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RESISTING ERASURE

Reading (Dis)Ability and Race in Speculative Media

Sami Schalk

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in representations of marginalized people in speculative media, an umbrella term for non-realist media including science fiction, fantasy, magical realism, alternative histories, ghost stories and horror. Historically, however, it has not been easy to find representations of racialized and/or disabled people in the genre, especially prior to the feminist and civil rights movements. In part, this is due to the fact that speculative media is typically set in futuristic, alternative or ideal worlds where the concerns and limits of the realist human bodymind¹ are considered no longer relevant. In reading race and (dis)ability in speculative media, therefore, there are two major issues of erasure to address: first, the erasure of race and (dis)ability as social vectors of power, particularly via the absence of racialized and disabled characters; and second, the erasure of race and (dis)ability as analytics in critical interpretations of speculative media. By resisting erasure, scholars, writers, readers and fans of speculative media can be able to better incorporate, explore and understand the multiple intersecting and overlapping ways race and (dis)ability appear in and impact the creation and critical reception of speculative media representations.

I use the term *(dis)ability* in the above paragraph to reference the overarching social system of power and privilege that benefits some bodyminds considered to have all or most socially expected abilities (the able-bodied/minded, non-disabled, etc.), while marginalizing and oppressing other bodyminds considered to lack key socially expected abilities (the disabled, impaired, etc.). I use the term (dis)ability because unlike race, which references a number of socially constructed racial categories, both privileged and oppressed (white/Caucasian, black/African American, Latino/a, Asian, Native American/indigenous, etc.), disability without the parenthetical marker merely references disability and impairment. Since there is no English language umbrella term in regard to disability and ability that might serve as an equivalent for sociopolitical terms like race, gender, class or sexuality, which each include several privileged and marginalized group labels, I use (dis)ability when referencing the larger social system and I use disability or ability individually when referencing those specific parts of the (dis)ability system. Other disability studies scholars use disability/ability or dis/ability to a similar effect.

When it comes to reading speculative media, it is particularly important to have language to discuss not just disability, but also ability (including hyperability or “powers”) since much speculative media represents humans or other sentient beings, such as aliens, vampires, mutants and superhumans, who are capable of feats considered impossible in the realist world. Furthermore, (dis)ability as a social system may be different in non-realist contexts where the hierarchies of

bodyminds—that is, the expectation, valuation and treatment of abilities, appearances and behaviors—are not the same as what exists in contemporary realist cultures. For example, in the Harry Potter series fantasy books and films where wizards exist, would those without the ability to access and use magic be considered disabled? Certainly the series depicts, at the very least, prejudice against so-called “muggles” and those born to muggle families. In worlds where different abilities and beings exist, it is likely that different hierarchies and oppressions will also operate. It is therefore useful to have language to address the role of disability and ability within these new hierarchies even when disability and ability might have varied meanings in different speculative media settings.

Many critical race scholars and, more recently, several disability studies scholars have critiqued speculative media for its failure to critically engage race and (dis)ability as part of its non-realist worlds.² In particular, speculative media has a history of leaving out racialized and disabled characters under the assumption that in the future and in other non-realist worlds, such as utopias, the categories of race and (dis)ability as we know them no longer matter because racism and ableism do not exist.³ Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin write that “because of their orientation toward the future, science fiction writers frequently assumed that America’s major problem in this area—black/white relations—would improve or even wither away.”⁴ A similar approach exists in speculative media regarding disability via the assumption that in future or alternative worlds, technology will advance to a point where disability can be either completely prevented at birth or always cured after its occurrence. By representing worlds where racism and ableism do not exist—because race and (dis)ability as social categories no longer exist—speculative media not only, as Mark Bould argues, “avoids confronting the structures of [these oppressions] ... and its own complicity in them,” but also tends to exclude people of color, disabled people and disabled people of color as full, complex characters.⁵ This erasure approach to issues of power, privilege and oppression, De Witt Kilgore argues, “enshrines white [non-disabled, heterosexual] masculinity, unmarked or troubled by culture ... as the norm to which all ‘difference’ must assimilate.”⁶

The lack of characters of color in speculative media has been a concern for several major fan websites including the Black Science Fiction Society (blacksciencefictionsociety.com) and Nerds or Color (thenerdsofcolor.org). While racial diversity is still lacking in many ways, there has been significant and notable change in the genre in the past 50 years—particularly in speculative fictional literature. The same cannot be said—or at least not to the same extent—for disability. While the speculative media fan site, Fangs for the Fantasy (www.fangsforthefantasy.com), does occasionally include critiques of the representation of disability in speculative media, particularly the appearance of supercrips,⁷ there are only a few speculative media fan and artist communities that seem to regularly include disability as part of their vision of diversity, most notably WisCon, the annual feminist science fiction convention, which featured disability as the central topic in volume 7 of their *WisCon Chronicles*.⁸ Collectively, while characters of color are more likely to appear in speculative media than disabled characters, neither group is adequately—by which I mean on par with population statistics—represented, particularly in protagonist roles. These characters, when they do appear, are more likely to show up in fiction than in any other medium, though the recent films *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Fantastic Four* and the Netflix television series *Daredevil* are important exceptions to this trend. Award-winning speculative fiction writer, Nalo Hopkinson, who represents a range of genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities, classes and disabilities in her work, writes that generally speculative film and television media “is some 30 years behind what’s happening in the literature; it’s still hung up on glorifying paramilitary regimes, whereas the range of political analysis in the written genre is much more varied.”⁹

Several scholars have also discussed the ways in which, in addition to the erasure of explicit representations of people of color and disabled people, ideas regarding race and (dis)ability are often abstracted into well-known speculative media tropes such as aliens (particularly alien

invasions), robots, cyborgs, technologically enhanced or altered human bodies and disease epidemics.¹⁰ Critical race and disability studies scholars have argued that the erasure of race and (dis)ability in speculative media in terms of the lacuna of racialized and disabled characters is replicated in critical interpretations of texts when scholars and fans overlook the racial and ability-centric overtones of these tropes. For example, Isiah Lavender argues that we can read cyborgs, robots and posthumans as “new racial forms” due to their treatment in non-realist worlds as servants or even slaves to humans, such as in David Brin’s *Kiln People*.¹¹ Similarly, Katie Ellis writes that, “Both disability studies and science fiction are concerned with physical difference, body modification, environmental adaptation, medical research and notions of technological transcendence.”¹² Critics are more likely overall, however, to note discourses of race in a representation than discourses of (dis)ability.

For example, many viewers and critics read James Cameron’s *Avatar* as a clear representation of indigenous/non-white people being colonized by the technologically advanced Americans, but few discussed the role of (dis)ability in the text beyond simply mentioning the disability status of the main character.¹³ In his 2009 “thumbs-up” review of the film—a time when the United States was still engaged in the “War on Terror” in Iraq—Roger Ebert notes how the American ex-military characters attack Pandora and its inhabitants even though they pose no threat to the Americans beyond living on land prime for resource excavation. Ebert suggests that viewers “are free to find this an allegory about contemporary politics. Cameron obviously does.”¹⁴ Ebert does not, however, discuss disability beyond noting that the central character, Jake Sully, is a white, male, veteran with paraplegia who is, in part, motivated by the desire to get access to the funds for an expensive surgery to “fix” his legs. What most critics do not discuss is how the majority of the film represents Jake in his avatar’s hyper-able body, not his disabled, human one. At the end of the film, Jake attempts to leave his human body entirely and become permanently one with his avatar—an attempt that is assumed to be successful, though the result is not depicted. In a review of the film for the *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Sara Palmer argues that *Avatar* is about compulsory able-bodiedness—that drive toward increased ability at all costs due to our cultural inability to imagine the positive aspects of living with a disability.¹⁵ In this one example alone, it’s possible to understand how both race and (dis)ability can be central concerns in a speculative media representation in indirect or at least less explicit ways than just having a racial minority or disabled protagonist.

The scholarly work to reveal how concerns with race and (dis)ability thematically permeate speculative media also demonstrates the importance of reading bodyminds within the context of their speculative fictional worlds. In speculative media, race and (dis)ability may not have the same meanings and markers as they do in realist contexts. The term defamiliarization refers to the way that non-realist media takes concepts from the realist world, such as disability, blackness or womanhood and adjusts them slightly in order to urge audience members to think more critically about these categories. Defamiliarization emerges in part from science fiction scholar Dark Suvin’s term “cognitive estrangement” that refers to the ways in which science fiction estranges or distances readers from their knowledge and assumptions about what constitutes reality in order to move them to question those very assumptions.¹⁶ As Nalco Hopkinson puts it, speculative media can “warp the mirror, and thus impel the reader to view differently things that they’ve taken for granted.”¹⁷

As a result of defamiliarization, audience members and scholars of speculative media must consider how to identify systems of race and (dis)ability in non-realist worlds—including who is privileged within these defamiliarized systems and who is oppressed. Is Mr. Spock a racial minority on *Star Trek* because he is mixed-species (human-Vulcan) even though Lieutenant Commander Geordie La Forge is racialized as a black man in ways we recognize in contemporary culture? Do we consider La Forge to be disabled because he is blind (a contemporary realist

disability) or do we consider him non-disabled since his blindness does not limit him physically or socially due to technological devices (initially VISOR in the television series and first film, then prosthetic implants in the later films) that actually allow him to see and see better than the average human? Is Marvel Comic's the Thing disabled due to his radiation exposure that resulted in superhuman strength and size, but an unusual, stigmatized appearance?¹⁸ Are the X-Men racial minorities, people with disabilities or something else entirely? Reading (dis)ability and race in speculative media requires understanding these categories as socially constructed and therefore mutable. That is, in order to fully understand the ways in which concerns with (dis)ability and race get expressed in speculative media, readers, viewers and critics must be willing to look for expressions and methods of oppression and marginalization not immediately recognizable as racism and ableism in contemporary realist terms.

In addition to the problems with the erasure of (dis)ability and race in speculative media through lack of disabled and racialized characters and overlooking how (dis)ability and race can be defamiliarized into seemingly unrelated concerns, when it comes to interpretation of speculative media, there is also the danger of additional erasure through the conflation of race and (dis)ability in the analysis of representations. Due to speculative media's defamiliarization of social categories, there are times in which it is possible to interpret a representation as being about race *and/or* (dis)ability. I emphasize *and/or* here because although I argue that it is important to read these defamiliarized representations as about both (dis)ability and race (or about both ableism and racism) as well as the relationship between these terms, more often than not, scholars interpret these speculative media representations as being about only one or the other.

For example, Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* is a speculative film set in a near-future world in which genetic testing determines what jobs certain humans are permitted to perform and where genetic engineering gives people a lifetime of advantages, social and otherwise. Race and science fiction scholar Isiah Lavender insists that in a society that "discriminates against genetic makeup in contrast to race or gender. Genoism stands for racism."¹⁹ Disability studies scholar Helen Meekosha, however, argues that *Gattaca* "could be seen as a film which confronts disability more directly [than other futuristic science fiction films]—through the theme again of genetic engineering."²⁰ Both scholars insist that the film's representation of discrimination based upon genetics is representative of racism or ableism in contemporary society. Neither offers the possibility that the representation of genetic testing and engineering in this speculative fiction future is inextricably connected to concerns of both race and (dis)ability.

Considering the history of eugenics in Western cultures, it is possible to read the selection of particular genetic traits deemed desirable (positive eugenics) and the elimination of other genetic traits deemed undesirable (negative eugenics) in *Gattaca* as being deeply embedded in a legacy of medicalized hierarchies of bodyminds based upon perceived racial and (dis)ability divisions—among others. Flexible eugenic categories such as "feeble-mindedness" were commonly used as rationale for the sterilization of certain individuals, however, feeble-mindedness in particular was a label typically indicative of a failure to perform proper racial, gender, class and sexuality behaviors.²¹ This failure to perform to these racial, gender, class and sexuality expectations of the period was then deemed a medical pathology—or impairment—of the bodymind. Concerns with genetics, therefore, have never been *just* about race or *just* about (dis)ability, but an imbrication of both terms and more.

Lavender and Meekosha's readings of *Gattaca*, therefore, are indicative examples of the tendency toward an either/or move in critical analysis of speculative media in which a text is either primarily (if not exclusively) about (dis)ability or race. This type of either/or reading often results in the conflation of race and (dis)ability, typically prioritizing one at the expense of another. This issue is similar to discussions in disability, race, gender and sexuality studies about the problems with oppression analogies in which, for example, sexism is compared to racism or ableism compared to

homophobia. These comparisons, while often an attempt to create connections between different marginalized groups, often end up both collapsing important material differences between various forms of oppression and erasing the experiences of those who experience multiple kinds of intersecting oppressions, such as women of color and disabled queer people.²²

While critical race and disability studies scholars have worked to draw attention to how issues of race and (dis)ability, of racism and ableism, play out in speculative media, there is more work to be done. There is a need to develop ways of reading non-explicit representations as related to *both* (dis)ability and race, due to the mutual constitution of these terms, rather than arguing for the priority of one over the other in a text. Defamiliarization of realist concepts and categories in speculative media means that a text can draw upon aspects of multiple recognizable social categories, concepts and histories and combine them into a single representation. As a result, speculative media figures such as aliens, robots and vampires as well as speculative media tropes such as time/space travel, body modifications and magic/superhuman powers can allude to multiple social systems of privilege and oppression at once without being directly or exclusively about any single category, issue or concern. For example, earlier I posed the question: Are the X-Men racial minorities, people with disabilities or something else entirely? Several scholars have made arguments about the ways in which we can read the X-Men in their various comic, television and film manifestations as symbols for different contemporary minority identity groups. To demonstrate my point about the importance of reading both race and (dis)ability as interrelated concepts in speculative media, I will provide a more extended engagement with the X-Men example here.

The X-Men are a group of genetically altered/advanced humans who have a variety of extraordinary differences in ability and occasionally appearance as well. The most well-known of these figures include the protagonist leader Professor Xavier, who is telepathic, and the antagonist leader Magneto, who controls magnetic fields. Professor Xavier's X-Men, including Storm, Wolverine, Cyclops, Jean Gray, Rogue and others, team up against Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants who seek to overpower, if not destroy humankind—before humankind destroys them. The battles between these two groups—literally and ideologically—represent the center of much of the X-Men series across its multiple media iterations.

Scholars have read the X-Men franchise in a variety of ways. Lawrence Baron reads the X-Men as symbolic of Jewish ethnic identity in America, while Matthew Diebler interprets the characters as representative of racial minority identity politics more broadly.²³ Michael J. Lecker, however, insists on reading the X-Men as symbolic of queer youth, while Ramona Ilea interprets the series as a representation of disability and disability rights politics.²⁴ Is one of these interpretations more correct than the others? When reading the textual evidence for each of these analyses together, it is clear that each interpretation for one marginalized group is also applicable to other groups in various ways.

In regard to ethnicity, the origin story of Magneto clearly locates him as a survivor of the Holocaust and this experience undergirds Magneto's distrust of humans, particularly the attempt to have all mutants registered with the government.²⁵ The representation of registering and monitoring the activities of a minority population in the X-Men series—and the potential impact of such surveillance—gestures toward not only the Holocaust, but also McCarthyism and the FBI's tracking of the leaders of civil rights, radical and other oppositional groups in the United States and abroad. In regard to race, scholars have read the differing approaches of Professor X and Magneto as analogous to the non-violent, accommodation/assimilationist approaches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference versus the (sometimes) violent, militant, separatist approaches of Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers.²⁶ However, while this comparison is apt, it is not limited to race or blackness. The differences in potential approaches for gaining civil rights in terms of conservative, liberal or radical tactics have been an issue for nearly all marginalized groups including feminists, lesbian, bisexual, gay and queer groups and people with disabilities.

In his queer reading of the series, Lecker suggests that the X-Men can be read as representative of queer youth because, similar to sexuality minorities, the mutants are born with their difference (mirroring the rhetoric of sexuality not being a choice), typically into non-mutant families who do not understand, are frightened by or reject their children's differences, which tend to emerge around puberty.²⁷ This familial reaction often causes self-hatred or isolation in mutants before they find connection and inspiration in non-biological mutant communities with adult mutants, which Lecker compares to the internalized queerphobia of queer youth who seek queer adult role models outside of their typically heterosexual families and communities of origin.²⁸ Even P. Andrew Miller, who suggests overall that the X-Men's mutants "can be seen as metaphors for any number of minority or marginalized groups," writes that a "homosexual reading ... seems *the best fit* to the mutant metaphor"²⁹ [emphasis added]. The evidence for this reading, however, can also apply to other marginalized groups. People with disabilities often come from primarily non-disabled families and communities and this can also lead to isolation, attempts to hide or downplay difference, internalized ableism and the need for non-biological adult role models. A similar argument might also be made for transracial adoptees or mixed-race children raised in racially homogenous—especially white—communities.

Finally, Ilea argues that the disagreement among mutants about the desirability of a cure can be read as a metaphor for debates about medical approaches to treating and/or "curing" disabilities. In the X-Men series this dispute is represented as particularly dividing mutants with more desirable or controllable powers, who can pass in appearance as human and who generally reject a cure, from mutants with less useful or controllable powers, who cannot pass in appearance as human and who generally welcome a cure. While Ilea does make a brief reference to passing as a concern in African American and sexual minority communities, she nonetheless insists upon the particularity of disability in interpreting this X-Men plotline. Lecker, however, claims that this reference to passing is indicative of the queerness of the series.³⁰ Yet again, despite the strong connection to disability in this part of the X-Men series, the idea of a cure or treatment is also historically and contemporarily pertinent for sexual and gender minorities—such as lesbian, gay and transgendered people—and for racial and ethnic minorities and women who have a history of being medically pathologized in the name of oppression and discrimination.³¹ As Richard Reynolds suggests then, the X-Men might be read as "a parable of the alienation of any minority."³²

While each of these discussed readings is interesting and important, I'd like to suggest that their overlap allows for another interpretation to emerge. In addition to being symbolic of discrimination more broadly, the evidence discussed above regarding specifically how mutants are marked and marginalized in the X-Men series also demonstrates the consistency of methods of oppression and Othering across different time periods and marginalized groups. The fact that, despite the de-familiarization of the categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality and (dis)ability through the representations of mutants, we can recognize so many contemporary and historically oppressed groups in a single—albeit long-lasting, complex and medium-crossing—non-realist world seems far more interesting in regard to the possibilities of speculative media than any attempt to definitively state what group the X-Men primarily or exclusively represent. By reading the X-Men series more broadly as symbolic of the relationship between oppressions and the mutual constitution of marginalized identity categories, we can begin to understand how speculative media generally can provide insights into the nuanced relationship of race and (dis)ability (as well as the relationship of these social systems to gender, sexuality and class) by forcing us outside of our realist, normative expectations of these categories. Tracing the relationship between (dis)ability and race (and other social systems) within the defamiliarized representations of speculative media resists the erasure of these categories that has typically occurred in much speculative media representations and speculative media scholarship.

Conclusion

Speculative media is a broad umbrella category that includes any non-realist representation such as science fiction, fantasy, magical realism, ghost stories, horror, futuristic tales and alternative histories. By removing the reader or viewer from reality, speculative media allows us to imagine infinite possibilities—both desirable and frightening ones—in order to comment upon, challenge or critique contemporary realist concerns. Marie Jakober writes that speculative media can “make us think, make us question, make us wonder what is, and what is not, changeable” in our world.³³ Historically, speculative media has tended to erase (dis)ability and race through the lack of racial minority and disabled characters. Scholarship on speculative media has often reinforced this erasure by taking the representations of “color-blind” and disability-free worlds at face value rather than interrogating how certain speculative media figures and tropes, such as aliens, disease outbreaks and mutants, are often symbolic of discourses and histories of race and (dis)ability. Furthermore, critical race and disability studies scholars have also perpetuated the erasure of the role of (dis)ability and race in speculative media by conflating these categories in order to claim the primacy of one over the other rather than arguing for an understanding of these terms as mutually constitutive.

It is important to note that there has been a slow, yet significant shift in both speculative media representations and the scholarship on these texts, though more in regard to race than (dis)ability. There are an increasing number of writers from marginalized groups producing new speculative media and many of these individuals have created the similarly increased number of disabled and racial minority characters in speculative literature, film and television, including occasionally disabled racial minority characters such as Lauren Olamina in Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* and Cameron Hicks and Rachel Pirzad in the short-lived Syfy series *Alphas*.³⁴ Recent anthologies, such as *Octavia’s Brood* and *Accessing the Future* are further examples of the increased presence of disabled people, people of color and disabled people of color in speculative fiction in particular.³⁵ Additionally, there is a growing body of scholarship on race in speculative media, including key collections such as Marleen S. Barr’s *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction’s Newest New-Wave Trajectory* and Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman’s *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism and the Speculative* as well as several notable monographs.³⁶ In contrast, the scholarship on (dis)ability in speculative media is only just emerging, such as in Kathryn Allan’s anthology *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure* and Angela Smith’s monograph *Hideous Progeny: Disability, Eugenics, and Classic Horror Cinema*.³⁷ More work in these areas needs to be done, particularly in regard to the fantasy and magical realism sub-genres since the vast majority of work on race and (dis)ability in speculative media has focused on science fiction and futuristic representations.

Continued conversations between scholars of (dis)ability, race and speculative media will allow us to understand the role of these social systems in the genre as well as highlight the work of authors, writers and directors who are attempting to better incorporate and engage race and (dis)ability. Many have written about the ways in which speculative media allows for imagining alternative worlds and how this very imagining is particularly important for those who have been marginalized and oppressed historically and contemporarily, as groups and as individuals. In response to the question, “What good is science fiction to Black people?” Octavia E. Butler responds with illuminating questions of her own:

What good is any literature to Black people? What good is science fiction’s thinking about the present, the future and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of

the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction?³⁸

Her questions, I believe, apply broadly. As a genre that typically considers itself progressive and subversive, speculative media is ripe for interesting, thought-provoking representations of (dis)ability and race that resist the ableist and racist norms of contemporary culture. However, the producers of these alternate worlds are still steeped in the many social systems of oppression currently operating in this world. As a result, representations that conform to oppressive norms in some fashion are nearly inescapable even when, as discussed above, human figures don't appear in a representation at all. Discourses of race, (dis)ability and other social systems can be abstracted into a variety of speculative media figures and tropes. By continuing to identify and discuss how these systems play out in speculative media, therefore, scholars and readers, audience members and fans can better chart the role of (dis)ability and race in this genre, resisting erasure and moving toward a deeper understanding of the mutually constitutive and stubborn role of racism and ableism in our world(s) and imaginations.

Notes

- 1 I use this term after Margaret Price who writes that bodymind should be considered a materialist feminist disability studies concept that refers to “the imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities usually called ‘body’ and ‘mind.’” See Margaret Price. “The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain,” *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 270.
- 2 Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 7; Ria Cheyne. “‘She Was Born a Thing’: Disability, the Cyborg and the Posthuman in Anne McCaffrey’s the Ship Who Sang,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 36, no. 3 (2013): 148; Samuel R. Delany, “Racism and Science Fiction,” *New York Review of Science Fiction*, no. 120 (1998), www.nyrsf.com/racism-and-science-fiction-.html; Sharon DeGraw, *The Subject of Race in American Science Fiction*, *Literary Criticism and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007); De Witt Douglas Kilgore, *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Johnson Cheu, “De-Generates, Replicants and Other Aliens: (Re)Defining Disability in Futuristic Film,” in *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory*, ed. Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare (London: Continuum, 2002): 198–212.
- 3 As Nickianne Moody notes, cyberpunk texts are an important exception to this statement because cyberpunk often features disabled characters and concerns with changes in expectations of ability. Nickianne Moody, “Untapped Potential: The Representation of Disability/Special Ability in the Cyberpunk Workforce,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 3, no. 3 (1997): 90–105.
- 4 Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin, *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 188.
- 5 Mark Bould, “The Ships Landed Long Ago: Afrofuturism and Black Sf,” *Science Fiction Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 180.
- 6 Kilgore, *Astrofuturism*, 231.
- 7 “Supercrip” is a term for representations of supposedly exceptional people with disabilities who are often lauded simply because their achievements exceed cultural expectations for people with disabilities. See Sami Schalk, “Reevaluating the Supercrip,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016): 71–86.
- 8 JoSelle Vanderhooft, ed. *Shattering Ableist Narratives*, *WisCon Chronicles*, vol. 7 (Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2013).
- 9 Hopkinson quoted in Nancy Batty, “‘Caught by a ... Genre’: An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 33, no. 1 (2002): 193.
- 10 Isiah Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Michael Bérubé, “Disability and Narrative,” *PMLA* 120, no. 2 (2005): 568–569; Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 20.
- 11 Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction*, 17; David Brin, *Kiln People*, 1st ed. (New York: Tor, 2002).

- 12 Katie Ellis, *Disability and Popular Culture: Focusing Passion, Creating Community and Expressing Defiance*, Cultural Politics of Media and Popular Culture (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 64. See also, Cheyne, "She Was Born a Thing"; Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 103–128.
- 13 For other critical discussions of disability in *Avatar*, see Ellis, *Disability and Popular Culture*, 71–77; Dana Fore, "The Tracks of Sully's Tears: Disability in James Cameron's *Avatar*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 53 (2011), www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc53.2011/foreAvatar.
- 14 Roger Ebert, "Avatar" (2009), www.rogerebert.com/reviews/avatar-2009.
- 15 Sara Palmer, "Old, New, Borrowed and Blue: Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Whiteness in *Avatar*," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2011), <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1353/1473>.
- 16 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 3–15; See also Perry Nodelman, "The Cognitive Estrangement of Darko Suvin," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1981): 24–27.
- 17 Dianne D. Glave, "An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson," *Callaloo* 26, no. 1 (2003): 149.
- 18 José Alaniz, "Supercrip: Disability and the Silver Age Superhero," *International Journal of Comic Art* 6, no. 2 (2004): 87–96.
- 19 Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction*, 128.
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