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Swallowing Voices: Mêtis and Its Enactment

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Abstract:
This paper
is not a paper.
It is a body that resists being swallowed:
Mêtis,
first wife,
forgotten cunning,
goddess in the gut
of Zeus.

Academia,
your syllabus teeth—fangs
that cut us deep,
your policy tongues,
your voices louder than mine,
than hers,
than ours.

Mêtis is not a name you remember.
But I do.
I carry her in the sideways glance,
in the hacked code,
in the silence that rewrites the rulebook.
We do not enter through the door.
We make a door where there was none.

Mêtis:
not compliance,
strategy dressed in disorder.
A limp, a pause, a workaround.
Note-takers
and extra time—
convenient offerings
on the altar of bureaucracy.

They flatten us.
Make us
legible,
manageable,
forgettable.

But we are not files in your cabinet.
We are normative hacks.
Clever breaks in the timeline.
Street-smart syntax.
Crooked solutions
to crooked spaces.

We are not asking for universal design.
We are imagining beyond it.
Dreaming blueprints in the margins.
We are building from the inside out.
From swallowed silence
to speech that splits gods open.

I stand with those
who name the speculative as scholarship—
Renita J. Weems, who rewrites scripture
with a womanist imagination.
Sarah E. Truman,
who stitches the poetic to pedagogy,
naming affect as method.
Susan Iverson,
who teaches with intellect's imagination.

This isn't metaphor. It's method. And it's mine.

Keywords: Mêtis; Disability rhetoric; Embodied knowledge; Normative hacks; Imaginative Design; Poetic scholarship

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Introduction

When I was pursuing my MFA, I worked closely with one advisor—call him Professor QB— who, I could tell, did not respect my creative approach as a poet. He worked with me on much of my work, scholarly and creative, never venturing to offer more than corrections to my grammar or derisions for using the passive voice. Near the end of the semester, I went to one of his poetry readings in Boston. A couple of other renowned poets read first, then he—quite renowned himself, mind you—stepped up to the podium. Professor QB announced that he was going to be reading a handful of poems from his latest book, and one "brand new" that he had just written. Now, poetry readings in Boston are a lovely experience, quite the opposite of the ones ridiculed by Charles Bukowski. As I have written before, the city itself is a haven for those who identify as poets (Hoggatt-Abader, 2022).. This reading was unfolding as delightfully as the numerous readings I had the privilege to attend as a grad student in Boston until Professor QB read the concluding line of his "brand new" poem: it was a line right out of one of my own! This was one of my poems that he had read and given me feedback on, so I thought it couldn't have been accidental. Could it?

To be clear, I almost erupted, but I held it together, calmly confronting him the next day in his office. He was caught off guard. After all, what authority did I have for such an accusation? I was a lowly grad student with a handful of lit mag publications; he was a tenured professor with several well-regarded books. He told me that, actually, he had been working on the poem for months. He said that, actually, he shared the poem with other poets to receive feedback and he could even dig up some emails as proof. He said that, actually, the two lines are different in this respect and that respect, and then he said something very similar to "I know you're stressed out working on your thesis. You probably got confused."

If this scenario makes your blood boil, there's good reason, but I offer it not to lay blame on Professor QB. I am not accusing him of plagiarism. Instead, I want to postulate that this scenario happens often in an act of what I conceive of as swallowing voices, a motif I am borrowing from the ancient Greek myth of Zeus swallowing his first wife, Mêtis. Never heard of her? Good reason for that, too. She has been swallowed. Silenced. Overpowered and subsumed by another mouth who voices her wisdom. Greek Historian Eric Havelock (1963) said that civilization relies on a cultural repository, "on the capacity to put information in storage in order to reuse it" (p. vii). I believe that the Western, traditional discipline of rhetoric and composition has, by virtue of its intimacy with Greek thought, furthered the tradition of swallowing female and marginalized voices. I define swallowing voices as using another voice, a more powerful one, to communicate someone else's ideas. I argue that writing professors, being in a position of authority can—unwittingly in the best of times and deliberately in the worst of times—swallow students' voices.

Swallowing voices happens when a person or institution in power appropriates, erases, redirects, or contains the voice of someone with less institutional or rhetorical authority—particularly when that voice belongs to someone from a marginalized identity. Swallowing is not always overt or malicious. It can be subtle. It can look like help. For example, in writing classrooms, swallowing can happen when a well-meaning instructor encourages a student to write about something "more academic" or "less personal"—steering

the student away from their lived experience in favor of a genre or voice that will be easier to grade. It can happen in peer review, when student feedback echoes normative language expectations rather than engaging with the rhetorical intentions of the writer. Or it can happen when professors "tidy up" a student's rough, raw paragraph during a writing conference, unintentionally replacing a student's voice with their own (I did that as a young teacher, and it bothers me to this day). These gestures are often pedagogically motivated—an attempt to scaffold or support. But if we don't recognize their cumulative impact, we risk becoming another mechanism through which students learn to doubt their own words.

In addition to being a swallowed goddess, mêtis is also a concept. According to Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant (1978), who reclaimed and elevated the role of mêtis in their book, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture*, it is a practical intelligence that all humans have. Perhaps many do not often have to rely on it as much as disabled people. It is distinct from phronesis, which is slow, reflective, and rooted in moral deliberation. Mêtis, by contrast, is a cunning, situational intelligence—improvisational rather than contemplative—often developed through the necessity of navigating environments that were never designed for us. Disability Studies scholar Jay Dolmage (2020) defines mêtis as "the rhetorical art of cunning...to transform rhetorical situations" (para. 4). He is the scholar I follow when spelling the word as I do, with a circumflex over the e (other scholars have used different spellings). In my own incident that I describe above, mêtis enabled me to avoid getting derailed: I finished my thesis and got my MFA regardless—I even used the wisdom from the experience in my advice to several readers as the "Ask a Poet" advice columnist for *The Smart Set*. I argue that mêtis is what enables disabled people to cultivate the ability to break codes—to hack into the system of "compulsary ablebodiedness" (McRuer, 2006, p. 2). Mêtis can be theorized as the classical archetype responsible for the successful hack—the skill that is required to break and rewrite prevailing conventions and assumptions.That skill is what we disabled people must use to function in a program that didn't anticipate our participation.

These everyday strategies emerge from mêtis itself: the cunning, adaptive intelligence disabled people cultivate to survive systems that would otherwise subsume or silence us. I am coining the term "normative hacks" to describe what many disabled people resort to in order to function in systems that are not designed for us. Normative hacks are interventions that crack the norms that govern our social, temporal, and physical spaces. These are practical forms of creative problem-solving by use of available means, whether it be using a pair of tongs to pick up something off the floor, or using books to elevate a screen to alter the built environment. Watch a disabled person go about their daily lives and you will see such normative hacks in action as they make breakfast, style their hair, or even negotiate time under the constraints of neocapitalism. The alternative ways we conduct our daily lives have equipped us with the knowledge necessary to design new systems, pushing beyond the paradoxical notion of "universal" design to what I conceive of as "imaginative" design.

I argue further that on an institutional level, one way that students' voices get swallowed is by providing bureaucratic accommodations that negate disabled people's capacity to use mêtis in the first place. Blunt, bureaucratic accommodations, things like note-takers and extra time on exams–blanket, one-size-fits-all

accommodations that are not tailored to meet the student where they are—nullify disabled people's distinct ability to break codes. Bureaucratic accommodations are a way of preserving norms and conventions—of permitting extra time or resources to succeed in a broken system. To demonstrate, in achieving my goal of writing an academic paper, I am relying on my skills as a poet and creative writer, something that may indeed violate academic genre conventions. I will use poems and creative writing to hack into the system of the academic genre, because as a disabled female myself, I don't feel I can march up to my goal and claim it by right. As I learned after my traumatic brain injury, I have to be crafty and strategic, and thus I rely on mêtis, giving me the ability to make unexpected moves to get around the constraints of genre and normative predictability.

I align my work with feminist scholars who have long upheld imagination as a legitimate form of knowledge-making. I stand with Renita J. Weems (1988), who rewrote scripture with a womanist imagination that refuses erasure and centers embodied Black women's spiritual authority. Like Weems, I believe that sacred stories—and scholarly ones—can be reentered, revoiced, and reimagined, as I hope this paper demonstrates. I align, too, with Sarah E. Truman (2022), who stitched the poetic to pedagogy and insisted that affect, relationality, and wonder are not detours from academic rigor but essential to knowledge production. In *Feminist Speculations and the Practice of Research-Creation*, Truman demonstrates how poetic inquiry functions not only as method but as epistemology, resisting the false dichotomy between emotion and intellect. Likewise, Susan Iverson (2015) calls us to "teach with imagination," foregrounding the ways creativity animates critical pedagogy and cultivates feminist praxis in the classroom and beyond. In my own example, it was poetry that helped stitch me back together following my injury; it supported the return of my linguistic expression, which is why I place such profound faith in it. When I write metaphor, remix myth, or render the poetic in scholarly form, I do so not in defiance of academic knowledge, but in alignment with a long feminist tradition that asserts imagination is a way of knowing. My speculative, poetic, and embodied interventions do not dilute scholarship. They are its evolution.

Understanding Mêtis

Meaning "wisdom," "counsel," or "skill" in ancient Greek,

Eickhoff (2001) says the word is a trick: Μῆ (not) and τις (anyone)--

The savvy to know which

Identity to

Show

Really, Debra

Hawhee (2004) says, mêtis

Exists as "immanent movement," rendering

Techne "difficult to locate strictly within the mind

Or consciousness" (p. 48). It is

Realized in the body as

Intelligent

Cunning

And

Limber smarts

Footnote, Robert Johnson (2010)

Only gives a footnote when he says that techne "can provide a disciplinary

Rationale for writing studies" (p. 673). That's it? Mêtis is "not often

Championed" (p. 688)? Okay then: I will

Elevate it.

In Hesiod's (2018) *Theogony*, the story of Mêtis is told in such a way that, to me, three characters appear linked: Athena, Hephaestus, and Mêtis herself. Mêtis, whose name means wisdom or cunning, was the first wife of Zeus destined to give birth to wise children, one of whom would overthrow him. As a result, Zeus, in consulting with the Sky and Earth, determined he would swallow her. He apparently didn't learn the lesson from his own dad that swallowing kin doesn't turn out as expected. Cronus, Zeus' Titan dad, had received the news that one of his children would overthrow him, so he swallowed his kids--Hera, Poseidon, Hestia, Hades, Demeter, and when it came time to swallow Zeus, Zeus' mother gave Cronus a stone instead. Later, Zeus would eviscerate his siblings from Cronus' belly, but more on that in a moment. I want to point out a small detail: whereas Cronus had swallowed his kids soon *after* delivery, in this case Zeus is swallowing the mother *before* she gives birth.

The reason history diverges slightly is important. Zeus knew the virtues of swallowing Mêtis. Mêtis had Titan blood, and her role in the victory over them was crucial. According to Apollodorus (2015), Mêtis was the one who gave Cronus "a drug to swallow, which forced him to disgorge first the stone and then the children whom he had swallowed, and with their aid Zeus waged the war against Cronus and the Titans" (p. 9). Possibly because she had intimate knowledge of Titan blood (i.e., she knew how to make Cronus barf), or more possibly because she had the cunning to get away with spiking his drink, she was able to administer a drug that would result in such regurgitation, enabling Zeus' siblings to help secure a victory over the Titans.

Swallowing Mêtis was Zeus' attempt to preserve her wisdom and cunning for himself, "so that the goddess would advise him about good and evil" (Hesiod, 2018, p. 75). But Mêtis was already pregnant with Athena when he swallowed her. Not long after, a battle-ready Athena burst from Zeus' head—an act that allowed Zeus to take full credit for her birth. Because she came from his body alone, he was seen as her sole parent, effectively erasing Mêtis' role. Hera, Zeus' sister and second wife (and yes, that's a lot to unpack), was so

outraged by this that she "without mingling in love gave birth to famous Hephaestus, expert with his skilled hands beyond all of Sky's descendants" (Hesiod, 2018, p. 77). If Zeus could have a child without her, she probably figured she could do the same. Hephaestus, born with a disability, is often associated with mêtis—in the form of cunning, strategy, adaptation. His motion was not linear but sideways, like a crab—an emblem of the clever workaround. Even in his conception, he was a rhetorical strike.

The important takeaway here is that in this interpretive synopsis, Mêtis, Athena, and Hephaestus are inextricably linked. In ruminating on these characters, I hope to align these characters with wisdom and cunning and assert the importance of mêtis as a rhetorical agent. In enacting mêtis myself--bouncing off my creative voice—I hope to assert the rhetorical potential of mêtis to those within and beyond the traditional Western domain.

Letters to Catrina[1]

I think of you as Mêtis, first wife of Zeus
Foretold to bear a child who would outsmart
That mighty king, and so he swallowed that
Possibility. Then Athena cleaved
Through his skull, body armor and all,
Swinging her happy blade. Mêtis stayed
As sage to offer wise woman's advice.

When Zeus turned bull and mounted Europa,
What did Mêtis do? When Leda screamed and wept
Did Mêtis, too? Our sacred parts have been
Defouled under holy names, the body
Peeled like forbidden fruit, like a blood orange...
It is not your fault. Nor is it mine.
Believe me: flesh has its own battle cry.

In *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture*, Detienne and Vernant (1978) defined mêtis as a form of cunning intelligence—a kind of shrewd, flexible, embodied wisdom used to navigate unpredictable circumstances. It is an ancient Greek concept distinct from logos (rational, systematic knowledge) and techne (applied skill). Mêtis is instead contextual, responsive, and often disguised, favoring subtlety over direct confrontation.

1 My sister, three years my senior.

The authors provide detailed explications of the theogonic myths, ancient Greek literature, and philosophy, using their extensive knowledge of the Greek language to point out nuances in original versions of ancient texts. Their book, the result of a ten-year study, is awe-inspiring in the scope of research, revealing that "By marrying, mastering, and swallowing Mêtis he (Zeus) becomes more than simply a monarch: he becomes Sovereignty itself" (Detienne and Vernant p.109). The authors argued that because he has swallowed her and all the possibilities of mêtis, "sovereignty ceases to be the stake played for in a series of indefinitely repeated conflicts and becomes, instead, a stable and permanent state" (p. 109). His swallowing her ends the cycle of usurping the throne. Not only would the prophecy not come to pass, but Mêtis will be with Zeus forever to provide wise counsel. According to the authors, the core features of mêtis include adaptability, the ability to adjust to changing environments or shifting circumstances, like the octopus, a frequent metaphor in their work; indirection, achieving goals not through head-on force, but through misdirection, illusion, or strategic disguise; embodied intelligence, knowledge that lives in the body, action, or instinct—not abstract thought alone; temporal sensitivity, knowing not just what to do, but when to do it; and practical cunning, an intelligence born from experience and survival, often undervalued by dominant systems of reason. Mêtis thrives in uncertainty and flux. It is the intelligence of the sailor, the trickster, the tactician—the one who wins not by force, but by navigating complexity.

The early philosophers did not consider mêtis as deserving of any formal treatise, definition, or discussion. Detienne and Vernant (1978) have pointed out that while there are no formal treatises on mêtis as there is on logic, Aristotle may have had some of its properties in mind when articulating phronesis, or practical intelligence (p. 3). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, which presents his inquiry into ethical life, Aristotle, after defining episteme, or scientific knowledge, and techne, or craft knowledge, describes another type of knowledge: "prudence (phronesis) is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being" (p. 105). Phronesis is similar to mêtis, in state and action—both are heady constructs that result in observable phenomena. In "Writing the Third-sophistic Cyborg: Periphrasis on an [in]tense Rhetoric," Michelle Ballif (1998) suggests that mêtis may be "a sophistic quality" that she uses to provide the metaphor of a "Third-Sophistic Cyborg" which she positions "not as a rhetorical subject/political agent in any traditional sense, but rather as a rhetorical figure that embodies postmodern rhetorical practices" (p. 53). Perhaps the Sophists were swallowed. Why don't we study them seriously in this discipline? Why do so few of their writings survive? One of the sophists, Protagoras, was exiled for being an atheist, and dominant authorities rounded up his books and burned them (Jarrat, 1990). That's one way to impose silence on a voice. Was Aristotle inspired by someone else's voice that didn't survive history? Did he voice the wisdom of someone else?

Believe me: flesh has its own battle cry,
And they would eat it, making mêtis
"more logical, prudent, systematic"
A way to study what can't be contained
Seafoam rolling on waves, crashing in doubt

Standing under, understanding the grain
That has since been blessed onto our pink tongues.

What is more sane than to eat and then shit?
Or was mêtis the hashish of the good
Ol days? Who will be the one to partake?
I'm more haunted by those highs, that rage
Than getting gobbled up by an angry
God (that only happens in times like these)
The daffodils are still there, but they're weeds.

In order to elevate mêtis above an adaptable propensity—a set of strategies, prone to whims—ancient philosophers made it food for thought. In reclaiming the role of the body—not only that but the extraordinary or disabled body—in the field of rhetoric, Jay Dolmage (2009) wrote"Metis, *Mêtis, Mestiza* , Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions" in which he described various aspects of mêtis, as well as details the ancient practice of eating it. The ancient Greek philosophers thought mêtis had to be digested, "placed into an ordered, proportional, hierarchized and cerebral epistemology (Dolmage, 2009, p.11). How often have we tamed a growling tummy with a midday snack? I haven't read any discussion of what its precise ingredients were, but I imagine it much like bread or wafers. Eating is a way of transforming our bodies, so we often attach heightened meaning to its occasion, often eating that which we don't understand as a way to aid our comprehension, or as Detienne and Vernant (1978) maintain, as a way to "provide the philosopher with a model of the activity of the *demiourgos*" (p. 4). *Demiourgos* translates as a demiurge, a powerful creative force. Perhaps the philosophers modeled themselves after the original act of swallowing Mêtis and gaining her savvy. Perhaps mêtis exists in the enacting of the creative force itself.

As her offspring, Athena is also "well -endowed in mêtis" and is sometimes given that same name (Detienne &Vernant, 1978, p. 179). In fact, Detienne and Vernant postulate that from her beginning, there were two Athenas: one with skills as a warrior, and the other with a arcane, magical craft: "the mêtis of the goddess in armor also employs other, more secret means which draw upon disturbing magic craft and mysterious spells" (Detienne & Vernant, 1978, p. 181). Having more than one signature trait, and the dexterity to navigate between them, is a hallmark of mêtis. That possibly can be seen as I weave back and forth between my scholarly and creative identities. In some stories, Hephaestus attempts to rape Athena, but he is not successful, and as both are endowed with mêtis, it is possible that Athena's skills as a warrior were what allowed her to defend herself. However, mêtis does not serve the overtly strong or athletic. Amber Jacobs (2010) pointed out that mêtis functions "on the side of the 'weaker', the 'frail' and the subordinate" (p. 4). Jacob's work seeks to underscore the relationship between Mêtis the goddess and mêtis the concept and align both with maternal instinct, especially in light of the fact that mêtis "in its transformative action that undermines power relations and does not keep what it wins, cannot be used in the service of notions of possession, own-

ership, legitimacy and sovereignty" (p. 5). Mêtis serves the underdog--it normally aids Hephaestus, but in the face of Athena, the direct descendant of Mêtis herself, it becomes inert. Athena's genealogy makes the difference. As her mother taught her, she knows how to avoid getting violated, appropriated, or swallowed.

While those words resonate with violence and negativity, those sentiments should not be entirely channeled toward Hephaestus. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod (2018) described Hephaestus as "the renown lame one"--for he was widely worshipped in ancient Greece, and not *in spite of* his disability, but *because* of it; the god is depicted in various instances riding a proto-wheelchair (Dolmage, 2006). In "Metis, *Mêtis, Mestiza*, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions", Dolmage (2009) maintains that "disability, throughout history, has not always represented loss, punishment, perversion, and alienation, but has instead often been seen as an embodied reality, a physical eventuality, even a desirable human variation" (p. 7). In fact, much of what we now define as abnormal or disabled is due to the pervasiveness of statistics and the standard of the bell curve in the mid-19th Century (Davis, 1995). Hephaestus is signified as disabled as a mundane fact of life, perhaps a natural byproduct of his blacksmith occupation. Disability has been welcomed as an inevitability. In that sense, mêtis is also an eventuality: as we age, as our bodies become transformed by labor, the wiser we become.

The daffodils are still there, but they're weeds.
Imagine a crown of them in place of
Athena's war hat, bold and bronzed,
A silk shawl for the aegis that defends
With its blinding light. Why did you come
to this world white-knuckled, gritting your teeth?
A hunter: always ready for the beast..

Some receive the gifts that come from the god
Of fire to forge the instruments that will
Save their life. Hephaestus, twisted and lame,
Legs outverted like a crab, moving in ways
That restore their last breath. What work is that
If not of mêtis? The strong fight back. Others--
Their smarts, their strength, come from the world beyond.

Additionally, Detienne and Vernant (1978) discussed the tradition of ancient blacksmiths being linked to celebrated creatures from the sea, in particular the seal and the crab, living on both the sea and land and having different ways of moving—as disabled people do. In discussing Hephaestus' curved feet, the authors maintain that "The peculiar shape of his feet is the visible symbol of his mêtis, his wise thoughts and his

craftsman's intelligence" (Detienne and Vernant p. 272). In "'Breathe upon Us an Even Flame': Hephaestus, History, and the Body of Rhetoric, Dolmage (2006) writes "there was a very positive association between Hephaestus's body and his mind: His outward-facing feet and his lateral thinking were allied, and both became a metaphor for mêtis, the ability to move from side-to-side like a crab, as opposed to the forward march of logic" (p. 125). Dolmage (2009) also illuminated the pattern of silencing Hephaestus: "The elision of Hephaestus and his mêtis from our view of rhetorical history is simply in keeping with a larger pattern of disavowals of Othered bodies and the maligning of embodied rhetoric" (p. 7). He will later extend mêtis to discussions of Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness and Helen Ciroux's Medusa, both of which offer lessons in the rhetoricity of mêtis, as othered bodies our field has neglected to center. Perhaps these voices have also been swallowed.

Since becoming aware of mêtis, I have been noticing it all around me, even the ways my pets use it, or don't use it as in the case of my dog who incessantly barks at each visitor, in contrast to my hamster's stealthy craft when she gets out of her cage. Detienne and Vernant (1978) also explored more examples of mêtis used by non-human members of the animal kingdom. In addition to exploring the mêtis enacted by the seal and the crab, the authors devote a chapter to creatures featured in the poems of Oppian, including the fox, the octopus, frogs and fish, in particular prawns, which are small in size yet able to kill the sea bass through their "cunning tricks" (p. 28). Small things often have to rely on their savvy to get ahead in life (for a human example, think Marie Curie or Ruth Bader Ginsberg). In various chapters in the book, the authors explain how those with lesser strength or power, or less prominent tools, can emerge victorious by using mêtis. In "Snake(s)kin: The Intertwining Mêtis and Mythopoetics of Serpentine Rhetoric," Kristin Pomykala (2017), traced the mythology, political mythology, and personal observation in recounting the mêtis of snakes (in addition to trees and other non-human subjects) in Western society, beginning with the serpent in the garden of Eden, to explore the deep connection we have with the creatures. Pomykala said, "Opportunities remain to re-member imaginatively, transversally, the feeling of raising serpentine energy along one's spine, sloughing off old skin, and slithering away in a sidewinding horizontal direction or down into the depths of uncertainty" (p. 272). In such a framework, we might easily see how the snake would capture the ambitions of the American Revolution, especially in light of the fact that mêtis is commonly used by the underdog. I offer these animal examples to increase the accessibility of the concept of mêtis, to provide another avenue of comprehension. I find it fascinating that they illuminate how marginalized voices often rely on such flexible smarts.

Their smarts, their strength, come from the world beyond.
Your daughter, my daughter, tell them before
The white suits lock us away: we create,
Innovate, love, and live the way most
(Many, I should say) have forgotten.
An apt title for our work of art: Love

and Thorns, red nourishment plaited by spines.

And who says we can't be both? A scholar
And an artist; an addict and a mom–
what does the law say? I remember when
They took her. I carry that grief for us
Both, have been for years. Tell: who swallowed you?
Who voices your smarts? And who speaks your truth?
I think of you as Mêtis, first wife of Zeus.

Hacking the System: Disabled Expertise

Mêtis enables disabled people to hack the code that provides the rules for how we do business, conduct our affairs, socialize, or study in school. Most societal systems are not designed for disabled people, so we often resort to what I am calling "normative hacks"—hacks that crack the norms that govern our social, temporal, and physical spaces. I define normative hacks as practical forms of creative problem-solving by the use of available means. I would like to push beyond the paradoxical notion of universal design to what I conceive of as "imaginative" design, which disabled people are uniquely qualified to design due to the alternative ways we conduct our daily lives.

I have had to use creative problem-solving since I sustained a traumatic brain injury over 20 years ago and I became hemiplegic and neurodivergent in an instant. I had to learn different ways to move: how to walk up and down steps, how to use a can opener with my new dominant hand, how to shave my underarms when I couldn't lift one arm above my head. I had to learn to read with double vision. I had to learn to think critically about texts when my only skill seemed to be remembering combination locks and zip codes. In other words, I had to learn how to hack the normative system. I had mistakenly thought that my body/mind was broken and needed to be fixed, so I entered the academy hungry to fix it. But the academy wasn't designed for a learner like me, even with the retrofit accommodations hurled at me from the institution. It wasn't until I was in my 30s that I learned about the social model of disability, and I realized that I wasn't broken at all. The system was broken. I realized the value in the other kind of learning I had to do as a disabled person: how to adapt the temporal, spatial, and physical environment so that I could function in a world that told me I didn't belong there. I believe all disabled people have this embodied knowledge and expertise, this propensity to read and break codes and hack systems, equipping us with a skill set that is undercut by blunt accommodations such as note-takers and extra time on exams. Routinized accommodations routinize disabilities in ways that reduce thinking about them to merely transactional concerns.

The first step in breaking code is of course reading it, as disabled people do all the time. We can tell which buildings are likely to have accessible bathrooms without going inside. We can tell when it's safe

to cross the street without seeing a green light. We can tell if we will encounter resistance to our ways of knowing by the design of syllabi. And we continually read the code in tired mantras: Be smart! Get thin! Be strong! Get healthy! Robert McRuer (2006) contends that we live in a system marked by "compulsory able-bodiedness" (p. 2) which is what produces disability in the first place. Ablebodiedness is not a choice, but rather the result of having been assimilated into a society that values the quick, strong, and normative over their counterparts. Eli Clare (2017) decries this phenomenon in their book, Brilliant Imperfection, noting, "In a world without ableism, defective, meaning the 'imperfection of a bodily system,' would probably not even exist" (p. 23). Recognizing how mêtis is swallowed makes visible the deeper mechanism of ableism: a system that survives by concealing the cunning, resourceful knowledges disabled people wield to move through an inaccessible world.

Next step: break into the code and figure out how it works. To be able to do that we need to first recognize that the code-makers had their own objectives in mind and they did not consider disabled people as users who should be considered in the design of the material, spatial, and temporal environment, necessitating that we must continually break into the system. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (2011) has proffered the term "misfit" to capture the mismatch between these codes and the disabled experience, and through this concept we can realize the system's method of encryption:

> The idea of a misfit and the situation of misfitting that I offer here elaborate a materialist feminist understanding of disability by extending a consideration of how the particularities of embodiment interact with their environment in its broadest sense, to include both its spatial and temporal aspects. (p. 592)

The design of most environments is encrypted in a way that keeps disability out. The codemakers did not anticipate our participation or interaction, and as a result, we do not fit, we mis-fit, in the environment. And as such, misfits will do what misfits will do: Perhaps dress in outlandish clothing (breaking normative sartorial codes) or listen to loud music (breaking sound control codes). Or conduct affairs in more subtle ways that break the codes of many areas of society.

One notable codebreaker was Ronald Mace, a wheelchair user who helped conceive of Universal Design, or put another way, one of the first hackers who broke through the system's method of encryption. After he entered North Carolina State University's School of Design in 1960, he recognized the need to rewrite building codes every time he was carried up a flight of steps. Those steps, which dominate many university environments, were part of the system's encryption method. They kept him out, necessitating that he break the code. With the principles of universal design, he helped to rewrite the code, becoming such the expert that architects as famous as I.M. Pei would regularly consult him regarding access standards (Hamraie, 2017).

Final step: Hack the system. After we have read the code and figured out how it works, then we need to change the system. Svetlana Nikitina (2012) has maintained, " the hackers' revolt is directed against imperfect designs, programming mistakes and security sloppiness" and although she does see limits in the creative and transformational potential of hacking she does see the possibility of "putting together new programs that are based on the eradication of flaws in the existing ones" (p.144).

To explore an example of a program flaw, let us imagine the steep steps that dominate university environments, maybe the ones Mace was carried up. All universities have them because, as we all know, if you are smart enough to be at college, you are smart enough to climb a bunch of stairs—wait. Okay, just a bit of sarcasm there to point out that academia has a tradition of equating physical and intellectual ability. Beyond the ubiquitous physical structures on university campuses, steep steps can also be theorized as time constraints and deadlines, and even the stigma of requesting disability services themselves. Being newly hemiplegic in college, I used to access my academic advisor's office in a building with those notorious steep steps that even lacked a handrail at the time. This was post-ADA so they did have alternative access on the side, but in any case, I wouldn't have noticed it (my TBI limited my spatial perception and visual acuity). However, those challenges were secondary to how I read the codes of social conduct at the time: I was a young girl who wanted nothing more than to be just like her peers, so there was only one way to access my advisor's office. Going up wasn't so bad, but going down presented too many variables for my body/mind to negotiate, so I had to sit down and scoot on my bottom. I was disabled by physical access problems AND by the way that I read social codes and expectations.

My code breaking was not unlike that of Hephaestus, the ancient Greek god I talked about in the second section, the builder, creator, and trickster who likewise broke through the system's encryption method. Because of his disability (either from birth or injury after Hera rejected him and threw him down from the sky), he could not move forward, but rather moved sideways like a crab. In all his stories, he is using hacks or creative workarounds to achieve his objectives within the normative code. Svetlana Nikitina (2012) has maintained, "Trickster gods in myths seem to offer a working prototype of the hacker. Just like hackers, tricksters defy definition" (p. 135). Importantly, Hephaestus continuously adapted the spatial arrangement to his body and his body to the spatial arrangement out of his creative problem-solving propensity. Here was a working-class god not born with a gift—he had to learn his trade—but with a capacity for cunning to accomplish his goals through whatever means available.

Institutional Swallowing

The potentials of mêtis often get lost in bureaucratic attempts to accommodate disabled people because they do not encourage awareness of the underlying norms that are often more disabling than a staircase. What especially seems to counter the ingenuity-born-of-necessity that can arise out of disability is using blunt instruments to provide academic accommodations. For example, one of the academic accommodations I received was double-time on examinations, and while this was necessary for me to have any hope of success, at times my peers' accusations would sink in: I was cheating. I wasn't hacking, I wasn't coming up with an adaptive measure, because the system anticipated it. The system anticipated that when I had an essay exam, I would go to the testing accommodation center and log in to a computer for not 50 but 100 minutes. Those bureaucratic accommodations were a way of preserving the status quo, of upholding the norms and conventions of a broken system. I will postulate here that I received that accommodation because the institution lacked imagination, the kind of imagination that can better plan more adaptive, more precise interventions. Many of those accommodations (ie, notetaking) are not offered at the graduate level perhaps because

grad students are coded as professionals, which is itself a code for neurotypical, able-bodied people. In that sense, academic accommodations create a glass ceiling that I, for one, have struggled to break through. One answer to Tanya Titchkosky's (2011) question, "What does it mean that bodies, minds, senses, and emotions are being managed under bureaucratic time?" (p. 102) is that students are given unimaginative accommodations by directive of a bureaucracy, which is, by its very nature, unimaginative.

Blunt, bureaucratic accommodations such as extra time on exams, and other unimaginative retrofit accommodations, can be seen as undermining the embodied, situational knowledge that is at the heart of the disabled experience. In *Building Access*, Aimi Hamraie (2017) traced the origins of the curb cut, created by sledgehammer-wielding activists in Berkley. Hamrai maintains that, though curb cuts are for the most part ubiquitous in ADA-sanctioned environments, we must still challenge such simple accommodations "because they risk depoliticizing and oversimplifying the material, epistemic, and technological force of designing ramps and curb cuts for disability access" (p. 102). Eliminating physical barriers does not mean that disability has been accepted, nor does it recognize the creative problem-solving that disabled people do every day. Wheelchair users formerly used hacks to get around the absence of curb cuts by carrying around a piece of plywood. I am not arguing against the necessity of them—rather I am theorizing that physical accommodations such as curb cuts and temporal accommodations such as extra time do not reduce the need to challenge prevailing codes. In this way, such accommodations risk swallowing mêtis itself—absorbing disabled people's adaptive intelligence into standardized fixes that neither honor nor learn from it.

Temporal accommodations are based on the assumption that we all experience time the same. Many disabled people have characterized their relationship with time with the phrase "crip time." Scholars of Disability Studies have characterized crip time as a "flexible approach to normative time frames" (Price, 2011 p. 63). Early articulations of crip time (Zola, 1988; Gill, 1995; Olkin, 1999) tend to reinforce the deficit model of disability and imply that an academic accommodation of "extra" time would be the right intervention. However, Dolmage (2018) identifies crip time as "an epistemology—a way of thinking and moving" (p. 179). It is a way of hacking the system. It is a result of our cunning, our mêtis—it is not a colloquial expression to imply that disabled people are always late. We aren't. Every disabled person I've ever known, myself included, is impeccably punctual, and we go to great lengths to be so. We know what it takes to work with time. Perhaps it is in those "great lengths" (never procrastinating, leaving early, etcetera) that crip time can be approximated. I used to start my papers weeks in advance, not because I needed "extra" time, but because I needed access to time's potential without its inevitable burden. When we design courses, we can honor crip time by centering flexibility—retrofit accommodations do nothing more than contribute to the impenetrable lid on the disabled academic experience. Retrofit accommodations have the capability to dull our propensity for creative adaptations. They swallow us.

If retrofit accommodations have such deleterious potential, then we need a new system. A model for how to build on the skill of rewriting normative codes is provided by imaginative design, which is an extension of what architects Alexander Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013) have called "speculative design." Speculative design "thrives on imagination and aims to open up new perspectives...to create spaces for discussion and

debate about alternative ways of being, and to inspire and encourage people's imaginations to flow freely" (p. 2). Imaginative design extends beyond physical space to digital and temporal space. This form of design can help us rewrite normative conventions to value the creative thinking of disabled people. Hacking the system with the goal of adopting imaginative design would create a more welcoming space, experience, and timeline for all body/minds *that can be imagined*. To double down on disabled people's qualifications as master hackers, Garland-Thompson (2011) stated "the individual and collective experience of misfitting can produce the subjugated knowledge, outsider/insider standpoint, or privileged epistemic state from which one could launch a liberatory identity politics" (p. 600). In other words, the experience of being atypical grants one an advantage—smarts, resourcefulness, adaptability, imagination. Disabled people should realize how much they have to offer, now more than ever, as agents of positive change. And to claim this role fully, disabled people must reclaim the mêtis so often swallowed by institutions—our cunning, adaptive knowledge—refusing to let it be absorbed into designs that merely accommodate rather than reimagine.

When I lived in Alexandria, Egypt, years ago, I met a friend whose lower limbs had been blown off by a bomb that was left unattended on the Sinai Peninsula since the 1967 war between Egypt and Israel. He was a sight to see, being severed beneath the ribs, and he knew it, using his startling visage rhetorically to get a donation from a passer-by or a kiss from a girl, which would be inappropriate in an Arabic country under most circumstances. He used a piece of wood outfitted with four wheels on the corners to travel, using the palms of his hands to propel himself. He was fearless. I'd see him sail down the Corniche (the curving highway that separated blocks of high-rise buildings from the Mediterranean) at tremendous speeds, alongside vehicles speeding even faster in the capricious logics of Egyptian traffic. He moved with the deftness and artistry of Hephaestus, a trickster who knew exactly how to navigate his world.

And guess what? I wrote a poem about him!

Noos

Alexandria, Egypt

I have been thinking lately of my friend Noos, severed
beneath the torso, pushing his skateboard with his palms
to that spot near my school where he begged alms,
his lower three-fourths shoved into his ribs after a battle
in the war for the Sinai Coast. With his rotten teeth,
and make-shift skateboard, wheels on a fruit cart's base,
Noos thanked God in repetitions of an aspirated h:
"Alhumdilila, alhumdilila! I almost died," he said. "Now
I drink tea." Homeless, his entourage of school girls fought

to bring him a cup of tea after class. He kissed their cheeks.

The first time I saw Noos, October sunset, I thought
he was working in a manhole, his legs balanced
on pipes beneath the street. I walked closer and saw
that he was severed below the fifth rib. Each time
I saw him, I wondered how he excreted waste,
in what dark alley, and which lucky girl got to handle
his prosthetic penis, but I simply asked him how he was:
"A'ml eh, ya-captain?" "Alhumdilila, alhumdilila!"
I never asked Noos where his family was, or if the girls
sustain him, even in Alexandria's streets on the first eve
of Ramadan, when the Mediterranean breeze rolls
off the sea and through the open windows of celebrating
families, carrying their music to Noos's sunburned ears.
I never asked him if he likes the girls who kiss him,
or those who demure, or if he had been a woman
and didn't have to go to battle, would he marry for position
or for heart?

The first time I saw Noos, I thought
he was a regular man with a regular build, legs
the laboring thin of the Egyptian poor. I walked closer
and saw that he was severed below the fifth rib.
I squinted in the Alexandrian sunset's uncanny brightness.
He waved to me, and I waved back, though I was too stunned
to give him my spare change, and until the next time
I saw him and bent down so he could kiss my cheek,
and carried a conversation while resting on my knees,
after I pressed my coins into his soiled hand
and heard him proclaim, *"Thank God, thank God!*

I'm alive!" the incisor hanging on to blackened gums,

I had thought that he was one of those things that appear

after too little water and too much sun.

Conclusion

This paper has been structured around 6 poems that were meant to shake up the traditional, academic paper genre. I've ventured into anecdote, making this paper resemble a work of creative nonfiction at times. I've also covered a lot of myth, all the while making bold accusations at the institution. I mean, shouldn't I be grateful that there are academic accommodations at all? Something is better than nothing, right? Such sarcasm reminds us that one of this discipline's jobs by virtue is to find out what is just and unjust and to push for what is just. Anyway, I guess you could say I went all over the place, all within the genre of an academic paper. Is that what you'd call it?

Perhaps you have been irritated by the fact that I didn't follow the rules. Perhaps you've been bothered by my casual use of "phronesis" or "code breaking," without more scholarly explication that told you something new. Or perhaps you've been giving me the benefit of the doubt, letting me sail free with my poetic license. Some readers may have read some of the discontinuities in my prose as failures to provide a cohesive analysis. The reason why I have not obeyed each dictum of the academic genre is because I'm challenging the conventions of linear expository writing. I'm challenging with mêtis.

In the "Phenomenology of Error," published years ago in *College Composition and Communication*, Joseph Williams (1981) discussed the particular way writing teachers respond to error, and he concludes that there are four possible scenarios: We notice the error and it bothers us. We notice the error and it doesn't bother us. We don't notice the error and it doesn't bother us (ignorance is bliss!). Or we don't notice the error and it still bothers us (I guess we're cranky that errors even exist). In a similar way, I will predict four types of reactions to an academic paper:

1. Do something unconventional, and bother readers.
2. Do something conventional, and don't bother readers.
3. Do something unconventional, and don't bother readers.
4. Do something conventional, and bother readers (still cranky after all these years)

Williams (1981) said that when we set out as readers with an expectation (as writing teachers with expectant red pens), we inform our experience reading "with an intention to experience the material constitution of the text (p. 159). So, in my case, I already know that scenarios 2 and 4 are out. Therefore, in a warm embrace of specious logic, I guess I have a 50% chance of this paper being successful, and in this high-stress, competitive experience of being a Ph.D. candidate, that's good enough for me.

Williams' (1981) article was itself a little research project that had 100 errors in the text, and he called on

readers to recall which ones they noticed, with the errors steadily becoming more noticeable and egregious. He says that if you didn't notice errors on the first read, that's because you were not expecting them in the first place—you were reading like a reader who reads an author they trust. He concludes that that is the way we should approach student essays, not expecting error and only noting them when one caught us off guard, to "define categories of error other than those defined by systems of grammar or a theory of social class" (p. 159).

I wonder how the expectations of this academic genre shape the way you read my paper. If you were to grant me accommodations for writing in this form, what would they look like? I've tried to hack the system of the academic paper genre using the available means (my craft). Did I succeed?

Biography

Kristen Hoggatt-Abader (she/her) is a poet and scholar who teaches writing at the University of Arizona. She is the former "Ask a Poet" advice columnist for *The Smart Set*, and her research and creative work has been published widely in literary and cultural journals.

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