brenda
Brueggemann (1999), James Wilson (2001), Cynthia Lewiecki Wilson (2001), Catherine Prendergast (2001), Rob McRuer (2004), and recently Jay Dolmage (2006) is beginning the conversation between disability and rhetorical studies, but more inquiry is needed that focuses on the embodied process of rhetorical production among disabled rhetors. As the writing of Grandin, Hughes, Hull and DJ Savarese shows, disabled rhetors themselves have already begun offering ways of reshaping rhetoric for the challenges and rewards of disability. The recent surge of rhetorical production and publication of writing by people with disabilities offers rhetoric a range of new material, pointing towards ways of revaluing the tactile rhetorical practices of disabled rhetors. Putting disability studies directly in conversation with rhetorical studies, and including the work of contemporary disabled rhetors, reveals the limits of the rhetorical tradition and opportunities for delimiting the tradition.

Both disability studies and rhetorical studies ask similar, crucial questions regarding personhood, including how certain bodies are constructed as having human integrity and rhetorical worth. In general, traditional rhetorical studies have promoted a model of tightly-bound personhood and *ethos* formation that excludes disabled rhetors who create rhetoric in relation to others. Disability studies scholars such as Lennard Davis (1995), Simi Linton (1998), and Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1996) in particular, with their theories on the body, can illuminate how rhetorical bodies have been shaped by a rhetorical tradition in narrow ways that often exclude and limit the disabled. They have interrogated the notion of the unified, rational, able, human subject and revised it with notions of interdependence, collaboration and connection. These interrogations inform rhetorical and composition studies’ formation of rhetorical bodies.
Specifically, theories from disability studies that name and critically engage with the norm—the unmarked status of the nondisabled subject that co-constructs limited and ableist understandings of disability—can put into stark relief the extent to which rhetoric and composition theory and pedagogy are driven by the normalization of speakers, writers and students. The model of the able, ideal orator, as I will investigate in chapter one, is constructed directly in relation to norms that variously pathologize, medicalize and finally normalize rhetorical bodies. The discipline of composition was founded in a context of remediation and normalization, over a century ago, by faculty at Harvard bothered by the deficiencies in their students’ writing. Disability studies brings into sharp relief the questions at the heart of rhetoric and composition, especially concerning how much of rhetorical success, or “natural ability,” in rhetoric can be altered by education, practice and training. Despite recent advancements in rhetorical studies that acknowledge how political, cultural and social circumstances result in the assignation of value of certain bodies over others, including gendered, raced and classed bodies, disability, especially its bodily materialities, has yet to be fully explored. Disability studies, with its redefinitions of basic understandings of competence, eloquence and ability can extend these sites of analysis and offer rhetorical studies new ways of invigorating traditional inquiries.

Although disability studies theories have yet to fully engage with the sense of touch in the disability experience of interdependence and interconnection, there are opportunities for examining how touch affects rhetorical production. Davis writes that describing the experience of disability means realizing that “disability exists in the realm of the senses. The disabled body is embodied through the senses. So there is a kind of reciprocal relationship between the senses and disability. A person may be impaired by the lack of a sense—sight, hearing, taste, or even touch, although touch is almost never completely gone. Yet, paradoxically, it is through the
senses that disability is perceived” (Enforcing 13). As Davis suggests, touch, perhaps because it is the most enduring sense, offers valuable insight into the experience and perception of disability. Life writing by people with disabilities, including activists and academics, such as those explored above, can extend this interesting paradox between disability and the senses. Bringing together rhetorical studies’ and disability studies’ complex, often paradoxical relationship to the sense of touch together with the accounts of disabled rhetors who use tactile rhetorics offers generative ways of delimiting rhetorical strategies. The alternative sophistical tradition, as chapter two and subsequent chapters detail, provides opportunities for revaluing the senses in rhetoric that, together with the contributions of disabled rhetors, reshape rhetoric. A key tenet of the disability rights movement is “nothing about us without us.” Rhetorical production by disabled rhetors therefore is an ingredient required to the reshaping of traditional and sophistic rhetoric. As this introduction models, subsequent chapters will include writing from a wide variety of disabled rhetors who employ tactile rhetorics to ensure that the task of reshaping rhetoric for disability is accomplished by and through the work of disabled rhetors themselves.

**Sophistic, Feminist and Alternative Rhetorics**

In addition to finding support in the field of disability studies, my project also draws from and contributes to recent work in sophistic, feminist and alternative rhetorics. In the past decade, scholars such as Susan Jarratt (1991), Kathleen Welch (1999), and others have combined feminist analyses with recoveries of the sophists, who had previously been ignored largely because of Platonic misrepresentations. Scholars have focused on the socio-cultural construction of knowledge in sophistic rhetoric and situate the sophists’ concerns in relation to current issues.
in rhetoric, including race, gender, class and other concerns such as technological literacy. Some scholars such as Debra Hawhee (2006), Jay Dolmage (2006) and Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant (1974) have begun examining the implications of sophistic theories for a wider range of bodies, but more specific applications to disability studies are still needed. The theories of knowledge making and rhetorical production that the sophists constructed, since they are based on social and cultural contingency, are applicable to a wide range of concerns. Sophistic rhetorics address embodied, sensual knowledge, the concept of normalcy, the relationship of natural and learned abilities and the cultural construction of knowledge by and about bodies, all of which are concerns important for disability studies.

I trace how the tactile rhetorical strategies that disabled rhetors use now can be appreciated by recovering how the sense of touch structured many key sophistic rhetorical concepts, including *logos* (discourse), *metis* (cunning, embodied intelligence) and *kairos* (opportune timing). I also use the work of disabled rhetors to aid in the redefinition of these key sophistic concepts for disability today. The sophists derived their name from the terms *sophos* and *sophia*, which in one meaning referred to skills in handicrafts, such as weaving (Kerferd 24). I argue that the fifth century philosopher Empedocles, who taught Gorgias and influenced the sophistic movement, provides a theory of rhetoric rooted in tactility, diverse bodies and multi-sensory knowledge making. Redefined rhetorical practices of *logos*, *metis* and *kairos* based on this theory of tactile rhetorics challenge contemporary sophistic studies and feminist sophistic studies to extend rhetorical studies of the body to bodies in contact, a challenge raised by the needs and accomplishments of disabled rhetors.
Feminist Science and Technology Studies and Studies of Touch

Alternative and sophisticated rhetorics, disability studies, and feminist science studies all share important key interests for intervening in how dominant discourses of science, medicine, rhetoric and technology shape and often limit bodies. Feminist science studies and disability studies in particular share similar strategies of investigating different bodies and embodiments can revise dominant viewpoints. Feminist theorists such as Sandra Harding (1986) and Donna Haraway (1988) have suggested standpoint theories and theories of situated knowledges to draw attention to how specific types of bodies outside of the norm (white, male, powered) contribute to knowledge making. Although relatively few connections among feminist theory, disability studies and science studies have been made explicit, each discipline deals with questions of how bodies and discourses are co-constructed in relations of power and how to restructure those relations for bodies outside of norms based on gender, ability or other hierarchies.

Recently, in feminist theory, feminist science studies, and disability studies, arguments have been made for including more attention to the materiality of the body. Critical theories based on the social construction of knowledge, although invaluable, need to be more attentive to the specificities of embodiment that partially structure experience. Scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Anne Balsamo (1996), and others have argued for feminism to remain attentive to the biological, material and visceral elements of embodiment to strengthen crucial theories. Disability studies theorists such as Tobin Siebers (2001) have made similar arguments for reclaiming the material experiences of disability. My project responds directly to this need, by investigating the sense of touch in the experience of disability to intervene in dominant discourses of rhetoric that normalize the rhetorical strategies of all bodies. I extend feminist body studies by investigating how bodies in contact shape rhetorical production. I draw on feminist
theories such as Donna Haraway’s situated knowledges that are attentive to the body to structure my investigation into touch among the rhetorical strategies of disabled rhetors, adding the critical perspective of the situated knowledges of bodies in contact. Since situated knowledges “privilege partial perspective,” they are a valuable epistemological and practical perspective for the tactile intersection of bodies, rhetoric and science. Haraway defines situated knowledge as “the particularity and embodiment of all vision” and advocates a “splitting of senses, a confusion of voice and sight” in order to avoid the persistence of vision as objectivity (180). This attention to senses and embodiment in the body lends itself to the use of touch in the disabled body.

Extending situated knowledges to the sense of touch reveals opportunities for disabled rhetors to contribute their partial perspectives to studies of touch. Scientific research on the sense of touch is relatively nascent compared to the other senses. Touch is the first sense to develop in the fetus and the last sense to be affected by illness, disability or age. Studies show that touch is integral to bodily health and crucially important to human and primate infant development. Studies from post-WWII orphanages demonstrate that children who are not handled or are isolated evince a failure to thrive, resulting in shorter statures, social and language problems.

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5 In Haraway’s concept of situated knowledges (as well as in her cyborg theory), the differently abled body seems to occupy a productive place. Haraway seems to invite connections to disability studies in her feminist theories, although a great study on this intersection is beyond the scope of this project. For example, she identifies people with disabilities as potential cyborgs, implicitly drawing on their tactile embodiments. “Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices” (178). In her theory of situated knowledges, she explains that “Feminist embodiment . . . is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for different in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis” (178). In her invocations of bodies in relation to prostheses and assistive communication devices, Haraway’s feminist theories of the body are applicable to disabled bodies as well.

6 Controversial if pioneering research by Harry Harlow with baby rhesus monkeys demonstrated that touch, physical contact and movement are all crucial to normal physical, psychological and emotional development. Duke University researcher and pediatrician Saul Schanberg explains that touch is our most essential sense. “If touch didn’t feel good, there’d be no species, parenthood, or survival. . . . Those animals who did more touching instinctively produced offspring which survived. . . . We forget that touch is not only basic to our species, but the key to it” (78).

7 Studies show that a lack of touch of children in orphanages results in lower weight and height half that of the normal range (Settle 1991) and a program of touch therapy in older adults resulted in reduction of signs of senility (O’Neil and Calhoun 1975). Despite significant anecdotal and scientific evidence that supports the use of touch in
Recently, the field and practice of touch therapy has gained institutional support at the University of Miami, and studies of the sense of touch have been done in relation to stress management, illness recovery, immune disorders, growth and development, and other areas.

Recently several studies of touch, including interdisciplinary studies, contribute to my use of touch to bring together the fields of disability studies and rhetorical studies. Ashley Montague’s *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (1971), which has gone into a third edition, and more recently Tiffany Field’s *Touch* (2003) summarize the variety of studies and research regarding the sense of touch. Both, in the spirit of feminist science studies, combine scientific, cultural, bodily and psychological analyses. Nina Jablonski’s recent *Skin: A Natural History* (2006) also combines scientific and cultural analyses of the skin as a canvas of self-expression. Erin Manning (2007) and Laura Marks (2002) also integrate a scientific approach to touch with politics and film, respectively. In a departure from these science studies approaches, a recent collection edited by Constance Classen, *The Book of Touch*, purposely resists an integrated scientific-cultural or science studies approach. Classen uses Sander Gilman’s notation of a tendency among writers of touch “to return over and over again to the physiological ‘realities’ for their understanding of the history of culture of touch” to support her reasoning (4). Citing the exclusion of the body in philosophy and its representation in art and literature, she

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8 In a recent study that positions rhetoric more directly in relation to touch, Shigehisa Kuriyama (1999) explores *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*. Kuriyama describes the Greek physician and writer Galen’s attempts to marshal accurately and with clarity in writing the pulse of the body, a key indicator of health, as well as facts about its strength, speed, rhythm and modulation. In contrast, the Chinese concept of pulse, *mo*, received a more flexible and perceptual treatment in writing. “Greek pulse theory . . . sought strictly to segregate what a pulse is from how it feels, a fact from perception” (95). Strong ties exist in history between rhetoric, touch and medicine that are just beginning to be realized.
decides to forego scientific information that she envisions as adding to this exclusion.⁹ She also identifies “one of the ideological barriers to writing about touch in culture is the customary Western emphasis on the brute physicality of touch” (5). To resist a trend in touch studies that omits scientific studies, I offer a science studies approach, imbued by feminist theory, to keep the body’s materialities central to this study.

As feminist theories and disability studies scholars have pointed out, critical analyses demand inter-disciplinarity and multi-modal approaches. My project, while it does not take a strictly scientific approach to touch, takes a science studies approach and draws on the materiality of touch, including how bodily responses affect rhetorical production. The physicality, materiality and physiology of touch are crucial elements in the rhetorical production of people with disabilities and must be included in studies. Theories of discourse and bodies are necessarily co-constructed. The sense of touch, because it necessarily includes at least two elements, already encourages a multi-modal analysis. Touch is a noun and a verb; it is a thing in and of itself, a happening, and an action. Touch transcends body and mind dualisms, as it always contains physical and well as cognitive elements. Touch is also always relational; it always brings at least two entities in contact, often making a third space. This space eschews the easy binaries of subject and object, since a touch is always constituted by a relationship. This study of touch and rhetoric works between these spaces, exploring the connections between bodies and language, theory and practice, literal and figural/metaphorical, and science and culture. Studying

⁹ As Classen notes, the sense of touch has been taken up, “at least edgewise, by a number of prominent French philosophers in the late twentieth century, such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Derrida (2000), Irigaray (1993) and Nancy (1993),” yet “no attempt has yet been made to undertake a broad approach to the sense of touch” (2). These edgewise approaches make the study of touch still a flexible enterprise for applying to different areas. I hope to model an approach that takes the “edgewise” properties of touch as advantageous for positioning touch studies in productive relation to other fields.
the sense of touch, as it circulates among bodies and language, creates a space for the contributions of disabled rhetors who reshape rhetoric for the needs and abilities of all rhetors.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

In the first two chapters, I examine the dominant rhetorical tradition and the alternative sophistic tradition with insights from disability studies to identify problems related to disability and rhetoric and to offer possibilities for change. In Chapter 1, “Rhetoric as Dis/Ability in the Dominant Tradition,” I use critical concepts from the field of disability studies to interrogate the foundations of the rhetorical tradition and the shaping of rhetorical bodies. I demonstrate that the classical model of the ideal, able orator is constructed directly in relation to disability. Disability studies’ articulation of how the bodies of disabled people have been medicalized, rehabilitated and normalized also illuminates how all rhetorical bodies have been similarly treated by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. In Chapter 2, “Socio-Cultural Sensual Models in Disability Studies and Sophistic Rhetoric,” I explore alternative, productive associations between rhetoric and disability, arguing that the sophists and present day disability studies theorists ask similar questions of rhetoric, concerning access to education, the importance of natural ability vs. learned ability, the social construction of knowledge and the effect of norms on rhetorical bodies. I argue that the sophists’ attention to the senses as a generative strategy for rhetorical production lends support to the tactile rhetorical practices of disabled rhetors today.

In chapters three through five, I examine more specific potential solutions in the sophistic tradition, that combined with the rhetorical production of contemporary disabled rhetors, can reshape the ableist and normalizing rhetorical tradition for a wider range of rhetors. In Chapter 3, “Empedocles and the Redefinition of *Logos* for Disabled Rhetors,” I argue that traditional
understandings of *logos* are inadequate for disabled rhetors and recover the theories of Empedocles, a key influencer of the sophistic tradition. Empedocles’ rhetoric, particularly his notion of *logos* as tactile and fleshy, supports the rhetorical strategies of contemporary disabled rhetors who make meaning in interdependent, physical connection with other bodies. In Chapter 4, “Reshaping the Rhetorical Appeals with *Metis*,” I explore the inadequacy of the traditional appeals of *ethos, pathos* and *logos* for disabled rhetors and redefine them based on the sophistic practice of *metis*. I pair rhetorical production of contemporary disabled rhetors with sophistic theories to redefine *metis* as a tactile rhetorical strategy well-suited for the experience of disability. In Chapter 5, “Reshaping the Rhetorical Canons with *Kairos*,” I explore the inadequacy of the traditional canons of invention, arrangement, style, delivery and memory for disabled rhetors and redefine them based on the sophistic practice of *kairos*. I use examples of rhetorical action by contemporary disabled rhetors, together with neglected theories of *kairos*, to redefine *kairos* as a tactile rhetorical strategy attentive to the challenges and rewards of the disability experience. Disabled rhetors use *kairos* to blend the canons to suit their needs and abilities. To conclude, in “Rhetoric Reshaped,” I bring together the previous chapters’ redefinitions of the traditional appeals and canons with redefinitions of *logos, metis* and *kairos* to construct a theory of rhetoric and composition reshaped to fit the needs and abilities of disabled rhetors. I reshape traditional understandings of the rhetorical situation for disability and explore implications in composition pedagogy and theory.
Chapter 1: Rhetoric as Dis/Ability in the Dominant Tradition

The dominant rhetorical tradition, at first glance, would seem to demand an able rhetor with an able body as the first and foremost requirement for rhetorical success. The ideal orator, as it is constructed by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, by definition, assumes ability. In fact, the art of rhetoric is nearly synonymous with ability. The successful rhetor in the tradition is an able orator, or one possessed of sound reasoning and a strong, able body well-suited for successful delivery. Brenda Brueggemann and James Fredal, in their study of disability in the rhetorical tradition, gesture to the staying power of this requirement of ability, noting that “[w]hile the particularly principles, rules and prescriptions that make up the art of rhetoric vary from one age to the next, rhetoricians and orators took for granted that anyone who hoped to control the will of an audience had to first control their own voice and body” (251). Elaborating, they describe the model of the orator perfectus who, throughout Greek and Roman rhetoric, “had to embody all the classical public virtues, including energy, willful self-control, and physical, intellectual, and financial resourcefulness” (252). This perfect orator is primarily an able orator, but also one at the height of his abilities.

To some extent, each of the forefathers of rhetoric depends on the assumption of an able rhetor to construct definitions of rhetoric and to shape rhetorical bodies. Plato, for example, in the parable of the two horses, represents good and true rhetoric with the figure of the white, straight, docile and rational horse. Aristotle builds ability into his very definition of rhetoric, assuming that rhetoric is the ability to see the means of persuasion in every case. Cicero depends on “gifts of nature” such as “the ready tongue, ringing tones, strong lungs, suitable build and shape of the face and body as a whole” to construct the ideal orator. Quintilian seeks to add the
moral attributes of a good man to the skill of a rhetor who speaks well, without any visible or invisible moral or bodily flaws.

Disability and the disabled rhetor, on the other hand, seem excluded by definition from the art of rhetoric and rhetorical success. In Plato’s parable of the two horses, the bad, deaf, dumb and crooked horse must be vanquished for the attainment of true rhetoric. Aristotle emphasizes the “right management” of the rhetor and the rhetor’s delivery. Cicero, who drew from Greek rhetoric, sums up the seemingly complete exclusion of disability from rhetoric by stating that “there are some men either so tongue-tied, or so discordant in tone, or so wild and boorish in feature and gesture, that, even though sound in talent and in art, they cannot enter the ranks of the orators” (305). This exclusion is symptomatic, to some extent, of all the rhetorical forefathers, who each pronounce disability as nearly antithetical to the pursuit of rhetoric.

The mandate of ability in rhetoric and the exclusion of disability in rhetoric, however, is not as clear cut as it appears. Brueggeman and Fredal point to apparent paradoxes between ability, disability and rhetoric by noting that while the tradition demands a perfect orator, “curiously, rhetoric has, at the same time, itself been denounced as a disabling pursuit. To the degree that persuasion was worked on auditors through . . . non-rational avenues, it crippled men’s . . . ability to deliberate coolly for themselves and follow the truth” (252). They sum up this paradox in two ways, stating that “[t]hough rhetoric required perfectly functioning bodies, its detractors also condemned it for appealing to the body and the senses” and that “bodily deformity thus at once prevented any rhetorical achievement while, at the same time, it symbolized the problem with rhetoric as a deceptive and sensuous art” (252-253). These contradictions are worth bearing out in more detail, as they lay bare assumptions undergirding definitions of rhetoric, ability, and disability, and points towards ways of moving beyond this
difficult contradiction. The simultaneous definition of “rhetoric as disability” and “rhetoric as ability” is in fact a productive contradiction, as it will point us toward ways of intervening in the tradition and its limited shaping of rhetorical bodies. Specifically, this chapter works in this productive contradiction, using recent critical theorizations of disability from disability studies to demonstrate disability and ability as crucial to definitions of rhetoric. I argue that in the dominant tradition, rhetoric is defined simultaneously by ability and disability—dis/ability.

Disability and rhetoric share a complex relationship, the nuances of which are imperative to parse through to make interventions into the tradition. Far from being excluded in rhetoric, disability in fact constitutes rhetoric’s basic definitions, forming a fundamental connection in which rhetoric and dis/ability are mutually dependent on each other. Rhetoric and the rhetorical bodies that the tradition shapes are as much dependent on notions of disability as ability. Theoretical insights from disability studies aid in revealing the connection between dis/ability and rhetoric. In particular, disability studies’ theorizations of the false binary between disability and ability, as well as the ways in which disabled bodies have been medicalized, rehabilitated and normalized in the wake of this false binary, guides our investigation into the rhetorical tradition’s shaping of rhetorical bodies. Crucial forefathers in the tradition treat rhetorical bodies, using literal and figurative associations with touch, shaping, sculpting and construction, to mold able rhetors directly in relation to disabled rhetors. Disability scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder gesture to this relationship between disability and ability in their designation of the “representational bind of disability” in which they note that “[w]hile disabled populations are firmly entrenched on the outer margins of social power and cultural value, the disabled body also serves as the raw material out of which other socially disempowered communities make themselves visible” (6). Rhetoric, as a fledging discipline, seeking to gain power in the shadow
of philosophy, frequently recruits the raw material of the disabled body, especially tactile associations with it, in order to construct a mold of the able, ideal orator. Crucial to this mold, however, is the disabled body, which co-constructs definitions of ability and rhetoric, and demonstrates that disability is as integral to the rhetorical tradition as is ability.

In its theorizations of disability and ability, disability studies has productively borrowed from other disciplines. These borrowings encourage advancements between disability studies and rhetoric that can move beyond contradictory assignations of rhetoric as disability and rhetoric as ability. Simi Linton, for example, borrows from queer theory, to explore how the “absolute categories of normal and abnormal depend on each other for their existence and depend on the maintenance of the opposition for their meaning” (23). Drawing from Eve K. Sedgwick’s elucidation of the “forced choice categories of homosexual and heterosexual,” Linton explains the patterning of disability similarly. Sedgwick writes:

Categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions . . . actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. (qtd. in Linton 24)
In disability studies, scholars such as Linton and Lennard Davis, like Sedgwick, explore term A as “the norm” directly in relation to term B, or the disabled. “To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body,” writes Davis in his investigation into the construction of normalcy in the nineteenth and twentieth century (23). Although I will investigate the relationship between disability and the norm more in-depth later in the chapter, for now it is important to note that disability studies scholars illuminate how definitions of ability and disability are co-constructed. Sedgwick’s argument regarding the mutually constitutive but seemingly binary oppositions of terms A and B in gender studies has been strongly supported by work in disability studies that uncovers how the categories of “abled” and “disabled” are mutually co-constitutive rather than binary. Disability studies scholar Rosemary Garland Thomson’s coining of the term “normate” also draws attention to what Linton calls “the unexamined center” shared between assumed binaries (24). “This neologism names the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate’s boundaries (Thomson 8). The unexamined center of the normate is outlined by “the array of deviant others” who simultaneously mark and hold up the boundaries of normal and abnormal, demonstrating how inextricably linked binaries actually are. This paradox is particularly true in rhetoric and in the figure of the able rhetor, who is outlined and propped up by the figure of the disabled rhetor.

The history of rhetoric provides a particularly clear example of how seemingly binary oppositions—between the able or enabling orator and the disabled or disabling one—are actually co-constitutive categories rather than opposed terms. “Able” or “normal” often functions as the ontologically valorized term A in rhetoric, but term B, “disabled,” simultaneously functions as both internal and external support for the maintenance of “able,” demonstrating how both ability
and disability create definitions, practices and pedagogies of rhetoric. Whether rhetoric is defined as ability or as disability, or by degrees of ability and disability, the logic of this false binary undergirds rhetorical bodies and definitions of rhetoric. Although I hope to work against the false binary of “disability” and “ability,” in rhetorical “success,” the deeply contradictory construction of rhetoric in terms of dis/ability must be marked in order to be revised. Recent theoretical models of disability identified by disability studies, such as the medical model, illuminate the impasse of the limiting models of “rhetoric as disability” and “rhetoric as ability” and move us toward new models that work in between the spaces of ability and disability. Working within this contradiction wherein rhetoric demands able-bodiedness yet is criticized as disabling, I employ the term “rhetoric as dis/ability,” in order to call attention to the way in which definitions, practices and theories of rhetoric are fundamentally co-constituted with definitions, assumptions and experiences of disability and ability. To prod the outlines of the able rhetor, I explore how the marking of the disabled rhetor has produced this model, and destabilize the boundaries of what is commonly accepted as able rhetoric. I track through the tradition the way in which rhetoric and rhetorical bodies have been medicalized and idealized by Plato, rehabilitated by Aristotle and eventually normalized and standardized by Cicero and Quintilian, drawing attention to the mutually co-constitutive ways in which rhetoric has employed the disabled body in order to construct the norm of the able-bodied rhetor. Revealing how the dominant rhetorical tradition has shaped rhetorical bodies will open up spaces for interventions from alternative traditions and models in subsequent chapters.
Plato and the medicalization and idealization of rhetorical bodies

Critical insights from disability studies’ identification and interrogation of the medical model of disability reveal key areas of common ground with Platonic definitions of rhetoric and shapings of rhetorical bodies. The medical model, as it has been defined and critiqued by disability studies scholarship, has “been operating (literally) on disabled people for more than a hundred a fifty years. The medical model terms disability as a disease in need of a cure” (Davis 41). According to the medical model, “disability is defined as an impairment, as opposed to the more current notion that disability be seen as a category defined by a social structure”(6). The medical model of disability defines disability as inherently a negative experience, an impairment, a disadvantage and a defect to be cured. In the absence of a cure, the medical model of disability often seeks to hide the disabled body, in hospitals, institutions or back rooms. The literal and figurative operating on the disabled body to which Davis alludes actually can be traced back to the rhetorical tradition, starting with Plato and at least through Quintilian. Specifically, Plato executes a model of rhetoric dependent on the concept of the ideal body, which at once medicalizes and idealizes bodies for rhetoric, placing the body, literally, in a contradictory position in the pursuit of rhetoric. In Platonic rhetoric, the body is medicalized to such an extent that it is not only cured, but also virtually erased, in the attainment of an ideal that paradoxically hinges on the registering and denial of the body’s senses.

First and foremost, Platonic rhetoric parallels the medical model of disability by assuming normative notions of “good” and “bad” (or true and false) rhetoric directly in relation to normative notions of able and disabled bodies. In The Phaedrus, good rhetoric, analogized as love and aligned with philosophy and dialectic, enables the soul, betters it, and urges it to release itself from earthly desires and rise up to attain true knowledge. Bad rhetoric, analogized as lust,
or love that seeks to satisfy sensual urges, disables the soul and the body, causing physical pain, weakness and most importantly, the soul to remain moored to the earth, distracted from the goal of true knowledge. Lust, or bad rhetoric, corrupts the soul by physically and spiritually disabling it. According to Socrates, the lusty lover’s “appetites” will cause the loved “great harm,” by retarding his intellect and causing him physical pain. The lover disables the loved by being “harmful to his physical condition, and most harmful by far to the cultivation of his soul . . . which there neither is more ever will be anything of higher importance in truth” (146).

Plato characterizes the dangers of bad rhetoric completely in terms of disability, whereas good rhetoric is characterized in terms of ability. Bad rhetoric, like lusty persuasion, disables the body and corrupts the soul. Good rhetoric, like love, betters the soul. Bad rhetoric, akin to a bodily impairment in the medical model, is a disability that must be fixed or it will continue to disable the body, intellect and soul. Good rhetoric, or the “transcendent good” of philosophy, is the ideal of ability that only pure love reveals. Ability and truth are almost synonymous in Plato’s rhetoric, as one must cultivate an ability to see the truth in order to shed bodily forms, attain communion with the divine and “remember” the truth. Plato’s separation of good (true) and bad (false) rhetoric along lines of ability and disability establishes a system of false binaries of rhetoric directly in relation to false binaries of bodies. In Sedgwick’s or Davis’ terms, Plato’s good rhetoric of truth and philosophy are closely aligned with term A or the norm: the opposite of disability.

Second, Platonic rhetoric and the rhetorical bodies it shapes parallel the medical model of disability in the assumption of a true, neutral and dominant discourse of philosophy that “fixes” bodies and minds. Plato depends on a supposedly objective, neutral and unquestioned authority of true rhetoric—otherwise known as philosophy—in much the same way the medical model
assumes that science and medicine are neutral sources of authority. Plato limits the practice of rhetoric to be a neutral conduit for the already revealed “Truths” of philosophy, which aid in the bettering of bodies and souls. The medical model of disability often takes on the unquestioned values and supposedly neutral discourse of science and medicine that defines disability as an impairment to be corrected or a negative experience to be fixed. This hierarchy operates in a top-down model of information, by which the doctor imposes a regime of fixing or curing on a patient. Similarly, Socrates operates akin to a doctor or healer in this Platonic dialogue, with the goal of fixing Phaedrus’ ill-conceived notions of rhetoric and the subsequent physical and spiritual harm these notions exert on his body and soul. Like a doctor who treats a patient, Socrates listens to Phaedrus’ speeches, diagnoses what is wrong, and attempts to heal him by correcting him. Since bad rhetoric produces disabling physical and spiritual effects on the body and soul, Socrates’ correction of Phaedrus in speech and in body is an attempt to cure, fix and better him. The entire three-part structure of the dialogue is an attempt to raise Phaedrus up to Socrates’ level. The transmission of knowledge in Plato’s rhetoric, like the transmission of knowledge and treatment in the medical model, operates in a strictly top-down hierarchy of expert-amateur. Socrates does not allow Pheadrus to compose his own speech for fear of further physical and spiritual retardation. Like a doctor curing a patient, Socrates uses good rhetoric, or philosophy, to simultaneously diagnose, remediate and correct Pheadrus’ misguided assumptions about rhetoric, begotten from the sophist Lysias, whose rhetoric focuses inordinately on the body. Socrates offers a speech extolling non-sexual, de-sensitized Love as an enabling force for the body and soul, revealing Truth to an inferior soul, and positions Love, likened to philosophy, as occupying the unquestioned value of other “truths” such as science and medicine.
A third parallel between the medical model of disability and Platonic rhetoric is how Plato individualizes, privatizes and then roots out disability in his construction of rhetoric and rhetorical bodies, much like the medical model’s attempts to individualize and incessantly cure the disabled body. Critiques of the medical model have shown how science and medicine labor to locate disability as residing in the individual body, as a problem to be identified and cured, rather than as an effect of social or cultural assignations of meaning or limiting environments.10 Similarly, Plato, in Socrates’ description of the tripartite construction of the soul, locates disability in only one of the three parts of the soul, and then, like the aim of the medical model, subjects this disabled part to intense scrutiny by rhetoric, a tool that operates much like medicine, as a cure for the good of the entire soul.11 Socrates explains:

In the beginning of this tale I divided each soul into three parts: two of which had the form of horses, the third that of a charioteer. Let us retain this division. Now of the horses we say one is good and the other bad; but we did not define what the goodness of one and the badness of the other was. That we must now do. The horse that stands at the right had is upright and has clean limbs; he carries his neck high, has an aquiline nose, is white in color, and has dark eyes; he is a friend of honor joined with temperance and modesty, and a follower of true glory; he needs no whip, but is guided by the word of command and by reason. The other, however, is crooked, heavy, ill put together, his neck is short and thick, his nose flat, his color dark, his eyes grey and bloodshot; he is the friend of insolence and pride, is shaggy-eared and deaf, hardly obedient to whip and spurs. (153)

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10 See, for example, Tobin Seibers’ (2002) complex critique of the individualization of disability as limiting possibilities for political and social resistance.
11 With the setting of the dialogue taking place in a remote location, outside the city walls, Plato also contributes to the process of individualizing rhetoric and privatizing disability.
The parable of the two horses relies on a binary of rhetoric and the bodies that use it, but it also relies on a false binary of logic such as characterized by Sedgwick, Linton, and Davis. The pursuit of good rhetoric must be accompanied by the eradication of disability, but is simultaneously dependent on disability to instigate this eradication. Plato establishes this binary logic by individualizing disability in the figure of the left horse, who as crooked, ill put-together, shaggy-eared and deaf, is disability personified. Plato individualizes and privatizes both disability and rhetoric. He promotes a medicalized view of disability and rhetoric in Socrates’ tripartite division of the soul, which locates difference in one characteristic in one part of the soul that must be controlled. To exert this control, Plato subjects the soul to an intense form of scrutiny, dissection, classification and remediation akin to the medical model’s treatment of disability. The sole goal of this process is to cure the soul, the body and rhetoric, to promote the soul’s salvation though remembering the transcendent good and denying the body. Rhetoric, like disability, must be fixed and cured. The bad, disabled horse, representing bad rhetoric and the sensual body that drags the soul down, must be trained and overcome in order to ensure the soul’s health.

This medicalized process of overcoming the disabled body and achieving the disembodied ideal of true intelligence begins with what disability studies scholars such as Thomson and others have called “the gaze,” or the intense visual scrutiny by which disability is registered, examined and cured by the medical model.\(^\text{12}\) As Thomson points out, as much as femininity prompts the male gaze, disability prompts the stare (28). For Plato’s rhetoric, as in the medical model of disability, the stare is crucial because it is the spectral examination that begins the curative process. In Plato’s rhetoric, however, the relationship is reversed at first—the stare

\(^{12}\) Thomson draws from feminist theory’s identification of the male gaze and applies to the experience of disability.
first prompts disability, then cures it. The gaze by which the chariot beholds the vision of love, or truth, prompts the painful growth of the feathers of the soul’s wings, the vehicle that eventually enables the soul to fly up to the divine towards pure knowledge. The gaze first disables the viewer and then enables him, once he learns eventually to tame his sensual impulses. The gaze starts a process by which the soul eventually learns to avoid the disabling pitfalls of sensual pleasure to recognize the true beauty that will lead him to ideal, divine knowledge. This ideal demands perfection and the erasure of the body and its senses. For Plato, disability stands in as a substitute for all things human and both must be overcome to achieve ideal truth, beauty and knowledge, which is the “colorless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge is concerned,” residing in the space above earth and “visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul.” This ideal truth, as it is “nurtured on mind and pure knowledge” must purge all elements of the earthly body completely in order to be attained (149-150).

The concept of the ideal has also been investigated by disability studies and further reveals the paradoxical way Platonic rhetoric both depends on and rejects the disabled body in order to mold ideal rhetorical bodies and souls. In Plato’s theory, the goal of rhetoric is to reveal true and absolute knowledge, or “the ideal,” and therefore, must follow a pre-determined and strict upward path to achieve this end. This path requires not only the erasure of disability, but of the body itself. But, simultaneously, this ideal goal of rhetoric—to reveal true knowledge—depends on a sublimation of disability that in fact reinstates disability as integral to the attainment of the ideal. Plato’s belief that true/absolute knowledge is attainable by humans would at first seem to defy the definition of an ideal, which presupposes that ideals are not humanly

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13 In fact, this gaze is a recollection of the knowledge of the true, good and beauty that the soul possessed before being born. The gaze is the soul’s recollection of the ideal, the knowledge of which was known before birth but was forgotten because of the “earthly debris” that covered it.
attainable. In his study of norms, Davis describes the ideal as it preceded the norm. “If we rethink our assumptions about the universality of the concept of the norm, what we might arrive at is the concept that preceded it: that of the ‘ideal,’ a word we find dating from the seventeenth century” (24). Even before this, the ideal is rooted in classical understandings of the divine body that are dependent on the visual gaze. The ideal “presents a mytho-poetic body that is linked to that of the gods (in traditions which the god’s body is visualized)” which means that “this divine body, then, this ideal body, is not attainable by a human” (25). Furthermore, “the notion of an ideal implies that . . . the human body as visualized in art of imagination must be composed from the ideal parts of living models. These models individually can never embody the ideal since the ideal, by definition, can never be found in this world” (25). Davis makes clear, then, that “the central point here is that in a culture with an ideal form of the body, all members of the population are below the ideal. . . . By definition, one can never have an ideal body. There is in such societies no demand that populations have bodies that conform to the ideal” (25).

In this contradictory space between the human and divine attainment of the ideal, Plato attempts to shape rhetorical bodies. Plato focuses on ideal and absolute knowledge, but ideal bodies also constitute an important element in the rhetorical and philosophical process for the attainment of this ideal. As Davis relates, the ideal body is not attainable or humanly possible, but Plato argues that ideal knowledge is attainable by humans. The ideal is attained through the gaze which structures the identification, medicalization and fixing of disability. Beauty, as a form of the ideal, absolute knowledge, is registered through the gaze and the tactile effects of this vision, but is attained by seeing beyond this sensory experience and rejecting it.14 Specifically, holding beauty in vision spurs the growth of the wings for the soul’s passage upward toward

14 Through vision, beauty can be found to be “shining most clearly through the clearest of our senses; for sight is the sharpest of physical senses” (151).
communion with the divine and true knowledge. A sense of nostalgia, often also present in versions of the medical model that yearn for the time before disability, Plato’s soul yearns to be reminded of “those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being” (150). Plato aligns this nostalgic feeling for the wings with ability and perfection. He relates, “it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect . . . since he separates himself from human interests and turns his attention to the divine” (151).

The process of separation of human interests from divine knowledge is how Plato uses the medicalized gaze to root out disability and form ideal rhetors. Heavily influenced by Empedocles’ theory of pores, Plato describes viewing beauty as a transformative, physical experience, the sensual enjoyment of which disables the soul and the disavowal of which enables it.15 “And as he looks upon him [the vision of beauty], a reaction from his shuddering comes over him, with sweat and unwonted heat; for as the effluences of beauty enter him through the eyes . . . the effluence moistens the germ of the feathers, and as he grows warm, the parts from which the feathers grow . . . become soft, and as the nourishment streams upon him, the quills of the feathers swell and begin to grow from the roots all over the form of the soul, for it once was all feathered” (151-152). Beauty is received by the act of viewing in a physical register—when gazing upon beauty “the particles which flow” from the vision interact with the viewer tactiley.

15 Chapter three will deal more explicitly with Empedocles’ influential theory of pores and its implications for a tactile rhetoric for contemporary disabled rhetors. For now it is important to understand the contradictory, often paradoxical relationship between rhetoric and touch in Platonic rhetoric that hinges on the tactile sensation of the skin to spur the wings but also on the denial of actualizing this touch in sexual communion.
In this tactile interaction, the viewing of beauty and the bad horse’s response to this view is disabling, starting the painful process by which the soul learns to overcome disabling sensory pleasures for the goal of divine knowledge. When the vision of beauty is taken away, “the mouths of the passages in which the feathers begin to grow become dry and close up, shutting in the sprouting feathers, and the sprouts within, shut in with the yearning, throb like pulsing arteries, and each sprout pricks the passage in which it is, so that he whole soul, stung in every part, rages in pain; and then again, remembering the beautiful one, it rejoices” (152). These “two mingled sensations” make the soul “perplexed and maddened,” a condition the soul struggles to understand (152). This frenzied, sensual lust is characterized as disability, as Socrates compares him to “one who has caught a disease from the eyes of another” (154). The visceral apprehension of the visual leads the soul down a perilous path towards the human elements that tie the soul to earth: lust, seduction, pleasure, pain, and everything sensual.

Apprehension of the true ideal, however, depends on a denial of this sensual experience. The good, able horse and the bad, disabled horse figure prominently in the attainment of the ideal that hinges on a disavowal of the body, senses, sexuality and above all disability. Beholding the vision of the radiant face of the beloved, the charioteer’s “memory is born back to the true nature of beauty, and he see it standing with modesty upon a pedestal of chastity” and upon viewing it “falls back in reverence” so that he is “forced to pull the reins so violently backward as to bring both horses upon their haunches,” one willing and the other “the unruly beast very unwilling” (153). The good horse responds obediently to the visceral vision of beauty by denying his sensual urges and heading the charioteer’s hand.

The bad horse, however, characterized as disabled and spurred by physical sensation, is unruly. Socrates repeats the tactile sensation that the gaze prompts, by which “the whole soul is
warmed by the sight, and is full of the tickling and pricklings of yearning” to which the obedient horse “controls himself and does not leap upon the beloved” but the “other no longer heeds the pricks or the whip of the charioteer, but springs wildly forward” (153). The tension between the charioteer, who holds the reins, and the good and bad horses forms a physical, tactile basis on which ability, reason and chastity struggle against disability, irrationality and sensual immodesty. Although the soul seeks to transcend the physical and sensual experience of viewing beauty, this transcendence is only possible through a painful process of learning, through physical pain, to deny the senses.

Socrates calls attention to the physicality of the gaze by repeating the struggle between the horses. Again, the physicality takes explicitly tactile and painful dimensions:

One horse in his shame and wonder wets all the soul with sweat, but the other, as soon as he is recovered from the pain of the bit and the fall . . . breaks forth in angry reproaches, bitterly reviling his mate and the charioteer . . . he urges them forward and hardly yields to their prayer that he postpone . . . struggling, neighing, and pulling he forces them again with the same purpose to approach the beloved one, and when they are near him, he lowers his head, raises his tail, takes the bit in his teeth, and pulls shamelessly. The effect upon the charioteer is the same as before, but more pronounced; he falls back like a racer from the starting rope, pulls the bit backward even more violently than before from the teeth of the unruly horse, covers his scurrilous tongue and jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground, causing him much pain. Now when the bad horse has gone through the same experience many times and has ceased from his unruliness, he is humbled and follows henceforth the wisdom of the charioteer and when he sees the
beautiful one, he is overwhelmed with fear; and so from that time on the soul of the lover follows the beloved in reverence and awe. (153)

The process of experiencing and overcoming disability eventually enables the soul to re-train itself. The bad horse learns to curb his desires because of the pain inflicted by the reins and bit, through which the charioteer manually controls him. Eventually the good, able horse and the rational, asexual charioteer overcome the urges of the disabled horse. The gaze at once medicalizes and regulates disability, fixing it and subsuming it into an able, ideal, and chaste rhetor. The “friendship of a lover,” which hinges on an asexual, non-physical relationship between two rhetors, is Plato’s only prescription for an ideal rhetoric (154). Despite the physical and tactile sensations necessary to spur the growth of the wings, the attainment of the ideal rests on the disavowal of the continuation of this sensuality, disability, and physicality. The sense of touch occupies a paradoxical position in the shaping of rhetorical bodies for Plato, as it is necessary to spur the growth of the wings, but must be overcome to ensure the soul’s attainment of the divine.

The medicalization and curing of disability that shapes the soul and body also shapes Plato’s definition of rhetoric. Socrates says, “The method of the art of healing is much the same as that of rhetoric” since “in both cases you must analyze a nature, in one that of the body and in the other that of the soul, if you are to proceed in a scientific manner, not merely by practice and routine, to impart health and strength to the body by prescribing medicine and diet, or by proper discourses and training to give the soul the desired belief and virtue” (162-163). Plato prescribes a medicalized gaze to construct ideal bodies and idealized rhetorics. The teacher of rhetoric operates in the capacity of a doctor as identified and critiqued by disability studies. This analysis
of the soul mirrors the “control of knowledge first of all” crucial to the doctor’s control of the
disabled body, by which the doctor then can “designate and classify” (Stiker 153). Plato advises
designation and classification by rhetors for souls, directing that after defining the soul with
“perfect accuracy” one “will classify the speeches and the souls and will adapt each to the other”
(163). This adaptation maintains the eradication of disability and erasure of the body as the key
component in the soul’s attainment of ideal, true knowledge.

For Plato, the overriding definition of rhetoric is disability. The construction of “rhetoric
as disability” dominates the trajectory the *The Phaedrus*, as “bad” rhetoric, characterized as
sensory knowledge and identified as disability in the figure of the disabled horse and the visual-
tactile experience of the growth of the wings, must be overcome completely for the ideal of true
knowledge to be attained by the mind. The ideal, as a concept driving ideal knowledge and ideal
bodies, co-constitutes this construction of rhetoric-philosophy, as Plato makes divine, ideal and
true knowledge a humanly attainable goal, but only, ironically, if the elements that make us
human—difference, disability, and sensuality—are eliminated. In this way, the goal of ideal,
dischwombodied, divine knowledge at once medicalizes rhetorical bodies, setting them up as
disabled bodies and souls to be fixed by a rhetoric that mirrors philosophy, and idealizes them by
erasing any semblance of difference, disability or sensuality. To make the ideal humanly
possible, Plato idealizes rhetoric and rhetorical bodies chiefly by the eradication of disability,
sensuality and difference, but he simultaneously enlists disability, sensuality and difference in
this process, making the construction of the ideal rhetor intimately linked to the figure of the
disabled rhetor. The ideal rhetor, in Plato’s philosophy-rhetoric, is simply not possible without
the disabled rhetor, demonstrating a key organizing principle of the false-binary logic that
undergirds much of contemporary disability studies critiques. Instead of a symmetrical binary
opposition in which one term operates in the valorized category—ability, philosophy, the ideal—
these valorized categories are in fact held in place, constructed by and depended on by their 
opposites—disability, rhetoric, the sensual human—for their meaning.

Aristotle and the rehabilitation of rhetoric and rhetorical bodies

While Plato’s definition of rhetoric rests on a diagnosis of “rhetoric as disability” and a 
medicalized process by which the disabled body must be overcome, Aristotle redefines rhetoric 
in order to make it applicable to a wider range of subjects and in doing so offers different 
figurations of the rhetorical body. In response to Plato’s idealization and eventual erasure of the 
body from rhetoric, Aristotle, interpreted through the lens of disability studies, rehabilitates the 
body for rhetoric. In fact, Aristotle’s project of rehabilitating the body for rhetoric parallels his 
larger project of the rehabilitation of the discipline of rhetoric after Plato’s limitation of it. Again, 
borrowing from key critical insights from disability studies regarding the rehabilitation model of 
disability, I identify key ways in which Aristotle offers a definition of “rhetoric as ability” and 
rhetorical bodies as bodies that seek rehabilitation by way of rhetoric.

    One primary way that Aristotle rehabilitates rhetoric and rhetorical bodies is by 
redefining the ends of rhetoric away from a single goal and towards multiple goals. Plato 
emphasized a single goal for rhetoric—the attainment of ideal, true knowledge for which the 
body must be cured and erased. Plato recruited rhetoric primarily to cure bodies and shape souls 
according to one prototype: the divine, the eternal, the ethereal. Although he aligns himself with 
Plato, Aristotle mainly departs from his teacher in his revision of the ends of rhetoric, opening up 
more opportunities for rhetorical bodies. Like Plato, Aristotle believed in absolute truth, but 
whereas Plato emphasized its divine, singular and transcendent nature, Aristotle emphasizes the
wide variety of empirical means by which truth and can be found in the here and now. Furthermore, Aristotle legitimates the study of rhetoric for subjects for which absolute knowledge is not available. By legitimating probable knowledge in the realm of rhetoric, Aristotle retools rhetoric for the pursuit of practical problems. Instead of privatizing and individualizing rhetoric as Platonic definitions encouraged, Aristotelian rhetoric is applicable to government, law, and public affairs. Since there is not one single goal in Aristotelian rhetoric as there is in Plato’s, Aristotelian rhetoric seeks to draw on many different faculties to apply to multiple pursuits. Accordingly, this multitude of goals calls for a rhetorical body and mind that is more flexibly equipped to accommodate diverse situations, ends and questions.

Similarly, although the medical model and rehabilitation model of disability share much in common, they differ regarding their ends. Whereas the medical model seeks primarily the single goal of curing disability, the rehabilitation model seeks instead to mitigate, change, and improve disability, a pursuit that results in myriad goals. Davis describes the rehabilitation model as identifying the “body in need of repair, concealment, remediation, and supervision” (41). Bodies that fall under the rehabilitation model are not cured, but instead endlessly adjusted, systematized according to a wide range of scattered goals. Henri Stiker, in his survey of disability in history, presents the birth of rehabilitation as a post-WWI phenomenon, but his characterization of it can be applied to rhetorical history as well. Noting that rehabilitation “is a notion different from cure,” Stiker writes, “[c]ure is a removal and relates to health. Rehabilitation is situated in the social sphere and constitutes replacement for deficit” (124). Instead of seeking to cure or remove the body, as Plato did, Aristotle seeks to retool and rehabilitate it for rhetoric. The social sphere in which rhetoric works demands a wide range of
abilities for the pursuit of varied types of provisional knowledge, for which developing the body and the mind is crucial.

In chapter one of *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle directly compares his definition of rhetoric to rehabilitative ends rather than curative ends. He argues

That rhetoric . . . does not belong to a single defined genus of subject but is like dialectic and that it is useful is clear—and that its function is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case, as is true also in all the other arts; for neither is it the function of medicine to create health but to promote this as much as possible; for it is nevertheless possible to treat well those who cannot recover health (35).

By removing the creation of health from the function of medicine, Aristotle removes the imperative to cure. Likewise, by removing the quest for perfection and for the ideal from rhetoric, Aristotle at once frees rhetorical bodies up for diverse purposes and then systematizes them in order to be able to discover all the available means of persuasion. By defining rhetoric in terms of an analogy of “treating well” those who cannot recover health, Aristotle forms a definition of rhetoric as rehabilitation. Like Plato, Aristotle defines rhetoric in a remedial context. “Aristotle describes those who require rhetoric,” states Jasper Neel, as “persons ‘unable to do a thing,’ persons without strength or power, the disabled or incapable” (qtd. in Wilson 6). Applying rhetoric treats or betters a person by enabling them to see the available means as persuasion.

Aristotle’s extension of the realm of rhetoric to provisional knowledge demands that the rhetor marshal diverse means of persuasion, including information from sensory perceptions. In a
major departure from Plato, Aristotle defines the senses as useful, reliable methods for observation, rather than as disabling and distracting shadows of true knowledge. In fact, the senses are integral to Aristotle’s definitions of “rhetoric as ability,” which is a definition of rhetoric based on ability led by the senses. George Kennedy translates Aristotle’s famous redefinition of rhetoric with ability as its key component. “Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (36). Kennedy translates Aristotle’s use of “ability” here with the Greek word “dynamis,” which is “ability, capacity, faculty,” noting that in his philosophical writing, dynamis is “the regular word for ‘potentiality’ in a matter of form that is ‘actualized’ by an efficient cause” (36). This dynamis-infused sense of ability opens up ability to potential, and situates rhetoric as a means of achieving that potential. Furthermore, Aristotle’s use of “to see” the available means of persuasion demonstrates how he rehabilitates the senses in light of Plato. “To see” translates from the Greek term “thoresai,” or “to be an observer of and to grasp the meaning or utility of” (Kennedy 37). Knowledge still exists in a ready-made form in Aristotle’s philosophy, but unlike Plato, he values the senses as a method for achieving this knowledge. The sense of vision in theoresai, in particular, departs from the medicalized gaze in Platonic rhetoric and is instead characterized productively in relation to the sense of touch. Whereas Plato used the soul’s gazing on beauty to create the conditions for disability that must be overcome to achieve true knowledge—the prickling of the pore passages which spur the growth of wings—Aristotle harnesses the gaze for its utility, potential and observational powers. “To see” or “to observe” means “to grasp” meaning, a productive prelude to the exercise of rhetoric.

Aristotle’s definition of “rhetoric as ability” rests on notions of disability to secure its meaning, demonstrating the mutual dependence of ability and disability in the dominant
rhetorical tradition. Aristotle places disability and ability directly in relation in his justification of the study of rhetoric. “It is absurd to hold that a man ought to be ashamed of being unable to defend himself with his limb, but not of being unable to defend himself with speech and reason, when the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs” (181). By prioritizing the ability to use rhetoric over the ability to use one’s limbs, Aristotle simultaneously constructs a definition of rhetoric that is mutually dependent on ability and disability. Aristotle devises a definition, theory and system of rhetoric directly in relation to disability and ability, a positioning that can only be legitimized by a rigorous, structured taxonomy of applications.

A second major way in which Aristotle’s rehabilitated rhetoric parallels the rehabilitation model of disability is through Aristotle’s installation of a highly structured system of treatment, betterment and formation for rhetoric and rhetorical bodies to organize the varied ends of rhetoric. In the absence of the singular goal of ideal knowledge and the erasure of the body from rhetoric, Aristotle exacts a complex, taxonomic system for forming rhetorical bodies. The rehabilitation model of rhetoric operates similarly, and reveals insights into Aristotle’s system. Stiker notes that rehabilitation is “more concerned with training than healing . . . for the simple reason that there is often no healing . . . there are compensations, rectifications, replacements, either through surgical means or long-term treatment. . . . the sick body is to be straightened up but not to be cured” (167). Aristotle’s analogy of rhetoric, as “treating well,” like medicine, even those who cannot heal structures his systematic straightening up of rhetorical bodies. Stiker describes systems of tracking, naming, physical therapy, occupational therapy and general “shaping up” in the rehabilitation model, which takes on literal meanings as well, as bodies are literally formed and shaped for certain tasks (168). Stiker focuses on this shaping of the body for
industrial work, but this process lends insights into how Aristotle similarly shapes bodies, rehabilitating them for rhetoric. To describe the effects of the rehabilitation model on the body, Stiker uses the French term former (which means both shape and train) as “applied in the stricter sense: to place in a mold, shape in a certain way, cause the worker to exist by arranging him, conceiving of him in a certain way” (168). As Stiker notes, “one of the important aspects of rehabilitation . . . was to conceive and create a system of training, in particular vocational training” (168).

Aristotle’s rhetoric, as it rehabilitates the body and the art of rhetoric after Plato, seeks to mold, shape and train rhetorical bodies through a highly structured system, focused on usefulness, for shaping the body and rhetoric for vocation. Modern definitions of “to rehabilitate” recall this sense of usefulness, in “efforts to restore to good health or useful life, as through therapy or education” (American Heritage Dictionary). As critiques from disability studies have noted, standards of value for what is a “useful life” or even “good health” are not neutral designations but often depend on normalizing and ableist foundations. This critique informs the strong sense of shaping of useful bodies that characterizes the rehab model and Aristotle’s rhetorical bodies. Aristotle argues for a definition of rhetoric based on use which also rests on similar ableist and normalization assumptions of truth, good and use. For Aristotle, rhetoric is useful “because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites” (180). Furthermore, Aristotle’s second reason for the usefulness of rhetoric rests on remedial assumptions on audiences. Rhetoric is useful because “before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to

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16 In disability, Stiker emphasizes the tenacity of the rehabilitation process. With rehabilitation, he writes, “the discourse of retour, “to return,” begins to appear. The lack is removed . . . It is also the very idea that you can replace. . . Replacement, re-establishment of the prior situation, substitution, compensation—all this now becomes possible language” (123-124).
produce conviction” (180). Aristotle argues for the usefulness of rhetoric directly in relation to assumptions of ability and disability, forming a foundation for rhetoric that draws its utility across systematic typologies of audiences and speakers.

To these ends, Aristotle creates taxonomic systems for typing speakers and audiences, a process that reveals connections to the rehabilitation model in his analogies. “Medicine,” he explains, “does not theorize about what will help to cure Socrates or Calias, but only about what will help to cure any or all of a given class of patients: this alone is its business: individual cases are so infinitely various that no systematic knowledge of them is possible. In the same way the theory of rhetoric is concerned not with what seems probable to a given individual like Socrates or Hippias, but with what seems probable to men of a given type” (183). Likewise, the rehabilitation model uses systems, taxonomies, classifications and information management so that rehabilitation “becomes a generalized notion and will be extended to all the disabled” (Stiker 124). Stiker describes a generalized system of tracking, naming, caring and homogenization that structures the treatment program for all disabilities. Much of Aristotle’s efforts towards theorizing rhetoric rely on shaping types of speakers, audiences and arguments in a systematized, generalized sense, rather than an individual sense. The goal of rehabilitation of disability is much the same, as it attempts to address individual differences and experiences of disability along broader systems of care, treatment and restoration. After defining rhetoric as an ability directly in relation to disability, Aristotle seeks to apply rhetoric to as broad a range of types of situations and bodies as possible. This large-scale restoration necessitates a system that is generalizable to a

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17 Again demonstrating how disability is as integral to the rhetorical tradition as ability, Aristotle characterizes audiences that need rhetoric directly in terms of those for whom it is unnecessary: “there are people whom one cannot instruct” (180). Other reasons for the usefulness of rhetoric that Aristotle includes are the already mentioned statement that “the use of rational speech is more distinctive of a human being than the use of his limbs” and that rhetoric draws out “opposite sides of the question” (180-181). Uses of limbs are subject to normalizing standards, as discussed, but so are the opposing sides of questions, since Aristotle states that “things that are true and things that are better, by their nature” are “easier to prove and believe in” (181).
wide range of bodies. Rehabilitation demands a pattern on which to model bodies. Aristotle devotes much of Book Two, for example, to characterizing certain “types” of audiences, devising general guidelines for evaluating the emotional states of audience. He also situates his three types of rhetoric along the characterizations of audiences: ceremonial, political and forensic rhetoric are “determined by the three classes of listeners to speeches” (185).

Although audiences and situations provide generalized models and types for the modeling of rhetoric, Aristotle’s construction of the speaker’s *ethos*, through habit or *hexus*, forms the most systematic approach to rhetoric. The flexible notion of habit applied to Aristotle’s understanding of character, since for the Greeks, “*ethos* was not given nature, but was developed by habit (hexis)” (Crowley and Hawhee 85). Aristotle understood *ethos*, or good character of a speaker, as formed by a process of habit, rather than by a strictly naturally ingrained ability. Although today’s understanding of *ethos* is more fixed, the modern definition of “rehabilitate” is to “re-establish the good reputation of a person, one’s character, one’s name,” demonstrating the connections between habit, rehabilitation and *ethos* that persist today (American Heritage Dictionary). A speaker’s good name and good character, in Aristotle’s rhetoric, was more malleable than modern audiences’ notions of character. In fact, Aristotle recognized two types of *ethos*: invented and situated. If a speaker already enjoys a good reputation, he depends on situated *ethos*. He may use “invented” *ethos*, too, however, to construct a character suitable to the occasion. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to “make us think him credible” and “this kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of this character before he begins to speak” (182). Good name and good character could be achieved by a process of formation, or habit, and changed to meet different situations.
This variation and management of ethos shows that Aristotle imagines a malleable system of ethos that did not rest on pre-determined models. This malleability, however, was subject to discipline by way of habit.\(^{18}\) The chief way that Aristotle seeks to model rhetorical bodies is through his construction of the appeal of the speaker’s ethos, which takes on the literal properties similar to those of “shaping up” that Stiker describes in the rehab model of disability. In his regulation of ethos through habit, Aristotle most clearly attempts to rehabituate or rehabilitate bodies for rhetoric. To regulate the flexibility of ethos, Aristotle provides, in Book Three, a system of guidelines for the formation of the speaker, through delivery. These prescriptions demonstrate the clearest ways in which Aristotelian rhetoric seeks to rehabilitate the body for rhetoric by shaping it along generalized guidelines. Despite this move towards generalization, however, Aristotle demonstrates an ambivalence regarding the subject of delivery, trying to strike the right balance between specialization and generalization, another similar tension in the rehabilitation model of disability. Although he began The Rhetoric recognizing that rhetoric resides “in the general ken of all men” and that “ordinary people” use rhetoric “at random or through practice and from acquired habit,” in his focus on delivery, Aristotle most clearly exercises his wish to render rhetoric a “subject that can plainly be handled systematically” (179). He continues to oscillate between prescribing and generalizing the model of the speaker, attempting to accord importance to delivery but then denying it. He seems to criticize the discipline because “no systematic treatise upon the rules of delivery has yet been composed” but then recognizes since “the whole business of rhetoric being concerned with

\(^{18}\) In Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle explores the complicated relationship between habit, ethos, nature and nurture. Considering the relationship between habit and nature, he writes, “Those who have become unrestrained through habit are more easily cured than those who are unrestrained by nature, since habit is easier to change than nature; for even habit is hard to change, precisely because it is a sort of nature” (qtd. in Hawhee 146). Again the absence of cure shapes bodies, allowing for change, but along strictly regulated systems.
appearances, we must pay attention to the subject of delivery, unworthy though it is, because we cannot do without it” (237). Oscillating between specifying and generalizing rhetorical delivery, Aristotle struggles with the implications for what improving one’s delivery means for nature and nurture, or learned or acquired ability.\(^1\)

Rehabilitating the body and delivery for rhetoric demands a system on which to standardize bodies. Aristotle’s systematic treatment of delivery reads like a “how to” manual for able delivery. Here Aristotle takes a prescriptive tone, explaining “for it is not enough to know what we ought to say; we must also say it as we ought” (236). Similar to the rehabilitation model’s management and prescriptions of bodies, Aristotle’s directions argue that “it is, essentially, a matter of the right management of the voice to express the various emotions—of speaking loudly, softly, or between the two; of high, low, or intermediate pitch; of the various rhythms that suit various subjects” (237). This “right management” requires “three things: volume of sound, modulation of pitch, and rhythm” (237). Almost sounding like an audiologist’s textbook for the oralist rehabilitation of deaf students, Aristotle seeks to model a template for delivery that strives for the appearance of naturalness while simultaneously covering up the artificial lengths needed to attain this naturalness.

The rhetor must disguise his artful delivery to give the impression of speaking naturally and not artificially. Aristotle explains, “Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary: for our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them” (238).\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Again he repeats his ambivalence regarding rhetoric, saying that the “right thing in speaking really is we should be satisfied not to annoy our hearers, without trying to delight them” (237), demonstrating his mixed feelings on how much learned ability or “trying” can be brought to rhetoric. He thinks that “we ought in fairness . . . fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts. . . . [S]till as has already been said . . . the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility” (237). Although Aristotle wants to rehabilitate the body, including the senses and how they affect intelligibility, he is stuck on how much the body can add to rhetoric. How much of natural ability can be affected or changed by how that ability is portrayed?

\(^2\) Aristotle writes that “the principles of good diction can be so taught, and therefore we have men of ability in this direction too, who win prizes in their turn, as well as those speakers who excel in delivery—speeches of the written
replacing and remaking the body for rhetoric and delivery rely on a strict system of restoration as well as concealment. Similar to the function of prosthesis that seeks to rehabilitate the body back to a prior, normal and natural state, Aristotle’s system of able delivery attempts to conceal artificiality with naturalness. As with the rehabilitation model of disability, Aristotle’s rhetoric hinges on a paradox, as it attempts to restore or achieve a prior state of “naturalness” that is no longer possible. Stiker explains that the rehabilitation model of disability “implies returning to a point, to a prior situation” (122). Rehabilitation means “[r]eplacement, re-establishment of the prior situation, substitution, compensation—all this now becomes possible language” with the advent of rehabilitation (Stiker 123-124). To regulate the “artificial” prosthesis of the body’s practice of delivery, Aristotle exacts a rigorous system of management and control in the form of able delivery.

Cicero, Quintilian, and the normalization of rhetoric and rhetorical bodies

While Plato sought to medicalize, cure and erase rhetorical bodies and Aristotle sought to rehabilitate them, Cicero and Quintilian seek primarily to normalize and standardize rhetorical bodies. As discussed, disability studies theorists have persuasively argued that disability is constructed directly in relation to the able, normal body, an insight applicable to the formation of rhetorical bodies in rhetoric. According to Davis, in order to understand the disabled body, we must start with concept of the norm and the normal body. Davis begins his investigation “with the rather remarkable fact that the constellation of words describing this concept ‘normal,’

of literary kind owe more of their effect to their diction than to their thought” (237). Aristotle states that “dramatic ability is a natural gift, and can hardly be systematically taught” (237). How much “effect” can add to “nature” or “ability” concerns Aristotle and is evident in his ambivalence regarding the canon of delivery.

Stiker elaborates: “Disability is to be as little apparent as possible, so that the rough spots on the social body remain unseen” (145). Also, in the rehabilitation model, he notes that “[d]efficiency will always be concealed so that the image projected and retained by the spectator or auditor will be agreeable, not be aggressive, and, above all, not stigmatize any social wound” (146). The rehabilitation model hinges on concealing.
normalcy, normality, norm, average, abnormal—all entered the European languages rather late in history” (24). In fact, the actual “word ‘normal,’ as ‘constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual’ only enters the English language around 1840” (24). As discussed, Davis reaches farther back in history to explore what predated the norm: the ideal. He identifies the ideal body that preceded the norm as exemplified in the tradition of the nude Venus or Helen of Troy. Davis refers to the story of the Greek artist Zeuxis, who reportedly lined up all the beautiful women of Crotona in order to select from each an ideal body part to be combined in a representation of Aphrodite, the ideal of beauty. This story illustrates the impossibility of the ideal and the lack of the norm. “In a culture with an ideal form of the body, all members of the population are below the ideal” and there is little pressure to conform (Davis 25). Davis argues that because of the advent of the norm, constructed in relation to the development of statistics, eugenics, the middle class, and Marx’s concept of the average man, the pressure to conform became attainable, and the norm became the new ideal. The model of the norm is made iconic in the statistical shape of the bell curve, which structures average and normal at the high part of the bell under which most bodies fall. The edges or tails of the curve represent bodies outside the norm. The construction of the ideal and the norm both demonstrate how each concept is mutually dependent on the abnormal, or disabled, body.

Cicero and Quintilian, in their fashioning of rhetorical bodies, also move between the ideal and the norm, but in reverse, by trying to make the ideal rhetor an attainable rhetor. In this tight space between the ideal and the attainable, they actually normalize rhetors, in complementary ways. Cicero, who prizes natural ability over learned ability in rhetorical training, emphasizes how “natural gifts” prime certain rhetors to attain the ideal. Crassus states
“in the first place natural talent is the chief contributor to the virtue of oratory” (305). “Inborn capacity” and “the gifts of nature” are chief in Cicero’s requirements for the ideal orator; among these are “the ready tongue, the ringing tones, strong lungs, vigor, suitable build and shape of the face and body as a whole” (305). Crassus admits that “good abilities may through instruction become better,” but then immediately points out that “there are some men either so tongue-tied, or so discordant in tone, or so wild and boorish in feature and gesture, that, even though sound in talent and in art, they yet cannot enter the ranks of orators” (304). Again, the able orator is constructed alongside the disabled, disqualified orator. The same trajectory that Davis outlines in his study of the norm in the nineteenth century is at work in the codification of Roman rhetoric—in the absence of the ideal, the norm is constructed which directly leads to the construction of the abnormal and disability. After using men so tongue-tied, discordant and wild to construct the mold of the ideal orator, he excludes these inferior orators completely from the ranks of orators.

Cicero’s ideal orator is a supremely able one, but since he is also one who is consistently constructed in relation to an ideal that is unattainable, he is normalized. As Crassus outlines the requirements of the orator, including the wide variety of gifts and qualifications he must possess, he insists on perfection. He describes Apollonius of Alabanda, who turns away pupils unsuitable for oratory, directing them towards other crafts, “just to be a man like other men” (306). The average man is suitable for these crafts, but not for the role of orator. Cicero’s following description of the ideal orator shows the tension between his desire for an ideal and his simultaneous desire to prescribe and normalize the orator. “But in an orator we must demand the

22 Crassus is generally accepted as the mouthpiece of Cicero in the dialogue, although there are exceptions to this rule.
23 Anything that does not fit the prescribed ideal is discarded from the mold of the able orator. “For there is hardly a soul present but will turn a keener and more penetrating eye upon defects in the speaker than upon his good points. Thus any blunder that may be committed eclipses even those other things that are praiseworthy” (305).
24 Interestingly, Cicero even draws on the story of the Greek artist Zeuxis’ search for ideal beauty as inspiration for the “cull[ing] the flower from various geniuses” that he undertakes in his model for the art of speaking in De Inventione.
subtlety of the logician, the thoughts of the philosopher, a diction almost poetic, a lawyer’s memory, a tragedian’s voice, and the bearing almost of the consummate actor” (306-307). Directly after making these incredible demands, Cicero recognizes the impossibility of his expectation. Through Antonius, he states, “Accordingly no rarer thing than a finished orator can be discovered among the sons of men” (307). The attributes from the other crafts that he has required of the orator—ranging from the thoughts of the philosopher to the bearing of the actor—“cannot win approval when embodied in an orator, unless in him they are all assembled in perfection” (307). Caught between demanding perfection and prescribing the traits he wants of an orator from a set of predetermined characteristics, Cicero first idealizes then begins to normalize the rhetor.

Crassus returns to defects and blunders in an attempt to reconcile the ideal with the norm. Building on his argument that “any blunder that may be committed eclipses even those other things that are praiseworthy,” he tells of a teacher who “has never succeeded in finding a single pupil of whom he really approved, not because there were not some who were acceptable, but because, if there was any blemish whatsoever in them, he himself would not endure it” (307). Any blemish whatsoever relegates an oratory student to the status of “unacceptable.” Perseverating on defects, Crassus repeats that “nothing stands out so conspicuously, or remains so firmly fixed in the memory, as something in which you have blundered” (307). The orator “does nothing otherwise than perfectly” (307). Crassus even remarks that he is unreasonable for “demanding in an orator this absolute perfection” from which he himself is “far removed” (307). The qualifications for the ideal orator are all or nothing—“For the man who is without ability, who makes mistakes, whose claim—in a word—does him discredit, should in my own

25 He acknowledges his unreal expectations for the orator, and chastises the disparity in standards he holds for himself and the ideal orator, stating “I want forgiveness for myself, but I do not forgive others” (307).
judgment . . . be thrust down to such work as he can perform” (307). Simultaneously, however, Crassus seeks, through his interlocutors Sulpicius and Cotta, “to stimulate you men of ability no less than to discourage the inefficient” (307). Even though in one breath Cicero insists on perfection in oratory, casting down anyone who does not meet these unreal standards, in the very next breath he contradicts this decree, and begins to set up a system of normalization that shapes and limits anyone who does not meet the standards of perfection—this is, ironically, everyone. While setting up an exclusionary system of requirements that idealize orators, Cicero simultaneously establishes a normalizing system as well.

In the tight place between the ideal orator and everyone else, Cicero begins a process of normalization of the rhetor which rests on a standardized system of rhetorical education and training. He explains, “those on whom these gifts have been bestowed by nature in smaller measure, can none the less acquire the power to use what they have with propriety and discernment” (307). Crotta desires to learn how to achieve this less-than-ideal status, rationalizing to Crassus that “for since you keep us in this pursuit and do not send us away to some other art, we must now further beseech you to explain to us your own power in oratory . . . for we are not too greedy; we are quite content with what you call your ‘ordinary eloquence’ . . . since you tell us the qualities to be sought from nature are not excessively deficient in ourselves, the thing we wish to know from you is what further requisite you consider should be acquired” (307). Crassus, a living example of the less than ideal orator, nevertheless instructs his students on how to achieve “ordinary eloquence.” In this way, Cicero begins to establish the “school course in rhetoric,” codifying a method that will leave a lasting legacy of normalization and regulation on rhetoric and rhetorical bodies.
Specifically in this space between the ideal eloquence and ordinary eloquence, dependent on the norm, Cicero outlines his influential program for rhetoric and its five canons. Crassus explains, “as to this ability of my own, however insignificant it is, I will explain to you my habitual method, nothing particularly mysterious or exceedingly difficult, nothing grand or imposing, just the plan I used to follow” (308). By making himself a living example of a type of oratory that falls short of the ideal, Crassus enables the explanation of his ordinary method that simply rests on habit, and is not even exceedingly difficult. In this way, Crassus lays out a program for rhetoric that normalizes in the absence of an ideal. Following his interlocutors’ plea for training, Crassus sets out his influential precepts for the duties of an orator, the realm of rhetoric and the “proper” type of orator. His habitual, ordinary method recalls meanings of the norm that rest on “usual” or “average,” but also attempts to reach for the ideal. These regulations established in the context of the space between the ideal and the norm exact lasting effects, as Cicero’s model is taken up through the Renaissance and beyond. Stating that “all activity and ability of an orator falls into five divisions,” Demarcating these five divisions, Crassus continues, explaining, “I learned that he must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument; next go on to array them in the adornments of style; after that keep them guarded in his memory; and in the end deliver them with effect and charm” (308).

The canons of invention, arrangement, style, delivery and memory are sketched out here, each introduced in the space between the ideal and ordinary orator and developed in the context of the norm. Although Crassus downplays his method as habit, not grand, mysterious or difficult, he still retains an attachment to the ideal orator. The orator must “manage” and “marshal,” his invention, use a “discriminating eye” for their “exact weight,” “guard[ing]” them in his memory,
orderly fashioning arguments and delivering them with effect and charm. Crassus continues to shape this method in a standardized, normalized fashion, stating that “we must speak in the first place, pure and correct Latin, secondly with simple lucidity, thirdly with elegance, in a manner befitting the dignity of our topics and with a certain grace” (308). This emphasis on purity, correctness, and elegance typifies the tight space between the ideal and the norm in which Cicero fashions the orator. By emphasizing a limited set of standards for rhetors, Cicero whittles down the possibilities for rhetorical achievement. In particular, this emphasis on normalization and standardization leaves little room for play, mistakes, or alternative methods.

In the absence of the ideal but in the desire for a level of attainable excellence, Cicero normalizes the rhetorical training of the orator, taking the famous orator Demosthenes, who overcame a speech impediment to become an accomplished speaker, as his model. Much of Cicero’s dialogue concerns Crassus’ and Antonius’ disagreement over the training of the rhetor. Crassus advocates broad learning while Antonio calls for more formulaic training. Despite their differences, which hinge on the same question of the effect of education or nurture on natural ability, they agree on the example of Demosthenes as the ideal orator. Like Aristotle, Cicero is ambivalent about how much education affects natural ability. Several times Cicero states that natural ability is paramount for the molding of the rhetor, but that practice is also important and can aid in natural deficiencies. For example, “the control and training of voice, breathing, gestures and the tongue itself, call for exertion rather than art; and in these matters we must carefully consider whom we are to take a patterns, whom we should wish to be like. We have to study actors as well as orators, that bad practice may not lead us into some inelegant or ugly

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26 Both interlocutors agree that natural ability is the most important foundation for excellence in oratory, but disagree on how to best foster this ability. Rhetorical training for both rests on a bedrock of natural ability, but for each there is a different system for developing and aiding that ability: Antonius’ system is generally regarded as more mechanical or formulaic, but both systems actually constrain the possibilities for rhetors.
habit” (310). The training of the orator is strictly regulated, under careful control so as to avoid repeating the ugly or inelegant habits. A sense of careful molding shapes the able orator—only able models and patterns are acceptable for training so as to avoid any patterning of non-standard or deviant rhetors. Demosthenes most clearly illustrates the acceptable patterning on which the training for a normalized orator rests. Although Demosthenes does not settle the question regarding the effect of nurture on nature, and in fact complicates it, he offers both interlocutors a model on which to pattern the training of the rhetor that rests on normalized, standardized and eventually replicable practices.27

Repeating the virtues of practice, Crassus compares rhetorical training to athletic training, a system that hinges on forming and transforming the body along a normalizing regimen. The example of Demosthenes is the impetus for Antonius’ prodding of Crassus to provide his “habitual” method of rhetorical training, a program that limits all rhetors by idealizing and then normalizing them, in its careful negotiation between the ideal and the norm and its injunctions for managing, marshalling, ordering, discriminating, guarding and charming. Antonius evokes his understanding of the ideal orator—“that man only who was able, in a style more admirable and more splendid, to amplify and adorn any subject he chose” in the living example of Demosthenes, who, along with Crassus, “will stand forth as an orator such as we are seeking, who may rightly be called not merely accomplished but actually eloquent” (302). Ironically, the disabled but “cured” Demosthenes is the pattern onto which the requirements for the ideal orator

27 Concerning Demosthenes, Antonius’ reports on a debate in Athens convey that we cannot “deny to Demosthenes the possession of consummate wisdom and the highest power of eloquence, but whether Demosthenes owed this ability to natural talent or, as was generally agreed, had been a devoted disciple of Plato, the present question was not what those rhetoricians were teaching” (301). Despite the well-known fact of his intense speech training to overcome his stuttering, Antonius reports that Demosthenes prizes natural ability and that “no craft of oratory existed”, when he says that “not a single writer on rhetoric . . . had been even moderately eloquent . . . while on the other hand he would cite a countless host of very eloquent men who had never learned those rules or been at all anxious to make their acquaintance . . . and among these . . . he went on to mention me in the list . . . as one who had never studied those matters and yet . . . had some ability in oratory” (302).
are drawn; we see that his disability and his overcoming of it make him an ideal candidate for modeling the importance of rhetorical training. His disability and his normalization, or eradication of it, both work in the service of rhetorical training, demonstrating how disability is at once the raw material against which and with which rhetorical success is constructed. Once his “natural” disability of stuttering is cured, thereby allowing his true nature to shine through, he becomes the prototype for hard work and perfection. Antonius describes Demosthenes:

[T]o return to our starting-point, let us take the orator to be, as Crassus defined him, a man who can speak in a way calculated to convince. . . let him press forward night and day . . . in this single vocation, and do as the famous Athenian Demosthenes did, whose pre-eminence in oratory is unhesitatingly admitted, and whose zeal and exertions are said to have been such that at the very outset he surmounted natural drawbacks by diligent perseverance: and though at first stuttering so badly as to be unable to pronounce the initial R or the name of the art of his devotion, by practice he made himself accounted as distinct a speaker as anyone; later on, though his breath was rather short, he succeeded so far in making his breath hold during a speech, that a single oratorical period—as his writings prove—covered two risings and two fallings of tone; moreover—as the tale goes—it was by his habit to slip pebbles into his mouth, and then declaim a number of verses at the top of his voice and without drawing breath, and this not only as he stood still, but while walking about of going up a steep slope. (320)

In the absence of agreement on the exact training for an orator, both Antonius and Crassus can agree on at least one thing: that the orator should, like Demosthenes, iron out any difference or
disability and be an able, normalized and standardized orator. While Antonius believes Crassus
too delimits the orator and while Crassus believes that Antonius makes the orator too
mechanical, both agree on a model that, like Demosthenes, should be free of disability and
relatively normal in appearance and sound. If an ideal is not attainable, in its place resides a
heightened sense of the norm.

Cicero idealizes the orator, but also begins to establish a system of norming of the orator
in order to make the ideal more attainable. The Roman rhetorician Quintilian continues the
process of normalization and standardization that Cicero begins. As Davis’ investigation of the
norm reveals, the norm rests on a “common type or standard, regular, usual” (24). Cicero clearly
begins molding a common type of orator in his rhetorical training, depending on the pattern of
the rehabilitated Demosthenes. An earlier meaning of norm, however, draws attention to how
Quintilian takes up this project of molding and ensures its legacy. Before approximately 1840,
the concept of the norm still retained its etymological root, meaning “perpendicular,”
materialized in the T-shape of the carpenter’s square, an instrument of design, measurement,
regulation, and most importantly for the construction of the normalized rhetor, replication. The
standardized T shape of the norm characterizes Quintilian’s approach to modeling the normal
orator.

In the truest sense of the term, Quintilian wants “to form” the good man speaking well;
that is, he seeks to mold and shape every stage of the orator’s progression, in a normative fashion
that is standardized and replicable. “Let the orator, then, whom I propose to form, be such a one
as is characterized by the definition of Marcus Cato, a good man skilled in speaking” (412-413).
This forming takes disability as the raw material against which and with which the good man
speaking well is shaped. “Nature herself . . . would have acted, not as a parent, but as a step-
mother, if she had designed the faculty of speech to be the promoter of crime, the oppressor of innocence, and the enemy of truth; for it would have been better for us to have been born dumb, and to have been left destitute of reasoning powers, than to have received endowments from providence only to turn them to the destruction of one another (413). Quintilian’s construct of the good man speaking well is shaped directly in relation to several binary relationships, including gender, species and nature, but chiefly it is shaped in relation to disability. In Quintilian’s comparison, disability is the archetype of the bad man speaking well, and it is better to be completely “dumb” than to speak badly or be a bad person speaking well. To explore how Quintilian arrives at this narrow construction of the good man speaking well, tracing the way in which Quintilian shaped his model in these limiting terms is productive. The construction of the good man speaking is a process of formation, often described as a manual formation, shaping or modeling that normalizes and shaves down the possibilities for orators. Quintilian’s life-long program for the formation of the good man speaking well is patterned on a shape similar to a bell-curve or the T-square in which most orators are conditioned to fall a certain pattern that is standardized, normalized and replicable.

To begin this formation, Quintilian advises early intervention for oratorical training, criticizing the “prevalent custom . . . for pupils to be sent to the teachers of eloquence . . . at a more advanced age than reason requires” (364). He seeks to intervene in the prevailing custom and to construct a new habit, an important element in norming which rests on “common type or standard, regular, usual.” A clear sense of formation and shaping directs this early, formative stage of education, as Quintilian, referring to Aristotle, seeks to unite the teachings of the grammarian and the rhetorician in the boy’s early education, stating, “He who shall suppose that these matters do not concern the orator, will think that a statue is not begun when its limbs are
cast” (366). In this early part of his training and his treatise, Quintilian makes a comparison between sculpture and rhetorical training that he will continually use to shape and standardize the mold of the rhetor.

A modeling of the orator, often compared to the way a sculptor crafts a statue, directs Quintilian’s treatise. Quintilian recommends providing students in their infancy with ivory blocks, presumably to familiarize them with the feel and touch of letters. Formal education begins as early as age three. Teachers should conduct themselves as examples for their students, especially in the early formative years. Quintilian also condemns corporal punishment, demonstrating a respect for bodily boundaries in students’ education. In these ways, Quintilian establishes a sense of shaping of the orator early in his life, when the young body and mind is most flexible and malleable. By the time the student meets his rhetoric and grammar teachers, correctness is the most important objective. The boy must master, especially with the grammerian, correctness, as well as standard spelling and punctuation. Early in his oratorical career, the student is patterned after normalized forms of language in standardness and correctness; accordingly, his mother, nurse and teacher should all speak exemplary Latin. In the formative years, only correct models form the pattern onto which an aspiring orator is shaped.

Despite this strict sense of formation, Quintilian does allow for some flexibility in his course of training, but this flexibility is ultimately regulated by norming. While laying out a detailed progymnasia for his students, he specifically states, “let no man require from me such a system of precepts as is laid down by most authors of books of rules, a system in which I should have to make certain laws, fixed by immutable necessity, for all students of eloquence” (383). Similar to Cicero, Quintilian is ambivalent about how much to prescribe for rhetorical training and how much space to leave for experimentation. Quintilian illustrates this tension in the
definition of rhetoric itself, stating, “for rhetoric would be a very easy and small matter, if it could be included in one short body of rules, but rules most generally be altered to suit the nature of each individual case, the time, the occasion, and necessity itself” (383). He recommends that teachers should “observe accurately the differences in ability in those whom he has undertaken to instruct, and to ascertain in what direction the nature of each particularly inclines him; for there is talent in incredible variety; nor are the forms of the mind fewer than those of the body” (377).

As with Cicero, for Quintilian the tension between strict and flexible rules dominates his rhetorical training, and like Cicero, Quintilian opts for more control over the process. While he acknowledges flexibility, Quintilian ultimately relies on rules that normalize and standardize the body for rhetoric, as evidenced in his comparisons to athletic training that mold the rhetorical body along normalizing lines of strength.

As a master of palaestric exercises, when he enters a gymnasium full of boys, is able, after trying their strength and comprehension in every possible way, to decide for what kind of exercise out to be trained; so a teacher of eloquence, they say, when he has clearly observed which boy’s genius delights most in a concise and polished manner of speaking, and which is spirited, or grave, or smooth, or rough, or brilliant, or elegant one, will so accommodate his instructions to each, that he shows most ability; because nature attains far greater power when seconded by culture; and he that is led contrary to nature, cannot make due progress in the studies for which he is unfit. (377-378)

Although he does acknowledge that nurture, in the form of teaching and learning, affects nature, especially natural ability, Quintilian still constrains himself to a narrow understanding of nature.
By using an analogy to gymnastics and strength, he ascribes an ableist understanding to physical and oratorical success, in which the “strongest” are necessarily the best and in which strength is narrowly defined. A physical sense of formation pervades Quintilian’s analogy, as metaphors of smoothness and roughness map on to ability and disability, and “[t]he teacher of rhetoric will decide in accordance to these particularities, just as the master of the palaestra will make one of his pupils a runner, another a boxer, another a wrestler, or fit him for any of the exercises” (378). The rhetoric teacher shapes his students just as a physical education teacher conditions his students.

Quintilian uses metaphors of molding material to include certain bodies and exclude others from rhetorical formation. These comparisons rest on disability. “We must so far accommodate ourselves, however, to feeble intellects, that they may be trained only to that to which nature invites them; for thus they will do with more success the only thing which they can do. But if richer material fall into our hands, from which we justly conceive hopes of a true orator, no rhetorical excellence must be left unstudied” (378). Analogous to the raw materials of a statue, good students are richer materials that deserve attention and shaping, for whom no effort should be spared. Quintilian repeats his comparison to physical training, aligning these rich rhetorical clay-like models with models of physical strength, explaining that even “genius” can be well cultivated. Despite this positive sense of molding and formation for good rhetorical

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28 To further elaborate his views on the aid of nurture for nature, Quintilian adds another example based on the art of sculpture, demonstrating again his emphasis on the formation, craft and shaping of the orator. “Had Praxiteles attempted to hew a statue out of a millstone, I should have preferred to it an unhewn block of Parian marble, but if that statuary had fashioned the marble, more value would be accrued to it from his workmanship than was in the marble itself” (396). Millstone is a material unfit for sculpture, while marble is a far superior material, but a skilled craftsman’s work on millstone could increase its value to make it more valuable than a raw block of marble. Quintilian sums up this complicated relationship between nature and nurture by stating, “In a word, nature is the material for learning; the one forms, and the other is formed. Art can do nothing without material; material has its value even independent of art; but perfection of art is of more consequence than perfection of material” (396). Perfection is the main objective in this process and art or learning is placed in the service of perfecting material. For Quintilian, this culminates in his definition of speech as “not the material, but the work; as the statue is the work of a statuary; for speeches, like statues, are produced by art” (398).
candidates, there is a type of student that must be excised in Quintilian’s training. “There may perhaps be some pupil unequal to some of these exercises. He must then apply chiefly to that in which he can succeed” (378). Quintilian’s formation process operates normatively in two ways here, first by excising the hopeless pupil completely from oratorical instruction, and then by placing limits on even the more able students, an action which funnels them away from what they cannot accomplish and towards what they are more qualified for. Both normalizations are exacted by a metaphorical and literally tangible sense of molding by which certain bodies are nurtured and shaped for rhetorical success and others are not. What remains unexamined in Quintilian’s training is the ableist assumptions that underlie who is regarded as a promising orator of rich material and who is relegated to the status of uneducable. In his frequent comparisons of rhetorical ability to physical strength, and success in sports such as wrestling and boxing, Quintilian translates a narrowly competitive and ableist framework onto rhetorical training. Might is right in this framework, and if not might then a streamlined, bell-curved shaped orator or standardized T-shaped pattern is Quintilian’s objective. Like the pattern of the bell curve or the T square, the norm is singular, unified and fixed, yet replicable and standard. Quintilian states, “For it is not enough that [the student] should speak concisely, or artfully, or vehemently, any more than for a singing master to excel in acute, or middle, or grave tones only, or even particular subdivisions of them; since eloquence is, like a harp, not perfect, unless, with all its strings stretched, it be in unison from the highest to the lowest note” (379). Like a perfect harmony, with no outlying notes, the well-formed orator should speak in union with his classmates, each one sounding just like the other.

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29 He elaborates: “For two things are especially to be avoided: one, to attempt what cannot be accomplished; and the other, to divert a pupil from what he does well to something else for which he is less qualified” (378).
30 Even the physical shape of the harp recalls the shape of the bell curve.
Another comparison to the arts more clearly demonstrates the normative crafting of student of rhetoric. Particularly through his use of statues as examples for his rhetorical training, Quintilian demonstrates his model of the construct of the good man speaking in ableist, normalized fashion, crafted along what we could now recognize as an ancient example of the norm and bell curve. Directly after stating his position regarding the uselessness of rules for rhetoric, Quintilian vacillates on the issue. “Yet I shall not deny that it is in general of service to attend to rules, or I should not write any…” (383). Accordingly, he provides some rules, stating that “an orator, in all his pleadings, should keep two things in view, what is becoming and what is expedient; but it is frequently expedient, and sometimes becoming, to make some deviations from the regular and settled order, as, in statues and pictures, we see the dress, look, and attitude, varied” (383). Deviations from the settled order, rule, or norm, however, only occur within a strict bell curved fashion:

In a statue, exactly *upright*, there is but very little gracefulness, for the face will look straight forward, the arms hang down, the feet will be joined, and the whole figure, from top to toe, will be rigidity itself; but a gentle bend, or, to use the expression, motion of the body, gives a certain animation to figures. Accordingly, the hands are not always placed in the same position, and a thousand varieties are given to the countenance. Some figures are in a running or rushing posture, some are seated or reclining, some are uncovered, and others veiled, some partake of both conditions. What is more distorted and elaborate than the Discobolus of Myron? Yet if any one should find fault with that figure for not being upright, would he not prove himself void of all understanding of the art, in which the very novelty and difficulty of the execution is what is most deserving of praise? Such graces and charms rhetorical figures afford, both such as they are in the thoughts and such as lie
in words, for they depart in some degree from the right line, and exhibit the merit of
deviation from common practice. (383-384)

As is the case in his opinion about strict, unyielding rules of rhetoric, Quintilian at first rejects a
stiff, rigid and inflexible approach to the arts of speaking. The “gentle bend” that Quintilian
recommends for statues and for rhetorical training at first seems accommodating and flexible, as
it attempts to encourage a freedom and variety of expression, motion and comportment, but this
openness is narrowed down quickly. Departure “in some degree from the right line” is
recommended by Quintilian, since the exact uprightness or straight line is “rigidity itself,” but
this “merit of deviation” ends up only recommended in slight degrees. Like the points plotted
along a bell curve, only a small degree of deviation is acceptable in Quintilian’s rhetorical
training. In his very next example, what falls outside the lines he has drawn for the rhetor is
relayed in ableist and normalizing terms that again identify disability as the trait to be eradicated
absolutely from rhetorical training. Using another example from art, Quintilian observes,

The whole face is generally represented in a painting, yet Apelles painted the figure of
Antigonus with only one side of his face toward the spectator, that its disfigurement from
the loss of an eye might be concealed. Are not some things, in like manner, to be
concealed in speaking, whether, it may be, because they ought not to be told, or because
they cannot be expressed as they deserve? . . . For these reasons it has always been
customary with me, to bind myself as little as possible to rules which Greeks call [x] and
which we, translating the word as well as we can, term univer sia or perpetualia,
“general” or “constant”; for rules are rarely found of such a nature, that they may not be
shaken in some part, or wholly overthrown. (384)
Taking the concealment of a missing eye as his model, Quintilian recommends that certain flaws be concealed in speaking as well. Rather than to show disfigurement, or to express something imperfectly, Quintilian recommends hiding it. Imperfect representation, in art or speaking, is rendered as “disfigurement,” as any mis-approximation is conceived as failure. To illustrate his point, Quintilian praises the decision of the painter Timanthes, who, rather than fail at depicting the grief on the face of Menelaus over his daughter’s sacrifice, paints a veil over the face to conceal it. While his fear at a failure of representation ostensibly motivates this decision, it is also possible that Timanthes cannot bring himself to paint the ugliness of the human face wrought by grief. Although Quintilian seems to advise against norms, general rules, or constants in his training, this seeming openness is not flexible enough to accommodate disability or any large degree of difference. Underlying his denial of universals or constants is the pervasive and regulating shape of the bell curve, as only certain efforts with only a small degree of deviation are valued and encouraged.

Rhetoric and rhetorical training are normalized in two ways through Quintilian’s formations. First, Quintilian advises not to say anything at all rather than to say it imperfectly. The rule instructs that it is better not to say anything at all rather than to risk saying it incorrectly. In this way, avenues of thought and expression are pared down by an overly oppressive sense of correctness and exactitude that pervades rhetorical training. Quintilian instructs students not to take risks in rhetoric, for fear of making a mistake or misrepresentation. Correctness is the only benchmark to direct our rhetorical training, and this single-minded objective permits little play, deviation or freedom of expression. Second, when an ill-advised risk happens, the result is characterized in terms of disability. Imperfect rhetoric here is illustrated in terms of disability
and disfigurement, in the manner of the unrepresented missing eye, and it is better to conceal
imperfection than to acknowledge it. Disability is so assiduously avoided in rhetoric that it,
ironically, can hardly be represented. The missing eye is not pictured, but its presence is made
obvious in its absence.

Like the double bind of representation which disability scholars David Mitchell and
Sharon Snyder identify, in which disability is ignored while also being the raw material out of
which literary, cultural and symbolic representations are made, rhetoric also uses disability to
both shape and excise certain rhetorical bodies. Whether rhetoric is defined as disability, as in
Plato’s case, or as ability, as in Aristotle’s, each definition draws is conditions from a mutually
dependent relationship between disability and ability. The definitions of rhetoric and rhetorical
bodies fashioned by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, demonstrate that disability, far from
being excluded entirely from rhetoric, forms the basis on which able, ideal, rehabilitated or
normalized rhetorical bodies are formed. The medical and rehabilitation models illuminated by
disability studies, as well as the construction of the norm, draw attention to the specifically
corporeal way in which rhetorical bodies have been shaped in the dominant tradition. Plato’s
denial of touch and erasure of the body, Aristotle’s manual for the rehabilitation of rhetorical
bodies, Cicero’s athletic training of the able body and Quintilian’s sculptural shaping of the
normal body: all depend on a structured process of bodily formation for rhetoric. In each of these
processes, the sense of touch either figuratively or literally shapes certain bodies while ignoring
others. In the medicalized, idealized, rehabilitated and normalized models of rhetoric and
rhetorical bodies in the dominant tradition, the sense of touch operates subtly to shape certain
bodies over others, always in a co-constitutive, mutually dependent relationship between ability
and disability. As an alternative to the dominant tradition, I turn to the sophistic tradition to
uncover the ways the sense of touch operates more explicitly to shape and reshape rhetorical bodies.
Chapter 2: Socio-Cultural Sensual Models in Disability Studies and Sophistic Rhetoric

Every advance in epistemology and moral knowledge has reinstated the sophists.
(Friedrich Nietzsche  The Will to Power 428)

The sophists, innovative fifth century BCE rhetoricians and the first professional teachers, have enjoyed a renaissance in recent studies of feminist, digital, postmodern and ethnic rhetorics, after previously being relegated to disrepute by Plato and Aristotle. Susan Jarratt, for example, compares historical and scholarly relegation of the sophists to similar marginalization of women and other minorities. Jarratt and other neosophistic theorists draw on Nietzsche’s claim that every advance in epistemology reinstates the sophists because the sophists continue to offer useful perspectives on contemporary issues. The sophists taught in a time of flux—political participation, educational access and literacy practices all underwent transformations in the fifth century BCE, making their rhetorical theories and practices useful to current issues. As many neosophistic studies have pointed out, we inhabit a similar time, as non-traditional students populate classrooms and our literacies undergo digital and multi-mediated changes.

In this chapter, I will show how advances offered by disability studies and innovations made by disabled rhetors who use the sense of touch reinstate the sophists. Sophistic rhetorics offer fresh perspectives on the rhetorical strategies of current disabled rhetors. This chapter and the chapters that follow argue that contemporary disabled rhetors are present day sophists because they implicitly draw on and revise sophistic strategies for the experience of disability. Sophistic rhetorics and disability studies can mutually inform each other, offering each other beneficial cross-disciplinary connections regarding the social and material construction of rhetorical bodies. In particular, sophistic rhetorics offer new ways of appreciating the contribution of disabled rhetors that the dominant tradition does not support because the sophists
value the senses in rhetorical production. Also, sophistic rhetorics offer disability studies new
definitions of norms, through their articulation of nomoi, locally drawn, flexible human codes
that are important predecessors of modern norms. In turn, disabled rhetors offer sophistic and
neosophistic studies new areas of inquiry, texts for study and rhetorical strategies to appreciate.
Sophists and today’s disability studies theorists and writers ask similar questions of rhetoric,
interrogating the socio-cultural construction of knowledge by and about bodies, access to
education, natural ability vs. learned ability, and the effect of norms on rhetorical bodies.
Extending this comparison further, I argue that the sophists’ appreciation of diverse sensory
experiences involved in rhetorical production supports important rhetorical advancements that
disabled rhetors demonstrate in rhetorics of touch.

Socio-cultural Constructions of Disability in Disability Studies & Sophistic Rhetoric
Attitudes towards disability in the cultural climate of ancient Greece in which the sophists taught
are different from contemporary understandings of disability, but overall they evince a striking
connection to the most current model of disability forwarded by disability studies because both
share similar approaches to epistemology based in contingent social and cultural contexts. The
current model of disability, the social model, formed in response to the medical model, argues
that meanings about disability are constructed in specific social and cultural contexts. Whereas
the medical establishment is primarily responsible for meanings attributed to disability that
define it as a flaw, defect, negative experience or impairment to be cured, disability studies
theorists and activists forward the social-cultural or constructivist model both to identify the
medical model and to provide an alternative to it. The medical model seeks to locate the problem
of disability only internally in the disabled body, individualizing and isolating disability and then
fixing or curing it in order to make it fit the norm of the able body. The medical model isolates, rehabilitates and normalizes the disabled body. The socio-cultural model, in contrast, locates disability in a social, political and cultural context. Instead of individualizing disability in the disabled body, the socio-cultural model focuses on how environmental, social or cultural barriers contribute to meanings of disability. The socio-cultural model of disability does not identify disability as a negative experience in and of itself, but instead examines how environmental barriers and non-accommodating societies contribute to the challenges of disability. The social constructivist model often hinges on a difference between the concepts of impairment and disability. As Irving Zola describes it, “an impairment involves the loss or diminution of sight, hearing, mobility, mental ability, and so on. But an impairment only becomes a disability when the ambient society creates environments with barriers—affective, sensory, cognitive, or architectural” (qtd. in Davis 41).

Both sophistic studies of rhetoric and disability studies share definitions of epistemology as shaped by similar social and cultural models. Disability studies interrogates the powerful ways in which institutions, social norms and a wide variety of legal, medical and educational discourses construct disability as much as disability itself. The social model in disability studies highlights how meanings attributed to disability and ability, to normal and abnormal bodies, are made in specific cultural and social contexts. As disability studies theorists and activist Simi Linton puts it, the socio-cultural model of disability “focuses on the external variables: the social, political and intellectual contingencies that shape meaning and behavior” (6). Disability historian James Trent, for example, demonstrates how meanings of disability are socially specific and historically contingent. He shows that mental retardation was “an expected part of rural and

31 As I have argued in the previous chapter, the medical model parallels the dominant rhetorical tradition’s treatment of rhetorical bodies.
small town life” until the nineteenth century, when inventions of “feeble mindedness” isolated and institutionalized bodies that had previously been accepted, educated and nurtured by many communities. Martha Edwards (1997) has shown the society of ancient Greece assigned a meaning to disability very different from our own time, as disability was often prized in classical Greece because of its strong associations with artisanal or warrior activities that accorded honor. These contingencies recognize that there are no universal truths regarding ability and disability. The “constructivist model sees disability as a social process in which no inherent meanings attach to physical difference other than those assigned by a community” (Davis 41).

The sophists share similar approaches to knowledge-making, emphasizing the specific social and cultural contexts that construct meaning-making in communities. As well-traveled teachers who prepared students to speak persuasively and to participate in the developing polis’ legal and governmental affairs, the sophists encountered many different societies and cultures. They developed educational programs and rhetorical training within the shifting contexts of different communities. Drawing from this diverse experience, “they believed and taught that notions of ‘truth’ had to be adjusted to fit the ways of a particular audience in a certain time and with a certain set of beliefs and laws” (Jarratt xv). Although the individual sophists espoused diverse viewpoints, there is general agreement that as a group they shared common goals, including “a fundamental understanding of knowledge and values as historically contingent, a recognition of all discourse as ‘rhetorical,’ and integrated relationship between theory, practice, and the political sphere” (Jarratt ix). Like Trent and Edwards, who emphasize the historically contingent meanings attributed to disability, the sophists believed that all knowledge and values, including those that construct meaning about bodies, are contingent. Like other disability studies scholars, the sophists recognize that cultural contexts drive group decisions about “normal” and
“abnormal” bodies. These broad characterizations of the sophistic movement identify their engagements with rhetoric in terms of a “socio-cultural” model that relies on an understanding of meaning and truth as socially situated, culturally contextual, and historically contingent.

There is evidence that the sophists in the cultural climate of ancient Greece held similar notions of disability that parallel today’s socio-cultural model of disability. Martha Edwards, in her study of ancient Greek society, describes what she terms as the ancients’ “community concept” of disability, which “presents physical disability as a cultural construct in which ‘physical disability’ has no inherent meaning but is defined by any given community’s understanding of people’s roles” (35). Edwards’ articulation of the Greek’s community concept shares several commonalities with the social model of disability. First, despite the idealized, neoclassical image of the mathematically perfect body typically accepted in studies of the body in Greek culture, Edwards situates disability within a broader socio-cultural context, arguing that impairment was a common phenomenon in ancient Greece because of many factors. Lack of vaccines and antibiotics, congenital disabilities, rudimentary birthing conditions, and acquired impairments through farming accidents and military wounds in a highly agrarian and militaristic culture all contributed to higher incidences of disability. Furthermore, the value placed on farming and especially military efforts contextualized impairment as an experience not universally negative and sometimes according accommodation and honor. Instead of understanding disability as an individual problem or dichotomized against ability, the Greeks

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32 Disability studies scholars Lennard Davis and Rosemary Garland Thomson also explore knowledge made about normal and abnormal bodies in specific social and cultural contexts, the mid-nineteenth century England and post-Civil War era America, respectively, but we will investigate them more in detail in the following sections.

33 Edwards positions the ancients’ community model against the modern medical model, which “assumes that disability is a medical condition that is inherent in the individual and that the disabled person’s functional ability deviates from that of the normal human body” (35). Edwards does not explicitly recognize the community model of disability in relation to current disability studies theories of the social model or social constructivist model.
recognized shifting definitions of ability and disability according to one’s function or role within the community.

Second, the Greeks had no fixed definition of physical disability, Edwards argues, and they had “not reached the level of abstraction in perceiving a category of physical disability in which people were a priori banned from carrying out certain roles” (36). Disability was determined in socially and culturally specific contexts. This fluid notion of disability is reflected in their terminologies—the Greek vocabulary of disability is vague, generic and subject to varied meanings according to different contexts of usage. There are at least thirty-two terms in the ancient Greek vocabulary for physical disability. The closest Greek term to “disabled” is most likely “unable” or *adunatos*, but the term “maimed” or *peros* was often used as well, sometimes interchangeably with the vaguest term “formlessness” or *amorphia*. The use of these terms depended on specific contexts. “Without context, the specifics of the Greek terms are usually lost, to say nothing of subtle shifts in meaning between audiences over time. . . . [N]o Greek term refers exclusively to physical impairment” (Edwards 36). The meaning of this nexus of terms for what we might call “disability” not only varied from usage to usage, but was “informed by the context and by the reading or performance” in which the term was used, since Greek texts were meant to be read aloud, with gesture and wordplay to inflect meaning (36). In Greek culture, fluid understandings of disability revolved around community needs, societal roles and individual circumstance. Edwards concludes that “[o]verall, we see people with a wide variety of physical handicaps participating in a wide variety of social, economic, and military roles. People with even the most severe handicaps were integrated into communities that accommodated all
ranges of ability. . . . for example . . . there were military roles for those who could not walk at all” (44).³⁴

Third, historical evidence of the sophist Lysias’ court case involving disability provides evidence of a socio-cultural model of disability in ancient Greece and sophistic rhetoric. The sophist Lysias’ defense speech, “On the Refusal of a Pension,” also called “For the Cripple,” provides one of the fullest accounts of how the sophists may have argued about disability. This court case most likely took place in the last years of the fifth century BCE and was composed for an anonymous client of Lysias, whose right to a pension he receives for being “unable” (ton adunaton) to work has been questioned on the grounds that he is actually able-bodied. The defendant had been classed among the unable most likely for a significant physical disability that prevents him from working even among an accommodating society. He is described as walking on “two sticks,” indicating that he possesses a severe physical disability affecting his legs and their function to walk. The pension he receives is disbursed by the Athenian Boule, the council of citizens, whose members annually inspect those classed as unable and provide a small pension for food to those who come from little wealth and are unable to work.³⁵ The defendant’s right to receive this pension is in question, as he has been observed with doing what might be considered able-bodied activities, or at least, activities that question his right to receive public funds.

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³⁴ Edwards’ completely sanguine picture of disability in ancient Greece is informed by a questionable logic—“one of the reasons that it is difficult to find information about people with disabilities in Greek society is that they were integral to the society” (44). Although this assumption seems untroubled by the insight that history is written by the victors, her identification of the community model does align with the critical perspectives now forwarded by disability studies’ social model. Since Edwards’ study, academic and activist nodes of disability studies and the disability rights movement have developed an approach to disability that continues to resist fixed definitions of the medical model and supports situated, social and cultural understandings of disability.

³⁵ The author of the Aristotelian Constitution of Athens describes the Boule’s function: “The Council inspects those who are disabled. For there is a law which bids those who possess less than three minai and who are incapacitated and incapable of work to undergo inspection by the Council, which is to give them two obols per day at public expense. There is a treasurer for this group who is elected by lot” (qtd. in Garland 35). We do not know exactly how the disabled were inspected and identified as unable.
Specifically, he has been seen riding a horse, carrying on a trade, and associating with wealthy friends.

That this case was even brought to court illustrates the socially constructed meaning of disability in ancient Greece and sophistic rhetoric. Despite appearing in court unable to walk without crutches, the defendant is accused of being able-bodied because of his activities. He is accused of being able bodied because of what he does, not because of what he is, or how he looks to a court. As Edwards notes, “his defense could not consist of simply appearing before the Boule. . . . [P]hysical impairment alone, in any degree, did not earn one a place among the ‘unable.’” (37). Athenian society and sophistic legal rhetoric did not regard disability as simply a self-evident, static concept, for which pre-determined meaning could be attached. The court’s witnessing of the defendant’s physical disability alone does not insure his winning the case. Instead, disability and its meanings, including its relationship to legal, social and cultural codes, were available for argument and for changes in meaning. Athenian society and sophistic rhetoric demanded an argument for disability, thereby putting the meaning of disability in a dynamic context, in a court of law in which social and cultural constructions determine meaning.

In several key ways, Lysias and his defendant’s case demonstrates understandings of disability aligned with a socially and culturally constructed model. Primarily, likely in an effort to align himself with the fluid, unfixed linguistic and functional definitions of disability in his society, the defendant does not provide the jury with a description of his physical impairment.

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36 Garland notes that Athens is the only ancient community known to have made financial provision for its poor and disabled citizens, even though the pension provided was less than the wage which an unskilled, abled citizen could expect to earn (35-36). Also, “in spite of the meager sums of money involved, the Athenian state took active measures to ensure that its generosity was not exploited by unscrupulous malingerers who were too lazy to do an honest day’s work or, worse, who used the pretence of disability for criminal ends . . . the state legislated that ‘anyone who wished’ was free to challenge a claimant’s entitlement to public support by prosecuting him in a court of law” (36-37). In examining Lysias’ case of the unable defendant, I want to recognize, but hold in abeyance this skeptical attitude towards disability Garland projects onto Athenian society and attempt to recognize the more innovative ways in which the Athenians may have understood disability.
He focuses instead on the functional effects of his disability, simply noting that he uses two sticks and a borrowed horse to ambulate. This description emphasizes his impairment in terms of what he does, not what he is. Then, the defendant makes virtually no appeal to pity or pathos in his speech, “even though such appeals were a conventional, almost formulaic element of Athenian lawcourt speeches” (qtd. in Edwards 37). This strategy suggests that the defendant chose to avoid any limiting associations between pity and impairment that individualize disability rather than setting it among the complex social and cultural forces that co-construct it. Finally and most importantly, Lysias and his client present a “triple misfortune” to argue for his case, a strategy that situates his disability in relation to other complex familial relationships: a father who left him no inheritance, a mother whom he supported until recently, and the absence of children to care for him. In addition, he tells the court that he is now growing older and weaker. Lysias and his client craft an argument for the meanings of disability that resists an understanding of disability as self-evident, pitiable or separate from other life circumstances. Integral to his impairment and the effect it has on his ability to make a living are these various other factors, which situate him in a complex social, familial and communal nexus of meanings that contribute to disability.

Lysias and his client extend this socially and communally situated meaning of disability by invoking the network of support necessary to complement the pension. Just as the disabled man rides a horse or walks on sticks for assistance, likewise he may trade goods or depend on wealthier friends to complement his pension. As Robert Garland notes, “since . . . the pension was at all times barely sufficient to support the disabled at the poverty line, it was perhaps assumed that responsibility for their well-being would have lain equally at the door of their relatives” (36). As the client explains with his triple misfortune, his relatives were not viable
sources of support for him, and, in fact, further contributed to his need for money. He may have needed to lean on the support of the wealthy friends he was observed holding company with, in order to supplement his pension. Furthermore, regarding the charge that he was observed trading and thus somewhat able to work, it is also possible that this was a supplementary income to his pension. Garland notes, “In cases where assistance from the family was not forthcoming, the disabled would perhaps have been expected to supplement their pension by seeking employment” (36). Horse riding, relying on wealthy friends and trading goods are not so much markers of able-bodied activities (although in some contexts they could be), but instead activities that happen in the context of disability, as communities and individuals developed makeshift provisions in a socially-situated and communally-anchored relationships.

Fittingly, historical evidence does not record whether Lysias’ client won his case or not, leaving us with productively unanswered questions. The question posed to the court was not only whether the client was eligible for public assistance, but whether he was disabled or not. This question points to the larger question of “what is disability?” which Lysias’ case partially answers in a complex of familial, social and community contexts. In Athenian society and in the sophist Lysias’ rhetoric, the meaning and effects of disability were not fixed, stable or uniform, but instead fluid, changing and contingent on an individual’s interaction, role or position within a community, society and family. In ancient Greece, disability as a concept was argued about, questioned, revised and evaluated based on a complex intersection of external factors. Although Lysias’ client presents us with the most details on disability in a primarily legal and rhetorical register, there is also evidence that socially situated questions of disability were more widespread than previously acknowledged.37

37 Isocrates, a more well-known sophist than Lysias, is recorded as having helped a client argue for the right to inherit his father’s estate as partial payment for six months of caretaking during which time the father was bedridden
The Senses in Sophistic Rhetorical Theories

The sophists’ construction of rhetoric in specific socio-cultural contexts, such as Lysias’ example demonstrates, undergirds their theory of knowledge as sensory-driven and provisional, other characteristics they share with socio-cultural models of disability. The sophists were also “skeptical of a divine source of knowledge or value and focused attention on the process of group decision-making in historically and geographically specific contexts” (Jarratt xx). Unlike Plato and previous philosophers, the sophists did not concern themselves with divine or transcendent knowledge and instead sought provisional knowledge.38 They positioned the senses as the most reliable pathways to attaining provisional, contextual knowledge. As Jarratt describes, “[t]he sophists’ experiences of widely varying cultures with different notions of ‘truth’ offered confirmation at the level of the social of the views of Heraclitus and Empedocles, who saw a physical universe full of a multitude of varied phenomena constantly in flux. This view of nature grounded ‘scientifically’ the pragmatic paideia they offered their changing society” (46). Cross-cultural connections contribute to flexible notions of truth, but connections between the social and material world also shape provisional, partial and multi-sensory approaches to knowledge-gathering in sophistic rhetoric. This appreciation of the senses was integral to the sophists’ understanding of knowledge as necessarily contingent and not universally true. As Bizzell and Herzberg argue, “Following Empedocles, the Sophists believed that human

38 For more details on Plato’s preoccupation with divine knowledge and its effect on rhetorical bodies, see chapter one. The search for absolute truth, divine certainty and transcendent knowledge that characterizes some forms of rhetoric, especially the dominant tradition, is part and parcel of the same over-arching, hierarchical theory of knowledge and being which positions an ideal of able-bodiedness as the norm to which all difference is inferior to. By not chasing absolute knowledge, the sophists circumvent the teleological goal of many strands of rhetoric, such as Platonic rhetoric, which only allow certain bodies and minds into the realm of rhetoric.
knowledge relies solely on sense perception and is therefore necessarily flawed. Certainty or absolute truth is not available to humans” (Bizzell and Herzberg 22).³⁹ This sensory-driven, provisional, and changeable definition of “truth” is crucial for disabled rhetors because it values the senses in rhetoric production (and their fallibility), while upholding a definition of rhetoric linked to contingency and change, conditions that also shape the experience of disability.

The sophists’ theories of knowledge as socially constructed and sensory-driven make their rhetorical theories flexible for a wide range of rhetors. In fact, the sophists built a form of disability into their basic definition of rhetoric and the knowledge-gathering necessary for rhetorical production. This built-in disability is not “disability” as it is typically understood, such as an impairment of a lack of a sense of hearing or sight. Instead this built-in disability is established by an attention to the productive partiality and fallibility of senses. The sophists, by relying on sense perceptions for knowledge-gathering, build into their rhetoric a recognition of that our abilities, faculties and perceptions are fundamental labile categories, open to changing over time, situation and human condition. Specifically, by linking provisional knowledge gained from sensory experiences with the pursuit of rhetoric, the sophists aligned themselves with the epistemological foundations of disability studies: that able bodiedness is temporary, that disability is contingent on socio-cultural meanings and that any type of ideal knowledge, body or standpoint is inaccessible and therefore moot. Most importantly, both sophistic rhetorics and disability studies recognize the senses, including their partiality and fallibility, as a valuable repository for rhetorical production.

³⁹ In the next chapter we will explore Empedocles’ theories in more depth. As Bizzell and Herzberg continue, “This view of knowledge was highly controversial in its own day. On the one hand, it appeared to destabilize traditional society by denying that human beings can know anything about the transcendent or even that the transcendent exists” but “[a]t the same time the Sophistic view of knowledge was exciting precisely because it celebrated human potential” (22-23).
Protagoras’ man-measure doctrine, often identified as a cornerstone of socially constructed sophistic rhetoric, promotes an understanding of sense perception and rhetoric as relative and provisional that is useful for disabled rhetors because it recognizes differences in ability based on age, disposition, and bodily conditions. Sextus quotes Protagoras:

Protagoras, too, will have it that of all things the measure is man... And for this reason he posits only what appears to the individual, thus introducing relativity. ... Now what he says is that matter is in a state of flux, and that as it changes there is a continuous replacement of the effluvia which it gives off; that, moreover, one’s sensations undergo change and alteration in accordance with one’s age and other aspects of one’s bodily condition. He says too that the reasons [logoi] of all the appearances are present in the matter, so that the matter is capable ... of being everything that appears to everybody. Men, however, apprehend different things at different times according to their various dispositions. For the man whose condition is natural grasps, out of what is contained in matter, what can appear to those in a natural condition, whereas the man whose condition is not natural grasps what can appear to those in his condition. The same account, moreover, must be given of differences in age, the question of whether one is asleep or awake, and every type of variation in one’s condition. (Sprague 11)

The first sentences of this man-measure fragment, in which Protagoras identifies man as the measure of all things, has been extensively examined on philosophical, ontological and metaphysical levels—in fact, as Kerferd notes, its meaning “take[s] us directly to the heart of the whole of the fifth-century sophistic movement” (85-86). Also crucial to the understanding of
sophistic relativism, cultural tolerance and even individual preference that is usually distilled from this fragment is an understanding of disability that follows in the less examined sentences. Man measures all things by the senses, which are affected by variations including disability.

The “alteration[s] in accordance with one’s age and other aspects of one’s bodily condition,” including “variations in one’s condition,” that Protagoras names as crucial in shaping one’s perceptions and logoi posit difference, change and temporary bodily states as key in forming perceptions and reasoning. Age denotes a category of varying ability and change in bodily disposition to which everyone is subject. Although age is not usually understood as a form of disability, it has been invoked by disability scholars as a “disabling” condition everyone experiences. Furthermore, one’s sensations are not only affected by the constantly changing state of matter and “continuous replacement of effluvia.” Three inter-related elements always combine according to Protagoras’ man-measure fragment: one’s changing sensory experience, the material elements of the world, and the intersection of these two elements that also changes based on age, states of being and other variables. The contingency and partiality of one’s sensory experience with the world always informs rhetorical production and the reasoning of logos. Also important to this ever-changing relationship between one’s senses, the world and logos is how “one’s sensations undergo change and alteration” based on age, bodily conditions, and “every type of variation in one’s condition.” Furthermore, in Protagoras’ rhetoric, “men apprehend different things at different times depending on their various dispositions,” and both “natural” and “not natural” dispositions provide possibilities for apprehension.

This crucial sophistic fragment displays attention to several key tenets that disability studies has recently forwarded through the social model: that the experience of the body (whether it is disabled or temporarily able-bodied) is always made in relation to the natural, built
and constructed environment, that assignations of “natural” and “not natural” are flexible based on one’s differing experience, and that sensory and knowledge-making experience is not fixed, but changeable based on various bodily conditions. All of these variables affect logos, or the reasoning by which one attempts to form expression in language. Protagoras’ articulation of “variations in one’s condition” invites us to imagine how other types of physical variation and the different sensory and bodily experiences that may attend these variations, serve as important shapers of rhetoric.  

Furthermore, Protagoras’ man measure fragment offers attention to key areas of disability studies that need theoretical and practical constructs. People with disabilities and scholars in disability studies articulate a need for studies of the senses. Despite the fact that most experiences of disability are immersed in the senses, Simi Linton explains that “we are missing the constructs and theoretical material needed to articulate the ways impairment shapes disabled people’s version of the world” and that “one research domain that is yet to be fully explored from the perspective of disabled people is the kinesthetic, proprioceptive, sensory, and cognitive experiences of people with an array of disabilities” (140). Linton provides the example of her use of a wheelchair and her explanation of how this “has an impact on my sense of my body in space and affects the information I am exposed to and the way I process sensory information” (140). Other disabled rhetors and theorists of disability, including Tobin Siebers, Mark Jeffreys, and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, call for more nuanced accounts regarding the material,

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40 Additionally, Protagoras recognizes the physical and natural world as another important shaper of experience and rhetoric, noting how “there is continuous replacement of the effluvia” which matter gives off into the world. Protagoras demonstrates an attention to the necessary interaction of the physical world, the body, and the sensory experiences that attend them in rhetoric in a way that supports how contemporary rhetors with disabilities negotiate their interactions with the world, with language and with the always changing variations of one’s body in a simultaneously changing world.

41 Subsequent chapters will explore more in-depth how disability studies theorists call for more material, visceral and sensory approaches to the social constructivist approach to disability. Following chapters will also focus more specifically on the sophists and the sense of touch for disabled rhetors.
sensual and bodily experience of disability. Sophistic theories of rhetoric provide disability studies theorists and disabled rhetors with strategies for harnessing diverse processes of sensory perception in rhetoric.

In addition to Protagoras, the sophist Gorgias also provides for disability studies opportunities in for valuing the senses in rhetorical production, even including attention to difference among the sensory perceptions of different people. Gorgias is well known for noting the role of the senses in rhetorical production and legitimating the study of rhetoric as the art of representing material realities in words. Although his arguments in On Nature, also known as On the Non Existent, seem to offer contradictory accounts of logos, Gorgias maintains a clear connection between the senses and rhetoric, and like Protagoras, recognizes the value of the multiplicities offered by different sensory perceptions experienced by different people. Exploring the nature of existence and experience, Gorgias argues that even if things do exist, they would “be incapable of being conveyed to another. For if existent things are visible and audible and generally perceptible, which means that they are external substances, and of these things which are visible are perceived by the sight, those that are audible by the hearing, and not contrariwise, how can these things be revealed to another person?” (46). Gorgias situates the question of how to translate perception to another person in the context of the senses. Answering his own question, Gorgias provides the rationale for the function of rhetoric, explaining, “For that by which we reveal is logos, but logos is not substances and existing things. Therefore we do not reveal existing things to our neighbors, but logos, which is something other than substances” (46). Gorgias side-steps the question of the true nature of reality by emphasizing the difficulty

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42 As sophistic scholar Bruce McComiskey points out, “this move is absolutely necessary for Gorgias to practice and teach an art of rhetoric, for if the language re-presents (presents again, unaltered) realities in a one-to-one correspondence, as many pre-Socratics thought, then the most profitable line of inquiry is to discover the true nature of those realities” (36).
of relating sensory perceptions to different people. As Sextus reports, “For, he says, even if logos has a substance, still it differs from all the other substances, and visible bodies are to the greatest degree different from words. What is visible is comprehended by one organ, logos by another” (46). This translation that takes place between one organ and another provides a space for translation, in which a multiplicity of meanings can exist.

From a disability studies perspective, Gorgias’ musings about how to convey sensory perceptions to our neighbors are especially important because they put into stark relief the challenges of representing any bodily experience, but especially the experience of disability, in language. Even if Gorgias focuses on representing what is visible and audible and “generally perceptible,” he invites consideration of sensory perceptions that fall outside of the general and into the particular, such as those involved in the experience of disability. In addition to acknowledging the difficulty in the translation simply between one person to another in conveying sensory perceptions, Gorgias also gestures to the multiplicity of perspectives experienced from one person to another, inviting the valuation of the diversity of sensory perspectives such as those offered by people with disabilities who necessarily experience different sensory perceptions.

Gorgias’ relationship to the diverse sensory experience of disability in rhetoric becomes clearer upon an examination of current disabled rhetors who, like Gorgias, put into stark relief the difficulty of conveying bodily perceptions from one person to another. Gorgias’ sense of logos, always a partial, flawed, inaccurate portrayal of senses, echoes the challenges many disabled rhetors write about of making sense of the diverse experience of disability in language. Kenny Fries, born with a congenital deformity in his legs, explains the challenge of his rhetorical process, writing that “[s]even years ago I began searching for the words with which to speak
about my own experience. . . I took the initial steps of finding the language, unearthing the images, shaping the forms with which I could express an experience I had never read about before” (1). Like Gorgias, Fries desires to pluck out from the air the words to describe his sensory experiences, but he finds difficulty in his attempts to convey his experience to another person. The experience of disability and the lack of models contribute to this difficulty in conveyance. Barbara Rosenblum, likewise, explains how sensory perceptions, in the form of sensations, confuse traditional anchors in meaning in her experience with cancer:

When you have cancer, you are bombarded by sensations from within that are not anchored in meaning. They float in a world without words, without meanings. You don’t know from moment to moment whether to call a particular sensation a ‘symptom’ or a ‘side effect’ or a ‘sign’. . . .Words and their referents are uncoupled, uncongealed, no longer connected. (103)

Gorgias’ concern for the difficulty in translating the external realities experienced by one person to another in language echoes Rosenblum’s rhetorical challenge. She fears her inability to grasp meaning, to name the sensations that float “in a world without words” more than the symptoms or side effects themselves. Like Gorgias, although not exactly in his terms, Rosenblum expresses rhetorical anxiety about the space between words and their referents.

Similarly, Nancy Mairs, who lives with multiple sclerosis, expresses Gorgian anxiety over the challenge of writing through sensory perceptions, linking her challenge of representation, like Rosenblum, to the experience of disability. “Disability is at once a metaphorical and a material state . . . I can’t live it or write about it except by conflating the
figurative and the substantial, the ‘as if’ with the relentlessly ‘what is’” (Mairs 58). Like Gorgias, Mairs expresses anxiety about conflating the figurative and the substantial, but uses the body in order to capitalize in the space between words and experience. Just as Gorgias creates the need for the art of rhetoric in order to translate between logos and the diverse sensory perceptions among people, disabled rhetors like Mairs and Rosenblum create the need for writing about disability in the space between bodily experiences and representation. Mairs explains this strategy: “I always write about the body . . . .I always write, consciously as a body. . . .Because language substitutes a no-thing for a thing, whereas a body is a pure thing through and through, this task must fail. . . .And so I use inscription to insert my embodied self into a world” (60). Echoing Gorgias’ musings on logos and how it represents the existent, substituting a word for a thing, Mairs laments the possible inaccuracies when “language substitutes a no-thing for a thing.” Instead of despairing about the fallibility, inaccuracy or misrepresentation of language, Mairs uses inscription to insert herself forcefully in this space in between the world and the word. She explains, “Part of my effort entails reshaping both that self and that world in order to reconcile the two. We bear certain responsibilities to each other, the world and I, and I must neither remove myself from it nor permit it to exclude me” (60). By reshaping the world and inserting herself into it, Mairs explores the space between a thing and a no-thing, between language and experience, productively for herself, her reader and her world. Sophistic theories in general that draw on the senses and Protagoran and Gorgian theories in particular which value difference, partiality and multiplicity in sensory production are useful models for disabled rhetors.
**Norms and Nomoi**

Much critical analysis in disability studies has focused on identifying the concept of the norm—or the presumption of the able body as “normal” and disability as “abnormal”—and resisting the imposition of the norm as the only option for bodies. Despite the important work towards the identification of the norm, disability studies theories lack specific practices for resisting the norm, often because this identification focuses on the norm’s inflexibility, persistence and apparent naturalness rather than the norm’s potential for flexibility and revision in its social and cultural construction. Sophistic *nomoi*, in particular the sophistic articulation of flexible, human-made norms or local codes, are predecessors of current norms such as the ones that regulate bodies and can provide an alternative understanding of norms. Whereas contemporary notions of norms usually interrogated by disability studies focus on norms as universally prescriptive and binding, earlier sophistic constructions of norms as *nomoi* create an understanding of norms as contingent, breakable and flexible. This understanding of norms is ripe for the needs of disabled rhetors, who search for new ways to interact with rhetoric.

In disability studies, previous studies of the norm, such as those done by Lennard Davis and Rosemary Garland Thomson, situate the norm as primarily a socially constructed modern development, but often emphasize the inflexibility and permanence of the norm.43 Davis traces the beginning of the construction of the norm to the mid-nineteenth century. This bell-curved, statistical meaning of norm as “constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual” enters the English lexicon “rather recently,” only in the

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43 Davis and Thomson are some of the earliest theorists in disability studies to examine the norm(ate) in relation to the disabled body, but early scholars such as Georges Canguilhem (first published in 1943; translated into English in 1978), who articulated the normal in relation to the pathological, clearly also worked in the discourse of the norm, although his work is only beginning to be read by disability studies scholars. Canguilhem has traced the concept of the norm, or average, in relation to what he argues as the continuum between the normal and the pathological, through the establishment of the discipline and practice of medicine in France.
last one hundred and fifty years or so (Davis 24). Davis understands the construction of the norm and of disability in the particular social and cultural circumstance of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationality, gender, and criminality, but underscores its seeming timelessness. The rise of literacy, statistics, eugenics, the middle class and Marx’s average worker all intersect at this time to create the measurable position of average in the form of the bell curve. He argues that “the very term that permeates our contemporary life—the normal—is a configuration that arises in a particular historical moment. It is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie” (49). Davis’ study of the norm, although it considers how norms are constructed in a specific social and cultural context, emphasizes the inflexibility of the norm as it continues to permeate every facet of life. He writes, “we live in a world of norms . . . we consider what the average person does, thinks, eats, or consumes. We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from subnormal to above-average” (23). This “world of norms” that “permeates our contemporary life” instills a notion of timelessness and inflexibility, despite what Davis identifies as its surprisingly recent social construction.

Thomson, too, in her articulation of the “normate” reveals the specific social construction of the concept of the norm but undercuts her argument by emphasizing the fixity, permanence and timelessness of the norm. Laudably, like Davis, Thomson seeks to highlight the social construction of the supposedly neutral and natural norm. Whereas Davis investigates the development of the norm primarily in eighteenth and nineteenth century England, Thomson chooses to focus on another particular historical moment, specifically post-Civil War America, in order to demonstrate how the “normate” was constructed against disabled “freakery” amid
discourses of American individualism. “In nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, freak shows produced a generalized icon of corporeal and cultural otherness that verified the sociopolitical status quo and the figure of the unmarked normate, the ideal subject of democracy . . . [and] gave the American citizen a ceremonial cultural forum in which to examine apprehensions about the grand democratic experiment” (80). Like Davis, however, Thomson focuses on the inflexibility of the norm while simultaneously revealing its social construction. She explores the figures of extraordinary bodies against the complementary figure of the normate throughout a wide range of historical, social and cultural epochs, including post Civil War America, nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, and twentieth-century African American women’s fiction. The unchanging status of the normate promotes a construction of the norm as fixed, timeless and inflexible throughout these wide varieties of social and cultural contexts.

Like Davis and Thomson, other disability scholars such as Linton make important strides in identifying the social construction of the norm, but stop short at demonstrating the flexibility of the norm or potential revisions to norms. Linton laudably identifies that the category of “[n]on-disabled is not a neutral, universal position from which disabled people deviate, rather it is a category of people whose power and cultural capital keep them at the center” (32). Current disabled rhetors are in need of specific strategies for resisting norms in rhetoric, composition and a variety of other locations. Studies of sophistic nomoi significantly extend disability studies’ recent studies of norms, first by providing an earlier, crucial cultural location for the study of norms specifically in relation to rhetoric and then by providing an alternative reading of norms as contingent, breakable, and flexible. This is not to say that sophistic nomoi were not

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44 Like Davis’ understanding of disability constructed directly in relation to and necessarily anchored to the norm, Thomson’s understanding of disability is intimately tied to its “opposite” the normate, which she identifies as “the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figured outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodied shore up the normate’s boundaries” (8).
prescriptive—sometimes they were—but nomoi were local codes constructed by people in a particular time and place for specific reasons, all conditions which recognized the built-in contingencies of norms. Sophistic nomoi present opportunities for transforming disability studies’ views of norms because the sophists emphasize human agency, collective decision-making, and built-in contingency of norms.

Like Davis and Thomson, the sophists understood norms, in the form of nomoi, as “social processes,” configured in a “particular historical moment,” but emphasized a built-in contingency of nomoi. The sophists’ nomoi are generally defined as flexible local codes constructed according to specific communities who exercised group decision making processes. Nomos is a term that most sophistic scholars identify in opposition to physis (or nature), translating it as “human law,” “convention,” “custom” or even “habit,” usually contrasting the divine and natural law of physis with the man-made and community determined codes of nomos (Kerferd 112; Guthrie 55).45 As Kerferd notes, “the nearest modern term for nomos is ‘norm’—the establishment or promulgation of nomoi is the setting up of norms of behavior. So nomos as law is a legally prescribed norm, and nomos as convention is norm prescribed by convention; in each case what is being said or prescribed is that something is to be done or not done” (112).46 From a disability studies perspective, studies of nomos are crucial, since nomoi denote prescriptive and normalizing codes which governed behaviors and established conventions for acceptable activities, but include a greater emphasis on the human agency and flexibility of norms. Furthermore, whereas physis, the term usually opposed to nomos, is usually a static state of being, nature, or “the way things are,” nomos denotes a sense of collaborative human agency,

45 A more detailed discussion of nomos and physis follows in the next section.
46 Kerferd exercises a more limiting reading of the relationship between nomos and norms, writing that “the term nomos and the whole range of terms that are cognate with it in Greek are always prescriptive and normative and never merely descriptive—they give some kind of direction or command affecting the behavior and activities of persons and things” (112).
change and transformation. Although nomos can refer to the ingrained, habitual and inflexible code of laws—as in its association with the modern notion of norms—sophist senses of nomos also recognize the flexibility and community construction of nomoi.

Sophistic rhetoric that hinges on human-made nomoi, articulated in specific communities and situated in particular socio-cultural contexts, intervenes in static notions of physis, as “the way things are” as dictated by virtue of god or nature. Notions of physis in the sophists’ time are a closer approximation to today’s norms (as critiqued by Davis, Thomson and Linton) than nomoi (which are actually earlier forms of norms) because both the sophists’ physis and modern norms present “truths” about the “nature” of bodies as fixed, timeless, and universal. Sophistic nomoi emphasize the possibility of agential change through individuals and communities even in the face of strongly ingrained cultural attitudes of stasis. Jarratt, for example, identifying nomos as “between mythos and logos” and integral to the orality-literacy transition, emphasizes the human agency implicit in sophistic nomoi. She describes the transition of thought that characterizes this important shift, explaining that “[i]f the mythic word is based on uncritical acceptance of a tradition warranted by nature (phasis), then a sophistic interest in nomos represents a challenge to that tradition” (42). More broadly, “the significance of this theory for the sophists lies in the human agency for change and in the continuity between physical and social forms” (Jarratt 47). An uncritical acceptance of physis or nature that sophists’ nomoi challenged also characterizes the uncritical acceptance the naturalness of the able body that disability studies activists and theorists challenge. The continuity between social and physical forms, based in flexible human agency across specific communities, that flexible sophistic nomoi create invites connections to the reforming of norms across the social and physical forms of disability. Nomoi constructed by groups in specific socio-cultural contexts challenge an uncritical

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47 We will explore physis more in detail in the next section.
acceptance of nature or *physis*. The sophists challenged *physis* or natural norms with man-made or *nomos* norms, but implicit in this challenge is an understanding that norms can be changed by the agency of communities in different social or cultural contexts. A sense of human agency identifies what Jarratt calls “the imposition of humanly determined patterns of explanation for natural phenomena in contrast to those assumed to exist ‘naturally’” (42). Community decision making characterizes *nomos*, which is an “expression of what the people as a whole regard as a valid and binding norm” (Ostwald 55; qtd. in Jarratt 41). Instead of the externally, divinely or naturally imposed norm of *physis*, *nomos* is a flexible norm constructed by a certain group of people, collaboratively, in a certain historical time and space. Contextual sophistic *nomoi* challenged ingrained attitudes regarding *physis* during the sophists’ times in ways that can inform how disability studies can challenge the seeming naturalness (or *physis*) of norms today.

One way in which sophistic *nomoi* offer disability studies strategies for revision involves the negotiation between specific difference and group identity in the experience of disability. The wide range of disabilities—physical, psychological and cognitive—often raises questions on how to promote group identity for the disabled without losing attention to the important differences that structure individual disability experiences. Groups such as the Deaf may seek to separate themselves from other people with disabilities, an argument articulated by Harlan Lane who draws on the Deaf as a specific social linguistic minority culture. Eli Clare notes a symptom of the debates between difference and sameness among people with disabilities as “horizontal hostility,” or when marginalized people distance themselves from other, more marginalized groups to “other” each other (92). Disability studies theorists and activists such as Tobin Siebers and Lennard Davis have debated the difficult position between the specificity of particular disabilities and group collectivity in formations of identity politics. Even though the medical
model exerts power by individualizing disability, Siebers and others criticize but seek to hold onto the individual elements of the disability experience. Others, such as Davis, seek to create political ties across group of people with different disabilities, and even drawing connections to other minority groups.

Sophistic nomoi present one possible model for disability studies to create practices that allow for group identity and decision making without losing attention to specificities among different types of disabilities. Jarratt, for example, recalls an earlier form of nomos, meaning “pasture,” that gestures towards productive ways for engaging with wide ranges of experience even among specific locations. Nomos as “pasture” was used metaphorically as a “range” of words that marked how local democracies, no longer held by the will of the gods exercised by the divine right of kings, met and developed laws, customs and contracts for dividing up land. These social contracts were group decisions made in specific political, social and cultural contexts. Common to both forms of nomos as pasture or custom “is the importance of human agency: in the first case, in the marking out and distributing of land; in the second, in the explicitly human ratification of norms as binding” (Jarratt 41). Although Jarratt terms these norms as “binding,” they were flexible in that they stood for the “possibility for reformulating human ‘truths’ in historically and geographically specific contexts” which sophists recognized as ever-changing, provisional and situated (42). As Jarratt relates, “[t]hus rhetoric can be closely linked with nomos as a process of articulating codes, consciously designed by groups of people, opposed to both the monarchical tradition of handing down decrees and to the supposedly non-human force of divinely controlled ‘natural law’” (42). Human agency, community-driven decision making, and inherent changeability are integral to the construction of nomoi in sophistic rhetoric and culture. Furthermore, the range of nomoi across wide ranges of people, but
understood in specific contexts, offers disability studies a model for reconstructed norms based on an appreciation for the wide range of experiences, codes and bodies but within specific, changing and contingent localities.

Disability scholar-activists continue to work in the spaces between natural and human-made nomoi in which the sophists worked, attempting to shift codes that position disability as a fixed, natural and unchanging trait and revise them towards articulations that appreciate the situatedness, flexibility and changeability across ranges of the disability experience. Flexible sophistic nomoi link rhetoric closely with disability studies, as both seek to rearticulate codes that shape behaviors, activities and ranges of certain bodies. With socio-cultural models of disability, they recode the medical model and the moral flaw model which seeks to identify disability as lack or defect to be cured. Like sophists of the fifth century, disability scholar-activists recognize the potential of human agency, especially in contexts of group decision making, to recode nomoi to better respond to changing contexts. Disability studies in activist, academic and rights movements resist the individualization and privatization of the medical model but also seek to strike a balance between the political power in community building and the need to retain the specificity of the individual disability experience. Sophistic nomoi that include specificities of experience across ranges of people and experience begin to offer disability studies models for revising limiting norms and towards constructing more flexible nomoi that accommodate a wide range of experience.

New Nomoi: Nature, Nurture and Embodied Rhetorical Educations

Although centuries separate the sophists and the disability studies movement, both groups share important cultural contexts. The increased access to education, employment and the public
sphere activists have in the disability rights movement achieved recently parallels the advancements that the sophists made as the first teachers of rhetoric in a burgeoning proto-democracy, which sought to shape rhetorical training for new kinds of students. Now, as then, questions of accessibility to education and the public sphere, especially who has access and who does not, continue to drive changes in politics, culture and society. Both disability rights movement activists and rhetoricians in the sophistic movement make education, political participation and the public sphere more accessible for a wider range of learners. These advancements in accessibility challenge assumptions regarding natural ability and learned ability, complicating debates about the interaction of nature and nurture in rhetorical education. The sophist Isocrates in particular offers disabled rhetors new nomoi that work against limiting assumptions of physis or natural ability, encouraging the role of embodied acquired abilities in rhetorical education useful for today’s disabled rhetors.

The nomos-physis debate characterizes the cultural climate in which the sophists taught. The debate surrounds questions of physis or natural-born claims to ability and nomos or acquired abilities. The sophists’ articulation of the “nomos-physis” debate endures now in discussions of disability, in its present iteration as the nurture-nature debate, as we continue to try to explore how nature and nurture co-construct the disability experience and to create appropriate educational systems to support this connection. The sophists significantly increased access to

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48 Passages of civil rights legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and IDEA have begun increasing access to education and the public sphere for people with disabilities, but much work still needs to be done.

49 Sophistic scholars such as Kerferd, Guthrie, and others have identified the nomos-physis controversy as a key tenet of sophistic rhetoric and pedagogy, but have yet to explore this debate as it relates specifically to disability in rhetoric. Guthrie reports that the nomos-physis debate, which we have identified as distinctions between natural-divine mandated norms and man-made norms, can “be found to enter into most questions of the day” in fifth century Greece (57). Kerferd adds that the two terms were of “great importance in much of the thinking and arguments” structuring almost all political and rhetorical thought. For example, “discussions of religion turn on whether gods existed by physis—in reality—or only by nomos; of political organization, on whether states arose by divine
education for a wider range of students of various “natural” and acquired abilities by charging fees for their services. Performing a highly controversial practice in their day, the sophists “sold instruction in wisdom and virtue” and “these were not the kind of things that should be sold for money” (Kerferd 25). Wisdom and virtue in fifth century BCE were typically considered as knowledge that came naturally, often characterized as *arête*. Commonly translated as “excellence,” *arête* denoted those qualities which made a man a natural leader in his community, and hitherto it had been believed to depend on certain natural or even divine gifts which were the mark of good birth and breeding. They were definitely a matter of *physis* [nature], cultivated, as a boy grew up, by the experience of living with and following the example of his father and elder relations. Thus they were handed down naturally and scarcely consciously, a prerogative of the class that was born to rule, and the thought that they could be implanted by an outsider, offering schematic instruction in return for payment, was anathema to fathers of the old school. (Guthrie 25)

Meno, a student of the sophist Gorgias but born into nobility and wealth, poses to Socrates an urgent question at the outset of their dialogue: “Can you tell me, Socrates, whether *arête* can be ordinance, by natural necessity or by *nomos*; of cosmopolitanism, on whether divisions within the human race are natural or only a matter of *nomos*; of equality . . . and so on” (Guthrie 57-58).

As George Kerferd notes, the charging of fees for goods and services was not typically offensive in Greek culture at this time; poets and artists also charged for their work (25). Kerferd begins to gesture to the issues of accessibility and diversity that the sophists intervened in, putting a finer point on the disapproval of the sophists in their day. “What is wrong is that the sophists sell wisdom to all comers without discrimination - by charging fees they have deprived themselves of the right to pick and choose among their pupils. So it is said to involve lecturing before ‘all kinds of people’ . . . an expression as contemptuous in Greek as it is in English, and taking money from any one who chooses to come along” (Kerferd 25).

As Guthrie relates, *arête* is more strongly aligned with natural abilities, aptitudes or characteristics of *physis*, or nature, but it clearly also is affected by external elements such as cultivation by example.
taught? Or is it a matter or practice, or natural aptitude, or what?” (qtd. in Guthrie 25). From the perspective of the social model of disability studies, the questions of *physis* (nature), and cultivation (nurture) that occupy Meno endure today. The sophists’ selling and teaching of knowledge previously understood as in-born, divine, or natural threatened established understandings of ability. As Meno indicates, the issue is whether *arête* can be taught and acquired by practice or whether it is a natural aptitude. Furthermore, if *arête* can be taught, it is potentially available to anyone, whether or not he is born to rule or the product of good breeding. The sophists made acquired ability and even the nurturing of natural ability in rhetorical education accessible to anyone who could pay, regardless of birth or ability.

The sophists’ efforts towards making rhetorical education more accessible for student of wider ranges of abilities continues their efforts to construct flexible *nomoi* to resist static conceptions of *physis* or natural ability. The Greek concept *physis*, is usually translated as “nature” or “reality” (Guthrie 55; Kerferd 111). Furthermore, “central to the meaning of the term [physis] is the static concept of ‘the way things are,’” as naturally dictated and established by natural or divine law (Kerferd 111).52 Earlier, *physis* was also used “to refer to the constitution or set of characteristics of a particular thing . . . as in the expression ‘the nature of man’” (Kerferd 111). When used in rhetoric training, *physis* possesses connotations that refer to the natural abilities of a rhetor. As Meno’s question regarding *arête* reveals, the sophists blurred the lines between natural abilities and acquired abilities, making the static of *physis* more malleable with the flexibility of *nomos*.

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52 This static sense of *physis* even dominates its additional meaning of “to grow,” since “*physis* was quite often felt to have a kind of overtone as a result of consciousness of a certain pull in that direction, and so it is frequently used of things that are the way they are because they have grown or become that way” (111). There is a valence of the concept *physis* that is not static, but it is infrequently used. “Just occasionally the word is actually used to mean something like ‘birth, genesis, or growth,’ but such cases are quite rare” (111).
The sophists’ disregard for “natural gifts,” their notion that self-improvement was accessible to all, and their assumption of arête as acquired are all ways in which sophistic studies intervene in traditional conceptions of ability, aptitude and nature. Meno’s questions encapsulate the questions the sophists raised which are at their core questions of ability and disability, and they point towards investigating whose abilities are nurtured and developed and whose are limited and shunted.53 These questions loom especially largely for people with disabilities, whose educations, throughout history and today, are often determined by their “natural” aptitudes. Then, as now, educators dealt with accommodating a wider range of learners brought forth by changes in the access to education for non-traditional students. Legacies of this debate continue today in questions of education, remediation and support for the disabled. Today, intelligence tests in education still largely govern what kind of support services, level of least restrictive environment, or degree of accommodations a student with a disability receives. We still question how much natural aptitude can be nurtured by teaching and support services, making decisions with material effects based on predictions of someone’s “natural aptitude.”

In addition to complementary emphases on socio-cultural models of knowledge, appreciation of the senses and focus on norms, disability studies and sophistic rhetoric also seek to make similar revisions to the illogical binary of natural vs. acquired abilities. In fact, a key disabled sophistic rhetor, Isocrates, known for his weak voice and stage fright, offers current disabled rhetors interventions into the nature and nurture debate and a valuable model of embodied, interconnected and collaborative acquired rhetorical ability. Isocrates is traditionally

53 Important to keep in mind is that while the sophists did break down some barriers concerning accessibility of education and the polis, they maintained others. They did mainly teach those who could pay, and those men who were propertied and free. However, departing from tradition, “the sophists taught young people that they could improve themselves via Sophistic teaching. They did not need to defer to the wisdom of their elders or social betters—self-improvement was open to anyone who could pay for it, and anyone, no matter his or her natural endowments, could make some progress under Sophistic teaching” (Bizzell and Herzberg 22).
understood as designating natural aptitude (*physis*) as the most important trait necessary for rhetorical success in his important pedagogical tract, *Against the Sophists*. Isocrates insists that the requirements of the good orator are first natural ability, second practical experience, and third formal training. Often forgotten in modern translations and excerpts is that Isocrates also names a fourth and fifth requirement: a teacher who provides instruction in the principles of discourse and a teacher who displays a mastery of discourse (Welch 50). In addition to leaving out the crucial interaction between teacher and student, this omission also disregards an important element of that interaction: the teacher’s modeling by example of rhetorical training. This modeling by example includes an attention to embodied rhetorical strategies, a living, interactive model of demonstration and collaboration.

Although he seems to affirm natural ability as a primary requirement for rhetorical training, Isocrates at other times recognizes the importance of acquired ability, including ability gained by pedagogical demonstration and modeling. Kathleen Welch has already explored this contradiction as useful for current models of critical thinking and class analysis. “Although Isocrates appears in places to designate aptitude as part of *physis*, he nonetheless at other, more dominant, places regards it as a human-made construct, as part of *nomos*. . . . in other words,

54 Despite this title, Isocrates is generally accepted as a sophist, a title he takes himself. He is defining himself against the “common herd” of sophists who claim to implant in their students true, honest natures and characters. Unlike some sophists, he stayed in one city and worked with his students for several years, developing a mentoring relationship with them. He sums up his position this way: “those who desire to follow the true precepts of this discipline may . . . be helped more speedily towards honesty of character than towards facility in oratory. And let no one suppose that I claim that just living can be taught; for, in a word, I hold that there does not exist an art of the kind which can implant sobriety and justice in depraved natures. Nevertheless, I do think that the study of political discourse can help more than any other thing to stimulate and form such qualities of character” (75). It is clearly an ambivalent position.

55 Although Welch does not take a disability studies focus, her exploration of Isocrates’ complex and sometimes contradictory stance on *physis* and natural ability and *nomos* or acquired ability is informative: “Isocrates’ repeatedly written accounts of the importance of aptitude fit into education as a transmitter of the status quo, of the perpetuation of power as it already exists, of a *physis* that is actually a *nomos*. ‘Aptitude,’ or native ability, frequently disguises a power structure that allows the dominant culture to reproduce itself and then to regard itself as nature (as part of *physis*). This aspect of Isocrates’ agenda requires more scrutiny. Interestingly, and maybe even ironically, Isocrates’ pedagogy enables people to subvert this system. . . . Although
aptitude for Isocrates and for us is a social construction” (52). For Welch Isocrates’ fluid ideas of “converting standard interpretation from a *physis*-driven aptitude to a *nomos*-driven aptitude” can be analogized to current educational reforms regarding critical literacies of class and culture. I argue that Isocrates’ fluid ideas of aptitude as a social construction between *physis* and *nomos* provides disability studies and disabled rhetors with important strategies for reforming rhetorical training for people with disabilities. Recalling Isocrates’ emphasis on a teacher’s demonstration in rhetorical training and the interaction between student and teacher draws attention to the embodied process of modeling enacted in education and the interactive collaboration between teacher and student.

Isocrates describes this collaboration in embodied and physical terms, validating a wider range of acquired and embodied knowledge-making practices important for disabled rhetors, such as those we examined in the introduction and including Fries, Mairs and others who depend on the sense of touch, collaboration and connection to produce rhetoric. In particular, Isocrates seeks to mold the teacher of rhetoric as an embodiment of physical modeling for his students. The teacher “must in himself set such an example of oratory that the students who have taken form under his instruction and are able to pattern after him will, from the outset, show in their speaking a degree of grace and which is not found in others” (74). Isocrates’ language emphasizes the physical process of the transmission of knowledge between teacher and student—a teacher “sets” an example to “form” his students who should be “able to pattern” themselves after his model. This physical process values acquired abilities, gained from embodied and collaborative interactions between teachers and students.

In addition, in his own words, Isocrates offers possibilities for disabled rhetors who depend on acquired abilities over natural abilities. In *Against the Sophists*, for example, Isocrates
critiques a certain brand of sophists who claim to have the power to make their students clever orators but who do not “attribute any of this power either to the practical experience or to the native ability of the student, but undertake to transmit the science of discourse as simply as they would teach the letters of the alphabet” (72-73). Here, Isocrates not only mentions practical experience first, privileging acquired ability, but also places practical experience, or learning, over native ability, in his noting that certain sophists fail in attributing success to this learning. Later, Isocrates positions natural ability and practice on equal footing in his very definition of ability. “For ability, whether in speech or in any other activity, is found in those who are well endowed by nature and have been schooled by practical experience” (74). Again, Isocrates pairs natural ability and practical experience, arranging them in the same sentence, using the term “and,” placing them as possible equivalencies. Formal training he arranges in the next sentence, suggesting that while natural ability and practice are primary, training is separate. Even in his description of formal training, though, Isocrates notes the importance of practice and experience, allowing us to understand formal training as a subset of the equal elements of ability and experience. He states, “Formal training makes such men more skillful and more resourceful in discovering the possibilities of a subject . . . but it cannot fully fashion men who are without natural aptitude into good debaters or writers, although it is capable of leading them on to self-improvement and to a greater degree of intelligence on many subjects” (74). Here Isocrates does not place training on equal footing with natural aptitude as he does in other statements, but he identifies rhetorical training as a way of improving aptitude and increasing intelligence.

Overall, Isocrates positions natural and acquired abilities as equal contributors for rhetorical success, emphasizing an embodied sense of practice on the part of the student and modeling on the part of the teacher. The student “must not only have the requisite aptitude but he
must learn the different kinds of discourse and practice himself in their use” (74). Isocrates equates aptitude with practice, possibly even allowing for natural ability to be strengthened and changed by practice. Although traditional readings of Isocrates adopt a hierarchical, three tiered structure of ability, practice and training, Isocrates places them as interdependent elements, stating, “When all of these requisites are found together, then the devotees of philosophy will achieve complete success; but according as any one of the things which I have mentioned is lacking, to this extent must their disciples of necessity fall below the mark” (74). No one requirement, including natural ability, functions without the others.

In Antidosis, Isocrates offers a specific example of acquired ability that puts into practice the embodied, collaborative and interactive teacher-student relationship he outlines in Against the Sophists, further demonstrating the importance of acquired abilities. Isocrates divides education into gymnastics, which trains the body and philosophy, which trains the mind, drawing connections between the two in rhetorical practice. Making an argument to validate rhetorical practice, he criticizes the contradictory thinking of people who “admit that no physical weakness is so hopeless that it cannot be improved by exercise and effort, but . . . do not believe that our minds, which are naturally superior to our bodies, can be made more serviceable through education and suitable training” (76). Although Isocrates privileges the minds as naturally superior to the body, he offers contradictory arguments about the body’s place in rhetorical education, at once positioning it as inferior but indispensable. He makes two more comparisons to bodily training in rhetorical education, drawing on the example of the “training of horses and dogs” and the corollary that training human nature “can improve men in any of those respects in which we improve the beasts.”

56 Although Isocrates’ ambivalence and eventual privileging of embodied acquired abilities open up possibilities for physically disabled rhetors, rhetors with cognitive disabilities still experience some exclusion in his theories.
Isocrates reserves his strongest criticism for those who “most absurd of all . . . behold in the shows . . . lions that are more gentle toward their masters than some people are toward their benefactors and bears that dance about and wrestle and imitate our skill, and yet they are not able to judge even from these instances the power that education and training have” (qtd. in Welch 76). Isocrates encapsulates the powerful effects of education and training in the bodies of horses, dogs, lions and bears, making an analogy to the bodies of students of rhetoric that similarly can learn astonishing skills. Welch explains, “Pedagogy as ‘aptitude’ versus no aptitude acquires new meaning when dancing bears are considered, as Isocrates asks us to do in this passage from what is arguably his most important work” (76). Particularly in terms of ability and disability, Isocrates’ redefines aptitude away from the stasis of physis to the flexibility of a socially and bodily constructed nomos. He privileges acquired abilities for students of rhetoric, emphasizing the body’s role in education. Again he draws attention to the embodied, physical process of the transmission of knowledge from student to teacher in rhetorical production.

Sophistic scholars such as Welch and others have suggested that Isocrates may himself have circulated rumors of his weak voice and stage fright to justify the time he spent in private composing written texts instead of speeches because he recognized the potential power of the new technology of literacy. While this may be true, it also throws into question whether Isocrates was “disabled” in the typical understanding of the world. As in the case of Lysias’s client, exact certainty regarding disability in this case is unavailable. This uncertainty presents us with productive possibilities regarding the place of disability in sophistic rhetoric, suggesting potential opportunities for current disabled rhetors. For Isocrates, disability—real or rumored—enabled alternative rhetorical strategies. Taking the physical, embodied student-teacher relationship that Isocrates advocates as a model for current disabled rhetors such as those discussed in the
introduction—users of facilitated communication and other people with disabilities who depend on the sense of touch for rhetorical production—it is clear that sophistic rhetoric offers opportunities for valuing the diverse embodiments that disability occasions. This model recognizes the meaning of disability as socially constructed, but appreciates the embodiment of disability—the senses, materiality and physicality of disability as productive. The experience of disability does not inhibit rhetorical success or curtail rhetorical strategies but in fact opens up new ways of achieving rhetorical success, discovering more available means of persuasion and connecting others in rhetorical strategies. Isocrates and the disabled rhetors his theories include invite us to turn to more specifically to the embodied practices of the sophists that can be recovered for the needs of disabled rhetors who use the sense of touch. Combining work by current disabled rhetors, including their implicit revision of sophistic practices, I turn to redefining *logos*, *metis* and *kairos* for the experience of disability in the next three chapters.
Chapter 3: Empedocles and the Redefinition of *Logos* for Disabled Rhetors

I doubt that any body, whether in trouble or out, can fully conceive a self without an other to stroke it—with fingertips and lips, with words and laughter—into being and well-being. Research has demonstrated that infants deprived of touch fail to thrive, and that blood pressure is lowered and spirits are raised in elderly people given pets to caress. If physical stimulation is wholesome—even lifesaving—at the extremes of life, why should we suppose the middle to be any different? Our bodies conceptualize not only themselves but also each other, murmuring: Yes, you are there; yes, you are you; yes, you can love and be loved. (Nancy Mairs, *Waist-High in the World* 49-50)

People with disabilities more often than not live their lives and produce rhetoric in relation to other bodies and often in direct physical contact with others—communication facilitators, assistance aids, assistive technologies or even assistance animals. Nancy Mairs places words and writing in relation to touching and stroking, demonstrating the intimate connection between touch and rhetoric. She equates “words and laughter” with “fingertips and lips,” in her argument for the importance of the sense of touch for “being and well-being,” a comparison that promotes an understanding of rhetoric as a physical, material, tactile body that connects people. In addition to the disabled rhetors such as Temple Grandin, Dawn Prince-Hughes, DJ Savarese and others I examined in the introduction, numerous disabled rhetors write about the importance of touch in structuring their identities, world and writing. Mairs describes the importance of physical personal connection in relation to her and her husband’s caretaking efforts, as she cares for his skin cancer and he cares for her multiple sclerosis. By equating words with bodies in their writing, disabled rhetors draw on an ancient understanding of “rhetoric as body,” a strategy that is crucial for them but unsupported by the rhetorical tradition.

Since people with disabilities depend on the sense of touch in daily life, exploring the sense of touch in rhetoric is crucial to the development of disability studies and to the recognition of disabled rhetors’ contributions. Disability activist Paul K. Longmore, while urging disability
studies to move beyond issues of access and toward developing a more sustainable disability culture, writes, “Beyond proclamation of pride, deaf and disabled people have been uncovering or formulating sets of alternative values derived from within the deaf and disabled experience. Those values are markedly different from, and even opposed to, nondisabled majority values. They declare that they prize not self-sufficiency but self-determination, not independence but interdependence, not functional separateness but personal connection, but physical autonomy but human community” (“The Second Phase” 1995). These alternative values of interdependence are based on figurative and literal physical connections among people.

Interdependence and connection are not simply concepts or metaphors for people with disabilities. People with disabilities often necessarily live and communicate in physical connection with other bodies. As disability studies theorist Lennard Davis has pointed out, disability exists in a reciprocal relationship in the realm of the senses—often a deficit in hearing or sight but also registered through the visual as well—but the sense of touch is never fully disabled (13). As I explored in the introduction, scientific research shows the sense of touch to be the first sense to develop in the fetus and the last sense to be diminished by old age or disability. Furthermore, the sense of touch is crucial to physiological, psychological and social development that affects normal growth and language development.57 Disabled rhetor Kenny Fries, introducing one of the first collections of writing by people with disabilities designed to “stare back” at the medical model’s gaze, describes the powerful connection between writing and touch in disability culture. “If asked what . . . binds together this work, I must reply that it is the theme of human connection—connection with the past, connection with one another, connection with our bodies, connection with ourselves” (3). As Mairs’ and others’ testimony demonstrates,

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57 Refer back to the introduction for more details on the sense of touch, including its fraught relationship in the rhetorical tradition and recent science studies approaches to touch.
bodily connections form the ties that bind disabled rhetors together rhetorically and culturally, in bodies and in words. The sense of touch is crucial to the physical, rhetorical and cultural connections necessary for developing disability culture.

Despite the testimony from numerous disabled rhetors of the importance of touch in their writing, the rhetorical tradition does not allow easy access to the sense of touch. Ancient associations between persuasion, physical seduction and force, personified in the goddess Pietho, portray the sense of touch negatively in rhetorical production. The dominant tradition’s treatment of the senses, particularly the sense of touch, is inadequate for the needs of contemporary disabled rhetors. As I explored in chapter one, Plato attempts to deny the senses altogether, by erasing the body from rhetorical production. Aristotle strictly regulates the body and its management the senses. Cicero and Quintilian normalize the senses through patterns of physical molding of rhetorical bodies. The dominant tradition is at best uncomfortable with the sense of touch and at worst denies it completely. Logos, or the word, as it is characterized in the dominant tradition, is divorced from the body, the senses, and especially touch.

As I explored in chapter two, the sophistic tradition offers possibilities to disabled rhetors because sophists like Protagoras and others value the senses in rhetorical production. Despite its value of the senses in general, the sophistic tradition still produces limited understandings of logos by relying on a binary of dissoi logoi. Known as “opposing arguments,” dissoi logoi partially addresses but do not adequately serve the needs of disabled rhetors who rely on touch and a definition of logos as body because they reinforce binary arguments. Contributions from disabled rhetors and disability studies theories prod logos beyond these binaries. Specifically, the experience of disability forces rhetorical studies to consider the multiple possibilities between

58 In chapter one, I argued that the false binary of ability and disability is integral in the dominant tradition and the shaping of rhetorical bodies. I also attempt to transcend this binary but identifying it and offering the alternative construction of rhetoric as dis/ability to demonstrate how disability and ability co-construct rhetoric.
logos and touch according to the multiple formations of the diverse bodies that shape them. In this chapter, I explore the limits of Gorgias’ relationship between logos and touch, a practice of dissoi logoi, and argue for the more productive connections between rhetoric and touch through Empedocles’ theories that provides support for the contributions of today’s disabled rhetors. In this chapter, with insights from disabled rhetors, I move from the limits of dissoi logoi to the possibilities afforded by the fleshy multi logoi of Empedcoles’ rhetoric.

The Limits of Logos and Dissoi logoi

In the dominant tradition, definitions of logos are inadequate for the needs of disabled rhetors. Logos, especially as it is defined by Aristotle, promotes a narrow understanding of reason, logic, meaning, thought, speech and the “word.” As feminist, cross-cultural and postmodern rhetoricians have persuasively pointed out, definitions of what counts as reasonable, truthful or meaningful are never neutral constructions, but always developed in relationships of power that validate some versions of truth and meaning over others. From a disability studies perspective, traditional definitions of logos are also limiting because they promote narrow understandings of what is logical, rational or reasonable especially for cognitively disabled rhetors. A disability studies perspective on traditional logos also is attentive to how definitions of logos have been primarily constructed by the able-bodied; the outward presentation of able-bodiedness often is recruited as indicator of a sound, logical mind. For all rhetors, traditional definitions of logos rely on a narrow understanding of cognition and neglect embodied ways of knowing.

Although the sophistic tradition offers more nuanced attention to the role of the body and perception in rhetoric than the dominant tradition, it still promotes definitions of logos that limit disabled rhetors. The sophist Gorgias, for example, famous for his definition of logos as drugs,
promotes a binary relationship between *logos* and the body. For Gorgias, *logos* is either disabling or curative for rhetorical bodies. The vehicle of this limiting binary relationship is the sense of touch, as Gorgias materializes the effect of *logos* on bodies through a tactile relationship of health or harm. Gorgias’ well-known definition of *logos* positions *logos* as a material and physical entity, as he explains, “speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity” (45). Gorgias’ definition of *logos* enforces a limiting binary of enabling or disabling effects as fear and grief are positioned against joy and pity.

Reinforcing the disabling effects of *logos*, he explains, “fearful shuddering and tearful pity and grievous longing come upon its hearers” and “at the actions and physical sufferings of others in good fortunes and in evil fortunes, through the agency of words, the soul is wont to experience a suffering of its own” (45). On the other hand, “turn[ing] from one argument to another,” speech or “sacred incantations sung with words are bearers of pleasure and banishers of pain” (45). Speech, or *logos*, for Gorgias, acts as powerfully and materially on the body as drugs, but limits this effect to the binary “either-or” logic of speech as enabling or disabling:

The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion. (46)
Although Gorgias seems to describe a wide variety of effects of speech as a material body such as drugs—distress, delight, fear, boldness—his main organizing principle for the effect of *logos* is either enabling, as in the curing of disease, or disabling, as in a drugging of the soul. Gorgias’ overall organizing principle of *logos* according to the binary logic of either enabling or disabling is part of the sophistic movement’s larger theory and practice of *dissoi logoi*, or opposing/two-fold arguments. While disabled rhetors such as Mairs and others I investigate below demonstrate a complex relationship between *logos* (or rhetoric) and bodies through their descriptions of touch, Gorgias’ definition of *logos* operates along a limiting binary of enabling or disabling effects, paralleling the common sophistic rhetorical practice of *dissoi logoi*.

The practice of *dissoi logoi* offers disabled rhetors a useful starting point because it encourages the placement of binary arguments in contact, but it must be pushed further in order to aid in the formation of disability culture. Commonly translated as the practice of showing both sides of an issue, or “opposing arguments,” the practice of *dissoi logoi* pertains specifically to the disability experience because it places binaries, such as “ability” and “disability,” in contact. The practice of *dissoi logoi* can begin to transcend the either-or binary logic that undergirds definitions of “able” and “disabled” and “normal” and “pathological.” The rhetorical practice of *dissoi logoi* is crucial for disabled rhetors because it necessarily marks the usually veiled “normative term” of ability that often anchors the binary logic that leads to limited understandings of disability. By including both terms of a binary in opposing arguments, *dissoi logoi* ensure that one term will not operate unmarked and therefore unquestioned. Arguments that construct disability as a solely negative experience, a deficit to be overcome, or a reduction
Disability studies begins to unravel the faulty chains of logic that identify disability in these limiting terms by critiquing the placement of the unexamined term of ability. The sophistic *dissoi logoi* parallels and provides rhetorical support for exactly the types of interventions in meaning that disability studies forwards. As a model of argumentation, the *dissoi logoi* supports key efforts in disability studies; as an example of subject matter, the *dissoi logoi* demonstrates how issues of ability and disability have occupied rhetoric from its beginnings. Relative definitions of ability and disability form key examples in *Dissoi Logoi*, the hand-book style rhetorical tract from which the practice draws its name. Almost all of the major headings of the work place in contact opposing arguments regarding typically opposed bodies, then demonstrate how these binaries are relative and even interchangeable. For example the sections concerning “good and bad” and “seemly and disgraceful” (translated often as “beautiful” and “ugly”) juxtapose opposing arguments and bodies. To demonstrate the general practice of how “twofold arguments concerning the good and bad are put forward in Greece by those who philosophize,” the writer says, “I shall examine human life and its concern for food, drink, and sexual pleasures: these things are bad for a man if he is sick but good for a man if he is healthy and needs them” (279). Relative and flexible definitions of ability and disability, health and illness follow as successive examples of the practice of *dissoi logoi*: “again, illness is bad for the sick but good for the doctors” (279). In the second section, on the seemly and disgraceful, the author applies the relativity of good and bad to the actions of particular bodies in specific places, demonstrating how normalcy is defined relatively from culture to culture: “to the Spartans it is seemly that young girls should do athletics and go about with bare arms and no

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59 See chapter one for more details on this. Rosemary Garland Thomson’s neologism of “normate,” for example, or Simi Linton’s strategic use of the term “nondisabled,” draws attention to what Linton calls “the unexamined center” shared between assumed binaries (24).
tunics, but to the Ionians this is disgraceful” (282). Seemliness and disgrace, both described here in terms of bodies, are accorded onto certain bodies based not on timeless transcendent assignations, but based on culturally contingent and changeable determinations of meaning. As in Gorgias’ assessment of logos as enabling or disabling, the writer of the *Dissoi Logoi* interchanges arguments regarding bodies. 

Simi Linton identifies the first steps in the overall project of disability studies directly aligned with the sophistic practice of *dissoi logoi*, marking opposing positions in order to revise them. “The field explores the critical divisions our society makes in creating the normal versus the pathological, the insider versus the outsider, or the competent citizen versus the ward of the state (2). Linton’s pairings of these binary terms is a form of *dissoi logoi*, placing in contact the co-constitutive relationship of seemingly opposed terms. The writer of the *Dissoi Logoi* enacts a similar practice, examining how cultural relativities produce differing arguments ranging from bodily appearances and actions to laws and statutes. For example, the author argues, “To the Tracians it is an ornament for young girls to be tattooed but, with others, tattoo marks are a punishment for those who do wrong” (282). The author is most likely referring to the marks of stigma, which for the Greeks was used to “refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual or bad... the signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, criminal or a traitor” (Goffman 1). The *Dissoi Logoi* author reminds us that these marks signified different, often opposing meanings based on cultures. In another example, the writer relays, “the demented and the sane and the wise and the foolish both say and do the same things.

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60 The writer of the *Dissoi Logoi* is unknown, but several sources surmise that it might have been Protagoras. 
61 The writer of the *Dissoi Logoi* also marks other binaries of interest to disability studies, such as the divides between novice/expert knowledge and theory/practice, in his questions regarding the transference of teaching rhetoric or lute playing from teacher to students. 
62 Although Irving Goffman’s work on stigma significantly predates work in the field of disability studies, it is generally accepted as an important key text on how certain people with visible and invisible stigmas (which includes everything from cognitive and physical disability to illiteracy and criminal status) work to manage information about their stigma and how they are affected in social situations, forming individual and group identities.
And in the first place, they use the same names for things . . . and they do the same things” (288). In either case, however, the stigma, symbolic tattoos etched into the skin, demonstrate that material effects of rhetoric are either good or bad. Like Gorgias’ logos as drugs binary, the tactile effects of rhetoric in the Dissoi logoi pit rhetorical and rhetorical bodies in binary terms, as either good or bad.

Despite its useful practice of marking the unexamined center, dissoi logoi must be prodded by contributions from disability studies theorists and disabled rhetors. Although dissoi logoi ensures that ability will not occupy the unexamined center, it continues to separate bodies into either able or disabled, and to pit rhetoric’s material effects on bodies as either good or bad. Disabled rhetors write about touch in ways that transcend the simple binary that Gorgias and the practice of dissoi logoi establishes regarding the material effect of rhetoric on bodies. As Mairs, Fries and countless other disabled rhetors attest, speech takes both disabling and enabling properties as described in Gorgias’ description, producing material and psychological effects on and through bodies; but it also transcends these two simple polarities. Today’s disabled rhetors display a complex relationship to touch in their writing that demands more nuanced approach to the sense of touch in rhetoric.63

Disabled rhetors demonstrate a complex, multifaceted relationship between rhetoric and bodies through their descriptions of touch in their writing, displaying the limits of Gorgias’

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63 People with disabilities as well as people experiencing illness often attribute the palliative effects to writing that Gorgias describes; disabled rhetors such as Mairs and others commonly refer to writing as a healing process. In fact, the process of writing as healing and restorative is common enough to have developed into its own genre of disability and illness memoir/pathography writing, which disabled rhetors both contribute to and extend. Often this recognition of the healing properties of rhetoric comes along with the recognition of the other side of the rhetorical coin: words hurt, restrain, limit and physically curtail the efforts of the disabled. Much of disability studies criticism has examines the ways in which the terminologies, labels and medical diagnoses can also work in literal ways to disable bodies, closing off opportunities for them, restricting services and assigning negative meanings to experience. Although many disabled rhetors, like Gorgias, clearly subscribe to an either/or relationship between touch and rhetoric (i.e., rhetoric either hurts or heals), my focus argues for paying attention to the more recent work by disabled rhetors that moves beyond the binaries of either healing or disabling and recognizes multiple effects.
definition of *logos* as either harmful or healthful. Although a wide range of disabled rhetors rely on the sense of touch to convey information, many evince complex, even contradictory relationships to touch that transcend binaries. For example, many disabled rhetors with autism depend on touch to interact with the world and create communication, but also experience difficulties regulating touch. This complex experience takes place on a bodily level that often shows up in their writing. Temple Grandin writes, “Tactile stimulation for me and many autistic children is a no-win situation. Our bodies cry out for human contact but when contact is made, we withdraw in pain and confusion” (*Emergence* 36). She elaborates, writing, “Even though the sense of touch is often compromised by excessive sensitivity, it can sometimes provide the most reliable information about the environment for people with autism” (65). Education specialist Douglas Biklen asks facilitated communication user Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay to explain his peculiar relation to touch, saying, “Given your sensitivity as a young child to being picked up, it is ironic that touch became so important to your learning” (138). Mukhopadhyay replies that “Different skills need different time to practice depending on the feeling of awareness of that part of the body. . . . To think about it, I recall that I learnt every skill through the touch method. . . . Touch is always a big help when an activity is new to me. I needed to be touched on my right shoulder, for doing any new skill, be it soaping. . . or be it learning how to write. So I consider that the touch method is the vital step to speed up my learning skill” (Biklen 138).

Rhetor with autism Lucy Blackman also probes the complicated relationship to touch and communication while reflecting on her composition process in her autobiography, wondering, “If affection in the form of cuddles and kisses cause discomfort and pain . . . how on earth does one develop interaction which might compensate for not interacting to speech and glance?” (146). She answers herself, writing, “I worked out when I was writing my autobiography . . . that being
touched in my skin and skeleton made my body aware of cause and effect. This created a clumsy crutch on which to hang expression. It does not mean that I changed, though I did make rational and analytical sense of what I was typing” (147). Especially for disabled rhetors with autism, the sense of touch, although difficult to manage, figures significantly into writing, typing, reading and all types of rhetorical production, demonstrating the values of interdependence and interconnection in bodily registers. They demonstrate a complicated relationship between touch and rhetoric, transcending binaries of either enabling or disabling.

In addition to disabled rhetors with autism, other people with disabilities describe a complex relationship to touch that transcends binaries. In “How to Talk to a New Lover about Cerebral Palsy,” Elizabeth Clare uses the sense of touch to illustrate both disabling and enabling effects of varying degrees. “Tell her: Complete strangers/have patted my head, kissed my cheek, called me courageous./ Tell this story more than once, ask/ her to hold you, rock you/ against her body, breast to back, her arms curving round . . . Don’t use the word spastic. . . Tell her:/ They taunted me retard, cripple/ defect. The words sank into my body./ The rocks and fists left bruises” (125). The devastating effects of words are made material in touch, as Clare compares taunting words to rocks and fists leaving bruises. But the healing effects of words also materialize in touch such as the embrace between lovers and Clare’s direction to “Try not to be ashamed as you flinch and tremble/ under her warm hands./ Think of stories you haven’t/ told yet” (126). These new stories are imagined in new physical connections which reshape rhetoric and bodies beyond binaries. The relationship between rhetoric and touch is more of a matter of degree rather than of polarity in Clare’s poetry, as she constructs multiple locations between her body, her lover, and her writing.
In his personal writing, Fries also pushes the relationship between rhetoric and touch beyond the polarities of enabling and disabling. He describes his congenitally disabled legs, writing, “Tonight, when I take off my shoes: three toes on each twisted foot. I touch the rough skin. The holes where the pins were. The scars. If I touch them long enough will I find those who never touched me? or those who did? Freak, midget, three-toed bastard. Words I’ve always heard” (146). Touching at first characterizes a dual relationship for Fries, as he remembers being either touched or untouched. Then he plumbs the depths of his experience with hurtful labels, continuing, “Disabled, crippled, deformed. Words I was given. But tonight I go back farther, want more, tear deeper into my skin. Peeling it back I reveal the bones at birth I wasn’t given—the place where no one speaks a word” (146). Like Clare, Fries attempts to tell new stories, forming new words and rhetorics, underneath his skin and under imaginary bones, in a search to reform words for a different body. Like facilitated communicators, Fries struggles to manage the sense of touch and its effects on his body, sorting through the range of sensations that touching and lack of touching creates. He equates silence with bones, a lack of words that attempts to break the connection between scars and hurtful words. In response, he creates multiple possibilities with reformed words and deeper penetrations, pushing for new relationships between touch and rhetoric beyond the binary of either enabling or disabling. Disabled rhetors demonstrate a complex relationship between logos (or rhetoric) and bodies through their descriptions of touch in their writing, rendering sophistic models inadequate.

An emerging model of disability, which scholars broadly identify as the spectrum or continuum model, encourages arguments about disability based on difference and degree rather than the faulty logic of binaries. Although the spectrum model has yet to be articulated completely in disability studies, several trends in debates identify the argument for defining
disability as degrees of difference along a continuum or spectrum as more persuasive than the binary of able vs. disabled. For example, debates regarding the designation of high-functioning vs. low-functioning type of disabilities, such as between autism spectrum disorder and Asperger’s syndrome, have resulted in arguments for degrees of difference rather than binary categories. Arguments for appreciating diversity in types of minds, also known as neurodiversity, values differences of degree rather than kind in cognition and sensory experience. In addition, Brenda Brueggemann and other compositionists concerned with disability write in order to make disability visible in the composition classroom, arguing that this move “will also make visible the continuum that links ‘abled’ (or TABs, those who are ‘temporally able bodied’) with ‘disabled’ (or PWDs, ‘persons with disabilities’) because “with such a continuum, the us/them dichotomy that is often in place for designating and dividing disability and disabled persons disappears” (“Becoming Visible” 371). Continuum models of disability take the marking of binaries in the practice of dissoi logos one step farther by making visible the points along a continuum of experience that connect people.

As a model for logos, the spectrum or continuum model of disability plots wider possibilities for argument and connection beyond the binary of two that the dissoi logos promotes. The multiple points in contact on a spectrum position people and the knowledge making strategies they bring to rhetoric—including multiple logos beyond the two of dissoi logos—as points in contact, changeable according to different situations, contexts and environments. Historian of disability Henri Stiker argues, “Let us stop seeing the able and disabled as normality and aberration, and let us no longer set them out as two separate

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64 The continuum model draws on the social and cultural models of disability which assign meanings to disability according to diverse social and cultural contexts rather than simple binaries. For more details on the social and cultural models of disability, see chapter two. In general, the continuum or spectrum model is associated with disability scholars and theorists who advocate the social models because they both draw attention to degrees of difference rather than binaries.
kinds” (194). Instead of the two separate logoi of normality and aberration, Stiker argues for a measure of difference by degree rather than kind. With disability, “difference is never fixed because it is a relationship . . . constituted by the relationship and always in a state of instability dependent on the network in which it is implicated” (193).65 Stiker’s concept of a network relates closely to the concept of a continuum or spectrum, which emphasizes a tension of interdependence among relationships. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder also draw on a form of the continuum model to argue that “[t]he medical philosopher Georges Canguilhem has pointed out that ‘[l]ife rises to the consciousness and science of itself only through maladaptation, failure and pain,’ thus placing disability, illness, and the aging process along a continuum of normative physiology rather then labeling them as abnormal pathological states of being” (3).

For Canguilhem, the normal and pathological always operate on a spectrum of bodily states that develop in relation to each other. He explains that “Without being absurd, the pathological state can be called normal to the extent that it expresses a relationship to life’s normativity” (227). Relationships structure Canguilhem’s delineation between the normal and the pathological. “An anomaly is a fact of individual variation which prevents two beings from being able to take the place of each other completely . . . diversity is not a disease; the anomalous is not the pathological. Pathological implies pathos, the direct and concrete feeling of suffering and impotence” (137).66 A relationship between two beings structures this spectrum, rather than the two beings themselves. Medicine and other sciences have largely been

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65 Stiker considers that this relationship is “[n]o doubt the relation of ‘something’ to ‘something else’, but this something was always constituted by the relationship” on which it is dependent, as the network. Here Stiker shows how sticky the two points of dissoi logoi are, but prods the something and something else to be further defined by an unstable relationship of a network.

66 Canguilhem traces a tactile meaning for anomaly, which comes from “the Greek anomalia which means unevenness, asperity; omalos in Greek means that which is level, even, smooth, hence ‘anomaly’ is, etymologically, an-omalos, that which is uneven, rough, irregular” (131). Interestingly, he relates that “a mistake is often made with the etymology of anomaly, by deriving it not from omalos but from nomos which means law, hence the compound a-nomos. . . . The Greek nomos and the Latin norma have closely related meanings, law and rule tending to become confused” (131-132).
responsible for structuring the normal and the pathological as a binary. Instead, Canguilhem
explores a mutually constitutive relationship between the state of being implied in *logos* and the
emotional tone of *pathos*. He notes “we can say that in biology it is the *pathos* which conditions
the *logos* because it gives it its name. It is the abnormal which arouses theoretical interest in the
normal. Norms are only recognized as such when they are broken. Functions are revealed only
when they fail” (208-209).

From a rhetorical studies and disability studies perspective, this definition of *logos* driven
by relationships invites possibilities beyond the limits of the “one” truth of *logos* propagated by
the dominant rhetorical tradition or even the limits of the sophistic tradition’s binary of two truth
or *dissoi logoi*, pushing for multiple connections between rhetoric and bodies. It is not
coincidence, as Canguilhem notes, that the norming of bodies accompanies the norming of
language—as French grammarians of the Enlightenment “undertook to fix the usage of the
French language, it was a question of norms, of determining the reference, and of defining
mistakes in terms of divergence” (150). Like Fries, Clare, and a variety of disabled rhetors who
use FC suggest, the connection between rhetoric and bodies—materialized in *logos* and touch—is multiple, demanding multiple *logoi* for different bodies. Critical insights from disability
studies such as the spectrum model and writing from disabled rhetors prods sophistic studies to
remember the flexible and multiple ways in which the concept of *logos* can be used, moving
beyond *dissoi logoi* to multi-*logoi*.

**Empedocles: From dissoi logoi to Multi Fleshy logoi**

The spectrum model of disability offered by disability studies also supports ancient, overlooked
definitions of *logos* that are more capacious than singular *logos* or even dual *dissoi logoi*. 
Sophistic scholar George Kerferd explains that there are at least three parts to *logos*. Kerferd explains, “what we are confronted with is not strictly speaking one word but rather a word with a range of applications” including “an extra-linguistic reference to something which is supposed to be the case in the world around us” (83). Regarding *logos*, he explains,

> there are at least three main areas of its application. . . first of all the area of language and linguistic formulation, hence speech, discourse, description, statement, arguments (as expressed in words) and so on; secondly the area of thought and mental processes hence thinking, reasoning, accounting for, explanation . . . thirdly, the area of the world, that about which we speak, hence structural principles, formulae, natural laws and so on, provided that in each case they are regarded as actually present in and exhibited in the world-process. (83)

In the spirit of Kerferd’s translation, I argue for redefining *logos* as multiple *logoi*, a reading that presents possibilities for disabled rhetors, who necessarily draw on the extra-linguistic properties of the world around them, often forming physical and emotional connections to others. Disabled rhetors such as Mairs, Fries and other rhetors who use touch as a rhetorical strategy can benefit from theories of multi *logoi* that support physical difference as built in to constructions of *logos*. In order to redefine *logos* as multiple for diverse bodies, I turn to Gorgias’ teacher Empedocles, who offers theories, pedagogies and practices that model diverse, multiple *logoi* for diverse, multiple bodies. Empedocles, influential on the sophists, provides a broad sense of the world about which the sophists spoke, one united by touch and connected by a broad sense of *logos* as
Empedocles is called the inventor of rhetoric by Aristotle. He taught rhetoric to Gorgias and possibly Tisias and is generally accepted as a strong influence on the entire sophistic tradition of rhetoric. From Empedocles Gorgias most likely learned to compare *logos* with drugs. From its very beginnings, the pursuit of rhetoric is connected with the art of healing. Purporting to be a miracle worker, Empedocles, known for his rhapsodic, repetitive and spell-binding speeches, also influential on Gorgias’ style, explains that those who listen to him will be taught miraculous things. He reports of “countless throngs” of people in his native Acragas following him and asking questions, “some desiring oracles, while some, who for many a weary day have been pierced by the grievous pangs of all manner of sickness, beg to hear from me the word of healing” (fragment 112). Like Gorgias, Empedocles conceives of *logos* as a material body that acts on other bodies in a physical, tactile way. Unlike Gorgias, however, he pushes beyond binaries of *logos* as enabling or disabling, instead offering a theory of multiple forms of *logos* for diverse bodies.

Empedocles’ theories are valuable to disabled rhetors because they provide a definition of tactile *logos* created in relation to the body, in multiple shapes and forms. I offer a redefinition of *logos* based on Empedocles’ theories for disabled rhetors of “*logos* as proportion,” a redefinition that promotes a sense of *logos* based on touch, on relationships among bodies and by degrees of difference rather than binaries. To forward a definition of tactile *logos* as proportion, I draw from several main Empedoclean theories of bodies and of rhetoric. First, Empedocles recognizes that

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67 Aristotle calls Empedocles the “inventor of rhetoric” in a fragment of *The Sophist* preserved in Diogenes. Satyrus also refers to Empedocles’ early work in rhetoric.

68 In another fragment, Empedocles reinforces his knowledge of drugs against ills and even purports to raise the dead: “And thou shalt learn all the drugs that are a defense against ills and old age . . . thou shalt bring back from Hades the life of a dead man” (fragment 111).
all bodies (human, animal, divine and even non-living) are formed and joined through tactile interconnectedness. Second, like the current spectrum model in disability studies, he recognizes ability and disability as operating on a continuum through a worldview in which physical variation and difference is not only tolerated but a part of the expected cycle of life. These theories support our Empedoclean-inspired major redefinition of *logos* as proportion for today’s disabled rhetors, which argues that *logoi* are as multiple and diverse and the variously shaped bodies that form them. For disabled rhetors who use the sense of touch to interact with other bodies in their daily lives and in rhetorical production—facilitated communicators, assistive technologies, assistance animals—Empedocles offers a worldview and theory of rhetoric supportive of the multiple *logoi* created by disabled rhetors in contact with other bodies. Finally, Empedocles demonstrates that multi-sensory based knowledge, especially garnered through the sense of touch, is a useful strategy for rhetorical production and pedagogy for disabled rhetors.

First, Empedocles’ rhetorical and bodily theories are important for disabled rhetors who use the sense of touch to create complex, multi-*logoi* driven arguments in their writing and their worlds because the sense of touch unites human, animal, environmental and all other bodies in Empedocles’ worldview. All matter and bodies are comprised of four root elements—air, water, earth and fire—which are put into physical contact by the opposing but complementary forces of Love and Strife. Physical effluences emanate from these elements, moving through pores, to create bodies and matter by a process of physical intermingling called the “symmetry of pores.” Empedocles instructs his audience to “know that effluences flow from all things that have come

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69 Empedocles says, “Hear first the four roots of things: shining Zeus, lifebringing Hera, aidoneus and Nestis whose tear-drops are a well-spring to mortals” (fragment 6). Guthrie notes that although this doctrine of the four elements was eventually dethroned by Anaxagoras and the atomists, its significance is clear because “in a modified form it was restored as the basis of physical theory by Aristotle, whose tremendous authority supported it through and beyond the Middle Ages. In spite of the challenge of chemists like Boyle, it would commonly have been said even in the eighteenth century that the elements of bodies were earth, water, air and fire” (143). Other scholars note that Empedocles’ four element theory influenced a wide range of other theories of the body and mind, including the theories of the four humors.
into being” (fragment 89). Empedocles explains, regarding the elements, that “For out of these have sprung all things that were and are and shall be—trees and men and women, beasts and birds and the fishes that dwell in the waters, yea, and the gods” (fragment 21). Pores and effluences of the elements combine with each other in a tactile process that molds them into various bodies. Theophrastus explores the kinship this physical interaction supports among wide varieties of human, animal and non living bodies. “How will living creatures differ as regards sensation from everything else? Sensible objects fit into the pores of inanimate things as well, for he explains all mixture by symmetry of pores. . . . Thus everything will be capable of sensation, and mixture, sensation and growth will be the same thing; for he explains everything by symmetry of pores” (Guthrie 233). Empedocles emphasizes the material process by which they form, saying “They are only a mingling and interchange of what has been mingled. Substance is but a name given to these by men” (fragment 8). A form of touch, in the form of physical sensation, unites the elements and the forces, producing everything.

Second, the tactile interactions of the pores and effluences form multiply shaped bodies occupying positions of disability and ability along a spectrum of difference. The effluences of the elements interact to form life by “running through one another . . . they take different shapes” as “mixture and forms imprinted on each” contribute to the diversities of life (fragments 21, 22). Bodies exist by way of physical contact and proliferate in manifold forms, shapes, and colors. Propelled by the force of mixture, bodies take on myriad shapes. Empedocles explains this diverse abundance, describing “as they [the elements] mingled, a myriad kinds of mortal

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70 Plutarch reinforces how all beings share porous, effluent characteristics: “Look at it in the light of Empedocles, ‘Perceiving that there are effluences from all things that have come into being. Not only animals and plants, or earth and sea, but also from stones, bronze and iron there is a continual and abundant outflow’” (151).
71 Empedocles emphasizes the physical process of intermingling as the elements tactilely interact, repeating several times how this physical process promotes multiple forms. As Empedocles describes, “by the mixture of water, earth, air and sun [fire] there came into being the shapes and colors of all mortal things that are now in being” (fragment 71).
creatures were brought forth, with all sorts of shapes, a wonder to behold” (fragment 35). This physical intermingling produces “countless tribes of mortal creatures . . . scattered abroad endowed with all manner of forms” (fragment 35, 36). These forms embody the difference and variation that characterizes disability. This process of mixture lays the foundation for Empedocles’ construction of rhetorical bodies existing along a continuum of forms, shapes, and abilities.

For instance, Empedocles’ descriptions of Love and Strife, the forces that propel the physical intermingling of the elements, demonstrate most clearly how disability and ability operate as part of the same cycle of life, as bodies are formed along a continuum of difference. Describing the formation of bodies by Love and Strife, Empedocles first employs the practice of dissoi logoi, or two-fold arguments, personifying the arguments in the forces of Love and Strife, before moving beyond the limits of binary logoi. He tells his listeners about the cycle of life, beginning with two-fold or dissoi logoi:

I shall tell thee a twofold tale. At one time it grew to be one only out of man; at another, it divided up to be many instead of one. There is a double becoming of perishable things and a double passing away. The coming together of all things brings generation into being and destroys it; the other grows up and is scattered as things become divided. And these things never cease continually changing places, at one time all uniting in one through Love, at another each borne in different directions by the repulsion of Strife . . . . They never cease changing their places continually, so far as they are immovable as they go round the circle of existence. (fragment 17)

72 Translators of the fragment generally use a form of dissoi for “two fold” and logoi for “tale.”
In the first telling of the life cycle, a *dissoi logoi*, or two fold tale, is driven by the two bodies of Love and Strife, through which Empedocles establishes the constant physical interaction that propels life and death. In another fragment, Empedocles doubles his *dissoi logoi*, multiplying his *logoi*, to describe Love and Strife distinctly in terms of a life cycle along a continuum of disability and ability. “This (the contest of Love and Strife) is manifest in the mass of mortal limbs. At one time all the limbs that are the body’s portion are brought together by Love in the blooming life’s high season; at another, severed by cruel Strife, they wander each alone by the breakers of life’s sea. It is the same with the plants and fish . . . the beasts . . . and the seabirds (fragment 20).

Taken together, these two fragments—a two fold tale full of double becomings and perishings—multiply the original two *dissoi logoi* and proliferate as multiple *logoi* in relation to the multiply shaped bodies formed with them. Empedocles repeats his two-fold tale at least four times to his audience, working different *logoi* into his repetitions, which mutate and transform alongside the proliferation of bodies he describes. He adjusts his *logoi* in relation to time and space, drawing on the peripatetic tradition of the early sophists, saying “I shall retrace my steps over the paths of song that I have traveled before, drawing from my saying a new saying” (fragment 35). He persuades his audience to listen to his repetitions, “Come, hearken to my words, for it is learning that increaseth wisdom. As I said before, when I declared the heads of my discourse, I shall tell thee a twofold tale,” which becomes a multiply folded tale with repetition and multiple *logoi*. He describes Love and Strife again, emphasizing again how they work together forming bodies, directing his audience “to attend to the undeceitful ordering of [his] discourse.” The order of his discourse mimics the “order” which forms bodies. Both
produce a wide range of *logoi* and bodies in a life cycle in which disability is a natural part of the spectrum of life.\(^73\)

Empedocles emphasizes that the limbs of bodies combine “by chance” through Love and Strife, demonstrating that disability and ability co-exist according to chance, in an example of a rudimentary form of genetic variation for bodies rather than pre-determined molds.\(^74\) As Love and Strife, “mingled, countless tribes of mortal creatures were scattered abroad endowed with all manner of forms, a wonder to behold (fragment 36).\(^75\) This wide manner of forms implicitly and explicitly includes difference and disability. Empedocles explicitly includes disability in the wide manner of forms generated by Love and Strife and does not subject disability to a medicalized view that seeks to root out disability, eradicate it, cure it or fix it. Empedocles describes that “many heads sprung up without necks and arms wandered bare and bereft of shoulders. Eyes strayed up and down in want of foreheads.” Love, taking her turn, works to unite these things into whole parts, but only by chance, and not completely. “Solitary limbs wandered seeking for union . . . But as divinity was mingled still further with divinity, these things joined together as each might chance, and many other things besides them continually arose” including “shambling creatures with countless hands.” Furthermore, “many creatures with faces and beasts looking in

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\(^73\) Both unifying and separating forces of Love and Strife shape bodies, as “being [is] implanted in the frame of mortals,” as they are “fitted together” by Love and dismembered by Strife. Each force operates at a physical force and “gain[s] the upper hand in turn when the time comes round” with “equal weight . . . equal length and breadth” they “never cease changing continually. These quotes are culled from several fragments, including fragments 16-20, as Empedocles repeats the process several times, demonstrating how his *logoi* and bodies proliferate.

\(^74\) In a fragment, Empedocles says, “as divinity was mingled still further with divinity, these things joined together as each might chance, and many other things besides them continually arose” (fragment 59). Guthrie and others have credited Empedocles with positing a proto-model of Darwinian evolution and natural selection.

\(^75\) MR Wright’s summary of Empedocles’ cosmic cycle clarifies: “(1) There are the elements in separation under the control of Strife. (2) As they begin to come together with the entry and advance of Love, the unattached limbs are formed. (3) These combine in various monstrous unions, except perhaps some which join in a manner fit to survive, giving in this way the generation of men and women. (4) As Strife decreases all life is absorbed with the coming of the elements into one under Love. (5) The entrance of Strife into the mixture causes the roots to separate toward their Like, and the whole-natured forms result. (6) These forms, when fully articulated, give the present generation of men and women. They in turn pass away when (1) Strife succeeds once more in holding the elements apart” (54). As is clear, Strife’s disarticulation of limbs is at least as important to the process, if not more so.
different directions were born; some, offspring of oxen with faces of men, while others, again, arose as offspring of men with the heads of oxen” (fragments 57-61). Although Empedocles positions Love as the force that fits bodies and limbs together, he spends more time and provides more vivid descriptions of the Strife that separates limbs. Furthermore, as he explains, chance, rather than a pre-determined mold, contributes to what forms will survive and which ones will not, forwarding a worldview tolerant of bodies in “all manner of forms.”

For Empedocles, the disability wrought by Strife, such as the severed limbs, is simply a part of the ever-changing cycle of life. Empedocles repeats his tales of Love and Strife several times, but what remains constant is that while Love brings bodies together in an enabling way and while Strife separates them in disabling ways, both forces are necessary to the formation of life. The wholeness of Love is not the teleological bodily state of perfection to which all bodies aspire. By referring to both forces as integral to his “two-fold tale,” Empedocles positions the formations of bodies directly in proportion to the formation of logoi, or arguments, in his worldview. He then multiples his two-fold tale, constructing multiple logoi to attend to the diverse bodies that are formed by chance along a spectrum of difference, constructing a flexible definition of logos well-suited to the emerging model of disability as existing on a continuum of difference forwarded by contemporary disabled rhetors and disability studies theorists.

**Proportions of Fleshy Logoi**

Empedocles builds disability into the very essence of his theories of bodies and logos by using a little-known ancient definition of logos as proportion. Simplicius quotes and explains Empedocles’ theories of bodies in what has been called a rudimentary “survival of the fittest” theory of evolution:
Empedocles says that during the first rule of Love . . . there came into being at random parts of animals such as heads, hands, and feet, and then there come together those ‘oxen with the heads of men’ and the converse, and ‘as many of these parts were fitted together in such a way as to ensure their preservation and became animals and survived, because they fulfilled mutual needs. . . All that did not come together according to the proper formula [logos] perished’ (204).

As Guthrie reminds us, a meaning for “proportion” in Greek is logos, a valence of the term that, along with Empedocles’ definition, draws attention to the bodily materiality of logos in addition to its relation to a physical process of measurement. Guthrie writes, “this proportion is a chance outcome of the interaction of Love and Strife . . . Now the word for proportion is logos, but logos had many other meanings in Greek, some of which have reference only to the behaviour of rational beings: it can mean thought or the result of thought” (160).76 While Empedocles is unclear about how exactly chance and proportion interact in the mixing of the four elements—if Love combines them completely by chance or by more calculated proportions—it is clear that this proportion by chance results in diverse bodily forms. The elements and forces combine by a sense of proportion based on chance, by which advantageous characteristics endure based on a pre-Darwinian sense of evolution. Favorable characteristics endure by chance. This evolution does not disqualify difference and disability from its spectrum, as many disabilities affect but do not necessarily impede survival. By way of chance and proportion-driven logos, forms combine randomly and not according to a prefabricated mold of ability or wholeness.

76 This definition of logos recalls Kerferd’s three-part translation of logos.
From the rhetors examined in the introduction such as Grandin, Prince-Hughes and Savarese, who use touch among various bodies to create rhetoric, to those such as Fries, Mairs, Clare and others who explore the myriad ways in which touch affects their writing and relationships, Empedocles offers a theory of rhetoric supportive of these interactions. By yoking chance-driven proportions of *logos* to the formation of bodies, Empedocles creates “fleshy *logoi,*” that anchor rhetorical bodies with a built-in attention to difference. Guthrie surmises that this ratio and proportion of the elements is generalizable to all life forms and matter in Empedocles’ theories, producing the “manifold variety of nature from four elements only” (214). To him, it “seems most likely . . . that Empedocles believed all natural substances, metals and minerals as well as organic tissues, to be differentiated from each other by a different proportion of the four common elements in their mixture. He gave only a few examples of this . . . namely animal life, but his Pythagorean faith in the kinship of all nature makes it improbable that he regarded inanimate objects as composed on an entirely different basis from animate. The difference would be one of degree” (215). Empedocles’ *logoi,* constructed in various physical proportions, also supports the current spectrum model of disability in disability studies that positions difference as a matter of degree rather than kind, on a continuum from ability and disability.

Empedocles’ use of proportion as *logos* is also useful for disabled rhetors because this definition of *logos* builds disability into rhetoric on a somatic level. Empedocles uses the disabled god Hephaestus, also known as the god of *metis* (cunning intelligence), to build disability directly into *logoi* formations. Specifically, in his descriptions of the formation of blood and bone, Empedocles switches from naming Zeus as the god to personify how the element of fire forges flesh and instead names Hephaestus, the disabled god of metalworking and
fire. In fragments 96 and 98, Empedocles invokes the disabled god Hephaestus in the making of flesh and bone, providing compelling evidence for the *logos* of rhetoric as a material body in contact with other diversely formed bodies. Hephaestus is widely known as the lame or crippled god, whose feet and hands are deformed, often pictured or described as crab’s claws. In one of these two key fragments, Empedocles states that “the kindly earth received us in its broad funnels two parts of gleaming Nestis out of the eight, and four of Hephaestus. So arose white bones divinely fitted together by the cement of proportion” (fragment 96). Aristotle also provides evidence of Empedocles’ use of *logos* in the making of bodies, stating, “So Empedocles says bone exists by the *logos*, that is, the essence and substance of the thing. But it was equally necessary that flesh and everything else should be the *logos*” (Metaphysics 214). The cement of proportion, *logos*, drives the formation of bones directed by a disabled god, building disability into bodies into “everything else,” including rhetoric.

In another fragment Empedocles connects Hephaestus to the making of flesh and blood, in addition to bone. “And the earth, anchoring in the perfect harbors of Aphrodite, meets with these in nearly equal proportions, with Hephaestus and Water and gleaming Air—either a little more of it, or less of them and more of it. From these did blood arise and the manifold forms of flesh” (fragment 98). The disabled god Hephaestus aptly makes proportions, sometimes a little more or less of the elements to create “manifold forms of flesh,” linking proportion-as-*logos* to diversely shaped bodies. In Empedocles’ definition of *logos* as proportion, Hephaestus creates flesh through diversely proportioned *logoi*, linking the formation rhetoric and bodies productively in disability. Through Hephaestus, Empedocles builds disability—situated along a continuum of difference—into the “word” of *logos*. This connection between *logos* and diverse

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77 Scholars of Empedocles have yet to fully explore or explain the discrepancy between the naming of Zeus and Hephaestus.
bodies provides for disabled rhetors a more flexible and embodied understanding of rhetoric’s usually disembodied and cognitive sense of *logos* as “word” or “speech.”

Disabled rhetors, especially those who use touch as a rhetorical strategy to construct complex, non-binary arguments, benefit from the theories and practices of multi *logoi* that Empedocles supports. In particular, Hephaestus’ process of *logos* as proportion aids in the creation of multiple, fleshy *logoi* produced in concert with the diversely shaped bodies that create them. Empedocles’ fleshy *logoi* proliferate in proportion to the diverse fleshy bodies that produce them. Consider, for example, Empedocles’ proliferating *logoi*, multiplying from a two-fold *logoi* to many more, in relation to the calls among disabled rhetors to recognize the power in difference, multiplicity and possibility. Cheryl Marie Wade, in “Disability Culture Rap,” multiplies her arguments, in Empedoclean fashion, as she invokes multiply shaped bodies.

Culture. Pass the word. Now maybe the word is the moan and wail of a blues. Maybe it’s the fierce rhythms and clicking heels and castanets of flamenco. Maybe it’s outsider art. Passing the word. Maybe the word is authentic movement, the dance that flows from the real body notes of cripples. Maybe it’s the way pieces of cloth are stitched together to commemorate a life, to remember a name. Maybe it’s American Sign Language . . . ASL performance art and ASL mime. (17)

As Wade raps, she takes on the rhapsodic elements of proliferating *logoi* and bodies that Empedocles fashions for rhetoric as its very beginnings. Passing the word for her is a forming of disability culture that draws on the properties of multiple bodies from diverse elements of experience of disability. In Empedoclean fashion, Wade’s *logoi* proliferate as the bodies in her
descriptions of disability culture proliferate. Passing the word in particular between the embodied *logoi* of ASL performance of the rhythm of bodies composing notes produces multiple *logoi* for multiple bodies. Invoking a “ragged edge,” the name of the collection in which her writing appears, which attempts to weave the “rough but strong cloth from . . . gnarled strands” of the disability experience, she invokes the tactile image of an AIDS quilt. As Wade puts it in similarly tactile terms, “We are more and more proud. . . raising our gnarly fists in defiance of the narrow, bloodless images of our complex humanity shoved down the American consciousness daily” (18). Wade reaches for fleshy, even bloody images and *logoi* to counteract the erasure of disability identity and culture. She demands multi *logoi* for diverse bodies to form disability culture. Her multi *logoi* most cogently define the range of disability culture, as she explains, “There’s power in difference. Power. Pass the word. Disability culture. What is it really all about?

    It’s this.

    And *this*.

    And *this*.

    Yeah, *this*.” (18)

For Wade, passing the word means passing through differently embodied meanings and differently shaped arguments for disability culture. Gnarly fists and gnarly words combine equally to produce fleshier images of disability culture. Multi *logoi*—It’s this. And *this*. And *this*. Yeah, *this*”—shape responsive *logoi* as multiple and diverse arguments for multiple and diverse bodies.
Multi-sensory Empedoclean Pedagogies for Disabled Rhetors

In addition to offering theories of *logos* and bodies rooted in the sense of touch, Empedocles also offers practices and pedagogies that value touch and model multi-sensory learning experiences. Empedocles uses touch and tactile analogies to teach his audiences his theories, tapping into all their senses for rhetorical production. In effect, Empedocles practices what he preaches, modeling a multi-sensory pedagogy, rooted in the sense of touch, to demonstrate this theory that *logoi* proliferate in proportion to the diverse bodies and sensory experiences that form them. Since Empedocles anchors all of the senses in the sense of touch, this emphasis on touch also validates the use of other sensory perceptions for rhetoric, supporting the wide range of sensory experiences that current disabled rhetors draw on in rhetorical production. People with autism, facilitated communication users, and people with a wide variety of sensory impairments and over-sensitivities, all depend on different senses and different combinations of senses to produce rhetoric.

Empedocles uses touch to undergird all sensory perception and to explore wide ranges of learning and teaching. First, he posits sensory perception as a legitimate path towards knowledge, validating all five senses. He counsels his listeners: “It is not possible for us to set God before our eyes, or to lay hold of him with our hands, which is the broadest way of persuasion that leads into the heart of man” (fragment 133). By doing away with the possibility of divine knowledge, Empedocles, like the sophists who followed him, legitimates sensory knowledge for knowledge-making and rhetorical production. He identifies divine knowledge or God as literally unattainable—unable to be grasped by our hands—but also legitimates what sensory knowledge we can grasp as productive. Knowledge we hold in our hands, often literally

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78 Unlike Plato, who denies sensory perceptions as legitimate pathways toward knowledge, and unlike Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian who strictly regulate a rhetor’s sense perceptions, Empedocles values the senses as productive if partial and fallible strategies for rhetorical production.
shaped by our sensory perceptions, is the “broadest way of persuasion” in Empedocles’ pedagogy.

Then, Empedocles builds on his privileging of the sense of touch to support multi-sensory strategies for knowledge-making. Touch is the “broadest way of persuasion” in Empedocles’ epistemology because he hinges all five senses on the sense of touch. As Theophrastus explains, “Empedocles explains all the senses on the same lines, saying that sensation takes place by a process of fitting into the pores of each organ” (De Sensu 7). Every sense is fleshy, tactile and interconnected for Empedocles. Although he recognizes differences in sensory acuity and even deficits in some senses, the sense of touch remains to some degree in each. Touch circulates throughout the senses and throughout a variety of bodies that exercise them. Vision, for example, occurs, when “colors are brought to the eye by effluence” (236). Effluences are tactile, material elements in this theory. Also, the ear is “a shoot of flesh” and the air when stirred strikes against the solid parts and produces a sound (239). Even the sense of smell is tangible and tactile, as Empedocles describes it in relation to the dog’s excellent sense of smell. After describing “[the dog] with its nostrils tracking out the fragments of the beast’s limbs and the breath from their feet that they leave in the soft grass,” he remarks that “thus all things have their share of breath and smell” and that “thus have all things thought by fortune’s will . . . for the blood round the heart is the thought of man” (fragment 105). The physical particles of scent, breath, smell and even thought all circulate among a variety of bodies, forming connections through touch among

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79 Animals possess night vision because they have more fire effluences and therefore better vision.
80 He relates smell to breathing, and recognizes abnormalities in this sense: when breathing becomes labored, “its roughness prevents our smelling as well, as in people suffering from catarrh” (240). About taste, we hear that Empedocles explained different tastes of water in the sea as “not perceptible to all, but serving to nourish the fish” (241).
81 Arguing that “for the wisdom of men grows according to what is before them,” Empedocles seeks to shape learning according to the broadest means at hand, the sense of touch (fragment 106). Referring to sensation and cognition, he explains, “For out of these are all thing fitted together, and by these do men think and feel pleasure and pain” and “just so far a they grow to be different, so far do different thoughts ever present themselves to their minds” (fragments 107 and 108).
all the senses. Furthermore, these sensory perceptions are valuable epistemological strategies. Aristotle clearly states that “sensation and thought are the same thing” among all beings for Empedocles. All beings share the property of sensation, or sensory perceptions, that enable cognition to a certain degree.

Empedocles illustrates the value of a multi-sensory pedagogy by using a tactile analogy to explain one of his most important theories, the formation of bodies, to his listeners. Repeating himself in a slightly different way, he rearticulates his theory of how pores and effluences of four elements, powered by Love and Strife, create all life. He compares this complicated process of bodily formation to “just as when painters are elaborating temple-offerings . . . when they have taken pigments of many colors with their hands, mix them in due proportion, more of some and less of others, and from them produce shapes . . . making trees and men and women, beasts and birds and fishes. . . so let not the error prevail over thy mind, that there is any other source of all the perishable creatures that appear in countless numbers . . . ” (fragment 23). By drawing on tactile analogies his audience would be familiar with, such as painting, Empedocles develops multi-modal and multi-sensory logoi for his listeners, modeling a pedagogy attentive to different ways of learning and being.

Empedocles’ theories of sensory knowledge are useful for contemporary disabled rhetors because they encourage multi-sensory combinations. Empedocles recognizes the senses as important for knowledge-making not despite their fallibility, but because their partiality fosters multi-sensory strategies. This is reflected in his multi-sensory pedagogy. He teaches his listeners, “Go to now, consider with all thy powers in what way each thing is clear. Hold not thy sight in

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82 For Guthrie this “is only intended to bring home the truth that both result from equally corporeal causes. There is a clearly defined hierarchy in nature but it is a matter of degree only” (233).
83 Recall that Empedocles describes, “by the mixture of water, earth, air and sun [fire] there came into being the shapes and colors of all mortal things that are now in being” (fragment 71). And “running through one another, they take different shapes—so does mixture change them” (fragment 21).
greater credit as compared with thy hearing, nor value thy resounding ear above the clear
instructions of thy tongue; and do not withhold thy confidence in any of thy other bodily parts by
which there is an opening for understanding, but consider everything in the way it is clear”
(fragment 4). This pedagogy hinges on discovering all the available means of persuasion—the
broader path of persuasion—that uncovers various openings for understanding in productive
ways. Empedocles tells his audience to use a multi-sensory approach to understanding and not to
position one sense as superior to another. This multi-sensory pedagogy even supports the
experience of disability which might reduce one or more of the senses, such as sight or hearing,
because it encourages the use of other senses in combination. Empedocles counsels his audience
to use any “other bodily parts by which there is an opening for understanding,” forming a
flexible and compensatory model for knowledge making. Since his theory of effluences and
pores posits that bodies and the elements produce effluences that are transmitted through pores
on the skin and other materials, these “openings for understanding” are necessarily tactile in
nature. Empedocles encourages his listeners to use their eyes, ears and tongues as they would
any other body part—primarily as an organ with which to receive and transmit information.

Furthermore, Empedocles’ identification of the sense of touch as the broadest method of
persuasion echoes the claims of contemporary disabled rhetors and theorists and even current
studies of the sense of touch. Scientific studies of touch identify it as the first sense to develop in
the fetus and the last to be debilitated by disability or old age. Empedocles’ theories support
disabled theorists such as Davis’ privileging of the sense of touch for people with disabilities. As
I have examined through the writing of disabled rhetors such as Mairs, Fries, Grandin and others,
people with disabilities demand rhetorical theories, practices and pedagogies that value the sense
of touch as a complex, multi-dimensional rhetorical strategy, beyond binaries. Empedocles’
rhetoric implicitly supports these needs, offering a theories and pedagogies that recognize that variations in abilities and disabilities rarely erase touch completely, echoing testimonials from disabled rhetors and current studies of touch. Furthermore, by hinging all the senses on the sense of touch, Empedocles offers a generative foundation for multi-sensory strategies useful for disabled rhetors.

To conclude, I explore the work of Sue Rubin and Lucy Blackman, both rhetors with autism and users of facilitated communication, to illustrate how Empedocles’ theories and pedagogies of touch are valuable for disabled rhetors. In his example of respiration, one of the lengthiest extant fragments from his work and a general example of his overall theory of pores and effluences, Empedocles offers theories of the body that are still trenchant today, as they respond to the needs of contemporary disabled rhetors such as Blackman and others and ring true regarding the science of touch. According to Empedocles “all things . . . have bloodless tubes of flesh extended over the surface of their bodies; and at the mouths of these the outermost surface of the skin is perforated all over with pores closely packed together, so as to keep in the blood with a free passage is cute for the air to pass through.” Empedocles illustrates this theory by employing a tactile analogy of a girl using a water-clock and stopping the passage of air and water with her hands.84 By describing the movement of air and blood in relation to the movement of a hand setting a waterclock, Empedocles again leads his audience through a

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84 It is worth noting the entire passage here: “Thus do all things draw breath and breathe it out again. All have bloodless tubes of flesh extended over the surface of their bodies; and at the mouths of these the outermost surface of the skin is perforated all over with pores closely packed together, so as to keep in the blood with a free passage is cute for the air to pass through. Then, when the thin blood recedes from these, the bubbling air rushes in with an impetuous surge; and when the blood runs back it is breathed out again. Just as when a girl, playing with a water-clock of shining brass, puts the orifice of the pipe upon her comely hand, and dips the waterclock into the yielding mass of silvery water—the stream does not then flow into the vessel, but the bulk of the air inside, pressing upon the close-packed perforations, keeps it out til she uncovers the compressed stream; but then air escapes and an equal volume of water rushes in, just in the same way, when water occupies the depths of the brazen vessel and the opening and passage is stopped up by the human hand, the air outside . . . holds the water back . . . til she lets go with her hand” (fragment 100).
pedagogical example centered on manual dexterity and tactile technical ability they would be familiar with.

The process of breathing in Empedocles’ ancient theory is tactile in nature, emphasizing “tubes of flesh” and “mouths . . . perforated all over with pores.” This description of pores is not so different from contemporary descriptions of how the sense of touch works with the skin. Although the science is more precise now, some parts of Empedocles’ theories still ring true. Scientist Donald Carr writes,

Neurologists now believe that one can picture the touch receptor as a membrane in which there are a number of tiny holes, or at least potential holes, like a piece of Swiss cheese and covered with cellophane. In the resting state the holes are too small . . . for certain ions to pass thorough. Mechanical deformation opens up these holes. When . . . currents are formed . . . by a strong pressure such as a pinprick, the currents are strong enough to trigger nerve impulses and the intensity of the prick is signaled by the frequency of the impulses. (qtd. in Ackerman 84)

Empedocles’ theory of pores as tiny perforations and tubes of flesh roughly corresponds to present understanding of touch receptors as holes in Swiss cheese covered with saran wrap. The mechanical deformation, currents, and pinpricks that Carr describes roughly correspond to the passages, perforations, bubblings and surges that Empedocles describes. Like this contemporary definition’s reliance on the manual analogy of saran wrapping to describe touch, Empedocles relies on an analogy of the water clock to describe to his audience how respiration by sensation works.
Disabled rhetors who use the sense of touch in their rhetoric describe how their experience of touch differs from the standard experience such as that described in neurological description above. Their non-standard experience, however, resonates with multi-modal and multi-sensory Empedoclean understandings of touch. Many users of facilitated communication (FC) describe the facilitator’s touch on their arm as a way of focusing all of their other senses to enable them to produce the motor coordination necessary to type. Blackman, for example, in her narrative of the first time she worked with FC specialist Rosemary Crossley, describes a multi-sensory experience of touch:

My partner placed her hand on mine again. . . I pressed single keys through the little holes, and suddenly my finger felt again as if it were a willing agent of my mind. In stabilizing my hand Rosie had given me another gift. My hand and mind were connected. The eyes are in some ways a periscope between the mind and the outside world. As with a periscope, their effectiveness depends on compensating for wave movement and also the judder of on-ship activity. However my body, my mind and my senses had never interacted in quite the same way as my sisters’ so I had some difficulty in knowing exactly what I could expect of all my bits and pieces, especially if I were trying to focus on, and also use, my hand in conjunction with abstract thought. The steady touch on my own hand and forearm somehow made me bring it into focus, and at the same time feeling the point of contact gave me an accurate measurement as to the distance between my fingertip and the sensation of that touch. (83)
Although Blackman notes the difference between her experience of touch and her sisters’ more normative experiences, her description shares several similarities with Empedocles’ theories. Like Empedocles, Blackman links thought and sensation, which in her case is facilitated by the Crossley’s touch, which Blackman describes as a gift of connection between her hand and mind. Also similar to Empedocles, Blackman uses multi-sensory examples to explore her sense of touch. She anchors her sense of sight in the sense of touch, much in the same way that Empedocles uses the sense of touch to unite all five senses. She explains her periscope eyes in a physical way, as unable to accommodate wave movement or “on-ship judder” activity. Furthermore, she enacts Empedocles’ advice regarding the sense of touch for uniting the other senses, to use “other bodily parts by which there is an opening for understanding, but consider everything in the way it is clear.” She uses Crossley’s touch to enable her own sense of touch, localizing all the “bits and pieces” to focus on typing.

Empedocles offers a multi-modal understanding of touch that draws on the body and its connections to other bodies, such as between Blackman and Crossley, in multi-sensory rhetorical relationships. Empedocles’ identification of touch as the broadest way of persuasion structures his theories of the four other senses, forming a flexible foundation for rhetorical production based on multi-sensory experience but hinging on the sense of touch. Disabled rhetors often employ a similar multi-sensory approach to meaning-making that also relies on touch and tactility to anchor and sort through the senses. Furthermore, for Empedocles, the mind is material and embodied; likewise the body is minded, making his theories conducive to disabled rhetors whose cognitive and/or physical disabilities also propel them to experience the always multiple ways of knowing and being that inform rhetorical production.\(^85\) Sue Rubin, for example,

\(^85\) Recall that in Empedocles’ epistemology all things have sensation and that sensation and thought are the same thing. All beings that have sensation also have thought.
explains, “Autism plays on a person’s five senses. It can vary from day to day and is not something one can control or see coming” (Biklen 103). She continues, emphasizing, “My only message here is that not all communication is best served through speech. Art and music are great examples of languages that do not have to be spoken to be conveyed. Peel more layers, look deeper than the obvious . . . [and] look at things and others from a new perspective” (105). Like Empedocles, she persuades her readers to explore all the openings of understanding and to consider all the senses for grasping which way a thing is clear. From her own perspective, she explains that “Many times I feel as if oral communication is over rated. Much of how I express myself is through my eyes” (86). She implicitly echoes Empedocles’ guidance regarding the interdependence of all the senses and to “not withhold thy confidence in any of thy other bodily parts by which there is an opening for understanding, but consider everything in the way it is clear.” Empedocles’ pedagogy, by emphasizing multi-sensory openings for understanding, supports the diverse communication needs of disabled rhetors such as Blackman and Rubin.

Blackman, reporting similar connections between the senses of vision, hearing, and touch, also implicitly draws on Empedoclean multi-sensory pedagogies and practices. Explaining her experience with autism to her readers, she writes, “I had a cross over effect where real sound flashed through my brain from what my eyes had picked up and what my skin had sensed. This was a two-way phenomenon. Hearing certain sounds gave me more of a skin- than a brain-response” (18). She elaborates on this multi-sensory connection, describing “what I call a ‘sound-feeling’ [which] may come from sounds other people cannot hear. . . . ‘Feeling’, which is a word which peppers my typed language, is nowhere as abstract in how I intend it to be understood as I think it is for some people. When I type, ‘I feel foolish’, or ‘I feel good’, the emotion is sensory and on a par with how my organs register comfort or hunger” (19). Just as
Empedocles uses “sensation” to undergird all sensory experience, Blackman’s uses “feeling” to structure her sensory experience, her rhetorical production, and her teachings to her readers about her disability. Empedocles’ argument that “all things thought by fortune’s will . . . for the blood round the heart is the thought of man” (fragment 105) supports the rhetorical and pedagogical strategies of disabled rhetors such as Blackman who connect feeling with language, and cognition with the body.

Blackman illustrates the importance of touch in connecting her speech and all of her sensory experiences in her first typed message after using facilitated communication. She writes, “IWANTSmothLIFE,” describing it as “a form which surprised me as much as my mother” (84). Forms of rhetoric shaped by touch allow for surprises such as these, encouraging, as in Empedocles’ theories, logos proliferating in shapes as diverse as the bodies and minds that construct them. A wide range of disabled rhetors who draw on multi-sensory rhetorical strategies, especially touch, to produce communication find theoretical, practical and pedagogical support in Empedocles’ foundational rhetoric.

Empedocles’ pedagogies and theories support the social model of disability studies and in particular support the argument of disability as difference existing along a continuum or spectrum. Empedocles offers an understanding of the body that appreciates difference and that recognizes that bodily experiences, such as disability, cannot be placed on a binary, but should be situated instead in a complex network of factors. His theories of rhetoric, logos and his pedagogies reflect this complexity, inspiring a redefinition of fleshy logos that proliferate in proportion to the diverse bodies that shape them. His theories of touch support the needs of people with disabilities who use tactile rhetorics, supporting multi-dimensional and multi-sensory combinations of rhetoric and touch that push beyond the binaries of enabling or
disabling. Taken together with the insights on the role of touch in rhetoric as offered by disabled rhetors ranging from Mairs, Fries and Clare to users of facilitated communication such as Blackman and Rubin, Empedocles’ theories enable a reshaping of *logos* for the challenges and rewards of the disability experience. This joint redefinition of *logos*, undertaken by the efforts of disabled rhetors and supported by neglected theories of the sophists and their predecessors such as Empedocles, forms a basis on which to redefine the triad of appeals for the disability experience, the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 4: *Metis* and the Reshaping of the Appeals for Disabled Rhetors

Having one arm is an endless koan. It is what it is, which is unknowable, and it attracts a lot of ideas, stories and images. Caught up in the negative story, I felt ashamed, incomplete, and not okay. I drank to die. Later on, caught up in a more positive story, I felt pride and a sense of identity, and was horrified that medical science would try to eliminate birth defects, as if by doing so they would somehow be eliminating ME. (Joan Tollifson, “Imperfection is a Beautiful Thing” 111)

Joan Tollifson, who was born with one arm, explains both a “negative story” and a “more positive story” in her experience of growing up with a disability. In the negative story, her *ethos*—the rhetorical appeal of character—suffers as a result of the ideas, stories and images caught up with her arm. She explains, “The question of ‘what happened to your arm?’ has followed me through life like some koan-mantra that the universe never stops posing” (105). Audiences continuously place limits on her appeals of *ethos* and *pathos* in their reactions to her arm. “Total strangers come up to me on the street and inquire . . . People tell me with tears in their eyes how amazingly well I do things, such as tie my shoe.s . . . Or they tell me they don’t think of me as disabled (I guess they mean a ‘real cripple’ would be totally incompetent) . . . or people try desperately to pretend that they don’t even notice” (105-106). In the eyes of others, Tollifson’s *ethos* always revolves around her arm, a “problem” that literally does not exist. This in turn limits her appeals of *pathos*, or the emotional connections she has with others, as audiences make her an object of pity or inspiration. Further, only one type of message, or one *logos* becomes available to Tollifson as she is limited by inflexible *ethos* and *pathos* formations to promulgate only one message about disability: explaining what happened to her arm.

The more positive story that Tollifson develops as a result of her growing sense of participation in the disability rights movement enables her to cultivate an identity, or sense of *ethos*, based on pride and self-respect. This more fully formed *ethos* derives from her
connections not only with other disabled people but also through her practice of meditation, which encourages her to physically and emotionally interact with people in new ways. She becomes a masseuse, takes karate lessons and even invents new meditative positions, all efforts to resist the negative connotations often attributed to the characters of the disabled. In each of these pursuits, she uses the sense of touch in order to reinvent her \textit{ethos}.

In this chapter I explore how Tollifson and other disabled rhetors implicitly draw on and redefine the ancient sophistic rhetorical practice of \textit{metis}, or cunning, embodied intelligence, in order to reshape the appeals of \textit{ethos}, \textit{pathos} and \textit{logos} for the experience of disability. \textit{Metis} is a rhetorical strategy based in the sense of touch that I will redefine as a tactile intelligence well-suited for negotiating the experience of disability in rhetorical production. \textit{Metis} enables multiple character (\textit{ethos}) formations, diverse emotional (\textit{pathos}) connections with audiences, and manifold messages (\textit{logoi}) for disabled rhetors. Like Empedocles’ multiply fleshy \textit{logoi}, the \textit{metis} contains associations with the sense of touch, positioning it as a flexible rhetorical strategy for disabled rhetors such as Tollifson who use touch in their writing. Disabled rhetors revise \textit{metis} for their current needs and abilities by redefining it to create connections with the \textit{ethos} formations of other socially disempowered groups and to multiply emotional appeals to audiences.

\textit{Metis} is a tactile rhetorical strategy that aids disabled rhetors in the reshaping of \textit{ethos}, which catalyzes revisions to \textit{pathos} and \textit{logos} as well. In Tollifson’s case, meditation, a multi-sensory experience she calls “pure sensation” and “honest seeing and speaking,” helps her reconstruct the appeal of \textit{ethos}, or the way in which a rhetor presents her character as a trustworthy and credible in the eyes of her audience (106, 109). This construction of \textit{ethos} is especially difficult for disabled rhetors because of pervasive negative meaning attached to
disability that unfairly denigrate their character, their moral disposition or their competence. Tollifson’s construction of ethos is particularly challenging since most of her rhetorical encounters predetermine her ethos, as questions about her arm follow her like a never-ending, unanswerable koan.

To resist the negative ethos others construct for her, Tollifson begins her essay with a rhetorical mediation, responding to the unanswerable question by reframing it. She explains her arm in a matter of fact way: “I’m missing my right hand and half of my right arm. They were amputated in the uterus, before I was born, by a floating fiber” (105). This ethos constructs disability not as an occasion for shame, pity or feelings of incompleteness, but instead as “no big deal” (105). This new ethos is bolstered by Tollifson’s use of her arm in new situations. In addition to massage and karate, she participates in sit-in for disability rights, and enters a Zen center, in which she learns how her body can form new shapes and connections. In each of these pursuits, she reconstructs her ethos not by overcoming her disability but by integrating it into her life. At first she despairs about being unable to form the traditional Zen mudra (left hand atop right hand, thumbs touching), but then realizes that meditation can happen in any position, and makes her own shape for the experience. Her ethos formation catalyzes changes in her appeal of pathos as well, as she forms new emotional connections with others, such as the group of disabled women with whom she participates in sit-ins, her massage patients, and her mediation group. After identifying the limits of traditional understandings of the appeals for disabled rhetors, I explore how disabled rhetors like Tollifson variously use are revise metis to reshape all of the appeals for their particular needs and abilities.
The Limits of the Rhetorical Appeals for Disabled Rhetors

The three traditional artistic appeals in rhetoric—*ethos* (ethical appeals), *pathos* (emotional appeals) and *logos* (logical appeals)—provide most rhetors with useful ways of discovering available means for persuading their audiences. For disabled rhetors, however, the appeals, as they have traditionally been defined, are limiting and ineffective. The medical, moral and charity models of disability, which define disability as a deficit, personal flaw, or occasion for pity also contribute to the limits of the appeals for disabled rhetors, as Tollifson’s rhetorical encounters with people on the street who stare, pity, infantilize or patronize her indicate. Although they rarely use rhetorical terms such as *ethos*, *pathos* or *logos* explicitly in their writing, disabled rhetors evince clear resistance to and reshaping of the appeals, often implicitly using and revising sophistic rhetorical strategies such as *metis* to remake rhetoric itself. To appreciate how disabled rhetors revise *metis* to transform the appeals means first recognizing how the appeals have been used in concert with medical models of disability to maintain ableist notions in rhetoric and limit the available means of persuasion for disabled rhetors.

Traditional understandings of *ethos*—the good character, ethical traits, goodwill and trustworthy persona that a rhetor conveys to an audience—have been developed in ways that limit and often erase disabled rhetors. Aristotle recognizes *ethos* as the “most potent appeal” and states that persuasive *ethos* is demonstrated in three desirable traits: intelligence, moral character and goodwill. Furthermore, he states that “[p]ersuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others. . . . his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses” (1.2). Aristotle constructs good character formation, including intelligence and morality, along strictly normalizing and ableist lines. His definition of
“good men” only includes men of a certain type, however, of whom disability is not tolerated. Aristotle most cogently enacts the erasure of any type of *ethos* formation for disabled rhetors by comparing the disabled to animals, beasts or barbarians. In works such as *The Politics* and in Book Three of *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle adheres to what we would now call medical or rehabilitation models of disability, positioning any difference as a departure from a normal type that must be eradicated, fixed, or rehabilitated in order to re-achieve normalcy.

Aristotle’s edict in *The Politics*, “[l]et there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared,” is usually identified an emblem for the intolerance of the disabled in the cultural climate of Greece. From the perspective of *ethos* formation, however, Aristotle’s edict is particularly problematic because it points towards the erasure of *ethos* among the disabled. As the “father of rhetoric,” Aristotle recognizes people with disabilities as less than human, further erasing any possibility of a cultivation of good character or trustworthy persona in the appeal of *ethos*. In an early example of how the norm operates to exclude any type of difference, Aristotle’s edict demonstrates that “[w]ith humans as with animals, any physical difference that ‘departs from type’ (the able-bodied male) becomes a ‘monstrosity’ that, by its very essence, is less than human” (qtd. in Wilson and Wilson 13). As well noted by feminists, the first departure is woman. Aristotle states that “the first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male” so much so that “we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity” (13). More extreme cases of deformity include birth anomalies in a child, who, for example, “has reached such a point that in the end it no longer has the appearance of a human being at all, but that of an animal only” (qtd. in Wilson 13).

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86 Important to keep in mind, however, are Martha Edwards’ evidence of the large prevalence and acceptance of acquired disabilities in ancient Greece, because of the military and farming. See chapter two for more details.
Aristotle further curtails the ethical possibilities for disabled rhetors by cataloging states of degraded “moral character,” casting disability in bestial terms. He notes that a “bestial character” is “rare among human beings; it is found most frequently among barbarians, and some cases also occur as a result of disease or arrested development” (13). These people may also possess a “morbid disposition” as demonstrated by “those who lose their reasoning to some disease, such as epilepsy or through insanity” (13). Aristotle dehumanizes people with both cognitive and physical difference, making good character cultivations nearly impossible. Like the moral flaw model of disability, which posits an outward sign of disability as evidence of an internal moral or spiritual flaw, Aristotle associates disability with bestial character or a degraded moral character. St. Augustine later implicitly reinforces this association between immorality and disability in his teachings that the deaf are excluded from salvation on the grounds that they cannot hear the word of God.

Disabled rhetors testify to the limits of traditional ethos and the effects of Aristotle’s legacy by describing the erasure of potential ethos formations. Tollifson’s horror at the elimination of birth defects, which she interprets as an elimination of herself, speaks to the fear of total ethos erasure. Kenny Fries describes the erasure of personhood that the disabled face in terms of silencing, which adversely affects ethos formation. “We who live with disabilities have been silenced by those who did not want to hear what we have to say. We have also been silenced by our own fear, the fear that if we told our stories people would say: ‘See, it isn’t worth it. You would be better off dead’” (1). Anne Finger echoes this fear when she publicly shares a story of the poor treatment she endured in her post-polio experience: a colleague informs her, “If you had been my child, I would have killed you before I let that happen” (2). Finger reacts to this declaration, writing, “It is my old fear come true: That if you talk about the pain, people will say,
‘See, it isn’t worth it. You would be better off dead’” (2). A double silencing impedes ethos formation in Fries’, Finger’s and others’ accounts: stereotypes regarding the worth of a disabled person’s character from external influences combine with internalized feelings of low self-worth to create difficult or even non-existent place from which to cultivate ethos. People with disabilities put into stark relief basic questions of ethos formation that hinge on definitions of personhood. They question who has the right to speak, who is counted as a person and whose character is worth cultivation.

Even if disabled rhetors manage to form a sense of ethos, doubts regarding their credibility continue to resurface, most likely because of legacies of Aristotle’s association between good character and believability. Helen Keller, for example, who collaborated with her teacher, was subject to doubt regarding whether she actually wrote her own life story. Today experts and researchers of autism continue to be surprised almost to the point of suspicion at the accomplishments of people with autism who demonstrate they do not fit the mold (or myth) of the autistic person alone. Users of facilitated communication, as I examined in the introduction, elicit the same kind of skepticism that Keller did because they depend on the sense of touch and a co-constructed ethos formation. This skepticism is rooted in ancient connections such as those made by Aristotle which link “good” character, morals and credibility exclusively to singular, able bodies.

Traditional definitions of the appeal of pathos, or the emotions, also limit people with disabilities by reinforcing associations between disability and pity, thereby curtailing the range of emotional connections they can make to their audiences. Pathos, in Aristotelian and neo-
Aristotelian contexts, locates emotion in the connection between the rhetor and his or her audience; it is the appeal that puts “an audience into a certain frame of mind” (1.2). The ancient Greek language associates pathos with disability almost synonymously in its definition of “to suffer or endure.” This definition limits the emotional appeals available to disabled rhetors. As a result of close associations between disability and the emotions of pity, connections between people with disabilities and their audience often operate along pre-determined models, severely narrowing the range of emotional connections possible.

Moral and medical models of disability which interpret disability as an outward indicator of a “spoiled identity,” immoral internal nature, or spiritual flaw affect all of the appeals available to disabled rhetors, but especially constrain appeals of pathos. In addition to constraining ethos formation for disabled rhetors by associating them with immoral characters, moral and medical models also curtail emotional connections between disabled rhetors and audiences by focusing on a limited range of emotions. Although slogans such as “piss on pity” and titles of work such as No Pity attempt to revise associations with pity, these connections remain. Closely related to pity models, supercrip narratives of overcoming disability, or sentimental narratives that invite wonderment and inspirational hope whittle emotional appeals down to a few predictable and limiting avenues. These limits, in turn, feed back into the process ethos formation for disabled rhetors, by boxing them into character formations that invite pity, hope, sentimentality or inspiration, as Tollifson’ experience with people on the street demonstrates.89

88 Aristotle is particularly ambivalent about the place of emotional appeals in rhetoric. In Book 1, chapter 1, he criticizes their place among the appeals, but then in Book 2 spends much time exploring the emotions. His opinion on the use of emotion in law courts—“It is not right to pervert the judge by moving him to anger or envy or even pity—one might as well warp a carpenter’s rule before using it” (1.1)—demonstrates his distaste for the emotional appeals, while book 2 describes their importance.

89 Susan Squier (2004) explores Tollifson’s mediation in relation to the paradox of disability identity, which is also a concern for ethos formations, especially ones that seek to make partial connections with other identities.
Disability studies scholars such as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, Thomas Couser and Rosemary Thomson have uncovered the limiting emotional models of disability in the genres of narrative, autobiography, and visual rhetoric. Couser identifies emotional patterns of triumph, nostalgia, and spiritual compensation in narratives about disability, arguing that these paradigms individualize the disability, eliding connections across experiences among the disabled, but also with their audiences. In photography, including advertising and other rhetorical registers, Thomson identifies a taxonomy based primarily on the four emotional appeals of the wondrous, the sentimental, the exotic and the realistic, all of which variously attempt to “appropriate the disabled body for the purposes of constructing, instructing, or assuring some aspect of a putatively nondisabled viewer” (59). Rhetorical purpose is also limited by these over-sentimentalized appeals, constraining disabled rhetors’ rhetorical situations even further.

Taken together, the pervasive focus on a limited range of emotions—pity, hope, nostalgia, sentiment—that moral models of disability propagate severely limits the range of emotional appeals available for disabled rhetors. Disabled rhetors who attempt to break out of these models face audiences who expect to hear pity and hope, making any different emotional connection difficult to forge. These limiting pathos models, therefore, affect ethos-driven stances or how rhetors may choose to characterize themselves and also affect logos-driven messages about disability. As critiques of the medical model have pointed out, the typical message is that disability is negative, something to be fixed or cured, or simply an occasion for non-disabled people to learn lessons by. These limiting paradigms of ethos, pathos and logos mutually reinforce each other and produce understandings of disability that are formulaic.

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90 Although these scholars do not align themselves explicitly with rhetorical studies, their findings are applicable in an examination of the limits of the rhetorical appeals for disabled rhetors, especially regarding pathos.
Logos, as I have explored in-depth in the previous chapter, has also been traditionally defined to exclude the messages of disabled rhetors, especially those who use embodied rhetorical strategies. Limited definitions of logos as logic, the word, or truth also limit the multifarious messages about disability. A double erasure of logos has been exacted on people with disabilities. Until relatively recently, many people with disabilities have been silenced, thereby denied access to forming any sort of logos or message at all. They have not had access to literacy education, support services or to the means of persuasion available to most other rhetors. At worst, the disabled, especially those with cognitive disabilities, are characterized as not possessing the capacity of logos at all. Catherine Prendergast, for example, has explored medical model constructions of mental disability that position the people with schizophrenia variously as visionaries, non persons, or in “a rhetorical black hole” (53). Limiting ethos constructions and limited logoi clearly interact in this case, as the character and ethos formations of people with cognitive disabilities such as schizophrenia and their messages are co-constructed. Since physical disability has long been misunderstood as an outward indicator of internal mental or cognitive disabilities, even physically disabled people without cognitive impairments have been characterized as logo-less. Simultaneously, moral and medical models have propagated inaccurate and limited messages about disability—that it is a deficit, an indicator of an internal character flaw, a solely a negative experience or something to be fixed at all costs. In the context of the triad of appeals, logos interacts with the limits of ethos and pathos often to severely curtail the available artistic appeals of disabled rhetors.

Disabled rhetors often evince frustration with language, especially of being unable find the words to describe their experience, demonstrating the limitations of traditional definitions of

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91 Refer back to chapter three for more details on how to redefine logos for disabled rhetors.
92 A person with cerebral palsy, for example, whose speech may be affected but who possesses “normal” intelligence, is often treated as cognitively impaired.
the appeals. These rhetorical struggles point out how ineffective the traditional available means of persuasion are for disabled rhetors, especially when they are combined with medical or moral models of disability. Kenny Fries, who was born without legs, attempts to articulate this difficulty of finding the words, or grasping the *logos*, of his experience, attesting to the inadequacy of the appeals for disabled rhetors. “Seven years ago, I began searching for the words with which to begin speaking about my own experience living with a congenital physical disability. . . . I took the initial steps of finding the language, unearthing the images, shaping the forms with which I could express an experience I had never read about before, so that my experience . . . could become meaningful to others” (1-2). He describes “reaching,” “searching” and “unearthing” words, as he gropes for meaning that embodies his experience. He relates that “what I remember most about that summer is wanting to throw all those drafts away, not thinking them poems. Not having a role model in whose steps I could follow, unsure of my own identity, I felt like one of those ‘shadow spirits’ Carol Gill writes about, unable to successfully meld on the page the nondisabled world I lived in with my experience of being disabled” (2). Without a model, Fries feels like abandoning any rhetorical or poetic stance, and feels as unmoored and unsure as a shadow. His *ethos* formation is severely limited by the dearth of available models and this in turn impedes his connection with his audience and his overall message.

Disabled rhetors draw attention to new models of language, including new rhetorical appeals necessary for articulating the disability experience. Barbara Rosenblum, for example, who attempts to describe her experience of living with cancer as “living in an unstable body,” echoes Fries and others. Implicitly reacting to a lack of *logos*, Rosenblum writes, “I was thrown into a crisis of meaning. I could no longer assess and evaluate what sensations meant. . . I was no
longer fluent in the language of my body, its signs and symbols, and I felt lost” (165). Like Fries, Rosenblum feels lost amid uncharted bodily territories, finding existing models of language inadequate for describing the disability experience. She continues, “When you have cancer, the body no longer contains the old truths about the world. Instead you must learn a new language, a new vocabulary, and over time, as symptoms converge and conflate, you learn the deeper structure of its grammar” (165-166). New experiences of the body call for new truths, new vocabularies and new structures of grammar that reach beyond typical models. She learns how to break through the limits of language, to form new languages; but first she must articulate the inadequacy of the current rhetorical strategies, especially of logos, for articulating the disability experience.

Disabled rhetors often identify the intertwined limits of the appeals before revising them. Harriet McBryde Johnson, a lawyer and disability rights activist, sums up the limits of the appeals that many disabled rhetors face in her memoir *Too Late To Die Young*. Johnson implicitly critiques the limits of traditional *pathos* and *logos*, at the outset of her work, setting up her audience for new models. Explaining that “[b]ecause the world sets people with conspicuous disability as different . . . we are read as . . . stock figures” (3):

> The world wants our lives to fit into a few rigid narrative templates: how I conquered disability (and others can conquer their Bad Things!), how I adjusted to disability (and a positive attitude can move mountains!), how disability made me wise (you can only marvel and hope it never happens to you!), how disability brought me to Jesus (but redemption is waiting for you only if you pray). (3)
As Johnson describes, these templates prefabricate rigid *ethos* formations for disabled rhetors as “stock figures,” who only occupy certain personas in relation to audiences. This *ethos*, in turn, establishes only a limited emotional connection and response from the audience which usually focuses on pity, sympathy or inspiration, funneling *pathos* appeals into a few predictable paradigms. Furthermore, templates of *ethos* and *pathos* combine to perpetuate certain messages about disability, limiting messages into predictable *logoi* that situate disability in primarily negative meanings. Disabled rhetors, by implicitly critique the limits of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, begin remaking the available means of persuasion for the experience of disability. I investigate how Johnson, along with other disabled rhetors, breaks out of these confining paradigms and limiting appeals with the rhetorical strategy of *metis*.

*Metis*: Tactile Rhetorical Strategies for *ethos* formations

As disabled rhetors such as Fries, Rosenblum and Johnson critique existing means of persuasion, they reach for new models based in sensory experience, a move that also finds traction in recent theories in disability studies that call for more attention to the body. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell write in one of the first collections in the field that “one of the defining difficulties for disability scholars is going to be grappling with ideas and experiences of physicality in a historical moment of constructivism” (27). They attempt to grapple with the body’s physicality by emphasizing the material metaphors of disability. Bringing together other theories of disability, they identify disability as “fleshy example of the body’s unruly resistance to what Lennard Davis has theorized as the cultural desire to ‘enforce normalcy’” (17). They also call attention to how the “body’s weighty materiality functions as a textual and cultural other—an object that exceeds the text’s (and thus culture’s) ability to control it” (17). In this way,
“disability serves as the ‘hard kernel’ or recalcitrant corporeal matter that cannot be deconstructed away” (17). The body, particularly a sensual, tangible and weighty body, remains in a difficult position for disability studies, which wants to hold onto the importance of the body without essentializing all bodies. Disability studies seeks to hold social construction, identity politics and the real material experience of disability in tension all at once, using each analysis and embodiment to check and balance the other.

To keep these goals in tension, Michael Berube encourages “disability studies’ dual focus on the body as material artifact and the body as social construction” and advocates a “necessary oscillation between hard kernels and social construction, between bodies that matter and the locations of culture” (342). Echoing the frustrations of the disabled rhetors who struggle with the limits of the appeals, disability scholar Simi Linton draws particular attention to the challenge of finding appropriate language for these “hard kernels”:

One research domain that is yet to be fully explored from the perspective of disabled people is the kinesthetic, proprioceptive, sensory, and cognitive experiences of people with an array of disabilities. For instance, because I use a wheelchair, I utilize my upper body for mobility and rock back and forth as I propel myself forward. My height when I am vertical differs from my measured height horizontally, and my impairment influences my height relative to objects in the world and to other people. Each of these experiences has an impact on my sense of my body in space and affects the information I am exposed to and the way I process sensory information. (140)
Linton continues, remarking “Even as I write this, I am struggling to find the words to describe these phenomena adequately. It is particularly difficult to find language . . . that do[es] not measure my movements in relation to nondisabled norms” (140). Related to this inadequacy of language is the pervasive influence of the medical model. “The fact that impairment has almost always been studied from a deficit model means that we are deficient in language to describe it any other way than as a ‘problem’” (140). Linton’s struggle to find the words to express the physical, weighty and sensory experience of how her impairment specifically shapes her world echoes the limits of the available means of persuasion that Fries, Rosenblum and Johnson express.

Metis, a Greek concept associated with the sophistic movement, is usually translated as “cunning intelligence,” or more recently as “embodied intelligence.” Exploring metis’ previous definitions in relation to the disability experience recovers new valences of the practice of metis for disabled rhetors. Combining these recoveries with disabled rhetors’ implicit use and redefinitions of metis as tactile intelligence reshapes the appeals for the experience of disability. I will redefine metis as tactile intelligence that includes tactile rhetorical strategies, through a combination of sophistical theories and writing by contemporary disabled rhetors. This tactile redefinition of metis fills the need in disability studies for perspectives attuned to specific

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93Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, in the only book-length study of metis, attempt to corral the multifarious concept, concluding that “there is no doubt that metis is a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years” (3). Of the many nuanced definitions of metis that circulate, most emphasize it as a practical intelligence that draws on sets of highly flexible and tacit skills for negotiating rhetorical situations. Recent studies of metis such as by Hawhee and Dolmage emphasize it as an embodied intelligence and an example of a rhetorical skill that values disability. Detienne and Vernant attest to the importance of metis in Greek culture, yet note it is difficult to track. They detect metis “at the heart of the Greek mental world in the interplay of social and intellectual customs where its influence is sometimes all-pervasive” but note that “there is no text which reveals straightforwardly its fundamental characteristics” (3). This characteristic parallels metis itself, and “metis must be tracked down elsewhere” such as in the history of technology, the skills of the artisan, the powers of mythological figures and the practices of the sophists (2). Although metis is “at the heart of the Greek mental world in the interplay of social and intellectual customs . . . it always appears more of less below the surface, immersed as it were in practical operations,” making it difficult to define (3).
sensory and kinesthetic experiences. Redefinitions of *metis* also fill needs that disabled rhetors articulate by reshaping the rhetorical appeals, especially *ethos*, and widening the available means of persuasion to include embodied, multi-sensory and especially tactile means for reshaping *ethos, pathos* and *logos*. Disabled rhetors implicitly invoke and productively revise this connection between *metis* and disability to reshape the appeals. To use *metis* to reshape the appeals, however, requires first exploring how the concept of *metis* in its original definition is associated with and synonymous with disability from its beginnings in sophistic culture and rhetoric.

*Metis*, as a rhetorical concept and practice, is well-attuned for the disability experience because it is characterized as a skill based on instability, shifting terrain, and changing situations, all hallmarks of the disability experience. *Metis* is “applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation, or rigorous logic” (3-4). The “temporal framework within which *metis* is at work [is a] shifting terrain, in uncertain and ambiguous situations” (14).94 The *metis* of the navigator of a ship, for example, operates according to the constantly changing environment of the sea: churning waters, shifting winds, cross currents and submerged obstacles such as reefs or icebergs. The navigator learns to adjust his body in relation to a changing environment. Oftentimes this response is the result of a tactile intelligence, as the navigator steers while tacitly responding to new terrain. Disabled rhetors necessarily inhabit rhetorical situations in which the terrain is shifting and the terms are uncertain. Rosenblum titles her meditation on her body’s experience with cancer as “living in an unstable body,” calling attention to the uncertainty of living and writing in her new body. After being thrown into a crisis

94 In this particular trait we see how *metis* is closely associated with kairos, the focus of the next chapter. In fact, Detienne and Vernant identify kairos as a type of *metis.*
of meaning, she writes, “The patient’s task is to learn the new language, hoping that the body will remain stable enough. . . . When you have cancer, the ground is pulled out from under your feet. . . . You must look for new, stable ground” (166).

Metis recognizes the challenges of instability and integrates this into its skill. It is in “this fraught and unstable time of the agon, [that] metis gives one a hold without which one would be at a loss” (Detienne and Vernant 14). Tollifson, in her study of zen meditation and ancient eastern wisdom illustrates a type of metis honed in the context of an unstable environment, in a story she recalls for modeling her own ethos:

Being disabled is a deep wound, a source of pain. But like all wounds, it is also a gift. As Eastern wisdom has always known, it is hard to tell good luck from bad luck. I recall the old story about the farmer who found a beautiful wild horse, and the neighbors said, ‘What good luck,’ and the farmer said, ‘Maybe.’ Then the farmer’s son tried to tame the horse and fell off, breaking his leg. The neighbors all said, ‘What bad luck,’ and the farmer said, ‘Maybe.’ Then a war started and the army came to conscript all the young men, and they took everyone’s sons except the farmer’s son with the broken leg. ‘What good luck,’ the neighbors said, and the farmer said, ‘Maybe.’ And on and on it goes. Life is the way it is, not the way we wish it was, and disability is the constant embodiment of this basic truth. (111)

Tollifson recalls the old story about the farmer and his son’s broken leg to illustrate key elements of the disability experience, especially how the meaning of disability is determined by social and cultural contexts that change over time, depending on a wide range of factors. In this context,
“disability” and “ability” are relative embodiments that change according to an unstable environment. Tollifson integrates instability into her own reinvented ethos formation by placing herself in situations in which her disability takes on new proportions: in massage, in karate and in meditation. Similarly, Rosenblum and other disabled rhetors work towards forming bodily responses in writing that allow them to learn a new language, a new system for interpretation and new way of interacting with their changing bodies. Instead of throwing their hands up at the instability and change occasioned by disability, they attempt to corral the weight of acquired experience to devise new rhetorical responses to the instability of disability. Fries, Linton and others all implicitly draw on this feature of metis when they search for ways of reinventing an ethos that takes into account the productive instability of their experience with disability. They begin revising metis for their own present needs by combining their need for inventing new flexible forms of ethos to respond to their changing lives.

Metis draws on a wide variety of tactile skills across a wide range of activities and occupations that invite alternative models of ethos formation for disabled rhetors. This range is most obvious in the various tactile skills that characterize metis, which position it as an important practice for disabled rhetors who use touch as a rhetorical strategy. Metis is manifest in the tactile “skills of a basket-maker, of a weaver, of a carpenter,” demonstrating the link between metis and the sophists, whose name derived from sophos or handicraft skills (2). Hand-wrought bonds through nets, weavings, traps or other devices, including the traps of the sophists’ interlocking theses or strings of words are the demonstrations of metis. “Bonds are the special weapons of metis. To weave (plekein) and to twist (strephein) are key words in the terminology connected with it” (41). Metis is also demonstrated in “mastery of a navigator, the flair of a politician, the experienced eye of a doctor, the tricks of a crafty character such as Odysseus, the
back-tracking of the fox and the polymorphism of the octopus . . . and the beguiling rhetorical illusionism of the sophists,” all character formations and occupations that draw on tactile, multi-sensory and embodied skills (2). Most importantly for disabled rhetors, metis is a type of embodied intelligence based on tactile, embodied and kinesthetic skills that foster transformative connections between bodies, especially among rhetors and their audiences.

Tactile practices of metis further complement the meaning of sophos as handiwork, closely associating the sophists with the sense of touch.95 The fishing frog, for example, uses a metic ploy called a sophisma, to wriggle out and escape the lure of the fisherman’s bait. Plutarch calls cuttle-fish, the cousins of octopus, sophisma, because “they have a long, thin tentacle which they move very slowly to lure the fish” they seek to catch in “living traps” (38). Furthermore, “Strophaios is also the name given by the Greeks to the sophist who knows how to interweave (sumplekein) and twist together (strefhein) speeches (logoi) and artifices (mechanai)” (41). Weaving and twisting are key tactile practices of sophistic rhetoric, as various theses interweave and combine to entrap rhetorical interlocutors. Strophios is also the name given to the mime in Greek culture who shapes diverse bodies with flexible appendages: he could “imitate the most diverse living creatures with movements of [his] agile fingers and hands” (41).96 The net making, trap making and basket weaving of metis also recalls the handiwork of the sophists, forming a tactile, technical and artful connection between diverse activities, bodies and rhetorics.

In addition to its associations with touch and its context within an unstable world, metis is a valuable rhetorical practice for disabled rhetors in two main ways, both of which encourage

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95 George Kerferd, in his study of the sophistic movement, finds an ancient linguistic connection between the sophos of handiwork and the sophists.

96 Hermes is also called strophaios, because he is the “twisted or sly one” but also because he represents a “living web of interweaving” by positioning himself near hinges. Plato, of course, in The Sophist characterizes the sophist as unable to be caught by nets or defined. He also compares the deceit and wiliness of the sophist in animalizing terms.
ethos transformations. First, metis is valuable for providing disabled rhetors with new models of ethos because metis includes disability as an advantageous type of ethos formation. Second, metis is a crucial rhetorical strategy for disabled rhetors’ ethos formation because it draws on the features of a wide range of bodies, supporting shape shifting and polymorphism across bodies, which also characterizes the disability experience. These two interconnected features of metis transform the appeal of ethos for disabled rhetors and catalyze transformations of the appeals of pathos and logos as well. Disabled rhetors implicitly draw on and contribute to the redefinition of metis in their use of metis to invent their ethos, transform their emotional appeals of pathos to their audiences, and multiply their logos or messages about disability.

Primarily, metis integrates disability into its essence as a rhetorical concept and practice by resisting the reading of disability as a deficit, and instead recognizing that disability is in fact advantageous in certain situations at certain times, opening up disability as a viable route towards ethos formation. As Jean-Pierre Detienne and Marcel Vernant explain, metis is often opposed to traditional notions of strength, and is often described as a type of skill that reverses the positions of a “weaker” or “stronger” rhetorical adversary. The crafty Odysseus, who embodies metis in the Greek culture and society in which the sophists taught, provides an example of metis as a rhetorical strategy for ethos formation that includes disability. Known as the polumetis one, or the one with many types of cunning metis, Odysseus is “the most subtle and most dangerous orator of Greece” because he appears before the Trojans to be an incompetent and even disabled orator. He crafts his ethos by using disability as a rhetorical strategy, thereby validating disability as one of many rhetorical strategies available in the

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97 Detienne and Vernant characterize metis’ reversal this way: “In every confrontation or competitive situation—whether the adversary be a man, an animal or a natural force—success can be won by two means, either thanks to a superiority in ‘power’ in the particular sphere in which the contest is taking place, with the stronger gaining the victory; or by the use of methods of a different order whose effect is, precisely, to reverse the natural outcome of the encounter and to allow victory to fall to the party whose defeat had appeared inevitable” (13).
formation of *ethos*. “Standing awkwardly with his eyes fixed on the ground . . . he looks like a
tongue-tied yokel or even a witness man (aphrona) (22). Then, “[a]t the moment he is about to
speak, the master of tricks, the magician of words pretends to have lost his tongue, as if he were
unskilled in the rudiments of oratory” (aidrei photi eoikos) (23). By using *metis* in this rhetorical
situation, Odysseus appears as a witless man, awkward and unskilled in oratory, in order to gain
his Trojan Horse admittance. In this instance *metis* confounds the typical expectation for
rhetorical success. Instead of making a strong rhetorical demonstration, an *ethos* of witlessness,
weakness and lack of rhetorical skill earns Odysseus admittance to the city. *Metis* recognizes that
strength or rhetorical sophistication is not always the most effective route. Instead *metis*
recognizes there are multiple ways to achieve a purpose and that different situations dictate
various types of strategies, of which strength is only one possibility.

In some instances, *metis* is even synonymous with disability, but resists negative
association with deficit that modern definitions of disability such as those constructed by the
medical model. Hephaestus, the disabled god integral to Empedocles’ theories of the formation
of blood and bone, also was a figure that embodied *metis* in Greek culture.98 Hephaestus’ *metis*,
for example, or his cunning skill used for devising everything from flesh and bone to traps, nets,
rudimentary wheelchairs and other blacksmithing tools, is enabled by his disability. His
deformed but pliable hands and feet, likened to the curved shape of crabs and tongs, allow him to
shape objects in bodies in ways that normally shaped appendages do not. Like the pincher of

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98 Empedocles, who we explored in the previous chapter as a theorist who promotes fleshy, multiple *logoi* and multi-
sensory rhetorical strategies, emphasizes the concept of *metis* in his theories of rhetorical bodies. Empedocles’ use
of the disabled god Hephaestus, who was prominently known as the embodiment of *metis*, as the maker of blood and
bone, is his most crucial use of *metis*. With Hephaestus’ *metis*, or his cunning dexterity in the task of forging bodies
among the other elements, Empedocles enacts an understanding of *logos* as proportion, a definition of *logos* that
integrates disability. *Logos* as proportion takes the myriad forms of bodies fitted together by chance as its loose
model for multiple, proliferating *logoi*, that operate according to a spectrum of difference, attentive to *tologoi* produced
by different bodies. This approach to *logos* builds disability into the very construction of rhetoric and rhetorical
bodies. For more details, refer back to chapter three.
crabs, these curved, strong appendages allow him to harness fire and forge technologies. Hephaestus’ metic hands and feet reverse the binary logic of disability as deficit and demonstrate that difference can be advantageous in certain circumstances. His *metis* is a technical, tactile and flexible skill that enables him to create bodies and objects in multiple shapes and sizes, a model for flexible *ethos* formations.

Hephaestus is an apt model for the needs of disabled rhetors like Fries and others who search for alternative models of *ethos* formation and bodily knowledge formations. In Greek culture and mythology, Hephaestus’ *metis* demonstrates not only a simple reversal of ability and disability, but also a proliferation of knowledge-making strategies according to different embodiments, a valuable resource for disabled rhetors seeking alternate models for *ethos* formation. Hephaestus’ deformed feet, for example, are valued as they are compared to the subtle movements of the crab, who is able to move back and forth and from side to side quickly and agilely. He was seen as possessing “a power . . . emphasized by his distinctive characteristic of being endowed with a double and divergent orientation” of curved appendages that allow him to engage with the fluid power of fire with a manual skill “even more mobile and polymorphic” than fire itself (Dolmage 121). Hephaestus’ disability, therefore, is not a liability, but instead an ability or a trait that renders him effective in certain situations at certain times. This polymorphism transcends a simple reversal of ability and disability, drawing on multiple bodies and abilities to produce many possibilities. His irregularly shaped hands and feet, and his oblique, tactile passages toward knowledge begin to offer models to describe the type of sensory and material accounts that Linton names as missing from disability studies. His irregularly shaped appendages offer models for rhetors such as Fries, who search for rhetorical predecessors

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99 *Karkinos* is the Greek word for crab and for the blacksmith’s tongs, lending support to Detienne and Vernant’s claim that “animal models . . . appear to be an integral part of the mythical representation of the blacksmith” (272).
and models of ethos. Like Tollifson, who creates a new meditation position, Hephaestus uses his unique bodily formation to his advantage, in his skill as a metalworker and fashioning of a rudimentary wheelchair.

*Metis* is also an important rhetorical strategy for disabled rhetors because it is multiple and diverse, often drawing on the characteristics of many bodies to support shape-shifting and metamorphosis, promoting multiple formations of ethos. *Metis’s* multiplicity complements its context within a fluid, unstable and shifting terrain.\(^{100}\) The terms *pantoie*, and *poikilos* and *aiolos*, all terms that denote “many,” “multiple,” or “of many colors,” often occur with *metis*. These terms refer to the complex, multiplying interplay of color, light and movement such as in the dappled hide of a fawn, the shimmering of snake, or the glittering of a weapon (18). The manifold movement of *metis* is compared to “worms, horseflies, wasps, a swarm of bees, all creatures whose wriggling and moving mass is never still . . . [and] with men, to those whose wiley mind is able to twist and turn in every direction” (19). In addition to drawing on the many tactile skills and practices of the weaver, sophist, fisher, and hunter, the more multiple and diverse properties of *metis* draw on many wriggling, twisty bodies in the human and animal world.

This polymorphic feature of *metis* is rooted in the mythological story of *Metis*, the goddess of cunning intelligence and Zeus’ first wife who possessed the shape shifting power to change herself into many different forms. Zeus marries *Metis*, but realizing the boundless limits of her power, attempts to control and contain it by swallowing her. Zeus also swallows *Metis* because it is prophesied that after giving birth to Athena, she will conceive a son who will be

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100 "Why does *metis* appear thus, as multiple (pantoie), many coloured (poikile)? Because its field of application is the world of movement, of multiplicity and of ambiguity. It bears on fluid situations which are constantly changing . . . in order to dominate a changing situation, it must become even more supple, even more shifting, and more polymorphic than the flow of time” (20).
more powerful than him and will dethrone him. Zeus uses *Metis’* skill against her, as “he treacherously seduces his wife with caressing words (*haimulioisi logoisi*), and having beguiled her wits by cunning . . . he engulfs her within himself” (67). Some accounts report that Zeus verbally tricks *Metis* into turning herself into a fly, as he uses her power of metamorphosis against her by convincing her to turn herself into successively smaller beings that he can eventually swallow.\(^{101}\) Other sources relate that *Metis*, in order to escape Zeus’ embrace, “changed herself into all kinds of forms,” including “a lion, a bull, a fly, a fish, a bird, a flame or flowing water,” suggesting more agency on her part (20). *Metis’* metamorphosis and polymorphy denotes a flexibility among bodies crucial to the concept of *metis*. The polymorphic, mobile and shape shifting characteristic of *Metis* forms the foundation for the wide range of traits, skills, bodies and practices the concept of *metis* draws on in Greek culture and thought. Furthermore, this polymorphic feature of *metis* is especially valuable to disabled rhetors who seek more flexible models of *ethos* formation.

Disabled rhetors with a variety of disabilities implicitly draw on and begin to redefine these key features of *metis* to invent their *ethos* in the face of historical and rhetorical erasure. They draw on the shape shifting properties of *metis* to negotiate an unstable body and world, using disability as a generative rhetorical strategy. For example, blind rhetor Stephen Kuusisto begins his prologue to his memoir *Planet of the Blind* with these first shapes to craft his *ethos*:

> I’ve entered Grand Central Station with my guide dog Corky, my yellow Labrador. We stand uncertain, man and dog collecting our wits while thousands of five o’clock commuters jostle around us. Beside them, Corky and I are in slow motion, like two sea

\(^{101}\) Detienne and Vernant infer this because it is a common theme in folklore, but also suggest that *Metis* turned herself into these many forms to elude Zeus.
lions. We’ve suddenly found ourselves in the ocean, and here in this railway terminal, where pickpockets and knife artists roam the crowds, we’re moving at a different tempo. There is something about us, the perfect poise of the dog, the uprightness of the man, I don’t know, a spirit maybe, fresh as the gibbous moon, the moon we’ve waited for, the one with the new light. . . . A railway employee has offered to guide me to my train. I hold his elbow gently, Corky heeling beside us, and we descend through the tunnels under the building. I’ve decided to trust a stranger. Welcome to the planet of the blind.

(1-2)

Offering his readers such a welcome, Kuusisto displays metic ethos in a few key ways. First, he takes on the metic-ethos of a shape shifter, constructing his readers’ first image of him as a combination man-dog team and even as an aquatic simile of “two sea lions,” amid the ocean of the railway terminal. Kuusisto cannot pin down this shape in language, even admitting, “I don’t know,” and hypothesizes that the “perfect poise of the dog,” coupled with the “uprightness of the man” form something new, possibly a spirit, or the strange light of a moon. Since, he explains, “this blindness of mine still allows me to see colors and shapes,” this entry into his memoir via shapes and light conveys his point of view and ethos effectively (2). Still, by admitting his inability to know or describe this man-dog team, Kuusisto both invents an ethos, carving out a new space for himself, and shapes it in relation to his dog, his environment, and the other people with whom he comes into contact.

Kuusisto’s metic-ethos takes its full effect in the words that close the prologue and that describe the physical connection between the man-dog team and the railway employee. This

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102 As Detienne and Vernant relate, the seal and sea lion are animal models for metis in Greek culture because of their amphibious way of living and their flexible bodies, including their appendages.
touch, as the Kuusisto accepts the offer to be guided to his train, ushers him and his audience into a different world. As the employee “gently takes [his] elbow,” Kuusisto, with his dog, decides to trust a total stranger, amid a place of pickpockets and knife artists, and is led to his train. In an unstable and shifting subterranean environment of the railway station, Kuusisto uses a form of tactile intelligence and polymorphic *metis* to create his *ethos* for his readers. The entry to the planet of the blind hinges on a touch. This touch invites us to explore the other ways in which disabled rhetors reform the appeals with a revision of *metis* as a tactile rhetorical strategy.

**Metic Appeals: Ethos, Pathos and Logos Reshaped**

Sharon Crowley (1994), borrowing from Aristotle, presents a useful model for understanding the revisions that disabled rhetors such as Kuusisto, Tollifson and others make to the rhetorical appeal of *ethos*. She explains the difference between situated *ethos* and invented *ethos*. Rhetors with situated *ethos* already have a space from which to speak or communicate; rhetors who do not possess a history or legacy from which to draw must invent their own. The sense of touch figures in largely to this remade *ethos*, as people with disabilities have developed systems of connection across diverse bodies to secure their *ethos*. Current disabled rhetors both use and redefine *metis* in their invented *ethos*, demonstrating how all of the appeals can be reshaped for the needs and abilities of disabled rhetors. Tracking the metic, shape-shifting rhetorical strategies of Nancy Mairs, Simi Linton and Harriet McBryde Johnson demonstrates how tactile *ethos* formations catalyze revisions of all the appeals for the experience of disability.

The shape-shifting feature of *metis* draws particularly on the *ethos* of the octopus in Greek culture and sophistic rhetoric.103 The polymorphic octopus provides a model for remaking

103 "Countless animals are endowed with *metis* [but] there are two which call for particular attention: the fox and the octopus. In Greek thought they serve as models. They are, as it were, the incarnation of cunning in the animal world."
ethos for disabled rhetors by modeling multifarious character formations. Theogenis uses the model of the octopus to advise diverse ethos formations, saying, “‘Present a different aspect of yourself (epistrepe poikilon ethos) to each of our friends . . . Follow the example of the octopus with its many coils (pouplokos) which assumes the appearance of stone to which it is going to cling. Attach yourself to one on one day, and, another day, change colour. Cleverness (sophie) is more valuable than inflexibility (atropie)” (39). The rigidity of “atropie is strictly opposed to polytropie, as immobility and rigidity to the constant movement of whoever can reveal a new face on a different occasion” and the ideal form of ethos is one “who can turn a different face to each person” (39). Odysseus, for example, is called the “polu metis” one and compared to an octopus because of his polymorphic ability to change the shape of his ethos.¹⁰⁴ The supple arms of the octopus, who can take on the shape of anything to which he clings, also can change his appearance by his own cloud of black ink. The metic model of the octopus ethos provides a model of a flexible, tactile intelligence for a wide range of diversely shaped beings who possess a changeable ethos. “To the Greeks, the octopus is a knot made up of a thousand arms, a living, interlacing, network, a poluplokos being. The same adjective is also used to describe the snake with its coils and folds. . . . The monster Typhon, too, is poluplokos: a multiple creature ‘with a hundred heads’ whose truck tapers out into its eel-like limbs” (37). These hundred heads model multiple ethos formations, a valuable model for disabled rhetors who draw on diverse, changing and sometimes multiple bodies to craft character.

Mairs describes a model of ethos formation that implicitly draws on and revises the polymorphism and flexibility of the metis of the octopus. When asked to publicly speak on the topic of how she copes with multiple sclerosis and how she discovered her voice as a writer, she

¹⁰⁴ Eustathius calls Odysseus the polu metis one and calls him an octopus (39).
asks herself, “how am I going to pull this one off? How can I yoke such disparate subjects into a coherent presentation. . . . This is going to take some fancy footwork, and my feet scarcely carry out the basic steps, let alone anything elaborate” (51). She takes her own “teacherly” advice—“if an idea is giving you trouble . . . put it on the back burner and let it simmer while you do something else” (52). Careful not to edit out the laborious rhetorical process involving in linking her voice to her disability, she draws attention to the difficulty of finding rhetorical strategies, especially ethos formations, for disabled rhetors.

Mairs illustrates a metic brainstorming strategy to compose her speech, taking an oblique, crab-like, path towards knowledge and ethos formation. Finding the steps to the fancy footwork she needs, she illustrates her rhetorical process that does not abide by strict rules of logic. Her knowledge operates similarly to metis—an oblique rhetorical strategy that develops over time in an unstable context. “I can’t claim to have reached such a flash point. But in the weeks I’ve had the themes of ‘disability’ and ‘voice’ sitting around in my head, they seem to have converged on their own, without my having to wrench them together and bind them with hoops of tough rhetoric” (52). She continues, again relating her ethos formation and topoi in metic terms, detailing a tactile, flexible and polymorphic strategy for forming her ethos and her argument. Regarding her writer’s voice and her experience with disability, she explains,

They are related, indeed interdependent, with an intimacy that has for some reason remained, until now, submerged below the surface of my attention. Forced to juxtapose them, I yank them out of the depths, a little startled to discover how they were intertwined down there out of sight. This kind of discovery can unnerve you at first. You feel like a giant hand that, pulling two swimmers out of the water, two separate heads
bobbling on the iridescent swells, finds the two bodies below, legs coiled around each other, in an ecstasy of copulation. You don’t quite know where to turn your eyes. (52)

The two heads of her discourse that she wrenches out from the calm beneath the surface implicitly recall the tactile intelligence of metis, including the oblique path towards knowledge of the crab-like Hephaestus and the multiple formations of the polymorphic octopus. She implicitly draws on the multiple heads of the metic monster Typhon, the coils of the metic octopus, and the irregular hands of Hephaestus in her labored rhetorical production.

Demonstrating the malleability of metis, Mairs revises ancient notions of metis for the current needs of disabled rhetors. She updates metis by aligning her experience with disability with other identity formations. Reflecting on her difficult rhetorical process, she finds the roots of her laborious rhetorical experience in the historical mind-body split, an especially problematic split for women. “A woman’s body is particularly suspect, since so much of it is in fact hidden, secret, carried about on the inside” (54). Pulling together her “crippled body” with her woman’s body, Mairs calls herself “doubly other,” and revises metis to accommodate the multiple identity and ethos formations of today’s disabled rhetors. She turns multiple ethos formations, drawn from her own polymorphic and doubled body, into alliances with other identity formations. She begins reshaping rhetoric to accommodate people with disabilities, providing productive models for multiple ethos formations that reach across identities.

Metic formations of ethos also encourage revisions of limiting appeals of pathos and form new emotional connections with audiences. Mairs begins her much-anthologized essay, “On Being a Cripple,” by inventing her ethos almost out of thin air, reclaiming the word cripple
for her character. This reinvented ethos enables a new set of emotional responses to her audience, multiplying both her appeals of ethos and pathos.

First the matter of semantics. I am cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are “handicapped” and “disabled.” I made the choice a number of years ago . . . unaware of my motives . . . Even now, I’m not sure what those motives are, but I recognize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People—crippled or not—wince at the word “cripple,” as they do not at “handicapped” or “disabled.” Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger. (9)

By inventing her ethos based on cripple, Mairs is able to swagger rhetorically, striding with confidence and a clear sense of self. With cripple, Mairs invents an ethos for herself that implicitly draws on the transformative and metamorphosis features of metis as it enables her toswagger in writing. For her, “cripple” is ironically a word that can help to create good character, despite its typical derogatory use. For Mairs, this is a very individual ethos, as she explains, “I would never refer to another person as a cripple. It is the word I use only for myself” (10).

Although “cripple” crafts an individual metic ethos for Mairs, the term promotes multiple pathos appeals to her audience. Her desire to make her audience wince works against typical pathos appeals of pity and sympathy, registering diverse emotional connections. Reappropriating cripple from the medical perspective allows Mairs to find alternative emotional appeals and to reshape arguments about disability. Swaggering rhetorically, she multiples her appeals of pathos,
causing her audience to register her as a “tough customer,” not an object of pity. Although she primarily uses *metis* to craft an individual *ethos*, the transformative properties of *metis* encourage multiple emotional connections across audiences. She both draws on and revises *metis*, using it to transform her *ethos* and to multiply her appeals of *pathos*.

In an example of *metis* that builds even more connections with audiences, Simi Linton both employs and revises *metis* to invent an *ethos* of collective disability identity. Reclaiming disability is crucial to the invented *ethos* that Linton seeks to create among people with disabilities. In order to reclaim social and cultural meanings of disability, and to resist “the notion that disability is primarily a medical category,” Linton employs a metic strategy of shape shifting and metamorphosis in her invented *ethos* (2). This metic *ethos* connects herself and the disability community together, depending on a wide variety of *ethos* formations that are multiple, shifting and variously shaped. She describes disability culture by emphasizing its polymorphy:

We have come out not with brown woolen lap robes over our withered legs or dark glasses over our pale eyes but in shorts and sandals, in overalls and business suits, dressed for play and work—straightforward, unmasked, unapologetic . . . we are not only the high-toned wheelchair athletes seen in recent television ads but the gangly, pudgy, lumpy, and bumpy of us, declaring that shame will no longer structure our wardrobe or our discourse. We are everywhere these days, wheeling and loping down the street, tapping our canes, sucking on our breathing tubes, following our guide dogs, puffing and sipping on the mouth sticks that propel our motorized chairs. We may drool, hear voices, speak in staccato syllables, wear catheters to collect our urine, or live with a compromised immune system. We are all bound together, not by the list of our collective
symptoms but by the social and political circumstances that have forged us as a group.

We have found one another and found a voice to express not despair at our fate but outrage at our social positioning. (3-4)

This sweeping and dramatic description of the difference and similarity among people with disabilities attests to the power of polymorphy that accompanies metic ethos. Bodies formed by assistive devices and assistance animals people this demonstrative parade of rhetorical and bodily variety. As she carves out a collective disability ethos, Linton both employs and revises metis, drawing from diverse human and non-human shapes of bodies to bind them in a collective ethos. The shapes of people are “gangly, pudgy, lumpy and bumpy,” all descriptors that call attention to the polymorphism that shapes this collective disability ethos. Linton invents this ethos with the requirement that “shame will no longer structure our wardrobe or our discourse” and breaks out of a discourse or mold of shame by offering proudly the multiplicity of shapes, sizes, and cadences of people with disabilities (4). Using the sophistic style of parataxis, she includes several short clauses that parade for the reader a sense of the many forms of disability.

In particular, disabled rhetors like Linton and members of disability culture revise metis by drawing on its polymorphic feature to form loose but binding connections. People are “wheeling,” “puffing,” “loping,” “tapping,” all demonstrating the diverse shapes, movements and sounds and exhibiting various embodiments of metis that construct a burgeoning culture. Hephaestus, the disabled god so often pictured in his ancient wheelchair and atop his ancient donkey, is remade for the twenty first century, taking on the shape, rhythm and cadence of a variety of disabilities. Linton’s metic-ethos also includes the animal models of ancient metis, but updates them with a range of technological and animal shape shifting, including people who are
“following their guide dogs” and “puffing and sipping on the mouth sticks that propel our motorized chairs” (4). This metic-ethos, one that unites and transforms many bodies in motion and in rhetoric and draws on the new shapes made by connections among human, animal and technological entities, succeeds in beginning the shedding of the discourse of shame that has previously structured wardrobes and discourses of disability. In this way, metic ethos stretches into the appeals of pathos and logos, revising emotional appeals and arguments about the disability experience in rhetoric. With this collective metic ethos, Linton also strikes a balance between the tangible, weighty and material bodies of disability and its social and cultural contexts, revising ancient forms of metis for the needs of the current disability community.

In addition to revisions of the appeals of ethos and pathos, metis also enables revisions to the appeal of logos for disabled rhetors. Detienne and Vernant emphasize the range of influence of the metis of the octopus on human behavior and especially sophistic rhetoric. They argue that in Greek culture, the metis of the octopus is “a model for a form of intelligence: poluplokon noema, intelligence ‘with many coils’” and that “this octopus-like intelligence is to be found in two types of men in particular—the sophist and the politician, whose qualities and functions in Greek society stand in opposition and yet are complementary just as are the separate spheres of speech and action” (39). They explain that

it is in his shifting speeches, his poikiloi logos that the sophist deploys his words of ‘many coils’, periplokai: strings of words which enmesh their enemies like the supple arms of the octopus. For the politician taking on the appearance of the octopus, making himself poluplokos, involves not only possessing the logos of the octopus but also proving himself capable of adapting to the most baffling of situations, of assuming as
many faces as there are social categories and types of men in cities, of inventing the thousand ploys which will make his actions effective in the most varied of circumstances.¹⁰⁵ (39-40)

In this example of metic *logos*, the flexibility and polymorphy of the octopus is a model for the sophists’ supple, multiple arguments. In concert with the multiple *ethos* formations that the metic model of the octopus provides, multiple formations of *logos* also proliferate through the tactile intelligence of the many-armed octopus. This model of metic *logos* multiplies the ways in which rhetors can adapt to different situations. *logoi* are as multiply coiled as the arms of an octopus, able to change and reform depending on a wide variety of social situations. This fleshy, tactile and malleable *metis*, which shapes flexible *logoi* dependent on diverse contexts and social situations, offers a productive model for disabled rhetors to hold in necessary tension the hard kernels of bodily materialities and the constructive forces of social and cultural formations.

To conclude, I examine how lawyer and disability activist Harriet McBryde Johnson offers an example that both builds on and revises *metis* by placing the triad of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* in concert. Her example of metic rhetoric involving all three appeals forms a flexible template on which to model metic rhetorical means of persuasion among a variety of disabled rhetors. She draws on *metis* but also revises it for the current needs of rhetors with disabilities. To link the triad of appeals, her metic *ethos* and metic *logos* combine in order to craft multiple

¹⁰⁵ Detienne and Vernant explore more connections between the sophists’ interweaving metic *logoi* and the flexibility of other bodies, including the wrestler, the fox, and others. “If the wrestler is as pliable as a withy, the sophist is a master at bending and interweaving *logoi*—at bending them since he knows a thousand ways of twisting and turning (pasas strophas strephesthai), how to devise a thousand tricks . . . and, like the fox, how to turn an argument against the adversary who used it in the first place. Like Proteus, he can run through the whole gamut of living forms. . . . The sophist is also a master at interweaving for his is constantly entangling two contrary theses. . . . Speeches interwoven like this are traps, strephomena, as are the puzzles set by the gods of *metis*, which the Greeks call griphoi which is also the name given to some types of fishing nets. With their twisting, flexing, interweaving and bending, both athletes and sophists—just like the fox and the octopus, can be seen as living bonds” (41-42).
appeals of pathos for her audience. First, like Linton and Mairs, she establishes a metic ethos that depends on her own distinctive shape, a physical description of her ethos that also lends a distinctive shape to her writing. She describes how she used to wear a brace on her back, but now in her forties, she is thin, “flesh mostly vanished, a jumble of bones in a floppy bag of skin” (1). As she tells, it “fortunately, a skittish anesthesiologist said no to fusion, plates, and pins—all the apparatus that might have kept me straight” (1).

Johnson’s non-straight physical formation is more productive for her rhetorical appeal of ethos. In the first pages of her Preface, to introduce her audience to the shape she and her message will take, she explains that “at age fifteen, I threw away the back brace and let my spine reshape itself into a deep twisty S-curve” (1). Her curved body recalls Hephaestus’ curved hands and feet. The shape of the curve, which draws on the roots gu and kamp, often occurs with the word metis, as these words denoted “feet [that are] twisted round or are capable of moving both forwards and backwards” or anything “curved, pliable or articulated” (Detienne and Vernant 46). Johnson details this reshaping, “Now my right side is two keep canyons. To keep myself upright, I lean forward, rest my rib cage on my lap, plan my elbows on rolled towels beside my knees. Since my backbone found its own natural shape, I’ve been entirely comfortable in my own skin” (1-2). Being comfortable in her own skin, the result of metic ethos modeled on a curved shape, enables Johnson to begin to form a metic logos as well. In fact, her detailed rendering of her upright posture in her first pages establishes a metic ethos that supports the rest of the book, thereby introducing one of Johnson’s key rhetorical remakings of disability—her project of revising stock logics of disability.

To build on this shape shifting metic ethos, Johnson adds metic logoi. As discussed, she begins by critiquing the stock, linear logics of disability that only purvey messages of
overcoming, pity, inspiration or caution, limiting appeals of *pathos*. “The world wants our lives to fit into a few rigid narrative templates: how I conquered disability (and others can conquer their Bad Things!), how I adjusted to disability (and a positive attitude can move mountains!), how disability made me wise (you can only marvel and hope it never happens to you!” (2-3). In addition to naming these rigid templates, in the parentheses that follow each of the rigid disability narratives, Johnson provides her own translation that reveals the hidden meanings behind these narratives, as well as the errors in circular logic. In this way, Johnson not only exposes the stock narratives of disability, but also the limits, illogic and ableism behind them. The disability voyeurism that this particular “wisdom” narrative invites structures readers to marvel at the lessons learned from disability but simultaneously discourages identification. The underlying logic of the “disability made me wise narrative” is that it's only a good story “so long as it doesn't happen to me.” Once she exposes the illogic of these narratives, she is freer to shape her own more flexible logic for her own narrative, which encourages multiple connections with others. “For me, living a real life has meant resisting those formulaic narratives. Instead of letting the world turn me into a disability object, I have insisted on being a subject in the grammatical sense: not the passive 'me' who is acted upon, but the active ‘I’ who does things” (3). The things that Johnson does include practicing law and politics in Charleston, as well as campaigning for disability rights and traveling, but most important for Johnson is her ability to tell stories. “And I tell stories,” she declares, “On one level, that not unusual . . . [but] for me, story telling is a survival tool, a means of getting people to do what I want. I'm talking mainly about getting people to drive my van” (3).

Similar to the sophistic practice of exchanging knowledge for money, Johnson tells stories in exchange for rides, a rhetorical strategy that multiplies her appeals of *pathos*. Her metic
ethos and logos combine to multiply appeals of pathos, increasing connections between her and her audiences. “To get a driver, I have to offer some incentive. Living on a budget with unpredictable cash flow, I naturally prefer not to pay when I can help it. Therefore, I offer stories” (3). This exchange facilitates an ever-changing audience, to which she adjusts her metic ethos and metic logos, forming a type of metic pathos. Johnson’s currency is stories and her goal is knowledge-making, especially in relation to the changing demands of her audiences. She begins with a flexible notion of truth reminiscent of the sophists’ provisional truths and explains, “my tales are true, or nearly true, as true as memory allows. They evolve in telling. They shift focus and emphasis depending on what the listener—an active participant in the story’s creation—wants. There are questions, digressions, reactions” (4). Although she displays no overt knowledge of the sophistic tradition, Johnson implicitly and explicitly invokes several key tenets of the sophists in her rhetoric. In addition to recognizing the knowledge and meaning-making as a type of currency, as the sophists who charged did, Johnson also incorporates into her narrative and rhetoric notions of metis and kairos. Like the sophistical strings of argument created by the sophists' periplokai, or words of many coils, Johnson's stories unfold depending on the audience and the situation. For example, “Easter lets me know when I've found a character’s voice by raising her right hand with an emphatic ‘Thank you!’ With Dave, it’s silence that tells me when the pacing is right; his habitual magpie-chatter stops. When Mike says, ‘Wait a minute, let me get this straight,’ he leads me to an angle I hadn’t noticed” (4). Johnson updates metis by involving her audience more fully in her metic-shaped ethos and multiple metic logos.

Johnson credits her various audience members as co-creators of her messages and meanings, demonstrating how her metic revisions of ethos and logos also revise pathos appeals, or the emotional connections she shares with her audience. She explains the flexible structure
and logic of her stories, co-created with her audiences, “I may recount the same sequence of events over and over again, but each listener makes a new story. That’s because storytelling itself is an activity, not an object. Stories are the closest we can come to shared experience” (4).

Although she emphasizes the discursive elements of story making, Johnson also demonstrates that her audience’s bodily and tangible gestures heavily influence her creations. Easter’s right hand indicates a well-made connection; Dave’s lack of talking affects her kairotic “pacing,” Mike’s retellings chart out a new route, a different angle. Sequences of events are not prefabricated or fixed. Johnson takes into account the sophistic and metic alternatives of finding alternative routes toward knowledge-making. She recounts the same events, but not in a pre-ordained order or way; instead, she works with her audience to reshape her re-telling each time.

In this way, Johnson unites her metic ethos with multiple, diverse logoi, in order to produce stories flexible enough to embody several truths and diverse audiences. Her metic ethos and logoi stretch into metic, flexible pathos connections with her audience, guided by encounters in diverse social contexts. By revising metis for her own needs, she also revises the stock logics of disability and the stock pathos appeals by formulating a metic ethos that encourages connections between disability rhetorics and diverse audiences that go beyond the typical emotions of pity, sympathy or inspiration.

These metic strategies involve her audiences’ response to reshape all of the appeals, but most productively transform appeals of pathos between disabled rhetors and audiences. Metic ethos and logos transform pathos by transcending associations of pathos with pity and suffering and instead invite associations between pathos and its alternative definition of “to change.” Johnson sums up the desires and efforts of many disabled rhetors when she writes that “my stories don’t aim to satisfy the general curiosity about what it’s like to live in a withered body
like mine or feed the public appetite for inspirational pap. Like all stories, they are most fundamentally a chance to ride around inside another head and be reminded that being who we are and where we are, and doing what we’re doing, is not the only possibility” (4). Johnson uses metis, including metic ethos formations and multiple metic logoi, in order to produce changes between herself and her listeners. She summarizes this goal of transformation by writing, “Philosophically, I think meaning is created by people in interaction, sorting things out together. This book doesn’t have a tidy message. It isn’t a tidy work” (4).

As a generative rhetorical strategy, metis encourages revisions to the appeals that foster meanings creating by people in interaction. Johnson’s untidy messages produce transformations that reshape ethos, pathos and logos for her and her audience. Instead of relying on the limits of the appeals that reinforce ableist notions about people with disabilities, disabled rhetors use and revise metis to reshape the appeals for their own needs, making meaning in transformations between themselves and their audiences. Disabled rhetors such as Tollifson, Mairs, Kuusisto and Johnson each implicitly use metis, particularly its polymorphic and metamorphic properties, and revise it, forming connections with other identities and creating a disability culture. In particular, they draw on metic ethos and metic logos to create a form of metic pathos, multiplying emotional connections with audiences. They make meaning in relation and in interaction with their audiences, transforming appeals of pity and inspiration to appeals of change and transformation. They transform the triad of appeals for the experience of disability, enlarging the means of persuasion available for disabled rhetors. Disabled rhetors’ transformations of the appeals through metis invite us to turn toward examining more in-depth a particular type of metis, the well-known practice of kairos (timing), in the reshaping of the rhetorical canons for disability.
Chapter 5: Kairotic Reshapings of the Canons for Disability

Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class . . . sexuality folds on top of race . . . everything finally piling into a single human body. To write about any aspect of identity, any aspect of the body, means writing about this entire maze. This I know, but the question remains: Where to start? (Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride* 123).

Ironically, in the last pages of her memoir of growing up with cerebral palsy and coming out as queer, Eli Clare asks herself and her readers a difficult question: where to start writing? She recognizes the complex interconnections between her body and her identity, but struggles with how to represent this in writing. Clare’s question about starting, however, points as much or more toward the inadequacy of the rhetorical canons, particularly the canon of invention, as it does to the complex interconnections of her identity. Where to start is a pressing question for Clare precisely because typical models of invention offered by traditional rhetoric and composition do not address the experience of disability. I will investigate how Clare and other disabled rhetors start writing, exploring how they combine the sophistic practice of *kairos* with the canon of invention to catalyze reconstructions of each of the canons for the experience of disability.

The five traditional canons of rhetoric and composition—*invention, arrangement, style, delivery* and *memory*—provide most rhetors with a hand-book style method by which to compose speeches, writing or other communicative acts. For disabled rhetors, however, the canons, as they have traditionally been defined, are ineffective and limiting. The traditional canons often propagate ableist assumptions about the composition process and exclude the potential contributions of disabled rhetors. In the last chapter, building on Empedocles’ redefinitions of *logos*, I redefined *metis* in order to reshape the three traditional appeals of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* for disabled rhetors, often drawing on rhetorical work by people with
disabilities to lay bare normalizing foundations of the appeals and to reconstruct them as more attentive to disability. In this chapter, I will reshape the five canons with the work of disabled rhetors who evince clear resistance to and reconstructions of the canons. As with the appeals, disabled rhetors often do not explicitly term their interventions into traditional rhetoric by naming the canons, but nevertheless work directly in relation to these crucial rhetorical concepts, offering new ways of adjusting them for the experience of disability and various abilities. Building on our redefinitions of fleshy \textit{logoi} and \textit{metis}, I track the particular reshaping of the canons by disabled rhetors by focusing on how the sense of touch in their rhetorical production. The rhetorical concept of \textit{kairos}, or the sense of opportune timing in rhetorical action, contains ancient associations with the sense of touch, especially in relation to bodily vulnerabilities, that can draw our attention to the innovative ways disabled rhetors are remaking the canons, often blending them together to create new composition strategies for their needs and abilities.

\textbf{The Limits of the Five Canons for Disabled Rhetors}

In order to appreciate how disabled rhetors employ \textit{kairos} to transform the canon of invention, it is useful first to recognize the basic normalizing and often ableist foundations of the five traditional rhetorical canons. Traditionally, the canon of invention is the most prized of the canons and refers to how and where a rhetor discovers his or her arguments.\footnote{Aristotelian and Roman treatments often credit invention as the most important canon. Aristotle devotes most of his treatise on rhetoric to invention and Cicero calls it “the most important of all the divisions, and above all is used in every kind of pleading” (\textit{De Inventione} I.7.9).} For Aristotle, the canon of invention guides the rhetor to search “in any given place [for] the available means of persuasion” (179). Aristotelian rhetoric and its contemporary derivatives usually direct rhetors to three places: the common topics, the special topics and then to external aids. While invention is often considered a distinctively cognitive approach to producing rhetoric, recent work has
recalled the materiality of the “places” to which the topoi literally refer. Aristotle invoked topoi, meaning place or location, most likely referring to the sense of associating places with certain arguments.

A disability studies perspective interrogates the normalizing and ableist foundations of the invention canon in several ways. First, this perspective questions the means of persuasion “available” to disabled rhetors. Until very recently, many means of persuasion were unavailable to people with disabilities, especially those who were excluded from education and often literacy services. People with disabilities have been denied access to many means of persuasion. Even services designed to educate people with disabilities, such as oralist education of deaf people that prohibits sign language, privilege one means of persuasion (oralism) over another (sign language), thereby perpetuating ableism and constraining the available means of persuasion for deaf rhetors who might be more rhetorically effective with the body-as-topos inventive process of sign language.

Second, a disability studies perspective on invention also interrogates the normalizing tendency of the “common” topics, since norms so often have defined and limited people with disabilities. Common topics are constructed directly in relation to norms and exclusionary practices against people with disabilities. They are “common” in the sense that they often rely on norms, or commonplaces, that are assumed to be known to everyone, but “everyone” in ancient Greece (and often even today) means white, male, propertied, franchised and able-bodied. Not surprisingly, the commonplaces themselves, since they rest on an epistemology that assumes a norm, have been frequently employed to perpetuate myths about disability. Brenda Brueggemann and James Fredal have pointed out that the topic of “establishing the greater and the lesser of the thing is often cited as the most foundational of the commonplaces. ‘Which is the
greater and lesser of disabilities? When is a disability greater or lesser? Sound familiar? Indeed—these questions are examples of the ‘commonplace’ arguments surrounding disability, perpetrators of persuasion about disability” (“Studying Disability” 225). Arguments that attempt to place disabilities in a hierarchy in relation to norms are exacted by this basic Aristotelian commonplace of establish the greater versus the lesser. “Common” is often synonymous with “normal,” and the common topics operate along the same types of faulty binary logic that separate the disabled from the abled.107

The remaining four canons also promote ableist and normalizing rhetorical strategies from a disability studies perspective, severely limiting the contributions of disabled rhetors. The canon of arrangement, for example, often promotes narrowly linear presentations of argument that do not support the differences of rhetors with disabilities, especially cognitive disabilities. Aristotle’s simple directive regarding arrangement—“A speech has two parts. You must state your case, and you must prove it”—only recognizes a single type of agonistic argument. Feminist rhetoricians begin to gesture towards the interrogations of the norm that must transform the canons. “But what if what constitutes ‘your case’ and ‘your proof’ are not clear-cut, and instead highly contested sites? And what if the traditional aim of persuasion, of winning over an audience, is also highly contested?” (Ede et al 415). Aristotle’s advice for arrangement models a highly agonistic structure for argument which does not take situated contexts such as cultural or gender differences into account. This strict, linear type of logic does not support the embodied methods of arrangement that feminist rhetors or disabled rhetors may use. In particular, traditional arrangement also depends on definitions of logic and the development of an argument

107 Aristotle’s secondary place for discovering arguments, the special topics, continue in this bifurcated logic, separating lines of argument into normal, common topoi and special, abnormal topoi.
based on limited norms, or assumptions about logical arrangements that do not consider the neurodiversity or embodied rhetorics of disabled rhetors.\textsuperscript{108}

Traditionally, the canon of style has promoted ableist and normalizing understandings of “correctness” that exclude anyone who deviates from perfect word choice, usage and clarity. This view of style excludes cognitively disabled or even neuro-diverse rhetors and further denies the contributions of different embodiments in the stylistic development of an argument. Aristotle encapsulates rhetoric’s ambivalence regarding the importance of style by advising that “the right thing in speaking really is that we should be satisfied not to annoy our hearers, without trying to delight them . . . [N]evertheless the arts of language cannot help having small but real importance. . . . [T]he way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. Not, however, so much as people think” (Rhetoric III.1). As a result of this ambivalence, style is often divorced from argument, and characterized as simply embellishment or dressing up of the main idea, a characterization critiqued by feminist rhetoricians in particular. Susan Jarratt explains this view style as a symptom of larger exclusions since “both rhetoric and women . . . have been] trivialized by identification with sensuality, costume, and color—all of which are supposed to be manipulated in attempts to persuade through deception” (Rereading 65). This trivialization hinges on associations with the body. The tradition’s ambivalence about style is closely connected to the body, especially the physicality of the female body, focusing attention on the powerful ways bodies influence rhetoric. As feminist rhetoricians explain, “bordering Aristotle’s emphasis on style . . . is an anxiety about the extent to which language can be used to obscure and mislead, to play upon the emotions of an audience” (Ede et al 420). This anxiety applies to all bodies outside the narrow mold of the norm, as they call attention to the body’s role in

\textsuperscript{108} As explored in previous chapters, neurodiversity is a term often used in arguments for appreciating the diverse cognitive approaches that people with disabilities, such as those with autism or Asperger’s syndrome may exhibit.
persuasion. Female bodies or any bodies that deviate from the norm, particularly disabled bodies, threaten to push the canon of style beyond its narrow foundations of correctness and clarity, thereby potentially obscuring language.

The canon of delivery, often the culmination of the rhetorical process in which the rhetor conveys his or her message, is intimately linked to traditional definitions that exclude disabled rhetors. Whereas most of the other canons are attentive to what is being said, written or communicated, delivery pays attention to how someone communicates. Like style, delivery receives at best an ambivalent treatment in traditional rhetoric and contributes to molding a single, able, normative rhetor based on ableist assumptions of the proper delivery of an argument. For Aristotle, it is “only owing to the defects of our hearers” that we must consider delivery at all, a concession that sets up audiences as in need of correct speaking and correction. Aristotle defines delivery as “essentially, a matter of the right management of the voice to express the various emotions” (Rhetoric III.1). Normative standards for delivery are built-in to Aristotle’s definition, as he emphasizes the “right management” of voice and “the three things—volume of sound, modulation of pitch, and rhythm” (qtd. in Ede et al 428). Most attention paid to delivery focuses on how to manage the body in communication, or how to achieve the correct volume, pitch, rhythm and gestures, guidelines that are usually constructed directly in relation to normative bodies. Deaf people, stutterers, or people with weak voices or unusual cadences, for example, are immediately positioned as existing outside the canon of delivery. Demosthenes, who famously names the three most important elements of rhetoric as “delivery, delivery and delivery,” embodies the ideal orator because he overcomes his stuttering and weak voice, rehabilitating his delivery by curing his disability. Cicero, who names Demosthenes as the ideal model for speakers, identifies delivery as “the dominant factor in oratory; without delivery the
best speaker cannot be of any account at all, and a moderate speaker with a trained delivery can often outdo the best of them” (De Oratore 3.11.19). Good delivery tips the balance, raising mediocre speakers to excellent status or demoting an excellent speaker to mediocre. Good delivery rests on proper regulation of the body, voice and gesture along normalizing and ableist lines.

The canon of memory also assumes an able body and mind in traditional rhetoric. Aristotle’s mappings of the canon mainly situate it in relation to invention, arrangement and style. The author of the Ad Herennium calls memory “the treasure-house of the ideas supplied by invention” and “the guardian of all the parts of rhetoric” (qtd. in Crowley 221). In ancient times, “even people who could write easily and well relied on their memories—not merely storage facilities, but as structured heuristic systems” (Crowley 222). Cicero reports that the teacher Simonides advised that “persons desiring to train this faculty must select localities and form mental images of the facts they wish to remember and store these images in the localities with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate themselves” (De Oratore 293). For disabled rhetors with cognitive impairments that affect memory, this five step linear construction of the function of memory in rhetorical production is impractical and insufficient. Even for other disabled rhetors, such as those with autism or Asperger’s syndrome, whose memories are often hyper-specific and sometimes extremely compendious, the traditional canon of memory does not support the wide range of differences that accompany disability. For people with disabilities who remember with the body, the cognitive emphasis of the traditional canon is insufficient. As is the case with the other canons, recent expansions of the canon that urge a reconsideration of how embodiment
necessarily affects rhetors’ engagement with the canons begins to gesture towards the variety of ways disabled rhetors can remake the canons.

**Kairotic Invention and Disability**

Each of the five canons excludes disabled rhetors and establishes normalizing foundations for the wide-ranging abilities of all rhetors. Since the canon of invention has been valued as the most important canon, interventions into the canons’ ableism and normalization must begin with invention, while maintaining connections the remaining four canons. Traditional understandings of invention and even some feminist revisions that attempt to recognize bodily difference are insufficient for disabled rhetors, but they are useful starting places for revising the canons with the work of disabled rhetors who use sophistic rhetorical strategies. Feminist rhetoricians such as Barbara Biesecker, drawing on Helen Cixous, who argue for the body as a site for topos and for bodily difference as a place for invention, begin to gesture to the wider range of bodies that can form and invent effective arguments, but they often continue to assume a singular, able body. Biesecker encourages a theory of rhetoric that would reconfigure invention by incorporating the body as a commonplace or topos. In the model of body as topos “differences are celebrated and exchanged rather than seized as levers in a struggle for power” (95). Taking this lead, I interpret disabled rhetors as extending this reconfiguration of invention. Specifically, they participate remaking the site of body as topos into *bodies* as topos, or the generative rhetorical productions constructed by bodies in physical and emotional relation. Since people with disabilities often live, speak, write, communicate, and perform other daily functions in an interdependent and interconnected relationship with others, they necessarily invent out of a place or topos of bodies in connection.
Scholars in disability studies may not frame their theories in rhetorical terms, but they clearly contribute the revisions of the canons for disabled rhetors who produce rhetoric in connection with other bodies. Lennard Davis, for example, offers the concept of disability as insight, which borrows from Cixous and others’ imperative to write through the body. Disability as insight is also applicable for extending the range of brainstorming or discovery strategies, or “insights” involved in the canon of invention. Davis uses disability as insight to suggest methods of resisting language that only postulates “the benefits of wholeness, of the ideal, of the totality of systems” and to wrestle “that language into the service of a new way of seeing (feeling, touching, signing)” (15). Although Davis desires to write through the body, he mainly focuses on disassociating the ancient connections between knowledge and sightedness (or blindness, as is the case with Teiresias, but still hinges on sight), narrowing his insight to one sense. To discover knowledge in different bodily registers, Davis seems to relegate feeling and touching to parenthetical examples, but these registers are crucial for a wide range of people with disabilities who produce rhetoric in physical relation to other bodies, such as those who use assistive technologies or aids such as facilitated communication or anyone who invents rhetoric in relation to others. I adjust the notion of disability as insight to disability as in-touch, in order to expand the range ways disabled rhetors can write through the body and through bodies in contact.

The rhetorical concept of inventive kairos, as I will redefine it as bringing diverse bodies in contact in space, motion and time, will reveal how disabled rhetors are reinventing the canons by using disability in-touch. The concept of kairos, from its very beginnings, is associated with and almost synonymous with disability, a connection that disabled rhetors draw on and ultimately revise. In its first uses in Homer and Hesiod, kairos is found accompanying descriptions of soft or vulnerable places on the body, synonymous with injury, disability and
impairment. In other cultural and rhetorical valences, *kairos* is associated with disability in the following ways: it denotes a vulnerable place on the body or injury; the normal and abnormal bodily experience of illness and health (including ageing); a doctor’s interventions into disease and illness; and in general calls attention to bodies’ contingency in relation to space and time. I will develop these associations in the following sections, demonstrating how disabled rhetors implicitly draw on them and then revise them to reconstruct the canons for their needs and abilities, particularly reconstructing *kairos* through its tactile qualities. Overall, *kairos* is a rhetorical concept closely related to disability, revealing associations that are both limiting and generative for disabled rhetors, who implicitly and often explicitly draw on and revise *kairos* to better meet their needs as rhetors and to adjust ableist notions about disability.\(^{109}\)

In current rhetorical theory, as well, *kairos* is a concept that is related closely to disability. Scholars have explored two competing notions of the concept of *kairos* in ways that particularly describe the rhetorical situations that many people with disabilities find themselves in. The tension between these two competing concepts of *kairos*—between static decorum and dynamic spontaneity—illustrates the tension of the disability experience and writing about disability in which disabled rhetors invent. Carolyn Miller describes the static elements of *kairos*, translating it as “propriety” or “decorum,” characterizing it as “a principle of adaptation and accommodation to convention, expectation, predictability” (xii). A sense of order guides this notion of *kairos* and rhetorical action because ‘violation of this order, failure to know the *kairos* and observe its propriety, will result in rhetorical, aesthetic, and even moral failure. This view of *kairos* is suited to the philosophies of order, of realism, of Platonic being” (xii-xii). Although this conventional definition of *kairos* has constrained all rhetors, people with disabilities are

\(^{109}\) As is the case with the appeals, *metis* and *logos*, disabled rhetors do not usually explicitly term their rhetorical strategies with concepts such as *kairos* or invention, but certainly drawn on them and often revise them in doing so.
particularly constrained by effects of the *kairos* of order, convention and decorum because
disability has so often been viewed as a disruption of order, a violation of convention and an
insult to decorum. The sense of accommodation and adaptation in this sense of *kairos*, in the
context of an ableist world, puts the burden of accommodation on the person with a disability to
conform to nondisabled expectations. The principles of decorum that guide this understanding of
*kairos* are the same principles that guide the passage of statutes such as the “ugly laws,” which
deem it “hereby prohibited for any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or deformed in
any way so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object to expose himself to public view.” This
1911 Chicago ordinance takes a version of *kairos* yoked to convention to guide it, outlawing the
disabled in public and thereby severely restraining their opportunities for rhetorical action.

Furthermore, this static sense of *kairos* undergirds many ableist attitudes towards
disability, as its sense of inflexible order promotes fixed, compartmentalized definitions of
ability and disability. Disability studies scholars and activists attempt to revise the notion that
ability and disability are bodily status unaffected by time, context and culture by using terms
such as “temporally able bodied” in order to call attention to the contingency of bodily abilities
and disabilities. This designation draws on a sense of time as always changing and labile in order
to resist notions of bodies unaffected by disease, illness, ageing or acquired disability.

People with disabilities, in their rhetoric and rhetorical action, have resisted the decorum-
laden meanings of *kairos* and have instead developed rhetorical strategies more closely aligned
with the term’s more dynamic, inventive meanings. This second meaning of *kairos*, which has
been generative for rhetorical studies, refers not to “the expected but its opposite: the uniquely
timely, the spontaneous, the radically particular . . . this sense of *kairos* encourages us to be
creative in responding to the unforeseen, to the lack of order in human life” (Miller xii). This
dynamic *kairos* spurs an equally dynamic sense of invention, since “[t]he challenge is to invent, within a set of unfolding and unprecedented circumstances, an action (rhetorical or otherwise) that will be understood as uniquely meaningful within those circumstances” (xii). This dynamic sense of *kairos* uncannily describes the everyday negotiations in life and in rhetoric that people with disabilities face. This dynamic sense of *kairos* supports the “radically particular” embodiments of the experience of disability and rhetorical actions that disabled rhetors inhabit. A creative response to the “lack of order” of life describes the experience of many people with disabilities, who must devise flexible rhetorical strategies based on the often-changing experience of living with a disability, often responding to the unforeseen. *Kairos* is “the way we measure our lives on the basis of critical events that disrupt the normal sequence of chronos” and many people with disabilities explore in their writing how disability disrupts but also positively transforms the “normal” passage of time or the “normal sequence of chronos” (Miller 169). Most illness and acquired disability memoirs include a diagnosis scene or narrative of the onset of disability as a “moment” that changed the course of their life. *Kairos*, as it denotes a qualitative rather than quantitative sense of time, can be seen to describe an experience with permanent disability or temporary illness, as it is a critical event that changes one’s sense of time and rhetorical action in myriad ways.

The experience of disability, as it puts bodies in a state of flux and adaptation, parallels this dynamic sense of *kairos*: it often demands unique, radically particular, responses, unforeseen by decorum and the ability to act rhetorical within a “set of unfolding and unprecedented circumstances.” Disability demands a kairotic invention that responds flexibly to the challenges and rewards of composing as a disabled rhetor. As Miller explains, this dynamic meaning of *kairos* is inventive and radically particular, as “timely action will be understood as adaptive, as
appropriate, *only in retrospect;* it cannot be discovered within the decorum of past actions” (xiii). The experience of disability directly corresponds to this dynamic sense of kairotic invention, as disability demands radically particular responses based in unfolding, often unprecedented circumstances that must be devised inventively and in direct resistance to decorum. Disabled rhetors invent everyday, in writing and in life, in a uniquely adaptive manner, resisting notions of decorum that have often held them back from rhetorical action, and kairotically exercising dynamic rhetorical action.

As Miller notes, the dynamic sense of *kairos* is frequently attributed to Gorgias and modern day sophists, who make connections between *kairos* and invention that call for situational styles of composing. Bruce McComiskey has explored Gorgias’ notions of *kairos* in the context of invention, arguing that a fundamental difference between the *topoi* found within Aristotle’s rhetoric and Gorgias’ *topoi* is that Aristotle’s are “acontextual, while Gorgias places his in the narrative context of the Palamedes myth” (49). As Scott Consigny elaborates, in Gorgias’ rhetoric, topoi are contextually determined within a context of probability which “embody the values of the community, in the sense that they comprise what the community considers important” (Consigny 84). The contextuality and situatedness of the sophists’ kairotic invention is particularly well suited for disabled rhetors, whose experience with disability is highly changeable and contingent and whose rhetorical situations therefore call for flexible inventive strategies.

Nancy Mairs and others relate the temporal instability (*kairos*) of disability in positive terms, resisting a normalizing or purely quantitative (chronos) way in which time should pass. Mairs describes how she has “had to learn to take satisfaction in stasis” and reports, “I can entertain myself for long moments” by observing others and “making up stories behind the
encounters and conversations of strangers” (37). This flexibility resists a normative, quantitative, chronos sense of a body’s relation to time and instead invents with kairos. A productive sense of her body’s limits structures her sense of time, as she writes, “Knowing that haste depletes me dangerously, I try to schedule only one major activity in a day, allowing ample time to prepare for it ahead of time and to decompress afterward” (36). She describes a sense of time regulated by not necessarily compromised by disability. Describing a sense of time aligned with kairos, she writes that “The languid, pensive state in which I now live much of the time has calmed me and expanded my contentment immeasurably. Because my slightest gesture requires effort now, I must focus on each moment, without much regard for past mistakes or the future’s treats or blandishments (37). Sophistic notions of kairos, in relation to critical disability perspective, allow for an understanding of the contingencies of bodies in relation to time and space, chance and luck, instability and changeability in ways that do not necessarily reinforce normalized standard for bodily identities or experiences.

In addition, disability studies scholars, writers and activists often employ formulations of this dynamic sense of kairos in their arguments to explain the radical temporality, instability and changeability of bodies that disability challenges us to recognize. Michael Berube, for example, draws on a sense of dynamic kairotic timing to challenge fixed notions of bodily states. “Any of us who identify as ‘nondisabled’ must know that our self-designation is inevitably temporary, and that a car crash, a virus, a degenerative genetic disease, or a precedent-setting legal decision could change our status in ways over which we have no control whatsoever” (viii). Also, Davis describes disability in similarly time-laden terminology that actually draws on dynamic senses of kairos. Davis explains that “all it takes is the swerve of a car, the impact of a football, or the tick of a clock” to cause disability. “Christopher Reeve, one day Superman, next day quadriplegic, is
the most dramatic example of this quick-changing act” (4). The process of ageing that even
temporally able bodied people experience also reveals the radical, but productive instability of
disability, demonstrating how kairos, as it denotes a sense of bodies in relation to time, is
connected to disability and even “normal” ageing. Dynamic kairotic senses of bodies in time and
space appreciate this temporality of bodily status. The ancient associations that kairos shares
with tuche (chance) and fate also demonstrate the multiple factors and forces that determine
bodily status.\footnote{Although chance and fate would seem to be opposed concepts, in ancient society (and to some extent today), both concepts of time are used to describe the experience with disability or illness as out of one’s own individual control.}

Kairos shares several ancient associations with medicine and disability, several of which
are associations that disabled rhetors implicitly revise in their writing about disability. In Greek
culture and medicine, doctors must possess a sharp sense of kairos in order to successfully
intervene in disease and illness. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant explain that for the
Greeks disease was thought of as multiple and shifting (poikilon) as the sea itself, and compared
the tacit and metic knowledge of the helmsman navigating a ship to the abilities of a doctor.\footnote{Here we see how metis and kairos are interconnected, as the ship navigator who possessed metis necessarily used it to respond to a kairotic world. Detienne and Vernant explore this connection, arguing that “no branch of knowledge appeared to have so much in common wit the art of navigation as the art of the doctor” (312). See chapter 4 for more information on this relationship.} Detienne and Vernant explain that “it was almost a commonplace to compare the pilot at the
helm of a ship with the doctor seeking to save the patient from the perils of disease” and that a
doctor must be “as polymorphic” as disease itself (311). A physical, tactile sense of agility and
intervention pervades the successful doctor’s use of kairos to treat his patients. A doctor must be
agile enough to respond kairotically to the many symptoms and changing nature of illness, and
“medicine is an art of the fleeting moment (oligokairos) and in which the opportunities for
intervention are always critical” (312). Durations of illness, growth and normal and abnormal
human development were described in kairotic terms in Hippocratic treatises, often in a curative sense. It is advised that “every disease can be cured, if you hit upon the right moment [kairos] to apply your remedies” (qtd. in Atwill 57). Both the poet Pindar and the anonymous writer of On Ancient Medicine emphasize the kairotic elements of medicine in tactile ways. The doctor, for example, is “epikairotatos” like the pilot of a ship on raging seas who exercises a “a grip of time,” or a knowledge of when to intervene based on an experiential knowledge: being able to foresee the course a disease will take based on prior experience allows him to “watch for the precise moment of intervention” and “to seize the opportunity of grasping Kairos by the hair” (312). This image of gripping refers to the bodily representation in statue form, in which Kairos is hairless except for one forelock on his head, which represent the fleetingness of opportunity rhetors must physically grasp before it passes. Detienne and Vernant compare the skills of pilots and doctors with the rhetorical skills of the sophists, who depended on “the same indirect and groping knowledge” based on probability, conjecture and tacit knowledge of changing and contextual situations.

Joan Tollifson, who was born without an arm, gestures toward a major trend in which disabled rhetors are revising medicalized meanings of kairos and replacing them with new meanings and embodied rhetorics. Most prominently, Tollifson uses the sense of touch kairotically, to revise her relationship to her disability. After becoming an activist for disability rights and access, she describes the construction of a new relationship between her body and her connections with other, writing, “I took up karate and broke boards with my arm. I studied massage and began doing it for a living, breaking another taboo. You aren’t supposed to touch people with a ‘deformed’ body part; it may be disgusting to them. That deep inner feeling of being disgusting still resurfaces every time I touch someone for the first time with my arm. The

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112 I will explore the hair of the god of Kairos more in-depth below.
healing occurs slowly, over a lifetime” (107). She breaks taboos through touch, inventing new bodily rhetorics and rhetorical situations for her disability experience. She becomes a metic shape-shifter, kairotically forming physical connections through touch among and between different bodies, continually reframing the question of ‘what happened to your arm’—an impossible rhetorical situation that people continually pose to her—into a reframed response, created in connection with other people. Particularly in the position as a masseuse, she, the “disabled patient,” takes the position of the kairotic physician-healer, able to use her touch to intervene to touch and possibly better the bodies of others. In this way, she revises ancient associations between kairos and medical intervention by coupling this intervention with a contribution from the patient. Tollifson’s reinvention of herself and her connections to other people, formed in physical contact and kairotic interventions, point towards the multiple ways disabled rhetors reshape rhetoric.

Kairotic Interventions into the Canons

Disabled rhetors use kairos to reinvent the canon of invention, often drawing implicitly on the embodied and tactile associations of kairos in order to remake and blend all of the canons. They bring together the many meanings of the flexible concept of kairos in dynamic ways, drawing upon the temporality of disability in the writing experience but also taking the concept of kairos into their own hands, literally, to offer new ways of grasping opportunities for rhetorical invention and intervention into all of the canons. They resist the static, decorum valence of kairos, opting instead for a dynamic meaning of kairos as bodies in contact in space and time. They also revise ancient associations of kairos with doctors’ curative abilities, resisting this medicalized notion of disability and intervening, often physically, in their own experiences and
representations of disability in writing and in their treatment. They take a dynamically kairotic approach to invention that affects the other four canons in rhetoric, exercising kairos in tactile ways that implicitly draw on its ancient associations with touch while simultaneously remaking connections between touch and rhetoric flexible for the needs and rewards of disability.

Many disabled rhetors use a kairotic inventive rhetorical strategy based on touch to revise the canons. Eli Clare, for example, describes at least two types of skins she wears to reinvent herself and her writing. Like many disabled rhetors, she describes her experience with language and writing in tactile ways. One skin is the one she reaches to reclaim and reinvent, in her writing. Describing her second skin, the she wishes to shed, she writes, “in the gawking, the pats on the head . . . the moments where I became someone’s supercrip or tragedy: all those lies become my second skin” (130). Clare combines touches with time here in kairotic invention. She writes, “Stereotypes and lies lodge in our bodies as surely as bullets. They live there and fester there, stealing the body . . . we need to name them, transform them, create something new in their place, something that comes close and finally true to the bone” (12). Clare’s invocation of the bones of language implicitly draws on the associations Empedocles’ theories of Hephaestus’ metic mixing of the logos of blood and flesh. In writing her life, Clare is “putting words to a loss that grasps at [her] bones,” writing of the “body as home, but only if it is understood that language too lives under the skin” (11).113

Clare’s use of the body is also an exercise of kairotic invention, which builds on her tactile recovery practice through writing. Her description of her skin and the various lies, stereotypes and losses that inscribe it implicitly draw on ancient associations between kairos and vulnerable, soft, critical places on the body, but extends to revise these associations. In Homer’s

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113 See chapters 3 and 4 for more details on Empedocles’ theories of logos and Hephaestus’ demonstration of metis, or cunning intelligence that I redefine in a tactile register.
Iliad, in one of its first uses, *kairos* is described in relation to a vulnerable bodily space, as it “denotes a vital or lethal place in the body; one that is particularly susceptible to injury and therefore necessitates special protection” (Sipiora 116). These vulnerable, but sensitive bodily parts include “where the collarbone parts the neck and chest” and “on the crown of the head where first hairs of horses grow on the skull” (qtd. in Hawhee 66).114 In Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, another early use of *kairos* accompanies advice against the overloading the axle of a horse-drawn cart, imbuing a tangible weightiness to the temporal and spatial elements of *kairos*. These uses of *kairos* particularly depend on a sensitivity to touch, especially resulting in bodily vulnerabilities synonymous with disability. The adjectival form of *kairos*, *kairios*, is the place ancient archers sought to hit on a bodily target, “not by aiming at flat targets, but rather by aiming at ‘an opening or series of openings’” such as vulnerable gaps in the body’s protective skeleton (Hawhee 66). These bodily forms of *kairos* draw attention to the physical interconnection between multiple bodies in time and space but also reinforce medicalized notions of bodies crippled by vulnerabilities and disabilities. Like the curative valence of *kairos* involved in the doctor’s kairotic intervention into disease, these senses of *kairos* may accurately reflect some of the real material effects and drawbacks of disease and disability, but do not adequately reflect possible rewards, insights or advantages that may accompany the experience of disability.

Clare’s second skin, wrought by the web of lies, stereotypes and patronizations, is riddled with bullets, which, like kairotic arrows and weights, pierce and drag her down, thwarting rhetorical action and composition.

Clare remakes this medicalized notion of *kairos* which rests on bodily vulnerability by using an inventive, dynamic form of *kairos* to reconstruct herself, her skin and her process of discovering arguments as a rhetor. Like many disabled rhetors, Clare experiences difficulty with

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114 Hair follicles are often the places most sensitive to touch on the body.
the canon of invention, and explicitly explores this difficulty to call attention to the inadequacy of the canon for disabled rhetors and to remake it. She explains, “for years I have wanted to write this story, have tried poems, diatribes, theories” (19). Even towards the end of her memoir, she describes her struggle to begin writing, eventually settling into an invention strategy that reaches beneath the skin. She draws on a sense of dynamic, inventive *kairos* that is “radically particular” in its “creativ[ity] in responding to the . . . lack of order in human life” (xii).

Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race . . . everything finally piling into a single human body. To write about any aspect of identity, any aspect of the body, means writing about this entire maze. This I know, but the question remains: Where to start? Maybe with my white skin . . . hands tremoring, traced with veins . . . Or with me in the mirror . . . or possibly with the memory of how my body felt swimming in the river, chinook fingerlings nibbling at my toes. There are a million ways to start, but how do I reach beneath the skin? (123)

Clare asks herself where to start with her invention process, noting the million possible ways, and opts for a kairotic invention that brings together diverse bodies in physical contact and resists medicalized notions of *kairos*. The maze of identity, replete with many bodies and temoring hands, recalls the polymorphic tactility of *metis*, of which *kairos* is a part. Clare’s active verbs of reaching, wrapping, straining, snarling, folding and piling recall the undulating limbs of the metic octopus, but this maze of bodies and identities also calls on many of *kairos*’ tactile elements, further demonstrating the relationship between *metis* and *kairos* and establishing
*kairos* as a valuable rhetorical strategy for disabled rhetors. Clare links her invention process of writing with tactile *kairos* in several ways. She presents one of her ways to start writing in kairotic terms—grasping of rhetorical opportunity—by depicting herself (in her memory) swimming through the water, with fish nibbling at her toes. This tactile relationship adds a dynamic element to traditional valences of *kairos* in archery and weaving, such as those discussed by Eric Charles White:115

In archery, [*kairos*] refers to an opening or ‘opportunity’ or, more precisely, a long tunnel-like aperture through which the archer’s arrow has to pass. Successful passage of a *kairos* requires, therefore, that the archer’s arrow be fired not only accurately but with enough power for penetration. The second meaning of *kairos* traces to the art of weaving. There it is the ‘critical time’ when the weaver must draw the yarn through a gap that momentarily opens in the warp of the cloth being woven. Putting the two meanings together, one might understand *kairos* to refer to a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved. (1987, 13)

The force of *kairos*, in space and time, depends on tactile, tangible penetration of the weaver’s movement through cloth or the archer’s shot through an aperture. The “power for penetration” and the driving “force” through which success is achieved is an action that depends on the archer’s or weaver’s manual touch. Both the archer and weaver derivations of *kairos* call attention to *kairos* as a hands-on skill. *Kairos* physically connects diverse bodies in motion. Rhetorical success employs *kairos* inventively through a physical grasping of a passing instant.

115 These connections to archery and weaving in *kairos* also demonstrate the connections between *metis* and *kairos* (*kairos* being a type of *metis*) because as a previous chapter discusses, *metis* is connected to the handicrafts of weaving, hunting, net and trap making.
This motion of physically seizing or grasping the right moment also draws from the ancient depiction of the god *Kairos* in sculpture, made in the third century BCE. In a hymn accompanying the sculpture, *Kairos* explains that he holds a razor in his right hand “as proof to men I am sharper than any sharp end,” and that he possesses hair on his face but not on his back “for one who encounters me to grasp” from the front (qtd. in Hawhee 73). On the other hand, *Kairos* represents the missing of opportunity “passing by” once it is gone, since with his winged feet and hairlessness “no one can grasp me from behind” (73). Hair follicles, as they are attached to the skin, form the body’s most sensitive areas of touch, drawing attention to the embodied physicality of successful rhetorical opportunities. The god *Kairos* draws particularly on the sense of touch to simultaneously invent and grasp rhetorical opportunity.116

Clare makes herself, her own movement, “a force of *kairos*” in touch with her environment, snaking through mazes of identities. In White’s terms, she is the kairotic arrow or taunt fiber, racing through multiple apertures to penetrate embodiments for rhetorical success. Furthermore, she works against the medicalized meanings of *kairos*, such as the aperture through which an archer’s arrow has to pass through to soft, vulnerable spots on the body by making herself, as a rhetor constructed of many identities and inventing herself in her writing, a formidable force of *kairos*, passing through the water and through different embodiments. She draws on and revises Homer’s notions of *kairos* as place on the body needing special protection by seizing the productive qualities of her tremoring hands and nibbled feet, reaching beneath the skin and pulling out new ways to invent. She draws on and revises Hesiod’s notion of *kairos* as limit or threshold, as it accompanied advice against over-loading the axle of a horse-drawn cart, by piling on aspects of identity—gender, disability, class, abuse and sexuality—onto the body.

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116 Even though *Kairos* is depicted in an able male bodied form and even though he adorned the entrance to the gymnasium, he draws on multi-sensory abilities that transcend simple definitions of abled vs. disabled.
Finally, in addition to using kairotic-tactile strategies to remake the canon of invention, drawing on bodies in-touch as topoi, Clare also yokes the first canon of invention to the last canon of memory, pulling on bodily memories to invent new ways of composing.

Clare’s kairotic invention, by involving multiple bodies in contact, revises medicalized notions of *kairos* and replaces them with notions of dynamic, tactile *kairos* that acknowledge the rhetorical advantages of disability. Later, she repeats her kairotic invention strategy, writing, “my body has never been singular. Disability snarls into gender. Class wraps around race. Sexuality strains against abuse. *This* is how to reach beneath the skin” (137). Clare emphasizes the multiple bodies and identities that shape her invention process, drawing attention to the tactility of composing. In her identities of gender and sexuality, she writes of how her disability is advantageous, suggesting how a body that has never been singular can creatively combine identities and bodies for rhetorical success. Clare invents her body from positioning bodies-as-topos and disability and insight and in-touch, writing authoritatively from this place. “The words *know* and *feel* are slippery in their vagueness,” she suggests, and focuses instead on touching, physicality and warmth (136). Recounting the story of a lover, she remembers her saying, “I like when your hands tremble all over my body. It feels good, like extra touching” (134). Putting multiple bodies in contact recreates identity and invention in rhetoric for Clare and revises medicalized notions of *kairos*. Clare discovers a methodology for invention and reinvention not in the singular, but in multiple, changing bodies. She writes focusing on touch in her last pages, writing, “I want to take the stone between my tremoring hands—trembling with CP, with desire, with the last remnants of fear, trembling because this is how my body moves” and pledging to “enter knowing that the muscled grip of desire is a wild, half-grown horse, ready to bolt but too curious to stay away” (138). Clare enters into rhetoric and invention with a grip that pulls on
dynamic notions of kairos and metis, drawing bodies in connection to revise assumptions that disability precludes rhetorical success.\textsuperscript{117} Clare pulls on memories of herself to catapult her invention, calling attention to a trend among disabled rhetors who blend the canons, often using tactile rhetorics to combine the canons for their needs. Feminist rhetoricians have already begun to recognize that the canons memory and invention are interlinked. Ede et al announce, “We begin our exploration by linking invention, the heart and soul of inquiry, with memory, the very substance of knowledge” (410). As they suggest, invention and memory are simultaneously material, bodily and discursive sites, but disabled rhetors extend this connection to all of the canons, demonstrating particularly how tactile-kairotic rhetorical strategies can remake and connect all the canons.

Many disabled rhetors begin to remake the canon of invention by explicitly refusing accepted models of invention and by calling attention to their difficulties in brainstorming, developing ideas and composing, then proceed to create new arrangements, styles, deliveries and memories. Kenny Fries, for example, writes about how he threw all his first drafts away when attempting to write about disability, Clare wonders where to start, and many disabled rhetors search for available means of persuasion outside of the norm. Nancy Mairs, in her description about the process of writing about disability, provides an example which can form a flexible template through which to investigate how a wider range of disabled rhetors remake the canons by using a tactile sense of inventive kairos to blend the canons, simultaneously combining diversely embodied and minded ways of composing.

\textsuperscript{117} We might especially recall from chapter one Plato’s parable of the two horses here, in which the blind, deaf and crooked horse must be overcome by a steady charioteer who steers him clear of his love vision and sexual desire in the form of touching. Also taking into consideration the animal intelligences and embodiments of metis and the tacit metic strategies of the pilot or helmsman, we see Clare as an unbridled metic-kairotic maker of invention opportunities.
Like disabled rhetors who invent their own ethos, disabled rhetors such as Mairs reject classical models of invention, most of them based on imitation, and reach toward constructing new models of invention. As much as Clare relies on kairotic invention to achieve rhetorical success in her composition, Mairs relies on akairotic invention in order to lay bare the inadequacy of the canons for disabled rhetors and to begin to reconstruct them. Mairs’ remaking begins explicitly noting the difficulty of the invention process, by productively employing akairos, the little-discussed counterpart to kairos, which denotes bad timing or lack of the seizing of opportunity. “I cannot begin to write this book. I’ve made some stabs at it, pried out of my rubbly brain a few pages, almost ‘preliminary,’ from time to time. But mostly I write letters . . . or read material at least tangentially related to my subject, or merely play solitaire on my computer until I try my own patience to the point of despair (3).

Mairs draws attention her body’s resistance to beginning the invention process as stabbings enacted by a “rubbly” brain, as well as excessive procrastination, avoidance behaviors. She also connects these stabs at composing to the literal materialities of writing. When she takes “stabs,” “prying” at writing in her experience, and implicitly invokes the ancient etymological meaning of “to write” as a tactile and transformative experience: to write, “grapho” means to carve, scratch, and cut in Greek. In this tactile way, Mairs implicitly draws connections to ancient associations between kairos and the arts of archery and weaving, both of which stress how timing is tactile in rhetoric and in handicrafts. Mairs’ stabs at writing parallel White’s early antecedents of kairos, which he translates as the right moment or opportune timing, in archery and weaving.
The beginning of a project is always hard, I remind myself—the bigger, the harder—. . .

But something more is dragging at my heels this time. That’s purely a metaphorical cliché, of course. I haven’t walked in years now . . . unless I change the metaphor to ‘dragging at my wheels,’ . . . but the automatic manner in which I came up with a comparison having so little to do with my real situation helps to explain my excessive dawdling. In embarking upon this book about disability, I have committed myself to spend months contemplating issues and experiences that mark mine as an undesirable, perhaps even an unlivable, life. True, no matter what I’m doing I can no longer forget that I have multiple sclerosis, but I can dull my awareness with books or beers or computer games. Writing has the opposite effect. It absorbs my attention utterly. And I don’t want to think about my crippled life. (3-4)

By employing akairos, Mairs breaks several rules of “good” composition in order remake the invention process and the four other canons for the experience of disability. At the outset, she refuses to take a strong, unified and confident “stance,” usually the foundation of standard ethos formation by admitting weakness, writing that she can’t write this book and therefore cannot invent. Mairs revels in the productive messiness of her long-drawn out, akairotic invention process, in which she procrastinates and dawdles more than grasps rhetorical opportunity forcefully. This failure of invention and of kairos, however, frees Mairs up to invent new ways of interacting productively with all of the canons. Her akairotic invention strains against standards for arrangement, as she resists arranging her text in a tight, linear, “state your case and prove it” formula, instead opting for a circular, meandering arrangement for her readers that parallels her own writing process. She purposely breaks rules of correct style, using the metaphor
of dragging her heels incorrectly. Metaphors form the anchor of speech and style, and Mairs uses metaphor here negatively, instead of using one meaning to shed light on something else, she uses the inappropriate metaphor of dragging her heels to call attention to the different bodily-material time and space she inhabits in disability. This slippage denotes how she intervenes in the canon of memory, as she forgets and remembers her disability and its effect on her writing process: she wants to forget about her “crippled life” but she cannot, as evidenced in her self-correction regarding the heels and wheels metaphor. Writing, as she remarks, completely absorbs her, heightening memory, making it impossible to forget about her MS, as the act of writing cognitively and physically is yoked to her disability. In her delivery, Mairs makes the most radical interventions into the canon focused most directly on able and normative rhetorical demonstration. Instead of editing out her akairotic invention, circular arrangement, incorrect style and faulty memory, Mairs delivers her message with these elements purposely left in, in order to resist normalizing and ableist structures of the traditional canons and to revise them.

In a contrasting scene of invention in a different essay, “On Being Crippled,” Mairs directly deals with her crippled life, kairotically seizing an opportunity based on a dynamic sense of *kairos* put in motion by touch and metic shape shifting to spur invention. She balances the *akairos* of her other essay with a kairotic grasping of a new rhetorical situation, one that combines the tactile elements of the disability experience in space and time in productive invention.

The other day I was thinking of writing an essay on being cripple. I was thinking hard in one of the stalls of the women’s room in my office building, as I was shoving my shirt into my jeans and tugging up my zipper. Preoccupied, I flushed, picked up my book bag,
took my cane down from the hook, and unlatched the door. So many movements 
unbalanced me, and as I pulled the door open I fell over backward, landing fully clothed 
on the toilet seat with my legs splayed in front of me: the old beetle-on-its-back routine. 
Saturday afternoon, the building was deserted, I was free to laugh aloud as I wriggled 
back to my feet, my voice bouncing off the yellowish tiles from all directions. Had 
anyone been there with me, I’d have been still and faint and hot with chagrin. I decided 
that it was time to write the essay. (9)

In this introductory paragraph, Mairs describes her cognitive process of invention as not only 
shaped by the visceral body experiences of urinating, opening a door, falling down, and getting 
back up, but as also shaped by the transformative “old-beetle-on-its-back routine,” an experience 
both familiar and unfamiliar to a non-disabled audience and an audience of diverse disabilities. 
Her process of “thinking hard” while in the bathroom shapes her decision to write her essay and 
shapes her invention of her topic, argument, and message. As she delivers her essay, she does not 
cover over her invention process, but instead weaves it into the framing of her argument, which 
consists of providing her audience access to the daily life and overall experience of living with 
multiple sclerosis. Her experience of falling, itself a revision of Hesiod’s meaning of kairos as a 
weighty threshold, shapes her decision of when to write the essay and how to write it. Whereas 
Hesiod’s notion of kairos as added weight that can unbalance and overload a carriage that results 
in the negative effects breaking of an axle and bodily vulnerabilities, Mairs’ falling is generative, 
allowing her to grasp kairos not in spite of bodily vulnerability but because of it.118

118 Recall from the earlier overview of the earliest appearances of kairos how it appears in Hesiod’s Works and 
Days, alongside advice not to overload horse-drawn wagon, thereby causing the axle to break and the goods to spoil. 
This association denotes kairos as a sense of weight (affecting time) in relation to body limits, thresholds and 
vulnerabilities.
As she describes, in a series of laborious clauses, the series of small movements needed to leave the stall, she takes the reader through, in words, the actions that now direct her life in time and space. Most people without a physical disability like MS will notice the series of small, individual movements that accompany the exiting of a stall. Mairs simulates this experience for her readers by appropriating a sophistic-styled clausal parataxis, as she guides them through the usually fluid movements of exiting in a series of small steps.119 All of these movements, unbalancing her, cause her to fall, as she is already distracted by her consuming invention process. Ironically, this fall inspires her invention, and she describes herself in the “old beetle-on-its-back” shape, a shape that causes her to laugh and to eventually write her essay. This beetle shape frees her to laugh, and instead of thinking hard, a strictly cognitive inventive process, she experiences a bodily inventive moment, as her beetle shape provokes her laughter. This laughter frees her up to recognize a main part of her message, as she realizes a disparity of her reactions: alone at the building on a Saturday, she is able to laugh at herself, while if it were during the week, she would have reacted with a different bodily response of stillness and chagrin. In rhetorical terms, this difference typifies the difference between the static notions of kairos based on order and decorum and the dynamic sense of kairos based on lack of order, radical particularity and unique invention. In Mairs’ experience, this difference decides her, organizes her thoughts and propels her invention: she will write an essay “on being a cripple,” and explore the intricacies of crippled life. She realizes her exigency in this kairotically metic-inventive process, as her beetle shape elicits a laugh that makes clear why it is necessary to write: in order to reach out to an audience that otherwise might silence her, cause her to stifle her laugh or shame her. Her exigency is to write to make known her experience to others and her purpose for

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119 As Jarratt has demonstrated, paratactic clauses are a hallmark of sophistic style and usually involve small, short clauses in succession.
her audience is sharpened by her temporarily shape shifting experience that allows her to kairotically grasp invention: it is time to write the essay.

This dynamic, flexible and timely sense of *kairos* executed by Mairs is echoed in current rhetorical theories which draw on the embodied, often tactile, practices of seizing opportunities in ancient sophistic rhetoric. These dynamic expressions of *kairos* invoke *metis* and can support the non-traditional strategies of disabled rhetors. As John Poulakos puts it,

> The rhetor who operates mainly with the awareness of *kairos* responds simultaneously to the fleeting situation at hand, speaks on the spur of the moment, and addresses each occasion in its particularity, its singularity, its uniqueness. In this sense (s)he is both a hunter and a maker of unique opportunities, always ready to address improvisationally and confer meaning on new and emerging situations. (61)

This active, inventive sense of *kairos* in which a rhetor is a hunter and maker of opportunities, draws on ancient associations between kairotic timing and the sense of touch.\(^{120}\) The arrow or yarn’s trajectory, as in the archery and weaving examples that White uses to explore temporal and spatial elements of *kairos*, are echoed in the rhetor’s hunting and making of fleeting situations at hand. Mairs, when she falls on her back, responds and creates a situation improvisationally, making her own unique opportunity to invent her essay. Similarly, Clare, as she writes herself swimming swiftly through water, refigures herself in her writing, starting with a fluid movement to kairotically inspire her beginning and healing in composition. Most importantly, this dynamic sense of *kairos* depends on a flexible, embodied response to changing

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\(^{120}\) Although Poulakos does not explicitly draw on *metis*, we see how the hunting of the fox and the flexible responsiveness of the octopus are important to *kairos*. 
situations. The experience of disability is not explicitly named as a type of kairos that prepares rhetors to be responsive, but the “particularity” of the disability experience can support the sense of improvised, flexible responsiveness that kairos also occasions. Dale Sullivan’s investigations into kairos also blend non-traditional tangible and cognitive elements in its creation. Sullivan explores Gorgianic kairos with the act of breathing in, or respiration, as a “kairos of inspiration” and connects it “with romantic concepts of genius and vitalism or with divine madness” (319). Hawhee draws attention to this sense of kairos as aperture in weaving and archery in this respiratory “commingling of momentary elements” whereby “the rhetor opens him or herself up to the immediate situation” (71).121 In these physical, tactile and tangible elements of the concept and practice of kairos, there are opportunities for appreciating the embodied approaches to invention in rhetorical production. People with disabilities, whose experience of disability often involves multifarious and frequently changing embodiments, model these more flexible and active uses of kairos that can transform the canons. Mairs and Clare both put tactile-kairotic inventive strategies in practice, opening themselves up, to grasp rhetorical situations creatively and spontaneously, making adjustments for the disability experience that transform the canons.

The reinvention of the canon of invention and memory that disabled rhetors such as Clare and Mairs perform with tactile kairos also restructures other canons such as the canons of arrangement, style and delivery. The canon of arrangement, which Aristotle simplifies as stating your case and proving it, is often agonistically argumentative or narrowly genre-driven. Types of arguments are determined by dominant paradigms of logic or genre, both of which can exclude people with disabilities, who use embodied and non-normative logics to make meaning. The disabled often are limited by genres that rely on paradigms of pity or inspiration. People with

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121 In the commingling of elements involves in Gorgias’ kairos, we can see the effect on Empedocles’ theory of pores and porous rhetorics on the body influencing his student.
disabilities resist these paradigms by blending visual and textual genres, depending on embodied and often tactile sense of rhetoric to rearrange arrangement and its position within the rest of the canons, particularly style and delivery. Suzy Becker, in her cross-genre book that includes the use of figures, drawings, charts, graphs and other stylistic features, indicates a trend in disabled rhetors who rearrange style, arrangement and delivery, reinventing the canons for disability. Becker’s discursive and pictorial representations of her experience with brain injury parallel innovations in style that other disabled rhetors are making by blending genres. Grandin, who thinks in pictures, provides appendices of photos and technical diagrams of her agriculture designs and bulleted lists for readers to find additional information. Luke Jackson, for example, an adolescent with Asperger’s syndrome, subtitles his book a user’s guide, and includes figures, charts, drawings, tables and appendices for a diverse audience. Paul and Judy Karasik, a brother and sister who write and draw of the brother’s experience with autism, combine text chapters with graphic, comic chapters.

In their writing, many disabled rhetors demonstrate innovative stylistic patterns that disrupt normative forms of the canon of arrangement. Dawn Prince-Hughes, an editor of a collection of personal essay by university students with autism, describes patterns that bend typical arrangement and stylistic conventions. “It is true that the word choices and sentence structures of autistic writers often make it difficult to follow their thought processes. I believe this is because most people are used to following one ‘logical’ train of through to what amounts to foregone conclusions. Autism spectrum people do not think this way” (xii). One contributor, Darius, writes that because of his “associative thought processes I often have an unusual and original point of view” that “though autistic thinking is generally equated with rigidity and inflexibility I wonder whether this nonlinearity in some aspects of thinking isn’t also a positive
quality” (38-39). Associative thinking can dislodge inflexible systems of logic and present new viewpoints, forming new arrangements of arguments.

In addition, disabled rhetors who use visual and stylistic figures (drawings, diagrams, and other pictorial devices) to rearrange the flow of text, narrative and argument blend the canons of style and arrangement in productive ways that allow for figures in the shape of bodies or language, inserted into text, to reshape rhetoric for their diverse needs. Even though style and rhetorical figures are often derided in rhetorical studies, there exist opportunities within the tradition for extending the range of style, especially for disabled rhetors who mix genres and include visual figures in their rhetoric. They explode the tight linear and logical patterns of traditional arrangement, mixing genres and canons. By employing visual diagrams, pictures and explanations, they cater to readers and rhetors who are visually oriented or whose cognitive impairments necessitate multi-modal literacies. They also use visual figures rhetorically to resist ableist notions of disability. Becker, for example, draws her comic alter-ego, her “imaginary medical superheroine Agatha” in order to help her ask tough questions of her doctors and to more actively participate in her own healthcare. Her illustrated figures intensify her style. These drawings function as powerful stylistic devices, emboldening statements and questions to punctuate and interrogate health care conversations. When Jackson draws himself in an illustration as an adolescent under an umbrella of autism, he makes a visual argument that connects syndromes rather than pits high and lower functioning people against each other. Disabled rhetors connect the canon of invention to the canon of arrangement, as the sophists taught, and imbue each canon with invention. By rearranging argument and narrative with visual figures, disabled rhetors actually draw on ancient but neglected roots of style that argue that figures are epistemological and generative parts of invention, rather than simply decorative or
deceptive tricks of language. Edward Corbett reminds us that classical rhetoricians did not look at rhetorical figures as simply decorative, and that rhetoricians such as Quintilian and Cicero attributed epistemological status to them as well. Cicero used the heading “figures of thought” to classify style, attesting to the inventive elements of the canon. Quintilian related the figures to the appeals, seeing the figures as lending credibility to our arguments, of exciting the emotions, and of winning approval (Corbett 458). Lexis, the Greek word for style, indicates this richer understanding of style’s potential, because it carries the “triple notion of ‘thought’ and ‘word’ (both of these notions contained in the Greek word logos) and ‘speaking’ (legein). The threefold implication of lexis indicates that the Greek rhetoricians conceived of style as that part of rhetoric in which we take the thoughts collected by invention and put them into words for the speaking out in delivery” (Corbett 414). In this rendering, lexis or style is integral to every element of rhetoric. When disabled rhetors draw themselves or the bodies of others into their arguments, they blend all of the canons, imbuing each with invention.

Correctness, clarity and appropriateness are certainly normalizing tenets of style, but figures of speech and stylistic devices also allow for interruption of “normal” word order and denote places where intervention is possible. Figures of thought and speech are quite physical and tactile in their rendering of language, as they call attention to the shape and physical force of different combinations of words on audiences. Periodic sentences, for example, use commas and colons loosely to leave the main idea until the end of the sentence, antistrophes literally “turn about” repeating words, apostrophes “turn away,” metaphors and tropes literally “carry over” and “turn” meaning. Quintilian attests to the wide variety the figures of style afford, as a figure is any form of expression where “we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and

122 Corbett describes this tendency: “It is fair enough to regard figure of speech as the ‘graces of language,’ as the ‘dressing of thought,’ as ‘embellishments,’ for indeed they do ‘decorate our prose and give it ‘style’” (459).
the ordinary” (IX I 4). As Crowley notes, Quintilian “likened the changes in language of meaning brought about by the use of figures to the changes in the shape of the body that came about ‘by sitting, lying down on something or looking back’” (194). Forming language in other than obvious and ordinary ways, in a way that recognizes how changes in bodies can affect adjustments in language, this view of style supports the innovations in style and arrangement that disabled rhetors are currently making. Prince-Hughes, implicitly echoing Cicero and Quintilian, demonstrates that style is clearly epistemological, inventive and generative for rearrangements of rhetoric for non-standard rhetors. Making an argument for the reshaping of style for autistic writers, she writes, “[w]e constantly see divergent possibilities (and at a staggeringly fast pace) and our word selection and sentence structures often reflect this. Also, we tend to punctuate out thinking processes rather than the actual sentences we write” (xii). She links style, or figures of thought, to the invention process of writing. “A comma, for example, is appropriate any time one pauses to think or stops to consider the possibilities of the sentence. Dashes often denote an important separate thought; perhaps seemingly unrelated to the ‘normal’ reader, but intimately connected in the autistic writer’s mind. The thesis may seem to stray hopelessly, several times, only to come together in a poetic way with overwhelming strength at the end” (xii). This nonlinear path of arrangement mirrors the sophists’ paratactic style, and also echoes Cicero and Quintilian’s epistemic and non-standard approaches to style and arrangement. Furthermore, this arrangement facilitates the understanding of the experience of disability as advantageous to rhetorical production.

Rhetors who write with and/or about disability, also restyle messages about disability by mixing style and arrangement to literally drawing different bodies into rhetoric. Becker, for example, demonstrates how different shapes (of writing and in writing) can be seized kairotically
in order to inspire rhetorical reinvention, rearrangements and restyling. Much of Becker’s memoir details how she receives a Bunting fellowship to write a book, but in the wake of her surgery, she experiences challenges such as memory loss, difficulty in word recall and other cognitive impairments. These difficulties increase her anxiety surrounding her ability to speak well, write ably and follow through with her project and results in a profound case of writer’s block. Like Clare, Mairs, Fries and countless other disabled rhetors, she simply cannot start writing. She tells of a particularly long, drawn-out inventive process that only happens in the last pages of her published book, recounting an episode in which she wakes up to find a caterpillar on her head, but mistakes it first for a scorpion and then as an ant. These errors reflect how she still struggles with word recovery and recall after her surgery, but she decides to begin writing anyway. After struggling to find and write the right word, she laments that vacation has not helped her speech, but decides anyway to start writing, combining *akairos* and *kairos* together to grasp a rhetorical situation. The visual figures and diagrams included in her memoir portray her difficulty in writing and speaking with standard, correct forms of language, but also portray her willingness to express herself and make arguments with diverse means of persuasion.

In addition to Agatha, her medical super-heroine, Becker also often draws her dog Mister, whose place in her life and in her writing allows her to ask more tough questions. She draws him during at least three crucial turns in the narrative—when she finds out she receives the Bunting, when she returns home from surgery, and when she questions whether the surgery was really worth it. This textual and visual stylistic arrangement resists pathologization and medicalization of disability, as these figures allow her the means of persuasion to resist curative measures of questionable necessity. In an important follow-up MRI appointment, Becker again draws Mister, scratching his head and saying “?!?” in response to the question she poses about the worth of her
surgery and its affect on her writing, wondering “part of me thinks it would be been better, written better, if I had never had brain surgery” (286). Becker’s question about “better writing,” unanswered by Mister, brings together key questions surrounding disability and rhetoric, again posing the questions that have troubled rhetorical studies since its beginnings: how much can we better our writing and speaking, how much of that is determined or bounded by natural or cultural limits, and how can we find alternative ways of achieving the widest available means of persuasion, despite variations in ability that almost anyone will experience, because of ageing, temporary illness or permanent injury?

Interrogations of invention, arrangement and style that disabled rhetors, who use dynamic senses of *kairos* to blend and reinvent all of the canons, also affect the canons of delivery and memory. Again, despite a tradition that seems normative and ableist, there are opportunities within the tradition for revaluing the distinctive contributions that disabled rhetors make. Cicero, for example, for whom delivery can tip the balance between a mediocre and excellent rhetor, explains that delivery, the “language of the body,” is the part of rhetoric that “penetrates the mind, shapes, molds, turns it,” lending support to the diverse physical and tactile interventions that disabled rhetors make in delivery. The most innovative changes that disabled rhetors make to the canon of delivery are by resisting the editing out difference—different embodiments and cognitive strategies—in their rhetorical production for their audiences. Mairs refuses to edit out her messy invention process from her writing. Clare and Becker likewise candidly retain their difficulties in inventing, arranging and sometimes styling their writing in the work, accomplishing two main objectives: they demonstrate the inadequacy of most of traditional rhetoric for disabled rhetors and they simultaneously revise these canons by offering new ways of adjusting the canons for their needs and abilities. In her collection, Prince Hughes makes the
decision not to edit the essays she solicited from autistic college students. She allows contributors to decide length and content. Even in her own writing, she did not abide by normalized rules of composition, planning, writing, and revising, so often heralded by the process approach. She writes, “I have, uncustomarily, let myself just write as I thought. I did not, for a change, censor or rethink what I put down” (xiii). She refuses to deliver her message according to normalizing standards.

One contributor, Darius, takes Prince Hughes’ refusal to edit a step farther, not only resisting revision, but physically challenging “normal” readers to stretch their minds and bodies to understand an atypically delivered message.

This essay not only explains how my mind works, it also shows how my thought processes work, through the way it is written. I have structured it somewhat (as to make it easier to understand), but not as much as I would for a paper, because I thought it might be more interesting for readers if it showed the original line of thinking.

Polishing the text further would no doubt have made it smoother, the change in subjects less jerky (from an NT point of view). It would also have ironed out many of my autistic thought processes, such as the associative thought processes. On the whole, I think that leaving traces of this autistic thinking process is more interesting than trying to sound completely neurotypical.

I also feel a perverse pleasure in making you work for your information. There is some justice in the fact that you will have to adapt to my idiosyncrasies for a change, instead of me having to spend a lot of energy trying to figure out what you are about. Are you feeling tired and somewhat confused and do you have the disconcerting feeling that you
have missed something, but do not know what and where? If you do, that may actually be the most valuable effect of this essay on you. It will make you appreciate the energy we have to put into tuning in to you. (41-41)

In this excerpt, Darius accomplishes several rhetorical strategies characteristic of a disabled rhetor reshaping rhetoric to better suit his needs. He contributes to an understanding of style as more than simply clarity or decoration and more closely linked to the figures of thought and cognitive elements suggested by Cicero and Quintilian. In this way, he recovers some of the original, generative and epistemological possibilities of style. His “jerky” style is indicative of this “autistic thought processes.” Also, he resists traditional rhetoric’s focus on polishing and perfecting a text in its delivery, both models that Cicero and Quintilian espouse, deciding revision often result in normalizing, and that polishing would mean normalizing his autistic thinking. Finally, Darius also uses a rhetoric of figurative and literal touch in order to better reach his audience. Darius specifically addresses his audience, including their feelings, which I have established as an important component of touch, regarding a non-normative reading experience. He wants his neurotypical audience to feel tired, confused and disconcerted in their reading experience of an autistic writer. He feels pleasure in the taxing bodily experience this reading produces for his audience; he wants to put them in his shoes, model for them his experience, and put his experience directly into contact with his. He reaches into his audience’s bodily and cognitive experiences as he models tiredness and confusion for them.

Disabled rhetors who resist a type of revision in their delivery that would normalize them also reshape the final canon of memory for their purposes, further demonstrating how they blend all of the canons to suit their needs. Claudia Osborn, a doctor who suffered a traumatic brain injury and sustained permanent brain damage, exhibits some of the challenges and redefinitions
offered by rhetors with non-normative memories. Her memoir of the time preceding her brain injury, her accident and her rehabilitation challenges even the most experimental forms of memoir writing, as her brain injury results in numerous problems with memory. In her author’s note, in her very first sentences addressed to her readers, she explains,

It is a daunting task for me to make my thoughts clear. My difficulty in telling this story was compounded by the deficits in my memory, language, and organizational skills. I have no memory of being injured and only a dim recollection of the nine months preceding my rehabilitation in New York. To compensate, I relied upon the memories of those close to me, copious notes from my journals, video- and audiotapes, and the assistance of my mother, who organized boxes of my papers and edited my manuscript.

Her challenges in memory, language and organization demonstrate some of the crucial overlaps between the canons. Osborn’s deficits with language necessarily include challenges to her organization skills, thereby affecting her arrangement of the material she selects. Furthermore, Osborn, like many other of the disabled rhetors I have examined, engages those around her in strategies of connection and collaboration, and works with friends, co-workers and her family in order to help reconstruct her experience. In addition to relying on the memories of others, she also employs external, technological aids such as tape recorders and journals.

Unlike Darius, Osborn seems to want to make the stylistic differences her disability exacts on her writing style less taxing on her readers, but overall she retains similar goals of reaching out to her readers to challenge them to adjust normalizing expectations regarding
rhetorical achievement. Describing the journal she kept while still in rehab, she explains that “[s]ome journal entries quoted in the book have been edited by me for clarity. My purpose is to candidly portray what it is to live with a head injury, not to require you to decipher my language at that time” (xi). Post rehab, Osborn is better able to clean up her style, correcting word usage, but her arrangement and memory still reflect her injury experience. In fact, this tension forms the overarching narrative of the book, as Osborn learns to live with the fact that she will never attain all of the capacities she possessed before her injury, and will not be able to return to her practice as a doctor. Although her narrative in rehab shows her progress, she resists an overcoming narrative because Osborn does not fully recover. She transforms. Like Clare, Mairs and Becker, she does not wait for the perfect moment when she is “cured” in order to compose. Instead, she invents her own kairotic grasping of the rhetorical situation, adjusting notions of ability, normalcy and rehabilitation to suit her needs. In a speech she delivers to her rehab class and community, she explains her transformation with an art analogy, comparing her recovery to a vignette of her experience as a child when she breaks a vase and attempts to tape it back together.

Rehab has shown me there is a second approach to shattered objects—whether a vase or a sense of self. It is to construct a new image rather than to patch the old one. I do not mean from scratch, but even so, it is a formidable task. The new image would incorporate much of the old sense of self. One would not discard any valuable qualities and personality characteristics that are still available; that is, not lost under a chair. The end result will certainly not be identical to the original, but there will be lots of similarity. It might be
beautiful. It will definitely be functional. Since I am rebuilding, I might intentionally alter the pattern. (201)

Like many of the ancient rhetoricians I have examined, such as Empedocles, Cicero and Quintilian, Osborn compares her self, her development and her change with an artisanal analogy, focusing on the malleability of patterns and models and using a sense of tactile physicality to illustrate her transformation and her development as a writer. Most notably, she recognizes that her disability has resulted in crack of her previous mold that allows her to realize different strengths, abilities and interests. Writing and painting are new talents that Osborn develops after her brain injury. This new sense of self allows her to break out of her previous mold and form a new norm for herself and her measure of personal excellence, *arête*. “I began to value the fledgling parts of the new me. I learned to use a new yardstick in an old world while others continued to measure my performance against their memory of me and weigh their losses” (221). Osborn makes new memories and new norms by adjusting her expectations, and refashioning her expectations for herself. In Empedoclean and Gorgianic fashion, she uses rhetoric to heal, explaining, “In this last year, my greatest intellectual pleasure and sense of achievement had come from writing and painting. Writing, especially, was satisfying. It allowed me clear and orderly communication, a chance for the new me to be known by Joan, my family, and friends; to feel understood; to bridge the emotional chasm between myself and others. I wondered if writing would help fill the gaping hole left by my loss of the practice of medicine” (214). Although Osborn does regain achieve the level of competence needed to practice medicine, she does seem able to use writing to fill part of that void. Her writing acts as Empedocles and Gorgias imagined
rhetoric, theorized as effluences that moved through channels of the skin, as she writes to fill
gaping holes in her life.

Disabled rhetors such as Tollifson, Clare, Mairs, Becker, Darius and Osborn mix and
blend the canons, often using a dynamic and tactile sense of *kairos*, in order to reinvent all the
canons for their needs and contributions. Their experiences with disability prepare them to create
rhetorical action improvisationally and dynamically within a set of unfolding and changing
circumstances. They both draw on and revise notions of *kairos* to stretch the limits of the
traditional canons and to remake them. They offer models for exploring the limits of the canons
for all rhetors. These models contribute towards revising rhetoric for the diverse needs and
abilities of all rhetors, an opportunity I turn to in the conclusion.
Conclusion: Rhetoric Reshaped

Rhetoric has usually demonstrated itself to be a flexible art, able to respond to the needs of a changing society, often by including attention to gender, race, class and other modes of difference. Despite this recent attention to difference, the experience of disability has yet to be fully studied in rhetoric and composition, leaving disabled rhetors without an accessible tradition or current composition strategies. The emerging field of disability studies has interrogated and exploded any sharp distinctions drawn between normal and abnormal, as well as between disabled and abled bodies, transformations to which our discipline must formulate responses. This response must hold in tension the social construction of meaning about disability with the real material differences that accompany disability. “A Rhetoric of Touch” works towards attending to disability in rhetorical studies. While, on the one hand that in the dominant tradition rhetorical strategies and rhetorical bodies have been idealized, normalized and limited, on the other hand, the sophistic tradition, when placed in contact with contemporary disabled rhetors’ writing, offers revisions for valuing diverse embodiments and multi-sensory rhetorical strategies.

I have explored the sense of touch as a rhetorical strategy among disabled rhetors to redefine key terms, including logos, metis and kairos, in the effort to reshape rhetorical studies, including the appeals and canons. By way of tying together and extending this project, I turn towards a specific model of composition, called rhetoric reshaped, tailored for disabled rhetors and that draws on the redefinitions in the previous chapters. In addition to its applicability to disabled rhetors, this model is also a flexible template for all rhetors who draw on multi-sensory and multi-modal rhetorical strategies to compose with emerging technologies, multi-mediated contexts and collaborations with others.
From Rhetorical Situations to Rhetorical Reshapings for a Rhetoric of Touch

As I have suggested, traditional and even most contemporary rhetorical theories fail to account for and value the contributions of rhetors with disabilities, especially those who rely on touch such as with assistive technologies, human aids in communication and assistance animals. The rhetorical triangle, for example, has long been deployed as a useful heuristic and as a starting point for understanding relationships between sender, receiver, and text, or between speaker/writer, audience/reader and message, but it has often been critiqued for its simplifying tendencies. Rhetorical situations also promote limited understandings of how rhetoric can circulate among diverse bodies. Lloyd F. Bitzer’s foundational essay, for example, on the rhetorical situation has been admired and critiqued for its framing of rhetoric, at once a theoretical-pedagogical tool that invites expansions of rhetoric and limitations of it. Bitzer defines the rhetorical situation as a “natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance” (1, 5). Bitzer’s definition especially raises several questions for disabled rhetors—what is a “natural” context of people, events, objects and relations and does this include connections between people and other bodies in contexts of assistance? What if “utterance” isn’t possible? What other forms of communication arise? What kinds of situations invite utterances and how do we identify those situations that might not?

Bitzer identifies three constituents of rhetorical situations—exigence, audience and constraints—but defines each in ableist and limiting terms, thereby discouraging and excluding rhetorical participation from people with disabilities. “Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. . . Further, an exigence which can be modified only by means other than discourse

123 Triangular models of communication or rhetorical situations are based on Aristotle’s triad of appeals: ethos, pathos and logos.
is not rhetorical” (6-7). In this construction of exigence, rhetoric is subjected to the same medicalizing that disabled bodies experience. Rhetorical situations are pathologized as “defects” that need to be corrected in Bitzer’s definition. The tropes of rhetoric as disability and rhetoric as cure co-circulate, as the precipitation of rhetoric is constructed as a “defect,” an “imperfection,” and an abnormality. The modification that Bitzer envisions is a normalizing attempt to fix a situation to make it what it “should be.” Furthermore, Bitzer limits the types of communication that can respond to exigence by deeming exigencies that can be changed “only by means other than discourse” as arhetorical. By limiting rhetorical means only to discourse, Bitzer ignores how a wide range of other rhetorical strategies, including touch, can impact situations, rhetors and audiences. As I have demonstrated with examples from rhetors such as Grandin, Prince-Hughes, Mairs, Clair and others, touch between and among bodies often enables and produces rhetoric in meaningful ways.

Bitzer’s second constituent, of audience, fulfills ableist assumptions as well, as audiences are normalized and regulated. “It is clear that a rhetorical audience must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers: properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (8). Bitzer attempts to excise the “mere” bodies of hearers and readers and only includes those powerful enough to transcend the deficiencies of their bodies and their means of receiving communication in order to mediate change. Audiences must be “capable,” or able. Furthermore, Bitzer’s third ingredient for rhetorical situations, constraints, relies mainly on Aristotle’s artistic and inartistic proofs, including ethos, pathos and logos, folding in the limits on the appeals I examined in chapter four. These “constraints” function exactly as they are termed, as Bitzer summarizes his definition of rhetorical situation: “These three constituents—exigence, audience,
constraints—comprise everything relevant in an rhetorical situation. When the orator, invited by situation, enters it and creates and presents discourse, then both he and his speech are additional constituents” (8). Bitzer’s rhetorical situation includes almost as much as it excludes.124 “Everything relevant” does not include incapable audiences and excludes “incapable” speakers even more fully. The impetus for rhetoric rests on correcting a “defect” and fixing an imperfection, making an implicit argument that rhetoric will not tolerate a speaker who embodies any “defects.” From a disability studies perspective, Bitzer’s definition and identification of the rhetorical situation depends on ableist, normalizing and regulatory systems of exclusion.

Recent challenges to the limits of the rhetorical situation begin to include more rhetors, but still stop short of including disabled rhetors or rhetors that draw from non-normative strategies. In a challenge to Bitzer’s reliance on the situation in order to produce rhetoric, Richard Vatz attempts to shift the emphasis away from situations and towards the speaker. Vatz focuses on the “phenomenological perspective of the speaker” and how that speaker’s “sifting and choosing” and “translation of chosen information” structures rhetorical choices (156-157). It might seem there is room for disabled rhetors and speakers in Vatz’s vision of rhetoric, which highlights the different positionalities of speakers, but Vatz’s rhetorical theory does not allow for relationships between and among rhetors, and mainly focuses on a single, able rhetor constructing communication.

The recent rhetorical situations re-envisioned by Barbara Biesecker contribute to a reshaping of rhetorical theories to better accommodate disabled rhetors. Biesecker, for example, uses the deconstructive concept of differance in order to rethink the rhetorical situation. She

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124 Through a critical disability studies perspective, we might augment Vatz’s theory of the rhetorical situation as controlled by the speaker with the additional contributions from facilitators in communication, keeping in mind that a phenomenological approach, especially one focused on bodily experiences between and among bodies, affects rhetoric significantly.
critiques an essentialist theory of the subject that underlies even “new” rhetorics that “continue to operate under the assumption that a logic of influence structures the relations between the constituent elements in any particular rhetorical situation” (110). Both Vatz and Bitzer “hold firmly to a conception of the human being that preserves an essence at the core of the individual that is coherent, stable, and which makes the human being what it is” (123). This critique is important for disabled rhetors who make meaning in connection and collaboration with other bodies, in unstable but generative contexts.

To argue against the limited notion of the human of a single, coherent and implicitly able body, Biesecker uses Derridean philosophy that is particularly useful for a rhetoric of touch. Important to Biesecker’s rethinking of rhetoric is Derrida’s graphic of difference: “it is the white, what we usually take to be empty space between . . . that gives rise to the text . . . it is in the middle or the suspense of two previously unjoined texts that meaning can be said to have been made. . . Difference is deliberately performed as the fold, where the border between inside . . . and outside” (118-119). This textual fold provides a suitably unstable but generative context for the “potential for the displacement and condensation of . . . provisional human identities” (112). Biesecker’s advice “that meaning emerges as nothing more than a tissue of differences . . . should not be taken as a disabling discovery” is particularly important for disability studies, especially for disabled rhetors who reach beyond texts and discover enabling folds, border, slips and middle spaces between and among bodies that rely on provisional human identities (119).125 Derrida’s focus on the materiality of this space in between texts, a move that Biesecker uses to link audiences and speakers, is also an enabling discovery for disabled rhetors who use touch in their rhetorical production. Instead of imagining the space in-between as just “white” or a non-

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125 Biesecker’s use of “disabling” is ironic in this context, but instructive. Biesecker seeks to reassign meaning—meaning produced by tissues of difference is an enabling discovery.
somatic “fold” of texts, it can be adjusted to refer to the spaces of connection made between and among multiple bodies, and open up difference and differance to a variety of diverse rhetors who use physical contact for communication.

**Rhetoric Reshaped**

Despite rhetoric’s long disengagement with the sense of touch, our investigation into the sophists’ use of the senses and current disabled rhetors’ use of touch demonstrates exigence and support for a theory of rhetoric and composition attentive to touch. To create rhetoric theory and a composition practice for touch, I draw on reformulations of the ancient sophistic concepts of *logos, metis* and *kairos* for and by disabled rhetors to offer a new rhetorical theory and model for disabled and diverse rhetors.

This model of rhetoric reshaped is sketched in figure 1 below. The model illustrates the traditional rhetorical triangle plus other rhetorical triangles which contain alterations from previous chapters’ redefinitions of *logos, metis* and *kairos*. The two triangles, placed in physical contact, connect at their apex, any angle, or along their sides, to promote flexibility and malleability. Two intersecting rhetorical triangles form the basic pattern for a rhetoric of touch, in the shape of an hourglass, but can be inverted along their sides to form a diamond. Like the concepts it adds to rhetoric, rhetoric reshaped can be shaped by the diverse rhetoric bodies that employ it, extending the possibilities and means of persuasion for rhetoric and rhetorical bodies. A cognitively disabled rhetor, for example, may decide to depend more heavily on appeals of *ethos* than *logos* and may use the rhetorical diamond as a model for intensifying *ethos* appeals.
Figure 1: Rhetorical Reshapings for a Rhetoric of Touch

Redefinitions for Rhetoric Reshaped

**Multi logoi**: many arguments; an understanding of words, arguments, messages or speech as diversely shaped as the bodies that form them.

**Metis**: tactile intelligence for shape shifting and metamorphosis in unstable contexts.

**Kairos**: tactile timing for invention that blends other canons.

**Peras Exigence**: rhetorical reshapings occur at multiple paths/points of exigence that value associations between diverse embodiments, especially disability, and discourse.

Although I want to resist strict one-to-one mappings between the rhetorical triangle and rhetoric reshaped, our redefined notion of multi *logoi* significantly extends limited definitions of *logos*, as I have demonstrated in chapter three with the recovery of Empedocles’ tactile *logoi* and the work of disabled rhetors such as Nancy Mairs, Kenny Fries, Cheryl Marie Wade and others.
Also, our redefined practice of *metis* works especially well to enrich *ethos*, as I have suggested in chapter four with the examples of disabled rhetors such as Joan Tollifson, Stephen Kuusisto, and Harriet McBryde Johnson, among others. These appeals of *metis-ethos* also transform appeals of *pathos* and *logos*. Redefinitions of *kairos* work to extend the canon of invention, as I have suggested in chapter five with the examples of Eli Clare, Suzy Becker, and Darius (the college student who only provides his first name). In addition to these affinities, however, each redefined term also enriches each of the appeals and each of the canons. Our redefinitions of *kairos*, for example, also significantly extend the appeal of *pathos*, demonstrating the flexibility of this model for disabled rhetors. To conclude, I offer a short reading through the lens of rhetoric reshaped, to show how this theory flexibly supports and values the contributions of disabled rhetors. I finish by exploring implications of this theory in composition pedagogy.

Journalist John Hockenberry, who typically uses a wheelchair, describes an experience covering the first Gulf War that illuminates the flexibility of rhetoric reshaped. In “Walking with the Kurds,” he relates his journey on horseback and on the backs of donkeys across the mountains separating Iraq and Turkey in the aftermath of the war. Although Hockenberry does not explicitly use sophistic concepts such as *metis*, *kairos* and multi *logoi*, our redefinitions of these terms in previous chapters and our theory of rhetoric reshaped allow us to read his narrative through this lens, demonstrating the flexibility of these concepts for rhetors and audiences.

In constructing his *ethos*, Hockenberry implicitly recalls Hephaestus’ *metis*—particularly Hephaestus’ forging of a rudimentary wheelchair and his use of a donkey for transportation, as pictured in many ancient paintings, which illustrate the shape-shifting, transformative, and tactile elements of *metis*. Similarly, Hockenberry negotiates between his the use of his wheelchair and the assistance of horses and donkeys to interact flexibly with the changing rhetorical situation of
his interviews. This metic ethos is situated in a shifting, uncertain context—both the rocky
terrain that the refugees cover and the overall unstable political situation. Hockenberry is able to
shape-shift, switching between moving over time and space in a wheelchair to a much different
journey on the back of a donkey, and then returning to his wheelchair at different points
throughout his interviews.

Each of Hockenberry’s different metic embodiments affects his appeals and his
composition process, especially invention, but also kairos. His opening lines describing his trip
atop a donkey introduce his metic ethos. “There were legs below. Stilts of bone and fur picking
around mud and easing up the side of a mountain near the Turkish border with Iraq. Two other
legs slapped the sides of the donkey at each step like denim-lined saddlebags. They contained my
own leg and hip bones, long the passengers of my body’s journeys, and for just as long a theme
of my mind’s wanderings” (22). Time and space take on new shapes in Hockenberry’s journey,
demonstrating how metis also affects the time, space, and bodily valences of kairos. Attempting
to describe the sensation of this strange experience, he again uses terms that connect kairos and
metis:

Neither the heroic foot-borne relief efforts, anticipation of the horrors ahead, nor the
brilliance of the scenery around me struck home as much as the rhythm of the donkey’s
forelegs beneath my hips. It was walking, that feeling of groping and climbing and
floating on stilts that I had not felt for fifteen years. It was a feeling no wheelchair could
convey. I had long ago grown to love my own wheels and their special physical grace,
and so this clumsy walk was not something I missed until the sensation came rushing
back through my body from the shoulders of a donkey. (23)
Shared sensation and the transference of feeling connect Hockenberry with his audience, including his immediate audience and his audience of readers. The different rhythms of space and time, combined with the concatenation of human and animal sensation, produce a rhetorical effect that connects many bodies and minds not only in multiple shapes, but in time and space. Hockenberry remarks on how these sensations affect his rhetorical situation, implicitly negotiating between *kairos* and *metis*. “I had often thought of riding a donkey in the mountains of western America as recreation but had never found the time to orchestrate such a break in space and time. As a vacation it had seemed like a lot of bother, but here, for the sake of a story, the impulse to toss my own wheelchair to the wind was as natural as carrying a notebook is to other journalists” (26). When Hockenberry encounters a crowd of refugees, some of whom are injured, his unique positioning in space and time, atop and then dismounted from a donkey, delimits his rhetorical situation, opening him up to connecting with his audience in productive ways. He describes a man with a “gray-skinned companion on his back . . . [who] had an ugly blackened bandage around his waist, and one of his legs was merely a stump. . . The man carrying him looked at me with authority, pointed to his wounded friend, and said: “There is danger here. He cannot walk . . . we have here many who cannot walk. We have enough,” he said with muted anger. “Why are you here?”(27).

Although the refugee’s question is first asked in anger, this rhetorical situation develops into an example of rhetoric reshaped as the encounter continues because Hockenberry’s metic *kairos* enables him to flexibly respond to a changing context. Hockenberry narrates how his physical disability enables his audience to open up to him. “I got down off the donkey, sat on the
ground, and assembled my tape recorder and microphone. The Kurdish refugees wanted to know why I couldn’t walk and if the Iraqis had shot me. Gradually they began to talk” (27).

“I am a teacher,” said one. “I am an engineer,” said another. . . . A large man stepped up and grabbed my microphone. . . . “Why is Saddam alive and we are dead? What is for American democracy? Bush is speaking of freedom and here we are free? You see us. They send you to us. You, who cannot stand? You are American, what is America now? Why are you here? . . . To him my presence was an unsightly metaphor of America itself: able to arrive but unable to stand . . . These were the questions. And so they remain. (27-28)

Hockenberry’s disability, especially his ability to negotiate between wheelchair and horseback, encourages his audience to identify with him and against him, allowing for rhetorical situations to reshape, responding to an unstable, changing and volatile environment. He reflects, “On a donkey among Kurds at the end of the dreadful back-lot-surgical abortion of a war, the paths of truth and physical independence seemed to diverge. I had no good answer for the Kurdish man who insisted that there were already too many people who could not walk” (35). Hockenberry’s comparison between paths of truth and paths of physical independence implicitly recall ancient associations between metis, disability and knowledge-making. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle explains that that a word associated with path, “peras . . . has the same meaning as tekmar . . . namely that of sign, indication, guide-mark” (qtd. in Detienne and Vernant 228). Furthermore, in a related semantic context, “poros . . . belongs to the semantic family of perao, to cross, mean[ing] the strategy or expedient invented by metis so as to open up a path” (288). Also related to this context of language and knowledge-making strategies is an association with disability. “In the
form of *peras* the same word is used in medical terminology to refer to the end of a bandage or piece of material which surrounds or protects a limb” (290). The variegated ancient Greek meaning of the bond and the circle, also derived from the word *peirar*, has been used by Detienne and Vernant to illuminate how *metis* works in an unsure world of changing and unstable environments.¹²⁶ *Peirar* and the adjective *apeiron* mean both “binding” and “circularity” as in the circular chairs that Hephaestus forges, revealing connotations of limitlessness (circles) and limits (bonds). The circles drawn around the models of rhetoric reshaped invite this productive association between disability and discourse, finding exigence at multiple points.

Ancient medicine and ancient language provide us with synonyms in the forms of *peras* and *peirata*: language is marked, shaped, bound and constructed just as our bodies, and their vulnerabilities are marked, shaped, bound and constructed. There are limits as well as new paths towards knowledge in this co-constitutive relationship. This ancient analogy and shared etymological meaning operates in our rhetorical reshapings to remind us that both bodies and communication interact to open up and close off certain types of knowledges. Communication marks bodies and bodies mark communication. The double meanings of new paths and circular bonds, denoted in the semantic field, reminds us that finding or taking one way necessarily means a choice not to take another direction, use a different turn of phrase or create a different rhetorical meaning.

Keeping in mind the paths, limits and bindings of knowledge that are opened up and guided different bodily knowledges, including disability, Hockenberry’s experience with the Kurdish refugees demonstrates the flexibility of rhetoric reshaped. Via the donkey, Hockenberry

¹²⁶ When Odysseus has himself bound to the mast of a ship, in the episode of the Sirens, his bonds are referred to as “peirata.”
relates well to his audience, but his disability, signified by the wheelchair, and its symbolic association with US occupation, enables more nuanced social, political, and cultural connections among him, his interviewees and his readers. The interviewed become the interviewers in Hockenberry’s experience, a productive reversal of a rhetorical situation, reshaped because of his disability. He also discovers even more about himself. “Holding on to the flimsy saddle and feeling each donkey step in my back and in my cramped and throbbing fingers, I could see that my entire existence had become a mission of never saying no to the physical challenges the world presented to a wheelchair . . . In Kurdistan I discovered that the world is a much larger place than can be filled by the mission of one man and his wheelchair” (33). In this way, via a metic-kairotic ethos atop a donkey and in a wheelchair, Hockenberry revises one of the most pervasive and damaging pathos appeals of the disability experience: he rescripts the super crip and reconnects to a larger world.

Pedagogically, a theory of rhetoric reshaped encourages composition practices such as the one that Hockenberry and other disabled rhetors illustrate. In general terms, composition studies and pedagogies have been interested in talking about rhetorical situations, classroom experiences, and compositional processes as “contact zones,” or places of intersection or collaboration, but have neglected the effects of physical proximities, including distance, and actual contact and between communicating bodies. At the same time, composition pedagogy models, even recent revisions, perpetuate normalized composition processes for students, demonstrating the legacy of the rhetorical bodies fashioned by Cicero and Quintilian.127 Current-traditional rhetoric, cognitive, process pedagogy and even social epistemic trends in rhetoric and composition are bound up in the norm, as each tends to group rhetors and students into tracts,

127 In fact, the discipline of composition as we know it was founded in a context of remediation and normalization, over a century ago, by faculty at Harvard who complained about the deficiencies in their students’ writing.
models and narrow realizations of certain rhetorical strategies. Cognitive based models, for example, do not only exclude anyone with a cognitive disability, but also model a narrow concept of what cognitive is and often ignoring embodied ways of composing. Even seemingly more flexible models of composition and rhetoric, such as process pedagogy and expressivist models, propagate narrow definitions of rhetors and validate limited ranges of rhetorical strategies. Expressivist models, especially neo-Platonic ones, advocate the singular, independent voice of a rhetor who has discovered an inner truth alone. Process pedagogy, too, advocates stages of the writing process by which ideas are revised, fixed and polished of errors, ironically focusing on a product as much as a process. Writing centers designed in the clinical model evince numerous similarities with the rehabilitative and medical models of disability, seeking to fix and cure writing of abnormalities and writers of aberration. Although editing and revising is part of any rhetorical and composition process, these models, when viewed in connection to the normative foundations of rhetoric and composition, persist in upholding norms that only validate some composing strategies over others.

While rhetoric and composition has relied on norms to promote a variety of models of education, disability studies scholars, as I have explored in the previous chapters, have begun to unravel this fixation on the norm. Disabled rhetors, in particular, advance this effort by offering alternative strategies based on the sense of touch that break out of norms. Rhetoric reshaped attempts to clarify these diverse tactile rhetorical strategies and to offer a flexible model for other rhetors. Rhetoric reshaped, in theory and pedagogical practice, redresses a historical marginalization of disability in rhetorical studies and also responds to rising numbers of disabled rhetors in classrooms. Since the diverse multi-modal and multi-sensory composing strategies that new medias and technologies demand are oftentimes a similar nexus of strategies that disabled
rhetors use—embodied tacit, visual, and above all, flexible—rhetoric reshaped also looks forward to the future of rhetoric and composition studies. This future necessarily includes disabled rhetors as much as it includes rhetors of a diverse spectrum of abilities.
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Vita

Shannon Walters grew up and went to school in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, where she decided early on that she wanted to pursue studies of English. She attended Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, majoring in English and minoring in Anthropology. She participated in Junior Year Abroad program at University College London and traveled through Europe. She wrote her honors undergraduate thesis on women writers with breast cancer who use metaphors to direct their own healthcare. After graduating from Rutgers in 2001, she took a year to work at a non-profit, travel through Asia, South East Asia and Italy, and decide what to study in graduate school. Her interest in illness writing led her to the disability rights movement and the field of disability studies. Her interest in writing led her to rhetoric and composition.

She began studying English with a specialization in rhetoric and composition and disability studies at Penn State University in 2002. In 2004, she received her Master’s Degree. While pursuing the Ph D, she decided to participate in the dual degree program with Women’s Studies. She also enriched this experience by serving as Composition Assistant, Rhetoric and Composition Representative for the English Graduate Organization, and officer for the Women’s Studies Graduate Organization. Her studies were enriched by the Visualizing Animals, Science Studies, Public Service Media and Disability Studies Reading Groups. In 2006-2007, she participated in the Rock Ethics Institute Dissertation Group, presenting her work at the Graduate Exhibition and winning first place. An award enabled her to spend the summer of 2007 in Washington, DC, revising. She defended her dissertation in December 2008, graduates in May 2008 and will join the faculty at Clemson University in August 2008.