Introduction

Crip Times

It was the summer of 2011, and for seven weeks in July and August I watched an embodied movement in motion. I was living in Madrid one block away from the Puerta del Sol [Gate of the Sun], the plaza that had been occupied since May 15 by Los Indignados, an eclectic group whose name (“the indignant ones”) marked and marks their sharp opposition to the dominant economic and political order. Members of the movement insisted that the Spanish political establishment was protecting finance capital through global economic turmoil, even as it simultaneously put into place a wide range of extreme cost-cutting measures (a program of so-called “austerity”) that made the lives of ordinary Spanish people more vulnerable and precarious. On any given day that summer, beneath the at times scorching heat of the Madrid sun, thousands of bodies came together, sweating, chanting, clapping, sitting, standing, embracing, laughing, and—at times—crying in frustration, fear, or pain.

The name “Los Indignados” was in part inspired by the Spanish translation of a 2010 French essay by Stéphane Hessel, *Indignez-vous!* calling in its very title for indignation and for action against injustice. Hessel, a ninety-three-year-old concentration camp survivor and member of the French Resistance against the Nazis, wrote in *Indignez-vous!* about a variety of topics: the vast income inequality sustained by the ruling class under capitalism; police brutality; the mistreatment of immigrants and the poor; and the struggle of Palestinians for self-determination, a struggle that Hessel perceived as linked to the historical struggles of the French Resistance itself and the fight for Algerian independence (Glass). If “indignation” sometimes connotes in English a relatively cerebral opposition to an idea, person, or event that is, as the *OED* puts it, “unworthy of regard or notice,” from 2011 onward, Los Indignados insisted, on the contrary, that the world take notice of what was happening in Spain.
Moreover, as Míriam Arenas Conejo and Asun Pié Balaguer make clear, their indignation was far from merely cerebral and was in fact expressed through “una experiencia de militancia encarnada” [an experience of embodied militancy] (239). “The outraged,” conjuring up images of anger, tensed bodies, and clenched fists, is thus a more forceful and visceral translation of “Los Indignados,” and indeed the English translation of Hessel’s book is Time for Outrage. In Spain itself, the occupation of the Puerta del Sol and dozens of other locations across the country represented the beginning of an embodied popular movement that came to be known by the day and month it originated: 15-M—or #15M, as news of the May 15 occupation traveled across Twitter and other social networks. Internationally, “Los Indignados” was (and remains) the more recognized descriptor for the activists who took the plaza that summer.

The Puerta del Sol is located a block away from the Plaza Mayor in Madrid and is, in a literal or official sense, the center of Spain. Km. 0 (the space from which distances are measured in Spain) is located in the Puerta del Sol and Calle Mayor [literally, Main Street] and other important streets and avenues—many of them busy pedestrian walkways lined with bustling shops and restaurants—radiate outward from the plaza. Given its geographical centrality in the city and country, the Puerta del Sol has often served as the symbolic location for Spanish citizens making public statements or participating in what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri might describe as “the political project of instituting the common” (Commonwealth ix), with the elements of the “common” understood expansively and democratically as “those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth” (viii). In the symbolic public space of the Puerta del Sol, Los Indignados announced through words and actions their opposition to the political and economic establishment, denouncing the privatization of public resources and other maneuvers that, in Hardt and Negri’s words, secure “regimes of property that exclude the common” (ix). In direct contrast to such exclusions, one prominent banner across an entrance to the Puerta del Sol essentially declared a welcome to anyone who might join the struggle. “Bienvenida Dignidad” [Welcome Dignity], the banner read, materializing through that invocation a space free from what activists identified as the indignity of austerity [Figure I.1].
In a Crip Time and Place

I had come to Madrid in 2011 to immerse myself in Spanish-language study. Like any serious student of language, however, I was acquiring in the process not only words and phrases that might reproduce the world as I knew it in English, but whole new ways of thinking that had the power to alter that world, or to make it strange. In many ways, it was a perfect year for that pursuit, given the rapidly shifting syntax and morphology of struggle not only in Spain but around the world. Revolutionary uprisings against despotic governments had swept across Tunisia, Egypt, and other locations from December 2010 onward and had been dubbed the “Arab Spring.” Not long after plazas and squares across Spain were occupied, students took to the streets in Santiago and other cities in Chile to demand free and accessible education at all levels; related movements in Mexico City and Quebec would emerge within a year. In London and across the United Kingdom in August 2011, protests erupted after the police shooting of Mark Duggan, an
unarmed black man, in the North London neighborhood of Tottenham. The UK protests drew attention to racism and police violence, as well as to poverty and rising levels of inequality in the country. The UK government in general at the time was implementing cuts that I will spotlight in great detail in the pages to follow; the general program of cost-cutting and privatization was not unlike what was taking place in Spain.

Neither these struggles nor the politics of neglect and scarcity that necessitated and animated them were explicitly focused on disability. Indeed, the main contention of *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance* is that the absolute centrality of disability to a now-global politics of austerity has rarely been theorized explicitly or comprehensively, even if increasing numbers of disabled activists and artists globally are recognizing and calling out the disproportionately negative impact of austerity on disabled people. The UK is one place where that calling out has been most amplified, and it is for that reason that I focus centrally, in what follows, on that location. *Crip Times*, however, is in many ways a product of the embodied promise and the profound disappointment of 2011, and the book thus of necessity reverberates to Spain, where it began for me, as well as to other locations where echoes of the promise of that year can still be discerned.

Los Indignados are often positioned as one of the main inspirations for the Occupy Wall Street movement that erupted in Fall 2011; working groups in occupied plazas in Madrid, Barcelona, and across Spain, as in New York and across North America later that year, focused on imagining alternatives to the dominant form of capitalism known as neoliberalism, as well as on rethinking a range of more specific issues structured by it, including health care, immigration, and education. Some working groups in Spain emphasized aspects of culture or employment, while others specifically emphasized justice for women, prisoners, or disabled people. Decisions regarding courses of action were reached through a consensus of the entire group present in the plaza at a given moment. The Puerta del Sol was covered in graffiti that summer and filled with pictures and signs declaring “La crisis que la paguen ellos” [Let them pay for their crisis!] or “Sin pan no habrá paz” [Without bread there will be no peace] [Figure 1.2]. Makeshift shacks filled the area; in addition to space for resting or sleeping, these shacks provided services such as a
people's free library for both borrowing and donating books and space for some basic community medical care. One manifesto makes clear that Los Indignados did not accept donations of money; they did, however, accept objects with use value, including chairs and tables, sleeping bags, food, and medicine (Álvarez et al. 29).

It was a crip time and place, to rework J. Jack Halberstam’s now-famous description of the “strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” that characterize queer times and places (In a Queer Time 1). As I hope will be clear throughout Crip Times, I am building on the work of a range of contemporary theorists who are attempting to locate (in the sense both of finding and describing spatially) what Halberstam identifies as “the alternatives to capitalism that already exist and are presently under construction” (12). In contrast to the work of Halberstam and many others in queer theory, however, my project is explicitly disabled, or crip.1 Exactly how this project might be comprehended as crip—drawing on the activist and theoretical
analytic derived from the word *cripple*—will be clearer as this Introduction continues. On a very basic level, however, *Crip Times* is simply more centrally concerned with what Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell term “cultural locations of disability”—“locales that represent a saturation point of content about disability” (*Cultural* 3). Such saturation points are not always immediately legible or tangible; few commentators beyond Arenas Conejo and Pié Balaguer read the Spanish 15-M movement of 2011 through disability, for instance (and virtually no commentators writing about the movement in English). This book in part attempts to theorize crip ways of reading for and across the saturation points.

As “La crisis que la paguen ellos” suggests, throughout the summer of 2011 Spanish activists were protesting the government’s reactions to the global economic crisis that had begun more than three years prior. In Spain, in the financial sector predatory and speculative lending practices generated a bubble with banks and property developers borrowing at a rate that inflated real estate values across the country (before the crisis, even though individuals were also being given predatory loans by Spanish banks, ordinary citizens were generally left far behind by the financial speculation among wealthy investors that produced the bubble). In 2008 the bubble burst, causing a sudden crash in the housing and construction sector. Construction prior to the crisis had been booming; the industry’s precipitous collapse, with thousands of construction companies declaring bankruptcy from 2008 onward, significantly contributed to the deep recession which the country entered. A state-financed bailout fund to protect the banks was established in 2009. Los Indignados quite rightly interpreted the government’s reaction as one that privileged bankers and pushed the majority of the population (which had essentially funded the bailout) even further into crisis. One of the initial slogans of the movement directly marked the defiance of Los Indignados against this official reaction, “No somos mercancía en manos de políticos y banqueros” [We are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers]. The centrist Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) [Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party], led by then-Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, imposed harsh austerity measures on the general Spanish population to combat the crisis, slashing government spending and raising the retirement age
from 65 to 67. The cuts to government spending were particularly punishing as the unemployment rate had risen above 20 percent by early 2011. For young adults, those whom friends and teachers were already describing to me as *una generación perdida* [a lost generation], the rate was closer to 45 percent. The bodies and minds of that generation were quickly registering the crisis: even before the occupation of the Puerta del Sol, a 2010 survey of primary care clinics noted a sharp increase in patients being treated for anxiety or for alcohol dependency; the same study noted a decided link between unemployment or the inability to pay personal debt and the risk of major depression (Fernández-Rivas and González-Torres 585).

The official political landscape in Spain has been dominated by two different parties for most of the past forty years. Los Indignados were outraged with both parties, and with good cause, given subsequent events: for ordinary citizens, the crisis in Spain generally accelerated in the years following 2011. The conservative Partido Popular (PP) [People’s Party] retook power at the end of the year, and between 2011 and 2015 Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy proved to be one of the most faithful executors of austerity in the Eurozone. A third-party, Left alternative in Spain, Podemos [We Can], emerged to great fanfare in early 2014 and in the space of four months propelled five candidates to seats in the general European Parliament (a popularly elected parliamentary body of the European Union). One of those members was Pablo Echenique, a wheelchair user who previously had no plans to enter politics, but who joined Podemos because he “was indignant because in Spain and other countries there are growing numbers of poor people, while we see more and more millionaires and politicians involved in corruption cases” (qtd. in Catanzaro). Podemos, however, could not achieve a majority in the December 2015 national elections. The PP received the most votes nationally but also did not receive a majority; a second national election was thus held in June 2016. The PP in the second election received even more votes but remained shy of a majority. In a parliamentary vote in October 2016, Rajoy was finally confirmed again as Prime Minister after a sufficient number of PSOE representatives agreed to abstain, essentially allowing his confirmation to move forward and avoiding a third election. A year earlier, Podemos-supported candidates were elected mayor in Barcelona and Madrid in May 2015; municipal success, however, has
not yet translated into a sustained challenge to the PP at a national level, not least because of the PSOE’s ongoing complicity with Rajoy and his austerity agenda.

While living near the Puerta del Sol during that summer of 2011, I became friends with a number of activists—particularly queer and disability activists, but also members of the 15-M movement more generally. I participated in some of the marches, including a massive one on July 23, 2016, retaking the plaza after it had been cleared by police. I witnessed such a clearance by police twice, the second time later in August in advance of then-Pope Benedict’s arrival. Catholic youth from around the world were descending on Madrid for World Youth Day, and Los Indignados were angry that Spanish taxpayers were essentially subsidizing the event. Moreover, as harsh cuts to social services were being imposed on the citizenry, visitors for World Youth Day were receiving transportation discounts on the Madrid Metro. Happy Catholic youth waving flags from around the world and marching through the streets singing songs about the life to come were welcomed by the officially secular state in Madrid that summer (Roman Catholicism has protections in the Spanish Constitution but is not a state religion). To make that welcome clear, Los Indignados were evicted from the plazas they had been occupying/living in across the country. And indeed, desalojo or desalojamiento [eviction] were the Spanish words most frequently used (by both activists themselves and the mainstream media) to describe the police clearance of plazas across the country.

Throughout this period, I was compelled by the ways in which bodies and bodily imagery emphasizing precarity were being used to send messages of outrage and resistance. Unruly bodies occupying public spaces, bodies—as it were—out of bounds, were challenging the guardians of capital and short-circuiting the official consensus that those guardians urgently needed to forge about the “necessity” or inevitability of drastic austerity measures. For the July 23 march, I was with disability activists Melania Moscoso Pérez and Javier Romañach. The march began near Parque Retiro (the large park on the eastern side of central Madrid) and wound through the financial center to the Puerta del Sol, with the intention of retaking the plaza after the eviction. As we moved slowly forward, we noticed that some activists had stripped down to their panties, bras, and briefs in front of the Ministry of Equality and Social Affairs (later,
under the PP, renamed simply the Ministry of Social Affairs). Their embodied action was intended to signify that “these cuts are stripping us to nothing” [Figure 1.3]. Later, as we passed the Banco de España heading into the Puerta del Sol, we saw that activists had written “CULPABLES” on its walls, peppering those walls with red hand prints. The banks, in other words, were perceived as “GUILTY” and as far as the people were concerned, they had blood on their hands [Figures 1.4 and 1.5].

The fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, which ended upon Franco’s death in 1975, is still experienced as casi ayer [almost yesterday] in Spain, and that memory of a decades-long state repression inevitably circulates around contemporary police violence (some would say that the memory of brutal repression held police violence in check, for a time). Clearly, however, especially in the days leading up to the Pope’s arrival, these embodied messages against austerity were increasingly perceived as too intense and too extreme by the powers that be, and violent police attacks on activists and activist spaces across the country.
Figure 1.4. "Guilty," Banco de España, Madrid. Photo by Author.

Figure 1.5. “The Government Has Blood on Its Hands,” Banco de España, Madrid. Photo by Author.
commenced as the summer continued (the police reaction that summer was not unlike the reaction against Occupy Wall Street later in the year in the United States, as the state moved in to clear occupied spaces across the country). During the two desalojamiento\textemdash\textquoteright s that I witnessed in Madrid, as 15-M activists were evicted from the plaza, I observed quite harsh police violence (mainly fierce beatings with police batons) against activists [Figure 1.6]. Bodies out of bounds, instituting the common in opposition to the financial and state institutions identified as culpables, as responsible for the crisis, apparently needed to be moved out of sight.

In the years that followed the birth of the movement, in the opinion of many activists police violence against them intensified almost continuously. Rajoy’s Partido Popular began to impose measures designed to curtail the kinds of protests and occupations the world witnessed in Summer 2011. By 2015 Spain’s Civil Protection Act, more popularly known as the “Ley Mordaza” [Gag Rule] was in effect, criminalizing any unauthorized photography of the police (such as the photos I myself took) and putting into place strict restrictions on how, when, and where protests in Spain could take place. In the very week that I am completing a first draft of this Introduction in Fall 2014, fourteen of nineteen
activists detained for their role in generating the movement—all of them between 18 and 26 years old in 2011—received a total of seventy-four years in prison for disorderly conduct, resistance, provocation or attack against agents of authority, and a range of other offenses. Moscoso Pérez told me of a friend who had to flee to Chile rather than face eight months in prison. The friend’s “crime,” apparently, was singing in an assembly while the Puerta del Sol was occupied.

Crippling Austerity

My own circle of friends and acquaintances that summer was a disabled and queer one. The bodies and body imagery I have thus far described, however, are not obviously or explicitly disabled, even if the capacity to write on the walls of the Banco de España in blood does, at the very least, suggest a wound or injury, with “blood” serving as the trace of a body that has been hurt or damaged in some way. The connections between disability and the 15-M movement were nonetheless quite explicit for some activists. The Foro de Vida Independiente y Diver-tad (FVID) [Forum for Independent Living and Diversity/Liberty] had emerged in Spain a decade earlier and put into circulation the concept of “Diversidad Funcional” [Functional Diversity], now used by many activists in numerous Spanish-speaking locations as the preferred term for talking about disability. Romañach described the emergence of FVID as “un mini 15M diez años antes de aquel” [a mini 15-M movement ten years before the fact] (qtd. in Arenas Conejo and Pié Balaguer). In 2011, significant efforts were made to ensure that the encampments in Madrid and Barcelona were accessible, and the global disability activist phrase “nada sobre nosotros, sin nosostros” [nothing about us without us] helped fuel the general “proceso de construcción del nuevo ‘nosotros’” [process of construction of the new “we”] that Los Indignados were defiantly putting forward; “nada sobre nosotros sin nosostros” became, in this new context, “no nos representan” [they don’t represent us] (Arenas Conejo and Pié Balaguer 236, 239). As the 15-M movement in general attempted to theorize precarity and vulnerability, the already established disability movement became a site for understanding those concepts as central and textured components of human experience (Arenas Conejo and Pié Balaguer 239).
Most studies of austerity, however, have noted neither disability’s centrality to a global austerity politics nor the nuanced ways, as in Spain, that disability might serve as a site from which to understand and resist that politics. Mark Blyth’s important book *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* makes no mention of disability, and even David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu’s *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills*, while focusing on public health in various locations, and opening with very personal illness narratives, has no entry for “disability” in the index. Crip Times thus in many ways simply aims to make explicit and central what is implicit and peripheral in other studies. The project “crips” contemporary capitalist globalization, or more precisely, cripsthe global economic crisis that is largely offered up as justification for the austerity we are now enduring and which does not promise to go away any time soon. *Crip Times* cripsthis crisis by specifically adding crip and queer perspectives to studies that are seeking to analyze the cultural logic of neoliberalism and the austerity that is now part and parcel of it. Analyzing the “cultural logic of neoliberalism” more generally, simply entails asking how cultural formations and movements circulate around, emerge from, and resist the hegemonic global political economy of neoliberal capitalism.

“Creeping privatization” and “crippling austerity” are phrases that currently travel rather freely through global media (although not necessarily or consistently through the mainstream media); “cripping austerity” (my subheading in this section, and a phrase I have often used during the completion of this book to describe its central aim), not so much. Indeed, I have sometimes been “corrected” by interlocutors hearing me use crip as a verb to describe an action that might be performed upon austerity. “Surely when you said ‘cripping austerity,’ you meant ‘crippling austerity,’” one writer from the right-wing Heritage Foundation informed me condescendingly. It’s not a misunderstanding that bothers me particularly (although members of the Heritage Foundation are definitely not the presumed audience for this book), as I do believe it’s useful to imagine that we are living in what I will call crip times, and I welcome the opportunity to think about what that might mean and to translate some of the edgy and powerful valences of *crip* (as noun, verb, and adjective) to readers or listeners unfamiliar with the term. *Crip Times* is obviously concerned from start to finish with disability (even as
it hopes to open up capaclously the many generative ways the term disability has functioned or might function). Nonetheless, some discussion of the other central terms of my analysis (on a basic level, neoliberalism and austerity, but even more importantly, crip and crip times) is important at the outset, particularly for readers outside crip culture, disability activism, or the interdisciplinary field of disability studies. I define my key terms in the remainder of this section before decidedly pivoting, in the remaining sections of this Introduction, to the UK.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been the dominant political economy since the 1980s; the architects of neoliberalism emphasized both the centrality of an unencumbered “free” market and the state’s complex role in vouchsafing that centrality. The neoliberal state is often imagined, or positioned rhetorically, as a small, supposedly noninterventionist and nonregulatory state, but as Richard Seymour quite rightly explains, and as my Spanish examples from 2011 underscore, “the neoliberal state is a big interventionist state,” especially in its penal, police, or military forms; the neoliberal state, as Seymour puts it in his important study *Against Austerity: How We Can Fix the Crisis They Made*, “is ever more involved in organising corporate dominance” (10, 11). In Chile under Augusto Pinochet (followed quickly by other repressive regimes in the Southern Cone), in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher, and in the United States under Ronald Reagan, neoliberalism was consolidated and slowly globalized through the state-driven privatization and deregulation of forces that would block the sacrosanct “free flow” of capital. In the process, the state was indeed, in one very specific sense, downsized through profound cuts to public social services, but it has been, in some ways paradoxically, deeply interventionist states around the globe that have managed that downsizing.

Especially in Chile and the Southern Cone, the consolidation of new regimes of private property and the control of vibrant, democratic public cultures were often secured through violence, repression, and the literal, state-sanctioned disappearance of dissidents. Naomi Klein, in her landmark book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, argues more generally that the engineers of neoliberalism have consis-
tently relied on or actively deployed “shock” to push their ideas through. Klein looks to both “natural” and human-made disasters in *The Shock Doctrine*, recognizing of course that even “natural” disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2004 are simultaneously “human made” in many ways (through callous disregard for the environment, through neglect of infrastructure, through underfunding of state-supported emergency services, and so forth). The point for Klein is that not only military coups and wars, but also earthquakes and hurricanes, and of course economic “crises,” have provided both a shock and a “blank slate” for imposing usually quite unpopular ideas on suffering populations already reeling from the disaster at hand. For example, after the violent September 11, 1973 coup that brought Pinochet to power (and that deposed and drove to suicide the democratically elected president Salvador Allende), Klein writes that the University of Chicago-trained economists (“Chicago boys”) around Pinochet were experiencing “giddy anticipation and deadline adrenaline” (94). The coup and its aftermath were to provide, finally, a laboratory for putting into place the ideas of economist Milton Friedman that they held sacred: “privatization, deregulation and cuts to social spending—the free-market trinity” (94). Similar giddy anticipation would erupt repeatedly among the power brokers of neoliberalism following countless shocks around the world over the next four decades.

Neoliberalism institutes “flexible” production, or “just in time” production, that is often outsourced to locations with cheaper labor costs, usually in the Global South. Having resources for production “just in time” means that the materials needed for production are never (inefficiently) stockpiled; the demand for products in various locations, moreover, is assessed more continuously and rigorously to avoid overproduction. David Harvey explains that the “‘just-in-time’ principle . . . minimises the cost of idle inventories”: “producers deal with suppliers directly and, with optimal scheduling and supply models, transmit orders for components directly back down their supply chain” (*Enigma* 68). The flexible efficiency of this globalized model of production stands in stark contrast to the Fordist mass production of the mid-twentieth century, which (with its innovative factories) was efficient in its moment but depended upon less than “optimal” forms of communication and delivery to and from its assembly lines. This efficiency of production has been coupled with an “efficiency” of sorts, of consumption; in
and through its flexibility and speed, as neoliberalism has congealed, it has relied on or produced “new forms of niche consumerism” (Harvey, *Enigma* 131), constructing or hypostasizing target markets or identities—particular, defined groups to whom a streamlined “just-in-time” production could cater.⁹

Niche consumerism is one of the ways in which individualism has been reinvented or repackaged for our times (consumption, in other words, has been hyper-individualized). The other dominant way in which individualism has been repackaged is more obviously punitive, as neoliberalism depends not only upon fetishized notions of consumer “choice” but also upon related notions of “personal responsibility” (Duggan, *Twilight* 12). The neoliberal mandate for “personal responsibility” implicitly calls for and explicitly generates a constant monitoring of both self and others. Lisa Duggan writes that “social service functions are privatized through personal responsibility as the proper functions of the state are narrowed, tax and wage costs in the economy are cut, and more social costs are absorbed by civil society and the family” (*Twilight* 15–16). Rhetorics of personal responsibility, perhaps unsurprisingly, have been particularly pronounced in the United States, but they are increasingly central in other locations such as Britain.

**Austerity**

Despite its different valences in different locations, contemporary *austerity* is a response to the crises of twenty-first century neoliberal capitalism, and is in many ways simply neoliberalism intensified, even as the fantasy of consumer choice is positioned as out of reach for more and more people. Like neoliberalism more generally, austerity is characterized by a lowering of government spending, an increasing of labor hours for workers (hence, the raising of the retirement age in Spain), cuts to benefits and social services, and—wherever possible—privatization of those social services. All these measures, in the age of austerity, are imposed to again spur capitalist growth that has stalled and to protect thereby the profits of capitalists through the crises. Austerity is generally wrapped up in rhetorics of emergency, whether the topic is reducing a national debt, paying for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, or protecting banks from catastrophic loss. The supposed
need for “emergency” austerity measures in so many locations was so pronounced in the years after 2008, that National Public Radio in the United States (now simply called “NPR”) reported that *austerity* had been named word of the year in 2010 by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary. NPR has itself since been a victim of austerity politics, as its budget has been slashed, a range of diverse programming cut, and staff reduced (Goldstein; Carney).10

Like Klein in her general overview of disaster capitalism, Mark Blyth—in his own history of what the subtitle of his book terms that “dangerous idea,” austerity—focuses on multiple locations, noting at the current moment that “German ideals of fiscal prudence clash with Spanish unemployment at 25 percent and a Greek state . . . slashing itself to insolvency and mass poverty while being given ever-more loans to do so” (2). The United States, meanwhile, has been marked by “a hollowing out of middle-class opportunities, and a gridlocked state” that, despite its gridlock (which might suggest fractures in a consensus), has generally not advanced alternatives to the economic order that has been dominant for more than three decades (2). “If we view each of these elements in isolation, it all looks rather chaotic,” Blyth writes, but “what they have in common is their supposed cure: austerity, the policy of cutting the state’s budget to promote growth” (2). Ongoing loans for Greece have come on the condition that harsher and harsher cuts be imposed on citizens (even though the Greek population voted overwhelmingly in 2015 to reject those conditions); the gridlocked state in the United States has often resulted from Republican refusals to act until more austere budgets are pushed through the legislature; and so forth. Post-2008, austerity has been the ubiquitous neoliberal cure for the global economic crisis.

Even if a consensus that austerity does not actually work is legible in many economic analyses and (clearly) in popular opinion, in most locations some form of austerity politics is still nonetheless put forward as “common sense” across the mainstream political spectrum.11 This seeming-consensus has certainly been evident for more than thirty years in the United States, with the Democrats and the Republicans, but also until recently in Spain, with the PSEO and the PP; it is evident, as we shall see, in the UK, with the Conservative (Tory) Party on one side, and “New Labour” as it emerged at the turn of the century under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown on the other. That consensus has shown multiple
fractures over the course of writing this book, with emergent parties of the Left (Syriza for a time in Greece, Podemos in Spain) or the left wing of the Labour and Democratic parties in the United Kingdom and the United States openly, if very unevenly, critiquing the consensus around austerity and imagining alternatives. However, given how thoroughly austerity has succeeded as what Richard Seymour rightly calls a “class strategy,” it is not likely “that the Left will be able to simply stop austerity in its tracks, and immediately reverse its successes thus far” (Against 29, 152).

As a transnational class strategy responding to the global crisis, austerity has served well as the pretext for managing “crisis,” and it has had as its effect the ongoing (and indeed astronomical) upward redistribution of wealth. Following the September 2015 election, by party members, of the socialist Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in the UK (and thus as the official leader of the opposition party), the editors of Salvage: A New Quarterly of Revolutionary Arts and Letters (including Seymour), observing that class strategy suddenly thrown into sharp relief through Corbyn’s challenge to the New Labour consensus, wrote that the struggle against austerity, and neoliberal capitalism more generally, “will refract through its own institutional and ideological character the conflict that cleaves society as a whole, that between exploiter and exploited, between oppressor and oppressed. And the odds in that conflict remain stacked heavily in favour of the habitual victors” (“Pessimism”). Although Crip Times turns repeatedly toward generative activist and artistic responses from 2011 forward, to a global austerity politics, I share Seymour’s (and his coeditors’) caution and pessimism about the ease with which austerity might be countered, given the immense political and economic power of those who would sustain it and who have profited immensely from its implementation, regardless of whether it has “succeeded” or “failed” (on its own ostensible terms) as an economic strategy.

Crip

Austerity bites, as one recent title out of the UK would have it; Mary O’Hara’s Austerity Bites details stories of the current hardship faced by poor and working-class populations in the country. Partly because of
that bite, however, *austerity* is probably the most readily accessible (and widely disseminated) keyword in my study. The terms *crip*, or *cripping*, however, as I suggested, could use more framing. In some ways, like *queer, crip* as a noun has had a variegated history. *Crip* has clearly been a derogatory term (derived in English again, from the word *cripple*) and will always, I contend, carry traces of a painful history of stigma and derision. *Crip* has, however, in the face of this, been a term that has been reclaimed by many disabled people and groups themselves. Even more than *disability* itself (which also has been reclaimed and resignified to mean something different from, or in excess of, lack or loss), *crip* has functioned for many as a marker of an in-your-face, or out-and-proud, cultural model of disability. As Snyder and Mitchell explain, a cultural model of disability recognizes “disability as a site of phenomenological value that is not purely synonymous with the processes of social disablement” (*Cultural* 5). Given that disabled people themselves have done the labor of resignifying *crip*, *crip* is not opposed to *disability* (far from it; *crip* arguably revels in disability). *Crip* does, however, generally stand in opposition to both the medical model, which would reduce disability to the univocality of pathology, diagnosis, or treatment/elimination, and to some forms of the well-known social model, largely developed in the UK, which suggest that *disability* should be understood as located not in bodies per se but in inaccessible environments requiring adaptation. *Crip’s* excessive, flamboyant defiance ties it to models of disability (and to uses of the term *disability*) that are more culturally generative (and politically radical) than a merely reformist social model.

Although the historical connections of *crip* to *cripple* seem to tie the term to mobility impairment, it has actually proven to be far stretchier. A recent set of two special issues of the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, coedited by Merri Lisa Johnson and me and focusing on “Cripistemologies” (a term coined by Johnson), positions *crip* as describing well what we might see as non-normative or nonrepresentative disabilities—disabilities, shall we say, that would never be legible beneath the universal access symbol for disability. Several essays included focus on what Anna Mollow terms “undocumented disabilities” (“Criphistemologies” 185); others focus specifically on borderline personality, anxiety, chronic pain, HIV/AIDS, trans identity, and a range of other forms of embodiment or impairments at times not always adequately
or easily comprehended by the signifier disability. Likewise, throughout her important study *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer at times uses the term to think carefully about issues, mental states, behaviors, or forms of embodiment that might not, on the surface, appear to be about disability at all. For Kafer and others, *crip* has the capacity to encompass forms of embodiment or states of mind that are arguably in excess of the able-minded or able-bodied/disabled binary. Not unlike *queer* at its most radical, *crip* often has the fabulous potential to be simultaneously flamboyantly identitarian (as in, we are crip and you will acknowledge that!) and flamboyantly anti-identitarian (as in, we reject your categories or the capacity of languages saturated in ableism to describe us!). As my use of “we” here suggests, and as Kafer’s study explicitly affirms throughout, the politics of *crip* have generally been actively collective or coalitional.

There have certainly been necessary debates about the limited or situated value of the word. I myself sought to encourage such debates when, in 2006 in *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, I listed a range of terms that have performed similar critical work and insisted that *crip* should be “permanently and desirably contingent: in other queer, crip, and queercrip contexts, squint-eyed, half dead, not dead yet, gimp, freak, crazy, mad, or diseased pariah have served, or might serve, similar generative functions. . . . Crip is a critical term [that] in various times and places must be displaced by other terms” (40, 41). Both *Crip Theory* and *Feminist, Queer, Crip*—as this list of varied, contingent, and shifting queercrip contexts hopefully affirms—situate *crip* itself as generally emergent from activist and artistic cultural locations of disability, even as it has been taken up at this point in a wide range of transnational academic locations (which can, of course, themselves be activist and/or artistic).

Eli Clare is one artist and activist who has written thoughtfully about *crip*; in *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, Clare explicitly uses the first-person plural to explain how “we in the disability rights movement create crip culture, tell crip jokes, identify a sensibility we call crip humor” (68). For Clare, creative deployments of *crip* differentiate it from the more individualistic *supercrip*. Supercrips have often been critiqued for participating in ableist “overcoming” narratives, as though disability represented an adversity over which one
must “triumph” (through athletic competition or daring adventures, for example).16

Clare appeared with numerous other disabled artists in Mitchell and Snyder’s groundbreaking 1995 documentary Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back, with the very title suggesting that crip is connected to disability community, solidarity, outspokenness, and defiance. Crip, in all these senses, has not been limited to the United States; in the UK the cartoonist Crippen has generated biting critiques of both ableist ideas generally and austerity in particular, and performer Liz Carr has created “crip radio” through a podcast called “Ouch!” available on the BBC’s disability website. In Australia, comedienne and disability activist Stella Young produced a comedy performance called “Tales from the Crip” aimed at affirming disabled people’s sexuality while mocking ableist notions that disabled people should be “inspirational” (she even wore a T-shirt that read “Inspiration Boner Killer”). “I identify with the crip community,” Young said in a 2012 interview, “I didn’t invent the word—it’s a political ideology I came to in my late teens and early 20s. People often say to me ‘You can’t say that!’ and I say, ‘Well, my people have been saying it for decades so I reckon I probably can’” (Northover). Back in the United States, Mike Ervin has blogged as “Smart Ass Cripple” since 2010 on the “official site for bitter cripples (and those who love them).” Leroy Moore has invented an African American, disabled, and gender-queer cultural form called Krip-Hop—with the K, for Moore, marking a distance from the C of the Los Angeles–based gang called the Crips. Aiming to bring hip-hop artists and poets with disabilities to a wider audience, Krip-Hop has been integrated into some of the performances of Sins Invalid, a troupe celebrating the beauty, desirability, and diversity of queer and disabled people of color.

Usage of the term as an adjective in cases such as these underscores its generative character: when combined with a noun (crip community, crip culture, Krip-Hop), “crip” as adjective is not simply additive. Describing something like culture as “crip” remakes the substance in question: “crip culture” is not simply crip + culture (as if we all agreed in advance what the latter term might mean). In the same ways that “crip” as noun does not simplistically mark a form of existence that can be known in advance, “crip” as adjective cannot be reduced to a mere descriptor. The term’s power when used as a verb in turn emanates from
its uses as a noun or adjective. Queer disability theorist Mel Y. Chen has written about “animacy,” which he describes as the degree of “liveness” associated with an entity or term. Animacy hierarchies, for Chen, have generally fixed, or deadened, that which has been understood as queer or disabled. For Chen, “a queer-crip approach to disability” is marked, in contrast, by an enlivening or “disentangling of the discourses . . . that contain and fix dis/abled bodies” (215). Whether as noun, adjective, or verb, crip has participated in what Chen identifies as “reworldings that challenge the order of things” (237).

To crip or not to crip is not the question for many writers, artists, and activists as the crip times I describe below demand action. We are, however, still collectively discovering what it might or can mean “to crip” and, as a verb, the term is still perhaps best defined by what it might potentially become (as a process) than by what it is. Two important conferences in Prague, the Czech Republic, that postdate the global economic crisis—Cripping Neoliberalism in 2010 and Cripping Development in 2013—implied in their titles that crip entails radically revisioning, from committed anti-ableist positions, the taken-for-granted systems in which we are located. “Cripping Neoliberalism” and “Cripping Development” interrogated fetishized notions of capitalist growth and highlighted how bodies and minds are unevenly caught up in, or differentially materialize around, global processes of uneven development. The location of the 2010 and 2013 conferences outside the United States or western Europe notably indicated a desire to find new languages useful for thinking about disability and impairment in the Global South or postsocialist countries.17

Crip and criping can certainly be positioned alongside a range of terms that represent the need for new or multiple languages for thinking about disability. For some scholars, such as Julie Livingston and Jasbir K. Puar, debility has played a key role in the development of new, critical vocabularies. Debility is useful, in particular, for Livingston’s work in Botswana, where no word translates easily into “disability,” but where a concept is nonetheless needed for encompassing a range of “experiences of chronic illness and senescence, as well as disability per se” (113). I am very sympathetic to this work, and debility arguably describes well many of the bodily experiences I consider in the pages ahead. Puar, however, often explicitly offers up debility as part of a supersession narrative, or
what she describes as “a move from disability to debility” (“Prognosis” 166). 18 Crip and crippling, in contrast, do not assume in advance that disability, especially as it is worked on and across by artists and activists and not just by state and capital, is always and everywhere exhausted.

Crip has crossed some borders relatively easily and has, at this point, moved in and out of various languages. One of the first special issues of an academic journal on crip theory (titled Criptetri) was a bilingual (English and Swedish) special issue out of Scandinavia; the issue carefully examined both the multiple and always contested ways in which the term had been taken up by a range of subjects in Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland. The activist, anticapitalist newspaper or zine Crip Magazine, out of Vienna, Austria, was also bilingual (English and German). Crip resonates strongly with some radical queer and disability activists in Spanish-speaking and German-speaking locations generally (in German, the contemporary history of crip partially intersects with the longer history of the Krüppel Movement, although the ways in which the term currently travels in German-speaking locations, perhaps especially in connection to radical groups in Vienna, seems to me to be semiautonomous from that movement). 19 In Spain, Moscoso Pérez and others have begun to talk about “cripwashing” as a complicated process of state control or domestication of disability liberation, using the very language of disability activism (170). “La teoría crip,” Lucas Platero suggests, is potentially translated as “literalmente teoría tullida” (“Políticas” 11); in Spanish contexts, la teoría tullida or crip has been used as a tool for naming or exposing neoliberal appropriations of radical visions of disability activism and coalition. 20 Theorizing similar appropriations in a Czech context, Kateřina Kolářová uses the idea of “the inarticulate post-socialist crip” to describe impaired or disabled (and socialist) modes of being that have been silenced by celebratory neoliberal uses of disability during the transition to capitalism in eastern Europe (257).

“To crip,” like “to queer,” gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted. 21 Crippling also exposes the ways in which able-bodiedness and able-mindedness get naturalized and the ways that bodies, minds, and impairments that should be at the absolute center of a space or issue or discussion get purged from that space or issue or discussion. Such purging has tended to be in the service of the smooth
functioning of a globalized neoliberal capitalism, which is (as should be clear from my Spanish and Czech examples above) one reason why the term has had such resonance with more radical disabled activists (since it exposes or disrupts that smooth functioning).

*Crippling* always attends to the materiality of embodiment at the same time that it attends to how spaces, issues, or discussions get “straightened.” The critical act of crip, I argue, resists “straightening” in a rather more expansive sense than we might think of straightening, at the moment, in queer studies, activism, or art. This is in part because the radical power of queer has been diluted by global commodification processes that have not (yet) domesticated crip or contained and commodified what Mia Mingus terms “crip solidarity” (“Wherever You Are”). For disability radicals, crip is a keyword that currently connects to what queer of color and crip of color theorists such as Mingus have begun to call “disability justice” (“Changing”). Disability justice moves beyond mere rights-based and nation-state–based strategies (represented most prominently by the Americans with Disabilities Act). It also forges anti-neoliberal coalitions in the interests of a global crip imagination, which can invent new ways of countering oppression and generate new forms of being-in-common.

**Crip Britain**

*Crip Times*, the book, as I have indicated, largely centers on one location, the UK. It repeatedly spins out, however, to other places as it traces both the globalization and resistance of my subtitle. For many disabled people living there, the UK has certainly felt like ground zero for austerity since the early 2000s. Crip times, the concept, thus attempts to capture what has been happening, during that time, in the UK. Some readers will note echoes of “New Times” in my title; those echoes are deliberate.22 “New Times” was a phrase used by Stuart Hall, Martin Jacques, and other cultural studies writers associated with the journal *Marxism Today* in the 1980s. Jacques edited *Marxism Today* between 1977 and 1991, when the journal stopped publication. A volume called *New Times*, collecting a series of articles published in *Marxism Today* and selected other pieces (including, importantly, critiques), was published in 1989 and was edited by Hall and Jacques. Some of the articles in
the volume had first appeared in a special issue of *Marxism Today* published in late 1988. During its existence, *Marxism Today* was the official journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain, although during the time of Jacques's editorship, contributions (and readership) came from the Left more broadly, including eventually the liberal or center-Left that would become associated with New Labour. Many of the pieces associated with the special issue and the 1989 collection emerged from direct conversations held in May 1988, as the writers gathered to make sense of contemporary Britain.

In the *New Times* volume and special issue, writers exploring the concept of “New Times” were attempting to account for shifts in the economic, political, cultural, and critical landscape under Thatcherism (a term coined by Hall himself), although they were also attempting to think beyond Thatcherism (Hall, “Great Moving” 14). Thatcherism and neoliberalism more broadly were positioned as phenomena marking a decisive shift, a new hegemonic formation, and the writers in *New Times* were interested in theorizing how popular consent to that formation had been secured. Hall himself considered various ways that the shift was being described (“‘post-industrial,’ ‘post-Fordist,’ ‘revolution of the subject,’ ‘postmodernism’”), recognizing at the time that none of these terms was “wholly satisfactory” for describing what was taking place (“Meaning” 117).

The Labour Party had faced dramatic losses in 1983, as Thatcher was reelected, although Klein (and others) would later argue that the manufactured “shock” of the Falklands War altered Thatcher's fortunes and allowed her to continue pushing through unpopular ideas and policies (in particular, defeating striking mine workers in the two years that followed the general election) (Klein 163–176). A critique of Labour Party politics in the UK, and of a politics focused solely on class and located largely with labor unions, emerged from this turbulent period and was a component of the *New Times* debates and anthology; Hall, Rosalind Brunt, and others were emphatic that the Left needed to account more actively for the changes wrought by “the politics of identity” (Brunt 150) and a wide variety of social movements (feminism most specifically, but also movements focused on race, sexuality, and the environment).

Disability as such (as a substantive entity that, even potentially, might be part of these new social movements) is only mentioned a handful of
times in the 463-page volume. David Marquand points out that post-Fordism has generated a “growing underclass of the handicapped and unskilled” (374). Beatrix Campbell, interviewing a range of people across the UK living in what she calls “New Times Towns” (279), mentions “disabled access” as part of a changing urban landscape and specifically identifies Chris Sharp, who ran the Pinehurst Training Initiative in Swindon and advised business owners there on “facilities for the disabled” (292, 294). Geoff Mulgan, in another essay on the changing face of cities, suggests that new communications infrastructures allow for new forms of communication, such as “teleshopping for the old and disabled” (267); a page later, he notes that city cards (allowing access to various urban spaces) allow for “discounts to the unemployed, pensioners or the disabled” (268). Sarah Benton gestures somewhat vaguely toward actual “movements” formed by “those disabled by injury, illness, or addiction” (343). Earlier in the volume, Robin Murray calls for new spatial organizations and “designs that take into account those needs which have no power in the market (like those of the disabled)” (61) and Charlie Leadbeater mentions “responsibilities to the poor and sick” (144). The latter two comments in particular identify “the disabled” in passing as subjects of concern in New Times, but in doing so, unintentionally imply that the disabled cannot really be subjects in their own right. The very grammar of these phrases, positioning disability and sickness as objects of prepositional phrases, underscores the illegibility of disability subjectivity in New Times.

In general, “disability” only appears in the New Times collection occasionally as a negative metaphor. Leadbeater, for instance, later suggests that, despite the changes that might be associated with New Times, nothing “disables the Left from having a powerful and coherent critique of Thatcherite individualism” (144). Other writers, including Hall himself, at the time and later, likewise considered how various elements of New Times might or might not “disable” the Left: “The conventional culture and discourses of the Left, with its stress on ‘objective contradictions,’ ‘impersonal structures’ and processes that work ‘behind men’s (sic) backs,’ have disabled us from confronting the subjective dimension in politics in any very coherent way” (“Meaning” 120). Hall’s sic in relation to “conventional” discourses of the Left is particularly ironic in this passage, calling attention to the ways in which our languages are always...
saturated in masculinism immediately before deploying language inescapably saturated in ableism. The cosmopolitan knowingness of *sic erat scriptum*, “thus was it written” (even if, of course, we would never write it that way), colludes in blocking access, in *New Times*, to new ways of knowing (and knowing with) disability.

Disability, however, is arguably present on a spectral theoretical level, as Brunt, Hall, and others turn to the writings of (disabled) Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to develop a vocabulary adequate to the moment. “Unless and until we have an adequate recognition of the ways identities work,” Brunt wrote, “we are not going to be effective at world-changing. Antonio Gramsci, the pre-war Italian communist leader, was particularly acute on this point, as on many others, of how to make a politics that was subjectively relevant” (153). It did not occur to the *New Times* writers (or most other commentators since) that Gramsci’s disability (a curved spine and diminutive stature) might have influenced his insights into the role of identity in shaping and reshaping hegemonic cultural formations, despite the fact that Brunt points out that

he was developing a different revolutionary vocabulary based on what he called “a critical awareness” that took as its first injunction the ancient Delphic wisdom, “Know thyself.” Gramsci’s point was that if revolutionaries were to develop a clear and coherent conception of the world they wanted to change they should make a start by asking how people experienced the world as it was, how they got by and coped with it on a daily basis. (153–154)

Anne Finger, Tom Coogan, and a few others have since begun the process of thinking through, in ways *New Times* writers did not, Gramsci’s relevance for disability studies (and I will engage Finger’s work momentarily, as well as in the Epilogue to *Crip Times*).²³

*New Times* writers perhaps most controversially attempted to theorize not just relations of production but of consumption and choice, working to find languages that did not simply see consumers as duped by ideology but as actively participating in forging cultural forms and shaping identities through their consumer choices. This was controversial because, even though Hall and others were trying to open up a generative “gap, analytically, between Thatcherism and new times,” they were still
taking some of the changes under Thatcherism (or aspects of Thatcherism) very seriously in order to ask whether “it may become possible to resume or re-stage the broken dialogue between socialism and modernity” (Hall, “Meaning” 127). According to many critics, then, the New Times thinkers appeared to be too captivated by the power, popularity, and spectacle of Thatcherism; their effort to discern new ways of thinking, these critics suggest, prepared the way for Blair and New Labour (and by analogy on the other side of the Atlantic, for New Democrats and Bill Clinton). Prior to his own ascension to power, Blair himself wrote a piece for Marxism Today. Mulgan would later work as an adviser to Brown.

After their losses in 1983, the British Labour Party did not win a general election until Tony Blair’s victory in 1997. “New Labour,” however, was a descriptor first used to describe a reinvented party in 1994, and a manifesto of New Labour’s positions was published in 1996, with the title New Labour, New Life for Britain. The manifesto reflected the party’s new commitment to the “third way” politics legible in other locations. This politics was dubbed “third way” because it supposedly reconciled right wing economic policies with more liberal social policies; third way thinking defined both Labour under Blair and Brown and the US Democratic Party under Clinton. As Lisa Duggan and others have shown clearly, “‘third way’ parties and leaders labored to combine pro-market, pro-business, ‘free trade’ national and global policies with shrunken remnants of the social democratic and social justice programs of Western welfare states” (Twilight 9–10). The “third way” politics of New Labour and of Clintonism really only continued neoliberalism in new guises, often in guises that appeared to validate or celebrate “difference” and diversity. For his part, Hall was quick to distance himself from the “change” Tony Blair and New Labour represented in the UK, and Hall’s own cultural studies effort to develop new vocabularies for thinking about the transition, “from one regime of accumulation to another, within capitalism, whose impact has been extraordinarily wide-ranging” (Hall, “Meaning” 127), can hardly be blamed for the rise of third way thinking. Still, some New Times writers (such as Mulgan) were more directly implicated in the rise of third way thinking and (by extension) the dissolution of a rigorous analysis of class in Britain. Jacques himself expressed some enthusiasm at the moment of Blair’s emergence, but even
before he became prime minister, Hall and Jacques had published an article arguing that “Blair embodies the ultimate pessimism—that there is only one version of modernity, the one elaborated by the Conservatives over the last 18 years” (qtd. in Harris). The journal returned for one issue in 1998 to denounce “the Blair project,” with a cover picturing Blair with the word “Wrong” written below his face (Harris).

_Crip Times_ looks back to this history to look forward; I intend the title to signify in at least three ways. First, given the traces of pain and stigma that, as I indicated, _crip_ always and inevitably carries, “crip times” can hardly convey any straightforward or simplistic cheeriness about the possibilities before us. I would argue, against some of its critics, that “new times” also was not simplistically optimistic (indeed, Hall and Jacques explicitly said as much in their Introduction [17]), while conceding that optimism is nonetheless more obviously or inescapably written on the surface of the “new times” 1980s phrase. “Crip times,” in contrast, are obviously harsh times, even—we might add—virtually Dickensian “hard times,” and my title thus in some ways allows me to have it both ways, agreeing with _New Times_ theorists that a new and decisive shift has taken place with the emergence of neoliberal capitalism while also recognizing and partially agreeing with other contemporary Marxist thinkers who want to foreground not a shift but rather the deep similarities between our moment and say, the worst ravages of industrial capitalism in Victorian England.24 Second, nonetheless, “crip times” sustains and extends the insistence that we must think about what Hall terms the revolution of the subject—extending that insistence, in particular, given that, as I suggested, _disabled_ subjectivities, experiences, and social movements were not obviously central to the _New Times_ project (and even though, significantly, radical AIDS activism on both sides of the Atlantic was coming into its own, and Hall himself would write a few years later about how the HIV/AIDS pandemic was one reason why we so desperately needed the work that cultural theory and cultural studies could do) (“Cultural Studies” 272–273). Finally, “crip times” does mark, in and through the harsh and austere moment we inhabit, promise and possibility. To adapt the words of crip artist Riva Lehrer (as she describes “these people I’m falling in love with”), a group of “really amazing crips” has materialized since the late twentieth century (qtd. in Snyder and Mitchell, _Self-Preservation_). To judge by the sheer amount of cultural
production and consciousness they have generated, these really amazing crips are arguably a collectivity that had not existed before in exactly the same way. That crip collectivity is now being (transnationally) radicalized by austerity, and collectively generating resistance to the inadequate resolutions to economic, political, and social “crises” proffered by the guardians of neoliberalism, or by any single state. I contend that the paradoxical ways in which “crip times” carries both harshness and potentiality, along with the simple fact that the crip radicalization traced in this book is the direct result of an age of austerity, should demand a consistent focus on both “identity” (in its complex and ever-shifting valences) and on the class dynamics and analysis that critics of *New Times* worried was in danger of being lost.

In many ways, although the chapters ahead have many layers, my theses in *Crip Times* are relatively straightforward and, I hope, consistent across the cultural locations of disability I survey in this book. Disability, as I have suggested, is one of the undertheorized central issues of a global austerity politics. Surveying the ways in which activists and artists are responding to crip times, I contend that crips themselves are globally putting forward this thesis about disability’s centrality and that, in some locations, their demand for disability justice is starting to register. Disability in our neoliberal moment, however, simultaneously exists as never before as a niche, an identity, even a market that is potentially quite useful (in varied ways that I will detail) to the guardians of austerity politics. Disability, in that dangerous situation, has some circumscribed potential to go the way of a globalized, commodified queerness, even if, as I have intimated, disability and crip both retain in our moment a certain critical possibility or promise not always palpable (any more, or as much) around queer. Finally, the path that crippling takes (that is, which way “disability” pivots in this dangerous moment) is wrapped up in affect, or rather a vacillation between the politics of affect (deployed quite effectively by state and capital to sustain the class strategy of austerity) and what Jasbir K. Puar and others have theorized as affective politics (*Terrorist* 215). Deborah Gould uses “the term affect to indicate nonconscious and unnamed, but nevertheless registered, experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body” (19). Affect in social movements, Gould argues, is indicative of potentiality; “affective states can shake one out of deeply
grooved patterns of thinking and feeling and allow for new imaginings” (27). A crip affective politics is discernible, I will argue in this book, in and through various forms of excessive and flamboyant, activist and artistic, crip resistance.

What has been happening since 2010 in the UK (and in the Eurozone) is in many ways not necessarily new, even if it is legible as a reaction to a new (post-2008) crisis in neoliberal capitalism. The cure for the current crisis in the United States and the UK, as well as in countries across Europe, is akin to the “structural adjustment” policies imposed on heavily indebted poor countries in the Global South by global financial institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank (with centers of power in the United States and western Europe) since the 1970s. Austerity in the UK, and elsewhere in Europe and North America, in a way thus represents crip times coming home to roost, as it were.

From 2010 to 2015 in the UK, austerity was implemented by a coalition government, the first to exist in Britain since World War II. In the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party, led by David Cameron, did not receive enough seats in Parliament for an outright majority and during five days of negotiations in May 2010, it was not entirely clear that a new government could be formed. Although the centrist Liberal Democrats, under the leadership of Nick Clegg, had prior to the 2010 elections appeared to favor a rather different political and economic agenda, they agreed to enter into a coalition government with the Tories. After his loss, Gordon Brown, the New Labour leader who had been prime minister since 2007, resigned from that position a day after resigning as Labour Party leader. In the new coalition government, Cameron became prime minister and Clegg, deputy prime minister. Ed Miliband was subsequently elected as the new Labour Party leader.

Soon after the formation of the coalition, the Tories embarked on one of the most intense austerity agendas in the world, ostensibly to address the immense budget deficit that had been generated in Britain by the global economic crisis. Cameron appointed George Osborne as his chancellor of the exchequer (akin to the secretary of the treasury in the United States); Osborne would become one of the primary architects of the Tory–Liberal Democrat austerity plan. Iain Duncan Smith was appointed the secretary of state for work and pensions; Smith would
execute the austerity plan by “reforming” welfare benefits in the UK. Although the coalition claimed repeatedly after 2010 that it did not plan to privatize the wildly popular British National Health Service (NHS), many commentators found this claim to be absolutely specious, as more and more elements of the NHS were altered, outsourced, or trimmed. The Health and Social Care Act of 2012 allowed for a dramatic restructuring of the NHS, devolving what had been organized by public Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). The CCGs would be responsible for deciding how health care would be organized and paid for; private organizations would be allowed to compete for the opportunity to provide care. The Health and Social Care Act explicitly used the (privatizing) language of choice and competition to describe the restructuring of the NHS that was being legislated.

In addition to these shifts in the ways in which national health care would be organized, the cuts to social services and benefits that emerged from Osborne’s and Smith’s program of austerity have been extreme. Moreover, in the general election of 2015, in an upset that few had predicted, the Tories won outright, and thus continued their austerity agenda without their coalition partners. In his 2010 budget, Osborne had laid out his intention of cutting £11 billion per year in benefits (following a drastic initial cut that was to be even larger) (Vale). In his 2015 budget, delivered a month after the Tories began governing alone, he announced that an additional £12 billion would be cut from the benefits budget. Osborne’s 2015 budget was approved by Parliament in October that year. It in some ways made austerity in the UK permanent, as a component of the budget mandated that the government run a surplus in so-called “normal” years. Such a target, which accepted without question that deficits and deficit spending are signs of an ongoing “crisis,” essentially precluded the possibility that the austerity cuts from 2010 to 2015 might be reversed. Although Corbyn as the new Labour leader rallied the opposition to vote against Osborne’s budget, twenty-one New Labour members of Parliament abstained from the vote, tacitly affirming an ongoing cross-party common sense that some form of permanent austerity is necessary.

Cameron continued to govern as prime minister until July 2016, when he resigned following the results of a popular referendum he had
called on British membership in the European Union. In a move dubbed “Brexit” (British exit), the country voted to leave the EU. Cameron, who had argued strongly against that result, stepped down and was shortly thereafter replaced by his former home secretary, Theresa May. Although I discuss Brexit briefly in my epilogue, *Crip Times* is largely about the Cameron years, when the Conservative austerity agenda was secured. The politics of affect that has accompanied this agenda has been multivalent—a limited but spectacular celebration of disability and disability identity (most obvious around the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games that I consider in chapter 1) having coexisted with a concerted campaign to cast recipients of benefits as “scroungers” or “spongers” or “shirkers.” Although Thatcher herself rode to power as early as May 1978 rhetorically introducing phrases such as “we should back the workers and not the shirkers” (qtd. in Jones, *Chavs* 62), phrases such as “benefit scroungers” or “shirkers” did not appear with frequency in the British press prior to the Tory–Liberal Democrat coalition; they are now ubiquitous. “Shirkers” are generally opposed to “strivers” in the contemporary scenario, and “strivers” take a US-style, neoliberal “personal responsibility” for their actions. Popular culture has disseminated the idea of “scroungers,” who supposedly don’t take personal responsibility and who cheat the system, in numerous venues, most infamously perhaps in the series *Benefits Street* that aired on Britain’s Channel 4 in January 2014. *Benefits Street* followed the lives of residents of James Turner Street in Birmingham, supposedly a location with one of the highest number of benefits recipients in the country. Those living “life on the dole” (and *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole* was in fact the title of yet another television “exposé” that aired on Channel 5) have been subject to a constant suspicion that turns attention away from class inequalities and toward (individualized) behavior. Owen Jones’s *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* makes clear that the stereotyping of poor people, especially poor youth, as dirty “chavs” (a derogatory term used to mock supposedly antisocial behavior and outlandish dress) has been a largely successful rhetorical strategy materializing what Cameron called in a key 2010 campaign speech a “Broken Britain” that needs behavioral change (and of course, “personal responsibility”) more than anything like class solidarity or economic justice (which, from Thatcher’s Britain to Cameron’s, has been cast as completely anachronistic) (Jones, *Chavs* 78).
Crippling Gramsci is useful for understanding this harsh project of rhetorical disqualification. In her brief analysis of Gramsci’s “Some Aspects of the Southern Question,” Anne Finger notes that Gramsci offers “a granular dissection not only of how the interplay among class, religion, regional, and social differences maintained capitalism’s power, but also for offering a sketch of how revolutionary alliances might be formed to contest capitalist hegemony.” “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” was an unfinished piece left behind by Gramsci at the time of his imprisonment; it attends to the ways in which the gap between the North and South of Italy is sustained discursively, in ways that block revolutionary alliances. The implication Finger puts forward in her analysis of Gramsci’s piece is that it is a sort of disability theory avant la lettre, in that Gramsci critiques the ways in which both “the propagandists of the bourgeoisie” and the Socialist Party disqualify Southerners by appealing, even “scientifically,” to a supposedly innate corporeal inferiority: “if the South is backward, the fault does not lie with the capitalist system or with any other historical cause, but with Nature, which has made the Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric” (qtd. in Finger). For Finger, this unfinished critique of bourgeois and Socialist Party rhetoric provides “in ‘embryonic form’ a reading of disability politics, one moreover that offers tantalizing hints about the links between disability and race.” As Crip Times hopefully will make clear (especially in my Epilogue, but also, in varied ways, in the chapters that precede it), these links between disability and race are very much active in the contemporary disqualification of benefit scroungers.

In contrast to Gramsci’s embryonic disability theory excavating how the Italian South was cast as essentially disabled (with its implicit critique of the ways in which what we might comprehend as disabled difference was indirectly targeted for scorn), the contemporary politics of affect stigmatizing recipients of benefits in the UK has often directly targeted disabled people. Liberals in general, New Labour, and also those much further on the Left have generally criticized this conservative campaign of rhetorical demonization. The critique of this stigmatizing rhetoric, however, has often quite interestingly come with a caveat. The caveat goes something like this: although no one denies that there are some people who have cheated the system in some way, the vast
majority of benefits recipients are not trying to do so. Critics of sponger or scrounger rhetoric often, quite earnestly, point to how very small the number of people is who have “cheated the system.” Even Jones, for example, positions his sharp critique of the ways in which the Conservatives have mobilized the figure of the fraud on benefits alongside an acknowledgment that (of course) a small amount of fraud does happen (Jones, Chavs 196).

Crip Times avoids all caveats in this regard, in part drawing on a logic from AIDS cultural theory and activism. In Melancholia and Moralism, Douglas Crimp urges that we “recognize that every image of a PWA [Person with AIDS] is a representation, and formulate our activist demands not in relation to the ‘truth’ of the image, but in relation to the conditions of its construction and to its social effects” (99). Every image of a scrounger in crip times (even the scrounger who materializes in a caveat temporarily acknowledging that yes, a small percentage of poor people do take advantage of benefits) is likewise a representation, and Crip Times attends not to the argument about whether scroungers exist but to the conditions of construction of such representations and their social effects. Or, in the spirit of the crip playfulness and artistry that will be on display throughout this book, I will suggest that if scroungers do exist, they’re fierce, fabulous, and committed to social justice for disabled people and opposed to their neoliberal spectacularization. As I put those scroungers before you, however, I’m explicitly putting forward a counter-representation, or arguing, as Hall does, for an ongoing attention not to the truth of a given representation but to the “politics of representation” (“New Ethnicities” 442). To illustrate what I mean, I turn in the next section to a brief and critical reading of a filmic representation, Tom Hooper’s The King’s Speech, which was produced in the same year (2010) that brought us the coalition and their austerity agenda.

The Crip’s Speech in an Age of Austerity

In the UK itself, The King’s Speech was specifically released, to great acclaim, in January 2011. It screened throughout much of that spring. In the United States, it went on to win Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay. In this section, I use The King’s Speech to reflect on what I will term emergent disabilities, or on
emergent uses of disability in our moment. By “emergent uses of disability,” I’m referring both to the ways in which disability is currently not repressed but managed by neoliberal biopower and indeed useful to its operation and to the ways in which disability exceeds that management. By using Raymond Williams’s term “emergent” to talk about disabilities themselves, I’m tentatively tracing the materialization of disabilities that I want to mark as somewhat different from the residual or dominant forms we think we know (Williams 121–127). The materialization of disabilities I consider took place in a range of locations, including onscreen in Hooper’s film, in journalism in circulation around it, and in communities responding to those textual representations. As many disability studies analyses would have it, dominant forms of disability in cinema, in the words of Jay Dolmage, “make it sound scary and clinical.” In the face of that clinical approach, however, most cinematic representations of disability, as Dolmage points out, “want to keep the disabled character cheerful. If that’s not possible, the disability turns the character completely evil. It has to be one or the other” (“Hollywood”). While not entirely disagreeing with this recognizable critique, and while I will examine here a character who does, I concede, work his way toward a type of cheerfulness, I argue that his cheeriness (or evil) may be beside the point. I’m not sure, any longer, that it has to be one or the other. A crip politics of representation must attend to what Puar might term “the convivial relations between” the emergent neoliberal utility of certain disabled figures and disability identity, representation, and rights (Terrorist 117).

Outside the theater, throughout the first half of 2011 various groups were mobilizing (or, we might say, keeping Hall’s contestatory politics of representation in mind, were scrounging together) an initial response to the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition’s punishing program of cuts to social services. A range of protests, marches, and actions in 2011 brought together students, workers, pensioners, and—indeed, as part of all these actions—disabled people. A massive public sector strike, for example, was held in the UK on June 30, 2011, to protest the coalition government’s cuts in general and specifically to protest changes to public sector pension plans, such as raising the retirement age from sixty to sixty-six. A “Unite the Resistance” meeting was held on June 22, in preparation for the strikes of June 30. A report on the meeting quoted a disabled activist
whose name was given only as “Andy,” and who insisted that disabled people would be “front and centre” of the movement against austerity cuts. Disabled people would take that position, Andy continued, “by right, not by charity” (qtd. in S. Robinson). There are many things I like about Andy’s June 22 assertion; it is, to use the language with which I closed the previous section, fierce, fabulous, and committed to social justice. It also importantly conjures up, however, tactical maneuvering at a specific historical moment: “front and centre” implies positioning in relation to forces that are themselves, similarly, not fixed but rather constantly shifting.

Although in relation to the emergent disabilities I will trace in circulation around The King’s Speech, I’m going to argue against disability rights, representation, and identity, I simultaneously want Andy’s forceful words to reverberate throughout the rest of this Introduction in order to (of course) argue for them. I will work my way in conclusion toward what I hope is both an amplification and resignification of Andy’s assertion that is still true to his militant intent. Put differently, in an effort to partially negate what I will theorize as “the crip’s speech,” I focus in this section on the complex ways that disability rights, representation, and identity currently function and circulate, and how they are, to stick with the language of positioning, corralled. Ultimately, though, I’m not exactly seeking to nullify any of them. This section of my chapter is necessarily paradoxical (or perhaps, more properly, dialectical), negating “the crip’s speech” while simultaneously discerning within it the articulation of another world, one that might be comprehended as depending upon the inventive forms of transnational queer-crip activist and artistic relationality that are the primary subjects of this book. I attempted to foreground (and work through) similar seeming paradoxes throughout Crip Theory. For instance, in a consideration of the chunks of concrete dislodged by disability activists with sledgehammers at inaccessible street corners in the 1980s (activists whom I identified as “crip theorists in the street”), I wrote that the concrete is “simultaneously solid and disintegrated, fixed and displaced. . . . If from one perspective that chunk of concrete marks a material and seemingly insurmountable barrier, from another it marks the will to remake the material world” (35). Similarly, the “crip’s speech” that I will trace in The King’s Speech (and the rights, representation, and identity that sub tend
it) in many ways appears solid and inert, while the crip’s speech that will emerge as this Introduction and project conclude is generatively disintegrated and displaced.\(^{30}\)

Although *Crip Times* is almost entirely about disability, important, field-transforming work in queer studies, as I have suggested, provides one of its conditions of possibility—work such as Licia Fiol-Matta’s *A Queer Mother for the Nation*, Lisa Duggan’s *The Twilight of Equality?* or Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages*. These studies and many others in their wake have arguably shifted the starting line for queer theory—in other words, these theorists may have argued their way toward the ideas I will spotlight in this section, but now I would say a critical queer theory begins with them. They demonstrate not simply that queer relationality at times fails to usher in a more just social order but also that it can actively collude with exploitation and hierarchization—with, for instance, patriarchy, racism, imperialism, class oppression—to shut down queer possibility, becoming, or world-making. As Fiol-Matta looks critically at the political and literary career of Chilean Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral, for example, analyzing aspects of Mistral’s life that might be understood as “queer” (a decidedly non-normative gender presentation, a series of affairs with women, a very public and yet spectacularly nonreproductive maternal identity), she argues that these non-normative, and even incoherent, aspects of Mistral’s life were actually deployed to buttress racialized nationalisms, patriarchy, and state-sanctioned heteronormativity throughout the Americas. Structures of racism and heteronormativity, in other words, congealed in and through Mistral’s queerness.\(^{31}\) Other theorists, Duggan and Puar perhaps most prominently among them, have outlined similar queer problematics—marked in Duggan by the concept of “homonormativity,” in Puar by concepts such as “homonationalism” (Duggan, “New Homonormativity” 175; Puar, *Terrorist 2*). For Duggan, a “new homonormativity,” at the turn of the twenty-first century, emerges from third way politics and works with and not against “dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions . . . while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (“New Homonormativity” 179). Homonationalism, for Puar, can be understood as a kind of “national homosexuality” that is in many ways sanctioned by state
and capital and that colludes in the securitization and imperialism required to sustain and extend the reach of neoliberal capitalism (Terrorist 2). These latter analyses, of course, are more directly specific to our own moment and to the workings of queer relationality in and through neoliberal capitalism. They demonstrate, arguably, that neoliberalism can function very efficiently with queerness, and no matter how far back we intuited that fact (some New Times writers were already talking about gay niche markets emerging in the 1970s), this foundational early twenty-first century queer work fleshed it out.

As should be clear from my opening sections, I’m interested in theorizing how neoliberalism and the austerity that now undergirds it similarly work, in queer ways, in relation to disability and to crip forms of relationality. Of course, The King’s Speech is not necessarily the most likely text to bring forward for such a project: 1930s Britain, when the film takes place, might have been an austere time for ordinary Britons; not so much (then as now) for the Royal Family. Still, perhaps surprisingly, I’ll start by not trashing the film. The King’s Speech tells the story of King George VI (Colin Firth), who assumes the throne in England in December 1936 after his brother Edward VIII abdicates in order to marry his mistress, a divorcée. “Bertie,” as King George is known to his intimates, is a reluctant monarch represented by the film as doing what is necessary for the British Empire at a time of looming war with Germany (although the historical Edward VIII was a Nazi sympathizer, this complication is completely avoided in the film). Bertie’s reluctance to rule is wound up with his fear of public speaking and a lifelong stammer (or stutter, as it is known in the United States). With the help of an Australian speech therapist named Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), however, Bertie learns to speak more confidently with minimal stammering, and The King’s Speech concludes with his nine-minute September 1939 radio address to the nation declaring that Britain is at war with Germany. As the film’s thematic string music crescendos in the background, Britons of all social classes (and indeed around the globe) are represented gathering in front of radios to hear Bertie speak: “In this grave . . . hour . . . perhaps the most fateful in our history . . . I send to every household of my uh-peoples, both at home . . . and overseas, this message . . . speaking with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I was able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.”
I say “perhaps surprisingly” in relation to what I’ll initially say about Hooper’s film, because of my goal in this section of considering “emergent disabilities.” If I were to simply trash *The King’s Speech*, I would essentially be identifying it as more of the same, as we have in fact learned to identify the “same old, same old” for a few decades now in disability studies. *The King’s Speech*, that is, is a sentimental, inspirational “overcoming” movie (meaning that it is clearly about the “triumph” over disability); it seems rather clearly designed for nondisabled consumption (disability activists and disability studies scholars have long critiqued the idea that one needs to “overcome” disability); it largely locates the problem not in the social context in which the disabled person finds himself but in his impairment (the problem is, in other words, King George VI of England’s stammer); and it joins a very, very long list of films that present audiences with an actor (in this case Colin Firth) who is ultimately showered with awards for playing crip—the message being, “good for you Colin Firth [or Daniel Day Lewis, or Sean Penn, or Jack Nicholson, or Dustin Hoffman, or Tom Hanks, or or . . . ], you can play this incredibly challenging role; here’s your Golden Globe, your Oscar, your global admiration.”

But crip times don’t call for simply the same old, same old representation. It’s Lewis, Penn, Nicholson, Hoffman, and Hanks that I contingently mark here as “residual”—in Williams’s terms, “effectively formed in the past, but . . . still active in the cultural process” (122). I’m going to suggest that *The King’s Speech* might be approached differently. In an effort to think in new ways about the uses of disability rights, representation, and identity in our moment, I’ll start by examining some of the innumerable positive spins on the film (positive readings of the film that can be easily located both outside and inside disability cultures). The BBC’s blogger Disability Bitch, for example, is a writer who usually, as she confesses, “tackles . . . controversial disability topics with all the subtlety of a hammer cracking a nut.” Yet Disability Bitch finds herself quite surprised by *The King’s Speech*, noting,

Readers, I must be ill. . . . I went to the cinema and saw a film where a non-disabled man played a disabled monarch, and I didn’t find myself overcome with hatred. . . . [The film] was scripted by a bloke who stammers himself and it was, y’know, kinda quite good, actually. . . . It’s become a boring cliché. Yet again a Normal actor’s going to win big prizes
for playing Abnormal. I’m Disability Bitch. I’m supposed to be throwing popcorn at the screen in protest, I think. Instead, I merely shrugged and noted that there are informative articles about stammering in every single newspaper in the world this week. And I’m only slightly exaggerating.

Indeed, Disability Bitch might have added, the bloke in question—screenwriter David Seidler—himself provided one of the presumably informative articles, weaving his personal story with Bertie’s, and answering his question of “Why tell the story at all?” with “Well, one percent of the population stammers. That’s an awful lot of stuttering. A great deal of living in silence.” A recognizable disability identity thus materialized in both The King’s Speech and (even more) in reporting around it—so much so that by early in 2011 there was something of a meme going around: “It’s been said that The King’s Speech will do for stuttering what Rain Man did for autism: plant a sympathetic view of disability in the public consciousness” (Wehrwein). As I’ve been implying, I think The King’s Speech goes beyond Rain Man and earlier films, but for now I just want to signal, first, its affirmation of disability identity. The film is undeniably intended to be inspirational (and a critique of inspiration is a major component of my next chapter), but even that inspiration, in this particular context, might be tied to the affirmation of an emergent disability identity. Wendy Chrisman in fact writes that “inspirational narratives can serve a different purpose” for “underrepresented disabilities” (181, 180).

Disability identity is also forged in the film through a particular kind of queerness and I would even say (to update somewhat my own arguments in Crip Theory), disability and queerness are not necessarily deployed solely in the service of an apotheosis of compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness (Crip Theory 19–28). In another positive spin, Melissa Wiginton, in a religiously inflected blog post about The King’s Speech and feminism (I largely disagree with Wiginton’s analysis, but invoke it to solidify a point), argues that this is “a story of men dealing with difficulty through mutual vulnerability.” It is, Wiginton insists, “what men have been warned against” and it “points to the possibility of new archetypes, metaphors, models and ways of being through which men of all colors can flourish, for their own souls and for the vitality of the common life.” It is, we might say, a kinda queer, kinda crip homosociality
for the twenty-first century, structured in part through a playful embrace not only of vulnerability, but also of the libidinal energy passing between the men. This nonhomophobic homosociality was played up not only onscreen, but off, in public appearances with Firth, Rush, and Hooper, who (for example) spoke in his acceptance speech at the Oscars about the “triangle of man love” responsible for the film’s success (Hooper, “Acceptance Speech”). Onscreen, just minutes before the king’s speech, Lionel says to Bertie softly, in the room where the two are alone with the microphone, “Forget about everything else and just say it to me. Say it to me as a friend.” With my earlier point about neoliberalism functioning efficiently with a certain amount of queerness still very decidedly in the background, then, I want to signal via Wiginton, second, that this “positive representation” of disability might be read through and not against homoerotics and even crip erotics that can play a role in generating new, twenty-first century masculinities.

Finally, the disabled figure in The King’s Speech has been positioned by some commentators as an appropriate figure not only for the crisis of 1939 (Britain in its “fateful moment” of confrontation with fascism), but our own. The film was released to a quite positive reception in Britain in 2011 only months after both the general election (and the beginning of austerity) and the announcement that Prince William and Kate Middleton were to wed. The Guardian’s film blog, in this context, attempted to account for the positive British reception of the film; the title of their account was “What The King’s Speech can teach Prince William and Kate Middleton.” Its subtitle, however, was even more pointed: “The nation has been roused by Tom Hooper’s tale of triumph for Windsor publicity in an age of austerity. Sound familiar?” There’s something uncannily accurate about how the Guardian’s analysis sums up what I’m arguing about emergent disabilities and about the cultural work of the film: “What does the applause for The King’s Speech signify? . . . it expresses an appetite for leadership—for a figurehead able to convince us that he or she is a sympathetic human being who feels our pain and will offer principled guidance in times of adversity” (Walters). The piece implies that the organizers of the Royal Collection for William and Kate, marketing souvenirs connected to the nuptials, took the lesson offered by the disabled monarch of The King’s Speech. The announcement for the Royal Collection specifically referenced “austere times” and in that context,
conveyed to every household of Britain’s peoples that the contemporary (and benevolent) royal family would absorb for consumers any tax rise from their purchase of wedding memorabilia.

“Today we’ve come a long way in our dealings with the handicapped,” Seidler writes in his own piece on the writing of The King’s Speech and the role his own stammer played in it. Disability rights have significantly advanced, he implies, completing the circle I’ve been drawing in this section: the film can be read as materializing an underrepresented disability identity, providing a positive disability representation, and marking an epoch (counterposed to earlier ones) of substantive disability rights.

I want, however, to rewrite the Guardian’s question: what does the applause for The King’s Speech obfuscate? And what might it mean that in “austere times,” or “times of adversity,” a disabled figure is not only deployed to represent a feel-good national unity, but even pedagogically offered up to the current House of Windsor, which—the Guardian piece suggests—might “earn itself a generation of ovations” if it walks the walk and talks the talk like Bertie? This is the crip’s speech that I want to negate—any sort of disability exceptionalism that, using disability as a vehicle, both positions threats (to the nation, to national well-being, to the economy and national solvency) as external or simply elsewhere (because “we” as a people, as a group, as a nation, are effectively and affectively united) and masks the redoubled, and internal, neoliberal threat to disabled or impaired bodies and minds.

In a different context, Julie Passanante Elman and I have adapted Puar’s notion of “sexual exceptionalism” in “queer times,” and I’m drawing on that adaptation in what I’m arguing here (Terrorist 2; Elman and McRuer). Puar contends in Terrorist Assemblages that contemporary geopolitics now target certain gay and lesbian, and even “queer,” subjects for life while simultaneously queering “terrorist corporealities” and targeting them for death (so that the “terrorist” body for Puar is always constructed as perverse, excessive, and queer in the broad sense—and through that construction, in need of elimination). Puar positions these queer processes—targeting some for life, some for death—as interrelated: “the deferred death of one population recedes as the securitization and valorization of the life of other populations triumphs [a telling and multilayered word, in the context of “Tom Hooper’s tale of triumph”] in its shadow” (Terrorist 3). Puar names the bifurcation
she traces “sexual exceptionalism,” suggesting that “homosexual [and again, even queer] subjects who have limited legal rights within the U.S. civil context gain significant representational currency when situated within the global scene of the war on terror” (Terrorist 4). “Currency,” in Puar’s analysis, might be understood both in its monetary sense, where the term describes units in a system of economic exchange, and in its linguistic sense, where the term describes concepts or ideas that gain acceptance over time as they are repeatedly used or deployed in various contexts.

Disability exceptionalism, as Elman and I theorize it, allows for “the deployment of disability’s depoliticization as cultural capital.” I’m putting forward disability exceptionalism here as a cousin of sexual exceptionalism that works particularly efficiently in narrativizing austerity, or (to reinvoke Klein) the “shock doctrine.” Rewriting Puar fairly explicitly, we might say that disabled subjects (or even subjects whom we might read as crip) who have often extremely limited legal rights or access within a given national context, and whose lives are made even more precarious by a global austerity politics, gain significant representational currency for the neoliberal establishment when situated within local manifestations of the current crisis of capitalism. “Currency,” in this formulation, would again have economic valences, as disabled subjects are situated in an insidious system of exchange that secures or vouchsafes austerity in and through exceptionalized narratives of disability identity (and, in this sense, it’s worth underscoring that the Guardian’s film blog, imagining how the House of Windsor might purchase ovations, explicitly uses language that draws attention to the narrative’s current earning power). “Currency” would also have linguistic valences, as those narratives increasingly become an accepted part of contemporary vocabularies. The “war on terror” that is Puar’s immediate topic is of course part of the current, global crisis of capitalism; hence my positioning of sexual and disability exceptionalism as cousins. I find that disability exceptionalism, however, queer as it may be (and indeed, as transparent or two-dimensional as it may be—because, what could be more cartoonish than a “sympathetic human being who feels our pain and offers principled guidance in times of adversity”?), has a particular capacity for narrativizing austerity and the shock doctrine.
Expired Insurance Policies; or, Scrounging Corporealities

I conclude, however, with a return to the promise of the crip’s speech amplified otherwise. It’s important, in doing so, to clarify how I am arguing against disability identity, representation, and rights, and how I am decidedly not. As with many other projects in disability and queer theory, Crip Times consistently puts pressure on “identity,” attuned to the dangers that attend its congealing in the neoliberal era. Nonetheless, despite the dangers that circulate around identity, representation, and rights, crip and disability both have, in the crip times sketched in these pages, also contingently but undeniably marked what Duggan describes as “an expansion of the hopeful moments of actually existing politics” (Twilight 86); a unilateral theoretical rejection of either term risks missing or fixing the vibrancy of actually existing politics. Duggan herself is rightly critical of what she describes as the “pedagogical tone” that at times accompanies theoretical assessments (and often, abrupt and knowing dismissals) of political movements that deploy “identity” (Twilight 86).32

Andy, the disabled activist preparing for the June 2011 public sector strikes, makes absolutely clear that avoiding a pedagogical tone and attending to the vibrancy of actually existing politics is crucial. Andy, after all, literally invoked “rights” and suggested that he and disabled comrades would represent disability in the struggle; presumably, this representation would be of disability importantly substantialized as an identity. Again, however, Andy’s deployment of identity, representation, and rights is a historical and tactical positioning of them “front and centre.” In that specific crip time and place, a time and place of indignation or outrage, disabled people materialize, Marx might say, “not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions” (German 155). Put differently, the definite conditions of embodied precarity in Crip Britain have necessitated and called forth disabled people’s positioning front and center in the struggle against austerity.

As identity, representation, and rights are comprehended by and in neoliberalism (and materialized in fantastic isolation in a text like The King’s Speech), in contrast, they are contained and domesticated. In that sense, they are worth countering directly and forcefully. In queer theory,
the anti-identitarian position, first, is the easiest to grasp: sexual and disability exceptionalism completely depend upon a limited identity politics that incorporates some identities while positioning others (whether “terrorist corporealities” or benefit scroungers) as inadmissible or incomprehensible, in all the senses of that term: unintelligible, ungraspable, or even the archaic sense of “having or subject to no limits” (and thus paradoxically in need of intense control) (OED).

An antirepresentation position, second, is more specifically a call to attend to emergent disabilities and to move away from the “positive representation”/“negative representation” binary that disability studies and other interdisciplinary fields often traverse. Whether or not The King’s Speech is a positive representation of stammerers (or any other “underrepresented disability”), it says very little about how that good or bad representation (and disability identity more generally) might be discursively useful in the current geopolitical order.

Third, and finally, a contingent and tactical argument “against disability rights” in relation to emergent disabilities should be understood in the Marxist sense, where rights are cordoned off from all that is happening front and center. Costas Douzinas, for example, has described rights as “an insurance policy for the established order” (93). He argues that the “rights of man started as normative marks of revolutionary change” (93). The emergent bourgeois order (and we might think here of Marx’s analysis in “On the Jewish Question”), however, substantialized those rights in ways that effectively negated them, so that “positive human rights” became “defence mechanisms against the possibility of resistance and revolution. The removal of the right to revolution was an attempt to foreclose radical change” (93). My point concluding this Introduction is essentially twofold: neoliberal capital can now deploy not just a globalized gayness, not just queerness, but even disability rights and the crip’s speech to hang on to its defense mechanism. The insurance policy, however, doesn’t cover it for all that’s happening at this moment, for all the inventive and slippery ways in which the crip’s speech, understood otherwise, is stammering its way toward resistance and revolution.

What has been happening on the ground in the UK from 2010 onward, and which I will detail in the chapters ahead, is disability exceptionalism hypostasized. Both the coalition’s initial Health Reform Bill
and the much more punitive Welfare Reform Bill proposed and put in place cuts that were devastating to countless disabled people across the country. There was almost immediately, for instance, a 20 percent cut to the disability living allowance (DLA). The DLA paid a maximum of £70 a week in care costs and £50 in mobility bills. That payment was capped and the DLA replaced in 2013 with a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) providing an even smaller maximum. By the final year of the coalition government, right before the Conservatives began to govern alone, the number of households with at least one disabled person in the UK in “absolute poverty” (meaning that someone’s income is so low that they cannot afford basic needs even before disability needs are taken into account) had increased by 10 percent. In that final year alone, 300,000 more “disabled households” entered absolute poverty (Pring, “Disability Poverty”).

But, as I’ve been suggesting, the austerity shock needs to be narrativized, and the coalition government said, first, that the increase in claimants had become unsustainable: as Smith’s plan to overhaul the welfare system was unveiled in 2011, the government reported that 3.16 million people were receiving DLA and that £12.1bn was the predicted expenditure for the previous year. According to their figures, this was a 30 percent increase from 2.4 million recipients eight years previously (Ramesh). However, it said, second, and even beyond the coalition (including, that is, the official New Labour opposition at the time), that “benefit fraud” and (corporealized) benefit scroungers were sabotaging the system, destroying it for the disabled people for whom it was intended. Maria Miller, for instance, while serving from 2010–2012 as UK Undersecretary of State for Disabled People (despite repeated calls for a vote of no confidence from the people she was supposed to represent), said in an interview that it was not right that the UK had “a benefits system where there are more alcoholics and drug addicts in receipt of disability living allowance than the blind” (this is actually an unremarkable assertion in most national contexts, where rehabilitation services of necessity are accessed by those needing help with addiction) (Owen). Miliband, the Labour/opposition leader at the time, in a speech in June 2011 officially “opposing” austerity politics, and “speaking with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if he were able to cross your
threshold and speak to you himself,” likewise (adapting Puar rather di-
rectly here) marked these crip times by invoking disability identity while
conjuring up a benefit-scrounging corporeality: services are being cut
by an austerity government, he notes, but ultimately it’s because citizens
“were not showing responsibility and were shirking their duties. From
bankers who caused the global financial crisis to some of those on ben-
efits who were abusing the system” (qtd. in Watt).

I have said I’m not interested in the “reality” of so-called “benefit
fraud,” but corporate tax evasion, which is far beyond anyone’s estimate
of “benefit fraud” in the UK, currently runs at £70bn (and the London
2012 Games alone cost a total of almost £9bn, of which £1bn was di-
verted public funds) (Murphy; Gibson). I’m less interested in the rest
of this book, however, in these rather ready-to-hand figures debunking
neoliberal uses of disability, than in crip (and queer) networks resisting
those uses of disability: from the Hardest Hit marches on May 11, 2011
and October 22, 2011 in London and across the country (on May 11 per-
haps the largest disability protest ever) to queer activists turning banks
into sexual health clinics and HIV/AIDS education centers, to activists
like Andy front and center by right and not charity (but audible now as
a crip reinventing the right to resistance and revolution), to cyber activists
generating the Spartacus Report detailing the effects of cuts on people’s
lives, to Broken of Britain or any other network reaching for the trans-
national consciousness Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) locates in
“everyone that refuses to accept that any country can destroy the lives of
people just because they are or become disabled or sick” and that resists
“government austerity measures which target the poor while leaving the
wealthy unscathed.”

“You still stammered on the W,” Lionel Logue says immediately after
King George’s successful speech, rallying the nation in times of trou-
ble (Logue’s identification of this imperfection is offered to his student
rather lovingly, as the two men smile and gaze at each other). “Well I had
to throw in a few,” Bertie replies, “so they knew it was me.” As disabil-
ity, like queerness, is remade by and for neoliberalism, crippling auster-
ity entails tracing resistance and revolution—those speeches, marches,
encampments, and other creative actions that we mobilize so that they
know that it’s still us—wherever they appear and however they are
embodied.
Mapping Crip Times

As a queer disability studies project, *Crip Times* is interdisciplinary, broadly attentive to the global political and economic shifts I have been tracing in this Introduction while considering through a crip analytic how specific activists and artists, participating in social movements of various kinds, generate change and resistance to hegemonic forms of globalization in an age of austerity. I am indebted throughout to a range of writers focused on critiquing austerity or neoliberalism more broadly from the vantage point of contemporary Marxisms. Certainly my focus on specific texts broadly conceived (film, internet memes, activist performance, photography, sculpture) is grounded in my own training in close reading in literary and cultural studies and in my belief that crippling austerity entails using whatever varied skills or capacities each of us has. Stuart Hall’s basic cultural studies understanding of “representation”—“the production of meaning through language” (“Work” 16)—drives my analysis of both dominant and alternative discourses of disability and impairment in crip times. I have, for instance, essentially argued here that the filmic language of *The King’s Speech* produces and thereby helps to consolidate new or emergent understandings of/meanings for disability in our moment, and that the language of disability is contested, in turn, by the emergent activist and artistic languages I have begun to put forward and that I will analyze in much more detail in the chapters ahead. I have already suggested that Raymond Williams’s understanding of dominant, emergent, and residual discourses animates my thinking in and about crip times. *Crip Times* additionally relies on the Williams of *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*; thus, in and through the textual analyses contained in each chapter, I also pose, as Williams would describe it, “a problem of *vocabulary*, in two senses: the available and developing meanings of known words, which needed to be set down; and the explicit but as often implicit connections which people were making, in what seemed to me, again and again, particular formations of meaning—ways not only of discussing but at another level of seeing many of our central experiences” (15). Each chapter includes, for this reason, not just an analysis of cultural texts and social contexts but a meditation on disability and one keyword: disability and dispossession in chapter 1, disability and resistance in chapter 2, disability and
displacement in chapter 3, and disability and aspiration in chapter 4. On the surface, this organization seems to pair neatly two negatives (dispossession and displacement) with two positives (resistance and aspiration). My analysis of each keyword, however, will complicate and sometimes explicitly reverse that surface appearance.

Chapter 1 opens with a focus on the hype around the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games as spectacle. I mainly approach this spectacle through a reading of an inspirational meme that circulated at the time—a well-known image of South African sprinter Oscar Pistorius running alongside a disabled little girl from Sussex in the UK. The opening texts for this chapter are thus largely images of incorporation that construct affective (and effective) global images of the UK (and South Africa) as open, tolerant, and accessible. I read these images as consolidating what I call an “austerity of representation” that is part and parcel of an economics of austerity more generally. All the spectacle, however, was happening at the same time that activists outside the Olympic and Paralympic stadiums were protesting the fact that the games were sponsored by Atos, a private French IT company also charged with carrying out tests designed to find disabled benefit recipients “fit to work” (and thus ineligible for benefits). Spectacle and dispossession thus emerge in this analysis as two sides of the same neoliberal coin.

The chapter, additionally, in the wake of Pistorius’s killing (in a gated South African community) of his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp, examines the affective shift around Pistorius’s global image. I read the melodrama into which Pistorius has been placed as obscuring the masculinist violence responsible for Steenkamp’s murder as well as, more broadly, the actual conditions of securitization, dispossession, and violence in South Africa that disproportionately impacts disabled people, women of color, and queers. I conclude by turning to some of the ways disabled cultural producers have generated what can be understood as critically crip forms of dispossession, materializing images and tactics that contest and dislodge the ways in which disability is caught up in neoliberalism’s austerity of representation.

Drawing on Kevin Floyd’s analysis, in The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism, of microlevel forms of queer resistance to neoliberalism (forms of resistance he terms “pornography”) (203), chapter 2
examines more closely global crip activism, broadly understood. I open with a meditation on the complex and contradictory life of resistance in contemporary queer and crip theory. A politics of resistance, deeply indebted to the work of philosopher Michel Foucault, played a large role in the development of queer theory in the 1990s and disability theory in the early 2000s. In some prominent queer theoretical texts of the past decade, however, resistance has been explicitly dismissed for a number of reasons, such as the problematic ways it is tied to identity or its capacity for easy commodification, including within critical theories that are consciously or unconsciously fueled by the search for new and different figures of resistance. I counterpose these critiques of resistance to queer and crip work on embodiment in global contexts committed to “carrying forward the project of resistance,” as Darieck Scott puts it (9). This work has often emerged in the generative space of queer of color or crip of color critique (the work, for instance, of Scott himself or of Nirmala Erevelles). I position such crip/queer theorizing as a tactic of resistance; my overview of this theorizing sets the stage for a brief consideration of five geographically specific locations where additional forms of crip activism and distinct tactics of resistance became legible in 2010–2011: California, Chile, Spain, Greece, and the UK.

Chapters 1 and 2 are broadly connected in their attention to activism; the remaining two chapters are directly focused on specific artists. Chapter 3 takes as its text the global and itinerant exhibition “El Museo de los Desplazados” [The Museum of the Displaced] which has generated more than 75 installations on five continents. My particular focus is the photography of Livia Radwanski, a Brazilian photographer living and working in Mexico City who documented the gentrification of Colonia Roma, west of the historic city center. Her photographs represented the displacement of families and the destruction of the buildings in which they live. The Mexican state under President Enrique Peña Nieto has notoriously refused to recognize student movements and other forms of activism; it has, however, officially and with great fanfare “recognized” some disabled individuals. My analysis of Radwanski’s work considers how populations that are not recognized come into focus in crip times, and some of the ways in which they resist.

I am especially interested, in this chapter, in the British government’s activities during this period in coalition with its Mexican partners. Even
as, back in the UK, the coalition government was putting forward a policy that came to be known as the “bedroom tax” (which resulted in a cut in benefits for anyone having a “spare bedroom” in the living space they were renting, and which disproportionately impacted disabled people and their families), it was busy exporting a vision of British openness and accessibility, redesigning street corners in Mexico City and preparing for 2015, which the government had declared the “Year of Mexico in the UK and the UK in Mexico.” I use a close reading of Radwanski’s photos, alongside a consideration of housing and processes of gentrification in Mexico City, to demonstrate the ways in which the global exchange of neoliberal forms of accessibility works in tandem with ongoing processes of displacement.

Finally, chapter 4 works with and beyond the Thatcherite keyword aspiration. I consider how rhetorics of aspiration emerged in Thatcher’s England, paying particular attention to the ways in which those rhetorics depended upon both able-bodied and disabled figurations (with those who were not “aspirational” consistently represented as sick and disabled). The rhetorical use of disability continued into the Blair and Cameron years (years sometimes described as Blatcherite or Blameron to mark the neoliberal continuity between the Tories and New Labour) as explicit appeals to an “Aspiration Society” became more ubiquitous. I attend to the material effects generated by the consensus around an Aspiration Society, considering those whom Owen Jones describes as “left behinds” (Chavs 61). Those who are not, or cannot be, sufficiently aspirational, have faced material consequences; these consequences have included literal dispossession and displacement.

Aspiration, however, has been conceived in other—Marxist and queer—ways and, through an analysis of a performance piece called Figures, by Bristol-based performance artist and sculptor Liz Crow, my final chapter attempts to access those alternative conceptions. An “aspiration to totality,” in the Marxist sense, attempts to “approach the universal” from a specific vantage point and grasp the “web of relations” that compose a historical moment (Floyd 12). Floyd argues that, over the course of the twentieth century, queer aspirations to totality make possible complex, situated understandings of, and interventions into, the social relations of capital and heteronormativity. In my final
chapter, I contrast Crow’s attempt to approach the universal from a specific *crip* location to neoliberal discourses of public art that ideologically deploy the universal to mask the specific. More directly, I consider and critique an art installation produced for Remembrance Day 2014 (November 9, 2014) outside the Tower of London, when 888,246 ceramic poppies were on display for almost a month. In Commonwealth nations, Remembrance Day has been celebrated since World War I to remember members of the armed services who have died in the line of duty. The popular 2014 installation was created by artists Paul Cummins and Tom Piper and was called *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*. Prime Minister Cameron and numerous other public officials showered the piece with effusive praise; attempts to critique *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* were ridiculed or even deemed offensive to the British people.

Crow also worked with numbers in her April 2015 installation *Figures*, but a much smaller number: 650. There are 650 constituencies in the United Kingdom and 650 Members of Parliament. Over a period of twelve consecutive days and nights in April 2015, Crow sculpted 650 human figures from raw river mud, “each one representing an individual at the sharp end of austerity.” Sculpted in London on the banks of the Thames and then returned to Bristol, the figures were ultimately burned in a bonfire while actual stories of austerity from across the UK were read aloud. On the day the Tories took full power in May 2015, the dust from the remains of the figures was scattered into the sea from a boat off the coast near Portishead. *Figures*, Crow insists, raises “profound questions about how we treat each other, what kind of society we want to be, and what role we might each of us have in bringing that about.” Crow’s *crip* aspiration to totality and burning installation, I contend, undermines from a specific vantage point the smug bourgeois universalism and neoliberal utility of public art such as *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*.

I conclude with an Epilogue that again ties these questions back to the intersection of region, race, and disability, titled, in homage to Gramsci and Finger, “Some (Disabled) Thoughts on the Immigration Question.” My Epilogue attempts to do some justice to the ways in which the antidisabled discourses of austerity in Britain are subtended by a racialized
anti-immigrant discourse, which is particularly evident in charges that eastern Europeans and others are coming to the UK because of alleged “benefits tourism.” The right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which has increasingly appealed to a segment of the British populace and even achieved some electoral successes, has particularly relied on anti-immigrant sentiment; many would say that Brexit, which I consider briefly in the Epilogue, partly depended on the resentments UKIP repeatedly articulated. I return to Los Indignados in conclusion to contrast their embrace of figures from elsewhere to the inward-looking “UKIPisation of English politics” (Seymour, “UKIPisation”). A politics of austerity, I conclude, will always generate the compulsion to fortify borders and to separate a narrowly defined “us,” in need of protection, from “them.” *Crip Times*, and crip times, however, can and will only end with an aspiration to the outward-looking vision proffered by the indignant ones.