

## “Reimagining Digital Citizenship via Disability”

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Human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity.<sup>1</sup> — Hannah Arendt

... democracy is what makes the institution of citizenship problematic.<sup>2</sup> — Étienne Balibar

... it might be a very good idea for us to expand the possibilities of democracy precisely because democracy offers us unfinished and infinitely revisable forms of political organization that stand the best change, in the long run, of responding adequately to the human rights of the unpredictable creatures we human are.<sup>3</sup> — Michael Berubé

### Introduction

A February 2016 protest by disability activists in Bolivia, featuring wheelchair users suspended from the country’s bridges, is widely shared across the world, via photos, videos, manifestos, and writings, circulating on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Operating from Malta, the online platform *Global Disability Watch: Powering Advocacy* assembles and reports “timely, accessible and usable ground driven information on disability, disability rights violations and development policy and practice from a range of global contexts, prioritising the global South” (<http://globaldisability.org/about>). In December 2015, Alice Wong, founder of the US-based *Disability Visibility Project* (<https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/>), kicked off a Twitter-based campaign #crippingthemighty, critiquing the well-resourced website, *The Mighty*, that publishes personal essays about disability (often drawing freely, and without payment, on the disability blogosphere).<sup>4</sup> In the UK, in 2011-2012, availability of videos, online reports, circulated by digital platforms, were used as a key tool to coordinate, publicise, and amplify disability protests, when mainstream media were slow to provide coverage.<sup>5</sup> In Canada, in 2013-2015, arts-based approaches to digital storytelling and drama are used to create an “archive of

over 100 digital stories from women and people of all genders living with disabilities/differences and healthcare providers.”<sup>6</sup> These vignettes are but a few instances that illustrate the burgeoning practices of digital citizenship engaging communities, publics, and individuals concerned with disability.

If we tackle the topic squarely, we find that digital citizenship is a concept that’s tricky to pin down. In 2007, the first book on the topic opened with a deceptively simple formulation: “ ‘Digital citizenship’ is the ability to participate in society online.”<sup>7</sup> However, this neat assurance turns about to be a complicated proposition, as the next sentence suggests: “What, however, does it mean to invoke the notion of citizenship in relation to the use of a technology?”<sup>8</sup> The 2007 *Digital Citizenship* book contained two mentions of disability, including the notion that the “individual benefits of broadband use” would be “reducing the impact of distance and disability”: “Some of the most promising applications for broadband are in telemedicine, distance learning, and Internet accessibility for people with disabilities.”<sup>9</sup>

In the intervening decade a particular version of digital citizenship has been established as the default approach across various settings, especially in schools. Mike Ribble’s *Digital Citizenship in Schools*, also appeared in 2007, published by the International Society for Technology in Education. In its third edition (2015), Ribble’s *Digital Citizenship* sums up it this way:

What are the appropriate behaviours in a digital society? How can an individual learn what is appropriate and what isn’t? These are core questions ... The goal of digital citizenship is to provide a consistent message to students and educational professionals so that they can become productive and responsible users of digital technologies.<sup>10</sup>

Digital access is the first of the nine elements of digital citizenship outlined by Ribble, and the book includes significant acknowledgement of disability and accessibility as integral to digital citizenship. This kind of incorporation of disability in discussions of digital citizenship is encouraging. However, we have a long way to go, not just in incorporating disability, but in acknowledging the deep ways in which it challenges citizenship itself, especially digital citizenship.

The topic of disability, digital technology, and accessibility has grown slowly across practice, policy, and research over at least a thirty-year period, and is finally gaining critical mass and influence — and many people, especially those engaged in digital technology, would have a sense of this. What has received much less attention is the radical way in which disability stands to recast our understanding of digital technologies, society, power, and participation.

With our opening vignettes in mind, we could suggest that the coordinates of a new account of digital citizenship can be found in the 2006 UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). The CRPD resembles a Arendtian “new law on earth,” aiming to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity” (CRPD, Article 1). Equal access to technology is a concept that straddles many articles of the CRPD, and forms part of its general obligations upon states-parties, for example: “to undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids,

devices and assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities” (clause g., Article 4, CPRD). Article 21 (“Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information”), Article 29 (“Participation in Political and Public Life”), and Article 30 (“Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport”), in particular, include extended reference to accessible and alternative formats, information, cultural material, media content, digital technologies, as well as material being available in sign languages. While its implementation may be slow and uneven, the CRPD is being widely used and debated as a reference point for discussions on the adequacy of digital participation, as it is across all other realms of social life. At a deeper level, the CRPD prompts us to reconceive how we imagine and do participation and, by implication, citizenship, so we do justice to: 1) the new digital forms and architectures of social life; 2) emergent understandings of disability. Before we explore this further, it is important to understand the issues faced in rethinking and enlarging citizenship to embrace disability.

### **Rethinking Citizenship with Disability**

Citizenship is a rich area of political thought and struggle, comprising different conceptualisations, and traditions. Disability is still a relatively new and little understood way to approach citizenship, let alone digital citizenship. Whether one works in liberal traditions of citizenship,<sup>11</sup> social citizenship and rights traditions (represented by the influential work of T. H. Marshall),<sup>12</sup> or critical traditions (relied upon here), disability problematizes concepts of citizenship, and how such concepts of citizenship are operationalized.

Hence the contention of North American scholar Michael Berubé that “disability issues are — or should be — central to theories of social justice in a much broader sense.”<sup>13</sup> As Berubé encapsulates it:

Disability is not the only area of social life in which the politics of recognition are inseparable from the politics of redistribution: other areas central to citizenship, such as immigration, reproductive rights, and criminal justice, are every bit as complex.<sup>14</sup>

What Berubé points out is that disability very often underpins or plays a crucial role in the mix of factors that shape the technologies of policy, power, and governance exercised in society, especially by states.<sup>15</sup> Digital life remains a form of technology too, because it is part of these things. The burden of these powerful dynamics of the representation, constitution, and marshalling of disability, including in new digital forms, fall heavily and consequentially on people with disabilities, especially as they seek to articulate, realize, and vouchsafe their rights through citizenship. As a way of redressing this, and expanding notions of citizenship, Canadian scholars Richard Devlin and Dianne Pothier have suggested that “the landscape of citizenship discourse needs to be expanded to respond to the particular experiential circumstances of persons with disabilities.”<sup>16</sup>

Various disability scholars have explored the ways that disability is pivotal to how power, control, distribution of resources operates in contemporary societies. Germane is Karen Soldatic and Helen Meekosha’s account of disability as a strategically crucial category in the neoliberal conditions of the current phase of capitalism (made all the more acute with the politics of austerity and precarity). Soldatic and Meekosha note that “work,” “care,” and eligibility for social and state

support, among other things, all require marshalling of flexible, and changing definitions of disability:

We learn from the neoliberal turn the “ambiguity” of disability, as a class of citizenship. While medical science wishes us to imagine that disability is predicated on a concrete and stable measuring of the body, in fact, the historical specificity of disability and its meaning as a class of citizenship is continually moving.<sup>17</sup>

This is a point also made by the US-based scholar Julie Avril Minch in her study of disability and citizenship in “Greater Mexico”:

The racializing logic of citizenship is deeply intertwined with a logic of able-bodied supremacy ... Neoliberalism ... exacerbates the racializing and disabling effects of dominant constructions of citizenship.<sup>18</sup>

For our consideration of digital citizenship and disability, the implications of this are important to register in relation to the cardinal and much debated institution of the stage. Soldatic and Meekhosha thus contend that:

Thus the state plays a central role in creating social, moral and political understandings of disability, and therefore we need to “bring the state back in” (Jessop 2001) to our analysis.<sup>19</sup> ... Regulatory practices that enable the state to legitimate its power and control are integral to understanding how disabled people experience not only their daily lives but also their lived experience of discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization.<sup>20</sup>

In relation to digital technology and disability, we might think of the rise of e-government and digital government,<sup>21</sup> which is increasingly being relied on for disability social support as well as a range of other ways in which the state touches upon and shapes the lives of people with disabilities.

This brief discussion of disability and citizenship hopefully points towards some of the reasons why it has proven difficult to imagine people with disabilities as citizens. There are simply deeply embedded assumptions, values, and emotions that disability challenges and disrupts. The idea, for instance, that people with cognitive disabilities have the right to participate on equal terms with others in terms of democracy, political participation, governance and management, sexuality, culture, and leisure continues to be troubling for many; and difficult for many societies to enact.<sup>22</sup> By precluding and excluding many people with disabilities from full citizenship — including a fair stake in the very definition of what citizenship might mean — normalcy is able to be “enforced.”<sup>23</sup>

These confining versions of citizenship are implicated in the narrow ways that disability is still often imagined in relation to digital technology. In the first place, we might recall that digital technology, as it has emerged in the period of 1970s to 2010s is closely associated with neoliberalism. Although its complexity lies outside the scope of this essay, digital technology involves shifts in markets, the state, governance, and regulation (for instance, privatization, deregulation, trade, and competition regimes), as well as it does technical and social innovation. Digital technology also offers new “affordances” (or capabilities) for exercising power and control, as much as social progress, democracy, justice, and other goals.

These overarching conditions of digital technology bear upon disability. In particular, digital technology is framed as salvational, wholly transformative, and a

great boon for the challenges people with disabilities face. Many scholars and commentators have critiqued this myth of technology as salvation for the “problem” of disability for a couple of decades, to little avail.<sup>24</sup> In the case of schools, it is commonplace to find smartphones and tablet computers, especially the iPad, represented as a “revolution” for people with disabilities, as in this article on Brisbane schools: “A learning revolution is under way in special schools, with the lives of disabled students profoundly changed with the introduction of iPads.”<sup>25</sup> It is certainly true that many forms of digital technologies have been sources of benefit for people with disabilities, who have used and shaped them in very interesting, typically understudied and little recognized ways. Yet many of the myths of disability and technology that frame news stories, policy, and everyday conversations have a strong undercurrent that technology will finally “solve” the problems that people with disabilities face, and that societies struggle with. In their study of such representations, Haller et al. put it this way:

Liberation. Revolution. Cure. Miracle. Even magic. These are just a few of the words the news media use to describe the growth of tablet, smartphone and iTechnology used by people with communication disabilities, particularly children ... Such words also represent the social construction of disability as a problem needing a solution by denying people with disabilities a role in employing iDevices meaningfully in their respective environments.<sup>26</sup>

Haller et al. find that while “some new narratives about technology are informing some stories about people with communication disabilities, the news media tended to give credit to the technology as enabling people to communicate rather than credit being given to people with disabilities who make the technology work.”<sup>27</sup>

The enduring and oppressive power of the great myth of disability and technology came home to me in late 2015, when I attended a big Australian conference on disability, entitled “New World Conference: Disability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” For the purposes of the conference, this new world of disability revolved around technology: “Our conference will showcase innovative technology designed to enhance the lives of people with disability and enable choice and control and full participation in life.”<sup>28</sup> Much of the discussion was excellent, led by and engaging many experts and other participants with disability, and with high levels of accessibility and participation. Yet the framing assumptions were highly problematic, especially as this conference was the flagship event for the new Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

In principle, the NDIS scheme offers person-centred and directed disability support for any citizen who requires it. In many ways, it is a scheme responding to the vision of social citizenship, extending the welfare state. In reality, there are many challenges and notable exclusions, that go well beyond existing critiques made of social citizenship and welfare. In particular, the role of digital technology in delivering the scheme has been presented as a breakthrough; yet the social and power relations of such technology as it unfolds in this, and other new arenas, of disability support are very problematic. For all its great promise, the NDIS is very consistent with, and in many ways, delivered on market-based, neoliberal principles, enabled and co-eval with digital technologies. So we may heed Soldatic and Meekosha’s warning here — to trace, interrogate, and challenge the ways in which the state, and broader regulation and governmentality,<sup>29</sup> works through digital technology to exert insidious, new forms of control in our lives. There is the danger, for instance, of

ongoing digital surveillance of individualized budgets to ensure that disabled people are spending their funds “responsibly”, a theme of welfare elsewhere. There are also the many ways in which Internet and mobile-enabled surveillance technologies, are being used in disability and health contexts (including homes), ostensibly for beneficial purposes but also with significant issues for rights.

In order to explore these these challenges, let us take up the setting of schools — which is a recurrent location and theme in digital citizenship.

### **Too Cool (or Troubling) for School?**

How digital citizenship is actually conceived and implemented in schools in relation to disability and accessibility varies greatly, despite some acknowledgement in various places and discussion in the research literature (such as Ribble’s *Digital Citizenship* text discussed above). If we examine digital citizenship “on the ground” more closely, what we find raises disturbing questions concerning disability.

Recently, my 12-year-old son started high school in Sydney, and commenced a class on “digital citizenship” (faintly amused that I’m writing an essay on the topic). In our state of New South Wales, the government provides a suite of curriculum and information on the topic to underpin teaching in schools: “Digital Citizenship: Essential information for students, teachers and parents about digital citizenship and being safe, positive and responsible online.”<sup>30</sup> High school students are asked:

Do you use the internet to share information about yourself or others, communicate with friends, comment on what you see online, play games, get material for an assignment or buy stuff online? If you answered YES to any of these, you are a digital citizen.<sup>31</sup>

To explain why digital citizenship is important, the Education Department says:

Do you want to get the best out of using the internet and keep yourself and others safe and healthy in an online world? Use these materials to learn what it takes to become a positive digital citizen.<sup>32</sup>

The resources include a range of reasonably up-to-date information, learning activities, videos, and games on cybersafety, cybersecurity, consumer protection, content creating and sharing, online community participation, and other issues.

In reviewing this material, I found nothing relating to disability and accessibility. Nor is there any material on digital inequalities or access broadly construed. There is some basic effort to prompt consideration of inter- and cross-cultural issues — notably in the “Global Citizenship” activity module. If this was improved, this is one place in school curriculum where disability could be introduced and integrated — as a stepping stone to a contemporary account of online cultural dynamics.

So, what’s wrong with this picture? Certainly, this is only one provincial education system, but — with variations — this kind of material would be familiar in many parts of the world, something evident in the circulation of approaches and resources across jurisdictions. Clearly, there is some effort among proponents of digital citizenship in schools to include broader treatments — as represented by Ribble’s *Digital Citizenship*. Yet the version of digital citizenship that often appears instead, and dominates public discourse also, typically resembles the version found in

NSW schools curriculum. The crucial effort to teach students to reflect upon and critically use digital technologies does not appear to connect with crucial dimensions of citizenship that disability entails. Whereas, if we take seriously disability as indivisible to digital citizenship, this would mean a much larger and richer account of digital citizenship — and indeed of citizenship itself.

Elsewhere in schools, and other educational settings, some effort is underway improve digital accessibility for all students.<sup>33</sup> So, it's likely that in pioneering or good-practice settings, disability, accessibility, and technology is being taught alongside, or part of, digital technology education, which might even extend to digital citizenship notions. However, I suspect this is not widespread, which is a serious problem for digital citizenship. Following Graham Longford, for instance, it could be argued that inaccessible digital technologies represent a “politics of code” — “technical features” and narrow design assumptions that amount to “hidden pedagogies of citizenship,” teaching students a powerful message that disabling technologies are “normal.”<sup>34</sup> The exposure and analysis of such taken-for-granted things that digital technologies “teach” us would be an excellent, critical mission for digital citizenship.

To understand why digital citizenship is not really grappling with disability, it is necessary to step back, and look at the big picture on disability in schools. Many school students with disability, especially high-school students with disabilities, face very difficult barriers to education that often result in exclusion. A stark illustration of this can be found in a 2015 case in a government school in Canberra, Australia. A ten-year-old student with autism was confined in a small cage: a two metre by two metre fenced enclosure made of pool fencing.<sup>35</sup> As the revelation of this shocking incident made news around the world, Diane Joseph, the director general of the Education and Training Directorate in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) explained:

“The structure has been in the classroom from 10 March until 27 March,” she [Joseph, the director general] said. “It was built for a particular student to help manage his behaviour and to provide a space for that student to withdraw.”<sup>36</sup>

The ACT Education Minister, Joy Burch, did not mince her words, declaring she was “quite frankly, disgusted that this structure was allowed in our school ... It is absolutely unacceptable.”<sup>37</sup> After a formal investigation of the incident, the school principal was sacked.<sup>38</sup> These are welcome responses, however Minister Burch also expressed her view that this was a “one-off incident.”<sup>39</sup> In relation to this school, this view was immediately contradicted by the action of an unknown person who pinned up a photo of the cage, with the 10-year-old boy sleeping in it, under the caption “Sanctuary.”

A source told the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] their understanding was the sign was put up to try to “normalise the fact that there was a cage in the classroom, to the other children, and to the boy himself”. “Let's label it a sanctuary, stick up a photo and it won't look and feel so bad,” the source said.<sup>40</sup>

Disability and human rights advocates have pointed out that people with disabilities, not only in institutional settings,<sup>41</sup> but also in households, schools, and elsewhere, are subject to confinement and treatment that would in relation to other groups be immediately regarded as torture.<sup>42</sup> In relation to school education, as well as university education, children and young people with disabilities are still subjected to

behaviour management and other policies and practices that deny them their human rights to education.<sup>43</sup> A challenging aspect of this oppressive situation is that schools vary widely on how they educate and support students with disabilities.

Learning, intellectual, cognitive, and developmental disabilities especially experience variable, inadequate, and often unjust treatment by schools.<sup>44</sup> There are various factors that contribute to this denial of rights by many schools and their communities, while others do better. One problem across an educational system is that a student can have a good experience in one school, then proceed to another school and find themselves effectively excluded because of poor practice there. If this occurs at a key transition point – from primary school to high school, for instance – the negative impact on a young person’s education and life prospects can be all the more disabling. Further, if schools actively reproduce — rather than challenge — cultural attitudes of stigmatization, these can be normalized at such an early age for all children.

Returning to our topic of digital citizenship, we can see that the contexts and sites of citizenship are crucially important. Schools are an important site for citizenship, especially for children and young people with disability. Yet, when it comes to schools especially, the links with broader ideas of citizenship, including social equality, political participation, and rights, are unclear. Also hazy are the links between digital citizenship and disability. There is a “disconnect” which emerges from the ACT case, if we notice a parallel development.

In August 2015, Joy Burch, the very Minister for Education and Training involved in the “cage” scandal discussed above, established a six-month topic-specific Advisory Committee on Digital Citizenship. The Advisory Committee included representatives from bodies such as the Youth Coalition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, and a “community representative” (from the YWCA) — but no representative from a disability organization. Charged with advising on “[o]pportunities to strengthen the partnership between parents and schools to enable the setting of consistent and high expectations for the use of ICT by students and teachers,” the Digital Citizenship Advisory Committee was scheduled to only meet twice, discussing cybersafety and digital literacy.<sup>45</sup> Again, we find a foreclosure of digital citizenship, where, in relation to disability in schools in this state especially, an expansion of citizenship, in all its forms, was sorely needed.

Of course, it could be rightly objected that the dominant version of digital citizenship we find in various places internationally, but especially in relation to children and young people in schools, is widely regarded as too narrow, and only a small part of a large framework needed to understand and address the realities of digital citizenship. In the context of this volume, and the broader digital citizenship debates, conceptualization, and research, we have the opportunity, of course, to consider and advocate for more expansive, accurate, and fit-for-purpose conceptions of digital citizenship. In this context, disability is very promising as a productive way of approaching, reimagining, and refining digital citizenship, as I will now discuss.

### **Disability and Digital Citizenship: Rights and Realities**

Contemporary social relations rely upon digital technology, often as a pre-condition of effective citizenship. This especially applies to the transformational project of delivering disability justice — that is, the now acknowledged goal of reforming



societies to genuinely incorporate and enable everyone, especially people with disabilities, as spelt out in the UN CPRD (often in tension with the systems of work, welfare, and disability social support being reconfigured globally). What, for instance, are the distinctive dimensions of digital citizenship that come into sharp relief, once we take seriously the uses, social practices, claims, and desires of people with disabilities in relation to digital technology? To sketch some possibilities here for how to reimagine digital citizenship via disability, I discuss three leading areas: accessibility; disability activism; intimate, everyday citizenship.

### *Accessibility*

Accessibility is the liminal issue for disability and digital citizenship. If people cannot access or use digital technology, because its design, implementation, or affordances pose barriers, then they are potentially excluded from the spaces and arena of digital citizenship. The most well-known example here is web accessibility, the subject of considerable design, standards work, compliance, and debate. A landmark human rights and anti-discrimination case in web accessibility occurred when a Blind man, Bruce Maguire took a complaint against the Sydney Olympics Organizing Committee (SOCOG) for its inaccessible website.<sup>46</sup> The outcome of this case, and the growing recognition of the importance of the web for public information and participation, and, especially modern concepts of government, services, and citizenship led to web accessibility being mandated for government websites in many countries.

This “struggle for web accessibility” continues and has many more dimensions than is typically understood.<sup>47</sup> The web now is used on mobile devices, and this area of accessibility is underdeveloped.<sup>48</sup> Further, digital accessibility encompasses a broader terrain of digital technologies than simply by web. Accounts of effective and fair citizenship have often assumed access to, literacy in, and mastery of traditional media (print media, such as newspapers, magazines, and books), information and advertising, radio and television broadcasting. As we know, these traditional media are being reconfigured with digital technologies, formats, and social practices. So: to what extent do today’s – or tomorrow’s – citizens with disabilities enjoy access to digital books or newspapers? The lack of such access to books and printed materials led to the Marrakesh Treaty on intellectual property, and extension of copyright extensions so people with vision impairments and print disabilities can gain access to digital material.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, there are pressing issues with access for people with disabilities to television and radio — two forms of media pivotal for providing resources and opportunities for the formation and exercise of citizenship.

So the issues in accessibility for digital citizenship are wide-ranging – and a long way for being addressed. If we explore them in greater depth, we also find that there is profound complexity to accessibility, that helps us to reflect upon citizenship itself.<sup>50</sup>

### *Digital Citizenship and Disability Activism*

The dominant ways that societies have conceived and constructed their public spheres excludes and diminishes many from participating on equal terms; especially many people with disabilities. The resurgent movements of people with disabilities and their allies have seen assertion of citizenship, political participation, and agency. A visible manifestation of this has been the use of digital tools by people with disabilities and

allies, often in creative ways, to express ideas, organize and contest policies, power, and authority in a wide variety of domains.<sup>51</sup> This is often associated with new and emergent domains and cross-category forms of politics — for instance, the politics of care; or the cross-category politics of health and disability; the resistance of disability activists on the front-line of contests over austerity politics; the rise of disability culture as a rich repository for ideas, practices, and critique in contemporary culture in general.<sup>52</sup> A much cited example is the aforementioned use of social media by disability activists confronting the welfare reforms in the UK, coinciding with protests over the London Paralympics).

Particular social media platforms have become generative for disability culture, activism, and conversation. Facebook is notable in many places, and across many strands and communities of disability, for its amenability to distributing information on disability — especially in a relatively easy-to-share, multimedia form. Twitter is another obvious platform that has become used with force and precision in fomenting and directing controversies in public culture. In a number of cases, a problematic, biased, or negative thing has happened in public culture relating to disability. The matter or event has met with an immediate, fast-growing response on Twitter, among those who follow disability issues. In turn the reaction has been registered back in the public culture, puncturing the ableist consensus, and providing an entry-point for disability activists, academics, and commentators to express their views. In terms of theories of “listening,”<sup>53</sup> we could suggest that Twitter has the potential to become an echo-chamber by which listeners can speak back, thread together new dialogues, and amplify these (via retweeting; and posting and recirculation across social media and other kinds of media platforms). This eruption into the public culture — and mainstream public spheres — demands attention, as it did in the case of #crippingthemighty mentioned at the opening of this chapter. It might be countered that such attention is still not often “mainstream,” and rather is desultory and temporary. Still, at the least it qualifies as an important practice in disability digital citizenship — pointing to the need for a recasting of the general terms of digital citizenship.

### *Intimate, Everyday Disability, and Digital Citizenship*

Perhaps the central area where citizenship has been debated and rethought in recent decades has revolved around the division between public and private spheres, and the argument, from different standpoints and traditions, that citizenship does not simply take place in the traditional, high ground of public, political life. The critique has been well-made concerning the need to acknowledge and remake the gendered, sexed, and racially constructed nature of citizenship and its grounds. One of the very interesting and widely debated characteristics of contemporary digital media is their troubling of the boundaries between public and private, official and intimate, work and leisure, exceptional and everyday.<sup>54</sup> This poses challenges for most users, in terms of understanding, negotiating, and controlling these new modes and possibilities for enacting and exercising citizenship. For social media users with disabilities, however, this can offer possibilities to present other versions of themselves, and other representations of disability, for different audiences. These new architectures of cultural representation have considerable political implications for how we understand and reconfigure public spheres.<sup>55</sup>

There are many instances in which digital platforms that have been associated with shifts in disability and representation. Blogs were taken up by people with disabilities, to discuss a wide range of quotidian, apparently personal topics that, by dint of being chronicled, circulated, and commented upon, brought them into public spheres in ways they have not been previously.<sup>56</sup> As well as collective blogs or blogs associated with disability media, individuals were able to blog about aspects of their experiences and daily lives. Particularly interesting strands of the blogosphere were developed, taking advantage of multimedia capabilities of the Internet. An excellent example of this is the growth of sign language Deaf stories in Vlogs (video-based blogs), and interwoven platforms such as YouTube. Such sign language Vlogs offer a way for Deaf to telecommunicate, which was simply not possible before, effectively creating Deaf ecologies of networked television. Such Vlogs, and the affordances of YouTube, also provided an infrastructure and audiences for Deaf people and communities to address their hearing counterparts, as, for instance in the “Deaf Vloggers: 5 Reasons I Like Being Deaf,” production, with sign language and captioning, produced by the National Deaf Children’s Society in the UK.<sup>57</sup>

The uses of digital platforms have been expanded with the growth of Facebook use by people with disabilities. For instance, people with intellectual disabilities have finally received long overdue acknowledgement as users of Facebook, which they commonly use also to connect with family and friends.<sup>58</sup> In other subtle ways, in the everyday processes of resistance, appropriation, and domestication of digital technology by people with disabilities, we can see the operations of citizenship occurring. This is something that arises from Arseli Dokumaci notion of the “micro-affordances of disability,” which she suggests are “non-normative ways of moving, sensing, and being in the everyday ... potentially transformative actions in the world.”<sup>59</sup> Holding that participation has always been a socio-technological process, Dokumaci draws attention to how disability ruptures our assumptions about bodies and environments, and thus “disabled individuals ... are forced to seek new niches to occupy and create new affordances within which their corporeal difference would be accommodated.”<sup>60</sup>

These intimate versions and everyday representations of disability are not readily, or usually, available in dominant media or popular culture.<sup>61</sup> In many ways, this kind of example, of which there are very many instances now available, over at least three decades of digital technology and cultures, offer a base of social practices concerning digital technology and culture — as a ground to consider how to expand our ideas of what digital citizenship might look like.

## **Conclusion**

In recent times, disability has gained prominence as an important arena of social justice, politics, and citizenship. This applies also to digital technologies and cultures, where “acts of citizenship” are increasingly generated.<sup>62</sup> Slowly, disability has become recognized as integral and generative part of social life and relations, especially in digital societies. As I have argued in this essay, there are various ways in which disability could be explicitly recognized as core to digital citizenship. However, to do this, we need to confront significant cultural baggage.

The expansion of digital citizenship to “include” disability is a good first step. Also helpful is the use of digital tools to tackle the many instances of exclusion,

discrimination, abuse, and violence that people with disabilities daily face. We need to go much further still, to challenge the foundational exclusion of disability from citizenship, especially as it is unfolding in digital societies.

Despite over decade where we have had an international treaty articulating the human rights of people with disabilities, including the right to education, the realities of how life proceeds and how citizenship is experienced are often dramatically different — as we see in the case of the child with disability in a Canberra school. There are many instances of this occurring in with the digital technologies, where: poor web and mobile accessibility prevents or degrades equal access to government services; new (and old) forms of television are not accessible to viewers who are Blind due to lack of audio description; online video cannot be consumed by Deaf consumers due to lack of captioning; interfaces and technologies are not designed with the requirements, patterns of use, or expectations of a wide range of users with diverse disabilities. In the settings and institutions of education, especially schools, such exclusions and narrow imaginings of digital society and technology are all the more troubling, given education is key to citizenship.

Thus, especially when it comes to the remaking of society with technology, citizenship is an ongoing process, with real flexibility as well as potentially new forms of oppression. As Minich reminds us: “Citizenship ... functions as a way of making the distribution of rights more equitable, not as a fixed relationship to a nation-state.”<sup>63</sup> People with disabilities have long had a fraught relation to states and nations, so there are positive developments with the emergence of cosmopolitan forms of disability, which see solidarity, exchange, and communication occur across different global, regional, and local settings. The role of digital technologies is a woven into this new, transnational fabric of disability, in ways we do not fully understand.

There are enough indications, however, to suggest that the altered states of citizenship via disability help us to recast digital citizenship. In the watchwords of this volume, disability can help us explore the deep *cultural* underpinning of digital citizenship; point towards emerging sources, patterns, and systems of *control* as yet scarcely on the agenda for discussions of digital citizenship; and help us analyze the new kinds of *contest* this entails, especially concerning inequality, political participation, and justice. In terms of a democracy yet to be fully imagined, digital citizenship, with disability, is unfinished business.

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## **Contributor Note**

Gerard Goggin is Professor of Media and Communications, University of Sydney. He is an Australian Research Council Future Fellow, undertaking a project on disability and digital technology. Gerard's books include *Routledge Companion to Disability and Media* (2017; with Katie Ellis and Beth Haller) and *Disability and the Media* (2015; with Katie Ellis), and with Christopher Newell, *Disability in Australia* (2005), and *Digital Disability* (2003). He is also widely published on mobile media, including *Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories* (2016; with Mark McLelland), *Locative Media* (2015; with Rowan Wilken), *Routledge Companion to Mobile Media* (2014), *Global Mobile Media* (2010), and *Cell Phone Culture* (2006). Gerard has a longstanding interest in media policy and social equity commenced in the early 1990s.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948; New York: Harcourt, 1994), ix; cited in Julie Avril Minich, *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Citizenship* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Berubé, “Disability and Citizenship,” *Dissent* 50, no. 2 (2003): 53.

<sup>4</sup> David M. Perry, “Two Ethical Futures for The Mighty,” 22 December, 2015, <http://www.thismess.net/2015/12/two-ethical-futures-for-mighty.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte Pearson and Filippo Trevisan, “Disability Activism in the New Media Ecology: Campaigning Strategies in the Digital Era,” *Disability & Society* 30, no. 6 (2015): 924-940.

<sup>6</sup> Carla Rice, Eliza Chandler, Elisabeth Harrison, Kirsty Liddiard & Manuela Ferrari, “Project Re•Vision: Disability at the Edges of representation,” *Disability & Society*, 30, no. 4 (2015): 513-527.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 1. See also: Karen Mossberger, “Towards Digital Citizenship: Addressing Inequality in the Information Age,” in *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, ed. Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (London and New York: 2009), 173-185.

<sup>8</sup> Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, *Digital Citizenship*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal, *Digital Citizenship*, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Ribble, *Digital Citizenship in Schools: Nine Elements All Students Should Know*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Arlington, VA: International Society for Technology in Education, 2015), 1.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, see: Gabriele Badano, “Political Liberalism and the Justice Claims of the Disabled: A Reconsideration,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 17, no. 4 (2014): 401-422; Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Anita Silvers and Leslie Pickering Francis, “Thinking about the Good: Reconfiguring Liberal Metaphysics (or not) for People with Cognitive Disabilities,” *Metaphilosophy* 40, no. 3-4 (2009): 475-498; Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, “Rethinking Membership and Participation in an Inclusive Democracy: Cognitive Disability, Children, Animals,” in *Disability and Political Theory*, ed. Barbara Arneil and Nancy Hirschmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance: chapter 7, “Disabled Citizens?” in Pete Dwyer’s *Understanding Social Citizenship: Themes and Perspectives for Policymakers* (Bristol: The Policy Press; second edition, 2010), 133-150; also the critique of T. H. Marshall in relation to disability in Alan Roulstone and Sim Prideaux, *Understanding Disability Policy* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2012), 32-34.. Lynne Davis offers the following discussion: “Returning to Marshall, the first point to be made in relation to people

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with disabilities is that, in order to exercise their social rights, they need to have been able to realise their civil and political rights. The extent to which people with disabilities have been able to do this is questionable” (Lynne Davis, “Riding with the Man on the Escalator: Citizenship and Disability,” in *Disability, Divers-ability and Legal Change*, ed. Melinda Jones and Lee Ann Basser Marks (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1999), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Berubé, “Disability and Citizenship,” 53.

<sup>14</sup> Berubé, “Disability and Citizenship,” 53.

<sup>15</sup> Berubé, “Disability and Citizenship,” 54.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Devlin and Dianne Pothier, “Introduction: Towards a Critical Theory of Dis-Citizenship,” in *Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy, and Law*, ed. Dianne Pothier and Richard Devlin (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

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<sup>18</sup> Julie Avril Minich, *Accessible Citizenships*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Jessop, “Bringing the State Back in Yet Again: Reviews, Revisions, Rejections, and Redirections,” *International Review of Sociology* 11, no. 2 (2001): 149-173; cited in Soldatic and Meekosha, “Disability and Neoliberal State Formations,” 206.

<sup>20</sup> Soldatic and Meekosha, “Disability and Neoliberal State Formations,” 206.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance: Paul Henman, *Governing Electronically: E-Government and the Reconfiguration of Public Administration, Policy, and Power* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Fiona Martin and Gerard Goggin, “Digital Transformations?: Reconstructing The Ubiquitous End-User: The New Politics of Gender and Media Policy in Digital Government Services,” *Journal of Information Policy* (2016), forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> See: C.F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and “Intellectual Disability”: The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011); Kacey Brooke Warren, *Recognizing Justice for Citizens with Cognitive Disabilities* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2015)

<sup>23</sup> Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> For instance, see: Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell, *Digital Disability: The Social Construction of Disability in New Media* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003); Katie Ellis and Mike Kent, *Disability and New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Mara Mills, *On the Phone: Deafness and Communication Engineering* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Alan Roulstone, *Disability and Technology: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2016).

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- <sup>27</sup> Haller et al., “iTechnology as Cure ...”
- <sup>28</sup> “New World Conference: Disability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” 27-29 October 2015, Brisbane, organized by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), <http://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-new-world-conference-2015>.
- <sup>29</sup> Shelley Lynn Tremain, ed., *Foucault and the Government of Disability* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
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- <sup>56</sup> See: Gerard Goggin and Tim Noonan, "Blogging Disability: The Interface Between New Cultural Movements and Internet Technology," in *The Uses of Blogs*, ed. Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 161-172; Katie Ellis and Mike Kent, *Disability and New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- <sup>57</sup> National Deaf Children's Society, "Deaf Vloggers: Five Reasons I Like Being Deaf" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFTMXyL90IU>.
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