**Introduction. Cultural disability studies and the cripping and popping of theory**

Well, my hands are shaky and my knees are weak

I can’t seem to stand on my own two feet

Who do you thank when you have such luck?

Elvis Presley, ‘All shook up’ (1956)

The out-of-controllability of the pop body has been a persistent feature since the music’s early days. From ‘All shook up’ in the United States and Johnny Kidd and the Pirates’ ‘Shaking all over’ (1960) in Britain, songs about uncontrollable neurological tremors, as physical symptoms conflating the ecstasy of sexual attraction and of dance, are heard from rock and roll on—and are themselves prefigured in the pleasure and fear of the transcendent body in the jazz and dance musics of the first half of the 20th century as well.[[1]](#footnote--1) There are identifiable and powerful links between popular music and the damaged, imperfect, deviant, extraordinary body or voice, which can be, and surprisingly often *is*, a disabled body or voice; these links have been overlooked in much critical writing about popular music. Popular music has always been about corporeal transformation or excess and the display of those—there has always been ‘a whole lot of shaking going on’—and reading that shakiness in the context of the disabled body is the starting point for opening up fresh insights into both popular music studies and cultural disability studies. The purpose of this book, then, is to explore the common cultural and social territory of popular music and disability, which has been a hitherto neglected topic. It is situated at a nexus of disciplinary or sub-disciplinary concerns: disability studies, popular music studies, cultural studies, performance studies, gender studies, and theory. It is intended as a timely musical contribution to the critical dialogue of recent years around disability culture, as one corrective to the relative silence of popular music studies here. *Shakin’ All Over* is the first book looking right across the popular soundtrack of ‘our time, crip time’ (McRuer 2006, 200).

From disability studies, Colin Barnes has reminded us that an ‘element in the development of disability culture and the arts that should not be overlooked is the relationship between disabled people and the “entertainment” industry. Historically, people with perceived impairments or “abnormalities” have provided an important source of entertainment for the non-disabled majority’ (2003, 12). Such entertainment ranges from nineteenth century freakshows to twenty-first century performance art, and there are now extended academic studies of each of these (see respectively Thomson 1996, Thomson 1997; Fahy and King 2002, Kuppers 2003, Sandahl and Auslander 2005, for instance). We can go back further to make tentative connections: in the early modern period, courts made space for dwarves and fools to explore misrule and satirise their masters and mistresses—an allocation of a dedicated disability performance facility and role. Rosemarie Garland Thomson has drawn our attention to the common etymology that connects the freak, the corporeal deviant, with the act of showing, display, performance: ‘the Latin word *monstra*, “monster”, also means “sign” and forms the root of our word *demonstrate*, meaning “to show”’ (1997, 56). As we will see, such a cultural or musical demonstration can be a sign of dissension, critique, too, as the monstrous, deviant or different stigmatised identity is claimed, staged, sounded, flaunted—we can say that it is popped and it is rocked: ‘performing difference, when that difference is a stigma, marks one as a target, but it also exposes and resists the prejudices of society’ (Siebers 2008, 118). In work that crips Laura Mulvey’s highly influential feminist film theory work on the female gaze, Thomson proposes not the gaze, but the stare. And, ‘as anyone with a visible disability knows, persistent stares are one of the informing experiences of being considered disabled…. [T]he disabled body is at once the to-be-looked-at and the not-to-be-looked-at’ (Thomson 2005, 31). That being the case, what better cultural location for managing and challenging that discomforting dialectic can there be for the visibly disabled ‘staree’ (Thomson 2005, 32) than the stage or the screen, particularly when his (mostly) moving (dancing) body might be accompanied by a deviant gang (band) making superloud noise (amplified music)?[[2]](#footnote-0) And how does a staree get to be a star?

So disability studies has indeed begun to formulate a body of work that is altogether more substantial than a ‘subfield in literary criticism and cultural studies’, as Thomson called for some years ago in her groundbreaking book *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997, 16).[[3]](#footnote-1) Indeed, cultural disability studies is arguably now a recognised, more than emergent, field, with its own dedicated journals, book series published by academic presses, and research centres and networks. But why should we look at popular music and disability, together? Because, we might argue, *they were invented at the same time*. That is, there are identifiable links between modernity, mass media and popular culture (including popular music), and disability. In fact, ‘[a]s Lennard Davis argues, *normal*—a concept and indeed an English word less than 160 years old—is an outgrowth of the development of statistics’ (Lubet 2011, 27; emphasis original). To historicise a little further, we can see that the shifts in perception of and engagement with people with disabilities took place in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. These shifts were due to the increasing visibility of disability—caused by, in Henri-Jacques Stiker’s view, the increase in workplace accidents in the mechanised and pressured workplace of the later Industrial Revolution, and the large numbers of World War One disabled veterans (we can make a similar presumption about the post-bellum situation in the United States a few decades earlier). So, effectively one could say that the new century (the twentieth) saw a ‘new way, both cultural and social, of addressing disability’ (Stiker 1997, 121). From the perspective of popular music, this is also the period of the development and dissemination of mass media and communications technologies. Marc Shell illustrates the connection in the specific context of polio from the late nineteenth century on: ‘[d]uring the seventy years in which polio epidemics were widespread, the various electronic media—cinema, radio, and television—were also coming into their own’ (2005a, 1). More generally in the context of the rise of mass media, one can understand the representation of the body as an ideal through which different (which are in their mundanity ordinary rather than extraordinary) bodies are excluded or marginalised. Eugenics, for example, ‘spread into mass culture in the form of product promotion’ in advertising (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 30). Like some of the sonic arts we are considering in popular music, mass visual technologies could offer ways of compensating for disability, as well as ways of disabling people, as Shell astutely notes:

Many polios [including Lord Snowdon, Bert Kopperl, Dorothea Lange] took up photography: angled or telephotographic lenses bring closer what a paralyzed person cannot reach…. Cripples, usually the victims of the voyeurs and the ‘rubberneckers’, could turn the tables on the observers thanks to the cameras…. Early movies … made even ‘normal’ people look odd when they walked—Charles Chaplin’s quasi-stumbling gait is still celebrated. Thanks to the slow rate of shutter intervals in early movies, nonparalyzed walkers seem to suffer from the same walking disorder [as] … paralyzed walkers. (2005a, 130, 137)

In the United States, ‘“[d]isability” as a socially composed grouping is less than two hundred years old’ (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 22); indeed, it is both part of modernity, and in some cases—in disabilities which are associated with polio, autism, AIDs, for instance—of modernism and even postmodernism.

**INSERT IMAGES, SIDE BY SIDE IF POSSIBLE IN THIS INSTANCE**

**Figure 1. Earlier music and disability: Blind Tom, sheet music for ‘Oliver gallop’ / ‘Virginia polka’ (1860)**

**Figure 2. Earlier music and disability: Squire Hughes, early 20th century (?) disabled singer’s publicity card**

Scholars have recently considered the practice of music within the frame of disability. So, for Rod Paton, because playing an instrument, say, is a complex and specialised form of the development of body control—it is a discipline—down to the nerves and muscles of the fingertips or mouth—‘where music is concerned, we all have a degree of disability’ (2000, 27). Alex Lubet sees not so much a connection between music and disability as a discontinuity which has a profound potential for generating discourse: ‘[b]ecause music is understood within many cultural systems to be a manifestation of “talent”—extraordinary ability—its juxtaposi­tion with disability—understood as talent’s op­posite—offers an exceptional window on social praxis’ (2008, 4). The arguments get more ambitious. Elsewhere Lubet argues that in certain anti-cultural societies the practice and love of music is itself a form of disability (Lubet 2011). Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus have proposed that ‘the special fluidity of music, unfettered by language or concrete referentiality … [contains the] power to disrupt the seemingly hard and fast distinction between ability and disability’ (Lerner and Straus 2006a, 10). My own interest is in popular music, which includes formal aspects of music itself, but also the many fascinating extra-musical facets that make popular music studies such an impure, imperfect and marvellously messy discipline: audience, industry, body, mediation, style, language, theory, and so on. Primarily, as the title of my book—itself taken from a song title and hit single from 1960—signals, the popular music I am discussing is that from the 1950s, from American and British rock and roll, onwards. Occasionally I move further back—to, say, the 1930s—or outside the strictly pop and rock—a jazz interlude—or away from the mass mediated transatlantic nexus—Jamaican reggae, or Congolese dance music—where these bring light or nuance to the discussion.

Broadly articulated, the theoretical framework of this book is threefold, drawing on and interweaving popular music studies, cultural and media studies, and disability studies. In terms of popular music studies, I focus on popular song, the pop industry, live performance, mediation and marketing, the voice, and fans; that list should make clear that mine is not a musicological approach, though I do discuss the music itself, if not through the dots and staves of notation, and with only intermittent use of music’s ‘forbidding technical vocabulary’ (Strauss 2011, 11). From cultural and media studies I take questions around subcultures and post-subculture theory, identity, the body, pleasures, race, gender, sexuality. These two theoretical groupings can be seen as related, and indeed it is the case that many cultural studies scholars have written extensively and convincingly about popular music, for example. In terms of disability studies, I am interested in ways in which theories of enfreakment, questions of performing difference, the post-social and cultural models of disability, the stare, and, to a lesser extent, the problematic of passing, can help in our understanding of popular music. And of course I am interested in how popular music can *resound* disability studies. The plethora of ‘studies’ here should stand as pretty clear evidence of a crossing (perhaps it is time to say ‘cripping’) of disciplines—an activity I have tended over the years to view as producing a rather positive critical positionality, as offered by the kind of academic I like reading, and that I aspire to be—but I want to point out one issue in this triangulation. Since mapping matters in theoretical questioning, I should (briefly) explain my own journey through the terrain, my statement of prior positionality. I come from cultural and media studies, and write a good deal about popular music—as my personal website puts it, I do ‘cultural studies with a soundtrack’ (McKay n.d.b, website). So for this book, it was the disciplinary frameworks and limitations of popular music and cultural studies, even at their blurring boundaries, that set me off. *I then came to disability studies*, in which I dipped my toe before putting my head under. I was not first and foremost a disability studies scholar (though I gladly acknowledge that my immersion in it has demonstrably changed my cultural and interpretive thinking; I have a new lens). With *Shakin’ All Over* I come in a spirit of openness. I want DS readers as well as music and cultural studies ones.

The founding binary of the social vs. medical model has remained important and influential in disability studies, no doubt in large part because the social model has an advocacy imperative inscribed within it. But the social model has also been challenged and nuanced, and the aspect of that challenge that has most relevance for us is in work placing the complexity of cultural representation and expression within it (see Riddell and Watson 2003a, 4). The cultural nuancing of the social model matters. I concur with, for instance, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell that ‘impairment is both human variation encountering environmental obstacles *and* socially mediated difference that lends group identity and phenomenological perspective.… [M]any cultural model scholars understand “disability” to function both as a referent for a process of social exposé and as a productive locus for identification’ (2006, 10; emphasis original). I take the cultural model into an important, high profile and relatively neglected part of the contemporary cultural realm—popular music. I also present what I think of as a more affirming version of the cultural model—‘“[d]isability” in this book’, write Snyder and Mitchell in *Cultural Locations of Disability*, ‘is largely … synonymous with sites of cultural oppression’. In *Shakin’ All Over* disability is also, as they go on to put it, designated ‘a source of cultural agency’ (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 6, 10). There is the powerful potential for, if not quite—or rather not always—cultural resistanceorliberation, then at least for what Danny Goodley has termed ‘a politics and culture of resilience’ (2003, 105). We will see how this potential has been shaped, and is fulfilled, or indeed missed, in the advocacy and campaigning activities of musicians around disability issues.

I aim to widen the cultural scope of disability studies by looking at the arena of popular music. Notwithstanding the small but important number of studies that write either about music and disability or about popular music and disability cited elsewhere in this introduction, I am struck by the extent to which pop and rock in particular have been neglected in cultural studies of disability performance, especially because I am *also* struck by the quite common occurrence of, for want of a better term, disabled pop.[[4]](#footnote-2) This really is the heart of the book—popular music as an interdisciplinary cultural form and practice, with a related critical approach drawing on cultural politics and cultural and media studies. That’s my bag. I was a pop fan before (I knew) I was disabled; my academic and popular writing on cultural politics has most often at least had a soundtrack, and frequently been directly about the relation between popular music, society, ideology, social movements. Only in recent years have I begun to embrace (my) disability—a muscular dystrophy—and seek to understand its plural meanings and effects. But then I thought back, back on my identity as an uncompromising young punk rocker of 35 years ago, with (to quote my school teachers) an ‘attitude problem’—with my gait? What did they expect?—, anarchist sympathies, and a suddenly surprisingly fashionable weird way of walking, and I drew inspiration from a troublesome singer I’d first seen aged 16 in 1977, playing drums for a singer called Wreckless Eric, and who, puzzlingly, seemed to speak to me once more as I was in my forties and going to hospitals again: Ian Dury. Not that I had external obstacles to the idea of the book, nor critical voices seeking to dissuade or undermine—quite the contrary; really I was just up against myself. The anxiety and insecurity, which both surprised me, were not really about writing, or trying to understand new theory and discourse, of course—they were bound up with the act of self-recognition and the process of acceptance. Popular music has helped me to understand myself in transition. (Contrary to much belief, pop can be wise and generous.) And now I understood why I had listened to Dury as a youth—or stared past Sid Vicious, asking me for a fight, at Johnny Rotten onstage singing ‘Bodies’—and before them to that great lost northern English singer-songwriter Kevin Coyne, with his anti-guitar playing and repertoire of songs about hospitals and suffering and ‘anything that rhymes with “me”’—a tiny phrase that, like one of Oliver Sacks’s musical ‘brain worms’, has stayed in my head for thirty-five years, waiting patiently for me to write the book it would be an epigraph to. (Pop can be wise and generous.) Tom Shakespeare wonders whether ‘disability scholars often emphasize the dimension of disability which they most directly experience’ (2006, 4)—though not a polio survivor, I was put in the polio ward at Mearnskirk Hospital outside Glasgow, Scotland as a child in the mid-1960s, alongside other wee boys who were in iron lungs. It is polio that starts this book, and it was polio that started me writing it; it seems clear to me (now) that this interest in polio is because it spoke to me both in my own neuro-muscular specialist embodied knowledge, and of my own childhood.

In the course of the book we will see that some artists sing of disability in compelling and sustained ways—drawing on autobiographical lyrics and experiences, singers and musicians as varied in musical style, sartorial image and lyrical language from Neil ‘Shakey’ Young to Ian Dury share the profound and formative experience of each being a polio survivor from childhood. Here the deployment of autobiographical authenticity within singer-songwriter practice portrays a different kind of childscape, which may be diseased, scar(r)ed, crippled. Young’s ‘sensitive’ falsetto and Dury’s ‘coarsened’ poetics (as we will see, their descriptions of their own voices) are discussed as alternate vocal representations of their embodied experiences. These are autopathographical texts and readings (see Auslander 2005, Cizmic 2006), in which disability is framed in autobiographical and experiential terms (Siebers 2008, 47; Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 4)—the very forms of authentic text production favoured in much rock lyric.[[5]](#footnote-3) Yet it should be noted that even popular music forms centred on the autobiographical lyrical narrative do not always make space for autopathography. In *The Songs of Blind Folk*, Terry Rowden argues that few blind African American musicians have explicitly referenced their experience of disability, preferring to ‘minimise and deflect attention away’, or to ‘lyrically pass’ (singing words that suggest the capacity to see, as in Blind Blake’s ‘Early morning blues’: ‘When you see me sleepin’ baby don’t you think I’m drunk / I got one eye on my pistol and the other on your trunk’) (Rowden 2009, 39-40). This seems a remarkable absence in a musical culture like the blues, which is after all largely predicated on an autobiographical lyric frequently drawing on experiences of struggle and suffering.

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**Figure 3. ‘That deaf, dumb and blind kid’ (with the perfect body): Roger Daltrey in the Who’s crip musical film *Tommy* (1975)**

We will see that some music-centred subcultures have opened up new cultural spaces and corporeal expectations—so punk and post-punk enfreakment were early embodied in the staring, semi-hunchbacked Johnny Rotten (both eye and spine permanently affected by childhood meningitis), punk dwarves graced the shop floor of Vivien Westwood and Malcolm McLaren’s King’s Road, London boutiques and the film backdrop of Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* (1978) alike, while bands with names like the Epileptics (see figure 18), the Subhumans, and the Happy Spastics (all UK), another Subhumans (Canada), Disability, and the Cripples (both USA) have made minor provincial waves. Here theorisations of the body and the expressions of the blank generation are employed in order to further nuance the understanding within post-subcultural studies of the differently abled (see also Church 2006, Calvert 2010). We will see that some musical acts explore and return to tropes of disability over lengthy pop careers. To offer one illustrative example, English rock group the Who stuttered the attitudinal voice of English youth in 1964’s ‘My generation’ (‘People try to put us d-d-down’), sang and acted ‘That deaf dumb and blind kid [who] sure plays a mean pinball’ in the film *Tommy* in 1975, while guitarist Pete Townsend was widely reported when he spoke out recently about the experience and the dangers of rock music-induced hearing loss: ‘I have unwittingly helped to invent and refine a type of music that makes its principal proponents deaf’ (quoted in Anon 2006). From youthful stutter to a hearing impairment more readily associated with older people, from the band that first sang, when they were young, ‘I hope I die before I grow old’ (it didn’t happen, not to the songwriter or the singer, anyway): cripping the Who offers us a different set of insights into the band’s body of work across the decades, which is also to do with refiguring the generational pull of youthful pop and rock. As singer Roger Daltrey said in 2006: ‘Can you see us onstage in wheelchairs?... It will still be us, still be the same music…. Pete may have trouble with the guitars, I suppose. He does like to jump around’ (quoted in Garfield 2006, 33). From another perspective, we will see that some pop musicians have displayed a fascination with the otherness of disability: Morrissey on BBC television’s weekly chart programme *Top of the Pops* in 1984, singing ‘Heaven knows I’m miserable now’ while controversially sporting a Johnnie Ray-era hearing aid and National Health Service glasses, Kurt Cobain being pushed onstage in a wheelchair and hospital gown at the 1992 Reading Festival, the is-she-or-isn’t-she-blind music press debates about eyepatch-wearing British singer Gabrielle in 1993.[[6]](#footnote-4)

*Shakin’ All Over* is intended to form part of a recent development within the emergent discipline of cultural disability studies—at the forefront of which were performance/theatre studies, and theory—as (popular) music research has begun to critically discuss the impaired or damaged pop body and voice, finding their presence to be surprisingly common in a cultural practice more readily associated with the youthful and sexual pleasures of the ideal body. Recent works focused exclusively on music and disability provide evidence of the development of an intellectual project by academics from each discipline, if predominantly a project led by music rather than disability scholars. Here I have in mind two collections of academic essays: Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus’s wide-ranging book, *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (2006), which encompasses some popular music examples alongside a greater number of classical ones, and the 2009 special issue on disability and pop of the journal *Popular Music*, which I edited (McKay 2009b). More substantial still is a quartet of book-length single-author studies, which have focused on either music in relation to a specific type of disability, or, like *Shakin’ All Over*, look at a range of musical, theoretical and disability questions and clusters.[[7]](#footnote-5) In the case of the former I am thinking of Oliver Sacks’s 2007 neurologically-oriented set of case studies, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, which, though firmly embedded in the medical model, sparkles with intelligence and insight. Also here features Terry Rowden’s *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness* (2009), the book that moved me towards *not* including in *Shakin’ All Over* a chapter on visual impairment and scopophilic pop, as I had originally intended. For the latter I refer to Alex Lubet’s *Music, Disability, and Society* (2011), which contains also an essay on blindness and music, and has several chapters on some forms of popular music, even if the case studies might seem less than accessible for many readers. Finally, Strauss’s *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (2011) has important insights about the formal understanding of the music itself (rather than, say, lyric or vocal delivery, or corporeal comportment onstage) as a representation of the experience of disability. Despite its inclusive subtitle, Strauss’s book contains no popular music whatsoever, focusing instead on what Lubet has called ‘the rigid, ungenerous cultural system’ of Western classical music, with its central institution of the orchestra, or ‘sonic Sparta’, as he powerfully describes it (Lubet 2011, 33, 77). In the context of popular music, I have of course used each of these—all of which have been published during the very half decade when I was first thinking about and then writing this book—as intellectual and cultural aids and prompts. Together they present compelling central evidence that pop, rock and classical music academic critiques are, shall we say, embracing their inner and outer crips. I would like to think that *Shakin’ All Over* contributes to that emerging field, while moving it in a significant new direction, into the cultural detail and trashy ephemera of pop and rock.

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**Figure 4. 1970s British chart-toppers Peters & Lee, featuring blind singer Lennie Peters**

Let me develop a point here, about the relative absence of visual impairment in this book. As just stated, originally it was my plan to include a chapter on blindness and music—I was thinking of all those early African American blues musicians whose very names signalled and marketed themselves as disabled: Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie McTell, Blind Boy Fuller, possibly Sleepy John Estes (see Rowden 2009, chapter 2). Or later jazz and soul stars like Rahsaan Roland Kirk, George Shearing, Ray Charles, and, of course, Stevie Wonder. But as the book in its writing became less pre-rock and roll-oriented and less jazz-focused many of these figures became less central to my narrative. And, on a purely pragmatic level, as I have just outlined, their musics and disabilities were beginning to be written about by other academics. Part of me regrets this absence here, particularly with Roland Kirk—my father was a jazz musician whose flute solos often featured vocal overblowing, and who occasionally played two saxophones at once, both techniques picked up from Kirk. So Kirk was a kind of family hero for us McKays. Also I was aware of the discourtesy towards him by at least one leading British jazz critic in the 1960s, who was obediently keen to join in the dismissal of Kirk as a circus clown or freak, and I wanted to address that controversy.[[8]](#footnote-6) And I regret it with George Shearing too, now pretty much absent from these pages, even though his extraordinary jazz journey took off with him playing accordion and piano in Claude Bampton’s All-Blind Orchestra from London during the 1930s (see Shearing 2004, chapter 4). (Us Brits don’t have too many major successes recognised and embraced by the American jazz world on its own patch—see McKay 2005—and we can still get excited when a local boy makes good across the pond.) It may appear a truism that, as Rowden points out critically, ‘[n]o role has been more strongly linked to disability than musicianship has to blindness’ (2009, 11), or that blindness is a means to a precious ‘enhanced interiority’ for musicians (Strauss 2011, 6). Yet Shearing himself rejected ‘the theory that blind people actually hear more or have the ability to memorize more than sighted players’ (2004, 30). Further, in our observation that there have been many blind musicians, we should bear in mind Lubet’s stark and well-put conclusion that ‘[b]lindness may not be an impairment at all when the musician … is actually making music’ (2011, 43). As for Stevie Wonder: Stevie Wonder is here, the stage is being set for his entrance.

Shakespeare makes the point of critiquing the social model by quoting a popular song lyric: ‘people with impairments will always be disadvantaged by their bodies: they will not be able to climb every mountain’ (2006, 46). My book probably is not inclusive either. Its musical choices, it should be clear, are being made mostly on the basis of the extent to which songs, artists, performances, autobiographical utterances, public interventions, *do* engage with disability in some way. For instance, in the course of writing it, I was surprised to find that there are not that many women here. I should not have been. I should earlier have noted Lucy O’Brien’s stark observation in *She Bop II* that ‘[w]omen with disabilities … are almost invisible’ in pop and rock (O’Brien 2002, 245); as we will see, the body-limits of the industry seem rather starkly gender-fixed. Lubet identifies the source of anxiety as not the industry but the audience: ‘This gender bias may owe to the expectation in music that women performers be decorative as well as proficient. Music audiences prefer not to view women’s impairments, but have less difficulty gazing at those of men’ (2011, 160). More generally, Rowden argues that disability—or rather, the discussion of its experience—is traditionally written out of popular entertainment, and specifically music, as the sort of thing people ‘would rather not dwell upon when they are trying to have a good time’ (2009, 100); disability as ectopic. (This is partly to do with the non-discursive reality of discomfort and in fact pain that people with disabilities may experience or embody, and ‘disability identity … is the identity most associated with pain’ (Siebers 2008, 20). After all, how many pop fans want pain—physical pain, that ‘most subjective of phenomena’ (Siebers 2008, 60)—in the pleasure-dome?) But I am more interested in the topic than the ectopic. So, while, extraordinarily, Joni Mitchell and Neil Young each contracted polio in the same epidemic in Canada in 1951, there is much more about Young than Mitchell in this book because he has made hugely significant music exploring that experience and she (to date) has not. Of course, wider questions of cultural silence, evasion, ‘passing’, in the context of disability, music and the industry, are also discussed where relevant and illuminating. Also, by way of discussing my choice of artists, I should say that I have been gently guided by my publisher to remember one particular meaning of ‘popular’ in popular music, and to focus more on relatively well-known, transatlantic musicians—those with a public profile—rather than, say, some of the more quirky, marginal, cult or grassroots figures I might have had a stronger personal preference for. I do see the need for readers to have recognisable examples or easy access to them. I have sought to strike a balance here. Of course, where the presence of disability might be a contributing factor in understanding the very *un*popularity of a pop or rock artist or band, then such are discussed. In particular though, there are energetic grassroots disability arts movements in which live music sounds centrally, the organisation and musical aesthetics of which are informed by various DIY practices (McKay 1998), that may seem underplayed here, even in chapter 5 where the do appear (see, for instance, Brown 2008, Cameron 2009, Elflein 2009, Calvert 2010), though I would argue that this is not necessarily the case elsewhere in my work (Moser and McKay 2005, McKay 2009b, McKay and Higham 2011).

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**Figure 5. Physically disabled street musician, Glasgow, 2009**

The chapters that follow are structured in most cases around specific issues or questions originating from popular music: the singing voice (chapter two), the performing body (three), hearing and listening to music (four), the popular music industry (five). The exception is chapter one, focused on a case study which is both chronologically and medically specific, that of the late polio generations and their use of popular music. Important artists (important in the context of disability) appear and reappear in different chapters. Young, for instance, is a polio survivor, who could sing with a falsetto voice, who was in early career a kind of performing epileptic and in mid-career made music for the disabled, and has campaigned with his family about disability, and he recurs throughout really. This tells us that many disabled artists have multiple strategies, if—and we will see that that is a very big if—they have been fortunate enough to sustain a lengthy pop or rock career. Some important questions for pop and rock, for cultures of disability, are explored across different chapters. Popular music as a *dis*abling rather than enabling cultural practice, for instance, is discussed in the context of rock music-induced hearing loss in chapter four and in terms of the industry’s wasteful, even fatal, lifestyle of excess and risk in chapter five. As I write again later, *pop crips. It really can*. The *un*popularity of some pop when it gets too cripped keeps coming back, periodically through the book sounding the lamentable limits of audience or industry acceptability and inclusiveness towards the disabled.

*Hallo to you out there in Normal Land.* Yeah, and to all you crips. On a Sunday morning in October 2008, when I ought really to have been completing the introduction for the disability special issue of *Popular Music*, I was instead flicking through the Sunday newspaper over a late breakfast, trying to avoid the finance pages. I picked up one of the free magazines, the *Observer Music Monthly*, and read an interview with polio survivor and epileptic Neil ‘Shakey’ Young, which included a photograph of him with polio survivor Joni Mitchell; I glanced at a short photo-feature on rock ‘n’ roll suicide Kurt Cobain and at another on 1980s Smiths-era Morrissey; I read an article on the thirty-year career of visually impaired Malian couple Amadou and Mariam, in which they talked about how ‘music gave us the strength to overcome the blindness’ (quoted in Adams 2008, 53); I read a review of a new Robert Wyatt album, which included a photograph of Wyatt smoking a cigarette in his wheelchair, and a review of a Hank Williams compilation; skimmed an article that mentioned polio survivor Ian Dury’s album *Do It Yourself*, and another in which Wyatt was referenced again. All this in one unthemed magazine. While I thought I was not doing my research on popular music and disability, here I was doing it all the same. The point is one that disability studies has taught us compellingly: the moment we begin to look for, to discuss disability (in popular music), we find it everywhere. Whether in its focus on bodies perfect and deviant alike, the romantic appeal in rock lyrics and lives to tropes of suffering or cognitive impairment, its damaged or what I call *mal canto* voices, its continuing status as expressive vehicle for emotional autobiography (from artists and audience members), its intermittent fetishing of enfreakment, its industrial carelessness and destructive appetites, or in the place of pop repertoires in music therapy or disability arts and advocacy, in fact pop is a profoundly dismodern cultural formation and practice (Davis 2002). My hope (be bolder! My burning aim) is that *Shakin’ All Over* opens new ground in the process of illustrating, understanding and interrogating that important Sunday morning observation.

1. According to Laurie Stras, ‘[i]n the 1920s and 1930s, jazz was indeed “disabled music”, considered by many to be aesthetically and functionally impaired to the point that it … was an active agent of medical and social disorder. Most commonly, jazz and its consumption were seen as both the origin and the product of mental or “nervous” disorder’ (2009, 300). Arguably, as we will discuss further, some sort of template was being set: such ‘contagious rhythms’ (Sartin 2010) would also be strikingly evident three or four decades later via the ‘risky behavior’ of rock and roll and then rock lifestyles. Medical doctor Jeffrey S. Sartin points out: ‘Bill Haley was a lifelong alcoholic, and Elvis died of a heart attack after years of drug abuse. The rock lifestyle carried many insidious dangers, among them the twin scourges of hepatitis and HIV’ (Sartin 2010, 110). [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. The boy stared at Johnny. While *The Boy Looked at Johnny* is a well-known British punk rock book from the late 1970s by then young music journalists Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, the title drawn from quoting a Patti Smith lyric, I am thinking of myself round the same time, as a seventeen-year-old watching the Sex Pistols live, and wondering now, as a fifty-something, about the attraction. The man looking at the boy staring at Johnny. What was his body saying to mine? [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. I give credit: this book, above all others, opened up for me the space and I feel gave me the legitimacy to explore disability and culture. I read *Extraordinary Bodies* first during a period when my mind needed opening up (it wanted to close down, as I was realising that that’s what my body was doing) and it worked. I was in a private panic, and it allowed me to transform or channel my febrility into intellectual production and textual energy. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. In *Music, Disability, and Society*, Lubet calls the research field ‘music DS’ (2011, 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. Though Cheryl Herr has pointed out the methodological difficulty inherent in a project which seeks to explore ‘an individual’s putative inability to do certain things typical of the majority of human beings (for instance, walking, talking, seeing, hearing, maintaining socially acceptable mental function and emotional balance)…. For a scholar of popular music to bring such questions to bear on a particular performer ideally requires access to an unusual depth of information about the individual, the kind of biographical data that is rarely available even for the most cherished and widely written about musicians of our own era’ (2009, 323). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. Richard Bruno has written of such ‘pretenders and wannabes’ that they suffer from a form of ‘factitious disability disorder’ (quoted in Shell 2005a, 279, n. 76). Another relevant term might be ‘disability paraphilia’ (Shell 2005a, 279, n. 82), though Tobin Siebers offers something which sounds less medically authoritative for the impersonating performance of disability, as when a non-disabled actor plays a disabled part—usually in ‘bombastic’ style—: ‘“disability drag” … [which] represses disability and affirms the ideology of ability’ (2008, 115, 114). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. For those interested, my reviews of several of them are available: Rowden (McKay 2010a), Lubet (McKay 2011), Strauss (McKay forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
8. Kirk addressed it himself at the time, by inviting the critic, Steve Race, who had recently described Kirk as like the famous white-faced (insult to injury) clown Charlie Cairoli, part of whose act involved playing instruments poorly, up to the piano to join in for a number at Ronnie Scott’s jazz club in London, where Kirk was appearing. According to the account of audience member Ron Malings, Race stumbled through the piece, embarrassed, out-of-his-depth (Malings 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)