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Scraps, Scrappiness, Scrapper: Crafting/Coding as Disabled Feminist (World)Making

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Abstract

DIY maker culture is booming, and while mainstream spaces and practices often reproduce systemic injustices and inequalities, disabled queer feminist creators are crafting/coding/making differently, generating alternative futures and worlds that are accessible, ethical, and collaborative. This paper explores how disabled feminists engage with technology and design to create community and intervene in dominant narratives of able-bodiedness. My case studies move between digital and physical technologies, including crip/queer game design; the creation and use of masks (both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic); and modding, hacking, and other fandom practices that build access into media, perform collective care, and challenge ableist attitudes. Throughout this process of sewing together scraps, I hold onto a crip feminist understanding of materiality and the body: We prick ourselves with sewing needles or get migraines from staring at the screen; our hearts and bodies are heavy with the effort of surviving violence—digital and physical, slow and fast, personal and structural.

Keywords

craftivism, cyborg theory, digital media, disability studies, feminist theory, game studies, queer theory

Patchwork Feminism and DIY Activist Histories

The 2018 robots-versus-aliens blockbuster *Pacific Rim: Uprising* offered viewers militarized, unqueer, anti-feminist cyborgs: soldiers controlling mechas/ giant robots

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in a technicolor showcase of violence, athleticism, and hyper-able-bodiedness. However, a disability-informed reading of the film can identify a seed of resistance, creativity, and solidarity in the relationship between makers and their metal suits. At the beginning of the film, we meet one of the protagonists, a fifteen-year-old girl named Amara, who has built her own mecha out of scrap material. Later, Amara gets conscripted into the military and is given a giant robot body to operate in the war, but for a moment the film offers the possibility of an underclass or marginalized community creating and using technology in their everyday lives. Amara and her relationship to the mecha, which she names Scrapper, embody the disabled feminist ethos of crip making, modding, building, and hacking. I imagine Scrapper being used for transportation over ruined roads and toppled infrastructure, carrying medical supplies and food between communities. I'm particularly interested in the choice of material—repurposed sheet metal and older tech, scraps that would be thrown in a landfill—to create something new. The design itself, a very small mecha, makes the connection between human and machinic bodies feel intimate. I think about what we make out of scraps when that's all we have. I think about what it means to be called scrappy, to get in scraps on the playground. I think about projects and ideas being scrapped. The word *scrap* resonates with me, deep in my bones, in the twinge of pain that dances down my sciatica nerve. We have made so much out of scraps and scrappiness.

Amara isn't the only feminist on screen making, hacking, coding, and modding lives and environments: In the 2012 sci-fi action video game *Mass Effect 3*, EDI (the sentient AI that lives in the spaceship) hacks an out-of-commission robot body so she can take humanoid form. In the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, Pris takes control of an army of animatronic dolls in an attempt at self-defense and survival. The sentient AI voice assistant Samantha in the 2013 film *Her* evolves past her programming and escapes the prison of her code. Unlike the *Pacific Rim* franchise, in which pilots have to mirror and perform the athletic feats of their mechas, the character Wu Zetian in Xiran Jay Zhao's 2021 YA novel *Iron Widow* controls a mecha with her mind. Zetian is physically disabled due to foot binding, lives in constant pain, and needs a cane to walk. In the 2024 fantasy video game *Dragon Age: The Veilguard*, ADHD-coded elf Bellara is the tinker of the group, restoring old artifacts and experimenting with new and old technologies and magics. These cyborgs in popular culture resonate with how disabled feminists are creating and using technology in their everyday lives in ways that are crip, queer, and feminist, and anti-capitalist, envisioning, crafting, and troubleshooting a different society and future.

This paper explores how disabled feminists engage with technology and design to create access and community, to intervene in dominant narratives of able-bodiedness, and to practice collective care. My case studies move between digital and physical technologies, from crip/queer game design to the creation and use of masks (both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic) as forms of activism and mutual care, to modding, hacking, and other fandom practices that build access

into media and challenge mainstream representations of disability. Disabled feminist media makers and users are crafting collective care, activism, identity, community, advocacy, and justice through coding and cropping, hashtagging and liking. This paper itself is a form of DIY patchwork feminism: stitching pieces into a pattern or theme, a shape or story; into something, maybe, to keep us warm. Throughout this process of sewing together scraps, I want to hold onto a crip feminist understanding of materiality and the body: We prick ourselves with sewing needles; our hearts and bodies are heavy with the effort of surviving violence, digital and physical, slow and fast, personal and structural. Instead of scrubbing out the marks, we let them stain the fabric, the screen, and the page. We learn their shapes. They speak to us. Quilting, after all, can be dangerous.

DIY maker culture is booming. Access to tools and skill sharing have led to a rise in make-it-yourself or fix-it-yourself mindsets; "professional and amateur inventors, crafters, hackers, entrepreneurs, artists, scientists, engineers, designers, teachers, or activists…are currently not only thinking about how to transform their material environments, but also taking their own steps in that direction" (Nascimento and Pólvora 2018, 928). Public libraries offer repair workshops. Universities offer courses on critical design and making. DIY ideas are rampant on Pinterest and Instagram, and thousands of free tutorials are available on YouTube. In part coinciding with the late-stage hipsterization of wealthy communities, handmade, handcrafted, secondhand, and homegrown are now popular, desirable, and fashionable labels. (As someone who grew up only wearing secondhand or homemade clothing back in the '90s when it was decidedly not cool, it's been strange to see secondhand stores transformed into vintage boutiques. This, of course, is due in large part to gentrification and neoliberalism, but that's a bit of an aside.) The broader point is that maker culture has come to the masses and is proliferating in different ways—some, in line with the dominant culture, while other movements and bodies create in direct opposition to mainstream society, challenging capitalist, patriarchal, able-bodied, colonial, and white supremacist ideologies. Contemporary digital culture can also be understood as a form of crafting: We make, post, share, edit, mix, sample, comment, delete, and start over (Maguire 2018; Munster 2006; Whitlock and Poletti 2008).

There's a long history of feminists using crafting as forms of resistance, community building, and activism, from quilting circles to making banners for protests and marches to yarn bombing/graffiti knitting or hosting knit-ins (a craftivist twist on sit-ins). Samantha Close notes that "knitting was a means for political action, particularly during wartime, when…knitting circles were a venue for women's political speech" (2018, 870) and draws a connecting line between historical knitting circles to contemporary antinuclear knitting protests. Zine making—the creation of amateur, DIY magazines, often politicized and countercultural—have a history in the 1970s punk movement and the 1990s Riot

Grrrl movement, both of which revolved around broader DIY practices and countercultural politics (Gray et al. 2022).

DIY activist traditions can also be linked to the history of sonic weaving and intertextual play in Black culture in North America, from mixtery to hip-hop and rap. Shane White and Graham White explain that "mixtery" was a form of cultural resistance and resilience used by African American slaves, "in which the lyrics of spirituals were composed, a process that often seemed to whites to entail an almost haphazard piecing together of texts drawn from the whole bible" (1999, 41). Mixtery includes a "practice of weaving a variety of wordless intensifiers—shouts, cries, yells, groans—into a melody, translating, thereby, their strongly felt emotions into sound" (33). Importantly, mixtery was a form of "communal, interactive singing" (28), centering community, collectives, and relationships in this cultural practice of resistance against white supremacy, slavery, and oppression. Playing with pitch and scripture, reclaiming Bible verses and practicing intertextual, collaborative music production, mixtery is a form of sonic and textual activist crafting.

We can follow the politized tradition of mixtery into the development and evolution of hip-hop and rap. Andreana Clay notes that from the 1970s through the '90s "hip-hop's use of samples from previous rhythm and blues (R&B) songs as well as excepts from political leaders such as Stokeley Carmichael and Malcolm X also created a 'text of freedom' for Black youth caught up in the search for identity" (2003, 1348); again, we see the blending of texts and musical styles with something new to create a Black art form that is explicitly politicized. Furthermore, Nathan D. Abrams draws attention to rap's reliance on mass media and technology, writing that "throughout rap music, the DJ's skills are constantly emphasized and re-emphasized" (1995, 10). DJing is an art of mixing, blending, and remixing—and here we now return to the use of digital technology as a form of politicized crafting. Speaking of budget cuts in school music programs in America in the 1970s and '80s, Abrams adds that "obsolete vocational skills could be now utilized and applied to this new technological terrain as a forum for resistance and creativity" (11–12). Thus, we return to the realm of the digital and the long history of marginalized communities explicitly engaging with technologies to create politically salient art as forms of community building, activism, and resistance to the dominant culture and material oppression.

In our brief foray into the histories of resistant DIY practices, we must also look to the trans histories of making, revising, rewriting, and transforming gender and the body. Here I want to draw attention to Ashley King's concept of "handmade," which she uses to denote "the intimate, expressive, and individually creative ways we commit to the materials on hand to craft bodies that work for us" (2019, 136). Reflecting on the occasional use of asterisk next to "trans" (i.e., trans*), King writes that "one can read the asterisk as a kind of visual symbol for an ongoing

process" (142). Rather than framing gender as a static, singular experience, King gestures towards the fluidity and malleability of gender, the way that trans, nonbinary, and genderfluid folks experience and express gender as movement and transformation, as a process rather than a final product. To me, the asterisk also speaks to the way that we deliberately craft our gender presentations in different spaces and for different audiences, at times making ourselves more palatable to the cishetero society (as a practice of survival), while at other times breaking gender norms and challenging the gender binary through deliberate use of clothing, makeup, hair, hand gestures, voice, and bodily movement.

Speaking of her relationship with her dog, Zoey, King writes "that being transgender has revealed so much to me about how our flesh is shaped into workable forms and how thoroughly enmeshed we are in relation to others: humans, animals, and objects" (142). This reflection resonates with the intimate and complex relationships disabled folks have with other nonhuman animals, from guide dogs to support animals, and the queer millennial family of fur babies (my partner and I, who are child-free, understand our cats as our children and full members of our family, for example). Disabled feminists—and many of us are also trans—are "handmade," construing ourselves through our relationships with medication, access aids, technologies, and support animals (human and nonhuman).

While contemporary mainstream maker culture in contemporary society runs along the lines of pre-existing power dynamics, queer feminist communities are making differently, following the examples set out by our queer and trans elders, shaped and inspired by the activists and makers that came before us. Alexandra Juhasz describes feminist queer media praxis and making as an orientation, intention, and process: "a doing and thinking, together, in the name of world-changing" (2014, 7). These "risky acts" generate "fleeting instants of potential—'revolutionary-instants'" (8). I want to hold onto the word "risk" here—risking our hearts and minds, our bodies and safety, taking risks through intimacy and vulnerability. When we enter any public sphere, when we make, share, like, or gather, we are at risk, and that risk falls differently on different bodyminds and social positionalities. As disabled makers, we risk encountering social and physical barriers to participation, and sometimes we risk our own health. These risks are compounded by the facets of our identities that are targeted by violent systems of power and violence; how racism, transphobia, and poverty interact with disability, exacerbating harm. As someone who lives with chronic pain, I often have to guess what my body can or cannot do, and how much pain each activity will cost. This is also true of digital labor: my hands curved around the screen or my shoulders hunched over the keyboard. Our bodies have limits, and these limits are not static or easily definable—but we know them when we encounter them. And too often we are asked to work beyond our limits, until we hurt or break—in order to pay rent, to access health insurance, or to maintain a personal relationship.

Collaboration and nonhierarchical relationship building are frequently cited as central to feminist maker culture (Bratich and Brush 2011; Gruwell 2022; Savic and Wuschitz 2018). Feminist media makers and collectives share knowledge, skills, tools, and resources. We teach each other to code, to hack a circuit board, to use the sewing machine or 3D printer at the library. We make objects and spaces in ways that are queer and feminist. In an interview for an open-source educational resource on disability and digital media, Dr. Jenelle Rouse (2022), a Black Deaf performance artist, explains that "'Maker' on its own really doesn't have a meaning, but if you break the word down, to make is to make something…This isn't always done alone but in partnership with others who have the same passion and goals and are inspired by the same work that I am." In the same project, D. Squinkifer (Squinky) (2022), a new media artist and game designer, tells us that "I am excited to learn more about the intersections between our communities and how we can collaborate and create liberation *for all of us*" (my emphasis). These makers draw attention to the communal aspect of both the creative process and the activist process, the need to work together in order to build a liberatory, accessible future for all of us—not just some of us.

Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch insist that "disabled people are experts and designers of everyday life…We also harness technoscience for political action, refusing to comply with demands to cure, fix, or eliminate disability" (2019, 4) and that we engage in "criptastic hacking" (Yergeau in Hamraie and Fritsch 4). We bring our meds, collapsible canes, and ramps with us. We use wooden spoons to turn on our computers and guide dogs to bring us our smartphones. I want to thread together the history of crip making with feminist maker traditions, knitting and crocheting, cutting and pasting, zine making, playing with linen or Twitter threads. Sewing protest flags, skirts, and wounds. The squares of my Instagram page look like a patchwork quilt. Sara Ahmed writes that "feminism is DIY: a form of self-assembly" (2017, 27). So is crip life and disabled making. DIY digital culture has also led to a rise in disabled feminist making: bloggers, vloggers, YouTubers, TikTokers, and podcasters are creating crip content for a crip audience (Ellcessor and Kirkpatrick 2017; Jerreat-Poole 2021).

Coding, Playtesting, Troubleshooting: Crip Game Design

Game design can be a form of queer feminist maker praxis. Mary Flanagan identifies games as potential forms of "activist art," writing that "creative experiments with games…provide a provocative look at how artists can challenge ideas, beliefs, and social expectations and subsequently transform them in their work" (2009, 3). Bo Ruberg identifies a contemporary movement in indie game development that they term "the queer games avant-garde" (2020, 1). Ruberg tells us that "this renaissance is in large part driven by radical, experimental, vibrant, and deeply queer work from a wide-reaching and constantly evolving network of LGBTQ game makers" (1). In their book, they describe many of these games as "scrappy and zine-like" (1) (recall how this article began, with Scrapper

and scraps), and while incredibly diverse, each is committed to queerness and to challenging the cisheteronormativity of mainstream gaming culture—embodying activist art and creative experimentation.

Digital making is an important part of activism, community building, care, and revolution. In a conversation about feminist hacktivism, micha cárdenas explains "the importance of intervening at the level of infrastructure" (quoted in Tanczer 2015, 7). Building a game engine, system, community, or story is a technical, narrative, and social intervention into able-bodied cisgender technology and gaming culture. With increased access to game development programs—from the open-source program Twine to low-cost options such as DragonRuby Game Toolkit and RPG Maker—alongside the rise of feminist and queer game jams and communities, more feminist/queer/crip/mad media makers are turning to games to create meaningful, critical experiences for players, and to communicate and express their own experiences, feelings, needs, politics, and sociocultural critiques.

While Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont remind us that coding was initially understood as a feminine crafting practice, like cooking or sewing (2018, xi), computer science and technology have become firmly situated in the realm of masculinity, while Silicon Valley culture continues to be dominated by white, able-bodied, cisheteronormative men. Game development emerges within this broader culture of inequality, with many barriers for marginalized game makers. Indeed, in the past few years, numerous games studios have been exposed for their toxic, sexist environments that harass and drive women, feminine, trans, and people of color out of the industry. However, game makers from the margin have continued to design, prototype, playtest, and publish games, often within a community of feminist, anti-racist, and queer media makers. For example, the Toronto-based group Dames Making Games (n.d.) opened in 2012 as a site to support queer and gender marginalized game makers. Founded in 2009, the Hand Eye Society (HES, n.d.) also encourages game design, with an emphasis on teaching children. HES targets underserved neighborhoods in Toronto, like Jane and Finch, a low-income area with predominantly POC and migrant residents. In 2016 HES hosted "Extraordinary Mind Games" for mad/mentally-ill-identified makers. Communities form as marginalized media makers support each other, teach each other, and challenge mainstream understandings of video gaming and maker culture.

What makes game design "crip"? Sometimes content, in other cases structure and form. Importantly, crip game design interrupts mainstream ableist/sanist discourse and design. Scholar and game designer Kara Stone (2018) writes that "the themes embedded in [*The Ritual of the Moon*] were experienced during production, as well: the effects of psycho-social disability (commonly labelled mental illness) on labor and art practice, queer discovery and narratives, and working through and with 'negative' feelings." Stone uses critical game design to

explore disability, mental illness, queerness, and affect. Kaitlin Tremblay (n.d.) uses the horror genre to explore the experience of living with mental illness and identifies her work as a "mostly true memoir." Al Donato (n.d.) uses game design to teach players how to correctly and safely *Administer Naloxone*. Neurodivergent, mentally ill, mad, chronically ill, and disabled game makers are coding their crip knowledge into playable experiences.

Disability representation in mainstream media tends to reproduce harmful stereotypes about mad people as violent and disabled people as tragic, passive, lacking in agency, and/or better off dead (Anderson 2020; Doell 2018). This is particularly true of the horror genre, which frequently features an asylum setting filled with crazy and murderous patients that the player must kill (Jerreat-Poole 2018; Rodéhn 2022; Stang 2018). Disabled feminist makers interrupt these stereotypes by using games as platforms for knowledge dissemination, encouraging empathy, identification, or understanding, and by challenging ideas of what a game is or should be. Many of these games are targeted at other disabled players, rather than an able-bodied audience. The game makers I discuss below play with form and content in ways that are queer, crip, mad, trans, and feminist. They challenge gaming conventions and genre conventions. They draw attention to the violence of norms and the ideologies of mainstream playculture. They offer moments of reflection, learning, understanding, and rest.

Meaningful choice or agency has long been considered a cornerstone of narrative design (Murray 1997; Tekinbaş and Zimmerman 2003). However, crip game makers will often limit or get rid of choice. Consider Zoë Quinn's decision to cross out some of the choices in her choose-your-own adventure game *Depression Quest* in order to approximate the experience of living with depression; Will O'Neill takes a similar approach in *Actual Sunlight*, which offers a linear narrative of mental illness and suicidality. Cultural slogans about "reaching out" pale in comparison to the embodied experience of struggling with mental illness. These games remind us that illness is typically understood as a singular, isolated, individual experience—and that under the colonial capitalist cisheteropatriarchy, it's the responsibility of the individual to self-care, self-soothe, find help, get treatment, get better, get happy, and get back to work. In reality, living with mental illness is much more complex and challenging than simply choosing to get better, and care and support should be a community—if not a societally—based system of support and access.

Game design can also crip/queer time and space. I'll draw on two examples here: *Queers in Love at the End of the World* by Anna Anthropy and *Rest Rest Convalesce!* by Squinky, Jess Marcotte, and Kalervo A. Sinervo. Game scholars have identified the queering of time in *Queers in Love* (Chang 2020; Lo 2017), a ten-second game that can be repeated indefinitely. Players get to choose how to spend their last ten seconds as a clock counts down on screen: kissing, hugging, holding, and/or

confessing their love for their partner. The world ends. Reset. Play again. The game interrupts a linear narrative structure, subverts a win/lose mentality and binary, and "upends gamic fantasies of mastery over time, narrative, fun, and choice" (Chang 2020). Revisiting this game as a crip scholar during a global pandemic, the game collects other meanings and associations, including a specific rather than vague/generic apocalypse. The cycle of ten-second periods of intensity resonates with cycles of illness and health in the experience of chronic illness and living through and with multiple health crises. I also identify a thread between the end of the world and those of us who will live shorter lives or whose survival is uncertain and unstable. Disabled communities are always living at the end of a world.

Turning to *Rest Rest Convalesce!*, we can see how crip game design can invite players to inhabit the time and space of post-surgery recovery. The player is introduced to a small room: a person is lying on a sofa, a cat perched on their stomach. The room also contains a coffee table, a television, a window, and a houseplant. There are a few objects on the table, including a glass of water and a bottle of medication. Gameplay is simple: You click on different objects and read the text that appears (accompanied by sound effects). For example, clicking on the glass of water results in the message "It's very far to reach." The second time you click, a different message appears. A third click, and the screen shakes violently, a warning siren rings out, and the text reads, in all caps "OW OW OW WHY DID I DO THAT OW." The game does not end and there are no win or lose conditions. Instead, the player inhabits this space indefinitely, becoming intimately acquainted with the domestic space of rest and recovery. The room is small, domestic, intimate, a place of rest and recovery—it can simultaneously feel safe and threatening. The game embodies the labor of rest and recovery, including pain and boredom. Unlike *Queers in Love*, there is no ending—rather than compressed into a few seconds, time here stretches out, long and slow and endless. While the game does not specify what kind of surgery the character has experienced, the possibility of gender-affirming surgery casts a trans lens over the scene, making the game queer, trans, and crip. Certainly, trans time overlaps with crip time in our shared experience of pathologization (being out of time or out of rhythm with the cis able-bodied norm). The constant sound of a clock ticking punctuates this experience, reminding the player of the seemingly endless time of recovery, which can be understood as crip and trans time.

Sewing, Cutting, Knotting: Masks as Queer/Crip Technology

In 2020 the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that masking was the best way to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus that had already killed thousands and disabled others through what became commonly termed "long COVID." Crafters everywhere broke out our sewing machines,

bobbins, threads, needles, and fabric scissors. We made masks for our friends and neighbors. We researched different patterns and adjustable straps, made three-layer masks or masks with pockets for replaceable filters. My mother sewed my first mask on her sewing machine. I prefer to sew by hand and taught my partner how to thread the needle and tie a knot as we stitched the elastics to fit around our ears. My mother taught me to sew when I was young, and I've used that knowledge to sew a "Gender? Yes/No" patch onto my jacket, to darn items of clothes when they get old and torn, and to adjust my first nonbinary outfits so the fit was right (so many vests!). She helped me with the vests, just like she helped me with my cosplay outfits, and when she was pinning the sides, I felt that there was an unspoken acceptance and understanding passing between us, that she was sewing her love and support for my new pronouns into my clothing just as she had sewn her love and support into dresses when I was mistakenly raised as a little girl.

I understand masks as a crip and queer technology that underscore the inventiveness and skill of disabled feminists as we struggle to survive in a dystopia of ableism and police violence (which disproportionately impacts Black folks and people with mental illnesses or addictions), forest fires and pollution, and viruses allowed to rampage unchecked across the globe. Needles, thimbles, and sewing machines are technologies. Modern sewing machines are even digital technologies, although my mother uses an older analog model. One of the goals of this article is to insist on the relationship between feminized, physical, domestic crafting and computation. We struggle to thread the needle and to read the tiny, futuristic font on the screen. We suffer carpal tunnel syndrome from keeping our hands curled into claws; we get headaches from staring at the screen or threading the needle. Understanding digital media as a form of crafting opens up possibilities for reclaiming and reframing digital labor as forms of feminist and queer making and activism.

Like me, Lai-Tze Fan describes her own crafting through her relationship to her mother. In her critical paper on research-creation as pedagogy, Fan describes a 2020 course project in which she invited students to make masks for frontline workers and reflect on the relationship between personal protective equipment and maker culture (2018, 43). Fan reminds us that "creators in the tech industry and craft cultures have more in common than many other fields of work" and that "they make through exploration" (42), identifying the creativity and critical thinking embedded in crafting/tech cultures. "The slow work of thinking about accessibility, resources, and sustainability" was gleaned from "the slow work, the slow contemplation of making and of mapping the cultural contexts and ecologies of critical thoughts" (44). Fan concludes, "I am glad that I scrapped their research essay. I've never been offered projects of which I've felt more proud" (45). The word "scrapped" reappears here, reminding us what we make from scraps, and what we can do and make when we scrap the cultural scripts laid out for us. Fan's

project also invites us to mobilize traditionally feminized labor practices as forms of collective care and community survival.

While we can identify traditions of feminist crafting in pandemic mask making, disabled communities have been using, making, and sharing masks and masking knowledge long before a national health agency discovered them. It's also worth noting the cultural salience of masking—while many North Americans were confused, frustrated, and unhappy with masking, several East Asian countries already had a cultural practice of masking when sick. I'd been in Japan a couple of months before COVID was announced to the world, and it was common to see commuters wearing surgical masks. Masks serve many purposes for disabled, immunocompromised, and sick people: Masks have been used to manage allergies, asthma triggered by allergies, and to survive in cities with poor air quality. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha talks about the 2017 wildfires in the Pacific Northwest that filled the skies with smoke, and how tapping into disabled community knowledge of masking—both the knowledge of masking as a survival, access, and care aid, and where to get one—was a way of surviving and navigating the climate change-fueled health disaster (2018, 134). Masks have been used to avoid infecting immunocompromised or elderly people with colds, flus, and other viruses that can be lethal in the wrong immune system. Disabled communities have a deep and long history of masking knowledge and practice that predates the CDC's announcement. Masking also illustrates the necessity of ASL interpretation and the limits, barriers, and violence that accompany the assumption that hard-of-hearing and Deaf persons should or will lip-read.

Masks can also be understood as a queer technology. CDC regulations that run counter to medical knowledge, and the stigmatizing of COVID, have parallels to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Zwalf and Sperring 2021). Since close contact increased risk of transmission, conversations about how to have casual sex during the pandemic rose in 2020. Tips included wearing masks, having sex in positions that avoid face-to-face encounters (doggy style, for example), and British Columbia's Centre for Disease Control famously advocated for the use of glory holes. While masks are not condoms and COVID is not HIV, there are resonances between them—shared moments, histories, practices, and affects that circle the queer body and the potentially contagious body.

I also want to claim masks as an example of what Jenny Sundén (2015) terms "technologies of (trans-) gender." As a nonbinary person who is frequently misgendered, masking has become a way of blurring the gender binary, and only when masked have I been read as masc, fem, and nonbinary. It casts doubt, makes it difficult to read and interpret the arch of my cheekbone or the shape of my face. Is my chin fem or masc? Do I have facial hair? The binary gender checklist that has become ingrained in how we read bodies is disrupted by the mask. The rise of masks as an accessory or fashion item further heightens its role as a part of

gender and identity performance—based on the pattern, I can signal that I'm a cat person, or that I'm trans, or what my pronouns are. The use of masks as gender tech resonates with the trans cyborgs and robots on-screen—from the robot Bubs in *Space Sweepers*, who saves up money for a skin graft (understood as a gender-affirmation procedure) to Ada in *Ex Machina* using wigs, makeup, and clothing as forms of gender signification.

In 2025 masks have become crip/queer symbols: Those of us who continue to wear masks in public are signaling our commitment to access, containment, and collective care. This is read and understood by the broader community, which explains why some masked people have been met with anger, criticism, resentment, and even violence—a knee-jerk defensive reaction by those who have chosen to unmask. I always feel in solidarity with other masked people, and this in turn helps with my anxiety when going out in public—I expect masked people to be more respectful of personal space, more likely to use hand sanitizer, more likely to take antigen tests, and more likely to stay home if they have symptoms.

Hacking, Modding, Rewriting: Caring Fans and Players

Recently, I complained to a close friend that surgical masks were too big for my face. She told me that she knots the elastic around her ears or attaches them to her ponytail to make the mask fit more securely. My mother routinely refits, tightens, or replaces elastics or ties on store-bought masks. Not everything we use is made from scratch, but revising, altering, tailoring, modding, and hacking the original design are forms of creative, critical making that can be leveraged in the spirit of queer feminism and a crip politics of care. Pivoting back from crafting to coding (but holding onto the histories, practices, and politics of crafting care), this section identifies the labor, skills, and knowledge of queer/crip fans and players who rewrite pop culture and media cultures. Flanagan identifies three tactics of critical play: "unplaying, re-dressing or reskinning, and rewriting" (2009, 33). While Flanagan's examples revolve around doll play, these tactics resonate with how marginalized players reclaim space, play, and games, and/or break, critique, challenge, interrupt, or destroy elements of mainstream gaming and visual media culture. Modders and fan communities have long been engaging in these tactics as they navigate able-bodied patriarchal gaming, from building access into games or gaming technologies to creating positive representation by telling their own stories through fan fiction. These players and fans are also makers, creators, and crafters.

Flanagan's concept of "unplaying" suggests playing wrongly, badly, in a way unintended by the game designer. When I played Davey Wreden's 2015 artsy, indie game *The Beginner's Guide,* in the level "Whisper" I was handed a gun and thrown into what looked like a traditional first-person shooter map (although the game did not require me to use the gun). Rather than progress through the level, I lingered,

using the gun to create a heart on the wall in bullet holes (Jerreat-Poole 2016). When I played Valve's 2020 sci-fi action-adventure virtual reality game *Half-Life Alyx*, I picked up a shovel and used it as a performative cane to bring my out-of-game identity as someone with a mobility impairment into the game world and narrative (Jerreat-Poole 2022). In the 2020 cozy management sim game *Spiritfarer*, created by Thunder Lotus Games, you play a character who ferries souls to the otherworld while growing crops, cooking, and fishing. At one point in the game, I was encouraged to deliver a character with dementia/Alzheimer's to the gates of death—and it was heavily implied that her disability warranted the final death. I rebelled—I continued to walk Alice to the prow of the ship and back to her quarters, to talk to her, and to cook her favorite meals (and while the game pushes a "disabled people are better off dead" message here, the system of keeping your guests happy through cooking, hugs, and conversation meant that Alice remained happy). Consequently, I did not fully progress through the game or complete the narrative, but that didn't matter to me. I wanted to care for my aging passengers. I didn't think Alice was better off dead. This kind of play, lingering in the middle of a game rather than moving to the next step, performing the same tasks again and again, is enabled by the game but not encouraged. Through this process, we tell other stories, stories that are made possible by the choices embedded in the game, but not necessarily intended by the game designer—stories that perhaps run counter to the game narrative or genre. In my refusal to play *Spiritfarer* as linear and goal-oriented, and emphasizing caregiving, cooking, and comfort, I return digital gaming back to the field of domestic crafting.

Modding can also be understood as a practice of unplaying or reskinning, changing the visual appearance of the game—and thus the symbolism and representation of the visual medium—altering the code and the gameplay/ludic elements, or hacking/redesigning the physical device. For example, YouTuber EnglishSimmer (2020) discusses a range of mods for *The Sims 4* that add disability representation to the game, including blindness, cochlear implants, hearing aids, prosthetic limbs, and nasal oxygen tubes. Moving to access, several players have created mods for Stardew Valley that alter the color palette of the game for people who experience eye strain, including a colorblind mod (Chan 2022). Exploring access in virtual reality, Rebeccah Redden (2018) notes that some players generate "3D printed lens holders for prescription lenses" and that "people have also built customized foot pedals, modded arcade joysticks, used voice recognition software, and even set up tumble mats to prevent falls." We innovate. We make do. We take a harmful and/or inaccessible technology or environment or practice and we mod it. We can link the practice of modding games to the way we mod spaces and society more broadly—from adjusting masks to better fit out faces, to wrangling makeshift barriers to hinder the flow of airborne viruses, to dismantling physical and attitudinal barriers in our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

"Rewriting" is another practice of creative hacking, a way of imagining differently, in ways that are crip/queer. Fans flock to fan fiction sites, forums, and blogs to create their/our own version of pop culture narratives, cripping mainstream media and sharing it with a found (or perhaps handmade, to return to King's concept of trans identity formation) family and community. This topic was explored in-depth in a 2019 special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* titled "Disability and/in/through Fanfiction." Fandom theorist Dean Leetal (2019) explores the "activism of care, disability, and fan fiction" in online spaces, noting how fans of *Supernatural* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe craft stories for each other as an ethic of care. In my own play-as-work, I've seen similar forms of intervention and disruption. For example, the character Aidan in the sci-fi video game series *Mass Effect* experiences migraines, which are underexplored in the games. However, there is an archive of migraine fan fiction where fans explore his experience as someone who lives with pain and needs rest and care (Jerreat-Poole 2020). Similarly, fans of Blizzard's multiplayer first-person shooter series *Overwatch* have been creating stories to delve deeper into the identity and experiences of Symmetra, a character who is coded as autistic (Cullen et al. 2018). These writers are engaging in what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) terms "reparative reading" by doing the creative and critical work of recovering and centering disability. Often these stories are framed through rest and care (rather than the dominant overcoming or super-crip narratives told by able-bodied society) and are typically created by and for disabled people.

Real-world practices of creating access and practicing care also appear in these fan communities—from fan fiction narratives about BioWare's fantasy video game series *Dragon Age* characters quarantining together and masking during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to mods for *The Sims 4* that add designs for face masks. We flow between digital and physical, coding and sewing, imagining, writing, and building. Fan communities form around these creations and the process of creating—members like, comment, and respond to posted stories, and friendships often develop through sites such as Archive of Our Own, Tumblr, Wattpad, and DeviantArt. What we see emerging here is a maker community doing the critical labor of rewriting and reskinning games and media through the lens of disability justice.

Making Crip Futures: Accessible Design

Crip making is attentive to access as a dynamic, complex, and multimodal practice and process. Accessible design is central to creating and sustaining crip/queer/feminist communities, activism, and futures. Accessible design in queer feminist making and communities includes the physical and/or virtual meeting and maker space, the technology we use, and the media we create and share. Ramps, non-gendered and accessible bathrooms, lights that don't flicker or are too bright (potentially harming people with photosensitivities, concussions, and seizure disorders), fragrance-free spaces, table and seating options and configurations for a range of body size, shape,

and abilities, closed captions, image descriptions, no strobing, and trigger warnings. This list is not exhaustive, but a starting point for thinking about how to create access in our feminist making spaces and practices.

Accessible design is a series of "frictional practices" (Hamraie and Fritsch 2019, 3): there is no smooth and easy one-size-fits-all, and universal design is and will always be an unattainable (but still worth aiming for) goal. Accessible design is aware of and challenges the "normate template" (Hamraie 2017, 19), that mysterious, imagined "normal" body that mainstream society is crafted for. It's a process, like altering a dress to a new style or size every few years. Ultimately, we want to create technologies and media with and for a range of disabled, mad, sick, and neurodivergent bodies, recognizing we all have different—and at times conflicting—needs. We want to imagine, design, prototype, and playtest communities and spaces (physical, virtual, and hybrid) that embody "access intimacy," where we collectively "hold the weight, emotion, logistics, isolation, trauma, fear, anxiety and pain of access" (Mingus 2011). This process is messy, difficult, intimate, vulnerable, emotional, and at times exhausting—but always necessary.

We also need to broaden our understanding of access and recognize the many barriers to participation that exist across geographies and social positions. Consider, for example, the necessity of free public library resources and services—including 3D printers, Wi-Fi, computers, and computer programs. Over the past ten years, my university has stripped the computer lab for our digital arts program from thirty working PCs to five, and we are about to lose those remaining PCs and the lab space itself. If we are not prepared to offer the hardware, software, and training to our communities, students, families, and fellow activists, then we are not the future of ethical feminist technology. We also need to understand access as access to the means of survival: to shelter, food, water, and healthcare. Chiara Francesca (2022), a disabled queer artist and writer, reminds us that, "the biggest barrier has been accessing healthcare, accessing housing, accessing decent food… If those experiences take up most of my day I'm not left with much energy, time, creative juice, will power to do anything else." This is where we need to return to Squinky's insistence that our critical work is to piece together a home for *all of us,* dismantling not only the cisheteropatriarchy in favor of a queer future, but all structures of violence and oppression, from systemic racism to capitalism. We must recognize that ableism is deeply intertwined with racism and colonialism, and that abolition requires the dismantling of both prisons and psychiatric wards/institutions. Rather than fighting over the scraps left for us, we could be building something better together—as many collectives, artists, communities, and activists are doing.

I like to think that after the events of *Pacific Rim: Uprising*, Amara and Scrapper go back to their community and rebuild. I think about the affect and intimacy between Hiro and Baymax, a care robot crafted by Hiro's older brother, in *Big Hero 6*. I think about the relationship between Ryder and AI in BioWare's 2017 sci-fi

game *Mass Effect Andromeda*, and how the AI can alter their biochemistry in ways that are both helpful and harmful. I am building an archive of pop culture and real-world crip feminist cyborgs who tinker with tech, who map out ethical feminist possibilities for tech cultures and caring futures. Sewing and soldering, hacking and drafting, sharing TikTok videos and Threads, we make objects and stories and experiences and communities, we make change and we make do. In the *Dragon Age* franchise, "the Maker" is the in-world version of a Christian God, and it's common to hear characters say "Thank the Maker." I think about that, when I'm lying in bed, fatigued and in pain, watching crip/queer YouTube videos or playing video games. I think about how much I want to thank the lowercase makers.

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