Crip Pandemic Archiving and/as Hope

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Abstract: My contribution, "Crip Pandemic Archiving and/as Hope" develops three core principles of what I describe as a "crip pandemic archiving praxis": (1) an **institutionally parasitic** relation to academia, (2) a **non-re-habilitative** editorial praxis, and (3) the creation of archives as a **persistently kairotic** space in relation to visitors/users. These principles emerge from reflection on experiences and lessons learned co-curating "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry." I argue for crip pandemic archiving praxis as a critically hopeful feminist methodology, and my goal is for the principles to serve as a portable framework for community members, scholars, instructors, and students to use and iterate in our collective work thinking beyond hegemonic archives and towards restorative, visionary cultural formations.

ORIGIN STORY[1]

It began with a question to editors of the open-access peer-reviewed scholarly journal of the Cultural Studies Association, Lateral, in the thick of early pandemia 2020-2021:

> Is there a space or precedent on the site for us to solicit and curate some sort of online exhibit or collection of evidence of crip life, vibrancy, creativity, survival, grief, etc.? Perhaps, something that would ultimately look like a mosaic or a tapestry of thumbnails? Not scholarly articles, but still engaged in a process of peer review?

> [The answer was a generous and excited "Yes"]

My co-editor Alyson Patsavas and I had just finished co-editing a scholarly section of essays with *Lateral* entitled "Cripistemologies of Crisis: Emergent Knowledges for the Present," where "cripistemologies" describes situated knowledge of disabled and multiply marginalized communities. Our collection articulated a critique of crisis rhetorics circulating in the first Trumpian moment in 2017. We argued that emergency and crisis rhetorics can (and do) lead to the erasure and devaluation of experiential knowledg-

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es and survival tactics held by disabled, racialized and lower-income communities that routinely weather ongoing crises. We highlighted the danger in overlooking this cache of cultural knowledge, both depriving the broader public of vital information, and treating already vulnerable groups as disposable at a time when they most need our care and attention.

Enter the pandemic, and we were faced with a fever pitch of crisis, and with the temporary wider awareness of pervasive sickness and proliferating pressing threats to life and livelihood. In this context, Aly and I became convinced that we needed something more concrete, representative, and accessible to really make what we had termed "cripistemologies of crisis" something material and multiply particular. Inspired by Mia Mingus's injunction to "leave evidence" in the face of cultural invisibility and invalidation,[2] we desired to create a gathering place for the work that those in the disability community were engaged in for mutual aid, coping, visibility, processing, and expression. We wanted to create a persistent and accessible repository of works and documentation. And so, "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry" began to take shape. This project, which felt like the hopeful thing we could do in dark times, redefined archiving as a minoritarian and feminist endeavor: We knew that this thing we were creating would need to be accessible and flexible, that it would muddy disciplinary and institutional boundaries, and that it would definitely be non-traditional with regard to the type of content that is typically put out by a peer-reviewed scholarly journal. With Lateral as a welcoming space and site that is all-online and open access, our experimental archival venture would have a persistent and accessible digital presence that could function as more than a publication or an archive. These affordances of the digital medium are particularly meaningful in the context of ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that disproportionately affect disabled populations, present and future.

In the context of this cluster conversation, *(Re)Writing our Histories, (Re)Building Feminist Worlds: Working Toward Hope in the Archives*, I attend to the ways that our emergent, crip, and pandemic-informed archiving praxis was both hopeful and feminist through its infrastructural commitment to access: We centered access at every step and layer of our convening, curating, access-testing, and publication of the collection. To put it more simply, we did our best to ensure that every step and aspect of the project accounted for access needs. This is a caring way to do archiving, and it is one that foregrounds the fulcrum of *access work as care work*, and thus vitally both feminist and crip — and as a fundamentally hopeful, world-making praxis.[3]

ACCESS WORK, EVIDENCE, AND CRIP HOPE IN THE ARCHIVES

Access work and caregiving are crucial to daily life and also function as sites of cultural evidence and visibility for daily lived experiences of disability. In our introduction to the second installment of "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry," we (Aly Patsavas and I) write:

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2   See Mia Mingus' blog, *Leaving Evidence*: https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com.

3   I am indebted to conversations with T.L. Cowan, Jina B. Kim, and Libbie Rifkin, which inform the way in which I continue to think about care in the archives, affective infrastructures, and care work as worldmaking.

Our work with "Crip Pandemic Life" has made apparent to us that there can be **a transformative mutuality of evidence and access in the moment and process of archiving**; particularly when creating an archive centered on the values of evidence and access. As Aimi Hamraie describes it [in our introductory roundtable], **access work is "culturally productive and transformative. And it leaves evidence. For example, when we transcribe something, that leaves evidence: we can archive that.**" (Danylevich and Patsavas, "With Grief and Joy," emphasis added)

To restate, briefly: access work is synergistic with evidence; it always leaves a mark; it is never not "culturally productive and transformative." The way in which Hamraie puts the pieces of access and evidence together really helps to shed light on the way in which access work is always-already an archival act as both process and structure. Putting it this way also powerfully valorizes care work and gendered labor, not typically considered worthy of an archive.

In hopeless times, it is particularly grounding and comforting to hold on to evidence of access work; of crip visibility and community in action. In other words, hope in hopeless times can take the shape of an archive of the evidence of our care for one another. Like giving ourselves and each other an object or a structure by which to ground ourselves in times of grief and despair. It has to do with persistence, with the concrete, the holdable, the visitable, the usable, and with the citable. As I reflect on this work, I get misty and filled with gratitude— it was a labor of love and a tangible daily source of hope and community in a tumultuous time.[4]

For a provocation, I turn briefly to queer theorists Lisa Duggan and Jose Muñoz in elaborating a praxis of hope in hopeless times: In "Hope and hopelessness: a dialogue," Duggan and Muñoz articulate a politicized praxis of hope that is very much rooted in negative, critical feelings, operating *in conjunction with* hopelessness, as indicated by the "and" in the title of the piece. Duggan offers that "Hope is the energy we use to smash, not depression (grief, sadness, despair, hostility, anger, and bitterness) but complacency in all its protean disguises" (281). In their particular, cranky-queer articulation of Hope, there is a drive towards liberation rooted in dissatisfaction, grief, rage, crankiness. It is, indeed, about desire and about transformation; a potential for world-making that relies upon coming together over negative feelings. To quote Muñoz, what they are articulating is a "certain practice of hope that helps escape from a script in which human existence is reduced" (278).

Pause: If a politicized praxis of hope is about an escape from a certain reductive script of existence, what role can archiving play here, you might ask? This question is salient because archives can, indeed, be reductive and de-politicizing: Roderick Ferguson describes as an "affirmative action of power," whereby the "archival economy" of the academy enfolds minority difference only to constrain and configure it to its regulatory and hegemonic ends (*The Reorder of Things* 12). However in

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4   See Mia Mingus' "'Disability Justice' is Simply Another Term for Love," *Leaving Evidence*, 3 November 2018, https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love/. Accessed 7 March 2025.

his analysis of the fight for Black studies in the late 1960s, Ferguson—following June Jordan's lead in referencing a critical host-parasite relationship for Black studies within the institution—[5]offers the proposition that "Black studies [like a parasite] would exploit the academy for sustenance, residency, and dispersal, imagining ways to be more in the academy than of it" (*The Reorder of Things* 108).

Just as the disability rights and justice movements are indebted to the civil rights movement, so a crip archival praxis is shaped by the critical parasitic relation advanced here by Jordan and Ferguson. Thus, I offer that a crip archival praxis is culturally transformative, affording us a proliferative escape from a reductive existential-archival script; offering alternative ways, times, and spaces to be/move.[6] This is meant to be resonant for marginalized groups threatened by invisibility and erasure, and for whom archives have not often been inclusive: A politicized praxis of hope in *but not of* oppressive times and spaces.

PRINCIPLES

Shaped by a core infrastructural value of access, I offer the following principles of crip pandemic archival praxis to in/form how we might go about conceiving, gathering, and caring towards a hopeful archive:

1. create a **space/process** that is **Institutionally Parasitic**

2. follow a **Non-Rehabilitative** approach to soliciting, curating, and presenting content

3. create a **Persistently Kairotic** space of engagement for the **community**

Briefly illustrated, with examples from our project:

Space/Process: Institutionally Parasitic

This is a way to survive and to be "in but not of" the scholarly worlds of cultural studies, historiography, and archiving.[7] For us, this was a mode of "hacking" access — or, creatively finagling ways to make our archiving project accessible to ourselves, our contributors, and our audience. First, for ourselves: we brought interdependency through co-authorship into a space that fetishizes the single author: I, an adjunct,

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5   Ferguson riffs off of the notion of parasitic relationality here based on a stunning line from June Jordan's 1969 essay on the fight for Black studies, articulating a critical "[…] we acknowledge the difference between reality and criticism as the difference between Host and Parasite." ("Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person," in *Moving towards Home: Political Essays.* Virago, 1989. [26], qtd. in *The Reorder of Things* 108.)

6   Here, I am referencing Roderick Ferguson's chapter in *Aberrations in Black:* "Something Else to Be: *Sula*, T*he Moynihan Report*, and the negotiations of Black Lesbian Feminism" and Margaret Price's chapter in *Mad at School*: "Ways to Move: Presence, Participation, and Resistance in Kairotic Space" (*Aberrations in Black* 110-137, *Mad at School* 58-102).

7   This specific phrase is a reference and a nod to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, on the "the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university," as elaborated in their open-access, co-authored book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (26).

partnered with a tenure-track faculty member (Aly) for the project, and subsequently we partnered with the director of the Disability Cultural Center (Margaret Fink) at Aly's institution, the University of Illinois, Chicago.

As a collective, our institutional location and partnership allowed us to access institution-specific research funds and grants so that we could pay a research assistant, access consultants, ASL interpreters, CART captioners, where such funds are not (yet) typically factored in. We were also able to fund an invited roundtable of some of the scholars-authors whose work inspired our project. For this roundtable, as well as for my editorial labor, we made a point of remunerating adjunct and contingent faculty contributors equitably — that is to say, at a higher rate than those with job security — for their intellectual and editorial contributions. This was a form of "hacking" the disbursal of funds to which we had recourse, prioritizing access and equity in a labor economy that assumes that scholarly writing pays for itself in the currency of accrual towards rank in a tenure-line faculty paradigm.

One other way in which we hacked access was with time: Urgent in its affect, the project also took time, allowing for the stops and starts, recursions and elasticities of a crip *pandemic* temporality. [8]We wanted it to be something manageable, something meaningful; something that meets the moment. And so,

> At the end of the day, a collection edited by two disabled and chronically-ill people required a much more interdependent process, as we navigated various bodymind crises and flares, respectively. This meant that at different times and for different components of the project, we stepped in for each other. […] We took, and offered, more time, many times. (Danylevich and Patsavas "With Grief and Joy")

Crip time - for contributors and authors, for peer reviewers, and for ourselves. One way that this particular access work is created an archivable imprint lies —proliferative— in the fact that we ultimately split the publication of the collection over two separate issues of the journal in order to accommodate differing timelines.

Content: Non-Rehabilitative

This is an approach to soliciting, curating, and presenting content with a sensibility of stewardship. For us, this began with the call for papers, which was more properly a call for contributions, since we weren't soliciting traditional scholarly papers. In the context of the pandemic, we were painfully aware of an exacerbated, ableist schism regarding "scholarly productivity." Mostly, this meant that those with proliferating caretaking demands and/or health crises found it impossible (or nearly so) to "produce scholarship." Attuned to the many disabled, gendered, and racialized scholars and cultural workers facing this predicament, we

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8   This is a reference to Ellen Samuels's essay, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time" in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no.3, 2017, https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5824/4684. Accessed 7 March 2025.

explicitly sought, instead: reflective writing, documentation of existing creative and/or activist or mutual aid projects, poetry, and art. Work that we received ultimately fell into three categories: documentation of and/or reflection on praxis projects, reflective essays, and creative works.

A non-rehabilitative orientation towards our work also meant that, in making recommendations for revisions, we were mindful not to erase atypical modes of writing and expression, while also bearing in mind the level of accessibility of a given piece — not only in terms of accessibility elements such as image descriptions and screen reader compatibility, but in terms of jargon, idiosyncratic writing, or layout that might pose access issues. Informed by my work as an instructor of first-year writing, I found myself recommending that contributors offer a "reader roadmap" at the outset of their pieces; and, where jargon arose, to be sure to define it or, if needed, to include a glossary. In our multi-modal introductory roundtable, we modeled a non-rehabilitative orientation towards a reader/visitor uninitiated in disability studies jargon by including a glossary that defined and contextualized key terms. Our graduate assistant Corbin Outlaw comments about this element of the piece, which they authored:

> I like to talk about how things 'feel' and for me, this glossary is like a waterbed, or a big bean bag chair to sit in while you read or listen. (Danylevich and Patsavas "With Grief and Joy")

Finally, resisting any illusion of "wholeness" or completeness in our archive, we included a "Continuing Threads and Proliferations" google-document with the second installment of the project. This document, with content gathered by Corbin Outlaw, is accessible to anyone for viewing and suggesting, and links out to praxis projects, essays, and creative works from groups who weren't well-represented in our collection.[9]

Community: Persistently Kairotic

If Kairos is the moment of learning, or, a timely space-time[10] of knowledge and power production/exchange, then this concept is a key feature of how doing hope in the archives as crip archiving works. Specifically, it makes a lot of sense to think of our hope for the collection in relation to our community of visitors/users operating as a persistent and accessible kairotic space—to borrow Margaret Price's use of the phrase (Mad at School). Crip knowledge, specifically in times of crisis, is something that we felt was fleeting and in need of preservation, and, as Sandie Yi put it in our introductory roundtable, the pieces in the collection serve as survival manuals, and as recipes for crip kinship (Patsavas and Danylevich "Crip Pandemic Conversation"). I add the word "persistently" to kairotic to emphasize the way in which the online and open-access archive offers a sense of permanence to otherwise fleeting encounters that forge and sustain access to community and knowledge.

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9   The "Continuing Threads and Proliferations" resource can be found here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lAg81bev-HbK5PJLGjXNXaPgbnUiOZmzCCxgpiZCBkkE/.

10 This formulation is a reference to the notion of "crip spacetime" developed by Margaret Price.

While the collection as a whole and each contribution is intended as a persistently kairotic space, our process and framing-oriented introductory roundtable as well as our closing accessible publishing workshop book-end the project as artifacts of persistently kairotic space that hopes to frame and supplement the user/visitor's encounter with the collection. Both involved synchronous discussions that were variously documented, archived, and rendered multiply accessible on the site.

With the introductory roundtable, we invited scholars and creatives whose work inspired and shaped the project for a recorded conversation about the collection. With this, we concretized a citational infrastructure of a genealogy of work into an introductory roundtable, also a novel instantiation of both literature review and acknowledgments. The roundtable took place on Zoom with ASL interpreters and captions, which were later edited for accuracy. The recording was uploaded to the site, and we generated an edited transcript, as well as a detailed glossary for any jargon or niche terms and phrases that arose, including a hyperlink in the edited transcript as well as a time-stamp corresponding to the Zoom recording, so that the term could be easily referenced in context. Finally, our closing workshop on accessible publishing was in person at UIC and on Zoom. This workshop was a required component for one of our funding sources, and also yielded an Accessible Knowledge Production Manifesto. The manifesto is included in our introduction to the second installment of the collection.[11]

Ultimately, hopefully, and urgently, a crip archiving praxis can serve as an iterable framework with which a radical elsewhere and elsewhen can begin to emerge, with and through our collective traces of access as evidence of — and capacity for — love.

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11   This is the 2023 introduction, "With Grief and Joy - Crip Pandemic Life, A Tapestry: Part II."

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