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ARTICLE

Crip Kin, Manifesting

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Abstract

How might those who have experienced medicalized technologies as forms of neglect, intervention, and surveillance begin to cultivate alternative relations to technology? Drawing on the work of three artists—Lisa Bufano, Sunaura Taylor, and Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi—I explore the possibility of framing technology as a site for crip kin-making. These artists are activating, interrogating, refusing, and repurposing medicalized aesthetics and technologies, finding within them inspiration and resources for their art practice. Rather than evaluating technologies on the basis of their ability to move bodies and minds into heightened productivity, efficiency, normalcy, and speed, they are creating objects and fostering relations that interrogate those very values. Building on scholars who recognize "kin" as encompassing more than the biological, reproductive, legal, and human, I discuss the possibilities of "crip kin," recognizing the queer possibilities of intimacy with other presences and entities.

In *Gloves for All*, three rows of gloves hang across a gallery wall, and visitors are encouraged to try on the ones that most closely match their own hands. Although the gloves are all made of the same white fabric, they differ in size and shape. A few resemble socks, their curves unbroken by slots for fingers or thumbs. Consisting of eighteen pairs of zero-, two-, three-, four-, five-, and six-fingered gloves, the piece is part of the *Project ImPerfect* series by

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Taiwan- and US-based artist Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi. The series also includes baby clothes with a range of sleeve lengths: some end with closed caps at the shoulder and others extend to the wrist; almost all are asymmetrical (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi, *Baby Onesies #1* and *#3*

Trained as an art therapist, Yi was moved to create these items after meeting with families who had children with limb differences and learning of their experiences with stigma and shame. Their inability to find appropriate clothing for their children symbolized a larger feeling of isolation and unbelonging. The stories felt familiar to Yi. She knew of children with limb differences who had been abandoned, a rejection she had often experienced herself and witnessed within her own family. As someone born with "two fingers on each hand and two toes on each foot" (Yi, 2010, p. 103), someone repeatedly told by relatives and doctors that she needed fixing, she, "too, felt rejected by [her] culture" (p. 112).

In response, Yi began making baby clothing that welcomed rather than rejected such variation; her "intention was to foster the idea that people with limb deficiencies 'fit' in this world from the beginning of their lives" (2010, p. 114). *Gloves for All* extends this welcome into adulthood by anticipating—even desiring—the arrival of visitors with multiple finger formations. Rather than the typical orientations of "accommodation" and

"retrofitting," both of which include disabled people only as afterthoughts or special needs (Hamraie, 2017), Yi (2010) anticipates and assumes the presence of disability, building it into her art practice "from the beginning" (p. 114). And she does so collaboratively, recognizing the need for imaginative kin formations that stretch beyond the familial or reproductive. With *Gloves for All*, Yi imagines a room full of strangers with differently formed hands, trying on gloves together, sharing stories and swapping sets. Through *Project ImPerfect*, she offers workshops where attendees can trace their hands, fingers, feet, and toes onto fabric, resulting in bright patterns of diverse bodily formations. Although participants are allowed to take some of the fabric home, Yi uses the rest to create clothes for babies as yet unknown, without regard to the presence of genetic or legal bonds. In sharp contrast to ableist assumptions that disabled babies can only be met with disappointment, Yi's workshops anticipate, prepare for, and welcome their arrival, both real and imagined. If, as Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg (2011) suggest, disability can be the catalyst for new kinship imaginaries, Yi extends such formations, queerly calling new kin into being.

Yi's gloves and onesies thus offer a kind of "speculative fabulation," to use Donna Haraway's phrasing (2016, p. 2), or what Ruha Benjamin calls "informed refusals," which combine "a critique of what is" with "a vision of what can and should be" (2016a, p. 970).[1] Such refusals are necessary in a context in which some people are supported as users and creators of technology, while others have technologies thrust upon, kept from, or directed against them.[2] Benjamin underscores centuries of medical experimentation on colonized, enslaved, institutionalized, and marginalized peoples, suggesting a reclamation of "refusal as a way to construct more reciprocal relationships between institutions and individuals" in the face of racism and settler colonialism (2016a, p. 984). More than mere reaction, refusal itself becomes a speculative practice, a way of imagining otherwise deeply grounded in the experiences of the past and present.

Given these histories that are far from over, how might those who have experienced medicalized technologies as forms of neglect, intervention, and surveillance begin to cultivate alternative relations to

technology? Benjamin (2016b), Haraway (2016), and other theorists have begun experimenting with speculative fiction as one way to enact refusal and resistance, and speculative art-making offers similarly transformative tools. Cultural productions can offer vocabularies, images, gestures, patterns, models, and designs to catalyze everyday practice (e.g., Rice et al., 2017; Schalk, 2018). As I explain below, Yi and other artists are using the technologies of art-making to theorize disability differently, positioning disabled people as producers of knowledge (Bailey & Peoples, 2017; Fritsch & Hamraie, 2019; Hendren, 2011; Miles, Nishida, & Forber-Pratt, 2017; Mills, 2011). More to the point, they are activating, interrogating, refusing, and repurposing medicalized aesthetics and technologies, finding within them inspiration and resources for their art practice. Yi's gloves and onesies, for example, reimagine "adaptive clothing" as a technology that can bind people together, creating space for loving disabled kin. Rather than evaluating technologies on the basis of their ability to move bodies and minds into heightened productivity, efficiency, normalcy, and speed, they are creating objects and fostering relations that interrogate those very values. All of this work requires reckoning with the ways in which technology, especially medicalized technology, is constantly being used to capacitate some and debilitate others (e.g., Fritsch, 2015; Jain, 1999; Puar, 2017; Terry, 2017).

Indeed, understanding technology as something that everyone is equally empowered to accept or reject, as something that operates within the privatized realm of individual choice, obscures the complex histories, webs, and attachments of technoscience. While Yi does refuse particular orientations to medicalized technology, her refusals are never complete or unambiguous; instead, through her art practice, she encourages us to mull over our affective, entangled relations to technology, recognizing those relations as further entangled with webs of disability, race, sexuality, gender, and empire.[3] Intervening in the discourses of rehabilitative therapy and adaptive equipment, Yi and other artists engage in crip expertise activism (Hamraie, 2017; Fritsch & Hamraie, 2019) to create different models of kin and relation. They imagine both disability and technology as

sites through which new relations can be forged, offering a model of queer crip kin that neither requires nor expects genetic relation. Or, more, they foster one created in the *ruins* of such attachments, given the legacies of familial abandonment and rejection that Yi traces.

Theories of disability and technology have tended to draw heavily on the figure of the cyborg. Haraway's non-innocent, blasphemous, and contradictory figure has long offered feminist disability theorists tools to imagine the disability/technology interface as a site of and for politics. The cyborg figure has been used to interrogate the persistent and pervasive assumption that disabled people's uses of technology are more assistive than creative (as if assistance cannot itself be a site of crip creativity), or more inevitable than political (as if such notions of "inevitability" were not themselves political). Moreover, with its suspicion of essentialist identities, insistence on coalition work, and challenge to ideologies of wholeness, the feminist cyborg offers crip theorists ways to connect disability to other justice movements and critical theories. Befitting the cyborg, however, the figure has also generated extensive critique, and disability studies scholars have joined other feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theorists in marking its omissions and universalizing assumptions (Kafer, 2013).

Haraway herself has long advocated for a proliferation of figures to think through, offering monsters, vampires, dogs, companion species, messmates, string figures, and, most recently, kin and oddkin as complements to the cyborg. Some of these figures are more promising (and more risky) for disability studies than others, but I share Haraway's sense that no one figure can capture the complexities of naturecultures, technoscience, and "getting on" together. I also share her sense that kin and oddkin—or here, crip kin—might be particularly useful frames for extending our theoretical imaginings. Whether thinking through the necessity of imagining kin differently in the age of climate change (Haraway, 2016; Murphy, 2018) or reckoning with the ways in which kinship networks have been pathologized, decimated, and destroyed through slavery, mass incarceration, settler colonialism, and eugenics (e.g., Benjamin, 2018; Burch, 2014; Erevelles, 2011; Murphy, 2018; Roberts, 1999; Spillers, 1987;

TallBear, 2018), kin is a site of power, friction, and potentiality. In this essay, then, I want to imagine the possibilities of theorizing crip technoscience less through the figure of the cyborg and more through the notion of kin. Although it is quite common to think about disability as deeply connected to technology, how might those framings expand if we stressed their radically relational dimensions?

Although her focus on kinship with dogs has garnered far more scholarly attention, Haraway (2008) also drew on disability/technology relations in her early articulations of companion species and becoming kin. Writing about her father after his death, she describes his legacy as being, in part, about his "constitutive companion species knots" with his "trusty cherrywood crutches" and wheelchairs (pp. 165, 167). The "vitality" she cherished in him "came from living with regard to all those partners" (p. 171). In marking not only her father's "becoming with" crutches and wheelchairs but also her and her brothers' becomings, Haraway traces the kinds of networked interdependencies that characterize much disability theorizing, organizing, and art-making.[4] Can we see *these* relations as an essential part of "making kin, not population" (Haraway, 2018)? And, more, can we begin to understand anti-ableist work—theories, orientations, and practices that interrogate the ableist underpinnings of normative kinship imaginaries (Burch, 2014; Erevelles, 2011; Nielsen, 2018)—as essential components of such projects? In other words, might relations of ability and disability tell us as much about "making kin" and "becoming with" as they can about cyborgs?

As with the cyborg, though, the concept of kin can be traced through multiple histories and genealogies, and the lineages we choose to trace can lead to vastly different sets of questions and orientations. Thus, in centering crip artists as producers of knowledge and theory, in looking at cultural productions that offer sideways approaches to technology and desire, can we trace resonances with other theories and orientations, and what would it mean to treat those resonances as relations meriting care? Queer, Indigenous, and critical race theorists have long recognized kin as

encompassing more than the biological or reproductive, and my thinking here is deeply indebted to and inspired by that work. As Juana María Rodríguez urges, we need to "expand our definitions of affiliation" (2014, p. 49) to include the deep affective ties that do not map onto heteronormative, homonormative, or reproductive categories. Moreover, as many of these theorists argue, our affiliative practices cannot be restricted to the reach of the "human," recognizing the queer possibilities of animacy and intimacy with other presences and entities. How might disability studies be in solidarity with these projects?

In this essay, I offer some examples of how we might make manifest crip kin, examining Yi's work alongside two other US-based artists, Sunaura Taylor and Lisa Bufano. I have chosen these three artists in part because their work resonates with the questions I am interested in exploring here, but I have also selected them because we inhabit overlapping social networks. My paths have crossed with all three women, to varying degrees of complexity and frequency, and they are similarly entwined with each other through direct and indirect connections. Intellectual and political intimacies can also be sensual intimacies, and I continue to experience the deep pleasures of entering and being entered by another's thoughts and words. In what follows, then, my ruminations are deeply partial, befitting a feminist queer crip examination of collaborative kin-making, crip intimacies, and technology. I highlight these relations as a way of marking that who these artists are or rather, who and what they are with, is key to their crip kin-making practices.

There are twelve images in this essay, and I integrate descriptions of them into the body of the text itself. Offering this kind of description is a key practice in disability studies as a way of making visual imagery more accessible to more people, but I also want to suggest that these descriptions can themselves be an act of queer crip kin-making.[5] Following the provocations of Georgina Kleege (2018), my descriptions are subjective, idiosyncratic, and partial; I am allowing my histories with these artists, my immersion in queer disability studies and practices, and my affective relations to these pieces to impact my descriptions. In that spirit, I

encourage readers to craft your own descriptions as you read. How do different approaches to the descriptive process lead you to different affective responses to a piece? I briefly return to such questions in my conclusion. First, though, I turn to the work of painter Sunaura Taylor and her intimate portraits of wheelchairs.

On Abandonment; or, Are Those Wheelchairs Really Empty?

As part of a speculative series about disability and changing landscapes, artist and writer Sunaura Taylor painted small notebook-sized watercolors depicting power wheelchairs in, and as, nature. These chairs are alone, without their riders, set free. Or have they been abandoned, left to their own devices, growing into something else? *Wheelchairs on the Moon* (Figure 2) is a whimsical drawing of exactly that, five yellow wheelchairs on the surface of a blue moon, with a yellowish-starry sky in the background. In *Furry Wheelchair* (Figure 3), Taylor has created a more earthen landscape, shades of brown blending into green. In the center of the page is a grey wheelchair, covered in hair; those familiar with Taylor's work will recognize the hairs as the same spiky hair she paints on her legs in her self-portraits. *Hairy Wheelchair* sits in a slightly darker landscape, more brown than green, and takes up more of the frame. The spiky hair from the previous painting has here grown long and wavy; it gently unfurls from every surface of the chair. The hairs have grown even longer in *Arctic Wheelchair* (Figure 4), where the power chair is now taking up most of the page, its long snow-covered fur blowing in the icy-blue wind.

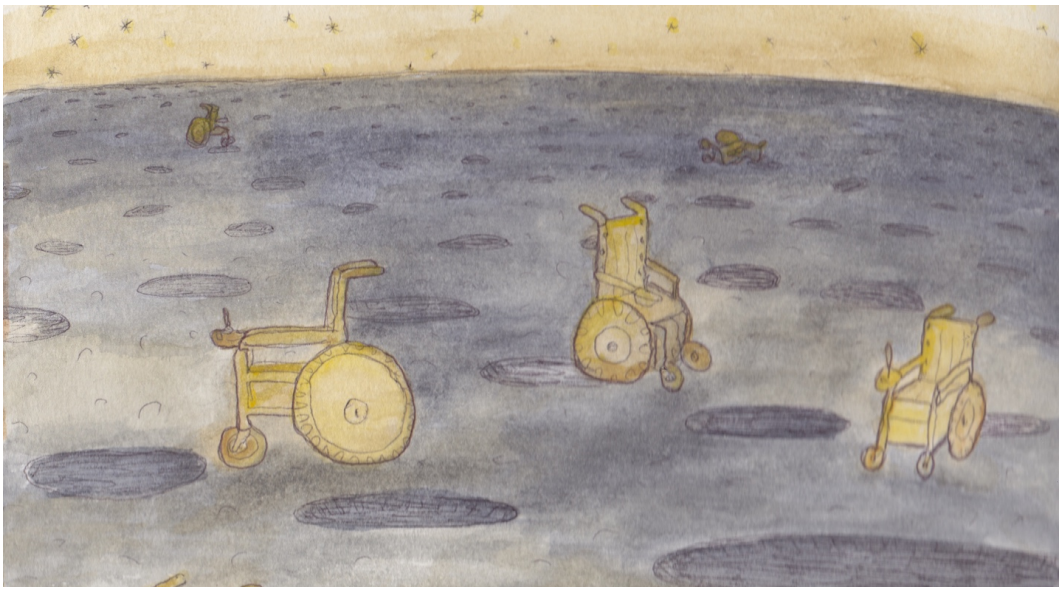

Figure 2. Sunaura Taylor, *Wheelchairs On the Moon.*

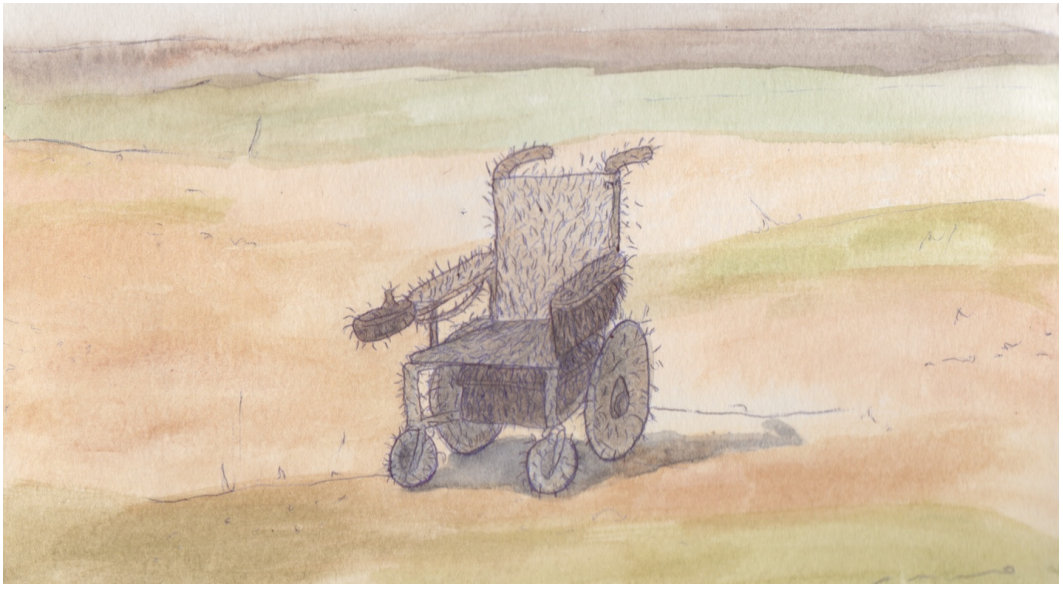

Figure 3: Sunaura Taylor, *Furry Wheelchair*

Figure 4: Sunaura Taylor, *Arctic Wheelchair*

When I first saw these paintings, I laughed out loud. All these wheelchairs, moving through the universe, going wherever they want. Taylor throws a wrench in the ableist concept of "wheelchair bound," untethering body from chair. She similarly intervenes in the ableist assumption that wheelchairs have no place in nature, that there is no need for accessible trails. These wheelchairs are forging their own paths, inhabiting any landscape they want. But the chairs still bear the traces of their users—remember Taylor's hairs—and so the images also point toward the intimate relationships many crips develop with their equipment, those who experience our wheelchairs as extensions of our bodies, as animate, as intimates (e.g., Belser, 2016).

But these images are also haunting. What happened to these chairs' companions? Did they disappear? Or did they merge fully with chair? Are those hairs the sign that Taylor and the chair have become one? As Eunjung Kim (2015) suggests, the exclusionary, violent history of the "human" might prompt us to "unbecome human" by developing or accentuating our proximity to objects, by "becoming objects" (p. 314). Taylor similarly pushes our questions of solidarity and community, exploring what it might mean to forge relationships not only beyond the "human" but even

beyond what gets marked as living. *Wheelchairs on the Moon*, for example, imagines wheelchairs in relation only to each other and the landscape, nary a human in sight; five wheelchairs forging their own intimacy with each other, turning and circling and holding still. Taylor's wheelchair paintings do what Mel Chen (2012) describes as the queer work of "reframing the terms of intimacy itself, so that it might not be restricted to operating between only human or animate entities" (p. 218). These wheelchairs beckon; even the more solitary *Furry*, *Hairy*, and *Arctic* wheelchairs evoke questions about what they might feel like to inhabit or ride. Although there may be no people visible in these chairs, they are anything but empty; they bristle with animacy and presence.

Contrast Taylor's wheelchairs with the more common, ableist framing of empty wheelchairs: chairs left behind because triumphed over. Ekso Bionics, creator of HULC and eLEGS, uses the trope of the abandoned wheelchair in advertising their robotic exoskeletons, which are touted as allowing the paralyzed to walk. One widely disseminated image makes plain the assumptions behind this technology: moving from left to right, in a composite of seven stills, it shows a young normative-looking light-skinned man wearing the eLEGS and moving from sitting in a wheelchair, to standing upright, to walking. With its profile depictions of intermediate positions, the photo echoes common images of the evolutionary stages of Man, culminating in the upright white man as apex of progress. Such technologies are thereby rendered not only revolutionary but evolutionary, not only desirable but inevitable.

But crip theory encourages us to question this inevitability. Although I have not myself tried the exoskeleton, I have encountered others using it, and as I quickly rolled around them while they struggled to move just a few steps, I imagined the progression moving the other way, from standing to sitting. Running the images in reverse—and describing the images as "in reverse"—makes clear that there are actually multiple temporalities in play here, and these technologies cannot run in only one direction. Some users will ultimately reject these technologies, abandoning them for less spectacular modalities. Even avid users will return to sitting, moving

"backwards" when they tire or the technologies break and need maintenance (Russell & Vinsel, 2016; Wool, 2015). Running these images in reverse also reminds us that such reversals are often neither chosen nor desired: benefits are cut; bodies acquire additional injuries; doctors and therapists move away; lovers and support staff leave; technology becomes obsolete; minds change.

I have imagined this reversal because I want to encourage these kinds of defamiliarizing approaches to technology (Schalk, 2018), but I know we cannot undo the pull of the progress narrative by simply running it in reverse. Moving the man from walking to sitting does not question the existence of the exoskeleton itself, or make evident its origins in militarized technologies intended to assist nondisabled soldiers in carrying weapons over rough territory. Running the images in reverse cannot address the deadly irony of a technology crafted to facilitate the death and disabling of foreign others being marketed as a way to alleviate the disablement of American consumers (Erevelles, 2011; Kafer, 2013; Puar, 2017; Terry, 2017). eLEGS is a technology rendered apolitical and benign by its association with injured American citizens; we justify the death and destruction it facilitates elsewhere by focusing on the promise of biomedical salvation it offers here (Terry, 2017). Nor is the wheelchair itself an innocent tool in a world where most people lack affordable and reliable access to the kinds of chairs they need. We need more than mere reversal to grapple with the debilitating—and uneven—effects of these technologies' production, use, and disposal.

What we need, urges theorist and designer Sara Hendren (2011), are "tools of estrangement": "Instead of posing 'solutions' to 'problems,'" she explains, "estranging tools ask whether we are asking the right questions in the first place" (p. 62). I want to suggest that these tools of estrangement be joined with tools of relation, or design practices that recognize the deep relations possible not only among the animate but the inanimate, tools that challenge the division of objects from subjects.[6] Taylor's wheelchairs—animate, lively—offer a narrative that allows us to dismantle the biomedical salvation tales of Ekso Bionics; if people in the United States no longer view

wheelchair use as a fate worse than death, we might be more willing to challenge the cruel bargain that makes violence "over there" justifiable if it leads to medical innovations "over here" (Terry, 2017).[7] As Hendren (2011) explains, design focused on estrangement is not satisfied with mere "use," but rather "draws attention to…social or cultural or political conditions and interrogates the origins of these conditions" (p. 62).

Thinking of estrangement and defamiliarization allows for the possibility of new relations to technologies, or thinking of technologies in terms of queer affective ties. We might begin to recognize, for example, that technologies, even "medical" ones, even serious "life-saving" ones, can be used differently, queerly. We can begin to raise serious life or death questions about what wheelchairs or breathing tubes are for, about how they might be used in ways that do not simply run counter to their intended purpose—as if *for* or *against* were our only options—but in completely different directions altogether. Perhaps "functional" technologies can be used only for pleasure, questioning which affects are associated with which technologies. What might it mean to treat deadly serious technologies—the very tools that keep us alive—with joy, delight, and wonder? With desire? "I love my feeding tube," writes a disability activist in a posting about queer crip desire, "and people don't understand, at all, how I could feel that way about a couple of tubes inserted into my abdomen to add and remove things from my body. But I do. I love my tubes so much. I wish I could write amazing poems about my feeding tube" (withasmoothroundstone, n.d.). How might we take this person's love for their feeding tube more seriously? Feeding and breathing tubes are often the technologies that people fear go "too far," rendering life not worth living, draining it of its "quality"; can we recognize the radical potential of insisting on kinship, relationality, and animacy at the very points where life is presumed to end (Chen, 2012)?

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway insists that practices of "making kin" are not easy, that they "demand our best emotional, intellectual, artistic, and political creativity, individually and collectively, across…differences" (2016, p. 208n18). How, then, might our relationships with machines and technologies shift if we proceeded from a deep love for disabled bodies,

minds, and experiences? If we proceeded in the spirit of recognizing feeding tubes, trachs, wheelchairs, and more as tools of estrangement *and* relation? Perhaps relation requires estrangement, requires rethinking who and what we can be in relation with.

Prosthetic Connections

Artist Lisa Bufano offers an estranging, defamiliarizing approach to relation in her imaginative use of prosthetics. She created spectacular prosthetics that allowed her to look and move in more-than-human ways, suggesting a fluidity between human, animal, plant, and machine bodies (Cachia, 2016). Lacking access to expensive art materials and acknowledging the reality of those who have had to craft mobility devices out of everyday objects and refurbished hand-me-downs, Bufano crafted her prosthetics/stilts out of twenty-eight-inch curved table legs. In so doing, she rejected the logics and circuits of biomedicine in favor of furniture design and art-making; rather than grant biomedicine exclusive authority over prosthetics, she centered a different form of expertise. These are prosthetics with no medical or normalizing "purpose," made solely for pleasure and politics, made from love for the opportunities offered by the odd body, made with the hope of crafting kin across differences.[8]

Such possibility was made apparent when Bufano placed the prosthetics/stilts not only on her own limbs but on those of her collaborator, Sonsheree Giles. In a still photograph from their 2007 performance *One Breath Is an Ocean for a Wooden Heart* (Figure 5), Bufano and Giles are dressed identically: their light-skinned bodies clothed in semi-sheer pantaloons, and bright orange prosthetics on all four of their limbs. Giles is moving on her four stilt-legs under the bridge formed by Bufano's body, her head and shoulders brushing against Bufano's stomach. Bufano was an amputee, Giles is not, but all eight of their prosthetics raise questions about who and what prosthetics are for. Bufano and Giles, in their movement together with the stilt-prosthetics, refuse any simple understandings of diagnosis or sharp delineation between "disabled" and "able-bodied."

Figure 5: Lisa Bufano, *One Breath is an Ocean for a Wooden Heart*

During the course of the performance, Bufano and Giles use their bodies, stilts, and each other to take on a wide range of shapes and qualities of movement; Bufano (n.d.) describes them as becoming "animated furniture, magical toys, 8-legged insect, 4-legged gazelle, 2-legged birds." Bufano and Giles begin the performance prone, lying head-to-head against a bare backdrop. They slowly arch upward off the ground, moving by exerting pressure against each other's head. The contact never breaks; it is not always a gentle or loving contact, it is not always skin to skin or scalp to scalp, but they never lose relation. Indeed, it is the presence of the other that makes movement possible; they need the connection to maneuver the technology of the stilts. In a description of the piece, Bufano explained that the focus on connection emerged from the feeling of disconnection; how are her relations always being mediated through the table leg, the stilt, the prosthetic? What does it mean to touch the other through an object, or when the other is an object? Rather than understanding prosthetics as a technology for overcoming disability—as the biomedicalized narrative requires—Bufano (n.d.) explored instead what the prosthetics *preclude*; she recognized them as simultaneously "enabl[ing] and constrain[ing]."

Finding possibility even in or through constraint, moving only by moving through and against another: Bufano offered an approach to technologies that runs in stark contrast to the eLEGS of Ekso Bionics. Her table legs are neither machinic nor medical, and they are grounded in intentional relation. Unlike the eLEGS, which privilege upright bipedalism above all else, Bufano created a technology that encourages or even amplifies the queerly sideways, animal-like crawling we are supposed to disavow or outgrow.

Expert Adornments

Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi creates what she calls "adornments" for disabled bodies, wearable pieces of art intended to showcase different bodily formations rather than "correct" or hide them; the interaction between body

and adornment is then carefully documented in large-scale color photographs. In an untitled self-portrait in the *Gloves for 2* series (Figure 6), Yi sits against a black background with her gloved hands positioned next to her bare feet; all four—hands and feet—having only two digits each. Yi's handmade multi-colored gloves faithfully follow the contours of her hands until they reach the ends of her fingers, at which point they extend into cascading nodes of varying sizes. In their fantastic colorful excess, the gloves refuse the notion that designing for disability can always and only mean designing for normativity and functionality. Drawing on the vocabulary of her own body and the bodies of her relatives, as members of her family have been born this way for generations, Yi imagines a different kind of family heirloom. In rejecting the narratives that have been handed down to her about these bodily formations—they can only be sites of shame, necessitating disguise and hiding—she creates adornments to showcase those very shapes. Through these designs, she has found kinship with ancestors she was supposed to forget, and made new kin with the artists and objects around her.

Figure 6. Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi, *Gloves for 2*

Figure 7: Chun-Shan (Sandie Yi), *Em-brace*

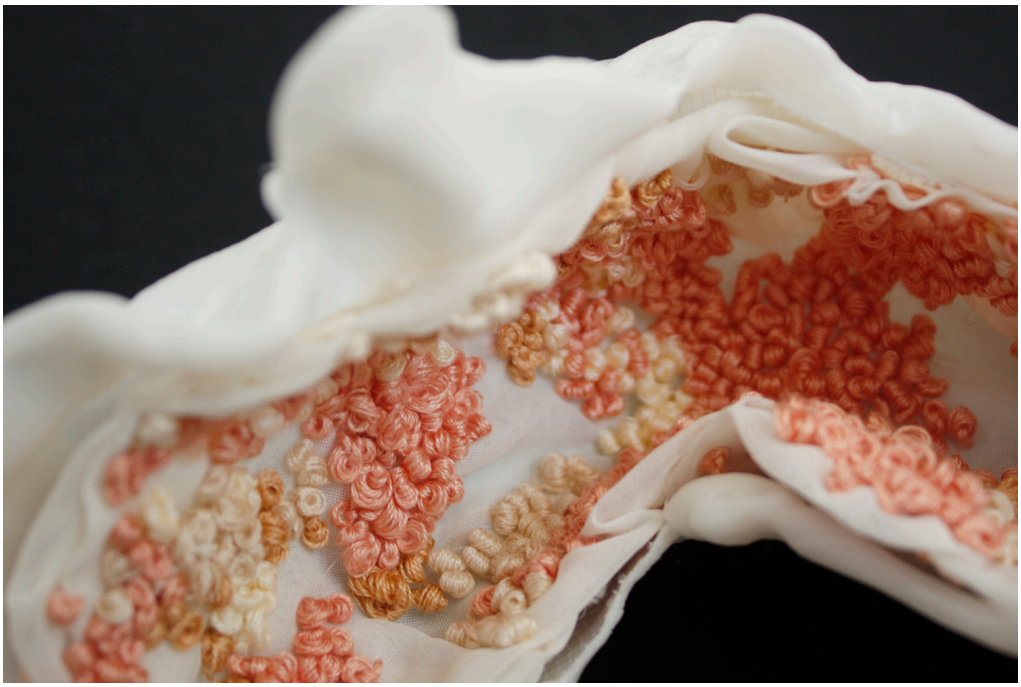

Figure 8: Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi, *Em-brace* (detail)

As part of her kin-making work, Yi created a series of adornments for other disabled artists; working in close collaboration, she embarked on nothing less than "body reconfiguration" through "mapping the memories and the living experiences" of her collaborators (n.d.). *Em-brace* (Figure 7) features Sunaura Taylor seated with her hands resting gently in her lap; her light-skinned hands are encased in white plastic braces that culminate in fabric cuffs with ivory, pink, and coral embroidery. After hearing Taylor describe childhood doctors' desires to straighten out her hands—a straightening that understood function in only the most narrow of ways—Yi created these cuffs to facilitate not movement but aesthetic and sensory pleasure. In so doing, she and Taylor subtly refuse the standard rubrics by which the progress of braces is normally measured: as a way of capacitating a disabled person into productivity (through work made achievable by a brace) and normativity (through surgeries made possible by a brace). This refusal is more apparent when we link Taylor's desire for such braces with her essay "The Right Not to Work" (2004), in which she interrogates the notion that disabled people merit services only on the grounds that such services can then mobilize them into productive workers and consumers. "Em-brace" functions instead as what Lars Hallnäs and Johan Redström (2000) call "slow technology," or technologies that implicitly and explicitly facilitate reflection over consumption, productivity, and accumulation.

Yi's contention that medical technologies, such as custom orthotics, can be made not for capitalist function but for pleasure is evident when we examine the inside of Taylor's braces. While the outside of the brace resembles a conventional plastic orthotic, the inside is lined with delicate pink and coral embroidery, echoing the stitching on the cuffs. The embroidered ivory and salmon loops are grouped together in small bunches, evoking collections of cells or fields of flowers (Figure 8). These tiny dots of thread are meant for Taylor's pleasure alone; they are meant to be felt, and they can be fully felt only by someone with Taylor's precise form. Yi and Taylor play with questions of visibility; rather than create an armor for Taylor, shielding her hands from view, the braces draw attention to her

hands' soft inward turn, showcasing their curve, while simultaneously providing hidden comfort. The embroidered knots are a way for Yi and Taylor to communicate with each other, sharing their experience of being the object of voyeuristic attention; Yi's hands leave their traces, caressing Taylor's skin through soft knots of thread.

Yi's desire to create soft cradles for Taylor's hands deepens in meaning for me when read in the context of Taylor's biography and activism. In her book *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (2017), Taylor is intentional about telling the history of her body:

> My disability was caused by U.S. military pollution in the town where I was born. Everything about my story is typical: the military and its industries secretly dumping toxic chemicals in unlined pits in the ground for decades; the poor, largely nonwhite neighborhoods that were affected; and the fact that the pollution was directly poisoning the lands of the Tohono O'Odham Nation. My body was formed with the help of toxic chemicals, heavy metals, airplane degreasers—the mundane detritus of militarization. (p. 120)

Taylor's narrative thus disrupts the conventional distinction often made between "acquired" and "congenital" disabilities, revealing how such distinctions fall apart in the context of environmental injustice. She was in fact "born this way," suggesting her disabilities are congenital, but her disabilities were caused by, and therefore acquired through, military pollution. By insisting that "everything about [her] story is typical," Taylor offers a potent description of how debility is endemic—or made endemic—to particular communities (Puar, 2017). Taylor argues for a disability movement that simultaneously values disable bodies while condemning debilitation, asserting that "The U.S. Military and Its Garbage Made be Diabled, and I Love My Body" (2017, p. 189). *Em-brace*, then, can be seen as a way for Taylor to demonstrate "loving her body" while demonstrating against the military industrial complex and the US settler state.

While *Em-brace* responds to memories of medical intervention by creating braces to caress and cradle the body, other pieces in this series draw more explicit attention to what Eunjung Kim (2017) calls "curative

violence," or the fact that many cures have physically, psychically, and symbolically violent effects (Clare, 2017). In one self-portrait (Figure 9), a detail from *Re-fuse Skin Set*, Yi stands before a white background; she wears mottled yellow latex shorts that match the adornment on her right hand, which is thrust toward the viewer. The adornment cradles her two fingers; composed of black stitching, white plastic, and latex, the adornment allows her fingers to rest in their most comfortable position. As with *Embrace*, this piece is part of a series of adornments made from the tools and materials of medicine; the black thread is reminiscent of sutures and staples, while the white plastic is akin to that used to make braces and splints. But rather than using sutures and hard plastic to force the body into "better" positions—with "better" measured entirely by normalizing criteria—Yi supports bodies in moving where and how they want, including not moving at all. In contrast to the normalizing imperative in which mobility must be enhanced at all costs, Yi allows herself the pleasure of stillness.

Figure 9: Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi, *Re-fuse Skin Set*

Figure 10: Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi, *Re-fuse Skin Set*

In the photographs documenting *Re-fuse Skin Set*, Yi stands with her braced hands on her hips or crossed in front of her, apparently naked except for the shorts and finger cradles; the images have been cropped to reveal only Yi's torso. There is a tiny notch cut into the top of the shorts, at the small of Yi's back, and the notch is surrounded by black suture-stitches; the front of the shorts (Figure 10) features two ovoid cut-outs surrounded by white plastic. Careful examination reveals that the cuts are positioned over two long scars on Yi's skin. Returning to the title, *Re-fuse Skin Set*, we can recognize Yi's finger braces as a reference to medical practices of fusing together (or *re*-fusing) fingers separated during surgery or fusing together joints, freezing one set of motions to free up another. But Yi's use of black suture-stitches that will never dissolve and her circling of the scars signal instead a *refusal* of such narratives of healing. Yi marks the violence of such interventions, highlighting their traces on her body, while gesturing toward the possibility of *re*-fusing her body back together differently, otherwise,

according to a different set of logics and rubrics. Yet any such reimaginings take place across the backdrop of histories of eugenics and neglect, with *refuse* signaling the way such bodies have been discarded, segregated, abandoned (Kim, 2019).

Although it is tempting to read these adornments as "returning" the body to its "natural" state, as freeing it from the effects of curative violence, Yi and her collaborators resist such readings. As Taylor insists, her body, like all bodies, was never natural (2017, p. 120), and Yi explains that her work is not about abandoning modification; she is less interested in "rejecting the notion of physical alteration" than in imagining alterations beyond "a correctional physical aid" (n.d.). Moreover, both Yi and her collaborators know that the biomedical interventions which they are challenging are irreversible; as the scars peering out of Yi's shorts demonstrate, interventions leave permanent marks, both physical and psychic.

The last piece in this series, *Dermis Footwear*, consists of two knee-high boots made from latex, cork, plastic, fabric, and black thread; the latex is constructed from castings of artist Sadie Wilcox's burn scars. Wilcox wears the boots, shot from different angles, in the accompanying photographs; the images show her bare legs from mid-thigh down and two of the images reveal her mint-green toenails poking out through the ends of the boots (Figures 11 and 12). The boots are made of a caramel-colored latex, creating a dark contrast with Wilcox's light skin, and there are black suture-stitches traveling around the boot in irregular patterns. There are asymmetrical cut-outs in the boot skin across the tops of Wilcox's feet, some suture-stitched, some not, and the skin of the human shows through. This skin, the human skin, is white, tan, and pink. The swirls, bumps, and ridges of the scars are echoed in the mottled patterns of the boot skin. Demonstrating Yi's interest in creating "a tool for remapping and engaging with a new physical terrain" (n.d.), the boots present scars as patterns to emulate, as sources of artistic inspiration and sites of collaborative dialogue. As Wilcox (2011) explains, "the cellular formation of [her] hypotropic scars exposes rich layers of texture, curve, and contour" (p. 138).

Figure 11: Chun-Shan (Sandie) Yi, *Dermis Footwear*

Figure 12: Chun-Shan Sandie Yi, *Dermis Footwear*

The skin in these photographs is in motion. The tops of the boots are falling over and peeling back; it is as if the boots of their own accord are recoiling from the fragile vulnerable skin beneath. Or perhaps we are to read the peeling back as a sign of healing, the way scabs start to lift and curl at the edges to make room for new skin underneath. Is the peeling away, the falling down, the collapsing, painful or liberating or both? Or have Yi and Wilcox drawn on the language of debridement, the removal of dead tissue from wounds, as a way to reimagine the healing of skin? Rather than the medical process of painful debriding, we get an animal one, reimagining debriding as a lizard or snake shedding its skin. But the skin beneath is neither fresh nor new; underneath the cast scars we find still more scars. These marks of violence will never disappear, no matter how many times these chrysalis boots are donned or doffed.

In stark contrast to the delicate embroidery in *Em-brace*, the stitching in *Re-fuse Skin Set* and *Dermis Footwear* is thick, harsh, and brash. It seems hurried, as if done out of anger or urgency; without these suture-stitches, this skin will fall apart. As micha cárdenas notes in her description

of a trans of color poetics, the "stitch brings the affect of pain" into our theories, allowing for the possibility of "creating relations through the stitch" (2016). Yi's pairing of the stitch with the cut, and her use of stitches that will never dissolve or be removed, refuses notions of such relations as creating quick or permanent healing. Moreover, Yi's slashing stitches and rough edges can be read as her rebuke of the racist, imperialist reduction of Asian women to "nimble fingers" and its racist, ableist assumption that, in Eunjung Kim's words, "to be properly human as a woman of color…is to be equipped with capacities exploitable in global production" (2015, p. 307). The urgency of this creation, the skill in these stitches, is neither exportable nor replicable, but arises out of the kin-making of these artists, their bodies, histories, and tools.

Yi's adornments thus rework and reimagine from queer crip perspectives what counts as expertise and who has the authority to intervene in the form and function of marked bodies. Yi deploys the tools, vocabulary, and appearance of medical technologies—orthotic plastics, suture-stitches, grafted sheets of skin—to map the traces of medicalized violence and its effects. With her collaborators she uses these tools and materials to tell and re-tell stories, shifting the center of gravity and positioning themselves as producers of knowledge. Yi's focus on skin-making merits attention, given skin's predominance as a marker for race and as a sign of "natural, biological" difference. Yi's assertion of expertise and authority here—the ability to make skin, the power to shift its appearance and effects—suggests that she is "seizing the tools to mark the world that marked [her] as other" (Haraway, 1991, p. 175); she makes clear that skin and its meanings are made. Casting custom orthotics or creating new skin does not have to be done in a laboratory, in isolation from the people "served" by such practices, but can be made in collaboration, in relation, in kinship networks, a collaboration based in affective ties.

Although my analysis thus far has focused primarily on the adornments themselves, I want to encourage close attention to the images of the adornments as well. In publicly presenting this work, Yi has exhibited the adornments and the photographs together, making clear that the images

are essential to her overall project. We can therefore read her careful cropping—excluding heads and faces from the frame, for example—as doing part of the work of "mapping the memories and the living experiences" (n.d.) of herself and her collaborators. In contrast to what painter Riva Lehrer describes as "specimen paintings" (Bergquist 2013), which turn disabled bodies into disembodied parts and promote voyeuristic access to sites of impairment, Yi has cropped the images to highlight sites of care, desire, and adornment. The relationship that matters here is not between viewer and viewed, but between artist and artist or even wearer and worn. Even the more confrontational image of Yi thrusting her finger-cradle to the camera insists on the primacy of her connection to the hand brace itself.

Perhaps we can read the refusal of eye contact in these images as a sign that these adornments and photographs were created with crip audiences in mind. Yi is not ultimately concerned with navigating the stare across difference or addressing the curiosity of nondisabled people; she is instead offering other queer crips the time and space to imagine inhabiting disabilities, technologies, and medicalized histories differently. Cognizant of histories of medical surveillance, ones that overlap with histories of racial and gendered surveillance, Yi knows that granting full visibility is not always transgressive or liberatory.

Refusing eye contact also requires viewers to stay with the adornments themselves and their relations with the bodies they cradle, cushion, brace, accentuate, mirror, reveal, and reflect. Although Yi describes her work as finding beauty in these bodies, her materials (hard white bulbous plastic, thick black thread), methods (jagged stitches, irregular shapes and holes, mottled colors), and positions (jutting hand, collapsing boots) suggest that she is after more than one affective response. A deep ambivalence runs through these adornments and their photographs, an awareness that "mapping the memories and the living experiences" of these crips means capturing also the moments that recognition brings not identification but refusal, that desire is often accompanied by disgust. As Petra Kuppers (2007) notes in her work on

counter-medical performance, "creative practices at the site of the scar can play with the mechanisms of repulsion and attraction" (p. 1).

It is this very ambivalence, this ability to index multiple and often contradictory affects, that leads me to frame these projects in terms of crip kin and queer crip kin-making. When I look at *Dermis Footwear*, I see skin that resembles my own, and I am moved by the loving care Yi and Wilcox put into creating latex skin that accentuates burned, scarred skin. But I am moved in more than one direction, and this sense of recognition is neither easy nor complete. I begin to imagine multiplying, radiating answers to José Esteban Muñoz's (2006) question, "How might subalterns feel each other?" (p. 677). Looking closely at these boots, the way they peel back and collapse, their repeated piercing by that black suture-thread, I am made aware of the persistence of deeply embodied memories that I have no desire to surface, memories that I fear if awakened will carry me off forever. These fears likely bind me to others encountering these images, a knotted kinship of experiences unspeakable, but again, this recognition is neither easy nor complete. When does queer crip kinship require not only sensuousness but its refusal? How are some of us only able to feel some things by allowing ourselves not to feel others? And how might we support our queer crip kin or form intimacies in *not*-feeling?

Crip Kin, Manifesting

Bufano, Taylor, and Yi each recognize that our attachments to medicalized technologies make manifest some kin but not others. Approaches that require coherent and discrete "models" of disability or strict adherence to the authorizing power of diagnosis are unlikely to lead to the crafting of new imaginaries called for here. These artists and their comrades offer informed refusals of technology as capitalist commodity, available only to those with the proper papers or disposable income; they are orienting themselves and their relations away from liberatory stories of identity through state recognition. Kin, Benjamin (2018) explains, do not inhere in particular categories or relations but emerge "*as an effect of social struggle*" (p. 65,

emphasis original). Thus, we can best find and make crip kin in becoming more aware of the deployment of disability in narratives of war violence and rehabilitation (E. Kim, 2017; Terry, 2017), the uneven distributions of technology (Puar, 2017; Fritsch, 2015; Fritsch & Hamraie, 2019), the possibility that new kinship imaginaries can be conscripted into neoliberalism (Eng, 2010; Erevelles, 2011; Friedner, 2017), and the assemblage of racist, ableist, sexist, and imperialist logics in the assumption that "human" is the only animacy that matters (Chen, 2012; Kim, 2015).

What makes this work queer? Or crip? I could point to Bufano, Taylor, and Yi's identifications and affiliations, or highlight dimensions of their biographies and histories, but both moves would solidify those terms in ways that run counter to the work itself. Muñoz (2006) "imagines a position or narrative of being and becoming that can resist the pull of identitarian models of relationality" (p. 677), and it is that unfolding of different models of relationality that resonates here. These women are collaboratively crafting relations in and through their art, and those deeply intimate and lively relations are not easily reducible to family, or reproduction, or identity. Their relations to me, themselves, each other, these histories, and these technologies exceed the bounds of my knowing. Kim TallBear (2018) suggests that such excesses may constitute "small moments of possibility" in which we can begin to recognize sex and sexuality more as relations than objects, relations that flow intimately between all kinds of bodies (p. 161).

These artists are attending to, in Muñoz's (2006) framing, "the receptors we use to hear each other and the frequencies on which certain subalterns speak and are heard or, more importantly, felt" (p. 677). Perhaps these are the frequencies on which, through which, we can move "toward more disruptive modes of organizing life altogether," cultivating the "insurgent space" and "poetics of survival" that Jina Kim (2017) describes as the work of crip-of-color critique. Of necessity, a "poetics of survival" takes many forms. Kim herself uses several different words to get at the same thing—world-making, speculative projects, poems, space—and it

seems worth noting that Muñoz draws on the language of "frequencies," evoking both sound and currents, all un-seen.

I have tried to convey in words what these different images, objects, and relations "look like" in order to make the images and (my understanding of) their meanings more accessible to more readers. But radical accessibility, speculative fabulation, queer crip kin relations, and more-than-human intimacy and animacy likely require a (neuro)queerer sensorium. Melanie Yergeau (2018) admits that

> There is much that I do not learn or experience when I avert my eyes. And yet—there is much that I do learn, do experience, do feel and intimate and express and attract and repel. I might not know or recognize your face, but I know your scent, what you wore last Thursday, the exact date on which we first met, the rhythm of your pace, the resting cut of your hair against your shoulder, the pulsing force field of the space between our bodies. There are intimacies and knowledges that exceed the eye-to-eye. (p. 211)

When Yi invited me to her studio to see more of her skins, my response was not to spread them out so as to see their gradations in color or size, but to rub them against my arm, my cheek, my lips. I kept placing them on my own body, layering, repositioning, and sliding them along my skin. They were cool to the touch, but warmed quickly against my body; they slid smoothly and easily across my mouth, and my lips coasted across them. I cannot remember their making a sound, but I recall they smelled alive; they felt lively. Feel these adornments across your skin; imagine what relation tastes like.

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Notes

[1] Benjamin is careful to note that she developed this concept of "informed refusal" in part through her engagement with the work of Indigenous scholars Audra Simpson (2007) and Kim TallBear (2013), both of whom identify refusal in ethnographic contexts as a practice of sovereignty and self-determination. Acknowledging these citational paths can be a kind of methodological kin-making.

[2] Eunjung Kim (2019) cautions, however, that this binary is neither fixed nor total; we need "to attend to locational specificities and internal differences" within and across such descriptions.

[3] Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne (2017) describe this kind of crip-informed approach as *dismediation*, identifying reluctant, alienated, partial, targeted, and limited orientations to technology, and Kelly Fritsch and Aimi Hamraie (2019) offer a generative and capacious articulation of *crip technoscience* as similarly concerned with friction, tension, ambivalence, and appropriation.

[4] It is not only Haraway's father, in other words, who "becomes with" his crutches and wheelchairs but also his children, as they learn patterns of movement and gesture in relation to and through his networked interdependent body; complex webs of companion species radiate and extend. In highlighting Haraway's recognition of the possibilities of crip kin in her essay about her father, however, I can't help but wish that this (net)work left more of a trace on her other kinship imaginaries. I continue to grapple with the risks of Haraway's selective deployment of disability, whether in figuring oddkin, articulating "damage," or urging us to "make kin, not babies" (Haraway, 2016; 2018). I am grateful to the editors for pushing me to recognize the promises even as I feel the risks.

[5] My thinking here is deeply indebted to conversations with Mara Mills about the Womyn's Braille Press and the queer possibilities of insider descriptions.

[6] Although I could have used many terms here, such as Ivan Illich's "tools of conviviality" (1973), I have chosen "tools of relation" as a way of gesturing toward the extensive work in disability studies that highlights the relational dimension of disability; multiple intellectual genealogies are at play. But I also prefer "tools of relation" in order to stress relationality itself as a site of politics. Unlike "conviviality," "relation" can also be used to describe the often violent or coercive deployment of affective ties (e.g., Benjamin, 2018; Chen, Dulani, & Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2011). Although I focus primarily in this essay on the possibilities of crip kin for disability justice, I do not want to ignore the ways in which kinship imaginaries can also be sites of injustice.

[7] As Nirmala Erevelles' (2011) and Jasbir Puar's work (2017) suggests, however, crippling conditions can be a "fate worse than death" when rendered by the state as a means of ongoing incapacitation and debilitation.

[8] Bufano's orientations resonate with the work of dancer-choreographer Alice Sheppard (2019), who is similarly interested in refusing function in favor of aesthetic pleasure. I am grateful to Sheppard for sharing her work in the final stages of this writing, and I look forward to engaging it more directly in the future.

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