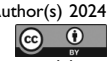
Article

Journal of Sociology
1–17



DOI: 10.1177/14407833241248193
journals.sagepub.com/home/jos


Enabling futures? Disability and sociology of futures

Hannah Morgan
School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom

Richard Tutton
Department of Sociology, University of York, UK

Abstract

Much envisaging of the future is inherently ableist. Euro-American cultural imaginaries traditionally have emphasised the narrative of medical progress, assuming the end of impairment. Disability is a frequent trope for and in dystopias, whereas more positive or progressive futures ignore the presence and aspirations of disabled people who are frequently excluded from individual and collective endeavours to articulate and shape the future. They are presumed to be in effect 'futureless', lacking a future of value, leaving an unoccupied space for existing inequalities and privileges to flourish. This paper brings disability studies and sociology of futures into dialogue and makes the case for creating crip space(s) within sociologies of the future. Foregrounding disability can trouble and enrich sociological engagements with futurity, while analytic perspectives from sociology of futures can inform scholarship in disability studies.

Keywords

Disability studies, ableism, crip, disablism, futurity

Introduction

In the last two decades, sociologists have developed new accounts of how futures are made and contested in contemporary societies (Adam & Groves, 2007; Coleman &

Corresponding author:
Hannah Morgan, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Social Science Building, Leeds, UK.
Email: h.morgan1@leeds.ac.uk

Tutton, 2017; Halford & Southerton, 2023; Urry, 2016). This body of work draws attention to important social differences such as in relation to gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and class, when it comes to understanding how futures are a significant part of social life. However, where do the experiences and perspectives of disabled people feature in this work? We observe that there is a 'disability lacuna' in 'sociology of futures' and this observation has been the starting point for an ongoing conversation between the authors and their respective interests in sociology of futures and disability studies. We wish to put these two fields into dialogue and consider what these two fields can learn from each other. We argue that 'sociology of futures' needs to become more inclusive of disabled people and to engage with how disability studies scholarship and activism challenge dominant future imaginaries and articulate alternatives to them. At the same time, sociology of futures has developed a set of important analyses that disability studies could draw on to further greater engagements in this field with the significance of future-making. This prompts us to consider the form that this engagement within disability studies could take in the conclusion to this paper.

By way of introduction, a few words are needed to characterise the two fields we are concerned with in this paper. Sociology of futures is not a clearly defined field and has been variously called 'sociology of the future' (Bell & Mau, 1971) or 'sociologies of the future' (Urry, 2008), in recognition that engagements with futurity come from very different sociological traditions. In this paper, we adopt Halford and Southerton's (2023) recent expression sociology of futures, used in their editorial to a special issue of the journal *Sociology*. They argue for an understanding of sociology as an open, 'cross-disciplinary practice that deliberately avoids operating as an autonomous discipline so it can better enrich itself through drawing out insights from across disparate intellectual endeavours' (Halford & Southerton, 2023, p. 266). These other fields include anthropology, where the work of Appadurai (2013) has been very influential in sociological circles (cited, for instance, by Halford & Southerton (2023) and Urry (2016) among others) and geography, where Anderson's (2010) work on anticipation has also been significant in sociological debates about futures (see Coleman & Tutton, 2017). Moreover, the term 'futures' recognises how scholars emphasise that there is no such thing as *the* future; instead, futures are always multiple, competing, contested, contextualised. Therefore, sociology of futures is concerned with analysing others' claims and actions in relation to these futures, but also has the potential – and, some would say, the obligation – to advance its own preferred futures (Halford & Southerton, 2023).

In contrast to European sociology, disability studies emerged as an interdisciplinary area of academic inquiry in the early 1980s, located predominantly in the social sciences and humanities. The field is defined by its relationship with the disabled people's movement, with which it remains in dialogue, and by its grounding in a social interpretation of disability whereby the focus is on the reproduction of disablement or disablism in societies. More recently, its attention has broadened beyond a focus on processes of disablement (the discrimination and oppression directed to disabled people) to ableism, described by Wolbring (2008) as 'a set of beliefs, processes and practices that produce – based on abilities one exhibits or values – a particular understanding of one's self, one's body and one's relationship with other of humanity including how one is judged by others' (p. 252). Thus, ableism's frame is more expansive than disability or disabled

people; it is the privileging of 'bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism and capitalism' (Lewis, 2020, n.p.). Ableist assumptions, structures and processes are some of the 'most entrenched and accepted isms' (Wolbring, 2008, 253) and can be seen writ large in dominant articulations of the future.

The field also grants primacy to the experiences of disabled people, as reflected by the disability rights slogan 'Nothing about us without us'.[1] Disability studies scholars and activists would argue that this extends to inclusion in opportunities to shape real and imagined collective futures. Despite this, disabled people's voices and aspirations are frequently excluded from imagined futures in mainstream cultures and academic thought (Goggin & Newell, 2005). This exclusion is both a form of structural violence perpetuating inequalities and compounding a lack of representation and, as Nixon (2011) expresses it, a form of slow violence which works to deny the right of disabled people to participate in shaping and claiming possible futures. Therefore, we argue that collective conversations about futures, to which sociology has an important contribution to make, must place disability with other important intersectional differences at their centre.

This is important to do, not least because, in global terms, the *World Report on Disability* (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011) estimates that there are more than a billion disabled people, with a global population prevalence of 15%, higher than previous estimates of 10% based on data from the 1970s. A range of factors contributes to this increase: populations are ageing; are more likely to be living with diseases, long term health conditions or impairments; and health inequalities are persisting in the absence of wider socio-economic changes (United Nations, undated). Given that, in the century ahead, the health effects of conflict, poverty and global warming will be ongoing and are projected to intensify, we cannot simply trade in imagined futures in which disabled people do not exist or where the experiences of living with disability are discounted.

Therefore, in this paper, we explore two related questions which bring the fields of sociology of futures and disability studies into dialogue with rich potential for both. How is disability largely missing from sociology of futures and what would it mean to better include it? In turn, what analytical concepts, methods and debates have sociology of futures advanced that could enrich disability studies scholars' interests in cultivating their own futurisms?

In what follows, we begin with delineating a short sketch of how disability and disabled people have featured in the imagined futures of European and North American cultures of the past 150 years. We then move on to introduce and characterise sociology of futures, and how existing ideas in the field could be relevant for thinking about disability futures, but also how there is a 'disability lacuna' in the field. There has sometimes been reluctance among some in disability studies to engage in 'future-making' which can be perceived to be at the expense of securing change in the present, but there is much that the field can take from sociology of futures to advance its own analysis of how futures are made in exclusionary ways and to articulate its normative claims about different and better futures. This takes us to the final part of the paper in which we set out how disability studies could cultivate what we call 'DisFuturism'.

Futures without disabled people or futures without disability?

In this section we outline the two dominant approaches to thinking about disability and the future, both of which envisage a future without disability but in very different ways. The first captures mainstream thinking about the future with its promise of the eradication of bodily deficit and disease, and the second, which emerged from the disabled people's movement, sees the promise of a future in which discrimination and disabling barriers no longer exist. In this way, the two approaches reflect the binary identified by the social interpretation of disability, often referred to by the shorthand 'the social model of disability' (Oliver, 1983). This model is based on the work of early disability studies activists in the UK (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), 1976), whose then radically new approach distinguished between a person's impairment – that is the condition or bodily difference – and disability, the disadvantage and limitations created by disabling barriers and forms of oppression imposed 'on top' of the restrictions and difficulties caused by impairment (UPIAS, 1976). It rejected what Oliver later termed the 'individual model of disability' which views the disadvantage experienced by disabled people as the automatic and inevitable result of their biological or genetic impairments. The causal nature of disability identified by these oppositional perspectives provides the basis for different responses: if impairment is the cause of disadvantage, then a logical response is to eradicate or reduce impairment, whereas if the cause is viewed as socially constructed the loci of action shifts to social processes and relationships.

Arguably, the individual model of disability has been a long-standing feature of traditional Euro-American cultural imaginaries of the future. These have centred narratives of medical and technological progress, where the imagined future state is one in which there are no people with impairments. This is evident in utopian literature produced in Europe and North America from the 19th century onwards, from Edward Bellamy (1888) to William Morris (1891). Parrinder (1997, p. 67) poses the question of utopian writing: 'can we imagine a better society without imagining, and wishing to create, better people?' By this, he means that utopia must also involve people living full lives of happiness and fulfilment, with minimal mental and physical suffering, and also –and most controversially – being in some way 'improved' through genetic intervention to produce enhanced strength and beauty amongst the population (Parrinder, 1997, p. 67). For example, Gilman (1915/1979) in her book *Herland* imagines a society that has become one of 'conscious makers of people', through exercising eugenic controls over population growth and 'quality' of the population. The narrator relates how 'sickness was almost unknown among them […] they were a clean-bred, vigorous lot, having the best of care' (Gilman, 1915/1979, p. 95). As well as utopian writers making use of eugenics, the eugenicist Francis Galton (1911) dabbled in his own utopian story called 'The College of Kantsaywhere'.

In imagining future societies in which disabled people would simply not exist, such utopias ignored how disabled people's lives at the time in which they were written were characterised by extreme oppression and suffering, and, significantly, prefigured the eugenic and genocidal realities of the 20th century for many disabled people, from the Nazi *Krankenmorde* (murder of the sick) (Robertson, 2018) to the forced sterilisation

of disabled people, which remained prevalent globally throughout the century (Herzog, 2018). As such, disabled people have experienced what Marino (2019) calls a 'double absence', being both marginalised, stigmatised and neglected in the present and excluded from imagined futures.

When not excluded completely (cf. Wälivaara, 2018), disability is generally understood as an individual deficiency overcome through technological interventions (Flynn, 2019). A well-known example is Star Trek character Geordi La Forge, whose congenital blindness is overcome by his use of a VISOR (visual instrument and sensory organ replacement) which enables him to 'see'. In later film versions, this is replaced by ocular implants acting as artificial eyes which remove any restriction caused by his impairment (smith, 2021a). Where disability does tend to feature in popular literature and cinema, this is in dystopian genres where disability is taken as a sign of societal breakdown or catastrophe. For example, we see multiple disabled and disfigured bodies living in the post-apocalyptic landscape ravaged by ecological devastation shown in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015). Through dystopias, writers or filmmakers depict possible futures which are to be avoided. As disability studies scholar Kafer (2013, p. 2) puts it, 'a future with disability is a future nobody wants'.

In contrast to the above, the disabled people's movement has envisaged its utopian futures without disability. In the UPIAS's (1976) *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, one of the first articulations of a social interpretation of disability, the future was a space where disability would no longer be imposed on people with impairments. Segregation and isolation would be replaced by full and equal participation in society. Building on the ideas of UPIAS and others, the disabled people's movement and disability studies has invested much energy into creating and building enabling futures (Griffiths, 2023) that emphasise independence, accessibility and inclusiveness in research, policy and practice.

Furthermore, there are elements of more speculative thinking about the future in disability studies. UK-based South African activist and academic Finkelstein (1975) produced a utopian vision where wheelchair users were the norm. Founder of the European Independent Living movement, Ratzka (1998) recounts the tale of Crip Van Winkle who, in 2050, is brought out of a deep hibernation to a future where universal design is mandatory. Mackey (2009, p. 2), in his analysis of these two utopian allegories, highlights the ways in which they seek answers to the problem of disability that reject the 'ableist collective fantasy' (p. 26) of a future without impairment. Mackey (2009, p. 2) also argues that they embody the 'same ideals [that] permeate much of modern socialist Utopian thought', which is not unsurprising given the Marxist and materialist underpinnings of much early disability studies writing (including that of Finkelstein and the UPIAS). Indeed, the role of capitalism in creating disability (and increasing the prevalence of impairment) is at the heart of Oliver's (1990) book *The Politics of Disablement* and, writing later, Oliver and Barnes conclude:

> Disabled people have no choice but to attempt to build a better world because it is impossible to have a vision of inclusionary capitalism: we all need a world where impairment is valued and celebrated and all disabling barriers are eradicated. Such a world would be inclusionary for all. (Oliver & Barnes, 1998, quoted in Mackey, 2009, p. 12)

In summary, we can see that in mainstream culture, representations and narratives of futures in which impairments are absent trade on ideas of human happiness, wellbeing and some version of genetic improvement. In contrast, narratives that emerge from disability activism and scholarship imagine a very different future, one that presumes the presence of impairment but that aspires to the eradication of forms of disablism and ableism.

Sociology of futures and disability futures

Where does sociology of futures fit within these wider cultural representations and narratives of futures? As Connell (1997, p. 1519) relates, the emergence of European sociology – as the science of human society – was concerned with 'discovering and expounding laws of progress' and was allied to utopian thinking. However, today's sociologists of futures do not tend to buy into 'laws of progress' any more. Instead, they are interested in how futures are actively constructed through social actions.

For example, a body of work identifies and analyses the 'range of rhetorical, organisational and material activities' through which social actors 'secure successfully for themselves a specific kind of future' (Brown et al., 2000, pp. 3–4; see also Borup et al., 2006; Oomen et al., 2022). This work explores and demonstrates how futures are performative, reshaping existing social realities in their own image. Another approach, informed by gender and sexuality studies, analyses how futures are the 'domain of sensations, emotions and feelings' (Coleman, 2018, p. 37). Coleman (2018) maps out several related but distinct ways that 'affective futurity' is experienced in everyday lives through optimism, hope and anticipation that show how the future is 'felt and lived out not as a temporality that is separate from the present but instead as one that is folded into the present' (p. 49). These approaches are examples of what Brown and Michael (2003, p. 4) characterise as a move in sociology to regard the future as an 'analytical object and not simply a neutral temporal space into which objective expectations can be projected'. Therefore, sociology has increasingly paid attention to how diverse social groups imagine, confront or are excluded from futures. This work has tended to centre on gender, race/ethnicity and social class rather than disability. As Van Emmerik et al. (in press), in this issue describe, attending to 'the minor' in sociology of futures provides an opportunity to give 'priority to what is marginalised, neglected or unrecognised'. Therefore, sociology has increasingly paid attention to how diverse social groups imagine, confront, or are excluded from futures. This work has tended to centre on gender, race/ethnicity and social class rather than disability.

For instance, Tutton (2023) has discussed futurelessness to highlight 'the relationship between imagined futures (and who imagines them), power relations and social change.' For Tutton (2023, p. 443), 'futurelessness' describes how some groups in society 'see that the futures they value or desire are being foreclosed, which can leave them with the sense that they "don't have a future" '. As Tutton (2023, p. 440) elaborates, 'feelings of futurelessness reflect how actors are differently positioned to enact their own desired futures'. This work on 'futurelessness' draws on Appadurai's (2013) arguments that people living in poverty are among the least able to 'exercise voice, to debate, contest and oppose directions for collective social life' (p. 186). For the impoverished, 'the future presents itself as a luxury, a nightmare, a doubt, or a shrinking possibility" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 299). As

Allison and Piot (2014, p. 3) argue, for socially and economically marginalised groups, especially in the Global South, 'attachments to the present have intensified. Embedded in rhythms of truncated work [and] interrupted life cycles […] imaginings are often radically presentist, collapsed or imploded into the immediacy of survival.' There is little time to dream of an elsewhen. Although those who experience or face poverty and precarity may feel that their futures are being foreclosed, more affluent groups who occupy more powerful positions with greater material and cultural resources, have more of a capacity 'to explore the future more frequently and more realistically, and to share this knowledge with one another more routinely then their poorer and weaker neighbours' (Appadurai, 2013, p. 188).

Such accounts emphasise that how one feels about the future and who has opportunities to imagine and publicly share possible collective futures with others is a consequence of one's position within existing social structures. Elite groups have the resources and know-how to ensure that their futures are heard. The tech industry centred in Silicon Valley is a case in point whose leaders have funded the work of academic institutes such as the Future of Humanity Institute that concerns itself with the 'long term potential' of humanity, drawing on transhumanist and earlier eugenicist ideas to advance the prospects of re-engineering human bodies and brains (Torres, 2021).

In contrast, Urry (2016, p. 13) and others have argued for a 'social futures' approach that 'problematizes both autonomous markets and the march of technology'. He contends that the 'future […] is too important to be left to states, corporations or technologists, and so 'social futures' (Urry, 2016, p. 190) is a democratising move that recognises that a wide range of actors should be included in meeting contemporary challenges and making alternative futures. Galviz and Spiers (2022, p. 1) claim that 'foregrounding social futures reveals a shift to the embodied and embedded ways that humans anticipate, imagine and live futures in their messy socially imbricated lives'. This approach eschews accounts of abstract and universal futures and focuses instead on 'matters of difference, to specific *times, places and peoples*, from which intersections futures emerge' (Galviz & Spiers, 2022, p. 1; original emphasis). Such a shift certainly opens a space for engaging with how futures are imagined and lived by diverse groups of people in different social contexts.

Examples of this include work in Afrofuturism and queer theory. Sociology of futures has engaged with work in Afrofuturism that draws together sociological, political, cultural and artistic modes of engagement and which has been especially powerful in creating new spaces in which to challenge white, Eurocentric narratives and conceptualisations of futures (Mitchell & Chaudhury, 2020). Afrofuturism emphasises the specificity and significance of Black people's experiences and cultural memories of the past 300 years. Eshun (2003) argues that the need to recover the past erased by the Atlantic slave trade has made some suspicious of 'futurological analysis' and the making of what he calls 'counterfutures'. Despite this, others argue that 'Afrofuturism aims to reclaim and transform the trauma of the forced voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic and subsequent past atrocities against African peoples, black and Afro queer diaspora' (Brooks et al., 2022, p. 260). Brooks et al. (2022, p. 260) contend that this is not a recent phenomenon but is deeply rooted in how 'Black people have always been futurists' as they sought to rebuild their lives after their forced relocation and enslavement, through songs and stories.

Afrofuturist scholarship has also embraced innovative methods such as the use of speculative fiction. Eshun (2003) uses the trope of an imagined future United States of Africa to interrogate 'Afrodiasporic subjectivity' in the 21st century. Sociologist Benjamin (2016) goes further in her work to create an entire work of speculative social science fiction called 'Ferguson is the Future' that centres on a future state-sponsored programme for regenerating victims of current police violence. In doing so, Benjamin (2016, p. 2) argues that 'social change requires fictions that reimagine and rework all that is taken for granted about the current structure of society'. Therefore, she reasons, 'fictions, in this sense, are not falsehoods but refashionings through which analysts experiment with different scenarios, trajectories, and reversals, elaborating new values and testing different possibilities for creating more just and equitable societies' (Benjamin, 2016, p. 2). Afrofuturism, then, as an interdisciplinary practice offers a range of distinct and powerful perspectives on futurity that centre Black people's lived experiences, and challenge Eurocentric futures.

Afrofuturism intersects with queer theory perspectives that sociologists such as Coleman have engaged with in her work on the affectivity of futures. Coleman (2018, p. 37) argues that interdisciplinary work in gender and sexuality studies is animated by a 'desire for the transformation of the present into a future that is different and better'. However, she traces how there are differing perspectives in queer theory on whether engagement with futurity is to be desired. For some, such as Edelman (2004), the primacy of futurity is an expression of an entrenched heteronormativity and argues for the refusal of what he calls reproductive futurism as opposed to making it more accessible to everyone. In contrast, Coleman relates how Munoz (2009) embraces futurity and argues that 'queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough' (Munoz, 2009, cited in Coleman, 2018, p. 48). Brooks et al. (2022, p. 266) propose the creation of 'Queer foresight research' that supports and works towards achieving queer equality, equity and liberation. A vital element in this is the cultivation of a 'Queer imagination' (Brooks et al., 2022, p. 266) that is embedded in lived queer experiences of different social worlds.

In sum, sociology of futures has developed a strong interest in 'social futures' and is concerned with how some groups are better positioned than others to shape how futures are imagined and debated in public. However, in doing so, sociology of futures has paid little attention to disability or the experiences and perspectives of disabled people when it comes to analysing futures. This claim is based on our reading of significant monographs, 2 journal special issues (comprising 18 papers) and a handbook, all published over a 16-year period. Together, these publications represent a breadth of rich and insightful sociological thinking (some of which we have already cited above) about futures and are indicative rather than fully representative of sociology of futures as practised in the anglophone academy (see Beckert & Suckert, 2021). However, they do reveal a certain lacuna when it comes to thinking about disability and the experiences and aspirations of disabled people in relation to futurity, with some exceptions as we detail below. It is one that is also apparent in wider reviews of the field by Beckert and Suckert (2021) and Suckert (2022).

If we consider three books often cited in the literature, *Future Matters* (Adam & Groves, 2007) (646 citations on Google Scholar), *What is the Future* (Urry, 2016) (620 citations on

Google Scholar) and *Imagined Futures* (Beckert, 2016) (1311 citations on Google Scholar), none of them directly addresses disability. As an example, Adams and Groves (2007, p. xiv), begin their influential book *Future Matters* by acknowledging that '

[e]ngagement with the future rests on tacit knowledge. We know what it entails and appreciate that it is somehow inextricably bound up with what it means to be human.'

They then go on to describe the ways in which children are asked to imagine their future, both what it will be and what it might be. There is a double irony here from a disability studies perspective. First, there is considerable evidence that for many disabled children, young people and adults there is, individually and collectively, a lack of, or exclusion from, imagined futures (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2017; Ryan, 2018). Second, despite the recognition that engagement with the future rests on tacit knowledge about what it means to be human, there is no mention or consideration of disability in the book. The universal nature of impairment/disability and the contribution it can make to thinking about what it means to be human (for example, Goodley, 2021) is a recent and rich vein in disability studies literature that we believe has much to offer mainstream sociological and popular discussions of the future, and to which we return in the final section of this paper.

Furthermore, in the two journal special issues that have appeared in major anglophone sociological journals in the past six years (Coleman & Tutton, 2017; Halford & Southerton, 2023), featuring the work of scholars from the UK, Australia and North America, there is only one example of where disability is addressed. In the 2023 *Sociology* special issue, Masquelier (2023) is the only author to directly address disability when he discusses how socialist visions of the future of work and post-work do not resonate with the experiences of disabled people, echoing the work of influential materialist disability studies authors such as Finkelstein, Oliver and Barnes. He suggests that many disabled people are often excluded from the worlds of work and cautions against sweeping claims that work is the basis of social identity and belonging.

In 2021, Galviz and Spiers (2022) edited the *Routledge Handbook of Social Futures* that represents a wide range of social science thinking on futures, with authors contributing from across different European, North American, Australian and African contexts in 28 chapters. Only two contributions engaged with disability. Groves' (2022) chapter addresses people's participation in future-making through a capabilities approach. This has become especially influential in the past decade. As Groves (2022, p. 61) relates, capabilities are 'opportunities for achieving [goals] through the exercise of agency'. People have uneven access to such capabilities and this reflects 'the relationship between characteristics of individuals and characteristics of their environments', giving the example of how disability may play a role in constraining an individual's capability. Also in the *Handbook*, Sheller (2022) touches on the deeply unequal access disabled people have to mobility in the context of discussing sustainable mobility futures.

In the texts surveyed for this article, we find that scholars have given limited attention to disability or the futures of disabled people. We are not able to account for why this might be so, when, as we have related above, sociology has foregrounded how diverse social groups imagine, confront or are excluded from futures. While this work considers class, gender and race/ethnicity, disability studies scholars highlight the ways in which disability remains an exceptional category. It is one we may all enter – indeed, as we age, this becomes increasingly likely. Moreover, as we recounted above, evidence

indicates that growing numbers of people across the world are experiencing forms of disability and this is set to continue. Disabled feminist J. Morris (1991, p. 192) contends that 'our disability frightens people. They don't want to think that this is something that might happen to them. So we become separated from common humanity, treated as fundamentally different and alien.' Unlike other forms of diversity, disability – whether impairment or disability – is a category that remains understandable to avoid (Watson, 2002). Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2021, n.p.) remind us that focusing on disability 'brings with it a realisation that Sociology presumes human ability […] is deeply ableist […] is disrupted by disability [and] Sociology needs disabled people'.

As we showed earlier, the disabled people's movement has put forward visions of accessible, inclusive and equitable futures for disabled people through political organising and utopian and speculative methods. Such efforts are certainly highly relevant to sociology that seeks to attend to how there are significant inequalities in future-making, which express uneven power relations and reflect structural differences. Including the perspectives and predicaments of disabled people would be an important addition to sociology of futures.

Disability activism and scholarship can provide a 'space of interpretive encounter' (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 56) for this task. Disability studies is 'a practice or way of being in the world, making it a praxis discipline' (Morgan, 2022, p. 144) where the hows of what we do are 'as important as its whys and whats' (Beresford & Russo, 2016, p. 273). One way of envisaging and enabling this practice is through the creation of crip space(s). Creating crip space can be viewed as a practice of radical inclusion that seeks to meet the challenge of the disabled people's movement for full, equitable and welcoming inclusion. It is a practice of cripping that rejects the ideology of compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer, 2006) and resists ableist constitutions of space, place and time. For McRuer (2018), crip is a noun or adjective 'a flamboyant reclamation […] to signify solidarity and resistance' and a verb that 'gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange or twisted' (p. 134). Cripping is inevitably a disruptive and subversive practice that reveals ableist norms and structures while also crafting alternative ways of being in the world (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006; Sandahl, 2003).

Disabled journalist s. e. smith (2021a, n.p.) describes crip space as 'an environment that pushes back on cultural attitudes about disability: it is a room where disability is at the centre of the conversation, one where all participants strive to make sure everyone is included'. However, crip space is more than an accessible inclusive space. Like thinking about disability more generally, it is counter-cultural 'a place where disability is celebrated and embraced, something radical and taboo in many parts of the world, and sometimes even for people in those spaces' (smith, 2021b, p. 273).

We extend their concept to call for identifying and amplifying existing crip spaces within the academy and aligned activism and to advocate for their creation in sociology of futures. Such spaces may not always be created by disabled people for disabled people; indeed, we argue there is a vital role for non-disabled people and for scholars within and without disability studies. However, 'crip spaces' create the type of affirming space where disability and disabled people are anticipated, expected, welcomed and feel a sense of belonging. A recent and highly effective example was the exhibition *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disabled People's Activism: Past, Present and Future* at the

UK's People's History Museum.[2] The project was led by a steering group and disabled activists were appointed community curators. The museum describes it as 'the most accessible exhibition' they have ever hosted, and it offers a model for future collaborative crip space-building that speaks to non-disabled as well as disabled people. Such 'crip spaces' enable what we call a form of disability gain (after the notion of 'deaf gain') that has the potential to enrich the sociology of futures by fully including 'a form of human diversity capable of making vital contributions to the greater good of society […] without recourse to 'normalization' (Bauman, 2010, quoted in Morgan, 2020, p. 112). As more people across the world are projected to experience forms of disability, so disability is an important aspect of the futures that confront us and should therefore be included and examined in sociology of futures.

In turn, through fashioning such 'crip spaces', sociology has much, then, to offer to critical thinking about the place of disability in the context of the multiple crises of the 21st century, from acts of terrorism, economic crashes, austerity, environmental disasters, climate change, civil wars, violence against people of colour, and pandemics. With these thoughts on the development of 'crip spaces' within sociology of futures, we aim to generate further debate within the field. For now, to conclude this current paper we wish to consider how disability studies, learning from sociology of futures, could cultivate and embrace its own kind of futurisms.

Towards DisFuturisms?

As we suggested above, mainstream utopian futures imagined by writers for able-bodied people are futures without impairment, without the presence of disabled people. Futures where disabled bodies are present tend to be dystopian ones; disability remains a form of disorder, disruption and failure, and thus acts as a marker of abjection. The challenge is how to enable a shift from futures where disability is undesired and unwelcomed and a sign of societal dysfunction, to futures where disability and disabled people are expected, welcomed and valued. As Kafer (2013, p. 34) summarises it:

> the task, then, is not so much to refuse the future [as it is presented] as to imagine disability and disability futures otherwise, as part of other, alternative temporalities that do not cast disabled people out of time, as the sign of the future with no future.

This is a case, then, for disability studies to embrace a more speculative form. Therefore, we would argue that there is scope for cultivating DisFuturisms, which could draw inspiration from other kinds of futurisms, such as the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) futurisms that Mitchell and Chaudhury (2020, p. 321) discuss, which 'center diverse, plural subjectivities and forms of agency, undermining homogenous notions of "humanity" ', using the creative arts, speculative fiction social movements, and scholarship to do so.

In putting this forward, we recognise that much of the energy and resources of disability activism remain devoted to creating an accessible present. As Griffiths and Mladenov (2022, n.p.) noted, the COVID-19 pandemic compounded and increased existing inequalities, placing disabled people 'in precarious, violent and abandoned situations', and their

individual and collected voices were excluded. Surviving and seeking to thrive in the present becomes the overwhelming priority. However, Griffiths and Mladenov (2022) conclude that 'though bleak, this situation is not beyond hope. Possible and preferable alternatives to the current trajectory exist' (n.p.) if space can be created for this. We contend that sociology, particularly sociology of futures, has a contribution to make to this task. It can create space to think, to analyse, to hope as the basis for collective action. We take inspiration from the interaction between disability studies and activism and sociological ideas and concepts, and from the significant role that adopting a *sociological imagination* and *thinking sociologically* (Bauman & May, 2001) has played in advancing the theoretical and practical agenda of disability studies and the disabled people's movement.

There is a growing body of work in the academy and beyond (particularly beyond) on more radically and imaginatively articulating and claiming disabled futures. Moreover, as Griffiths' research with young disabled activists demonstrates, there is activity within the movement reflecting on whose futures are being advanced and on what terms. Griffiths (2023) explores how the future is imagined by and through disability activism and considers the implications of differing conceptions of the future on the accessibility and inclusiveness of this project. He argues there is a tendency within disability activism for a nostalgic remembering of past activism (which he calls retrotopian) that can posit alternatives as 'dangerous' or traitorous to the founding ideals of the movement. He concludes that collective imaginings of the future advanced by more powerful and established figures in the movement can deny young activists in particular the opportunity to 'disrupt, invert and transform current understandings of disability' and thereby 'to produce new, creative and experimental forms of disability activism' which imagine the future differently (Griffiths, 2023, p. 103).

As Griffiths (2023) maintains, a situation where 'the radical imaginings of all members are not tolerated' in obsequious adherence to a 'true' vision of the future is as deterministic as ableist envisaging of the future (p. 98). Anti-ableist practices require a radically different engagement with disability that moves beyond identifying and challenging disabling barriers and ableist tropes. It necessitates a shift from addressing the 'negativity' of discrimination and oppression through a recognition of the universality and ubiquity of impairment and of the more complex web of ableism that cannot be removed with a focus on barriers. Instead, we should, we must, embrace and affirm the diversity and positive contribution of impaired and disabled bodies and minds, centring intersectionality and the most excluded and marginalised of disabled people, such as people of colour, LGBTQ, indigenous and colonised peoples.

Moreover, as Smilges (2023, p. 4) contends in relation to greater integration of disabled students into mainstream schooling, 'access doesn't eliminate ableism, it enabled ableism to bare its teeth'. Including or integrating disabled people into conventional imaginings of the present or future simply serves to maintain and obscure forms of discrimination and othering. To be in the future on non-disabled or ableist terms remains inherently exclusionary and an experience of violence.

This is a crucial matter of disability justice as articulated by disability activist Mingus (2011) and explored in her utopian short story *Hollow* (Mingus, 2015), which builds on a tradition of imagining radically different and inclusive disabled futures in science and

speculative fiction (Stone, 2023). Disability justice requires us to 'actively work to build something that is thought of as undeniably undesirable and to try and reframe it to others as liberatory, is no small task' (Mingus, 2017, n.p.). Enacting disability justice within futures thinking is a vital contribution to the creation of *DisFutures* (as opposed to dys-futures) where disabled people, their ideas and aspirations are genuinely included and valued rather than, following Smilges (2023), simply given access to discussions and debates that are imbued with ableist assumptions.

Conclusion

We close this paper by reaffirming our contention there is much to explore and to be gained from a dialogue between sociology of futures and disability studies. To address the current disability lacuna in sociology of futures, we argue for creating a crip space within the field in which disability futures can come to be imagined and debated. Creating crip spaces provides a ready opportunity to enrich sociological engagements with futurity, and builds conceptual tools for disability activism in the academy and beyond. Crip spaces are creative, imaginative, uncomfortable and even frightening (to return to Morris' reminder that disability is an inclusive category to which all humans can belong). They provide space to open unexpected lines of flight or to delve into Pandora's boxes with a positive and affirming approach that places disability at the centre.

Furthermore, we argue that disability studies itself should engage with and learn from sociology of futures and work by Afrofuturist and queer theory scholars. *DisFuturism* – rich, playful, provocative, speculative and challenging in turn – is needed to imagine and work towards a world where disability is accepted as part of the human condition and where disabled people play roles in imagining and shaping the futures of that world.

Notes

1. See the introduction to chapter 1, 'Nothing About Us Without Us', in Charlton's (2000) book of the same title for a concise overview of the usage and significance of this slogan.
2. The exhibition closed in October 2023. An accessible 3-D tour as well as accessible versions of the exhibition narrative and bespoke audio-visual assets: https://phm.org.uk/exhibitions/nothing-about-us-without-us/.

ORCID iD

Hannah Morgan https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1039-9337

References

Adam, B., & Groves, C. (2007). *Future matters: Action, knowledge, ethics*. Leiden: Brill

Allison, A., & Piot, C. (2014). *Editors' note on 'neoliberal futures.' Cultural Anthropology*, 29(1), 3–7.

Anderson, B. (2010). Preemption, precaution and preparedness: anticipatory action and future geographies. *Progress in Human Geography 34*(6), 777–798.

Appadurai, A. (2013). *The future as cultural fact: Essays on the global condition*. Verso Books.
Bauman, H. (2010). Deaf Studies in the 21st Century: "Deaf- gain" and the Future of Human Diversity. In M. Marchark & & P. E. Spencer (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language and Education 2*.
Bauman, Z., & May, T. (2001). *Thinking sociologically (2nd ed.)*. Blackwell Publishing.
Beckert, J. (2016). *Imagined futures: Fictional expectations and capitalist dynamics*. Harvard University Press.
Beckert, J., & Suckert, L. (2021). The future as a social fact. *The analysis of perceptions of the future in sociology. Poetic*, *84*, 101499.
Bell, W., & Mau, J. A. (Eds.). (1971). *The sociology of the future: Theory, cases and annotated bibliography*. Russell Sage Foundation.
Bellamy, E. (1888). *Looking backward: 2000*–1887. *Ticknor & Co*.
Benjamin, R. (2016). Racial fictions, biological facts: Expanding the sociological imagination through speculative methods. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, *2*(2), 1–28.
Beresford, P., & Russo, J. (2016). Supporting the sustainability of mad studies and preventing its co-option. *Disability & Society*, *31*(2), 270–274.
Borup, M., Brown, N., Konrad, K., & , & Van Lente, H. (2006). The sociology of expectations in science and technology. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management*, *18*(3–4): 285–298.
Brooks, L. J. A., Tester, J., Kominskey, E., & Weeks, A. D. (2022). Queering: Liberation futures with Afrofuturism. In Galviz, C. L., and Spiers, E. (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of social future*. 260–274). Abingdon.
Brown, N., & Michael, M. (2003). A sociology of expectations: Retrospecting prospects and prospecting retrospects. *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, *15*, 3–18.
Brown, N., Rappert, B., & Webster, A. (2000). *Contested futures: A sociology of prospective techno-science*. Ashgate.
Charlton, J. L. (2000). *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. University of California Press.
Coleman, R. (2018). Affective futurity. In: K Selberg. (Ed.). *Gender: Time* (pp.37–52). Macmillan Reference USA.
Coleman, R., & Tutton, R. (2017). Introduction to Special Issue of *Sociological Review* on Futures in question: Theories, methods, practices. *Sociological Review*, *65*(3), pp.440–447.
Connell, R. W. (1997). Why is classical theory classical? *American Journal of Sociology*, *102*(6), 1511–1557.
Edelman, L. (2004). *No future: Queer theory and the death drive*. Duke University Press.
Eshun, K. (2003). Further considerations on Afrofuturism. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *3*(2), 287–302.
Finkelstein, V. (1975). *To deny or not to deny disability*, Independent Living Institute. http://www.independentliving.org/docs1/finkelstein.html.
Flynn, S. (2019). The future is fixable: Convention and ableism in science fiction. *Journal of Science Fiction*, *3*(2), 76–92.
Galton, F. (1911). *The Eugenic College of Kantsaywhere*. *Reproduced in Utopian Studies*, *12*(2), pp. 191–209.
Galviz, C. L., & Spiers, E. (Eds). (2022). *Routledge handbook of social futures*. Routledge.
Gilman, C. P. (1915/1979). *Herland*. Women's Press.
Ginsburg & Rapp. (2017). Cripping the future: Making disability count. In Salazar, J. F., Pink, S., Irving, A., & Sjöberg, J. (Eds.) *Anthropologies and futures: Researching emerging and uncertain worlds* (pp. 43–60). Taylor & Francis Group.
Goggin, G., & Newell, C. (2005). Imagining disability tomorrow. *Journal of Future Studies*, *10*(2), 69–74.

Goodley, D. (2021). *Disability and other human questions*. Emerald Publishing.
Goodley, D., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2021). What does disability bring to sociology?' *Human Figurations*, *9*(1). https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/idx/h/humfig/11217607.0009.103/–what-doesdisability- bring-to-sociology?rgn=main;view=fulltext
Griffiths, M. (2023). Livin' in the future: Conceptualising the future of UK disability activism through utopian, retrotopian and heterotopian configurations. *Capital & Class*, *47*(1), 85–105.
Griffiths, M., & Mladenov, T. (2022). Surviving now, planning for tomorrow: Disabled people and COVID-19 policy failures. Eurozine. https://www.eurozine.com/surviving-now-planning-for-tomorrow/.
Groves, C. (2022). Anticipation: Flourishing for the future. In Galviz, C. L., and Spiers, E. (Eds.). *Routledge handbook of social futures* (pp. 59–68). Routledge.
Halford, S., & Southerton, D. (2023). What future for the sociology of futures? Visions, concepts and methods. *Sociology*, *57*(2), 263–278. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038523115758
Herzog, D. (2018). *Unlearning eugenics: Sexuality, reproduction, and disability in post-Nazi Europe*. University of Wisconsin Press.
Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist queer crip*. Indiana University Press.
Lewis, T. (2020). *Ableism 2020: An updated definition*. https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/ableism-2020-an-updated-definition
Mackey, P. J. (2009). Crip Utopia and the future of disability. *Critical Disability Discourses*, *1*. https://cdd.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cdd/article/view/23383.
Marino, S. (2019). Ethnic identity and race: The 'double absence' and its legacy across generations among Australians of Southern Italian origin: Operationalizing institutional positionality. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42*(5), 707–725. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1451649.
Masquelier, C. (2023). *Intersectional socialism. A Utopia for radical interdependence*. Bristol University Press.
McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York University Press.
McRuer, R. (2018). *Crip times: Disability, globalization, and resistance*. New York University Press.
Miller, G. (Director). (2015). *Mad Max: Fury Road.* Warner Bros. Home Entertainment.
Mingus, M. (2011). C*hanging the framework: Disability justice. How our communities can move beyond access to wholeness*. https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/02/12/changing-the-framework-disability-justice/.
Mingus, M. (2015). Hollow. In Imarisha, W., & Brown, A. M. (Eds.), *Octavia's brood: Science fiction stories from social justice movements* (pp. 84–92). AK Press.
Mingus, M. (2017, April 11). *Access intimacy, interdependence and disability justice*. 2017 Paul K Longmore lecture on disability studies, San Francisco State University. https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice/.
Mitchell, A., & Chaudhury, A. (2020). Worlding beyond 'the' 'end' of 'the world': White apocalyptic visions and BIPOC futurisms. *International Relations*, *34*(3): 309–332.
Morgan, H. (2022). Mad studies and disability studies. In Beresford, P., & Russo, J. (Eds.) 2022. *The Routledge international handbook of mad studies* (pp. 108–118). Routledge.
Morris, J. (1991). *Pride against prejudice*. Women's Press.
Morris, W. (1891). *News from nowhere or an epoch of rest, being some chapters from a Utopian romance*. Reeves & Turner.
Munoz, José Esteban (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. NYU Press.
Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Oliver, M. (1983). *Social work with disabled people*. *Macmillan, for the British Association of Social Workers*.

Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. Macmillan.

Oliver, M., & Barnes, C. (1998). *Disabled people and social policy: From exclusion to inclusion* Longman.

Oomen, J., Hoffman, J., & Hajer, M. A. (2022). Techniques of futuring: On how imagined futures become socially performative. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *25*(2), 252–270.

Parrinder, P. (1997). Eugenics and Utopia: Sexual selection from Galton to Morris. *Utopian Studies*, *8*(2), 1–12.

Ratzka, A. D. (1998). *Crip Utopia and the end of the welfare state.* In Conference on independent living, Independent Living Institute, London. http://www.independentliving.org/docs4/ratzkacu.html.

Robertson, M. (2018). *The first into the dark: The Nazi persecution of the disabled*. UTS PRESS.

Ryan, S. (2018). *Justice for Laughing Boy: Connor Sparrowhawk – a death by indifference* Jessica Kingsley Press.

Sandhal, C. (2003). Queering the crip or cripping the queer? Intersections of queer and crip identities in solo autobiographical performance. *GLQ*, *9*(1–2), 25–56.

Sheller, M. (2022). Mobility justice: Sustainable mobility futures. In Galviz, C. L., & Spiers, E. (Eds.) *Routledge handbook of social futures* (pp. 206–215). Routledge.

Smilges, J. L. (2023). *Crip negativity*. University of Minnesota Press.

smith, s. e. (2021b). 'The beauty of spaces created for and by disabled people. In Wong, A. (Ed.), *Disability visibility. First-person stories from the twenty-first century* (pp. 271–275). Vintage Books. pages 271-275

smith, s. e. (2021a). 'Disabling Utopia to save it. *The Nation*, July 26–August 2, 2021. https://www.thenation.com/article/society/disability-utopia/.

Stone, K. (2023). Hollow children: Utopianism and disability justice. *Textual Practice*, *37*(9), 1405–1422.

Suckert, L. (2022). Back to the future: Sociological perspectives on expectations, aspirations and imagined futures. *European Journal of Sociology*, *63*(3), 393–428. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975622000339.

Titchkosky, T. (2011). *The question of access: Disability, space and meaning*. University of Toronto Press.

Torres, E. P. (2021). The dangerous ideas of 'longtermism' and 'existential risk.' *Current Affairs*, July 28. https://www.currentaffairs.org/2021/07/the-dangerous-ideas-of-longtermism-and-existential-risk.

Tutton, R. (2023). The sociology of futurelessness. *Sociology*, *57*(2), 438–453.

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. (1976). *Fundamental principles of disability.* https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/UPIAS-fundamental-principles.pdf.

Urry, J. (2008). Climate change, travel and complex futures. *British Journal of Sociology*, *59*(2), 261–279.

Urry, J. (2016). *What is the future?* Polity Press.

Van Emmerik, C., Coleman, R., & Lyon, D. (in press). Towards a minor sociology of futures: Shifting futures in Mass Observation accounts of the Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Sociology*.

Wälivaara, J. (2018). Marginalized bodies of imagined futurescapes: Ableism and heteronormativity in science fiction . *Culture Unbound*, *10*(2), 226–245.

Watson, N. (2002). Well, *I know this is going to sound very strange to you, but I don't see myself as a disabled person: Identity and disability. Disability and Society*, *17*(5), 509–527.

Wolbring, G. (2008). The politics of ableism. *Development*, *51*, 252–258.
World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) *World report on disability 2011*. World Health Organization. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44575.

Author biographies

Hannah Morgan is Associate Professor in Social Policy and Disability Studies at Leeds University. Her work is concerned with the application of the ideas of the disabled people's movement, and the role of professional practices in the lives of disabled people.

Richard Tutton is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of York and co-director of the Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU). His work engages with the making and contesting of social and technological futures in the contemporary world. They are equal contributors to the paper.